

Rethinking Comparative Media System Theory From Ghana: Toward a Patronage-Based Hybrid Model

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This study examines Ghana’s media system through a decolonial lens, using Hallin and Mancini’s comparative framework not as a universal template, but as a point of departure. It explores Ghana’s media in four dimensions: the structure of the media market, political parallelism, journalistic professionalization, and the role of the state. The analysis shows that Ghana operates as a patronage-based hybrid system in which media-politics relations are structured by personalized networks and economic dependencies rather than ideological alignments. Drawing on decolonial scholarship, the article proposes the patronage-based hybrid model as a new analytical category and argues that theorizing African media systems adequately requires centering African epistemologies and historical experience rather than measuring them against Western ideal types.

Keywords: comparative media systems, Ghana, Africa, media-state relationship, decolonial turn, Afrocentrism, hybrid model, patronage

Comparative media analysis is the study of comparing media systems across different countries and regions to identify patterns, similarities, and differences (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). One of the most influential frameworks for comparative media analysis was developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their influential book *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Drawing on an extensive study of media systems in 18 Western countries, the authors proposed three models for understanding the relationship between media and political systems: the liberal model, the democratic corporatist model, and the polarized pluralist model. Each model is analyzed by studying four distinct dimensions: the structure of media markets, the degree and nature of political parallelism, the development of journalistic professionalism, and the role of the state in shaping the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 21). While Hallin and Mancini’s framework was developed primarily through the study of Western media

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systems, they argue it can serve as a starting point for analyzing media-politics relationships in other parts of the world.

This article takes up this task by examining Ghana's media system through a decolonial lens, using Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework not as a template to be applied, but as a set of variables to be critically engaged, expanded, and ultimately transcended. Our primary research question asks which kind of media system emerges in Ghana when the four dimensions of comparative media system theory are examined through a decolonial framework. We argue that colonial legacies, patron-client networks, and linguistic domination shape Ghana's media-politics relationship in ways that necessitate new analytical categories beyond Western comparative frameworks.

Ghana's media system emerged from British colonial rule in 1957, inheriting characteristics of the elite-oriented journalism, linguistic exclusion, and political instrumentalization that persist six decades after independence. However, most scholarship analyzing African media systems continues to rely on frameworks developed from Western European and North American experiences, treating these models as universal despite their inability to capture the specificities of postcolonial contexts. As Rodney-Gumede (2020) argues:

Comparative media systems theory has failed to pronounce on trajectories of media development in postcolonial societies in a meaningful way, as media development in postcolonial societies has been analyzed from within normative liberal frameworks emanating from North America and Western Europe. (p. 1)

There is a growing body of literature on African media and communication studies, which includes a call for decolonizing media studies (e.g., Langmia, 2021; Mano & Milton, 2021b; Mohammed, 2021, 2026; Moyo, 2020; Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018; Mutsvairo, 2018; Rodney-Gumede, 2015, 2020; Salgado, 2018). These calls maintain that African epistemologies, as well as African indigenous knowledge systems, writings, and scholars, remain marginalized. They call for observing the world from Africa instead of the Global North, questioning Eurocentric scholarly traditions, and rejecting conceptual schemes based on Euro-American experience and standards.

Building on these decolonial interventions, this article makes three contributions. First, we reframe Ghana's media analysis by foregrounding colonial legacies. Second, we propose the patronage-based hybrid model as a new analytical model that captures how personalized networks and economic dependencies, rather than ideological commitments, structure media-politics relationships in the postcolonial contexts. Third, we demonstrate how utilizing concepts like linguistic domination, instrumentalization, and African epistemologies in media systems analysis helps us move beyond the Hallin and Mancini (2004) model, contributing to decolonial scholarship.

Our analysis proceeds as follows. First, we provide a historical overview of Ghana's media development from the colonial era to the present. Second, we examine Ghana's system through reflections on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) four dimensions while deploying decolonial critique. This move allows us to show that the colonial past is not simply a legacy, but a living force shaping the present. In discussing these

dimensions through a decolonial critique, we propose the patronage-based hybrid model and outline pathways for theorizing African media systems.

A Brief Historical Overview of Media and Politics in Ghana

The birth of print media in Ghana can be traced back to the arrival of European missionaries in the early 19th century. The first newspaper in Ghana, the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*, was established in 1822 by Sir Charles MacCarthy, the British governor of the then Gold Coast (Anokwa, 1997, p. 9). The newspapers at Cape Coast were primarily aimed at serving the interests of the British colonial administration and the European trading community (Asante, 1996, p. 1). The second half of the 19th century saw the emergence of African-owned newspapers in Ghana, as educated Africans began to challenge the dominance of the missionary and colonial press. These newspapers served as platforms for African voices and played an important role in the early nationalist movement. They were instrumental in advocating for African rights, promoting education, and challenging colonial policies. The early 20th century witnessed the rise of the nationalist press in Ghana as the country's independence movement gained momentum. Newspapers played a crucial role in spreading nationalist ideas, mobilizing public support, and challenging colonial rule (Twumasi, 1974).

Radio broadcasting in Ghana also followed a parallel colonial logic. The station established by Governor Sir Arnold Hodson in July 1935, known as ZOY, was set up in Accra under the auspices of the British Broadcasting Corporation to relay its programs to approximately 300 listeners (Asante, 1996; Asante & Gadzekpo, 2000). As noted by Asante (1996), the British colonial administration established radio broadcasting as a public service with the aim of providing information, education, and entertainment to a limited audience in Accra. However, the medium's purpose later shifted to counter the anticolonial messages disseminated by the growing nationalist press. Based on recommendations from a 1954 commission, the station was subsequently renamed the Gold Coast Broadcasting Service and transformed into a separate government department.

A major transformation in Ghana's radio landscape occurred in 1995, when the state's broadcasting monopoly was finally broken in line with the 1992 constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech and media ownership. This change did not come easily. In 1994, Radio EYE made history as Ghana's first private broadcaster, but it was quickly shut down by authorities (Ayiteyvie, 1996). Following public demonstrations and legal battles, the government eventually opened the airwaves, screening and allocating frequencies to private broadcasters.

Analysis of Ghana's Media System Through a Decolonial Lens

The four dimensions of media systems include the structure of the media market, political parallelism, journalistic professionalization, and the role of the state. We examine these four dimensions within Ghana's media system while subjecting them to decolonial critique to formulate a model appropriate for Ghana.

The Structure of Media Markets and Development of a Mass Press in Ghana

Following the colonial template, Ghanaian newspapers, as in many African countries, generally catered to the educated urban elites rather than a true mass audience. As Jones-Quartey (1974) explains, the colonial press was established primarily as a communication tool for British colonial administrators and a small group of educated African elites who worked within the colonial system. According to Asante (1996), the newspaper's content focused mainly on colonial government announcements, trade information, and news that served the interests of the colonial administration. This colonial foundation established a pattern that profoundly influenced the development of newspapers in Ghana. Rather than evolving as a medium for mass communication, newspapers became an instrument for elite discourse. Ainslie (1966) notes that the colonial administration actively maintained this limited reach because broader access to information and news could potentially threaten its control over the colony.

The colonial structure also influenced how subsequent newspapers were established and operated. Boafo (1988) explains that even when independent African-owned newspapers emerged later in the colonial period, they tended to follow the same elite-oriented model. These papers, often launched by educated Africans who had been exposed to British education and culture, continued to primarily serve urban, educated readers rather than attempting to reach the broader population. Karikari (2007) terms this the "colonial press tradition," where newspapers functioned more as platforms for elite political discourse than as vehicles for mass communication and public information (p. 15). Even after Ghana gained independence in 1957, newspapers continued to operate primarily as an elite medium, never developing the mass circulation characteristics seen in European countries (Anokwa, 1997).

Today, this historical pattern continues to influence how newspapers operate in Ghana, contributing to the extremely low circulation rates of less than one per 1,000 people (Media Ownership Monitor, 2017), significantly lower than even the lowest rates found in Southern European countries such as Greece in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) analysis. Boafo (1988) states that newspaper circulation in Ghana is heavily concentrated in urban areas, with very limited penetration in rural areas. According to Boafo (1988), about 85% of all newspapers originate from Accra, the capital, with the remaining 15% coming from Kumasi and occasionally other regional capitals. Boafo (1988) posits that very few newspaper copies reach small towns and villages, largely excluding rural readers like "the village schoolmaster or teacher, the elementary school child, the semi-educated farmer or fisherman, and other new literates" (p. 27). Boafo (1988) argues that this centralized and urban-focused newspaper publication and circulation system is dysfunctional and inadequate for fostering development.

Apart from newspapers being concentrated in the urban parts of the country, the cost of newspapers, low incomes, low literacy rates, and poor distribution networks outside major cities all limit the reach of the Ghanaian print media. Additionally, most newspapers are published in English, a language introduced by the British colonial masters, while many Ghanaians speak local languages. Previous efforts in the late 1950s and 1960s to publish regional newspapers in local languages, as well as experiments with rural community newspapers in the 1970s, were not sustained because of mounting difficulties and lack of support (Boafo, 1988, pp. 27–28). Afrobarometer confirms that 56% of Ghanaians listen to radio news every

day, and 29% use radio "a few times a month or 'a week'" (Isbell et al., 2018, p. 1). These factors mean that radio has long been the dominant mass medium in Ghana, as in most of Africa.

Ghana shares some characteristics with the polarized pluralist model, particularly in terms of limited newspaper circulation and an elite-oriented press concentrated among elites, which is a characteristic rooted in colonial history rather than delayed industrialization as in Southern Europe. However, unlike the Southern European cases, Ghana's low circulation stems from linguistic domination (Langmia, 2021), where English-language newspapers exclude the majority of the population, and from colonial structures that deliberately restricted information access. Akrofi-Quarcoo and Gadzekpo (2020) affirm that colonial authorities at the time even saw broadcasting in local languages as a "threat to their empire building and civilization agendas" (p. 95). This lack of local-language newspapers in Ghana mirrors not just market failure, but dynamics of power inherited from colonialism. While Southern European countries' limited press development was related to delayed industrialization and literacy, Ghana's pattern emerged from colonial legacies where newspapers primarily served colonial administrators and educated elites (Jones-Quartey, 1974).

From a decolonial standpoint, the very categories of press development and media underdevelopment are saturated with coloniality, implicitly measuring Ghana against a Western telos of media modernization. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) argues, the coloniality of knowledge entailed the systematic dismissal of indigenous knowledge systems (p. 10). Understanding Ghana's limited press development therefore demands an analytical vocabulary that begins from Ghana's own historical and colonial experience, rather than treating that experience as a deviation from a Western norm. As Rodney-Gumede (2020) contends, "Normative classifications of media systems, along a sliding scale from free and highly developed professionally to politically co-opted and unprofessional, do not provide enough nuanced data to capture the unique characteristics of media systems shaped by histories of colonialism" (p. 3).

In Ghana, factors like low incomes, poor distribution networks outside urban areas, and limited advertising markets create particular limitations on newspaper development. These economic challenges mimic broader structures of uneven development stemming from colonial and postcolonial political economy rather than the delayed industrialization Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe in Southern Europe. A decolonial approach recognizes that these are not simply transitional deficits on the path toward a Western-style media market, but rather the ongoing consequences of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) describes as the continuation of colonial power structures that persist beyond formal decolonization (p. 11). Understanding Ghana's media economy therefore requires an analytical vocabulary drawn not from Western development theory but from political economy grounded in the African experience of dispossession, extraction, and structural dependency.

Additionally, the dominance of radio as Ghana's primary mass medium represents a significant departure from Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework, which focuses heavily on print and television. From a decolonial perspective, however, this is not a departure that requires explanation or apology; it is a vindication of indigenous communication traditions that Hallin and Mancini's (2004) print-centric model does not recognize. This pattern echoes broader African media traditions where oral communication plays a central role, as well as practical factors like literacy rates. This centrality connects to indigenous oral communication traditions predating colonial media (e.g., the griots, oral historians, and community

communicators). In precolonial Ghana, among the Akan-speaking societies, including the Asante, oral tradition formed the foundation of communication. Stories about Anansi (the clever spider) were told in the evenings by elders, serving as a medium of teaching patience, humility, and moral ethics. Talking drums served as a method of long-distance communication, announcing the death of a chief, the declaration of war, or the beginning of a festival. As Shaw (2009) argues, in precolonial Africa, there existed a “form of oral discourse, using communication norms informed by oral tradition and folk culture, with communal storytellers, griots, musicians, poets and dancers playing the role of the modern-day journalist” (p. 493). A decolonial framework would center these oral discourses as legitimate sites of journalism rather than treating them as markers of underdevelopment.

Journalistic Professionalism in Ghana

The evolution of journalistic professionalism traces back to the colonial era, though formal professionalization emerged only in the post-independence period. As Boafo (1988) notes, during the colonial period, newspapers were “run not by professional journalists but rather by nationalist leaders who were professionals in such other fields as law, medicine, religion and teaching” (p. 58). The transition to professional journalism began in the 1950s, marked significantly by the establishment of the *Daily Graphic* by Cecil H. King’s Daily Mirror Group, which introduced modern professional practices to Ghana’s media landscape. Therefore, unlike Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) analysis, where formal training is not a prerequisite, Ghana’s approach to journalistic professionalism has emphasized institutional training. Journalism in Ghana exhibits a mixed degree of professionalism, with a relatively long tradition of formal institutional training.

The Ghana Institute of Journalism, now known as the University of Media, Arts and Communication–Institute of Journalism, is one of the institutions of formal journalism training. According to Boafo (1988), the institution had the dual mandate of providing “formal and systematic training in journalism” while fostering “development of a patriotic cadre of journalists” (p. 65). This was later complemented by the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana, established in 1973, offering advanced professional training. Currently, several public and private universities also offer journalism programs.

Despite the emphasis on formal training, Hasty (2005) states that this educational pathway has emerged as a “second choice” for students who were unable to secure university admission at the time, immediately positioning journalism as a fallback career rather than a primary professional aspiration (p. 17). While this perception may have evolved in recent years, it remains an important historical factor in understanding Ghanaian journalism. This educational background of journalists directly influences journalists’ relationships with sources and their approach to gathering news. State journalists navigate complex hierarchies of deference when interacting with government officials, who often possess significantly more formal education. This dynamic affects everything from access to information to the framing of stories, as journalists feel compelled to defer to the interpretations and perspectives of their more credentialed sources. This educational disparity manifests in daily interactions, where journalists feel intimidated or inferior when interviewing sources with more extensive academic credentials. As Hasty (2005) emphasizes, “Class status in this postcolonial context depends heavily on educational credentials” (p. 17), making the

gap in educational qualifications a persistent source of professional insecurity. Class as an analytical category did not play a role in Hallin and Mancini's framework.

Regarding autonomy, Ghanaian journalists operate in an environment where both the collective and individual journalistic independence of the profession face challenges. Article 162(1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees press freedom, stating, "Freedom and independence of the media are hereby guaranteed" (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992, p. 95). This constitutional provision expressly prohibits censorship, licensing requirements, and other forms of governmental control over the media. Despite constitutional protections, journalists still work within multiple constraints imposed by factors such as media ownership, political pressures, and economic factors. In state media, particularly the *Daily Graphic*, journalists work within institutional structures that fundamentally restrict their independence despite constitutional protections. Journalists working for state media have limited independence because of how the organization is structured. Private media organizations likewise face similar challenges to their independence. Gadzekpo (2008) notes that many private newspapers are owned by politicians or business figures with political connections, creating subtle, but persistent, pressure on editorial independence. As Wiredu (2022) states, this ownership structure forces journalists to "report to do the biddings of their paymasters" rather than adhere to professional standards of independence and objectivity (p. 50).

While they are not directly controlled by the government, journalists struggle with financial pressures that affect how they operate. Hasty (2005) explains that private journalists often have to develop careful relationships with politicians and other powerful people to get the information and resources they need to do their work. This means that even though they are technically free from the government control, economic realities can force them to compromise their independence. This economic precarity reinforces the perception of journalism as a transitional occupation rather than a sustainable career path, which in turn hinders journalistic autonomy. In terms of collegial control, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) has played a central role in maintaining professional standards, a function that aligns with the collegial control model described by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe collegial control as primarily operating within the newsrooms, where journalists exercise authority over each other, or demonstrating an external influence. In Ghana, the GJA functions as an external body that sets and attempts to enforce professional standards across the entire journalism sector in Ghana (Hasty, 2005).

Regarding professional norms, Ghanaian journalism has developed in a hybrid manner that blends indigenous practices and adapted Western standards. The GJA's code of ethics establishes distinct professional norms, including truth telling, independence, and protection of sources (GJA, 2017). Nevertheless, the implementation of these professional norms has faced significant challenges in practice. Unlike the organic collegial control described by Hallin and Mancini (2004), membership in the GJA is voluntary, which limits its ability to enforce standards universally across the profession. Additionally, a particularly telling example is the widespread practice of *solli* (solidarity payments) from sources to journalists, despite being prohibited by the GJA Code of Ethics. According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2023) report, the practice of *solli*, where journalists accept money to influence content and cover events, undermines journalistic performance. These payments, which are common among both state and private journalists, represent a clear contradiction between formal ethical standards and everyday practice. As Hasty (2005) observes, "Through money, the state secures the

cooperation of state journalists in the construction of state hegemony. Simultaneously, money secures the cooperation of state employees in the deconstruction of state hegemony through the scandals and exposés of private journalists” (p. 136). Such economic dependency makes it difficult to enforce ethical standards when doing so could jeopardize journalists’ ability to meet basic needs.

Ghana has established professional institutions. However, significant challenges remain. As Hasty (2005) demonstrated, Ghanaian journalists face several problems regarding professional autonomy, which include economic precarity, political pressures, and the widespread practice of accepting *solli* from sources. From a decolonial perspective, the very concept of journalistic professionalism is itself grounded in normative liberal frameworks developed in North America and Western Europe, whose histories’ trajectories diverge significantly from the colonial heritage and legacies that continue to shape the media-politics nexus in Ghana (Rodny-Gumede, 2020). As discussed in the media market analysis, Shaw (2009) demonstrates that African journalism is grounded not in the Enlightenment ideal of the disinterested observer, but in the tradition of the engaged community communicator, a distinction with direct implications for professionalism. In this tradition, journalistic authority is derived not from institutional affiliation or formal codes but from communal trust and shared values expressed through *ubuntu*, a standard that Western-derived professional frameworks are not designed to recognize or evaluate (Shaw, 2009, p. 493).

Journalism education in Ghana reveals important divergences from Western models of professionalization. Unlike in Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) analysis, where formal training is not necessarily linked to professional status, Ghana has emphasized institutional training. However, as Hasty (2005) notes, journalism has often been viewed as a “second choice” career, creating status implications that affect journalists’ relationships with sources and their professional identity. A decolonial framework would therefore not measure Ghanaian journalism against the benchmark of Western professional autonomy, but would instead ask which forms of journalistic practice best meet the communicative needs and democratic aspirations of Ghanaian communities—an inquiry that aligns with what Rodny-Gumede (2015) describes as *ubuntu* journalism, a model grounded in communal values, social responsibility, and the ethos of care for collective well-being. Where Western professional norms prioritize individual autonomy, impartiality, and the adversarial interrogation of power, *ubuntu* journalism centers relational accountability. Here, the journalist is answerable to the living community, whose trust sustains their authority. As Shaw (2009) argues, it is precisely the *ubuntu* worldview, largely based on group solidarity and belonging, that informs the oral discourse style of journalism unique to precolonial Africa (p. 493). In practice, this reshapes news judgment, favoring stories that build collective understanding over those that dramatize conflict, and reconfigures sourcing practices toward communal voices, elders, and grassroots networks rather than credentialed officials alone. Accountability, in this framework, is not abandoned, but reconceived: Rather than a combative fourth estate confronting power from outside, the journalist operates as a community communicator who names wrongdoing while remaining embedded in the social fabric that must be restored, much as the precolonial griot engaged in social criticism only when “the weight of community values and traditions was solidly behind the message” (Bourgault, 1995, p. 17). Objectivity, too, looks different: not the detached neutrality of the liberal model, which Shaw (2009) argues is more consumer- than community-oriented (p. 506), but what Shaw (p. 493) calls the African journalism model of oral discourse, a communicative practice grounded in transparent engagement with the community whose interests are being served. We thus acknowledge the objection that accountability to community norms risks subordinating

critical journalism to communal consensus, suppressing stories that challenge embedded power within the community itself. Shaw (2009), however, is explicit that community embeddedness does not mean uncritical deference: The griot tradition was not one of praise singing alone, but encompassed satire, dissent, and hard scrutiny of those in power, with the community's own norms and values serving as the standard of critique rather than the ceiling of it. Relational accountability, properly understood, is therefore not a constraint on critical journalism, but its foundation.

Political Parallelism in Ghana

Ghana has a pluralistic and highly partisan media landscape, reflecting the diversity of political competition that has characterized the country since the return to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. Many media outlets have clear political orientations and allegiances, often serving as mouthpieces for political parties and figures. This pattern was especially visible during the 2020 election, where media houses prominently featured stories that favored government initiatives such as "Free SHS" and "One District One Factory." Mahama and Saaka (2023) note that the *Daily Statesman* supported the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) party at the time. Mahama and Saaka (2023) state, "Eight out of the 14 stories sampled contained President Akufo-Addo's responses to former President Mahama's petition, while portions of the petition itself was published on only four occasions" (p. 41). The state-owned *Daily Graphic* also demonstrated subtle bias toward the government position despite its mandate for neutrality. For example, it consistently published headlines that favored the NPP, such as "President Akufo-Addo's Free SHS Saves Parents GH¢3.2 Billion" (Adu, 2020). This is seen as sympathetic to the NPP. On the other hand, *The Herald* also leans toward the National Democratic Congress (NDC). This partisanship extends into the broadcast sector as well. Frederick Blay, the former acting chairman of the NPP, owns a majority stake in Western Publications Ltd., while Dr. Kwabena Duffour, former finance minister in the NDC government, controls the Excellence in Broadcasting Group Limited, which includes GHome TV and Starr FM. Similarly, Gabby Otchere-Darko, an NPP member and presidential cousin, owns *The Statesman* (Media Ownership Monitor, 2017). Despite a ban on political parties directly owning radio and TV stations, many outlets are owned by individuals closely tied to these parties. State-owned media such as GTV and *Daily Graphic* are theoretically neutral, but in practice, they tend to favor the government of the day. This has been a source of controversy, with opposition parties often accusing state media of bias. According to a UNESCO (2023) report, several efforts to transform the state media into a truly independent public service broadcaster have been halted.

There are also many instances of media personnel crossing over into politics or serving in government. Prominent journalists frequently resign and run for public office or are appointed to political positions. A striking example is Kojo Opong Nkrumah. A celebrated broadcast journalist at Joy FM, he left his role in 2016 to become the minister of information and later the minister for works and housing. There is also Kwame Sefa Kayi, host of "Kokrokoo" on Peace FM, who has been unofficially linked to the NPP, though he has not taken up an official role. This revolving door between media and politics arguably contributes to political parallelism.

As indicated by Hallin and Mancini (2004), this creates audience partisanship where media consumption patterns strongly reflect political loyalties. NPP supporters typically gravitate toward media outlets perceived as pro-NPP, while NDC supporters follow pro-NDC channels. This partisanship is especially

evident in radio listenership, where political talk shows attract highly partisan audiences who seek confirmation of their political views. In Ghana, language contributes to this division, as different-language radio stations are often aligned with particular political parties. Social media have intensified this pattern, creating echo chambers where partisan audiences consume and share content that aligns with their political preferences. This audience segmentation influences advertising revenue and programming decisions, reinforcing the system's political parallelism. The highly partisan character of much of Ghana's media has both advantages and disadvantages. To some extent, it allows for a diversity of voices and political debate. However, it also fosters polarization, as consumers turn toward media that reinforce their political views. There are concerns that partisan media contribute to the spread of misinformation, political propaganda, and even hate speech. As Ghana's democracy continues to evolve, a key challenge is ensuring a media landscape that combines political pluralism with higher degrees of professional detachment, objectivity, and commitment to the public interest.

On political parallelism, Ghana's mediascape aligns with and at the same time diverges from Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework. The nature and roots of this parallelism differ substantially from patterns observed in Southern European media systems. A key difference lies in the basis of political alignment. In Southern Europe, Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe political parallelism as reflecting deep-seated ideological divisions and organized social groups with clear political interests. However, in Ghana, media partisanship tends to operate through more personalized networks and patron-client relationships. Hasty (2005) demonstrates how these alignments often stem from individual connections among media owners, journalists, and political figures rather than institutional or ideological commitments. From a decolonial standpoint, this is not evidence of underdevelopment or institutional immaturity, but rather reflects a distinctive political culture forged under colonialism and shaped by the particular trajectories of Ghana's postcolonial democracy. As established in the media markets analysis above, normative classifications of media systems cannot provide sufficient nuance for postcolonial contexts. Such classifications fail to capture the characteristics of media systems shaped by colonial histories (Rodny-Gumede, 2015, p. 132). A decolonial framework does not judge Ghana's patron-client media relationships against an idealized Western norm of institutional professionalism, but instead asks what purposes these relationships serve within Ghana's own social and political ecology. The historical development of this parallelism also differs significantly. As Temin and Smith (2002) document, Ghana's return to multiparty democracy in 1992 saw media outlets aligning with political factions more based on personal and economic relationships than ideological positions. This demonstrates what Voltmer (2013) describes as characteristic of transitional democracies, where media-politics relationships often develop through informal networks rather than formal institutional channels.

Additionally, the role of ownership structures further distinguishes Ghana's political parallelism. In Ghana, many private newspapers have clear political leanings that reflect the owners' personal political connections rather than representing organized social or political movements. These ownership patterns create direct links between media and political figures that operate differently than the institutional relationships Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe. Economic dependencies also shape political parallelism in distinctive ways. As Hasty (2005) explains, many media organizations rely heavily on government advertising and political patronage for survival—creating what she terms “instrumentalization,” where media serve as tools for political negotiation and influence rather than platforms for ideological debate (p.

94). The practice of *solu* payments further complicates these relationships. By creating personal economic ties between journalists and political sources, it functions simultaneously as a mechanism of political control and a survival strategy for underpaid journalists, making it resistant to ethical enforcement from any direction (Hasty, 2005; UNESCO, 2023). Instead of pathologizing these practices through a Western normative lens—that is, treating *solu* payments as mere corruption, owner-politician ties as simply captured media, or journalism as a second-choice career as evidence of professional failure—a decolonial framework invites us to understand them within the context of African political culture, where the logic of political power operates through networks of personal obligation and reciprocity that predate and outlast formal democratic institutions.

Moreover, the state-owned media present another dimension of political parallelism not fully captured by Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework. While outlets like the *Daily Graphic* are theoretically neutral, Gadzekpo (2008) shows how they tend to favor whichever party holds power, reflecting what might be termed "administrative parallelism" rather than consistent political alignment. This differs from both the stable party alignments of Southern Europe and the professional neutrality ideal of the liberal model. The fluid nature of political alignments in Ghana also challenges Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework. As Temin and Smith (2002) note, media outlets may shift their political support based on changing personal relationships or economic interests rather than maintaining consistent ideological positions.

The broadcast sector exhibits its own distinctive patterns of political parallelism. Despite constitutional restrictions on political parties directly owning radio and TV stations, many outlets maintain informal political alignments through ownership by party-affiliated individuals. UNESCO (2023) documents how this creates a form of "hidden parallelism" that operates through personal networks rather than formal institutional ties (p. 51). A decolonial analysis of these patterns, as Mano and Milton (2021a) argue, requires an approach that neither uncritically imports Western normative frameworks nor rejects them wholesale, but instead engages them in productive dialogue grounded in African epistemic self-confidence. These patterns suggest the need to reconceptualize political parallelism when analyzing media systems in transitional democracies like Ghana, accounting for personal and patronage networks, economic dependencies, fluid patterns of political support, informal mechanisms of political influence, and the distinctive role of state media in newly democratic contexts.

The Role of the State in Ghana

The state's relationship with Ghana's media is best understood through the concept of instrumentalization, which refers to the systematic use of media institutions as tools for political and economic objectives rather than as independent platforms for public communication (Hasty, 2005; Tettey, 2001). As will be shown across the domains of public broadcasting, state advertising, licensing, and legal regulation, the Ghanaian state exerts influence not through direct censorship alone, but through a web of structural dependencies that render media organizations functionally beholden to political power. In terms of public service broadcasting, Ghana maintains the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) as its state broadcaster. Unlike the European models where public broadcasting often maintains high audience shares (30–50%), GBC's influence has diminished significantly since media liberalization in the 1990s. The state broadcaster now competes with numerous private television and radio stations, including major

networks like TV3, Metro TV, and UTV. This shift reflects a broader trend of declining state broadcaster influence, though GBC retains significance through its nationwide coverage and mandate to broadcast in local languages.

Regarding state funding and subsidies, Ghana's approach differs from both the European and American models described by Hallin and Mancini (2004). While GBC receives state funding, it also relies heavily on commercial revenue through advertising. Direct press subsidies, common in European systems, are largely absent in Ghana. However, the state's most pervasive form of instrumentalization operates through its role as a major advertiser: Government agencies and state-owned enterprises provide significant advertising revenue to media organizations, creating financial dependency that serves as a subtle, but powerful, mechanism of editorial control. This creates a complex dynamic in which media organizations must balance editorial independence with commercial interests linked to state advertising. The state's role as an advertiser has become particularly significant in sustaining many media organizations, especially during economic downturns.

Since the restoration of democratic rule in 1992, Ghana has been known for relatively high levels of media freedom compared with many other African countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2026). However, there are still significant ways in which the state exerts influence over the media. One major area is the regulation and licensing of broadcast media. Radio and TV stations must obtain licenses from the National Communications Authority (NCA), which is under the Ministry of Communications and the National Media Commission (2013)—a regulatory structure more characteristic of European systems. These bodies oversee licensing and content standards and ensure fair political coverage, particularly during elections (UNESCO, 2023). Critics argue that the licensing process is sometimes opaque and politicized. There have been instances of the NCA shutting down radio stations for allegedly political reasons or for violations of technical regulations ("Shutdown of Radio Stations in Ghana," 2025). Together, licensing authority and advertising expenditure constitute the two primary mechanisms of state instrumentalization of the media in Ghana. Many private media outlets rely heavily on government advertising, as the private sector advertising market is relatively underdeveloped. This financial dependence creates pressure for positive coverage of the government.

Overly broad libel and defamation laws are another concern. Ghana's criminal code contains provisions on false news and defamation that have sometimes been used to punish critical reporting. Numerous journalists have been arrested or faced lawsuits for their work, although prosecutions are relatively rare. In an effort to advance media freedom and democratization, the Supreme Court—under the NPP government—struck down the Criminal Libel Law in 2001 (Shardow & Asare, 2016). Nonetheless, there are still civil defamation lawsuits and potential government threats against journalists. In 1999, for instance, the editor of the *Free Press* newspaper, Eben Quarcoo, was arrested and charged with criminal libel for publishing an article alleging corruption in the government (Committee to Protect Journalists, 1997). In 2018, investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas faced legal action and death threats after exposing corruption in Ghana's judiciary through his undercover reporting. His colleague Ahmed Hussein-Suale was later shot and killed in Accra, the capital of Ghana—an attack widely linked to his involvement in Anas's investigative work.

Laary (2022) cites another instance from February 2022, when the Ghanaian government charged, arrested, and imprisoned many independent journalists, private media professionals, civil society members, and political activists who had expressed opposing viewpoints (e.g., Kwabena Bobbie Ansah, Blessed Godsbrain Smart, Oheneba Boamah Bennie). Although the criminal libel law was repealed, a threat still looms over journalists, particularly those who investigate corruption or wrongdoing by public officials. Other laws, like the National Security Act and antiterrorism legislation, grant security agencies broad surveillance and arrest powers that could be misused against journalists (Tettey, 2001). Lack of a freedom of information law is another obstacle to the media serving as an effective watchdog.

The state provides some subsidies and support to the media, although this is relatively limited. The Media Development Fund, created in the early 2000s, aimed to help newspapers acquire modern equipment and provide training for journalists. However, the fund has been dormant in recent years due to a lack of financial contributions from government and private media. The GBC, as the public broadcaster, receives state funding (UNESCO, 2023, p. 72), but faces issues of political influence and a lack of complete editorial independence. Transforming GBC into a model of independent public service media remains an unfulfilled aspiration (UNESCO, 2023, p. 73).

The role of the state in Ghana's media system also reveals important limitations in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework. The organizing concept here is instrumentalization: The state does not simply regulate the media, but actively deploys media institutions as tools for political governance and legitimation. Inasmuch as Ghana has liberalized its media sector since returning to democracy in 1992, which shows some parallels with the liberal model, this instrumentalization persists through both direct and indirect means. Government advertising is the most systematic form of this instrumentalization: By controlling advertising expenditure, the state creates financial dependency that produces favorable coverage without requiring explicit editorial directives (Tettey, 2001). A decolonial reading recognizes that the persistence of state influence is not simply an institutional deficit but demonstrates the particular configuration of power inherited from the colonial state, which constructed media institutions as instruments of administration and control rather than as platforms for popular voice. The postcolonial state in Ghana inherited these institutional logics and has reproduced them under new political conditions. The decolonial view is therefore not to replicate the liberal model's ideal of state-media separation, but to ask which forms of public communication, including public service media, would most adequately serve the democratic and developmental aspirations of Ghanaian society.

Taken together, the limitations identified across all four dimensions do not simply establish the inadequacy of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework for addressing Ghana's media system; they constitute the analytical material from which a more adequate model can be constructed. Building on that framework, rather than applying or rejecting it, requires using its own dimensions as a diagnostic grid that clarifies which functions the analytical categories of a postcolonial media system must serve. In Ghana's case, those categories must account for the enduring structural consequences of colonial history, for patron-client networks as the primary logic of media-politics relationships, and for instrumentalization as the dominant mode of state-media interaction.

The significant role of foreign ownership and investment, the ongoing influence of colonial legacies from language choices to geographic centralization, and the relatively recent transition from authoritarianism all require additional analytical dimensions to be fully understood. As Jones and Hadland (2024) argue, blanket models developed for and by Western theorists have a difficult application to Global South systems, and even partial correspondences tend to be imperfect. These challenges in “applying” Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) framework to Ghana suggest the need for a more fundamental theoretical reorientation rather than mere expansion. Hallin and Mancini’s fundamental insights about the relationship between media and political systems, and their emphasis on systematic comparison, remain valuable. However, the Ghana case demonstrates the need for an epistemological decolonization of comparative media studies.

Discussion and Conclusion

The comparative media systems theory has been widely influential in the field of communication. However, it has also been subject to criticisms. The authors themselves have acknowledged both empirical limitations and theoretical challenges (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). Hallin and Mancini have actively engaged with critiques of their framework. They state that they “never intended [their] book to be taken as providing a comprehensive conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of media systems” (Hallin & Mancini, 2012a, p. 207). They reiterate this point elsewhere (Hallin & Mancini, 2012b, p. 1). We do not argue that their framework makes universalist claims; rather, we treat it as what it is: a rigorous analysis of Western media systems that offers a productive analytical point of departure. The problem this article addresses is not the framework itself, but its mode of application, which is the tendency in comparative media scholarship to use Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) categories as a universal yardstick that positions postcolonial media systems as deficient approximations of a Western norm. While this concession is acknowledged, a decolonial reading demands that we go further.

Our analysis, which used Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) dimensions of comparative analysis as a starting point, reveals that Ghana’s media system operates as a patronage-based hybrid system that defies easy categorization. The four main dimensions proposed provided a useful, but ultimately insufficient, instrument for analyzing Ghana’s media system. Ghana’s media exhibits elements of all three models while fully conforming to none. Importantly, Hallin et al. (2021) have argued for “hybrid media systems” to recognize local agency and blurred boundaries and to move beyond linear developmental models (p. 4). Within this framework, patronage operates not as an alternative to hybridity, but as its organizing principle: It is the logic through which Ghana’s media system hybridizes elements of the three models. Patron-client networks simultaneously drive the political parallelism that echoes the polarized pluralist model, the state instrumentalization that echoes aspects of the democratic corporatist model, and the market liberalization that echoes the liberal model—producing a hybrid configuration whose internal coherence is patronage rather than ideology or formal institutional design.

What emerges from our analysis is a patronage-based hybrid system. We have presented evidence that the colonial legacy has been the contributing factor in low newspaper circulation rather than delayed industrialization of the European experience. As established in the Media Markets section, newspapers served as instruments of elite colonial discourse created to meet the administrative needs of the colonial power (i.e., colonial press tradition). In the context of linguistic domination (Langmia, 2021), English-

language press excluded the majority of the population. The elite-oriented character of Ghana's press is an enduring legacy of the colonial era that remains a characteristic of Ghana's media. These elements are constitutive parts of the patronage-based system within the structure of the market dimension of the comparative system.

There are other contributing elements of the patronage-based system within the journalistic professionalization dimension. Journalists in Ghana work under financial constraints that affect their work. As a result, they develop relationships with politicians and other powerful individuals to obtain the resources and information they need to sustain their jobs and livelihood. The practice of *solli* by both state and private journalists adds to a maze of professional and economic dependencies that contribute to the patronage-based system.

It is in the political parallelism dimension of the comparative system theory that we see the strongest elements of the patronage-based hybrid media system in Ghana. Ghana has a pluralistic, but highly partisan, media with the return of the multiparty democratic form of government in the 1990s. The partisanship extends across media. The ownership structure of the media outlets with clear ties to political parties lends itself to patronage-based connections and relationships. The revolving-door element of media personnel crossing over to politics is symptomatic of the underlying patronage-based arrangements. As demonstrated above, while media partisanship in Southern European media systems reflects ideological divisions, in Ghana, it tends to operate through more personalized networks and patron-client relationships. Furthermore, many media outlets in Ghana depend heavily on state advertising and political patronage. This instrumentalization (Hasty, 2005) turns media into tools for political jockeying and influence, preventing them from serving as independent institutions.

This feature of the media system in Ghana is shared across two dimensions of comparative media system theory: political parallelism and the role of the state. While Ghana has liberalized media since returning to democracy in the early 1990s, sharing some parallels to the liberal model in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative system theory, the instrumentalization of media institutions through direct and indirect means for legitimation and political rationalization registers a strong role for state intervention. As argued above, by controlling advertising expenditure, the state creates financial dependency among media outlets, ensuring favorable coverage without necessitating explicit editorial directives (Tettey, 2001). The persistence of the state influence, which reduces media to tools of administrative control, reveals a certain configuration of power inherited from the colonial state. The patronage-based hybrid system of Ghana finds its expression in the state-politics nexus.

The concept of hybridity allows us to expand the boundaries of what constitutes media in ways that Hallin and Mancini (2004) did not address. Just as colonial legacies shaped the structure of Ghana's traditional media (concentrating ownership, restricting access, and embedding patron-client dependencies), the affordances of digital platforms are creating new hybrid spaces that demand continued decolonization of our analytical frameworks. Future studies must address social media, networked publics, diasporic media, platform designs and affordances, social media-based activism and other forms of audience participation, and how these might impact the various dimensions of any reimagined comparative media system studies.

If the patronage-based hybrid system is helpful in explaining media systems in “transitional” societies, it is in a position to provide insights for the enterprise of comparative media studies.

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