

Free Market Media, Democracy, and Partisanship: A Case Study of Kolkata's Newspapers' Coverage of Anti-Industrialization Protests

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This article studies how multiple news media's different partisan political interests and professional journalistic norms intersect and alter the media system's ability to represent diversity. Through a case study of the news coverage of anti-industrialization protests in the East Indian city of Kolkata and by drawing on political economic critiques and theories of political communication, this article argues that "hybrid" forms of professional journalism remain central to a media system's ability to represent differences or "external pluralism." This article proposes the conceptual framework of "hybrid partisan system" to account for the changes in a media system due to the intersection of multiple news media outlets' partisan alliances and professional interests.

Keywords: partisan media, commercial model, journalistic professionalism, media system, democracy

Through a case study of the news coverage of anti-industrialization protests in the East Indian city of Kolkata, this article studies how commercially run news media's different partisan interests and professional journalistic norms intersect and alter the media system's ability to represent a diversity of views. The commercially run press in Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal and one of the country's four major cities, historically had stable partisan political ties (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013) and also pluralistic conditions. In contrast to the survival crisis of newspapers in industrialized countries, Indian newspapers experienced a steady growth in circulation and readership, thanks to rising literacy levels, comparatively lower levels of digital penetration, and fragmentation of the media market through regional diversity (Thakurta, 2012). When a Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM)-led state government, which remained in power in West Bengal for more than three decades from 1977 to 2011 (Banerjee, 2007; Basu, 2007), initiated plans for corporate industrialization in the state by acquiring agricultural land, it triggered peasants' protests in the rural areas of Singur and Nandigram (Chatterjee, 2008; Nielsen, 2009).

Commercially run newspapers are expected to ignore the interests and movements of disadvantaged groups (Cottle, 2008; Gitlin, 1980; Kumar, 2004; McChesney, 2008). This forms the fundamental inadequacy of market-driven media. But when market-driven news media are oriented along partisan lines, differences and diversity are expected in the media system in the attitude to movements. A

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partisan media model under pluralistic conditions is seen as a democratic alternative (Baker, 2006; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; McChesney, 2008; McQuail, 1992). Although conceptually different, media systems in contemporary societies cannot be described as strictly partisan or commercial. Despite their shift to the commercial model, the news media in many societies continue to run as partisan entities (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011; McCargo, 2012; Waisbord, 2000, 2009). The popularity of Fox News in the United States over the past decade speaks of the resurgence of partisan journalism (Waisbord, 2009). Professional journalism, seen as an essential feature of the market-driven model in traditional liberal theories (Curran, 2002; Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott, 1982, 2006; Hackett, 2006), however, remains significant when commercially run players also function as partisan entities. This article studies how commercially run news media's partisan interests and professional journalistic norms intersect and influence the workings of a media system. Drawing on theories of political communication and political economic critiques and through qualitative thematic analysis of Kolkata's mainstream newspapers' coverage of anti-industrialization protests and interviews with editorial staff, this article argues that "hybrid" forms of professional journalism remain central to the media system's ability to represent differences or "external pluralism." This article proposes the conceptual framework of a "hybrid partisan system" to account for the changes in a media system.

Literature Review

Theoretical Significance of the Partisan Model—Plurality and Democracy

The market-driven news media model has been critiqued for being less receptive to the causes of disadvantaged social groups for reasons of profits (Cottle, 2008; Gitlin, 1980; Kumar, 2004; McChesney, 2008). But when market-driven news media are oriented along partisan lines, there remains a scope of diversity of views on specific issues. Such differences and diversity are less likely when commercially run players impart neutral information as nonpartisan entities. Political economic critiques of communication, inspired by Marxist principles, lend ideological support to partisan journalism (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009; Curran, 2007; McChesney, 2008, 2015). A partisan media system, despite the negative connotation of the term "partisan," assumes a plurality of voices and multiple channels of communication, which are good for democracy (Baker, 2006; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; McChesney, 2008; McQuail, 1992). In its strongest form, a partisan system, such as the press system in Denmark in early 20th century, had multiple newspapers representing the views of a particular party each in the public sphere (Hallin & Mancini, 2008). This led to political diversity. Figure 1 represents an ideal type of partisan system with leftist and rightist media players, driven by causes and advocacy-based roles, fostering political diversity in the media system.

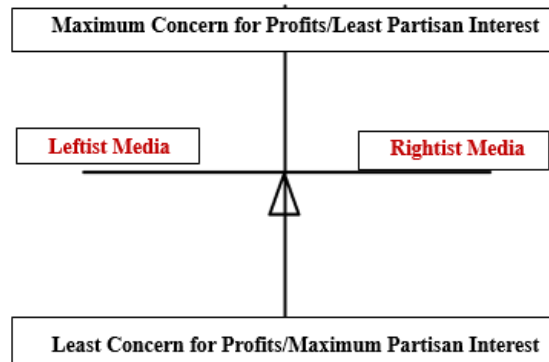


Figure 1. Ideal partisan media system.

Unlike traditional European media systems, partisan systems in contemporary societies do not reflect traditional left–right political cleavages or fixed political identities (Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Waisbord, 2000, 2009). An ideal type of partisan media system, as shown in Figure 1, remains less common in contemporary societies. Waisbord (2000) observes that partisan newspapers in non-Western societies represent different political or economic interests and have fleeting alliances (Waisbord, 2000). But competing partisan news outlets have the potential to guarantee differences of views on specific issues and yield beneficial results under competing conditions in the absence of market concentration (Baker, 2006; Curran, 2011).

Significance of Professional Journalism in the Free-Market Model

The partisan media system, in an ideal form, ignores the significance of professional journalism. Professional journalism, linked traditionally to the market model, referred to the values of conveying objective information through the “gatekeeper model” (Waisbord, 2009)—or the processes of separating facts from opinions through news production (Becker & Vlad, 2009). Deuze (2005) summarizes a set of values associated with professional journalism in liberal theories: public service (fulfilling public service goals by imparting impartial information and acting as watchdogs), objectivity, autonomy, and immediacy. The ethos, ideologies, and values determine the shared norms of a group, ideal professional behavior, and also legitimize the need of journalism’s freedom from government regulations (Curran et al., 1982).

Professional journalism, with its roots in Durkheimian ideas of differentiation and specialization of reporting functions, does not necessarily translate to journalists’ control over their work conditions (Salcetti, 1995). Objectivity, a cornerstone of professional journalism, has been critiqued by scholars for resulting in a form of news in market-driven media that remains bereft of active political engagement and marginalizes dissenting views (Curran, 2007; Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1984; McChesney, 2008, 2015). Political economic critiques thus lend ideological support to partisan journalism, which “offers a way in which reality can be

interpreted from the viewpoint of different social and political groups, in place of bland 'spot' reporting of events and topics that are presented in a disconnected and decontextualised way" (Curran, 2007, p. 37).

***Intersection of Partisan and Commercial Media—
Significance of Professional Journalism in Diversity***

The development of mass markets and the news media's profit-based, commercial interests, traditionally were seen as processes that challenged the news media's traditional partisan ties (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009). To reach out to large sections of the audiences, it seemed economically pragmatic to convey neutral information (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009). Thus, professional journalism—conflated with objectivity in liberal views (Deuze, 2005)—was associated with market-driven media. This explains the conceptual difference between partisan and commercial models, differentiated on the basis of the news media's advocacy-based and neutral information dissemination roles. However, the partisan tradition continues in contemporary societies despite the news media's shift to the advertising revenue-based model (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011; McCargo, 2012; Waisbord, 2000, 2009). In the present day, the news media thus often function as both partisan and commercial entities. Professional journalistic norms can be said to prevail under such conditions despite the presence of commercially run players' partisan interests (Allern & Blach-Orsten, 2011; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; McCargo, 2012; Waisbord, 2000, 2009). Partisan actors, when run commercially in different settings, also adopt profit-based interests and the values of "impartial" journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Professionalism thus tends to exist in "partial" and "hybrid" forms (Hallin, 2008; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Schudson & Anderson, 2009; Waisbord, 2009) due to the coexistence of the news media's advocacy-based partisan roles and professional journalistic norms. Downey and Neyazi (2014), for instance, refer to the complex interaction of political, commercial, and professional logic in Indian media. Referring to Brazilian television network TV Globo's informal alliance with the country's military dictatorship in 1984, Porto (2003) observes that news media abandoned their partisan alliances and followed the norms of professional news making when society was organized and when partisan coverage could result in the loss of audiences and advertisers. Professional routines such as the reliance on official sources of information (Bennett, 2010) can be said to affect the workings of a media system when multiple media actors function as both partisan and commercial players. Micro factors such as professional values and routines (editorial integrity and news values) can intersect with organizational (legitimization/commercial needs of the media) and macro factors (market competition; Hackett, 2006).

Significantly, partisan newspapers (*Al Ahdath al-Maghribiya* and *Attajdid*, with differing secular-left and Islamist views, respectively) in Morocco, television networks in Brazil, and British mainstream newspapers (both known to differ in their political leanings) failed to represent a diversity of views (Curran, 2011; Douai, 2009; Porto, 2003). Hallin and Mancini (2012) emphasize that one must distinguish between "external pluralism" in the media system and "the political activity of media, the tendency of media to intervene in political debate, to engage in advocacy, or to try to influence political events" (p. 295). Media partisanship can have "negative results when there is a high degree of media concentration and the media are lopsidedly partisan in one direction" (Curran, 2011, p. 18). This article suggests that a media system's ability to represent diversity needs to be revisited in relation to the norms of professional journalism.

Impact of "Hybrid" Professional Journalistic Norms

When the news media function as both partisan and commercial entities, their partisan interests coexist with professional journalistic norms. In such cases, professional journalistic practice does not necessarily translate to objectivity (Schudson & Anderson, 2009; Waisbord, 2009). Donsbach (2010), for instance, observes that German journalists perceive the goal of "championing particular values and ideas" as an important aspect of their work as a journalist (p. 41). Professionalism in this sense translates to the ability of journalism to exert control over its field of practice vis-à-vis external interests (Waisbord, 2013). This view of professionalism differs from Anglo-American values of objectivity, fairness, and public service (Waisbord, 2013). News values, which often allow commercial actors to predict what the audience finds "appealing and important" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2012), and the watchdog role of the press can be expected to influence the workings of the news media. Rao (2008) notes that the watchdog journalism, which had its roots in Anglo-American professionalism (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009; Waisbord, 2000), existed in the Indian press since the country's adoption of liberal democracy, but market reforms and new techniques of investigative journalism allowed broadcast journalists to seek accountability and hold corrupt politicians accountable to the public. Thus, professionalism prevails in "hybrid" and partial forms (Hallin & Mancini, 2008; Schudson & Anderson, 2009) as journalistic norms coexist with the news media's partisan interests, challenging the conceptual/theoretical incompatibility between the partisan and commercial models. This article thus raises the following research questions:

RQ1. How do partisan political interests relate to the diversity and differences in commercially run newspapers' coverage of anti-industrialization protests?

RQ2. How do professional journalistic norms affect commercially run dailies' partisan interests?

Methodology

Chakravartty and Roy (2013) describe the Indian state of West Bengal as having a "direct" partisan media system because of the news media's direct links to major political parties and/or journalists, editors, and owners' explicit political leanings. The press in India originated in Kolkata as part of elite culture and the nationalist movement against British colonial rule. Newspapers historically were not dependent on the mass market and acted as the ideological instrument of the elite, being dependent on philanthropic business sources; advertising emerged as a primary revenue source in the late 1970s (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010). Kolkata's newspaper market had pluralistic conditions, with multiple players catering to a fragmented readership base (Chatterjee, personal communication, 2012). A left party coalition, led by the CPIM (a national party with traditional support base in the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala), returned to power in state government in West Bengal in 2006 and initiated the policy of corporate industrialization by acquiring agricultural land. The state government's plan of agricultural land acquisition in the rural area of Singur for a small car factory by one of the country's leading industrial groups, Tata Motors, met with resistance in the form of peasant protests in 2006 (Nielsen, 2009). Similar protests emerged in the rural area of Nandigram in early 2007 in response to rumors of land acquisition for proposed chemical hub and industries. Nielsen (2009) observes that multiple social groups in Singur had different

motivation for organising the protests but some economists and intellectuals described them as local resistance against neoliberal reforms (Patnaik, 2007).

Definition of Key Theoretical Concepts and Operationalizing Research

Partisan Press

“Partisan press” in this article refers to commercially run publications’ necessity to “defend political or economic interests” rather than their direct/permanent links to party organizations (Waisbord, 2000, p. 21). Partisan news media (in non-Western societies such as those in Latin American countries) have fleeting political or economic interests and are run commercially (Waisbord, 2000, 2009). Udupa (2015), for instance, describes language dailies’ partisan support for specific causes in her study of news-making practices of English and vernacular Kannada language dailies in the Indian city of Bangalore. However, partisan interests of commercially run players tend to change in such cases.

Commercial Model

Media ownership is seen as an indicator of the commercial model in this article. When commercially run news media are owned by diverse players such as individuals, families, or political parties rather than just large corporate businesses, they are expected to put less emphasis on the market-based criteria of efficiency and profit maximization, unlike the news media of large corporate-run entities (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Table 1 shows that the newspapers’ partisan and commercial interests are the key variables on the basis of which the following dailies were selected for comparison.

Table 1. Coexistence of Partisan and Commercial Models

Differing Partisan and Commercial Interests in Selected Dailies					
Partisan interests	Support for state government’s economic policies		Antigovernment/anti-CPIM		Propaganda of CPIM
Commercial model	Part of family-run media conglomerates		Individual owners		Commercially run party press
Newspapers	<i>Anandabazar Patrika</i> (ABP) (largest selling [regional] Bengali newspaper)	<i>The Times of India</i> (TOI) (Kolkata edition of a national English daily)	<i>Bartaman</i> (medium-sized, local Bengali newspaper)	<i>Dainik Statesman</i> (DS) (the sister concern of a reputed English daily; local player)	<i>Ganashakti</i> (GS) (commercially run Bengali party mouthpiece and part of the national communication network of the left party, CPIM)

**Data Collection Methods—
Thematic Analysis of Newspaper Articles and Qualitative Interviews**

Qualitative thematic analysis of newspaper articles and in-depth interviews were the key research methods. Themes were identified from a data set of 200 newspaper articles through grounded theory approach and analyzed. I read 750 articles including news reports, editorials, and posteditorial columns spanning from May 25, 2006, to November 15, 2007. Following the sampling method in previous qualitative research of media and movements (Richards, 2007), I identified initial codes based on which 200 articles were short-listed for thematic analysis. Examples of the initial codes include the state government's plans of industrialization; problems faced by protesters; violent action by the police on protestors; and criticisms of the CPIM and government. Attride-Stirling (2001) notes that codes could be determined "on the basis of the theoretical interests guiding the research questions, on the basis of salient issues that arise in the text itself, or on the basis of both" (p. 390). The aim of thematic analysis in this article was to represent the similarities and differences of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which helps understand the differences in commercially run partisan newspapers' attitude to the anti-industrialization protests. The article adopted Attride-Stirling's method of thematic network analysis in which salient themes were identified at different levels of the text: A network of themes representing the coverage of the protests in each newspaper was useful for comparative analysis. Thematic analysis involves core "generic" skills that define major qualitative methods and analytical traditions, such as grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were analyzed to identify "lowest-order premises" of the text, which are referred to as the "basic themes" (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Some basic themes were combined to represent an abstract principle called "organizing theme" (Attride-Stirling, 2001), which combined multiple ideas and (in some cases) related to literary concepts. A cluster of organizing themes were combined to represent an overarching idea or "global themes," the "principal metaphors" of the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The basic, organizing and global themes were represented as "web-like" maps or network of themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001) for a comprehensive analysis and description of each partisan daily's representation of the protests.

I conducted 38 semistructured, in-depth interviews with journalists, senior editorial staff in decision-making positions, and former journalists. The journalists who worked with the selected dailies were identified through bylines. The interviewees held designations such as reporter, senior reporter, special correspondent, and staff correspondent with the selected dailies. Their years of experience varied from seven to 30 years. The interview transcripts were analyzed through a grounded theory approach as well as on the basis of themes, identified from previous studies of professional journalism (Deuze, 2005; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2012; Weaver, 2009).

Findings

Partisan Interests and Professional Journalistic Norms in a Partisan System

Overall, this study found the following: There remained differences in the selected dailies' responses, with both support for (by *Bartaman* and DS) and opposition (by ABP, TOI, and GS) to the anti-industrialization protests, due to antigovernment sentiments and the support for the state government's economic policy. But professional journalistic norms such as news values, the necessity to convey

information, and the government watchdog role caused a shift in the ABP and TOI's partisan alliance with the government and in their attitude to the protests. This blurred the differences in the newspaper landscape.

Themes of Opposition and Support to Anti-Industrialization Protests

Protests as Discredited (Global Theme). Figure 2 shows the opposition of the ABP, TOI and the CPIM's party press, GS, toward the protests through basic themes or "lowest-order premises," identified from the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

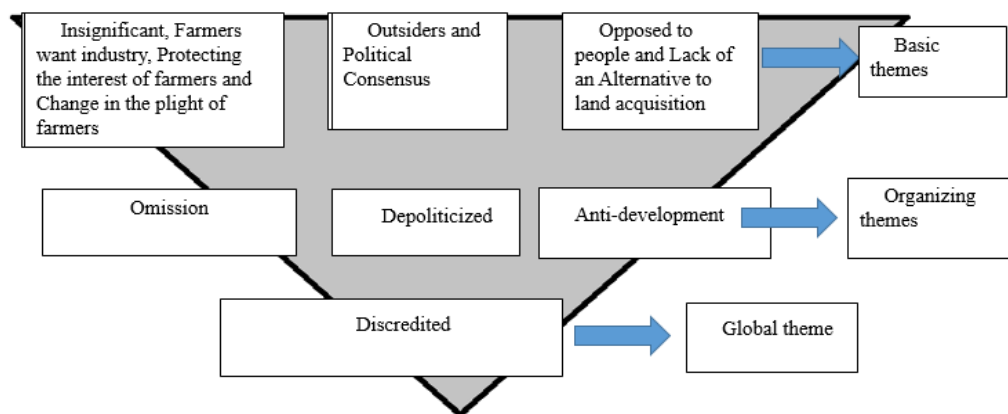


Figure 2. Opposition to protests in ABP, TOI, and GS.

The interrelated basic themes—"insignificant," "farmers want industry," "protecting the interest of farmers," and "change in the plight of farmers"—identified in the ABP, TOI, and GS, show the omission of the news of the protests. The basic theme "insignificant" shows that the news coverage dismissed the importance of the protests. In an editorial published on May 29, 2006, the ABP said that the protests were an "unnecessary obstacle" at a time when the state government proactively adopted a well-defined policy of agricultural land acquisition for big industrial projects ("An Unnecessary Controversy," 2006). A news report published in the TOI on June 4, 2006, said that the CPIM leaders took extra care to avoid a repetition of the Singur "fracas" when officials of Indonesia-based Salim group inspected land in Nandigram (Moitra, 2006). A CPIM legislator was quoted as saying, "These (protests) are nothing new. Government faced similar problems while acquiring land for the Haldia Petrochemicals project in the 90s" (Moitra, 2006, p. 3).

The basic theme "farmers want industry" also identified in ABP, TOI, and GS, conveyed the state government's version that farmers in Singur spontaneously gave away land in exchange of monetary compensation. The ruling left party's (CPIM) traditional support base remained with agricultural laborers, so the leftist government insisted that its economic policy had the support of Singur's local farmers. For instance,

a TOI news report, published on November 14, 2006, said the following: "Our protagonists are the farmers who have been on a land-selling spree for Tatas' small car project" (Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2006, p. 1).

These newspapers reported that the state government pledged to protect the needs of farmers, as described by the basic theme "protecting the interest of farmers." The TOI stressed that "the CM (chief minister) allayed fears of a food crisis," responding to critiques of farmland's industrial use ("Industry, Not Land Reforms," 2006, p. 2). A news report (Ghosal, 2006), published in the ABP on September 26, 2006, highlighted the state government's proactive role in protecting the needs of farmers and criticized protesters, represented as being backed by the CPIM's political opposition: "Exactly when Mamata Banerjee (the CPIM's main political opposition and Trinamul Congress [TMC] party leader) led the opposition in Singur, (chief minister) Mr. Buddha met with the head of Tata group to ensure alternative livelihood for farmers losing land" (Ghosal, 2006, p. 1).

The ABP, TOI, and GS represented Singur as a future industrial hub, which would improve the protesting farmers' social and economic plight. The basic theme "change in the plight of farmers" demonstrates this idea. A news report published in the TOI said, "Yesterday he was a land-loser. Today he is a bike-owner. . . . Their pockets are full" (Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2006, p. 2).

The organizing theme (or a higher order "abstract principle"), omission, which suggests the exclusion or omission of the news of protesting farmers, was formed by combining interrelated basic themes such as "insignificant," "farmers want industry," "protecting the interest of farmers," and "change in the plight of farmers." Following the Left Front state government version, the ABP, TOI, and the GS's news reports said that city-based intellectuals and the CPIM's political opposition, those "outsiders" to agricultural land, led the movement. This idea is expressed by the basic theme "outsiders." An ABP-report, published on December 3, 2006, said "Initially they (the government) thought that local villagers put up the resistance. But the administration came to know later that . . . outsiders were made to cause the disturbance" ("The Administration Progresses," 2006, p. 1).

The Left Front government's main political opposition, the TMC party did not ideologically oppose capitalist industrial growth and was, therefore, accused of opposing the state government's policies for short-sighted electoral gains (Nielsen, 2010). The ABP, TOI, and GS reiterated that it was not desirable for any political party to be seen as "anti-industry," and thus there was political consensus on industrialization. The news reports stressed that there was no opposition to corporate industrialization or the Tata group per se, but only against the ruling CPIM ("Despite being Mamata's ally," 2006; "Please Make the Tatas Stay," 2006). A report published in the TOI on October 6 2006 said, "It augurs well for West Bengal that over the past five days, top political leaders of all hues have begun yielding ground on land acquisition at Singur" (Banerjee, 2006, p. 1).

The basic themes "outsiders" and "political consensus," which express these ideas, were combined to form the organizing theme "depoliticized." The organizing theme, "depoliticized," suggests that the protests had no political significance as they were led by the CPIM's political opposition for narrow electoral gain. The Tata motor car factory project in Singur's agricultural land was taken up as part of a government-initiated drive to "reindustrialize" West Bengal, which lagged behind other states in industrial development (Nielsen, 2009).

The ABP, TOI, and GS argued that the protesters challenged the collective interest of people and failed to promise an alternative path of development. A January 2007 editorial in the left party press GS said, "Their leadership has no clue of why are they opposing . . . what would be the model of development (if they are against industry)" (Chakraborty, 2007, p. 6).

These ideas were expressed through the basic themes "opposed to people" and "lack of an alternative to land acquisition," which were combined to form the organizing theme "antidevelopment." The global theme "discredited," based on the sociological concept of the "strategy of discreditation" (Nielsen, 2009), combined the interrelated ideas of the organizing themes "omission," "depoliticized," and "antidevelopment." The Left Front "discredited" the movement by emphasizing that it was engineered by the CPIM's political enemies to disrupt development in the state. The themes described above remained active in the ABP, TOI, and GS and were absent in *Bartaman* and DS.

Partisan Interests and Selective Role of News Values

As the state's influential, largest selling newspaper, the ABP intended to sway public opinion in favor of the state government's policies of industrialization. The newspaper did not act as a government watchdog and ignored newsworthy events because the state government was perceived to be doing "good work," and the industrialization drive was seen as an honest initiative by the chief minister. A chief reporter with the ABP said, "The target was (not to) give importance to whatever (news) was perceived to be against industry" (D. Ghosh Thakur, personal communication, 2012).

The TOI supported the state government's economic policies and initially opposed the protests because "(corporate-owned national newspapers such as the TOI) . . . are definitely for huge investment" (S. Sen, personal communication, 2012). The newspaper supported the state government's link with a corporate industrial group such as Tata Motors. The state government's industrialization initiative was seen as newsworthy because West Bengal historically witnessed slow industrial development. But the ABP downplayed other newsworthy events such as news of the growing unity of CPIM's political opposition against the party, the rift within the Left Front coalition partners on the issue of corporate industrialization in Singur and the CPIM's loss of the traditional support base among agricultural workers, which remained significant in West Bengal's political landscape. The ABP's chief reporter said, "In case of Singur our coverage bypassed news values . . . we did not carry some news even though we had the information" (D. Ghosh Thakur, personal communication, 2012).

Protests as Legitimate (Global Theme). *Bartaman* and DS championed the cause of Singur and Nandigram's protesters, as reflected in the themes of support, shown in Figure 3.

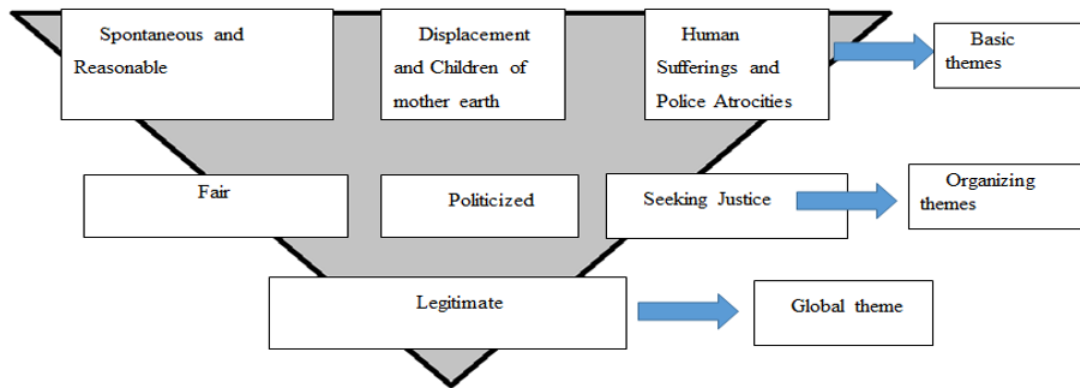


Figure 3. Themes of support to protests in Bartaman and GS.

The basic themes “spontaneous,” “reasonable,” “displacement,” “children of mother earth,” “human suffering,” and “police atrocities” were identified in the reports of *Bartaman* and DS and were absent in the ABP, TOI, and GS at the initial phase. *Bartaman* and DS emphasized that the protests in Singur and Nandigram were a spontaneous opposition by local farmers and thus countered the state government’s narrative. This idea is expressed by the basic theme “spontaneous.” The term “spontaneous opposition” recurred in news reports and editorials (“State Government Uncomfortable,” 2006; “The CPIM Waiting,” 2006). In a first-person account, “Bajmelia, Beraberi [localities in Singur] bursting in anger, unhappiness and anxiety,” published in DS on September 23, 2006, Ghosh (2006) reported: “It didn’t seem like that they were taught to say these words. It was the normal voice of ordinary farmers. Excited and angry. Overwhelmed by discontent and emotions” (p. 1).

The news reports also said that the protesting farmers had a genuine cause for agitation, as elaborated by the basic theme “reasonable.” A news report, published in *Bartaman* on December 7, 2006, described how the farmers incurred huge economic losses: “Asim Das of Khaser Bheri and some other farmers who didn’t give away land said, we were getting ready to grow potatoes. We didn’t give away our land” (“Angry Farmers,” 2006, p. 1).

The basic themes “spontaneous” and “reasonable” were combined to form the organizing theme “fair.” The news reports said that the displaced protesting farmers had a strong connection to the land, which was no different from a mother and child’s bond. This was expressed by the basic themes “displacement” and “children of mother earth.” A news report published in *Bartaman* on May 29, 2006, described how the farmers were displaced from their land and livelihoods: “Farmers ask, where would their families live if their houses are destroyed” (“Farmers Won’t Give,” 2006, p. 1).

A news report published in the DS on December 4, 2006, said that the farmers opposed the policies of land acquisition because they had an emotional bond with agricultural land: “To them land is like a

mother. That's why they think that giving away land for industry is akin to killing one's mother. . . . Land is our mother. We have to protect the mother who looks after her children" (Saha, 2006b, p. 1).

The organizing theme "politicized," formed by combing these basic themes, emphasized that the protests were politically significant, having raised issues such as displacement due to neoliberal reforms (Patnaik, 2007). The newspapers reported the sufferings of innocent villagers and the power excesses of the CPIM cadre and the police (Sanyal, 2007; "The CPIM Waiting," 2006), as expressed by the basic themes "human sufferings" and "police atrocities." Saha (2006a), in a December 3, 2006, news report in DS, reported instances of police brutality on powerless people: "Men had no option but to be the silent witness to the police setting fire on haystack and firing before an octogenarian woman" (p. 1).

Bartaman and DS also reported the nexus between the police, administration, and the ruling party and that the CPIM cadre masqueraded as the police in fake uniforms to attack the protesters. An editorial in *Bartaman* on January 8, 2007, said, "The CPIM criminals have come out against local villagers in Nandigram in the most brutal fashion" ("CPIM Leadership," p. 6).

The basic themes "human suffering" and "police atrocities" were combined to form the organizing theme "seeking justice," drawn from movement activists' necessity to represent themselves as victims of "injustice," as described in social movement studies (Boykoff, 2006; Gamson, 1992). The global theme "legitimate," formed by combining the organizing themes "fair," "politicized," and "seeking justice," suggests that *Bartaman* and DS legitimized the protesters' cause and challenged the state government's strategy of discrediting the protests. This overarching idea ("legitimate") or the principal metaphors of the text (Attride-Stirling, 2001) gives credibility to the protests by focusing on their ideals and actions (as represented by the ideas of the organizing themes "fair" and "politicized") and by assigning blame to the administration and emphasizing moral outrage (as represented by the organizing theme "seeking justice"; Harlow & Johnson, 2011).

Partisan Interests and Selective Role of News Values

Bartaman, a medium-sized Bengali daily started by a former journalist, identified as an antiestablishment newspaper and enjoyed loyal readership in the districts where the misuse of power by the CPIM party apparatchiks remained rampant in the 1980s and 1990s. The newspaper's antiestablishment attitude translated to sustained opposition to the ruling CPIM because the party remained in power in the state for three decades since 1977. The Bengali daily DS was launched in 2004 a few years before the protests of Singur and Nandigram and catered to anti-CPIM political constituencies at the time of the protests. The editor with DS said that the newspaper's policy was to oppose the CPIM and, therefore, it championed the cause of the farmers. "We aggressively took up the Singur issue. . . . The policy of DS was to oppose the CPIM" (A. Ghosh, personal communication, 2012).

Bartaman and DS reported newsworthy events such as the growing unity of CPIM's political opposition, the rift within the Left Front coalition partners, and the loss of the left's support base among agricultural workers. Also, DS identified as an "activist" newspaper as it became a platform of critiques of neoliberal industrialization.

Shift in the ABP and TOI's Attitude to the Protests From Opposition to Support

Change of Themes--From "Discredited" to "Legitimate" (Global Themes). There was a shift in the ABP and the TOI's attitudes as the protests in Singur gathered momentum and fresh protests started in Nandigram from January 2007 onward. The oppositional basic themes such as "spontaneous," "reasonable," "human suffering," and "police atrocities" came to be identified in the news reports of the ABP and TOI in the later phase of the time frame, as shown in Figure 4. The interrelated basic themes "spontaneous" and "reasonable," and "human suffering" and "police atrocities" were combined to form the organizing themes "fair" and "victims," respectively, leading to the global theme "legitimate."

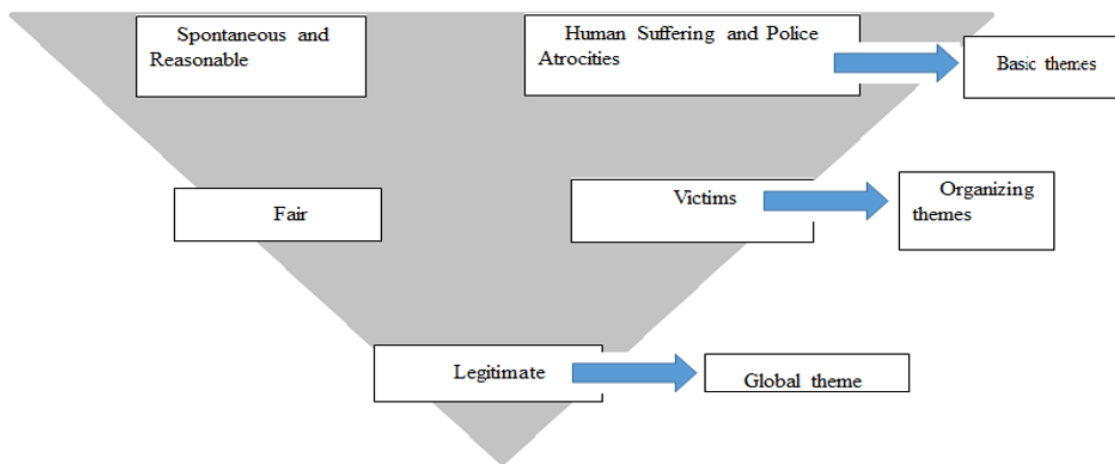


Figure 4. Shift from support to opposition to protests in ABP and TOI (January to March 2007 onward).

Change of Sources in the ABP and TOI

In 2006, 57% and 60% of the articles (20 and 18 out of a total of 35 and 30 articles) in the ABP and TOI, respectively, cited only sources of the state government and the ruling party. But in March 2007, 86% and 73.9% of articles (12 and 17 out of 14 and 23 news reports, respectively) in the ABP and TOI quoted sources of both the state government and the political opposition. Figure 5 shows the shift in the ABP and TOI's tendency to cite the sources of the state government in 2006 and 2007.

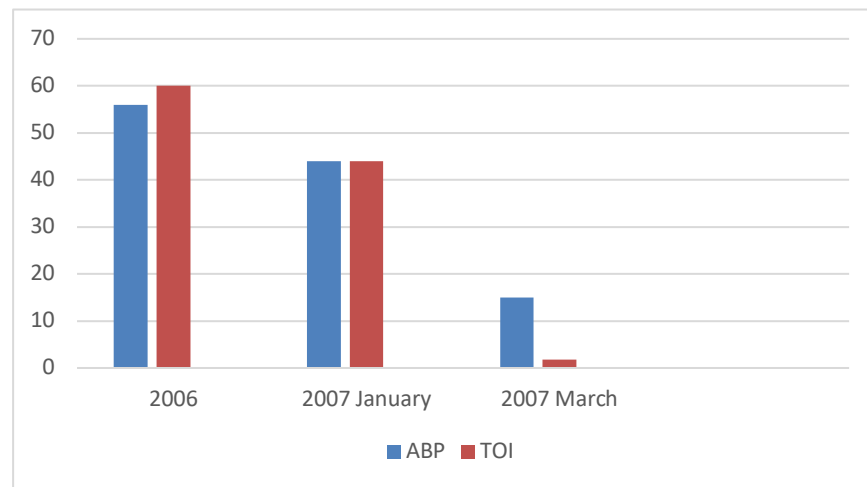


Figure 5. Percentage of articles citing only state government in 2006 and 2007.

Impact of Professional Norms: Less Differences in the Attitude to Protests

Professional journalistic norms such as news values and the need to provide information encouraged a shift in the attitude of the ABP and TOI toward the protests in the later phase of the time frame. This blurred the differences in the media system as the partisanship became skewed in favor of the protests and against the state government.

Changing Role of News Values

The ABP and TOI could not ignore the news of the protests as they gathered momentum with growing public support and sympathy. In May 2006, the protests of Singur were said to lack public support and were seen as unorganized. A correspondent with ABP said, "Initially the protests were insignificant and unorganized. We thought that such incidents of dissent are common" (S. Basu, personal communication, 2012).

There was a perceived shift in public mood, which made the protests politically significant and newsworthy. The televised images of police atrocities on the protesting farmers triggered public sympathy, and the ABP and the TOI were forced to "react" to television news. Although protests and demonstrations were fairly common in West Bengal's political history, the ones in Singur and Nandigram eventually came to be regarded as exceptional by journalists for their growing middle-class appeal and national importance.

Necessity to Convey Information

Journalists with the ABP and the TOI said that they could not suppress news of significant political events at a time when information was readily available. It was essential to provide important information because of the newspapers' credibility with the key readership. The TOI's resident editor said that as a credible newspaper they responded to the obvious questions that readers had in relation to important political events.

Thus, newspapers provided information despite their initial support for specific government or economic policies. This caused the news coverage to shift in favor of the protesters. The TOI's resident editor said, "This is not a period when there is no television. . . . If a newspaper doesn't publish news, you will not read it anymore. . . . Credibility issue, that's the main branding" (S. Sen, personal communication, 2012).

Journalists also felt compelled to report news of police violence, as this affected large sections of the dissenting population.

Necessity to Criticize the Government

The ABP and TOI reported the police and the ruling party's brutality in the later phase because it was seen as an essential journalistic duty to criticize "law and order" failure. The perceived atrocities on people by the police and the administration also necessitated government criticism. The TOI's resident editor said, "[When] they [the government] become antipeople, then we are critical" (S. Sen, personal communication, 2012).

The newspapers' informal alliance with the state government ended when the government was perceived as repressive. The proposed industrialization projects seemed jeopardized because of administrative failure and the government's inability to cope with political challenges. The TOI's bureau chief said, "A government that can't deliver. A government that could not bring in the Tatas . . . that is where the critique came from" (S. Roy, personal communication, 2012).

There was no significant shift in *Bartaman*, DS, and party press GS's attitude toward the anti-industrialization protests. All the selected dailies except the GS were antigovernment in their political stance in the later part of the time frame. This skewed the partisanship against the government and in favor of the protests.

Discussion

A partisan media system, in an ideal form, is a static model (see Figure 1) that remains opposed professional journalism and is influenced only by advocacy-based causes (Curran, 2007, 2011; McChesney, 2008, 2015). Such a partisan system, conceptualized as a democratic alternative to market-driven media, remains uncommon in contemporary societies. Commercially run news media in the present day function as partisan entities despite their shift to the commercial model. When commercially run media are driven by political roles, it does not necessarily translate to external pluralism in the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Although there remained differences in Kolkata's press system on the issue of anti-industrialization protests due to commercially run newspapers' partisan interests, such differences were blurred because of the growing influence of professional journalism in a section of the selected dailies, the ABP and the TOI. This minimized the differences of views, and skewed the partisanship in favor of the protests and against the state government. It can be said, therefore, that although there can be differences and diversity of views when multiple commercially run, partisan players have different political and economic interests, external pluralism in a media system does not remain fixed. The article further argues that professional journalistic norms remain central to a media system's ability to reflect political diversity when commercial players display partisan tendencies. This article proposes a conceptual framework--that of the "hybrid partisan" system--to account for the changes in a media

system, drawing from Hallin and Mancini's (2012) coinage of "hybrid" forms of professional journalism. The commercially run news media's shifting partisan alliances (Waisbord, 2000) and "hybrid" professional journalistic norms (Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Schudson & Anderson, 2009) remain central to the proposed "hybrid partisan system." Partisanship in contemporary societies does not remain fixed, as partisan media outlets maintain shifting political alliances due to their support for specific administrations' political and economic interests (Waisbord, 2000). Commercially run media are also known to abandon their political alliances when society is organized in a way that counters their partisan alliance (Porto, 2003). Thus, such players support professional journalistic norms despite the "centrality" of partisan interests in the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Journalistic professionalism may not always translate to objectivity (Donsbach, 2010) and is said to exist in "hybrid" or partial forms in partisan settings (Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). The conceptual framework of "hybrid partisan system" accounts for the changes in a media system that occur because of the intersection of "hybrid" professional journalistic norms and the shifting political and economic interests of commercially run, partisan players.

Different sections of the selected dailies initially opposed and supported the protests because of their partisan interests (support for the state government's economic policy and opposition to the government). The tendency to rely on official sources, criticized for resulting in news that adheres to the political and economic status quo (Bennett, 2010; Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1984), also advanced the ABP and TOI's support for the state government's economic policy. These dailies relied primarily on sources of the state government in the initial phase, even though the protesters' cause was endorsed by the state's political opposition such as the TMC party (Nielsen, 2009). The CPIM-led government and the administration's industrialization initiatives were also seen as newsworthy by the ABP and TOI because of the importance of industrialization in the local political landscape. Professional journalistic norms thus coexisted with and failed to challenge the commercially run dailies' partisan interests in the initial phase and protected the political status quo (the differences of the views in the media system).

Information dissemination and government watchdog roles along with news values, however, worked against a section of the selected dailies' partisan interests in the later phase. The necessity to convey information created scope for dissenting views against the state government, skewing the partisanship in favor of the protests and against the state government. Thus, professional journalistic norms challenged the political status quo or the differences of views over a time frame. The selected dailies in the later phase became government watchdogs, a key tenet of journalistic professionalism in liberal theories (Curran, 2002).

In India, the strength of the ideas of the free press and belief in the country's democratic institutions encouraged journalists to be critical of the government (Sonwalkar, 2002). The government watchdog role was further encouraged by changes in India's macroeconomic framework, namely by the "greater entry of foreign capital and foreign consumer goods," "the opening up of sectors such as telecommunications, transport, infrastructure, mining, banking, insurance, etc., to private capital," "many more entrants into the capitalist class" (Chatterjee, 2008, p. 56) and ascendancy of the relative power of the corporate capitalist class over that of other social groups since the 1990s. These structural changes corresponded with ideological changes such as the tendency of the urban middle class to view the state apparatus with suspicion and as being ridden with corruption and inefficiency--the negative pole of the state contrasted with the positive pole of the free market (Chakravarty & Schiller, 2010; Chatterjee, 2008). The traditional ideal of the "autonomous" investigative

journalism lost some of its significance in the democratic process “in a world where the media are themselves so powerful that they, in some estimations, form the stage on which much politics is carried out” (Matheson, 2010, p. 83). The ABP and TOI considered it essential to act as the government watchdog only after the protests gained momentum. This suggests how watchdog journalism in Kolkata’s newspaper landscape—similar to trends in Latin American countries and post-Soviet Russia—does not simply reflect the changes in the democratic process, but is driven by a mix of political, economic, and professional reasons (Matheson, 2010; Waisbord, 2000).

Drawing from Hallin and Mancini’s (2012) coinage, the proposed conceptual framework has been described as a “hybrid partisan system” to take into account the coexistence and intersection of commercially run dailies’ shifting partisan interests or advocacy journalism and hybrid professional journalistic norms such as news values, information dissemination function, and the watchdog role of the press. The proposed “hybrid partisan system” (see Figure 6) suggests that micro influences such as professional journalistic norms affect macro factors such as commercially run news media’s partisan interests to influence political diversity or the democratic potential of a media system. This happens with the changes in a media system when a section of commercially run news media change their partisan alliances and shift from one end to the other end of the political spectrum due to the norms of professional journalism.

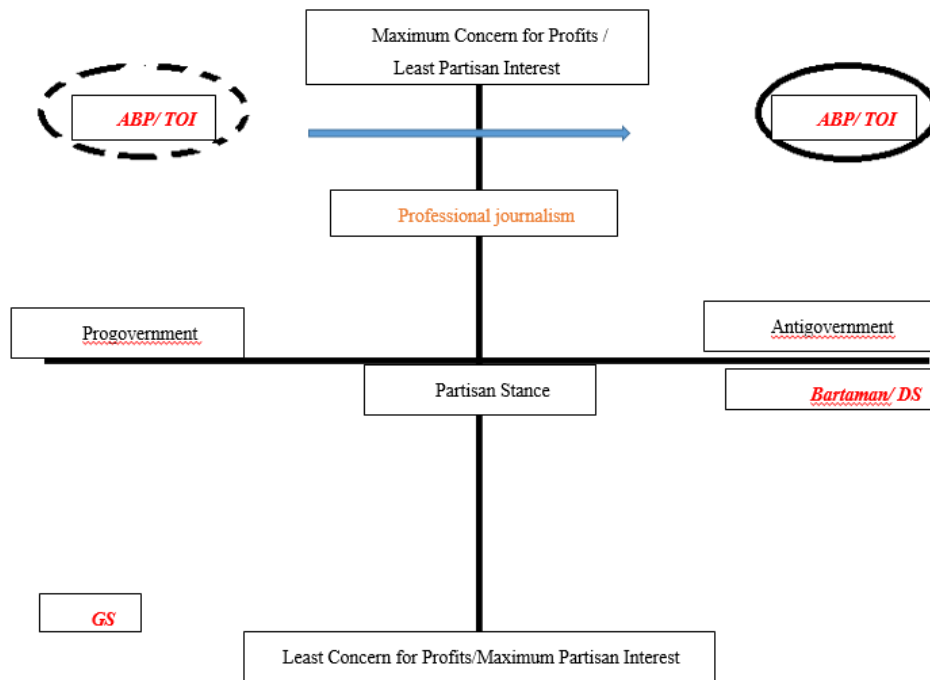


Figure 6. “Hybrid” partisan system. The dotted circle is ABP and TOI’s initial progovernment position. The solid circle represents ABP and TOI’s later antigovernment position. The arrow is the movement across political spectrum due to professional journalism.

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