

**Media in the midst of a struggle over imaginaries:
critiques to the press in the context of the 2019 Chilean social protests**

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The 2019 Chilean social protests gave rise to public debate on competing imaginaries for the future of Chile, leading to a referendum concerning the abolishment of the Pinochet dictatorship-based Constitution. Those protests were extensively covered by Chilean media. Given the high polarisation in the Chilean society, these media representations were heavily contested by laypersons (cf. Pécher 2024 on human rights violations during the protests).

In this study, we look into how the struggle around competing imaginaries in the media crystallises in critiques to the press by calling it populist, through the analysis of a set of 278 tweets from October–December 2019 in which the Chilean press is called populist.

On the one hand, we look into which types of media are being called populist, with a focus on the unique position of morning shows, which became highly popular news outlets during the protests. On the other hand, we analyse which meaning is given to populist in these tweets, where we distinguish critiques to the press – be it media outlets, journalists or articles – for being sensationalist (thus lacking professionalism), from more ideological critiques for deemed manipulation of information or for exacerbating violence. In doing so, we show how the press' role in spreading certain imaginaries made it a target for online critiques. This study also highlights a specific strategy to attack the press in the context of the Chilean social protests through the association with populist, for which we have so far not found equivalents in prior studies on European contexts.