Media Entry and Political Slant

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Introduction

How does competition affect slant in media outlets? Depending on where bias originates, increased competition can either exacerbate or discipline ideological distortion. When readers mainly seek confirmatory news, additional outlets intensify polarisation (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005). If, instead, audiences value accuracy, fresh voices can curb spin and nudge coverage toward the centre (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010). We provide empirical evidence of these mechanisms by building a model of political demand and supply of slant and analysing the entry of a new media provider in Spanish TV news.

Formal models of ideological positioning on a left–right line capture both forces. Entry widens product differentiation, yet it can make extreme positions unprofitable (Anderson and Coate, 2005). Ownership motives, mergers, and multi-product strategies further shape the equilibrium (Baron, 2006; Chen and Riordan, 2007; Anderson and McLaren, 2012).

More recently, Perego and Yuksel (2022) uncover a complementary channel—*issue selection*—through which tougher rivalry can magnify disagreement even when accuracy matters. Thanks to text-analysis techniques, we incorporate issue selection by proxying for the available news landscape and comparing topics and slant across outlets.

On the empirical side, evidence on competition and slant is scarce. The rollout of *Fox News* shifted vote shares toward Republicans (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017), and the historical spread of newspapers altered turnout and cross-party learning (Gentzkow et al., 2011). Yet these studies focus on the arrival of a new outlet as a whole, treating its ideological stance as given rather than modelling how competition reshapes slant itself.

Closest to our paper is Prat and Strömberg (2006), who track audience reallocation after a new TV channel launch in Sweden. We push this agenda further: we examine how viewers adjust when rivalry intensifies *and* explicitly control for the political slant on offer. Using state-of-the-art machine-learning and large-language-model techniques, we separately

measure topic choice, ideological tone, and airtime allocation—covering the three main vehicles of media bias identified in the literature (Puglisi and Snyder, 2015). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first empirical test of how competition feeds back into slant itself.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

Data

Our empirical setup extends the audience–transcript panel first assembled in Menéndez (2025). We retain the original sources, variable construction, and cleaning rules, then splice in two waves of additional channels and households.

Audience Shares

We use the national, minute-by-minute audience file provided by Kantar Media. For every clock-minute t the dataset reports the fraction of all switched-on television sets tuned to each monitored channel, so shares across channels add up to one.

- **Incumbent period (15 Dec 2022 – 14 Jan 2025)** Four free-to-air broadcasters are present in every minute: *TVE 1*, *Antena 3*, *Telecinco*, and *laSexta*.

- **Post-entry period (15 Jan 2025 – 31 Dec 2026)** The set expands to five with the launch of *Cuatro Noticias*, a 60-minute bulletin that airs live at 20:00.

Text Classification

Transcripts and Story Segmentation

Closed captions are scraped for the entire sample. Following Menéndez (2025), caption lines are grouped into coherent *stories* via BERTopic, which exploits contextual embeddings and temporal adjacency. Each story inherits precise on-air start and end stamps, enabling a one-to-one merge with audience impressions.

Building Content Characteristics The pipeline for the construction of the slant measure is shown in figure 1. Let S_{jd} denote the set of BERTopic stories on channel j at date d and $\mathcal{P}_{jd} \subseteq S_{jd}$ the subset flagged as political by keyword matches. For $s \in$

P_{jd}, define $tone(s) \in \{-1, 0, 1\}$ and party label $p(s) \in \{L, R\}$ when $|tone(s)| = 1$. Story length in minutes is $min(s)$, and total broadcast minutes that day are $min_{jd} = \sum_{s \in S_{jd}} min(s)$.

$$x_{jd}^{party+} = \frac{1}{min_{jd}} \sum_{s \in S_{jd}} \mathbb{1}\{tone(s) = 1\}\mathbb{1}\{p(s) = party\}min(s),$$

$$x_{jd}^{party-} = \frac{1}{min_{jd}} \sum_{s \in S_{jd}} \mathbb{1}\{tone(s) = -1\}\mathbb{1}\{p(s) = party\}min(s), \tag{1}$$

$$x_{jd}^{political} = \frac{1}{min_{jd}} \sum_{s \in \mathcal{P}_{jd}} min(s),$$

for each $party \in \{L, R\}$.

**Figure 1:** Measurement pipeline for political-slant variables.
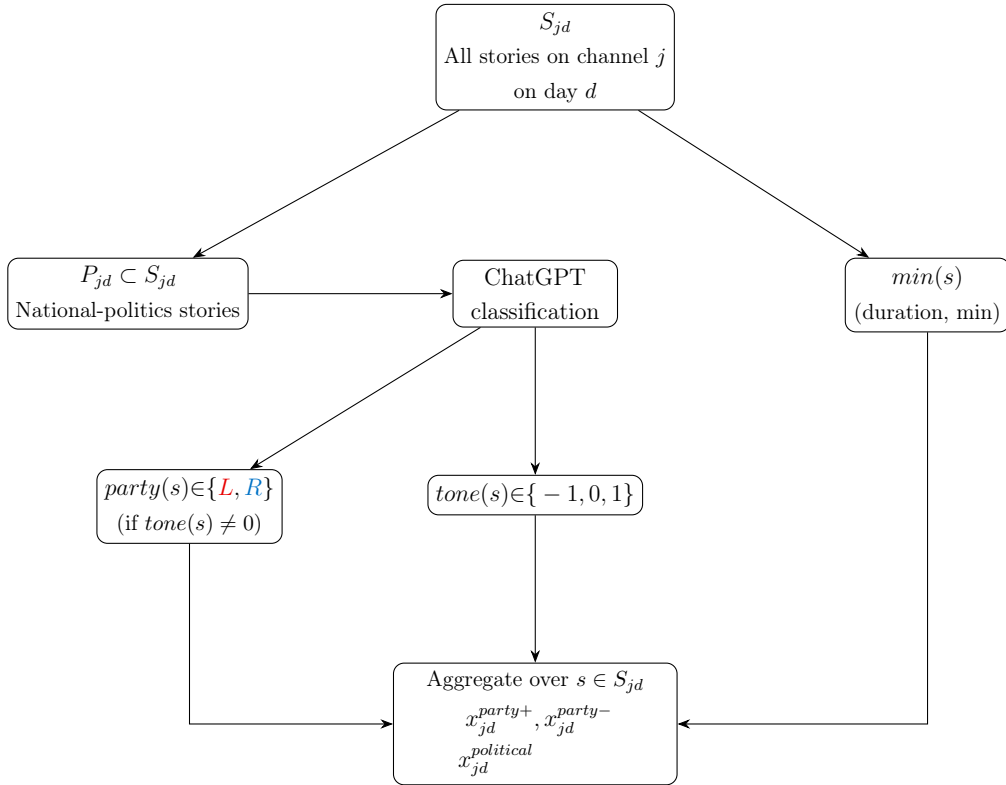
Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2 shows the net ideological tone that each channel devotes to left- and right-wing parties before and after the entry of *Cuatro*, incorporating the latter. Before entry, Antena 3 and Telecinco lean right, while TVE and the fledgling La Sexta lean left. After entry, the rest of the outlets stretch the spectrum at both ends: TVE and La Sexta shift further left, while Antena 3 and Telecinco move further to the right.

To better represent this along a one-dimensional spectrum, Figure 3 plots the normalized left-right scores for each channel before and after entry.

**Figure 2:** Average tone pre and post entry by channel-party
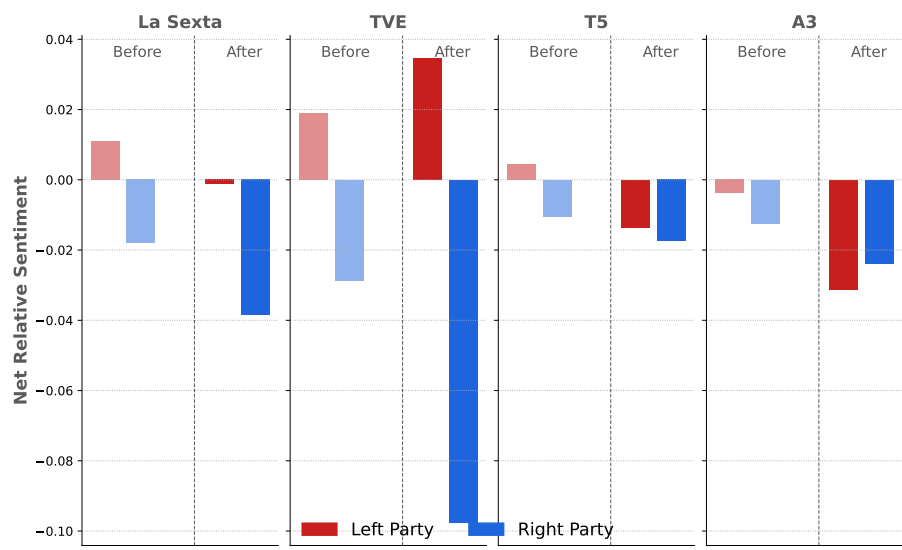
Notes: Average tone for each channel-party as classified by Chat GPT-4 over the full sample period.

Considering only the supply of content, entry appears to have increased ideological extremity in the positioning of other channels.

In future work, we plan to incorporate the demand side using audience data and to model issue selection via the topics chosen by viewers.

Figure 3: Relative position change before and after entry
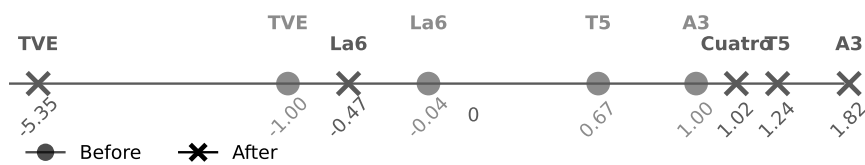
Notes: Average tone for each channel-party as classified by Chat GPT 4 from the whole sample period.

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