



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Tobias Eberwein,
Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW), Austria

REVIEWED BY

Argyro Kantara,
Cardiff University, United Kingdom
Brian Calfano,
University of Cincinnati, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE

Tamara Besednjak Valič
✉ tamara.valic@rudolfovo.eu

RECEIVED 09 March 2023

ACCEPTED 15 June 2023

PUBLISHED 14 July 2023

CITATION

Valič TB, Rončević B and Tomšič M (2023) How media pluralism navigates ideological orientations: the case of Slovenia. *Front. Commun.* 8:1143786. doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2023.1143786

COPYRIGHT

© 2023 Valič, Rončević and Tomšič. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

How media pluralism navigates ideological orientations: the case of Slovenia

Tamara Besednjak Valič^{1,2,3*}, Borut Rončević^{1,2} and Matevž Tomšič³

¹Rudolfovo - Science and Technology Centre, Novo Mesto, Slovenia, ²Faculty of Information Studies Novo Mesto, Novo Mesto, Slovenia, ³School of Advanced Social Studies, Nova Gorica, Slovenia

Introduction: Media and its reporting shape public opinion, and doing this can obtain an indirect and significant influence on the course and results of the political process. In this context, media operates as an active element of the political process.

Methods: The authors use the Janis-Fadner coefficient of imbalance to analyze a total of 1434 media texts published in 10 different Slovenian media outlets. The texts were published between March and September 2020.

Results: The authors discover weak media plurality as the main characteristic of the Slovenian media space. The results show the majority of media reporting is strongly anti-right-wing-governmental and left-wing oriented with little pluralism. Most news coverage of web portals demonstrates a distinct ideological note, resulting in predominant expressions of centre-left and anti-center-right government views.

Discussion: Most analyzed media is significantly more unfavorable to the center-right government than the center-left opposition, taking a notable left-wing stance. Confirmed by previous conducted studies, the Slovenia's political left seems to have much stronger media support than its right-wing counterpart. For the purpose, would be important to observe whether demonstrated harsh anti-government and pro-opposition orientation changed following the establishment of a new left-wing government after April 2020 elections.

KEYWORDS

media, media pluralism, ideological orientations, transition, Slovenia, Janis-Fadner coefficient of imbalance

1. Introduction

Without the media, communication in modern society is unimaginable. Therefore, many discussions and controversies revolve around this topic. Most often, discussions of the media revolve around their place in the structure of contemporary society and their role in this context. Media discussions are usually associated with the functions performed by the media, such as informing the public (i.e., by reporting on events) and others that offer more public appeal, such as entertainment. However, in the context of the present study, we highlight the importance of the media in connection with political life. Butler (2018), for example, refers to the media as “way, the media limit the arbitrariness of the authorities. The latter, at the same time, can instrumentalize media for various particularistic purposes (Butler, 2018): specifically, the media seem to provide essential leverage for the exercise of political and other influence.

Freedom and autonomy of the media are critical conditions for the functioning of democracy (Balčytienė et al., 2015; Abbas and Zubair, 2020). Therefore, we can understand their existence as an expression of the democracy of a society. However, democracy requires not only freedom but also equality of expression. In this context, media pluralism is important, as it also is in the context of ensuring the quality of content delivery. The political life of a democratic society, which is pluralistic, can only develop with a diversified media space. For the purpose of this research, the diversified media space is regarded as consisting of organizations (newspapers, radio and television broadcasters, and online media) that are receptive to views of different ideological orientations.

The prerequisite for a diversified media space is media freedom. Restricting media freedom is considered a severe breach of democratic standards (Whitten-Woodring and Van Belle, 2014). Sometimes, such attempts to restrict media freedom are made by politicians, especially, but not solely, those in power. The problem of political influence or even control over the media is also allegedly characteristic of some members of the European Union. For example, Hungary and Poland are most frequently highlighted in this context (see, for instance, Bátorfy and Urbán, 2020; Surowiec and Kania-Lundholm, 2020). Additionally, European Union institutions often mention the same situations with respect to media freedom in other European countries. In particular, some researchers (MFRR, 2021) have also pointed out similar phenomena, involving political influence over the media, playing out in Slovenia, especially in the period between 2020 and 2022.

According to the interplay of powers in democratic societies, it would be utopian to expect an complete absence of pressures. However, realized and effective pressures on the media are those that restrict media freedom. Such realized media pressures are reflected in media coverage in the form of coverage favoring the one who is exerting pressure, referred to as the pressurer. Based on this, the authors define media pressure as recognized attempts by the government or other centers of power to exert control over media reports (Makarovič et al., 2008). However, these attempts can be more or less successful. Effective pressure is therefore reflected in media messages in the form of bias in favor of the pressurer. If the pressurer is the government, the outcome of pressure is reflected in pro-governmental reporting.

Turning our attention to the situation in Slovenia, this is a country that has been listed as problematic in terms of media freedom (MFRR, 2021). However, past research shows that leftist parties enjoy more substantial connections than their rightist counterparts in Slovenia with various strategic groups: specifically, financial power groups, academia, the judiciary, and the media. The result of this situation is disproportionate influence and informal power within society (Adam, 1999; Tomšič, 2008; Tomšič and Prijon, 2014; Kleindienst and Tomšič, 2017). Some authors even claim the existence of an ideological hegemony of the left, generated in particular *via* media space (Adam et al., 2009; Adam, 2012). This hegemony manifests in the form of a strong prevalence of messages and opinions that are—at least in the Slovenian context—perceived as leftist. It is related to a high level of elite reproduction, which is expressed in the dominant position of the left-wing political camp, which has been in power for most of the period of Slovenia's independence (Adam and Tomšič, 2002; Adam et al., 2009).

In 2020, the authors conducted an empirical study on media messaging. The goal was to assess the level of pluralism in the Slovenian media landscape. In this context, we propose that the Slovenian media landscape is experiencing relative bias in terms of reporting, with distinct anti-governmental attitudes in the analyzed texts when the predominantly right-wing government was in power (March 2020 to May 2022). Additionally, we assert that there is a distinct left-wing ideological orientation to the majority of media outlets in Slovenia. This correlates with their predominantly negative attitudes to the government, which is ideologically divergent.

By analyzing the political leanings and ideological orientations of ten major web media outlets, we determine the (im)balance of the Slovenian media landscape. Adopting a rigorous methodology, we prove there is a distinct left-wing ideological orientation across media outlets covering the majority of the media landscape in Slovenia. The research results demonstrate pre-dominantly negative attitudes toward the center-right government. The results contribute toward an understanding of the Slovenian media landscape as a leftist hegemony.

2. The role of the media in a democratic society

A key element of representative democracy is political pluralism, where different individuals and groups compete for voters' support (Dahl, 1972, 2005). This political pluralism is an expression of social pluralism. It defines modern Western society and results from its cultural, social, and economic heterogeneity, in which individuals pursue different interests and subscribe to diverse values and ideological orientations (Tomšič, 2007). All this can be manifested through the public sphere. The public sphere represents a space that, in a complex way, connects the area of private autonomy with the system of political power in various forms of social communication (Habermas, 1991; Deane, 2005). At the same time, it is also a space for communication between different actors, enabling social reflection through the articulation of other ideas, concepts, and visions for the current and future development of society (Pinter, 2005).

The media space is an integral component of the public sphere. As such, it is one of the most important factors enabling a democratic political life, specifically, it is where actors articulate their various social and political interests. The media represent a mechanism for social communication between actors from different social fields, and their role as mediators among citizens is significant. This encompasses civil society on the one hand, and political power structures and the bearers of this power on the other. In addition to information exchange, the purpose of which is to educate citizens and holders of power, the role of the media in controlling the ruling elite is crucial. In doing so, the media serve as a means of presenting views, ideas, critiques, and proposals formulated in the sphere of civil society. In summary, not only do the media function as transmitters of all of the above, but they also produce these themselves, thus taking on the role of creators of public opinion (see also Anastasio et al., 1999).

Authors often label the media as the “fourth branch” of power (Cater, 1977; Splichal, 2005). In this context, this is not about power

in terms of formal powers (as granted to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government), but about the influence that the media exert by providing citizens with information on the situation in politics, the economy, and other areas at home and abroad. This does not mean information only in a narrow sense, i.e., statements of facts, but also includes interpretation of those facts. At the same time, one must be aware that media coverage shapes public opinion: that is, people's perceptions of what is happening in the realm of public affairs (Temple, 2013; McCombs and Valenzuela, 2021). Although there are other factors that influence this perception and media messages are received by rational individuals, the media play a very important, if not a central, role in the development of these perceptions (given that most of what we know about what is happening around us is what we learn from the media).

Having said all this, we can conclude that social and political dynamics largely depend on how the media space works. Considering the development of democracy, not only is it important to maintain the freedom of expression of individuals and groups, but it is also important to ensure that such groups have the opportunity to comprehensively and accurately present their opinions to the public. Here, we discuss the relevance of media pluralism for the functioning of democracy (Ciaglia, 2013; Karppinen, 2013; Brogi and Parcu, 2014; Brogi, 2020). In light of this, we conclude that the political life of democratic polity needs a diversified media space consisting of media outlets (newspapers and radio and television networks) that are receptive to viewpoints of different political and ideological orientations. When a certain political side, ideology, or interest group dominates the media, the equality of political competition, as one of the fundamental democratic postulates, is denied. In such cases, different political alternatives lack the opportunity for appropriate articulation. Such a situation can result in an artificially created imbalance of the political space. When the media are aligned (financially, personally, or ideologically) with the ruling elites (political or economic), the task of criticizing the ruling political elite is poorly implemented, leading to undermining of the second fundamental postulate of democracy—control over power.

3. Review of the media situation in Slovenia

During the communist period, the media served primarily as a tool of power to carry out ideological indoctrination. They were part of what Althusser (2006) called the “ideological apparatus of the state”. Such abuse of media, of course, also applied to the Slovenian situation during the period of communist Yugoslavia. During this period, the media were subject to the directives of the state-party *nomenklatura* (Nežmah, 2012). The claim of the media narrative was that all media houses of the state were socially owned. Furthermore, the narrative treated journalists and media actors as “socio-political workers” (Tomšič, 2021). In practice, the work of the journalists was required to support the official ideology of socialist self-government with all its ideological dogmas. In this regard, this situation represented a marked regression compared to the situation in the first Yugoslavia, when Catholic and liberal positions polarized the media space. Most media were strongly

polarized and could be defined as politically biased in their treatment of politics and society. Nevertheless, the media space was undoubtedly quite pluralistic. The establishment of the communist regime radically eliminated the aforementioned existing pluralism.

Admittedly, in the last period of the former regime (i.e., in the 1980s), when its pressure on society gradually softened, a niche for non-conformist activity also emerged in the realm of the media. However, non-conformist media were exceptions, not the rule. The so-called central media always supported the ruling nomenklatura, which was eventually reformed—although this occurred under tremendous pressure from the general dissatisfaction of the people with the country's situation.

With the transition to democracy, institutional conditions for the development of a free, open, and diverse media space were established (Avbelj and Cernič, 2020). According to Tomšič, most of the Slovenian media space preserved certain principles of the former communist regime even after the formal transition to democracy (Tomšič, 2020). In this regard, we can discuss a high level of media reproduction. The media outlets that had already been present under the former regime managed to remain on the market. In this context, we can state that, at least in specific segments of the media, the changes that have taken place since 1990 have been relatively small. In the context of the print media, in the post-independence period, not a single serious daily newspaper managed to establish itself under the latest market conditions (only two tabloids remained: *Slovenske novice* and the newer *Svet 24*). The editors and journalists who were engaged this work under the former regime have primarily maintained their positions even in the post-1990s period.

To date, media pluralism in Slovenia has not been a topic of much research. The first major survey of the media space, in terms of its plurality, prevailing value patterns, and policy links, was conducted by a group of researchers from the Institute for the Revival of Civil Society. The research findings were published in 2002 in *Dignitas* as a special thematic issue (No. 13/14). The special issue was entitled “Slovenian Reality as Constructed by the Media” (Aplenc and Jerovšek, 2002). Based on these findings, the media space seems to be distinctly one-sided in its political and ideological preferences. As such, the media seem to support the so-called transitional left: that is, the political parties and groups that are the successors of the former socio-political organizations, especially the LDS and ZLDS (now SD) parties. A more systematic, comprehensive, and methodologically complete survey of media pluralism was conducted for the requirements of the Ministry of Culture in 2006 by the staff of the Institute for Strategic and Developmental Analysis under the title “The State of Media Pluralism in Slovenia 2006”. Finally, in 2007 and 2008, two surveys were conducted that included analysis of the plurality of the media space. These were the “Study of Media Freedom and Autonomy of the Media Space in the Republic of Slovenia in 2007” and “Media Freedom in Slovenia in 2008.” Each contained an analysis of comments in the central Slovenian print media.

It is also worth mentioning some studies that have tackled the issue of media ownership and its impact on the plurality of media space, thereby highlighting the problem of media concentrations (Bašič-Hrvatina and Kučič, 2005; Bašič-Hrvatina and Petković, 2007).

In summary, existing research on media pluralism has shown that despite the differences in the reporting by individual media outlets, there is a detectable imbalance. We have noted an imbalance in terms of the preferences of the media for different political options and the ideological orientation of analyzed Slovenian media outlets. According to the research that has been conducted, most Slovenian media outlets and opinion leaders favor the parties of the transitional left, both those directly derived from the structures of the former communist regime and the newly established ones acting in the interests of those structures. Media content is dominated by opinions, values, and views that can be described as left-wing.

4. Materials and methods

The study presented here should be understood as a continuation and an upgrade of similar past research. An analysis of traditional print media reporting is complemented by an analysis of the content of online media. However, recent research is more comprehensive, as it covers a larger set of analyzed units (i.e., published articles). Our study dates to 2020. For the purposes of analysis, we applied a similar methodology to those employed in the aforementioned studies conducted from 2007 to 2008. The research questions were based on the range of studies that have indicated a lack of plurality and increased left-wing bias in the Slovenian media (see also Makarovič et al., 2008). In this context, we were interested in investigating whether the reporting presented in selected Slovenian media is balanced regardless of the political side that is in power. Additionally, we were interested to determine whether we could detect any particular ideological orientation as pre-dominant in the media landscape of Slovenia. We formulated the main research questions as follows:

- RQ1: Is the reporting of the Slovenian media landscape balanced in terms of distinct anti-governmental and pro-governmental reporting?
- RQ2: What ideological orientations stand out as pre-dominant in the Slovenian media landscape?

4.1. Determining the media sample

The media landscape has, in recent years, undergone many changes related to digitalization. The widespread usage of ICT has enabled a change in the communication model of the media, inverting the long-recognized top-down distribution of news (Newman, 2011). The contemporary media approaches are user-oriented and Internet-dominated. Statistical data in Slovenia show that more than one million Internet users (out of a total of 1.5 million Internet users in the year 2020) use the Internet to read “Internet news, Internet newspapers, and Internet magazines” (SiSTAT., 2020). People’s level of trust in traditional media—radio, TV, printed media, and social media—is very low (rated as the least trustworthy) (EBU., 2020). Based on this, we initiated the research using a sample from traditional media drawn from their presence on the Internet via web portals. To determine the rankings of the web portals, we used the SEMrush tool. The SEMrush tool is a

search engine optimization (SEO) tool, internationally recognized primarily for its use in marketing analysis, and also used in scientific research. It can be used in research on the web visibility of content on university websites (Vallez et al., 2022) or state tourism websites (Vyas, 2019), or in web analysis for start-up businesses (Chitkara and Mahmood, 2020).

Based on the organic rankings of media websites as established using the SEMrush tool, we identified the 10 most-visited Slovenian media outlets. We calculated these rankings using the Traffic Analytics function of SEMrush. We were interested in the period between the 1st of March 2020 and the 30th of September 2020. For further details, see also Tomšič et al. (2020).

In Table 1, we summarize the main characteristics of the 10 web media portals that, according to their organic reach, characterize the Slovenian media landscape. Regarding their share of the media landscape, 24ur.com encompasses 36% of the overall organic reach, and Siol.net 15%. Rtvlo.si follows at 13%, and Slovenskenovice.si at 10%. The remaining media outlets form less than a third of the Slovenian media landscape, ranking in the following order: Svet24.si, Zurnal24.si, and Delo.si, at 6% each; dnevniki.si, at 4%; and Vecer.si and Nova24.si, at 2% each. All except two of these outlets are privately owned, with one of the other two forming part of the national broadcaster (Rtvlo.si), and the second (Siol.net) being owned by a state-owned company, Telekom.¹ Some media portals are standalone (Siol.net), while others are integrated with both their own radio and television networks (Rtvlo.si), only their own television network (24ur.si, Nova24.si), or with their own newspapers (Delo.si, dnevniki.si, and Vecer.si). All of these except Rtvlo.si are privately owned; the latter forms part of a public broadcaster.

For the purposes of this research, we re-created the Slovenian media landscape in the form of the landscape formed by the above-listed 10 media web portals.

4.2. Determining the sample of media texts

The contributions published by the media from day to day are not all equally important from the point of view of the state of media pluralism. The most important are those that deal with topics that (a) are a matter of broad public interest and (b) trigger controversies and disagreements between key political protagonists. With such topics, it is important that they are presented from different angles and that all parties involved have the opportunity to present their views.

Based on a review of the main topics of public debate during the designated period, the three most politically relevant and widely discussed topics were determined as follows:

1. Governmental measures in response to COVID-19 outbreaks during the first wave of the pandemic between 1 May and 25 May 2020, with a total of 797 relevant media texts;
2. Media legislation between 1 July and 30 September 2020, with a total of 278 media texts; and

¹ The Siol.net web portal is owned by Tsmmedia, which is owned by the state-owned Telekom.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the web portals analyzed.

Web portal name	Share of the media landscape	Ownership status	Integration with other media
www.24ur.com	36%	Private	POP TV
www.siol.net	15%	Public	Standalone
www.rtv slo.si	13%	Public—national broadcaster	TV, radio
www.slovenskenovice.si	10%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.svet24.si	6%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.zurnal24.si	6%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.delo.si	6%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.dnevnik.si	4%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.vecer.com	2%	Private	Printed newspaper
www.nova24.si	2%	Private	TV

TABLE 2 Statements defining the codes.

Code name	Description
Pro-governmental	The text narrates or expresses a favorable attitude toward the government.
Anti-governmental	The text narrates or expresses an unfavorable attitude toward the government.
Pro-opposition	The text narrates or expresses a favorable attitude toward the opposition.
Anti-opposition	The text narrates or expresses an unfavorable attitude toward the opposition.
Balanced	The text narrates or expresses a balance of attitudes toward both the government and the opposition.

3. The relationship between politics and the migrant crisis between 15 March and 30 September 2020, with a total of 359 media texts.

Thus, the primary media text sample consisted of a total of 1,434 media texts.

4.3. The coding process for media texts

Once the sample of media texts was selected, we initiated the coding process. Based on previous research, we adopted the code values shown in Table 2.

We developed and followed the following strict protocol:

1. A third person, who was not involved in the coding process, assigned a designated number of media texts to each coder.
2. Two independent coders, who were not in contact with one another before or during the coding process, coded each media text.
3. Each coder was required to read the media text and assign it scores as presented in the coding table (see the Coding Sheet in Supplementary material for details).
4. A third person, who was not involved in the coding process, collected the results of the coding process and checked them

against one another. If the results of both coders were identical, the third person confirmed the codes.

5. If the codes did not match, the third person assigned the media text to a third coder to re-code the media text.

To ensure the independence of coders and their work, the coders were unaware of each other's identities. The authors of the study did not participate in the coding process.

Ultimately, 188 media texts were excluded from the analysis, as their content did not correspond to the analyzed topics. The final sample for analysis consisted of 1,246 media texts.

4.4. Method of analysis: the Janis–Fadner coefficient of imbalance

The main research objective was to determine whether media reporting is aligned with the government's positions and advocates for its policies. The results should provide information about government control over media.

The authors applied the Janis–Fadner coefficient of imbalance (Janis and Fadner, 1943) for this analysis. Several authors have taken the same approach in the past in conducting similar analyses (Etter et al., 2018; Leiva and Kimber, 2019; Zhang and Ha, 2021). The Janis–Fadner coefficient of imbalance (CI) applies to any type of communication for which favorable content (f), unfavorable content (u), relevant content (r), and total content (t) can be defined and instances classified accordingly. In our case, the number of relevant texts and the total number of media texts was the same.

$$Cf = \frac{(f^2 - fu)}{rt}, \text{ where } f > u;$$

$$Cu = \frac{(uf - f^2)}{rt}, \text{ where } f < u; \text{ and}$$

$$CI = Cf - Cu.$$

The Janis–Fadner coefficient of imbalance helps to establish whether the attitudes of the coverage of a particular topic toward a particular group or position are negative (indicated by a value tending toward -1) or positive (a value tending toward +1). A

value of zero, therefore, signifies overall balance (Makarovič et al., 2008). In our case, the values were assigned as follows. For analysis of political actors, negative values were assigned for the codes #anti-governmental and #anti-opposition, and positive values for the codes #pro-governmental and #pro-opposition. For analysis of ideological orientations, negative values were assigned for the code #left, and positive values for the code #right. In all cases, the value 0 was assigned for the code #balanced. For further details, see Tomšič et al. (2020).

Based on our sample, we calculated the Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient in the following manner.

For the variable of attitudes toward governmental political actors, in cases where the values for #anti-governmental are larger than those for #pro-governmental:

$$Cf = \frac{(\#anti\text{-governmental} * \#pro\text{-governmental}) - \#anti\text{-governmental}^2}{(\#anti\text{-governmental} + \#pro\text{-governmental} + \#balanced)^2},$$

and in cases where the values for #pro-governmental are larger than those for #anti-governmental:

$$Cf = \frac{\#pro\text{-governmental}^2 - (\#anti\text{-governmental} * \#pro\text{-governmental})}{(\#anti\text{-governmental} + \#pro\text{-governmental} + \#balanced)^2}.$$

For the variable of attitudes toward opposition political actors, in cases where the values for #anti-opposition are larger than those for #pro-opposition:

$$Cf = \frac{(\#anti\text{-opposition} * \#pro\text{-opposition}) - \#anti\text{-opposition}^2}{(\#anti\text{-opposition} + \#pro\text{-opposition} + \#balanced)^2},$$

and in cases where the values for #pro-opposition are larger than those for #anti-opposition:

$$Cf = \frac{\#pro\text{-opposition}^2 - (\#anti\text{-opposition} * \#pro\text{-opposition})}{(\#anti\text{-opposition} + \#pro\text{-opposition} + \#balanced)^2}.$$

Finally, for the variable of ideological orientation, in cases where the values for #left are larger than those for #right:

$$Cf = \frac{(\#left * \#right) - \#left^2}{(\#left + \#right + \#balanced)^2},$$

and in cases where the values for #right are larger than those for #left:

$$Cf = \frac{\#right^2 - (\#left * \#right)}{(\#left + \#right + \#balanced)^2}.$$

5. Results

5.1. Media attitudes toward the government and opposition political actors

Based on the analysis presented in Table 3 (see also Tomšič et al., 2020), we can see significant differences in terms of attitudes

toward national political actors among different media outlets. In this regard, Nova24tv.si stands out, as anti-opposition (46.3%) and pro-government (43.5%) texts were pre-dominant in its reporting. In this regard, it stands out in comparison with other media outlets. Other than this outlet, most of the media space exhibited a distinct reporting structure. Siol.net exhibited the highest proportion of reporting with a balanced attitude among the remaining media outlets, with 73.7% of its texts falling into this category, while 69.8% of those published by Slovenskenovice.si did so. Most other outlets exhibited a significant proportion of texts with balanced reporting. However, upon closer examination, one can see a less pluralistic picture. The media texts analyzed were found to present unbalanced attitudes, and anti-government attitudes were strongly prevalent in all media outlets. The lowest percentage of unbalanced anti-government texts was observed for Siol.net, with 14.00%, and Zurnal24.si, with 21.9%. In the cases of other media outlets, the proportion of such texts exceeded 30% (Slovenskenovice.si, Delo.si, and 24ur.com) or even 40.00% (dnevnik.si, Rtv slo.si, Vecer.com, and Svet24.si) of all reporting. In contrast, most media outlets did not exhibit significant representation of pro-government and anti-opposition attitudes. In the case of Rtv slo.si, a taxpayer-funded public media outlet, 55.8% of reporting was balanced. However, anti-government texts still stood out, representing 41.6% of all reporting by Rtv slo.si. Notably, only 2.6% of the unbalanced texts were pro-government. The differences between the media outlets were statistically significant and quite substantial (contingency coefficient C = 0.628; statistical significance: p = 0.000).

Calculating the Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient, as shown in Table 4, clarified the nature of attitudes within the reporting of various media outlets toward the government and the opposition (see also Tomšič et al., 2020). Among the 10 analyzed media outlets, only one (Nova24tv.si) was characterized by the prevalence of positive attitudes toward the government over negative ones. Across the texts from this media outlet, the calculation indicated a predominance of negative attitudes toward the opposition over positive ones.

Almost all other media outlets showed a clear predominance of negative attitudes toward the center-right government over positive ones, with the exceptions of Siol.net and Zurnal24.si, where the Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient indicated only a slightly negative attitude. Siol.net and Zurnal24.si, therefore, exhibited balanced reporting in terms of attitudes toward the center-right government. Most outlets, other than Nova24tv.si, exhibited a balanced attitude toward the opposition. However, we noted a distinct lack of reporting on the opposition: in some cases, as for Rtv slo.si and Slovenskenovice.si, we found no such texts in our sample. In contrast, Rtv slo.si exhibited a very high level of negativity toward the center-right government that was currently in power, exceeding the average across the media space. The Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient for Rtv slo.si was −0.16, while the average coefficient for the entire media space was −0.08.

The results presented in Table 4 show that, in general, the attitude of the media outlets analyzed toward the government was somewhat more negative than positive. On the other hand, reporting on the opposition was either largely balanced or did not adopt any particular attitude.

To sum up, of the 10 media outlets analyzed, the web portal Nova24tv.si was the only one with a solid pro-government and

TABLE 3 Proportion of published texts exhibiting different attitudes toward political actors.

Media outlet	Pro-governmental	Anti-governmental	Pro-opposition	Anti-opposition	Balanced	Total
24ur.com	4.0%	31.0%	0.0%	0.8%	64.3%	100.0%
Delo.si	3.2%	36.1%	0.6%	0.0%	60.0%	100.0%
dnevnik.si	1.9%	46.9%	1.3%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Nova24tv.si	43.5%	0.0%	0.0%	46.3%	10.2%	100.0%
Rtvslo.si	2.6%	41.6%	0.0%	0.0%	55.8%	100.0%
Siol.net	6.1%	14.0%	0.9%	5.3%	73.7%	100.0%
Slovenskenovice.si	0.0%	30.2%	0.0%	0.0%	69.8%	100.0%
Svet24.si	3.3%	45.9%	0.0%	1.6%	49.2%	100.0%
Vecer.com	3.4%	45.5%	0.7%	0.7%	49.7%	100.0%
Zurnal24.si	10.5%	21.9%	1.0%	5.7%	61.0%	100.0%

TABLE 4 Overall media attitudes toward national political actors.

Attitudes toward political actors		Media outlet										
		24ur.com	Delo.si	Dnevnik.si	Nova24tv.si	Rtvslo.si	Siol.net	Slovenskenovice.si	Svet24.si	Vecer.com	Zurnal24.si	Total weighted
Pro-governmental	Count	5	5	3	64	5	7	0	2	5	11	5
Anti-governmental	Count	39	56	75	0	79	16	13	28	66	23	38
Pro-opposition	Count	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Anti-opposition	Count	1	0	0	68	0	6	0	1	1	6	2
Balanced	Count	81	93	80	15	106	84	30	30	72	64	76
Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient	Attitudes toward government	−0.08	−0.12	−0.22	0.66	−0.16	−0.01	−0.09	−0.20	−0.20	−0.03	−0.09
Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient	Attitudes toward opposition	0.00	0.00	0.00	−0.67	−0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.00

anti-opposition stance. In further discussing the impact of these media outlets, we must consider the low share of organic traffic to the website of Nova24.tv. Based on this, Nova24.tv remains on the fringe of the Slovenian media landscape.

5.2. Ideological orientations of media outlets

As noted in Table 5, most reporting was ideologically neutral, with the exception of that of the media outlet Nova24tv.si (Tomšič et al., 2020). This outlet was predominantly right-wing (82.3% of all articles). The reporting by the remainder

of the media outlets confirmed the overall picture. Other than the aforementioned outlier, the proportion of balanced texts ranged from 61.9% (dnevnik.si) to 87.8% of all articles (Siol.net). However, more detailed analysis revealed a less pluralistic picture of the Slovenian media landscape. Severe imbalance could be observed in reporting adopting a particular ideological stance. A large majority of such ideologically less neutral reporting was left-wing. In the case of some specific media outlets (e.g., 24ur.com, Rtvslo.si, and Svet24.si), we could not detect such content in our sample, or the percentage of such texts was insignificant. The one exception was the media outlet Siol.net, where beyond the high proportion of ideologically neutral articles, the ratio of left-wing (7.0% of texts) to right-wing reporting

TABLE 5 Proportion of published texts with different ideological orientations.

Media outlet	Left-wing	Right-wing	Balanced	Total
24ur.com	21.4%	0.0%	78.6%	100.0%
Delo.si	25.8%	0.6%	73.5%	100.0%
Dnevnik.si	36.9%	1.3%	61.9%	100.0%
Nova24tv.si	0.0%	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%
Rtvslo.si	27.9%	0.0%	72.1%	100.0%
Siol.net	7.0%	5.3%	87.7%	100.0%
Slovenskenovice.si	16.3%	2.3%	81.4%	100.0%
Svet24.si	32.8%	0.0%	67.2%	100.0%
Vecer.com	33.1%	2.1%	64.8%	100.0%
Zurnal24.si	13.3%	5.7%	81.0%	100.0%

(5.3% of texts) was relatively balanced. In contrast, the public media outlet [Rtvslo.si](#) was extremely unbalanced in terms of ideological orientation: the analysis indicated that 72.1% of its articles were neutral, but up to 27.9% were left-wing texts. The texts sampled from the national radio and TV broadcaster [Rtvslo.si](#) did not contain any right-wing oriented pieces. The differences, in this case, were noticeable, statistically significant, and quite substantial (contingency coefficient $C = 0.648$; statistical significance: $p = 0.000$).

The Janis–Fadner coefficient of imbalance was also calculated to analyze and summarize the predominance of one type of ideological orientation over the other in the published texts analyzed.

Among the media outlets analyzed, the prevalence of left-wing opinions in reporting, as compared to right-wing opinions, was most evident for [dnevnik.si](#), [Svet24.si](#), and [Vecer.com](#), followed by [Rtvslo.si](#), [Delo.si](#), and [24ur.com](#) (Table 6). Reporting by [Nova24tv.si](#) adopted a pre-dominantly right-wing orientation, as mentioned above. The remainder of the media outlets appeared to adopt a relatively neutral stance; this was most characteristic of [Siol.net](#) and [Zurnal24.si](#). To summarize, based on observation of the media space as represented by the 10 most widespread media outlets in Slovenia, left-wing reporting prevailed over right-wing reporting.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This analysis of the media landscape focused on the 10 most visited web portals among Slovenian media outlets; as a means of objectively selecting the research population, the authors chose to analyze the 10 web portals with the highest traffic. Further examination revealed that the 10 most frequently accessed web portals were, in fact, those of the most prominent Slovenian media outlets. We implemented this approach for the analysis in order to provide insight into the levels of plurality and balance in the Slovenian media landscape.

Based on the initial data analysis, the reporting presented by the Slovenian media outlets analyzed is predominantly neutral and balanced. This indicates that most news coverage adopts neither

a positive nor a negative stance toward any political personality or worldview, and the media outlets give the impression that they have no clear ideological profiles. However, upon closer examination, less pluralism is detected. Most news coverage presented by the web portals was found to exhibit a distinct ideological leaning, resulting in the predominance of expression of center-left views and views opposed to the center-right government. We detected the predominance of these views during the period analyzed, throughout which center-right-wing parties were in power. Based on the Slovenian overall media situation as reflected in previous research (Section 3) and confirmed by this study, these results can be tentatively generalized to hold only when right-wing parties are in power. In this context, the [Nova24tv.si](#) outlet stands out as the only online portal that expressly supported the center-right government during the period analyzed, criticized the opposition, and exhibited a distinctly right-wing orientation.

Regarding (un)favorable attitudes in reporting toward the center-right government or center-left opposition, we detected two media outlets ([Siol.net](#) and [Zurnal24.si](#)) exhibiting relative balance in reporting. However, in both these cases, we still observed slight anti-center-right-government sentiment. Furthermore, most analyzed media outlets were significantly more unfavorable toward the center-right government than toward the center-left opposition, taking a notable left-wing stance.

In examining media reporting, the profile of national radio and television broadcaster RTVSLO (or its multimedia web portal [Rtvslo.si](#)) deserves special attention. Among the media outlets analyzed, this was the only public one. As it is publicly financed, [Rtvslo.si](#) should provide services in which the confrontation of different views is readily apparent. In this context, plurality and impartiality are essential to its strategic mission and objective. Nevertheless, based on our results, the [Rtvslo.si](#) web portal is not particularly balanced in terms of advocacy of political options or ideological neutrality.

Based on the results of our analysis, most media outlets seem to have a well-defined, predominantly left-wing political

TABLE 6 Calculation of the overall ideological orientations of media outlets.

Ideological orientation		Media outlet										Weighted Total
		24ur.com	Delo.si	dnevnik.si	Nova24tv.si	Rtvslo.si	Siol.net	Slovenskenovice.si	Svet24.si	Vecer.com	Zurnal24.si	
Left-wing	Count	27	40	59	0	53	8	7	20	48	14	26
Right-wing	Count	0	1	2	121	0	6	1	0	3	6	3
Neutral	Count	99	114	99	26	137	100	35	41	94	85	92
Janis–Fadner imbalance coefficient	Overall ideological orientation	−0.05	−0.06	−0.13	0.68	−0.08	0.00	−0.02	−0.11	−0.10	−0.01	−0.04

and ideological stance. Considering the results of previous studies (see, for example, Makarovič et al., 2008), this situation can be seen as a characteristic of the entire period after Slovenian independence. In this context, Slovenia's political left wing (the transitional left, as described above) seems to have much stronger media support than its right-wing counterpart. The results of the several studies that have been conducted are consistent in this regard. The dominance of leftist political orientations and anti-governmental media reporting is more evident during periods of center-right majority government.

In the given context, several prospects for further research arise. First, in order to analyze the orientation of media reporting when center-left governments are in power, it would be important to examine whether the previous harsh anti-government and pro-opposition orientations changed after the previous government lost the elections in April 2022 and the new left-wing government was formed. Second, it would be interesting to conduct a case study on media pressure exerted by the new government, especially in terms of limiting access to free speech. Government officials frequently decline to answer questions posed by the non-mainstream media and publicly express negative opinions of these media outlets. Additionally, in May 2023, the newly appointed editor of the web portal Siol.net closed down the possibility for individuals to add comments below published media texts. These acts have not been discussed as problematic in any of the mainstream media. Third, it would be very important to study the reporting presented by the national radio and television broadcaster RTVSlo (which was determined to be biased in terms of political orientation and its impact on democracy), the quality of the media space, and the pluralism of information. This is especially important since the takeover of RTVSlo was one of the main activities of the new government, which even changed the relevant legislation in order to remove the senior management of the public broadcaster. Finally, the media landscape continues to be a weak point of the Slovenian post-communist transition. As such, its one-sidedness and political instrumentalization can obstruct the establishment of a genuinely

pluralistic democracy. The impact of the media on the quality of Slovenian democracy is also a research question worth exploring further, in order to fully understand the Slovenian post-communist transition.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: MT and BR. Methodology: TV. Formal analysis, investigation, resources, and writing—review and editing: TV, BR, and MT. Writing—original draft preparation, visualization, and supervision: MT. Project administration: BR. Funding acquisition: Faculty of Media. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research was funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, Grant No.: 3340-20-08106. Open access funding was provided by Faculty of Information Studies as the work was partly supported by Slovenian Research Agency Program P1-0383 (TV and BR).

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Nuša Erman, who participated as a data curator and analyst for the original report for the Ministry of Culture, and the assistance of Mrs. Anja Dular in administration of the media article coding process.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher,

the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1143786/full#supplementary-material>

References

- Abbas, Z., and Zubair, M. (2020). Freedom of expression under censorship is a threat to democracy. *Dialogue* 15, 19.
- Adam, F. (1999). *Ambivalentnost in Neznosna Lahkost Tranzicije*.
- Adam, F. (2012). "The dynamics of elites and the type of capitalism: Slovenian exceptionalism?," in *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 53–70.
- Adam, F., Kristan, P., and Tomšič, M. (2009). Varieties of Capitalism in Eastern Europe (with Special Emphasis on Estonia and Slovenia). *Commun. Post-Commun. Stud.* 42, 65–81. doi: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2009.02.005
- Adam, F., and Tomšič, M. (2002). Elite (Re)Configuration and politico-economic performance in post-socialist countries. *Europe-Asia Stud.* 54, 435–454. doi: 10.1080/09668130220129551
- Althusser, L. (2006). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, eds. G., Akhil, and A., Sharma (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell Pub) 86–111.
- Anastasio, P. A., Rose, K. C., and Chapman, J. (1999). Can the media create public opinion? A social-identity approach. *Curr. Direct. Psychol. Sci.* 8, 152–155. doi: 10.1111/1467-8721.00036
- Aplenc, A., and Jerovšek, J. (2002). *Slovenian Reality as Constructed by the Media*. Ljubljana: Nova Revija.
- Avbelj, M., and Cernič, J. L. (2020). *The Impact of European Institutions on the Rule of Law and Democracy. Slovenia and Beyond*. London: Hart. Avbelj Matej Cernič Jernej Letnar. doi: 10.5040/9781509915071
- Balčytienė, A., Raeymaeckers, K., and Vartanova, E. (2015). "Safeguarding newsroom autonomy: tensions between the ideal and the actual," in *European Media in Crisis* (London: Routledge) 117–35.
- Bašič-Hrvatini, S., and Kučič, L. J. (2005). *Monopoli: družabna igra trgovanja z mediji*. Mediakcije 3. Ljubljana: Maska.
- Bašič-Hrvatini, S., and Petkovič, B. (2007). *In Temu Pravite Medijski Trg? [You Call This a Media Market?]*. Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut.
- Bátorfy, A., and Urbán, Á. (2020). State Advertising as an Instrument of Transformation of the Media Market in Hungary. *East Eur. Polit.* 36, 44–65. doi: 10.1080/21599165.2019.1662398
- Broggi, E. (2020). The media pluralism monitor: conceptualizing media pluralism for the online environment. *Profession de La Inform.* 29, 85863. doi: 10.3145/epi.2020.sep.29
- Broggi, E., and Parcu, P. L. (2014). Evolving regulation for media freedom and pluralism in the European Union. *Utilities Policy* 31, 256–265. doi: 10.1016/j.jup.2014.03.001
- Butler, P. (2018). A free press: boisterous watchdog of democracy. *SAIS Rev. Int. Affairs* 38, 15–22. doi: 10.1353/sais.2018.0012
- Cater, D. (1977). *The Fourth Branch of Government*. Vintage Political Science and Social Criticism. New York: Random House.
- Chitkara, B., and Mahmood, S. M. J. (2020). "Importance of Web Analytics for the Success of a Startup Business," in *Data Science and Analytics*, eds. B., Usha, N. R., Roy, and B., Panda (Singapore: Springer) 366–380. doi: 10.1007/978-981-15-5830-6_31
- Ciaglia, A. (2013). Pluralism of the system, pluralism in the system: assessing the nature of media diversity in two European countries. *Int. Commun. Gazette* 75, 410–426. doi: 10.1177/1748048513482262
- Dahl, R. A. (1972). *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University press.
- Dahl, R. A. (2005). *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Deane, J. (2005). "Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere," in *Media and Global Change Rethinking Communication for Development*, eds. H., Oscar, and T., Tufté (Buenos Aires: CLASCO) 77–90.
- EBU. (2020). *Trust in Media 2020*. Geneva: Media intelligence service. Available online at: https://www.ebu.ch/publications/research/login_only/report/trust-in-media
- Etter, M., Colleoni, E., Illia, L., and Meggiorin, K. (2018). Measuring organizational legitimacy in social media: Assessing citizens' judgments with sentiment analysis. *Busin. Soc.* 57, 60–97. doi: 10.1177/0007650316683926
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT press.
- Janis, I. L., and Fadner, R. H. (1943). A coefficient of imbalance for content analysis. *Psychometrika* 8, 105–119. doi: 10.1007/BF02288695
- Karppinen, K. (2013). *Rethinking Media Pluralism*. Fordham: Fordham University Press. doi: 10.5422/fordham/9780823245123.001.0001
- Kleindienst, P., and Tomšič, M. (2017). Human dignity as the foundation of democratic political culture: legal and philosophical perspective. *Law, Cult. Human.* 18, 385–404. doi: 10.1177/1743872117738229
- Leiva, R., and Kimber, D. (2019). "Economic Indicators Affecting the Media Reputation of a Country: The Case of Chile (1990–2015)," in *Global Aspects of Reputation and Strategic Management* (New York: Emerald Publishing Limited) 143–63. doi: 10.1108/S1064-485720190000018007
- Makarovič, M., Rončević, B., Tomšič, M., Valič, T. B., and Lamut, U. (2008). *Slovenski Mediji v Družbi in Slovenska Družba v Medijih*. Nova Gorica: Fakulteta za uporabne družbene študije.
- McCombs, M., and Valenzuela, S. (2021). *Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and Public Opinion*. 3rd edition. Cambridge, UK: Medford, MA: Polity.
- MFRR. (2021). Press Freedom Deteriorating in Slovenia under Latest Janša Government. Available online at: https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Slovenia_PressFreedomMission_Report_Final_20210630.pdf
- Newman, N. (2011). *Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Media*. University of Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Department of Politics and International Relations. Available online at: <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:94164da6-9150-4938-8996-badfd6f6b507>
- Nežmah, B. (2012). *Casopisna Zgodovina Novinarstva [History of Press Journalism]*. Ljubljana: Beletrina.
- Pinter, A. (2005). *Sodobne Teorije Javne Sfere [Contemporary Theories of the Public Sphere]*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.
- SiSTAT. (2020). *Purpose of Internet Usage by Regular Internet Users According to: Year, Purpose of Internet Usage, Education, and Sex*. Ljubljana: Statistical office of Republic of Slovenia. Available online at: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/29743025.px/>
- Splichal, S. (2005). *Kultura Javnosti [Culture of the Public]*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.
- Surowiec, P., and Kania-Lundholm, M. (2020). Towards illiberal conditioning? New politics of media regulations in Poland (2015–2018). *East Eur. Polit.* 36, 27–43. doi: 10.1080/21599165.2019.1608826
- Temple, M. (2013). The media and the message. *J. Polit. Market.* 12, 147–165. doi: 10.1080/15377857.2013.781479

- Tomšič, M. (2007). Medijski pluralizem in dinamika menjav političnih elit (media pluralism and dynamics of elite change). *Annales* 17, 459–468.
- Tomšič, M. (2008). Historical development of slovenian political elite. *Innov. Issues Appr. Soc. Sci.* 1, 47–66. doi: 10.12959/issn.1855-0541.IIASS-2008-no2-art03
- Tomšič, M. (2020). “Medijski Politika in “avtomomna” odvisnost Medijev [Media Politics and “autonomous” dependence of Media],” in *Z Lepilom Na Podplatih. Trideset Let Slovenske Države [With Glue on the Soles. Thirty Years of the Slovenian State]*, eds. Š., Ivan (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba) 207–217.
- Tomšič, M. (2021). “Cetrta Veja Oblasti – Ena Najbolj Nevralgičnih Točk Postkomunistične Slovenije [Fourth Branch of Government – One of the Most Neuragic Points of Postcommunist Slovenia],” in *Trideset Let Slovenske Države [Thirty Years of the Slovenian State]*, eds. D., Darko, and D., Rupel (Koper: Marezige: Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko, Inštitut IRRIS) 205–10.
- Tomšič, M., and Prijon, L. (2014). Ideological profile and crisis discourse of slovenian elites. *Polit. Central Eur.* 10, 53–74.
- Tomšič, M., Rončević, B., Erman, N., and Valič, T. B. (2020). *Raziskava Medijske Krajine: Raziskovalno Poročilo Pripravljeno Po Pogodbi Št. 3340-20-081069*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za medije.
- Vallez, M., Lopezosa, C., and Pedraza-Jiménez, R. (2022). A Study of the web visibility of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda on University Websites. *Int. J. Sustain. Higher Educ.* 23, 41–59. doi: 10.1108/IJSHE-09-2021-0361
- Vyas, C. (2019). Evaluating state tourism websites using search engine optimization tools. *Tourism Manage.* 73, 64–70. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2019.01.019
- Whitten-Woodring, J., and Van Belle, D. A. (2014). *Historical Guide to World Media Freedom: A Country-by-Country Analysis*. London: CQ Press. doi: 10.4135/9781452234229
- Zhang, X., and Ha, L. (2021). Comparing the five measures of media reputation attributes in local and national newspapers. *Int. J. Busin. Commun.* 60, 678–698. doi: 10.1177/2329488421998442