

PRESS RELEASE

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Research: Why French Canal Plus TV Channels Broadcast About 50% More Far-Right Opinions

- **New billionaire channel owner shifted political coverage**
- **EPOS team analyzed about 262,000 guests on TV and radio shows (2002-2020)**

Bonn, Mannheim, 27.06.2024 – **The coverage that media outlets give to political parties changes when a new owner takes over: Three French TV channels from the Canal Plus Group gave about 50 percent more air time to the far right after being bought by French billionaire Vincent Bolloré in 2015. These are findings of the discussion paper “Hosting Media Bias: Evidence from the Universe of French Broadcasts” published by the EPOS Economic Research Center at the Universities of Bonn and Mannheim.**

“For democracies to function, voters need to be exposed to a variety of views in the media,” says Camille Urvoy from the EPOS Economic Research Center. “Yet, our analysis of the hosts and about 262,000 guests appearing on French television and radio shows suggests that owners want their channels to focus on certain views - possibly corresponding to their own preferences. In this context, it is interesting how journalists adapt to a major ownership-driven change in the editorial line. We take the acquisition of three television channels in France by Vincent Bolloré as an example.”

Shift to the radical right under new media boss

According to the research, the takeover led to an increase in the time devoted to politicians from the radical right of 5.5 percentage points. The shift is stronger, amounting to an increase of about 50 percent compared to other channels, when politically vocal guests are included. These could be activists and commentators, for example. Their speaking time is not monitored by media regulators because they are not professional politicians.

How editorial shifts are brought about

According to the research, at the Canal Plus channels, the political shift was brought about by hosts complying with a new editorial strategy: those journalists who stayed on the acquired channels after the takeover started featuring far-right guests more frequently. At the same time, many hosts stopped appearing on the acquired outlets and did not find a similar position on another leading outlet.

Different coverage times for political groups

As to the broader media landscape in France, the authors find that other media channels also largely differ in how much attention they devote to different political groups. “This is despite the existence of broadcast regulations meant to ensure respect for pluralist expression,” says Urvoy.

Policy implications – ensuring pluralism within and across channels

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Some important policy implications can be drawn for the regulation of the media. “First, when measuring pluralism of views represented on a channel, it is important to not only focus on politicians, but to include non-politicians as well who may be used to bias content,” says Urvoy. “Second, the takeover by Bolloré shows that rules to protect pluralism and impartiality within channels are needed. This is all the more important as most people get their news from a limited number of sources. So external plurality across different channels is not enough to ensure that citizens are exposed to a plurality of views.”

The presented discussion paper is a publication without peer review of the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS. Access the full discussion paper here: <https://www.crctr224.de/research/discussion-papers/archive/dp537>

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The Collaborative Research Center (CRC) Transregio 224 EPoS

Established in 2018, [the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS](https://www.crctr224.de), a cooperation of the universities Bonn and Mannheim, is a long-term research institution funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). EPoS addresses three key societal challenges: how to promote equality of opportunity; how to regulate markets in light of the internationalization and digitalization of economic activity; and how to safeguard the stability of the financial system.

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