Comunicación y Sociedad
Departamento de Estudios de la Comunicación Social
Universidad de Guadalajara

The state control of the Cuban printed press (1959-1965): A systemic analysis

La estatalización de la prensa impresa cubana (1959-1965): un análisis sistémico

A estatização da imprensa escrita cubana (1959-1965): uma análise sistêmica

DOI: https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2025.8957

Salvador Salazar Navarro[1]
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0782-3942

Based on Hallin and Mancini's dimensions for the study of media systems, this study analyzes the transformation of the Cuban print press between 1959 and 1965, from the beginning of the Revolution to the founding of the Granma newspaper, the official organ of the Communist Party. Through a historical analysis, this study examines changes in content and institutions that strengthened state control over the media. The results show how state intervention centralized communication and reformulated journalism. This study seeks to understand the role of the press in revolutionary contexts.
Keywords: Printed-press, Cuba, republic, revolution, state control.

Con base en las dimensiones de Hallin y Mancini para el estudio de los sistemas de medios, se analiza la transformación de la prensa impresa cubana entre 1959 y 1965, desde el inicio de la Revolución hasta la fundación del diario Granma, órgano oficial del Partido Comunista. A través de un análisis histórico, se examinan cambios en contenidos e instituciones que consolidaron el control estatal de los medios. Los resultados muestran cómo la intervención estatal centralizó la comunicación y reformuló el periodismo. Este estudio busca entender el rol de los medios en contextos revolucionarios.
Palabras clave: Prensa, Cuba, república, revolución, estatalización.

Com base nas dimensões de Hallin e Mancini para o estudo dos sistemas midiáticos, analisa-se a transformação da imprensa escrita cubana entre 1959 e 1965, desde o início da Revolução até a fundação do jornal Granma, órgão oficial do Partido Comunista. Por meio de uma análise histórica, se examina as mudanças nos conteúdos e nas instituições que consolidaram o controle estatal da mídia. Os resultados mostram como a intervenção estatal centralizou a comunicação e reformulou o jornalismo. Este estudo busca compreender o papel da mídia em contextos revolucionários.
Palavras-chave: Imprensa, Cuba, república, revolução, estatização.

How to cite:
Salazar Navarro, S. (2025). The state control of the Cuban printed press (1959-1965): A systemic analysis. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e8957. https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2025.8957

[1] Bronx Community College, City University of New York, United States.
salvador.salazar3@gmail.com
Submitted: 01/07/25. Accepted: 05/22/25. Published: 08/27/25.

Introduction
The Cuban press at the crossroads of 1959: bibliographical and conceptual review

The story that follows can be summarized in a few lines. On March 10, 1952, Cuba's long-time "strongman", General Fulgencio Batista, carried out a coup d'état, shattering the already fragile and short-lived republican constitutional order (ironically, in May of that year, the country was preparing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of independence). When Batista seized power *manu militari*, Cuba boasted one of the most notable print media systems in Latin America (Alisky, 1981; Lent, 1992; Valle, 2020), remarkable not only for the number of publications but also for their overall quality. Some newspapers, such as the conservative *Diario de la Marina*, had been founded when Cuba was still a Spanish colony; others, like *El Mundo*, appeared during the first U.S. occupation and were inspired by the journalism practiced in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The list is much longer, including outlets such as *Avance*, *Diario Nacional*, *Noticias de Hoy*, *El Crisol*, *El País*, *Excelsior*, *Información*, *Prensa Libre*, and the magazines *Bohemia* and *Carteles*,[2] to name only the most prominent.

Over the fifty years of the republican period, dozens of publications emerged –some daily newspapers, others magazines– not only in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, the country's main cities, but in virtually every urban settlement on the island.[3]

---

2 Journalist and researcher Ada Ivette Villaescusa Padrón (2015, 2021), who has extensively investigated this period, has produced detailed profiles of each of these print media. We recommend consulting the appendices of two of her books, referenced in the bibliography of this article. The reader will find relevant information on the main Cuban publications of the Republican era, as well as the early years of the Revolution. We acknowledge the work of this author, an essential reference for the study of the history of journalism in Cuba.

3 Lent (1992) points out that, from the founding of the Republic of Cuba on May 20, 1902, until the first days of Castro's Revolution, the Cuban press was rich in titles. In Havana, there were at least a dozen newspapers at any given time; often, the number was 21 or 22.

During Batista's dictatorship (1952-1959), relations with the press followed a "carrot and stick" approach. Periods of censorship and overt repression alternated with a policy of behind-the-scenes negotiation. The Batistato[4] perfected the mechanisms of press corruption (Henken, 2022), practices that had already been developing for decades.[5] According to José Ignacio Rivero, last owner-editor of *Diario de la Marina* and thus one of the main protagonists of this story, when Fidel Castro arrived in Havana there were 58 newspapers in circulation in Cuba, with a combined daily print run of 800 000 copies –an average of 130 newspapers per thousand inhabitants (Rivero, 2004). For his part, Alisky (1981) described Havana's media market in the 1950s as the most competitive in the world, with 21 newspapers circulating more than one million copies.

Despite clientelism, corruption, informational silences, forced closures, and periods of censorship, Cuba's print media was also an expression of remarkable ideological plurality. Newspapers like *El Mundo*, *Diario de la Marina*, *Prensa Libre*, *El País*, and *Noticias de Hoy*, along with magazines such as *Carteles* and *Bohemia*, welcomed the broadest range of political viewpoints of the era. The island's media landscape included communist, nationalist, feminist, and conservative publications,

---

4 Fulgencio Batista played a leading role in republican Cuba from the 1930s until his departure from power in 1959. His relationship with the press presents points of continuity, but also of rupture, throughout his long political career, distinguishing between his constitutional period (1940-1944) and the dictatorial period (1952-1958). In this article, we will refer to the latter period, as it precedes the arrival of Fidel Castro and the corresponding transformation of the press system.

5 In 1928, dictator Gerardo Machado, to subdue the press, issued subsidies in exchange for support and instituted censorship. After the economic crisis of 1929, Cuban newspapers needed government money to survive. The situation deteriorated further when Machado was overthrown in 1933, leading to even greater political instability. In the following two years, newspapers suffered the consequences of strikes and lockouts that forced most to close for short periods. From then on, government subsidies alternated with censorship as a form of control (Lent, 1992).

among many others. Even within a single outlet, antagonistic ideological positions could coexist, as was the case, for example, with the cultural supplement of *Diario de la Marina*.

Six years later, in 1965, the number of daily newspapers had shrunk from 58 to just three national publications: *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde*, and *El Mundo* –the latter being the only survivor from the old Republic, which disappeared in 1968 after a fire destroyed its printing facilities. The transformation of the Cuban press was not only quantitative but also involved a significant shift in content.[6] Social and crime reporting disappeared; heroes and villains assumed new roles in the news agenda; other social actors and stories emerged in the pages of the newspapers; and the old republican values of God, fatherland, and family (*Diario de la Marina*'s motto) gradually vanished. Along with them went admiration for the United States as a model of progress, Christmas celebrations, beauty queens, and critiques of Soviet communism, among a long and fascinating list of topics that make this scenario a paradigmatic object of study for historians of journalism and communication.

The study of these years –arguably the most decisive in the history of Cuban journalism– has been undertaken by numerous authors, both academics and participants in the events themselves.[7] For the present research, we sought to review virtually all the bibliography published on the subject in the form of scholarly articles and books. The review included general histories, compilations, and memoirs. Two conclusions emerge from the most recent literature on the topic. First, there are outstanding studies that use the press as a historical source (Bustamante, 2021; Ferrer, 2021; Guerra, 2012, among many others). Second,

---

6 Numerous authors have studied the changes in press content following Fidel Castro's rise to power. Although the list is much longer, we recommend consulting Bruzón Sosa (2025), Díaz Castañón (2010), Marrero (2018), and Villaescusa Padrón (2015).

7 Among the latter, see the testimonies of Franqui (1980, 1985), Cabrera Infante (1992) and Rivero (1987, 2004). The list is incomplete and biased, since it lacks voices from the revolutionary side, although the texts by Ortega (1989), Marrero (2003, 2006, 2018) and Vera and Constantín (2003), which we will comment on later, were all written by the revolutionary officialdom.

there is a growing body of work specifically focused on the journalistic output of the period, demonstrating in recent years the development of historical communication and journalism studies in Cuba (Salazar, 2023).

Among the consulted works, *Prensa y revolución: la magia del cambio*, compiled by historian Díaz Castañón (2010), stands out for its analysis of the content of several print outlets circulating in Cuba during the early years of the Revolution. Researcher Villaescusa Padrón has conducted a highly detailed review of the publications from this period, with her findings presented in *Desafíos en la prensa cubana 1959-1960* (2015) and *La prensa cubana ante el acontecer histórico insular 1961-1965* (2021). Rich in detail and references, these volumes are invaluable for delving into the content of the era's most relevant publications.

A less well-known but essential text for understanding the media production of the period is Salwen's *Radio and Television in Cuba: The Pre-Castro Era* (1994). Although its primary focus is the audiovisual industry, it provides valuable information on the print media and helps establish connections between institutions, figures, and processes of the time.

Journalist and researcher Fernández Cuenca's *La imposición del silencio: Cómo se clausuró la libertad de prensa en Cuba, 1959-1960* (2016) offers a critical assessment of changes in Cuba's communication system during the first two years of the Revolution. It challenges official histories written from the perspective of revolutionary historiography, among the most relevant being Ortega's (1989) work, a text that, despite its age, remains essential for studying the so-called "coletilla" practice, which we will address later. Journalist Marrero examines this period in three of his books: *Dígase la palabra moral: Rescate de un periodismo digno y veraz* (2003), *Congresos de periodistas cubanos* (2006), and *Dos siglos de periodismo en Cuba: Momentos, hechos y rostros* (2018). Finally, journalists Vera and Constantín published *El periodismo y la lucha ideológica* (2003). All these works, published by the Unión de Periodistas de Cuba (UPEC), represent the revolutionary side's official account of the transformation of journalism in Cuba and the establishment of the party press system.

More recently, scholar Henken (2022) has explored what he calls "the origins" of Cuba's official media. In a well-crafted synthesis, he traces Cuban journalism's current functioning back to the watershed year of 1959. Historian Lambe (2024) also returns to this subject in her book *The Subject of Revolution: Between Political and Popular Culture in Cuba*, devoting a section to what she terms "a revolution in journalism" (p. 31).

History, as is well known, is always a social construct mediated by the subjectivity of those who write it. In the case at hand, this mediation is crucial when analyzing each of these texts. In other words, the fact itself is less important than the interpretation each author gives it. Two clear divisions can be observed: one geographical (those who write from "the Revolution" and those who write from "the Exile") and another generational (those who lived these events and those who study them from the present). Finally, some of these works reveal two opposing objectives in addressing the state control of Cuban journalism: on the one hand, legitimizing the process; on the other, settling scores with the past.

Why is this period of such interest? First, because the print media system that emerged from these years remains largely in place in Cuba, not only in terms of institutions, regulatory mechanisms, and news values, but also in its strategies for confronting dissenting voices. Second, because –viewed from the present without letting fascination cloud critical judgment– the journalism of those days was remarkably vibrant, with a variety of genres, strong visual presentation, immediacy in reporting, and an unrestrained use of language. Finally, and no less importantly, because the dismantling of Cuba's "bourgeois-republican" press and its transformation into a "socialist" communication apparatus has echoes in recent Latin American contexts, admired by some and criticized by others, in countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Based on the dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2008) for the study of media systems, the following pages examine the transformation of the Cuban press between 1959 and 1965 –that is, between Fidel Castro's rise to power and the founding of *Granma*, the official organ of the Cuban Communist Party and the most important newspaper in the Cuban print media system after the triumph of the Revolu-

tion. The period ends with the establishment of a press system whose defining feature is the high degree of political intervention (Somohano Fernández, 2020),[8] a structure in which the Party-State is the hegemonic voice, expressed through the so-called "political and mass organizations".

Hallin and Mancini (2008) outline four dimensions for studying media systems:[9] 1) the development of media markets, especially press penetration and circulation; 2) the level of political parallelism in society; 3) the professionalization of journalism; and 4) the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. While acknowledging the critical role played by other media in Cuba in the late 1950s and early 1960s –particularly radio, cinema, and especially television– this article focuses on print production, which constitutes a subsystem with its own organizational and institutional dynamics.

Drawing on the literature as well as on period press sources, the main objective of this article is to analyze, from a systemic perspective, the transformation of Cuban print journalism in the early years of the Revolution. The contribution of this study lies in its understanding of the sociohistorical conditions that mediated these changes. A historical reading allows us to identify the key milestones of this transformation, but above all, to examine the factors influencing each change. The study may also serve as a comparative reference for other processes of press state control in recent Latin American contexts, such as in Venezuela and Nicaragua.

---

8 "Cuba is characterized by the high level of political intervention in the media, manifested in the latter's structure (where official media predominate, with institutional affiliation to so-called political and mass organizations) as well as in the procedures governing journalistic practices. The exercise of censorship greatly limits the work of the press in the country" (Somohano Fernández, 2020, p. 11).

9 For these authors, the term "media system" refers to the institutions, practices, and actors that make up the media in a society, understood in terms of the relationships among them and between them and the broader social structure within which they operate, including, more generally, political and economic institutions.

What follows offers an overview of the main features of the print media system before and after 1959, organized according to the four domains of comparison proposed by Hallin and Mancini.

Development

Republic and revolution: from government subsidies to the state control of print media

Although by the late 1950s Cuban publications had lost some prominence due to the growing influence of cinema, radio, and television –the latter two being areas in which Cuba was a pioneer in the region– newspapers remained among the most important in the Ibero-American sphere. As in other countries of the region, most print outlets were concentrated in urban areas, particularly in the capital, had a commercial nature, and were often linked to powerful families.

The print media market operated according to a commercial model based on selling audiences to advertisers. All available sources agree that only two outlets were able to fully cover their costs through advertising revenue: the magazine *Bohemia*[10] and the newspaper *Prensa Libre*.[11]

---

10 Founded on May 10, 1908, by Miguel Ángel Quevedo, who handed it over to his son, Miguel Ángel Quevedo de la Lastra, in 1926. The latter gave the publication an increasingly political character and made it one of the most important magazines in Latin America. Quevedo left the country in 1960, disillusioned by the communist direction taken by the Cuban Revolution.

11 Its first issue dates to 1941. Its owner and director was Sergio Carbó, one of the most important voices in republican journalism, who was also one of the five members of the so-called Pentarchy government (1933). With the motto: "Neither with one nor with the others, with the Republic", it stood out for its blue headlines. The newspaper, with a liberal-nationalist tendency, quickly entered conflict with the fledgling revolutionary government. It was intervened in May 1960, and a year later, in November 1961, it merged with the newspapers *Combate* (1959-1961), the organ of the Revolutionary Directorate, and *La Calle* (1952-1961), linked to the Orthodox Party. The new publication was called *Diario de la Tarde* (1961-1965), which eventually merged with *Mella* (1944-1965), a publication of the Socialist

The rest survived –aside from commercial advertising and, in some cases, promotional giveaways– through the sale of favorable coverage or, at times, silence to "sponsors".

The Batista dictatorship used corruption as a method of controlling the press more than it relied on outright censorship, which was implemented only during specific periods, mostly toward the end of the regime. By the 1950s, much of the press depended on government subsidies to survive in an oversaturated publishing landscape. This corruption took several forms, among them the so-called *botellas* ("bottles"), phantom positions in the public administration awarded to press executives, editors, journalists, and associates, who would collect salaries for work they did not perform. The "press subsidies", to which we will return later, referred to monthly payments from Batista's administration to media executives and journalists.

This economic weakness and generalized corruption were the Achilles' heel of the Cuban press and one of the main reasons for its vulnerability when the revolutionary government came to power.[12] Henken (2022) characterizes the media under Batista's late-1950s dictatorship as "private", "ideologically diverse", and "deeply corrupt". The first term refers to the economic structure, one of the most significant changes brought by the revolutionary decade, as in barely five years, the entirety of Cuban print media came under socialist state ownership. Ideological diversity is another important factor: the print media of the

---

Youth, and became the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*, which continues to be published today.

12 In a media landscape "crowded" with print publications, as was the case in Cuba in the late 1950s, revenue from commercial advertising was insufficient to sustain most of them, so these publications relied heavily on government subsidies, namely from the Batista dictatorship. Added to this was the widespread practice of the so-called "botellas", which we mentioned earlier. These were the elements the new revolutionary government would use to delegitimize the republican press, which was linked to the dictatorship (Marrero, 2018). This explains why its dismantling was so swift and effective and why it met with so little resistance from most of society at the time.

1950s reflected a variety of political currents, a heterogeneity that did not disappear abruptly on January 1, 1959, but gradually diminished.

In the Revolution's first year, the only significant change was the closure of five newspapers associated with the Batistato (*Tiempo en Cuba*, *Alerta*, *Ataja*, *Mañana*, and *Pueblo*) and the emergence of publications that had previously operated clandestinely, such as the daily *Revolución*, tied to the July 26 Movement and directed by Carlos Franqui; *Noticias de Hoy*, the organ of the Popular Socialist Party, directed by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez; and *Combate*, of the Revolutionary Directorate, led by Julio García Oliveras. The rest of the Republic's periodicals continued circulating without major setbacks. In the first months of 1959, new publications also appeared within the revolutionary field, for example, on March 23, *Lunes de Revolución*, the cultural supplement of the daily *Revolución*, was launched; and on April 10, Raúl Castro and Che Guevara founded the magazine *Verde Olivo*, the weekly of the Rebel Army.

The major republican press –and with it the print journalism operating under market rules– would cease circulation in the first half of 1960, but the dismantling of the republican press proceeded in several phases, starting in the Revolution's earliest days. First came a campaign to discredit it. It was from the pages of *Revolución*, the antithesis of the republican press model, that Carlos Franqui published the so-called "Palace List", detailing the funds Batista had given to the island's newspapers, thus exposing the links between the major press and the dictatorship.[13]

---

13 The list, published on January 29, 1959, in the pages of *Revolución*, included the names of media outlets and journalists who had received bribes from Batista. Juan Marrero (2008) mentions a total of sixty media directors, editorial writers, columnists, and political editors from print media, both in the capital and throughout the country. He mentions a total amount of 239 000 pesos per month, almost four million pesos per year (note that, in those years, one Cuban peso was equivalent to one US dollar). Among the print media that received some form of state funding were *Información*, *Alerta*, *Diario de la Marina*, *El Mundo*, *El Crisol*, *Ataja, Avance*, *Mañana*, *Tiempo en Cuba*, *Diario Nacional*, and *The Havana Post*.

To this were added calls for boycotts, public burnings of issues of *Diario de la Marina*, *Prensa Libre*, and *Avance*, symbolic burials of newspapers, and economic strangulation, such as prohibiting promotional lotteries and the demand by dockworkers for double wages for unloading newsprint destined for *Prensa Libre* and *Diario de la Marina*. Another key factor was the loss of advertisers, either because their businesses had been expropriated or because potential consumers had left the country. Finally, the decisive blow came between January and May of 1960, when the press engaged in the so-called "battle over the coletilla" (*batalla de la coletilla*).[14] By May 1960, the free press market had disappeared entirely. Newspapers such as *Avance*, *Diario de la Marina*, *Diario Nacional*, *El Crisol*, *El País*, *Excelsior*, and *Información*, along with the magazine *Carteles*, ceased publication. *Bohemia*, *Prensa Libre*, and *El Mundo* were intervened in that same year and radically altered their editorial line to one of complete adherence to the new revolutionary government.

After the closure of media linked to the "defeated bourgeoisie", for the next five years, print outlets with heterogeneous tendencies within the revolutionary camp coexisted, though in 1965, a forced homogenization was imposed on publications expressing diverse currents within the Revolution.

In addition to domestic factors, the structural transformation of the print media market after 1959 was shaped by two external influences. On one hand, U.S. policy toward the Revolution adopted a defensive "siege mentality", which criminalized dissent and justified the state control and closure of media. On the other hand, Soviet influence on journalism, channeled through cadres of the old Popular Socialist Party, played a decisive role in dismantling the old press and creating

---

14 The so-called "Press Freedom Committees", created in each newsroom, aimed to highlight the disagreement of "revolutionary workers and journalists" with the editorial policies of media owners. To this end, and as a mechanism of control, they inserted short explanatory texts, or postscripts, at the end of news stories, expressing the revolutionaries' point of view. The postscripts remained published until the media outlet in question was taken over by the Revolution.

a new media structure inspired in many respects by the "customs and practices" of the so-called Soviet Leninist press. In the newspapers that emerged from the 1959-1965 watershed, censorship and self-censorship were common, along with information blackouts and an apologetic style fostering the cult of personality, especially around Fidel Castro.

The most evident change was in the system of ownership. However, it would take another decade, until 1975, for this vision to be codified in the *Theses and Resolutions of the First Congress of the Communist Party*. Borrowed wholesale from the Soviet "big sister", the document assumed a deterministic link between the economic base and the communicative superstructure, affirming that media content "is determined by the ownership regime … [and] under no circumstances can operate apart from or above social classes, but constitute instruments of ideological and political struggle" (Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1975, p. 1).

The concept of "political parallelism" refers to the degree to which the structure of the media system mirrors the divisions of the political party system and interest groups (Hallin & Echeverría, 2025). While it is true that late republican Cuba did not have strongly institutionalized parties with clearly defined ideological identities, it is nonetheless possible to see how newspapers operated as instruments of political action, at times merging with the island's political and economic power structures. A detailed characterization of each publication lies beyond the scope of this study. Still, it is worth mentioning –because it is the most illustrative case– the connection between the newspaper *Noticias de Hoy* and the Popular Socialist Party. In other cases, the relationship was less obvious but still present; for example, *Bohemia*'s editorial sympathies leaned toward the Orthodox Party.

During the transition period from 1959 to 1965, the island's print media reflected the interests of political groups. However, the trend toward concentration and univocal information ultimately culminated in a party press system, rendering the notion of political parallelism inoperative. Díaz Castañón (2010) traces how various publications of the era served the interests not only of political parties or factions but also of economic and religious sectors. The most prominent example is the trilogy of newspapers representing, formally or informally, the three political forces that, in one way or another, contributed to

Batista's overthrow: *Combate*, representing the Revolutionary Directorate; *Noticias de Hoy*, the communists; and *Revolución*, the July 26 Movement. *Diario de la Marina*, in turn, represented the interests of the Catholic clergy and the powerful cattle-ranching sector, while *El Mundo* aligned more closely with the petite bourgeoisie.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2008), journalistic professionalization can be defined by three criteria: the autonomy of journalists from external intervention in their work, consensus on ethics and standards of practice, and the prevalence of a public service ideology. Many journalists of the republican era were enmeshed in clientelist networks and received benefits from the government, due in part to low salaries and job insecurity. Since the 1940s, there had been some attempts to reverse these practices, though with limited results. For instance, Lent (1992) notes the case of *El Mundo*. After this newspaper was absorbed by the Empresa Editorial El Mundo, S. A., the first action taken by the new editors was to reject government subsidies. Later, in 1943, *El Mundo* informed its staff that they could not hold government positions.

In 1941, the Havana Reporters Association convened all press associations to discuss the state of journalism and called for the first National Congress of Journalists in Havana. As a result, journalists established a professional guild, the Colegio Nacional de Periodistas, and agreed to create a journalism school as well as a plan to reform retirement benefits.

The Manuel Márquez Sterling School of Journalism, created by presidential decree in April 1942, began operations the following year under the Ministry of Education, financed entirely by the government. The guild, also created by presidential decree in 1942, started functioning in 1944. Prospective members of the guild were required to hold a certificate of competence from the journalism school and to pledge to uphold eight rules of professional conduct (Lent, 1992). These measures had only a limited impact on journalists' autonomy, especially considering that it was the government itself that created and funded these institutions. With the advent of the Revolution, a radical transformation occurred in professional organizations, culminating on July 15, 1963, with the establishment of the Unión de Periodistas de Cuba (UPEC).

From an ideological standpoint, the state control of the Cuban press can be explained as a paradigm shift. Pre-revolutionary journalism was inspired by the principles of the liberal press model, especially the journalism practiced in the United States. As the 1960s progressed, Cuban journalism embraced the Leninist view of the press, which regarded newspapers as instruments of party propaganda, ideological struggle, and mass organization. In the service of a greater good –the salvation of the nation and its guarantor, the Revolution– the press accepted restrictions on its operations.

It is also relevant to observe how, from 1959 onward, the values underpinning journalism began to shift. There are notable similarities between Lenin's[15] and Fidel Castro's thinking regarding the role of the press, particularly in how both leaders, as their revolutions radicalized, moved from acceptance of the liberal model to what they each considered either a "surpassing" of it or a "necessary adjustment" in the conditions of a confrontation with counterrevolutionary forces.

On February 9, 1959, Fidel Castro declared on CMQ-TV: "Freedom of the press has been restored. It is an inalienable right of the people. The Constitution establishes it, and within a regime of freedom, it must function. The Provisional Government will govern within the spirit of the law" (in García, 2020). Almost a year later, on January 22, 1960, speaking to Telemundo cameras, he stated:

> More important than a newspaper is the State, which represents the revolutionary interests of the nation … if the authority of a newspaper or a newspaper director is important, much more important, in every respect, is the authority of a government in the face of a State that they have tried to undermine (as cited in García, 2020).

---

15 At the beginning of the Russian Revolution, Lenin had defined freedom of the press as the possibility of "making the opinions of all citizens public" (Lenin, 1968, p. 250). However, in a radical speech delivered on November 17, 1917, he stated: "Tolerating the existence of these [bourgeois] newspapers means ceasing to be socialists" (p. 250). He added: "We must abandon this [bourgeois] freedom of the press dependent on capital … If we are moving toward the social revolution, we cannot add the bombs of lies to Kaledin's bombs" (p. 258).

A few years later, in a speech delivered in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1964, commemorating the anniversary of the Moncada Barracks assault, Fidel Castro was even more explicit about the role of the press:

> They tell us there is no freedom of the press here. And it's true. There is no freedom of the bourgeois press here. The bourgeois, the reactionaries, have no freedom of the press here. There is one line, the line of the Revolution … And, of course, when the imperialist enemy has disappeared, and when the exploiting classes have disappeared, then we can afford even the luxury of dissolving the State … but we are realists, we are in the midst of a struggle, the State is necessary; that State which was once the instrument of the landowners is today the instrument of the workers (as cited in García, 2020).

The Revolution's discourse thus shifted from recognizing and celebrating the liberties enshrined in the eighteenth-century Atlantic revolutions –freedom of opinion, expression, religion, and assembly– to critiquing them as "bourgeois" freedoms and promoting their "surpassing" within a socialist framework in which the media were in the hands of the "people". As we have seen, journalism became detached from the market, and the ideal of social responsibility diminished in importance. At the same time, its functions of "propaganda and agitation" in the new revolutionary society were strengthened.

Table 1 summarizes the main transformations that occurred in the Cuban press system during the period 1961-1965. Table 2 lists the leading media mergers and demises during the period studied.

Conclusions

A historical analysis of Cuban communicative processes from a systemic perspective allows us to visualize the complex interplay between public communication and the political and social context during a period of profound transformation, the first half of the 1960s in Cuba. A nuanced reading of these processes seeks to reveal the tensions, negotiations, and ruptures within them, moving beyond simplistic interpretations of both processes and actors. This systemic and historical approach also contributes to envisioning the future of Cuban journalism.

TABLE 1
TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE CUBAN PRESS SYSTEM (1961-1965)

Dimension	Situation prior to 1959	Changes between 1961-1965
State intervention	Mixed control: bribes, subsidies, and occasional censorship by the Batista government.	Total intervention: the State assumes ownership, regulation, and production of printed communication. All private media disappear. The press becomes a direct instrument of the Party-State.
Political parallelism	High ideological plurality. Existence of media linked to different political groups (communists, Orthodox, Catholics, etc.), albeit with clientelist ties and episodes of censorship and media closures.	Elimination of pluralism. A partisan press model is imposed. By 1965, all media respond exclusively to the Party-State. Political parallelism disappears as an operative category.
Development of media markets	Existence of a commercial press system that received state subsidies, highly competitive, with numerous print publications in circulation (58 newspapers in 1959, 800 000 daily copies).	Disappearance of the free market. Progressive elimination of newspapers not aligned with the Revolution. By 1965, only three national outlets remain: *Granma*, *Juventud Rebelde*, and *El Mundo* (the latter would disappear in 1968).

Dimension	Situation prior to 1959	Changes between 1961-1965
Professionalization of journalism	Existence of professional bodies such as the Colegio Nacional de Periodistas and journalism schools, but with widespread corruption and lack of autonomy.	Dissolution of republican-era professional bodies and institutions. Creation of UPEC (1963) as the sole professional organization. Adoption of an ideology of the press as a revolutionary instrument. Disappearance of the notion of professional autonomy.

Source: The author.

TABLE 2
TIMELINE OF MEDIA MERGERS AND CLOSURES (1959-1965)

Year	Event/Publications
1959	Closure of media linked to Batista (*Tiempo en Cuba*, *Alerta*, *Ataja*, *Mañana*, *Pueblo*). Emergence from clandestinity of revolutionary media and founding of new ones: *Revolución*, *Noticias de Hoy*, *Combate*, *Verde Olivo*.
1960 (January-May)	Closure of major republican dailies: *Avance*, *Diario de la Marina*, *Diario Nacional*, *El Crisol*, *El País*, *Excelsior*, *Información*, and the magazine *Carteles*. Intervention in *Bohemia*, *Prensa Libre*, and *El Mundo*, which shift to pro-government editorial lines.
1961-1964	Survival of revolutionary media with differing tendencies. Increasing ideological control and pressure toward homogenization.
1965	Consolidation of a single system. Only three national publications remain: *Granma* (founded that year as the Communist Party's organ), *Juventud Rebelde*, and *El Mundo.*

Source: The author.

In pursuing this complexity, the operational framework established by Hallin and Mancini (2008) proves helpful, with its four dimensions for analyzing media systems: state intervention, political parallelism, development of media markets, and professionalization of journalism.

The rapid disappearance of the republican print media system underscores the press's fragility in the face of the new revolutionary power. Discredited on the one hand, and unable to survive economically on the other, the Republic's newspapers –and with them republican journalism– vanished within a few short years. While they had serious shortcomings, these outlets also represented a vision of journalism as a forum for coexisting, often antagonistic, perspectives and as an institution capable of questioning and holding power to account. This stands in sharp contrast to the univocal information environment of the post-revolutionary years.

The content of the media ceased to reflect ideological diversity, transforming instead into vehicles for official propaganda. Genres such as social and crime reporting disappeared; topics like criticism of communism or the celebration of traditional values such as "God, Fatherland, and Family" were removed; and revolutionary narratives were reinforced. Media institutions shifted from private companies with clientelist connections to entities directly controlled by the Party-State, devoid of editorial autonomy.

With the Revolution came a new media system in a permanent state of exception. Ideologically, an instrumentalist vision of the press was reinforced, subordinate to the party apparatus, which regulated and controlled it (Somohano Fernández, 2020). Media were conceived as tools for class struggle, disseminators of party guidelines, and organizers of the masses.

Between 1959 and 1965, the Cuban print media system underwent a radical transformation, moving from a market-based model, albeit with structural limitations, to one of absolute state control. Pre-revolutionary media, while not all linked to political parties or factions, expressed a plurality of ideological currents. Beginning in 1959, through a gradual process of institutional and ideological concentration, they came under the service of the Party-State as mass communication tools prioritizing propaganda.

Centralization was achieved by eliminating private outlets, intervening in those that survived 1959, and eventually merging revolutionary publications into *Granma*. The Soviet press model inspired the resulting structure. The creation of UPEC (1963) as the sole professional organization formalized the new order. The prevailing journalistic ideology emphasized service to the Revolution, censorship, and the cult of personality, especially around Fidel Castro.

In terms of professionalization, the period saw the disappearance of republican-era guilds and associations, replaced by UPEC as the institutional home of revolutionary journalism. However, as shown, the true supracontrolling body of the press was located within the ideological spheres of the Communist Party, which defined the editorial line and regulated media activities.

The values underpinning the journalistic profession also changed. The liberal "watchdog" ideal of maintaining distance from power gave way to a vision of journalism committed to the Revolution, justifying informational silences to "avoid giving weapons to the enemy". It should be noted, however, that during the republican era, the press also suffered from severe constraints on its independence, often curtailed by economic dependence and corrupt practices.

Finally, the role of the State in its relationship with the print media system shifted decisively. Under Batista, there was a balance between economic incentives and censorship, alongside the creation of institutions aimed at directly controlling print production. Between 1959 and 1965, all private media disappeared, and the Party-State took complete control of news production under the umbrella of political and mass organizations.

The media became instruments of agitation, propaganda, and mass organization, aligned with the Communist Party. Their role as a forum for public debate or a check on power was eliminated in favor of a unified and militant narrative.

The state control of the Cuban print media proceeded in three well-defined stages. The first, in January 1959, saw the closure of media close to the Batista dictatorship, delegitimized by their links to the fallen regime. The second stage, lasting until May 1960, involved the confrontation between the new government (and its own publica-

tions) and the major republican newspapers, ending in their closure and/or intervention. The third, more complex stage, from 1960 to 1965, was marked by the coexistence of revolutionary-aligned publications expressing different currents of thought. In 1965, the final chapter was written with the consolidation of a Soviet-inspired media apparatus, headed by *Granma* at the top of the press system.

Bibliographic references

Alisky, M. (1956). Havana Havoc: Too many dailies. Subsidies corrupt crowded Cuban journalism. *Nieman Reports*, *10(2)*, 16-18.

Alisky, M. (1981). *Latin American Media: Guidance and Censorship*. Iowa State University Press.

Bruzón Sosa, P. A. (2025). *Historia de la prensa plana en Cuba*. Neo Club Ediciones.

Bustamante, M. (2021). *Cuban Memory Wars. Retrospective Politics in Revolution and Exile*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Cabrera Infante, G. (1992). *Mea Cuba*. Alfaguara.

Díaz Castañón, M. P. (2010). *Prensa y revolución: la magia de cambio*. Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

Fernández Cuenca, W. (2016). *La imposición del silencio. Cómo se clausuró la libertad de prensa en Cuba. 1959-1960*. Hypermedia Ediciones.

Ferrer, A. (2021). *Cuba: An American History*. Scribner.

Franqui, C. (1980). *Diary of the Cuban Revolution*. Viking Penguin.

Franqui, C. (1985). *Family Portrait with Fidel*. Vintage Books.

García, J. (2020, August 10). Fidel y el periodismo. *Cubaperiodistas*. https://www.cubaperiodistas.cu/2020/08/fidel-y-el-periodismo-2/

Guerra, L. (2012). *Visions of Power in Cuba. Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Hallin, D., & Echeverría, M. (2025). Media systems in Latin America. In A. Casero-Ripollés & P. C. López-López (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Communication in Ibero-America* (pp. 32-48). Routledge.

Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2008). *Sistemas mediáticos comparados. Tres modelos de relación entre los medios de comunicación y la política*. Hacer.

Henken, T. (2022). Los orígenes de los medios de comunicación oficiales de Cuba y el renacimiento de la prensa libre: de la subordinación, el silencio y la unanimidad a la independencia, la responsabilidad y la diversidad. In C. González & S. Ángel (Eds.), *Los mitos de la Revolución cubana: Estancamiento y regresión de una utopía* (pp. 245-282). Programa Cuba, Universidad Sergio Arboleda. https://www.in-cubadora.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Los-mitos-de-la-revolucion-cubana.-Estancamiento-y-regresion-de-una-utopia.pdf

Lambe, J. (2024). *The Subject of Revolution. Between Political and Popular Culture in Cuba*. The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill.

Lenin, V. (1968). *Acerca de la prensa*. Progreso.

Lent, J. (1992). *Bibliography of Cuban Mass Communications*. Greenwood Press.

Marrero, J. (2003). *Dígase la palabra moral. Rescate de un periodismo digno y veraz*. Pablo de la Torriente.

Marrero, J. (2006). *Congresos de periodistas cubanos*. Pablo de la Torriente.

Marrero, J. (2018). *Dos siglos de periodismo en Cuba. Momentos, hechos y rostros*. Pablo de la Torriente.

Ortega, G. (1989). *La coletilla: una batalla por la libertad de expresión, 1959-1962*. Editora Política.

Partido Comunista de Cuba. (1975). *I Congreso del PCC. Tesis y resoluciones sobre los medios de difusión masiva*. https://www.granma.cu/file/pdf/PCC/1congreso/Tesis%20y%20Resoluciones/I-Congreso-PCC.-Tesis-y-Resoluciones-sobre-los-medios-de-difusi%C3%B3n-masiva.pdf

Rivero, J. I. (1987). *Prado y Teniente Rey. Una trinchera de ideas*. Ediciones Páginas Cubanas.

Rivero, J. I. (2004). *Contra viento y marea. Memorias de un periodista*. Ediciones Universal.

Salazar, S. (2023). Old and New Directions in the 20th Century Cuban Printed Press Historiography. A Cartography of the Press History Field. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e8516, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2023.8516

Salwen, M. (1994). *Radio and Television in Cuba. The Pre-Castro Era*. Iowa State University Press.

Somohano Fernández, A. (2020). *Modelos oposicionales de intervención múltiple: análisis de condiciones de producción periodística en medios independientes de la estructura mediático-partidista en Cuba* [Doctoral dissertation]. Universidad Iberoamericana. https://ri.ibero.mx/handle/ibero/5688

Valle, A. (2020). *La estrategia del verdugo. Breve panorama de la censura cultural en Cuba*. Puente a la Vista Ediciones.

Vera, E., & Constantín, E. (2003). *El periodismo y la lucha ideológica*. Pablo de la Torriente.

Villaescusa Padrón, A. (2015). *Desafíos en la prensa cubana 1959-1960*. Editora Historia.

Villaescusa Padrón, A. (2021). *La prensa cubana ante el acontecer histórico insular (1961-1965)*. Citmatel.

PROFILE

Salvador Salazar Navarro
Associate Professor of Spanish at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY). He has edited three volumes related to the history of the press in Cuba. His most recent academic book is *Cinema, Revolution, and Resistance: The Cultural Policy of the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry towards Latin America* (CLACSO).