

Death of a prosecutor: election battles rage on

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Comments about someone else sometimes reveal more about the person doing the commenting. That's the current situation with the two major Argentine publications Clarín and La Nación, which together almost hold a monopoly on daily newspapers. When these papers report on the death of Argentina's state prosecutor Alberto Nisman on January 14 of this year, we learn almost nothing. The articles make it clear that the authors have made little real attempt to uncover the truth and have no journalistic ethos but are instead part of a political brigade that merely echo or indeed give voice to the messages of the Right.

In autumn 2015 the people of Argentina will go to the polls. Current president Cristina Kirchner can't stand for re-election. But the signs are good for her political faction, the left-Peronists. There is a large base of voters, most recently the pensioners, who have benefitted from the politics of the husband and wife Kirchner led governments over the past ten years. The opposition, on the other hand, is fragmented and is having trouble convincing voters of its program and is therefore seizing any available opportunity to discredit the President. That's the current political context.

Kirchner can't claim to have reacted well to the Nisman affair. She could, for instance, have just issued a statement saying: "Argentina has an upstanding judiciary, we should trust that the authorities will carry out a full investigation". Instead she has been commenting at length and inconsistently on the case as it unfolds.

It's an indication of the bleak state of political culture in Argentina, where there is huge polarization between absolute approval and absolute rejection of the government.

But what are the German media doing, how would we assess German reporters' efforts to keep us informed about the situation in Argentina? The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) takes the strongest position: they says that the Kirchner administration's attempts to use political measures to free themselves from the economic straits that drove the country to the brink of collapse during the 2001/2002 crisis, have done the country "probably more harm than all its other societal problems". It goes on: "The left-wing populism that has plunged the country and other parts of Latin America into disaster is now finding increasing popularity in Europe, look at Spain and Greece."

This, written by a newspaper that expressed its "hope for positive change" shortly after the military putsch in 1976 and remained shamefully silent as Argentina's military murdered tens of thousands of people. The paper opted instead to focus on celebrating the important economic relationships between Germany and the dictatorship.

Spiegel and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*? They've recalled their reporters from Buenos Aires and in their half-hearted reporting have adopted Clarín and La Nación's right-wing brigade line: the President is about to face charges, she is evading charges, charges are imminent and an arrest warrant is looming. No independent research, the context is ignored. And what about *taz*, which does at least still have a man on the ground? Publishing mood pieces on the protests of the discontented middle class.

It's left up to Horacio Verbitsky, an Argentinian journalist – in the truest sense of the word – who is largely ignored by the German media, to deftly explain in the [New York Times](#) that the allegations by prosecutor Nismán don't hold up to legal scrutiny.

This assessment is confirmed in Argentina by all reliable lawyers and recently also by judge Daniel Rafecas in his decision from last week, finding that there was “not even the minimal level of evidence needed to press charges.”

As for the alleged deal for which Nismán wanted to take the President and others to court: offering the withdrawal of arrest warrants for Iranian suspects in a terrorist attack in exchange for Iranian oil? The oil is unusable in Argentina's refineries. In addition, the head of Interpol has publicly contradicted Nismán, stating that those arrest warrants are still in place, as are Interpol's international Red Notice alerts.

For me, the conclusion is clear: German reporting on Argentina is a political disaster.