

Campaign coverage in Spain: Populism, emerging parties and personalisation

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Introduction

The general elections in December of 2015 had no precedent in the Spanish recent democratic history. We have witnessed many changes regarding the voting behaviour, the configuration of party-systems with the irruption of new political actors, and the consolidation of new cleavages and subsequent campaign issues. Therefore, since 2015 the political context has derived in an open, volatile, unstable and multiparty system, which involves an authentic political earthquake.

This chapter analyses the coverage of the Spanish general election campaign in 2015 in various media outlets (television, printed and online press), according to traditional research dimensions in political communication: tone of the campaign, identification of issues, main actors, populist traces, and different frames. Results showed that the most covered issue was party politics and domestic elections, as well as the performance of democracy and governance; the irruption of two emerging parties: *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos*; the presence of populist features in the media; the personalisation of the political information; the prominence of the strategic-game frame, the negative tone and conflict on the media coverage of the campaign.

Political context of the 2015 elections

The general elections in December of 2015 had no precedent in the Spanish recent democratic history. The irruption of new political parties, the electoral volatility, the party system fragmentation and the impossibility of parliamentary groups to agree on the appointment of the Prime Minister compelled the Head of the State to call for new elections again, that were held in June 2016.

The political context in Spain has been profoundly transformed in the last decade, and especially following the last general elections of 2015 and 2016. The situation in which Spanish politics emerged is one unknown in recent history. We have witnessed many changes regarding voting behaviour, the configuration of party-systems with the irruption of new political actors, and the consolidation of new cleavages and subsequent campaign issues.

The described political panorama eroded the structure of party competition including new socio-political cleavages to the traditional ones. One of the main campaign issues had to do with the economic crisis, its consequences for citizens, and the clear incapability of the conservative government to sort out the situation for regular people. Those discussions were also integrated with a more general dispute against the so-called old politics style, very confronted from the positions of new political parties.

Podemos (We can) was really successful in framing this discussion in a very favourable space, incorporating the concept of political “caste” to address politicians of traditional parties. The fight against the attitude of the establishment was victoriously included in their agenda. Their leaders were reporting not only cases of systemic corruption, but also of morally questionable issues that mainly affected the *Partido Popular* -Popular Party- (hereafter, PP) and *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* -Spanish Socialist Party- (hereafter, PSOE), the traditional parties. It is interesting to verify how the traditional cleavages of electoral competence were found quite blurred or absent, since the confrontation was built around new issues. The ideological approach and the resolution of regional tensions with the nationalists of Catalonia and Basque Country were only in the background, something that creates some problems of adaption to new circumstances and inconveniences to traditional parties, especially to the social-democrats of PSOE in the middle of an endless leadership succession process. Therefore, the principal issues manifested in the campaign were democratic regeneration, institutional reform, an “overwhelmed” constitution after 40 years, and the nationalistic challenge faced in Catalonia.

Hence, the electoral campaign was constructed around a multifaceted struggle between the traditional political parties, PP and PSOE, and the new ones, *Ciudadanos* and

Podemos, and also between the new and old left, and the new and old right. A very complex electoral panorama that creates problems of adaption to even more rooted organisations.

Nevertheless, PP obtained 28.7 percent of the votes and 123 seats out of 350, and consequently won the elections in 2015. The difference with PSOE was relatively tight (less than 7 percent and 33 seats) but enough to avoid a social-democrat government: the leader of PSOE, Pedro Sánchez, tried to find parliamentary support among third parties (*Podemos* with 43 seats and *Ciudadanos* with 40) with no success. After two months of multilateral negotiations, the political situation remained blocked by the incapacity of parties in order to agree a government. Given the difficulties described and following the regulations established by the Constitution, for the first time in Spanish history the head of the State was forced to call again for new elections that were celebrated few months later in 2016. In that moment, PP increased its electoral support in fourteen seats and could manage to create a government with the support of *Ciudadanos*.

Spanish political and media systems

Spain is a parliamentary monarchy. The political representation is structured in two chambers, the Congress and the Senate, where the first one prevails over the later. The electoral system established to elect the Congress, which appoints the Prime Minister, is proportional. Political parties present their candidacies in closed lists. The country is politically and administratively decentralised in a model that has been labelled as “effective asymmetric federalism” or, in other words, a complex constitutional framework that combines the conception of Spain as a single political nation with the existence of Autonomous Communities. This configuration provides a structure for a joint decision-making process distinctive of a federal model. At the same time, it lays the foundation for a bilateral dialogue, especially with the so-called historical nationalities: Andalusia, Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia (Strömback and Luengo, 2008: 551).

After a short period of adaptation successive the transition to democracy at the end of the 1970's, political structures, actors, institutions and processes started to be increasingly rooted and established. During the 1980's and 1990's, political scientists have mainly pointed out several references of stability regarding general political realm. For decades, we could talk about a moderate multiparty system in Spain, although during periods of overall majority (1982-1993, 2000-2004, 2011-2015) we could also characterise it as an imperfect two-party system (Cotarelo and Bobillo, 1991).

Electoral competition has been organised around two main political parties at the national level, i.e., social-democrats of PSOE and conservatives of PP, and a minor one, i.e., the communist colligated with the greens and other left minority formations (*Izquierda Unida* -United Left-, hereafter, IU). Those political parties represented the traditional ideological struggle. However, considering that Spain includes specific regions with different coexisting national realities, there are also several nationalist parties competing at the regional level where they become determining actors, principally in the Basque Country and Catalonia. Therefore, in Spain we could traditionally find the activation of not only the ideological cleavage but also a peripheral one.

Nonetheless, PP and PSOE have seized power since 1982: between 1982 and 2008 both parties have controlled no less than 81 percent of the seats in Congress, and in some cases more than 90 percent. This trend was considered by scholars as a very clear symptom of political stability. This concentration of electoral support disappeared in 2015 with the irruption of new actors, and particularly the growth at national level of the regionally founded *Ciudadanos* (Citizens), and the establishment of *Podemos*. Nowadays, PP and PSOE jointly obtained 63 percent of the seats, but only 56 percent of the votes, which means a decrease of more than one third. The economic straits lead to political representation system general distrust, and this situation opened the possibilities for new political parties which received waves of upset voters from traditional deep-rooted parties (Luengo et al, 2016: 259). *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos* are challenging the longstanding two-party dominance. This transformation could be illustrated by paying attention to the following data.

According to the Effective Number of Parties (Eff N), a well-known index that illustrates the fragmentation of the system weighting the electoral support for the parties, Spanish records were situated in around 3.3 of average between the 1980's and the first decade of the 2000's at the level of votes. This figure reached 5 in 2015. At the seats level, the same value was never above 3 between 1977 and 2011, but reached 4.1 in 2015. It is interesting to state that in the Spanish parliament the number of parties with representation has never been below 10 (1982 and 2008), with a maximum of 14 (1979). Accordingly, Spain is one of the more fragmented party systems of Europe, a dynamic fuelled by the development not only of regional political forces but also recent emerging parties.

The electoral volatility points out a clear pattern of this open process. With the exception of 1982, the aggregate volatility till 2011 ranged between 4.9 and 16.4 percent, a quite moderate record. The same index for the 2015 elections was more than double (35.4 percent), which involved a huge amount of voters changing their ballots. With regards to

electoral behaviour, there are indications displaying that the Spanish electorate has become more volatile, with a more and more blurred party identification. Consequently, from 2015 the political context has derived in an open, volatile, unstable and multiparty system, which involves an authentic political earthquake.

It is impossible to understand the electoral process under analysis without the explanation of the role played by *Podemos*. The beginning of this formation can be traced back to the aftermath of the 15-M, the famous outraged movement that in 2011 organised camps within major Spanish cities against corruption and political representation crisis, and in opposition to the austerity measures imposed by the so-called Troika (Luengo and Marín, 2016: 60). *Podemos* generated big expectations among citizens, scholars, and journalists, since this very young political organisation reached impressive and unexpected electoral results in several secondary elections, obtaining 5 seats at the European Parliament, increasing its electoral support in Andalusian elections (reaching the third position with 14.8 percent of the votes and 15 seats at the regional chamber), and gaining the mayoralty of the two principal Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona, among others (Luengo et al, 2016: 206).

To some extent, *Podemos* could be labelled as an anti-establishment party deeply critical of mainstream parties and based on a quasi-biological binary perception of the world as a “us” versus “them”, good versus evil or, at least, the positive versus the negative (Luengo et al, 2016: 256). Thus they emphasise substantial doubts about the credibility of political, economic, and social elites.

The media system in Spain cannot be understood without taking into account the specific recent authoritarian past. Until the 1970’s mass media had to work according to the guidelines imposed by the dictator, making the conditions for its development tightly controlled. Due to four decades of dictatorship and the lack of press freedom during that period, professionalisation of journalism started later in Spain than in other neighbouring democracies (Strömback and Luengo, 2008: 550). These processes mentioned have led analysts to point out to an “incomplete professionalisation”, with clear consequences like, for example, the low degree of associationism among Spanish journalists (Ortega and Humanes, 2000: 162-168).

Normatively speaking it would perhaps be possible to say that Spanish journalism is independent, but it is also clear that Spanish newspapers tend to belong to a clear ideological orientation, and that they, to some extent, are quite belligerent (Cotarelo, 2002: 191). This pluralist polarised model reproduces social divisions in the structures of Spanish journalism, which frequently cover political events in a biased way. An increasing number of Spaniards

don't trust their journalists to deliver honest reporting. Journalism is the second-least-respected profession and journalists are distrusted almost as much as politicians. In addition, following the latest Reuters Digital News Report¹, the Spanish media have the lowest credibility in Europe: over half (53 percent) of users in Spain do not think that the media are independent from undue political influence (Negredo, et al, 2016: 43).

The Spanish media system has traditionally been quite television-centric, although with the irruption of new technologies of information and communication those trends of media consumption have been transformed, with special intensity among the youth. These actual patterns are illustrated by the data presented by the European Social Survey² (7.0) for 2014. The proportion of Spaniards watching television more than 2 hours on average weekday is 18.6 percent, a record that is not even reaching the average (19 percent) of the 21 countries included in the sample. Twelve years before, the same value was above the average. Regarding newspapers consumption, in 2016³ around 30 percent of Spanish people declared that they never, or almost never, read newspapers, including free sheet and digital versions.

The media landscape in Spain is broad and diverse. There are around 85 newspapers to choose from. However, there is an increasing market in Spain regarding free dailies; excluding sports papers, the third most widely read newspaper in the country is *20 minutes*. Sports papers are very popular, probably impulsed by the fact that in the country there are no daily tabloid newspapers. Instead a huge catalogue of magazines published weekly or monthly which provide similar content to what tabloids do in other countries.

Concerning broadcasting media, there was a public service monopoly in Spain both nationally and regionally until the late 1980s, as well as in other parts of Europe. It was not until 1989 that private companies were allowed to broadcast, and it was not until the late 1990s that satellite-technology was introduced. Currently, Spain also has a dual model of public service and commercial TV. Almost three decades after the introduction of private television in Spain, the media landscape has become more competitive and commercialised, likewise dominated by not too many private corporations. A wide swath of commercial networks exists alongside publicly funded channels, both national and regional, with

1

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford University, retrieved January, 2017 from <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org>.

2

ESS Round 7: European Social Survey Round 7 Data (2014). Data file edition 2.1. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

3

Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Barometer September 2016 (No. 3149).

commercial channels commanding about 80 percent of the market. In accordance to the European trend, paid political advertising is prohibited on television in Spain.

The apparent variety mentioned is just illusory, since most of the market is controlled by no more than a dozen of conglomerated media corporations. Data for 2016 reveals that two private operators dominate broadcasting, while newspapers increasingly find audiences online, where they face strong competition from a mix of new and long-running digital natives (Negredo et al, 2016: 42).

Over the past decade and a half, dwindling advertising revenue has put these corporations under heavy pressure. Regarding circulation, there has been a continuous loss of sales in the paid-for press, including national, regional, as well as specialised, since 2007. After 2015, it seems that there is a slight advertising revenues growth, particularly visible in Internet, Radio and Television, whereas print managed to remain flat after several years of falling income (Salaverría and Gómez-Baceiredo, 2017).

Regarding the sample taken into account in this chapter, we have to point out that we selected the most popular general interest newspapers, including those exclusively online. Since 2013, the major source of news is online, growing from 79 to 86 percent, values even higher than those for television (72 to 79 percent). In 2015, social media reached the printed press in the same sense, and passed the latter afterwards, with a value of 60 versus 56 percent. Those described trends are explained in a very high degree by the variable age, since they are far more intense under the age of 35. The digital native successes may be driven by the ongoing loss of human capital at all levels of many traditional newsrooms and the user's desire for a broader spectrum of views and news (Negredo et al, 2016: 43).

Concerning the printed press, we included *El País* and *El Mundo* (both traditional newspapers), *Público*, *Europapress* and *El Diario* (online newspapers). Aside the sports papers⁴, *El País* is Spain's number one print and online brand, with a net circulation average of 210.034 and some 1.2 million readers per day, closely followed by *El Mundo* (116.657, 0.8 million)⁵. We can say that the first one is a center-left, traditionally associated with the Socialist Party, was long considered the paper of record in Spain but has seen a decline in readers (ten years ago, it had more than 2 million readers⁶), resources, and reputation. *El*

4

Retrieved January, 2017 from. Marca is the most consumed newspaper, with almost 2.2 millions of daily readers.

5

Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión (July 2015-June 2016), Retrieved January, 2017 from <http://www.introl.es/medios-controlados/>.

6

Mundo, is the main voice on the free-market right, as opposed to the traditionalist, Catholic right. *El Diario* has quickly become one of the country's most-read originally digital news venues with a 17 percent of weekly use, and *Público* reached the 14 percent. *El Diario* is only one of a large number of progressive start-ups that are rejuvenating Spain's media landscape (Negredo et al, 2016: 42).

Regarding television usage, we have included *Antena 3* (A3) and *T5* (T5), both private channels, and *La1* (the general state public channel, of *Televisión Española* -TVE). Following the Ranking of Spanish Television Channels, A3 is showing the highest share (16.5 percent), followed by *La1* (11.7 percent)⁷. The most viewed television channel in Spain is A3 with an accumulated share during January 2017 of 13.3 percent, followed by *T5* with a 13 percent, and *La1* with a 10.5 percent⁸. In the last months, the difference between the first channels has been very tight, which illustrates the high level of competition in the sector. A3 news is showing 55 percent of weekly use, *La1* news 42 percent, and *T5* news 36 percent (Negredo et al, 2016: 43).

The news coverage of the 2015 election campaign: Data Analysis

Undoubtedly, the most relevant aspect of the 2015 elections was the emergence of two new parties, *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos*. Speculations about government coalitions and the risk of repeating elections occupied much of parties' campaign and media agenda. Indeed, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* and their party leaders, Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera, had great presence in the media during the 2015 electoral campaign (Figure 1). They were the main political actors in 8.5 and 10.5 percent of the total of news stories. This coverage was in detriment to other political parties that had parliamentary representation in the previous legislature: *Unión Progreso y Democracia*⁹, *Unidad Popular*¹⁰, *Esquerra Republicana per Catalunya*¹¹, *Democracia y Libertad*¹², *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*¹³, etc. Together, these political actors

Asociación para la Investigación en Comunicación (AICM), General Media Survey General Report, 2006. Retrieved January, 2017 from <http://www.aimc.es/-Datos-EGM-Resumen-General-.html>

Asociación para la Investigación en Comunicación (AICM), General Media Survey General Report, 2006. Retrieved January, 2017 from <http://www.aimc.es/-Datos-EGM-Resumen-General-.html>.

Source: elEconomista.es. Retrieved January, 2017 from <http://ecoteuve.eleconomista.es/audiencias/>.

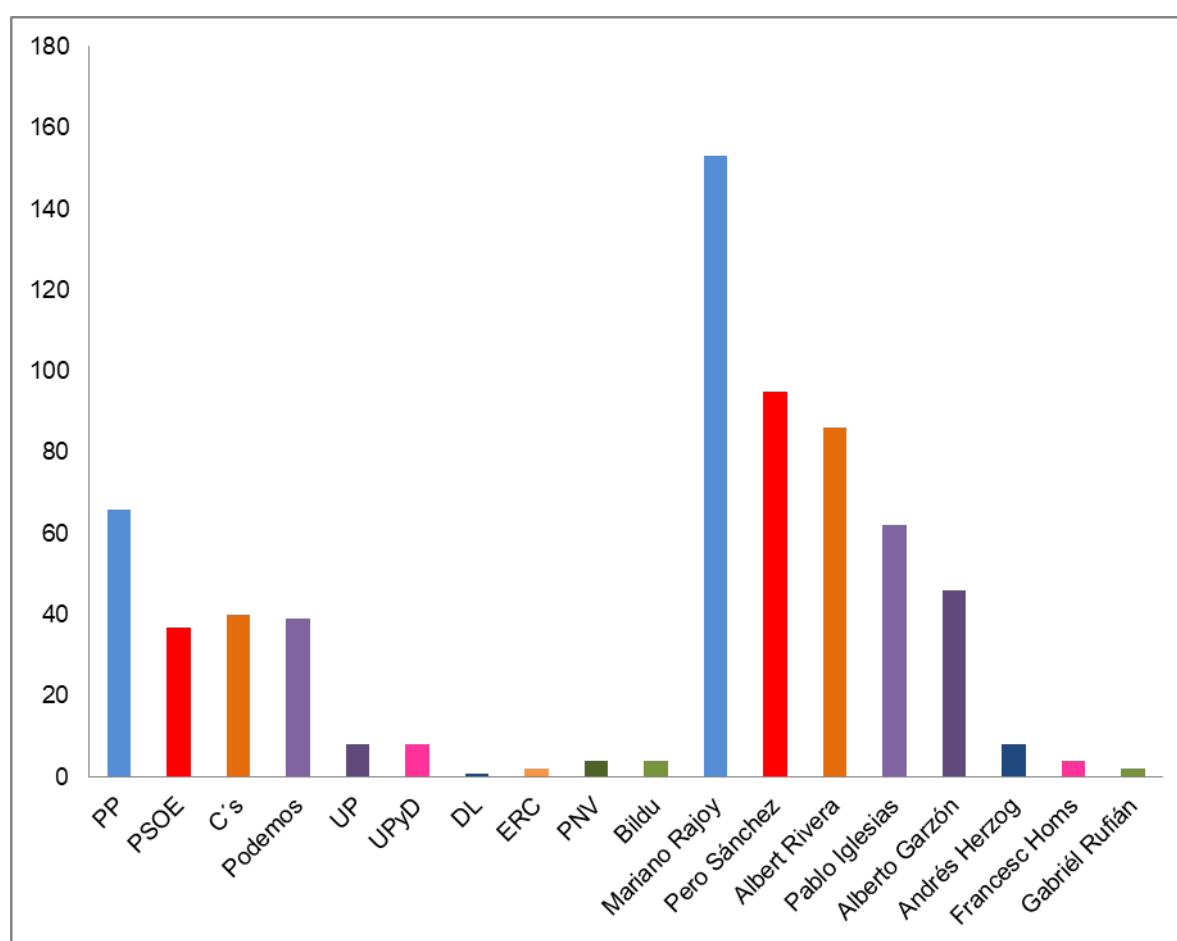
Union, Progress and Democracy

Popular Unity.

Republican Catalanian Left.

only appeared as the main one in 3.5 percent of the sample. Regarding major parties, the President of the government, Mariano Rajoy and Popular Party, were the most covered political actors (18.4 percent), followed by Pedro Sánchez and Socialist Party (11.1 percent). Finally, 19.2 percent of news stories were about more than one political party/party leader equally.

Figure 1: Main political actors in the news stories (total mentions)



(N = 1191)

Analysing the media included in the sample, Chi-square tests indicate that the differences in coverage of political actors are statistically significant. *La1* was the most conservative in its coverage of political actors. PP and PSOE received together 41 percent of the coverage of *La1*. It is also by far, the media that paid less attention to new parties, *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos* (they only were the main actors in 3.6 percent of the news stories of *La1*). *T5* also enormously covered PP and PSOE (41.8 percent) but unlike *La1*, *T5* paid more attention to new parties (*Ciudadanos* and *Podemos* were the main actors in 27.9 percent of the news stories). In all the media outlets, Popular Party was the most covered party. In *La1*, *T5*, *publico.es*, *eldiario.es* and *europapress.es*, PP was the main political actor in more than 20 percent of news stories. Socialist Party received almost the same coverage as *Ciudadanos* (a new party without representation in Parliament before the 2015 elections) in *europapress.es* and *A3*: both parties were the main actors in 13.8 percent of news stories of these media outlets. PSOE obtained a little bit more attention than *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos* in *eldiario.es* (12.1, 9.6 and 11.1 percent respectively), *El País* (9.9, 8.9 and 7.5 percent) and *T5* (16.5, 15.2 and 12.7 respectively). In general, *Ciudadanos* was the third party in media attention (as main political actor), followed by *Podemos*. Only *eldiario.es* paid a little bit more attention to *Podemos* than *Ciudadanos* (11.1 and 9.6 percent respectively). Although Popular Unity had representation in Parliament in the previous legislature, it was the fourth party in coverage. The media outlets that paid more attention to Popular Unity were *publico.es* and *eldiario.es* (8.1 and 7.1 percent respectively).

Issues

Compared with the 2011 elections, when the Eurozone crisis and the threat of a bailout agreement took center stage in the campaign agenda, the effects of the Euro Crisis in the country were left in the background in the 2015 campaign. Only 5.1 percent of the news referred to the Euro Crisis and the austerity measures requested by the European Union. It should also be noted that only 9.6 percent of this news referred to the positive consequences of the austerity measures for the country, in contrast to 37.7 percent that showed the negative concerns for the country.

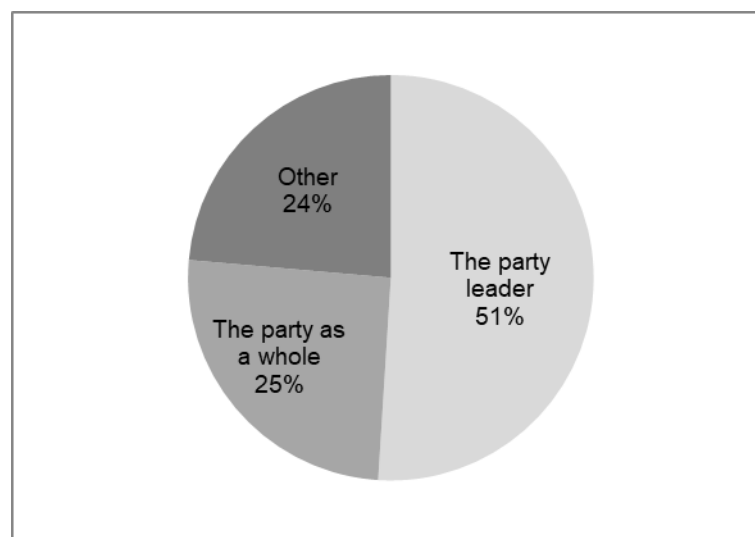
Regarding dominant issues during the campaign, the most covered topic by the media was ‘party politics and elections’ (66.8 percent). This topic included electoral debates, campaigns and party events, intra-party conflicts, discussions about electoral programs, and other closely related issues. The second most covered topic was ‘functioning of democracy and

governance’ that includes for example State reform and internal cabinet problems (8.8 percent). Within this category it is also included ‘Peripheral nationalisms’ since it relates to State reform. Nationalisms and the ‘Catalonian referendum’ were largely present in the media agenda during and after the elections. Although this topic only appeared in the 1.4 percent of the news stories as dominant issue, it was present in much more news as second and third dominant issue. In fact, the disagreement between Socialist Party and *Podemos* regarding how to face the independent challenge made impossible to reach a government agreement between them and nationalist parties after the elections.

Personalisation of politics

As Figure 2 shows, party leaders were important protagonists of the 2015 electoral campaign. Figure 1 also proves that Mariano Rajoy, Pedro Sánchez, Albert Rivera, Pablo Iglesias and Alberto Garzón were the main political actors in news stories above their respective political parties.

Figure 2: Personalisation (main actor in the news items)

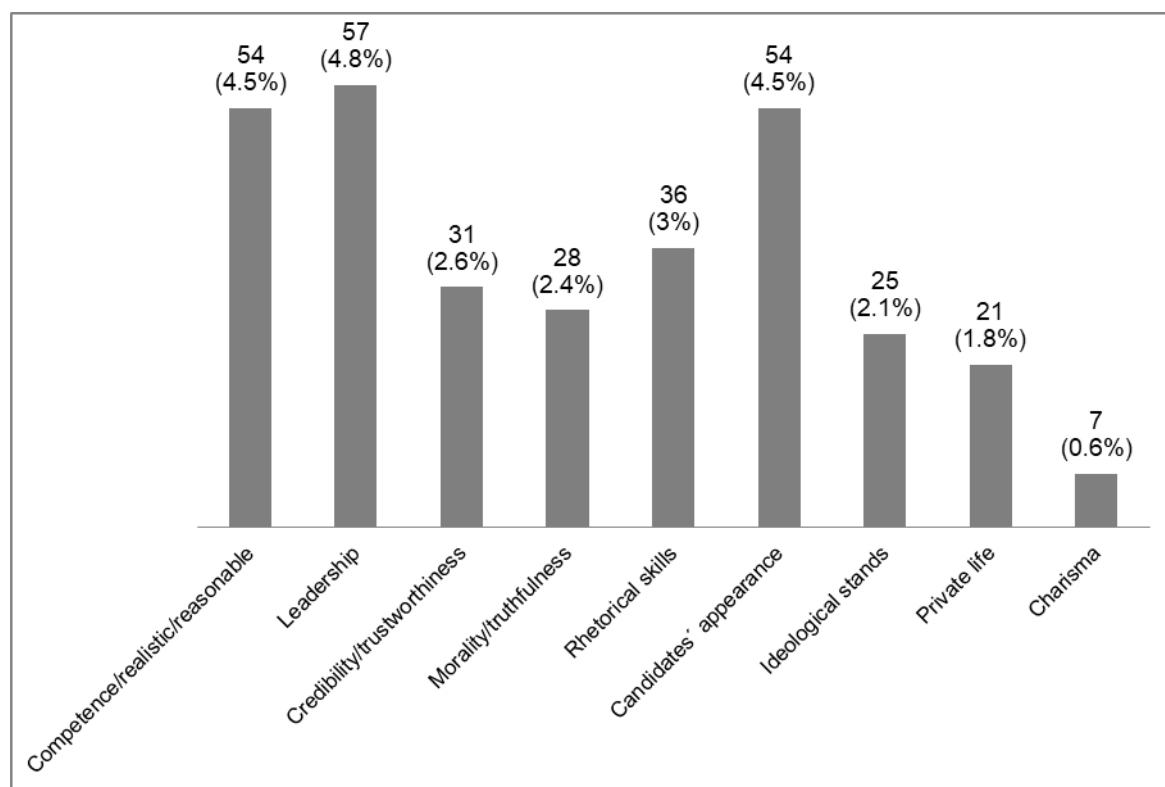


(N = 1191)

The party leaders also were the main source of information of news stories (35 percent), followed by facts, events and figures (21 percent), other party members (13.3

percent), other media outlets and journalists (6.5 percent) and experts (6.2 percent). In almost half of the news items, the party leaders were represented in visuals (49.4 percent) or direct quotations (49.3 percent).

Figure 3: Characteristics of candidates/party leaders (total news items)



(N = 1191)

Regarding the characteristics of candidates (Figure 3), 26.3 percent of news items addressed some aspects of them. The most mentioned characteristics were 'Leadership' (4.8 percent), 'Competence' (4.5 percent) and the 'Candidates' appearance (4.5 percent).

If we distinguish the results by candidates, we find that the media focused on Mariano Rajoy's appearance (34 percent), the candidate as competent (20 percent), his leadership (14 percent) and, finally, his credibility (10 percent). His appearance was highly mentioned during the coverage of the aggression that the President suffered in Galicia as well as during the coverage of his performance in the electoral debate against Pedro Sánchez (especially his

nervous tics). Concerning Pedro Sánchez, his leadership was the most mentioned characteristic by the media (23.8 percent), followed by his appearance (19 percent), his rhetorical skills (14.3) and his competence (11.9). His position as the Socialist Party leader was very questioned during the elections as well as his performance in the ‘four candidates debate’ and in his debate against the President, Mariano Rajoy. The most addressed features about Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias were their leadership (21.7 and 28.6 percent respectively) and their appearance (17.9 and 19 percent respectively). Finally, Albert Garzón also was characterised by his appearance (19 percent) and competence (19 percent). It is also remarkable that media highlighted the youth of Sánchez, Rivera, Iglesias and Garzón, as well as their handsomeness.

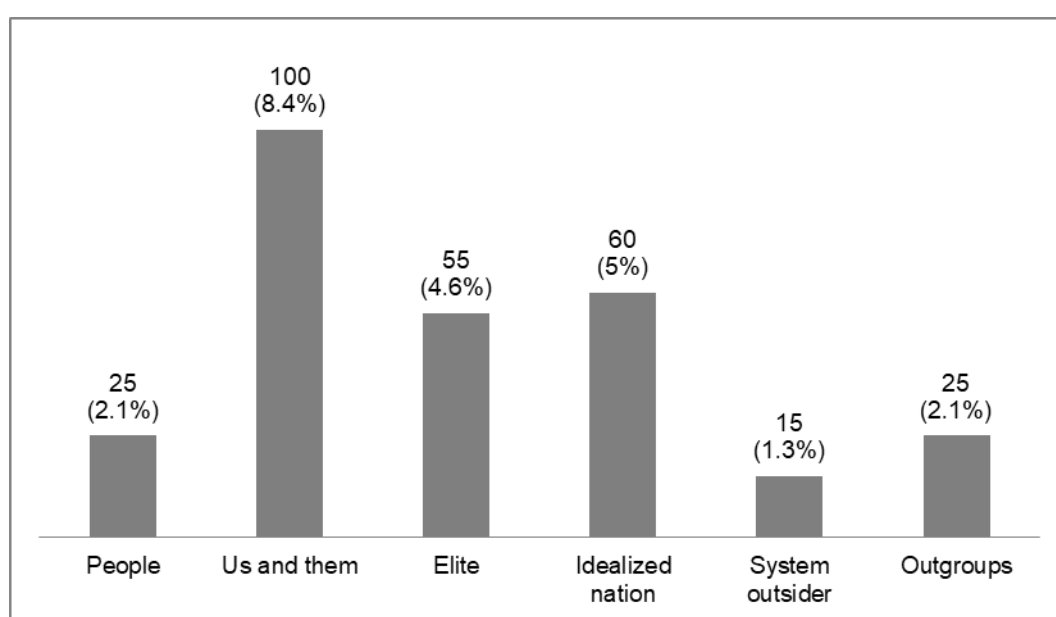
Populism

As Figure 4 shows, the Spanish media emphasised some populist features of parties and candidates discourses. The most common point had to do with the division between “us” and “them” (8.4 percent), followed by the idea of an idealised nation (5 percent), the criticism of the elite using words such “caste” and “establishment” (4.6 percent), the using of the expression “the people” to address the voters (2.1 percent), the identification of out-groups considered bad for the country (2.1 percent) and the self-identification as outsiders of the system (1.3 percent). On the one hand, the most criticised elite was the political one (63.4 percent of mentions), followed by an undetermined elite (18.18 percent) and the economic elite (10.9 percent). In the first case, they pointed mostly at mainstream parties (Popular Party and Socialist Party). In the second case, they referred to bankers and big companies within the energy industry. On the other hand, the out-groups targeted as negative for the country were political groups (76 percent of the mentions), alluded mostly to nationalists and “separatists” who were seeking the “breakdown of the country”.

Regarding the meaning of “them”, it is one that varies according to the actor. Firstly, for Popular Unity and *Podemos* (leftist parties) “them” means the elite (political, economic, undetermined, “la casta”, etc.) and “us” refers to the common citizen. Secondly, *Ciudadanos* and Popular Party (centrist and rightist parties) had in common the use of this kind of division against the parties/actors who seek to “break the unity of the country” (nationalists and other parties who support the holding of the Catalanian referendum), but they differ in some aspects: *Ciudadanos* also used this kind of rhetoric to refer to mainstream parties (including Popular Party), and the overspread corruption within the system, whereas Popular Party alluded to an alleged “coalition of losers” or “coalition of super-red” (communists and

socialists) that created a threat to the stability of the country. Thirdly, the Socialist Party used this kind of rhetoric to refer the conflict between “the right” and the interests of the citizens. Finally, the nationalist parties used the division “us” and “them” to narrate the conflict between Catalonia and Basque Country interests (“us”, “our people”), and the Spanish state (“them”). They also used the idea of an idealised nation to speak about the independence of Catalonia and Basque Country.

Figure 4: Presence of populism features in the news stories (total news items)



(N = 1191)

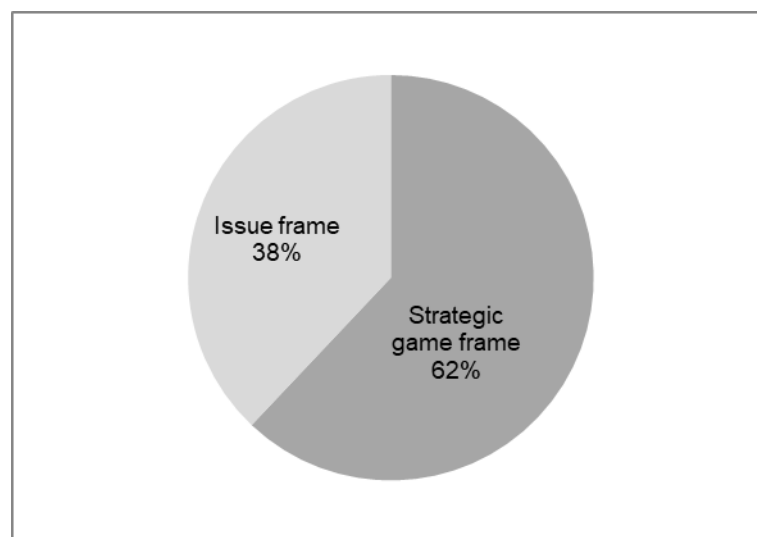
Examining in depth political actors, 21.07 percent of these populist features were found in the news items where *Podemos* and Pablo Iglesias were the main actors; 15 percent in the news items of Popular Unity and Alberto Garzón; 14.29 percent *Ciudadanos* and Albert Rivera; 10.71 percent Popular Party and Mariano Rajoy; and 7.5 percent Socialist Party and Pedro Sánchez. The most common populist features in *Podemos* and Popular Unity (both left-wing parties) were the division “us” and “them” as well as the criticism to the elite (Pablo Iglesias was who popularised the term of “the caste” in Spain). In the case of *Ciudadanos* (centre-right), the most frequent was the division of “us” and “them” to refer to

nationalists and traditional parties. Regarding the Popular Party (traditional right-wing party), the most common populist feature in their news was the “idealised nation”, normally in reference to the unity of Spain against the actors who try to break or destabilise the country. Finally, in the case of Socialist Party (traditional left-wing party) the most present feature was the division “us” and “them”, to allude mainly to “the right” as a prominent danger for the interests of common citizens.

News framing of politics

Regarding news frame, media coverage of 2015 Spanish electoral campaign was characterised by a strategic game frame (Figure 5). 62 percent of news items framed the elections as a game, focused on tactics and strategies of the campaign, on intra-party conflicts or on a personality contest. The remaining 38 percent of news items were centred in issue positions, substantial discussions about best policies for the country, or real life citizens’ conditions.

Figure 5: Dominant frame of politics

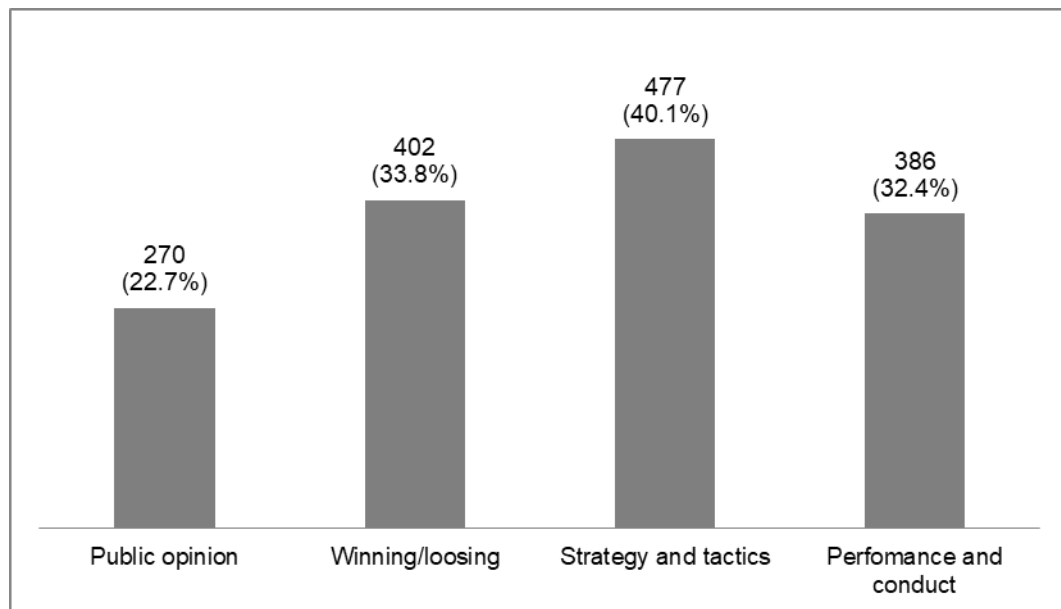


(N = 1191)

Following Figure 6, we can observe different elements of strategic and game frame. The most relevant element had to do with the strategy and tactics of candidates and parties in

order to win the election and the electoral debates, or succeeding favourable news coverage, etc. (40.1 percent). Right after we can find the logic of winning/loosing or horse race frame (33.8 percent), news referred to the performance of candidates, parties, politicians and campaigns (32.4 percent) and, finally, mentions to public opinion supporting different candidates and parties (22.7 percent). These frames were very present in news stories as to the televised debates (four debates took place during the campaign), the electoral events of political parties, the publication of opinion polls, etc.

Figure 6: Strategic and game frame (total news items)



(N = 1191)

Analysing these dynamics by media outlet, we can observe that the strategic and game frame was slightly higher in online newspapers (63.4 percent) and television (63 percent) than in newspapers (59.8 percent). However, the Chi-square test indicates that these differences between dominant framing in media coverage and media outlet are not statistically significant.

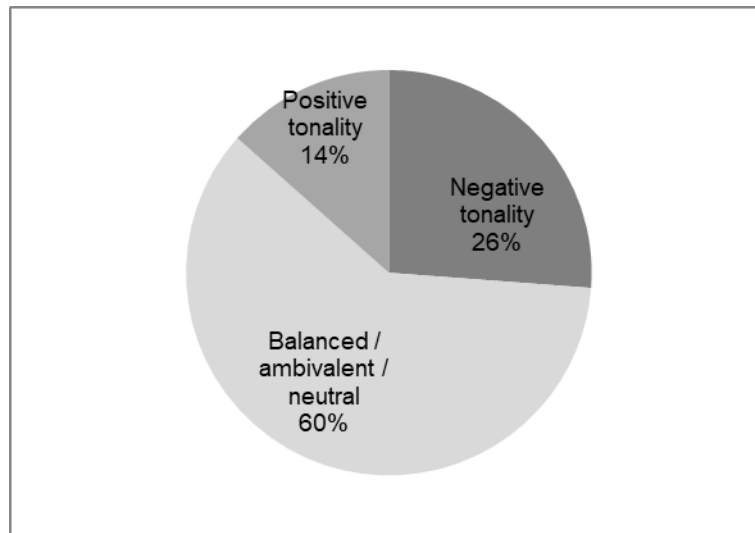
Negativity and conflict

Spanish politics is not characterised by consensus but by conflict between major parties (especially, Popular Party and Socialist Party). They are polarised in most of the important issues (education, peripheral nationalisms, anti-terrorism policy, the role of the Catholic Church in society, macro-economic policy, minorities rights, etc.), with the most visible exception of the European integration (both parties are pro-European Union) and a few more issues. The irruption of new parties has not transformed this political scenario but probably it has increased the polarisation of political parties. That is perfectly reflected in how the media covers politics in Spain.

On the one hand, the coverage of 2015 Spanish campaign was dominated by conflict between parties, candidates, politicians (39 percent) in contrast to the news stories that showed consensus, agreements, accordance, etc. between political actors (4 percent). There were two moments during the campaign in which the candidates and political parties showed some degree of consensus and agreement. The first moment was when Mariano Rajoy was hit by a young man in Galicia during a rally. All the candidates showed solidarity with the President of government and condemned the use of violence. The second one was after a terrorist attack in the Spanish embassy in Kabul where two Spanish police officers passed away. All the candidates showed solidarity with the family of the victims and affirmed their commitment in the anti-terrorist fight.

On the other hand, Figure 7 shows that the tone of 60 percent of news stories was neutral, ambivalent or balanced. 26 percent of news was characterised by a negative one, framing the stories as political failure, crisis, cynicism, etc., and only 14 percent of news was dominated by a positive tone, emphasising achievements, political success, problem solutions, enthusiasm, hope, etc.

Figure 7: Negative vs. Positive tonality



(N = 1191)

If we analyse the same topic distinguishing by media outlet, it can be found that conflict was more present in online newspapers (40.5 percent) and newspapers (40 percent) and less in television (36.2 percent). The consensus was present in the same proportion in television (4.1 percent) and newspapers (4 percent) and less in online newspapers (2.8 percent). The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between tone and media outlet are statistically significant.

Regarding negativity in media coverage, it was more present in newspapers (32.1 percent) and online newspapers (27.1 percent) than in Television (14 percent). In proportion, television was the outlet that covered the news the most using a balanced/ambivalent/neutral tone (64.6 percent) and positive tone (21.4 percent). By contrast, only 9 percent of news items of newspaper were covered using a positive one, and 13.3 percent in online newspapers. The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between media outlet and negative tone are statistically significant.

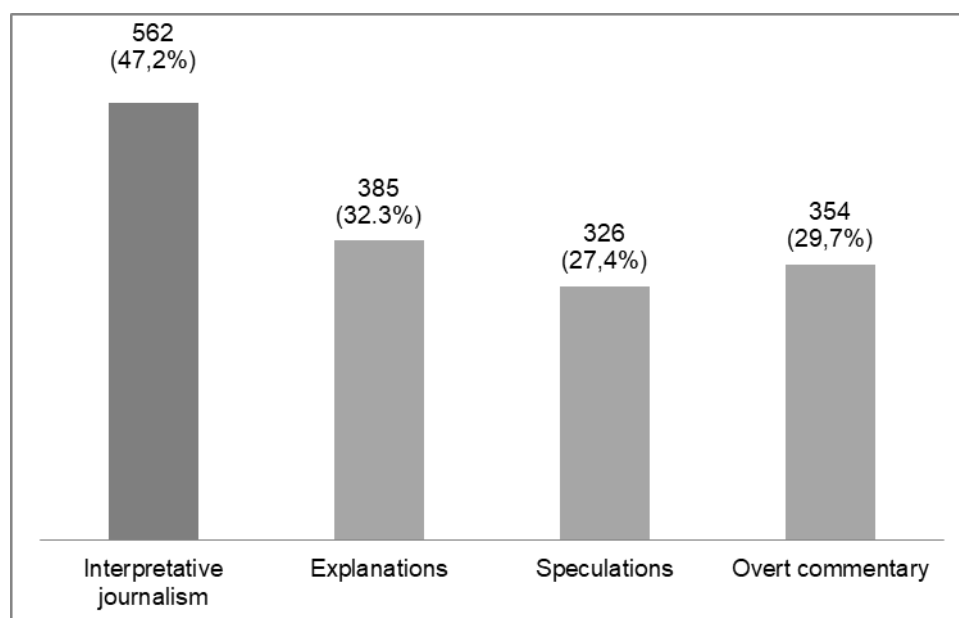
Interpretative journalism

As shown in Figure 8, interpretative journalism was very present in the media coverage of the 2015 Spanish electoral campaign (47.2 percent of the news items). Following Salgado and Strömbäck's (2012) proposal of distinguishing three different types of interpretive journalism, the most present type of interpretative journalism in news items had to do with the explanations or interpretations of the reasons behind events or actions (32.3 percent),

followed by explicit commentary by journalists (29.7 percent) and speculations about future consequences of events (27.4 percent).

If we select only the news stories and exclude the other types of news items (including more subjective elements such as editorials, columns, commentaries, etc.) the presence of interpretative journalism in news items drops from 47.2 to 34.1 percent, the explanations to 20.8 percent, speculations to 18.2 percent and open commentaries to 18 percent.

Figure 8: Interpretative journalism (total news items)



(N = 1191)

Table 1 introduces the distinction by media outlets in the study. It can be observed that the presence of interpretative journalism was higher in newspapers (46.3 percent) than in online newspapers (30.7 percent) and television (30 percent). In this analysis we only include news stories, excluding other types of news items that included subjective elements by journalists (opinion, editorial, column, reportage, etc.). We excluded this type of news items in order to not bias the results since the newspapers of our sample have much more opinion items than

television and online newspapers. The Chi-square test indicates that these differences between media outlet and interpretative journalism in news stories are statistically significant.

Table 1: Contingency table: presence of interpretative journalism by type of medium¹⁴

		Presence of Interpretive Journalism		Total
		No	Yes	
Media Outlet	Television	133	57	190
		70,0%	30,0%	100,0%
	Newspaper	95	82	177
		53,7%	46,3%	100,0%
	Online newspaper	289	128	417
		69,3%	30,7%	100,0%
Total		517	267	784
		65,9%	34,1%	100,0%

Chi-square = 15.358^a / p-value < 0.001

Conclusion

The aim of the present research is the analysis of the media coverage of 2015 Spanish electoral campaign. The results displayed showed that the most covered issue was party politics and domestic elections, as well as the performance of democracy and governance. Compared with the previous general elections in 2011, when the crisis of the Eurozone and the threat of a bailout were the prominent topics of the campaign, in 2015 the same issues were in a secondary position.

The second significant finding was related to the irruption of two emerging parties: *Ciudadanos* and *Podemos* were the third and fourth most covered parties by the media (at very close levels to the coverage of Socialist Party). The coverage of new parties was made in detriment of other minority parties with preceding parliamentary representation (Popular Unity, Unity, Progress and Democracy, and the nationalist parties). Private media outlets covered these two emerging parties much more than other minority parties, i.e., disproportionally. The public television channel (*La1*) was configured as an exception in that sense. We might find the explanation of this dynamic in the legal framework. Although

Spanish Electoral Law¹⁵ imposes proportional coverage of parties during campaigns to news broadcasts, with the criteria of previous parliamentary representation, the public channel is held more accountable in that sense. In addition, in this specific case, and given the electoral expectations of *Podemos*, the Electoral Court decided to reinterpret the criteria and make a slight exception.

The research has also shown that the media coverage of the campaign centred in candidates more than in political parties, i.e., in persons over structures: candidates and specific party leaders were the main actor in more than half of the news items of the sample; they also were the first source of information of news stories; and they were represented in visuals and direct quotations in almost half of the news stories. The media also addressed several characteristics of the candidates, especially their leadership, their appearance and their competences. This trend reflects a clear pattern of personalisation of politics in the news media.

Other relevant findings stated by our research results are related to the presence of populist features in the media. The division between "us" and "them" was a prominent dimension, followed by the reference to an idealised nation and the effective confrontation to the elite. These populist features were found mostly in news stories where *Podemos*, *Ciudadanos* and Popular Unity were the main actors. Although we also found some populist features in the news items about the two major parties (Popular Party and Socialist Party), but it was much less in proportion to their total coverage. These populist features normally referred to the conflict between the political elite and the common citizen (left-wing parties), the conflict between the Spanish State and the Catalanian and Basque interests (right-wing parties vs. nationalist parties) as well as the confrontation between the new and old politics (new vs. traditional parties).

Finally, the results also show several interesting dimensions: the dominant framing during the electoral campaign was the strategic and game frame; the conflict between political actors was much more frequent than the consensus; a negative tone was more present than a positive one. Considering the media outlet, the results suggest that conflict and negative tone were displayed more in newspapers and online newspapers than on television. However, no statistical significance was found between the outlet and the dominant news framing. Regarding interpretative journalism, we found it in almost half of the news items of

the sample. But when we distinguish between opinion and information (facts), we realised that interpretations are concentrated on editorials, columns, commentaries, etc. In addition, interpretative journalism was more recurrent in newspapers than in the other media analysed.

Today, Spain is going through very uncertain times in political and social terms. The new dimension of Spaniards political disaffection, the irruption of new technologies of communications, the consolidation of innovative repertoires of collective action, the creation of new political demands, the permanent movements in the media landscape, the crystallization of new political parties, the question of the traditional party-system, and the extended distrust towards the present political representation arrangements, have led to a very unpredictable context with no precedent in Spanish democracy. Moreover, those recent dynamics have also displayed an impact on electoral campaigns and, thus, have altered the way media in general depict electoral struggles. It is probably too soon to forecast if this situation is part of a new era or if it is just part of a temporary political earthquake that has altered the traditional development of electoral campaign and, consequently, the regular performing of media.

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