

LEADERSHIP AND THE PERSONALISATION OF POLITICS. SÁNCHEZ AND CASADO IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS: THE ROLE OF MAINSTREAM TELEVISION CHANNELS IN BIPARTISANSHIP

LIDERAZGO Y PERSONALIZACIÓN DE LA POLÍTICA. SÁNCHEZ Y CASADO EN LAS ELECCIONES GENERALES DE 2019: EL PAPEL CONSTRUCTOR DE LAS TELEVISIONES GENERALISTAS AL BIPARTIDISMO

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the television coverage given to the main leaders and parties for the presidency of the government of Spain during the two general elections held in 2019. Its aim is to analyse the coverage that *TVE*, *Antena 3* and *Telecinco* – Spain's most popular television networks – gave the leaders of each party during the two election campaigns in their prime-time news broadcasts, and thereby measure their contribution to the personalisation of politics and verify whether they contribute to the media positioning of certain parties more than others. The study has a quantitative design, identifying a variety of common elements, complemented by a qualitative analysis based on the study of the news content. Both cases consider the number of times the candidate and party are mentioned in presenters' introductions, journalists' voice-overs, labeling, image content, and the total number of times the leaders appeared in the 266 pieces studied.

Keywords: political parties, leaders, news, electoral campaigns, 2019 general elections, bipartisanship, television.

RESUMEN

El artículo aborda la cobertura televisiva de los principales líderes y partidos candidatos a la presidencia del gobierno de España durante las dos elecciones generales de 2019. El objetivo es ofrecer un análisis del tratamiento que las cadenas más importantes, *TVE*, *Antena 3* y *Telecinco* hicieron de las dos campañas electorales en sus informativos de



máxima audiencia para medir su aportación a la personalización de la política a través de los líderes y comprobar si contribuyen al posicionamiento mediático de unos partidos más que a otros. Se sustenta en un método cuantitativo, identificando diferentes elementos comunes, y complementado con un análisis cualitativo basado en el estudio del contenido de las noticias. En ambos casos se tienen en cuenta las menciones a los candidatos y partidos a través de las entradillas del presentador, la voz en off del periodista, la rotulación, el contenido de las imágenes y las intervenciones de los líderes que aparecen en las 266 piezas que se han estudiado. Las cadenas, además de dar mayor protagonismo a los líderes que a los propios partidos, privilegian la figura de Pablo Casado y Pedro Sánchez sobre el resto de los candidatos. Los informativos analizados otorgan un mayor protagonismo a los líderes del PSOE y del PP que a los del resto de fuerzas políticas, contribuyendo de esta manera al bipartidismo en España.

Palabras clave: partidos políticos, líderes, informativos, campañas, elecciones generales 2019, bipartidismo, televisión.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until the general elections of December 2015, bipartisanship in Spain remained intact since 1982, formed by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP) (founded in 1989 to replace Manuel Fraga's Popular Alliance). These two parties alternated in government as center-left and center-right blocs in all general elections held between those dates.

The Spanish reality can be described based on the characteristic fact of the existence of an institutional architecture and electoral mechanisms that indeed favor the prevalence of bipartisanship, creating an asymmetrical structure of opportunities for the potential emergence of power by other party options (Francés and Santacreu, 2014, p. 111).

According to Burns (2018), among the causes of the end of the political system initiated during the Transition, we find the decline of socialism in Spain and the immobility of the center-right, which prevented a healthy ideological debate. The center-left, represented by the PSOE, lost the left, and Podemos emerged in 2014, while the center-right lost the center, which was conquered by Ciudadanos.

According to Gil-Torres (2018), despite Union, Progress, and Democracy (UPyD) opening a small gap in that bipartisanship in the 2008 and 2011 elections, it wasn't until the general elections of 2015 when Podemos and Ciudadanos (C'S) obtained more than 30 percent of the seats in the Congress of Deputies.

The progress of these two new parties was largely due to the significant media projection of their leaders: Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera. In the 2015 and 2016 elections, both Podemos and Ciudadanos maintained their positions as the third and fourth political forces. Iglesias and Rivera led their parties in the general elections held in 2015, 2016, and 2019.

These are two forces that have been arbiters in the governance of Spain, although C'S collapsed after the results of the November 2019 elections and its leader resigned. On the other hand, VOX emerged with relative strength in April 2019 with its leader, Santiago Abascal. After the November elections, it became the third political force, while Podemos became the fourth.

2. Personalization of politics in the media

The literature on the study of elections and media coverage is extensive, but contemporary politics is increasingly focused on leaders rather than parties (Blondel and Thiebault, 2010). Regarding how the media treats political forces, there are studies that demonstrate that in some cases they benefit bipartisanship. Cárdenes (2011) showed that the digital versions of *El Mundo* and *El País* contributed to this reality both in their content and form by establishing special sections dedicated to the PSOE and PP and their candidates. Users could access news related to the PP and PSOE much more easily than those of other political forces.

In the fate of parties, leadership plays a fundamental role. In 2021, there was a shift from the left-wing bloc (PSOE and Podemos) and the right-wing bloc (PP, C's, Vox) to a general increase in the weight of the major parties (PSOE and PP) at the expense of others that have lost strength. In May 2021, Pablo Iglesias left politics after his failure in the regional elections in Madrid. On the other hand, the president of the PP, Pablo Casado, resigned from his position in April 2022 after months of confrontation with the president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso. This confrontation plunged the party into a serious internal crisis, which ended with the election of Alberto Núñez Feijó as the party's leader.

Research on the personalization of politics is extensive. Balmas et al. (2014) provide a conceptual and theoretical development of the distinction between centralized and decentralized personalization and demonstrate its usefulness for empirical analysis. According to these authors, political personalization implies changes, as the balance of power is shifting significantly, flowing upward (to party leaders or prime ministers) and downward (to individual politicians within each party or cabinet members). In both cases, the losers in these processes of political personalization are the parties and the brand structure, while the winners are individual politicians. This shift in weight between individuals and the party they represent is a significant variation, especially in parliamentary democracies.

Some authors, such as Renwick and Pilet (2016), address the personalization of the electoral system since 1989. They focus on the debates and reform processes in countries where reforms have been more frequent, particularly those that began the period with flexible list systems that allow voters some influence over which candidates are elected.

Other studies have focused on the role that political leaders play as drivers of voting intention in parliamentary elections within the framework of the literature dedicated to the personalization of politics in election campaigns (Garzia, 2014). In the same vein, Blondel and Thiebault (2010) address the issue by stating that changes in social structure have diminished the role played by class and religious affiliation, while the importance of personality in political leadership has increased. The authors evaluate to what extent the phenomena of 'personalized leadership' differ from one country to another, including comparative case studies on Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, Italy, Poland, Japan, and Thailand.

According to McAllister (2007), the personalization of politics not only provides an opportunity to convince voters but also for electoral mobilization without the need for the political party itself to assume the function, as was the case before. For this author, the

new politics establishes that if a leader is elected, the personalized mandate they possess will convey considerable political autonomy without relying on the party machinery. Leaders now hold their positions by virtue of a personalized mandate, not just based on support within the party (Poguntke and Webb 2005, p. 9).

Costa-Lobo and Curtice (2014) study the role of both leader evaluations and ideological preferences in the electoral decision-making process. Based on data from the 2007 Swiss federal elections, they investigate how leader voting and ideological voting are conditioned by the political sophistication of voters and the level of electoral competitiveness. According to Van Aelst et al. (2012), the focus of news coverage has shifted from parties and organizations to candidates and leaders.

On the other hand, Adam and Maier (2010) determined that the degree of personalization in election campaigns and media coverage can also vary due to the specific context of an election (e.g., the relationship between parties, candidates, and issues). An interesting example of how the party list can influence the degree of personalization in politics is the emergence of new political parties, a phenomenon that is not uncommon at all.

Personalization from the media system has been mainly investigated in the field of communication. Many studies focus on media coverage of the political context, with particular emphasis on television coverage (Rospir, 1999; Bucy & Grabe, 2007; Schulz & Zeh, 2005; Laguna, 2003 and 2011; Scammel & Semetko, 2008; Rodríguez et al., 2014; Pasquino, 2016; Rebolledo, 2017; Donofrio & Rubio, 2019). Therefore, the new role that the media, especially television, has given to the personalization of politics (Keeter, 1987; Brants & Voltmer, 2011) associated with leadership is crucial. This trend is attracting increasing interest and generating more research. Personalization of politics refers to the increasing prominence of political leaders in relation to the political forces they represent and its translation into media impacts.

In electoral campaigns, television remains the preferred medium for viewers to follow political information and has the greatest influence among voters (Peris & López-Rico, 2017; Schulz et al., 2005). According to Lozano Rendón (2001), the current political system is driven by marketing, where the rules make the candidate's image more important than their discourse and personality. The simplification of the message over comprehensible dialogue has transformed political news into entertainment in the form of personalization. The personalization of politics implicitly involves the concept of candidate leadership, as leaders are often portrayed as representing the entire politics of their countries and/or the party they lead (Pasquino, 2016).

A comparative news study conducted in 16 countries (Van Aelst et al., 2017, p. 128) showed that, in general, leaders are more prominent in television news compared to the political institutions they represent, although personalized political coverage varies greatly between countries. While in Italy or the United Kingdom, political actors are featured in three out of every four cases, in Spain or Switzerland, it is less than half.

In Spain, both in the general elections of 2015 and those held in 2019, television has been the main audiovisual medium, although there are significant changes between these two dates, mainly in the preferred channel among viewers. According to the Center for Sociological Research, 56% of people chose television as their primary source of political

information in the last electoral campaign of 2019 (CIS, 2019). However, the most evident evolution and distribution of viewers can be seen in the electoral year of 2019 compared to 2015, a year in which there was a prominent preference for one channel. In contrast, in the recent elections, the news programs of *Telecinco* and *Antena 3* are virtually tied in terms of audience share (14.5% and 14.6% respectively), followed by *TVE* with 14.1%.

3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

The main objective of this research is to analyze the treatment given by the most-watched Spanish television news programs (La1 de TVE, Antena 3, and Telecinco) during the two campaigns for the 2019 general elections, an unprecedented event in Spain. The importance of the research lies in television's portrayal of the prominence of political leaders and how it contributes to the personalization of politics. It focuses on the role of television as a medium, the construction of the news narrative, and the use of resources such as voice clips of the leaders included in the news.

The working hypotheses we start with are as follows:

(H1) Television news tends to give more prominence to leaders than to the parties they represent.

(H2) Television channels tend to give more prominence to the leaders of the PSOE and the PP than to those of other political forces, including a greater number of voice clips from these two parties compared to others.

(H3) The reference to the leader's position in the news of different television channels is higher for the PSOE and the PP than for other parties.

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodological design in this study consists of different temporal samples corresponding to the two general election campaigns of 2019. The informative pieces from the election campaigns for the Cortes Generales (Spanish Parliament) were selected and analyzed from the three prime-time news programs of the channels with the highest viewership. From all the selected news pieces, the sample was reduced to those related to the five most-voted parties in both campaigns, which include the Socialist Party, Popular Party, Vox, United We Can, and Citizens.

The first analysis selection corresponds to the period from April 12th to April 29th, inclusive, and the second selection from November 1st to November 11th, 2019. The studied time interval includes the election campaign, reflection day, voting day, and the day after for both election campaigns. These two periods amount to a total of 266 units of analysis and over 278 minutes analyzed. As it is the last period of significant political activity before COVID-19, it remains a "normalized" sample without the interference and informational fluctuations caused by this pandemic. The 266 selected pieces are part of a larger study with 709 political news items analyzed during both campaigns.

Both qualitative analyses of the formal and audiovisual elements of the news pieces and quantitative analysis have been conducted to determine the validity of the premises set forth to achieve the objectives. In the audiovisual analysis of the pieces, it is important to adopt film analysis methodologies (Marzal-Felici and Gómez-Tarín, 2007) as a starting point, considering aspects such as staging, narrative resources, and non-verbal language.

For a proper investigation of the formal aspects, content analysis tables have been developed based on the different audiovisual theoretical frameworks of spectacularization by Casero-Ripollés and Marzal (2011), regarding editing, topic selection, dramatization, and production type. This research has been extended over time to delve into the analysis of commonalities and differences in both election campaigns during a typical or common year (prior to COVID-19). Los estudios realizados se han elaborado afinando el sistema modelo de análisis textual de la tripartición de elementos audiovisuales de Gómez-Tarín (2016) con otros elementos narrativos. Este tipo de análisis ha sido aplicado por otros autores en posteriores estudios de comunicación política incluyendo además el análisis de los elementos constructivos del relato (Rodríguez-Serrano *et al.*, 2019, p. 6).

In addition, this analysis has taken into account different graphic elements and captions, allowing for a more comprehensive study of the narrative and discourse in the informative content of news across these three channels. These three forms of qualitative analysis on different audiovisual elements and languages provide a complete view of these informative programs during the election campaigns.

This approach helped us identify the elements that characterize the format and assess whether they enhance the complex and calm debate on the issues or, on the contrary, contribute to simplifying and trivializing the public space by promoting simplicity and decontextualization of approaches, as well as "personalization of politics" (Bennett, 2012).

The quantitative analysis, necessary to address the object of study in its entirety and complexity, quantifies the frequency and manner in which these codifiers appear (image, caption, and totals). It also takes into account objective variables regarding the mode of information presentation and the total airtime of political leaders. In this regard, special attention has been given to discursive forms and narrative styles, especially when studying leadership and the personalization of politics in the news pieces.

For example, attention has been given to variables in the message corpus and the total airtime (sound bites) regarding the reference to the political leader's position, analyzing the reference of the political leader in the sound bites to themselves, their party, other leaders, or other parties. This involves assigning a series of weights and ratings that allow for clarification and clear results regarding the mentions given to the parties and leaders of each political formation in the two 2019 campaigns.

Throughout this analysis, the news pieces of the five main national parties (PSOE, PP, Podemos, Vox, and Ciudadanos) have been studied. The research concept led us to make a comparison of how television channels have treated the two hegemonic parties in Spanish politics compared to the others. In that sense, we first analyzed each of these three parties separately (Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox), extracting and quantifying data and items individually for each news program and party. After analyzing the data separately, we found it appropriate to group them into a single unit to establish a comparison with the other two most-voted parties, providing both numerical and percentage measurements.

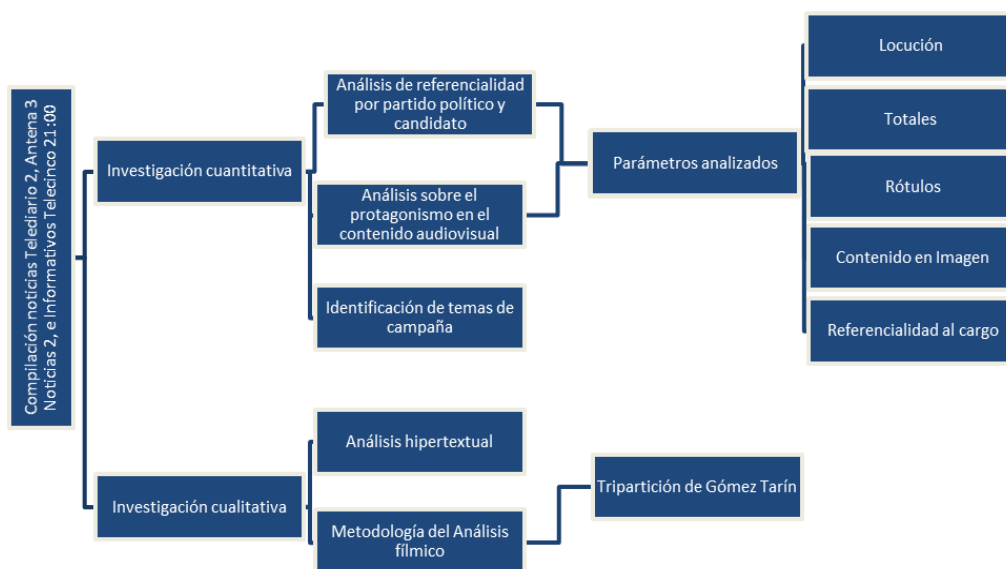
The conducted average is based on the absence of significant differences in the results, and especially on the similarities detected among the three political formations in the analyzed items when grouped together. The joint treatment of these three parties, which

emerged only a few years ago in contrast to the PSOE and PP, allows us to make more categorical progress in the intention of this research.

To ensure a proper analysis with such a large amount of data, the descriptive statistical method has been chosen (Daymon and Holloway, 2011) as it provides an overall and summarized view of all the data in the sample. This allows for sufficiently organized and structured information to determine the patterns observed by the different news programs. In order to establish whether the differences found in terms of the quantitative results of the content of the news pieces from the three prime-time editions of the analyzed news programs, regarding the two main political parties and the average of the other three political forces studied, are significant, we have deemed it appropriate to perform an association analysis between variables using the chi-square test. This verification allows us to determine not only if there is a statistical association between the variables under study, but also to analyze in which specific categories a higher dependent association occurs.

The chosen contents for this analysis are Informativos Telecinco, Antena 3 Noticias 2, and the Telediario de La1 (TVE) prime-time editions. These news programs are the most-watched and have the highest viewership exchange among different channels, which is associated with various political and electoral events, the main focus of this research. In the study, the news pieces have been distributed by parties and news programs, as well as the distinction of the temporal sample from different campaigns. As shown in Figure 1, this work covers a broader research field, which is subsequently narrowed down and focused on the object of study addressed in this article.

Figure 1. *Methodological scheme.*



Source: Author's own work.

5. METHODOLOGICAL SCHEME

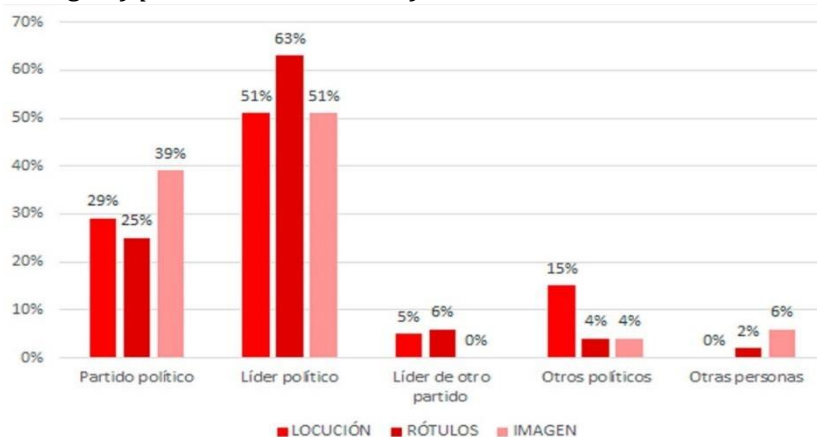
Political leader versus political party comparison

The data shows how television networks give greater prominence to political leaders than to the parties they represent, although there are differences in the treatment of the PSOE

and the PP compared to the other three parties grouped together (Podemos, Ciudadanos, and VOX).

Figure 2 (PSOE) indicates that, in terms of the prominent role in voice-over, graphics, and imagery given by the three television networks in the news pieces related to this party, political leadership receives nearly double the percentage of prominence compared to the party itself. References to other leaders and other parties are minimal. The television networks prioritize the leader over the party, in line with the findings of Rospir (1999) and Navarro and Olmo (2018, p. 1475).

Figure 2. *Percentage of prominence in the informative content in the PSOE news pieces.*

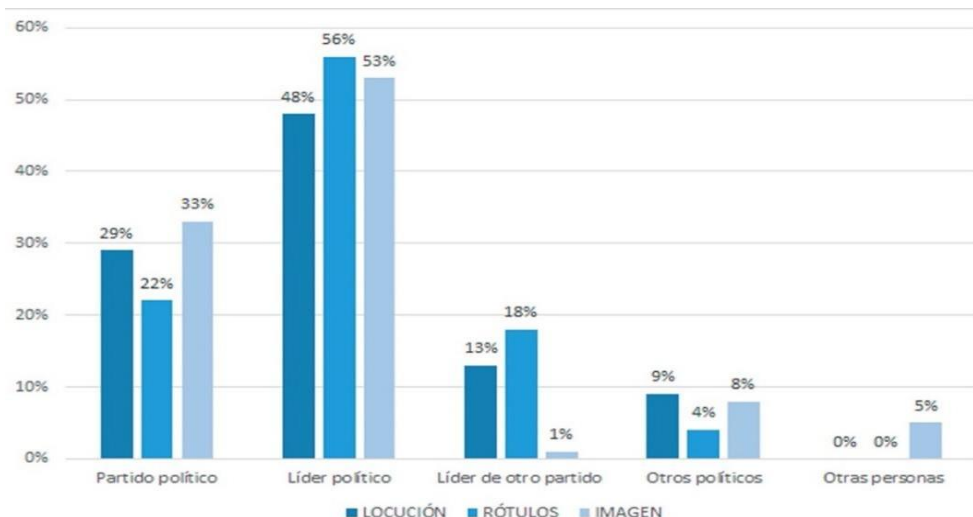


Source: Author's own work.

In the case of the analyzed news about the Partido Popular (Figure 3), the results are relatively similar to those of the PSOE, as these media outlets give prominence to the leader over the party itself, although leaders from other parties have a notable presence in these news pieces. The data confirms Laguna's theory (2003) that audiovisual media, in its quest to gain viewership, increases this phenomenon to be more competitive.

It is based on a journalistic criterion when editing the news, meaning that some channels incorporate mentions or statements from leaders of other political forces as a response to the soundbite provided by Pablo Casado in that news piece. Therefore, it is a pattern determined by the channels themselves.

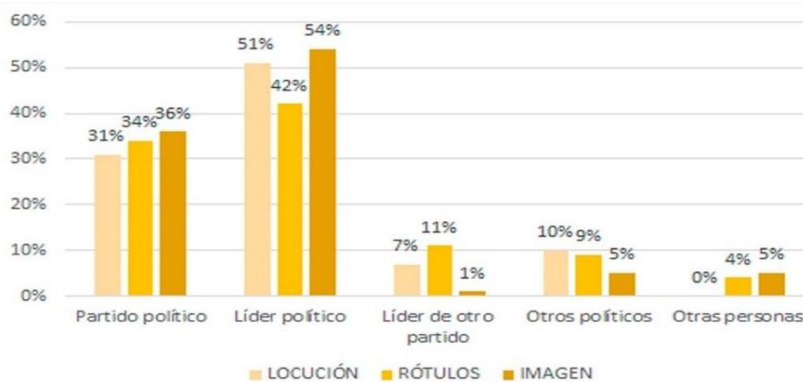
Figure 3. *Percentage of protagonism of the informative content in the pieces of the PP.*



Source: Author's own work.

In Figure 4 (referring to the news pieces where Podemos, C'S, and Vox appear = other parties), we observe how the channels maintain the same strategy of giving more prominence to the leaders of the three parties considered as a unit of analysis (Podemos, C'S, and Vox) than to the party itself. Mentions and presence of other leaders and other parties different from these have been detected in the news pieces of these political forces.

Figure 4. Percentage of the protagonism of the informative content in the pieces of other parties.



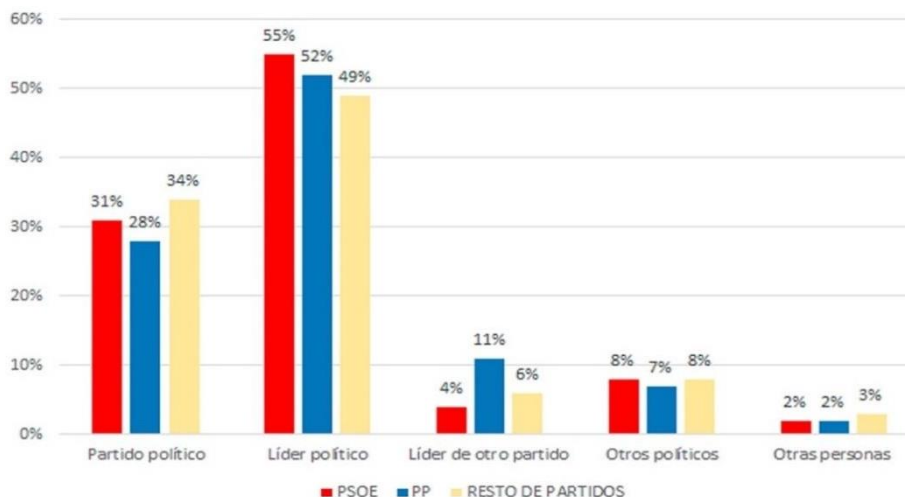
Source: Author's own work.

Regarding the content of voice clips, the data clearly reflects the strategies of the PSOE and the PP in the two election campaigns. The leader of the People's Party focused his messages on talking about other leaders, especially his main opponent, Pedro Sánchez. 37% of his statements were directed towards the leaders of other parties, and 23% of them were about other parties, while his campaign proposals occupied 35% of his interventions. These data contrast with the strategy of the Socialist Party, as Pedro Sánchez only allocated 11% of his interventions to address other leaders and focused more on commenting on the proposals of his own party (52%) and 32% to address other political forces. These opposing campaign strategies are reflected in this analysis.

Out of the 266 analyzed pieces, 82 of them correspond to what we have called combined pieces, meaning news where different political parties and their leaders appear. Figure 5 is very illustrative as it reinforces the theory of greater prominence of the two leaders of

the two main parties compared to the rest. In fact, it can be observed that Pablo Casado is the leader who appears the most (52% political leader + 11% leader of another party = 63%), ahead of Pedro Sánchez (55% + 4% = 59%) and other leaders (49% + 6% = 55%).

Figure 5. *Protagonism of the informative content in the pieces (media) in a direct comparison between parties.*



Source: Author's own work.

It is worth noting another significant data in the section "Political Party," where 34% of the protagonism falls on the rest of the parties, surpassing the bipartisan forces (PSOE 31% and PP 28%). In other words, in these combined pieces, there is a greater mention of Podemos, C'S, and Vox than of the PSOE and PP, and therefore, their own leaders (Iglesias, Rivera, and Abascal) are mentioned less frequently.

Protagonism of the leaders of the PSOE and the PP compared to the emerging parties

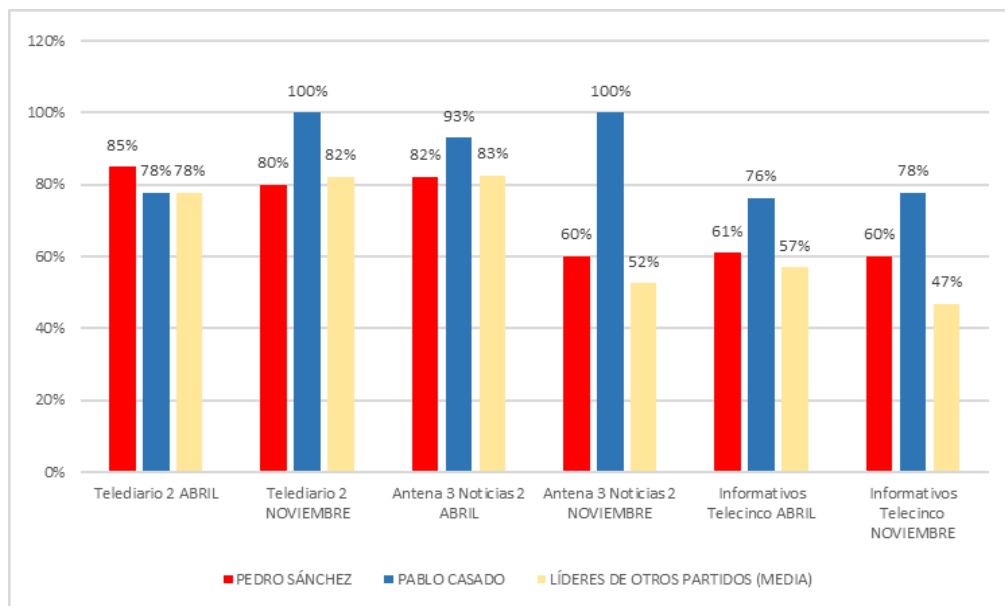
The television channels have generally given greater prominence to the leaders of the PP and the PSOE in both analyzed campaigns than to the analysis unit formed by the candidates of the other parties (Iglesias, Rivera, and Abascal). The analysis of prominence is based on the images used, the captions inserted in the pieces, and the voiceover of the journalist and/or presenter, in other words, it is a visual (image and on-screen text) and auditory analysis.

In Figure 5, the three television channels grant Casado the greatest prominence in both electoral campaigns, except in the case of the Telediario on April 2nd (TVE), where Sánchez is ahead of Casado with 85% compared to Casado's 78% and the emerging parties' 78%.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting a standout fact, which is the significant prominence that the Atresmedia channel offered to the candidate of the Popular Party in the November elections: 100% compared to the Socialist candidate's 60% (Figure 6). The channel's editorial line and the shortened campaign period (from 15 days to 8) after the repeat elections caused Antena 3 to concentrate more prominence on Pablo Casado than on the other candidates. In fact, the Socialist candidate dropped from 82% in April to 60%

in November. Similarly, the leaders of the other parties experienced a decrease in this aspect of 31%, going from 82% in the April election to 52% in November.

Figure 6. *Percentage of prominence of the political leader in the image, voiceover, and captions of the news about their own party.*



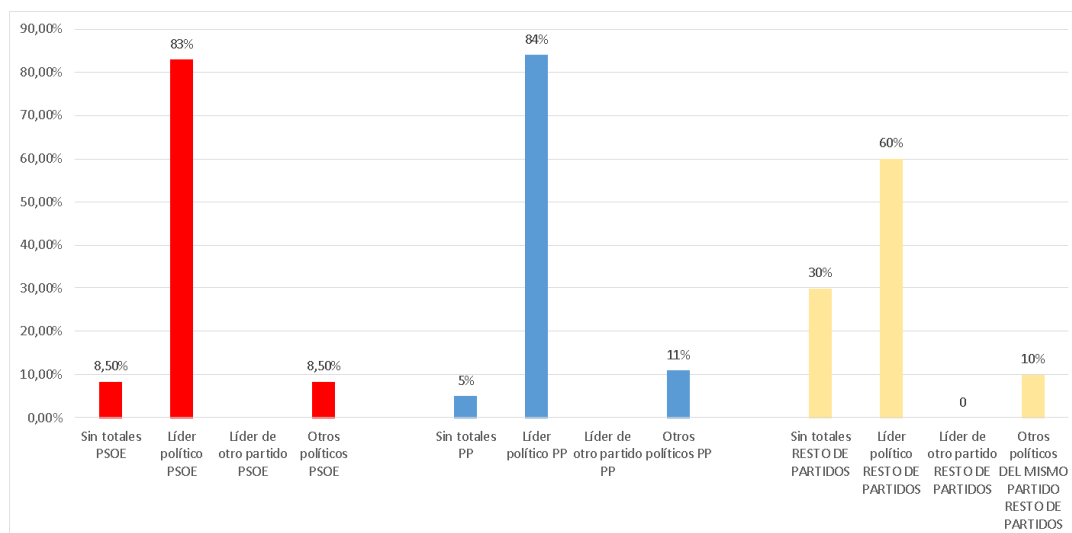
Source: Author's own work.

Comparison of news with voice clips of the leaders of the PSOE and PP versus the rest of the parties

In television, voice clips of candidates are the clearest and most evident resource for personalizing politics and showcasing leadership. According to González-Melero (2017), they are a fundamental element for providing agility to the piece and offering information to the viewer about the events. Furthermore, their importance is such that many reporters use the main character of the voice clip as a source of information for their television piece.

The politician speaks face-to-face with their voters, without mediation. Therefore, this research includes comparisons of the total voice clips and offers an innovative perspective due to the lack of studies on this subject (Figure 7). This part of the work is conducted from the point of view of how each channel uses the resource of total voice clips in the hands of the journalist during editing, which aligns with the editorial line of each media outlet to highlight a key idea of the campaign in the words of the leader themselves.

Figure 7. *Percentage of protagonism in the content of total voice clips in both electoral campaigns of the Telediario.*

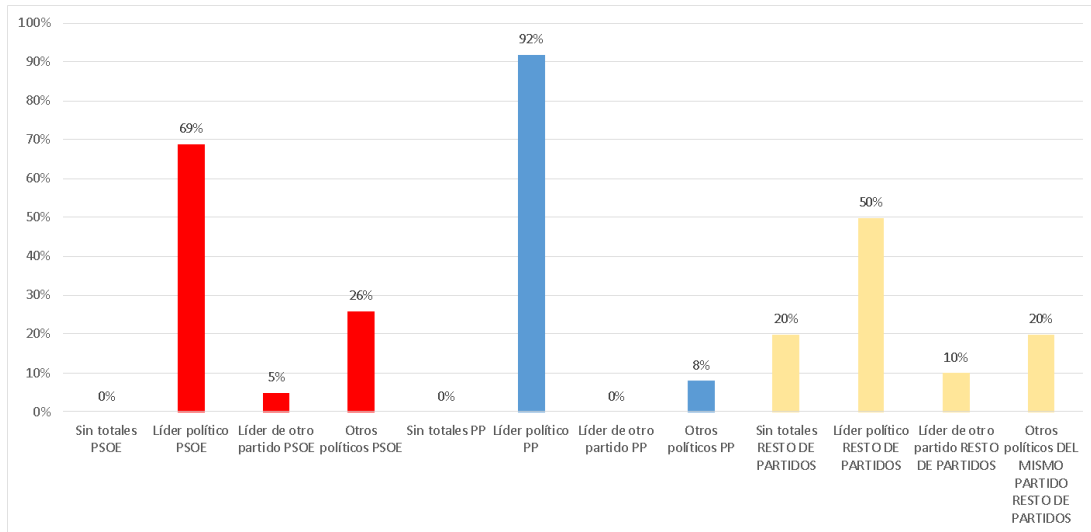


Source: Author's own work.

In the case of TVE, news related to the PSOE includes voice clips of Pedro Sánchez in 83% of the cases, while the percentage of statements by Pablo Casado rises to 84% in the case of those belonging to the PP. These data clearly contrast with the pieces that deal with the rest of the parties, where the percentage of voice clips of their leaders (Pablo Iglesias, Albert Rivera, and Santiago Abascal) noticeably decreases to 60% of the news. In this sense, it should be noted that 30% of the news about these 3 parties (UP, C'S, and Vox) do not include any voice clips from other leaders of these 3 parties, compared to 8.5% of the news about the PSOE and 5% of the news about the PP, which did include statements from other leaders who were not Sánchez and Casado, respectively.

The equal treatment of the PSOE and the PP in terms of including voice clips of their leaders by TVE differs significantly from that done by Antena 3. In this case, as observed in Figure 8, Pablo Casado is more favored than Pedro Sánchez. In 92% of the news related to the PP, this channel incorporates voice clips of the popular leader, while in the case of news about the PSOE, the percentage drops to 69%, giving voice to other leaders of the Socialist Party who are not Pedro Sánchez in 26% of the analyzed news.

Figure 8. *Percentage of prominence in the content of voice clips in both electoral campaigns in Antena 3 Noticias 2.*

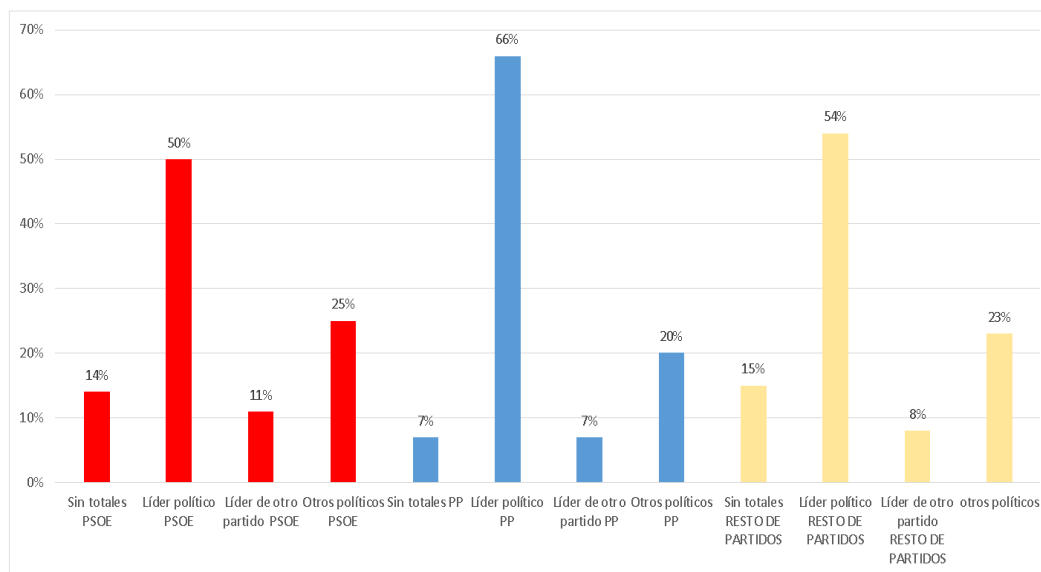


Source: Author's own work.

It should be noted that in this case, Antena 3 incorporates voice clips of the leaders of the PP in all the news related to this party, in a clear example of personalization of politics through the most visible faces of the party (Casado, 92%, and other politicians from the PP, 8%). These data contrast with the news related to the Rest of the parties, where only 50% of the news includes voice clips of their leaders.

The results of the analysis of Telecinco's news are mixed (Figure 9). On the one hand, like *Antena 3*, the Mediaset channel gives greater prominence to Pablo Casado in terms of voice clips compared to the PSOE (66% versus 50%), but the data shows how the Rest of the parties (54%) surpass the PSOE by 4%. The emergence of VOX with its leader Santiago Abascal, the tendency of this channel to sensationalize the information, and, like Antena 3, being a private channel, allows *Telecinco* more freedom in the treatment of electoral information. This freedom is based on a more sensationalist tone with VOX due to its novelty, the selection and editing of news, and the inclusion of voice clips from different leaders in the same piece, based on the relevance or message deemed most important by the editors of *Informativos Telecinco*.

Figure 9. *Percentage of protagonism in the content of the voice clips in both campaigns in Informativos Telecinco.*

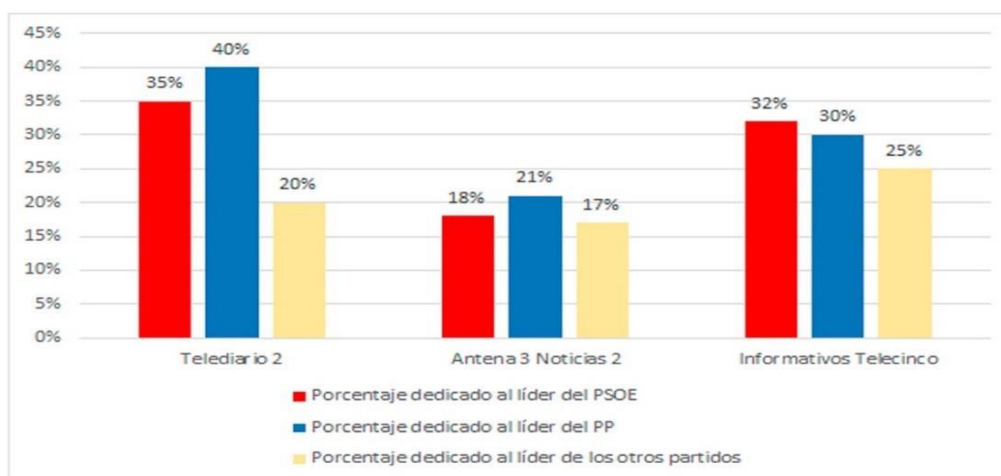


Source: Author's own work.

However, the general trend set by the channels to give greater prominence to the leaders of the PSOE and the PP is reinforced by analyzing the weight of the leader's voice clips in relation to the duration of each news piece. In both election campaigns, the three television channels give more weight to the voice clips of the PSOE and the PP compared to the Rest of the parties (Figure 10).

This greater presence is due to the fact that the duration of the voice clips is longer compared to the total duration of the news piece, clearly showing that the voice clips of the leaders of the Rest of the parties (Podemos, C'S, and Vox) last for a shorter percentage of time compared to those of the PSOE and the PP.

Figure 10. *Percentage of average time dedicated to leader's voice clips in the news pieces of their own parties between the two national election campaigns of 2019.*



Source: Author's own work.

On the other hand, Antena 3 had a more equal treatment regarding the weight of the candidates' voice clips in the news pieces dedicated to each party. In the same Figure 9,

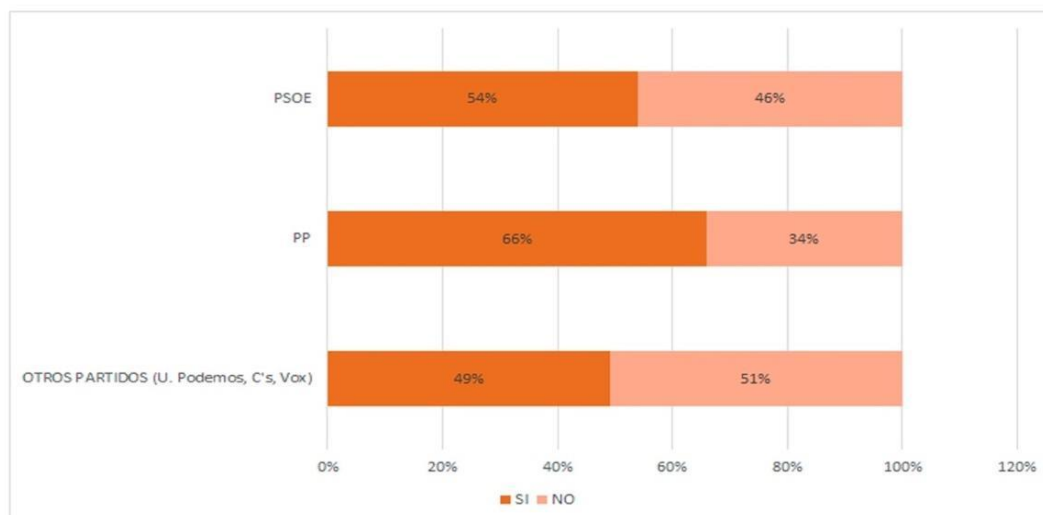
we can observe how Pablo Casado, like in TVE, has the highest presence through voice clips in the news pieces with 21% in relation to the duration of the informative piece. However, Pedro Sánchez is only slightly below with 3% less (18%), and the rest of the parties with their leaders are one point below (17%) compared to the PSOE.

Telecinco was the only channel where, in the overall coverage of both campaigns, the statements of the PSOE candidate occupied more space with 32% in relation to the duration of the news, followed by Pablo Casado (PP) with 30%, and the rest of the parties with 25%. Despite these percentages in both electoral processes, it is worth noting the difference in treatment by Mediaset's channel between the PSOE and the PP compared to the rest of the parties in the November elections, as the two dominant parties doubled the percentage of the unit formed by Podemos, C's, and Vox. This clearly indicates that Sánchez and Casado appeared in public statements twice as much as Iglesias, Rivera, and Abascal.

Reference to the leader by the channels and the parties

The two private channels (Antena 3: 81% and Telecinco: 73%) conclusively use specific and direct reference to the political leader position of all parties, whether through the voice-over of the journalist, the introduction by the presenter, or the captions, in both the April and November electoral processes. On the other hand, TVE does it to a lesser extent, appearing in only 14% of the analyzed news pieces.

Figure 11. *Referentiality to the position of the political leader in the textual/graphic content or voice-over in the news pieces, by political party.*



Source: Author's own work.

As we can observe in Figure 11, both in the case of the PSOE and especially the PP, the news that discusses these parties reflects the inclusion of a reference to the position of the leader in the head of the list to refer to them. This can be in the format of live or pre-recorded reports from journalists sent to the rallies, through added captions in the political chronicle, or in the introduction given by the presenter in the TV studio. 66% of the news pieces discussing the PP include the word "leader" in the information, 54% in the case of the PSOE, and 49% when it comes to the rest of the parties.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the presence of multiple screens, the impact of digital media, social networks, and radio, television has not lost its influence as the primary means of communication for following political information during an election campaign (Peris and López-Rico, 2017). Therefore, its effect on voters deserves to be considered as a key factor in measuring the impact it has on them and verifying the role that television continues to play as a political narrative builder.

The major television networks we have analyzed provided extensive coverage of the two general election campaigns held in Spain in 2019. It is common among them to give more prominence to the leaders than to the parties they represent (Van Aelst et al., 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2017, p. 128), thus confirming Hypothesis 1, with Antena 3 being the network that most clearly exemplifies this reality.

The analysis of news pieces shows that television contributes to the simplification of politics by constructing the news narrative around the candidates and leaders (Keeter, 1987; Brants and Voltmer, 2011). In this way, television gives greater prominence to the leader at the expense of the party, reducing politics to a clash of personalities (Sánchez-Murillo, 2005). Many times, leaders strategically put aside the party brand to become the main attraction of the electoral campaign. This was the case in the regional elections in Andalusia in 2022 with Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla and in Galicia in 2021 with Alberto Núñez Feijóo, both of whom led the PP to an absolute majority.

This research demonstrates that in the two general campaigns held in Spain in 2019, television networks gave more prominence to the leaders of the PSOE and the PP than to those of other political forces (H2), thus promoting bipartisanship (Cárdenes, 2011). This idea is supported by the visual and audio analysis of the images used, the captions and the journalist's voice-over, and is confirmed by the detailed study of the leaders' appearances. In this regard, Pablo Casado is the candidate who received the best treatment from the three television networks, with Antena 3 standing out for including voice cuts of the popular leader in 92% of the pieces dedicated to the PP.

Furthermore, the Atresmedia network has given the highest visibility to the candidate of the PP, as it has featured news with Casado as the protagonist in 100% of the PP pieces during the November campaign and in 93% of the news during the April election. The network's editorial profile, which is closer to the right and aimed at a more center and center-right audience, could be behind these results.

The general trend set by television media of giving greater prominence to the leaders of the PSOE and the PP is reinforced by the fact that the duration of the appearances of these candidates is proportionally greater compared to the total duration of the news piece. It is clear that the voice cuts of the leaders of the other parties (Podemos, C'S, and Vox) have a shorter duration compared to those of the PSOE and the PP, thus confirming Hypothesis 2.

Therefore, the candidates of the PSOE and the PP appear more on the screen proportionally, addressing the voters more than their opponents, which benefits the two major parties. The study also determines that the popular candidate, Pablo Casado, is the leader who has appeared on television the most, surpassing Pedro Sánchez by a wide margin. Casado assumed the presidency of the PP only 7 months before the April 2019

elections, and the novelty factor of a leader can also determine the level of personalization in electoral campaigns (Adam and Maier, 2010).

Another notable conclusion of the research is the explicit reference to the leadership position by television networks in the news coverage of all parties. Antena 3 and Telecinco clearly choose to link the electoral campaign information to the candidate representing the party, with a clear intention of personalizing politics, while TVE did so to a lesser extent, whether through voice-overs, journalist interventions in their reports, or accompanying graphics. The more impartial nature of the public television is marked by a stricter code of conduct regarding the treatment of political information, especially during election campaigns, which explains this fact.

In this regard, the clear and direct reference to the leadership position in political news is an important element that shapes the argument about how television networks personalize politics through the candidates and contribute to giving greater prominence to some parties over others. It is also worth noting that, on occasion, for strategic reasons, parties themselves are most interested in emphasizing the personalization of the leader during an electoral campaign rather than the party brand (McAllister, 2007). However, television networks made more use of the reference to the leadership position in the news about the PP and the PSOE than in relation to the other parties, contributing to showing voters a greater personalization of leaders Casado and Sánchez compared to the others (H3).

In conclusion, this research contributes to demonstrating that the promotion of bipartisanship is not a fortuitous matter for the media, but rather a recurring phenomenon over time, as argued by Reig in 2004 and Fernández Baena in 2005. They expressed that, in addition to the economic interests of television networks, there are also the different ideological interests of public institutions and private companies that govern the democratic system in which we live.

For future research, we would like to propose a broader study that encompasses both the campaign period and the time outside of it, and includes newspapers, radio, and digital media. This would allow us to ascertain whether or not other media outlets in general promote bipartisanship in Spain through different means, such as favoring the two major parties through their leaders, as the main television networks did in Spain in 2019.

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