

Evolution of the Spanish media agenda (1980-2010). Longitudinal analysis of the front pages of two of the most important Spanish newspapers

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Abstract: The newspaper front page is a preferential media space where the journalistic selection and hierarchy are explicitly reflected. This article presents the results of a longitudinal study of the evolution of the Spanish media agenda, based on the analysis of two of the most important Spanish newspapers: *El País* and *Abc*, which have different editorial lines. The examination of these newspapers focuses on the identification of the main issues, actors, territories and degree of homogeneity of their main front-page news stories. The study of the evolution of the front-page agenda of these newspapers covered a three-decade period, from 1980 to 2010. A total of 800 news items were subjected to content analysis for this study. The results demonstrate, on the one hand, that there is a significant presence of issues and actors related to institutional policy and, on the other hand, that the Spanish press lacks an international perspective and is focused on national current affairs.

Keywords: front page; newspapers; media agenda; longitudinal analysis; content analysis; infotainment.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Theoretical framework: the front page and its journalistic importance. 2.1. Social relevance of current affairs news. 2.2. The front page as the most important journalistic space. 2.3. Advancing agenda setting studies. 3. Methods. 3.1. Objectives. 3.2. Hypotheses. 3.3. Analytical method. 3.4. Sample design. 4. Results. 4.1. Main issues. 4.2. Protagonist actors. 4.3. Protagonist territories. 4.4. Homogeneity of the Spanish media agenda. 4.5. Comparative analysis between the front pages of *El País* and *Abc*. 5. Conclusions. 6. Bibliographical references.

Translation by **Cruz-Alberto Martínez-Arcos, Ph.D.** (University of London)

1. Introduction

The front page is the most important news space. It is where the journalistic hierarchy is manifested at its highest degree. In this sense, the front page reflects the editorial line and professional priorities of a newspaper. Consequently, its capacity set the media agenda is very high.

The front page has a great social influence because it has the ability to direct, to a large extent, the public's attention towards a limited number of issues. This ability is particularly strong in the case of the main front-page news story. Therefore, this space plays a key role in the journalistic construction of social reality.

The preferential and strategic character of the front page in the journalistic mediation of events justifies the importance of its study. The analysis of the front page allows us to explore the contribution of newspapers to the articulation of the public sphere in a democratic society. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to examine the evolution of the front page of the Spanish newspapers over the past 30 years (1980-2010), to try to identify with precision the essential features of their contribution to the journalistic construction of reality.

This article is structured in four parts. The first one presents the theoretical framework on which the research is based. The second part describes the methods of analysis. The third section systematically presents the results obtained about the four aspects of the agenda of the Spanish press: issues, actors, territories (countries, geographic regions, etc.) and degree of homogeneity. Finally, the article offers conclusions that highlight the strong presence of the political and institutional power and the national affairs as essential features of the main front-page news stories of the Spanish newspapers over the past three decades.

2. Theoretical framework: the front page and its journalistic importance

The longitudinal analysis of the newspapers front pages is a very important object of study mainly due to three reasons that have also helped to build the theoretical framework of this research: the democratic and social relevance of current affairs news, the journalistic importance of the front page, and the relation of the study of the front page to the current development of agenda setting studies.

2.1. Social relevance of current affairs news

Firstly, the importance of this object of study has to do with the fact that journalistic information is a key element for the exercise of citizenship in contemporary societies. In this sense, it is a crucial resource for the implementation of important social

functions: to know the reality of our environment, especially the reality with which we have no direct contact; to develop our own vision of the world; to take part in the formation of public opinion; and, ultimately, to fully participate in the political and social life (Sampedro and Resina, 2010; Grossi, 2007; McCombs, 2004; Casero-Ripollés, 2008).

Therefore, the informative function of journalism is key to democracy. Journalists play an essential role in the development, expansion and improvement of democracy (McCombs *et al.*, 2011). Journalism provides, on the one hand, a platform for public dialogue and the articulation and expression of views, which are essential for democracy (Brants *et al.*, 2010) and, on the other hand, exercises a function of control of the political system, by giving visibility to its activities (Schudson, 2005). As a result, political information acquires great importance in today's societies because it affects key issues such as the legitimacy, consensus, power, influence, decision making, and social perception of the political reality (Casero-Ripollés, 2009).

2.2. The front page as the most important journalistic space

The front page has great relevance within the press. At the professional level, the front page constitutes a preferential space that clearly reflects the news selection and ranking criteria of a particular newspaper (Gans, 1980; Borrat, 2003).

Without a doubt, the definition of the front page content is the most relevant strategic activity in the management of a newspaper (Davara-Torrego *et al.*, 2004; León-Gross and Blanco-Castilla, 2009). Since the front page is the most important journalistic space, it is key in establishing the most important social issues and actors within the media agenda (McCombs, 2004) and in shaping particular discourses about them, which generates powerful interpretive framings (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007; Vicente-Mariño and López-Rabadán, 2009; López-Rabadán, 2010).

In this sense, in terms of audience and social influence, the front page is the main element of impact of the press. Even television and radio news programmes present reviews of the front pages of the most important newspapers. In addition, it is important to highlight that, as a professional model, the printed press gives prestige and notable impact to the rest of the system media (Merrill and Fisher, 1980).

Thus, a specific analysis of this information space is a proper and accurate way of studying the media strategies used in the construction of social reality. In this sense, previous studies that try to describe the media agenda have taken the front page as their main empirical object (Erbring and Goldenberg, 1980; Danielson and Lasorsa, 1997; Davara-Torrego *et al.*, 2004 and 2009; Alvarado, 2008; Bouza, 2008; Gibson, 2011).

2.3. Advancing agenda setting studies

This research is based on the perspective of the agenda setting studies. For decades, these studies have demonstrated to be one of the most solid and established theoretical approaches in communication sciences (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; McCombs, 2004 and 2005). Moreover, this line of research has been particularly productive in the study of journalistic news and their characteristics (Sádaba and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2007; Meyer-Rodríguez, 2009; Rodríguez-Borges, 2010; Gómez-Patiño, 2011).

Agenda setting theory describes the process by which the news media present certain issues in frequent and prominent manners to make large segments of the public perceive those issues as more important than others (McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs, 2004). Therefore, it proposes that the journalistic coverage and attention will influence the priorities and concerns of citizens.

Taking this theoretical framework as a starting point, this research develops different ways of advancing in the study of the media's information structure and, consequently, editorial strategies. On the one hand, the study extends the characterisation of the agenda to include a specific study of the most important actors and territories. On the other hand, the study involves a longitudinal analysis that compares the evolution of three features of the agenda: issues, actors and territories. Finally, it compares the agenda of two newspapers with opposing editorial lines in order to identify the degree of homogeneity of the media agenda in the Spanish social and political context.

In addition, the analysis of the media agenda includes a complementary study that classifies the different news issues into two broad categories, hard news and soft news, and reviews their evolution. This classic typology (Tuchman, 1972) has been considerably consolidated (Scott and Gobetz, 1992) and developed (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010) as a shared convention in journalism studies. Essentially, this classification differentiates between those news issues that have a high level of public and civic interest (politics, economy, etc.), and require an immediate publication, the so-called hard news, and those news items that have insubstantial informative value (trivia, sports, celebrities, crime and accidents, human interest stories, etc.) and, accordingly, have a reduced incidence and are disconnected from profound social change trends, the so-called soft news.

Currently, the remarkable proliferation of soft news in the news outlets is linked to the emergence of the infotainment genre (García-Avilés, 2007; Labio-Bernal, 2008; Ortells-Badenes, 2009). In turn, the social and political consequences of this phenomenon have become a powerful line of research (Baum and Jamison, 2006).

3. Methods

3.1. Objectives

Based on the longitudinal analysis of the Spanish press, this research raises four specific objectives that allow us to obtain a deeper understanding of its information structure:

01. To accurately identify the main issues that integrate the front-page agenda of the Spanish press, while differentiating between hard and soft news and examining their evolution in the last three last decades.

02. To identify the main actors of the front-page agenda of the Spanish press and to review their evolution in the last three decades.

03. To identify the main territories referenced to in the front-page agenda of the Spanish press and to review their evolution in the last three decades.

04. To determine the degree of homogeneity of the front-page agenda by means of a double strategy: by quantifying the level of coincidence between the two newspapers under study in terms of main front-page news stories and by identifying the basic similarities and differences between their respective agendas in terms of issues, actors and territories.

3.2. Hypotheses

Taking into account these objectives, and taking as a starting point the important transformations that the information structure of the Spanish press has experienced in the past 30 years, we propose the following four hypotheses, which will be verified with the analysis:

H1. The presence of soft news issues significantly increased from 1980 to 2010 in the front pages of Spain's most important newspapers, in line with the growth of infotainment in journalism.

H2. The front-page agenda of Spain's most important newspapers experienced the emergence of new actors (NGOs, civil society, experts, etc.) which have acquired a growing journalist protagonism.

H3. The territories referenced to in the journalistic news have diversified, which has generated a significant advance in the globalisation of the front-page agenda of Spain's most important newspapers.

H4. The front-page agenda of Spain’s most important newspapers has suffered an increasing homogenisation, which produces a high degree of thematic coincidence between the analysed newspapers in terms of main front news stories.

3.3. Analytical method

Table 1. Summary of the content analysis protocol

Variable		Associated values	
1	Main issue (* Soft News)	1. Politics (partisan competition, political debate) 2. Economy 3. Employment 4. International affairs (excluding EU) 5. Health* 6. Education* 7. European union 8. Environment* 9. Energy 10. Sports* 11. Industry* 12. Social welfare* (social policies) 13. Corruption	14. Elections 15. Agriculture* 16. Culture* 17. Immigration* 18. Terrorism 19. Housing* 20. Monarchy, Royal family 21. Territorial organization of the state 22. Justice system 23. Security (uncertainty)* 24. Others (disasters, crime and accidents)*
2	Main actor	1. Institutional/official actors 2. Politicians 3. Economic actors 4. Alternative actors 5. Civil society	6. Media system 7. Cultural actors 8. Others (specify)
3	Main territory	1. Spain (national/regional/local) 2. The whole world 3. United States 4. European union 5. Rest of Europe 6. Russia	7. Asia 8. Latin America (Central and South America) 9. Middle East and Maghreb 10. Sub-Saharan Africa 11. Others (specify)
4	Homogeneity of the agenda	1. Same main front-page news story 2. Different main front-page news story	

Regarding the method of analysis used to develop this research, we opted for a quantitative approach based on content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002; Colle, 2011). This method, which is central in communications research, presents a series of suitable qualities for the study of press coverage according to our objectives. Content analysis allows undertaking an objective, comprehensive and systematic study of the characteristics of the media agenda based on a predefined set of categories, objectives and hypotheses (Krippendorff, 1990; Igartua, 2006).

Table 1 offers a simplified summary of the content analysis protocol applied in this research, through the four main variables and their respective associated categories. With regards to the differentiation between hard and soft news, our classification was based on the criteria listed in the literature review (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky, 2010). An asterisk (*) identifies the issues classified as soft news.

3.4. Sample design

The sample design was based on temporal, professional and discursive criteria. First, the temporal criterion was applied to establish a significant and historically relevant time period to examine the evolution of the Spanish media agenda. In this case we examined the last thirty years (1980-2010) because it is a period of time large enough to detect structural trends in the Spanish press, and it is very significant at the socio-political level, because it covers the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Spain up to the present day. The sample was delimited in temporal terms in two steps: first, we selected the initial years of each decade (1980, 1990, 2000, 2010); and then we selected the newspapers published during first 100 days of each of these years, to later apply content analysis to their corresponding front pages.

Table 2. Design and distribution of the analysed sample

Year	<i>El País</i>	<i>Abc</i>	Subtotal
1980	100	100	200
1990	100	100	200
2000	100	100	200
2010	100	100	200
Subtotal	400	400	800

The professional criterion was applied to select two relevant representatives of Spain’s most important newspapers. *El País* and *Abc* were selected because: a) they both have a very prominent position in the national media landscape of Spain, b) they both were published during the whole period under analysis, and c) they exhibit clearly different editorial lines: progressive and centre-left in the first case, and conservative or centre-right in the second (Canel, 1999; Idoyaga and Ramírez-de-la-Piscina, 2001).

Finally, the sample was delimited in terms of unit of analysis. In this case, we opted for analysing only the main front-page news stories. However, the detailed distribution of the sample, presented in table 2, included a total of 800 analysed front-page news stories.

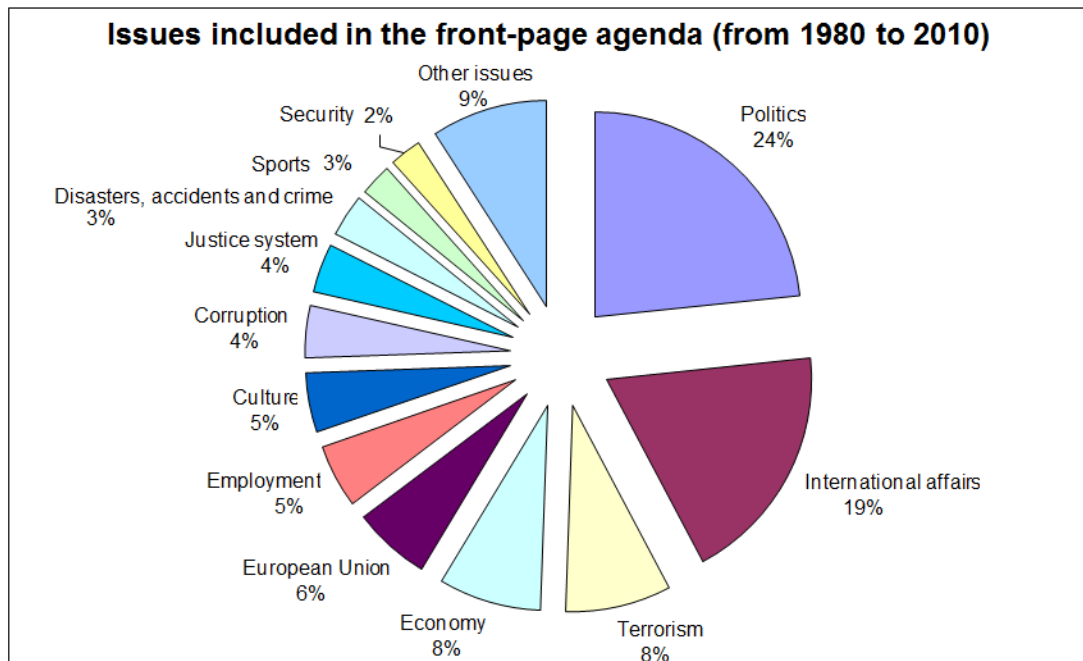
4. Results

In general terms, the results obtained from the content analysis offer an accurate picture of the dominant informative structure of the Spanish press during the last thirty years. In this regard, we detected many significant trends to interpret its professional strategy. The main findings are systematically reviewed in the following sections.

4.1. Main issues

With regards to the issues included in the agenda of the Spanish press during the analysed period (1980-2010), the overall results distinguish three groups of issues (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Issues included in the agenda of the Spanish press (N = 800 front pages)



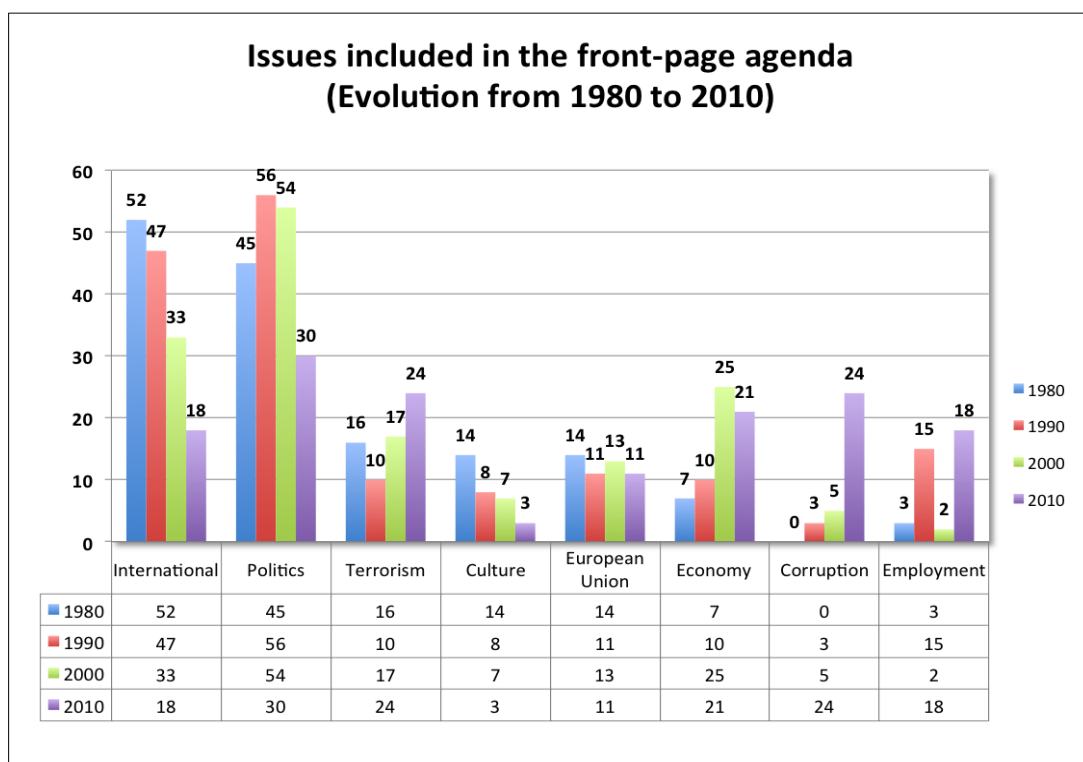
The largest group includes political affairs, both the Spanish national debate (T1) (185 front pages; 23.6% of the total) and international politics (T4) (150 front pages, 18.8%), which are clearly configured as the most important issues. To this we must add other issues that are more specific but are directly related to the current political situation, such as terrorism (T18) (67 front pages; 8.4%), the functioning of the European Union (T7) (49 front pages; 6.1%), and cases of political corruption, primarily concerning Spain (33 front pages; 4.1%).

The second largest thematic group refers to issues related to citizens' social and daily life: the economy (T2) (63 front pages; 7.9%), employment (T3) (40 front pages; 5%),

the justice system (T22) (30 front pages; 3.8%), and citizen security (T13) (19 front pages; 2.4%).

Finally, the third group is characterised by lighter contents and a considerable load of entertainment and informative drama. We are talking about disasters, crime and accidents (T13) (26 front pages; 3.3%), and sports (T22) (21 front pages; 2.6%). This block also encompasses news related to the artistic and cultural spheres (T16) (37 front pages; 4.6%).

Figure 2. Evolution of the front-page agenda in terms of news issues (N= 800 front pages)



With regards to the evolution of the front-page news issues, it is possible to identify a powerful trend of fragmentation. After an initial situation in 1980 in which two important topics (national policy and international affairs) represented about 80% of the front-page agenda, other more specific topics gained a remarkable weight throughout the three-decade period. While the previous topics have lost 60% and 30% of their relative weight, respectively, the presence of others issues such as corruption, economy, employment, and terrorism has experienced strong increases. Interesting findings were the very stable coverage of the European Union and the virtual disappearance of Cultural Affairs from the front pages of the Spanish press.

The final result of this trend in 2010 is the consolidation of a quite balanced and plural thematic agenda, in which 6 issues acquired a very similar relative importance. These

issues are: national politics, corruption, terrorism, economy, international news, and employment. Figure 2 summarises the data obtained about this evolution

Finally, there were significant findings regarding the evolution of the presence of hard and soft news and their evolution during the period under analysis. Soft news reached an average presence of 19.12% of the total sample during the whole period. In addition, during the thirty-year period there was no increase in infotainment news. The increase in soft news from 1980 to 2010 was minimal: about 1.5 percentage points (table 3).

Table 3. Evolution of the presence of soft and hard news (1980-2010)

Year	Percentage presence of soft news	Percentage of hard news
1980	20% (40 front pages)	80% (160 front pages)
1990	15% (30 front pages)	85% (170 front pages)
2000	15% (40 front pages)	85% (160 front pages)
2010	21.5% (43 front pages)	79% (157 front pages)
Total	153 / 800 = 19.12%	

This situation is mainly due to the importance achieved by topics such as national politics, corruption, economy and employment. In contrast, other issues classified as soft news such as sports, culture, disasters, crime, accidents, and social welfare had a much lower presence on the front-page agenda during the period under analysis.

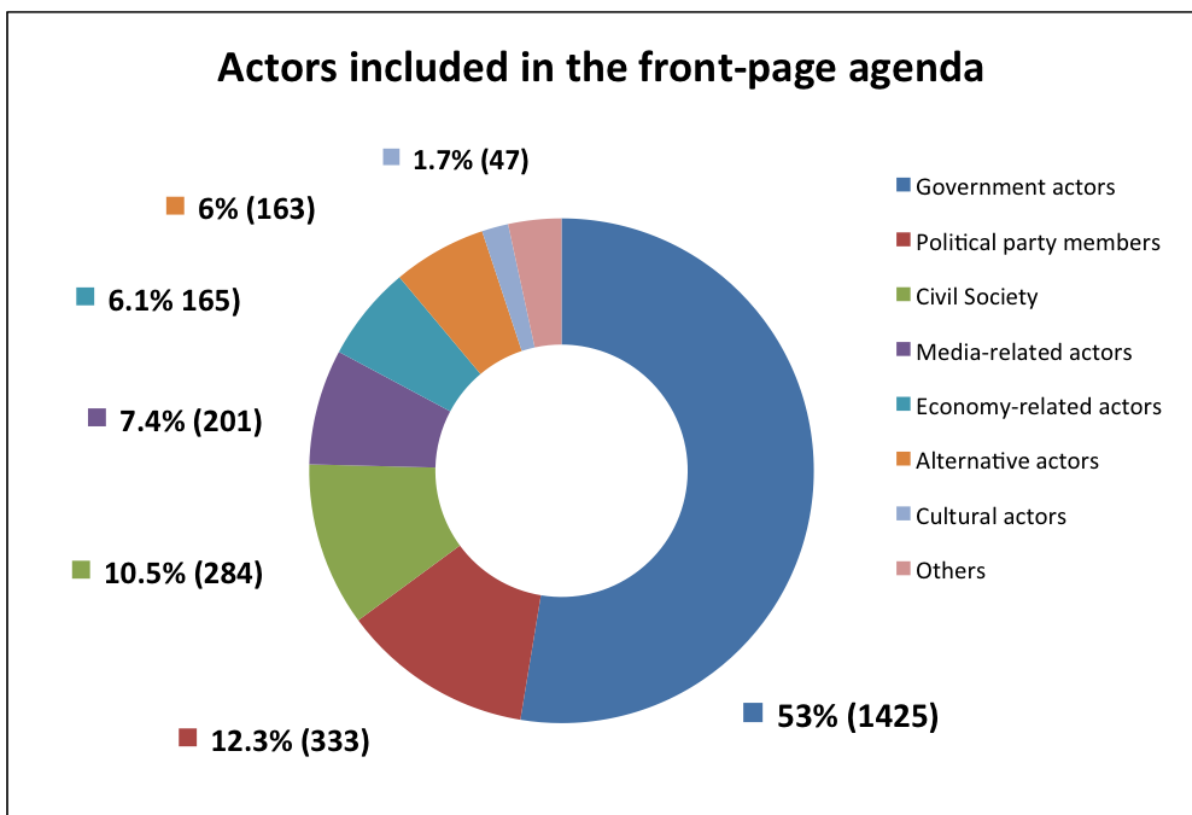
4.2. Protagonist actors

The results of the analysis confirmed that there were two major trends from 1980 to 2010 with regards to the protagonist actors, particularly in terms of significant presences and absences (Figure 3). Governmental actors predominated while new alternative actors and representatives of the civil society appeared irregularly.

On the one hand, the enormous informative weight of politicians with governmental positions (at the international, national, regional and local levels) is outstanding. The presence of these actors reaches 52.6% in the sample (1425 cases in 800 front pages). To this group we should add the important presence of party representatives (12.3%; 333 cases in 800 front pages). However, 64.9% of these actors belonged to areas related to government institutions (figure 3).

On the other hand, there is a moderate presence of members of the civil society (unions and associations) (10.5%), the media (7.4%), the business and economic sectors (6.1%) and alternative actors, such as scientific experts (6%) (figure 3). Together these actors represent 30% of the sample. So despite the fact that, individually, these actors have a reduced weight in the front-page agenda of the Spanish press, when they are combined their presence becomes important, but does not reach the levels of relevance reached by the actors linked to government institutions.

Figure 3. Actors included in the front-page agenda (N= 2710 actors)



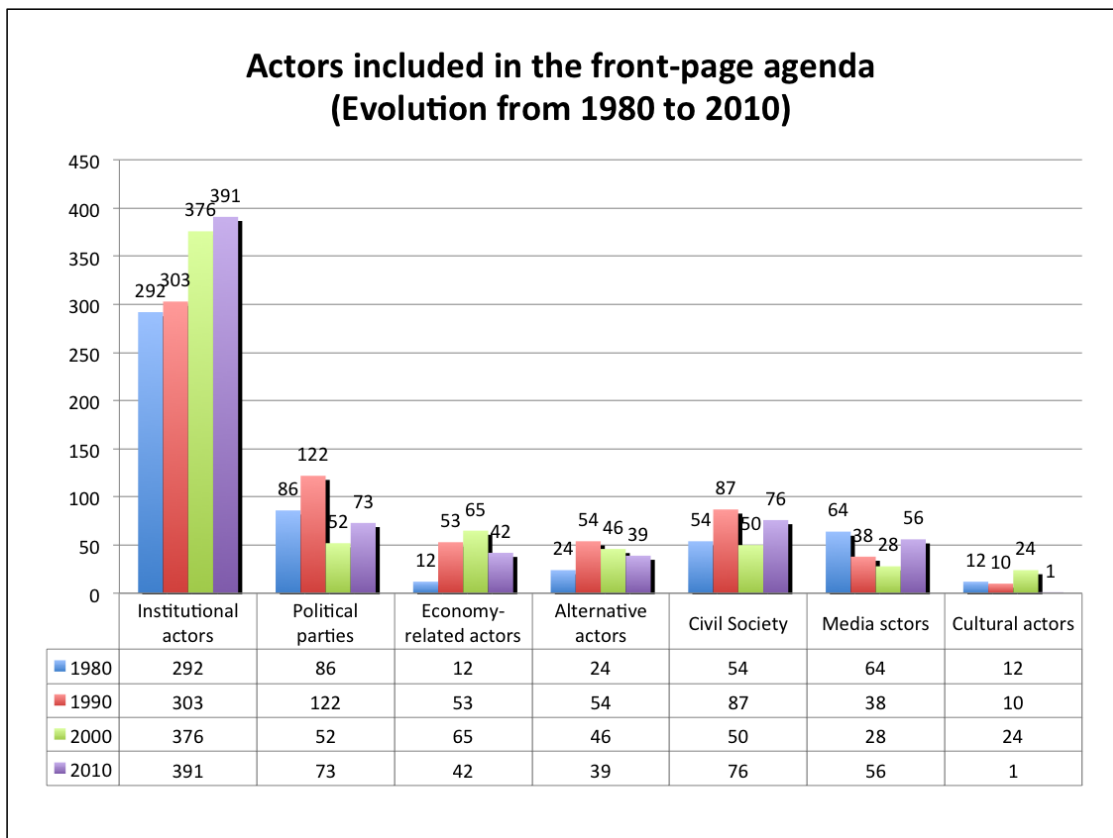
With regards to the evolution of the protagonist actors of the front pages of the Spanish press from 1980 to 2010, three major trends can be identified.

Firstly, there is a strong protagonism of institutional actors linked to political parties and government positions. During the thirty-year period, their supremacy was constant and even increased to nearly 25%. In this way, they are clearly the most dominant social group in the front-page agenda of the Spanish press.

Secondly, a group of secondary actors have strengthened and consolidated their media presence in different dimensions and levels. Some of these groups are the civil society

(whose presence increased by 20%), the alternative actors (whose presence increased by 40%) and agents from the economic and business world, which have remarkably increased their presence (by 300%). Apart from a greater media attention, the fact that explains these increases is that all of these actors had a very low presence in the 1980s. Therefore, despite their increased presence, they have not shadowed the hegemony of the institutional political actors.

Figure 4. Evolution of the front-page agenda in terms of protagonist actors (N= 2.710 actors)

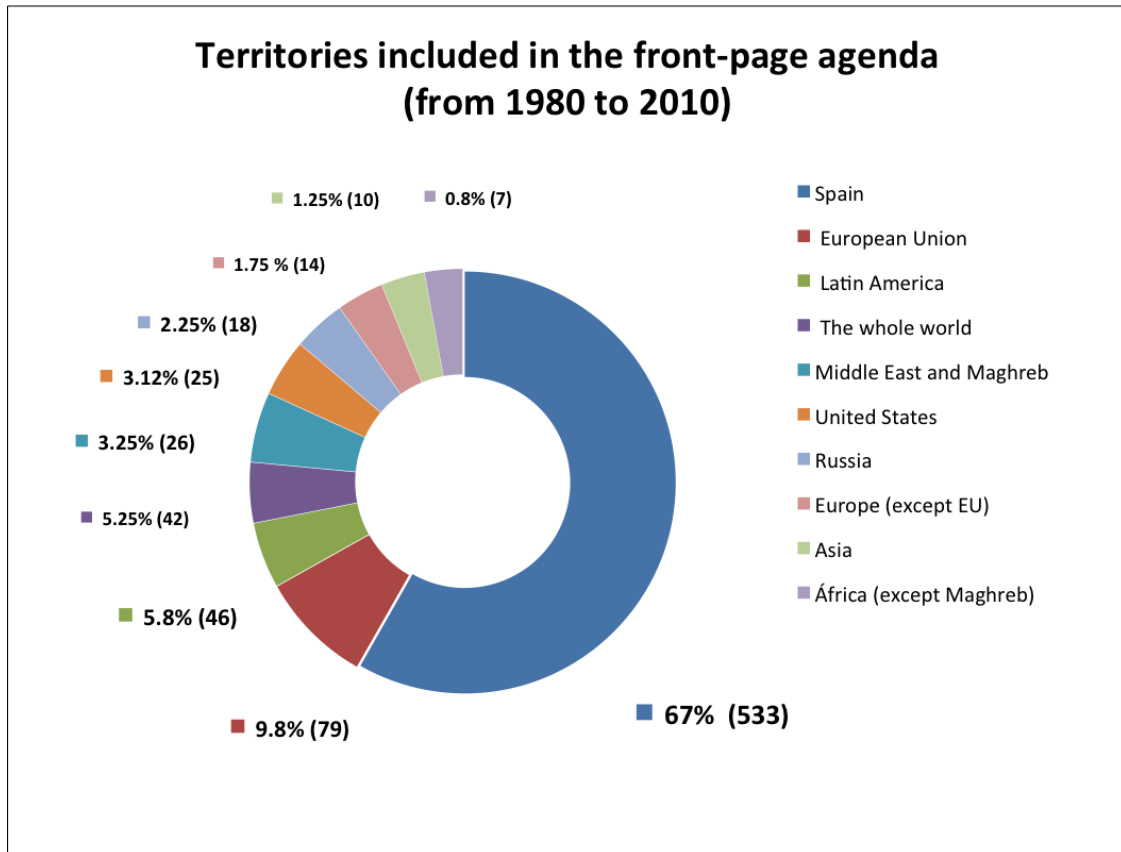


Finally, also worth noting is the setback experienced by important social groups such as members of the media and, particularly, the cultural and artistic world, which virtually disappeared from the front pages analysed in 2010. Figure 4 presents the data obtained about this evolution.

4.3. Protagonist territories

The overall results of the analysed period (1980-2010) with respect to the territories referenced to in the front-page news stories highlight the low degree of internationalisation of the Spanish press and the strong protagonism of the national news (figure 5).

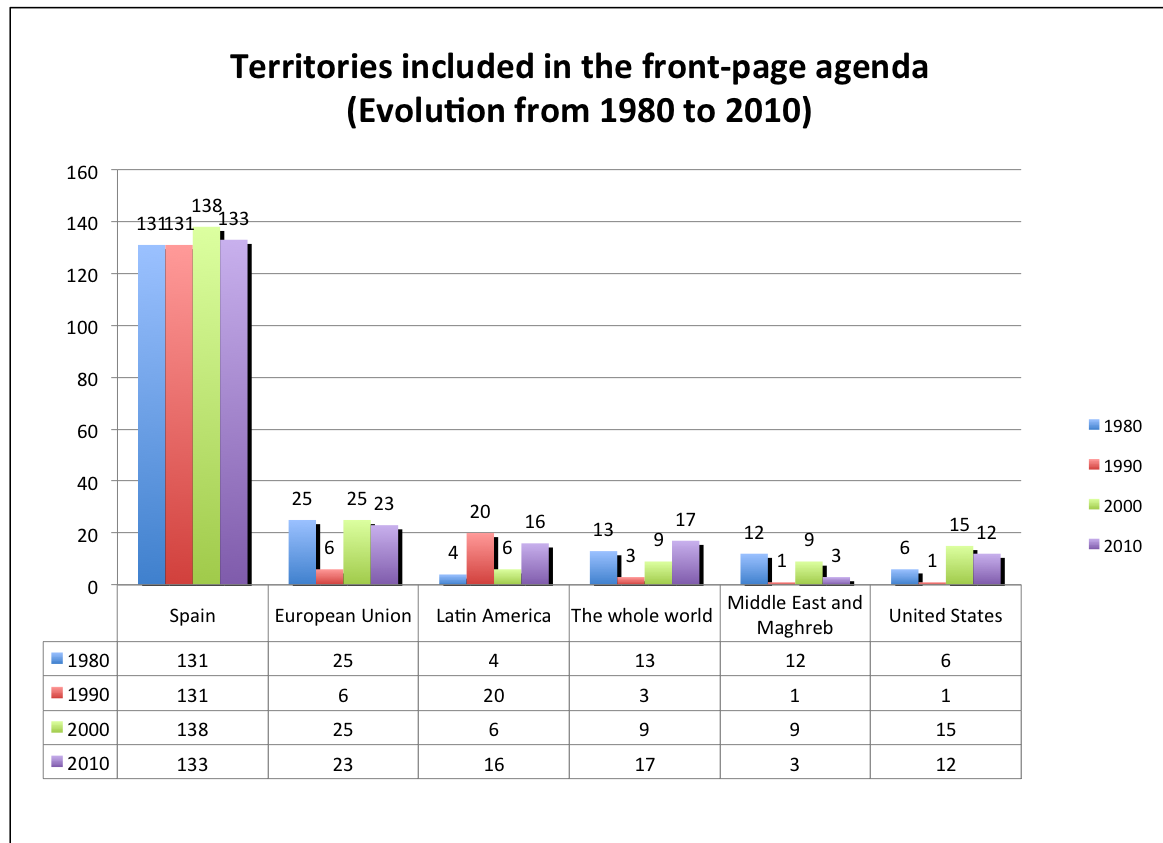
Figure 5. Territories included in the front-page agenda (N= 800 front pages)



The data show that Spain is by far the most important territory in the front-page media agenda. Approximately two thirds of the sample of front-page news (66.6%; 533 front pages) refer to national affairs. This aspect reveals the low global projection of the Spanish newspapers. In this sense, only 5.3% of the analysed front pages (42) presented a global reference in their main news stories. Also striking is the fact that, after 25 years of being part of the European Union, Spain maintains a quite discreet presence as informative reference in the front-page agenda of the Spanish press (9.9%; 79 front pages).

A third group of protagonist territories appeared in the front-page agenda of the Spanish press, but with a very low importance: countries and regions that have been historically relevant for Spain's diplomatic relations and international policies. It is the case of Latin America (5.8%; 46 front pages), the Middle East (3.1%; 26 front pages), the United States (3.1%; 25 front pages), and Russia (2.25%; 18 front pages). These results suggest that there is a disconnection between Spain's international relations and the press, which acts with clearly distinct criteria.

Figure 6. Evolution of the front-page agenda in terms of protagonist territories (N = 800 front pages)



With respect to the evolution of territories referenced to in the front pages of the Spanish press from 1980 to 2010, the most relevant finding is the lack of variations. In fact, during the three decades there were very few variations with respect to the overall results: Spain was the most referenced territory (near or greater than 65%) while the rest of the territories had a lower but very regular presence. In particular, when comparing the beginning and end of the period, 1980 to 2010, we can observe an almost identical situation after three decades of evolution. These data, certainly paint a very static and excessively nationalist picture in terms of the geographical coverage of the Spanish media. The results on this aspect are presented in figure 6.

4.4. Homogeneity of the Spanish media agenda

The degree of similarity between the two analysed newspapers in terms main front-page news stories was small. From 1980 to 2010, *El País* and *Abc* only coincided in 25.5% of the analysed front pages. The ideological difference between their respective editorial lines partly explains their divergent thematic interests. The degree of

coincidence is significantly low, which clearly indicates the existence of different news criteria and quite conflicting professional strategies.

In order to obtain a better understanding our study should be complemented with an in-depth examination of other national newspapers and other professional internal factors, such as staff composition, business structure, and news criteria. This examination can be undertaken through the direct observation of the journalist process and the use of surveys and in-depth interviews. Table 4 presents data on the degree of thematic coincidence between the front pages of the two newspapers.

Table 4. Summary of the degree of thematic coincidence in front pages (N=800)

Thematic coincidence in the front pages of <i>El País</i> and <i>Abc</i> (Evolution from 1980 to 2010)	
1980	30% (60 front pages)
1990	17% (34 front pages)
2000	26% (58 front pages)
2010	29% (52 front pages)
Total	204% 800 = 25.5%

4.5. Comparative analysis of the front pages of *El País* and *Abc*

A more comprehensive comparative analysis of the contents of *El País* and *Abc* allows obtaining meaningful results about their front-page agenda. In line with the proposed methods, we compared the following variables of the news stories: issues, actors and territories.

With regards to the issues, in the sample we found a similar pattern in both newspapers, which partly compensates the little coincidence between their main front-page news stories. In the 800 analysed front pages, *El País* and *Abc* shared a similar interest for two major issues of the news agenda: politics (T1), which appeared in 22.2% and 24%, respectively, of the front-page samples of these newspapers, and international affairs (T4), which appeared in 21% and 16.5%, respectively, of the front-page samples of these newspapers. There was also a similar secondary interest for other issues: economy (T2) (in 7% and 8%, respectively), employment (T3) (5.5% and 4%, respectively) and terrorism (T18) (8.7% in both cases).

Regarding the main differences, it is necessary to point out that *El País* had a more pro-European perspective, and thus provided significant coverage about the EU (T7; 41 front pages), and paid significant attention to issues related to corruption (T13; 24

front pages) and the justice system (T22, 20 front pages). On the other hand, the conservative newspaper, *Abc*, is less interested in these issues (which appeared in only 8, 9 and 10 front pages, respectively) and clearly more inclined to give more presence to issues related to culture (T16; 36 front pages), sports (T10; 16 front pages), and citizen security (T24; 15 front pages). Table 5 summarises the comparative analysis between the two newspapers.

Table 5. Summary of the comparative content analysis (1980-2010)

More important issues	<i>El País</i> (N=400)	<i>Abc</i> (N=400)
1 st	T1. Politics 22.2% (89 front pages)	T1. Politics 24% (96 front pages)
2 nd	T4. International affairs 21% (84 front pages)	T4. International affairs 16.5% (66 front pages)
3 rd	T7. European Union 10.2% (41 front pages)	T16. Culture 9% (36 front pages)
4 th	T18. Terrorism 8.7% (35 front pages)	T2. Economy 8.7% (35 front pages)
5 th	T2. Economy 7% (28 front pages)	T18. Terrorism 8% (32 front pages)
6 th	T13. Corruption 6% (24 front pages)	T3. Employment 4.5% (18 front pages)
7 th	T3. Employment 5.5% (22 front pages)	T10. Sports 4% (16 front pages)
8 th	T22. Justice system 5% (20 front pages)	T24. Other issues 3.7% (15 front pages)

With regards to the protagonist actors, the front pages of *El País* included a greater number of people than those of *Abc*. In the sample, we identified a total of 2701 actors, of which 57.6% appear in the progressive newspaper and 42.3% in the conservative daily. This remarkable difference reveals a greater richness and plurality of information in the progressive newspaper, which maintains this structural trend throughout the analysed period.

With regards to the different groups of actors, we found a fairly similar pattern. Institutional and political actors acquire a clear predominance in both *El País* and *Abc* (although to a larger extent in *Abc*). However, it is important to mention that while *El País* pays greater attention to actors from the media sector, *Abc* gives greater space to actors from the cultural and artistic world.

Finally, regarding the main territories, there is another fairly stable pattern. Throughout the three-decade period, Spain is clearly the protagonist territory in both *El País* and *Abc* (appearing in 62.5% and 70%, respectively, of the samples of front pages). In addition, both newspapers pay a similar degree of attention to the rest of the territories, although *El País* always shows a greater European and international projection.

5. Conclusions

The longitudinal analysis has allowed us to describe in detail the predominant front-page agenda of Spain's most prestigious newspapers during the last thirty years. Based on the obtained results, it is possible to synthesise the main structural patterns of the Spanish press and to verify the initial hypotheses.

In relation to the first hypothesis, there was a significant presence of soft news issues: in 19.12% of the total sample. However, the presence of these issues did not show a significant growth in line with the growth experienced by infotainment in the overall media landscape. Soft news maintained a constant presence during the analysed period. Similarly, national politics was the most-covered news issue. However, over the three-decade period there was a significant fragmentation of the thematic agenda due to the importance acquired by other issues such as corruption, employment and the economy.

In relation to the second hypothesis, there was a remarkable increase in the presence of new alternative actors (NGOs, civil society, experts, etc.). These actors appeared in 30% of the total sample, and experienced increments that ranged from 20% to 300%. At the same time, the institutional actors linked to politics maintained a strong protagonism in the front-page news stories: 64.9%. And this presence is growing because the presence of government actors increased by 25% between 1980 and 2010. Regarding the third hypothesis we did not detect a significant diversification in the number of territories referenced to in front-page news stories. Two-thirds of the total sample of front pages, 66.6%, made reference to Spain; while the rest of the territories were given secondary importance. This distribution remained constant from 1980 to 2010. Therefore, the results do not demonstrate a significant development in the globalisation of the Spanish media's agenda.

Finally, the results refute the fourth hypothesis, since there was no growth in the degree of homogeneity of the front-page agenda of the Spanish press. On the one hand, the level of direct homogeneity, based on the coincidence of front-page news stories between both newspapers is low (25% on average). On the other hand, there was an important similarity between both newspapers in terms of protagonist issues, actors and territories. However, this similarity is a structural constant since 1980 and not a trend that has developed in the last decade.

In short, the consistency of the patterns detected in this longitudinal study of newspaper front pages paints a fairly static and excessively traditional professional structure in the Spanish press, with a strong presence of national affairs and the political and institutional power.

* This paper is part of the research projects “*La producción periodística de la información política: fuentes, agendas y enfoques*” (“Journalistic production of political information: sources, agendas and approaches”) (P1-1B2010-53), and “*Periodismo y fuentes de información política en España: relaciones y dinámicas comunicativas*” (“Journalism and sources of political information in Spain: relationships and communication dynamics”) (CSO2010-16313), directed by Doctor Andreu Casero-Ripollés (Jaume I University) and funded by the *Bancaja* Foundation and the Jaume I University of Castellón (Plan for research promotion, 2011-2013), and the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (R&D National Plan 2008-2011), respectively. [[Certifying document](#)]

The authors thank the collaboration of Miriam Ballester, Vanessa Amat and Mariola Tárrega, as research assistants.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE IN BIBLIOGRAHIES / REFERENCES:

P. López-Rabadán and A. Casero-Ripollés (2012): “Evolution of the Spanish media agenda (1980-2010). Longitudinal analysis of the front pages of two of the most important Spanish newspapers”, at *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 67. La Laguna (Tenerife): La Laguna University, pages 459 to 480 retrieved on ___ de ___th of ___ of 2____, from DOI: [10.4185/RLCS-2012-964](https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2012-964)

Article received on 14 may 2012. Submitted to pre-review on 16 may. Sent to reviewers on 18 may. Accepted on 1 octubre 2012. Galley proofs made available to the authors on 5 october 2012. Approved by authors on: 18 october 2012. Published on 20 october 2012.

Note: the DOI number is part of the bibliographic references and it must be cited if you cited this article.
