

# Spanish Monarchy under examination: from consensual media silence to attack and defense frames in the case of the scandal of the emeritus king Juan Carlos I

## La monarquía española a examen: del silencio consensuado de los medios a los enfoques de ataque y defensa en el caso de los escándalos de Juan Carlos I

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** media use different interpretive frames when covering political scandals. This paper studies two of them –attack and defense frame. These clearly reflect the political positioning of the media and their attitude toward cases of political corruption. **Methodology:** This work carries out a

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quantitative content analysis of the coverage given by the traditional and digital Spanish press to the corruption scandals linked to the figure of the Spanish King Emeritus, Juan Carlos I. The complete theoretical framework pointed out by Robert Entman, which was empirically developed by Jürgen Maier et al., is followed for its analysis. **Results:** the main results show that the Spanish press generally framed the scandal associated with King Emeritus, Juan Carlos I, especially by presenting the facts from the attack approach, although significant differences were found depending on the headline analyzed. **Discussion:** the analyzed data corroborate other international research on political scandals, although the Spanish press seems to offer fragmented approaches more often than the German press studied by Maier et al. **Conclusions:** we finally found out that in the case of the alleged scandal concerning Juan Carlos I the Spanish media, more so the traditional than the digital press, does offer an interpretive bias and is polarized.

**Keywords:** monarchy; scandals; political corruption; media; King Juan Carlos I; framing; polarization.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** los medios de comunicación utilizan diversos marcos interpretativos (enfoques, *frames*) a la hora de cubrir los escándalos políticos. En el presente trabajo se estudian dos de ellos -el de ataque y el de defensa- que reflejan de manera clara el posicionamiento político de los medios y su actitud hacia los casos de corrupción política. **Metodología:** este trabajo realiza un análisis de contenido cuantitativo de la cobertura otorgada por la prensa tradicional y digital española a los escándalos de corrupción ligados a la figura del rey emérito, Juan Carlos I. Se sigue para su análisis el marco teórico completo apuntado por Robert Entman desarrollado empíricamente por Jürgen Maier *et al.* **Resultados:** los principales resultados muestran que la prensa española enmarcó de forma generalizada el escándalo del rey emérito, sobre todo presentando los hechos desde el enfoque de ataque, aunque existen diferencias significativas dependiendo de la cabecera analizada. **Discusión:** los datos analizados corroboran otras investigaciones internacionales sobre escándalos políticos, aunque la prensa española parece ofrecer enfoques fragmentados más habitualmente que la prensa alemana estudiada por Maier *et al.* **Conclusiones:** finalmente encontramos que, en el caso estudiado, la prensa española, más la tradicional que la digital, sí ofrece un sesgo interpretativo y se polariza.

**Palabras clave:** monarquía; escándalos; corrupción política; medios de comunicación; rey Juan Carlos I; *framing*; polarización.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Spain, there is exhaustive historical research on the Head of State and its legal treatment. However, studies are scarce from the perspective of how the media have reported on this key political institution of our democratic system and how media representation has influenced the attitude of citizens toward the Monarchy. This type of work has been more frequent, for example, in the United Kingdom, where different studies have been published since the 1970s (see, for example, Blumer et al., 1971; Garrido et al., 2020, p. 123; and Garrido et al., 2022, p. 3).

This shortage of research may be partly explained by the fact that, although research books have been published over the years on serious issues related to King Juan Carlos I, they were not reported in the press until at least 2008 (de Pablos and Ardévol, 2009, p. 239). These authors point out that the media consensus to silence anything that could damage the image of the Spanish monarchy was broken with

the arrival of the newspaper *Público* (de Pablos and Ardévol, 2009, p. 237). At that moment there was no longer unanimity to "accompany the king's strategy" (Barrera and Zugasti, 2003, p. 76). In parallel, after the high levels of trust in the Monarchy during the nineties of the last century, it goes from 5.5 (out of 10) in 2008 to 3.72 in mid-2014 (Garrido et al., 2020, p. 124), when King Juan Carlos I abdicates.

The decline in trust coincides with a progressive increase in the number of reports critical of the royal family, especially with the media coverage of the *Nóos* case, also known as the "Urdangarín case" (son-in-law of the then King of Spain, Juan Carlos I) and, initially, Operation Babel. This case began in 2010. Likewise, the relationship of the former monarch with Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein was the subject of an investigation by various publications, even by those with a monarchist editorial line, as is the case of *Vanity Fair* (Velasco-Molpeceres, 2018, p. 135). On the other hand, on April 18th, 2012, Juan Carlos I apologized to the *Efe* agency, TVE, and Radio Nacional in a brief message that was distributed to all the media: "I am very sorry. I made a mistake and it will not happen again". He was responding to the avalanche of criticism after breaking his hip on a hunting trip in Botswana, for having left the country at a time when it was in the midst of an economic crisis (see, for example, the reports on the subject in *El Mundo* by Romero, 2012).

The critical period opened by these events closes with the abdication of Juan Carlos I and the coronation of his son Felipe VI on June 19th, 2014, although the final judgment of the Supreme Court sentencing Urdangarín to 5 years and 10 months in prison is not made public until June 12th, 2018. On this date, the media publishes explanatory tables about the convicted and their sentences (see, for example, *OkDiario's* information of that day).

A new informative boom occurs as a result of the scandals of the already emeritus king when *La Tribune de Génève* (Geneva, Switzerland) publishes in early March 2020 that Juan Carlos I possessed 100 million dollars in accounts in that city. From that date and during the following year, there was no end to the information linking him to various scandals. In August 2020, he left Spain. This is the period on which this paper focuses.

The boom in media coverage of the royal family scandals is part of an international media trend. The representation of scandals in the media has increased notably over the last few years, especially since the 1990s as shown by the longitudinal studies that have been developed (see, for example, Allern et al. 2012). By media coverage of political scandals, we mean in this paper an "intense public communication about real or imagined defects that are consensually condemned and generate universal outrage or scandal" (Esser and Hartung, 2004, p. 1041). Regarding corruption, we adopt the definition of *Trasparencia Internacional*, widely accepted in the scientific community, which understands it as the abuse of people in positions of power for private ends or benefits (*Trasparencia Internacional*, 2009; Berganza et al., 2021).

Among the scandals that are most relevant, or at least occupy the most time and space in the public debate, are those related to corruption. It is worth asking whether we are, then, faced with a political culture that favors corruption; or whether what is happening is not that politicians are more corrupt, but that the increase in frequency is due to a change in the news selection criteria of information professionals, who tend to make this type of acts more and more visible (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 278). As Thompson (2000, pp. 57-59) points out, this may be due to three factors: attracting larger audiences vis-à-vis competing media; the rise of investigative journalism; and the apogee of new media and communication technologies, with the emergence of which the private activities of politicians are more exposed to public scrutiny. To this can be added the controlling role of political power played by some journalists and media outlets. As well as, in countries with a high tradition of political

polarization, where Spain is situated (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), the ideologization of the media, which supports the positions of specific traditional parties and values and which conceive the scandals affecting rival politicians as a source of support for their ideological positions. Thus, the inclination of editors and receivers for one political party or another is one of the factors affecting both the frequency of the coverage of a corruption case and the way it is framed (Puglisi and Snyder, 2009).

This concept of framing applied to the media alludes to the process of presentation (verbal or visual) of information and the external and internal factors underlying this process (Maier et al., 2019, p. 105). On the other hand, as these authors (2019, p. 105) indicate, in the literature on framing, when identifying the different approaches, operationalization problems are encountered. That is, there is a wide variety of indicators to measure the same approaches, which poses a problem from the point of view of the comparability of results between different investigations. To alleviate this, in this research we will start from the construction of the attack and defense approaches following the operationalization of Maier et al. (2019) to compare the results of their work and other previous work by different authors with the one carried out here and to be able to make an advance in the knowledge of these frameworks that can serve as a guide for future research.

Numerous approaches have been identified relating specifically to political corruption scandals. However, as Maier et al. (2019, p. 107) point out, some studies note that two types of frames appear most frequently. And it mentions, first, the "guilt frame", which translates into the accused politician being guilty (Kepplinger et al. 2012, p. 662) and which others refer to as the "attack frame" or "anti-government frame". In this research, we will refer to it as the "attack frame".

On the other hand, Maier et al. (2019, p. 107) refer to the "excuse approach", which defends the alleged violation of norms, and which is not found by Kepplinger et al. (2012) but which Shah et al. (2002, p. 357) put at 4%. Other authors refer to this framework as a "response frame" or "pro-government frame" (see Shah et al., 2002). In this paper, we will refer to it as the "advocacy frame".

As Maier et al. (2019, p. 107) emphasize, no study on the coverage of political scandals includes the full four-element theoretical framework developed by Entman (1993) for the analysis of this particular type of issue. His does, and the present research replicates the development made by these authors, due to its theoretical and empirical interest, and because it seeks to be able to provide cumulative and comparable knowledge.

The four elements that Entman (2012, p. 28) considers to be taken into account when analyzing political scandals are: problem definition (whether "the conduct is defined as a problem that impedes or threatens the good development of government or society"); interpretation of the cause (whether "the wrongdoing is clearly attributed [...] to the candidate individual as the causal agent"); moral evaluation (whether "the misconduct and the person responsible for it receive moral public condemnation by legitimate political actors"); and treatment or recommendation (when "a solution involving sanction against the individual is widely called for or debated").

## 2. OBJECTIVES

This research addresses the analysis of the coverage of the alleged acts of corruption linked to the figure of the emeritus King Juan Carlos I. The choice of topic is in line with the definition (mentioned above) of what Transparencia Internacional (2009) defines as corruption. It is, moreover, an issue that is very present in the Spanish media and which has the characteristics pointed out by Esser and Hartung (2004, p. 1041) on the coverage of political scandals mentioned in the introduction of this paper.

The five newspapers analyzed have a series of features of great interest to this study. Firstly, *El País* has traditionally been considered a center-left media that has supported the positions of the socialist governments (of the PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español, in power during the year analyzed in this research). Until 2009, it took a position of defense of the monarchy (de Pablos and Ardévol, 2009, pp. 240-241). In that year, after the Spanish press broke its "critical silence" towards the figure of the now emeritus, it took a turn (de Pablos and Ardévol, 2009, p. 242). *El Mundo*, on the one hand, is a newspaper that has stood out for promoting investigative journalism and for acting as a watchdog of power and that, as far as the monarchy is concerned, can be considered neutral (Martín-Llanguno et al., 2022a, p. 57). On the other hand, ABC constitutes a traditionally monarchist-center-right media (Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2017, p. 611).

Regarding the digital native media, we start from the idea that, as shown by López García and Valera Ordaz (2013), the arrival of these new media outlets implied the overcoming of the so-called sanitary curtain that surrounded the information about the Royal Family, but, at the same time, that they have a greater tendency to the homogenization of content, the lack of deepening, and generation of standardized approaches, due to the greater use of information from news agencies (Tirado-Pascual, 2016). Regarding *elDiario.es*, López García and Valera Ordaz (2013), show that already in 2013 it was critical not only of King Don Juan Carlos but also of the monarchy and that it favored a change of political system (republic). For its part, *El Español*, born as a personal project in 2015 by Pedro J. Ramírez after his dismissal as director of *El Mundo*, presents an ideology close to neoliberalism (Sánchez-Gutiérrez and Nogales-Bocio, 2018).

Looking at these characteristics of the analyzed newspapers, the analysis of the existing literature that studies the coverage of the monarchy by the daily press, the characteristics of the Spanish media system (highly politically polarized), and how the media cover political corruption scandals, different hypotheses can be established in the framework of our study, guided by the Framing theory and, specifically, the role played by attack and defense frames in the media. Thus, the first hypothesis is postulated as follows:

H1. Media coverage of the Spanish Monarchy and the figure of the emeritus king increases significantly from March 1st, 2020 when information about Juan Carlos I's finances begins to be published.

Secondly, taking into account the high level of political polarization existing in the Spanish press, in our study a less objective and neutral positioning on the topic studied is to be expected in comparison with studies using the same measurement variables in other countries with a different media system. Thus, Kepplinger et al. (2012, p. 668) conclude that only 4% of the information possesses the two frames of attack and defense (which implies a more objective and neutral -and less biased and fragmented- positioning); and Maier et al. (2019) obtain in 29% the presence of both frames and 61% of only one. On the other hand, from the previous studies, it is concluded that in the coverage of political scandals, the attack frame is more frequent, whose presence can range from 18% in the study of Shah et al. (2002) to 84% in the work of Kepplinger et al. (2012, p. 668) or 88% in the research of Maier et al. (2019). The defense frame is found in about 4% of the information, according to previous studies, although in the case studied by Maier et al. (2019), it rises to 31%. Thus, the second hypothesis is postulated:

H2. Most of the information has only one frame (attack or defense), which implies a partial and fragmented view of the case of the king emeritus. Moreover, the attacking frame is much more frequent than the defensive one.

On the other hand, most information contains only "fragmented approaches" or "implicit approaches" (see Matthes, 2007, p. 138), which include only some of the elements of the approaches developed by Entman (1993)-as opposed to explicit approaches that contain all elements. In the study by Maier et al. (2019), 58% of the attack frames are implicit (fragmented), as opposed to 30% explicit. As for defense frames, these authors found 28% implicit versus 3% explicit. Hence, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H3. The press offers to a greater extent fragmented approaches, that is, implicit rather than explicit. Moreover, within the implicit approaches, the majority correspond to the use of attack frames, while the explicit ones that are linked to defense frames are in the minority.

On the other hand, as explained in detail above, the editorial stances of the media would explain the way corruption cases are framed. Hence the group of hypotheses 4, which are postulated as follows:

H4. Differences among the various media in the use of frames are significant.

H4.1. Following its monarchical tradition and the data from previous studies, ABC will be the one that most frequently uses the defense frame.

H4.2. Following the governmental stance, its tradition, and previous research data, El País will use the attack frame to a greater extent than ABC but will do so to a lesser extent than El Mundo, which will still use the attack frame more forcefully.

H4.3 Taking into account the characteristics of digital natives, the two analyzed media will use fragmented approaches to a greater extent than traditional newspapers.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

For the present study, the evolution of the news coverage of the corruption scandals related to the figure of Juan Carlos I by El País, El Mundo, and ABC from July 1st, 2014 (a few days after his abdication, which took place on June 18th, 2014) to March 1st, 2021 (four days after the publication of his second tax regularization) was analyzed, comprising a body of study of 899 pieces of information. Additionally, a quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) was performed on a randomly drawn sample of 15 days of information published between March 1st, 2020, and March 1st, 2021. March 1st, 2020, was adopted as the starting point because, at the beginning of that month, the Swiss newspaper Tribune de Genève carried on its front page the headline "Juan Carlos hid 100 million in Geneva" (Abascal, 2020), which triggered investigations by Swiss authorities and Spanish prosecutors into his accounts. In total, 334 news items from the five nationally focused generalist newspapers with the highest number of readers per day in Spain are analyzed. These correspond to three headers of traditional written press, which are El País, El Mundo, ABC, according to data from the first wave of the EGM (AIMC, 2021); and two digital natives: elDiario.es and El Español (according to February 2021 data from OJD Interactiva (n.d.)).

The search for news (both informative and opinion) of El País and El Mundo was carried out in Lexis Nexis Academic. The rest of the newspapers had to be searched using the search engines of the media themselves since they do not appear in the Lexis Nexis records. The dates analyzed are as follows: March 6th and 16th, June 9th and 16th, July 8th and 13th, August 4th and 18th, October 29th, November 7th, December 7th, 11th, and 20th, 2020, January 14th, and February 26th, 2021. For digital media, the days immediately before the event were analyzed since traditional print newspapers print the news one day after the event; while digital media publish the information on the same day of the event.

For the quantitative content analysis of the sample (n=334), a content analysis code was developed based on the research of Maier et al. (2019), whose operationalization, as noted, starts from the four elements of a frame developed by Entman (1993). Thus, to code a frame as an attack or defense, first, the indicators of each element of the frame are coded (see Table 1). If more than one indicator of each frame appears in the information, the one that appears first is collected. Once this is done, we analyze whether the frames are explicit (if they contain all four elements), implicit (if they contain two or three), or if there is no frame (if they contain one or none of these elements). Finally, it is coded whether the information contains the attack frame, the defense frame, both, or none. Attack and defense frames may therefore appear in the same information.

**Table 1.**

*Attack and defense frame elements indicators.*

Element of the frame	Attack frame	Defense frame
<b>Problem definition</b>	Violation of rules Subject of public interest Other	No violation of rules It is a private matter Other
<b>Interpretation of the cause</b>	It is their responsibility  The failure is due to their personality  They had full personal responsibility for the issue Other	They are influenced by external circumstances  It is a coincidence or happenstance that it happened to them  It was out of their personal control Other
<b>Moral evaluation</b>	They are condemned ... From their own field From the Government From the opposition From the media outlet or other media From public opinion Others	They are supported... From their own field From the Government From the opposition From the media outlet or other media From public opinion Others
<b>Treatment/recommendation</b>	Support for... General or non-specific measures Resignation from office or similar Personal punishment (fine, removal of a title...) Slander or defamation To restore everything, to resolve everything An apology The constitution of a committee to study the case Structural actions (change of the Constitution, laws) Transparency Other	Rejection for... General or non-specific measures Resignation from office or similar Personal punishment (fine, removal of a title...) Slander or defamation To restore everything, to resolve everything An apology The constitution of a committee to study the case Structural actions (change of the Constitution, laws) Transparency Other

**Source:** Maier *et al.* 2019, p. 108.

Coding was performed by three people and was carried out in May 2021. Using Krippendorff's alpha, reliability was found to be  $\alpha \geq 0.71$ , a figure that ensures the objectivity of the study (Krippendorff, 2011). The descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (Chi-square) were performed thanks to the IBM SPSS Statistics program (version 22).

#### 4. RESULTS

Media coverage of the Spanish Monarchy and the figure of King Emeritus increases notably from March 1st, 2020 (H1), when information on the finances of Juan Carlos I begins to be published. Thus, between July 1st, 2014, and February 29th, 2020, the three traditional press headers analyzed published 135 news items (15.2% of the total), while, in the following year, they publish 754 (84.8%) (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Information related to scandals in *El País*, *El Mundo*, and *ABC* (n=899).

	Between July 1st, 2014, and February 29th, 2020	Between March 1st, 2020, and March 1st, 2021	TOTAL by media outlet
<i>El País</i>	53 (16,2%)	275 (83,8%)	328
<i>El Mundo</i>	61 (19%)	260 (81%)	321
<i>ABC</i>	21 (8,75%)	219 (91,25%)	240
TOTAL per period	135 (15,2%)	754 (84,8%)	899

**Source:** Own elaboration.

The results of the sample extracted between 2020 and 2021 (n=334), where the two digital newspapers are already included, confirm that the relevance of the scandal of the king emeritus is similar in four of the five newspapers, where we perceive that the number of stories is very similar (around 50), except for *elDiario.es*, which triples this figure (n=142) due to the large amount of agency news it publishes. The average number of daily publications among the five newspapers is 22.33, however, on August 4th -the date on which the Royal Family informed that the emeritus had left Spain- 75 news items were published, almost half of them in *elDiario.es* (n=34) and a quarter in *ABC* (n=18), far from the 4 published by *El Mundo*, 7 in *El Español*, and 12 in *El País*.

It is confirmed that Spanish newspapers mostly "framed" (i.e., gave some kind of focus to) the scandal of the king emeritus (Table 3). In 67.5% of the articles, a single perspective -either attacking or defending- of the facts was presented (H2). Only 11.0% of the articles presented both perspectives, while 21.5% appeared without a frame.

**Tabla 3.** Number of frames used by the newspapers (%)

Number of frames used	Total	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>ABC</i>	<i>elDiario.es</i>	<i>El Español</i>
No frame	21,5	31,9	26,1	14,6	20,4	17,3
One frame	67,5	53,2	73,9	62,5	71,1	69,2
Both frames	11,0	14,9	0	22,9	8,5	13,5
N	334	46	46	48	142	52

**Source:** Own elaboration

No significant differences appear between traditional print media and digital natives in terms of the level of bias, [ $\chi^2$  (2, N=334) = 2.112, p>0.05], however, they do exist if we compare the five newspapers [ $\chi^2$  (8, N=334) = 19.554, p<0.05] (H4), although the intensity of the relationship is low ( $|V|=0.171$ ). Reading the typed residuals shows that, when presenting the two frames, *El Mundo* is the least likely to do so ( $-2.6|<-2.58$ ), while it is *ABC* that has the highest probability ( $2.8|>2.58$ ). *El País* is the least likely to present a single frame ( $-2.3|<-1.96$ ), and the most likely tendentially to present none ( $1.9|>1.65$ ).



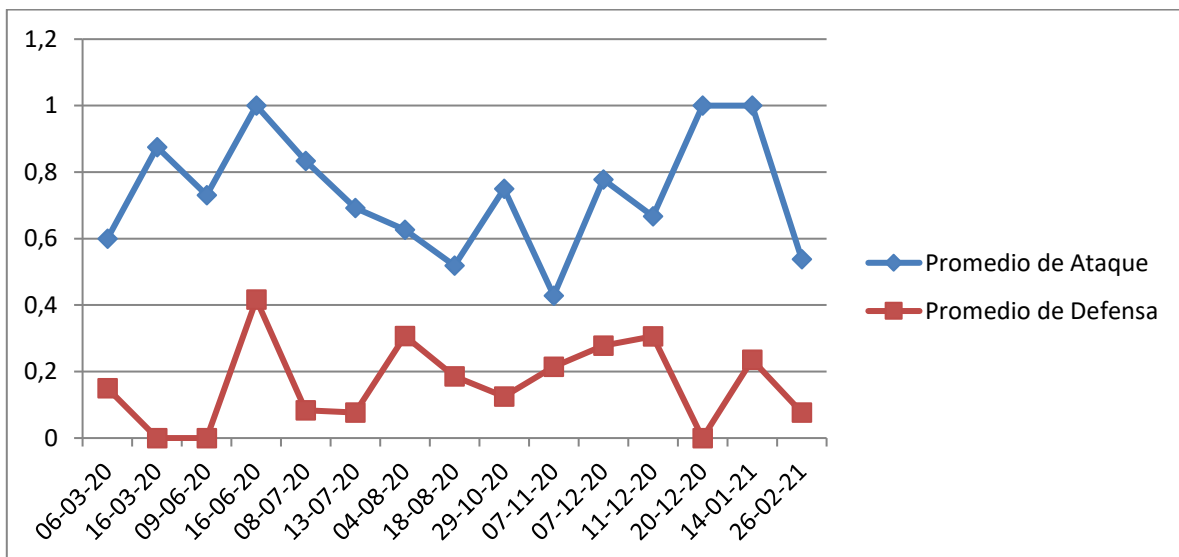
**Table 4.** Number and type of frames used by the newspapers (%).

Number of frames used	Total	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>ABC</i>	elDiario.es	El Español
No frame	21,5	31,9	26,1	14,6	20,4	17,3
One frame (attack)	59,4	51,1	73,9	45,8	61,3	61,5
One frame (defense)	8,1	2,1	0,0	16,7	9,9	7,7
Both frames	11	14,9	0,0	22,9	8,5	13,5
N	334	47	46	48	142	52

**Source:** Own elaboration.

When we disaggregate the results of the single frame between attack and defense (Table 4), we observe that newspapers presented the scandal much more often through the attack (59.4%) than the defense (8.1%) (H2). The longitudinal analysis of these frames (Figure 1) shows that there is no date in which the defense outnumbered the attack. However, there are some points where there is a greater balance. This happens on November 7th, with a difference in averages between attack and defense of only 0.21 points, when the newspapers announce that Sepblac, the Spanish Money Laundering Prevention Service, had found new hidden funds of the emeritus in the tax haven of Jersey, as well as on August 4th, the date of the announcement of the departure of Don Juan Carlos from Spain, where the difference in averages barely exceeds 0.31 points. On the contrary, the point of greatest discord between newspapers occurs on December 20th, 2020, when the public debate revolves around the possible return of the monarch at Christmas. The difference in averages is, then, 1 full point, i.e., there are no frames of defense and, in the case that the information is framed, all the newspapers do it from the attack.

**Figure 1.** Evolution of the average number of attack and defense frames.



**Source:** Own elaboration.

The differences between newspapers and the use of a specific type of framing (defense or attack, no framing, or both) are again significant [ $\chi^2$  (12, N=334)=31.911, p=0.001] (H4). When there is a defense frame, there is a higher probability that ABC carries it out (2.4>1.96) (H4.1) and a lower

probability of El Mundo ( $| -2.2 | < -1.96$ ). In fact, none of the coded information from El Mundo adopts the defense frame. However, when there is an attack frame, there is a higher probability that El Mundo does it ( $| 2.2 | > 1.96$ ) and a lower probability that ABC proposes it ( $| -2.1 | < -1.96$ ) (H4.2), although the intensity of this relationship is weak ( $| V | = 0.178$ ).

The results show (Table 5) that fragmented, i.e., implicit, approaches predominate over explicit approaches in both attack (64.8% and 4.8%, respectively) and defense (18.5% and 0.6%) frames. Explicit approaches, as can be seen, are in any case more common in attack than in defense frames (H3).

**Table 5.** Use of implicit and explicit attack and defense framing by newspapers (%).

	Total	<i>El País</i>	<i>El Mundo</i>	<i>ABC</i>	<i>elDiario.es</i>	<i>El Español</i>
<b>Attack frame</b>						
Not used	30,4	34,0	26,1	33,3	31,0	26,9
Implicit	64,8	61,7	63,0	62,5	66,9	65,4
Explicit	4,8	4,3	10,9	4,2	2,1	7,7
<b>Defense frame</b>						
Not used	80,9	85,1	100	62,5	78,9	82,7
Implicit	18,5	14,9	0,0	35,4	20,4	17,3
Explicit	0,6	0,0	0,0	2,1	0,7	0,0
N	355	47	46	48	142	52

**Source:** Own elaboration.

The Spanish newspapers do not show significant differences when it comes to using the explicit or implicit attack frame [ $\chi^2 (8, N=334) = 7.749, p > 0.05$ ] (H6.3). However, if we look exclusively at the explicit attack frame, we find that El Mundo is more likely to use it ( $| 2.1 | > 1.96$ ), and elDiario.es less likely ( $| -2.0 | < -1.96$ ). On the contrary, in the defense frame the differences are significant [ $\chi^2 (8, N=334) = 23.530, p < 0.01$ ], although the intensity of the relationship is weak ( $| V | = 0.189$ ). Thus, ABC is the one that most uses the implicit defense frame ( $| 3.3 | > 2.58$ ) and the only one, together with elDiario.es, that uses the explicit defense frame, although on rare occasions (2.1% for ABC and 0.7% for elDiario.es).

When defining the scandal, the violation of rules by the king emeritus -which is part of the attack frame- is the most used argument. Moreover, within this frame, we find significant differences between traditional and digital media [ $\chi^2 (2, N=334) = 6.403, p < 0.05$ ], although the intensity of this relationship is weak ( $| \theta | = 0.138$ ). Thus, the argument that the king's scandal is a matter of public interest is more likely to appear in traditional media ( $| 2.5 | > 1.96$ ). On the contrary, when the focus is on defense, there are no differences between digital natives and traditional media, and Spanish newspapers define the scandal mostly as a private issue (14.0%), an argument that exceeds the argument that there is no violation of rules (5.7%).

ABC is, regarding the attack frame, the most likely to leave the problem undefined ( $| 3.3 | > 2.58$ ), the least likely to use the violation of regulations argument ( $| -3.3 | < -2.58$ ) but the one that tends to use the most the argument that it is a private matter in the defense frame ( $| 1.9 | > 1.65$ ). El País is the one that most frequently defines the scandal as a violation of norms ( $| 2.5 | > 1.96$ ) while El Mundo is the one that most uses the argument that it is a matter of public interest ( $| 4.3 | > 2.58$ ) and elDiario.es the least ( $| -2.1 | < -1.96$ ).

Concerning the interpretation of the cause of the scandal, it is most common for newspapers to not

refer to this issue, both for the attack frame (94%) and for the defense frame (97.3%). Between traditional newspapers and digital natives, there are differences in the tendency to focus on the interpretation of the cause in the attack frame [ $\chi^2$  (2, N=334) = 4.921,  $p < 0.1$ ], but not in the defense frame. The former are more likely ( $|1.7| > 1.65$ ) to complete this item than the latter ( $|-1.7| < -1.65$ ) and specifically reference the emeritus personality as their root cause ( $|2.2| > 1.96$ ).

Breaking down the results by newspaper, the results become significant both in the attack frame [ $\chi^2$  (8, N=334) = 24.848  $p < 0.01$ ] and in the defense frame [ $\chi^2$  (16, N=334) = 31.264  $p < 0.05$ ]. Thus, it is perceived that El Mundo is the newspaper that most completes the attack frame by interpreting the cause of the scandal ( $|2.2| > 1.96$ ), and tends to do so by affirming that the fault lies in the personality of the monarch ( $|1.7| > 1.65$ ). For its part, ABC is the newspaper that most completes this element of the defense frame ( $|2.6| > 2.56$ ) with the argument that what happened 'was beyond his personal control' ( $|4.3| > 2.56$ ). In fact, it is the only media outlet among those studied that propose this idea. For its part, elDiario.es is the least likely to argue this element of the frame, either attack ( $|-3.0| < -2.56$ ) or defense ( $|-1.9| < -1.65$ ), the latter only tendentially.

Regarding the use of moral evaluation in the approaches, the results show a higher frequency of use in the attack frame (66.0%) while in the defense frame, it decreases slightly over half (27.8%). In the attack frame, the most frequent is that the condemnation comes from 'others' (28.4% -which includes Podemos members who are not part of the Executive Power or regional politicians, among others- or from the newspaper itself that issues the information (17%). In the case of defense, the most frequent is that the support shown also comes from 'others' (9.9%).

By types of media (traditional or digital natives) we found differences in terms of moral evaluation in both the attack frame [ $\chi^2$  (6, N=335) = 18.803  $p < 0.01$ ] and defense [ $\chi^2$  (6, N=334) = 29.469  $p < 0.001$ ], in both cases the relationship is weak ( $|V| = 0.237$  and  $|V| = 0.297$ , respectively). Traditional media present condemnation of the former monarch more frequently from the perspective of the government ( $|2.3| > 1.96$ ) and public opinion ( $|2.4| > 1.96$ ). Digital natives are less likely to offer such a perspective, but more likely to present the conviction from the perspective of 'others' ( $|2.7| > 2.58$ ). In terms of the frame of defense, traditional media are more likely to show support for the monarch from the media outlet itself or other media ( $|4.3| > 2.58$ ) and digital natives from the perspective of 'others' ( $|2.6| > 2.58$ ).

The results broken down by newspaper in moral evaluation are also significant both in the attack [ $\chi^2$  (24, N=334) = 52.683  $p = 0.001$ ] and defense [ $\chi^2$  (24, N=334) = 76.492  $p < 0.001$ ] approaches, although the intensity of this relationship is weak ( $|V| = 0.198$  and  $|V| = 0.239$ , respectively). Thus, it is observed that ABC is the most likely to affirm that the king emeritus is condemned by the government ( $|4.1| > 2.58$ ) and the least likely to condemn him by the media outlet itself ( $|-2.1| < -1.96$ ), the latter trait being shared with El Español ( $|-2.7| < -2.58$ ). In terms of defense from moral evaluation, ABC is the newspaper most likely to present arguments along these lines ( $|3.7| > 2.58$ ) and elDiario.es the least likely ( $|-2.0| < -1.96$ ). Support by the media itself finds in ABC its maximum exponent ( $|5.6| > 2.58$ ) while elDiario.es offers it the least ( $|-3.4| < -2.58$ ). ABC also most frequently offers the view that the former monarch has the support of citizens ( $|2.6| > 2.58$ ).

Finally, regarding the measures to solve the scandal, we find that the media, in general, more frequently present approaches of support for the measures (53.7%) than rejection (22.1%). The argument most frequently put forward by the newspapers is that a committee (such as a parliamentary commission of inquiry) should be set up to study the case (20.9%), followed by inflicting a personal punishment on the former monarch (14.3%, which could range from the removal of his monetary allowance from the State accounts to the elimination of his photos from public institutions, as well as structural changes (7.2%, usually manifested in changes of laws to eliminate the inviolability of the figure of the king

from the Constitution or even the change of regime from monarchy to a republic). Both the argument of the investigation committee and that of structural reforms are the measures that are also presented with the greatest rejection in the news stories of these newspapers (11% and 6.3%, respectively).

If we compare the different types of media studied -traditional or digital natives- we again find differences in terms of the measures to deal with the scandal from the attack frame [ $\chi^2(10, N=334) = 38.024, p < 0.001$ ] and from the defense frame [ $\chi^2(7, N=334) = 19.082, p < 0.01$ ]. In the first case, the intensity of the relationship is medium-low ( $|V| = 0.337$ ) and in the second it is weak ( $|V| = 0.239$ ). Traditional media more frequently show arguments in support of carrying out structural actions ( $2.1 > 1.96$ ), as well as more likely to reject measures of personal punishment towards Don Juan Carlos ( $2.9 > 2.58$ ). The digital native media, for their part, show in their news stories mainly arguments in favor ( $4.8 > 2.58$ ) and against the constitution of a committee to investigate the case ( $2.7 > 2.58$ ).

El Español is the one that most uses the treatment/recommendation element in the attack frame ( $2.1 > 1.96$ ), while ABC is the one that most rejects this type of argument ( $2.0 > 1.96$ ). Specifically, within the defense frame, it is interesting to note that, concerning the implementation of structural actions, it is El País that most frequently shows arguments rejecting them ( $2.0 > 1.96$ ), and El Español the one that is least likely to reject them ( $-2.0 < -1.96$ ).

#### 4.1. Discussion of results

Once the results have been broken down, we can confirm that, since March 2020, media coverage of the Spanish Monarchy and the figure of the emeritus king has increased exponentially, which verifies our first research hypothesis. Moreover, the data allow us to affirm that, for the most part, Spanish newspapers "framed" the scandals attributed to the king emeritus and that most did so with a single focus, data that has been corroborated by other research (Kepplinger et al., 2012; Maier et al., 2019) and that verify our second hypothesis.

Furthermore, the use of the single approach of attacking his figure turned out to be much more frequent than the defense, as stated in the second hypothesis, also in line with the negativity that the information on the subject of corruption entails. However, the percentage of the attack approach (59.4%) does not reach the maximum obtained in other research works in the European landscape, in particular the German one (88% in Maier et al., 2019). The longitudinal analyses confirm this trend but show that it also depends on the news event since on certain occasions, such as when it was announced that the king emeritus had decided to leave Spain, the average of the defense frames is clearly close to that of the attack frames.

When we analyze whether the frames are implicit or explicit, the former appear in a majority of both attack and defense frames. If we exclusively consider the explicit approaches, we see that they appear mostly in the attack frames, while the explicit defense frames are practically nonexistent. All this corroborates the third hypothesis, which stated that the press offers fragmented approaches to a greater extent, as concluded by Maier et al. (2019), and that within the implicit approaches, the majority correspond to the use of attack frames, while the explicit ones that are linked to defense frames are in the minority. Likewise, it is observed that the percentage of explicit frames is lower in the Spanish press than in the German press studied by Maier et al. (2019).

As our data reveal, moreover, the difference in the use of framing by the different newspapers is, in general, significant, which corroborates our fourth hypothesis. Thus, it is confirmed that El Mundo is the most likely to present a biased approach since it is the one that most frequently shows an attacking one, as well as the one that explicitly proposes it the most. ABC, on the other hand, is the one that most

frequently presents both approaches, because, although it is the one that least frequently proposes the one of attack, it is also the one that most frequently presents the one of defense and almost the only one that uses it explicitly -with minimal use by *elDiario.es*. To this end, ABC is the newspaper that most frequently uses the argument that the news issues related to the alleged corruption of the king emeritus are a matter of private origin and that they were beyond the personal control of the ex-monarch. ABC tends to complete the defense frame by supporting the monarch more frequently from the media itself and showing rejection of the measures or actions proposed to solve the scandal. *El País* is the one that least frequently biases its news with a single approach and the one that most frequently presents none at all -which corroborates our hypotheses 4.1 and 4.2. This apparent good performance of *El País* is in line with what has been evidenced in the research recently carried out by Martín-Llaguno et al. (2022a), where it was found that this newspaper, in its publications before the Geneva papers scandal, focused mainly on corruption, despite being a media outlet that positions itself as a defender of the Royal Family, and which, a priori, supports Juan Carlos I (de Pablos and Ardévol Abreu, 2009). This idea is still perceived in our results since this newspaper is the one that most frequently rejects structural actions, while *El Español* is the one that least rejects them. Otherwise, *elDiario.es* and *El Español* do not stand out in almost any other aspect.

However, our hypothesis 4.3 cannot be completely verified since the differences between traditional and digital native media do not appear when we evaluate the level of bias (number of frames used), the specific type of frame used (attack or defense), or their level of fragmentation. Differences were observed when analyzing the elements of the frame. Thus, digital natives less frequently propose the argument that the scandal studied is a matter of public interest, they are the ones who least often venture to interpret the cause of the scandal, and the ones who most frequently use the so-called 'others' to condemn or defend the emeritus. Likewise, digital natives show arguments in their news stories for and against the constitution of a committee to investigate the case, one of the measures that the minority parties in Parliament put on the table quite frequently. For all these reasons, it is perceived that a certain standardization of frames is maintained in digital natives, as already observed by Tirado Pascual in 2016. This can be explained, in the case of *elDiario.es*, by its high publication of agency news regarding this case.

With this research, which replicates the approach developed by Maier et al. (2019) based on Entman's studies (1993; 2012), we advance in the objective of filling a gap in the academic literature, which has yet to study in more detail how scandals and the dynamics of media coverage are framed. This research does not analyze, however, media that are currently a key source of information for citizens, such as social networks or television. In fact, despite the longevity of television, there are hardly any studies on the projected image of the Spanish monarchy. Among those that exist, they either focus on RTVE and how it showed the figure of Juan Carlos I during the Transition (Bellido-Peris, 2019), or they echo specific issues with little sample coverage related to the topic analyzed in this research, such as the study carried out by Lava Santos and Pardo de Pedro (2022) that analyzes the coverage of Telecinco and La 1 of RTVE the three weeks after the departure of Juan Carlos I from Spain, in August 2020. Not much research has yet been done on social networks either, although the few that have been carried out reveal that Twitter became a variable forum for public debate on the movements of the Royal Family. Specifically, the expatriation of the former monarch reached high levels of discussion on Twitter, contrary to what happened with the tax regularization of Juan Carlos I (Martín-Llaguno et al., 2022b). Thus, future research should study how these other types of media frame the scandals as well as check what effects the use of the frames used has on the audience.

On the other hand, it is of interest to continue delving into the relationship between the media and the monarchy in Spain and the coverage given by the former to this institution and its head, the king, who is also the Head of State. The period analyzed in-depth concentrates most of the information related to

the corruption scandals of Juan Carlos I which harmed his image. It would be interesting to observe whether the results would be different in a context in which the media reports seem more favorable, at least judicially, for the emeritus king, compared to those of the period chosen for the sample.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study of the evolution of the frequency of news coverage of corruption scandals related to the figure of the emeritus king allows us to confirm once again the idea of a break in the consensus of the Spanish press to silence anything that could damage the image of the Spanish monarchy, something that may have contributed to the drastic decline in the high levels of public trust that the Monarchy enjoyed during the nineties of the last century. It is also clear from this work that the media have not only broken their silence but have clearly positioned themselves (in favor or against -through defensive or attacking frames-) in the face of events affecting the Monarchy. Therefore, a biased and polarized representation is perceived in the way newspapers present the scandal of the king emeritus. In any case, this research has determined that the biases appear more frequently in the most conservative newspapers, ABC and El Mundo, although in opposite directions.

Even though the predominant approach is one of attack over defense (in a ratio of 6 to 1) regarding the alleged corruption by the figure of the emeritus king, the level found is lower than that of other international studies. This implies that the Spanish media do not condemn the facts so strongly since they take into account other aspects of the royal figure, such as his role in the transition to democracy.

As stated by Maier et al., 2019:

(...) news framing is a key instrument in influencing the interpretation and course of a scandal by presenting specific perspectives on a problem concerning an (alleged) violation of rules, who is responsible and why, how the (alleged) misconduct should be assessed, and what treatment might be appropriate to overcome the situation. (p. 110)

In the case of the king emeritus, it can be concluded that the Spanish press -especially the traditional press- clearly takes sides, offers an interpretative bias, and polarizes, but at the same time, it is these newspapers, and not so much the digital ones whose approaches are more standardized, which can lead the discourse on the analyzed scandals. In any case, it has become evident that the audience is exposed to very different interpretations depending on the media they read.

This paper offers an operationalization of variables under the framework of the Framing theory, empirically applying the complete model enunciated by Entman (1993 and 2012) to the case of scandals, something that has been scarcely done so far. Thus, the convenience of making further progress in the homogenization and comparability of variables in political communication through which to measure concepts such as political polarization becomes evident at a time when it is especially urgent since there is a significant increase in scientific, political, and social interest in this issue. This is because political polarization does not stop growing on a global scale (both in democracies and other systems) and affects not only the traditional press but also the discussions that are established in social networks, especially Twitter (Kubin and Sikorski, 2021, p. 188).

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**ResearchGate:** <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eva-Luisa-Gomez-Montero>

**Academia.edu:** <https://uv.academia.edu/GomezMontero>