

The professional ethics of journalists in the face of governments and politicians: Perceptions of professionals and citizens in Spain

La ética profesional de los periodistas frente a los gobiernos y políticos: Percepciones de los profesionales y ciudadanos en España

Marcel Mauri-Rios. Pompeu Fabra University. Spain.

marcel.mauri@upf.edu

[CV]  

Amparo López-Meri. Jaume I University. Spain.

meri@uji.es

[CV]  

Cristina Perales-García. Pompeu Fabra University. Spain.

cristina.perales@upf.edu

[CV]  

This article derives from the research project “Accountability and Journalistic Cultures in Spain. Impact and proposal of good Spanish Media practices”, Ref. CSO2015-66404-P, financed by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO/ERDF, EU). January 2016 – June 2020.

How to cite this article / Standardized reference

Mauri-Rios, M., López-Meri, A., & Perales-García, C. (2020). The professional ethics of journalists in the face of governments and politicians: Perceptions of professionals and citizens in Spain. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (77), 295-308.

<https://www.doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1459>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper analyses the pressures that have been exerted or attempted to be exerted from politics on journalism. **Methodology:** The study uses a combination of qualitative methodologies, such as focus groups; and quantitative ones, such as surveys to journalists; both methodologies allow knowing how politics influence on journalists and how it can limit media instruments of accountability. **Results:** this study demonstrates that journalists and citizens share their perception on how political influence is one of the main circumstances affecting the development of good journalism. **Discussion/conclusion:** In spite of journalists recognizing political and government pressures, the study concludes that they do not give in or feel responsible to political parties or governments.

KEYWORDS: ethics; self-regulation; journalism; Spain; politics; deontology; ethical codes; accountability.

RESUMEN

Introducción: En el presente trabajo se analizan las presiones que desde la política se han ejercido o intentado ejercer sobre el periodismo. **Metodología:** A partir de la combinación de metodologías cualitativas, como los grupos de discusión con ciudadanos, y cuantitativas, como encuestas a las profesionales, se analiza cómo esta influencia de la política sobre los periodistas puede llegar a limitar los instrumentos de rendición de cuentas de los que disponen los medios de comunicación. **Resultados:** los resultados de esta investigación ponen en evidencia que periodistas y ciudadanos comparten la percepción que las influencias políticas son uno de los principales supuestos que afectan al desarrollo de un buen periodismo. **Discusión/conclusiones:** Pese a que los periodistas reconocen las presiones políticas y gubernamentales, el estudio concluye que no ceden ante ellas ni se sienten responsables ante partidos o gobiernos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ética; autorregulación; periodismo; España; política; deontología; códigos éticos, rendición de cuentas.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction. 2. Theoretical framework. 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. Bibliography.

Translation by **Carlos Javier Rivas Quintero** (University of the Andes, Mérida, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

The relation between political power and journalism is as ancient as the journalistic profession itself. By the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke had already formulated the concept of “Fourth Estate” for the first time (Guillamet, 2003), referring to the role exerted by the media in a democracy to supervise the other powers of a State. In fact, one of the elements that allow measuring the democratic health of a society is the independence that the media have in relation to the political power (Alsus, 2010, p. 138), a key aspect for journalists to exercise this democratizing function. After all, citizens need constant, accurate and independent information in order to develop in a free society (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). But this media independence in the face of governments and politicians is perceived in very varied forms depending on the countries or journalistic traditions (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

This article presents the results of a research that analyzes the perceptions Spanish journalists and citizens have about how political power influences on the behavior of the media and until what point this desire for political control limits the capacity of the media of being accountable to the citizenry. This research introduces the perception of citizens in an unprecedented manner -an original input that contributes to completing the outlook of professionals in communication- to address the perception these two groups have about how the political influence conditions journalistic practices: Specifically, the objectives of this study are a) to identify until what point both journalists and citizens feel that political pressures are a problem for journalism in Spain; b) to verify what response is expected by these two collectives from the media in the face of a possible political interference; and c) to identify the main barriers that make the accountability of journalists difficult in the Spanish context due to the interference of political power.

In this sense, we propose different research questions:

RQ1. How do government and political pressures affect the exercise of journalism?

RQ2. How are these pressures perceived by both journalists and citizens?

RQ3. How do journalists and citizens react to these pressures?

RQ4. What role does the influence of the political power have when limiting the accountability of journalists and the media?

2. Theoretical framework

Through its power for setting the media and political agenda, the media are perceived as a central force in modern democracies (Green and Stubager, 2010). Journalism exerts a fundamental function on liberal regimes since a citizenry informed and knowledgeable about politics is essential for the construction of free societies (Casero-Ripollés, 2012). Granting citizens their right to information is a fundamental mission of the media and professionals in communication (Mauri-Ríos, Marcos-García and Zuberogoitia-Espilla, 2020). To fulfill this democratizing function, journalists must be able to inform objectively and distance themselves as much as possible from any type of influence or pressures. These interferences (whether they are political or economic ones) concern journalists since they limit their independence and their capacity to exercise free journalism (Alsius and Salgado, 2010; Fengler *et al.*, 2015).

Recent studies, based on the electoral campaign and the presidential term of Donald Trump or the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, show how this political interference desire has been intensifying during the past recent years (Graber and Dunaway, 2017; McNair, 2018). But the opposite phenomenon also occurs: several authors (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2011) have demonstrated how politicians are depending more and more on the media, and how these media have been colonizing politics to the point that no political measures are taken without considering how they are going to be presented in the media, due to the capacity the mass media have to influence on the construction of the political agenda (Green and Stubager, 2010). Other studies proved how the emergence of social networks, such as Facebook, but particularly Twitter, has added even more connection and capacity to exert pressure from politics on journalism, and vice versa (Parmelee, p. 2013).

This mutual relation or influence that the media receive from or exert on politics is conditioned by the professional principles and values governing journalism (Alsius, 2010). Journalists and the media must abide by the twofold necessity of ensuring the fulfillment of the right to information and expression of citizens without forgetting to comply certain principles and responsibilities that should be inherent in the very journalistic profession (Rodríguez, López, Merino and Mauri, 2017).

With the objective of working for the sake of public interest and to ensure the basic values of journalism -which authors such as Alsius have classified into four principles like truth, justice, responsibility and freedom (1999)-, journalists must follow professional ethics, which Kovach and Rosenstiel call a “moral compass” (2001, p. 181). These professional ethics are the foundation to perform communication aimed at informative excellence and quality (Mauri and Ramon, 2015). Professional ethics must be grounded in performance criteria that allow establishing the rate of compliance with a correct professional praxis. Said guidelines have been traditionally collected in deontological codes. More recently, they also settle through other accountability instruments that accelerate the interaction between the media and citizens, and which can contribute to this task of holding journalists accountable (Suárez, Rodríguez, Mauri, López, 2017, p. 322). According to the definition given by Mauri and Ramon (2015, p. 381), accountability in journalism implies that the media implement informative transparency, develop self-regulatory instruments and promote the participation of users. It is important to bear in mind that accountability in the media environment is an essential element to ensure plurality and independence of the media (Bertran, 2010).

The ethic principles commonly accepted by the journalistic profession also allude to this relation between journalists and political power. Based on the studies of analyses, and deontological codes and documents compilations conducted by Aznar (1999), Pérez-Fuentes (2004) and Alsius (2010), in the Spanish ambit, or by Noordenstreng and Hannikainen (1984), Weaver and Wilhoit (1986),

Bertrand (2000) and Fengler and RussMohl (2008), in the European and International ambit, we observe how these political constraints are a source of concern for the journalistic profession. Alsius (1999, 2010) classifies the principles of journalistic ethics of the main Spanish and international codes into four sections: principles of truth, justice, responsibility and freedom; and places in this last section all that referring to the control that political power exerts on journalism. Control that, if being exerted would clearly limit this journalistic principle of freedom and would put at risk the capacity of the media of exercising their functions independently (Alsius, 2010).

Other recent researches affirm that the political constraints that delimit the relation between journalists and political power have been intensifying progressively (Casero and López, 2016; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Almirón, Narberhaus and Mauri, 2016; Sjøvaag, 2020). Some studies state that within the pluralist-polarized or Mediterranean journalistic culture in which the Spanish journalism is contextualized (Rodríguez-Martínez et al., 2017), unlike what could be the cases in Northern Europe or in the Anglo-Saxon countries, some media corporations take advantage of their influence capacity and their relation with power to receive political favors (Van Dalen, 2012, p. 482). The research about this influence of political power on journalism in these less professionalized and independent journalistic cultures is key in the sense that this relation may condition the contents that the media disseminates (Tandoc, 2018; Maheshwari and Sparks, C., 2018).

Most of the existing literature about government and political influence on the media address this consubstantial relation between political power and the media from the perspective of the very politicians and journalists. This research provides an innovative view since it is not common to include the perception of citizens in these kinds of studies.

3. Methodology

This research has been conducted basing on the combination of different quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Specifically, in order to delve into the perceptions of journalists, some surveys and in-depth interviews have been carried out, while the insights of citizens were addressed through focus groups. All of these techniques have been implemented in six Spanish territories: Andalusia, Catalonia, The Valencian Community, Galicia, Madrid and The Basque Country.

Regarding the quantitative survey technique, an online questionnaire with 29 questions about the conditions affecting the informative practice, the obligations of the media, their relation with the audience, the responsibility of journalists to different agents and the effectiveness of the accountability instruments was designed. The questionnaire, which combines dichotomous, multiple choices and rating scale form questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011), was administered through the SurveyMonkey platform (from October 2017 to January 2018). In order to have greater participation, entities such as the Federation of Associations of Journalists of Spain (FAPE), the College of Journalists of Catalonia (CPC) and the Madrid Press Association (APM) helped disseminating and administering the survey through multiple channels. The collected data were analyzed using the IBM specialized software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

In line with the criteria established by Weischenberg, Malik and Scholl (2006, p. 227), subsequently implemented in the European Project “*Accountability and Transparency in Europe*” (MediaAcT, EU SSH-2009-5.1.1), those who were surveyed had to be working with journalistic tasks in a journalistic communication medium (professionals with public relations tasks were excluded), and at least half of their income had to be from their profession as journalists (including freelancers if 50 percent of their incomes derived from their journalists activities). There is not an official census of journalists in Spain (Fengler *et al.*, 2015; Rodríguez, Mauri and Fedele, 2017). In the face of this limitation,

combining criteria such as the number of journalists affiliated to professional associations and to the different types of media, previous studies have demonstrated that the estimated population of journalists in Spain is 25,000, and to accurately address the Spanish case, a sample of 100 participants would be valid (Eberwein *et al.*, 2014, p. 72).

In the research under analysis, 228 responses were obtained (N=228). As for the participants, women prevailed (52.2%). The majority ranged from 35 to 44 years old (31.6%), followed by the groups ranging from 25 to 34 (25.4%) and from 45 to 54 (23.2%). Four out of ten affirmed having more than 20 years of journalistic experience (42.5%). They work mainly in the written press (18.4%) and the national public radio (18%); while the rest of mediums registered percentages lower than 10%. The majority has university training in journalism (71.1%) and a significant percentage stated not belonging to any journalists' syndicate (81.6%), although half of them admitted being part of an association or professional body (53.1%).

On the other hand, six focus groups were conducted, one in each one of the territories included in the sample. This qualitative technique consists in gathering a group between 6 to 8 unrelated people to each other to debate a specific topic, with the guidance of a moderator who introduces previously defined questions. The participants in the group are influenced by or influence on the rest of participants, interacting and sharing opinions and experiences. To this regard, 38 people have participated, 22 women and 16 men, who have expressed their opinions about the ethics of current journalism, the instruments to ensure the ethics of the media and the attitudes of journalists from an ethical point of view. All the focus groups were carried out throughout a month and a half period (from April 12 to May 31, 2018). 42% of the participants are in an average age group and the rest are divided almost equally between younger than 30 years old and older than 60. Those who received higher education have PhDs or Degrees, some in the audiovisual communication and journalism ambit. The people with intermediate or lower education levels work mainly on administration or commercial tasks.

4. Results

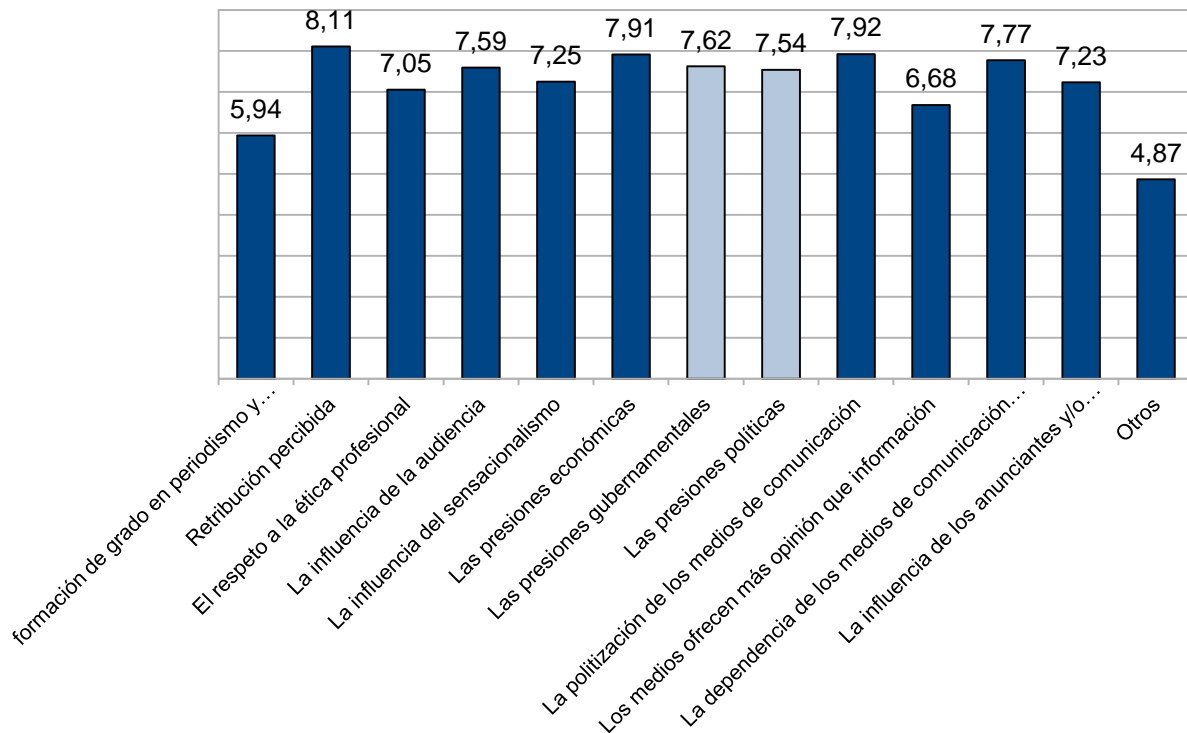
4.1. The perceptions of journalists and experts

When asking journalists about what scenarios affect more directly the exercise of their profession, in a scale from 0 to 10, those who were surveyed placed government and political pressures in the fifth and seventh position, with 7.62 and 7.54 points, respectively (graphic 1), behind salary received, politicization of the media, economic pressures, the institutional sources dependency and the influence of the audience. As it can be seen in the graphic, most of these other factors also have a linkage with political power.

Additionally, the results of the surveys show that having years of experience is essential to act against the pressure in the profession. The oldest participants admitted feeling less pressure than those who were younger. However, they all stated openly the existence of such pressures and ranked them above 7.5 in a scale from 0 to 10, in which "0" means they do not affect them at all and "10" indicates they completely affect them. For those whose age range from 19 to 24 years old, government pressures got 8 point out of ten and political pressures 7.78. The age group who ranked these influences the lowest is the one from 45 to 54 years old, although this classification is not so distant from the one stated by the young participants, since they placed them in 7.19 and 7.25, respectively.

Regarding news treatment, when they must refer to governments and institutions, the participants affirmed that they offer more information about the executive power than about the political

representatives of the opposition in 57% of the cases. However, they admitted not publishing official information systematically in 85.5% of times.



Graphic 1: scenarios that affect the overall context of journalism.

Source: authors' own creation based on the data of the survey.

In spite of these pressures, 90.4% of the journalists surveyed admitted not interviewing government figures when they requested it, and only 9.6% of professionals affirmed doing it. In a similar way, the participants stated, in 82.9% of the cases, that they give greater prominence to non-institutional sources, although they admitted that if emergencies appeared they publish the official recommendations in 91.2% of the cases.

As for the attention the participants pay to the indications given by the Spanish Government for the orientation of embargo of important information that affects the safety of the State, the responses were quite balanced: 51.2% said not to accept such indications, against 48.7% who accepted them highlighting the importance of maintaining the national security.

When journalists were asked about to whom they feel responsible, the answers varied based upon their years of experience (see table 1). The less seniority in the exercise of their profession, the more they feel responsible to their own consciousness (with a mean of 9.75 in a scale from 0 to 10, in which "0" does not give any value and "10" implies maximum attention). On another note, the participants having up to five years of experience put their direct superior as the person to whom they are accountable (with a mean value of 8.21). When they already have worked in this profession for 15 years, they give a higher score (a 9) to the obligation of being accountable to their information sources.

Table 1. *To whom or what do the journalists surveyed feel responsible.*

* N with 2 or less respondents

		Mi conciencia	Mi superior directo	Mis compañeros de redacción	Las normas éticas de la profesión	Mis fuentes	La audiencia/público	Nuestros anunciantes	El gobierno del Estado español	El gobierno de la Comunidad Autónoma donde trabajo	Partidos políticos	Valores democráticos	Autoridades religiosas/grupos religiosos	Dios o mis valores religiosos	Otros
		<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>	<i>Media</i>
Edad por grupos	19-24	8,67	6,44	7	8,11	7,44	7,67	1,78	1,55	4	2,89	8,22	0,22	0,22	0*
	25-34	9,62	8,21	7,64	9,14	9,21	8,52	3,43	1,75	2,88	2,09	8,21	1,14	0,72	3,5
	34-44	9,32	7,5	7,76	9	8,85	8,68	3,71	2,38	3	2,46	8,49	1,63	0,78	0,63
	45-54	9,42	7,02	7,47	9,21	9,34	8,96	4,77	2,06	2,15	1,75	8,77	1,49	1,87	4,38
	55-64	9,38	6,06	7,12	8,65	8,38	8,85	6,5	1,97	2,5	1,79	9,06	1,38	1,35	0,5
65+	9,5*	9*	9*	9,5*	9,5*	9*	4*	2,5*	2,5*	1*	9*	0*	0*	*	

Source: authors' own creation.

Their perception on accountability also varies depending on the type of informative medium they work for. Firstly, the vast majority coincided that they are accountable to their own consciousness, scenario in which workers of weekly newspapers rated with a “10” or with scores higher than 9 in the case of those freelance, news agencies, private and public radios, and not daily newspapers and magazines journalists. Secondly, news agencies workers decided on their direct supervisor; private radio journalists chose their editorial co-workers; and weekly newspapers editors chose the ethical norms and information sources. However, they do not pay attention to the need of giving explanations to the audiences, an aspect that contrasts with the opinion of citizens that is going to be analyzed in the next section.

Broadly speaking, we observed that journalists are neither accountable to political parties (2.11), nor to the governments of their communities (2.73) nor to the Spanish Government (2.05).

4.2. The perceptions of citizens

Basing on the focus groups with citizens, we noticed that the influence of the political power is one of the factors promoting distrust and contributes to the negative vision people have about journalism. According to the citizens who participated, this influence affects the objectivity and independence of journalists, it even undermines the freedom of expression; it also damages objectivity since the media, as stated by the participants, follow an ideological approach based on economic and political interests. When this ideological approach conflicts with the ethics of journalists, their autonomy and independence are put at risk. It also undermines the freedom of expression because current journalism is more ideologically homogeneous due to the influence of neoliberalism, and this lack of diversity, as they argued, erodes the effectiveness of the freedom of expression.

However, for those citizens who participated in the focus groups the problem is not the ideological approach of the medium and its linkage to a specific political party. That way, the participants differentiated between the ideological view of the medium, valid in a context with democratic plurality, and the direct influence of a party on the medium, understood as a relation of dependency which can scarcely allow journalism to have the critical perspective expected from it: “the editorial line of a newspaper should not match totally with the ideology of a party because that would be propaganda” (woman, focus group No. 4).

On another note, the citizens also perceived a direct linkage between political interests and economic benefit. Some participants commented that a big corporation buying a medium of communication can change its ideological stance regarding a specific issue. The same thing happens in the public media when the governing political party changes.

The overall perception is that ruling parties control some mediums ideologically by checking the pieces of news before they get disseminated, and for the case of the public media, through the election of their directives. “When the president of the Government Mariano Rajoy found himself in the dock... that was not broadcasted on the 24 Hours Channel” on the Spanish television, stated a participant, to which others also added: “freedom of expression does not exist because the director of the news program is a well-connected person to the current governing party in Spain” (woman, focus group No. 3). “I have friends who work as journalists in Madrid and have their hands tied. Politicians are in control; before they release a piece of news, they read it and if they notice the news suits their desires, it is disseminated, otherwise, it is not” (woman, focus group No. 5).

Broadly, they consider that the capacity of influence can be also appreciated in the very politicians’ interest in managing the media and control the discourses. As stated by a participant, people who are related or are even paid by some political figures, work participating in talk shows to advocate certain ideas.

The overall perception of the participants in the focus groups regarding the news coverage that affect political power is negative. Basing on their comments, news of political nature tends to range over evasion, misrepresentation or complaisance if they are dealing with ideologies similar to the ones of the broadcasting medium. As for evasion, they stated that it materializes in practices such as omitting data, hiding sources or stories, delaying the news, belittling the importance of facts or hindering their dissemination, as it happens with the correction of mistakes, which tend to be in the last page. Misrepresentation derives from the manipulation of data dissemination or treatment.

To this regard, citizens spoke about favoritism towards certain politicians and biased news, by which information and opinions get mixed. The media “inform but also misrepresent to a certain extend”, stated a citizen. “On the one hand, we have an excess of information and, on the other, we have gross manipulation based on the interests of whoever is releasing that information”, added one of the participants. On the contrary, if the affected party has a similar ideology to the one of the medium, the attitude of the medium becomes compliant, the questions of the journalist turn out to be very little cutting and the resulting news uncritical. Some participants believe that there is not enough investigation: “I miss that incisive-cutting press. I think journalists are much more compliant with public figures, and specifically with politicians, especially if they are governing (...) [journalists] swallow their lies and they seem so cool about it; and there is no criticism afterwards, they do not expose [politicians]” (woman, focus group No. 1). “Do politicians show up and just say what they feel like saying? Very well, but later there will be a journalist who as a good discourse analyst, has to be critical” (woman, focus group No. 2).

However, some statements consider that the difficulty does not lie in the lack of critical spirit of journalists, but in other factors conditionings their labor, such as the editorial line, the lack of democratic culture in politicians, who tend to handle mediums with a similar ideology or do not answer the questions of journalists, or the fear of the increasingly restrictive laws. The citizens also pointed out that most of the times there is not enough diversity in the stances regarding political issues.

Additionally, these citizens also denounced that events apparently become news only if they permit criticizing the party opposing the ideology of the medium. Some parties receive more negative attention than the rest, according to the media interests.

Most of the participants in the focus groups understand that journalist, in the first place, must be accountable to their audience mainly, and to the citizenry in general, as well as to comply with their own consciousness, the ethical norms and the democratic values. However, they acknowledge that, instead of this, political interests come first. According to these citizens, the media give explanations to the government, political parties or advertisers, before citizens, something that generates repudiation among the participants in the focus groups.

In this sense, they defend the necessity of a mutual respectful behavior between journalists and politicians. The parties should respect the ideological differences of journalists and their need of accessing information, as stated by the participants. In this context, the possible perks or gifts that politicians offer to journalists would also be an aspect to monitor. To accept an invitation to attend conferences or other activities organized by parties can imply a linkage to a political option, which can become an uncomfortable situation for the journalist who wants to preserve his/her image of independence. In the face of the interferences of the political power, citizens propose the existence of public organizations for control, with the authority to punish and maintain the independence from political estates. However, they seemed gloomy about the actual implementation of these types of entities: "There should be an organization to check if the ethics of the media are consistent with what the supreme value of information in the lives of citizens entails" (man, focus group No.3).

In general, there was a sensation of helplessness regarding the regulating options for the journalistic profession. The citizens could not find optimal options to regulate the media, not even from public entities because they are politically influenced, as they stated. They affirmed that it is currently easy to find abuses and unethical behaviors, such as evading information when the actions of a governor are legally questioned, denunciations of journalists after receiving coercive demands from the directive of their medium or prohibited questions that journalists cannot ask to the public high office, among other examples. According to the participants, a change in the mindset of people to put ethics before money and power would be necessary.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The existence of political pressures in journalism is a fact dating back to the beginnings of the very profession (Aznar, 1999; Bertrand, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986). A situation that does not prevent journalists and citizens from feeling concerned because of being expectable, as the results presented in this article demonstrate.

There are different factors promoting this political interference situation in journalism, as the journalists and citizens pointed out. At the same time, these factors entail a context of weakening in journalism that facilitates the emergence of said interferences. The politicization of the media and of the editorial line, the economic and business model crises, the job insecurity or the lack of democratic culture in the political groups are some of the issues that journalists and citizens pointed out as elements that influence negatively in the journalistic profession. This is due to the relation of dependency that is established between journalists and the political power, according to journalists and citizens, a tendency broadly demonstrated by literature (Almirón, Narberhaus and Mauri, 2016; Casero and López, 2016) that, according to these results and in line with the findings of recent researches, consolidates rather than diminishing (Graber and Dunaway, 2017; McNair, 2018).

The fact that the politicization of the media or the political and government pressures be some of the circumstances affecting more the journalistic ambit in Spain is consistent with this vision, according to the journalists surveyed. The results obtained during this research are also consistent with the “Annual report of the journalist profession”, a monitoring of the current state of the profession conducted by The Madrid Press Association every year. The survey corresponding to 2017, with a sample of 1756 people who work in the communication ambit, revealed that the lack of political or economic independence is the third most important problem in the profession, with 14.7%, only behind the increase of the strike and job insecurity, and the bad reputation of the journalistic labor. In a scale from 0 to 10 (in which “0” is the absence of independence and “10” total independence), the journalists surveyed ranked their freedom with 4.4, below the accepted level. Finally, and based on the same survey, 80% of journalists admitted having received pressures when they were executing their professional functions.

All of these factors hinder the development of accountability instruments from journalism to the audience because they limit journalistic self-regulation in the sense that they condition press freedom; they make the existence of transparent media difficult; and do not contribute to the participation of the audience, key elements for us to talk about accountability (Mauri and Ramon, 2015). Therefore, we observed that political interferences and government pressures are an obstacle for the will of the media to create accountability instruments (Rodríguez, López, Merino and Mauri, 2017). Citizens coincided with the journalists on this matter. They do not trust the media because of the political influence that, as they mentioned, affects the journalistic objectivity and independence (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001), which endangers the democratizing function of the media in free societies (Alsius, 2010; Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

In spite of the situation described by all those who participate in the media system (journalists and the citizens), it is important to point out that these pressures and the job insecurity –which aggravate a situation of professional weakening that promotes all types of interferences- do not manage to crush the majority of journalists in any specific matter. That way, according to what we found in the survey, Spanish journalists do not give in to pressures when some politicians or government workers want to be interviewed by their own will and not because of journalistic interest. Therefore, we conclude that journalists acknowledge the political and government pressures, but do not give in to them or feel responsible to parties or governments. To this regard, the ethical norms, the very sources and, above all, the very consciousness set the responsibility sense of Spanish journalists.

6. References

- Almiron, N., Narberhaus, M., & Mauri, M. (2016). Mapping media accountability in stateless nations: The case of Catalonia. *Catalan journal of communication & cultural studies*, 8(2), 207-225. https://doi.org/10.1386/cjcs.8.2.207_1
- Alsius, S y Salgado, F. (Eds.). (2010). *La ética informativa vista por los ciudadanos*. Editorial UOC.
- Alsius, S. (1999). *Codis ètics del periodisme televisiu*. Pòrtic.
- Alsius, S. (Ed.). (2010). *The ethical values of journalists: field research among media professionals in Catalonia*. Generalitat de Catalunya.
- Asociación de la Prensa de Madrid (2017). *Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística, 2017*. APM.

- Aznar, H. (1999). *Ética y periodismo: autorregulación, códigos, estatutos de redacción y otros documentos*. Paidós.
- Bertrand, C. J. (2000). *Media ethics and accountability systems*. Routledge.
- Casero-Ripollés, A., & López-Rabadán, P. (2016). *Periodistas y políticos en España*. Editorial UOC.
- Casero-Ripollés, A. (2012). El periodismo político en España: algunas características definitorias. En VV.AA, *Periodismo político en España: concepciones, tensiones y elecciones* (pp. 19-46). Sociedad Latina de Comunicación Social.
- Eberwein, T., Fengler, S., Philipp, S., & Ille, M. (2014). Counting media accountability-The concept and methodology of the MediaAcT survey, en Fengler, S.; Eberwein, T.; Mazzoleni, g.; Porlezza, C.; Russ-Mohl (Eds.), *Journalists and Media Accountability: An International Study of News People in the Digital Age* (pp. 65-79). Peter Lang.
- Fengler, S., & Ruß-Mohl, S. (2008). Journalists and the information-attention markets: Towards an economic theory of journalism. *Journalism*, 9(6), 667-690.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884908096240>
- Fengler, S., et al. (2015). How effective is media self-regulation? Results from a comparative survey on European journalists. *European Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 249–266.
- Frost, C. (2015). *Journalism ethics and regulation*. Routledge.
- Fuentes, J. C. P. (Ed.). (2004). *Ética periodística: Principios, códigos deontológicos y normas complementarias*. Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco.
- Graber, D. A., & Dunaway, J. (2017). *Mass media and American politics*. Cq Press.
- Green-Pedersen, C., & Stubager, R. (2010). The Political Conditionality of Mass Media Influence: When Do Parties Follow Mass Media Attention?. *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(3), 663-677. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123410000037>
- Guillamet, J. (2003). *Història del periodisme: notícies, periodistes i mitjans de comunicació* (Vol. 14). Universitat de Barcelona.
- Hallin, D. C.; & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hardy, J. (2008). *Western media systems*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114561009>
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). Are watchdogs an endangered species? *Columbia Journalism Review*, 40(1), 50-50.
- Maheshwari, S., & Sparks, C. (2018). Political elites and journalistic practices in India: A case of institutionalized heteronomy. *Journalism*, 1464884918761630.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918761630>

- Mauri-Ríos, M. & Ramon-Vegas, X. (2015). Nuevos sistemas de rendición de cuentas de la información periodística: exploración del escenario online español. *El profesional de la información*, 24(4), 380-389. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2015.jul.04>
- Mauri-Ríos, M.; Marcos-García, S., & Zuberogoitia-Espilla, A. (2020). Analysis of professional perceptions relating to the effectiveness of codes of ethics for journalists in Spain. *Journal of information, communication and ethics in society*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-11-2019-0123>
- Mazzoleni, G., & Schulz, W. (1999). "Mediatization" of politics: A challenge for democracy? *Political communication*, 16(3), 247-261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105846099198613>
- McNair, B. (2018). *An introduction to political communication*. Routledge.
- Meyer, T. (2002). *Media democracy: How the media colonize politics*. Polity.
- Nordenstreng, K., & Hannikainen, L. (1984). *The mass media declaration of UNESCO*. Praeger Pub Text.
- Parmelee, J. H. (2013). Political journalists and Twitter: Influences on norms and practices. *Journal of Media Practice*, 14(4), 291-305. https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.14.4.291_1
- Rodríguez Martínez, R., López-Meri, A., Merino Arribas, A., y Mauri-Ríos, M. (2017). Instrumentos de rendición de cuentas en España. Análisis comparativo en Cataluña, Galicia, Madrid y Valencia. *El Profesional de la Información*, 26(2), 225-67. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2017.mar.12>
- Rodríguez-Martínez, R.; Figueras, M.; Mauri-Ríos, M., & Alsius, S. (2013). [How dominant are official sources in shaping political news coverage in Spain? The perceptions of journalists and citizens](https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2013.792697). *Journal of mass media ethics*, 28(2), 103-118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2013.792697>
- Rodríguez-Martínez, R.; Mauri-Ríos, M., & Fedele, M. (2017). Criticism as an accountability instrument: the opinión of Spanish journalists. *Communication & Society*, 30(1), 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.30.1.57-72>
- Rosenstiel, T., & Kovach, B. (2001). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. Crown publishers.
- Sjøvaag, H. (2020). Journalistic autonomy: Between structure, agency and institution. *Nordicom review*, 34(s1), 155-166. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2013-0111>
- Strömbäck, J. (2011). Mediatization and perceptions of the media's political influence. *Journalism studies*, 12(4), 423-439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2010.523583>
- Suárez-Villegas, J. C., Rodríguez-Martínez, R., Mauri-Ríos, M. y López-Meri, A. (2017). Accountability y culturas periodísticas en España. Impacto y propuesta de buenas prácticas en los medios de comunicación españoles (MediaACES). *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, (72), 321-330. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2017-1167>

- Tandoc Jr., E. C. (2018). Gatekeeping Influences and Journalistic Capital: Proposing a mechanism of influence. *Journalism Studies*, 19(16), 2344-2358.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1345320>
- Van Dalen, A. (2012). The people behind the political headlines: A comparison of political journalists in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain. *International Communication Gazette*, 74(5), 464-483. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048512445154>
- Weaver, D. H., Wilhoit, G. C., & Bergen, L. A. (1991). *The American journalist: A portrait of US news people and their work*. Indiana University Press.
- Weischenberg, S.; Malik, M.; & Scholl, A. (2006). Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. *Media Perspektiven*, (7), 346-361.
- Wimmer, R. D.; & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: an introduction* (novena edición). Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

AUTHORS:

Marcel Mauri-Rios

Marcel Mauri de los Ríos has a PhD in Journalism. He is a historian, journalist, and History of Journalism and Journalistic Ethics professor at the Communication Department of the PFU. He is also a consultant of ethics and the right of communication in the Open University of Catalonia (OUC). He did a pre-doctoral residency at the Sorbonne University of Paris in 2007 and did a post-doctoral residency at the University of Columbia (New York). He has published about ethics in the media and History of Journalism.

marcel.mauri@upf.edu

H-Index: 10.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2615-8343>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=H2SFG0kAAAAJ&hl=en>

Amparo López-Meri

Amparo López Meri is a professor in Journalism and Audiovisual Communication at the Jaume I University, in Spain. Her current lines of research are about the reformulation of journalism in digital settings and the impact of social media in journalism and political communication. She is member of the research group “Journalism, Communication, Power” of the Jaume I University. Additionally, she has a long career in the media as reporter of the Europa Press TV news agency and news editor in different Spanish television channels.

meri@uji.edu

H-Index: 11.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3408-2190>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=PGmmpFAAAAAJ&hl=ca>

Cristina Perales-García

Cristina Perales-García has a PhD in Journalism and Communication Sciences from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. She is a Professor of Journalism at the Communication Department of the Pompeu Fabra University and member of the “Research Group in Journalism” (GRP) of the same university. She has participated in research projects financed by the Ministry and public entities. Her main lines of research are ethics in the media, history of journalism, political communication and the

study of journalistic discourses. She has done different research residencies in European universities, among which the ones at the University of Stirling (Stirling, Scotland), at the University of Applied Sciences (Tampere, Finland) and at the University of Poitiers (Poitiers, France) stand out.

cristina.perales@upf.edu

H-Index: 7.

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2937-2468>

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=M4sm_y8AAAAJ&hl=ca