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## Spanish Audience Interest in Televised Politics: from electoral debates to *politainment*

**Abstract**

Televised politics have become an essential focal point in the planning of the electoral campaigns of any political party. Television is the main source of information during electoral processes and *politainment* programs have become decisive engagements for candidates. This paper carries out a diachronic analysis of the evolution of the audience of Spanish televised debates in order to verify whether this format is worn out. The sample includes ten electoral debates between presidential candidates held before April 2019. In addition, it focuses on the integration of other platforms in the broadcasting and viewing of the electoral debate, e.g. Twitter. The results of this research show the interest of the Spanish audience in this format, from the first broadcast in 1993 up until today, turning them into real television milestones. Likewise, the candidates have also increased their presence on television through other entertainment formats in order to show furthermore human and emotional facets to the electorate. This recent media exposure of political leaders has also been followed by the Spanish citizens.

**Keywords**

**Television, audience, televised debates, elections, political information.**

### 1. Introduction

Despite the transformations undergone by television in recent years, it remains the preferred medium for information about electoral processes. According to CIS (2019) data, 84.1% of Spanish people rely on television to find information about political matters and the electoral campaign. After television come the social networks (39.5%) bettering both radio and the newspapers. Politicians are aware of the power of their televised appearances, therefore this type of media participation is assessed and studied in depth.

Together with the coverage in news programs during electoral processes, the debates between the candidates are a mandatory appointment in the campaigns. The face-to-face meeting of the different political candidates, so common in other democracies such as the USA or France, was slow to appear in Spain. The public wants to know how candidates behave, and what their human qualities are during a live televised confrontation (Marín, 2003). Spain was a latecomer to televised electoral debates, as the first took place in 1993, sixteen years after the first democratic elections. Up to April 2019, ten debates have been held in which the participants were the candidates for the Presidency of the Government.

Furthermore, in the last few years we have witnessed a clear spectacularization of politics, as many studies on *politainment* confirm (Durántez-Stolle & Martínez-Sanz, 2019; Berrocal, 2017). This relatively recent term, as indicated by Berrocal Gonzalo, Campos-Domínguez & Redondo García (2014), brings together two functions associated with the media, as are political information and entertainment. *Infotainment* is defined as “a media tendency to present information as a performance, the true function of which is to be a container for publicity” (Rúas, Rodríguez & Bouza, 2009). Berrocal (2012) mentions that this new approach of politics towards spectacularization is strongly linked to a personalization of politics aiming to inform and entertain by using the figure of the leader; thus the study of political communication in electoral campaigns must consider all these expressions.

The main parties replaced political rallies with the participation of candidates and political leaders in televised entertainment programs (Gallardo & Lavín, 2016). Among the programs in which they participate, there are morning magazines, *infoshow*s, and various debates and interviews conducted as part of entertainment programs. This led to an increase in the interest in political programs on television which was consolidated in the most recent elections and “turns television into the leading medium to surprise and empathize, thus increasing the visibility of political parties,” as the political scientist, Inma Aguilar, points out<sup>1</sup>.

Over the years, television has also changed in many aspects. New broadcasting agents altering the sector have been incorporated (Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc.), the viewing dynamics have altered with on-demand services together with the range of devices (smartphones, tablets) that allow for mobile consumption. In addition, a process of media convergence has occurred in which it is difficult to establish an exact borderline between internet and television (Carlón & Scolari, 2009). In this context, the behavior of audiences faced with the electoral rituals that make up televised debates must be studied; from a diachronic perspective, we must understand how and why there is audience following for this format in order to confirm whether this genre has worn thin over time, in terms of the public's interest. The political parties are aware that, besides helping undecided voters to choose, the debates reinforce the position of some voters (Berrocal, 2003).

Electoral debates have been one of the most widely studied subjects of research in different disciplinary fields since they began. In the contextual framework of political communication, they have turned into historical milestones (Gallego & Martínez, 2013) due to the influence that some theorists grant them in terms of voter intention (Abramovitz, 1978). In the scientific bibliography, multiple articles address them from different national perspectives (Micovic & Gallego-Reguera, 2017; Padilla Castillo, 2014; Benoit & Sheafer, 2006; Mazzoleni, 1991; Gilbert, 1982).

Most of previous research focused on the study of the debate in itself (discourse analysis, content analysis, non-verbal communication, linguistic analysis, etc.) (López-García, *et al.*, 2017; Téllez, Muñiz & Ramírez, 2010; Quintas-Froufe & Quintas-Froufe, 2010), or on the effects of the debates on the voter (Luengo, 2011; Proaño, 2002; Lledó, 200; Schrott, 1990). In recent years, works have also been published on the influence on the debate format of new technologies and social networks (Márquez Martínez, 2017; Kalsnes, Krumsvik & Storsul, 2014; Márquez Martínez, 2017; Elmer, 2013; Casado Ruiz, 2012; Sampedro & Seoane, 2008) or on the effect of the debates on the electoral behavior of voters from the perspective of reception studies (Domínguez Cortina, 2013; Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007).

However, this study analyses electoral debates from a perspective that has rarely been addressed in previous studies after the documentary review had been conducted, as is audience interest.

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<sup>1</sup> The show of the candidate. Retrieved from  
[http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/11/23/television/1448302180\\_867268.htm](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2015/11/23/television/1448302180_867268.htm).

## 2. Objectives

Electoral debates have become televised milestones in the history of television audiences over the 26 years in which the format has existed in Spain. Therefore, the research questions are linked with the evolution of the electoral debate audience in Spain:

Q1: During the period analyzed (1993–2019), have the debates always aroused the same interest among Spaniards?

Q2: With reference to the audience, has the format worn thin?

Q3: What other televised formats with the presence of political leaders are as relevant as electoral debates in terms of audience during the political campaign?

This article has a three-point objective:

First, to carry out a longitudinal analysis of the audience of the televised electoral debates between the main candidates of the political parties held in the context of general elections in Spain, from the first (1993) to the most recent in April 2019 (O1). It will also compare the audience data regarding the debates with the most viewed television programs in each of the years studied, in order to contextualize the indicators within the time frame of the interests of the Spanish television audience.

Second, it aims to investigate the integration of other social networking services involved in the broadcasting and viewing of the electoral debate, such as Twitter, an essential tool of current political communication (Rodríguez & Saavedra, 2017), which permits the incorporation of other audiences that were up to now unknown to the debate, such as the social media audience (O2). Ruiz del Olmo & Bustos (2017) point to 2011 as the year of the change when a double mediatic model is seen in television and social networks; this is, however, not mixed and overlapping enough. Gamir (2016) also considers that the incorporation of Twitter as a political tool occurred in Spain during the 2011 general elections, but it was in 2015 that Twitter became “the channel of reference for messaging during the electoral campaign” (Gamir, Cano & Calvo, 2017).

Finally, we analyze the presence of political leaders on other formats of the televised grid, apart from the mainstream formats of political communication such as electoral debates which, like them, attract great audience interest (O3). In 2015, as Peris (2017) states, the great leap forward of politicians into entertainment programs occurred, a situation that grew in the 2016 campaign and would mark the establishment of *politainment* in Spain (Teruel, 2016). The sample for analysis is made up of all televised features in which the main leaders of the five political formations (PSOE, PP, Ciudadanos, Podemos and Vox) appeared during the 2019 electoral campaign.

## 3. Methodology

A methodology complying with the quantitative analysis was used to conduct this study, which is predominant in research works on television audience. The quantitative comparative analysis and the critical interpretation of results allow for an evolving perspective on the behavior of the Spanish audience regarding electoral debates and other *politainment* programs.

The sample includes ten televised electoral debates in Spain (1993–2019). The indicators selected for the analysis are the main audience indexes: the audience share, the number of viewers and the viewer profile by gender, age, and social class. As Huertas (2002) states, said indexes, when considering large samples, are the only means of providing a complete picture of the television audience of a country.

Regarding the analysis of the programs in which the candidates participate in interviews, three types must be differentiated: news programs (Antena3 noticias2, Telediario 2, La Sexta Noche, Al Rojo Vivo, El Objetivo, Informativo Tele5 21h), of purely informative content;

entertainment programs (El Hormiguero and Mi casa es la vuestra) where the content solely aims to entertain; and infoentertainment programs (Espejo Público, El programa de Ana Rosa and Los desayunos de La 1), with a mixed format produced by teams of journalists, which, in addition, includes entertainment sections.

The research sources used are those of audience studies such as the data, insights and consulting company Kantar Media, the audiovisual consultancy agency Barlovento Comunicación<sup>2</sup> and the unpublished material provided by the *Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences*, for whose invaluable collaboration we are very grateful.

#### **4. Analysis of electoral debates**

During the period analyzed ten electoral debates took place between the Spanish presidential candidates. Of the 13 elections held so far, debates were held in only six (1993, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016 and 2019). The following is an analysis of each, based on the indicators mentioned earlier.

##### **4.1. Debates in 1993**

The year 1993 was the first when electoral debates were broadcast on television in Spain, as the earlier ones were radio broadcasts with Manuel Fraga Iribarne and Fernando Morán on Cadena Ser in 1987, before the first European elections.

On May 24 the first of the two TV debates held between José María Aznar and Felipe González was broadcast by Antena 3 and moderated by Manuel Campo Vidal. It obtained a share of 61.8% (9,625,000 spectators) and reached the highest average audience share minute at 11:21pm with 11,074,000 viewers and a share of 67%. It was the second most viewed broadcast in the history of Antena 3 (excluding sports programs) (Barlovento, 2019).

The second debate, broadcast by Telecinco and chaired by Luis Mariñas, had more viewers (10,526,000) and a 75.3% share. This second broadcast had 13.5 more share-points only a week later. This was due to the fact that the second debate lasted longer (166 minutes compared to 134 minutes for the first) and ended at 1:18am, a time slot when the network shares rise due to the drop in audience numbers and competition. The most viewed minute (11:09pm) had over 12 million viewers (12,876,000) and a share of 73.4%. These numbers made the debate the second most-viewed program in the history of Telecinco, aside from sports events (Barlovento, 2019).

The number of contacts (people who viewed the debate for at least one minute) was also very high in the second debate as it reached 18,141,000 viewers compared to the 15,676,000 viewers of the former.

The shares for both networks tripled the average annual share of Telecinco (21.4%) and Antena 3 (21.1%), and also meant that these debates led the ranking of most viewed programs of the year 1993, except for sports programs<sup>3</sup>.

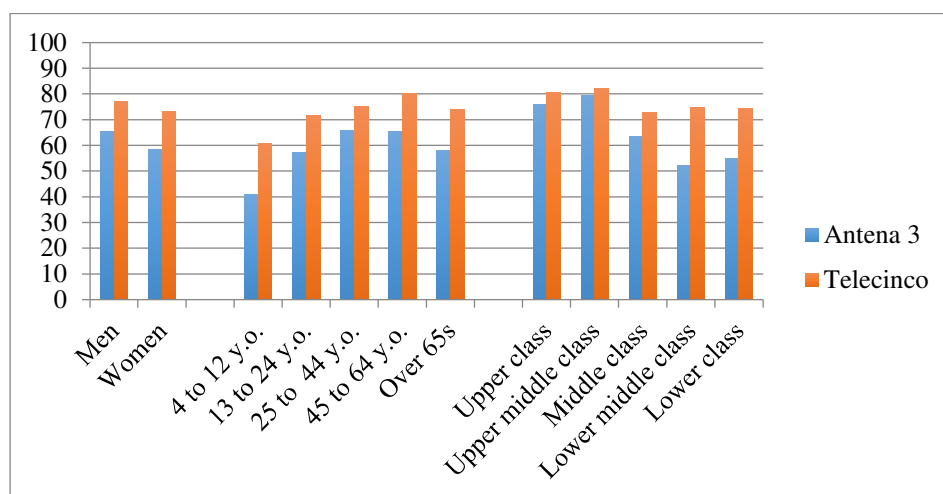
Regarding the sociodemographic analysis of the target (by variables of gender, age, and social class), Vaca (2012) indicates that the first segmentation feature in television preference is the sociological variable of age. In the first debate, the share by age was as follows: children (from 4 to 12 years old) 40.9%; youth (13-24), 57.2%; young adults (25-44), 65.9%; mature adults (45-64), 65.3% and the elderly 65.58%, while in the second debate the share for children was 60.9%; youth, 71.6%; adults, 75.1%; mature adults, 80.2% and the over 65s, 73.9%. In the age segment of young adults, the highest audience share was reached in the first debate while in the second debate, the highest share was reached in mature adults.

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<sup>2</sup> We specially acknowledge Ricardo Vaca and Antonio Millán for their collaboration in this research.

<sup>3</sup> The most viewed program was the Spain-Denmark football game, broadcasted by *La 1*, with 11,948,000 viewers.

**Chart 1:** Shares by target (expressed in percentages) in the year 1993.



Source: Barlovento Comunicación.

Regarding the social class, the upper-middle class and the upper class were the most interested in both debates, as they have a higher percentage of affiliation.

Finally, regarding gender, men were the most interested viewers in both debates.

#### 4.2. Debates in the year 2008

Fifteen years later, another two electoral debates took place between José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy, both candidates for presidency of the government. One of the major changes compared to the previous ones was the fact that a non-media organization, as is the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, was responsible for the organization, production, and broadcasting of the debate. The Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences offered a unique organization model, because in other countries the electoral debates are sponsored by journalistic organizations or civic groups (Schroeder, 2017). Therefore, these debates were the first global debates in Spain, as stated by Pulido (2009), press chief of Television Academy, thanks to the international service of Televisión Española and to Antena 3 Internacional.

The first debate, held on February 25, moderated once more by Campo Vidal, was broadcast in simulcast by twenty national, regional, and local television networks<sup>4</sup>. The debate was followed mainly on the national networks: La 1 (36.4% with 8,036,000 spectators), Cuatro (10.7% with 2,360,000 spectators) and La Sexta (6% with 1,335,000 spectators). The sum of each of the network's shares added up to 59.1% and meant 13,043,000 spectators (Barlovento, 2019). This was the most viewed debate in the history of the Spanish television.

During the 110 minutes of debate, the most viewed moment was 38 minutes after the beginning (10:38pm), when 14,733,000 spectators were viewing.

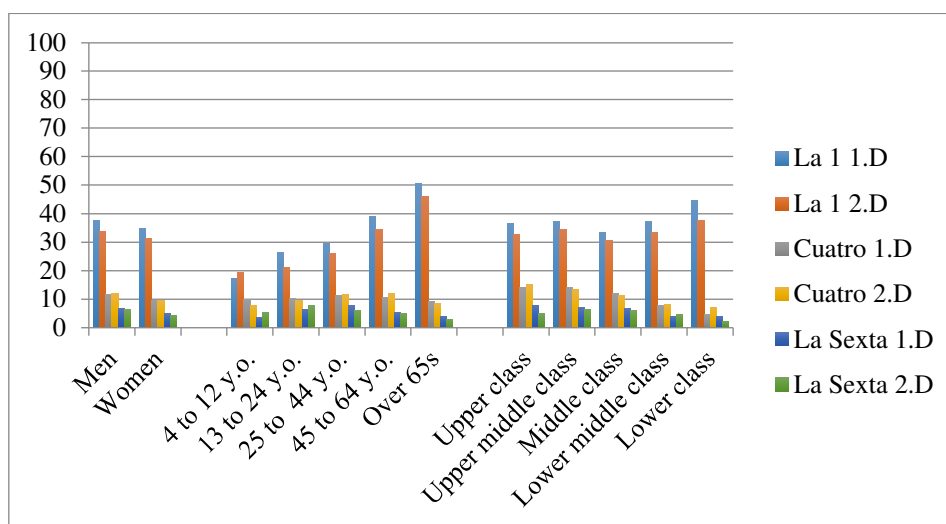
The second debate, moderated by Olga Viza, took place on March 3, at 10:00pm. Although the number of networks<sup>5</sup> that broadcast the debate increased, as it included Canal Sur and Televisión de Canarias, among others, the audience lost interest as can be seen in the indexes reached (11,952,000 spectators and 56.3%). Again, the network chosen by most viewers was La

<sup>4</sup> TVE1 (36.4%), Cuatro (10.5%), La Sexta (6%), TVM (10.3%), Red Popular TV (0.9%), C9 (7.6%), TVG (11.1%), CMT (4.7%), NET TV (0.2%), Onda 6 TV (0.2%), TVE Internacional (0.2%), Veo (0.2%), Canal Extremadura (0.2%), TPA (5.4%), Red Localmedia (0.1%), 7RM (2.2%), CNN+ (0.1%), TV Castilla y León (0.9%), IB3 (2.5%) and 24 horas (0%).

<sup>5</sup> TVE1 (32.7%), Cuatro (10.8%), La Sexta (5.3%), TVM (13.3%), Canal Sur (7.3%), Red Popular TV (1%), C9 (5.4%), TVG (7.8%), CMT (3.8%), TVE Internacional (0.1%), Veo (0.4%), 8TV (1.4%), Canal Extremadura (1.2%), TPA (6.9%), TVCAN (3.1%), Red Localmedia (0.1%), 7RM (0.3%), TV Castilla y León (2.7%), IB3 (1.8%), 24 horas (0%), Onda 6 TV (0.6%) and Intereconomía (0.1%).

1 although its share dropped compared to the previous debate (32.6% and 6,958,000 spectators), followed by Cuatro (10.8% and 2,300,000 spectators) and La Sexta (5.3% and 1,126,000 spectators). The maximum audience minute was almost one hour after the beginning of the debate (10:58pm) with 13,501,000 spectators, more than one million fewer than the previous debate.

**Chart 2:** Shares by targets of La 1, Cuatro and La Sexta (expressed in percentages) in the year 2008 (1.D: first debate; 2.D: second debate).



Source: Barlovento Comunicación.

Regarding the target profile of the main broadcasting networks, no major changes are observed between the two debates. Men had the highest audience shares on all networks. In terms of age, on La 1 the highest shares were obtained in the segment of individuals over 65 years old (50.7% in the first debate and 46.1% in the second debate). It is striking that the lower classes, unlike on previous occasions, had a higher share (44.7% in the first debate and 37.8% in the second) compared to the upper classes in La 1, while in Cuatro and La Sexta the upper and upper-middle classes had the highest results.

In the ranking of the most viewed programs of the year (except for sports programs)<sup>6</sup>, the debates stood out, but this did not occur when the simulcast programs were explicitly excluded.

### 4.3. Debates in the year 2011

In 2011, one single debate organized by the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences was held between the candidates for presidency of the government: Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba and Mariano Rajoy. On November 7, 2011, the face-to-face debate took place, chaired again by Campo Vidal, and broadcast in simulcast by seventeen television networks<sup>7</sup>.

The political debate obtained a share of 54.2% after calculation of the numbers for all the networks that broadcasted it, with an average of 12,005,000 spectators. Like the year 2008, the audience preferred to follow the debate mainly on La 1 (24.8%). In fact, the broadcasting of the debate represented an audience increase of more than ten points for La 1, the most viewed network of the year. The other national networks with most of the audience were Antena 3 (9.3%), La Sexta (6.1%) and Cuatro (4.3%).

<sup>6</sup> The most viewed program in that year was Eurovision (10,619,000 spectators and 62.8% of share).

<sup>7</sup> La 1 (24.8%), Antena 3 (9.3%), La Sexta (6.1%), Cuatro (4.3%), Intereconomía (3.5%), 24 horas (1.7%), Canal Sur (7.4%), Telemadrid (7.9%), Veo7 (0.5%), 13 TV (0.5%), C9 (2.6%), Aragón TV (10.1%), CMT (3.7%), IB3 (3.8%), CYLTV (1%), 7 RM (1.7%) and V Televisión (0.8%).

The minute with most viewers occurred at 10:31pm when 13,728,000 people were viewing the debate simultaneously on the seventeen networks which broadcast it.

Regarding the target profile the debate achieved its best results in the age range of the over 64s (67.3%) and those between 45 and 64 (54.9%), as well as among men (55.8%). Apropos the social classes, the upper social classes showed the most interest (62.2%).

As in 2008, the debate was one of the most viewed programs of the year<sup>8</sup> because of the total viewers gathered by the different broadcasting networks. However, again it is excluded from said ranking because it does not include the programming in simulcast. Nevertheless, this debate had the second largest audience of the whole history of Spanish television.

#### 4.4. Debates in the year 2015

The year 2015 marked the end of the two-party system in Spain. The irruption of Podemos and Ciudadanos, two emerging political parties in the European elections of that year, meant reconsidering the traditional pattern of debates in Spain. The Spanish political system was no longer limited to the classical two-party left- and right-wing models, and now these new parties would be incorporated into the political arena and, consequently, into the televised scenario<sup>9</sup>. As Campo Vidal (2017) said, the negotiations to organize the debate were the result of simultaneous three-way contacts: between the parties and public and private television broadcasting networks; between the political parties and the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences; and between the broadcasting networks themselves and the Academy. Finally, it was agreed that two debates should take place, one with the four political parties together, and another, the traditional face-to-face model.

The first of these, shown by Atresmedia and chaired by Ana Pastor and Vicente Vallés, was held on December 7 with the presence of the Partido Popular (Soraya Saénz de Santamaría), PSOE (Pedro Sánchez), Podemos (Pablo Iglesias) and Ciudadanos (Albert Rivera). The presence of the Vice-president of the Government instead of the President, was the point of contention. It was the first debate in Spain in which four political parties participated, those which were most relevant in accordance with voting intention.

The debate was broadcast simultaneously on Antena 3, where it reached a 26.2% share (5,027,000 spectators)<sup>10</sup> and La Sexta (a share of 22% and 4,206,000 spectators). The sum of the two networks meant that the debate was followed by 9,233,000 spectators, therefore obtaining a share of 48.2%.

A week later, on December 14, the traditional face-to-face debate between the candidates Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez took place, organized by the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Twelve<sup>11</sup> networks broadcast this meeting and attracted 9,728,000 viewers (48.7%) during the 125 minutes of debate. The group Atresmedia with La Sexta (14.6% share and 2,914,000 spectators) and Antena 3 (14% and 2,794,000 spectators) was preferred by the audience, followed by La 1 (13.4% and 2,678,000 spectators). It was the first time that La 1 broadcast an electoral debate and it did not reach the position of audience leader for the transmission of an electoral debate in Spain.

The “golden minute” came at 10:31pm, with 11,194,000 spectators and a 51.7% share.

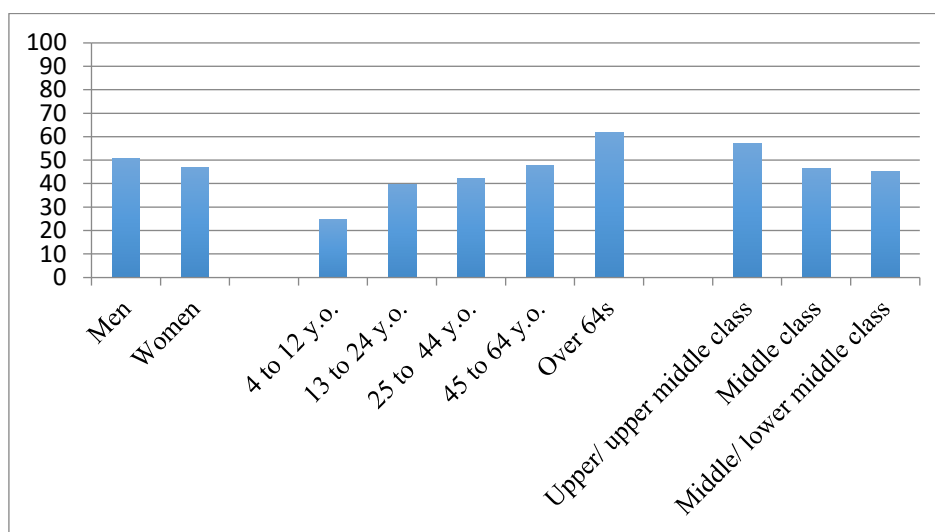
<sup>8</sup> The most viewed broadcast of 2011 corresponds to the football match Barcelona–Real Madrid on May 3 (in La 1), with 14,114,000 spectators and a share of 66.9%. The most viewed non-sports broadcast was Telediario 2, broadcast during the break of said game, reaching a share of 54.9% and 11,564,000 spectators.

<sup>9</sup> The face-to-face meeting of Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera in the program Salvados in La Sexta (10–18–2015) that reached 25.2% of share and 5,214,000 spectators is worth mentioning, due to the exceptional audience numbers achieved, four times the average annual share of the network (7.4%).

<sup>10</sup> This broadcast took the eighth place of the ranking of the most viewed programs in Spain that year, except for sports programs.

<sup>11</sup> La Sexta (14.6%), Antena 3 (14%), La 1 (13.4%), 13 TV (3.6%), Canal Sur (7.6%), 24 horas (0.8%), Telemadrid (3.4%), Aragón TV (2.8%), CYL7 (1.3%), La otra (0.5%), Canal Extremadura TV (7.9%) and V Televisión (0.6%).

**Chart 3:** Shares by targets (expressed in percentages) in 2015.



Source: Barlovento Comunicación.

The target profile did not vary much compared to the previous debate, the highest share was achieved in men (50.7%), in the oldest age group (over 64) (61.9%) and in the upper and upper middle social classes (57.1%).

This debate would be remembered as the last face-to-face debate of the two-party system in Spain.

As Gamir mentioned (2016), in 2015 Twitter became a channel of reference for political elections. Proof of this is that the political debates and special news programs about the general elections came in first among the social audiences and received over 10 million comments in December (Kantar Media, 2016).

The first electoral debate received 2,491,539 tweets published by 304,733 single users, which number meant it became the broadcasting platform with largest social audience of the year in Spain, surpassing the reality shows and Eurovision, programs that traditionally led this audience ranking. The second debate resulted in lower data (1,674,930 tweets by 261,556 single authors), but nevertheless came in third place in the ranking of programs with the highest social audience in Spain. This was, then, the confirmation of Twitter as another platform for following the electoral debate.

#### 4.5. Debates in the year 2016

For the first time in Spain, polls were held only six months after the previous general election. Once more, the Spanish Academy of Television Arts and Sciences organized a debate with the presence of the four main political parties (PSOE, PP, Ciudadanos and Podemos) and this time, with the main candidates for the Presidency of the Government (Pedro Sánchez, Mariano Rajoy, Albert Rivera and Pablo Iglesias).

The debate, held on June 13, 2016, was broadcast in simulcast by seventeen networks<sup>12</sup> and was followed by 10,496,000 viewers (57% share). Like the last debate, La Sexta was the lead platform (14.1% and 2,602,000 spectators), followed by La 1 (13.2% and 2,435,000 spectators). Telecinco, which had not broadcast any electoral debates since 1993, managed to reach the third position (12.1% and 2,236,000 spectators), one point above Antena 3 (11%).

<sup>12</sup> La Sexta (14.1%), La 1 (13.2%), Telecinco (12.1%), Antena 3 (11%), 13 TV (2.5%), 24H (1.7%), Canal Sur (6.3%), Telemadrid (3.3%), La otra (1%), And-TV (0.8%), La 7TV (3.4%), Canal Sur (0.1%), Aragón TV (2.1%), CMT (1.3%), Canal Extremadura (2.3%), CYL7 (0.6%) and TV Mediterráneo (0%). Intereconomía also broadcast the debate, but the audience was not measured.



The “golden minute” was at 10:41pm, when the program was viewed by 11,888,000 spectators. The audience profile returned the same pattern: by gender, better results were obtained among men (58.9%); and by age, among the age segment of individuals over 64 (67.3%). Regarding social class, the replacement of the traditional segmentation of social classes by the new socioeconomic index is noteworthy<sup>13</sup>. The social groups IA and IB were the most interested in the debate.

The social audience of the debate, according to Kantar Media, reached more than 1.8 million tweets from 233,000 single authors. These numbers did not better those achieved in the first debate with the four representatives held in Spain in December 2015.

#### 4.6. Debates in the year 2019

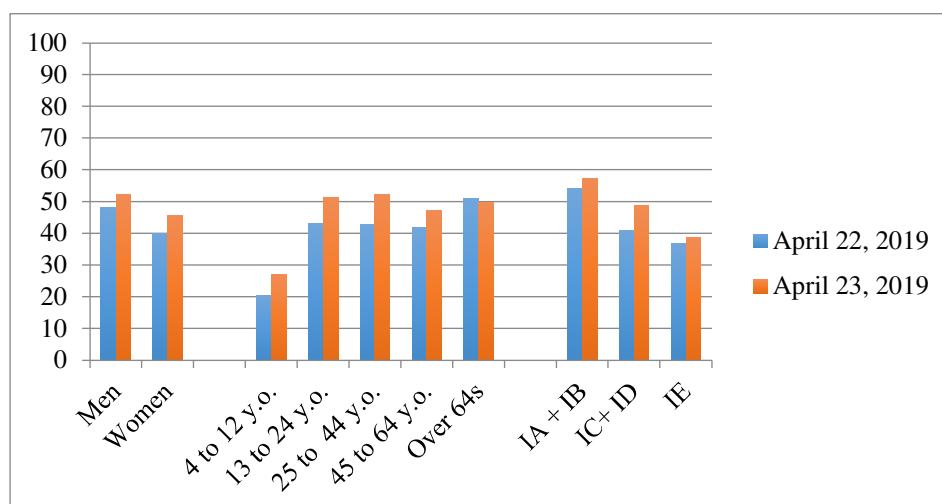
After the general elections had been brought forward, Atresmedia announced that the electoral debate between the five candidates for the presidency (from the PSOE, PP, Podemos, Ciudadanos and Vox) would be held on April 23, and moderated by Ana Pastor and Vicente Vallés. However, one week before the debate, the Central Electoral Commission, after accepting the appeals of ERC, Coalición Canaria and PNV, prevented the participation of Vox due to non-compliance with the proportionality principle.

After this decision, Pedro Sánchez decided to not attend the debate and instead participate in the one proposed by RTVE, which he had declined earlier. Considering the decision of the three political parties to attend the Atresmedia debate and several changes of date of the debate proposed by the public entity, the President of the Government decided to participate in both in such a way there would be two debates with the same political leaders on two consecutive days.

On April 22, at 10:00pm, the debate on *RTVE* took place and was broadcast by eleven television networks<sup>14</sup>. According to Kantar Media data, *La 1* was the channel with the highest audience figures (7,245,000 viewers and a 35.7% share); the “golden minute” was at 11:00pm with 9,629,000 viewers.

The profile of the audience had the same parameters as the previous debates: men (48.2% share), over 64 (51%) and the upper and upper-middle classes (54%).

**Chart 4:** Shares by targets (expressed in percentages) in the year 2019.



Source: Barlovento Comunicación.

<sup>13</sup> Groups are established to distribute population from the highest incomes (IA) to the lowest (IE).

<sup>14</sup> *24H* (2.8%); *Trece* (2.2%); *Canal Sur* (7.4%); *Telemadrid* (5.2%); *CMM* 65,000 spectators (4.9%); *Aragón TV* (8.5%); *Canal Extremadura* (5.4%); *IB3* (5.3%); *CSUR-AND* (0.1%); *TPA2* (0.5%).

The following day, the candidates again participated in the electoral debate proposed by Atresmedia which was broadcast by the two main channels of the group: Antena 3 and La Sexta, with a share of 48.7% and 9,477,000 viewers. Antena 3 had the highest audience figures (5,283,000 and a share of 27.2%) compared to La Sexta (4,194,000 and a 21.6% share). The “golden minute” occurred at 10:30pm with 10,963,000 viewers (share of 51.3%).

Unlike the previous debate, the public had a younger profile. The age range of 25–44 years old (52.3%) and 13–24 years old (41.2%) were the most outstanding although with little difference compared to the segment of individuals over 64 (49.8%). Once again, the segments IA and IB (57.4%) were the most interested in following the program.

Apropos the data of social audience, the first debate had 1,743,266 tweets and 311,595 authors, and the second had 2,116,109 tweets and 368,137 authors, very high numbers that place Twitter in the fourth and third place of the ranking of the most commented television programs<sup>15</sup> since 2017 (excluding sports broadcasts). When this article was completed, the debate of April 23 had become the most commented television event of the year 2019 on Twitter.

### **5. *Politainment* and audiences in the general elections of April 2019**

The electoral debates are not the candidate’s only relevant engagements on television. Political communication has evolved in recent years towards new marketing techniques such as the use of emotional resources, with a combination of politics and entertainment. In Spanish politics, this change in communication strategy, when designing electoral campaigns, began significantly with the general elections of the year 2015.

Since the 2011 elections, an increase in the presence of politicians on television has been seen, moving from participation solely in the debates between candidates to over 20 appearances for the 2015 and 2016 elections<sup>16</sup> when each candidate appeared an average of six times on television programs. In the elections of April 2019 –it is important to remember that in that year new elections were again called in November– this number multiplied, increasing the presence of candidates on TV interviews and debates. While Pablo Casado, Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera each appeared on nine programs, Pedro Sánchez was more selective and only gave five interviews on news bulletins and on *Al Rojo Vivo*. Lastly comes Santiago Abascal, who appeared on *Mi casa es la tuya* and *Espejo Público*, a total of only two interviews.

After the announcement (on February 15) of the elections being brought forward to April 28, and during the full pre-campaign period, the candidates of the five main political parties nationwide –Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos), Pablo Casado (PP), Pablo Iglesias (Unidas Podemos) and Santiago Abascal (VOX)– and the top candidates of other parties were seen in many interviews on the main generalist channels, both public and private –La 1, Antena 3, Telecinco and La Sexta. On these programs they answered questions from both children and adults (*La Sexta Noche*, *Érase una vez Moncloa*, *El programa de Ana Rosa*) or the questions formulated by journalists (*Al Rojo Vivo*, *Espejo Público*, *Los desayunos de TVE*); they even showed the viewers and voters their most carefree side (*El Hormiguero*, *Un café con Susanna* or *Mi casa es la tuya*). The only general-interest channel that did not invite any of the candidates was the private network Cuatro which belongs to the Mediaset Group.

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<sup>15</sup> The first and second position of the *ranking* are occupied by the 2018 (2,343,485 tweets) and 2017 editions (2,147,976 tweets) of Eurovisión.

<sup>16</sup> The leaders substituted political rallies with television studios, aiming for mass audiences. Retrieved from [https://elpais.com/politica/2015/12/10/actualidad/1449775158\\_043667.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2015/12/10/actualidad/1449775158_043667.html)

**Table 1:** Appearances on programs, by candidate and genre.

PROGRAM	NETWORK	CANDIDATE	GENRE
Telediario 2	La 1 TVE	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	INFORMATION
Telediario 2	La 1 TVE	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFORMATION
Telediario 2	La 1 TVE	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFORMATION
Mi casa es la tuya	Telecinco	Abascal, Casado and Rivera	ENTERTAINMENT
Los Desayunos de TVE	La 1 TVE	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
laSexta Noche	laSexta	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFORMATION
laSexta Noche	laSexta	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFORMATION
laSexta Noche	laSexta	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFORMATION
Informativos Telecinco 21h	Telecinco	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	INFORMATION
Informativos Telecinco 21h	Telecinco	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFORMATION
Informativos Telecinco 21h	Telecinco	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFORMATION
Informativos Telecinco 21h	Telecinco	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFORMATION
Espejo Público	Antena 3	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
Espejo Público	Antena 3	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
Espejo Público	Antena 3	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
Espejo Público	Antena 3	Santiago Abascal (VOX)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
El programa de AR	Telecinco	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
El programa de AR	Telecinco	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
El programa de AR	Telecinco	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFOENTERTAINMENT
El Objetivo	laSexta	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFORMATION
El Objetivo	laSexta	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFORMATION
El Objetivo	laSexta	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFORMATION
El Hormiguero	Antena 3	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	ENTERTAINMENT
El Hormiguero	Antena 3	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	ENTERTAINMENT
El Hormiguero	Antena 3	Pablo Casado (PP)	ENTERTAINMENT
Antena 3 Noticias 2	Antena 3	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	INFORMATION
Antena 3 Noticias 2	Antena 3	Pablo Casado (PP)	INFORMATION
Antena 3 Noticias 2	Antena 3	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFORMATION
Antena 3 Noticias 2	Antena 3	Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	INFORMATION
Al Rojo Vivo	laSexta	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	INFORMATION
Al Rojo Vivo	laSexta	Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	INFORMATION

Source: Barlovento Comunicación.

On analyzing the total of TV appearances, it may be said that the group that focused more on the election was Atresmedia, which held 19 interviews with the five candidates, of which 11 were on their main channel (Antena 3) on the following programs: Antena 3 Noticias 2, El Hormiguero and Espejo Público<sup>17</sup>. The remaining eight interviews were on La Sexta on the programs Al Rojo Vivo, El Objetivo and La Sexta Noche. As for Mediaset, on Telecinco alone the candidates were welcomed eight times. One of these was triple, when Bertín Osborne interviewed Abascal, Casado and Rivera in *Mi casa es la tuya*. The remaining interviews were conducted on El programa de Ana Rosa and on the Pedro Piqueras' Informativo 21h.

Finally, in La 1 held conversations with the candidates on only five occasions, three of them on Telediario 2 and two more on Los Desayunos de TVE with the leader of Podemos and the current President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez.

Segmenting the interventions of the candidates based the content of programs (news programs that tend to broadcast political content, or purely entertainment programs), only four of the five candidates appeared on entertainment programs (Abascal, Iglesias, Casado and Rivera), while Pedro Sánchez preferred to keep a much more institutional profile by only appearing on interviews conducted by the networks' news bulletins.

One of the entertainment programs is where the best audience data for all the appearances was obtained. The presence of Albert Rivera on El Hormiguero attracted over 3 million spectators and a 16.5% share, the best audience data in March, and placed it among the 20 most viewed broadcasts of the month; this was followed by the triple intervention on *Mi Casa es la tuya* with more than 2 million viewers placing it as the prime time leader and "golden minute" of the day.

Finally, on analyzing the interviews with Santiago Abascal, whose party was the last group to join the electoral scenario and who appeared least often on television, very good share data is found as the interview with Bertín Osborne was audience leader and golden minute with a share of 15.7%. Abascal's interview with Susanna Griso was the most viewed within its time slot with more than 500,000 spectators.

These results do not differ much in the case of appearances on the news programs with political content. The interview with Albert Rivera by Pedro Piqueras has the best audience data with a 15.7% share, followed closely by the interview with Pablo Casado and Pedro Sánchez (15.4%) on the same news bulletin. Considering the above and in view of the results obtained by the study, it can be concluded that the participation of the candidates on this type of programs contributes to their improving their global audience, as in the case of El Hormiguero, as well as the fact that voters see a more human and personal facet of the politicians, far from the constrained format of the electoral debate usually produced in Spain.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

Despite there being little tradition for the format, electoral debates have become turning points for television in Spain. With reference to the first research question about the interest of citizens in this format (Q1, O1), it can be seen that during the 26 years of broadcasting, Spanish citizens have shown great interest in these programs, making them audience successes for the networks broadcasting them.

The public network emerged initially as the main means for following the debate, however, its progressive loss of relevance was striking. This was linked to the loss of audience of said network over the last decade. On the contrary, in parallel there is the founding of a channel like *La Sexta* which has become a clear, strong news reference for Spanish citizens

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<sup>17</sup> Some programs geared sections towards entertainment in their formats, such as *El Programa de Ana Rosa* which incorporated a section called "*Érase una vez... Moncloa*" where the areas children asked the candidates questions; and *Espejo Público* which designed the section "*Un café con Susanna*" where the hostess invited the candidates to have a coffee at her home.

with the broadcast of electoral debates and the incorporation of multiple audience-leader news programs to its program grid<sup>18</sup>.

Regarding the second research question about the erosion of the format (Q2), the evolution of the audience of electoral debates allows us to confirm the establishment of this sort of program on the Spanish grid. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the television ecosystem has undergone huge changes during the period analyzed. On the one hand, the fragmentation of the audience resulting from the increase in channels hinders the concentration of mass audiences for TV programs, although, on the other hand, the number of spectators that make up the Spanish audience has increased considerably<sup>19</sup>. For this reason, it was less complicated to bring huge audiences together for the first electoral debates, when there was hardly any media competition.

Each of the electoral debates was broadcasted on prime time<sup>20</sup>, however, in none of the editions did the golden minute of the audiences coincide with the golden minute of the debate, defined as the last minute of intervention in an electoral debate (Campo Vidal, 2016). As Campo Vidal (2017) believes, if the debate began half an hour earlier, the spectators would stay until the end and the audience would have increase noticeably.

Apropos the third research question (Q3, O3), it was observed that candidates also increased their presence on television through other entertainment formats in order to show other more human and emotional facets. These spaces aim to show citizens the most individual and more intimate features of the candidates during the political campaign.

The results of the analysis show the preference of the Atresmedia group, through its networks Antena 3 and La Sexta, for news contents of a political nature, while the Mediaset España group appears to avoid broadcasting electoral debates and instead focuses on the appearance of political leaders on entertainment programs.

In addition, during the period analyzed, there were great changes on the political panorama in Spain with the irruption of new political players. However, the two-party electoral debates have, for the moment, resulted in the highest audience numbers.

Since 2015, with the incorporation of Twitter, the electoral debates have a second platform on which the broadcasts are commented and followed (O2). The interest and growth of social spectators is high, as seen in the audience data reached.

In the future, the quantitative perspective of this research should be complemented with qualitative data about the audience in order to draw a full profile of the Spanish audience in the electoral debates and *politainment* programs. In further research projects, it would also be interesting to correlate these data, by means of the triangulation of methods, with participation or voting intentions, so as to discover whether electoral debates have, to a certain extent, lost influence despite maintaining most of the audience.

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<sup>18</sup> An example of this was the special edition *Al Rojo Vivo: objetivo la Moncloa* broadcast on the day of the general elections and which became the most viewed space of the day (share of 20.7% and 4,044,000 spectators).

<sup>19</sup> As Ricardo Vaca stated (2012), from 1993 to 2011, the audience census increased by eight million individuals.

<sup>20</sup> They all were broadcast on Mondays, except for the last electoral debate of 2019, which was broadcasted on a Tuesday.

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