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Political scandals, media systems, and ideological polarization: the case of the emeritus King Juan Carlos I

Abstract

Research on scandals is a privileged way to explore jointly media and political systems, and the links between them. In this article, we explore how the coverage of political corruption in digital native and paper newspapers has the characteristics of politically oriented scandals (Mancini, 2019), which are more common in polarized pluralist systems, like the Spanish one. To do so, we have studied the scandals related to the former King of Spain, Juan Carlos I. In the research, we have analyzed the evolution of media coverage on the topic between July 1, 2014, and March 1, 2021 in three different paper newspapers (*El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC*). During this period, 889 journalistic pieces were published in these three newspapers. Also, we have conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a sample of 334 pieces from the last year covered by the research (2020–2021) on *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC* and on digital natives *El Español* and *elDiario.es*. The results show a political instrumentalization of the scandal, media partisanship (the media support some political parties' positions) in *El País*, *elDiario.es* and *ABC*; and ideological polarization (analyzed content presents two politically opposed groups) in *ABC* and *elDiario.es*.

Keywords

Corruption scandals, political polarization, partisanship, Juan Carlos I, King Emeritus, monarchy, media.

1. Introduction

One cannot speak of political scandals without considering the role of the media. Political corruption, to become a scandal, needs “a reaction of outrage from the audience against a political agent to whom is a conduct that is perceived as an abuse of power or as disloyalty to the rules that regulate the office he exercises is ascribed” (Malem, 1997, p. 84). From this it can be deduced that, in most cases, without the role of the media, cases of political corruption do not become scandals (Amadeo, 1999; Canel & Sanders, 2005). This is how Esser and Hartung (2004, p. 1041) see it. They affirm that political scandals involve “intense political communication about a real or imagined defect that is by consensus condemned and meets universal indignation or outrage.”

There is a large consensus in the literature on the concept of political corruption. Accordingly, for example, Zamora and Marín Albaladejo (2011, p. 216) define it as:

The violation of law, or of the ethical principles on which the political system or a type of civic morality is based, in relation to what constitutes an abuse of the public service, in order to obtain a direct or indirect, material or immaterial private benefit, and may thus affect what is considered socially as the general interest or the proper functioning of that system.

In addition, Berganza *et al.* (2021, pp. 3302–3305), Villoria (2006), Malem (1997) and Garzón (1997) come to the same conclusion.

On the other hand, the study of scandals is a privileged way to jointly research media systems and politicians. These “are closely intertwined, and what takes place within one produces consequences on the other” (Mancini, 2019, p. 157). Mancini recognizes three types of corruption scandals: market-driven, which are directed by the premise of “scandals sell” (Thompson 2000, p. 32) and which seek to monopolize large audiences; those who seek the defense of public virtue and morality (*Custodians of conscience*, as the title of the 1998 book by Ettema & Glasser); and politically oriented. Each type of scandal, as Mancini indicates, occurs most frequently in a particular media and political system. Furthermore, it is framed differently and has a different effect on public opinion depending on the political culture of the country in question (de Miguel Pascual & Berganza, 2019, p. 467). Politically oriented ones are more common in the countries of the polarized pluralist model (Mancini, 2019, p. 160), among which is Spain (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Politically oriented scandals have four closely related characteristics (Mancini, 2019). First, there is a political and strategic instrumentalization of the corruption scandal, understood as the use of the scandal to defend political positions and strategies. This instrumental use is observed “in the way the scandal is narrated, in the language that is used, and in the aspects and the frames that address the entire story and the aim to achieve the often-secret objectives” (Mancini, 2019, pp. 161–163). Second, in addition to this, they occur in media systems that are not totally independent and that are characterized by a high level of partisanship with respect to the political organizations and/or the large companies and industries outside the media field.

Third, the origin of these scandals lies, in many cases, in investigations carried out by journalists following leaks, for example, of agents of the secret services. This characteristic is also present in the case study of this article: in 2018, *OkDiario* and *El Español* revealed the content of some tapes that included some conversations from 2015 between former retired commissioner José Manuel Villarejo, the former extramarital partner of the emeritus king (Corinna Larsen), and businessman Juan Villalonga. In them, Larsen cites the pressure from the Spanish National Intelligence Center¹.

Fourth and finally, in the pursuit of private and not general interests, the coverage of politically oriented scandals shows, according to Mancini (2019), a high ideological polarization. Several studies published in Spain, especially those related to printed media, display a growing polarization (see, for example, Casero, 2012; Martínez Nicolás & Humanes, 2012; van Dalen, de Vreese & Albæk, 2012; and Strömback & Luengo, 2008). For Kubin and von Sikorski (2021 p. 188), it is a phenomenon that continues to grow in the world and that affects not only the traditional press, but also social networks, especially Twitter, with its ability to create the so-called “echo-chamber.” However, the existence of political polarization, also among citizens, is the focus of academic debate. Within the enormous literature that addresses the subject, there are voices that deny the existence of this phenomenon among the population (see Fiorina *et al.*, 2005, for the American case). For his part, Prior (2013) finds no evidence that the partisan media is responsible for the fact that the citizens are more partisan.

¹ Montero, D. (2018, July 11). Las cintas en las que Corinna desveló que Juan Carlos I la usaba como testafarro: "No porque me quiera mucho, sino porque resido en Mónaco". *El Español*. Retrieved from https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20180706/corinna-desvelo-juan-carlos-testafarro-no-monaco/320468523_o.html [Accessed February 9, 2022].

Other authors take opposing positions and point out (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008) that the American population, especially those closest to politics, is today much more polarized than in previous times. But again, the debate arises on how this polarization occurs. Boxell *et al.* (2017) cannot attribute this growth to the Internet, since, in their study, it is the population groups with less access to this medium that have experienced a greater growth of this phenomenon.

Political polarization is a concept that according to Kubin and von Sikorski (2021, p. 197) is barely defined in approximately one third of the scientific articles in the English language of an empirical type in the field of Communication. It is usually explained by emphasizing “the simultaneous presence of opposing or conflicting principles, tendencies, or points of view” (Fiorina & Abrams 2008, p. 566). Polarization can be ideological or affective (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). In this work we will focus on the measurement of the first type.

It seems unquestionable that the media and social networks struggle to attract loyal niche audiences defined by their political ideology (Farias & Roses, 2009, p. 21). This often means that people’s views become increasingly extreme if they are always exposed to homogeneous points of view that reinforce their own beliefs and where contrary opinions have little credibility (selective exposure). The risk to democracy is clear, since for it to develop it is necessary the existence of a healthy debate and the establishment of basic consensus on some facts and issues.

2. The scandals of the emeritus King Juan Carlos I

The events that dominated most of the case’s attention date back to 2008, when Juan Carlos I allegedly received a 100 million dollars donation from Saudi Arabia, which was deposited with the Swiss bank Mirabaud. In 2012, the monarch allegedly donated 65 million euros from that account to his former partner Corinna Larsen. That same year, he suffered a fall during an elephant hunting trip to Botswana that forced him to undergo hip surgery. He publicly apologized for being absent from the country and for engaging in such activities at a critical time in the economic crisis. In 2014, Juan Carlos abdicated in favor of his son Felipe and went on to receive the title of emeritus king.

The actual scandal broke in 2018. Then, several media outlets made public a 2015 conversation in which Larsen claimed that the emeritus king had received commissions for the construction of the AVE between Medina and Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, and that he had used “front men” to hide the money in Switzerland. In 2020, the British newspaper *The Telegraph* revealed that Felipe VI appeared as a beneficiary of the Lucum foundation, linked to his father and allegedly related to opaque money. Felipe announced that he was renouncing his father’s inheritance and that the latter would be left without his annual stipend from the royal budget. In August 2020 Juan Carlos I left Spain and settled in the United Arab Emirates.

At the end of 2020, it came to light that Juan Carlos I had received funds from the Mexican businessman Allen Sanginés-Krause, money that was allegedly not declared². Soon after, the emeritus king paid more than 600,000 euros to the country’s tax authorities to regularize his fiscal situation and, in February 2021, he made a second payment of approximately four million euros for the same purpose³.

² Olmo, J. M., Gabilondo, P. & Parera, B. (November 3, 2020). El millonario mexicano Sanginés-Krause pagó decenas de gastos de Juan Carlos I. *El Confidencial*. Retrieved from https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2020-11-03/millonario-mexicano-sangines-krause-pago-decenas-de-gastos-de-juan-carlos-i_2817935/ [Accessed January 14, 2022].

³ Irujo, J. M. & González, M. (February 25, 2021). Juan Carlos I paga más de cuatro millones al fisco en una segunda regularización. *El País*. Retrieved from <https://elpais.com/espana/2021-02-25/juan-carlos-i-paga-mas-de-cuatro-millones-al-fisco-en-una-segunda-regularizacion.html> [Accessed January 14, 2022].

3. Objectives and hypotheses

This research will focus on the analysis of the media coverage provided by the printed and digital native press to the various scandals that have been related to the emeritus King Juan Carlos I. The main objective is to verify whether its coverage meets the characteristics of those defined by Mancini (2019) as “politically oriented scandals.”

Hence, the following hypotheses have been proposed in this study:

- H1. The frames of the analyzed journalistic pieces are fundamentally political.
- H2. There is a high level of media partisanship. Through the media, the particular positions of political parties are defended.
- H3. Media polarization occurs. According to the concept of political polarization by Fiorina and Abrams (2008, p. 197), a high polarization is expected: the analyzed pieces of each newspaper will be constituted into conflicting blocs that oppose each other.

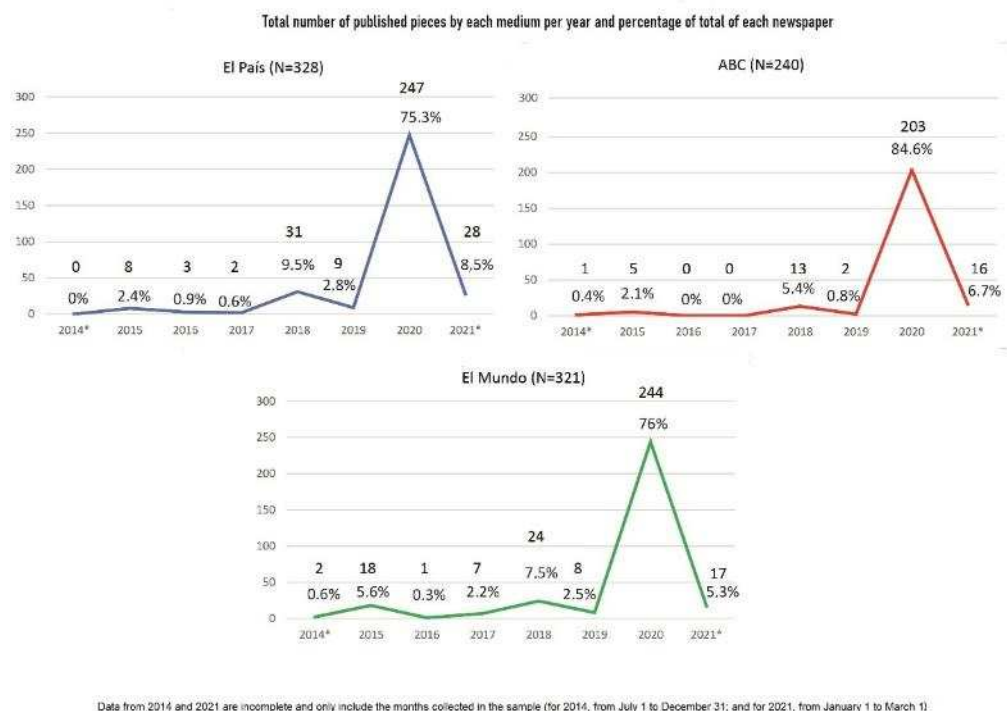
4. Methodology

4.1. *The choice of the sample*

For this study, a search was made of all the journalistic pieces published in *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC* whose main theme was the different scandals related to the figure of King Juan Carlos I. The period selected was between July 1, 2014 (a few days after his abdication, which became effective on June 18, 2014), and March 1, 2021 (four days after the publication of the information on February 25 in *El País* on his second tax regularization). In the case of *El País* and *El Mundo*, the LexisNexis database was used to search for any pieces (belonging to both informative and opinion genres) that contained the terms <“Juan Carlos I” OR “Don Juan Carlos” OR “rey emérito”>. Subsequently, a manual filtering of the resulting units of analysis was carried out in order to identify only those related to the scandals of the emeritus king. Regarding *ABC*, the search was carried out with the same terms as in the case of *El País* and *El Mundo*. However, unlike the two previous media, the search in LexisNexis had to be completed with the MyNews database and the newspaper’s own archive. The reason is that LexisNexis only collects what was published by *ABC* until the end of October 2016. In total, 889 journalistic pieces were found in *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC* related to the alleged scandals of Juan Carlos I. The vast majority of them, 754 (84.8% of the sample), were published between March 1, 2020, and March 1, 2021, in response to different events, such as the departure of Juan Carlos I from Spain or the announcement that he made at least two payments to the country’s tax authorities to regularize his tax situation (see Figure 1). Thus, March 2020 marks the news boom since, at the beginning of that month, the newspaper *Tribune de Genève*⁴, from Geneva (Switzerland), published that the emeritus king had 100 million dollars in bank accounts in that city. From that date and during the following year, the information related to various scandals did not cease and, in addition, he left Spain in August 2020.

⁴ Besson, S. & Zumbach, (March 3, 2020). Une enquête dévoile l’argent secret de l’ex-roi d’Espagne à Genève. *Tribune de Genève*. Retrieved from <https://www.tdg.ch/geneve/actu-genevoise/enquete-devoile-argent-secret-lexroi-despagne-geneve/story/31925842> [Accessed January 20, 2022].

Figure 1. Journalistic pieces about the emeritus king related to scandals per year (n=889).



Source: Own elaboration.

After analyzing the evolution of journalistic coverage on the subject and observing that there is a great news boom from March 1, 2020, it was decided to carry out an analysis of quantitative (Krippendorff, 2004) and qualitative content (Schreier, 2012). Thus, 15 days were randomly selected from the information published between March 1, 2020, and March 1, 2021, in five media outlets. As printed representatives, *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC* were chosen for being the three most read national newspapers according to the first EGM survey of 2021 (AIMC, 2021). As for the digital natives, *elDiario.es* and *El Español* were chosen for being the two media with the most traffic according to OJD Interactiva (2021) in February 2021. The dates selected were: March 6 and 16, June 9 and 16, July 8 and 12, August 4 and 18, November 2 and 7, December 7, 11 and 20 of the year 2020; and January 14 and February 26 of the year 2021. Regarding digital media, the immediately preceding days were analyzed. Therefore, the body of analysis is made up of 334 journalistic pieces (of informative and opinion genres), which constitute the main sample of the analyses shown in the results section.

As shown in Table 1, of the 334 journalistic pieces selected for qualitative analysis, 141 (42.2%) came from printed media, while the remaining 193 appeared in digital natives. The medium with the greatest presence in the study was *elDiario.es*, with 142 (42.5%), practically the same as all three paper newspapers together. The rest of the included newspapers published a relatively similar number of pieces. All the contents analyzed in the study were independently coded by two people using content analysis coding and instruction coding. Intercoder reliability was measured thanks to Cohen's kappa coefficient, which was suitable for all variables.

Table 1. Number of pieces analyzed in the period March 2020-March 2021 (n=334).

	Number of pieces analyzed by medium	Number of pieces analyzed by type of medium
<i>El País</i>	48 (14.4%)	Printed: 141 (42.2%)
<i>El Mundo</i>	45 (13.5%)	
<i>ABC</i>	48 (14.4%)	
<i>elDiario.es</i>	142 (42.5%)	Digital: 193 (57.8%)
<i>El Español</i>	51 (15.2%)	

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2. The choice of the media under analysis

The digital native and printed media that are the subject of this study were selected because they have the largest audiences within their typology and because they have very different characteristics that fit the objectives of this work. These objectives involve closely exploring the links between the Spanish media and political system and their degree of adequacy to the type and characteristics of politically oriented corruption scandals (Mancini, 2019). Hence the need to choose newspapers that represent different ideological positions and different views on the emeritus king and the Spanish monarchy.

Therefore, *El País* is a newspaper that is traditionally regarded as center-left and close to the socialist governments. However, it was also seen as the “embodiment of the mainstream press and the support for the king’s cause” (Pablos Coello & Ardévol, 2009, p. 240) before the end of the “critical silence” of the media on Crown matters.

El Mundo is usually characterized for being a newspaper that stands out for developing investigative journalism and for its surveillance of power. Ramos Fernández (2013) points out that, when Pedro J. Ramírez –currently director of *El Español*– was still in the management team, sometimes the roles were reversed in the news about the Royal House, being “more critical the conservative *El Mundo* and more comprehensive the progressive *El País*” (p. 219). *ABC*, for its part, is located in the center-right and has traditionally a monarchical (Pablos Coello & Ardévol, 2009) and conservative nature (Barredo Ibáñez, 2013).

As for digital media, two were chosen. On the one hand, *elDiario.es*, which is not only critical of King Juan Carlos but also of the monarchy itself (López García & Valera Ordaz, 2013). Regarding its place in the ideological spectrum, Guerrero-Solé (2022) places it on the left.

And, on the other hand, *El Español*, which was born in 2015. It was founded by Pedro J. Ramírez after being fired by *El Mundo*, and presents an ideology close to neoliberalism (Sánchez-Gutiérrez & Nogales Bocio, 2018). With respect to the aforementioned case, Ramírez himself was critical of Juan Carlos I. For example, in February 2021, the director and founder of the medium stated that “his behavior has not been honorable or exemplary” and that he should not continue to be king in a speech on TVE compiled by his own medium⁵.

Several research tried to scientifically show the ideology of the different Spanish newspapers. One of the most recent studies is that of Guerrero-Solé (2022), which uses the ideology perceived by the population of Spanish political parties to try to estimate the ideology of the different media by relating their ideology to that of the people who interact with them on Twitter. Of the five newspapers that we analyze in this study and following the scale from left (minimum value of 2.4 of the Jaccard index) to right (maximum value of 9.4), Guerrero-Solé (2022), we find *elDiario.es* as the one that is more to the left (3.81), followed by *El País* (4.764). With values closer to each other, tending to the right, there are *El Español* (7.458), *El Mundo* (7.573) and *ABC* (7.765).

⁵ Pedro J. Ramírez: “Ha llegado el momento de que la Fiscalía llame a declarar al rey Juan Carlos I” (February 26, 2021). *El Español*. Retrieved from https://www.lasexta.com/programas/sexta-noche/entrevistas/pedro-ramirez-quanto-mas-tarde-rey-emerito-volver-espana-mejor_20211076187284477bc8000019c6a48.html [Accessed February 9, 2022].

4.3. The operationalization of the variables under study

For the operationalization of the objective and hypothesis of this work, different approaches proposed in the existing literature on the framing theory will be used. This paradigm offers excellent theoretical and empirical tools that are widely tested to analyze how the media and the communication professionals build their narratives about corruption scandals. The framing theory refers to “the process (textual or visual) by which media information is presented (frame building) and the internal and external factors underlying it” (de Vreese & Lecheler, 2012).

For the measurement of the main frame regarding information on corruption cases (H1), the classification of frames and the definition of their characteristics employed by Amadeo (1999, pp. 274 *et seq.*) were used. Amadeo recognizes three types of possible narratives referring to the characters involved in this type of scandal (which are also articulated by the terms used): legalistic, political and moral. To these categories we added that of “other frames.” Amadeo identifies the legalistic frame of the units of analysis by the terms “referring to the judicial process itself.” According to Amadeo (1999), the political terms refer to “what is proposed in the field of power and in the fight for public opinion.” Finally, the moral terms “directly imply an ethical approval or sanction to the protagonists” (Amadeo, 1999, pp. 274 *et seq.*).

For the operationalization of the other variables of this research, the categorization elaborated by the international network of researchers in Political Communication NEPOCS (Network of European Political Communication Scholars) was used. NEPOCS applied it to its 2016 study “Comparing Political Journalism” (Routledge). Thus, two quantitative variables were employed for the particular positions and strategies of the political parties that appear in the media (H2). The first measures the strategic frame of the units of analysis. This refers to the journalistic pieces “that are centered around interpretations of candidates’ and parties’ motives, their strategies and tactics for achieving political goals” (Aalberg, Strömbäck & de Vreese, 2012, p. 172). In other words, the assumption that is made from every newspaper that behind a performance of a character or political party there is a subsequent political motivation. This frame is mainly used when the editorial position of the medium is different from that of the political actor, since with this type of information it is a matter of revealing the hidden strategies of the other side. The variable used in the content analysis coding was the following question: “Is the frame of the unit of analysis predominantly strategic in explicit terms?” The categories into which it was divided were two: 1. Yes; 2. No.

The explicit general tone of the pieces was also measured. The categories of this variable were four: positive; negative; a mixture of both; and neutral.

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5. Results

The political frame is present in 51.5% of the analyzed journalistic pieces. Therefore, in the coverage of the scandals related to the emeritus king, this frame was prioritized over others that focused on the legal consequences and the judicial proceedings (legal/judicial frame). The latter approach is the second most frequent, with 27.8% of the pieces. Finally, the moral frame has a presence of 10.2%, while other approaches constitute 10.5%. A chi-square test was performed between the variables medium and the main frame used, with the null hypothesis meaning there are no statistically significant differences between media. The result does show significant differences between the two [χ^2 (16, N=334) = 34.992, p=0.004], although the strength of these differences is weak (Cramer’s coefficient $|V|=0.162$).

Only one of the media does not present the political frame as the predominant one: *El País*, which gives more importance to the legal/judicial frame which is the most frequent with 43% of the pieces. This is in line with what will be seen later, a greater neutrality in dealing

with the figure of the emeritus king parallel to the position held by the socialist government during the period analyzed.

After analyzing the different predominant frames, it is verified that, in fact, the political is the primary one, with a presence in more than half of the pieces. Consequently, the first hypothesis is validated.

Table 2. Main frame by medium (n=334).

	Main frame			
	Political	Legal/Judicial	Moral	Another frame
<i>El País</i>	35.4%	43.8%	16.7%	4.1%
<i>El Mundo</i>	37.8%	31.1%	20%	11.1%
Medium <i>ABC</i>	52.1%	22.9%	14.6%	10.4%
<i>elDiario.es</i>	62.7%	23.9%	3.5%	9.9%
<i>El Español</i>	47%	25.5%	11.8%	15.7%
Total	51.5%	27.8%	10.5%	10.2%

Source: Own elaboration.

Below, it is examined whether there is a media partisanship (H2), that is, whether the particular positions and strategies of the political parties are defended through the media. In addition, it is analyzed whether media partisanship crystallizes in the establishment of antagonistic blocs in dispute (political polarization, H3) both from the ideological and the positioning point of view regarding the emeritus king and the model of State in Spain (monarchy versus republic). In order to elucidate these aspects included in the H2 and H3 of this research, the general tone of the contents (positive, negative or neutral) with respect to the figure of the emeritus king was verified and the presence or absence of the strategic frame of the units of analysis was also analyzed.

Table 3. General tone by medium (n=334).

	General tone			
	Neutral	Negative	Balanced	Positive
<i>El País</i>	54.2%	31.3%	12.4%	2.1%
<i>El Mundo</i>	20%	73.4%	2.2%	4.4%
Medium <i>ABC</i>	29.2%	50%	6.3%	14.5%
<i>elDiario.es</i>	31.7%	52.1%	7.7%	8.5%
<i>El Español</i>	31.4%	68.6%	0%	0%
Total	32.9%	54.2%	6.3%	6.6%

Source: Own elaboration.

To examine the general tone of the pieces, the chi-square test was performed. The purpose was to check if there are significant differences between the media and the general tone used by each one of the newspapers individually. In this sense, the null hypothesis means the absence of relationship between both variables. Therefore, the study shows that there are significant differences [$\chi^2(12, N=334) = 37.479, p=0.000$], although the strength of association is low ($|V|=0.193$).

The first conclusion drawn from Table 3 is that, after seeing the results of the five newspapers in whole, the general tone of the units of analysis on the scandals of the emeritus king is negative. *El País* is the one with the greatest neutrality with more than 20 points above any other medium (see Table 3), which has a tone reminiscent of the continuous statements of the PSOE in the Government that justice is equal for all and that it must be allowed to act⁶.

ABC stands out for having a higher percentage of pieces that are positive in tone, which reflects the positive assessment it makes of the legacy of Juan Carlos I. Its assessment of the figure of the former monarch always involves highlighting his historical relevance, which is in line with Partido Popular's position⁷. When interpreting *ABC*'s percentage of 50% (24 pieces) in negative tone, we must bear in mind that, among these pieces, those focused on revealing what this medium understands as a strategy of overthrow of the monarchy by the Republican and pro-independence parties were codified. Thus, of the 24 units of analysis in negative tone of *ABC*, 8 (33.3%) evaluate negatively the emeritus king; 7 (29.2%) are against the strategy of the Government and the Republican parties; 6 (25%) contain negative references to both; and 3 (12.5%) relate to other topics.

In the rest of the media, negativity is dominant, especially in *El Mundo* with 73.3%, which also comes from a combination of criticism in two senses. On the one hand, there is criticism of the Government, which it considers the architect of a threatening movement against the monarchy, which at the same time it does not criticize (*Un Gobierno contra su Majestad*, December 20, 2020⁸, opinion). On the other hand, it also publishes very critical articles on the actions of Juan Carlos I (*Lo siento, no puedo defenderle*, November 7, 2020, opinion)⁹. Note, therefore, that the criticisms of *El Mundo* are directed at the scandalous acts of the emeritus king but not at the monarchical institution or Felipe VI.

The negative tone is also the most frequent in *El Español* (68.6%) and in *elDiario.es* (52.1%). *El Español* shows a hostile stance towards Juan Carlos I that includes compromising scoops on the emeritus king, while clearly separating his figure from that of the current king and monarchy in Spain. Felipe VI and the monarchy are perceived to have been harmed by the actions of the emeritus king. Examples of this are: the news item *Así quedó manchado el 'contrato del siglo' del AVE la Meca por las comisiones de Juan Carlos y Corinna*¹⁰; the opinion

⁶ See, for example, the news published in *elDiario.es* (June 8, 2020). El Gobierno, sobre la investigación contra el rey Juan Carlos por el AVE a La Meca: "La Justicia es igual para todos". Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/gobierno-investigacion-juan-carlos-justicia_1_6028139.html [Accessed May 19, 2022].

⁷ EFE (August 3, 2020). El PP respeta la decisión del rey emérito de irse de España y alaba su legado. *La Vanguardia*. Retrieved from <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20200803/482658767617/el-pp-respeto-la-decision-del-rey-emerito-de-irse-de-espana-y-alaba-su-legado.html> [Accessed June 15, 2022]. In this article we find the following statements: "The PP has expressed this Monday its most 'absolute respect' to the decision of King Juan Carlos to go live outside Spain and has highlighted his role in the arrival of democracy and his legacy as head of the monarchy [...]. King Juan Carlos I demonstrates, with his decision, 'his loyalty to Spain, to the parliamentary monarchy and to King Felipe VI', according to PP sources, who have specified that his role in the arrival of democracy in Spain has been 'crucial and decisive' [...]." Similarly, the issue was addressed by one of the leaders of the party, the president of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who through her Twitter account underlined "the historical work of Juan Carlos I for Spain", to whom the Spaniards owe "the best years" of democracy. Europa Press (December 6, 2020). Ayuso dice que la Constitución es "bastante más avanzada" que las leyes actuales y elogia al Rey Juan Carlos I. *Europa Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-ayuso-dice-constitucion-bastante-mas-avanzada-leyes-actuales-elogia-rey-juan-carlos-20201206133956.html> [Accessed June 15, 2022]. This news item states the following: "Ayuso refused to comment on the news published by the newspaper *El País* that King Juan Carlos has regularized his tax situation claiming that it is not up to her to address that issue [...]. Thus, she only wanted to recall the 'important role' that, from her point of view, the emeritus king has had and everything that the Spaniards owe him. 'It has had a fundamental role so that all Spaniards of the left, of the right and without sides threw their arms around each other and around a text like the one that brought us here', she said."

⁸ Rosell, F. (December 20, 2020). Un Gobierno contra su Majestad (A government against His Majesty). *El Mundo*, p. 2.

⁹ Peñafiel, J. (November 7, 2020). Lo siento, pero no puedo defenderle (I'm sorry, I can't defend you). *El Mundo*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Elizondo, M. (July 7, 2020). Así quedó manchado el 'contrato del siglo' del AVE la Meca por las comisiones de Juan Carlos y Corinna (This is how the 'the contract of the century' of the Ave to Mecca was tarnished by the commissions

article *Juan Carlos I pedía "honradez" en plena crisis a los seis meses de mover 100 millones a Bahamas*¹¹ (both from July 7, 2020); and the story *La gran traición de Juan Carlos a Felipe VI: ensucia su nombre con 65 millones que entregó a ex amantes*¹² (March 15, 2020). Within this last story, it is stated that the scandal of the emeritus king is "a betrayal of Juan Carlos de Borbón to his son who, in addition to dirtying his name, puts the monarchy in a very difficult situation in our country."

The negative tone of the units analyzed in *elDiario.es* are mainly related to criticisms of the emeritus king and the monarchy as a political system¹³.

The strategic frame appears in 10.8% (36 pieces) of the total analyzed content. The chi-square test was performed to check if there are significant differences between the presence of the strategic frame and the different media, with the null hypothesis meaning that there is no relationship between variables. It can be seen that the differences between media are significant [$\chi^2(4, N=334) = 32,860, p = 0,000$], with a medium-low strength of association ($|V|=0.314$) according to Cramer's V coefficient.

This approach is more frequent in printed media (63.9%, with 23 of the 36 cases) than in digital media (36.1%, with 13 cases). There are significant differences between the different newspapers. Accordingly, it is not found in any of the articles of *El País*, which, therefore, maintains a more neutral frame where political strategies are not openly proposed. Meanwhile, in *ABC*, it has a presence of 41.7% (15 cases). It is followed by: *elDiario.es* (30.5%, 11 cases); *El Mundo* (22.2%, being 8 the cases); and *El Español* (5.6%, with 2 cases).

The journalistic narratives that the analyzed media adopt to capture the strategic frame also reveal clear editorial positions. That way, we can clearly see in *ABC* its opposition to the "left" and to the Republican parties (including Podemos, Izquierda Unida, Más País, Bildu, ERC, Junts, Compromís, CUP and BNG), as will be seen through some examples. The main line of argument in *ABC* focuses on revealing the existence of an antimonarchical strategy on the part of these parties by taking advantage of the scandals of Juan Carlos I. For this medium, the left, the Republican and the pro-independence parties are trying to attack the parliamentary monarchy as a political system established in the 1978 Constitution and move towards a republic. An example of the above is the column *Dolor de padre, dolor de hijo*¹⁴

of Juan Carlos and Corinna). *El Español*. Retrieved from https://www.elespanol.com/invertia/empresas/20200707/manchado-ave-meca-comisiones-juan-carlos-corinna/503200303_o.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

¹¹ Criado, A. (July 7, 2020). Juan Carlos I pedía "honradez" en plena crisis a los seis meses de mover 100 millones a Bahamas (Juan Carlos I asked for "integrity" in the midst of the crisis six months after moving 100 million to the Bahamas). *El Español*. https://www.elespanol.com/espana/20200707/juan-carlos-pedia-honradez-tesis-millones-bahamas/503200122_o.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

¹² Castro-Villacañas, J. (March 15, 2020). La gran traición de Juan Carlos a Felipe VI: ensucia su nombre con 65 millones que entregó a ex amantes (The great betrayal of Juan Carlos to Felipe VI: sullies his name with 65 million that he delivered to ex-lovers). *El Español*. https://www.elespanol.com/reportajes/20200315/traicion-juan-carlos-felipe-vi-ensucia-millones/474953442_o.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

¹³ Escolar, I. (March 15, 2020). El rey hijo mata al padre para intentar salvar la corona. *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/escolar/hijo-padre-intentar-salvar-corona_132_1001700.html [Accessed June 15, 2022]. In this opinion article by the director of *elDiario.es* it is stated that: "Now that it is evident that Juan Carlos de Borbón abused the inviolability given to him by the Constitution and used his position to enrich himself, why does this privilege not end so that it does not happen again?" Sáenz de Ugarte, I. (August 3, 2020). La huida del rey que necesitaba demasiado dinero para sus gastos. *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/huida-rey-juan-carlos_129_6145551.html [Accessed June 15, 2022]. In this news item it is claimed that: "Those who thought that abdication would solve the problems of the monarchy's legitimacy were overtaken by events that had been hidden for years by their own decision to look the other way." Elordi, C. (December 10, 2020). El Gobierno tiene que pasar a la ofensiva. *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/huida-rey-juan-carlos_129_6145551.html [Accessed June 15, 2022]. This opinion article states that: "If at this stage it is not worth recalling that the emeritus king was a fundamental character of the Transition -it even begins to sound ridiculous- there is no point either in insisting that Felipe VI has separated from his father, or that he has even punished him by withdrawing his assignment. Because the scandal has gone too far for it to be softened."

¹⁴ Martínez, A. (August 4, 2020). Dolor de padre, dolor de hijo (A father's pain, a son's legacy). *ABC*, p. 8.

(August 4, 2020), which argues that: “The left, always motivated by its republican drive, will not fail to take advantage of the mistakes made by Juan Carlos at the end of his reign to relish his old dream.” On the same day, it was published in the opinion page the column entitled *El rey solo*¹⁵, which emphasizes that the king’s actions have allowed “the enemies of the Constitution to use his case to embark on an operation to harass the monarchical regime.” This idea even appears in the headline of the article *Un lustro de acoso a la Monarquía para acabar con el sistema de 1978*¹⁶, adding that it is the “first step of a defined plan” in the introductory heading.

El Mundo focuses its narrative on unveiling and criticizing what it considers, on the one hand, the government’s strategy to address the issue of the scandals of the emeritus king and, on the other, the strategy of the Republican and pro-independence parties (ending the monarchy). This idea is noted in *El objetivo final no es Juan Carlos I*¹⁷, of December 7, 2020, an editorial in which it is argued “how good it is for some parties” that there is a constant presence in the media of Juan Carlos I because “it is part of the campaign of demolition in progress against the monarchy.” *El Mundo* also highlights that harming the monarchy was a collateral damage for the Government in the opinion article *A Sánchez le vienen bien los líos del rey padre para aplacar a Iglesias*¹⁸, published on November 7, 2020.

In *elDiario.es* the journalistic narrative is clearly separated from the rest of the media, as shown before. Thus, some of its headlines present a hostile tone towards Juan Carlos I. It is observed in the following articles: *Juan Carlos I intenta evitar la investigación judicial de las tarjetas opacas pagando ahora a Hacienda* (December 6, 2020)¹⁹; and, *La presión judicial y política aboca al rey emérito a irse de España para tratar de salvar la monarquía de sus propios escándalos* (August 3, 2020)²⁰. In addition, it clearly echoes the Government’s strategy of helping the survival of the Spanish monarchy by dropping the emeritus king and building a firewall between him and the current monarch Felipe VI. In the article *Cuatro millones se llevan por delante la última operación para reflotar la monarquía*²¹ (February 26, 2021), this government strategy is insisted upon.

Based on the above results it can be concluded that H2, raised in this research regarding the high level of media partisanship with respect to political organizations, is only partially confirmed. The partisanship is clearly observed in the case of *El País*, *ABC* and *elDiario.es*, but it is not so obvious in *El Mundo* and in *El Español*. *El País* is the medium with the highest number of units of analysis published in a neutral tone, in line with what the PSOE defended in the Government. *ABC* is the medium that offers a higher percentage of positive assessments regarding the emeritus king and a lower percentage of negative ones. These follow the line of

¹⁵ Camacho, I. (August 4, 2020). El Rey solo (The isolated king). *ABC*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Muñoz, P. (August 4, 2020). Un lustro de acoso a la monarquía para acabar con el sistema de 1978 (A period of harassment of the Monarchy to end the system of 1978). *ABC*, p. 18.

¹⁷ El objetivo final no es Juan Carlos I [Editorial] (The ultimate objective is not Juan Carlos I). (December 7, 2020). *El Mundo*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Landaluce, E. (November 7, 2020). A Sánchez le vienen bien los líos del rey padre para aplacar a Iglesias (The king’s troubles are very convenient for Sanchez in order to placate Iglesias). *El Mundo*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Juan Carlos I intenta evitar la investigación judicial de las tarjetas opacas pagando ahora a Hacienda (Juan Carlos I tries to avoid the judicial investigation of black cards by paying now to the tax authorities) (December 6, 2020). *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/juan-carlos-i-evitar-investigacion-judicial-tarjeta-opacas-pagando-ahora-hacienda_1_6485465.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

²⁰ Pinheiro, M. & Herrera, H. (August 3, 2020). La presión judicial y política aboca al rey emérito a irse de España para tratar de salvar la monarquía de sus propios escándalos (The judicial and political pressure forces the emeritus king to leave Spain to try to save the monarchy from his own scandals). *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/pression-judicial-politica-aboca-rey-emerito-exilio-tratar-salvar-monarquia-proprios-escandalos_1_6145712.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

²¹ Saenz de Ugarte, I. (February 26, 2021). Cuatro millones se llevan por delante la última operación para reflotar la monarquía (Four million sweep away the last operation to refloat the monarchy). *elDiario.es*. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/politica/cuatro-millones-ultima-operacion-reflotar-monarquia_129_7254266.html [Accessed January 13, 2022].

argument adopted by the Partido Popular and, on the one hand, highlight the historical legacy of the former monarch and, on the other, criticize the strategy of the left-wing and the Republican parties to try to overthrow the monarchy. For its part, *elDiario.es* is in line with Unidas Podemos and other Republican parties and criticizes both the figure of the emeritus king and the monarchical system.

The same is true of H3: it can only be partially accepted. The ideological polarization, pointed out by Mancini as one of the features of the coverage of politically oriented scandals, is appreciable only in the cases of *ABC* and *elDiario.es*. These newspapers are the representatives of two ideologically opposed blocs regarding politics and their idea of desirability of continuing to maintain a monarchical system in Spain or replacing it with a republican one. This is in line with the political polarization of their audiences and the phenomenon of selective exposure: remember that, of the five newspapers that we analyzed in this work and according to the Guerrero-Solé scale (2022) from left (minimum value of 2.4 of the Jaccard index) to right (maximum value of 9.4), *elDiario.es* is the one placed more to the left (3.81), followed by *El País* (4.764) and *ABC* (7.765), which is the one more to the right.

6. Conclusions

This research confirms that the coverage of political corruption scandals in the Spanish newspapers analyzed (both digital natives and traditional), for the specific case under study, has, in general, the characteristics of what Mancini (2019) defines as “politically oriented” with some relevant nuances. These characteristics are so closely related that the first and second overlap.

The first of the characteristics refers to political and strategic instrumentalization, understood as the use of scandal by the media to defend political positions and strategies. The results confirm that the journalistic approach to the scandal has been mostly political, with the exception of *El País*, whose preferential frame has been the legal/judicial one. This is interpreted as a partisan strategy, which is in line both with the position of apparent neutrality of the PSOE in the Government in the face of the scandal, and the rest of the results obtained on this medium.

The second of the characteristics pointed out by Mancini (2019) is the high level of media partisanship with respect to political organizations, which results in partisan media. This partisanship is clearly observed in the cases of *El País*, *ABC* and *elDiario.es*, but it is not so obvious in *El Mundo* and *El Español*. Therefore, this characteristic does not apply to all the analyzed newspapers. The same can be said of the ideological polarization, pointed out by Mancini (2019) as one of the features of the coverage of politically oriented scandals: it is appreciable only in the cases of *ABC* and *elDiario.es*.

The results show the extent to which the partisan media are the origin or cause of the existence of polarized audiences (if any, a topic that is the subject of extensive academic debate) and the role that political parties also play in this process. That is, to what extent they reinforce the political polarization of the population through their interventions in the media. This, despite having been widely explored, especially in the US, is far from unanimous conclusions (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008, pp. 563-564).

Note that the results are applicable to the specific case study that is analyzed in this work, still pending for future analysis the verification in other cases and on other types of media.

This research confirms the interest of jointly studying the media and political systems, the links they establish between them and the consequences that this has for democratic systems and for the professionalization of journalism. It also offers an operationalization of variables under the theoretical framework of the framing theory that could be useful for future work. It is also clear that continuing to advance in the homogenization and comparability of variables in political communication through which to measure concepts such as polarization or political parallelism is especially urgent in the current context, in

which there is a growing social concern about its repercussions on democracy due, particularly, to the rise of social networks. In addition, as Fiorina and Abrams (2008, p. 563) conclude in their emblematic work, the study on political polarization presents a main problem: the use of different indicators when empirically researching the concept. This entails difficulties in performing inferences, which make the results problematic when it comes to drawing general conclusions about the state of the matter.

On the other hand, it is interesting to further research the relationship between the media and the monarchy in Spain and the coverage that the former provide to this institution and its head, the king, who is also head of state. It is also relevant to continue studying to what extent media representation was able to influence the decline in citizens' opinion on the monarchy. These constitute insufficiently explored issues, at least in comparison with the existing literature on the English monarchy.

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