

All News is Bad News

Newspaper Coverage of Politics in Spain

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Abstract

Spain has a highly partisan media system, with newspapers reaching self-selected partisan audiences and espousing explicitly partisan editorial preferences. Do the newspapers of the left and right differ in how they cover politics, based on partisanship? We review theories of issue-ownership, journalistic standards, and information scarcity and test hypotheses derived from each. We find that the parties converge substantially in virtually every aspect of their coverage. Few differences emerge when we look at what topics are covered, how skewed the coverage is in terms of focusing on just a few topics, or how coverage shifts from topic to topic over time. However, we confirm important differences across the papers when they make explicit reference to individual political parties. Journalistic norms result in a surprising focus on the faults of one's enemies, however, rather than the virtues of one's allies. Our assessment is based on a comprehensive database of all front-page stories in *El País* and *El Mundo*, Spain's largest daily newspapers, from 1996 through 2009.

Keywords: political parties, newspapers, political communication, agenda-setting, punctuated equilibrium, media and politics

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News Coverage in a Politicized News Environment

In a news environment where readership is segmented by political preference and where the editorial line of the newspapers makes clear their partisan leanings, one might expect strong differences in the patterns of news coverage. In a politicized environment, one might expect that left-leaning news outlets might emphasize different issues (social services, poverty, education) than those outlets favoring parties of the right (immigration, crime, national defense).

Newspapers might contribute to the ability of some parties to claim “ownership” over a given issue, consolidating their connection in the minds of voters with those issues that are important to them. On the other hand, differences might be more subtle: more in the framing of how issues are presented than on the choice of topics themselves. Further, journalistic norms toward the coverage of political conflict, toward reporting the activities of important official acts, and competitive pressures not to be scooped by a rival paper suggest that media content would be similar despite differences in partisan orientation. Increasing market competition strengthens these similarities, as does increasing attention to what it is called soft news.

Here we demonstrate the limits of partisanship in the Spanish media system. Our analysis is based on a comprehensive assessment of all front page stories in Spain’s two largest dailies, *El País* and *El Mundo*, from 1996 through 2009. We show that there are few differences in the topics of coverage but that partisanship or ideology has more subtle effects. Both newspapers are heavily focused only on the two largest parties, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Socialist Workers Party of Spain, PSOE) and the *Partido Popular* (People’s Party, PP), and they tend to focus on their ideological rival, not their ally. Thus, to the extent that the media are biased, they are biased against their rival, not in favor of their ally. Hence, we can say that “all news is bad news” when a party appears in the newspapers. Good news, about a new proposal to solve a problem, is much less newsworthy than the bad news about the problems of

the rival party. Thus, paradoxically for those who might expect that the parties play a role in helping their associated parties appeal to the electorate through selective attention to those issues which are favorable to them, we find that partisan selection occurs more in focusing on the failures of the rival party, not the successes of the allied one.

Background and Literature

Spain features a highly politicized media environment. In their review of media systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004) identify it as a pluralist democratic model,¹ noting that newspaper circulation is among the lowest in the EU, that newspapers are highly politicized, and that readership for individual papers is divided by partisanship. Spanish newspapers are said to represent distinct political tendencies and to take an advocacy role, mobilizing their readers to support different causes. For example, in the 2004 general elections, surveys indicated that more than 56 percent of PSOE voters were readers of *El País*, while 63 percent of PP voters were readers of *El Mundo*. Given that voters (and readers) of the left and right might be mobilized by different issues (social services, retirement, welfare for example for left-leaning readers; economic growth and the business environment for the right), a “partisanship hypothesis” would hold that newspapers would have greater or lesser coverage of individual issues based on which party “owns” that topic (see Budge and Keman 1990; Petrocik 1996).

This idea of issue-ownership has been recently applied to the analysis of the media agenda, following a similar argument of existing analysis on party competition (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). Party competition relies not only on drawing attention about different positions on issues, but on drawing attention to issues that have differential benefit to one party, because part of the electorate considers this party better able to handle this issue. According to this idea, in a highly politicized media system we should expect that the media might contribute

to the politicization of some issues, and depoliticize others, drawing attention to issues that are more favorable to the political party with which they are associated. We refer to this as the “party divergence hypothesis.”

On the other hand there are many reasons why media coverage may not be so cleanly divided. First, the parties themselves may not be able to be so choosy in their public activities. Green Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) showed for example in their study of Danish parliamentary activity and media coverage that while the parliamentary opposition was relatively free to “pick and choose” the topics of their questions, parties in government were forced to respond to whatever issues were being discussed in the media; they had little ability to focus attention only on their preferred topics. Walgrave and colleagues (2009) looked at whether voters would associate a party with a policy issue after just a few mentions of the issue by party leaders in a controlled experimental setting, and they found that they did. Parties, therefore, are not immutably associated with just a few issues in the public mind. Sigelman and Buell (2005) looked at the relative attention to issues across many US presidential campaigns and show that the campaigns differ more from year to year than they do from party to party. That is, when a particular issue is more salient in a given campaign, both parties focus on it more. In sum, there are many reasons why we should be skeptical of claims that parties can unilaterally own issues or speak only about those issues which are favorable to them. The idea that parties themselves may not be able to select issues, but must address even those issues brought up by rivals we can call the “party convergence hypothesis.”

Second, there are many reasons why a news outlet, even if associated with a party, may not be able to avoid certain issues. Media outlets are run by journalists, not political leaders, and journalistic norms apply. These imply attention to conflict rather than consensus; the “horse

race” questions of what political actor is “winning” and which is “losing” rather than the substance of public policy; the use of anecdotes and human interest frames, and similar familiar practices (see Graber 2010; Iyengar 1992; Iyengar and McGrady 2007). Bennett (1990) and Gandy (1982) provide further reason to expect minimal differences. For example, Bennett’s “indexing” theory discusses the patterns of journalistic reporting of “official” government actions, as these are seen as inherently newsworthy (see also Sigal 1973). Similarly, Gandy’s “journalistic subsidy” idea focuses on the tendency for the objects of news coverage to make it easy for journalists to cover them by reducing the costs of stories dramatically. All these concepts point to common journalistic norms rather than ideological preferences or partisan preferences driving the news. Like the previous set of considerations, these suggest a convergence of media coverage on similar topics, though the explanation lies in media norms, not in partisan competition. We can refer to this as the “media convergence hypothesis.”

Recent discussion of the media as a commercialized and profit-driven industry has focused on the rise of “soft news” in all media outlets. Changes in the communications environment have generated a long term decline in hard news such as coverage of international affairs, or issue specific political debates, leading to tabloidization of news or a new model of infotainment (Norris 2003). According to this view, media outlets, increasingly faced with competitive pressures as news outlets multiply, respond by focusing on relatively inexpensive reporting on human interest stories, natural disasters, and celebrities, sports, and entertainment as compared to the “hard news” of national and international public policy (see Hamilton 2004; Curren et al. 2009). These changes occur in a growing number of countries and in all types of media outlets (with more intensity in the case of TV) independently of the characteristics of the media system. From this we can deduce the expectation that news should increasingly focus on

the “soft news” of entertainment, weather, and human interest, and that this trend should be similar in all media outlets. We can call this the “soft news hypothesis.”

From a perspective of information theory, or attention scarcity (see Jones and Baumgartner 2005, Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2011), the range of issues that might be covered in the news is always much greater than the available space allows. This leads us to expect few differences across media outlets (Boydston forthcoming). On the other hand, the hypotheses derived from this perspective also suggest that coverage should be highly concentrated on just a few topics (“concentrated attention hypothesis”), and that patterns of change in attention over time should have the characteristics of friction: heavy replication of the status quo (that is, issues in the news today are highly predicted by what was in the news yesterday), combined with explosive shifts when new topics arise (“friction hypothesis”). Whether these shifts in attention are driven by indexing the actions of government officials, mimicking the actions of other news outlets, or by paying attention to events in the real world, we expect few differences from source to source, but high levels of concentration and friction in both newspapers.

Finally, we emphasize that the discussion above refers to the distribution of stories across all possible topics of attention. It could well be that the papers cover similar sets of issues but slant their coverage in more subtle ways. We will investigate the possibility of this “partisan framing hypothesis” by looking at how political parties are discussed across issues. It might well be that partisan and ideological differences are apparent, but these do not rise to the level of different choice of topics for discussion. Rather, their more subtle impact is seen only by looking more closely at how the same policy issues are framed.

A Comprehensive Analysis

In order to test the various hypotheses we lay out above, and more generally to understand the nature of news coverage of politics in Spain, we have already created a comprehensive and far-reaching dataset. It includes every article from the front pages of two of the most relevant Spanish newspapers—*El País*, and *El Mundo*—from 1996 to 2009. The development of these databases follows the methodology of the Comparative Agendas Project (see www.comparativeagendas.org), a methodology that has already been used by this research team for the creation of databases about the political agenda and public opinion in Spain; here we focus only on the media however. As is typical in the agendas project, we have created a comprehensive database, not a sample. Each story, picture, and illustration that appeared on the front page in either of the two papers during the 14 year time span of our study has been included, approximately 100,000 stories in all.

For each story, we have recorded the title, date of publication, size of headline, story, and photo, information to identify the most important actors or institutions mentioned (ranging from local governments to national and international actors), political parties mentioned, and the topic. The topic of the story is classified according to the 23 major topics and 247 subtopics of the Spanish Policy Agendas project (www.ub.edu/spanishpolicyagendas). We have also created other variables to analyze whether stories refer to elections (national, regional, local or European) morality issues (abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.) or political scandals (by type of scandal and political party involved). As a whole, for each article we have gathered information about 37 different indicators which allow for systematic coding of media agenda.

Each story has been coded by two different coders with a reliability of 93.25 percent at the topic level and 90.35 percent at the subtopic level. This coding is based on the scheme

elaborated by the *Comparative Policy Agendas Project*, led by the Belgian team, directed by S. Walgrave, who has elaborated a specific handbook for the media coding.

The Spanish Media in Context

The ideological fragmentation of readers across newspapers that Hallin and Mancini note for Spain has been in place since the mid-1970s, becoming especially intense in the late-1980s with the creation of *El Mundo*. *El País* was created in 1976 by the media group PRISA, always maintaining a clear connection with the PSOE. By contrast, from its creation in 1989 *El Mundo* became the “relentless inquisitor” of the PSOE governments and a point of media support for conservative elites, especially the PP (Castells 2009, Gunther et al. 1999). Both *El País* and *El Mundo* are parts of two of the largest Spanish media groups, PRISA and UNEDISA respectively. The PRISA group is the largest media group and also controls one of the main radio stations (la SER), different magazines, and *Cuatro*, a TV Channel (formerly the pay-per-view TV, Canal +). UNEDISA is one of the rival media groups that emerged in the late nineties around *Telefónica*, a former state telecommunications monopoly that was privatized by the first conservative government of the PP. This media group has a large impact on generalist and specialist newspapers (*Marca*, specialized on sports is the most read newspaper) and magazines, while its broadcasting activities are weak—a sports radio network (*radio Marca*) and a digital TV Channel (*VeoTV*) with a small audience (Llorens 2010).

These two large media groups have consolidated dominant positions in the Spanish media market for the last decades. Since 1988, several media regulations have been enacted, each oriented to foster liberalization; these have resulted in some mergers among media outlets, and an increasing concentration of power among media groups². Despite this, the Spanish media market has maintained its plural character, with seven medium size private corporations (with the

exception of the Spanish public broadcasting corporation RTVE), owned by media groups and no other industries, and mainly operating at the national level (with the exception of the *grupo Godó* which mainly operates in Catalonia) (Castells 2009).

Fragmentation is especially high in the Spanish newspaper sector. From the early 1980s to 2010, the number of newspapers has been growing steadily although most of them are regional and local newspapers with very small market shares (less than 1 percent). Five newspapers—*El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC*, *El Periódico* and *La Vanguardia*—concentrate most of the readers throughout the period (about 29 percent in the mid-eighties to 20 percent in 2010), with some important variations for the case of *El País* and *El Mundo*. *El País* has been the leading newspaper throughout this period, but its market share has declined in the 1990s after the creation of *El Mundo* (from 18 percent in 1987 to 12 percent in 2004). According to Castells (2009, 256) the professional quality of *El Mundo* and its independence vis-à-vis the socialist government provided a platform for the left-wing critics of Felipe González (in fact, 21 percent of the readers of *El Mundo* were voters of the far- left in 1993), and made it the second largest newspaper in terms of readership. From 1996, there is a clear divide between the readers of both newspapers by party ideology: more than 60% of *El Mundo* readers are voters of the right, and more than 50% are voters of the left with few variations across time.

Increasing fragmentation is not related to the creation of tabloid or sensationalist popular newspapers, as these are almost inexistent in Spain (Bustamante 2000, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). In contrast, from the mid-2000s, free-newspapers—*Metro*, *20 minutes*—and digital newspapers have gained an increasing market share. The first digital newspapers appeared in the mid-1990s, but it was not until 2004 when this source of information gained significant political relevance (in 2009 the number of readers was 3.7 million versus 1.2

million in 2004). Still, in 2010, 80 percent of the readers of newspapers prefer the print option, versus 8 percent that only read digital newspapers, with the rest reading both versions.

Results

Spain indeed has a fragmented and ideologically distinct set of newspapers, and the two papers on which we concentrate here, *El País* and *El Mundo*, have clear partisan identities. In this section we review a range of empirical results that test the hypotheses laid out in the first section.

Topics of Coverage

Table 1 shows the distribution of front-page stories by topic. We define 23 distinct topics of attention (and further subdivide these into some 247 more detailed subtopics as discussed above). The table shows that the main topics of attention are the same in both papers, Justice and crime (21 percent of the stories in *El Mundo*; 16 percent in *El País*), Government Operations (20 percent; 17 percent), Culture and Arts (9; 10), Sports (7; 6), Defense (6; 7), and Rights (6; 7). Similarly, those topics such as foreign trade, agriculture, and public lands and water that receive very little attention in one paper also receive little in the other. Figure 1 shows the data from Table 1 in graphical form, making clear the high correlation between amounts of coverage across the 23 topics; the correlation in fact is 0.98.

(Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about here)

A review of these data suggests that while there are some differences between the papers (more crime coverage in *El Mundo*, for example, more defense and international stories in *El País*), readers of the two papers are getting generally a very similar mix of stories. This suggests that the partisan difference hypothesis may be incorrect though we cannot tell if the party- or media-convergence hypothesis is the cause of this. That is, we see convergence but we cannot distinguish between the party convergence hypothesis and the media convergence hypothesis.

But the evidence is strongly supportive of convergence rather than partisan difference in newspaper coverage.

The Dynamics of Coverage

Not only are the topics of coverage highly correlated, but they appear to follow the same patterns over time. Figure 2 shows the number of stories per month on six select issues.

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

The upper-left graph in Figure 2 shows the number of stories per month on the state of the economy. The economy typically has about 10 stories on the front page of either newspaper, but there are noticeable periods of heightened and lower attention; these are highly similar in the two papers. Agriculture, in the upper-right, shows lower attention overall, but nearly identical peaks of attention in both papers during those rare periods when it hits the front pages. Across all the examples in Figure 2 (and similarly in the cases not shown, for lack of space), the number of stories in one paper is a very strong predictor of the number of stories in the other. The papers may be mimicking each other or they may both be responding to the same cues in the environment, but there is no support for the idea that partisan differences in ideological orientation lead one paper to report on topic X while the other paper is focusing on topic Y. Again, while we cannot distinguish between the partisan and the media-based explanation for this, it is clear that convergence, not divergence, is the rule.

The similarities do not stop at only the choice of topics. The two papers are virtually identical with regards to coverage of policy-relevant versus non-policy topics. Figure 3 shows that the papers are almost identical in the proportion of arts, culture, sports, and human interest stories that they publish on the front page, as compared to the “hard news” of government and public-policy relevant information.

(Insert Figure 3 about here)

These trends also hold over time, as in the previous section. August is clearly a time for non-policy discussion and it makes little difference which paper one considers to reach this conclusion. Figure 4 shows these data. The figure also shows there is no increase over time in the percentage of soft news, in contrast to the soft-news hypothesis, which suggests that competitive market pressures would lead all media outlets to focus increasingly over time on human interest, sports, and culture at the expense of hard news about the economy, justice, and government.

(Insert Figure 4 about here)

Finally, Figure 5 shows a slight difference in the coverage of domestic v. foreign news stories. In spite of its name, *El Mundo* publishes only about 23 percent foreign-focused stories whereas *El País* features about 31 percent international coverage.

(Insert Figure 5 about here)

In both newspapers, foreign stories are typically truly focused on happenings abroad; just 19 (*El País*) or 20 (*El Mundo*) percent of them present a focus on the activities of Spain or of the Spanish abroad.

In sum, a review of the topics of attention, of the percentage of soft news, and of domestic v. foreign coverage shows that there are very few differences between the two papers. The similarities continue when we look at the concentration of attention on just a few topics, and on patterns of how attention shifts from topic to topic over time.

Highly Concentrated Attention

While there may be any number of issues subject to public concern or to official government actions, only a few reach the threshold of newsworthiness to hit the front pages. Figure 6 shows that both newspapers concentrate their attention on an extremely small number of topics.

(Insert Figure 6 about here)

Looking at the right side of the figure, it shows that over 10 percent of all the stories in *El Mundo* were on a single topic and that only a few topics had over 2 percent of coverage, with the rest of the topic areas defined in the Spanish Agendas Project receiving miniscule proportions of the total coverage, or no coverage at all. The left panel in the Figure shows an almost identical pattern for *El País*. Figure 7 and Table 2 show exactly what those topics of high attention are, for the two papers.

(Insert Figure 7 about here)

Figure 7 lists the topics receiving more than 1 percent of the total coverage. As is clear, the topics are similar in the two papers. The topic numbers in the legend of the figure are reproduced in Table 2, which gives a short description of the topics that dominate attention in the two papers.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

Table 2 lists the top 20 topics of attention and makes clear that terrorism, corruption, war, political parties and campaigns dominate the front pages, as do certain broad categories such as sports, culture, and performing arts. The cumulative percentages listed make clear that just 20 topics constitute 50 percent of the agenda for *El País*, and 56 percent for *El Mundo*. Further, as is clear by perusing the table, the individual topics may vary slightly in order, but they are highly similar across the two newspapers. So we see very strong support for the concentration of

attention hypothesis, and only minor differences between the two papers both in the topics of highest attention and in the degree of skew in coverage.

Stability and Explosive Shifts in Attention

Attention naturally changes from topic to topic as the news evolves. We saw in Figure 2 for example that attention to any particular topic can be highly unstable, moving up and down in a particular month as events, other news, and the actions of newsworthy actors in the political system affect the newspapers. Naturally, some topics typically gain more attention than others. Looking at how attention shifts over time, some months might be expected to produce slightly more Economics news than others, for example, or less Foreign Trade news than the month before. If there were no institutionalized routines, and if the events in society were evolving according to a large number of different and unrelated factors, then the Central Limit Theorem would guarantee that the distribution of changes in attention would be approximately Normal, producing a bell-shaped curve (see Jones and Baumgartner 2005 for a more detailed explanation of these dynamics). Figure 8 shows the relevant distribution of month-to-month changes in attention to the 23 major topics in the Spanish Agendas Project.

(Insert Figure 8 about here)

The figure shows very similar patterns in both newspapers suggesting a high degree of friction in the process of newsmaking. That is, changes are highly clustered around zero, meaning that the number of stories in a given month is likely to be very close to the number in the previous month (in the figure we eliminate all observations where there are no stories, to avoid an over-inflation of zeros based on no coverage at all). But when new topics emerge on the front pages, shifts in attention can be highly explosive. The distribution is simultaneously peaked at zero and with a “fat tail” going out to the right, evidence of a process with great

friction: little change most of the time, but explosive rather than moderate change when it occurs.

Partisanship Beneath the Similarities: Framing the Enemy

In a highly politicized media environment one might also expect that the newspapers would not treat their allies and their rivals equally. In this section, we review how the parties are discussed. First, it is important to note how rarely parties are discussed: From 2000 through 2009, just 15 percent of stories in *El País* and 22 percent of stories had any mention of a political party. Further, discussion of parties is highly focused on just a few topics of attention. Figure 9 shows the distribution of attention for those stories that mention any political party with the same distribution shown in Figure 1 above, which includes all newspaper stories.

(Insert Figure 9 about here)

In Figure 1 we showed that there were few differences between the two papers in the choice of topics they cover. We repeat that analysis in the upper-left graph in Figure 9, combining the two newspapers together. The data show a relatively wide spread of attention across the 19 major topics of the Spanish Agendas Project, with no individual topic receiving more than 20 percent of the total attention. In the upper-right panel, we show the same distribution but limit the analysis to those stories mentioning a political party. Elections, corruption, regional autonomy, and other issues categories in Government Operations dominate; this single category represents half of all the party-related stories. In the lower half of the figure we sort the data in descending order of frequency to make clear that attention related to political parties is almost exclusively limited to: Government Operations, Justice, Rights, and Macroeconomics. This is an important first observation. For, even if the newspapers are

differentially framing the parties with respect to health care, for example, there is so little discussion of such matters that it is unlikely to have a significant effect on readers.

Which parties are the focus of which newspaper? Figure 10 shows the distribution.

(Insert Figure 10 about here)

Both parties focus substantially on just the two major parties. We combine related parties into just five categories: PP, PSOE, Basque, Catalan, Far Left, and Other. The newspapers focus heavily on the dominant PP and PSOE, which account for 74 percent of the political party mentions. For *El País*, the PP gets slightly more attention than the PSOE, while the reverse is true for *El Mundo*. The papers focus on their partisan rivals, not their allies. With the exception of certain issues where the Basque parties are prominently discussed, and in the case of regional autonomy where the Catalan parties are also featured, there is very little diversity in the discussion of political parties in the main Spanish newspapers. Parties of the far left in particular, as well as other small parties, are virtually ignored.

Figure 11 shows that the general tendency of papers to focus on their opponents rather than their allies holds in different topic areas, and also the particular place held by the Basque and Catalan political parties. Virtually ignored when attention focuses for example on the economy, they are highly prominent when attention shifts to regional issues, justice, or political rights.

(Insert Figure 11 about here)

Figure 11 presents a wealth of information and on two different topics: the position of the Basque and Catalan parties, and the tendency of the papers to focus on their rivals rather than their allies. Basque parties are highly visible in the cases of: terrorism, political rights, elections, regional autonomy, justice, and civil rights. Catalan parties show relatively prominently only in

the case of regional autonomy. When attention focuses on the economy, or on corruption scandals, the regional parties virtually disappear. Further, *El País* has a higher focus on the activities of the PP and *El Mundo*, on the PSOE.

Finally, we can show more clearly the desire of the newspapers to make their rivals appear in the worst political light by comparing coverage of the PP and the PSOE in the two papers across those topics where there is substantial attention. Recall from Figure 9 that discussion of political parties is highly concentrated on just a few topics. Figure 12 below shows the relative attention to the PP as compared to the PSOE in the two papers for those topic areas, as well as those more specific policy subtopics where we have enough observations to have confidence in the results. The data are calculated so that a value of zero would indicate that of all stories mentioning either the PP or the PSOE, an equal percentage mentions each party. Negative values show a greater focus on the PP, and positive values show a greater focus on the PSOE. If the papers focus on their rivals, then *El Mundo* should have positive values and *El País* negative ones.

(Insert Figure 12 about here)

In general, the papers focus on their partisan rivals, not their allies. This is particularly so in the case of corruption for *El País*, where 75 percent of the two-party coverage is related to the PP. Similarly in *El Mundo*, 76 percent of economics-related coverage is focused on the PSOE, though the overall trends across all topic areas combined are not as stark. We mentioned in the introductory section to this article that *El Mundo* was established with the goal of being the “relentless inquisitor” of the PSOE, and it appears to live up to this goal.

Conclusions

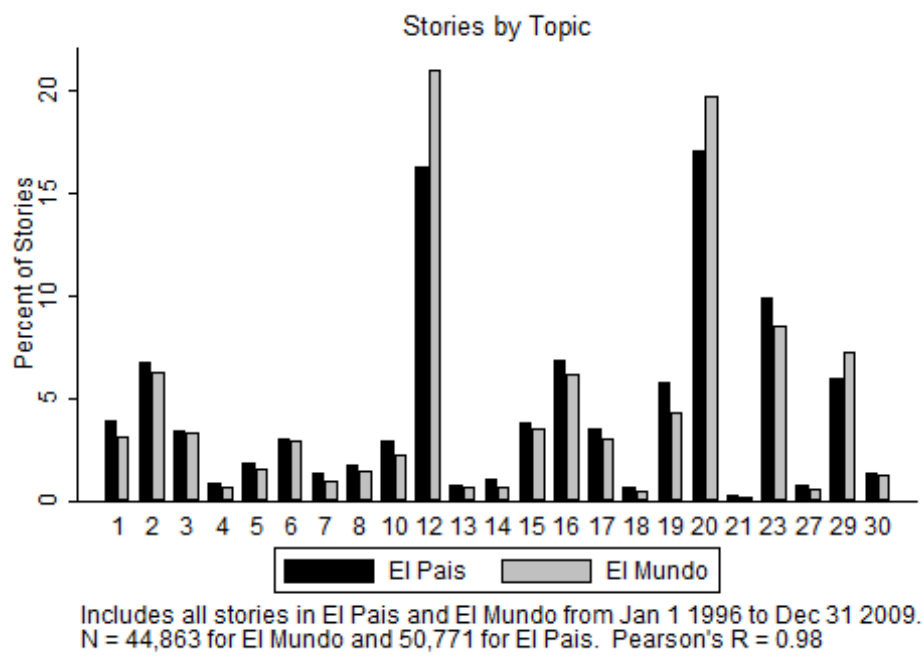
The Spanish media system is highly partisan. Readership and editorial preferences are substantially divided by party preference. In this environment, it is easy to expect that the papers could contribute substantially to a system where supporters of different parties experience politics in substantially different ways. Journalistic norms of what is newsworthy, on the other hand, require that major events receive treatment. We find, based on a large-scale assessment of the content of all stories appearing on the front pages of *El País* and *El Mundo*, that the papers differ little in many important aspects: they cover the same topic areas, they cover similar percentages of “soft news” (and this does not increase over time), they focus attention equally on certain topics to the detriment of others, and they show substantial “friction” in how they shift attention from topic to topic over time. In all these ways, the papers are highly similar. In about one-fifth of the stories, a political party is explicitly mentioned. Within this group of stories, we do find some differences. Overall, *El Mundo* is highly focused on its declared enemy, the PSOE. Both papers treat the parties substantially differently depending on the topic of coverage. Regional parties are generally ignored, except on those topics with an explicit regional focus. Extreme parties are virtually always ignored, to a much greater degree than their electoral support might suggest readers would prefer. While some of the discussion of the regional parties may be good news for that party, for the most part, it is clear that parties cannot control their own image in the media. This is because it is the rival paper, not the allied one, that typically wants to “make news” out of the actions of a political leader. From the perspective of the leadership of either of the two main parties in Spain, it is clear that no news is good news.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. News Coverage in *El País* and *El Mundo*, by Topic, 1996 to 2010.

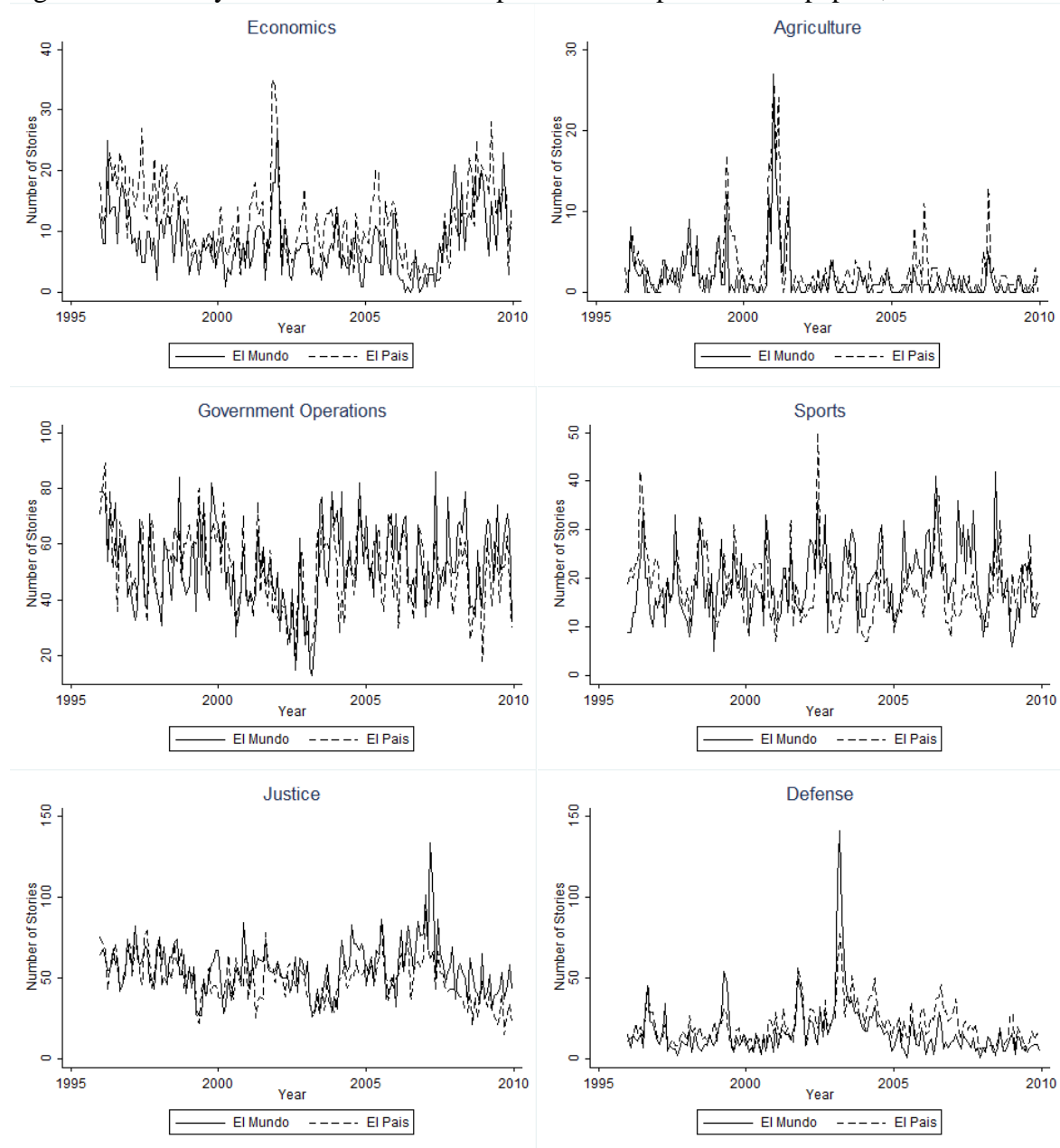
Topic	Description	<i>El Mundo</i>		<i>El País</i>	
		N	%	N	%
1	Economy	1,399	3.12	1,994	3.93
2	Rights	2,792	6.22	3,442	6.78
3	Health	1,485	3.31	1,735	3.42
4	Agriculture	303	0.68	445	0.88
5	Labor	723	1.61	925	1.82
6	Education	1,320	2.94	1,555	3.06
7	Environment	444	0.99	673	1.33
8	Energy	676	1.51	893	1.76
10	Transport	1,031	2.30	1,480	2.92
12	Justice	9,369	20.88	8,249	16.25
13	Social	297	0.66	410	0.81
14	Housing	312	0.70	545	1.07
15	Business	1,573	3.51	1,932	3.81
16	Defense	2,761	6.15	3,473	6.84
17	Science	1,368	3.05	1,802	3.55
18	Foreign Trade	212	0.47	332	0.65
19	International	1,939	4.32	2,923	5.76
20	Government	8,840	19.70	8,628	16.99
21	Public Lands	69	0.15	165	0.32
23	Culture	3,829	8.53	5,032	9.91
27	Weather	283	0.63	405	0.80
29	Sports	3,260	7.27	3,038	5.98
30	Death Notices	578	1.29	695	1.37
	Total	44,863	100.00	50,771	100.00

Figure 1. Topics of Coverage in Two Spanish Newspapers.



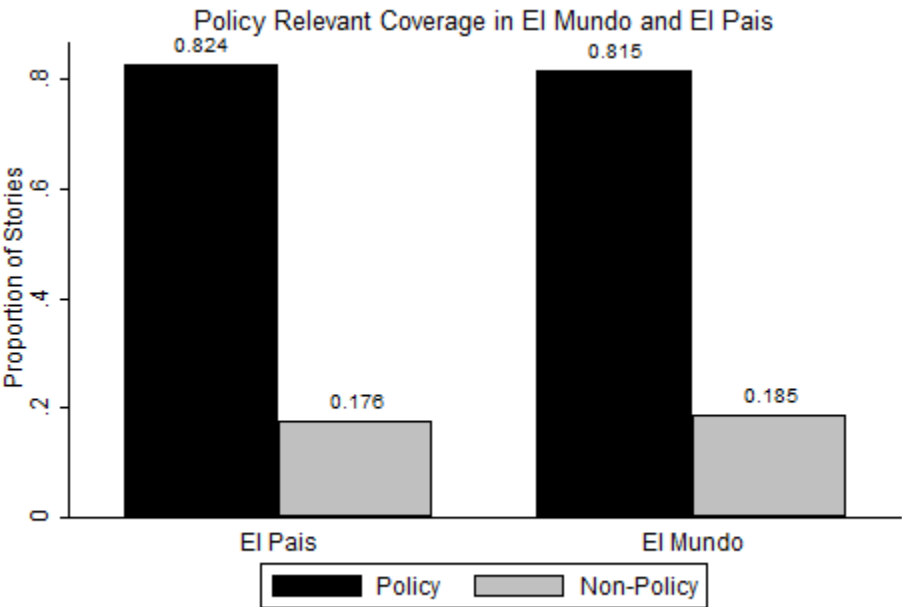
Note: See Table 1 for exact numbers and percentages.

Figure 2. Monthly Stories on Selected Topics in Two Spanish Newspapers, 1996 to 2010.



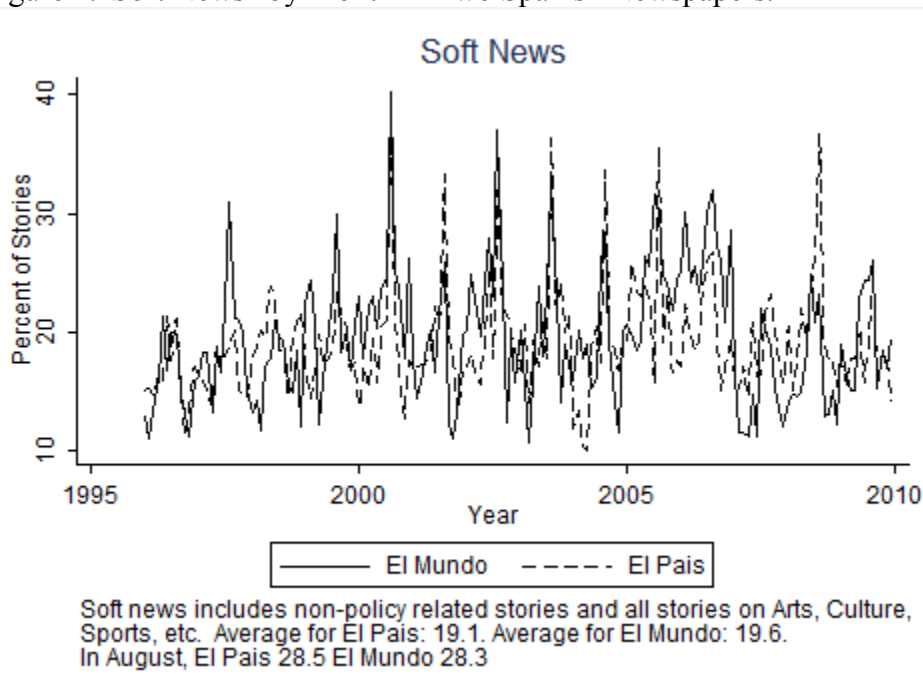
Note: The figures show the number of stories per month on selected topics in El País and *El Mundo* from 1996 through 2010. The number of stories on each topic is typically highly correlated between the two newspapers.

Figure 3. Policy and Non-Policy Coverage.



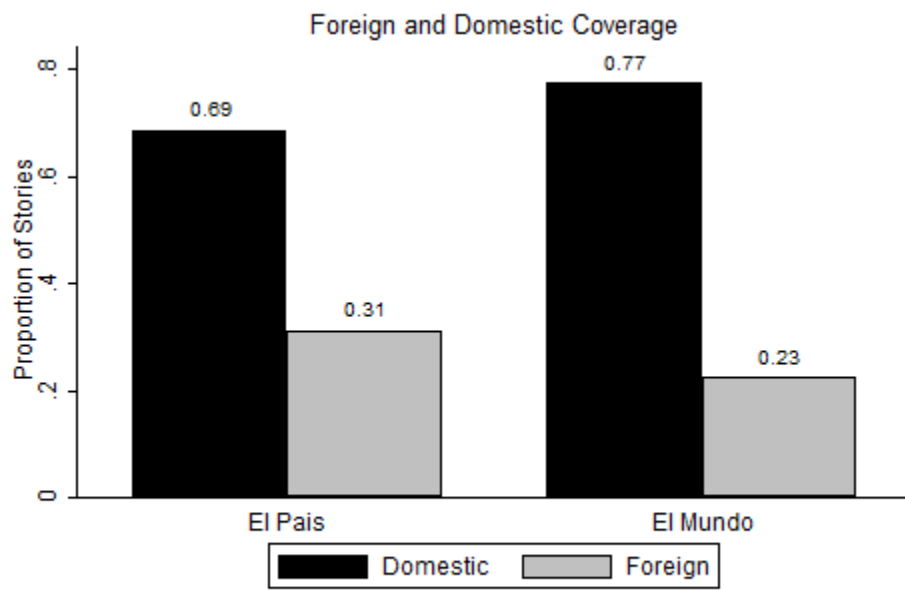
Based on 50,771 articles in El Pais and 44,863 in El Mundo, 1996 to 2009.

Figure 4. “Soft News” by Month in Two Spanish Newspapers.



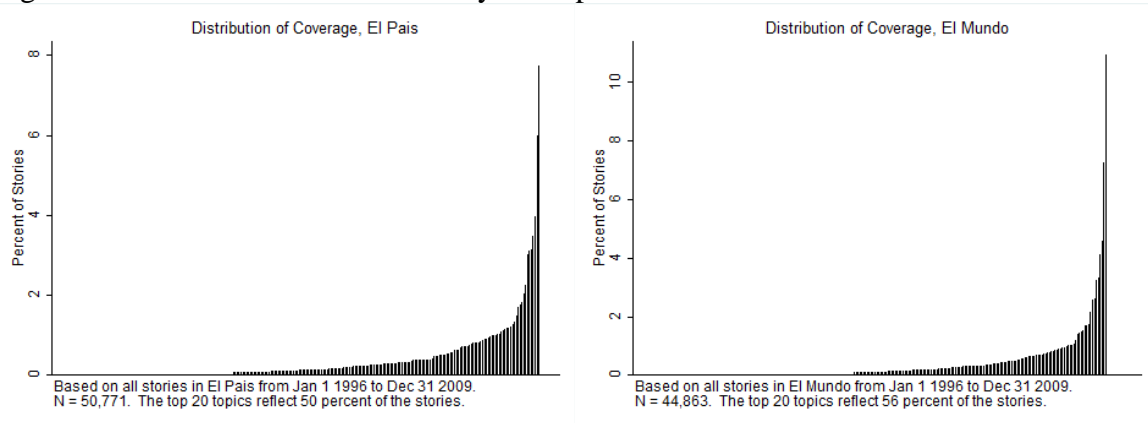
Note: Soft news includes both stories on any topic that include only human-interest element, with no discussion of public policy as well as all stories on topics 23 through 30; see Table 1 for a list of these topics. The peaks of non-policy coverage relate to the calendar: July and especially August have very high percentages of non-policy coverage on the front pages.

Figure 5. Domestic and International Coverage.



Includes all stories in El Pais and El Mundo from Jan 1 1996 to Dec 31 2009.
N = 44,863 for El Mundo and 50,771 for El Pais.

Figure 6. The Distribution of Stories by Subtopic.



In both newspapers, coverage is highly concentrated on just a few subtopics.

Figure 7. The Topics with Greatest Attention, by Newspaper.

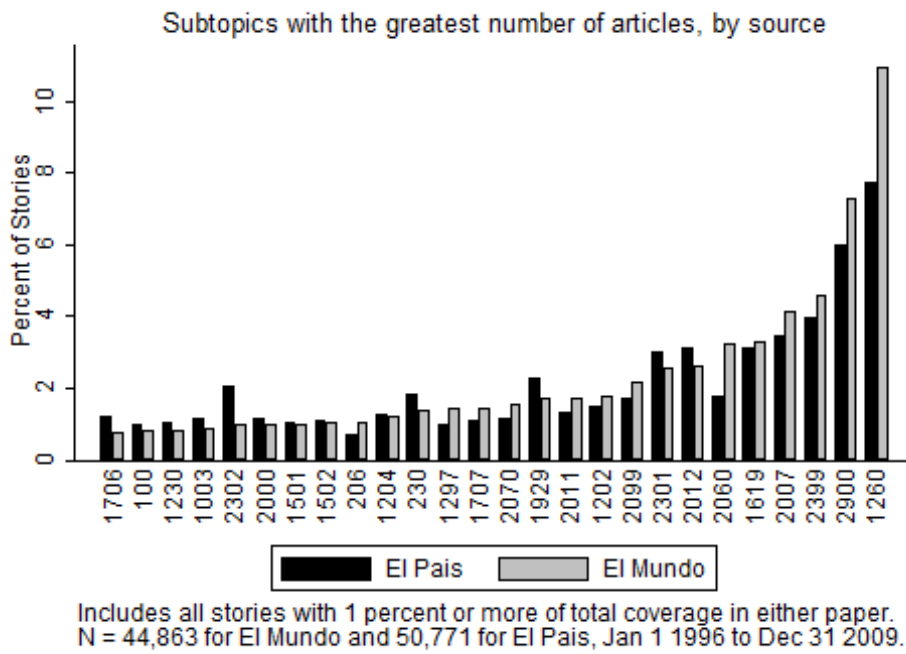
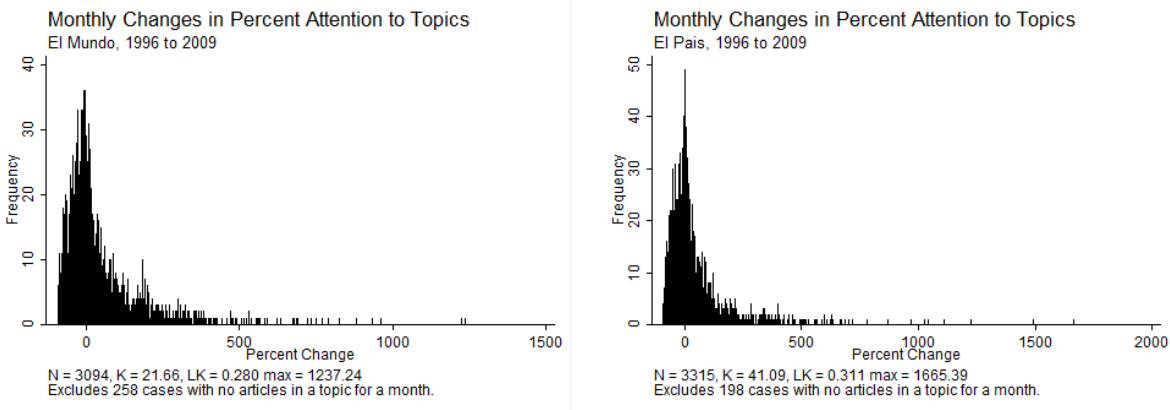
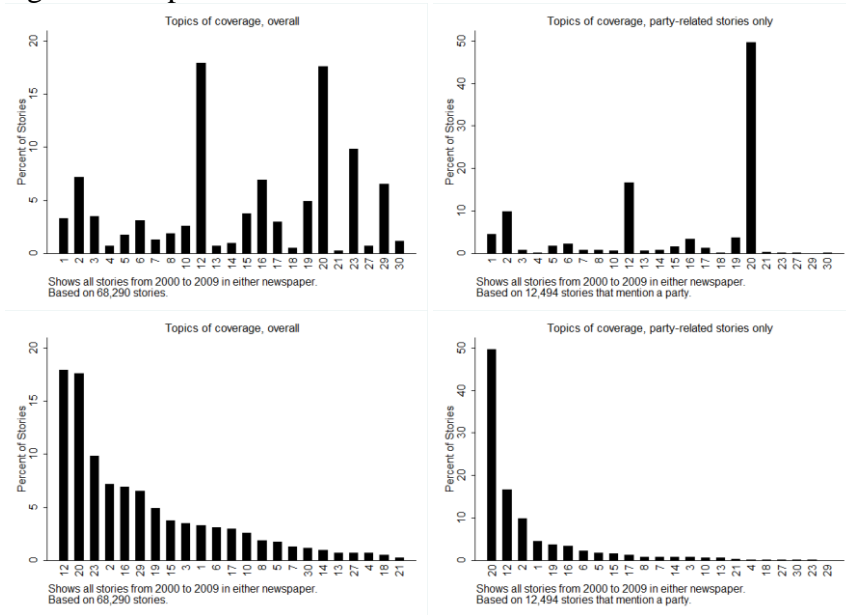


Figure 8. Patterns of Change in Attention in Two Spanish Newspapers, 1996 to 2010.



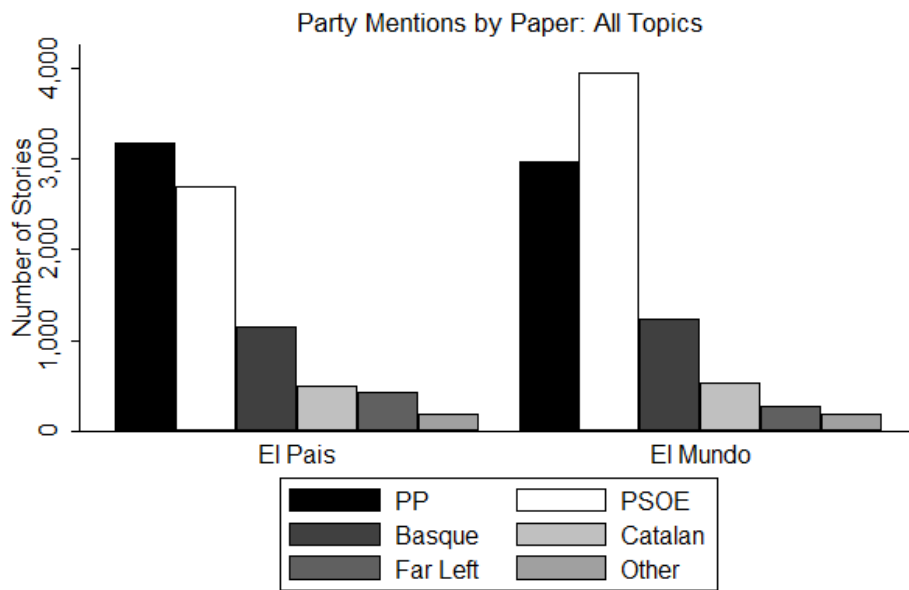
Note: The distributions show that from one month to the next, the number of stories on a given topic is typically very similar to what it was in the previous month (e.g., the monthly change value is close to zero). However, the distributions also show extremely great change on a relatively large number of cases. These are when the papers publish a great number of articles on a topic that they had relatively ignored in the previous month. K and LK scores show that the distributions are far from a normal distribution, which would occur if the monthly changes were random.

Figure 9. Topics on which Parties are Mentioned.



Note: the upper left figure repeats the data from Figure 1, but combines both newspapers. The upper-right figure shows the same distribution for those stories that mention any political party. The lower figures show the same data but are sorted in descending order of frequency.

Figure 10. Political Parties Mentioned, by Newspaper.



Shows number of stories that mention each party.
Date of coverage: 2000 to 2009.

Figure 11. Party Mentions in Different Topic Areas.

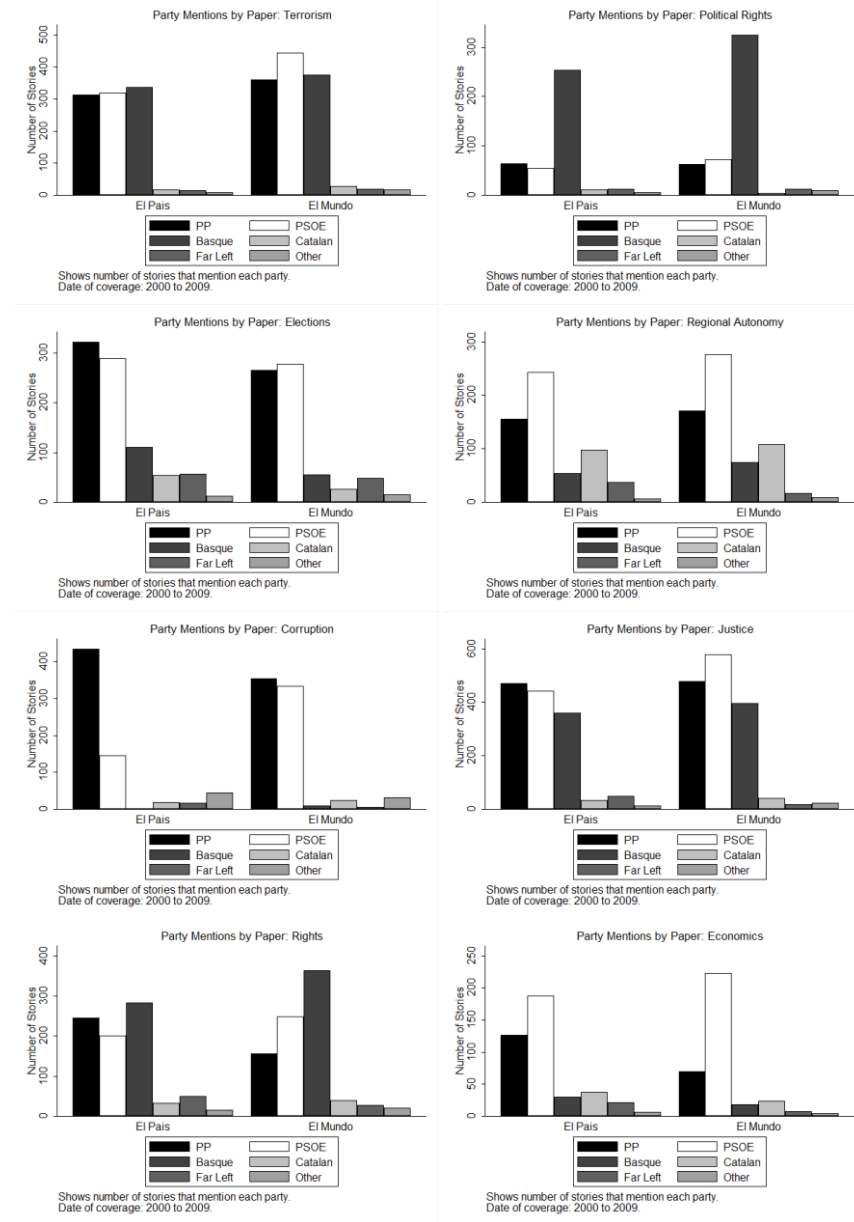
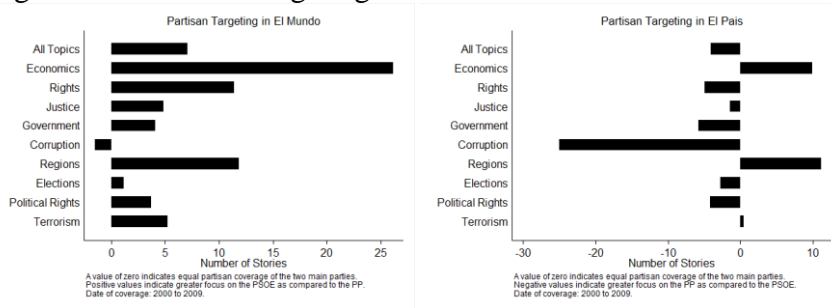
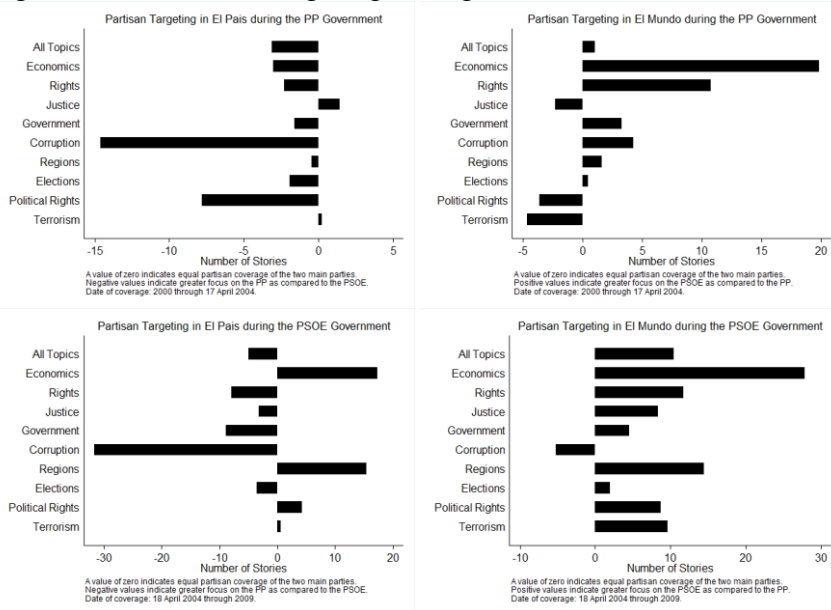


Figure 12. Partisan Targeting.



Note: A value of zero would indicate that of all stories mentioning either the PP or the PSOE, an equal percentage mentions the PP. Negative values show a greater focus on the PP, and positive values show a greater focus on the PSOE.

Figure 12a. Partisan Targeting during PP and PSOE Periods of Government



Note: The figure shows that the trends in Figure 12 are relatively unaffected when we look only at the period when the PP was in government (upper graphs) as compared to the period after 17 April 2004 when the PSOE was in power (lower graphs).

Table 2. The concentration of Attention in a Small Number of Topics.

El País					<i>El Mundo</i>				
Topic	Description	N	%	Cum. %	Topic	Description	N	%	Cum. %
1260	Terrorism	3,933	7.75	7.75	1260	Terrorism	4,897	10.92	10.92
2900	Sports	3,038	5.98	13.73	2900	Sports	3,260	7.27	18.18
2399	Culture	2,013	3.96	17.70	2399	Culture	2,061	4.59	22.78
2007	Political corruption	1,760	3.47	21.16	2007	Political corruption	1,846	4.11	26.89
1619	War	1,601	3.15	24.32	1619	War	1,482	3.30	30.19
2012	Electoral campaigns	1,573	3.10	27.41	2060	Political parties	1,461	3.26	33.45
2301	Performing arts	1,527	3.01	30.42	2012	Electoral campaigns	1,170	2.61	36.06
1929	Diplomacy	1,146	2.26	32.68	2301	Performing arts	1,156	2.58	38.64
2302	Culture and literature	1,037	2.04	34.72	2099	Other gov't activities	974	2.17	40.81
230	Immigration	920	1.81	36.53	1202	Organized crime	785	1.75	42.56
2060	Political parties	888	1.75	38.28	2011	Gov't-Parl. relations	764	1.70	44.26
2099	Other gov't activities	859	1.69	39.97	1929	Diplomacy	763	1.70	45.96
1202	Organized crime	750	1.48	41.45	2070	Decentralization	685	1.53	47.49
2011	Gov't-Parl. relations	671	1.32	42.77	1707	Media	656	1.46	48.95
1204	Judicial Reform	648	1.28	44.05	1297	Crime	641	1.43	50.38
1706	Telecommunications	609	1.20	45.25	230	Immigration	625	1.39	51.77
2000	General gov't	599	1.18	46.43	1204	Judicial reform	542	1.21	52.98
1003	Air transport	598	1.18	47.61	206	Political rights	474	1.06	54.04
2070	Decentralization	585	1.15	48.76	1502	Stock market	466	1.04	55.07
1502	Stock market	569	1.12	49.88	1501	Banking	454	1.01	56.09
233 additional sub topics		25,447	50.12	100.00	225 additional sub topics		19,701	43.91	100.00
Total		50,771	100.00		Total		44,863	100.00	

Attention in both papers is highly concentrated in just a few topic areas.

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Notes

¹Hallin and Mancini (2004) classify media systems in three different groups—liberal (US and UK), democratic corporatist (which prevails in northern Europe) and polarized pluralist (most common in the Mediterranean countries)—according to four different factors (state intervention, political parallelism, media markets historical development and journalistic professionalism).

² Existing regulations prevent them from monopolizing the media system. This constitutes an important difference with other countries like Italy or France, and it is explained by two main factors. First, the cross-media ownership rules limit the vertical integration of different media outlets from newspapers to magazines, radio, and TV. Second, strict regulations remain in place to protect pluralism and thus to prevent monopolistic situations from arising (Llorens 2010, 850).