
Special issue
Political communication

Miljana Micovic
m.micovic@nextibs.com
Professor. Next International
Business School. Universitat de
Barcelona, Spain.

María Gallego-Reguera
m.gallego@nextibs.com
Professor. Next International
Business School. Universidad
Internacional Menéndez Pelayo.

Submitted
November 21, 2016
Approved
March 13, 2017

© 2017
Communication & Society
ISSN 0214-0039
E ISSN 2386-7876
doi: 10.15581/003.30.3.185-199
www.communication-society.com

2017 – Vol. 30(3)
pp. 185-199

How to cite this article:
Micovic, M. & Gallego-Reguera, M.
(2017). Analysis and comparison of
the general election debates in
Spain (2015 & 2016) and Serbia
(2016): new television formats for
new political scenarios.
Communication & Society 30(3),
185-199.

Analysis and comparison of the general election debates in Spain (2015 & 2016) and Serbia (2016): new television formats for new political scenarios

Abstract

The history of election debates is a clear reflection of the political context of a country at such an important moment as the general elections. Spain and Serbia are two countries of different democratic culture and political reality; however, in the two states there is a recent tradition of political debates that are organized in general, parliamentary and presidential election campaigns. The main objective of this study is a comparative analysis of the format of these electoral television programs in order to observe the results, the main similarities and differences in the realization, the discussed topics, the role of the moderators and the spatial and temporal distribution. In Spain, before the general elections in 2015, three debates were organized between two candidates (PP-PSOE), among three (PSOE-Podemos-Ciudadanos) and four candidates (PP-PSOE-Podemos-Ciudadanos). The debates were organized by the Academy of Television Sciences and Arts, El País Digital and Atresmedia group, respectively. In June 2016, new general elections were held in Spain because the political parties failed to form a government with previous results. This time only one debate was organized among four candidates (PP-PSOE-Podemos-Ciudadanos). On the other hand, in the last parliamentary elections in Serbia, on April 24, 2016, three debates were organized, on 19, 20 and 21 April, in which participated up to 10 parties and citizens' movements. All debates were organized by Radio Television of Serbia and the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID).

Keywords

Debate, general elections, Serbia, Spain, television formats, audiovisual

1. Introduction

The following study analyses and compares the new formats of the debates that took place in Serbia and Spain in 2015 and 2016, with the

objective of identifying the differences and similarities between them. The debate analysis dates back to the times of Nixon-Kennedy (Roper, 1960). Since then, its study has aroused interest among scholars, in a context of evolution towards medialization and spectacularization (Benoit, 2002; Mazzoleni, 1998/2010). Over the years, the scientific community has proved that in an election, debates seldom modify the subsequent vote. They do, however, have an informative and pedagogical justification. It seems that debates reinforce the tendencies of the audience, yet they can always influence those who are undecided (Hagner & Rieselbach, 1978/1980; McLeod & Chafee, 1972).

The present research is framed in the comparative studies of election debates. As all the scholars in political communication stress, there is a lack of research in this field. McKinney and Carlin (2004: 228) point out the usefulness of international debate analysis as a comparative, intercultural approach would allow scholars to have a better understanding of the similarities and differences of debates in different countries, in terms of content and effects. It's also important to note that this type of comparative research is now trending in the European sphere. According to Swanson (1995: 4), the study of political communication is turning more comparative, being characteristically different across countries, but also sharing certain similarities.

Spanish and Serbian political contexts present few similarities, given that in Spain, democracy and liberty of expression has been present for decades, whereas in the 90s, Serbia was immersed in a process of transition to democracy after the Slobodan Milosevic's regime, which characterizes it as a young democracy. However, the election debates happen to have comparable formats. In both countries, high-level elections that correspond to the same chronological moment are analysed, and therefore can be compared as current political communication tools. Therefore, this is a comparative study between different countries that aims to contribute to the research of election debates, which, as previously mentioned, is scarce.

2. Theoretical framework and context

The format of presidential debates and its influence on the development of political programmes and citizens has been one of the most analysed types of research having to do with political communication. For instance, McKinney and Carlin (2004: 10) point out that whereas experts and journalists are still arguing about the ideal format for debates, scholars have abandoned that discussion. Zarefsky (1999) supports the idea that there is room for discussion because debate can have different formats. Other researchers consider that the format of the debate can also influence in the reasoning and behaviour of the candidates. Kraus (1988: 21) claims that it can hinder the development of a solid argumentative thread. Likewise, Lanoue and Schrott (1991) consider that the debates are a joint press conference because they do not fulfill their real potential as political argumentation exercises. In this line, Pfau (1984: 13) claims that "Some approaches trigger the conflict; other don't. Some obtain substantial answer, others don't". Some other authors have researched the influence of the format, like Carlin, Howard, Stanfield & Reynolds (1991). However, McKinney and Carlin (2004) warn that there is still a strong need for further research in the field.

It must be taken in consideration that there are three classic debate formats: moderated debates, panel debates, and town hall debates (Schroeder, 2012). The candidates themselves prefer to know the format because they believe that if they study and master every detail, they can better control their performance and feel more self-confident. That's why broadcasted debates are so heavily negotiated.

The role of the moderator in a debate is, or should be, fully neutral. They organise turns, balance the times and the order of interventions, orientate and control the speakers' discussions (Cebrián Herreros, 1992: 342). Occasionally, they may act as a representative of

the audience, stressing topics that are of particular interest, never making value judgments nor identifying themselves with either contender. The moderator should propose new topics, suggest leaving behind those which have already been discussed at length, modify the discussion along the way if needed, and interrupt the participants if they do not respect the speaking time. As Schroeder (2008: 191) claims, the moderator should be acceptable for each candidate, as well as for the sponsors, the press and the voters.

Despite the short tradition and the interruption of high-level debates in Spain, we can find relevant scientific interest in its research. We can underline the contribution to the field of theoretical and practical analysis of election debates in Spain by Campo Vidal (2013), Canel (2006), Castells (2009), Díez Nicolás & Semetko (1995), Gallego Reguera (2009, 2012, 2016), Marín (2003), Ruiz Contreras (2007), Santamaría (2012) and Vidal Riera (1997), as well as the international comparative studies carried out by Schoreder (2012) with the United States of America, and Micovic (2012, 2014) with Serbia.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the existing bibliography for communication tools for campaigns in Serbia is very scarce. It is a challenge to find an article about the debates in Slavujevic's book (2007). There is some relevant data in Matic's doctoral thesis (2006), which addresses the topic of the usage of television in Serbian campaigns from 1990 to 2000. There is also a compilation of studies by Mihailovic (2008) about the 2008 presidential campaign with reflections on the election debates derived from the results of different types of analysis.

2.1. Debates in Spain in 2015 and 2016

In Spain, the history of debates is relatively short and is deeply marked by the two-party Spanish system. They began back in 1993 with a head-to-head debate between Felipe González (PSOE) y José María Aznar (PP), and were not seen again until 2008, when José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) and Mariano Rajoy (PP) faced each other twice. In the following elections in 2011, there was a single head-to-head debate between Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba (PSOE) and Mariano Rajoy (PP).

Faced with the new political context marked by the collapse of the two-party system (Boix & López-García, 2014) and the boom of new leaders and communication strategies (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra, & Tormey, 2016; López-García, 2016; Sánchez Duarte, 2016; Del Olmo, Ruiz, & Díaz, 2016; Rodríguez Andrés, 2016) which were used in the subsequent general election on December 20th 2015, there were proposals to organise debates among the four main parties: PP, PSOE, Podemos y Ciudadanos. On February 25th 2015, once the State of the Nation Debate was already in full swing, Pablo Iglesias challenged Rajoy for a head-to-head debate, trying to take a stance as the main candidate to the Presidency of Spain (Mateos, 2015). Following their campaign strategy, the People's Party decided that its leader only debated with the PSOE and rejected the proposals coming from new political parties.

On Monday, November 30th 2015, the Spanish newspaper *El País* (PRISA group) organised the first campaign debate between Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos). It was broadcasted both online and on live radio by *Cadena Ser*. The meeting was moderated by the journalist Carlos Vega, and the absence of Mariano Rajoy was evident by the presence of an empty stand that would have corresponded to him had he joined the debate.

The second debate of the 2015 campaign took place on Monday, December 7th, and was organised by the *Atresmedia Group*. This time, the contenders were Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), along with the representative of the PP, the Deputy Prime Minister of Spain, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría. This meeting was the so-called "7D: The decisive debate" (7D: *El debate decisivo* in Spanish) and was moderated by the journalists Ana Pastor (*La Sexta*) and Vicente Vallés (*Antena 3 Televisión*).

Mariano Rajoy (PP) only attended a single head-to-head debate with Pedro Sánchez (PSOE), which was on Monday, December 14th. This debate was organised by the Spanish Academy of Television and moderated by the journalist and president of the Academy, Manuel Campo Vidal. The debate was broadcasted online and on all the channels that applied for it, among which were *La 1 (TVE)*, *Antena 3 Televisión* and *La Sexta*.

Faced with the inability to re-form the government after the general election on December 20th 2015, new elections were called for June 26th 2016. During this election campaign, Mariano Rajoy agreed to partake in the four-sided debates, and Podemos joined forces with IU, Equo, and other left-wing formations under the name “Unidos Podemos”. This one-time four-sided debate took place in the Spanish Academy of Television on Monday, June 13th 2016, and was moderated by Ana Blanco (La 1, TVE), Pedro Piqueras (Telecinco), and Vicente Vallés (Antena 3 Television).

2.2. 2016 debates in Serbia

Debates in Serbia began to take place in the nineties, during Milosevic’s regime. Although he never participated in a debate himself, other Serbian politicians faced off on television on different types of programmes. Firstly, debates among more than two candidates (1990, 1992) were organised by local channels, whereas the first head-to-head debate took place in 1997 and was organised by the national television system. The changes in Serbian politics occurred in 2000, when Milosevic’s regime ended and the Democrats Alliance (DOS) came to power. There were no debates that year, but in the following years to date, there have been debates in 2002, 2004, 2008, and 2012. In 2012 and 2016, a period in which Serbia was still considered to be a young democracy, there were debates among more candidates that represented the leading parties in the parliamentary elections. These meetings were organised by the public television system (RTS).

During the 2016 Serbian parliamentary election campaign, there were three debates. As they did in 2012, they organised a series of debates named “Word over Word,” organised by the RTS (Radio Television of Serbia) and the Center of Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)¹.

Prior to discussing these three events further, it is worth mentioning that the “Word over Word” debates have taken place every year since 2012 during each election campaign in Serbia. They are done outside of election periods so that citizens can have direct access and contact to their political representatives. They have support from a project called *Connect People with Politicians* which is supported by the Agency of the United States for the International Development (USAID) and the Institute of International Democracy (IID). These organisations have provided guidelines about the rules, format, and the production of debates. Given the fact that debates have been taking place consistently, one can argue that debates in Serbia are already a part of all the election campaigns.

In the 2016 Serbian campaign, three debates took place on April 19th, 20th and 21st, all of them broadcast live at 9pm in the filming set of RTS. One difference with Spain is that CeSID and RTS are the ones who invite the parties to participate in the debates. The moderator and director of the three debates, Zoran Stanojevic², sends an invitation letter begging the political parties to communicate as soon as possible who will be the representative.

The debates were divided into two groups according to who the participants were and the topics to be discussed. The debates with the first group took place April 19th and 20th, with ten candidates (five representatives from five different parties per day), whereas

¹ CeSID is a member of the International Debates Organisation that addresses this issue in several countries in the world (<http://www.debatesinternational.org/>).

² Zoran Stanojevic provided the invitation letters to the authors of this article.

second group's debates were held April 21st with seven candidates who represented seven out of ten lists that debated the previous days. The first debates lasted 75 minutes, and the last one lasted 90.

The candidates that participated in the first debate were: Milenko Jovanov (Serbian Progressive Party), Vladimir Pavicevic (Coalition – Democrat Party, DSHV, ZZS), Sanda Raskovic Ivic (Dveri – Serbian Democrat Party), Borko Stefanovic (Serbia for All of Us) and Miroslav Parovic (Together for Serbia – Popular Alliance). The participants in the second debate were: Zarko Obradovic (Socialist Party – United Serbia), Nemanja Sarovic (Radical Serbian Party), Cedimir Jovanovic (Alliance for a Better Serbia), Milica Djurdjevic (For Free Serbia), and Aleksandar Stevanovic (Enough).

Lastly, the third debate had participation from the party leaders: Aleksandar Martinovic (Progressive Party), Bojan Pajtic (Coalition – Democrat Party, DSHV, ZZS), Dusan Bajatovic (Socialist Party – United Serbia), Nemanja Sarovic (Radical Serbian Party), Bosko Obradovic (Dveri – Serbian Democrat Party), Boris Tadic (Alliance for a Better Serbia) y Sasa Radulovic (Enough). Two parties, the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party, did not participate.

3. Methodology

The main goal of this research is to carry out a comparative analysis of a concrete politics genre, the broadcasted debate, with the aim of achieving relevant conclusions about the similarities and differences of such genre between the communicative traditions of Spain and Serbia. The analysis of the format of the debates in both countries consists of observing the conditions and rules of the development of the programmes regarding its production and its staging.

This study aims at contributing to the comparative research of election debates, which is a political communication tool that has been scarcely researched both in Serbia and Spain. In order to do so, the study presents significant data of the history of debates, presents the debates that are object of study and carries out an analysis of the format of the programmes that took place in both countries during the election campaigns of 2015 and 2016. This study is based on the audiovisual corpus, entirely available online, which includes all the first-level debates that took place in the 2015 and 2016 campaigns (Table 1).

Table 1. The general election debates in Spain (2015 & 2016) and Serbia (2016)

Country (date)	Debate	Organising entity	Participantss (Party)	Moderator(s)
Spain (30/11/2015)	"El País Debate"	<i>El País (Prisa)</i>	Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	Carlos Vega
Spain (7/12/2015)	"7D: The Decisive Debate"	Atresmedia	Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría (PP) Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) Pablo Iglesias (Podemos)	Ana Pastor Vicente Vallés
Spain (14/12/2015)	"Cara a Cara 2015"	Academy of Arts and Sciences of Television	Mariano Rajoy (PP) Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	Manuel Campo Vidal
Spain (13/06/2016)	"Deb4te"	Academy of Arts and Sciences of Television	Mariano Rajoy (PP) Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) Pablo Iglesias (Unidos Podemos)	Ana Blanco Pedro Piqueras Vicente Vallés

Micovic, M. & Gallego-Reguera, M.
**Analysis and comparison of the general election debates in Spain (2015 & 2016) and Serbia (2016):
 new television formats for new political scenarios**

Serbia (19/04/2016)	“Word over Word”	RTS and CeSID	Milenko Jovanov (Serbian Progressive Party) Vladimir Pavicevic (Coalition – Democrat Party, DSHV, ZZS), Sanda Raskovic Ivic (Dveri – Serbian Democrat Party), Borko Stefanovic (Serbia for All of Us) y Miroslav Parovic (Together for Serbia – Popular Alliance)	Zoran Stanojevic
Serbia (20/04/2016)	“Word over Word”	RTS and CeSID	Zarko Obradovic (Socialst Party – United Serbia), Nemanja Sarovic (Radical Serbian Party), Cedomir Jovanovic (Alliance for a Better Serbia), Milica Djurdjevic (For Free Serbia), Aleksandar Stevanovic (Enough)	Zoran Stanojevic
Serbia (21/04/2016)	“Word over Word”	RTS and CeSID	Aleksandar Martinovic (Serbian Progressive Party), Bojan Pajtic (Coalition – Democrat Party, DSHV, ZZS), Dusan Bajatovic (Socialst Party – United Serbia), Nemanja Sarovic (Radical Serbian Party), Bosko Obradovic (Dveri – Serbian Democrat Party), Boris Tadic (Alliance for a Better Serbia) y Sasa Radulovic (Enougha)	Zoran Stanojevic

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The examples that were extracted from the debates have been transcribed, and the examples and quotes from Serbian have been translated by the author. Likewise, for the Serbian debates, there has been a correspondence with the organiser and moderator Zoran Stanojevic, who provided some of the original documents used in the organisation of the debates. These texts contribute with relevant information for this research. Also, the authors of this study have participated in the organisation of the debates “Cara a Cara 2015) (“Head to Head 2015”) and “Deb4te” in 2016, which therefore provides organizational information of such programmes resulting in additional value for the study.

Moreover, this work refers to the various formats of debates before the 2015 and 2016 elections in Spain and Serbia in order to observe the novelties regarding the formats of the broadcasted disputes that took place previously in both countries. Each debate whose object of study is explained separately and whose relevant data about temporal and especial distribution is brought to light. Next, the most relevant topics in the debates are listed. Lastly, there is an analysis of the role of the moderator in each debate to observe whether there are differences regarding their interventions.

4. Results of the comparative analysis of the debates in 2015 and 2016 in Spain and Serbia

4.1. Comparison of the format of the debates

In Spain, the novelty in the 2015 and 2016 campaigns was the diversity of the formats for the four debates that took place in those elections, given the fact that since 1993 the only format

was head-to-head. In Serbia, in spite of the high number of broadcasted debates since 1990, we can notice that still there is not single debate format. The country is still in trial phase trying to find the most appropriate format for the Serbian mentality and culture. Anyway, since 2012 the format of the first debates “Word over Word” has been established as the official format for those who come later.

4.1.1. "El País Debate"

The first debate in the 2015 elections in Spain was “El País Debate”. At the beginning, the moderator Carlos Vega explained the characteristics of the format. This moderator’s function was consistently repeated in all the analysed clashes in this study. The moderator explained that Mariano Rajoy’s stand was left empty because the candidate would not attend the debate. Vega added that the PP offered the participation of the Deputy Prime Minister, Soaraya Sáenz de Santamaría, but they did not accept it because the debate was strictly among the candidates to the Presidency, which she was not. The stand remained empty on the set and the cameras focused on it several times making his absence visible. The other candidates debated while standing, behind podiums that were decorated with logo of *El País*. The fact that the scenography was blue (corporate color of PP) draws our attention because in all of the analysed debates, the organisers tried to include the scenography with the corporate colors of all the parties.

“El País Debate” lasted an hour and a half and consisted of four main theme blocks with three advertising breaks (approximately every half an hour). In each block, the candidates were provided with two initial minutes to introduce their proposals. Later, there was an open debate with questions from the audience both in-studio and online from social media. This format resembles that of *town hall meeting* o *people’s debate*, that were established in the USA by Bill Clinton in 1992 (Schroeder, 2008: 40). To close up their remark, the three candidates relied on a final golden minute.

4.1.2. “7D: The Decisive Debate”

The second decisive debate, called “7D: El Debate Decisivo”, took place in the frame of the 2015 campaign was organised by the *Atresmedia Group* and broadcasted by *La Sexta*, *Antena 3*, *Onda Cero*, and online by *Atresplayer*. The candidates debated standing, without any podiums. To limit their position there was a square drawn on the floor. Inside this space, each candidate had at his disposal a base to hold their documentation and a stool that none of them used³. The scenography combined black, white and grey colours, so as we previously stated, there was no presence of any corporate colour of either party. The debate lasted two hours and was moderated by journalists: Ana Pastor (La Sexta) y Vicente Vallés (Antena 3 TV).

The moderators explained the format stressing that it was “open and flexible” and that “for the first time in Spain, the rules are set by the journalists, but we must say that the politicians are here because the parties have accepted these conditions”. In this debate, as well as in that of *El País*, there was audience in the filming set (almost 300 people), although they could not participate in any way during the programme.

In regards to time distribution, the debate was divided in three thematic areas, with two advertising breaks (approximately after one hour and one hour and 45 minutes respectively). To balance this timing, there was a device called “The room of time” where four La Sexta journalists were gauging the time usage of each candidate with a chronometer.

³ It would concern a distinct research the observation of how does the presence or absence of stand influences in the gestuality and non-verbal language of the candidates, as we have noticed a considerable higher frequency in the hands movement when there is not a stand in the debates.

4.1.3. "Head to Head 2015"

The third debate in the 2015 campaign, called "Head to Head 2015" (literally "Face to face" in Spanish), was organised by the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Television. It started with the images of the photographers capturing the moment of the candidates coming into the studio. Likewise, we can find a difference here with Serbia, because as it was observed in the debates of this country, the programme does not show any footage of debate prior to the current event. All the programmes start with the candidates on site, at their stands.

The candidates debated while sitting behind a 1.70m long table and with the moderator sitting in-between. It is worth mentioning at this point that the decision about position (no matter standing or sitting) was taken during the negotiation process. There were even podiums especially designed for this debate just in case the candidates took their places standing. The scenography of "Cara a Cara 2015" was simple, with a grey colour that intended to convey sobriety. It could be argued that there was a contrast with the *Atresmedia* debate, which contained elements typical of an entertainment show. For instance, *Atresmedia* set up a camera inside each the candidate's vehicle in order to follow every detail of their arrival to the studio.

Regarding the time distribution, the debate consisted of four different theme blocks and each of them began with a minute to answer a question. Afterwards, there was an open debate. There were two advertising breaks and the main novelty in regard of the previous clashes was that there were questions coming from Spanish journalists to conclude each themed block.

4.1.4. "Deb4te"

The four-sided debate was celebrated in the 2016 campaign and was called "Deb4te". It was distributed in five blocks and moderated by Ana Blanco, Pedro Piqueras and Vicente Vallés. In regard of time management, the moderators could manage the time according to balanced criteria. The candidates stayed behind the stands with the logo and a grey and black filming set, with some intertwined lines that represented the colours of each party. Each candidate had approximately two minutes to answer the first question and later could ask for the floor in case of being alluded. The time of each remark was measured in order to balance the time management by each candidate.

4.1.5. "Word over Word"

The three debates of the 2016 campaign in Serbia were called "Word over Word" and were moderated by Zoran Stanojevic, who organised them as well. As we already stressed, in Serbia there is no broadcasting of any images prior to the debate nor the greeting between the candidates. There is no audience in the studio and the moderator explains the rules of the debate and the format while the candidates remain standing behind their podiums. The scenography presented the colours of the RTS. Unlike Spain, in Serbia not all the parties have a corporate colour.

The debate lasted about 75 minutes and was composed by three theme blocks. The rules were identical in all three debates: for each of the posed questions, the participants had one minute to answer, one minute to reply to the opponent and one minute to conclude. At the end of the debate, all the participants counted on one minute to expose their conclusions. Time was strictly measured and shown in a screen. If a candidate exceeded his time, there was an acoustic signal that indicated that time was over. The participants only could talk on their turns and their established time and could not interrupt each other. The moderator stressed that "all participants agreed on the rules [...] and have committed to making us of appropriate language for public communication".

The order of interventions was determined by a draw just before the debate. It was prohibited to access the film set with any objects. The moderator provided each candidate with pen and paper. In this line, one could notice the influence of the USA debates, where it is prohibited to take any objects to the debate and only pen and paper are allowed. Instead, in Spain politicians cannot help but equip themselves with a wide range of papers, statistics, newspapers cuttings, graphics and so on, although this turns out to be a distraction rather than a support.

At the beginning of each topic there was a one-minute survey done to citizens from different Serbian cities where they were asked which are, in their opinions, the greatest problems for Serbia.

Table 2. Scheme of the debate format in Spain and Serbia

Debate	Space distribution	Duration	Interventions	Interruptions	Audience and questions
<i>El País debate</i>	Standing behind the pódiums	90 minutes	4 thematic blocks 2 initial minutes in each block 1 golden minute 3 advertising breaks	Yes	Audience in the studio Questions of the audience
<i>7D: The Decisive Debate</i>	Standing without a podium and a stool nearby	120 minutes	3 thematic blocks 2 advertising breaks “The room of time” 1 golden minute	Yes	Audience in the studio No questions
<i>Head to Head 2015</i>	Sitting behind a table	120 minutes	4 thematic blocks 1 minute to answer a question in each block 2 advertising breaks	Yes	Questions of directors of Spanish newspapers No audience in the studio
<i>Deb4te</i>	Standing behind the podiums	120 minutes	5 thematic blocks An initial question and 2 minutes to answer it and a final remark of 1 minute without questions 2 advertising breaks	Yes	No questions and no audience
<i>Word over Word</i>	Standing behind the podiums	75 minutes	3 thematic blocks 1 minute to answer each topic 1 minute to reply 1 minute to conclude the block 1 minuto to conclude the debate	No	No audience and no questions A one-minute survey done to Serbian citizens

Source: Prepared by the authors.

4.2. The topics of the programmes

One of the main goals of the election debates is to get to know the politicians’ opinions and the proposals regarding the topics that the citizens are most concerned about. In Spain, this

barometer is provided by the CIS⁴ and in Serbia, the surveys about the main citizens' concerns that later will be discussed in the debates are elaborated by the CeSID. We can observe that given that the political contexts are largely different, there are some topics in the Serbian and Spanish debates that coincide, but the campaigns of each country deal with specific topics from each respective country.

In "El País Debate" four main topics were discussed: the economy (the biggest concern, the crisis, unemployment, inequalities, etc.), social policies and the welfare state, territorial policies and last, the proposals to "regenerate all that is damaged in politics" as defined by the moderator of the debate. Once the topics were decided, it was deemed necessary prior to starting the debate to pose a question about the terrorist attack in Paris, since this tragic event touched all of Spanish society.

As it was already stated, apart from the questions that the moderator posed regarding the main topics, the audience also posed certain questions that introduced new sub-topics in the big blocks of time, such as gender equality, the return of those who left for working reasons, the measures to guarantee a dignified old age, the competence of autonomous communities and the permanence of small town halls.

The "7D: The Decisive Debate" started with a trending question followed by these thematic areas: the economy and the welfare state (unemployment, taxes, cutbacks, deficit, education, pensions...), institutional reforms (corruption, Catalonia and the model of state, Constitutional reform, gender violence) and post-election agreements. The closing question was about military intervention in Syria, after which the candidates disposed of a "decisive minute to ask for a vote, if they wish so," as the moderators stated. The new point in this debate was that throughout the entire programme, the topics were shown onscreen, making it easier for spectators to follow.

In the "Cara a Cara 2015", the topics corresponded with those of the CIS barometer: unemployment and the economy, the pension system and welfare state; institutional reforms and territorial distribution and lastly, Spain in the world. Each of these topics was introduced with questions by the moderator, for instance "Where is Spain placed in this new Europe, in its relations with Latin America, and in what direction will you drive it if you become President?" Before starting the debate, the moderator posed this statement to both candidates: "The idea of Spain you have. You have one minute to explain where you want to drive the country". As it was already stressed, the novelty in this debate was that there were questions coming from the several directors of Spanish newspapers that were used to close the blocks.

In the Serbian debates, there are no questions from the journalists. One of the explanations for this is that journalists in Serbia are not neutral. Even though nowadays the media is more open and diversified, Bačević (1994: 100) claims that "the Serbian political scene lacks neutral media and journalists". Consequently, political parties would not allow this format in the organization of a debate.

June 13th 2016, when the "Deb4te" took place, the biggest citizens' concerns were still the economy and employment. These were the first topics discussed in this meeting. The second topic was social policies; the third, the democratic regeneration and the institutional reforms; the fourth, external policies and the last, the likely post-election agreements.

Regarding the topics of the debates in Serbia, the first two programmes (April 19th and 20th) tackled the same topics: what should Serbia's relationship be with the European Union, how to improve Serbian agriculture and how to solve the catastrophic natality crisis

⁴ CIS surveys are available on these links:

December, 2015: http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?estudio=14250

May, 2016: http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?estudio=14282

in the country. The debate on April 21st addressed three topics: safety and the migration crisis, unemployment and the relations in the region. What could be stressed as different from the Spanish debates is that the opening titles show the biggest concerns of Serbian citizens, although not all of them are lately discussed. Topics such as unemployment, corruption, safety, the European Union, Russia or its region were shown on screen. For instance, the topic of Russia was never the main topic in any debate, although it was touched upon in the frame of Serbian relations with the European Union.

According to this debate analysis, the topics debated in both countries are: unemployment, the economy, corruption, safety and the migration crisis. The rest of the topics are specific to each political context.

4.3. The role of moderators

If we compare the 2015 and 2016 debates with those that took place before, we can observe that the former rely on a more active role by the moderator: they have posed questions, insisted that the candidates replied to them and not diverge from the topics that were begin discussed, etc.

In the last decade in Serbia, it has been observed that the moderator's role in the conflicts between politicians has been more passive than in Spain. We can argue that this role is still the same as the 2012 debates in the presidential campaign. Furthermore, the main functions of the moderator will be explained and examples of their remarks will be brought up in order to compare their role in all the broadcasted debates in Serbia and Spain.

Generally speaking, the first remark of the moderator was devoted to thanking the candidates for their presence and participation, and to explain the format of the programme. The way to address the candidates was formal, so the moderators always addressed the candidates as "usted"⁵. One of the main tasks of the moderators was time management. In this regard, they could interrupt the candidates' speech, tell them how much time they had left, or warn them that their time was over. Vega did this differently: "Thank you, Pedro Sánchez. Your 30 seconds are up." "We have little time left for this block." Campo Vidal also noted the time distribution between the two candidates: "Allow Mr. Rajoy to finish and continue, Mr. Sánchez." "Let's finish, but finish for real". Likewise, Ana Blanca warned the candidates: "There is little time left, let's do a round", as well as Vicente Vallés: "You already had the floor, Mr. Rivera. Keep in mind that you have set your own time limit that you must manage yourself."

Regarding time management, the moderators often discussed the time balance during the debate. Ana Pastor remarked: "There is balance, not with total accuracy, but good enough." It is curious that the moderators stressed how difficult it was to close up a block. Vega mentioned: "The economy block is endless. We could have four debates and it would still never end." For his part, Vicente Vallés in the "Debate Decisivo" also warned: "We never finish the debate, I am going to award 10 more seconds".

In the El País debate, the moderator is also the only one who addresses the audience either to invite their questions ("Let's listen now to the questions of the audience") or to ask for their applause ("I am going to ask the audience for something that they could not do for the whole debate: applaud").

The moderators posed questions that they deemed worthy for the sake of obtaining information or refocusing the debate. For example, Vega asked Pablo Iglesias about education: "Where do you take the money from to do that, Pablo?" Ana Pastor also repeated

⁵ Note of the translator: "Usted" is the Spanish formal word to address somebody. "Tú" is the informal and both are translated as "you" in English.

the question when a candidate would not reply. For example, she reformulated a question to Pablo Iglesias: “I did not ask you about the surveys, but about the programme: which is it going to be, the current one or the one from one year ago?”, and said to Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría: “But, Miss Deputy President, we have asked you about Bárcenas, about those messages: do you think that there has been political responsibility in the PP, in the Government?”

In the Serbian debates, Stanojevic was usually forced to require more accuracy from the candidates: “Let’s move on to the replies and explain more precisely what your list offers to improve the agriculture”, “A bit more precisely, how are you going to handle the European integrations?”, “I please ask you to go away from that topic”.

Sometimes, the candidates avoided discussing a certain topic and the moderator would have to warn them that they had to address the topic. In the “Cara a Cara 2015”, Campo Vidal repeated five times that it was mandatory to debate about the topic of Catalonia.

To sum up, the main functions that the moderators had to fulfill were well defined and had a common goal, which was to guarantee the correct development of the programmes, respecting the rules that were established for each of the clashes between politicians.

5. Conclusions

This article presents a comparative analysis between the formats of the debates in high-level politics in Serbia and Spain. Both countries launched their debate methods in the 90s: Serbia in 1990 and Spain in 1993. The main difference lays in the 15-year-long interruption of debates in Spain; in Serbia, debates have taken place steadily.

There is a main difference regarding the organising and broadcasting entity. On the one hand, in Serbia since 2012, public television (RTS) and an independent group (CeSID) have been the main organisers. They invite the parties (in other words, the representative candidates) to partake in the debates. On the other hand, the debates have not been institutionalized and the dynamics are more complex: in each case, the political parties have to negotiate and reach agreements with the organising entities or channels. In this matter, it is worth mentioning that the labour of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Television brought back the debates in 2008 and organised those of 2011, 2015 and 2016, and offered in all of them an open signal for national and international media. In the 2015 debates, we observe that apart from the “Cara a Cara” between Rajoy and Sánchez, there were two more debates (El País and Atresmedia) where the other candidates to the presidency debated with Rajoy’s absence. This decline of the four-sided debate changed after the new call of elections in June 2016, when Rajoy changed his mind and said he would attend a four-sided debate.

Regarding the evolution of the audiovisual format, it can be observed that in Serbia the debates keep the same format since 2012, but there was a lot of experimentation before (journalists’ questions, audience, standing or seating, possibility to interrupt each other or not). Furthermore, we note that the Spanish model has been modified steadily towards a more flexible version, with a higher chance of interruption, as well as the presence of audience and the possibility for them to pose questions. We conclude that the entrance of new parties into the Spanish political scene has triggered a significant evolution from the traditional head-to-head debates to a more open format: in the 2015 and 2016 elections, there were more actors, more debates, a bigger role for the moderator and a higher number of moderators. The role of the moderator in Serbia is less flexible and more passive than the Spanish one, maybe due to the fact that there is a total lack of interruptions, as stated in the rules. The moderators’ function has become less important, since in the 90s moderators had more freedom than now.

The topics addressed in both cases corresponded with the political reality of each country. In Spain, the topics were very similar or simply differently formulated in each debate, but generally they matched the citizens' main concerns, according to the CIS. The same situation arose in the Serbian debates, in which the biggest problems of the country are discussed. Nonetheless, there are differences with regards to the time distribution, given the fact that in Spain interruptions are allowed, whereas in Serbia they aren't. It is true, though, that in both cases the debates are divided into blocks and have a closing minute. It is essential to point out that the Serbian format is similar to the American one because of their collaboration with the organising debate entities from the USA, such as NDI and USAID.

Along this research, it has been observed that Spanish format is more flexible in comparison to the Serbian one, since it allows interruption and facilitates a context for dialogue. However, it is up to the politicians whether or not they take advantage of the format of the debate.

References

- Baćević, L. (1994). Mediji i izbori. *Gledišta*, 1-6, 95-110.
- Becker, L. B., Sobowale, I. A., Cobbey, R. E., & Eyal, C. H. (1978/1980). Debates "Effects on Voters" Understanding of Candidates and Issues. In G. F. Bishop, R. G. Meadow, & M. Jackson-Beeck, *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral, and Policy Perspectives* (pp. 126-139). New York: Praeger.
- Benoit, W. (2002). *The primary decision: A functional analysis of debates in presidential primaries*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Bishop, G. F., Oldendick, R. W., & Tuchfarber, A. J. (1978/1980). The Presidential Debates as a Device for Increasing the Rationality of Electoral Behavior. In G. F. Bishop, R. G. Meadow, & M. Jackson-Beeck, *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral, and Policy Perspectives* (pp. 179-196). New York: Praeger.
- Boix, A., & López-García, G. (2014). El significado de las Elecciones Europeas de 2014 en España: giro a la izquierda y hundimiento del bipartidismo. *Unión Europea Aranzadi*, 7, 69-93.
- Campo Vidal, M. (2013). *La cara oculta de los debates electorales: Los debates cara a cara presidenciales en España*. Madrid: Instituto de Comunicación Empresarial (ICE) & Nautebook.
- Canel, M. J. (2006). *Comunicación política: Una guía para su estudio y práctica* (2 ed.). Tecnos: Madrid.
- Carlin, D. P., Howard, C., Stanfield, S., & Reynolds, L. (1991). The effects of presidential debate formats on clash: A comparative analysis. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 27, 126-136.
- Casero-Ripollés, A., Feenstra, R., & Tormey, S. (2016). Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign: The Case of Podemos and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(3), 378-397.
- Castells, M. (2009). *Comunicación y poder*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Cebrián Herreros, M. (1992). *Géneros informativos audiovisuales*. Madrid: Ciencia.
- Del Olmo, F., Ruiz, J., & Díaz, J. B. (2016). Del tweet a la fotografía, la evolución de la comunicación política en Twitter hacia la imagen. El caso del debate del estado de la nación en España (2015). *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 108-123.

- Díez Nicolás, J., & Semetko, H. A. (1995). La televisión y las elecciones de 1993. En D. L. Swanson, A. Muñoz Alonso, & J. I. Rospir Zabala, *Comunicación política*. Madrid: Universitas.
- El País. (2 de diciembre de 2015). *El País Debate*. Retrieved from http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/11/30/media/1448893833_064378.html
- Gallego Reguera, M. (2009). *El debate de los Debates 2008: España y EE. UU. Barcelona*. Barcelona: Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes de Televisión y Àmbit.
- Gallego Reguera, M. (2012). *Debate del Debate 2011*. Madrid: Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes de Televisión y Dykinson.
- Gallego Reguera, M. (2016). *El regreso del Cara a Cara en España: La organización profesional de los debates electorales televisados entre candidatos a la Presidencia del Gobierno en 2008 (Tesis Doctoral)*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid .
- Hagner, P. R., & Rieselbach, L. N. (1978/1980). The Impact of the 1976 Presidential Debates: Conversion or Reinforcement? In G. F. Bishop, R. G. Meadow, & M. Jackson-Beeck, *The Presidential Debates: Media, Electoral, and Policy Perspectives* (pp. 157-178). New York: Praeger.
- Holtz-Bacha, C. (2004). Political Communication Research Abroad: Europe. In L. L. Kaid, *Handbook of Political Communication Research* (pp. 463-478). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kraus, S. (1988). *Televised Presidential Debates and Public Policy*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lanoue, D. J., & Schrott, P. R. (1991). *The Joint Press Conference: The History, Impact and Prospects of American Presidential Debates*. New York: Greenwood.
- López-García, G. (2016). 'Nuevos' y 'viejos' liderazgos: la campaña de las elecciones generales españolas de 2015 en Twitter. *Communication & Society*, 29(3), 149-167.
- Mancini, P., & Swanson, D. L. (1996). *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy: an international study of innovations in electoral campaigning and their consequences*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Marín, B. (2003). Debates electorales por televisión. In S. Berrocal Gonzalo, J. L. Dader García, & J. I. Rospir Zabala, *Comunicación política en televisión y nuevos medios* (pp. 207-243). Barcelona: Ariel.
- Mateos, A. (26 de febrero de 2015). Iglesias reta a Rajoy a un cara a cara en televisión porque 'la oposición real no está en el Congreso'. *El Mundo*.
- Matić, J. (2006). *Televizijska prezentacija kampanja za parlamentarne izbore u Srbiji 1990-2000 (doktorska disertacija)*. Beograd: FPN.
- Mazzoleni, G. (1998/2010). *La comunicación política*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- McKinney, M. S., & Carlin, D. B. (2004). Political Campaign Debates. En L. L. Kaid, *Handbook of Political Communication Research* (pp. 203-234). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Micovic, M. (2012). Debates en las nuevas democracias europeas. Serbia y España cara a cara. In M. Gallego Reguera, *Debate del Debate 2011* (pp. 83-90). Madrid: Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes de Televisión y Dykinson.
- Micovic, M. (2014). *La comunicación y el discurso políticos en España y Serbia. Análisis comparativo de las estrategias argumentativas utilizadas en los debates electorales televisivos (Tesis doctoral)*. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona.
- Mihailović, S. (2008). Predsednički izbori 2008. Okolnosti i rezultat. (S. Mihailović, Ed.) *Predsednički izbori 2008. Okolnosti i rezultat*, 7-19.
- Milivojević, C. (2008). *Na prvu loptu. Političko komuniciranje u Srbiji 1990-2007*. Beograd: Cvijetin Milivojevic.
- Pfau, M. (1984). A Comparative Assessment of Intra-Party Political Debate Formats. *Political Communication Review*, 9, 1-23.

- Rodríguez Andrés, R. (2016). El ascenso de los candidatos outsiders como consecuencia de las nuevas formas de Comunicación Política y la desafección ciudadana. *Comunicación y Hombre*, 12, 73-95.
- Roper, E. (Noviembre de 1960). Polling Post– Morten. *Saturday Review*, pp. 10-13.
- Ruiz Contreras, M. (2007). *La imagen de los partidos políticos: El comportamiento electoral en España durante las elecciones generales de 1993 y 1996*. Madrid: CIS.
- Sánchez Duarte, J. (2016). La red como espacio para la militancia política: tecnología y participación en campaña electoral. *Communication Society*, 29(3), 33-47.
- Santamaría, J. (2012). Los candidatos tratan de afirmar su propia credibilidad. In M. Gallego Reguera, *El debate del Debate 2011: España* (pp. 37-43). Madrid: Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes de Televisión y Editorial Dykinson.
- Schroeder, A. (2008). *The Presidential Debates: Fifty Years of High-Risk TV*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schroeder, A. (2012). Los formatos de los debates televisivos. En M. Gallego Reguera, *El debate del Debate 2011* (pp. 19-24). Madrid: Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes (Academiav) y Editorial Dykinson.
- Slavujevic, Z. D. (2007). *Izborne kampanje: Pohod na birače. Slučaj Srbije od 1990. do 2007. godine*. Beograd: FPN.
- Swanson, D. L. (1995). El campo de la Comunicación Política. La democracia centrada en los Medios. In A. Muñoz-Alonso, & J. L. Rospir, *Comunicación política* (pp. 3-24). Madrid: Editorial Universitaria.
- Vidal Riera, F. (1997). *Los debates "cara a cara": Fundamentos básicos para la celebración de debates electorales audiovisuales entre los líderes de los partidos mayoritarios (Tesis doctoral)*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Zarefsky, D. (1999). Looking forward, looking back: Presidential debates, 1960-2000. *Meeting of the central States Communication Association*. St. Louis, MO.