
Miscellaneous

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Submitted

September 25th, 2023

Approved

January 16th, 2024

© 2024

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

www.communication-society.com

2024 – Vol. 37(2)

pp. 19-33

How to cite this article:

Doménech-Beltrán, J. (2024).

Cross-cutting exposure to the

Spanish public broadcasting

system: influence of ideology,

partisanship, and interest in

politics on RTVE's consumption,

Communication & Society, 37(2), 19-

33.

doi.org/10.15581/003.37.2.19-33

Cross-cutting exposure to the Spanish public broadcasting system: influence of ideology, partisanship, and interest in politics on RTVE's consumption

Abstract

According to the selective exposure hypothesis, media consumption is determined by the ideological predispositions of individuals, who aim to confirm their opinions through media content. This research explores the role of the public state-owned radio and television corporation, Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), as a facilitator of transversal exposure, that is, consumption that is not aligned with individuals' prior convictions. Through a quantitative methodology based on contingency tables and the calculation of corrected typed residuals, and through the CIS post-electoral studies, we analyse the relevance of ideology, partisan identification and interest in public issues as predictors of public television and radio consumption over a period of 11 years (2008–2019) in Spain. The results indicate that being a voter of the party in government and sharing its ideology are related to a higher likelihood of consuming RTVE television channels. In addition, the results show a higher transversal exposure of public radio, compared to television, which is more strongly influenced by the ideology and partisanship of the audiences.

Keywords

Selective exposure, cross-cutting exposure, public media, political information, ideology, partisanship, political interest.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. *Selective exposure theory*

The theory of selective exposure originated in the 1940s, when Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) suggested the idea that media effects were influenced by individuals' information selection, attention, and retention processes, which seek to reinforce their predispositions through media consumption. That is, people are exposed to media content according to their ideological preferences in order to consolidate their convictions and reject messages that question their worldview.

This perspective is based on Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, which holds that individuals try to avoid having to face information that challenges their previous ideas. Festinger's postulates also made it possible to introduce certain modifications in the basis of

the theory of selective exposure, as the approach turned from the concept of rejection of opposing content to the notion of searching information aligned with the individual's preferences (Frey, 1986).

The current scenario of media fragmentation has led to a recent resurgence of interest in studying selective exposure, in an environment characterized by a higher capacity for source selection and by the consolidation of the internet and social networks as sources of information (van Aelst *et al.*, 2017), which has resulted in a fragmentation of audiences (Sunstein, 2001). Indeed, in the US case, Stroud (2008) argues that this fragmentation of audiences into ideological niches has emerged as a business strategy of cable television segmentation. Therefore, selective exposure is produced as a response to individuals' distrust of media that broadcast information that does not agree with their opinions, which they also perceive as biased and hostile (Pfau *et al.*, 2007).

Moreover, in a media context characterized by the increase of the supply, audience preferences have become more decisive in explaining media consumption (Stroud, 2011), which has motivated consumers to become more selective in choosing between the different options offered by the market (Bennet & Iyengar, 2008).

Consumption of ideologically aligned media leads to a reduction in political tolerance and promotes animosity towards the ideological opposite (Stroud, 2008, 2011), as increased polarization on public issues (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012). However, this tendency decreased in countries where media systems have a stronger public service orientation, as opposed to market-oriented systems (Iyengar *et al.*, 2010). In this sense, it is appropriate to highlight the importance of the media system where exposure is produced. Among the different conditioning factors that mediate politically oriented media consumption (Stroud, 2008; Humanes, 2014), such as the type of media or the specific issues they address, the nature of the media system stands out. Several studies argue that the characteristics of the media system promote selective exposure or make it difficult –and the opposite phenomenon: transversal exposure– (Goldman & Mutz, 2011). Selective exposure tends to occur more frequently in media contexts where there is a high level of political parallelism, i.e., where there is a strong bond between the media and the political system.

On the other hand, academia has unanimously established that the consumption of political information increases political knowledge and interest in public affairs, and motivates political participation (Prior, 2007; Meilán, 2010). Numerous studies find a correlation between media use and interest in political affairs (Delli Carpini, 2004; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013), thus deepening inequalities in political participation and knowledge between those interested in public affairs and those who are not (Prior, 2007; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013).

1.2. Ideology and partisanship as predictors of media consumption in Spain

The Spanish media system is a clear example of polarized pluralism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), with a high level of political parallelism and in which political journalists act in a priestly manner toward political institutions and actors (van Dalen *et al.*, 2012). Several studies confirm the importance of positions on the left-right axis in explaining media consumption in Spain (Fraile & Meilán, 2012; Humanes, 2014, 2016; Ramírez-Dueñas & Vinuesa-Tejero, 2020; Humanes & Valera-Ordaz, 2023; Ramírez-Dueñas & Humanes, 2023), as opposed to the political interest-oriented exposure, which prevails in Scandinavian countries (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013; Skovsgaard *et al.*, 2016; Dahlgren, 2019). For example, research by Valera-Ordaz and Humanes (2022) accredits media consumption guided by political orientations in Spain by comparing selective exposure motivated by political preferences with selective exposure guided by interest in politics. For this reason, in contrast to other systems such as the democratic-corporate system (where selective exposure based on citizens' interest in politics

can occur more easily), exposure to content guided by the ideology or partisan affinities of consumers is produced with greater facility.

Compared to other European countries such as Germany or the United Kingdom, Spanish consumers tend to prefer news that reaffirms their political beliefs to more balanced and unbiased news (Rodríguez-Virgili *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, variables related to interest in politics do not have as much explanatory weight in media consumption in Spain (Humanes & Mellado, 2017), which confirms the partisan nature of the Spanish media system.

On the other hand, one of the most important issues in the study of selective exposure is the nature of media to which citizens are exposed. Humanes confirms that “the type of media (press, radio or television) affects the intensity of selective exposure” (2014, p. 794) in Spain, with the press being the media that is most affected by the effect of selective exposure. Fraile and Meilán (2012) –in a study based on four surveys carried out in different electoral periods from 1993 to 2008– highlighted that the degree of polarization of Spanish television channel audiences was lower than that of the press or radio.

In this sense, the research by Valera-Ordaz and Humanes (2022) confirms that ideological preferences are still not as decisive in explaining the selective exposure of television audiences, as is the case with the press and radio. In other words, the audiovisual groups have not yet generally adopted ideological segmentation as a commercial strategy, apart from the Atresmedia group with La Sexta. However, political polarization, the transformation of the Spanish party system toward a multi-party model and increased competition in the audiovisual market suggest that, in the future, the segmentation strategy of the US audiovisual market could be assimilated into the Spanish case (Humanes & Valera-Ordaz, 2023).

1.3. *Public broadcasting systems and cross-cutting exposure*

Selective exposure finds a corresponding counterpart in cross-cutting exposure; in other words, “exposure to political perspectives that citizens do not find likable” (Goldman & Mutz, 2011, p. 42). The benefits of cross-cutting exposure to political information in democratic societies have been widely highlighted by various studies, as it allows for greater awareness of the ideological positions of others (Mutz, 2006), increases political tolerance among citizens of disparate ideologies and thoughts (Mutz, 2002, 2006; Pattie & Johnston, 2008) and enables debate of public issues in order to reach agreements in the general interest (Mutz & Young, 2011).

The media are the main sources of information that citizens have regarding political diversity (Mutz & Martin, 2001). In this sense, public broadcasting services are essential in providing quality journalistic information, and their performance determines the quality of democracies to a large extent. Among other matters, they guarantee editorial independence and journalistic autonomy (Nissen, 2006), stimulate citizen participation, promote cultural diversity, and play a social, cultural and identity-related duty (Moragas & Prado, 2000). A social function that, moreover, must necessarily remain detached from political power (Fernández Alonso & Fernández Viso, 2012; Bustamante, 2016), as this independence is essential to carry out the public service mission with guarantees.

In this regard, Article 3 of Law 17/2006 of June 5, 2006 regulating the public service of radio and television, includes certain attributions that RTVE must fulfil in exercising its public service function, such as guaranteeing objective, truthful and plural information, facilitating public debate, promoting democratic participation or disseminating civic values as an essential service for the cohesion of society.

Therefore, the public media should be responsible for mitigating, at least in part, selective exposure or, in other words, part of its mission should be focused on facilitating and encouraging citizens' exposure to the diversity of opinions. In this regard, Castro *et al.* (2018) argue that the extent of cross-cutting exposure that citizens receive depends on the media system and the strength of the public media system in each country.

As far as the Spanish case is concerned, there are few studies that provide an in-depth analysis of the role of public broadcasting systems as drivers or inhibitors of cross-cutting exposure, both at national and regional levels (Valera-Ordaz, 2023), despite the relevance of these public media in the study of this phenomenon.

Some empirical research has found a correlation between consuming RTVE and voting for the party in government that administers the public broadcaster at different times (Humanes, 2014; Valera-Ordaz *et al.*, 2021). This type of study analyzes the evolution of RTVE's audiences over time in terms of ideological preferences, and it questions the transformation of RTVE's audiences because of successive changes of government. The results of these studies suggest that the composition of the audiences of La 1 –the main television channel of the public broadcasting corporation– changes according to the party in power, both in terms of ideology (Fraile & Meilán, 2012) and party identification (Humanes, 2014; Valera-Ordaz *et al.*, 2021; Humanes & Valera-Ordaz, 2023), confirming, once again, the politicization suffered by the media –including the public media– in the media systems of southern Europe (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and the instrumentalization of public media by those in power (Arriaza-Ibarra, 2013).

2. Objectives

This article proposes three main research objectives related to the transversal exposure of citizens to political information provided by the Spanish public broadcaster, Radiotelevisión Española:

- O1. Explore how partisan identification and ideology influence exposure to state public television and Radio Nacional de España.
- O2. Study the evolution of the ideological composition of Spanish public television and radio audiences over time, and analyze whether these changes are associated with changes in government during the same period. In other words, whether the majority partisan preferences of RTVE consumers correspond at each moment in time with the political party in power.
- O3. Analyze if the consumers of RTVE (television and radio) show a greater interest in public affairs or, on the contrary, whether the consumption of RTVE is evenly distributed among the population, regardless of their interest in politics.

3. Methodology

Since 2008, the post-electoral studies by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) have included questions related to the consumption of political information through the three main media (press, radio, and television). For the purposes of this article, the databases from the post-electoral CIS studies following the general elections held in Spain since 2008, were used; the surveys corresponding to the elections of 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016, April 2019 and November 2019.

It should be noted that during the 11 years covered by the period studied, new political forces have become consolidated in the Spanish party system, as in the case of Ciudadanos and Podemos from 2015 onwards, and Vox in 2019. Therefore, the time frame selected allows us to study the phenomenon of exposure to RTVE in different stages of the Spanish political system: a first period, characterized by a marked bipartisanship, dominated by the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), and a second stage that extends to the present day, characterized by the consolidation of new groupings both to the left and the right of the two majority parties.

Table 1 shows the CIS databases used, the total sample of the study and the sample size of the questions related to television and radio consumption, respectively, during electoral campaigns (since not all the people interviewed stated that they follow political information through these types of media). This research focuses on questions related to the preferred

television channel and radio station for following public affairs during the campaign. These questions are open-ended, and respondents answer spontaneously. In other words, they choose a TV channel or radio station without the interviewer providing them with a list of possible answers. The dependent variable, therefore, results from the answers of the respondents, who choose, in the case of television, the publicly owned channels (La 1, La 2 and Canal 24 horas) and, in the case of radio, Radio Nacional de España (RNE). In both cases, the sample sizes are sufficient to meet the research objectives.

Table 1. CIS databases used and sample sizes of the questions about television and radio consumption during electoral campaigns.

| Number of CIS study | General elections | Total sample | Sample of the television question | Sample of the radio question |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2757 | March 9, 2008 | 6083 | 5294 | 2381 |
| 2920 | November 20, 2011 | 6082 | 5260 | 2174 |
| 3126 | December 20, 2015 | 6242 | 5422 | 2202 |
| 3145 | June 26, 2016 | 6175 | 4853 | 1888 |
| 3248 | April 28, 2019 | 5943 | 4812 | 1914 |
| 3269 | November 10, 2019 | 4804 | 3567 | 1092 |

Source: Own elaboration.

To respond to the research objectives, a bivariate analysis using contingency tables is proposed to cross-reference RTVE consumption with ideology, partisanship and interest in politics. In addition, an analysis of association between variables is carried out using corrected standardized residuals to establish whether there is a statistical association between the variables of interest. These values are to be interpreted as follows: when the corrected standardized residual is greater (or less) than +1.96 (-1.96), there is a statistical association between the variables at a 95% probability. If the value is greater (or less) than +2.56 (-2.56), the statistical association between the variables exists, in this case, at a 99% probability. The higher the value of the residuals, the stronger the association between the variables.

Some of the variables of interest have been recoded to facilitate statistical analysis. Among those related to media consumption, the variable relating to preference for RTVE channels includes all channels belonging to the public broadcaster, i.e., La 1, La 2 and Canal 24 horas. Regarding independent variables, the ideological self-placement, recorded on a numerical scale from 1 to 10, has been simplified into three ideological orientations: left (1-4), center (5-6) and right (7-10).

Regarding interest in the electoral campaign, the original responses have been grouped into yes (a lot or quite a lot of interest) and no (little or no interest). Ideally, interest in public affairs could also be measured using the CIS question on interest in politics in general. However, this question was not systematically included until the 2016 election barometer, so data from previous years are not available.

On the other hand, the vote recall variable only includes the parties with the largest parliamentary representation during the timeframe analyzed, given that sufficient sample sizes are needed to test the hypotheses. As noted, the data for Ciudadanos and Podemos appear from the 2015 elections onwards, and for Vox, only in the two 2019 elections.

4. Results

The results of this research are presented in the form of contingency tables, derived by crossing the preference for the media options belonging to RTVE with variables related to the respondents' political preferences (voting recall and ideology) and interest in issues related

to the electoral campaign. The results for television are presented first, followed by those for radio.

4.1. *Exposure to Televisión Española (La 1, La 2 and Canal 24 horas)*

Statistical analyses show that 33.5% of PSOE electors chose RTVE in 2008 to get information during the electoral campaign. In other words, after the first mandate of the socialist José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, one out of every three voters of the governing party at that time chose one of the channels of the public corporation to follow the political news during the campaign. This logic was consolidated after Zapatero's second legislature at the head of the Spanish government. In the 2011 election, this preference increased to 48.9%. Although it is true that the preference for RTVE's channels increases between both PSOE and PP voters, the gap between the two parties widens after three years of socialist government. Moreover, the corrected typed residuals indicate a significant statistical association between choosing RTVE channels and being a PSOE voter in the 2008 and 2011 campaigns, both at 99% probability. In summary, PSOE voters were significantly more likely to consume RTVE in 2008 and 2011 compared to the general population.

For PP voters, their consumption of RTVE is lower than in the case of the PSOE in both 2008 and 2011. However, while there is no statistical association between being a PP voter and choosing RTVE channels in the 2008 election, a negative association between both variables was observed in the 2011 election. Thus, the probability of PP voters choosing public television channels in 2011 was significantly lower than that of the general population.

Table 2. Consumption of RTVE television channels according to vote, ideology and interest in the electoral campaign.

| | 2008 | 2011 | 2015 | 2016 | Abril 2019 | Nov. 2019 |
|---|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Vote recall | | | | | | |
| PSOE | 33.5% (8.2) | 48.9% (9.6) | 22.8% (.5) | 19.6% (-1.8) | 25.5% (1.2) | 28.7% (1.0) |
| PP | 26.3% (-1.7) | 35.7% (-2.2) | 40.4% (16.5) | 36.3% (13.1) | 35.0% (5.9) | 38.6% (6.2) |
| Ciudadanos | - | - | 20.1% (-1.3) | 22.7% (.5) | 30.9% (3.8) | 32.5% (1.7) |
| Podemos | - | - | 9.0% (-10.1) | 11.2% (-6.3) | 12.9% (-6.4) | 17.1% (-4.3) |
| Vox | - | - | - | - | 25.1% (.3) | 29.3% (.7) |
| <i>Total</i> | 28.0% | 37.6% | 22.1% | 21.7% | 24.4% | 27.4% |
| Ideology | | | | | | |
| Left | 29.1% (2.8) | 41.9% (6.7) | 13.8% (-13.2) | 13.1% (-13.1) | 17.8% (-9.2) | 20.9% (-7.6) |
| Center | 25.7% (-2.0) | 33.9% (-3.1) | 25.9% (5.0) | 26.3% (5.4) | 29.2% (6.0) | 33.1% (5.3) |
| Right | 25.6% (-1.2) | 31.1% (-4.5) | 36.2% (11.2) | 35.4% (10.4) | 30.7% (4.9) | 32.7% (3.4) |
| <i>Total</i> | 27.4% | 36.8% | 21.8% | 21.5% | 23.5% | 27.2% |
| Interest in the electoral campaign | | | | | | |
| Yes | 30.8% (7.5) | 40.9% (7.5) | 19.8% (-4.9) | 20.6% (-1.1) | 20.6 (-6.2) | 24.5% (-3.3) |
| No | 22.3% (-7.5) | 31.6% (-7.5) | 25.4% (4.9) | 22.0% (1.1) | 28.3% (6.2) | 29.5% (3.3) |
| <i>Total</i> | 26.5% | 35.6% | 22.3% | 21.3% | 24.4% | 27.5% |

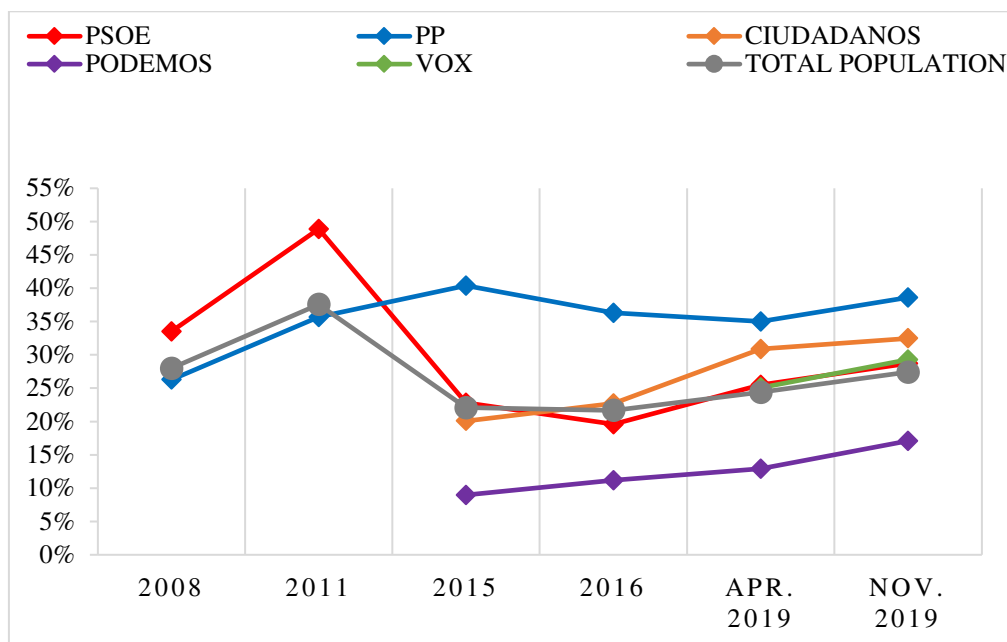
Source: Own elaboration.

This tendency reversed completely from 2011 onwards. With the arrival of Mariano Rajoy (PP) to power, being a Partido Popular voter is significantly associated with preferring RTVE channels for information during the electoral campaign. In the 2015 and 2016 elections, this

association occurs at a 99% probability, with a value of the corrected standardized residuals much higher compared to the other years analyzed. On the other hand, being a PSOE voter during these two elections is no longer statistically associated with preferring public television channels.

It should be noted that the consumption of RTVE in 2015 is evidence of the evolution of the television market in Spain. The percentage of people choosing publicly owned channels drops considerably compared to the data from previous elections, as shown in Figure 1. Looking at the audience data for La 1, the principal channel of Televisión Española was the audience leader in 2011, with a screen share of 14.5% according to the audience measurements carried out annually by Kantar Media (Kantar Media, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016). From then on, it fell for four consecutive years, reaching a screen share of 9.8%, the worst ever for La 1 to that date. The growth of the private channels Antena 3 and Telecinco, and the consolidation of La Sexta and Cuatro –to a lesser extent– as important generalist channels in the market, affected the audience figures for La 1 and, as a result, the number of people who chose it as their main source of political information fell compared to previous elections.

Figure 1. Evolution of RTVE's audience according to vote in the general elections (%).



Source: Own elaboration.

The 2015 election saw two new political forces enter the Spanish parliament: Ciudadanos and Podemos. In the case of the former, the data indicate that, as with PSOE voters, there is no significant statistical association between being a Ciudadanos voter and preferring RTVE channels during the campaign for the 2015 and 2016 elections. However, we did find an association in the case of Podemos voters, albeit negative, in that those who voted for that party in 2015 and 2016 were significantly less likely to be exposed to public television. The same trend is repeated during the subsequent elections throughout the period analyzed. Podemos voters are significantly less likely to consume RTVE channels for public affairs information in all the cases analyzed. In this sense, we can affirm that Podemos voters are under-represented in the audience of the public broadcaster, compared to the voters of other political forces. This fact could be related to the party's discourse, characterized by an animosity towards the traditional media and, specifically, with accusations against the Partido Popular of instrumentalizing the public broadcasting corporation since they came to power.

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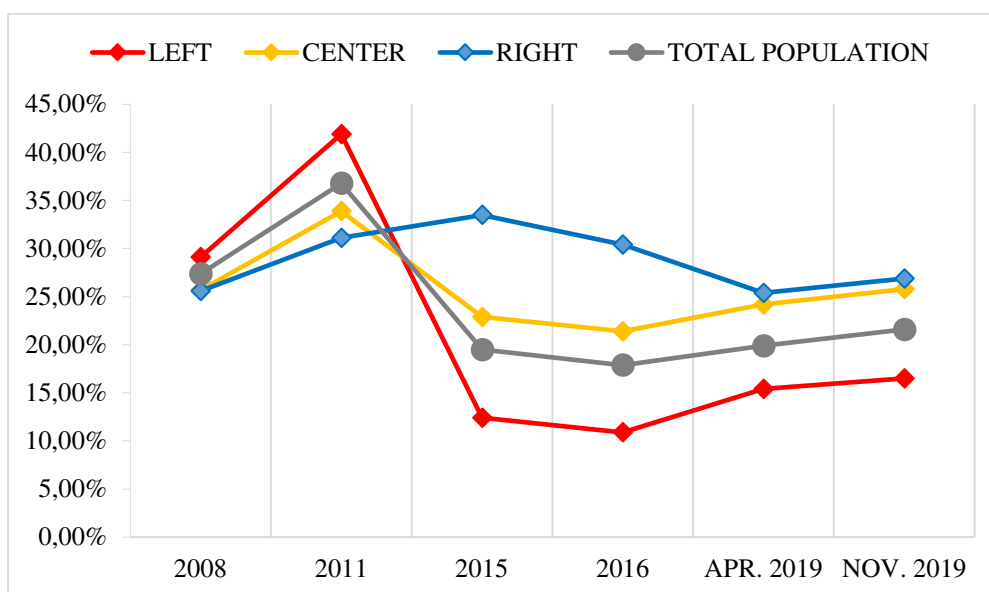
It should be recalled that, in June 2018, the Socialist Pedro Sánchez became president of the Spanish government after the success of the motion of no confidence tabled against Mariano Rajoy, which had the support of Unidas Podemos and other parties with less parliamentary representation (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, PDeCAT, PNV, Compromís, EH Bildu, and Nueva Canarias). In other words, between the 2016 election and that of April 2019, the two main Spanish political parties (PP and PSOE) ran the government without this change being through an election. This could be the reason for the results on the two electoral processes held in 2019 (April and November). In both elections, we observe that voting for PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos is significantly associated with choosing RTVE channels. Regarding the scale of the association, it is higher for PP voters than for PSOE voters, even though the socialists were already in power during those years. This suggests that audience behaviors take some time to adapt to changes of government, so that the higher probability of some groups of voters to consume RTVE –PP in this case– is maintained over time even though a new government comes to power.

In terms of the ideology of the respondents, we also found significant differences. In 2008 and 2011, those who considered themselves to be on the left (1-4) were more likely to choose RTVE channels for public affairs, while those on the center and the right of the ideological spectrum were significantly less likely to prefer public television channels. In other words, the results endorse the findings in relation to vote.

Since the 2015 election, and after four years of a PP government, the trend significantly reversed. People who declare centrist and especially right-wing positions are more likely to prefer public television channels compared to the general population, according to the data from the 2015, 2016 and the two 2019 elections.

Therefore, the calculation of the corrected typed residuals allows us to affirm that ideology is related to preferring these channels in all the elections analyzed, and with quite high figures. In conclusion, the higher probability of left-wing people consuming RTVE in 2008 and 2011 gives way to the significantly higher probability of right-wing people from 2015 onwards. This is followed by those in the ideological center in April and November 2019, with significantly higher values than those of the general population.

Figure 2. Evolution of RTVE's audience according to ideology in the general elections (%).



Source: Own elaboration.

It is worth highlighting the data for people in left-wing positions from 2015 onwards, as the observed values are significantly lower than expected. This does not occur, as indicated above, in the case of PSOE voters, but does occur in the case of Podemos voters. Along the same lines, in the case of the two 2019 elections, the analyses show that, despite the party in government after the 2018 motion of no confidence being the PSOE, people on the left were not as supportive of RTVE as those in the center or on the right. This could be due to two reasons. On one hand, the aforementioned particularity related to the change of government through a motion of no confidence and, therefore, the short space of time between the investiture of Pedro Sánchez as head of the Executive and the general election of April 2019 and the influence of people who were in the most left-leaning positions and who have traditionally been more distant from the PSOE's positions on the other.

Finally, with respect to the relationship between interest in the electoral campaign and its relationship with preferring public television channels, we observe that during 2008 and 2011, those most interested in campaign-related issues more frequently opt for public television channels. This association occurs in a context of strong bipartisanship in the Spanish political system, as well as in a less fragmented television landscape. From this point onward, we observe a significant association between having no particular interest in the campaign and RTVE consumption in all subsequent elections (except for 2016, where no significant relationships appear).

In other words, those who reported having little or no interest in the electoral campaign were more likely to choose public television channels, while those who were quite or very interested in everything related to the campaign were less likely to choose RTVE. This could be due, as mentioned above, to the consolidation of other generalist television channels in the Spanish television market. This is especially true in the case of La Sexta, which adopted a business strategy based on the broad coverage of political issues while consolidating its position in the market. In 2015, La Sexta achieved its best audience figures, with a 7.4% audience share (Kantar Media, 2016), a record high to date. Likewise, as Valera-Ordaz and Humanes (2022) point out in their research on the motivations that guide selective exposure to political information in relation to the November 2019 election, having a greater interest in politics and issues related to the electoral campaign increases the probability of consuming La Sexta compared to other television channels.

4.2. Exposure to *Radio Nacional de España*

In the case of public radio, the results show that selective exposure is less widespread than for television, and that there is, therefore, greater transversal exposure. In other words, the data indicate that RNE is consumed more uniformly by all ideological and voter groups than television. Political factors –voting and ideology– therefore have less influence on radio consumption than on television.

According to vote recall in general elections, in 2008 there was an association between being a socialist voter and preferring RNE. However, from 2011 onwards, there is no association between being a voter of either of the two main parties –PP and PSOE– and consuming RNE. In the other time points analyzed, there are occasional associations between consuming RNE and voting for a particular party (Ciudadanos in 2015 and Podemos in April 2019). A negative relationship is also sporadically observed, as in the case of Vox in April 2019, whose voters consume public radio less regularly than the general population.

However, these relationships can be considered sporadic, as there is no consistent and sustained association over time between voting for the governing party and preferring Radio Nacional. Thus, from 2011 to 2019, state public radio is generally consumed by all groups of voters equally, and no statistically significant associations are found between its consumption and the population's party preferences.

Table 3. Consumption of RNE according to vote, ideology and interest in the electoral campaign.

| | 2008 | 2011 | 2015 | 2016 | Abril 2019 | Nov. 2019 |
|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Vote recall | | | | | | |
| PSOE | 11.5% (2.4) | 14.4% (-.3) | 10.4% (.7) | 10.1% (.4) | 10.8% (1.1) | 13.4% (1.1) |
| PP | 8.0% (-1.7) | 14.3% (-.5) | 11.7% (1.9) | 11.7% (1.6) | 11.7% (1.1) | 10.1% (-.6) |
| Ciudadanos | - | - | 12.4% (2.0) | 9.1% (-.2) | 12.1% (1.4) | 14.5% (.8) |
| Podemos | - | - | 7.5% (-1.3) | 11.1% (.9) | 13.5% (2.2) | 14.4% (.9) |
| Vox | - | - | - | - | 3.4% (-2.4) | 12.0% (.1) |
| <i>Total</i> | 9.8% | 14.9% | 9.3% | 9.6% | 9.6% | 11.5% |
| Ideology | | | | | | |
| Left | 10.4% (1.4) | 15.4% (1.4) | 7.9% (-2.4) | 8.8% (-1.0) | 9.7% (.3) | 10.6% (-.8) |
| Center | 8.3 (-1.4) | 14.6% (.3) | 11.3% (2.0) | 10.0% (.5) | 10.7% (1.2) | 12.6% (.8) |
| Right | 9.3% (-.2) | 11.3% (-2.0) | 10.3% (.6) | 10.4% (.6) | 6.7% (-1.8) | 11.6% (.1) |
| <i>Total</i> | 9.6% | 14.3% | 9.4% | 9.5% | 9.5% | 11.5% |
| Interest in the electoral campaign | | | | | | |
| Yes | 9.8% (-.2) | 14.3% (-.3) | 8.7% (-1.3) | 8.7% (-1.3) | 8.7% (-1.8) | 11.3% (-.4) |
| No | 10.0% (.2) | 14.8% (.3) | 11.0% (1.3) | 10.4% (1.3) | 11.3% (1.8) | 12.0% (.4) |
| <i>Total</i> | 9.8% | 14.5% | 9.4% | 9.4% | 9.6% | 11.6% |

Source: Own elaboration.

Along the same lines are the data on public radio consumption according to ideology. The results show that, in general, ideology is even less related than voting to preferring RNE in the six general elections analyzed, with few exceptions.

In 2011, after the second legislature of Zapatero's socialist government, the probability of those on the ideological right choosing RNE is significantly lower than that of the population as a whole. The same occurs in 2015, but in reverse. The probability of preferring state public radio among people on the left is significantly lower than that of the general population. This happens after the first legislature of Mariano Rajoy as the head of the government.

From 2015 onward, however, there are no longer significant differences between the different ideological groups, so there is a transversal consumption of Spanish public radio among the entire population, regardless of ideological position. Finally, interest in the electoral campaign does not show statistically significant associations either. Even though radio is a type of media that is generally characterized by being consumed by those who show a greater interest in public affairs, interest in the campaign is not a relevant factor in explaining the consumption of RNE over the 11 years analyzed.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This research explores the relevance of ideology, partisanship and interest in public affairs as predictors of RTVE consumption. The results indicate that, in the case of television, those people who share the ideology of the party in government and who vote for it in general elections are significantly more likely to consume public television than the general population.

However, in the case of the two 2019 elections, we observe that being a PP voter and being in a right-wing position remain predictors of public television consumption, even though in 2018 the motion of no confidence tabled by the socialist Pedro Sánchez triumphed. In other words, the data suggest that the political alignment between TVE's audiences and the party in

government does not always coincide temporally with the duration of the legislatures. This could be because audience behaviors and their perception of the public broadcaster take time to adapt to changes in executive power, a fact that is even more accentuated in this case due to the proximity between the motion of no confidence and the following election.

Overall, the results confirm that the consumption of state public television is guided by the audience's ideological and partisan preferences. In this sense, the results endorse the findings of previous works on the importance of political factors as predictors of public television consumption (Fraile & Meilán, 2012; Humanes, 2014, 2016; Ramírez-Dueñas & Vinuesa-Tejero, 2020; Humanes & Valera-Ordaz, 2023), as can be expected from a polarized pluralistic media system in which public broadcasting management tends to exhibit high levels of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

We can conclude that selective exposure occurs in Spanish public television, in that audiences' political preferences significantly explain their consumption over time, to the detriment of cross-cutting exposure, i.e., the consumption of information not aligned with the individual's prior beliefs. Although some recent studies have shown that citizens are aware of the educational and informative mission of the Spanish public broadcasting corporation (Goyanes *et al.*, 2021), the results of this research show that political factors such as ideology and partisan identification guide public television consumption.

In this sense, the results show that TVE's capacity to provide transversal exposure to all citizens regardless of their political beliefs is limited, which, to a certain extent, undermines the public service mission of the Spanish broadcasting corporation. The idea of public service of an entity such as RTVE, aimed at offering quality information of public interest to all citizens, would be compromised, since some of them condition their consumption based on their ideology or proximity to a particular political party.

It is also worth highlighting the negative association between ideology and partisanship, on one hand, and TVE consumption, on the other. Thus, being in the ideological sphere antagonistic to the government and being a voter of the main opposition party is usually associated with a lower probability of consumption of public television channels. These differences show that audiences perceive the public broadcasting corporation as an entity instrumentalized by political power (Arriaza-Ibarra, 2013), which places the public media at the service of its interests, despite the fact that independence from political parties is conceived as a priority value associated with public television, above impartiality or neutrality (Azurmendi *et al.*, 2018).

In the case of radio, however, the results indicate that there is mostly a cross-cutting exposure, so that RNE is consumed by the different ideological segments and groups of voters in Spanish society. No stable patterns of audience behaviors determined by political factors are observed, beyond specific associations in the consumption of RNE. In this sense, it could be said that RTVE's public service mission is deployed more effectively through radio than through television, at least during the period analyzed. As for interest in public affairs, the data indicate that, from 2015 onwards, those less interested in politics tend to consume RTVE television channels more regularly, unlike in 2008 and 2011, when there was an association between being interested in politics and consuming public television more intensely. This could be due to the increase in supply and the consolidation of the internet as a source of political information, as television channels, especially public ones, must compete against multiplatform media for the attention of audiences (Bennet, 2008; Ramsey, 2017). Moreover, the change in trend occurred from 2015 onward, coinciding with the consolidation of other generalist television channels whose business strategies revolve around the coverage of political events, as is the case of La Sexta, and with the loss of RTVE's audience to the two large private television channels (Antena 3 and Telecinco).

Finally, it is worth pointing out some of the limitations of this research and outlining some lines of future research. Firstly, regarding the methodology, it is worth highlighting the

limitations of bivariate exploration. Assessing only the relationship between pairs of attributes, or, in other words, studying the behaviors of one variable as a function of another, is a methodological limitation that needs to be clarified in subsequent research. It is therefore pertinent to warn of the need for multivariate studies that control the effect of ideology and voting on RTVE consumption by other variables that may be relevant, such as socio-demographic attributes, to endorse the findings presented in this article by means of more sophisticated methodological approaches. Moreover, in relation to this issue, future studies should incorporate the time variable in the statistical analyses in order to observe how the explanatory weight of ideology and voting in RTVE consumption evolves.

Secondly, the time period selected is relevant and broad, as it is adjusted to a period of 11 years (2008–2019), but it could be limited. The reliance on secondary data sources and their shallowness in terms of questions related to citizens' media consumption makes it difficult to investigate the phenomenon of selective and cross-cutting exposure beyond election periods.

Thirdly, it should also be stressed that in this article we have analyzed the weight of partisan identification and ideology on the consumption of RTVE, which is not the same as concluding whether RTVE is an instrumentalized media. This would imply carrying out an exhaustive content analysis of the journalistic coverage offered by the broadcaster. In this sense, and according to the results of this research, which clearly indicate that TVE's television audiences are sensitive to changes of government, it would be advisable to carry out an analysis of the news coverage provided by TVE to determine whether such news treatment justifies the change in the political profile of the public television audiences over time, or whether, on the contrary, it is an unjustified perception of the audiences.

It would also be interesting to explore the level of cross-cutting exposure produced by regional public audiovisual systems. This implies studying whether the consumption of regional television and radio stations is guided by ideology and citizens' votes, or whether, on the contrary, regional broadcasters exhibit a higher degree of cross-cutting exposure compared to the state public broadcaster. For the moment, only the Catalan case has been studied in depth (Valera-Ordaz, 2018, 2022; Sintes-Olivella *et al.*, 2023). This type of analysis would even provide greater knowledge in the study of the factors that motivate exposure to the media –in this case, public media– since, in some specific media contexts such as Catalonia, positions on national identity or independence explain the phenomenon of selective exposure more precisely than positions on the traditional left-right axis.

This work has been financed by the grant for the contracting of predoctoral research personnel (ACIF) from the Conselleria de Educació, Universidades y Empleo (Generalitat Valenciana).

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