

2009 European Parliament Elections in the Aragonese Press

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Abstract: This article examines the 2009 European Parliament Elections, which are a legislative landmark in the European Union's consolidation process. In particular, the article analyses the news coverage of the election campaigns in the regional paid-for print press in Aragon. The methodology employed is quantitative content analysis of all the elections-related news items published during the 15 days the campaign lasted, in the *Heraldo de Aragón*, *El Periódico de Aragón* (both published in Zaragoza), the *Diario del Altoaragón* (published in Huesca) and the *Diario de Teruel* (published in Teruel). The analysis focuses on identifying the political protagonists of the news published by these newspapers, and establishing whether these media used a European, national, or regional perspective. The hypothesis is that the Aragonese regional press focused more on the national politicians (even non-candidates) than on the actual MEP candidates. The results confirmed this hypothesis, since the press coverage of the campaign was presented from a national perspective and its protagonists were José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy.

Keywords: 2009 European Parliament Elections; election campaign; leaders; press; Aragon.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 3. Results. 3.1. Main protagonists of the press coverage. 3.2. Secondary political actors in the press coverage. 4. Conclusions. 5. Bibliography. 6. Notes.

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1. Introduction

In the 30th anniversary of the European Parliament elections, and while the Treaty of Lisbon waited for ratification, the celebration of the latest elections for the renewal of the European Parliament, from 4 to 7 June 2009, across the 27 EU countries was characterised by abstention. This lack of participation is not new and, for many, reflects once again the Euroscepticism that has shadowed the entire process of European integration (Tigasson, 2009), and reinforces what Galindo has called the “divorce of the European institutions and their citizens” (2010: 69).

A historical reading of the results obtained since the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 reveals that there is a difference of about 25 percentage points in the civil participation between the general elections within each EU member state and the European elections (Morata, 2000: 22). For this reason many experts consider the European elections to be of second order (De-Vreese, 2009; Tenscher and Maier, 2009; Berganza, 2008b: 127; Maarek, 2007).

The rates of participation in the elections of 7 June, 2009, in Spain confirmed this trend: the level of abstention surpassed the level of mobilization and reached 55.1% of the electorate. On the other hand, in the last legislative elections in Spain (9 March, 2008), the participation reached 73.8%, which is about 20% more participation. In other words, the interest aroused by the process of renewal of the European Parliament among Spanish citizens is clearly lower than the interest aroused by national electoral processes in the country.

However, the European Parliament is a body with an increasing relevance in the daily life of the Member States. Its capacity to influence domestic affairs is on the rise, since there is a voluntary transfer of sovereignty from the national parliaments to the European Parliament, which favours European integration but to the detriment of the effective power of the Member States within their own territory. This implies that a good part of the measures that directly affect the daily life of the European citizens is decided outside their respective countries. In view of this situation, it is surprising that the polls show a decreasing civil interest towards the European elections.

In any case, abstention rates are just one of the main reasons why the European Parliament elections are considered to be of secondary importance. Another reason for the lack of interest towards the European elections is the approach taken by the political parties in their campaigns for these elections. On many occasions, political parties see these elections as an opportunity to “measure their levels of popularity” and test their internal political situation (Berganza, 2008a: 17), and thus focus more on national issues than on European-level affairs.

According to Morata, the absence of a genuine European party system, a single electoral system and, therefore, of “a true European campaign” influences decisively this situation, by restricting in some way the promotion of the parties (and thus of their agendas and candidates) and by confining their campaigns to a scope that is similar to other internal elections (2000: 23).

The aforementioned scholars also agree that as a consequence of the secondary character of these elections, the media also orient their coverage towards national and local issues, which ends up affecting the information and, therefore, the knowledge that the public gets of the European Parliament (Berganza, 2008a). The survey undertaken by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research after the elections of June 2009 shows that the votes of 58.6% respondents were mainly influenced by domestic policy issues, and not by the European Union. The latest European elections, therefore, have not been an exception in the electoral participation and the national reading of the campaign.

Another characteristic feature of the electoral processes in general, beyond the geographical area to which they are limited, is their high degree of personalisation. This phenomenon is the result of the growing influence of the US presidential political system on the rest of Western democracies.

However, this characteristic feature, Garcia explains, is a constant not only in campaigns: “The candidate has become the axis on which contemporary politics revolve” in general (2009: 27). Politics are focused on the candidate (and his or her personal rather than professional attributes,) while other actors are left in the background. This tendency to personalisation “has been strengthened in recent years by the increasing frequency of media acts whose protagonist is the political leader (debates, interviews, direct interaction with citizens, etc.), who becomes a brand within the symbolic ‘market’ of politics” (2009: 27).

This is especially evident during electoral periods, which is one of the moments in which the press focuses the most on politics. During these periods, a single politician tends to represent the electoral message and to work as bait with which the voter can identify more easily. Thus the candidate ends up becoming, as we have just mentioned, a brand.

In what follows, this article will examine whether there was a personalisation of candidates in the 2009 European Parliament elections and whether, as previous studies have pointed out, the parties’ national leaders became the personal focus of the campaign (Berganza, 2008a: 27). Other studies have highlighted the efforts of the political actors to influence the news published the weeks before the voting day and to favour their own interests (Casero, 2009). In this case, as Berganza emphasizes when referring to previous European elections, the national focus of the campaign has traditionally proved most beneficial for the political groups (2008a: 27).

Most studies of the European Parliament elections in Spain (Berganza, 2008, 2008b; Canel and Berganza, 2001; Morata, 2000) have focused on the analysis of the various aspects of the coverage made by the national media. The research presented here takes a step forward and introduces another element in order to further delimit the increasingly “ethnocentric” character (Berganza, 2008a: 25) of the European elections.

Since so far it has been shown that the national media gives less significance and a national approach to the European Parliament elections, it is interesting to investigate whether this categorisation of the news also affects, and in which ways, the regional media, in particular the media from the Autonomous Community of Aragon.

The aim of this article is, therefore, to analyse the journalistic treatment given by Aragon’s paid-for general information newspapers to the 2009 European Parliament election campaign, and in particular to identify the political protagonists in the news published during the two weeks leading to the elections. The analysis is based on the assumption that the Aragonese press focused more on Spain’s national political leaders, even those not participating as MEP candidates, than on the MEP candidates including the Aragonese politicians.

2. Methodology

The methodology used to carry out this research is content analysis, which is a technique widely and successfully used in the social sciences and in the field of communication. Although the use of this methodology in political communication is not new, the area to which we apply it is: the Autonomous Community of Aragon, where hardly any work with this theme and methodology has been published (Garcia et al., 2011; Zugasti et al., 2011).

One of the main advantages of content analysis is its utility to achieve objective, valid and reliable measurements. It also allows describing in a graphic and simple way, thanks to the tables of frequencies and contingency, the coverage made of the election campaign by the selected newspapers. Moreover, this method allows the examination of a large volume of information. On this occasion the analysis included 602 news items that appeared published from 23 May (the day the coverage of the campaign started) to 7 June 2009 (the voting day) in the four main general-information paid-for newspapers of the Autonomous Community of Aragon.

The following four newspapers were selected according to criteria of territorial relevance and dissemination: 1) the *Heraldo de Aragón*, which is published in Zaragoza and is the most important newspaper in the community, with a circulation of 53,087 copies in 2008; 2) *El Periódico de Aragón*, which is the main competitor of the *Heraldo de Aragón* but has a lower dissemination (an average circulation of 12,087 copies); 3) the *Diario de Altoaragón*, which is the main local newspaper in Huesca (with an average circulation of 7,449 copies); and the *Diario de Teruel*, which is the main newspaper in the third of the Aragonese

provinces, Teruel, and is not subject to the control of the *Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión* (OJD), the office that keeps statistics of newspapers circulations (Association of Spanish Newspaper Publishers, 2010: 46-47).

3. Results

The European Parliament election campaign raised considerable interest in the print press of the Autonomous Community of Aragon. As previously mentioned, between 23 May and 7 June, 2009, the analysed newspapers published a total of 602 news items about the elections. However, the attention paid to this election was not equal in the four newspapers.

As table 1 shows, the *Heraldo de Aragón* was the newspaper that focused the most on the campaign, since 33.4% of all the collected news items appeared in its pages. Following with very similar percentages were *El Periódico de Aragón* (25.4%) and the *Diario de Altoaragón* (25.1%); while the *Diario de Teruel* published the lowest percentage of news items (16.1%).

Table 1. Distribution of the units of analysis across newspapers

Newspaper	Percentage
<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	33.4
<i>El Periódico de Aragón</i>	25.4
<i>Diario del Altoaragón</i>	25.1
<i>Diario de Teruel</i>	16.1
Total	100.0

Table 2 presents the classification of the sample of news and is particularly useful to determine whether the coverage made by the four newspapers emphasised the European, the Spanish or the Aragonese dimension.

The “national” section stood out above the others because it encompassed over a third of the news items about the campaign (35.5%). This was followed by the “Regional” and “Local” sections (with 26.4% and 12% of the news items, respectively). If we sum up these percentages, we find that 73.9% of the news items had content focused on Spain. It is surprising that during the European Parliament election only 1.5% of the news items about it were included in the international section.

The weight of the editorial section is also interesting, since 19.1% of the texts were published in it. However, the two most important pages of a newspaper, the front and back pages, included very low percentages of the news items: 3.5% and 0.7%, respectively.

Table 2. Classification of the campaign-related news items within the newspapers

Section	Percentage
National	35.5
Regional	26.4
Editorial	19.1

Local	12
Front Page	3.5
International	1.5
Back page	0.7
Society	0.2
Others	1.2
Total	100.0

Political corruption and scandals became one of the main topics of the European Parliament election campaign. The press echoed such cases as the “Gürtel”, which affected the national and regional leaders of the PP, and the Prime Minister’s use of the official aircraft to attend campaign events. In Aragon, a preferred topic was the “Operación Molinos” (Mills Operation), which involved the detention in *La Muela* (a municipality of Zaragoza) of several people accused of urban corruption, including the Mayor of the town, who was affiliated to the Aragonese Party (PAR), which was a partner of the Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party (PSOE) in the autonomous Government. This explains why the political scandals and corruption were the main theme in a large number of units of analysis (14%).

Table 3: Main theme of the units of analysis

Main topic	Percentage
Political corruption/scandals	14
Economic crisis	13
Abstention/Euroscepticism	13
Electoral organization of the party	7.1
Other economic affairs	7
Infrastructure	5.6
EU institutions	5.3
The Autonomous State	3.5
Legalization of the Internationalist Initiative	3.2
Polls data	2.2
Education/ Research and development	2.2
Abortion	1.8
Immigration	1.5
References to the civil war/ Francoism	1.5
Environment	1.5
Housing	1.2
Relations with non-EU countries	1
Relations with EU Member States	0.7
Health	0.7
Church-State relations	0.5
Agriculture	0.5
Water	0.5
Terrorism	0.3
Energy	0.2
Family models	0.2
Civil security	0.2
Justice	0.2
Others	11.8

Total	100.0
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The second most frequently covered issue had a distinctly national character: the economic crisis (13%). The theme of abstention reached the same percentage of mentions. This is one of the shadows that recurrently appears on the European Parliament elections and which, intertwined with the Euroscepticism, often finds a place within the campaigns and their informative coverage.

In the seventh place of the list we find another topic that exceeds the national sphere to reach the European area: EU institutions, operation and law became the protagonists in 5.3% of the units of analysis. However, in order to find another issue directly linked with the supra-national profile of the elections we need to go almost to the end of table 3, where Spain's relations with other EU countries were the main subject in 0.7% of the news items.

The rest of the issues whose prevalence was under 3% do not present by themselves the European character of the previously mentioned issues. In fact, there are some issues that are specifically national such as the Autonomous State (3.5%), which is omnipresent in Spanish politics, and the debate on the legalisation of the Internationalist Initiative that emerged at the beginning of the campaign. Arnaldo Otegi, leader of the Batasuna party that was declared illegal, called for the vote to the Internationalist Initiative party, which was recently legalised by the Constitutional Court despite the suspicions that it was serving as a political front for ETA. This was the reason why the debate on this issue had a relatively prominent coverage: 3.2% of the articles on the campaign.

In the face of the elections the organisation of the party was the main theme in 7.1% of the analysed units; other economic affairs unrelated to the crisis were the main theme in 7% of the news items; and issues related to infrastructure were in 5.6%. It is important to mention that the subject of water, which is of special interest in Aragon due to the Ebro Group's controversial project of diversion, was virtually out of the coverage of the 2009 European elections.

Table 4 presents the perspective used by the press to deal with the topics presented, i.e. whether the subjects were treated from a regional (of Aragon or other autonomous communities), national or European point of view. The most abundant approach was the national: 52.7% of the issues were strictly addressed from this dimension. If we also take into consideration the news items presented from the point of view of Aragon (15.9%) and of other autonomous communities (3.5%), we find that the main theme of 72.1% of the articles was presented from an exclusive Spanish perspective.

Table 4: Perspective of the main theme

Perspective	Percentage
National	52.7
Aragonese	15.9
European	11.1

National and European	8.1
Aragonese and European	7.8
Other autonomous communities	3.5
Other autonomous communities and European	0.5
Others	0.3
Total	100.0

On the other hand, the approaches that went beyond the national perspective were much less common in the coverage. Among these approaches stood out the European perspective, which was taken in 11.1% of the analysed texts, which is, however, a figure somewhat low if we consider that this is the European Parliament election. However, 8.1% of the analysed items included a mix of supranational and national perspectives, while 7.8% mixed the Aragonese and European perspectives.

3.1. The main protagonists of the press coverage

Table 5: Main protagonist of the units of analysis

Main protagonist	Percentage
José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero	11.5
Mariano Rajoy	10.8
Aragonese candidates of the <i>EdP-V</i> coalition	6.1
EU institutions	5.3
Other national politicians of the PP	5.1
Other national politicians of PSOE	5
Aragonese United Left candidates	4.2
Juan Fernando López Aguilar	4
Aragonese candidates of the PSOE	3.3
Other politicians from the EU	3
Other Aragonese politicians of the PSOE	2.8
Jaime Mayor Oreja	2.5
Aragonese candidates of the PP	2.3
Other Aragonese politicians of the PP	2.2
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the PSOE	1.7
Marcelino Iglesias	1.7
Felipe González	1.5
Willy Meyer	1.3
Other national politicians of the United Left	1.3
Other politicians of the Internationalist Initiative	1.2
Other politicians of the Coalition for Europe (CEU)	1.2
Other Aragonese politicians of the United Left	1.2
Cayo Lara	1
Rosa Díez	1
Other politicians of the Pro-Aragon Union (CHA)	1
Aragonese Party (PAR)	0.8
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the PP	0.7
Other candidates of the Internationalist Initiative	0.7
José María Aznar	0.7
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the <i>UPyD</i> party (Union Progress and Democracy)	0.7
The Media	0.5
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the <i>EdP-V</i> coalition	0.5
Other politicians of non-Aragonese parties of the <i>EdP-V</i> coalition	0.5
Aragonese candidates of the <i>UPyD</i> party	0.5
Candidates from other EU countries	0.3
Oriol Junqueras	0.3
Francisco Sosa Wagner	0.3

Other candidates of the Coalition for Europe CEU	0.3
Other opinion leaders	0.3
Trade unions	0.3
Politicians from non-EU countries	0.3
Other national politicians of the <i>UPyD</i> party	0.3
Leaders of the Catholic Church	0.3
Ramón Tremosa	0.2
Other Spanish political parties	0.2
NGOs	0.2
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the United Left	0.2
Barack Obama	0.2
Luisa Fernanda Rudi Ubeda	0.2
Terrorists	0.2
Other	8.3
Total	100.0

Table 5 presents the results concerning the main protagonists of the units of analysis. The two most prominent protagonists were José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy, who became the protagonists of 11.5% and 10.8%, respectively of the news items. This is a clear signal of the weight of the leaders of the two main parties in the election campaign and its media coverage, and is at the same time a sample of the national profile acquired by the European election campaign. These ideas are reinforced if we consider that the fifth and sixth positions in terms of importance were not occupied by electoral candidates, but by the national leaders, again of the PSOE (5.1%) and the Popular Party (5%).

The only two protagonists that did not belong to the Spanish political establishment and had considerable weight in the coverage were the member states and institutions of the European Union (5.3%) and the non-candidate politicians from other EU countries (3%). The candidates from other EU countries were the third non-Spanish European protagonist that had a much less marked, almost residual, presence than the previous ones: in only 0.3% of the election-related news items.

It is important to highlight that the MEP candidates of Spain's two major national parties previously seemed to hold a protagonism that at the end vanished because of the national perspective with which these supranational elections were presented. Juan Fernando López Aguilar, of the PSOE, was the main actor in just 4% of the items, and Jaime Mayor Oreja, of the PP, in 2.5%.

Table 6: Activity of the main protagonist of the units of analysis

Activity	Percentage
Criticism to the adversary in a rally	19.6
Proposal in a meeting	14.5
Proposal in interview/statements to the media	7.1
Criticism to the adversary in interview/statements to the media	6
Proposal in meetings with organisations	5.6
Others in interview/statements to the media	4.5
Criticism to the adversary in meetings with organisations	3.8
Others at a rally	3.5
Presence in polls	3
Criticism to the adversary in a debate	2

Others in meetings with organisations	1.3
Others in a debate	0.8
Proposal in a debate	0.2
Others	28.1
Total	100.0

Regarding the Aragonese MEP candidates, the greatest media protagonism was achieved, with a 6.1%, by the MEP candidates of *Europa de los Pueblos-Verdes* (EdP-V), which is a political coalition of several nationalist parties, including the Pro-Aragon Union (CHA). The Aragonese MEP candidates of the United Left were the protagonists in 4.2% of the units of analysis. The Aragonese MEP candidates of the PSOE and the PP had less relevance: 3.3% and 2.3%, respectively.

Regarding the activities carried out by the protagonists of the coverage, the rally activities stand out since 37.6% of the units of analysis showed the main character in this classic forum which, as shown in table 6, keeps occupying a relevant place in the coverage carried out by the media.

In second place were the interviews and statements made by the main actors in the media (17.6%), which were above the visits and meetings with different political parties (10.7%). In the last place are the activities developed in televised face-to-face debates which, like the presence of the protagonist in polls, appeared in just 3% of the news items. This limited coverage of those debates is surprising given the effort that the parties put in their preparation and given that they are “a media opportunity from which, with luck and good use, all the participants can obtain abundant benefits” (Cantavella et al., 2008: 83).

In both rallies and discussions, the criticisms to the opponent were more abundant than the electoral proposals. This is something common in campaigns and has already been highlighted by other studies (Herrero and Benoit, 2009). On the contrary, the proposals stood out above the disqualifications when the protagonist of the news spoke with the media, made a visit, or attended a meeting.

Based on the data presented in table 7, we can affirm that the Aragonese press treated positively the protagonists of the news about the European Parliament elections. Only 22.8% of the news items offered a clear negative judgement.

Table 7: Assessment of the main protagonist of the units of analysis

Assessment of main protagonists	Percentage
Neutral or positive	77.2
Negative	22.8
Total	100.0

The following tables show the protagonists of the elections-related news in each of the newspapers under study [1].

The first table highlights the little attention paid to the two candidates of the PSOE and the PP. Juan Fernando López Aguilar was covered, above all, by the *Diario de Teruel* (6.2%). However, this newspaper barely reported on Jaime Mayor Oreja (1%). References to the Socialist candidate were similar in the *Diario del Altoaragón* (4%), the *Heraldo de Aragón* (3.5%) and *El Periódico de Aragón* (3.3%). This last newspaper was the one that paid attention to the PP's candidate the most (3.9%), above the *Diario del Altoaragón* (2.6%) and the *Heraldo de Aragón* (2%).

The presence of the rest of the candidates in the Aragonese press was greater, as it ranged from 17.5% in the *Diario de Teruel* to 33.8% in the *Diario del Altoaragón*. Curiously, the *Diario del Altoaragón* is the only one who covered more the MEP candidates than the non-candidate politicians (29.8%). The news about the non-candidate reached almost 50% in the *Diario de Teruel* and exceeded 26% in the papers from Zaragoza.

The significant presence of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy in the press is surprising, since none of them was participating in the European elections. However, both of them considered the European elections as a trial for the general elections, and for this reason they acquired a greater protagonism, even more than the MEP candidates of their parties. References to the Prime Minister of Spain reached 13.1% in *El Periódico de Aragón*, 12.6% in the *Diario del Altoaragón*, 11.4% in the *Heraldo de Aragón*, and 7.2% in the *Diario de Teruel*. References to the leader of the PP reached their lowest percentage (8.2%) in the *Diario de Teruel*, and increased to 11.4% in the *Heraldo de Aragón*, 12.6% in the *Diario de Altoaragón*, and 13.1% in *El Periódico de Aragón*.

Table 8. Main protagonists (candidates and non-candidates) across newspapers

Protagonist	Newspaper			
	<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	<i>El Periódico de Aragón</i>	<i>Diario de Teruel</i>	<i>Diario del Altoaragón</i>
López Aguilar	3.5%	3.3%	6.2%	4%
Mayor Oreja	2%	3.9%	1%	2.6%
Rodríguez Zapatero	11.4%	13.1%	7.2%	12.6%
Rajoy	8.5%	15%	8.2%	11.3%
Candidates	23.4%	21.6%	17.5%	33.8%
Non-candidates	26.4%	26.1%	48.5%	29.8%
Other	24.9%	17%	11.3%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Regarding the geographical origin of the protagonists of the news, the differences among the newspapers are more remarkable. The presence of the Aragonese politicians was outstanding in the *Diario de Teruel* (45.5%), considerable in *El Periódico de Aragón* (28.1%) and the *Diario del Altoaragón* (25.2%), and relatively low in the *Heraldo de Aragón* (16.4%). In fact, the latter covered more other social actors (24.9%) than the political class of the region.

Table 9. Main character (Aragonese and non-Aragonese) across newspapers

Main protagonist	Newspaper			
	<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	<i>El Periódico de Aragón</i>	<i>Diario de Teruel</i>	<i>Diario del Altoaragón</i>
Non-Aragonese politicians	58.7%	54.9%	43.3%	68.9%
Aragonese politicians	16.4%	28.1%	45.5%	25.2%
Other social actors	24.9%	17%	11.3%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

However, as shown in table 9, the non-Aragonese politicians received more attention from the media, and especially, from the *Diario del Altoaragón* (68.9%). Only the *Diario de Teruel* published less news of the non-Aragonese politicians than of the Aragonese politicians.

Table 10 shows that the MEP candidates, excluding the candidates of the PSOE and the PP, were the protagonists most positively assessed by the press (93.9%). Juan Fernando López Aguilar and Jaime Mayor Oreja accumulated more positive than negative comments. However, the treatment received by the candidate from the Canary Islands was a bit more positive (79.2%) than the treatment received by his main rival in the elections (73.3%), whose percentage was very similar to that registered by the non-candidate politicians, both national and Aragonese (75.7%).

It is interesting that politicians worse assessed by the four Aragonese newspapers are the Prime Minister of Spain (63.8%) and the leader of the opposition (67.7%), which did not participated in the elections but still accumulated the highest percentages of references as main protagonists throughout the period under analysis.

Table 10. Assessment of the main protagonists (candidates and non-candidates)

Assessment	Main protagonists						
	López Aguilar	Mayor Oreja	Rodríguez Zapatero	Rajoy	Candidates	Non-candidates	Others
Neutral or positive	79.2%	73.3%	63.8%	67.7%	93.9%	75.7%	70.8%
Negative	20.8%	26.7%	36.2%	32.3%	6.1%	24.3%	29.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

On the other hand, the Aragonese politicians were judged positively by the Aragonese press almost 95% of the times. More than 20 percentage points behind were the non-Aragonese politicians (71%) and other social actors (70.8%), as shown in table 11.

Table 11. Assessment of the main protagonist (Aragonese and not Aragonese)

Assessment	Main protagonists		
	Non-Aragonese politicians	Aragonese politicians	Other social actors
Neutral or positive	71%	94.9%	70.8%
Negative	29%	5.1%	29.2%

Total	100%	100%	100%
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3.2. Secondary actors of the press coverage

Table 12 shows the presence of the secondary actors accompanying the protagonists in the news about the European Parliament election campaign. The presence of the PSOE's national politicians who were not MEP candidates is outstanding: they were present in 8.9% of the analysed news. However, it is interesting to see that the five actors who followed them in importance all belonged to the PP: Jaime Mayor Oreja and Mariano Rajoy (8.3%), other national politicians of the PP (7.9%), other Aragonese politicians of the PP (6.7%), and Aragonese candidates of the PP (5.7%). This proved once again that the presence of the national leader and the non-candidate politicians was equal to or greater than that of the MEP candidates.

The next block of secondary actors corresponds to the PSOE group: Aragonese candidates of the PSOE (5.4%), José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (4.8%), Juan Fernando López Aguilar (4.4%), other Aragonese politicians of the PSOE (4.1%) and Marcelino Iglesias (3.5%). The presence of the Prime Minister, once again, shadowed his party's candidates but, on this occasion, the Aragonese candidates ranked even higher than these two figures.

Table 12. Secondary actors in the sample of news

Secondary actors	Percentage
Other national politicians of the PSOE	8.9
Jaime Mayor Oreja	8.3
Mariano Rajoy	8.3
Other national politicians of the PP	7.9
Other Aragonese politicians of the PP	6.7
Aragonese candidates of the PP	5.7
Aragonese candidates of PSOE	5.4
José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero	4.8
Juan Fernando López Aguilar	4.4
Other Aragonese politicians of the PSOE	4.1
Marcelino Iglesias	3.5
Other politicians of the Pro-Aragon Union (CHA)	2.9
Other politicians of EU countries	2.2
Aragonese candidates of the United Left	1.9
Aragonese candidates of the <i>EdP-V</i> coalition	1.6
Obama	1.6
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the PP	1.6
Willy Meyer	1.3
Alfonso Sastre	1
Felipe González	1
Francisco Sosa Wagner	1
EU institutions	1
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the PSOE	1
Cayo Lara	0.6
The media	0.6
Other opinion leaders	0.6
Other politicians of the Internationalist Initiative	0.6
José María Aznar	0.6
Other politicians of the Coalition for Europe	0.6

Other Aragonese politicians of the <i>UPyD</i> party	0.6
Ramón Tremosa	0.6
Rosa Díez	0.6
Candidates from other countries	0.3
Other non-Aragonese candidates of the United Left	0.3
Other candidates of the Internationalist Initiative	0.3
Other Aragonese politicians of the United Left	0.3
Other national politicians of the United Left	0.3
Other national politicians of the <i>UPyD</i> party	0.3
Aragonese Party (PAR)	0.3
Trade unions	0.3
Others	5.7
Total	100.0

These data show that the main collective actor in the secondary actors of the sample of news was the PP. In this case, Mayor Oreja and Rajoy appeared the same number of times, which shows that the pro-European dimension of these secondary political actors is greater than that of the main actors. However, in the majoritarian presence of Aragonese MEP candidates of the PSOE we observe a major regional reading of the elections.

The secondary actors that had a European dimension and a remarkable presence were other EU politicians (2.2%) and institutions (1%), which were way behind the national organisations, i.e., they were not seen as really relevant by the media under analysis.

With regards to the activity of the secondary actors, table 13 shows that like with the main protagonist, the main activity was developed in rallies (38.7%). The meetings with groups accounted for 13.3%, the statements to the media 9.9%, and the activities within debates 6.3%. The position of the secondary actors in the election polls reached 3.8%.

Examining the character of the activity transversally we can see that the secondary actors criticised the political adversary 26.6% of the times and put forward proposals in just 21.9%. These figures highlight the dominant tone of confrontation and conflict that characterised this election campaign.

Table 13. Activity of the secondary actors of the sample of news

Activity	Percentage
Criticism to the adversary in a rally	18.7
Proposal in a meeting	13
Others in a rally	7
Proposal in meetings with organisations	5.1
Criticism to the adversary in meetings with organisations	4.4
Proposal in media interviews/statements	3.8
Others in meetings with organisations	3.8
Position in polls	3.8
Criticism to the opponent in a debate	3.5
Others in media interviews/statements	3.2
Criticism to the adversary in media interviews/statements	2.9
Others in a debate	2.2
Proposal in a debate	0.6
Others	27.9

Total	100.0
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As shown in table 14, the assessment of the secondary actors was mostly positive. Of the sample of news 73.7% offered positive or neutral assessments and just 26.3% offered clearly negative judgements.

In theory, the protagonists of the elections, Juan Fernando López Aguilar and Jaime Mayor Oreja, were considered secondary non-protagonist actors. At least that is what can be deduced from the data in table 15 and its comparison with table 8.

Table 14. Assessment of the secondary actors in the sample of news

Assessment	Percentage
Neutral or positive	73.7
Negative	26.3
Total	100.0

The candidate of the PP received more mentions as secondary actor than the PSOE candidate. The presence of Mayor Oreja was especially prominent in the pages of *El Periódico de Aragón* (15.2%) and the rest of the newspapers (around 6%).

Mariano Rajoy was also taken more as a secondary actor than José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. With the exception of the *Diario de Teruel* (4%), the references to the PP leader were between 8.1% in the *Heraldo de Aragón* and 10.3% in the *Diario del Altoaragón*. For its part, the references to the Prime Minister ranged from 3.4% in the *Diario del Altoaragón* to 7.6% in *El Periódico de Aragón*.

As in the case of the protagonists, the secondary non-candidate actors appeared in most of the sample of news. In the *Diario de Teruel* they were present in 62% of the news, in the *Heraldo de Aragón* in 33.3%, and in the other two newspapers in over 40%. For its part, the candidates appeared prominently in the *Diario de Altoaragón* (31%) and less remarkably in the rest of the papers: from 16% in the *Diario de Teruel* to 20.2% in the *Heraldo de Aragón*.

Table 15. Secondary actors (candidates and non-candidate) across newspapers

Secondary Actors	Newspapers			
	<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	<i>El Periódico de Aragón</i>	<i>Diario de Teruel</i>	<i>Diario del Altoaragón</i>
López Aguilar	4%	6.3%	2%	4.6%
Major Oreja	6.1%	15.2%	6%	5.7%
Rodriguez Zapatero	4%	7.6%	4%	3.4%
Rajoy	8.1%	8.9%	4%	10.3%
Candidates	20.2%	17.7%	16%	31%
Non-candidates	33.3%	43%	62%	41.4%
Others	24.2%	1.3%	6%	3.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The data in the tables 16 and 9 are very similar. The references to non-Aragonese politicians as secondary actors were majoritarian in all newspapers except in the *Diario de Teruel* (40%). This newspaper covered more than any other the political class of Aragon, which appeared remarkably in the *Diario de Altoaragón* (37.9%) and *El Periódico de Aragón* (31.6%), and less remarkably in the *Heraldo de Aragón* (19.2%).

The references to other social actors varied considerably across newspapers: they were relatively frequent in the *Heraldo de Aragón* (24.2%), and very rare in *El Periódico de Aragón* (1.3%).

Table 16. Aragonese and non-Aragonese secondary actors across newspapers

Secondary actors	Newspapers			
	<i>Heraldo de Aragón</i>	<i>El Periódico de Aragón</i>	<i>Diario de Teruel</i>	<i>Diario del Altoaragón</i>
Non-Aragonese politicians	56.6%	67.1%	40%	58.6%
Aragonese politicians	19.2%	31.6%	54%	37.9%
Other social actors	24.2%	1.3%	6%	3.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Regarding the assessment of the secondary actors, table 17 shows that, as in the case of the protagonists, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Mariano Rajoy were the worst judged by the Aragonese press. The Prime Minister received negative assessments in 46.7% of the news, while the PP’s leader stood slightly behind him (with negative assessments in 46.2%).

A more positive assessment was received by the candidates of the PSOE and the PP. In this occasion, and unlike what happened when they were protagonists, Mayor Oreja (65.4%) received slightly more positive assessments than López Aguilar (64.3%). However, the candidates were, once again, better assessed (87%) than the non-candidates (74.6%) by the four newspapers.

Table 17. Assessment of the secondary actors (candidates and non-candidates)

Assessment	Secondary actors						
	López Aguilar	Mayor Oreja	Rodríguez Zapatero	Rajoy	Candidates	Non-candidates	Others
Neutral or Positive	64.3%	65.4%	53.3%	53.8%	87%	74.6%	77.4%
Negative	35.7%	34.6%	46.7%	46.2%	13%	25.4%	22.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

When the Aragonese politicians were secondary actors the Aragonese press also gave them a positive treatment (96.2%). Other social actors were treated positively in 77.4% of the news. As shown in table 18, the most negative assessments were given to the non-Aragonese politicians (40%).

Table 18. Assessment of the Aragonese and not Aragonese secondary actors

Assessment	Secondary actors		
	Non-Aragonese politicians	Aragonese politicians	Other social actors
Neutral or Positive	60%	96.2%	77.4%
Negative	40%	3.8%	22.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

4. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained in this study, we can say that the main geographical perspective offered in the coverage of the European Parliament elections by the press of the Autonomous Community of Aragon was not regional, but national.

This is evident in such formal aspects as the section in which the sample of news items were published and in aspects of content such as the themes and perspectives. In this sense, the coverage was focused on issues directly affecting Spain, which were addressed from a remarkably national point of view.

The consideration of the European elections as a sort of rehearsal for the national elections prevailed among the protagonists of the coverage. The Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition particularly caught the attention of the media. The results show that the campaign was personalised around the leader of the party at the national level, which confirms the tendency observed in previous elections.

The non-Aragonese politicians of the PSOE and the PP that were not MEP candidates also acquired a remarkable importance. This did not happen with the MEP candidates of the main parties: Juan Fernando López Aguilar and Jaime Mayor Oreja were relegated, respectively, to the eighth and twelfth positions in the scale of protagonists.

The Aragonese politicians neither received much attention from the four newspapers. The political class from outside Aragon received a positive treatment in the *Heraldo de Aragón*, *El Periódico de Aragón* and the *Diario del Altoaragón*. Only the *Diario de Teruel* behaved differently since in its pages the Aragonese politicians appeared more than the non-Aragonese ones. However, the political actors of Aragon received more positive judgements than politicians from other places, which highlights that despite the national perspective of its coverage, the Aragonese press judged the politicians of its region more positively, which was even more evident in the case of the secondary actors.

Paradoxically, the actors most prevalent in the coverage, Rodríguez-Zapatero and Rajoy, received the largest number of criticisms, regardless of whether they were protagonists or secondary actors. In other words, the analysis demonstrates that a strong presence in the

media is not always accompanied by a positive assessment of the political actor, but quite the contrary.

This research does not only delve into the research line initiated by other authors in the coverage of the European Parliament elections in the national media, but also opens the door to future work in two ways. On the one hand, it is intended as a first approach to the study of the press coverage of the European elections from the regional level, which allows examining whether the press from other autonomous communities exhibit the same patterns of coverage exhibited by the Aragonese press.

On the other hand, this article establishes a starting point for further research on the informative behaviour of the analysed newspapers with regards to other electoral processes. In other words, the results of this study raise the question of whether these newspapers would make a national reading of other election campaigns which, by definition, are not national, but municipal or regional.

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6. Notes

[1] To facilitate crossed analysis with other variables and obtain statistically significant results, the “Main protagonist” variable was recoded according to two criteria. First, we divided the protagonists into two groups: candidates and non-candidates. To these categories we added the two main candidates of the PSOE and the PP as well as the Prime Minister of Spain and the leader of the opposition who, as indicated, reached the highest number of references. Those characters outside the political sphere were grouped under the value “others”. Second, the protagonists were distributed in three large blocks: Aragonese

politicians, non-Aragonese politicians, and other social actors. The same criteria were used in the case of the “Secondary actors” variable.

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