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Political Pressures in TVE: Cascade Effects, Morphology of Manipulations and Professional and Personal Reprisals

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ABSTRACT

The journalistic field of Spanish public service broadcaster has traditionally been questioned for its lack of political autonomy because of pervasive news manipulations over the course of years. Prompted by these challenges and growing sociopolitical pressures to set a politically free public governance, this study aims to explore how political pressures interfere in the news production process in TVE, elaborating on their potential impact at professional and practical level. Drawing upon 45 in-depth interviews with TVE newswriters, our findings first illustrate the reach and morphology of political pressures in TVE, examining how the news production management structures the anatomy of political interferences in the newsroom. Then, the study outlines the main typologies of pressures, illustrating the main consequences for journalists' labor conditions and journalistic practice. We argue that both internal and external political pressures are inextricably inter-related, showcasing their structuration through a top-down cascade effect.

KEYWORDS

Political influence; TVE; news manipulation; journalistic field; journalism practice; political interference; news production

Introduction

In recent years, the traditional functions of public service broadcasting (PSB) have been challenged by a myriad of organizational, structural, and economic factors inside and outside the news business (Bennett 2015; Hanretty 2011; Polonska and Beckett 2019). In Spain, prompted by professional demonstrations and a questionable approach to public governance when appointing upper and middle managers, TVE has received much criticism (Soengas and Rodríguez-Vázquez 2014), laying the ground for a deep transformation of the structure and management of this entity. Given this backdrop, a growing number of scholars have raised concerns about the increasingly politically oriented nature of the service; the growing manipulations of the news; and the lack of consensus in establishing an independent and politically free institution, starting from the board of directors (Humanes and Fernández-Alonso 2015). This study focuses on the extension, morphology, and the practical and personal effects of political pressures in TVE.

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This article examines the structure and potential effects of political pressures in PSB in Spain, elaborating on how the news production process and journalists' role have established a framework for manipulating news at TVE. Drawing upon 45 in-depth interviews with journalists working at different sections and centers of TVE, our results reveal the role of both like-minded middle managers and news workers in the consolidation and naturalization of political pressures, triggering a top-down cascade effect and challenging of journalists' independence and autonomy as a result. We argue that internal and external political pressures are inextricably related, having a critical impact both professionally and personally on how news workers reflect upon their role in the organization. This study contributes to ongoing discussions on the declining reliability of PSB in democratic societies (Polonska and Beckett 2019), illustrating the main psychological and professional implications of political interferences on public news workers.

The Context of Spanish PSB: A Historical Overview

The birth and evolution of Spain's public television TVE was strongly conditioned by the context of its creation (i.e., right in the middle of Franco's dictatorship). As a result, it was not until 1982 when the first statute of the corporation was approved. In 1982, the Socialist Party won the elections, and in the same year, RTVE also ceased to be the only television in the Spanish media market, as the Basque Country established its own regional television without the central government's permission. This situation forced the central government to pass a law that regulated the conditions of this new media landscape in an effort to gain some control over RTVE's new competitors (Bustamante 2008).

In 1988, Law 10/1988 of Private Television was passed, and since then, commercial broadcasters were able to join the media landscape. Despite the Socialist Party's rejection of this idea during their first years of government, private broadcasters finally entered the market arguing for "providing a broader informative pluralism" (Piedrahita 1994). In 1990, three new private corporations (Antena 3, Gestevisión Telecinco, and Sogecable) joined RTVE and the regional public televisions. At the end of the 90s and during the early 2000s, the right-wing Popular Party came to power, and this period at RTVE was characterized by strong governmental interference and serious economic problems (Gómez-Montano 2006). However, there were some regulatory novelties: in 2001, the 1980 RTVE statute was reviewed to include some new entries on the integral sense of public service and decentralization. At the end of the year 2000, new concessions for private broadcasters were granted for Net TV and Veo TV, two corporations well-known for their sympathy with the Popular Party.

The left-wing Socialist Party returned to power in 2004 with José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero as president, and in 2006, arguably the biggest step towards independence in the history of RTVE was taken with the passing of Law 17/2006 (Bustamante and Corredor 2012). This law changed the method by which the president of the corporation was appointed, who now needed the approval of two-thirds of the parliament, having been previously evaluated by a committee of experts based on professional merits. In 2011, the Popular Party won the elections defeating the Socialist Party, and Mariano Rajoy formed a new right-wing government. After four months of administration, by virtue of a Royal Decree, Law 17/2006 was modified to accommodate the appointment of the president of RTVE by simple majority on a second round, thus de facto annulling the

previously stipulated majority of two-thirds of parliament. This last period of the Popular Party's administration has been regarded both by academics (Gómez-Montano 2006) and in-house journalists as one of darkest periods of journalism at RTVE (García-de-Madariaga, Navarro-Moreno, and Olmo-López 2019).

In 2018, a no-confidence provision withdrew Mariano Rajoy from the government of Spain and elected Socialist Party's Pedro Sánchez as president. Sánchez's arrival ushered in a promise of transformation at RTVE and was received with a certain optimism. The first measures included the recuperation of the expert committee in charge of assessing the eligibility of all candidates for the presidency of the corporation, and the need for a reinforced majority of two-thirds of the parliament for the president's appointment. Meanwhile, Rosa María Mateo, as a temporary unique administrator, was appointed by the government to run the corporation until the public tender process was fulfilled. However, currently, the temporary administrator continues to act as president and the public tender is on standby.

In conclusion, RTVE has historically struggled with maintaining a distance with the government, which has created not only an undesirable situation for professionals inside the organization (García-de-Madariaga, Navarro-Moreno, and Olmo-López 2019) but has also partially influenced the audience's distrust in the public service media (PSM). RTVE's foremost challenge in the coming years is reinforcing its relationship with the audience and improving its image among them (Lamuedra 2012), but there is also a need for structural reforms. While the media, commercial, technological, and political landscapes become increasingly intertwined, PSM has a responsibility towards citizens to become more approachable, diverse, and irrevocably independent. As academics call for a change in perspective to a more accessible, open, and advocate rights-based approach in PSM (Aslama-Horowitz and Nieminen 2017), RTVE's commitment to society must begin by shielding the professional autonomy of its journalists.

The Autonomy of the Media Field under Political Pressures

The media in general, and PSB in particular, are fields that have always dealt with at least two kinds of pressures. First, they struggle for autonomy from the economic field, usually called the market (Bourdieu 1998a). Second, it must fight the continuous pressure from the political field (Hilgers and Mangez 2015). In the case of public PSB, political pressures are usually more dominant: although state funding permits PSB to be—at least partially—free from the market, the government often attempts, in return for this funding, to use PSB for its own purposes (Benson and Powers 2011). Thus, similar to other fields in modern democracies such as science, education, or the arts, journalism and media must also constantly fight for their autonomy (Bourdieu 1996).

Analyzing the autonomy of the field of communication and media in a Bourdieusian framework is a well-established research tradition (Benson and Neveu 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2006; Myles 2010; Schultz 2007; Willig 2013). According to Bourdieu, autonomy can be achieved in a complex system of competing fields. For media, these competing systems are usually the market whose currency is capital return and politics whose currency is political power (Bourdieu 1991). Consequently, both market and politics seek to dominate the field of media to use it for their specific purposes (Benson 2006).

Regarding political pressures, the agents of the political field (politicians, the government, the state, political factions, and so on) also attempt to use the media in order to broadcast their political agendas (Hesmondhalgh 2006). Politicians recognized early on that mass media and television in particular “enjoys a de facto monopoly on what goes into the heads of a significant part of the population and what they think” (Bourdieu 1996, 18.). In the case of PSB, where the institutions receive funding from the state, this pressure from political agents and interests can be very significant, since there are various “roles the state can play as owner, regulator, and funder of the media” (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 49). Consequently, PSB’s independence from political pressures has been one of the most discussed topics in journalism studies on PSB in recent years (Bennett 2015; Hanretty 2011; Polonska and Beckett 2019).

Due to the aforementioned external pressures, media autonomy can be conceived in two ways. The first approach is in terms of external factors, i.e., independence from the external pressures of competing fields such as markets and politics. The second way of defining autonomy is ascertaining field-specific features; in the Bourdieusian perspective, this is the determination of field-specific agents, capitals, norms, and habitus (Bourdieu 1986a, 1991). According to the original Bourdieusian idea, the field is

the space of the relations of force between the different kinds of capital or, more precisely, between the agents who possess a sufficient amount of one of the different kinds of capital to be in a position to dominate the corresponding field. (Bourdieu 1988, 34)

Habitus is defined as certain durable and transposable dispositions or tendencies that social agents have in order to be active during social actions (Grenfell 2008). Habitus is also related to autonomy, since it is by the habitus that the agents of a specific field can distinguish themselves from the agents of other fields. In the field of journalism, the agents of the field develop ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that are different from the habitus of both political and economic agents (Bourdieu 1989b, 1998b).

Nowadays, digital media platforms offer various alternatives to PSB, and consequently, PSB has lost a significant part of its traditional audiences as well as a great deal of its market share, making it increasingly dependent on state funding (Benson and Powers 2011). Given its economic dependence on the state (Brevini 2013), it is not surprising that the political field has become more involved in demanding a say in PSB’s operation (Collins et al. 2001). Over the years, an extensive debate has emerged on the proper role of PSB and its independence from political pressures (Farooq, Rbiha, and Aguenau 2015; Figueiras 2017; Mermin 2004; Nyarko, Mensah, and Owusu-Amoh 2018; Newton 2016). Lamuedra, Martín and Broullón-Lozano, based on the report by the International Press Institute, emphasize, “concerning the specific warning about the national public broadcasting corporation RTVE, the report also condemned the lack of independence, information manipulation practices, the pressure brought to bear on professionals and the internal purges” (Lamuedra, Martín, and Broullón-Lozano 2019, 1531–1532).

According to media scholars, political independence of the field implies PSB employees making their day-to-day decisions without political subordination and not being subjected to threats from politicians (Hanretty 2011). In Bourdieusian terms, they should be able to live by the autonomous habitus of the field (Bourdieu 1977, 1989b). Nevertheless, as Benson and Powell argue, the government always has and will try to influence the

operations of PSB; the question is to what extent is it possible to maintain the autonomy of PSB in the face of continuous political pressure (Benson and Powers 2011).

In the case of RTVE, political pressures have become so intense as to have seriously endangered the autonomy of the journalistic field, raising concerns among citizens and academics about the real public value of the entity in question. When the autonomy of a given field, in our case, of the Spanish public media field is low, participants tend to develop a habitus that might be different from the habitus of agents working within an autonomous media field (Bourdieu 1989b, 1996, 1998b). Significant shifts in professional habitus mediated by agents that communicate between different fields (Rothenberger, Auer, and Pratt 2017), such as journal editors who mediate between political demands and professional journalistic values, might undermine participants' autonomy (Bourdieu 1989a). However, this struggle could also respond to the field's norms and the habitus of its agents, and as a consequence, a modified field-structure could evolve (Bourdieu 1996). Understanding the process of constructing or reconstructing a professional field like public journalism is therefore essential to analyze the structure of external and internal influences. Based on this theoretical framework, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the reach and nature of the political pressures on the field of journalism and media in the case of RTVE?

RQ2: How are political pressures structured, how do they externally form the journalistic field, and how does the news production process enhance or hinder their potential?

RQ3: How do political pressures affect newswriters' habitus both professionally and personally?

Method

In order to answer our three research questions, we conduct 45 in-depth interviews with journalists working at TVE. These interviews took place between April and September of 2019, during the first and second general elections called by Pedro Sánchez and being Rosa María Mateo the temporary unique administrator of RTVE. By using public lists of workers' names at RTVE and pre-made possible email structures, we started to contact professionals of different regions, areas of expertise, and, when this information was publicly available, union affiliation. At the same time, there was an attempt to make parallel contact through private messages on Twitter in the event that no response was received from the company email address after a period of 5–10 days.

After having established contact and agreed on a meeting time, the interviews usually took place between 5 and 15 days after the acceptance. Once the interview was completed, every respondent was asked, on a voluntary basis, to name another informant at RTVE who could contribute to the study and develop more precise (snowball sampling), objective-oriented interviews. This procedure resulted in a sample that was fairly diverse, as it included respondents with different educational backgrounds, responsibilities, levels of experience in the organization and geographical locations. All the interviewees were granted anonymity in order to protect them from possible consequences within the organization. When asking interviewees for references of other possible

respondents, the name of the person who referred them was never revealed, unless the latter gave explicit consent thereto.

The questionnaire of the interviews included three subsections, starting with general questions about political pressures and interference, the past and present effects of these pressures in the newsroom and how they were materialized in practice (morphology). Before starting the interview, a set of general questions about the interviewee was asked: professional background, experience in the organization, responsibilities, and the perception of its work conditions and work stability. At the start of every interview, respondents were told once again that their answers would be treated anonymously, and were specifically asked to respond to the questions using as many examples as possible.

Audio recordings were made of all the interviews, using a maximum of three different devices (phone, computer and portable recorder) to ensure the quality of the recordings, which were then stored and encrypted in a computer. After being labeled accordingly, the interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to implement a thematic analysis of data. For the thematic analysis, the six-step process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed, starting with an overall reading of all the interviews in order to codify and select the main themes. Later, these themes were revisited and reviewed, and finally refined before being reported.

Results

Political Pressures in TVE: The Role of Like-Minded People

All the interviewees acknowledged the existence of political pressures in their daily work in RTVE. In fact, they normalized the reach and range of such pressures and thus, the lack of autonomy in the journalistic field. By highlighting this general lack of autonomy, our participants seem to agree that the crucial feature of political pressures is not their existence *per se*, but the “capacity” or “legitimacy” of the newsroom to manage, cope, or respond to such pressures. This normalization clearly results in considerable changes in habitus, since professional habitus is, in a significant part, a “result of an organizing action and it also designates a way of being” (Bourdieu 1977, 214). Participant 17, for example, reflected on the existence of political pressures as follows:

Yes, as in any other media, in the best case scenario, we receive some suggestions, or in the worst, pressures. This has always happened; it’s the eternal dialectic between the political powers and the professionals. The key is to have the ability to respond to these suggestions or pressures.

While all the participants acknowledged the existence of political pressures during the course of their professional careers, the effects of such pressures may vary according to the ruling government and the legitimacy and independence of the management staff. In this sense, all the participants acknowledged that both PP (Popular Party) and PSOE (Socialist Party) attempted—with varying degrees of success—to influence the PSM to their benefit, as the following participant comment illustrates: “In this sense, RTVE has, in practically every era, been a governmental media.” (P27)

Despite the general political interferences in the newsroom in the history of TVE, most participants seem to agree that the most recent period in which the field of journalism enjoyed more professional freedom and autonomy was during Rodríguez Zapatero’s

government. This corresponds to a well-known observation, according to which the decline of external pressure is in tandem with increasing autonomy (Bourdieu 2000a). According to our interviewees, the application of Law 17/2006 to select a president by consensus served to “armor” the independence of the organization, and although the newsroom was still subjected to political interferences, the strength and legitimacy of the management staff prevented such pressures from being deployed in practice. Participant 15 perfectly summarized many of our participants’ ethical concerns about the virtue cycle during Zapatero’s presidency: “There was a period of some years during Rodríguez Zapatero’s presidency in which RTVE, at least in the informative services, was fairly independent. I’m not saying there were no pressures, but these had no effect or consequences.”

On the contrary, most participants clearly acknowledged that it was under the presidency of Mariano Rajoy and José Antonio Sánchez as general director of RTVE that the field was less autonomous since “more control over the information and political manipulations were exercised” (P5). For example, Participant 30 reflected upon the relevance of Law 17/2006 and the arrival of Mariano Rajoy as follows:

The 2006 statute was a step towards independence, but then came the Royal Decree-Law [stipulated the appointment of the general manager through an absolute majority and not by consensus]. The *Partido Popular* repealed it when Mariano Rajoy came to power, which was a step back. (P24)

Traditionally, the structure of political interferences in Spanish public television(s) was built on the appointment of staff connected with the ruling party. According to our findings, this strategy of “selection” of political commissioners—instead of independent professionals—is a pervasive tactic in the history of TVE, and the main subterfuge to integrate the political discourse of the ruling government into daily news content. Through the appointment of hierarchies attached to the principles, norms, and values of the ruling government and the recruitment of in-house news workers willing to collaborate with the official political discourse (what our respondents refer to as “the parallel newsroom”), politicians control the informative output of the television, while independent in-house journalists are “pressed” to comply with formal “guidelines” on how to “manipulate” news contents on demand. “The key is to have personal relationships with a clear link with the Popular Party or to the person who appoints them in that position,” Participant 3 states. This phenomenon is a typical example of what Bourdieu calls the struggle for doxa, which refers to the field-specific truth that “always takes place under the control of the constitutive norms of the field and solely with the weapons approved within the field” (Bourdieu 2000b, 110). Thus, the journalistic field could be pressured through its own currency or “weapons” that are the means of news production and dissemination.

Similarly, one participant noted that another strategy to exercise political influence is to assign political information tasks to in-house journalists who “sympathize” with the ideology of the ruling party: “There’ve been all kinds of cases. I’ve known cases in which the person belonged to that party. Others just feed from that party’s ideology and end up being perceived as kind by those parties that appoint them in those positions,” Participant 23 states. However, the vast majority of journalists working in the “parallel newsroom” were hired professionals who came from news organizations or press cabinets with a clear right-wing orientation, as Participant 26 describes:

Basically in these last years, they were people coming from outside the organization. The news programs chief, Gundín, came from outside; one of his go-to's came from outside the organization too. They also brought in Álvaro Zancajo, who came from outside RTVE too. Even the president, José Antonio Sánchez, came from outside too, but he had had another period as president of the organization earlier—a pretty dark period too—and his commitment to public service is very relative. (P26)

Echoing this perspective, Participant 6 clarified:

A lot of them come from outside. Especially when the Popular Party is governing, most news programs chiefs came from outside. The lady that they appointed for the morning news services also came from the Popular Party, the director that we had later too was external ... In news programs especially, they are all journalists that come from ideologically-related media; the last news programs chief came from *La Razón*, for example. (P6)

Origin, Production, and Morphology of Political Pressures in TVE

The structure of political influences is determined by the process of news production itself. Three positions are responsible for managing the news production process of political information in TVE: editors, heads of sections, and journalists. According to our findings, the news selection process begins with the arrival of national agencies' daily agendas (mostly from Europa Press). Generally, the production process has a cascade effect: leaders, either the news editor or the heads of sections, propose the topics and issues to be covered; select them according to their newsworthiness; and set up a hierarchy. After news selection and editing, journalists are told to cover the selected news items with clear "orientations" and "guidelines," although the process may occur in a reverse manner: journalists or heads of sections "sell" the news stories to editors who then decide whether their coverage is appropriate.

Participant 19 clearly explains the process of news production management in TVE:

Every morning, there's a meeting with a representative from the management, the newscast editors, and the heads of all sections, and that's when the newscast time is divided up. Later, throughout the day, that menu can vary, and this does not happen through a global meeting, as it is the responsibility of the management and the editors, who directly make changes to the content.

Similarly, Participant 17 described how the news production process is typically executed:

Usually, in Madrid, every day at 10 in the morning and then at 5 in the afternoon again, there's a meeting of all the section heads and the editors. Theoretically, at those meetings, the section heads propose their topics, and the editors tell them when they'll be given in the newscast.

However, as previously mentioned, this directionality is often challenged, as journalists and heads of sections may propose the main topics and issues to be covered, as Participant 10 mentions:

The section head proposes a series of topics, which are 'sold' to the editor, and the editor ends up buying them. It is he who decides the elements with which he'll compose the newscast. Many times, it's the journalist who proposes, but sometimes, it's the editor who proposes to the journalist, and this changes on a cases-by-case basis.

The professional roles of the different newswriters involved are determined by their respective responsibility in the selection and treatment of the news production. On the one hand, heads of sections “generally propose news to the editor” (P14), while the editor “decides what is going to be news, with the approval of the information director” (P12). According to our findings, it is always the editor who has the “last say” in the production process, while the heads of sections are in charge of “selling information to the editor” (P8). Under this hierarchical structure, it is the informative director who eventually decides whether a piece of news “is covered or not.” Participant 23 clearly elucidated the chief roles of the professionals involved in the news production process:

In the decision-making process, it's the head of section who sells the news to the editor, who has the last word over what goes into the newscast, apart from the chief of news programs. The journalist is the one in charge of shaping it. (P21)

Throughout this process, the role of journalists fundamentally is to “create” the news and be “in touch” with reality in order to provide a more or less accurate idea “of what is going on out there” (P3). Their role, however, is not only limited to news production, but also involves creating a clear approach towards news creations. However, although the vast majority of news workers do not participate in the meetings that set the news of the day, they generally do have a take on the perspective of news production through reasoned discussions with their head of sections. In general terms, journalists shape the news and subsequently undergo a process of “editorial review,” in which they may also “fight” to convince their managers that their criteria should be taken into consideration, as Participant 18 illustrated:

Journalists have to craft the news, whilst also adding their critical perspective. They have to apply their journalistic criteria. For example, you have to fight for the time you need to explain your news, like by saying, ‘This needs one minute and a half because I need to make these statements ...’. They have to fight for their news too.

In general, political influences may be internal or external. External influences are easy to conceptualize: they simply mean the pressures from a given field of power towards another field. In order to provide a field-theoretic explanation of internal influences, the concept of habitus needs to be considered again. Those agents that originally internalize external pressures, basically internalize the norms and values of the external field, which in our case, include the norms and values of the political field. They build these norms as part of their habitus; as Bourdieu states, habitus is “the product of the internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, p. 31). Thus, internal influences might be considered as internalized external influences, similar to how habitus is always an internalization of norms that are originally external (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

The evidence from our findings reveals that the pressures are mainly internal and are therefore directly exercised by the heads of sections, editors, or different political commissioners, and are “presumably” derived from the pressures received from political officials of the ruling government (P14). There is a cascade effect on the way in which internal political influences are deployed, emanating from top political hierarchies and reaching the newsroom by a series of interactions. Internal political influences may become public because journalists detect them and reject the basic “guidelines” and “orientations” required for

news production. However, when influences are accepted, for example, when the “guidelines” or the “dictates” are followed by hired personnel, they do not have personal effects but only practical ones (manipulations). However, when political influences are neglected, the effects are both personal (reprisals) and practical (manipulations). Many participants explained the morphology of internal influences in the following terms:

The heads of section apply the pressures, following the instructions of the ruling party. (P7)

Internally, bosses try to influence how you should do your job, so you say what they want you to say. (P9)

All the participants acknowledged the existence of political influences, because they have been internally subjected to them by the heads of sections or because they have been externally contacted by press cabinets. Internal pressures bear on how news stories are approached, modified, or simply ignored. In any case, the conflict between management and the newsroom arises when journalists disagree with the political discourse set by political commissioners. External political pressures, on the other hand, are typically executed through direct calls from press cabinets representing the interests of political parties or candidates. Participant 7 explained her usual experience: “What’s normal is that press cabinets call, even when they’re not in the government: ‘Hey, I didn’t like this ... how can you end the newscast like that?’” Similarly, Participant 4 reflected upon the differences between internal and external influences:

When they come on behalf of political parties, it’s the press cabinet chief that calls, but when they come on behalf of your bosses, that’s when the pressures are presented in the form of suggestions: ‘change that text,’ ‘take this statement out and not this one,’ etc.

Practical and Professional Effects of Political Influences in TVE

The effects of political pressures are manifested according to their practical or professional implications. The practical effects include a myriad of examples pertaining to what our interviewees consider as “manipulations,” including “suggestions” for changing texts or the inclusion of biased information, which generally translates into “not to speak badly of the ruling government” (P19). On the other hand, the effects of political influences at a professional level are deployed through reprisals and executed when these “suggestions” or “recommendations” about the treatment of informative content are not strictly followed by newswriters. These external political pressures reshape the journalistic field’s structure and operation to a significant extent, as they have serious effects on both journalistic capital and the habitus of journalists. According to Bourdieu, the professional practice of a given field’s agents can be expressed by the following equation: “practice results from relations between one’s dispositions (habitus) and one’s position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field)” (Grenfell 2008, p. 51). When agents with greater power (meaning more capital) tend to normalize political pressures and make them a part of the field’s normal operation, then they might become an accepted norm, and through the internalization of norms, they will become a part of the professional habitus (Bourdieu 1986b).

The morphology of the manipulations implemented is manifold and diverse. Typically, they are executed through two main strategies: (1) the emphasis on data, news, or

information that benefits the ruling party and which the government wants society to be aware of, and (2) the concealment of news, data, or information that harms or challenges the government. The first strategy involves political measures approved by the ruling government (such as laws, decrees or subsidies), strengthening of the government's ideology or doctrine on a given issue, or emphasis on the political opposition's corruption cases of the political opposition. Regarding this last scenario, many participants also referred to strategies of counter-programming, in which relevant news about the opposition (the celebration of a national congress or the selection of new regional or national candidate) is replaced by party politics of the ruling government. Regarding the second strategy, our participants included cases of corruption of the ruling government or measures to reduce state spending (economic cuts). Both the aforementioned influences correspond to the processes that Bourdieu (1988) called "struggle at the field." With regard to the struggle between political and journalistic fields, the corresponding types of capital are political capital, manifested by political power, and journalistic capital, manifested by professional values. The political field could increase its control over the journalistic field by lessening the capital of the latter (Bourdieu 1996). As our evidences suggest, this can be done either by determining what journalists can or cannot write about, since both kinds of influence undermine the professional practice of journalists, and consequently, the autonomy of the journalistic field itself.

When political "orientations" or "influences" originating from the upper echelons are ignored, individual journalists generally withdraw their by lines, and another news worker who "sympathizes" with the "doctrines" or "dictates" of the ruling government takes over in the process of news production. Many of our interviewees acknowledged that throughout their careers as journalists in TVE, they have had to withdraw their bylines from political news pieces due to the manipulations executed or the clear guidelines given. Participants 3 and 23 explained the proportion and phenomenology of unsigned information in TVE:

In the newscasts of the last period, there were newscasts in which 80% of the pieces aired were unsigned. And this means that the content went against the journalist's opinion. (P3)

I would refuse to sign when it reached a point where I no longer agreed. That is a right we have set in RTVE's charter, and it's the way in which we resolve those kinds of situations. (P23)

The procedure for not signing a piece of news, however, is quite challenging. Many participants acknowledged that the Statute of Journalists' Rights and the *Consejo de Informativos* fully support them when these conflicts emerge. However, all of them also stated that they cannot refuse to produce news, and therefore, despite disagreements that might arise in relation to the perspective of a piece of news, they must produce it and fight for journalistic ethics to prevail over political interests, as Participant 12 noted:

You can't refuse to work, because you can be fired for that. You can't say in any job that you refuse to work; what you can do is fight for it to be right. I remember pieces that I refused to sign; there must have been only two, because they usually don't even ask you to do the pieces if they know you won't agree, or sometimes, we end up arriving at a compromise. (P1)

Once the journalist withdraws her/his signature and thus challenges the authorities of the public television, what typically follows is a consequence at a professional level, i.e., a

reprisal. From a field-theoretical perspective, this can be understood as an agent with less capital trying to struggle with an agent with more capital, meaning that the former provokes the position of the latter. As the field itself can be conceived as a “competitive game or ‘field of struggles’ in which social agents strategically improvise in their quest to maximize their positions” (Grenfell 2008, p. 54), resistant journalists can be considered as either agents who fight for the professional values of the field, or as agents who strive for higher positions in the field. Thus, from a Bourdieusian perspective, resistant journalists are active agents who not only merely refuse the position of other agents, but also strive for better positions as they have a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1989a, p. 64).

The majority of journalists interviewed who have refused to accept political pressures in the news production process claimed that they had suffered reprisals from their direct heads of sections, editors, or directors. The morphology of these reprisals may also vary depending on the conflict, and above all, the newsworker’s persistence over time. Therefore, the reprisal varies depending on whether a particular journalist “understands the message” and stops reporting cases of political pressures and adapts to the “orientations” of their superiors, or whether, on the contrary, they continue with their “wayward” behavior. Our evidence revealed that many reprisals have occurred at a professional level, all of them stemming from conflicts over the execution of political influences and newsworkers’ subsequent complaints to the *Consejo de Informativos*. The most common included the cancellation of correspondent and presenters’ contracts, assignment to night or weekend shifts, change of program, reduction of salary bonus, etc. Below, we cite examples of some of the reprisals suffered by the interviewees:

Particularly, with the case of Fernández-Díaz’s audios, I refused to sign the report if the audios were not included, and as I saw this that this had no effect, I refused to sign and to put my voice in it. After that, I left on holidays, and when I came back, I was no longer in the newscast. (P15)

Yes, at a personal level, having to fight with those situations has made me lose my job as a correspondent and have all my salary supplements taken away, leaving me just with a base salary. That and being banned for five years from political news. (P24)

These professional reprisals had important psychological implications for the majority of the interviewees. Therefore, political pressures, when not fulfilled, had an effect of liquidation of trust between management and journalists, leading to reprisals that had psychologically consequences in the newsroom and generated personal problems among professionals:

This affected me deeply; my dream had been to work in public television and in the newscast, and being kicked out for trying to do my job right was a trauma that was difficult to accept, I had to consult a psychologist. I had severe depression for 4 or 5 months. Of course, you understand why they remove you, but you just can’t deal with it. I had a very bad time. They called me to the office and told me I was no longer going to work in the newscast and put me in the early morning shift. (P8)

Discussion and Conclusion

This article explored, described, and examined the nature of the political pressures against the autonomy of the media field as it has emerged within Spain’s main Public Service Broadcaster, RTVE. As extant research on the role of PSB in society has shown, it is of especial relevance for a democracy to maintain its PSB as independent and autonomous

(Bourdieu 1996), and free from any political interference that could jeopardize its credibility and objectivity (Humanes and Fernández-Alonso 2015; Soengas and Rodríguez-Vázquez 2014). Drawing upon 45 interviews with TVE journalists, we offer five insightful contributions to this line of inquiry.

First, as previous studies on the effects of political pressures on journalism practice have noted (Soengas and Rodríguez-Vázquez 2014), our findings provide empirical support for the growing trivialization of political pressures inside PSM. This trivialization implies that the professional habitus of Spanish journalists has somehow adapted to the lack of autonomy, or in other words, the political field's ingression to the journalistic field has become, from a meta-field perspective, part of the norm. Accordingly, in a Bourdieusian sense, the Spanish PBS can be even considered to be a communicative aspect of the political field. Our results provide insightful evidence for the role of party politics in the execution and emergence of political pressures at TVE. Although political interferences seem to exist regardless of which political party is in power, our findings indicate that it was under the right-wing Mariano Rajoy's term of government and José Antonio Sánchez's presidency at TVE that these political interferences and manipulations were particularly marked. On the other hand, the socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was noted as the most favorable period for independence and professional quality (García-de-Madariaga, Navarro-Moreno, and Olmo-López 2019; Gómez-Montano 2006).

Second, our study contributes to the ongoing theoretical discussions on the structuration of political pressures in PSM newsrooms (Bennett 2015; Bourdieu 1996; Hanretty 2011; Polonska and Beckett 2019). Our findings first illustrate that the configuration of such political pressures is fundamentally based on the appointment of like-minded professionals. According to our findings, the appointment of middle managers and the board of directors without the needed political consensus and professional backing turn these professionals into illegitimate agents in the eyes of the newsroom. These appointed middle figures were not generally advised to conduct any political manipulation, but rather had a shared and foreknown political vision on how the informative service output must or should be to favor the agents who had diligently positioned them. Therefore, the public service, far from being a normative entity, transformed into a sort of "quid pro quo" tool to ameliorate the image and reputation of the ruling government. Thus, a noticeable political agenda was pushed through the PSM discourse, impairing the relation with its audience and the overall perception of PSM by the Spanish population. Again, all these phenomena contradict the Bourdieusian conception of an autonomous societal field, and this finding leads us to conclude that while journalists might develop a habitus through which they can reconcile with political pressures, the audiences strongly resist accepting the lack of autonomy in PSM.

Germane to the structuration of political pressures inside the newsroom, our study also hints that political interferences are not only contingent on the appointment of closely tied professionals, but also on the supportive attitudes of newswriters who have traditionally sympathetic with governmental views. Therefore, underpinnings of political pressures can be found both in the appointment of like-minded individuals and supportive newswriters who are typically assigned to the most controversial issues. This triggers growing grievances among "non-compliant" professionals, who in many cases, are downgraded to covering marginal issues. Simultaneously, the normalization of certain politically

motivated editorial guidelines lead the least experienced journalists to assume those parameters as journalistic habitus in order to avoid potential conflicts.

Third, our study describes and explains in detail how political pressures are engendered and the roles different newswriters play in structuring and naturalizing their professional habitus in theory and in praxis. We first illustrate the emergence and consolidation of political pressures through the news production process that also naturalize the continuously decreasing autonomy of the field, which goes in tandem with the changing habitus of journalists. Our empirical findings reveal that news selection and production are set in daily meetings, during which the most suitable perspective for news contents are also discussed.

During the process of this negotiation, when journalists assume that they can no longer preserve and defend their journalistic instinct, they typically withdraw their signature from the piece. These discussions, where news values are manipulated in order to shape a particular political vision, showcase how the management staff try to legitimize bias throughout the news production process. This intention to manipulate information with discussions that are seemingly about journalistic criteria seems to be the element that launders those political influences into the news production habit. Consequently, some journalists perceived this process as a normal part of the field of struggle, as “part of the job” became the standard for news making. When political pressures are considered as one of the field’s accepted norms, then the journalistic field not only loses its autonomy, but the “norm of accepted political pressures” becomes the habitus of the field’s agents as well.

Fourth, our study complements extant research on the morphology of political and commercial pressures in the newsroom (Goyanes and Rodríguez-Castro 2019), by arguing that, in the case of TVE, external and internal influences are inextricably inter-related. The analysis of the structure of the way in which political pressures reshape the journalistic field is, from a field theoretic point of view, extremely important when explaining the exact character of changes in the norms, habitus, and autonomy of the field. Internal political influences at TVE are a direct consequence of the questionable procedure by which the president and the different political heads of section are designated, typically by direct appointment. Internal and external influences are established through direct editorial guidelines, typically set by like-minded professionals, which through a cascade effect, internally pressurize newswriters to favor the political views of those who appointed them. Consequently, the field’s autonomy is undermined by not just the invasive pressure of an external field, namely politics, but also by agents of the journalistic field itself. This process is, on the one hand, fostered by editors who are willing to let political pressures affect news production, and on the other, implicitly fostered by those journalists who are willing to consider political pressure as a norm, and consequently, make the acceptance of political pressures, again, part of their professional habitus.

Beyond the cascade effects of the merging internal/external political influences, our results also illustrate that a common type of external influence at TVE are those that are potentially executed by political press cabinets. Typically, these pressures are deployed by direct calls to individual newswriters with the intention of challenging, confronting, or showing discrepancy with their professional views on the content produced. These pressure tactics are used by press cabinets to deliver their viewpoints on a story by trying to manipulate journalists’ output. They are easily applied when there is no

intermediary between the organization's upper management and the press cabinet. This intermediation usually occurs through a manager figure in the newsroom with editorial power who replicates these pressures, thus leaving the journalist in a weaker position to deal with them. These powerful, intermediary agents are the promoters of an intersectional political-journalistic field where political pressures are increasingly naturalized and where accepting political intervention becomes a part of normal journalistic habitus.

Fifth and finally, our study provides insightful findings on the potential effects of political pressures both at the level of practice and in terms of labor conditions (personal). When political influences are exerted on ideologically sympathetic journalists, the effects are purely practical: influences are by passed. When the other journalists become aware and react to these influences, these tend to have effects both on practical and personal matters. In the practical sense, the mechanisms available for journalists to preserve their integrity allows them to separate themselves from the story, but do not prevent the story from reaching the audience. However, on the personal side, some participants believed that confrontations with the directive staff led to reprisals. Some of these reprisals have turned into larger confrontations, such as legal disputes between the journalists and the organization. More severely, some participants connected these reprisals with serious psychological consequences, such as requiring attention for major episodes of anxiety and depression. This last finding indicates that changing a professional habitus as a consequence of the changed norms of a given field is not easy, since, as Bourdieu suggests, habitus is deeply rooted in the psychology of the agents with many unconscious elements (Bourdieu 1977). Those with more flexible values and less personal involvement can easily adapt to a situation in which their autonomy is heavily restricted, but others may experience severe damage when their original professional and personal habitus run counter to the norms of the field.

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