

The framing of the information on the Catalan referendum in two leading British newspapers

Abstract:

Even though the independence referendum held in 2017 in Catalonia did not meet success, the large role of media and easy and fast international broadcast, and the fear of a possible imitation effect in other regions, made the whole world observe and discuss it.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the media treatment in two British reference newspapers: The Guardian and The Telegraph.

Under the hypotheses that the information treatment on the Catalan referendum could be prone to the spread of information according to their editorial lines, the research analyses 188 news pieces using framing analysis.

The first hypothesis that both newspapers adapted their versions of the story to readers predisposed by the different editorial tendencies of each newspaper was not confirmed. Results allow to conclude that in the information of the British press of reference about the illegal referendum in Catalonia, a fair journalistic treatment prevailed.

Keywords

Catalonia; Referendum; Framing; Journalism; British newspapers; Public opinion.

1. Introducción

The European political landscape is undergoing the greatest transformation since the end of the Cold War: on the one hand, different populist parties are entering parliaments and governments (Kriesi, 2014) spreading Euroscepticism across the continent like a virus (Treib, 2020), on the other, Brexit have shaken the very base of European integration (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos, 2019).

In this context, the independence “constitutive referendum” held on 1 October 2017 in Catalonia, that exacerbated the territorial crisis in Spain (Dowling, 2018), obtained great international attention.

Even though it did not meet success, the large role of media and easy and fast international broadcast, and the fear of a possible imitation effect in other regions (Sardinia and Südtirol in Northern Italy, Corsica in France, etc.), made the whole world observe and discuss the situation around 2017 referendum (Hennebry-Leung and Bonacina-Pugh, 2019).

As expected, while most of the European countries, while condemning police repression, advocated for the unity of Spain, territories with the same aspiration openly manifested their support (Cramer, 2016). In particular, Fiona Hyslop, the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for External Affairs, said: "The decision over Catalonia's future direction is a matter for the people who live there, and the Catalan and Spanish Governments are perfectly entitled to take positions for and against independence. However, all peoples have the right to self-determination and to choose the form of government best suited to their needs, a principle which is enshrined in the UN Charter”.

Scotland and Catalonia are, in fact, the highest profile cases of secession movements within the EU at present (Bourne, 2014).

After the UK voted to leave the EU, while all of Scotland's council areas voted to remain in the EU, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced her intention to prepare legislation for a proposed second Scottish independence referendum and, in June 2017 general election, the first major electoral test after the EU referendum, the SNP won 35 of the 59 Scottish seats in the House of Commons, making this possibility closer to reality.

For this reason, our work, assuming that UK media and public opinion are particularly sensitive towards this issue, aims at understanding how British media have approached the information on the referendum held in Catalonia on October 1, 2017.

In order to assess it, two internationally recognized reference newspapers were chosen: The conservative leaning Daily Telegraph, and the progressist leaning The Guardian.

Previous literature (Perales-García, and Pont-Sorribes, 2018; Micó and Carbonell, 2017) suggests that the international coverage of the referendum has been particularly geared towards the fear of a possible Catexit and the disgregation of the unity of Spain, and toward the role attributed to the European Union as an actor that should mediate the current situation.

Our hypothesis, based on existing literature, are that media favoured one version over the other, according to their interest and political positioning.

Accordingly 3 subhypothesis have been formulated:

Sub-hypothesis 1. The informational frameworks of the media give more presence to one version of the story than to the other.

Subhypothesis 2. The institutional sources consulted are not proportional in relation to the two versions.

Sub-hypothesis 3. The sources used by the newspapers do not represent the position of both versions in a balanced way, nor do they proportionally select the informative quotes.

2. Theoretical background

1.2. Background on the Catalan referendum

Despite a strong and diffuse national sentiment (Guibernau, 2004), support for independence in Catalonia has long been limited (Barrio, Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel, 2018): it is only since the mid-2000s that the Catalan secessionist movement has become a key protagonist in the territory's political landscape, moving from the margins to become the axis of political dispute (Portos, 2020).

Convergència i Unió (CiU), the real powerhouse driving the Catalan nation-building project since the first Catalan Parliamentary elections in 1980 and in power until the mid 2000, only had enhancing territorial autonomy through gradual concessions from the central state as an objective (Guibernau, 2003).

The process of reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, from 2003 to 2010, is “widely regarded as providing a favourable context for a public discussion of Catalonia's relationship to Spain and for the Catalan secessionist movement to gain momentum” (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013, 49).

At the same time, the conflict between centre and periphery subsequently spiralled as the Great Recession hit Spain, resulting in a complicated multi-level economic, social, political and territorial crisis that developed during this period bringing 20% of the Catalan population on the streets, in the largest (at the time) pro-independence demonstration in democratic Spain on 11 September 2012 (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos, 2019).

In addition, corruption scandals shaking CiU encouraged its leader to take a more radical stance along the centre-periphery axis (Basta, 2017, pp. 10–11).

Following the party's relative victory in the 2012 and the formation of a coalition government with ERC, the regional parliament adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty and Right to Decide of the People of Catalonia.

The initial proposal to hold a referendum was brought by the state-wide conservative party (PP) to the Constitutional Court, which immediately ruled it out on the grounds that it violated the sovereignty of the Spanish people. Thus, the regional Parliament adopted a Law on Non-Binding and Non-referendary Consultations by in September 2014, essentially deprived of a legal basis (Barrio, Barberà & Rodríguez-Teruel, 2018).

This episode encouraged secessionist elites to devise a new strategy, which culminated with the organization of a referendum on independence on 1 October 2017. The participation rate was 43% (2,266,498) of the population, with 2,044,038 voting yes (92%).

The state's reaction was repressive: at first it futilely tried to prevent the referendum from being held, while later it legally persecuted the political and social leaders that promoted it. Finally, Catalonia's autonomy was struck down by the first-time application of article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, in which the central government took control of its institutions for several months.

2.2 Catalanian conflict in the media

There is a very rich stream of research about media treatment of the Catalan conflict in Spanish and Catalan media (Oller, Satorra & Tobeña, 2019).

Ballesteros (2015) analyzing the previous referendum attempt, already pointed out the conflict frame and the high level of polarization: Madrid's press used conflict more intensively and described criminal features and negative evaluations with reference to the actions of Catalan institutions and officials, which were absent in the Catalan press (Xicoy, Perales-García and Xambó, 2017)

Gamper Sachse (2018) analyzing the 2017 referendum define media treatment of the process as a "cloud of clear-cut antagonism" stressing out how newspapers, radio stations and state media have treated the events in a strong partisan way. For the most part, Spanish media describe the Catalan independence movement as an act of constitutional disloyalty by the government of Catalonia, or as the sheer folly of a mesmerized mass, while independentist media have strongly contested the legality and legitimacy of the imprisonment of politicians and the infringement of basic freedoms, as well as the brutal police repression of the referendum on 1 October 2017.

In the same vein, Micó and Carbonell (2017) in a wide study of national and international media, consider that the maintenance of the unity of Spain is the preferred option of much of national and international media while the independence of Catalonia is the choice of a high percentage of Catalan media.

Other studies have focused on international media. Perales-García and Pont-Sorribes (2017, 2018), analyzing the main newspapers in France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, conclude that the conflict frame was widely shared by all newspapers analysed for illustrating the sovereignty process, and they refer to the role attributed to the European Union as an actor that should mediate the current situation.

López-Olano and Fenoll (2019), comparing public broadcasting BBC, DW and RT find out a positive correlation between the government position and the treatment of both the referendum and the secessionist movement, observing that Russian RT's coverage is closest to Catalan independency, while the BBC and DW are leaning towards the constitutionalist bloc.

Moreover, the Catalan conflict has also generated comparative analyses with other European regions and international contexts, such as the Québécois, with whom it shares similar claims. Dubois and Villeneuve-Siconnelly (2019) focus on the coverage of French-language newspapers in Québec during the four months previous to the 2017 Catalan Independence Referendum, highlighting, once again, the dominant use of the conflict frame. In addition, they notice a low number of direct references to the current Québec sovereignty movement, together with the presence of a 'projection effect', which highlights how local independence experience could bring solutions to the Catalan case.

2. Methods

The corpus of this case study is made up of the entire universe of journalistic texts that deal with the referendum in Catalonia in the headlines between September 1 and November 30, 2017

in The Telegraph and The Guardian. The full texts in PDF have been extracted from the Mynews database, with the keywords "Catalonia" and "Catalan" with the Boolean operator OR in title and subtitle during the months of September, October and November 2017 in searches carried out in each month separately. The sample has finally been made up of 188 texts.

Our framing analysis understands “media frames” as the way in which a specific message is packaged and presented by the media (Cacciatore, et. alt, 2016).

In Entman’s words: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (1993, 52).

The identification of the frame has been based on previous content analysis studies or frames on issues of the political sphere (Capella; Jamieson, 1997; Nisbet; Brossard; Kroepsch, 2003, Iyengar, 1994; Patterson, 2001; Author, 2012) .

This research team has examined relevant texts in the main newspapers and magazines, identifying common framing devices for the Referendum in Catalonia. The initially proposed typology was later validated in pilot studies carried out by three researchers, two Communication professors and a PhD student from outside the study. The coders team used pre-analysis for automation. For the typology of frames, a classical model is chosen that attempts to maximize the inclusiveness of the full possible range of frames that may appear in the coverage, not just those that appear more frequently (Bailey, 1994; Nunnally, 1978).

Figure 2 represents the validated frames.

Figure 1. Narrative devices and frames

Frames: narrative devices	
Political strategy	Action by political and institutional agents (leaders, parties, civil associations) and pointing out their positions, etc.
Public Opinion / Demoscopy	Surveys and statistics that show the public's point of view, demographic data of support / rejection of the referendum and / or the independence of Catalonia, and results of electoral processes.
Peaceful demonstrations	Expression of the people in the street without violence, police charges or riots: peaceful occupation of schools, demonstrations with a festive and family nature, etc.
Unrest / altercations	Public disorder and violent demonstrations with police charges to maintain public order.
Anecdotal personalization/Non experts	ocused on the citizen of the street and their day to day in relation to the subject; entrepreneurs, parents, professionals, students ... Framing based on personal and testimonial narrative.
Crime / Courts	Performance of the judiciary: arrests, actions of judges / prosecutors, taking statements, prosecutions ...

Potential consequences from independence

Futuribles that independence from Spain would trigger: EU, borders, economy, sports, etc

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The coding has been carried out by the authors with SPSS. She was subjected to a previous reliability test with an independent coder trained for months in all variables on 20% of the sample, excluding those from the registry. In all variables, reliability was equal to or greater than 80% in Cohen's Kappa coefficient. After performing the content analysis, they have been treated with the SPSS software for statistical calculations of frequencies, crossovers of variables, chi-square test for categorical variables and inferential reliability studies.

Only to informative texts have been taken into consideration. In terms of categorization, we consider "Sources" people to whom journalists currently give voice, through direct citation, distinguishing between political and non-political sources. "Politicians" includes all people with institutional positions and members of the political system, equivalent figures in opposition political parties and people with public office. We include members of citizen associations with political activity related to the October 1 referendum such as Omnium Cultural, Catalan National Assembly and Catalan Civil Society. In the "non-political" category we included those who do not respond to the previous definition, members of security forces, justice professionals, academics, religious, athletes, professionals from the private sector, citizens, etc.

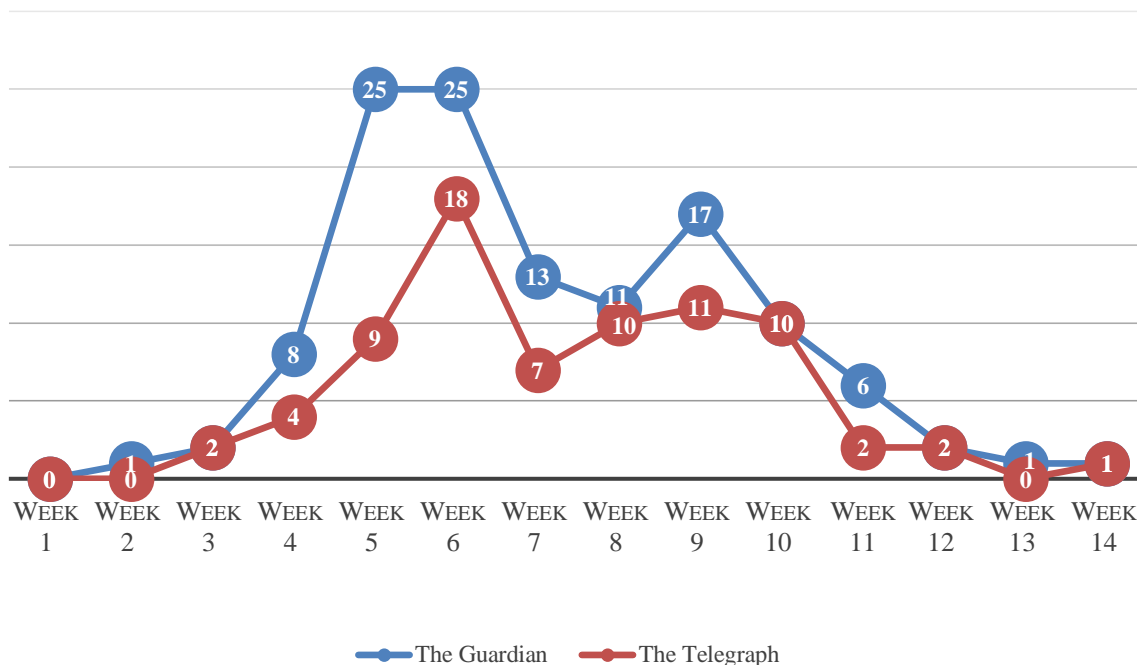
Regarding the evaluative analysis, the valence and direction of the opinion texts are considered, and that of the sources cited in direct style -in quotation marks- for the informative pieces (López-Pan, 2002).

3. Results

A total of 188 pieces have been retrieved, with an average of 2 per day, which shows the media attention even when dealing with a foreign policy issue for the United Kingdom. More than half, 59.6% (112), belong to The Guardian and 40.4% (76), to The Telegraph. October has been the month with the highest attention in the two newspapers, 128 texts compared to September 33 and November 27. On October 2, 14 texts were published: 9 in The Guardian and 5 in The Telegraph.

The weekly curves are similar in both newspapers. Remarkably, weeks 5 and 6 (from September 25 to October 8) that include the date of the referendum, the calling of a general strike by the independentists and the speech of King Felipe VI, on October 3rd, about the unity of Spain. In these weeks, 24 and 43 texts were published respectively in the two newspapers. Another moment of attention is week 9 (October 23-29). On September 27th, the Catalan Parliament approves a resolution that assumes the mandate of the polls on October 1 and declares the independence of the Catalan Republic. President Mariano Rajoy dismisses the Catalan Government, dissolves the Parliament and calls elections for December 21:

Figura 2. Weekly media coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.



Source: Elaborated by the authors

75.5% (142) of the texts are informative compared to 24.5% (46) of opinion among editorials and tribunes. The proportion of opinion is higher in The Guardian -with 32 texts representing 28.57%- than in The Telegraph, which is 18.42% with 14 texts. The Guardian publishes 16 tribunes and 7 editorials versus 11 tribunes and 2 editorials from The Telegraph.

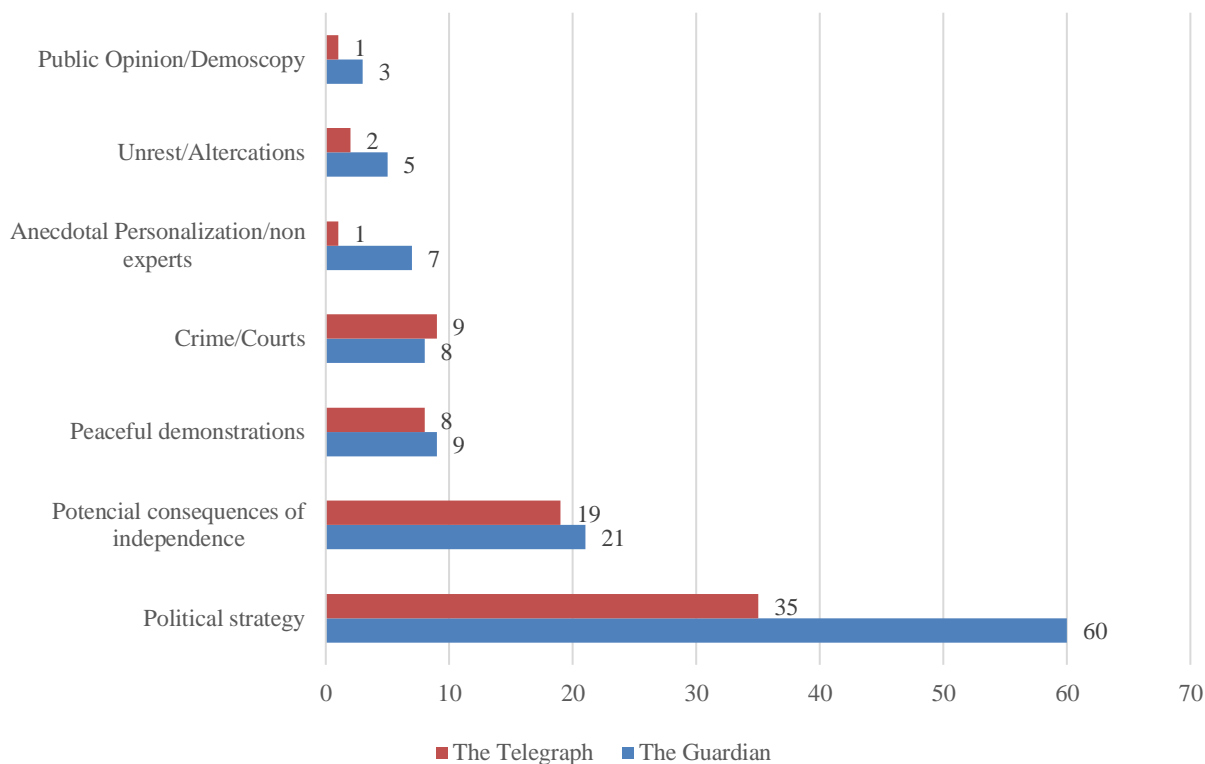
3.1 Framing analysis

More than half of the texts, 50.53%, display a "Political strategy" frame, followed by 21.7% on "Potential consequences of independence". They follow with 9.04%, the frames "Crime" and "Manifestations". And less presence is registered by "Anecdotal personalization" (4.25%), followed by "Disturbances" and "Public opinion", both below 4%.

These results confirm the theoretical basis of our analysis by showing that the story of the news of the referendum, and by extension the informative references received by British society, have been preferably constructed on the selective basis of political strategies of parties and their representatives. The discourse of the Spanish elites has enjoyed enormous representation in both newspapers. The balance between sources favorable and contrary to the referendum has been the trend in both newspapers.

The hypothetical consequences of the independence of Catalonia from the Spanish State has been the second most numerous informative frame, a question widely addressed on the dates of the referendum:

Figure 3. Frames of the texts in *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*.

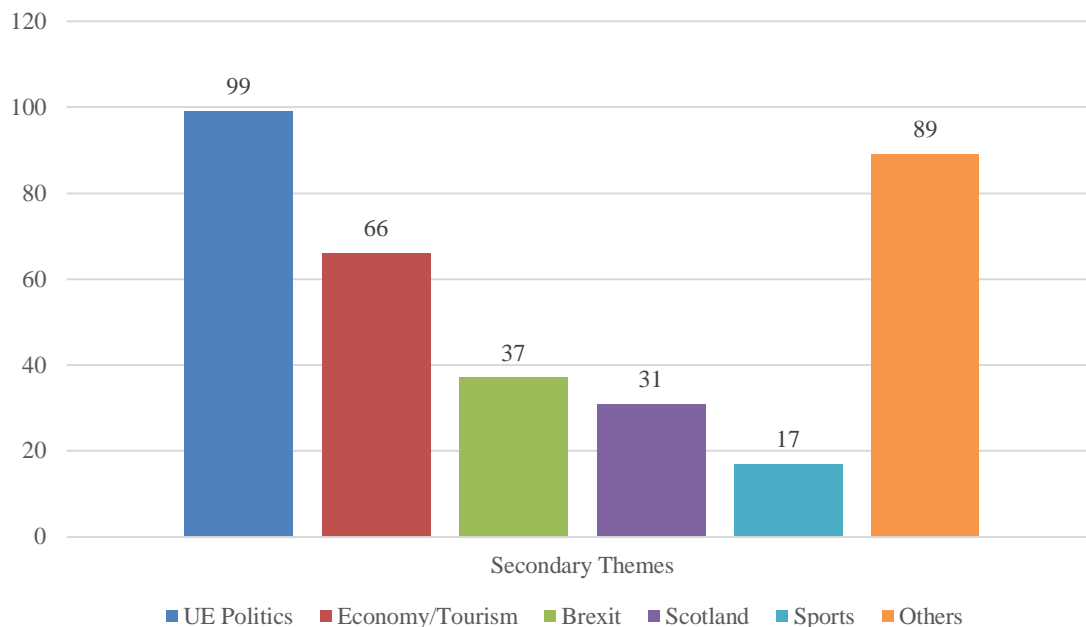


Source: Elaborated by the authors

A qualitative element of the content analysis yields interesting results on the secondary themes that were correlated with the news of the referendum in the informative pieces analyzed. The most frequent referred the British reader to European politics, 99 texts (52.7%); also to the economy and tourism, 66 texts (35.1%), followed by Brexit, 37 texts (19.7%) and the independence of Scotland, 31 texts (16.5%). There are 17 texts about sports.

In the category "Others" we have included secondary topics that appear more than once. The Franco regime appeared correlated in 25 informative texts, and the right of self-determination in 5 texts. The allusion to the dictatorship is linked to other issues listed literally: "Franco, ETA and the Basque Country", "Franco, freedom of expression, fundamental rights and the corruption of the Judiciary", "Franco and the violence exercised by the Security Forces", "Franco and Nazism", or "Francoism, the Catalan language and Trump".

Figure 4: Secondary themes in *The Guardian* y *The Telegraph*



Source: Elaborated by the authors

3.2. Analysis of authors and opinions

86.2% (162) of the texts bear the signatures of correspondents or special envoys, which denotes the importance given to the topic. The main signatory is Sam Jones (41 texts), correspondent for The Guardian in Madrid, followed by James Badcock, freelance who works for The Telegraph in Spain (26 texts); Stephen Burgen, freelance for The Guardian (21 texts), and Hannah Strange, Barcelona correspondent for The Telegraph (20 texts). Those signed by agencies and / or by the newsrooms of both newspapers represent 5.9%.

Ten of the 16 tribunes published by The Guardian adopt a neutral or ambivalent position. Of the eleven published in The Telegraph, 6 are against it and 4 adopt a neutral or ambivalent attitude. The authors of these tribunes represent a varied range of positions, such as Carles Puigdemont and Ada Colau in The Guardian, Josep Piqué, who signs 2 in The Telegraph. International firms include Jerry Adams of Sinn Fein and Nigel Farage, pro-Brexit UKIP party. The editorials of both newspapers are divided between 5 editorials with neutral or ambivalent positions, and 4 manifestly against the referendum. By headlines, The Guardian dedicates 7 editorials, of which 4 are neutral and 3 are contrary; The Telegraph publishes an editorial against and another neutral or ambivalent. There is no editorial in favor of the referendum in the period analyzed, a result that refutes our second hypothesis, which tried to clarify whether the conservative and social democratic editorial lines of both newspapers could be aligned with one of the two parties that were confronted by the holding of the referendum. Both newspapers have expressed similar positions regarding the bankruptcy of legality and the inadmissible unilateral way to resolve the conflict.

Going into content, The Guardian publishes 2 editorials on September 21 and 24, and 5 on October 8, 11, 23, 27 and 29. Those of October 29 and September 24 appeared in the Sunday newspaper The Observer. These figures express the importance that this newspaper gave to the news of the referendum in Catalonia. Of the 7 editorials, 3 denounce the illegality of the consultation; one of them included the subtitle “The ballot is unconstitutional, the confrontations angry and intimidating. But it’s not too late for both sides to start talking sensibly about autonomy”(The Guardian, September 24th, 2017):

“The referéndum is, frankly illegal. The highest courts in the land have ruled it unconstitutional. So the leadership’s threat to stage it regardless and declare independence two days after an assumed triumph at the ballot box is profoundly dangerous. There is, currently, no legal way of holding a vote like this, nor any legitimate preparation for holding it” (*The Guardian*, September 24th, 2017, §7).

On October 11st, the newspaper insists on the unconstitutionality:

“Mr Puigdemont’s decision to pause is both tactical and understandable. There is no clear scenario for secession, and certainly no obvious legal path offered by the 1978 constitution, which proclaims Spain’s ‘indissoluble unit’” (*The Guardian*, 2017, October 11th, §3).

And advocate for dialogue through a mediator:

“In Brussels, officials have made clear that a unilateral declaration of Catalan Independence would mean an exit from the European Union—with no obvious back in. Perhaps an EU mediation effort could make sense. But for any mediation to succeed, both Madrid and Barcelona have to step back from the brink. It is time to start a dialogue. Spain, in all its diversity, achieved a remarkable democratic transition after Franco.” (*The Guardian*, 2017, September 21th).

After the referendum, on October 27, *The Guardian* continues to denounce the illegality, but also criticizes the attitude of the Spanish government for the brutality of the police actions of October 1st:

“There is no doubt that the Catalan leadership acted illegally in holding the referéndum. There can equally be no doubt that Madrid turned a blind eye to legal an civil rights when it dismissed criticism of police brutality in the anti-referéndum operations.” (*The Guardian*, 2017, October 27th, §5).

The Guardian considers the independence aspiration legitimate, but not the way it has been handled by Puigdemont or President Rajoy.

“This means, for Rajoy, no more incendiary arrests of key opponents or police crackdowns, no acts of political revenge and no playing to the hardline unionist gallery in Madrid. Now that the high point of the crisis has arrived, he must make a courageous, practical commitment to openly discuss the best way forward.

For his part, Puigdemont must eschew the gesture politics and vainglorious posturing that have characterised his approach. Independence for Catalonia is a respectable ambition. But it cannot be conjured into existence by otiose declarations, specious parliamentary manoeuvres, media manipulation and spin, misuse of public funds and the intimidation of ordinary citizens. To become a reality, independence requires the clear majority in favour within Catalonia that it presently lacks, the maximum possible degree of agreement with the Spanish state and people and the support of the international community. These

conditions have not yet been met” (*The Guardian*, “Observer Editorial”, 2017, October 29th, §7 y 8).

The Telegraph publishes 2 editorials, 1 against and 1 neutral or ambivalent. The first, entitled "The crisis in Catalonia can be ended, but not by trampling on people's legitimate concerns," published on September 21, considers the referendum illegal:

“Madrid is correct to have judged the referéndum unconstitutional. It has erred, however, by pursuing a heavy-handed response. There is considerable support in Catalonia for a plebiscite, but not necessarily for independence. Catalans want to be heard, but for many it is so they can say they wish to remain part of Spain” (*The Telegraph*, 2017, September 21st, §3).

The one published by The Telegraph on October 27th, when the consultation was held, is neutral or ambivalent. Although it refers to Madrid considering the consultation invalid, it asks what is the role of the European Union in the conflict. And that is precisely what is highlighted in the title: "The EU was supposed to end nationalism. Catalonia proves it has failed":

“The Spanish crisis is a conflict of nationalisms. Catalonia’s separatists want to create their own country; Madrid argues that if they secede, the larger nation of Spain will fall apart. Madrid also insists that the referéndum held on October 1 was invalid, attracted the support of fewer than half of the voters and thus cannot be said to count – that it would make more sense to hold legal elections. This argument might have won more sympathy were it not for Madrid’s overreaction to the plebiscite. Violent scenes of alleged police brutality, reminiscent of the bad old days of Franco, handed the separatists a moral authority they would otherwise not have had. Where is the EU in all of this? Its leaders like to think of themselves as the voice of European civilisation, democratic and open to national self-determination” (*The Telegraph*, October 27th, §2)

3.3 Qualitative analysis of personal political and non-political news sources

The first generic hypothesis tried to clarify whether the news treatment of the news had been fair. To answer it, we have carried out a qualitative analysis of the personal sources used in the 138 informative texts, because as explained in the methodology, the valence and direction of the statements attributed to these sources would frame the line of opinion of the information itself.

Quantitatively, an average of 3.1 sources per piece of information has been computed. 21 texts (15.1%), presented up to 4 personal sources; 17 to 3; 16 through 4, and 19 with a single express personal font.

Political sources with express identification of the position, to which an institutional political opinion is attributed, have been analyzed separately from non-political sources, which represent a sample of popular or non-institutional opinion.

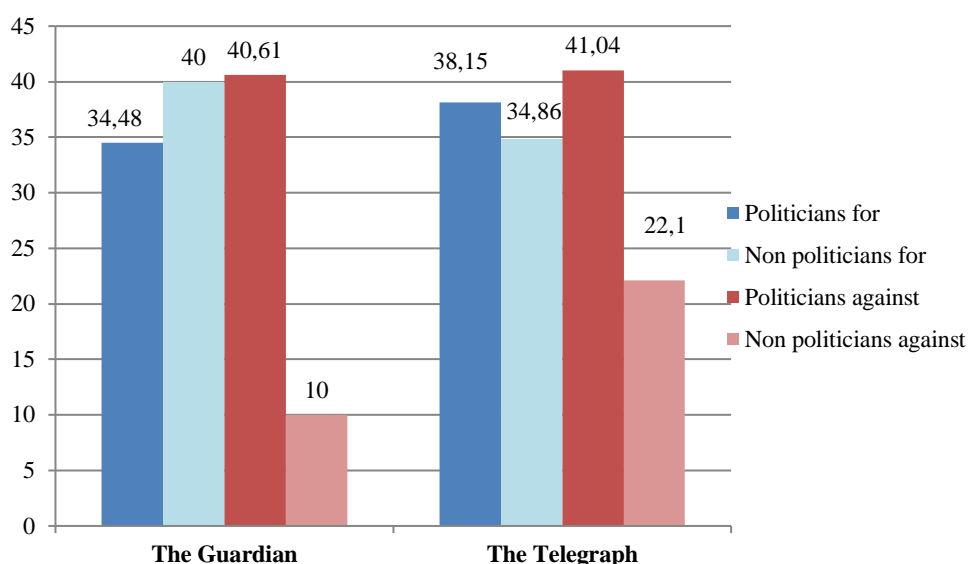
The average number of political sources per text is 3.02. 16.9% (23 texts) include up to 5 political sources. However, the average number of non-political sources per text is 1.7 and 33.6% of the texts lack non-political sources, a figure that agrees with the dominant framing of

“political strategy”; 29.8% of the texts cite a single non-political source, and 13.7%, 2 non-political sources.

Regarding the direction of the sources, it can be observed that the political sources for and against the referendum are balanced, and even slightly overrepresented those against the referendum. The same does not happen with the non-political sources included in these texts, clearly favorable to the referendum. In The Guardian, the position in favor of the referendum is present in 34.48% of the policies and in 40% of the non-political ones, compared to 40.61% and 10% who are against independence.

In The Telegraph, 38.15% of political sources represent the pro-independence position and 34.86% of non-political sources, compared to 41.04% and 22.1% of opposing sources.

Figure 5. Direction of political and non political sources in informative texts in the total number of sources (%)



Source: Elaborated by the authors

Following these figures, it is not possible to infer that the discourse of the political sources in favor of the referendum was imposed on that of the opposite position. The balance of institutional sources representative of both ideological positions shows the equanimity of the reference press mentioned in the introductory framework. It confirms that the professional press preserves the informative value.

Figure 6: Political sources most cited in informative texts

Political source	Number of quotes
President of Catalan Government, Carles Puigdemong	34
President of Spanish Government, Mariano Rajoy	24
Vicepresident of Catalan Govdernmen, Oriol Junqueras	13
Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau	8
Vicepresident of Spanish Government, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría	8
Spanish Government representative in Barcelona, Enric Millo	7
Carmen Forcadell, president of the Catalan Parliament	7
King of Spain, Felipe VI	6
Spanish Education Minister, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo	4
Leader of <i>Omnium Cultural</i> , Jordi Cuixart	3
Leader of Asambleia Nacional Catalana, Jordi Sánchez	3
President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker	3

Source: Elaborated by the authors

As for non-political sources, the results offer a different image. The percentage difference of non-political sources favorable to the referendum used in the news texts shows their clear over-representation. In the case of The Guardian, the difference is 30 percentage points, and 12 in the case of The Telegraph.

A plausible explanation for this disproportion may be related to the journalistic genre preferably used by both newspapers; as these were chronicles and reports signed at the foot of the street by correspondents and special envoys on the days of the referendum, they found a street taken mostly by the independentists, visibly more mobilized than the constitutionalists. If the chronicles and reports tried to faithfully convey the feeling of the street in Catalonia during those dates, the authors found many more testimonies from citizens in favor of the referendum than contrary, which is quantitatively shown in our research.

4. Conclusions and discussion

Observing how a foreign political news was treated by the press of another nation was a propitious occasion to evaluate the role that the press of reference continues playing in the shaping of public opinion.

The research questions provoked by direct observation encouraged the hypothesis that, in the international sphere, the independence story had been superimposed on the constitutionalist one, and that the British media would reflect unequal attention to the opposing positions.

The first hypothesis foresaw an informational imbalance favorable to the independence story about the referendum. The data do not allow confirming this hypothesis. Both the informative texts as well as the editorials and opinion polls present a balanced attention. Both headlines argued in favor of constitutional legality and against the unilateral independence path. Nevertheless, the analysis of the editorials allows us to appreciate slight differences between The Guardian and The Telegraph. As the subhypothesis presumed, the conservative newspaper, although it made an emphatic defense of the Spanish constitutional framework, was somewhat more favorable to independence and dedicated one of its editorials to reproach the ineffectiveness of the European institutions.

On the other hand, the conclusions we can draw from the analysis of the political and non-political sources used to build the informative pieces do not allow us to confirm this hypothesis either. The direction of the opinion expressed by the personal political sources cited in the informative texts is slightly higher in the case of those opposed to the referendum. A full explanation of this fact lies in the fact that the entire national and international political class, with few exceptions, took a position alongside the Spanish Government and condemned the unilateral rupture of the legal system.

The same does not occur with the direction of the opinion of the non-political personal sources cited in the information. The investigation shows that those in favor of the referendum are overrepresented. We presume that this may be due to the greater social mobilization of the independentistas. Since the majority of the information was elaborated in the streets, the correspondents and reporters found many more testimonies in favor of the referendum than those against it; if the streets were taken on those dates, without a doubt it was the supporters of the referendum who were more mobilized. This does not mean, however, that an unbalanced use of the testimonies in favor of one of the parties inevitably interferes with the narrative offered. It suggests that there are more pro-independence Catalans than constitutionalists.

The rate of secondary references to Francoism and the "short democratic experience" of Spain, detected in the informative and opinion texts, is striking. The presence of this thematic correlation between Francoism and the Catalan challenge for independence encourages further

research, since once again it appeals to the ontology that can be unexpectedly created by linking the history of a nation with a news item of this nature. It is interesting to note that 99 texts (more than 50%) relate the news of the referendum to the European Union as a secondary theme. It could be a correlation that emphasizes the supranational dimension of the referendum.

The research allows us to conclude that there was an equitable journalistic treatment by the British press of reference about the illegal referendum in Catalonia. The independence story was not imposed on the constitutionalist in this case. The framework of the information analyzed and the direction of the opinion published in both newspapers, advocated for the respect of the constitutional framework and condemned the unilateral way as a solution.

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