

Delivering a Coup D'état: 23F and the Diminishing Role of Spanish Public Broadcaster RTVE in the Digital Era

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The year 2021 marked the 40th anniversary of the so-called 23F, or the February 23, 1981, military coup d'état attempt that threatened democracy in Spain after the end of Francoism. In the last four decades, the canonical narrative about this event has been based on televisual images recorded in two main locations: the Congress, where a group of military men tried to seize power, and Zarzuela Palace, where King Juan Carlos I gave a speech supporting democracy. Radio Televisión Española (RTVE), then a monopolistic enterprise, captured and broadcast these events. This article analyzes the ways in which RTVE, a public service broadcaster (PSB), has managed this collective patrimony. Hence, it scrutinizes the role of PSBs and how they have evolved into digitally centered public service media. It compares RTVE's coverage and positioning in the contemporary digital mediascape with other audiovisual materials in the ongoing 23F narrations. For that purpose, it details the available contents on RTVE's website to determine how they are organized. Complementarily, it examines how 23F exists on YouTube to study alternative networks of exchange.

Keywords: Spain, RTVE, public service broadcasting, public service media, coup d'état, YouTube

This article focuses on a key historical event in Spanish history—the February 23, 1981, coup d'état attempt (23F)—to examine four main issues. The first is the relationship between televisual images and historical events. Analyzing a series of historiographical sources, it explains 23F and its importance for the country's transition to democracy. Then, it carries out a textual analysis of relevant 23F televisual images to study the canonical account of this event. Second, it addresses the access to archival images and, consequently, the ways in which a public service broadcaster (PSB), such as Radio Televisión

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Española (RTVE), has managed the Spanish collective heritage. Given the growing digitalization of audiovisual archives, this article subsequently interrogates, through the lens of media policy, RTVE's necessary transformation from PSB to public service media (PSM). Third, comparatively addressing the two last issues, the article explains how 23F has mutated within the Spanish televisual system, fundamentally through the appearance of private broadcasters, which have used 23F in several programming formats. Fourth, to account for RTVE's responsibility as depositary of national memory, it offers a content analysis of its website to determine how the archival management of 23F contributes to the citizens' awareness of the event; comparatively, the article addresses the presence of this historical event on YouTube. Finally, this article offers a series of conclusions and recommendations to improve RTVE's democratic performance as a PSM.

Hence, this article interrogates the contemporary functioning of PSBs within Europe, focusing on RTVE, a long-standing operator within the Spanish televisual spectrum. It addresses how RTVE has struggled to transform into a PSM, particularly in terms of fulfilling its duties as a key agent in the preservation of Spain's history. Therefore, this work contributes to the existing bibliography on European media history and, specifically, the pivotal role of PSB/PSMs in fostering diverse democratic national cultures.

23F, Recent Spanish History, and Canonical Media Images

The label "23F" refers to a key event in Spanish contemporary history and the difficult consolidation of the democracy after the Civil War and the Francoist dictatorship. On February 23, 1981, the most important—but not the only—attempt to overthrow democracy occurred. Fundamentally, it involved an attempt to stop the institutional transformations that were eliminating the power of the military to influence social life. Today, it is one of the key events through which Spaniards understand, explain, and question their common democratic history and memory (Blain & O'Donnell, 2003; Gallo González, 2016; López, 2014).

Among the existing photographic and television images on the 18 hours of uncertainty that followed the coup attempt, a few, captured by RTVE, stand out. Two brief audiovisual excerpts are particularly relevant to account for the beginning and the end of the attack. Other media outlets had a key informative role; more precisely, some radio stations chronicled the event *strictly live*, and some newspapers (*El País*, *Diario 16*) printed special issues to support the constitutional regime. Nonetheless, RTVE's recordings condense the best 23F summary, forging the hegemonic narrative of the coup and its status as both a political and a media event (Jünke, 2016; Palacio, 2014). In this regard, RTVE's 23F footage epitomizes how audiovisual media, more extensively, and television, specifically, reinforce and greatly build the perception of shared experiences and collective memories (Smith, 2012). Hence, an analysis of the particularities of the recorded events is a necessary step to understand their historical significance.

The first recording, featuring Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero storming into the Spanish Congress with other members of the Guardia Civil (Spanish militarized police force), is a resounding expression of the event's importance (see figure 1). It was fortuitously captured by a mobile unit, which was at the Spanish Congress to cover—but not to broadcast live—the parliamentary session devoted to

electing Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo as president, replacing Adolfo Suárez. The second recording shows King Juan Carlos I at his office in the Zarzuela palace, dressed as commander-in-chief of the Spanish military, rejecting an invitation to a military regime that would limit civil liberties (see figure 2).

Consequently, the event's quick resolution is greatly attributed to Juan Carlos I, even if other interpretations have remarked the 23F ambivalences and several unknown facts (Campos Domínguez & Martín Jiménez, 2011; Jünke, 2016).



Figure 1. Lieutenant Colonel Tejero at the Spanish Congress (Pujol, 2011).



Figure 2. King Juan Carlos I in the televised speech defending democracy (RTVE, 1981).

After the coup was aborted, a trial started. Ultimately, 29 military officers and a civilian were condemned to prison sentences, including Tejero and General Alfonso Armada, King Juan Carlos I's preceptor while he was the crown prince during Francoism. This fact fueled a series of conspiracy theories about the involvement of the king in the attack—so far, the evidence of 23F.

Several foci of interest remain unresolved. There are 13,000 pages of court documents, but they will not be made public until at least 25 years after the death of those tried and condemned, or 50 years after the coup. In the hectic hours after Tejero's attack, many telephone conversations were also recorded. However, they have been "lost"; among them are conversations between those inside the Congress and the exterior. Given the absence of these documents to detail 23F, the televisual images acquire great relevance. Their custody and dissemination are not a trivial matter.

Even though RTVE possesses extensive 23F archival materials, only a limited amount of footage—a minute and a half—has become central in creating the canonical account of the event. This material shows Tejero in the speaker's stand with his gun drawn, screaming, "Everybody quiet!" His subordinates surround him, holding machine guns, and ask Congress members to lie down. Subsequently, first vice president, Lieutenant General Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado, stands up to confront the Guardia Civil. A couple

of police officers try to knock him down; a few shots are fired. Through Suárez's intercession, Gutiérrez Mellado returns to his place (RTVE, 2011, 0:54).

However, the Congress recording does not last a minute and half, but over 33 minutes. In the extended footage, the hesitations of the coup plotters become evident. Of the four RTVE's cameras, three are immediately shut down, but the recording goes on through the fourth camera, which continues rolling undetected. This camera captures a series of gestures in which the intimidation tactics of the assailants are less coercive. For example, a couple of them escort socialist congresswoman Anna Balletbò, who was pregnant, outside. In a conciliatory tone, Captain Jesús Muñecas, takes the stand and states,

Good afternoon, nothing is going to happen; but we are going to wait a moment for the competent military authority to come in and decide what has to be done. . . . Rest easy, I don't know if this will be a matter of 15 minutes, 20 minutes or half an hour, I don't think that it will take longer. . . . Of course, nothing will happen. (RTVE, 2011, 10:54)

Toward the end of the recording, tension returns as Suárez demands an explanation. Before that moment, for the most part, things had calmed down. For example, Major José Luis Goróstegui, Gutiérrez Mellado's aide, and the president of the State Council, Antonio Jiménez Blanco, approach Suárez's seat. They sit on the ground; an armed assailant walks nearby and does not even ask them to move to pass through. He gets around them, tiptoeing. Both Goróstegui and Jiménez Blanco had entered the Congress after the coup had already started, easily avoiding the plotters' security perimeter (RTVE, 2011, 17:53).

Canonical accounts of 23F are largely based on the mentioned minute and a half video—a violent intervention that epitomizes the attempt to hijack popular sovereignty. Conversely, the 33-minute video, in which one can easily perceive the coup plotters' hesitations, has been typically marginalized. It is suitable to analyze this incongruity because it will clarify how 23F has mutated within the Spanish media system in the past 40 years. For this purpose, first it is necessary to understand the changing role of PSBs within the processes of national collective memory to subsequently question RTVE's role as interpreter and custodian of these audiovisual materials.

The Changing Role of PSBs and the Use of Archives

In Europe and other geographic areas, PSBs have been the seeds for the different national television systems, consolidated after the Second World War, according to a shared convention: Television, as a technology and a mass media communication system, was an instrument of social influence that should be protected by the state to guarantee collective harmony and knowledge (Moe, 2008; Storsul & Syvertsen, 2007). Differing opinions on the social influence of television have periodically structured a series of relevant debates. In countries where these debates have been extensive, PSBs have had a greater capacity to adapt to the shifting demands of successive time periods, and technological changes and innovations. Starting in the late 20th century, PSBs have faced unequalled challenges, fundamentally related to the expansion of the global communication systems, the rapid development of digital technology, and the appearance of new actors who are able to use social media affordances to

create content (Tambini, 2015). Bourdon, Buchman, and Kaufman (2019) summarize these challenges as follows:

Traditional public service broadcasters, initially established to serve citizens rather than consumers, and to help service national conversations in well-informed democracies, face a multiplicity of difficult challenges today, including commercialization (since the 1980s), digitization (since the 1990s), competition from powerful global media players, the fragmentation of their audiences, and the requirement, to transition from a broadcasting mindset to a digital mindset (in the 2000s). (p. 1)

In Spain, debates about PSBs—referring both to RTVE as a television operator that began in 1956, during the dictatorship, and to other regional networks that emerged in the 1980s—have been limited, mostly centered on the prerequisite regulations for their administrative frameworks. In contrast, in Scandinavia, for example, these debates have addressed key issues such as the need to foster democratic quality (Larsen, 2014). Consequently, it is not surprising that in these Northern European countries, PSBs are in good health, managing to successfully adapt to the challenges of the digital world even while losing audience support (Andersen & Sundet, 2019). In 2007, the Council of Europe specified that PSBs should become PSM to fulfill their tasks in the 21st century. This transformation points to the multiple audiovisual platforms that emerged through the Internet and the obligation to acknowledge them as key elements in any future developments or strategic plans (Iosifidis, 2007; Jacka, 2003; Jakubowicz, 2010).

The PSB model has frequently encountered detractors. The latter have used well-known arguments against the importance of their cultural and societal role, such as their paternalistic attitude in wanting to preserve their position above citizens, or their unjustified cost, given that the laws of the market can offer greater satisfaction at a lower price. Antagonistically, supporters of PSBs have redoubled their argumentative efforts to secure their continuity, funding, and necessary relevance. In transitioning from PSBs to PSM, several aspects of their functioning remain unaltered while others have changed. The six core values of PSM, as defined by the European Broadcasting Union (2012), are “universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation” (as cited in van Dijck & Poell, 2015, p. 159).

“Independence” (from all types of power) and “excellence” (a professional criterion beyond economic gain) are classical aspects, whereas “universality,” “diversity,” “accountability,” and “innovation” introduce several modifications. Universality and diversity focus on the need to connect with both individuals and groups who are on the receiving end of messages, assuming the difficulty of uniting them in a global scenario of superabundance and innumerable personal nuances. This is particularly relevant given the enormous importance that PSBs have had historically and will continue to possess in forging national identities. Accountability and innovation highlight the active role of users within the communication circuit, from production to dissemination, departing, therefore, from the habit of simply conceptualizing them as the final step of these processes. Users are instead active participants within a complex spectrum of subject positions in which the distinction between producers and consumers has become blurry (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Just, Büchi, & Latzer, 2017; Ritzer &

Jurgenson, 2010; Thurman, 2008). In this sense, the key term to define the adaption of PSBs to PSM is *engagement*, encouraging the participation of viewers or users and, at the most basic level, allowing them to self-manage what they watch.

The extended trajectory of PSBs has allowed them to accumulate an immense and valuable patrimony, greatly derived from their previous monopolistic condition and their longevity: hours and hours of images and sounds that entertained, informed, moved, and educated entire communities. As Kolokytha, Korbziel, Rozgonyi, and Sarikakis (2019) state, "Archives are essential elements in the democratic function of PSBs, not only but crucially as repositories of culture and custodians of historical facts" (p. 2). This legacy enables PSBs to continue holding a relevant position in the digital world. It is thus essential that they manage and organize these materials to stay relevant, establishing a series of differences with competitors. Furthermore, PSBs must create spaces for the articulation of collective identity, functioning as a "technology of citizenship" (Nolan, 2006).

PSBs have crucially encouraged citizens to embrace critical positions; this goal should also guide them in transforming into PSM, preserving a common public sphere that grants neutrality and independence in the digitalization era (Izquierdo-Castillo & Miguel-de-Bustos, 2021; Larsen, 2014), beyond the adoption of various competitive strategies to add more consumers. Facilitating access (or not) to historical events that were recorded in audiovisual formats is, therefore, a test of democratic will. Materials such as 23F's still have pronounced repercussions in contemporary Spanish collective experiences, helping to interrogate relevant issues.

Some PSBs, such as RTVE, do not conceptualize their archives as indispensable parts of the common, national heritage, but only as exclusive repositories from which to obtain elements to create new materials again and again. Moreover, in Spain, there is no legislation that protects and facilitates the citizens' rights to access the collective television memory. Conversely, other countries, such as France and the UK, have taken that need seriously; hence, they have designed national archives beyond the control of their respective public broadcasters, including the Institut National de L'Audiovisuel and the British Film Institute (Bryant, 2010; Hidalgo Goyanes, 2013). Because there are no such "neutral" repositories in Spain, it is crucial to examine RTVE's actions, frameworks, and tools; likewise, it is imperative to address how other broadcasting and digital actors have sought to correct or compensate for this anomaly.

As RTVE has progressively lost its monopolistic control over national television, the interpretations of 23F have moved away from the canonical account outlined earlier. Competitors have taken advantage of RTVE's unwillingness to facilitate access to its archives, creating a series of counternarratives that have sought to capture audiences through multifarious and, frequently, sensationalistic strategies.

23F in the Spanish Televisual Panorama: RTVE and Competing Networks

Historically, 23F has typically appeared on RTVE and other TV stations' programs to consolidate the story derived from the well-known minute-and-a-half video of Tejero's irruption, bypassing—with

exceptions—the rest of the footage. The reason is, in part, that material has been typically reused in newscasts and news bulletins. In these spaces, pieces adhere to a strict time limit.

In RTVE's repertoire, significant examples revisit the minute-and-a-half video. The first occurred on February 28, 1981, within the reputed documentary program *Informe semanal*. The piece, *18 horas de tensión* (1981), made with necessary haste because events were still unfolding, recreates the atmosphere inside the seized Congress through interviews with parliamentarians and their assistants. Witnesses accentuate anecdotal aspects of the short-lived military takeover (a hidden radio that allowed parliamentarians to follow what was happening outside, and the annoyance of a politician who was injured by pieces from the ceiling that fell over him as a result of shots fired). Additionally, some party leaders ponder the unpredictable course of the Spanish transition to democracy. To create suspense, these comments are accompanied by still images of the outrageous Tejero scene and the shot marks in the Congress building. The documentary ends with a mass demonstration supporting the constitutional regime.

A decade and a half after the coup—and not before—RTVE broadcast *Quince años después* (1996). This piece attempts to offer new information, even if it does not go beyond personal experiences. Loyal Lieutenant General José Antonio Sáenz de Santamaría, in charge of the National Police that day, functions as the main thread to return to the coup. This reportage also features the testimonies of key protagonists of the event, such as Suárez or Felipe González, leader of the PSOE (Socialist Party) at the time of the attack, who would be elected president with absolute majority in 1982. A few years later, *Informe semanal* delivered *23-F: Radiografía del golpe* (2001), a reportage that highlights the normalization of democracy, ruling out the possibility of a regression into a totalitarian regime. Offering profiles of the coup leaders, this program contrasts the danger perceived on the day of the attack with the incompetence and improvisation that characterized the conspiracy. In line with the spirit of a democratically consolidated Spain, it is worth mentioning a reportage in the RTVE program *Crónicas*, broadcast for the 25th anniversary of the coup. With *23F: Regreso a los cuarteles* (2006), RTVE attempts to reestablish the military's reputation by emphasizing its democratic transformation. It compares the trajectories of the coup plotters with those of various loyal military officers. When one analyzes these news reportages, it is clear how RTVE has been successively accommodating different narrations of 23F without disturbing the canonical version consolidated in the minute-and-a-half sequence featuring Tejero.

In the 1980s and 1990s, RTVE lost its monopolistic position as regional public channels and national private networks with diverse agendas appeared (Ibáñez Fernández, 2007). 23F continued to gather interest, in line with the specific editorial interests and business strategies of these new channels. Next, we discuss a few relevant programs.

For the 23F 10th anniversary, some regional PSBs jointly broadcast the program *Iñaki, los jueves*, which featured *Historias del 23F* (1991). Hosted by Iñaki Gabilondo, RTVE's news television director during the coup, the reportage gathers politicians such as Santiago Carrillo (leader of the Spanish Communist Party) and Anna Balletbò, and journalists such as José María García (a prominent radio narrator during 23F) and Pedro Erquicia (the RTVE executive entrusted to watch over the king's television address); in addition, it features more anonymous protagonists, such as the Congress's stenographers or

a replacement soldier who was mobilized by his superior officer in support of the coup. Thus, this program also pays homage to ordinary people, expanding the pool of witnesses.

In turn, both Antena 3 and Telecinco, the two main free-to-air private channels in Spain since the early 1990s, have dealt with the coup fomenting a series of hypotheses—ignored or downplayed by RTVE—about several unknown facts that require clarification. Furthermore, they have promoted their interventions as unprecedented findings that delve into the deliberately omitted details of the coup. For example, allegedly other military leaders were involved in the coup. However, hoping to minimize damage and diminish friction within the armed forces, the political authorities decided to exclusively prosecute the core organizing hierarchy. Two of these programs address this issue. They were simultaneously broadcast on both Antena 3 and Telecinco on February 23, 1994. *Equipo de investigación* (1994) and *La máquina de la verdad* (1994) featured several previously unheard but eloquent voices that explained alternative versions of the conspiracy. *Equipo de investigación* offers *Se rompe el silencio* (1994), an inquiry on a series of intercepted phone conversations between different conspirators, which may ultimately reveal the implication of renowned individuals (Altozano, 1994). For its part, *La máquina de la verdad*, an entertainment format that combines polemical debate and judiciary interrogation—utilizing the “truth” of a polygraph as guarantor of veracity—features a star guest, Secret Services agent Gil Sánchez Valiente, who was on the run after the coup and never stood trial. At that time, Sánchez Valiente was linked to the alleged existence of a briefcase with highly sensitive data that could potentially damage several state institutions and incriminate known political and official figures (S. T., 1994).

Equipo de investigación would create a sequel to *Se rompe el silencio* titled *Los silencios del 23F* (1997), returning to the opacity of the intercepted phone calls. Julio Camuñas, the government's delegate in the state-owned telecommunications company Telefónica during the coup, certifies having tapped several private lines and some parliamentary lines following the orders of the contingency government created as a result of the ministers' confinement inside the Congress building (Barbería, 2011). This Antena 3 program adds a few striking figures; 1,000 tapes were recorded on 23F and soon thereafter, involving 114 people; on these tapes are several conversations between Juan Carlos I and different general captainties. However, these recordings have been lost, and their content remains unknown.

In addition, several fictional series deal with 23F. The first two were released in anticipation of the 30th anniversary of the coup. One can speculate that this coincidence may stem from the rivalry between two networks: a public broadcaster eager to preserve the centrality of its official voice to address Spanish history, and a private channel fighting to seize it. This led both networks to design their programs to focus on the positive effects of the event. Antena 3 broadcast the miniseries *23-F. Historia de una traición* (Martín, 2009) was broadcast on February 9 and 10. It depicts the story of two friends who are military officers, their mutual accusations of insurgency, and their children's suspicions about what really occurred. On February 10 and 12, RTVE showed *23-F: El día más difícil del Rey* (Alea Docs & Films & Quer, 2009). Each series has a different approach: The former plays with the protagonists' anonymity to fuel speculations about unsolved mysteries, and the latter focuses on Juan Carlos I's dilemma, his family, and the lessons that Prince Felipe, now King Felipe VI, learned that day. The latter show is, therefore, an exegesis of the monarchy.

It is now necessary to focus on *Operación Palace* (2014), broadcast in La Sexta, a progressive channel within the Spanish media spectrum. This show frontally questions the legitimization of Juan Carlos I as true champion of democracy. In fact, halfway between fiction and nonfiction, this fake documentary supports the theory that the king participated in the coup.

Operación Palace explains that, in collaboration with elected politicians from the entire ideological spectrum and faithful military commanders, Juan Carlos I agreed to play a role in the creation of a fake military attack that would frustrate the military's resistance to accept democracy, anticipating the real, expected coup. The program's creative team fabricates a self-reflexive fake documentary, conceiving it as an experiment on media persuasion. Allegedly, it brings to light what the television recordings could not capture: the conspiracies behind the known facts and those who benefited.

Operación Palace uses the famous footage of Tejero—who is labeled an ignorant puppet. However, deviating from canonical accounts of 23F, it does not highlight the selfless magnanimity of the king. Conversely, it fuels old murmurings that cloud his figure, such as the hypothetical involvement of the Spanish and American Secret Services. Not without reason, after the coup, Juan Carlos I became a symbol of democracy despite having inherited his position as monarch from the Francoist dictatorship.

The reception of *Operación Palace* was greatly polarized between detractors and enthusiasts ("Cartas al Director," 2014; "La 'Operación Palace,'" 2014). Detractors remarked on the trivialization of an event that truly threatened Spanish democracy. Enthusiasts, who were especially active on Twitter during the show, did not focus on past experiences, but conversely praised the attempt to reflexively address contemporary democracy and evaluate the successes and fiascos of the transition. Furthermore, as opposed to other conspiracy-driven counternarratives of 23F, *Operación Palace* achieved a significant television share (23.9%) and became a world-trending topic on Twitter, with almost 270,000 comments during the broadcast alone (Bellido Peris, 2016; Gallo González, 2016). Although the visibility of this program dwindled as time went by, it placed 23F in the spotlight for the following weeks. It brought to the fore a variety of televisual, journalistic, and online discourses that interrogated or reaffirmed the importance of Juan Carlos I in the consolidation of democracy and speculated about the lingering, unknown truths about 23F (Núñez Bolaños, 2015). In addition, *Operación Palace* managed to engage new generations with an event that they often perceive as ancient history. Predictably, the youth were especially participative on social networks. Therefore, *Operación Palace* signaled the increasing importance of digital forums for the dissemination, questioning and reshaping of historical events and the shifting narrations of the nation. In this regard, in the increasingly competing and multifocal digital mediascape, it is now necessary to analyze how RTVE has managed and used 23F materials on its online platforms.

23F, RTVE.es, YouTube, and Other Digital Actors

On RTVE's website, a December 2020 search for the February 23, 1981, coup d'état using the keyword "23F" rendered 130 results. A user may organize the materials using the default relevance category or by date. We have chosen to carry out our analysis following the relevance criterion because it exposes how RTVE.es organizes the diverse materials to engage users. Table 1 shows a numerical breakdown of the available materials and a description of the items under different categories.

Table 1. Source: RTVE.es.

Original archival materials on 23F	Documentaries or news pieces on 23F	Fictional materials on 23F	Promotional materials created by RTVE to advertise 23F content	Materials unrelated to 23F
3 results	70 results	6 results	24 results	27 results
Three-minute video that shows how former president Suárez stood up to the military	Interviews with key historical figures Podcasts	Episodes of drama series Fragments of drama series	Promotional RTVE ads on dramatic series or documentary specials	Podcasts on RNE (Spanish National Radio) that were broadcast on February 23 of any year
King Juan Carlos I's speech supporting democracy 12-minute video depicting the initial stages of the 1981 coup	Fragments of documentaries Complete documentaries Contemporary news pieces that affect 23F protagonists		Interviews with actors of series	Texts on unrelated events happening on February 23 of any year Audiovisual news pieces unrelated to 23F

Figure 3 shows a graphic representation of this content.

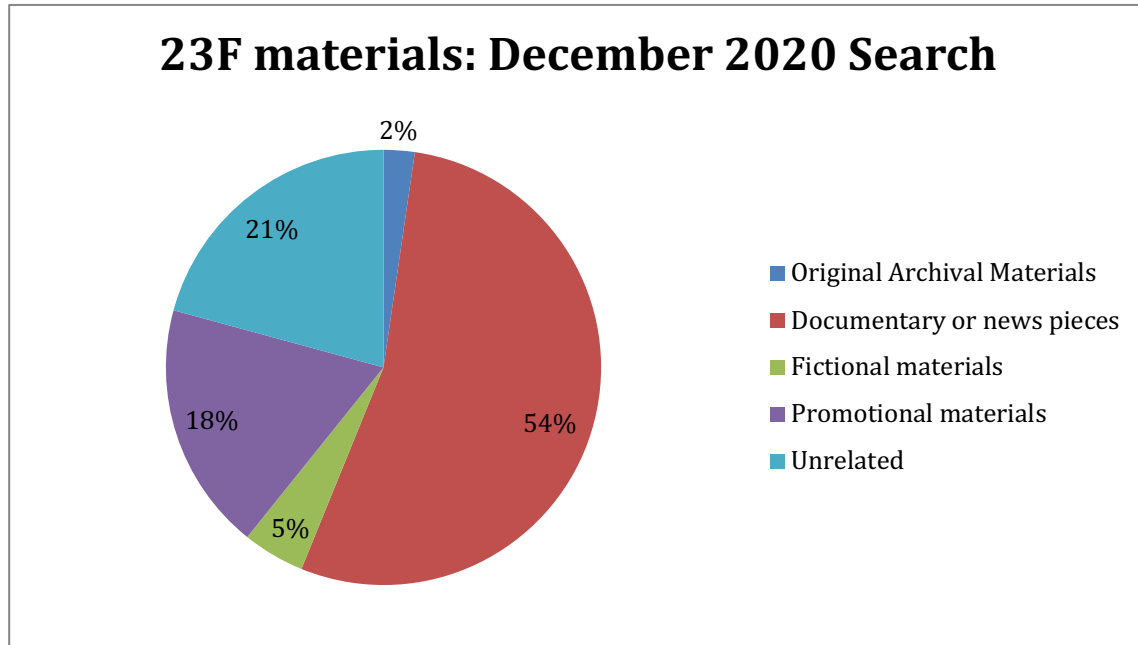


Figure 3. Source: RTVE.es.

Archival materials are not systematically organized. Documentary or news pieces created after 23F constitute the majority of results: 54%. Original archival materials, as such, used on their own and not as supporting materials for more contemporary news pieces and updates, make up only 2% of the results. A few aspects stand out.

1. The first result is a link to a page that contains the drama series *23F: El día más difícil del Rey*. Although the series was initially broadcast on RTVE and later on TV3 (Catalonia's regional PSB), RTVE does not own the rights for its digital distribution. Hence, when users try to watch the series, they encounter broken links.
2. RTVE.es does not prioritize original 23F archival materials, offering only a few short fragments of the event. The full 33-minute video of the coup does not appear among the available original archival results.
3. The first original archival footage result is number 10 on the list. It is a short video that shows how President Suárez confronted the assailants—that is, an incomplete archival account of 23F that reinforces the canonical versions of the Spanish transition to democracy.
4. Result number 11 is the first unrelated piece to the coup: a link to an unrelated radio podcast. That is, the "23F" search request identifies any content that contains the tag "23F,"

following a chaotic hierarchization of materials. Another example of this "tag chaos" is a music show on reggae, which is only included on the list because it was released on February 23.

5. RTVE.es does not distinguish between text, audio, and audiovisual content. Hence, these materials are mixed.
6. Most results are short news pieces on 23F or fragments of documentaries about it, ranging from interviews with some of its main protagonists to recollections of the event from Spanish political and cultural figures. Additionally, results include interviews with some of the creators of both *23F: El día más difícil del Rey* and another series, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (Grupo Ganga, 2001–), one of RTVE's flagship programs.
7. Most results within the promotional materials column advertise the aforementioned drama series. Other pieces publicize RTVE's upcoming coverage on the coup, in anticipation of its anniversary.
8. RTVE's chaotic hierarchization of results is particularly evident in a few cases. One of the text pieces is a 2011 discussion of the whereabouts of ex-convict Tejero on the 30th anniversary of the failed coup. Underneath RTVE.es offers a link to its 30th-anniversary coverage. Surprisingly, this special coverage does not appear among the 130 results of the initial search. Moreover, a promotional news piece on the 30th-anniversary coverage is on the list, but not the special page itself.

Furthermore, when one goes into the "23F 30th Anniversary Special," the main screen in the middle is inoperative (<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/30-aniversario-23f/>). On this screen, users would watch the 33-minute video of the Congress assault, but it is unavailable.

9. RTVE.es does not allow any communication from users, limiting the direct communication with citizens and using a one-way, top-to-bottom approach to the organization and dissemination of media.

Given that February 23, 2021, marked the 40th anniversary of the coup, it was necessary to perform a second search to determine how RTVE.es updated its archives. This search was conducted March 10, 2021, and rendered 229 results (see Table 2).

Table 2. Source: RTVE.es.

Original archival materials on 23F	Documentaries or news pieces on 23F	Fictional materials on 23F	Promotional materials created by RTVE to advertise 23F content	Materials unrelated to 23F
10 results	163 results	6 results	40 results	10 results
Three-minute video that shows how president Suárez stood up to the military	Interviews with key historical figures Podcasts	Episodes of drama series Fragments of drama series	Promotional RTVE ads on dramatic series or documentary specials	Podcasts on RNE that were broadcast on February 23 of any year
King Juan Carlos I's speech supporting democracy (3 times)	Fragments of documentaries Complete documentaries		Interviews with actors of drama series on 23F	Texts on unrelated events happening on February 23 of any year
TVE news flash from February 24, 1981, announcing the coup plotters' withdrawal	Contemporary news pieces that affect 23F protagonists			Audiovisual news pieces unrelated to 23F
Interview with Jordi Pujol, president of Generalitat of Catalunya, the day after the coup				
Demonstration in front of the Catalan Congress in support of democracy four days after the coup (3 times)				
A video of Catalan parties' speakers				

supporting
democracy

Figure 4 shows a graphic representation of this content.

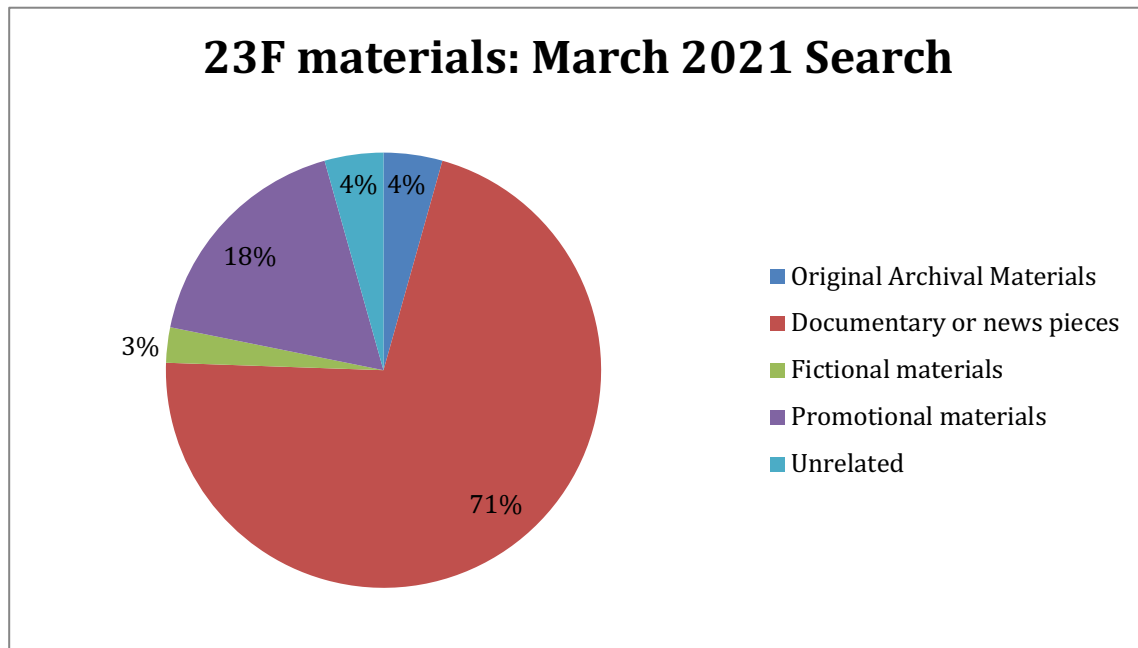


Figure 4. Source: RTVE.es.

The first result is identical to the previous search, a link to the series *23F: El día más difícil del Rey*. The third result addresses a key controversial issue within Spain, the questioning of the Spanish crown, which is increasingly under scrutiny because of a series of economic scandals linked to King Emeritus Juan Carlos I. It features a declaration of the current king, Felipe VI, praising his father's role during the coup, thus reiterating the canonical account of 23F. Most of the top results are either written news pieces or video interviews with key 23F protagonists, or more anonymous characters, such as the Congress's usher, which were created for the 40th anniversary of the coup. One has to go through three pages, to result 34, to find the opposite perspective: a news piece that remarks on how pro-independence Catalan politicians question the crown's legitimacy. As the list continues, several materials address how different cultural fields—from comic books to literary works and radio programs or special documentary features—have conceptualized 23F.

Even though a site is devoted to the 23F 40th anniversary (<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/23f/>), it is not connected to previous pages related to the coup. The featured archival materials, such as Juan Carlos I's 1981 discourse in support of democracy, are demoted to the bottom of this site. Within the 40th-anniversary page, the main video has the headline, "The King praises the 'firmness and authority' of Juan Carlos I on 23F: 'He was a key factor in the triumph of democracy,'" taking the Crown's side on the current polemic

about the suitability of maintaining the monarchy (Gil Grande, 2021). Below this is a short video on the role of the secret services in the coup and six video interviews with several politicians and cultural figures.

Conspicuously, the 33-minute video of 23F is once again nowhere to be found among the 229 total results. Although RTVE has recuperated some relevant archival materials, such as an interview with former president of Generalitat of Catalunya, Jordi Pujol, it has failed to organize its archival materials; instead, it has squeezed them between promotional pieces for different fictional contents, podcasts on a variety of issues that briefly touch on 23F, interviews with diverse cultural figures, and even regional newscasts that tangentially address the coup. Moreover, some videos (such as Juan Carlos I's speech) are repeated several times, proving once again RTVE's chaotic handling of archival materials.

After analyzing how RTVE handles its privileged access to 23F archival footage, a few inferences may be drawn. First, despite its exclusive ownership of original archival material about the 23F coup d'état, a public enterprise such as RTVE does not properly manage and organize this footage to give citizens the rightful and straightforward access to a key event in Spanish history. In this regard, RTVE's search algorithm uses a simple "23F" tag that chaotically organizes disparate materials under the same label. Furthermore, RTVE is losing Web traffic because users are likely to turn to other search engines to find the desired information and audiovisual materials. Second, RTVE's organization of original archival materials and its coverage of 23F are current-affairs driven, giving priority to ongoing news. Consequently, it subordinates its privileged access to original footage or even special dossiers on the event—such as specials on the 30th and 40th anniversaries of the coup—to ongoing and anecdotal events, such as Lieutenant Colonel Tejero spending his vacation in the Canary Islands.

Given this scenario, to find videos about 23F, it is faster to step outside RTVE's site and use other navigation tools. Attempting to find the full 23F video, a user may try a Google search. Although the keyword "23F" does not allow one to easily find it, a modification does the job: "23 F video completo" (RTVE, 2011). Therefore, a user interested in watching this original material cannot view it within RTVE's website because of its insufficient internal mechanisms. Hence, RTVE is not providing reliable access to existing 23F audiovisual materials specifically, and the history of Spain more generally. This becomes more evident when attempting to find information about 23F on the leading video social network: YouTube.

When users enter the search term "23F" on YouTube, RTVE is significantly absent within the first few dozen results. For the most part, private media groups control the narrative. The first results are a documentary made by the newspaper *El País*, with more than 253,000 views (*El País con la Constitución*, 2018); a 10-minute animated version of 23F, created by Memorias de Pez, a website that produces "short and easy historical summaries" of events, with more than 500,000 views (Memorias de Pez, 2017); and the previously discussed Antena 3's 1994 documentary program *Se rompe el silencio*, uploaded by a YouTube user. Going down the list, there is an 11-minute video about the Congress assault, which, significantly, has been uploaded by the official account of former president Adolfo Suárez (not RTVE; President Adolfo Suárez González, n.d.), and a series of news excerpts, which show, for example, how the younger generations have little knowledge about 23F (La Sexta, 2016). Among the first available results, conspiracy perspectives on

23F also abound, giving free reign to polemical journalists, such as Pilar Urbano, to delve into "hidden truths" (De Verdad Televisión, 2011).

Even though RTVE has a YouTube channel with 1.36 million subscribers, it is an invisible agent on 23F. When entering RTVE's YouTube channel and searching for the coup, the first available results are either promotional materials on upcoming broadcasts of the series *Cuéntame, cómo pasó* or *23F: El día más difícil del Rey*, or excerpts from episodes. Scrolling down RTVE's YouTube channel, users find limited news coverage on the coup. No original archival materials are uploaded.

Failing to provide proper access to these materials, RTVE is being phased out of the "historical game," allowing private television operators, digital enterprises, or amateur users to get ahold of the 23F YouTube narrative and, hence, govern most online reinterpretations of a pivotal event in Spanish history. RTVE is off track, especially considering that YouTube functions as a sort of "laboratory" where diverse forces and emerging relationships between different economic social and cultural interests converge and clash. Additionally, there is a growing logic of participatory culture in which a dominant form of social collaboration is becoming increasingly relevant (Papachirissi, 2002; Roberts, 2016; Strangelove, 2010). Users watch videos online and often produce their own, or they link videos to their profiles on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, acting as "multipliers" (McCracken, 2005). In this scenario, social media affordances allow individuals to create and disseminate novel types of communicative structures, creating online communities to articulate varying ideological positions (Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2013; Wilson, 2011).

Furthermore, platforms such as YouTube sometimes catalyze instances of cultural confusion, or at least re-contextualization (Poster, 2006), given that users frequently watch videos far from the original contexts in which they were created. In this connected ecology in which information is being transferred from one digital setting to the next through the networked individual (Hamilton, 2014; Holt & Sanson, 2014; Manovich, 2013; van Dijck, 2011; Zelenkauskaite, 2017), RTVE is losing its position as a fundamental agent in the re-mediation of Spanish history. It is thus failing to intervene in the construction of significant "frameworks of social memory" (Halbwachs, 1992) that constantly reevaluate Spain's historical past.

Conclusions

In the European context, traditional PSBs are trying to adapt to the current digital challenges to protect their centrality. RTVE's shortcomings in managing archival materials about recent Spanish history epitomize a rather inadequate approach to this mission. 23F is a significant example of how RTVE is failing to play a key role in a shifting media environment in which it has become, at times, peripheral and, in the promotion of democratic values, often irrelevant. The 23F television coverage has fluctuated between the reaffirmation of the hegemonic version on RTVE and its questioning on other private networks—albeit to different degrees and from various perspectives—and digital arenas such as YouTube. To strengthen its position within this highly competitive environment and successfully transition from PSB to PSM, RTVE should adopt more systematic strategies in organizing its archives to foster less univocal readings of historical events, engaging the citizenry in diverse and even conflicting ways. Today, television increasingly exists on several screens, and making archival materials available through all these multiple

screens is one of the key tasks of any public provider (Hagedoorn & Agterberg, 2016). As a first step, RTVE should adapt its practices, organization, and content management within its website to mobilize one of the primary tools through which PSM engage the citizenry.

RTVE's strength relies on the vast patrimony of images and sounds it possesses. After decades of existence, it holds an immense collection of significant memories of Spain, both ordinary and extraordinary. Its online content should not merely be accumulative or a supporting instrument for RTVE's shifting broadcasting strategies. Hence, RTVE must deploy its resources to create comprehensive online archives that address key events in the history of Spain, such as 23F, facilitating universal access to them and not subordinating the importance of these archival materials in favor of the production of current-affairs-driven content. A clear effect of this restrictive nature can be seen in the popular ignorance of the entire 33 minutes of the Congress sequence.

RTVE has lacked a long-term plan for the dissemination of these audiovisual documents. We suggest that RTVE retool its website and carefully structure historical materials. RTVE could create, for example, a page to address the 23F historical events, including the entire Tejero sequence, Juan Carlos I's speech and the rest of archival footage it owns, as well as the successive programs, documentary pieces, and other materials that have been produced in the last 40 years. Furthermore, RTVE could even repurpose these audiovisual materials to design a didactic unit that both universities and schools could use to teach history subjects; today, their course programs typically provide an incomplete perspective on 23F, exclusively based on the canonical minute and a half of the Congress's assault and Juan Carlos I's speech. As a PSM, RTVE should also prioritize its participation in social networks such as YouTube. Additionally, it should engage digital users, nurturing the formation of multifocal communities. Thus, RTVE would manage to strategically inhabit different digital access gates to increase the visibility of its archives and, most relevantly, fulfill its obligations as a key agent in the preservation of shared cultural and social memories. Otherwise, in the digital era, its role will only diminish. RTVE's survival and responsibility toward the citizenry are at stake.

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