







Number 36 / March-August 2022  
print ISSN: 1390-3837 / electronic ISSN: 1390-8634

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## DOSSIER

---

- Political construction of Nayib Bukele  
on Twitter in the context of COVID-19 19  
*Juan Arturo Mila-Maldonado, Jhonatan Andrés Lara-Aguiar,  
Carlos David Carrasco-Muro and Emilio Esteban Narváez-Ruiz*

- The political participation on Twitter.  
No one studies the detached 39  
*Verónica González-List*

- Communication and disinformation in elections:  
research trends in Spain and Portugal 65  
*Rubén Rivas-de-Roca, Ricardo Moraes and Pedro Jerónimo*

- El rol del periodismo en los debates presidenciales  
en la Argentina y Brasil 87  
*Carolina Franco-Häntzsch and Mariano Dagatti*

- Thematic, strategic and positional frames about  
the 2016 Peruvian presidential debate 113  
*Sandro Macassi*

---

## MISCELLANEOUS

---

- Emotions, public space, and urban images  
in the context of COVID-19 139  
*Pablo Cabrera-Barona, Fernando Barragán-Ochoa,  
Andrea Carrión and Felipe Valdez*

Engagement of the Spanish, English and German health ministries on TikTok <i>Tania Forja-Pena</i>	163
---	-----

Concern about COVID-19 and its effects on the online political participation of citizens in the Ecuadorian context <i>Marcos Zumárraga-Espinosa, Sonia Egas-Balseca and Carlos Reyes-Valenzuela</i>	183
--	-----

New media in political campaign. The case of Madrid regional elections in 2021 on TikTok <i>Víctor López Fernández</i>	207
--	-----

The political use of terrorism in the 2021 Peruvian presidential campaign <i>Marina Mendoza</i>	227
---	-----

---

## GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING PAPERS

---

Publication guidelines in «Universitas»	255
---	-----

---

## DOSSIER

---

- Construcción política de Nayib Bukele  
en Twitter en el contexto del COVID-19 19  
*Juan Arturo Mila-Maldonado, Jhonatan Andrés Lara-Aguilar,  
Carlos David Carrasco-Muro y Emilio Esteban Narváez-Ruiz*

- La participación política en Twitter.  
Nadie estudia a los deshilvanados 39  
*Verónica González-List*

- Comunicación y desinformación en elecciones:  
tendencias de investigación en España y Portugal 65  
*Rubén Rivas-de-Roca, Ricardo Moraes y Pedro Jerónimo*

- The role of journalism in presidential  
debates in Argentina and Brazil 87  
*Carolina Franco-Häntzsch y Mariano Dagatti*

- Frames* temáticos, estratégicos y posicionales  
sobre el debate presidencial peruano de 2016 113  
*Sandro Macassi*

---

## MISCELLANEOUS

---

- Emociones, espacio público e imágenes urbanas  
en el contexto de COVID-19 139  
*Pablo Cabrera-Barona, Fernando Barragán-Ochoa,  
Andrea Carrión y Felipe Valdez*

Engagement de los ministerios de sanidad español, inglés y alemán en TikTok	163
--	-----

*Tania Forja-Pena*

La preocupación por el COVID-19 y sus efectos en la participación políticaonline de la ciudadanía en el contexto ecuatoriano	183
--	-----

*Marcos Zumárraga-Espinosa, Sonia Egas-Balseca  
y Carlos Reyes-Valenzuela*

Nuevos medios en campaña. El caso de las elecciones autonómicas de Madrid 2021 en TikTok	207
---	-----

*Víctor López Fernández*

La utilización política del terrorismo en la campaña presidencial peruana de 2021	227
--	-----

*Marina Mendoza*

---

## NORMAS EDITORIALES

---

Normas de publicación en «Universitas»	263
--	-----

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## Political construction of Nayib Bukele on Twitter in the context of COVID-19

*Construcción política de Nayib Bukele  
en Twitter en el contexto del COVID-19*

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**Received on:** 25/10/2021 **Revised on:** 20/12/2021 **Accepted on:** 23/12/2021 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

**Suggested citation:** Mila-Maldonado J. A., Lara-Aguiar, J. A., Carrasco-Muro, C. D., & Narváez-Ruiz, E. E. (2022). Political construction of Nayib Bukele on Twitter in the context of COVID-19. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 19-38. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.01>

### **Abstract**

*This article aims to analyze the use of Twitter as a communication channel by the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele (@nayibbukele), an outsider, who is also considered the 'millennial' president of that nation and who strongly employs this digital platform for the dissemination of its government policies. The present analysis is landed and justified in the context of COVID-19, characterized by the taking of restrictive confinement measures at the regional and local level, with a strong struggle between the executive and the Salvadoran legislative apparatus, as well as the impact of the virus on all corners of the globe. As a temporality, the April-June quarter of 2020 is taken, for a total corpus of 766 messages. Through content analysis, the role of the political actor in a health crisis, the presence of struggles with the political class, the construction of the category of people applied to the Central American nationality, the polarization present in their agenda and others are analyzed. Elements of interest within the construction of the 'us-them' dichotomy in a digital environment. As the main finding, it is obtained that Bukele is framed within two characterizations; the first coupled with confronting political and social actors (mainly the legislative apparatus), an environment strongly marked by polarization; and the second, where he connects with citizens through charisma and the use of a close and positive language, in which polarization becomes an absent element, and integration is called for.*

### **Keywords**

*COVID-19 pandemic, political agenda, populism, Twitter, Nayib Bukele, polarization.*

### **Resumen**

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el uso de Twitter como canal de comunicación por parte del presidente de El Salvador, Nayib Bukele (@nayibbukele), *outsider*, a su vez considerado el presidente 'millennial' de dicha nación y quien emplea fuertemente esta plataforma digital para la difusión de sus políticas de gobierno. El presente análisis se fundamenta y justifica en el contexto del COVID-19, caracterizado por la toma de medidas restrictivas de confinamiento a nivel regional y local, con una fuerte pugna entre el ejecutivo y el aparato legislativo salvadoreño, así como la afectación del virus a todos los rincones del planeta. Como temporalidad se toma el trimestre abril-junio de 2020, para un corpus total de 766 mensajes. Por medio del análisis de contenido se analiza el rol del actor político en una crisis sanitaria, la presencia de pugnas con la clase política, la construcción de la categoría de pueblo de forma aplicada a la nacionalidad centroamericana, la polarización presente en su agenda y otros elementos de interés dentro en la construcción de la dicotomía 'nosotros-ellos' en un entorno digital. El principal hallazgo es que Bukele se enmarca dentro de dos caracterizaciones; la primera aunada a confrontar actores políticos y sociales (principalmente el aparato legislativo), entorno fuertemente marcado por la polarización; y la segunda, donde conecta con la ciudadanía a través del carisma y del uso de un lenguaje cercano y positivo, en cuyos casos la polarización se torna un elemento ausente y se apela a la integración.

### **Palabras clave**

*Pandemia de COVID-19, agenda política, populismo, Twitter, Nayib Bukele, polarización.*

## **Introduction and situational context**

El Salvador in 2020 was marked by the political conflict between the powers of the State, even in the context of the pandemic. In February 2021, armed soldiers entered a session of the Legislative Assembly. According to International Amnesty (2021), this problem was an attempt to intimidate legislators into approving a loan to the country's security forces. In March, the Executive decreed mandatory confinement measures and ordered the security forces to arrest people who failed to comply with the measures. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), more than 16 000 people were arrested. These people were held in containment centers; according to Deutsche Welle (2020a), these facilities were in precarious and unhealthy conditions.

During the implementation of the containment measures, the Office of the Attorney for the Defense of Human Rights reported more than 1600 complaints of human rights violations, including more than 620 abuses related to the right to freedom of movement. In addition to political conflict with the legislature, the government disobeyed three sentences issued by the Supreme Court's Constitutional Chamber that prohibited the detention of people for breaching the confinement and quarantine rules (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Since May, classes were online and in August, the Ministry of Education announced that schools and universities would be closed until December 31. Education continued through the Internet, radio and television. Regarding social protection measures managed by the Salvadoran government to address the health emergency and its consequences, according to ECLAC (2020), monetary transfers and subsidies for basic services occurred. In relation to transfers, they were only executed once in April with a US\$300 bonus.

In general, the context of El Salvador during 2020 showed a setback in relation to the respect for democratic institutions. The intervention of the security forces at the seat of parliament, as well as the arbitrary detention of people for non-compliance with quarantine measures are harmful precedents. A positive aspect in this context, however, was the reduction in the homicide rate. According to the UNDP (2021) there was a decrease of 1068 fewer victims compared to 2019, the rate was 19.5 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants.

Under these parameters, this article aims to analyze the political construction of President Nayib Bukele, President of El Salvador, in his Twit-

ter account (@nayibbukele) in the framework of COVID-19, based on the main characteristics of populism as a political idea. Likewise, the target is also to analyze the justification of containment measures at the regional level, as well as the positioning — to some extent from the controversy — of the Salvadoran representative ulism and the thematic current situation of COVID-19.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Twitter as a channel for political and health communication**

In a context of cultural transformation and globalization, the creation of a virtual world is present, where social networks (e.g. Twitter) are important as channels of effective communication between politicians and their followers. Through their use, leaders build their images more effectively and help establish collective imaginary in interactions with their audiences (Congosto *et al.*, 2011).

According to Congosto *et al.* (2011), “Twitter is a source of information that allows to segment users, discover how citizens participate in political debate and see how they are grouped by ideological affinity” (p. 12), with the possibility of mobilizing audiences with shared interests through 208 characters, together with images, multimedia material or external links. In this way, Twitter has the possibility to be personalized and to disseminate a short message on large scales and to establish influence and a call toward spaces of social mobilization around opinions shared by many internet users on a digital space that changes the limitation schemes by the geographical location of the internet users for their feedback.

To emphasize on the size of the study, a political candidate can build a solid image of himself and his ideas in this digital platform by using formal or informal language according to the characteristics of the audience, becoming an important mobilizing leader and establishing a customization of his role in politics, where the user can share the information and thus generate unimaginable scopes (Carrasco *et al.*, 2018).

As mentioned by Álvarez (2018), Twitter is part of a novel (and still developing) concept of digital democracy, as a political and legal superstruc-

ture that allows leaders to bring together large groups of individuals who are part of a country in their communicative processes. The political user of this social network adds themes from the public agenda to political agendas, establishes accountability mechanisms, and convinces undecided audiences in contexts of electoral campaigns and other forms of militancy. Social networks are becoming an increasingly powerful communicative dimension, hence “today, citizenship use Facebook or Twitter to be informed, but also services such as WhatsApp, Instagram or platforms such as YouTube” (López-López & Vázquez-González, 2018, p. 1206), and politicians serve as spokespersons in such processes.

In practical scenarios, Twitter has been part of building the political image of major leaders like Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump (Álvarez, 2018). Trump’s campaign played a key role because of the struggle with some media conglomerates and their bias to favor Hillary Clinton’s campaign and discredit Trump’s (Mila-Maldonado *et al.*, 2021).

Twitter has become part of the political identity of Nayib Bukele, who is one of the youngest person to be president of a country (37 years at the time of starting office) (Libretilla.com, 2019), thus becoming a person belonging to a digital native generation, allowing him to interact with audiences with different types of information consumption (Grassetti, 2020). This underpins the interest of studying how the current president of El Salvador uses Twitter to create his political profile in a context of global health crisis. But, above all, to look at the discursive uses employed on Twitter, and how these influence the emotion of their messages, since, in terms of Vizer (2009): “telematics (computing and distance communication) allow to operate not only on information, but also on strategic manipulation and control of physical, social and mental processes” (p. 2).

## **Theoretical Premises of Populism**

The article addresses the theoretical current of populism with the aim of deepening on its components and characteristics during COVID-19 pandemic in El Salvador, taking as the object of analysis the political messages of Nayib Bukele. Populism is based on the fact that it often manifests itself in discursive, mobilizing constructions within contexts of social and political crises (Laclau, 2005). It turns out to be a political process that accumulates

popular equivalences manifested through emotional speeches regarding unmet needs on the part of the State, which are articulated by political subjects in a scenario of uncertainty and distrust of the great majorities.

People are the central concept for populist definition, absorbing ideological impulses and discursive emotional attachments. The designation of people catalyzes collective mobilization: “The people exist as long as they are designated as such, and the non-people exist in opposition to the first” (Casullo, 2019, p. 49). For this reason it is seen as corporatism, in which the politician adheres to social sectors through statements of social change (Howard, 2004). The accumulation of popular hopes and demands makes it a shared political identity, where its adherents connect with ideological tendencies of political, economic and social transformation.

Exacerbating populism requires moments of political and social fracturing, i.e., populism has polarizing characteristics in a divided society. Such a concept is not confined to an absolutist and unitary definition, but rather it contains analytical aspects present in dichotomous conjunctures of the social space: people versus corrupt elite as the general will of people (Mudde, 2015). For this reason, Laclau (2005) states that populism is composed of three dimensions: “The equivalence between unmet demands, their crystallization around certain common symbols, and the emergence of a leader whose word embodies this process of popular identification” (p. 58). All these in an agonist public space, in dispute of meanings and political identities, immersed in a polarization of political adversaries through identifications of a we / them.

Regarding the latter, Mouffe (2005) argues that the construction of an ‘us’ always calls for exclusion of those who will be left out of the political project. In other words, the constitution of an “us” as a popular identity that brings together heterogeneous needs, translated into equivalencies, will create a “them”, an adversary. For Mouffe (2005), analyzing we/them is key to categorizing whether it is a populism of the left or the right, depending on the affective components as a collective will to build the people.

In this sense, populism does not follow a narrow view that is endorsed only by a left-wing ideology; on the contrary, it also acquires mechanisms established as popular sovereignty rooted in extreme-right neo-liberal logic. This is based on the reconstitution of the political area and its constant transformation into the struggle of parties. For this reason, Mouffe (2005) specifies that right-wing populism is formed by false premises and mechanisms

of exclusion expressed in xenophobia, racism and classism, as a political project of collective and people construction.

De la Torre (2018) says that a populist actor establishes a kind of metaphor by building—from democracy as a discursive support— people as a ‘we, meanwhile, for the politician “We are all (I am —with lowercase letters) his/her mirror” (p.186), as a way to connect with his/her followers. Similarly, this typology of politicians redefines the concept of citizens, transforming them “into children who need guardianship and who, if they do not obey the wise and caring father, can even be punished” (p.187).

One of the key elements of populism is the figure of the leader built on emotional and hopeful statements, which are essential for connecting with adherents: “One of the constants of populist movements is their lack of a heavily structured apparatus; the only solid nexus is the leader. There are, or almost, no intermediary levels” (Dorna, 2003, p. 122). The acceptance of populist speeches will be effective as long as the leader’s figure is built from a linguistic flow, but, above all, by being mystified by gathering the vision of the past to become the hero of the future (Casullo, 2019). Charisma is an innate aspect of leaders, so it facilitates their role of authority by allowing them to show their awareness and empathy with the public. “The charismatic leader shows a contagious dynamism and offers an irresistible attraction” (Dorna, 2003, p.77).

In this sense, Nayib Bukele, as an outsider, proposes new forms of public administration. Advocating the use of social networks as a political instrument in its mandate, he supports a renewal of the political and social aspects in the light of popular sovereignty (Navas, 2020). Hence, it is interesting to analyze him on the theoretical basis of populism, since he violates the discursive forms and norms of traditional political activity, through the construction of a collective actor based on the category people, as evidenced by other famous politicians like Donald Trump (Mila-Maldonado *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, this study is based on theoretical variants of populism, such as vectors that allow to analyze and interpret the construction of the political figure and the discursive uses in Bukele’s mandate, because he promotes the construction of the identity of the Salvadoran people through his leadership, due to complex processes — discursive and emotional — that consolidate political projects rooted in popular sovereignty (Errejón & Mouffe, 2015).

## Methodology

In this article, Twitter was considered the object of study, specifically the account of the Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele (@nayibbukele), because, it is considered as its political agenda, and it allows characterizing and analyzing the construction of his political profile on the theoretical basis of populism. So Twitter, in the present time, has been set up as a public space that manages the visibility of political life (Jungherr, 2016). Therefore, the aim is to identify the main populist qualities present in Nayib Bukele, based on the use of his Twitter account @nayibbukele, in a context coupled with the taking of measures to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, other elements are identified such as the construction of the variable of people in his speech, the construction of the enemy, and other aspects of interest such as the polarization observed in his messages and elements that are typical of political negativism.

The time of the study includes tuits (776 in total) published by Bukele during April-September 2020, seen as the months in which the first restriction measures were taken in the region. For this, it is important to take into account the crisis component of Laclau (2005), where the emergence of populist leaders can be identified, who seek to bring together popular equivalencies. Therefore, this situation makes it possible to observe the action and configuration of Bukele as a political subject, as well as the discursive components in the face of the health crisis in the country.

The research is quantitative, whose numerical nature allows analyzing big data in order to systematize them effectively, corresponding to phenomena of social reality and statistical results derived from criteria of accuracy (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2014). This type of research allows testing hypotheses and understanding behaviors of variables and individuals in specific contexts of interest (Del Canto & Silva, 2013). This principle presents in a way applied to understanding the role of the communication management of Nayib Bukele's Twitter account around the health crisis generated by COVID-19 and its ravages at the local and global level. It is based on the premise that the president is one of the main spokespersons for El Salvador regarding management measures to reduce the negative effects of the virus and get a solution on time. Thus, the importance of social media management as political instruments, and the importance of studying message management and dissemination in a digital age, especially on the part of a

considered ‘millennial president’ and close to the new generations that grow in hybrid environments between presentiality and digital (Grassetti, 2020).

To this end, the corpus (composed of tuits) is examined methodologically under the content analysis procedure, since it is “a research technique designed to formulate, on the basis of certain data, reproducible and valid inferences that can be applied to its context” (Krippendorff, 1990, p. 28). This technique, based on the statistical systematization of data, makes it possible to perform a strictly valid interpretative exercise (Igartua, 2006), based on the preparation of a coding manual (Neuendorf, 2002), which includes variables created according to theoretical categories of populism, in order to make representative and reproducible inferences in subsequent investigations and obtain a generalization of the results.

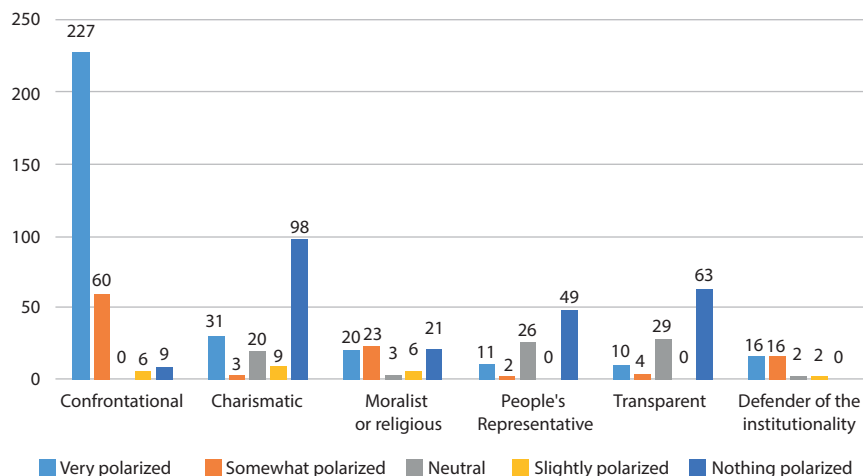
They are also incorporated into the variable codes aimed at determining whether the profile of the representative is oriented toward charisma or confrontation, as well as to identify values in the messages, their tone and the level of polarization (Islas, 2020), propitiated from his agenda. The choice of categories derives from the need to evaluate the populist characteristics of actors beyond their theoretical definitions, while incorporating qualitative precepts, taking political communication as a cross-cutting element. Then, to have a deeper analysis of the data, we correlate or cross-examine variables, so that they function as vectors that allow deeper interpretations. But, above all, to carry out a comparative study: to compare two or more states that lie on the same common element of the case of analysis (Marradi *et al.*, 2007).

## Presentation of results

**Table 1**  
*Construction of the political profile and polarization*

Chi-square tests			
	Value	gl	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
Pearson chi-square	521.679 <sup>a</sup>	20	.000
Credibility reason	593.049	20	.000
Linear association by linear	124.771	1	.000
N of valid cases	766		

**Figure 1**  
*Political profile construction and polarization*



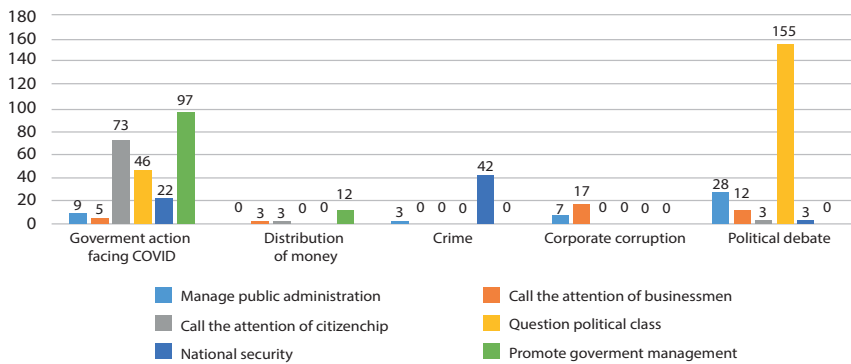
As the first crossing of variables, a significant relationship is obtained between the construction of the political profile of Bukele and polarization (Chi-square of .000), while when looking at the figure, polarization is observed in messages when they are constructed from the confrontation (227 messages with those characteristics). It indicates that Bukele presents an anti-systemic and critical character to his political adversaries, especially messages criticizing his management, reflecting a redemptive and protective discourse of the people against enemies of the old Salvadoran politics. Meanwhile, in cases where there is no polarization, his profile is usually charismatic (98 times) or transparency-oriented (in 63 of his tweets broadcast). As the figure shows, messages do not have a polarization burden when Bukele presents himself as: charismatic, representative of the people and transparent, so that his political image is built on the basis of empathy to connect with his followers.

In this way, the value of charisma is present in the Salvadoran president when giving people part of his political and discursive construction (Dorna, 2003). On the other hand, the polarization that is often boosted by populist leaders is present (Casullo, 2019) by establishing antagonistic relationships with the Legislative Assembly and other institutions that act as obstacles — openly pointed out by Bukele — in making people's will through his political management.

**Table 2**  
*Topic and trend*

Chi-square tests			
	Value	gl	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
Pearson chi-square	1952.627 <sup>a</sup>	90	.000
Credibility reason	1025.317	90	.000
Linear association by linear	100.187	1	.000
N of valid cases	766		

**Figure 2**  
*Topic and trend*



As a second crossing with a significance of 99% (Chi-square of .000), a significant relationship is obtained between the topic and the trend of the message<sup>1</sup>. The most relevant data is present when Nayib Bukele confronts and questions the opposition political class of El Salvador, leading to a political struggle. In this sense, 155 messages that share both characteristics affirm the assertion that this actor's political agenda is strongly characterized — among other issues by the confrontation of other political actors opposed to their government, especially the Legislative Assembly, described by Bukele as the old and retrograde state bureaucracy that impedes the development of El Sal-

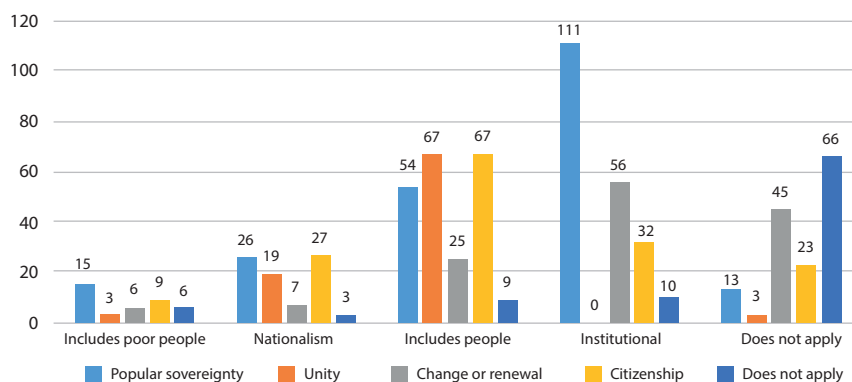
<sup>1</sup> Within the second analysis, some of the items that presented few frequencies to be considered significant in the analysis were omitted.

vador. In this sense, the Salvadoran president calls the collective memory by associating negative meanings of the country's political past with the aim of delegitimizing his political adversaries, classified as the traditional political class, which seeks only its private and party interests in relation to those of the people. This is evidence of the often confrontational attitude of populist leaders (Mudde, 2015). It is also representative that the government's action against COVID-19 was aimed at politically promoting government management, as well as making a call for citizens to be aware of the pandemic.

**Table 3**  
*Characterization of people and exaltation of values*

chi-squared test			
	Value	gl	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
Pearson chi-square	410.761 <sup>a</sup>	35	.000
Credibility reason	410.776	35	.000
Linear association by linear	161.769	1	.000
N of valid cases	766		

**Figure 3**  
*People characterization and value exaltation*



This is an equally significant relationship (.000 Chi-square, which results in 99% of significance) between the characterization of the people

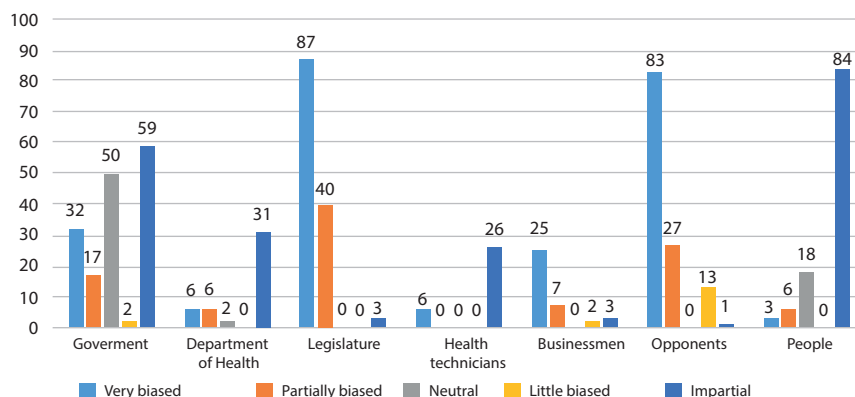
and the exaltation of values by Nayib Bukele, where relevant aspects are identified in Salvadorans. While at the previous crossings the charismatic and confrontational qualities with other political actors were highlighted, a strong relationship between the value of ‘popular sovereignty’ and the institutionalism he uses to address the people are observed in 111 messages in this crossing. Likewise, a speech is made about the inclusive people who work from sovereignty (54 messages) and from unity (67) as values. This reflects the discursive political strategy in Bukele, since it evokes symbols and meanings of popular sovereignty around the political appropriation of the people. It endorses political responsibility as virtue and participation of the people in his institutional mandate. Similarly, Bukele relies heavily on patriotic values such as civility and unity, i.e., for him there is nothing but the country. It allows affirming that Nayib Bukele maintains closeness, articulation and respect towards the people (Arenas, 2010).

Regarding the polarization variable, there is a significant relationship with the actor referred to in the message (99% significance expressed in .000 Chi-square). For example, much of Bukele’s messages (87 highly polarized and 40 somewhat polarized) revolved around the Legislative Assembly, which has been identified as the main figure of check and balances for the Salvadoran president. There is a lot of polarization in the message when such an actor is present. Now, if this data of interest is intertwined with the previous crosses, the confrontational character of the relationship between the two parties could be reaffirmed. The President often accuses the legislative body of impeding his functions, preventing the approval of resources needed for action to curb the pandemic, and categorizes them —although perhaps not using such terminology— as enemies of the people.

**Table 4**  
*Actor and polarization*

Chi-square test			
	Value	gl	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
Pearson chi-square	610.116 <sup>a</sup>	52	.000
Credibility reason	670.827	52	.000
Linear association by linear	.052	1	.819
N of valid cases	766		

**Figure 4**  
*Actor and polarization*



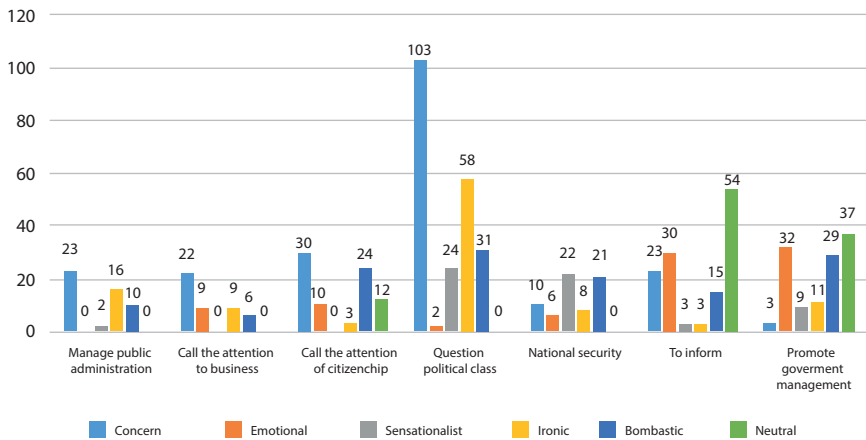
Thus, the people stand out as a second actor, with 84 references by the Central American leader, from an integrative quality. Bukele has two main customizations in relation to the ‘other’ he relates to: on the one hand, he is charismatic and integrates the people as part of his political work; and, on the other hand, he is the politician who confronts the political class that opposes – either in a discursive way or through legislation – his presidential functions. President Bukele adapts the use of his Twitter account to the target audience in his messages.

It reaffirms the existence of a profile construction of Nayib Bukele that incorporates typical characteristics of populism, seen as an expression of democracy that emerges “when citizens feel that politicians have appropriated the popular will and have taken power from the Sovereign” (Arenas, 2010, p.171). In this sense, Bukele is seen as an official who owes to the people and was elected to change the way politics is done in El Salvador, to cleanse institutions (so that they regain the people’s trust), and to change obsolete—listed by such as corrupt— schemes of the Salvadoran political past.

**Table 5**  
*Trend and tone*

Chi-square tests			
	Value	gl	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
Pearson chi-square	523.064 <sup>a</sup>	54	.000
Credibility reason	577.106	54	.000
Linear association by linear	70.989	1	.000
N of valid cases	766		

**Figure 5**  
*Trend and tone*



As a last crossing, an equally significant relationship is obtained between the trend and the tone of the message<sup>2</sup>. It is possible (with 99 % of significance observed in a Chi-square of 000) to emphasize that when the president questions the political class he usually does so in a tone of dismay. This relation has occurred 103 times, and Bukele often places the Legisla-

<sup>2</sup> Some of the items that presented few frequencies to be considered significant were also omitted in this analysis

tive Assembly in a negative position by mentioning that it limits his efforts to safeguard the integrity of the people during the health crisis. There are issues of non-approval of resources and excessive bureaucracy when the president seeks to establish a decree or measure that requires approval of this power. Similarly, the questioning of the political class can arise from irony (58 tweets interweave this relationship). As a third element of interest, the ‘information’ and ‘promotion’ trends are often related to a tone of neutrality in 54 and 37 messages, respectively.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Among the main findings of the research, it is possible to emphasize that Nayib Bukele tends to adapt to the political and social actors who are part of his messages. First, he stands out as a populist politician who articulates and shapes a view of the Salvadoran people often ‘mistreated and neglected’ by the political class, while incorporating confrontation elements that can characterize populist actors from the identification of adversaries and a strongly polarized discourse composed of patriotic principles and values, thus building a “we” as a country and confronting a “they”: bureaucracy and traditional political parties.

However, messages were also identified which stand out a more institutional and neutral position of the president, especially when the tweets were aimed at spreading schedules of national chains, informing specific pandemic management measures or retweeting non-polarized messages from other actors or institutions. It should be noted that the construction of his political agenda, in terms of decisions to fight the pandemic, promotes the management of his government, especially with the aim of strengthening the institutional and governmental image, as well as disciplining the behavior of the population during the pandemic.

The relevance of institutions is one of Bukele’s main resources for the construction of meanings around public management. In other words, through his messages he seeks to resignify the practices of public institutions in his government, by recalling a past of inefficiency and political proselytism of traditional parties of El Salvador.

However, it should be pointed out that during this analysis, his speech does not categorize him as radical right-wing populist (Casullo, 2019), he

does not exclude foreigners and he is not elitist. He is also not categorized as left-wing populist (Salomon, 2013), since he does not articulate a fully revolutionary discourse so attached to the lower classes or in opposition to the business sector, but he uses a people's unifying discourse on public policy and promotion of a state model. He emphasizes the importance of the productive apparatus and the service sector for post-pandemic economic recovery, noting that it must respect COVID-19 measures and care about the lives of citizens, by elaborating emotional messages with some charisma and empathy, in order to show closeness in relation to the fears and concerns of the citizens in times of pandemic.

Thus, Twitter has been consolidated as a powerful dissemination tool for President Bukele, having a closer role to a digital native audience and not focusing his speech from a political party or mainstream media. Rather from personalization and closeness to the citizens as a perfect outsider (Casullo, 2019), incorporating charisma as one of his main qualities to connect with the people (Deusdad, 2003).

The president emphasizes the importance of citizens' lives by applying restrictive quarantine measures. In addition, the expansion of intensive care units stands out in the framework of his political agenda, serving this information as a generating tool of awareness for the Salvadoran people as to comply with the restrictions to discipline the population.

The context of COVID-19 in El Salvador proved to be an essential moment in characterizing the populist variants deployed in Bukele's administration, since social fears emerged in the population, and the president used this fear as a political ideology. First, Bukele resorts to moral discipline of capital, i.e., he calls the popular will by focusing on the redistribution of wealth (Errejón & Mouffe, 2015); the most basic needs (food and basic services) of the people predominate in his agenda. Second, he is seen as a disruptor of the status quo, where the main adversaries are the traditional politicians, who, according to him, are the responsible for the containment of the country's development; moreover, another of his main enemies is crime, but through a security discourse, he enacts a cleansing in the name of the popular mandate (Deutsche Welle, 2020b).

In the construction of his political figure, Nayib Bukele presents populist variants such as charisma, a confrontational characteristic, and the defense of popular sovereignty, the latter in terms of a statist political project, observed in the government's promotion of the measures taken by his go-

vernment in the context of COVID-19. It can be concluded that Bukele uses certain populist political discourse, but he is a populist that is not framed into the left party—he is not a revolutionary—or the right—he does not call to nationalism or racism—but he does adopt and resort to certain features of it, in order to confront the traditional political class, particularly against the Legislative Assembly; thus, seeking to consolidate a statist and innovative model in the face of an obsolete Salvadoran political party.

Finally, the main constraint during the research was the recent and evolving nature of the pandemic, which prevents the existence of mature and sustained references over time, as well as the lack of post-pandemic measures. From this perspective, this type of research leads to the deepening of studies in the area to be part of the subsequent references to know the political-communicative implications of the transmission of information in these contexts of health crises; they demonstrate weaknesses in the communication setting of governments and represent challenges for population integration. The possibility of extending these studies to the qualitative field and even the mixture of the different methods allow the transversal incorporation of other disciplines of exact sciences, starting from the health nature of the phenomenon. This will allow the establishment of the foundations for the management of similar future events.

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## **The political participation on Twitter. No one studies the detached**

***La participación política en Twitter.  
Nadie estudia a los deshilvanados***

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**Received on:** 17/11/2021 **Revised on:** 25/12/2021 **Accepted on:** 18/01/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

### ***Abstract***

*This article is a state of art about political participation on Twitter that trace a map around the interaction forms relevant for the social studies that elucidate the panorama projected by them to explain and comprehend what is happening with these phenomena between the users who form the biggest sector in Twitter: the ordinary users. The subject is important because despite Twitter is the political social network chosen by scientific authors as well as users, there are not studies about the conversation between ordinary citizens with no political agendas. The article is formed with four sections, inductively built from an exploration with grounded theory of the recent literature; 1) Twitter in the public sphere, 2) social effects of Twitter in the political participation, 3) Twitter in activism, protests and mobilizations, and 4) relationship between Twitter and mass media. The conclusions show that the social studies offer an incomplete idea about the communicative practices on political issues on Twitter and that the users who integrate the biggest collective on Twitter are not shown in the scientific literature. The concept 'detached' is proposed to refer to these ordinary users.*

### ***Keywords***

*Political participation, Twitter, ordinary user, digital interaction, detached.*

**Suggested citation:** González-List, V. (2022). The political participation on Twitter. No one studies the detached. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 39-64. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.02>

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo esboza un estado de la cuestión sobre la participación política en Twitter realizado con el objetivo de mapear las formas de interacción que se están estudiando, para dilucidar hasta dónde el panorama que proyectan esos estudios es suficiente para explicar y comprender los entresijos de lo que ocurre con este fenómeno entre los usuarios que conforman el sector más amplio en la red: la población común y corriente. El tema es relevante porque si bien Twitter es la red social política de preferencia tanto para los investigadores como para los usuarios, no se encuentran estudios de las conversaciones que realizan ciudadanos de a pie sin vínculos entre ellos ni lazos que los integren con una causa, movimiento, hashtag o partido político. El texto está integrado por cuatro apartados, formados inductivamente con lo que reveló una exploración de la literatura reciente realizada con la teoría fundamentada: 1) Twitter en la esfera pública, 2) efectos sociales de Twitter en la participación política, 3) Twitter en activismo, protestas y movilizaciones, y 4) relación entre Twitter y periodistas o medios de comunicación. Las conclusiones apuntan a que los estudios sociales ofrecen una idea incompleta de las prácticas comunicativas de asuntos políticos en Twitter y que los usuarios que conforman el colectivo más grande en Twitter no aparecen en la literatura. Se propone el concepto ‘deshilvanado’ para designar a esos usuarios de a pie.

## **Palabras clave**

Participación política, Twitter, usuario común, interacción digital, deshilvanado.

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## **Introduction. Political participation on Twitter**

Twitter is the preferred political social network for both researchers and users. Social studies consider it a medium that consolidates political communication, making it a little more innovative, because it facilitates the rapid transmission of short messages and promotes the dissemination of informal and spontaneous speeches, while allowing direct listening and conversation. On Twitter, public institutions, political parties, social movements, and business organizations spread their opinions and establish peer-to-peer communication with partners, sympathizers, militants, or clients (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Moya-Sánchez & Herrera-Damas, 2015; Murcia-Verdú, 2018; Ortiz-Espinoza & Espejel-Trujillo, 2021; Veenstra *et al.*, 2014; Zamora-Medina & Zurutuza-Muñoz, 2014).

Political participation on Twitter is on a global scale. In Brazil and South Korea, the use of Twitter has increased among citizens and politicians, to the extent that this network plays a role in deliberation and participation because of its easiness to share user-generated content (Kim & Park, 2012; Martins de Souza *et al.*, 2017). In Spain, it was suggested to reflect on the desirability of shifting interest in television to the image management of politicians on Twitter, because it extends contact between leaders and citizens (Quevedo-Redondo *et al.*, 2016). In Nigeria and Turkey, politicians who wanted to make their views available to broad audiences and ordinary citizens used Twitter, which has led to a change in election campaigns and voter courtroom (Opeibi, 2019). In New Zealand, the use of Twitter was specifically recommended for women politicians who wish to practice public relations and gain visibility (Fountaine, 2017).

## **Other social media**

Some studies on political participation in social media do not indicate a specific platform. For example, Effing *et al.* (2013) discussed that politicians with more participation in social media—which are not specified—obtained more votes in the Netherlands during national elections. Barisione *et al.* (2017) concluded that social networks have been widely demonstrated to improve political participation and collective action. Brown *et al.* (2017) suggested that social media activism be studied—without distinguishing which—to understand how collectivities maintain their identity in a social movement.

On the other hand, authors who indicate the social networks used to conduct their studies—commonly Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—conclude that cover them all. For example, Youmans and York (2012) conducted their study on Facebook and Twitter, but in their discussion, they refer to the networking capacity—in general—for mobilizations. Van Stekelengurg and Klandermans (2017) noted differences between recruitment or call for mobilization by traditional channels against that made on social networks Facebook and Twitter, referring to networks in general.

Other authors analyze the effects of incidental exposure to political news that identify as an emerging trend in digital consumption, with conclusions more or less favorable to political participation in network, in terms of how

users engage with mobilizations or political positions that they hear on their digital platforms because they get into activities outside political participation (Kümpel, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2022; Serrano-Puche *et al.*, 2018).

## **The social media ecosystem**

There are also studies that do not refer to social media as applications or platforms, but to the interaction that occurs on the Internet in generic terms, understanding it as a media sphere or as stated by Van Dijck (2013), as an “ecosystem.” This author warned that the like button belongs to Zuckerberg. Each time a user clicks like on any of the more than 350 thousand websites that have it installed; their personal data is routed to Facebook even if they do not have an account on that network. “The like button allows Facebook to track how many users and whose friends have clicked the button [that] indicates a profound modification of a social standard” (2013, pp. 49-50).

Authors who do not indicate which social networks they used to make their observations refer to the Internet or Web 2.0 in general as if it constituted an ecosystem. Hekim (2021), says that the Internet has been praised as a tool that increases political participation and improves dialog between politicians and citizens, and that the widespread use of social media has made them a valuable communication channel for both individuals and organizations. Consistent with the recommendation that Brown *et al.* (2017) had expressed years ago about their interest to study social media activism—without specifying any—to better understand it; Kadiri *et al.* (2020) say that political participation and user engagement on the Internet require academics to investigate and understand the inherent potential in these actions on various social networks.

## **Political participation and Twitter**

It seems that there can be no politics without electronic interaction in this digital age. A significant part of the literature has been devoted to understanding the political actions that are conducive to Twitter or in some network. We are at a point where it is necessary to conceive and employ theorizations that are in concordance with the digital age to talk about the online phenomenon of political participation. Some approaches to political

participation that consider the electronic world are using tools that analyze interaction in traditional media, resulting that the phenomenon is underestimated and not scaled (Trejo-Delarbre, 2015). Nowadays, even the social groups that do not interact with the digital age are affected by the dynamics of social networks.

This does not mean [...] that people around the world participate in the networks. In fact, most do not. But everyone is affected by the processes that take place in the global networks of this social structure (Castells, 2012, p. 51).<sup>1</sup>

The degree of Twitter-political codependency is so high that some academics conduct research with questions that would not even be considered in some geographies, for example, Straus *et al.* (2016): question “Why do some senators use Twitter more often than others?” (own translation). All research questions are credited to the knowledge. The spectrum establishes conditions where it is possible to follow the dialog on these two phenomena: *political participation* and *Twitter*, necessary and relevant to better understand the reality of our time. But the question remains about the daily political interaction that happens 24/7 on Twitter between ordinary users, who are unknown to the public opinion.

## **Political participation in ordinary users in a daily basis**

Twitter created a constant and always-open political discussion space that did not exist. In the past, ordinary people could talk about politics only under certain conditions, such as when they were at the hair salon and said something about the news, or at the meeting with friends, or at work with the colleague. Frequent users have a voice on Twitter to discuss about politics, and they instantly incorporate the dynamic dialog of the Twitter timeline. No matter what time and place, they can write, dictate, or repeat whatever they are thinking about the political event that triggered their opinion of the moment. They use their digital prosthetics—as stated by Mercedes Bunz (2017) to cell phones—to enter Twitter to answer the question “What is

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<sup>1</sup> Castells used a 2007 data from Hammond et al., but the Statista page consulted on November 24, 2021, estimated 82% of Internet users of social networks in the world for this year. <https://bit.ly/3ImEM93>

going on?”. Are those who are not accustomed to political opinion taking on the interest there? Is this how political positions are being delineated? Does this talking about politics on Twitter translate into any action? Are political actors watching those interactions?

The above questions remain unanswered, because unless there is research carried out 1) in contexts of campaigns, debates or political elections; 2) on perverse ways of using the Network; 3) on a hashtag, meme, topic, social cause, mobilization, or activism; 4) on a relevant political situation; 5) on a structural approach, or 6) in comparison with another social phenomenon such as the media; no studies have been found that observe the daily interaction on day-to-day political issues made by ordinary users.

Because of the latter, the literature review was done to map the interests of researchers, to emphasize the need and propose a perspective that allows to improve our understanding of the phenomenon. Once understanding this form of participation, it will be possible to analyze whether it has any social influence, whether it is able to achieve any public influence or whether it exercises any power.

### **Brief note on grounded theory**

The results on the following pages are part of an exploratory study of the literature conducted for doctoral research of grounded theory on political participation on Twitter. The concept of grounded theory tends to be confusing because it refers to a set of procedures used to conduct a scientific study, the result of which is a theory as well as the name of this strategy which is not a theory. Informed theory is a methodology for generating the theory that will explain how study participants conceive that interaction on which the researcher asks a question. It refers to something that lies at the root (the foundation) of the dynamics of the studied group. It is the concept that a group of people have of their interactions, an exchange that surprises the researcher and wants to understand; for this reason, the researcher turns to the people and asks them questions about their relationships, so that they can explain the way they understand them. The grounded theory is a way to explain this understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher so that he/she does not alter it or modify it by adapting it to his/her own paradigms. If the researcher uses his/her deductive reasoning, if he/she establishes previous

categories, or if he/she uses an established theory to explain how community members relate and communicate, the outcome of the research will not be a grounded theory. For these reasons, there is no research theory and no previous categories or references derived from verified theoretical bodies when working with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

## Materials and method

The aim of the literature review was to know the objectives of research conducted on political participation on Twitter. The search words used were political participation and Twitter.<sup>2</sup> More than a thousand titles were obtained, indicating that the topic is being addressed with interest by the academic community. Once the results were selected with criteria of date and discipline, half of them remained, with a total of 271 articles. To describe this overview, reference is made to a representative selection of these studies.

Many valuable works were not included because they do not focus on analyzing the relationship between political participation and Twitter. Studies that integrated their corpus of analysis with political hashtags or algorithms with political variables to investigate phenomena outside political participation, and work on political phenomena with disciplines and approaches other than sociology and communication were also omitted.

Although the search words used were political participation and Twitter, UNAM Digital Library, Redalyc and ResearchGate, as well as literature on Twitter, provided research on other digital platforms and social networks in general that were included because of their relevance in sizing the topic.

There were three criteria used to classify this set of publications: 1) decreasing order in terms of the number of jobs; 2) alphabetical order by last name; and 3) chronological order according to the date of publication moving toward the most recent. The chronological criterion is important because it makes it easier to observe how quickly these topics have evolved, as well as the emergence of new routes of exploration by social researchers. The first works, for example, called on the academic community to take an interest in these topics by describing the characteristics of political participation in social networks and their potential, while the most recent analyze

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2 The search of words was done in spanish and english: *political participation AND Twitter*.

more specifically aspects of these dynamics or to enter the study from perspectives. It is understood that the relevance of studying these phenomena has been established in social studies.

The presentation was ordered according to the number of titles in each topic to provoke a sense of gap by the little studied phenomena and boredom for those that will be investigated. For the same reason, the introductory paragraph to each block indicates the number of titles it has. There are 118 reports on Twitter in the public sphere and only 28 on the relationship between this social network and the media, so there are opportunities for research in the latter topic. At the same time, four thematic sets were established, and the decreasing order were also incorporated. The topic for each group was determined inductively from reading the abstracts of those materials.

It is interesting to comment that the first search was made in the UNAM Digital Library, and once classified the topics already determined, it was proceeded to search at Redalib and ResearchGate, finding it unnecessary to add new titles to the sets: it was appropriate to save the new texts in the thematic boxes already labeled. However, the increase in the number of articles did force the index to be rearranged, the most relevant being that the group that was at the end with the least titles was ranked penultimate, in other words, fewer jobs addressed the relationship between the media and social networks (theme four) and more work focused on activism and mobilization (theme three). The names or central themes of journals were not considered, the factor of inclusion was the content of the articles.

There are 51 works in our corpus that are framed in contexts of political campaigns and party debates — this being the largest set of texts — and only three that analyze the political use of social networks, relating it to the cultural features of the population studied. The following diagram shows the list of topics and jobs listed.

The following is an overview of the results obtained in this literature review. Because of the space, only a representative selection of these articles is referred to with the aim of drawing an overview of the subjects being investigated to attend to empirical evidence and whether they reveal the characteristics of the users. The total number of works that are available to give ideas of where to advance in the research is indicated. In the bibliography only the studies mentioned here are presented.

## Classification of topics in the literature reviewed



### Twitter in the public sphere

This section contains 118 papers that study the relationship between actors or agencies in the public sphere and citizens on social networks.

#### *Networks in campaigns and political debates*

This set consists of 51 studies that analyze how social networks affect campaigns and political debates during elections. For example, Blas Risk *et al.* (2019) made a quantitative analysis focused on Twitter during the counting of votes of elections in Spain 2015 and found that the media are at the

center of the activity, but citizens gain high visibility by using humor in conversation. Ramos-Sandoval and Blázquez-Soriano (2021) analyzed feelings in the tweets of the presidential debate in Peru in 2021 and suggest that there are opportunities to understand reactions and opinions in Peru in relevant political situations in the analysis of social media data. Nicasio-Varea and Pérez-Gabaldón (2021) conclude that despite the increasingly widespread use of Twitter by politicians, they must learn to exploit this instrument that offers possibilities to reach people and gain support at the ballot box. These authors carried out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the tweets published by the profiles of two candidates for the mayor of Valencia0 in 2019.

### *Social media public communication*

This name groups 42 titles that study how politicians or government bodies relate to social media users outside election seasons. Using survey and Twitter data, Amador and Piña-García (2017) noted that electoral participation, inter-regional participation, interest in politics, and sources of political information are reducing, while participation in Twitter is increasing; they conclude that Twitter is significant in terms of political participation in Mexico. Using data from eighteen qualitative interviews, Farkas and Schwartz (2018) analyzed the perception that social media managers of Danish political parties have of user-generated content and found that they use Facebook only for one-way communication and public opinion monitoring, concluding that voters are not represented on Facebook users. Guarino *et al.* (2020) verified whether it is correct that exposure to propaganda, influencers and disinformation on social networks are responsible for the polarization of users on the networks and the success of the campaigns, and found highly partisan community structures aligned with politicians, very active users, users with roles, and useful information in the retweet related to exposure, interactions, and user participation with respect to advertising. Del Valle *et al.* (2021) deny the existence of algorithm-enabled echo chambers on Twitter and support the hypothesis that social networks can open discussion spaces between political parties, which they say, it is particularly important in fragmented consensus democracies where it is imperative that the parties form coalitions, as is the case with the Dutch parliament. Ortiz-Espinoza and Espejel-Trujillo (2021) found that the volume and presence in social networks does not guarantee the impact of the candidates' tweets or their connection

with the public. They mention the example of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador who was the least active candidate and the one who obtained the most interaction.

### *Perverse use of the network*

This section groups 13 studies that review the introduction or non-introduction of fake news, bots or algorithmic biases in social media to manipulate public opinion. For example, Stukal *et al.* (2017) developed a methodology for detecting bots on Twitter to study the activity of bots in the political discussions of the Russian tweet activity. Sinpeng *et al.* (2020) reached the same conclusions as Ortiz-Espinoza and Espejel-Trujillo (2021): the winning candidate Duterte in the Philippines was little active on social media, so his prominence was not made by paid trolls and fake accounts, but by his supporters who made aggressive support in both the digital and offline movement. Tank-Mercuri and Esteves de Lima-Lopes (2020) conclude that the repetition and standardization of stigmatized speeches, as well as their spraying on social networks, are used as an instrument to gain popular support. With grounded theory, Santini *et al.* (2021) performed observational netnography and discourse analysis in more than 19 thousand tweets, sorting the sample into user-generated bots, media spambots, and political bots, and concluding that bots set the stage for Jair Bolsonaro's victory in Brazil's presidential election in 2018.

### *Citizenship and political actors*

This section contains 12 works that carried out theorizations or models for the study of the interaction between citizens and political actors on social networks. Papacharissi and De Fatima Oliveira (2012) present a theory of affective news to explain the distinctive character of the content produced by the public on the Web in times of political crisis. Barisione *et al.* (2017) propose the concept 'digital movement of opinion' as a heuristically useful tool for investigating new forms of digital citizen participation. Hanteer *et al.* (2018) propose a model for obtaining data on Twitter and say it is useful for finding different communities in the context of political communication on Twitter.

## **Social Effects of Twitter on Political Participation**

This second group contains 88 papers that study the effects of the political use of social media in the different areas of analysis proposed by researchers.

### *Analysis of participation*

In this topic, 41 titles are grouped that refer to the motivations for participating or not politically in the network, or the context in which such participation occurs, in studies that are not related to citizen mobilizations or political campaigns. For example, Bernhard and Dohle (2018) conducted a survey among German citizens to determine whether it is true that the perception of what friends or acquaintances do on social media affects their own communication activities and found that the scope and influence of Facebook and Twitter affects the intensity of online communication only when it comes to friends and acquaintances. Matingwina (2018) surveyed 124 students and said that, as a result of the Arab Spring, there are national security concerns in Zimbabwe about the potential shown by the networks to coordinate and mobilize users. Muhammad Saud *et al.* (2020) surveyed Lebanese using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for political purposes and conclude that social media are suitable for using an online political platform and provide an opportunity for users to participate in the political sector of their country.

### *State-of-the-art*

This topic groups 15 pieces reflecting on academic production that addresses the relationship between political participation and social media. Campos-Domínguez (2017) analyzes the literature on Twitter since its appearance in 2006, focusing on the use that broadcasters and recipients make of political debate and the electoral campaign. Whitesell (2019) says research is needed to explain how stakeholders use networks to influence policies and engage with stakeholders. Trein (2021) states that ruptures usually occur through incisions and discursive ellipses with the linearity of the original discourses, but in the case of politics, the propagandistic character of the stickers remains even when a new meaning is constructed.

### *Young people*

This topic contains 15 titles where young people represent the studied population and articles whose central focus is the political participation of young people in social networks. Yang and DeHart (2016) surveyed 4556 US university students after the 2012 election to investigate what psychological and behavioral factors related with social media predicted young people's online political participation, and they found that online social capital, political self-efficacy, and participation in Facebook groups were positive predictors, while social trust did not have a direct influence. Acevedo *et al.* (2021) incorporate perspectives from the public and private spheres and the philosophy of technology, to analyze the relationship of young people with politics on Twitter and conclude that young people have a way that allows them to generate resistance processes to the models imposed by the right and the left in political campaigns. On the other hand, Vázquez-Barrio *et al.* (2020) claim that participating in political affairs is not important for young people, but they prefer using the networks to entertain.

### *Women*

This section includes ten titles that reflect on the role of women in political participation in social networks. Guha (2015) analyzed the usefulness of hashtags to focus and publicize feminist issues on Twitter and concluded on the need to relate the main themes of the Network and activism to engage the public. Sánchez-Duarte and Fernández-Romero (2017) interviewed twelve activists with a broad background in the feminist movement and in the intensive use of social networks and show that digital collective action repertoires are configured as endogamic spaces and not completely conquered by feminist collectives. Parsloe and Campbell (2021), with a thematic analysis of 481 tweets, studied how Twitter has facilitated indigenous women's activism in North America.

### *Each Network on its role*

This topic has four research that analyzes differences of political participation in different networks. Woo Yoo and Gil de Zúñiga (2014) examined the impact of using Twitter, Facebook, and blogs on gaps in political knowledge and participation among people with different educational levels and concluded that there are differences that contribute to widening inequa-

lity in political commitment. Sockmann *et al.* (2020) compared the use of Chinese social networks Weibo and WeChat with Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook and reflect that, because of the authoritarianism of the state, the significant differences between American networks are not seen in Chinese networks where users know that political discussion is sensitive to the state and use any network to demonstrate, while in the United States, Twitter is more conducive to political expression.

### *Culture*

This section lists three articles that discuss the differences in the political use of social media related to users' country, language, or ethnicity. Vaccari *et al.* (2015) found that institutional environments and technological possibilities play a role in the political discourse of social networks. Institutional and non-institutional political participation is significantly stronger in established democracies than in third-wave democracies. Ahmed *et al.* (2018) noted that the contents of publications of English-speaking communities, compared with those in Malay, differ both in the way they use Twitter and in the users with whom they interact. Workneh (2021) argues that social media platforms are likely to increase intra-group political participation, but also chronically decrease the engagement of the external group. His study is part of a political context in Ethiopia in 2018 that embodies highly heterogeneous and competing collective identities, ethnic and other.

### **Twitter in activism, protests, and mobilizations**

This third block has 37 works related to activism, mobilizations and citizen participation linked to a cause or its triggering factors, and its links with social networks. For example, Smith *et al.* (2015) analyzed 770 tweets related to Taksim Square in Turkey in 2013 and noted that efforts to change are based not on calls for action but on the dissemination of information. Dutceac and Bossetta (2016) found that the citizens and not the political parties are the ones who make political appeals prior to an electoral process. Mercea and Bastos (2016) propose the concept of engagement compass to point out the relationship between activists' patterns of life and their investment of personal time in protest, characterizing activists as 'serial' by virtue of the relationship they establish between their public and personal activities.

Chan and Park (2021) analyzed participation in protests in South Korea in 2016-2017 and concluded that what motivates political participation is not network services, but the use of network users and their participation in rival protests.

## **Relationship between Twitter and journalists or media**

This fourth and last block refers to 28 titles that relate traditional media to social media.

### *Social Media and Traditional Media*

The 17 studies that make up this section discuss relationships and distinctions between traditional media and social media with respect to the role they play in the political participation of citizens. Justel-Vázquez *et al.* (2018) quantified the times that statements published on Twitter are used by journalists and conclude that the network is a source of The New York Times not only in electoral contexts. Anastasopoulos and Williams (2019) say that much of our knowledge about participation in political protests comes from data collected about violent protests, because the media focus on the violence of social mobilizations and ensure that the digital revolution diverted attention from the traditional news sources to social networks. Casero-Ripollés (2020), with big data techniques of more than 120 million tweets and a methodology machine learning and social network analysis, claims that the influence on Twitter in the media system is being reconfigured and that the media obtain intermediate and low values in authority, questioning their power to effectively condition the political conversation on Twitter. Christine Hine (2020) conducts a content analysis of the performances of three British newspapers from Twitter between 2007 and 2014 to explore the potential contribution of different journalistic practices in maintaining inequalities in social media platforms. It concludes that there is a complex ecology of connections that goes between traditional and new media, and between different media constructions as cultural devices, which must be explored to understand how people assimilate the variety of representations of what Twitter is and who uses it. He claims that this exploration is important because it relates to the ability to consider oneself with a voice, which is a decisive aspect of digital equality and, consequently, of social equality.

### *Dual Screening*

There are 6 titles where the studied population uses social networks to express themselves in real time on the political content presented by television. Shah *et al.* (2016) found that facial expressions, physical gestures, and candidate flickering are consistent, solid, and significant predictors of public expression during debates, above the candidates' memes, rhetoric, and tone. Jennings *et al.* (2017) found that political debates are related to increases in the political knowledge of viewers and that accuracy reduced problem-based tweets and consequently reduced knowledge acquisition, while it increased the production of problem-based tweets along with the acquisition of knowledge.

### *Networks and media. Opposite content*

There are 5 articles where it is observed that the framing of traditional media with respect to political power is contrary to the content circulating on social networks. Nunomura (2013) verified whether Twitter reflects the traditional media agenda in the second round of the presidential election in Brazil in 2010 and found that news published in the national press is different from what is popular on the Web. Robles *et al.* (2015) analyzed how activists of the 15-M movement used Internet when it broke into Spanish public life and observed that they tried to control information presented by the press. García-Perdomo (2017) conducted two types of studies with software that analyzes and categorizes large databases in Colombia's presidential elections in 2014 and in both cases found opposing positions between network users and journalists.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

Some authors refer to the physical world as "reality." Even though a lot has been said about the real and virtual in the digital age. And even if the discussion is not settled, there is no doubt that everything that happens in the online world is real.

In the digital age, the answer to the question of whether the media is the message is: it depends. With these studies it is not appropriate to analyze the phenomenon of interaction on social networks with the tools that were stu-

died by media scholars. It is required to specify the media and the message, as well as the context that, as some authors point out, positions as the factor that tilts the scale to one side or the other, in the possible electronic interactions. There is the need to “link or relate the elements that had not been associated in communicative study objects, to see how they are integrated and what new aspects they can prove” (Orozco & González, 2011, p. 12).

Differences in user participation related to the different platforms they choose for their messages are disrespected in some studies, while others do not specify which applications they used to perform their work. Generically referring to social media circumvents the fact that not all applications are equal. Moreover, this distinction is connected to the economic and political context in which phenomena are inscribed, and it is therefore important to delineate it. It appears that the differences between the different applications in authoritarian regimes are blurred because the contents of the messages are prioritized over the media used to broadcast them. Is this always the case? Is this true for all repressive systems? Studies are needed in this regard. Not all social media users can choose the platform they are going to use to get their ideas going. What Western researchers conclude with regard to political communication in the digital age does not concern everyone. All countries are different.

Researchers report media describing realities that are not verified on social networks, what reality did the press refer to before the digital age? Despite differences in the findings, there is consensus that the media are losing authority and their ability to influence public opinion. This constitutes an analysis perspective relevant to the communication that requires research.

All the studies on mobilizations, protests and activities obtained were carried out with data collected with a hashtag. There is a technical practicality in the use of this resource for the integration of the corpus and also methodological relevance. Moreover, the fact that academic studies refer to the multiple and diverse hashtags that circulate on social networks to identify social movements also makes those causes more visible to the academic world, which is fair and imperative for democracy. However, to what extent is this practice of circumscribing studies around a hashtag or electoral topic or event legitimizing a data integration criterion that is hegemonic in social studies by putting aside a portion of reality that is also visible on those networks?

Users manifest themselves politically daily, not only from specific events and not only from them. Social media give a place to users. No ordinary citizen was able to express his/her dissatisfaction with the media's picture of the news, but now the social sciences are asking to go to the polls and to express that rejection on election day to consider it valid. Otherwise, if it is going to be expressed only on networks, users must use a hashtag or keywords to be seen. It is our sciences that must move by devising strategies to identify those users and those publications and ask them why and the reason they do it. If that does not happen, research is dealing with a small portion of what happens and is visible in political interaction on social networks.

It is said that Twitter currently influences the media and not the other way around; and that Twitter's authority and influence on public opinion is superior to that of the press. In this regard, it is alarming that the media maintain agendas on the national context clearly decoupled from the issues that are trending on social networks. Candidates and politicians, for their part, do not use or know or do not want to take advantage of the possibilities that the networks have for interacting with their audiences. This attitude is not coherent with studies that show how online interaction between popular personalities and users translates into forms of social commitment and manifestation. The latter is another consensus of the diverse collection of academic titles.

In general terms, there is a tendency to interpret the findings of the research by questioning the political commitment of online activists to Spanish-speaking authors, as well as an optimism and a celebratory attitude in Anglo-Saxon scholars. In some studies, there is a tendency to interpret the data in contempt of the interaction itself and it stands out how academics get to conflicting interpretations. The conclusions of authors expressing their views based on their findings are also highlighted. It is observed that researchers are clear in their positions, in contrast to authors who strive so hard to suspend their judgments that their academic pieces do not make relevant contributions to the understanding of the phenomena they study. Emphasis is placed on the importance of developing tools and strategies that help to better understand political participation in the digital age.

There is a lack of research on the relationship between few followers and the impact of messages. Citizen voices that manifest themselves in networks can go unnoticed by algorithmic leverage. Huge amounts of data obtained with algorithms are relevant, but the findings must be more in tune with data that is broad, vague, or indiscriminate. There are not studies with data selec-

ted manually. It is not possible to accept or reject the potential of social networks in political participation, but it is possible to integrate the political map of the digital world by gathering studies that specify their coordinates.

No studies were found on the ways in which ordinary users use these digital tools to participate politically. As regards political participation, social movements are studied as well as organized actions; manifestations articulated with identity evidencing their chronology, legitimacy, and legality; and the social actions that happen around political events in the form of party debates or electoral processes. We need to observe the political interaction on Twitter that is detached, i.e., the one which does not belong to political parties or hashtags, or that do not rise with systematic operations, because it does not meet criteria of relationship or visibility. Their participants are not influencer, their tweets are not trendy, their interactions do not get a certain number. It is stated that, despite these characteristics, such silent political participation that is deployed among “detached” tweets or separated from a hashtag, activism, or visible public or private event, and alien to the referents used by the social sciences, is part of the connected forms of political participation. This is a participation that happens at this time. To make the collection of studies more complete, those considered detached users who became audible with social networks are required. Once this form of political participation has been identified and studied, it will be possible to analyze what this social group can do, hence it is urgent that researchers see it.

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## **Communication and disinformation in elections: research trends in Spain and Portugal**

*Comunicación y desinformación en elecciones:  
tendencias de investigación en España y Portugal*

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**Received on:** 15/12/2021 **Revised on:** 14/01/2022 **Accepted on:** 29/01/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

**Suggested citation:** Rivas-de Roca, R., Morais, R., & Jerónimo, P. (2022). Communication and disinformation in elections: research trends in Spain and Portugal. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 65-86. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.03>

### **Abstract**

*The relationship between politics and communication is not new, but it seems to have sparked renewed academic interest in recent years. The transformations that have affected contemporary democratic societies, such as digital technologies or the rise of disinformation, explain the concern about these issues. One of the topics of greatest interest are the elections, as the moment in which participatory democracy takes place. In this changing context, this study aims to carry out a review of the main research on political communication and elections in the Iberian area (Spain and Portugal), identifying possible similarities and divergences. The objective is to know the research trends (topics and methods) in order to later pose pending challenges. An in-depth bibliographic review was conducted published during 2008-2021 in WoS, Scopus and reference books. As results, similarities are observed in the methodological preference for content analysis, although the topics addressed differ depending on national circumstances, beyond a certain coincidence in the analysis of national legislative elections. In Spain, the action of the new parties on social networks has been especially addressed, while in Portugal the interest in television prevails. Likewise, the breakthrough of scientific production in Spain contrasts with the lower number of studies in the Portuguese cases. Researchers from both countries face the challenge of offering comparative studies between elections, as well as implementing a higher methodological plurality that allows to delve into the reasons of communicative actions.*

### **Keywords**

*Political communication, elections, election campaign, disinformation, meta-research, comparative studies, Spain, Portugal.*

### **Resumen**

Las relaciones entre política y comunicación no son nuevas, pero parecen haber suscitado recientemente un renovado interés desde el punto de vista académico. Las transformaciones que han afectado a las sociedades democráticas contemporáneas, como la digitalización o el auge de la desinformación, explican la preocupación por estos asuntos. Una de las cuestiones de mayor interés son las elecciones, como momento en el que se materializa la democracia participativa. En ese contexto dinámico, esta investigación pretende revisar las principales investigaciones sobre comunicación política y elecciones en el ámbito ibérico (España y Portugal), identificando posibles similitudes y divergencias. El objetivo es conocer las tendencias investigadoras (temas y métodos), para plantear después los retos pendientes. Con este fin, se desarrolla una revisión bibliográfica en profundidad de investigaciones publicadas durante el período 2008-2021 en WoS, Scopus y libros de referencia. Como resultados, se observan semejanzas en la preferencia metodológica por el análisis de contenido, si bien los temas abordados difieren en función de circunstancias nacionales, más allá de cierta coincidencia en el análisis de los comicios legislativos de índole nacional. En España se ha tratado especialmente la acción de los nuevos partidos en redes sociales, mientras que en Portugal prevalece el interés por la televisión. Asimismo, la explosión de producción científica en España contrasta con el menor número de estudios en el caso portugués. Los investigadores de ambos países tienen el reto de ofrecer estudios comparativos entre elecciones, así como implementar una mayor pluralidad metodológica que permita ahondar en las motivaciones de las acciones comunicativas.

### **Palabras clave**

Comunicación política, elecciones, campaña electoral, desinformación, meta-investigación, estudios comparados, España, Portugal.

## Introduction

Electoral processes represent the most symbolic moment in democratic systems, as political actors say all kinds of messages to get the support of the citizenry. This political class is increasingly professionalized, providing great messages (Berrocal, 2017) with a mediatized logic. Mediatization is an established phenomenon by which messages adapt to the narrative of the media (Strömbäck, 2008), although in the last decade there has been orientation to the digital world (Stromer Galley, 2014; Ward, 2018). Campaigns focused on online action appear, allowing greater segmentation and impact of communicative items.

In the context of digital technologies, social networks (Koc Michalska et al., 2016), and more recently instant messaging services (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2021), have become the main mechanisms for political participation. Despite the potential benefits of these platforms to increase the degree of public knowledge, the academy has shown remarkable attention for their effects on the boom in disinformation. This broad and multifaceted concept involves the dissemination of false or inaccurate content that causes distrust in public institutions (Freelon & Wells, 2020). Elections are also strongly affected by these contents, hence the verification agencies carry out initiatives to dismantle lies during these periods (Rodríguez Hidalgo et al., 2021).

Misinformation is experienced in a context of hybrid political communication, in which digital logic relates with traditional media system, both of which are necessary for the electoral success of the candidates (Chadwick, 2017). Social networks have implied a paradigm shift in political communication (Stieglitz & Dang Xuan, 2013), reinforcing the perception that we live in a “permanent campaign” (Blumenthal, 1980), while most political messages are intended to capture votes, regardless of their date of issue. However, the materialization of these phenomena is different by countries and geographical areas, since factors such as political cultures or media systems intervene (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In addition, elections continue to be held in national spaces determined by historical and regulatory constraints.

The aim of this research is to explore how these changes have been scientifically studied in Spain and Portugal. These are neighboring countries with such a recent political history, being part of the third democratizing wave of the 70s, but there are also important ideological differences in territorial fragmentation or digitization. Therefore, this study reviews the

main research on political communication and elections in the Iberian sphere (Spain and Portugal), assessing similarities and divergences. It is intended to know the research trends, in terms of topics and methods, as well as to pose possible challenges pending on the literature.

As a time frame, we set the period 2008-2021, because 2008 is the beginning of a new era of political communication by Barack Obama's campaign, marked by the use of digital platforms (Stromer Galley, 2014). This more direct approach to the audience, and thus less media-dependent, transformed the panorama of electoral communication. In addition, concerns about disinformation have intensified since 2016, particularly about the use of social networks by populist leaders (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016; Ward, 2018). Our study analyzes articles published in Web of Science (WOS), Scopus and reference books during 2008-2021, applying a selection criterion based on their relevance to the research area. The terms "elections", "disinformation" or "campaign" are used as the main search markers in the title or keywords of articles.

The sample amounts to 49 scientific publications conducted in Spain and/or Portugal and uses the above terms, regardless of their language or the nationality of authors and journals. In a breakdown, 27 contributions refer to Spain, 19 to Portugal and only three conduct a comparative approach between the two countries. The search includes the main international journals and publishers in English, for which the words set as criteria are translated. Collection of data has been manual and shared between the three researchers. Thematic analysis is used as a pattern to find emerging issues (Brake & Clarke, 2006), based on the definition of common codes for topics such as the geographic scope of elections, the parties considered or the preferred methodology.

In order to carry out a literature review of the main research on political communication, our contribution employs the following structure. First, there is a background of political communication during electoral periods, with special attention to the Iberian countries. The findings are presented separately for Spain and Portugal. In each of them, the type of elections, the agendas (campaign issues), the most studied social networks, the disinformation phenomena and the methods used for the scientific study (quantitative, qualitative, etc.) are analyzed. Finally, this article identifies topics that are still scarcely addressed, which allows to suggest lines of future research.

## **Background of political communication in electoral periods**

Political communication refers to interactions between political actors (parties and leaders), the media and citizens, which are currently happening in a mediatized way (Castromil et al., 2020a). This flow of communication is essential to the democratic system, based on the idea that members of a community need information to make their political decisions. One of the main ways of public intervention is voting, hence the importance of elections. Since the emergence of the mass media, political communication has been gaining social participation, now applied from the aforementioned hybrid perspective between traditional media and digital platforms (Chadwick, 2017).

The technological transformation caused new communicative practices, among which an increase in the spectacularization in the television era (Donofrio & Rubio Moraga, 2019). The rapid emergence of new political parties in Spain since 2014 is an example of how mediatized politics now revolves around the construction of influential profiles. In the face of this cyber campaign, mainstream media is in a weak position.

The literature has indicated that Twitter is the main social network for electoral purposes, thanks to its capacity for immediacy and its adaptability to different political contexts (Jungherr, 2016). Facebook has also been widely used for these purposes, although each social network is better suited to certain audiences and sociodemographic profiles, a fact that parties seem to know (Stier et al., 2018). The internal dynamics of these political groups have been modified by digital transformation, in addition to the gradual introduction of automation techniques and big data.

Social networks were initially interpreted as a tool to promote citizen participation. This optimism contrasts the democratic threat posed by misinformation, developed primarily through social networks. In fact, Twitter has been the subject of several disinformation campaigns during election periods, which were characterized by the massive use of bots (Keller et al., 2020). In any case, social networks have potential advantages, such as a communication model in which the public plays a more active role and disadvantages. Continuous access to data can lead to passive consumption of information, also social networks have more capacity to generate selective exposure using echo chambers (Castromil et al., 2020a).

On the other hand, political leaders operate on networks from an unmediated perspective. Consequently, the ability to influence and make something viral is fundamental to the success of a candidate. This has been especially exploited by populist leaders, who focus their speech on appealing directly to citizens and positioning themselves as equals, rejecting elites (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016). The citizen accesses information intentionally filtered by the political leader. However, both the introduction of digital technologies and the shaping of populist discourse depend largely on the political features of each territory.

According to the comparative media models of Hallin and Mancini (2004), Spain and Portugal are within the polarized pluralist system. Both countries have a history of late democratization and a strong political party. In addition, certain features of dirigisme and patronage, derived from the poor development of rational-legal authority against their European counterparts, are observed. At the media level, this means a high level of political parallelism, as well as a limited professionalization of journalism.

The authors of the influential proposal for comparative media models have qualified their validity after the advent of social media and digital platforms (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). Technological convergence leads to a possible reduction in the differences between these systems, due to the equalizing capacity of Internet. Therefore, the survival of the traditional polarized model in the Iberian countries must be interpreted with caution.

Although there are similarities in the political and informational context, there are also significant differences. Portugal's system of territorial organization is centralized, which means fewer elections. The agenda of the elections in Portugal tends to leave aside regional issues (Lagares Díez *et al.*, 2020), contrary to what happens in Spain, where there is emphasis in historical reasons. The latter country has also experienced the appearance of new parties, which have deepened into a discursive polarization (López García & Valera Ordaz, 2017). According to the recent findings in research on disinformation in social networks (Alonso López *et al.*, 2021), the Portuguese public sphere is perceived as less polarized, with the debate prevailing for thematic issues.

The interest in deepening the study of political communication in the Iberian countries is triggered by the parallel emergence of extreme right parties: Vox (Spain) and Chega (Portugal). Vox has been the third force in Spain, following the first electoral success in the elections in Andalucía in December

2018, where it managed to monopolize social media care (Rivas de Roca *et al.*, 2020). Regarding Chega, as well as Vox, it shares the ideas to the homeland and order (Aladro Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2020), but its messages are less critical towards the old elites and, so far, has garnered less electoral success (Mendes & Dennison, 2021). The two parties show that democracy in the Iberian Peninsula is undergoing changes, which makes it necessary to inquire about how the academy has questioned itself about these processes.

## **Political communication and elections in Spain**

Since 2008, the crisis of traditional parties and the emergence of new political actors and forms of communication have focused on academic studies in Spain. The period 2015-2016 was particularly intense by the repetition of general elections and the entry into the Congress of the deputies of “Podemos” and “Ciudadanos”. The communication of its leaders in social networks has been extensively analyzed (García Ortega & Zugasti Azagra, 2018; Suau Gomila *et al.*, 2020), to which are added more extensive studies on the different speeches and agendas that structured the campaign (López García & Valera Ordaz, 2017).

The predilection for the general elections was also observed in 2011 (Zamora Medina & Zurutuza Muñoz, 2014) and the electoral repetition of 2019 (Castromil *et al.*, 2020b), but it is not a limitation for other elections to occur. Because of the appearance of Podemos, the 2014 European Parliament elections were particularly studied in Spain (Casero Ripollés *et al.*, 2016). These elections are not evaluated as an object in European democracy, but are analyzed to learn about the practices of new populist political actors, who are more prone to obtain representation in that vote in the case of Spain. It is striking that one of the few comparative research found in the Iberian countries concerns about European elections, particularly on the communicative style of right groups (Belim, 2020).

There was a temporary coincidence between the European, regional and municipal elections in Spain on May 26, 2019, but there are hardly any joint approximations to their communicative dimension, such as that carried out by Rodríguez Vázquez *et al.* (2020) toward national television programs during election night. Instead, references to autonomous elections are frequent in many territories (Córdoba Cabús *et al.*, 2021; Xicoy Comas *et al.*, 2021).

Studies normally focus on a single autonomous community, seen as a political whole, without making comparisons between regions. It differs from the situation at the municipal level with studies of specific localities (Nicasio Varea & Pérez Gabaldón, 2021) and others that address candidates for various mayors (Criado Grande *et al.*, 2012; Quevedo Redondo *et al.*, 2016).

The academy has also examined several municipal candidatures in an autonomous community, as Martínez Rolán and Piñeiro Otero (2017) carry out in Galicia, but this type of approach is scarce. Research on proximity tends to focus on regional policy (Rivas de Roca *et al.*, 2020) or municipal political figures with national influence (Sintes Olivella *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, longitudinal studies are more common in general elections (García Marín *et al.*, 2018), which arouse a degree of continuous academic interest over time.

Regarding the issues of concern to researchers, the emergence of new parties and ways of making politics in Spain has been addressed in different articles (López García, 2016; Casero Ripollés *et al.*, 2017; Suau Gomila *et al.*, 2020). This includes right formations such as Vox, in a booming trend of populism on a global scale. These investigations coexist with the construction of agendas during the campaign, both at the state level (Castromil *et al.*, 2020b) and autonomic level (Rivas de Roca, 2021).

There has been growing concern in recent years about the use of computer techniques by political parties, sampling in non-electoral periods (Calvo *et al.*, 2019) and in electoral periods (García Orosa *et al.*, 2021). These tools refer to big data formulas to better segment the information that is disseminated to the potential voter. The area of computing has still been little addressed due to the broad academic coverage of the candidates' communicative style (Zamora Medina & Zurutuza Muñoz, 2014; Quevedo Redondo *et al.*, 2016).

The analysis of the image and communication strategies of the political actors in the election is related to the use of social networks. In Spain, scientific publications have focused on Twitter (Meso Ayerdi *et al.*, 2017; Fenoll *et al.*, 2018; Marcos García *et al.*, 2021), in parallel with what is happening at the international level (Jungherr, 2016). Its adaptation to the features of political communication makes this social network as a preference, although the fact that it is relatively simple to analyze can contribute to its academic popularity. On the other hand, political action on Facebook has hardly been undertaken analytically (Sintes Olivella *et al.*, 2020), although phenomena such as paid political advertisements on this social network are categorized as a source of disinformation, as happens on Instagram (Aladro

Vico & Requeijo Rey, 2020). This dissemination phenomenon of distorted messages, which undermine the credibility of the authorities, has been seen in situations such as Covid-19 or the crisis in Cataluña (Goyanes & Skoric, 2021), but little has been mentioned in electoral processes (Rodríguez Hidalgo *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, there are some isolated approaches about the use of platforms in politics. Rivera Otero *et al.* (2021) provide an interesting contribution on the consumption of networks according to the vote, trying to understand how platforms condition democratic actions. To do this, they implement a comparative analysis of data from a survey, which contrasts with most research in the area. Methodologically, content analysis is the preferred formula for examining political communication in Spain (Fenoll *et al.*, 2018; García Orosa *et al.*, 2021). These studies are mainly aimed at social networks, leaving aside more classic approaches such as journalistic coverage (Xicoy Comas *et al.*, 2021).

The centrality of the content analysis is evident in the different methodological designs that triangulate this technique with others that are more qualitative, such as the discourse analysis (López García, 2016; Meso Ayerdi *et al.*, 2017; Nicasio Varea & Pérez Gabaldón, 2021). In addition, the combination of content research with metric studies is sometimes found (Marcos García *et al.*, 2021). The case study strategy functions as a structuring framework for some of these articles about political messages on social networks (Casero Ripollés *et al.*, 2016).

Although digital platforms are the object of study of numerous scientific publications in Spain, there are few analyses of social networks derived from the sociological theory related to the topic (Martínez Rolán & Piñeiro Otero, 2017). Computational methods open the door to new possibilities in this direction, applied to language and feelings in elections (Córdoba Cabús *et al.*, 2021). For its part, the unique use of qualitative methods is extremely limited (Calvo *et al.*, 2019; Goyanes & Skoric, 2021), which explains how the academy presents a quantitative orientation toward communication analysis.

The number of articles on political communication in Spain is high, but there is not so much variety in subjects of study and methodologies. Moreover, the concept of disinformation appears detached from the actions of the leaders, making it difficult to insert it as an element to consider. In any case, the studies collected show that Spanish research has a large group of specialists who deal with these issues, particularly since 2015-2016.

## Political communication and elections in Portugal

In a mediatized context since 2009, there has been an increase in the interest of academics in political communication and elections in Portugal. It is also important to remember that this was a relevant year for the country, with the holding of three electoral calls: european, legislative and municipal. That year was also a first opportunity, in the national context, to assess the potential of the Internet for election campaigns, in a movement that was strongly influenced and inspired by Barack Obama's "highly mediated e-campaign" (Figueiras, 2012a, p.17). Therefore, a set of works emerges to explore the way in which Portuguese political parties use the new media.

The first work in Portugal was devoted to studying the campaign for the European Parliament elections of 2009, analyzing not only the institutional websites of the parties, but also the use of blogs and digital social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, in promoting new opportunities to interact with voters. This occurs especially through quantitative approaches, which favor the identification of the presence or absence of certain elements that enhance communication and interaction (Canavilhas, 2012). Although the parties used many of these resources for the first time, it was also evident that there was still a low professionalization level of the campaigns in the country, largely due to the organization of the parties. But also to the power that the television still had (Lisi, 2013).

In these early work, many of the studies focused on the analysis of traditional media, such as press coverage of the European elections, through a qualitative approach that considered the perspective of Portuguese press correspondents in Brussels (Martins, 2012). The television was addressed for legislative elections, seeking to evaluate, through a quantitative and qualitative study, the emphasis given to parties, candidates and themes, but including dimensions such as campaign customization and "politics-show" (Cunha, 2012).

Notable studies for the 2009 elections also included room to address humor as a way of approaching voters in legislative and local government campaigns, the case of an analysis of one of the most successful television humorous programs — "*Gato Fedorento Esmiuça os Sufrágios*" — (Cabrera, 2012). Such research would eventually open an approach to politics through the humor that still maintains, exploiting one of the most discussed concepts in the field of communication, i.e., infoentertainment.

Some of the works represented a milestone in the studies on elections in Portugal, and were therefore compiled in a work on *Os Media e As Eleições* by Rita Figueiras (2012a), who is one of the main authors in the study of the political communication campaigns, with works like *A Mediação da Política na Era das Redes Sociais* (2017), where an analysis is made on the changes taking place in the policy in the digital environment of the web 2.0. It is also important to note that some scholars (Freire, 2010) considered that 2009 marked a remarkable change in democratic terms, since the results of the municipal and legislative elections showed a rejection by the voters of the solutions of majority governance, forcing a greater understanding among the different parties.

After a year marked by three electoral events, the country returned to the polls in 2011 for an early election that took place at a time of financial crisis. The role of the austerity measures presented by the socialist minority government and the resignation of the Prime Minister, José Socrates, forced the country to look for international help, which led to the intervention of the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank Group known as Troika. Communication was dominated by economic issues. This was the case in the 2011 legislative elections, but also in the 2015 legislative elections, which ultimately influenced much of the work of academics. The research focused on an analysis of the impact of the economic crisis, in electoral and political terms, particularly in countries that were rescued such as Portugal and Greece.

The economic situation eventually led to changes in electoral campaigns, both in personalization and individualization and in the austerity measures implemented during the intervention period (Magalhães, 2014). In this context in which Portugal is a financially intervened country, the role of the European Union (EU) is questioned, leading some academics to assess the impact of this discontent on the 2014 European elections (Freire & Santana-Pereira, 2015).

Following the economic crisis affecting the 2011 legislative elections, in 2015 the country experienced a remarkable new episode for national politics, given that the so-called “non-alternation position” that characterized the national party system according to some sociologists was altered by the results of the October 2015 elections (Teixeira, 2018, p. 77). The formation of government that resulted from these elections, consisting of a minority Socialist Party government and parliamentary agreements signed bilaterally

lly with three other left-wing parties, BE, PCP and PEV, did not break the logic of majority competition between PS and PSD, but did change the traditional model.

The Portuguese political system had been characterized by “the absence of left-wing alliances reflected in the exclusion of the PCP and, since 1999, the BE from national governance” (Teixeira, pp. 78-79). The collaboration between these forces was called “Gerigonça”, generating several works by academics seeking to analyze the context that gave rise to it (De Giorgi & Santana-Pereira, 2016). Their representation by the media (Barros, 2019) or the influence of media frameworks on readers’ views on the new governance solution (Correia & Morais, 2020) were also analyzed, among other approaches.

After the elections of 2015 and four years after an unprecedented political solution in the national context, in May 2019 the country returned to the polls to elect European deputies and in October to elect national deputies. The legislative elections were, in this context, especially relevant, not only because the country had a government formed on the basis of parliamentary agreements for four years. But also because there was “an increase in electoral volatility in Portugal and Europe and uncertainty and a further fragmentation of party systems, with the emergence of new parties that challenge the institutional status quo” (Teixeira, 2018, p. 14). The 2019 legislatures indicated the entry of new parties to the Assembly of the Republic (PAN, Livre, Liberal Initiative and Chega), and also a new set of studies that are now paying attention to phenomena such as populism (Salgado *et al.*, 2021), and the communication strategies of their politicians.

Other issues arise related with populism, such as posttruth, fake news and a whole set of disinformation phenomena (Figueira & Santos, 2019). Some works that analyze fake news on Facebook during the 2019 legislative elections stand out (Baptista & Gradim, 2020), as well as studies that deepen on the relationship between partisanship and the proneness to share fake news (Baptista *et al.*, 2021a) or how political ideology can affect belief in fake news (Baptista *et al.*, 2021b).

In general, it can be stated that since 2009 there has been an increase in the number of work on political communication and elections. In this context, it is important to emphasize that scientific articles have privileged the study of legislative elections as the main object, at least in manuscripts published in the journals with the highest impact considered in this research. This is followed by the European, presidential and local elections. To understand this

approach, it must be mentioned, on the one hand, that between 2008 and 2021 the country was asked to elect national deputies on four occasions, without any party having obtained a majority in any of the elections. On the other hand, the economic crisis that affected Portugal and forced the Troika intervention also led to a large part of the studies to focus on the analysis of the conditions that led to this request for aid, i.e. the articles ended up dominated by financial matters and their involvement in domestic politics. This explains why some of the authors provide importance to the European elections, with the aim of understanding how the image of the EU was affected.

## Conclusions and discussion

The scientific study of political communication in Spain and Portugal shows patterns of continuity and divergence, which force to estimate the different modalities of elections that occur in each country, as well as to question whether their political and media systems are comparable. The findings can be categorized into the following conclusions.

As a contribution in relation to Spain, a preference is found for general elections and, to a lesser extent, for autonomic elections as the object of study. In addition, there are publications on different candidates for municipal governments. However, there are no comparative studies between autonomous communities, while the European elections are not a relevant element *per se*. In contrast, the new parties have been the subject of attention in recent years, which coexists with classic issues such as agendas.

In Spain, Twitter is established as a main space for the study of communication, as Facebook, Instagram or even traditional media are analyzed to a much lesser extent. References of misinformation as part of elections are scarce, although the topic generically attracts attention in both states (Sánchez Esparza & Jerónimo, 2021). Methodologically, content analysis prevails, handled in a unique or triangulated way with other methods.

Regarding Portugal, our research reflects that its legislative elections are more studied. Although several academics have sought to study how political parties have used new technologies to communicate with voters since the election campaigns in 2009, the fact is that traditional media, particularly television, continue to dominate most of the studies analyzed. Social

networks have gained interest in recent years when they were part of the researchers' analyses.

Social networks are seen as a space for leaders to communicate directly with audiences and, from another angle, as environments capable of spreading fake information during election campaigns, which can affect voters' perception of specific parties and ideologies. However, there were still few studies devoted to analyzing the different phenomena of disinformation in the electoral context. Nor do we find little studies on municipal elections. Even so, since the autonomous elections (municipal) of 2017 there was a growing tendency of parties and candidates to use social networks, particularly, Facebook. A trend that continued in 2021, where it was observed the use of Facebook and, in some cases, Instagram, for political communication.

It is worth noting the interest that has already begun in relation to disinformation at the local level in Portugal (Correia *et al.*, 2019; Sánchez-Esparza & Jerónimo, 2021). From a methodological point of view, quantitative analyses also prevail in this country in a research approach that prioritizes content analysis. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, discourse analysis or focus groups, are rarely explored.

In comparison, the studies collected share the prevalence of the quantitative, the interest in elections at national level (general in Spain and legislative in Portugal) and concern for disinformation, which is detected later in Portugal. In addition, the volume of scientific production in Portugal on political communication and disinformation is significantly lower, leading to a shortage of publications in the journals Scopus or WOS during the period under review.

Therefore, we suggest that the growth of research around communication in elections has occurred in a little different way. In this sense, both countries lack the capacity to deepen on qualitative methods, making it difficult to unravel communicative actions. Some pioneering studies are already moving in that direction. In the case of Spain, the development of comparative studies between autonomies or the relation between this regional policy to the national policy is identified as a challenge, since the messages may differ to accommodate the voter. For its part, the academic analysis of these issues is still in the consolidation phase in Portugal, and it needs to go beyond the legislative elections, in line with very recent research.

One limitation of this work is its exploratory character, given the small sample, especially in Portugal. This has prevented systematic quantitative

analysis between these countries, which would favor a more rigorous contribution from their publications. As mentioned above, the lack of articles in high impact journals on the political reality is one of our main conclusions.

Significant transformations of Western democracies, including those of the Iberian countries, affect the media system and the action of citizens at the level of political organizations. On the common basis of late democratization, the scientific study of political communication in Spain and Portugal should further diversify its methods and approaches to contribute to a better understanding of the changes in the democratic system, although it is true that work has progressed in recent years.

### **Finantial support provided to the research**

University: Universidad de Sevilla

Country: Spain

City: Sevilla

Subsidized project: VI Plan Propio de Investigación y Transferencia

Code of the project: IV.3 (Contratos Predoctorales o de PIF para el Desarrollo del Programa Propio I+D+i de la US en Áreas de Especial Atención)

University: Universidade da Beira Interior

Country: Portugal

City: Covilhã

Subsidized project: MediaTrust.Lab

Code of the project: PTDC/COM-JOR/3866/2020 (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia)

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# The role of journalism in presidential debates in Argentina and Brazil

## *El rol del periodismo en los debates presidenciales en la Argentina y Brasil*

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**Received on:** 27/12/2021 **Revised on:** 25/01/2022 **Approved on:** 20/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

### **Abstract**

*Presidential debates are crucial in current election campaigns. The way they are staged is the outcome of difficult negotiations between media and politicians. This study aims to compare presidential debates' format between Brazil and Argentina, focused on the role journalists. To this end, literature and secondary sources have been reviewed and reconstructed to see the trajectories of presidential debates in both countries. While Brazil and Argentina are similar with respect to their political and media systems, presidential debate's histories differ significantly. This investigation's result show that journalists in Brazil, while having been marginalized from the overtly critical role they played on the first debates in the country, still play a role on them in current campaigns. In contrast, Argentine journalists are not allowed to participate on the debates, aside from a quiet moderating stance. This difference is likely due to the different timing on which presidential debates in one and the other country have taken place. While in Brazil debates started being organized early on (with the first direct and democratic elections), at a time where the mass media were undoubtedly dominant, in Argentina these have only recently taken place, just when the media systems (there and elsewhere) are increasingly fragmented and the objectivity and neutrality of journalist is being questioned.*

### **Keywords**

*Presidential debates, Brazil, Argentina, journalism, electoral campaigns, formats, credibility.*

**Suggested citation:** Franco- Häntzsch, C. &S Dagatti, M. (2022). El rol del periodismo en los debates presidenciales en Argentina y Brasil. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 87-112.  
<https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.04>

## **Resumen**

Los debates presidenciales televisados son un momento central de las campañas contemporáneas. Resultan de tensas negociaciones entre medios de comunicación y políticos. A partir de un minucioso examen de archivo y fuentes secundarias, este trabajo compara la evolución del género en Brasil y la Argentina desde el retorno de sus respectivas democracias hasta la actualidad: dos países latinoamericanos con sistemas políticos y mediáticos similares, pero con resultados diferentes en este sentido. Se centra en los formatos que predominan en ambos países, con especial atención al papel de los periodistas. Se constata que, si bien periodistas brasileños han debido ceder parcialmente al rol “crítico” que tenían en los primeros debates del actual período democrático (retirada que refleja una pérdida de credibilidad), todavía participan en la mayoría de los encuentros entre candidatos. En la Argentina, en cambio, se ha prohibido expresamente que periodistas y representantes de los medios de comunicación tomen parte activa de los debates presidenciales televisados: se teme que tengan una actitud sesgada o poco objetiva. Las diferencias, argumentamos, tienen que ver con el diferente momento en el que los debates se originaron en cada país: más temprano en Brasil (en un momento de auge de los medios masivos de comunicación); más reciente en la Argentina, al calor de una creciente fragmentación del sistema mediático y de abiertos cuestionamientos al sector.

## **Palabras clave**

Debates presidenciales, Brasil, la Argentina, periodismo, campañas electorales, formatos, credibilidad.

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## **Introduction**

In today's democracies, the media system and the political system are a complex plot. Part of this complexity results from the fact that the media and political groups and individuals share a common objective: To challenge citizens to generate short or long-term collectives.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned by Silverstone (2004, p. 229) “Politics, like experience can no longer even be considered outside the media”. This article aims to capture how this complexity — inevitable and complicated — is concretized at a key moment for electoral campaigns in contemporary Latin American democracies: Televised presidential debates.

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1 See Verón (1998).

Our aim is to describe the evolution of televised presidential debates in two Latin American countries: Brazil and Argentina, with the specific purpose of characterizing the place of journalism, one of its central actors. After all, the conflicts that fuel the relationship between politicians, journalists, and audiences have in recent times become increasingly empirical as a result of the “media battles” that polarized the media-political scenario, in the context of the “left boom” of various countries of the region (Levitsky & Roberts, 2011; Balán & Montambeault, 2020, on the “war” between the “new left” and the major multimedia groups in Argentina and Brazil, see specifically, Kitzberger, 2016).

After presenting our methodological approach, we will begin by reviewing the history of televised discussions in both countries. We will address the formats that gender has adopted on both sides of the border. Then, we will focus on journalists, media representatives. We will assess the role they have played over the years in the discussions we are dealing with. We will note that while in Argentine debates the journalist is suspected and feared, and has almost no space to play a critical role, in Brazil the journalists still have an interrogative position in the meetings between presidencies, although they have had to give up space to new and varied forms of intervention by both politicians and citizens. To conclude, we will offer an analysis of all the differences observed in both countries.

## **Materials and methods**

The study is based on a comprehensive survey covering all the debates on which the democratic stages are recorded in Brazil (1985-cont.) and Argentina (1983-cont.). The investigation was done in two stages. First, we have conducted a very extensive review of secondary sources: press releases, civil or private publications and previous works — which will be mentioned later — with the aim of identifying encounters and recompiling the history of practice in one country and another. Secondly, we look for the greatest amount of information concerning the formats of the debates found in the first instance. To this end, we look for and classify the audio-visual archive of those broadcasts; after reviewing the videos found, we categorize each discussion according to what kind of information and intervention it presents — if it does — between three actors: journalists or moderators,

candidates, and audiences. Please note that this examination is part of a series of previous and larger work, to which we will refer where appropriate, which has enabled us to have a deeper look at our case studies, as well as additional materials, as an interview with organizers of Argentine debates.

We added two notes regarding the data obtained. First, Brazil has been subject of more examination than Argentina. Asymmetry is likely to be the product of the longest-time debates in the first case, as we will see below. For this reason, our argument regarding the evolution of practice in Brazil takes previous findings. Second, and in contrast, the audiovisual record of Argentine debates is more complete than that of its Brazilian counterpart. The difference is due to the recent incorporation of practice in that country — the origin of which is contemporary to the increasing use of streaming and digital means of transmission of information — but, also, to the public character that its organizers have given to it; conversely, in Brazil there are debates protected with commercial property rights. However, thanks to the addition of previous work in this area, we have collected enough data to give our work confidence.

In particular, at least 53 debates have taken place in Brazil since the return of the direct presidential elections in 1989, of which we have found 38 with sufficient information about their staging and format. In Argentina, as we said, the corpus is more limited and current, so we were able to get the debates in its entirety: these are four meetings, two of 2015 and two of 2019, of which there is a complete audiovisual record. Table 1 presents a summary of the meetings held in both countries since the return of the respective democracies, the history of which is described below.

**Table 1**  
*Argentine and Brazilian debates since the return of democracy*

Year	Round	Number of debates	Organizers
BRASIL			
1989	Total	10	TV Bandeirantes, Rede Manchete, SBT, Rede Globo/SBT/Rede Manchete/Rede Bandeirantes
	1°	8	
	2°	2	
1994	Total	3	TV Manchete patrocinado por Associação Comercial do Rio de Janeiro, TV Manchete patrocinado por Associação Brasileira de Imprensa, TV
	1°	3	
2002	Total	4	TV Bandeirantes, Rede Record, Rede Globo
	1°	3	
	2°	1	
2006	Total	7	Rede Bandeirantes, TV Gazeta, Rede Globo, SBT, Rede Record
	1°	3	
	2°	4	
2010	Total	13	Rede Bandeirantes, Folha de São Paulo/UOL, Emissoras TV Católicas de São Paulo, TV Gazeta/Estado de São Paulo, RedeTV!/Folha de S. Paulo, Universidade Católica de Brasília/TV Senado, Rede Record
	1°	9	
	2°	4	
2014	Total	9	Rede Bandeirantes, UOL/Folha de S. Paulo, TV Aparecida/CNBB/, Rede Record, Rede Globo
	1°	5	
	2°	4	
2018	Total	7	Rede Bandeirantes, RedeTV!/Istoé, TV Gazeta/UOL, TV Aparecida/CNBB, SBT/Folha de S. Paulo/UOL, Rede Record, Rede Globo
	1°	7	
ARGENTINA			
2015	Total	2	Argentina Debate
	1°	1	
	2°	1	
2019	Total	2	Cámara Nacional Electoral
	1°	2	

## **State-of-the-art and context. Presidential debates in Brazil and Argentina. A comparative story**

Presidential debates are intended to provide information to voters and to show political differences between candidates.<sup>2</sup> However, they are rituals that not only offer information, but also spectacle (Weber & Abreu, 2010). In Latin America, the first presidential debates took place in Brazil and Venezuela in the 1960s, as television progressively occupied the center of the mass media system (Verón, 2009; Carlón, 2012). However, the practice did not enter the continent's institutional political culture until the 1990s,<sup>3</sup> when democracy became a desirable future for the main forces of the local political spectrum.

Today, several Latin American countries hold televised presidential debates, and even many of them have enacted laws or other regulations in this area, including Brazil and Argentina, which are our focus. The democratic history in these two countries has important differences (Devoto & Fausto, 2008). However, the similarities unite them. On the one hand, the two opened competitive electoral regimes in the 1980s, as part of the so-called "third wave of democratization" (Huntington, 1994). On the other hand, those transitions occurred simultaneously with a mutation of the media ecosystem, characterized by the passage from media societies to mass societies (Verón, 1989). The return of democracy was parallel to the passage from "a regime of representations based on media dependence (the media are there to tell us the truth) to a regime of production of a real media in which the political appears strongly interdependent" (Escudero, 2007, p. 41). Television would acquire a dominant position at the time: both Brazil and Argentina had open television systems developed under the control of some channels with great territorial and population influence.

As can be seen in two aspects relevant to our subject matter, the political regime, and the media system, in the two countries are comparable. The history of televised presidential debates is, however, going through notoriously divergent paths. We shall proceed to restate them, focus on the diversity and evolution of the formats that have been acquired by the discus-

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2 Expected effects studied by the classical literature of reference. Cf. McKinney and Warner (2013).

3 At the end of the 1980s, discussions were held in Uruguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Colombia. Peru and Mexico joined in the 1990s. For the current year (2021), excepting Cuba whose regime is not competitive, all the countries of the region have held at least one meeting between presidential candidates. The data come from an ongoing research, part of a Master's thesis.

sions in each of the two countries. The description will serve as a framework for examining the role of journalists. In other words, we aim to show differences in the history of televised debates and, hence, in the participation of journalists in such events by keeping the media-political systems of our two case studies “constant”.

## **Debates in Brazil: history, innovation and diversity**

Brazil is the Latin American country that first adopted pre-election debates on television. There is a record of one and improvised debate before the meeting between Nixon and Kennedy — which historiography hails as the inauguration of international practice (Schroeder, 2000) —. On September 15, 1960, TV Tupi, the first television station in Latin America, organized a debate between candidates for the presidency. It was relatively successful, since the main candidate and subsequent winner, Jânio Quadros, abandoned the debate (Ruiz & Albano, 2012; Leite, 2003). The military regime that ruled *de facto* from 1964 to 1985 did not allow further debates: as is evident, the coexistence of political and media censorship is not the appropriate ground for the organization of televised presidential debates. However, unlike other dictatorships in the region — such as Argentina, for example — Brazilian authoritarianism enabled parliamentary and subnational elections to be held under official and extra-institutional controls that guaranteed the triumph of officialism. Despite the uncompetitive conditions and, in particular, the Falcão Act, which restricted the possibility of deploying election campaigns, televised debates were organized between 1982 and 1985, in the heat of the growing social demand for democracy.

Due to the past attempts, it is not surprising that during the conflicting election campaign that occurred during the return of direct presidential elections in 1989,<sup>4</sup> six debates were organized for the first round on three out of the four main national broadcasters: TV Manchete, Rede Bandeirantes and Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT)—the country’s main media group,

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4 The 1985 elections, the first after the withdrawal of the dictatorship, were carried out by an indirect procedure, i.e., from the election of an Electoral College, a system designed by the outgoing military regime. This electoral system was not without questioning; in this line, the citizens’ demands for a change of electoral regime were expressed (outstanding the movement called “Diretas Ja”).

Globo, did not participate this time—<sup>5</sup>. However, the four stations in the second round, associated in a press pool, held two meetings in which the finalists Fernando Collor de Mello (National Reconstruction Party, PRN) and Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva (Workers Party, PT) participated. These were meetings that had a great media and political impact at that time and later.<sup>6</sup>

These “inaugural” debates on the return of democracy adopted a “traditional” or “classic” format. Sitting or standing in lecterns, the candidates were involved in two types of interactions: between them and with journalists. For their part, they asked questions from both a panel and from the position of the moderator. The interactions occurred, in all cases, in the limits imposed by strict rules concerning themes, times and presentations.<sup>7</sup>

The televised debates of 1989, the first debates between Brazilian candidates, laid the foundations for a tradition that is now entrenched, despite their limitations. Still today, at the heart of the media and political agenda, the conduction of the television debates depends on the initiative of private commercial actors, who cooperate and compete between them. The debate on open and commercial television is one of the most important moments of Brazilian electoral campaigns since the return of democracy.

However, the above statement must be nuanced, since in the elections of 1994 and 1998, televised presidential debates were opposed for two concurrent reasons: on the one hand, by the refusal of the twice-elected Fernando H. Cardoso to debate (Leite, 2003; Machado, 2011); on the other hand, because certain requirements of the Electoral Code regarding the conduction of such events were incompatible with the commercial requirements of television, insofar as they were forced to invite all candidates of a highly fragmented system, and were afraid that it would be a long and boring broadcast that would not generate controversy (Weber & Abreu, 2010). Even so, there is a record of at least three debates between presidencies prior to the 1994 elections, all of which are the result of the initiative of various civil socie-

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<sup>5</sup> Instead, Globo opted for a series of individual interviews with the candidates.

<sup>6</sup> Globo presented a synthesis of the second of these pre-balloting debates, held three days before the election, on the news program *Jornal Nacional*, the most watched on television. The broadcast was the center of a major controversy for being considered biased, unfavorable to the PT candidate (Leite, 2003; Machado, 2011; Souza dos Santos & Fernandes, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Such is the trend in gender (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988). Even though the time given to each candidate had been limited, some of the meetings prior to the first round had been extensive, mainly due to the large number of participants (Machado, 2011).

ty organizations. Again, the format of these debates was “classic”.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, in 1998 occurred the only presidential elections since the return of Brazilian democracy in which no televised debates were held between the candidates.

Under a legal umbrella less out of line with the needs of the media,<sup>9</sup> debates became customary since this millennium. In the 2002 elections, the impetus of the organizers TV Bandeirantes, Rede Record and Globo – each of which arranged their own meeting between presidencies before the first round of the elections – contributed to the future of televised debates in real media events.<sup>10</sup> As a novelty, during this election campaign, the path was opened to experimentation and diversification of formats to innovation within the possibilities offered by gender. For the first time, the meeting organized by Globo for the second round took the form of the American town hall meeting,<sup>11</sup> with the incorporation of live voter questions from the broadcast site.

A new player came into play on the scene of the debates: the common citizen, embodied in the figure of the undecided voter. The staging for the occasion accompanied the news: Globo placed the opponents, Lula da Silva and José Serra, in a sand in which they could move freely, without fitting to the rigidity of the stands. Despite some variants, the chain maintained the same scheme in the subsequent elections, but only for the meetings prior to balloting. Meanwhile, the confrontations before the first round are more similar to the classic format, both because of the willingness of participants and because of the dynamics of exchanges between politicians and a moderator or journalists, from which the public is excluded.

In any case, from the 2002 elections onwards (at least until the last elections in 2018), Brazilian chains organize, in total, more than one debate for each round. The impetus stems not only from the main commercial channels, but also from the promotion by regional channels, the press on their online pages and the religious media network. Most of the invited candidates participa-

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8 They led to interactions between the candidates, combined with questions raised by moderators and journalists. Sobriety in staging also continues. Thematic issues were addressed in line with the civil and sectoral nature of the organizers of the discussions. For a more detailed description of its future, see Sousa Rego (2011).

9 In particular, the obligation to invite candidates was limited to only those belonging to parties with parliamentary representation (Leite, 2003), which has been in force until now (art. 46 of the Electoral Code).

10 We follow Leite’s reading (2003) based on the term Katz and Dayan (1992).

11 We find references to this format in Schroeder (2000) and Milcovic (2014).

te in different meetings (in fact, the practice is maintained despite the possible absence of leading candidates in the electoral campaign<sup>12</sup>). In 2006, three debates were organized for the first round and four for the second round; in 2010, nine and four, respectively; in 2014, five before the first round and four before the second; in 2018, there were seven debates before the first round of the elections. However, there were no debates before the second, due to the refusal of the favorite – and finally elected – J. Bolsonaro to attend.<sup>13</sup>

As can be expected from the above and given the large number of variables combined in the production of televised debates (Weber & Abreu, 2010; Machado, 2011), different formats coexist in the history of the debates in Brazil. As Falconi-Pires (2017) expresses by reference to the Weber and Abreu categories (2010), we find more conventional models alongside other interactive and complex ones.<sup>14</sup> Among the major new developments recently introduced, the incorporation of the technological possibilities offered by digital media is highlighted: the recent debates of 2018 added live analysis of trends in social networks and questions and comments by internet users. Issues such as duration, order of blocks and thematic selection and staging also vary, as well as levels of audience and impact on the media agenda of meetings. We will then discuss some of these issues when examining the future of the place of journalists within this growing variety of forms of debate in Brazil.

## **From the empty chair to the elections: Presidential debates in Argentina**

In contrast to the profuse history of Brazilian televised debates, the Argentine case can only be described as curbed. For the presidential elections

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12 Some “fouls” had more attention and criticism than others; for example, the controversy over the “empty chair” that Globo placed in the studio when Lula missed the debate for the first round of 2006 (Machado, 2011). In any case, we insisted, none implied that these events would no longer take place.

13 The then candidate was excused for the need to preserve his health after the attack suffered during a campaign. However, he simultaneously held an interview on the Record channel. We worked on the case in a previous brief (Franco-Häntzsch, 2020).

14 An example of a “conventional” debate, in this case “conventional with Platea-Stage”, is the final meeting for the second round of 2006. Instead, in the first round, we found a “complex colloquial debate” and a “simple interactive debate.” For details on these categories and the examples mentioned, see Machado (2011). We do not extend into this categorization here as it does not directly contribute to the aim of this paper.

of 1983, which opened the democratic period, the main open television stations, based in Buenos Aires but with national scope, were under the control of the State (Morone & De Charras, 2009; Postolski & Marino, 2009). In any case, accompanying the democratic opening, as was also the case in Brazil, Argentina witnessed a revival of the demands for citizen and cultural participation (Com, 2009).

In this context, there was a vocation to promote debates on television at various levels and with an unequal degree of success. The first time that a television broadcast the debate of two Argentine politicians was in 1984, following the call of the then President R. Alfonsín to elections aimed at knowing the will of the citizens regarding the way to solve the conflict of the Beagle. The meeting between representatives of the main political parties was broadcast on Channel 13, hosted by B. Neustadt.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it was the moment of the first televised debates between candidates competing for subnational positions. Thus, in 1987, debates were organized for Bonaerese governorate between A. Cafiero, candidate for the Justicialist Party (PJ), and J. M. Casella, candidate for the Radical Civic Union (UCR).

The debates between presidencies were different. In 1989, the candidates for the presidency for the PJ, C. Menem, the main opposition party, and UCR, E. Angeloz, Representative of the officialist party, were invited to discuss with Neustadt. Menem's absence, symbolized by an empty chair in the study, converted the debate into ordinary interview.<sup>16</sup> Menem by that time was heading the polls. His later and loose triumph – 47.51% against 37.10% – allowed to understand the officialism's incompetence to resolve hyperinflation was more important than the new president's television absence.

After this, presidential debates were left off the agenda during subsequent electoral periods. The main reason was the repeated refusal of the electoral career leaders to attend the debate on television. Such are the cases of Menem in 1995 and N. Kirchner in 2003 (paradoxically, in the latter case in rejection of the request of former President Menem). Additionally, the impossibility of the main political parties and their campaign teams to

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15 It was about the acceptance or rejection of the firm of the Peace Treaty with Chile.

16 The UCR took advantage of the situation with posters and a spot showing only an empty chair. The spot wondered in twelve seconds: "The polls say that many Argentine doubt Menem's ability to govern the nation. Is that why Menem denies the hand-in-hand debate against Angeloz?" The PJ doubled the bet with another warning showing several empty chairs, while the voice-over remarked: "Hubo debates que la UCR no fue capaz de sostener: con los empresarios, los trabajadores y los jubilados".

reach an agreement for a television debate in 1995 (Acosta & Campolongo, 2017, pp. 5-6) or, quite simply, the lack of initiatives that will promote such encounters as apparently happened between 2007 and 2015.

The tendency to fail to handle televised presidential debates in Argentina was reversed in 2015. An NGO that year, Argentina Debate, managed to hold two meetings. A first debate was broadcast by six national and regional TV channels and streaming with some setbacks arising from the impromptu absence of the pro-government candidate, D. Scioli, from the Front for Victory (FPV).<sup>17</sup> The success of this first debate most likely led to a second meeting: before the runoff, Scioli agreed to debate M. Macri in the live television. This second debate was broadcast on the five national channels<sup>18</sup> and on six cable channels, reaching a rating of 54.8<sup>19</sup> points; also, on streaming, where it obtained approximately 340 thousand live visits.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond the media success of this first time, presidential debates in Argentina took over the law the following year. In 2016, the National Congress gave effect to Law 27,337, which punishes mandatory televised presidential debates. More specifically, it gives responsibility to the National Electoral Chamber to organize two debates between presidential candidates prior to the first round in the elections, and an additional one if a second round of elections is required. In addition, it punishes candidates who refuse to debate. Thus, in contrast to private and commercial interests in Brazil, in present-day in Argentina, presidential debates are initiatives of the state. The model was tested in the last elections: in 2019, the two debates scheduled before the first round of the presidential elections were held. The triumph of Alberto Fernández in the first round required a third round.

The format of the series of debates in 2015 and 2019 was the same. It was defined that direct exchanges between the candidates would dominate almost all the broadcast, followed by a closing monologue (segment common by all the debates presented in this work, both Brazilian and Argentine). Of course, as is the norm in gender, the times devoted to questions

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17 These are: Channel 26 (cable), Channel 9 (air), Televisa and Acequia TV (from Mendoza city) and Channel 13 of San Luis.

18 Specifically: America, Argentine Public Television, Channel 9, Telefe and El Trece.

19 The figure even exceeds one of the most seen events by Argentine: The 2014 World Cup final. See: <https://bit.ly/3rm5ysv>

20 The data are derived from an anonymous interview carried out for a previous work (Franco-Häntzsch, 2017) with a member of the NGO Argentina Debate, in charge of the broadcast.

and answers were prefixed and defined, as well as the order of exposure. The “thematic blocks” that guided the discussion were also predetermined. Neither journalists nor citizens questioned the candidates. Representatives of the former had the role of moderators, whose role was limited to the event, while the latter, had the role of spectators (either as assistants or as viewers), and euphoric manifestations were prohibited. Finally, the Argentine television debates of 2015 and 2019 were similar in their setting on stage, sober, but spectacular, marked in the discourse by memories of information communication situations (news and political opinion programs).<sup>21</sup>

### **Analysis. The margins of journalism: Information, suspicion, and experimentation**

We have succinctly presented the history of televised presidential debates in Brazil and Argentina. A long history in Brazil, with time for the exploration and diversification of formats, managed mainly by private channels, which contrasts with Argentina’s recent entry into the organization of televised debates, first because of the impetus of an NGO, and then the state. From these divergent paths, different models of debate emerge, which are observed, among other aspects,<sup>22</sup> in the variable places or roles of the media and journalists.

This distinction will be discussed in more detail below. While the formats currently in use in both countries restrict the performance of journalists, the limitations are less severe in Brazil than in Argentina, and it might be because of different motivations that can be synthesized as follows: a common recognition of the declining “authority” of journalism to the public; the Argentine presidential debates add the fear of political actors to the bias of the media.

Brazilian and Argentine journalists, as we have already mentioned, play an apparently similar and insignificant role in the debates. Let us begin by reviewing the way in which this phenomenon has been investigated in Brazil. Analysts of the televised presidential debates have emphasized the gra-

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21 See Franco-Häntzsch (2017, pp. 31-34).

22 We have examined in a previous paper both the relative role of citizenship and candidates (Franco-Häntzsch & Dagatti, 2021).

dual loss of role for journalists in the broadcast. Leite (2003), notes that when introducing the town hall meeting — Globo's new format for the second round of the 2002 elections, mentioned in the previous section — there was a “hesitation” of the journalist's critical role, which loses the possibility of freely interviewing the politician.

Additionally, after examining the evolution of the debates before the second round organized by Globo, Falconi-Pires (2017) finds that “there are aspects that point to a transformation in the behavior of the media in relation to the political discourse in the debate, more specifically with regard to genre”. While TV station representatives could challenge the candidate in 1989, since “journalists had the credibility” to do so, with the new century “the journalist leaves the place of question, and gradually (...) occupies a place as mediator, promoting a shift in focus, which is now divided between the undecided candidates and voters present in the debates” (all references refer to 2017, p. 125).

Similarly, Verón (2003) mentioned about a *preventive* strategy. Television, as a media institution and organizer of the debates, led to a “elegant” retreat in the face of a progressive crisis of legitimacy of information discourse in the political field. The disarticulation of exchanges between politicians, undecided voters, and journalists who prescribed the rules of the new debate formats seemed to raise questions about journalism and a deterioration in public confidence in televised information. In the author's terms, the outline proposed for the 2002 meeting by the Globo chain:

It can then be understood, not as an expression of definitively acquired legitimacy, but as a set of precautions that could indicate that media managers know, or at least consider, that they are moving forward in a dangerous area. (2003, p. 174)

Such an interpretation of the critical, or at least interrogating, role of the media in the political field seems, at first glance, to fit the Argentine case. Let us recall, from the previous section, that the proposed outline for all the discussions to date — both in 2015 and 2019 — excludes the possibility for the moderator to ask questions or comments that interfere in the debate between the candidates. The media must be neutral. In fact, between the first and second meetings of 2015 — the first ones in the country — the rules of the debate were adjusted to strengthen the limits to the interference of journalists in the dialog between the candidates. Perhaps as a result of a more

“neutral” moderator role than expected in the first meeting.<sup>23</sup> In relation to the next, a clause was expressly incorporated that precluded comments from the presenters during the transmission.<sup>24</sup> In addition, as stated by a member of the Argentine NGO debate — the organizing institution of the events at that time,<sup>25</sup> the personalities appointed to the office were forced to sign a public record that committed them to abide the rules set between the parties. In addition, none of Argentina’s debates — neither the 2015 nor the 2019 inaugurals — incorporated panel journalists. In short, the role of journalists, as representatives of the media institution during the controversial development of debates, is negatively sanctioned — even in a regulatory manner.

While in Brazil the “withdrawal” of journalists has been argued, it seems to respond to their “anticipated?” loss of credibility; the Argentine case seem to illustrate the existence of an intersystemic tension —between the political system and the mass media system— that affects the powers of the media to political actors. The question is that the communication objectives of journalists and politicians overlap, they both want to question citizens, speak on behalf of them and express a feeling of society. The formers seek to legitimize their role as mediators between the latter and third parties; to do so, the usual solution is to plead the supposed neutrality of the environment. On the contrary, politics will exercise various strategies aimed at circumventing the intercession of journalism: it will strive to contain it, it will prefer controlled communication situations, and it will challenge the purported neutral place of the information discourse, denouncing its interests, its contradictions, its biases.

In Argentina in 2015, this conflict was open and was part of the public agenda. No one was unaware of kirchnerism’s disputes with major media corporations — and with some of the top journalists and political analysts — even

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23 The apparent reason for “adjusting” the rules seems to be that in the run-up to the first round of elections, on October 4, L. Novaresio, a journalist in charge of the two-block moderation, provided comments “in a personal capacity” (according to his words). Some implications of this fact were observed in the media between the events and expectations about his role. Hours after the event, the newspaper *La Nación* wrote “although everything was timed, the presenter took more minutes to explain the modality, acknowledged and expressed his opinion as a candidate.” See: <https://bit.ly/3HpPVWL>

24 The text stated: “During the live broadcast of the debate, it is the duty of the moderator to maintain a role strictly in accordance with the rules and principles agreed upon by all parties and expressed in this Style Manual” (Style Manual for the Second Round).

25 The data are derived from an anonymous interview carried out for a previous work (Franco-Hüntzsch, 2017) to a member of the Argentine NGO Debate in charge of the broadcast.

if there were discrepancies about its motivation (Vincent, 2011; De Diego, 2014). Under such conditions, the attention addressed to the role of moderators in presidential debates was due to a certain suspicion that weighed on Argentine journalism around its vocation of truth, and to a fear of the political agents (the candidates, or some of them) to the “unpunished” question, purported but falsely “objective” and “independent” of journalists/moderators.

In a previous paper (Franco-Häntzsch, 2017) we suggest that the “cornered” place of journalists in the Argentine televised confrontations of 2015 appears to be the result not only of their loss of credibility, but also of high mistrust. According to what was stated by the representative of Argentina debate, journalists were silenced as requested by candidates. Otherwise, they would not agree to debate. In the words of the informant:

When you see the production of the debate, it was a debate that was ‘protecting’ somehow the candidates, so that they really encourage themselves to take that first step. (...) When we were going a little bit more aggressively, they stopped us (...). [what surprised us [was that] there was a lot of relation in the way of thinking of the campaign teams of all the candidates. For example, one of the things we wanted was for the moderator to ask a question. It was not accepted. They preferred the question between candidates rather than the question of a moderator of a channel who could have a particular intention. If you notice, the role of the moderator was pure moderation, without any content. (Interview. Emphasis is proper)

The latter may respond to the absence of D. Scioli, the official candidate, to the first debate.<sup>26</sup> The crisis of journalism’s legitimacy and the suspicion that political agents hold of this “falsely disinterested” informational vocation led to journalists having no choice but to be mediators; moreover, they impose on the medium “the burden of proof” of proving its intended neutrality. The referred rigidity of the rules that limited the performance of journalist-moderators constitutes a guarantee; according to María O’Donnell, one of the journalists appointed to moderate the 2019 presidential debate<sup>27</sup> “The candidates did not want journalists asking them questions”.

Similarly, another way to demonstrate the neutrality in the organization of Argentine debates was expressed by the search for balance between the

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<sup>26</sup> We comment on this absence in another work (Franco-Häntzsch, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Source: <https://bit.ly/3rm9Zne>

actors that occupied that role. According to the provisions of the Act, the name of the eight moderators of the two mandatory debates by 2019 was the subject of discussion and consensus among the candidates' teams. It was also expressly sought that the final election respected diversity in terms of gender, origin (according to a federal criterion) and institutional affiliation.<sup>28</sup> The marginal position of journalists-moderators in intervening as polemicists or interrogators in the debate — a task delegated exclusively to politicians — is then balanced in terms of representation and management of mediation. As mediators, journalists — and therefore, the media — regulate the relation between political agents and spectators; as representatives, they express from the point of view of the organizers, not so much the position of the citizens/public — since they cannot speak on their behalf, but on behalf of the media institution — as its composition and distribution —, but from a heteronormative and corporate point of view, i.e., balance between women and men, balance between capital and provinces.

The number and diversity of presidential debates in Brazil — whether compared with its centralized organization from the state or an NGO in Argentina — relativizes this representative dimension: organized by private channels and by various private and public actors from churches to regional media; each broadcaster appoints its own figures to embody the roles of journalists and moderators. They are journalists on the channel, not representatives of a centralized public service. Competition among media agents is paramount; public acquisition is as important as the dissemination of information for consumption and citizen profit. For that reason, the idea of neutrality or objectivity in each debate is defended in the name of an ideal of journalism and not in the name of a supposed neutrality and offset of the organizing institution, as in Argentina, where first an NGO first and then the State, from the National Electoral Chamber, claim to be apart to all sectoral interests.

Having noted the refusal of journalists to intercede during Argentine debates, we are thus returning to the analysis of Brazilians. When we opened this section, we referred to investigations that observed the gradual withdrawal of journalists from the protagonist place they knew they had in the first presidential debates in Brazil. As evidence, these tests offered the no-

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28 In this sense, it should be noted that in 2015 gender inequality in the election of moderators had aroused controversy.

velty of the format that the Globo chain introduced for the second round of 2002. In view of the media centrality of the leading broadcaster, and the continued application of this scheme, the assessment provides at least part of the evolution of the models of debate in the country. However, we consider important to clarify it. Not only in the light of the Argentine case, but also to provide a more detailed analysis of the diversity of debate formats that currently coexist in Brazil.

Let us begin by agreeing with the partial reduction in the participation of journalists during the debates in Brazil. During the first recorded broadcasts — 1989 and 1994 — it was normal for television station representatives to dominate the debate. For example, in the two debates that the radio station pool organized prior to the balloting in the first direct presidential elections on the return of democracy, each of the four thematic blocks was opened with a question from the moderator to both candidates. L. da Silva and F. Collor de Mello. It was followed by questions from a panel of journalists. Given the nature of the organization in that moment, each station assigned its own moderators and journalists, who alternated during the meeting's development — apparently pointing out the relevance that, for the media, entails “being” on screen.

Similarly, in the debates in 1994, particularly in the one on TV Bandeirantes, the role of the specialized journalist was introduced, who was betting on giving authority to the media. Additionally, the Brazilian Press Association oversaw one of the three debates transmitted by TV Manchete. In short, in the early Brazilian televised presidential debates, the role of journalists was visible and central, especially in contrast to the place of voters — given the relevance that the latter acquired later, but also with the short time allotted for the candidates to question their opponents. By contrast, in subsequent years, as we have already pointed out, the debates in Brazil offer progressive visibility to the actions of the candidates themselves and figures representing the public, to put on the scene new types of interactions.

However, if observing at all the Brazilian debates, i.e., the plurality of meetings organized by various national and regional chains for both electoral rounds since the return of democracy, certain nuances are imposed.

We will begin by emphasizing that the space dedicated to media representatives to interview politicians, although it has been reduced, is maintained in most of the debates. For example, the one that RedeTV! organized for the first round of 2010 included three blocks of direct exchanges between

the candidates, and two in which the journalists initiated the dialog. In Rede Bandeirantes issue for the first turn of 2014, the balance was more noticeable: two blocks of each type. In the same year, SBT and Grupo Folha organized one in which journalists intervened in one of the three blocks.

In short, we find a balance slightly in favor of questions between candidates, but the role of journalists is still in force. In addition, many debates keep the opening question in the voice of the moderator, who in some cases is expressly allocated to producers, for example, each of the debates that organized TV Gazeta, RedeTV! and Bandeirantes for the first round of 2010; or that of Record in the first round of 2014 (although his host claimed that “the Record debate privileges interaction between the candidates”) or that of RedeTV! for the same occasion in 2018.

By adjusting the limits of the information observed, it should be noted that, in any case, the interventions of the representatives of the media appear to be less and less contentious compared with those in 1989. On the return of democracy, the moderators focused on specific issues and on the agenda. For example, M. G. Bastón de Toledo opens the first block of the debate on TV Bandeirantes during the first turn of 1989 interrogating: “[faced with the situation lived by Brazilians] how to reduce inflation, guarantee the necessary investments and maintain a satisfactory wage policy? How will the money be obtained, and what are the concrete measures?” The journalists who at that time played the additional role of interviewers did not miss an opportunity to challenge candidates on particularly sensitive issues: for example, questions about his faith to atheist F. H. Cardoso before the Brazilian believer audience in a debate for the Prefecture of St. Paul (Leite, 2003), or instigation, in the second turn of 1989, so Lula da Silva would give his opinion about the “lessons” that could be drawn from the Soviet experience in the face of a possible PT government (Falconi-Pires, 2017).

Today, the questions are far from that level of provocation. For example: “Candidate please choose the topic you consider more important to be presented tonight, 21 days before the election, and explain your position and your government proposal on this item” (debate in Rede Bandeirantes, prior to the second round of 2010), or: “Why does Mr. or Mrs. want to be President of the Republic?” (Discussion on SBT/ UOL Portal for the second round of 2014). As we can see, rather than polemize, recent questions introduce broad and general judgments, enabling the debaters to make a free opening.

On one additional point, we have found differences between the debates that are organized in Brazil in advance of the first and second round of elections. While in the first round journalists have spaces to participate, as we refer and exemplify, the tendency is to encourage direct interaction between candidates, with little or no intervention by journalists. It should also be stressed that the country's main channel, Globo, also proposes different formats before the first and second round of elections, but in no case does it envisage journalists to interrogate candidates.

## Results

The table below (Table 2) provides a synthesis of what has been presented in this paper.

**Table 2**  
*Results of the analysis: Presidential debates compared  
in Brazil and Argentina*

Main differences between Brazil and Argentina regarding the way in which televised presidential debates take place, with a focus on the place of journalists in debates in both countries		
	Brazil	Argentina
Length of the trajectory of the presidential debates in the country	Long: Debates are held from the first direct elections to the present (1989-2021), excepting in 1998.	Recent: Debates were held in the last two presidential elections (2015 and 2019).
Type of organizer	Commercial media (mainly)	In 2015 by an NGO; from 2019 onwards by the State, in accordance with the regulation in the matter.
Role of the journalist in debates	-Journalists ask candidates questions as moderators or panelists. -The role has decreased in two ways: the questions asked in the present are less controversial than those of the past, and today's debates are conducted in a variety of formats that do not always incorporate the possibility of journalists to be part of it.	Journalists do not ask questions to candidates. Moreover, it is expressly forbidden for them to take part in the conduction of the debate.

*Note.* Own elaboration, based on what has been researched for this work and in previous opportunities.

In short, our article has endeavored to emphasize that the role of journalists and media representatives in the conduction of presidential debates differs between Brazil and Argentina. While the former has gradually given up their inquisitorial role for candidates and voters to take the control in the interaction that is displayed in the television studio, their image retains some visibility that Argentine journalists fail to obtain. The latter, under the focus of suspicion, seem bound to demonstrate their balanced neutrality in a scenario sponsored by an agent who is invariably intended to be impartial, the Argentine NGO debates in 2015 and the national state from 2019 onwards (as prescribed in the 2016 Act). In this scenario, they can only aspire to stick to the much-needed conduct of the debate, without intervening or guiding the dialog between the debates.

## **Brief final considerations**

The electoral campaigns in Brazil and Argentina integrated the presidential debates as part of their agenda. As rituals, these are communicational practices that aim to measure the relationship between politics, media, and citizenship. The current diversity of models and formats in Brazil and the centralized organization in Argentina seek to attract, despite their contrasts, the attention and interest of the spectators. In each case, it is a precarious balance that exposes social, communication and political struggles between the different sectors involved.

The track record of presidential debates in Argentina and Brazil is uneven, but there are similar accolades and criticism (on the value of debates for democracy, on the role of journalists, on the low level of argumentation, on the limited participation of citizens, on the excessive care of candidates); which is specific to the genus (Schroeder, 2000; Milcovic, 2014), and is the cause to search centrality of the event. In the framework of this network of tense relations that underlie the televised encounters between candidates, we wonder what rules the effective place of journalists in Brazilian and Argentine broadcasts?

The answer arises from the convergence of the first and second sections of this article. Presidential debates were early in the gradual transition to a competitive regime in Brazil, in an era in which television was consolidated as a privileged arena of political exchange. In this scenario, large private

and commercial actors dominated, who took the initiative to organize debates among candidates, setting the tradition.

In Argentina, by contrast, in the context of a more complicated transition and with channels managed by the outgoing dictatorship, televised electoral debates were postponed. Henceforth, in the face of continued turbulence, candidates with the greatest chances of electoral success found excuses to circumvent the long-awaited encounter. The televised presidential debates only came to light after 25 years of democratic coexistence, in a transformed media environment, in two ways: one because of the penetration of new technologies and the international trade opening that questioned the privileged market position of the main media players privatized during the decade of 1990 (Becerra, 2015); on the other hand, the doubted legitimacy of media and journalists to be neutral spokesmen of “the people”, the citizenship-audience.<sup>29</sup> In view of this panorama, one civil organization and the state itself were then the guarantors of the neutrality of the dispute. A must in the debate was to restrict the actions of journalists, suspected of bias and personal interests.

Thus, the Argentine case invites to hypothesize on the marginalization of journalists in response to their ability to damage the public image of politicians. This is a complement to a hypothesis that the marginalization of journalists from debates is a consequence of their delegitimization as guardians of public truth, of the deterioration of their image that we have seen; it also seems to describe the trajectory of the formats of debate in Brazil. Along these lines, Brazilian journalists are not excluded from similar transformations to those that have limited their Argentine counterparts; however, nuances and differences suggest that “dependent trajectory” mechanisms exist (Pierson, 2004) in which the different moment since the beginning of this practice has consequences in one country and another.

The debates are at the center of the public scene before and after their conduction. Although everything seems to indicate that they do not change electoral trends,<sup>30</sup> they are important moments in presidential campaigns,

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29 During the development of this work, we have made references to “media battle” that Kirchnerism set with the main media of the country.

30 The assertion comes from various studies evaluating the extent to which a televised presidential debate modifies the expected election results (Stimson, 2004; Erikson & Wlezien, 2012). This conclusion does not deny that discussions may generate other types of effects, such as the degree of voter information about candidates or their positions.

and they are presented to the audience as a symbol of democracy. They are the result of arduous negotiations between representatives of the political world and representatives of the journalistic world. It is a delicate balance managed by parties with experience acquired throughout history, negotiations, interdicts, and containment.

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## Thematic, strategic and positional frames about the 2016 Peruvian presidential debate

### *Frames temáticos, estratégicos y posicionales sobre el debate presidencial peruano de 2016*

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**Received on:** 19/12/2021 **Revised on:** 13/01/2022 **Accepted on:** 25/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

#### **Abstract**

A reconceptualization of the game and strategy frames is carried out separately according to the international literature and sub-indicators are built to obtain a more accurate measurement of each of them. The coverage of the 2016 Peruvian presidential elections is analyzed in 20 radio, press and television programs, three days before the presidential debate, three days after and three days before the vote by way of comparison. The objective is to identify the impact that the presidential debate has on the prevalence of the use of the three journalistic frames in each of the presidential electoral rounds. The electoral debate influences the increase in the thematic framing of the first round, but not in the second round of elections. Positional framing is reduced after the electoral debate in both rounds, while strategic framing is not affected. The results show that the dynamics of the electoral system, such as the presidential debate, influence the prevalence of the use of framing. It highlights the need to study the influence of political dynamics on framing, decreasing the analysis around journalistic production. This broadens the way of seeing framing as discursive strategies to influence the audience and places them as part of a complex political communication process that also involves political institutions.

#### **Keywords**

Framing, strategic game frame, thematic frame, presidential debate, political communication, presidential elections, election coverage, news analysis.

**Suggested citation:** Macassi, S. (2022). Thematic, strategic and positional frames about the 2016 Peruvian presidential debate. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 113-135. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.05>

## **Resumen**

Se realiza una reconceptualización de los enmarcamientos de juego y estrategia por separado según la literatura internacional y se construyen subindicadores para obtener una medición más precisa de cada uno de ellos. Se analiza la cobertura de las elecciones presidenciales peruanas de 2016 en 20 programas de radio, prensa y televisión, tres días antes del debate presidencial, tres días posteriores y tres días previos a la votación a modo de comparación. El objetivo es identificar la incidencia que tiene el debate presidencial en la prevalencia del uso de los tres enmarcamientos periodísticos en cada una de las vueltas electorales presidenciales. El debate electoral influye en el incremento del enmarcamiento temático en la primera vuelta, pero no en la segunda vuelta electoral. El enmarcamiento posicional se reduce después del debate electoral en ambas vueltas, mientras que el enmarcamiento estratégico no se ve afectado. Los resultados demuestran que las dinámicas del sistema electoral, como el debate presidencial, influyen en la prevalencia del uso de los enmarcamientos. Se resalta la necesidad de estudiar la influencia de las dinámicas políticas en los enmarcamientos, descentrando el análisis en torno a la producción periodística. Esto amplía la forma de ver los enmarcamientos como estrategias discursivas para influir en la audiencia y los sitúa como parte de un complejo proceso de comunicación política que involucra también a las instituciones políticas.

## **Palabras clave**

Enmarcamiento, enmarcamiento de juego estratégico, enmarcamiento temático, debate presidencial, elecciones presidenciales, comunicación política, cobertura electoral, análisis de noticias.

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## **Introduction**

Studies on the role of the media in political significance during electoral processes have generated intense debates that have been in place to date. Recently, the study of media approaches has revitalized this discussion by focusing on its impact on citizen debate and contribution to democracy (Busby *et al.*, 2018; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017).

According to Rinke *et al.* (2013, p. 475), “analysis of news framing has the potential, both to understand the functioning of modern democracies and to guide democratic practice,” which would help to understand the dynamics of political significance from a broader perspective. However, the relation between approaches and political systems and electoral dynamics has received little attention.

This study addresses presidential debates because they represent an electoral dynamic that could reinforce the contents of democracy, because they prioritize discussion and promote deliberation on the significant issues of governance.

## **Theoretical framework**

Frame studies are a set of approaches that cover the analysis of production processes, thematic development, reception processes and even the impact on political communication processes (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; Muñiz; 2020), becoming one of the dominant paradigms today.

In the studies on the content and structure of news, Chong and Druckmans's "media frames" (2007, p. 100) stand out, which are defined as "the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a communicator uses when transmitting information about a problem or event to an audience. The chosen frame reveals what the communicator considers relevant to the issue in question". For its part, D'Angelo (2018) makes a substantive precision when mentioning that the analysis of the news frames focuses on the production of news, while the media frames refer to the study of other audiovisual genres.

The analysis of the news frames has been applied to political processes, scandals, public disputes and conflicts, and the analysis of their impact on electoral processes attracted the attention of many researchers. Much of the reflection revolved around whether the journalistic coverage of elections strengthens or weakens democracy.

Election framing studies focused on the time spent by the media on themes (thematic-frame) or competition between candidates and their campaigns (strategic-game frame). The weeks before elections are often analyzed because of the interest in the person who leads the voting intention (Strömbäck & Aalberg, 2018), leaving aside other stages of the electoral process.

## **Strategic and positional framing in elections**

Decades ago, Patterson (1994) identified that media coverage of elections paid more attention to adversary confrontation and delegitimization than to proposals. From their study, the research alerted on the predomina-

ce of the strategic-game frame that uses a language of competence, the prediction of results or the personal attributes of the candidates, reducing the presence of thematic framing.

Capella and Jamieson's research (1996) finds that strategic-game frame affects citizens' attitudes, generating disaffection and political cynicism; in addition, according to Aalberg *et al.* (2011) it contributes to the loss of substance of political parties and the weakening of the democratic system.

When the media use strategic-game frames, they highlight "the behavior of politicians, demonstrating the self-interest of these actions, stimulating negative attributes about their character, pointing to earlier stories about politics, and reinforcing cynicism, such as mistrust" (Capella & Jamieson, 1996, p. 60). This encourages candidates to abandon programmatic speeches and to focus on strategic activities to gain greater media attention. The greatest use of these frames, according to Jamieson (1992 p. 166), is based on the fact that "the strategy scheme has the advantage of being a story. As such, it uses a native news structure, which reduces events to stories."

The strategic-game frames have also been described as those news in which:

Election coverage emphasizes victory, loss, strategy, and tactics, all the stories that encourage voters to view the campaign primarily through politics as a sports perspective. (Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015, p. 44)

Other authors used a similar concept called horserace to describe news highlighting candidates' attributes, as well as their position in the competition to win the election (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007).

In summary, the authors addressed the framing of electoral coverage with dissimilar nuances, some used the concept of strategic-game schema (Jamieson, 1992; Patterson 1994), and others used strategic-frame (de Vreese & Semetko 2002; de Vreese, 2005) or strategic-game frame (Muñiz 2015) and also used the horserace concept (Sigelman & Bullock, 1991 or Iyengar *et al.*, 2004).

The literature shows concern about how journalistic coverage with game-strategic frame impacts on a lower intensity and frequency of news focused on programmatic, problematic, and proposed aspects. Iyengar (1994) includes them under the concept of thematic frame that has presumably been declining due to the priority given to episodic framing news, focusing on the description of proselytizing activities (Feezell *et al.*, 2019; Boukes, 2021; Theorin *et al.*, 2021).

However, one of the difficulties mentioned by Aalberg *et al.* (2011), is the accuracy of the indicators used to analyze these approaches. De Vreese (2005) notes that indicators related to strategic aspects differ from game-related indicators in terms of their effects on political cynicism. Thus, Aalberg *et al.* (2011) argue that both dimensions (strategic and game), correspond to different framing; in fact, the authors formulate differentiated indicators for each one.

This study supports the proposal of Aalberg *et al.* (2011) to separate the two dimensions but considers that the label of the “game” framing does not express the set of categories involved in journalistic practice. The dimension of the game has been renamed as “positional framing,” as the indicators reviewed in international literature (Jamieson, 1992; Patterson 1994; de Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Muñiz, 2015) refer mostly to a place that candidates occupy in an ordinal hierarchy, i.e., the expected “position” to arrive in the first place. Journalists structure the news and prioritize the information that generates in the audience the perception that one of the candidates outstrips or lags the other, thus creating an expectation about the results of the elections.

The “positional framing” will be categorized in news using winning and losing language, the role of the actor in the competition, the advancement or receding of candidates, the results of surveys and citizen opinions on trends (see sub-indicators in Annex 1). In other words, the journalist draws up the news by incorporating information on how the candidate moves forward or backward in an ordinal position that moves him or her closer to winning the elections.

On the other hand, strategic framing is categorized in the news that mentions the material and symbolic campaign resources and the personal attributes of the candidate. It includes the motivations, personality and image traits and discursive tactics employed. For more details, consult the methodology for operational definitions and Annex 1, which contains the sub-indicators for each of the three approaches.

## **Electoral dynamics and framing**

Research on the analysis of framing in electoral processes increased from the initial statement of Etman (1993), but few studies explored its link with political processes. Araújo and Prior (2020) in studying Bolsonaro’s

candidacy find that the press framings are directly related to the political context, normalizing the candidate's undemocratic behavior, and affecting political dynamics. By contrast, Dimitrova and Kostadinova (2013) emphasize that it is necessary to explain what political dynamics beyond production processes influence the predominance of the use of game-strategic or thematic framing.

Khan (1991), finds that in the U.S. senate elections, the horserace framing is variable; there is a greater presence of this framing in states where there are competitive electoral processes and less prevalence in states with little political competence. Lawrence (2000) finds that the use of game-strategic framing prevails in public disputes or during the formulation of public policies. The comparative study of Strömbäck and Aalberg (2008) between the United States and Sweden shows the predominance of strategic framing in the United States, while the theme prevails in Sweden.

Esser and D'Angelo (2006) mention that the difference in the use of framing when elections are covered may be due to the culture of political communication in each country. In fact, Floss and Marcinkowski (2008) compare the framings produced in Germany and Switzerland and find differences that they attribute to the existence of dissimilar political cultures.

Therefore, differences in the uses of framing would be due to structural variables such as the configuration of the political system, national political culture, the intensity of controversy or choice. But presumably, electoral dynamics would also explain the differences in the intensity with which strategic, positional, or thematic framings are present in journalistic coverage.

It is well known that electoral systems vary substantially; some have a strong presence of patronage practices, others differ by the duration of their electoral processes, the presidential election with double round or systems that use direct presidential voting, or the delegated vote. These differences have not been sufficiently analyzed regarding the predominance of one framing over another.

From our perspective, differences in the intensity and frequency of the country-wide approaches could be explained by dissimilar configurations of electoral processes.

Some research explores the relationship between events in the electoral process and the production of news framings. Muniz *et al.* (2018) mention that stages and phases have a moderating effect on media framing. Dunaway and Lawrence (2015) investigated the newsmaking of news framing, finding

that certain contexts influence the criteria of journalists to select a particular frame.

Thus, the predominance of frames vary depending on the changes that occur in the electoral process; in fact, one of the most disruptive events is the presidential election debate.

Electoral debates should not be considered solely as thematic events, as their results would generate a positional effect (Téllez *et al.*, 2010) or reinforce the attitude of voters (Holbert, 2005). A recent study finds that young voters see the debates as an opportunity to learn about the true characteristics of the candidates (Arceo-Vacas *et al.*, 2020). However, it is to be assumed that its eminently thematic character, regardless of how it is perceived by viewers, should have an impact on the media's post-debate information production.

This study aims to analyze how electoral dynamics influence the prevalent use of strategic, positional, and thematic approaches, taking into account the first and second round electoral debates. The study will focus on how the media react to disruptive situations in campaigns, as electoral debates involve proposals, programs and solutions to campaigns aimed at the candidate's performance or interest in winning elections

## **Electoral Dynamics and Party System in Peru**

It is important to outline the Peruvian electoral process to understand the role it plays in the production of journalistic frames. The Peruvian party system is living a crisis of representation that impairs the disrepute of politics (Levitsky & Cameron 2003; Tanaka, 2007), and is also considered one of the world's extremely volatile party systems (Mainwaring & Torcal, 2005). The weakness of political institutions gives the media more prominence because they become the regulators of politics, as they collect the demand from citizens and transfer it to political actors and vice versa. Peruvian media gained power and centrality in public decisions by developing this mediation process.

The 2016 electoral process began on January 11 with 19 presidential candidates and 28 congressional lists, i.e., with high volatility with respect to their Latin American counterparts (Cruz, 2016; Seifert-Bonifaz, 2016). Political parties became "foster care" for outsiders with little or no party ties included in their presidential lists. Therefore, it was possible that the can-

didate had a political orientation different to the party or its leaders, so that the first round meant the emergence of new faces in politics, whose political orientations were unknown to the population.

The well-known instability of the party system increased by the fact that Congress incorporated a few months ago a regulation that empowered the National Electoral Jury to disqualify any candidate who incurs handouts or irregularities, without any correction possibility of the administrative procedure. As a result, two candidates were excluded in the first round, increasing distrust of the political system.

The debate on the first round of elections was held with ten candidates,<sup>1</sup> although 70% of the electoral preference was concentrated on four of them. Keiko Fujimori was the only one who had secured her position to the second round of elections, but with expectations of obtaining 50% of the votes to win in the first round. The remaining three showed rising curves and similar probabilities of entering the second round in the elections of April 10. Therefore, the electoral debate was extremely important for the positional expectations of all candidates.

Likewise, the second round of elections followed the polarization pattern observed in the second round of 2011, with the participation of Keiko Fujimori and Ollanta Humala, a nationalist-oriented progressive. The difference was that there was no ideological confrontation in the 2016 elections, as both candidates had the same neo-liberal orientation. The support focused on the claim of Fujimorism to anti-fujimorist voters; therefore, in the second round, the personal attributes of candidate Fujimori (daughter of dictator Alberto Fujimori) regarding corruption and questioning her democratic credentials were the center of political discussion (Acevedo, 2016).

The presidential debate on the second round was held one week before elections. Candidate Kuczynski was below the polls and the debate would be crucial to retrace the trend. Five themes were addressed: economic growth and employment promotion; sustainable development and environmental management; education, poverty reduction and inequality; transparency and the fight against corruption; and citizen security and internal order (Portocarrero, 2016). The design focused on thematic issues, and once each

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1 Those who participated in the first round were Gregorio Santos, Fernando Olivera, Verónica Mendoza, Miguel Hilario Toledo, Alfredo Barnechea, Antero Florez-Araoz, Alan García, Keiko Fujimori and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

topic was discussed, the other candidate could comment on the first one's presentation. This led to the personalization of opinions and the debate in various topics, so that the debate focused on the attributes and characteristics of the candidates, giving rise to positional coverage.

## **Methodological framework**

The design of this research is quantitative with a descriptive level. This study incorporates a before and after design to investigate the impact of the first and second round debates on the prevalence of the positional (game), strategy and thematic frames that the media used in the Peruvian presidential election campaign of 2016.

## **Research Questions**

As this is a descriptive study that seeks to investigate the impact of electoral contexts on frame coverage, research questions are asked instead of hypotheses:

- Will the presidential debate affect how often the media use thematic, positional, and strategic frames to cover election news?
- Will thematic and positional framing be more prevalent after debates, but will strategic framing be more present before presidential debates?
- Will the configuration of the first round versus the second round have a significant influence on the prevalence of the three types of frames?

## **Sample and observed periods**

The analysis included 20 journalistic spaces in private media, radio, press and television. The highest rating news programs and the bestselling newspapers of the right, center and left political parties were selected. The sampling unit was all news published three days before and three days after the two presidential debates.

To analyze the impact of the presidential debate on the frames, 2223 electoral news were selected in the pre- and post-debate periods of the first

and second round. The news covered the period from March 28 to June 4, 2016, grouped in four weeks (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Number of news according to presidential debates and voting*

First round					Second round					Total
Pre Debate	Debate	Post debate	Pre elections	Election	Pre Debate	Debate	Post debate	Pre elections	Election	
March 28-April 2nd	April 3rd	April 4 - April 6	April 7-April 9	April 10	May 23rd-May 28	May 29	May 30-June 1st	June 2-June 4	June 5th	
536		397	334		441		310	215		2223

Students were trained in the analysis and codification of news, both in conceptual aspects and in analysis procedures. Each student codified the news on the SurveyMonkey platform, the database was exported to SPSS V23 for consistency and statistical analysis. A coordinator oversaw and unified the coding criteria.

## Defined variables

The independent variable consisted on the time period before and after each presidential debate. Each period consisted of three days, considering that electoral issues remain on the agenda, and the period before elections was included as a comparison variable (see Table 1).

There were three dependent variables: positional (or game) framing, strategic framing, and thematic framing. These frames are based on the proposal of Aalberg *et al.* (2011) who separates strategic framing from (positional) game framing, including much of its indicators, but incorporating others formulated by Jamieson (1992), Patterson (1994), de Vreese and Semetko (2002), de Vreese (2005) and Muñiz (2015). Likewise, the name of the game framing was redefined by the positional framing, since it expresses better the set of indicators referred in the literature.

The measurement of these frames, as stated by Matthes and Kohring (2008), is expressed in a numerical intensity. Each frame has 4 or 5 sub-indicators that are coded as 0=absent and 1=present, so each news could contain

more than one sub-indicator and more than one frame. The score for each frame was calculated by adding its corresponding sub-indicators: zero (0) if the frame was not present in the news and 4 or 5 if it was strongly present.

For constructing the variables, Matthes and Kohring's approach (2008) was used. News from the 2014 election were analyzed, combined with a review of indicators developed by international literature. As a result, indicators were eliminated and others were incorporated that better expressed the thematic, positional and strategic dimensions, so that each indicator is independent, comprehensive and mutually exclusive.

The operational definitions, sub-indicators and reliability used in this research were as follows:

*Strategic framing:* How the media prioritizes in the story the related aspects of personal attributes, candidate motivations, strategies, tactics, activities and campaign resources employed. Four indicators were used: attribution of motivation; customization; campaign tactics and strategies; and competitive resources (see annex 1). This variable has a "Crombach alpha" of 0.631, which according to the standards of political communication with a sample of 2223 news is considered an acceptable reliability (DeSante, 2011).

*Positional framing:* The way the media prioritizes positional advancement or recoil in the story using the metaphors of competition, public opinion results, and the consequences of results, the candidates' advances, and the benefits resulting from campaign actions, to show a better or worse position of a candidate to win the elections. Five indicators were used: language of competition; positional advancement; positional advantage; expression of public opinion and prediction of results (see annex 1). This variable has a "Crombach alpha" of 0.677.

*Thematic framing:* The way the media prioritizes in the story aspects related to the contents proposed by the candidates or the population, with respect to problems, solutions, plans of government, demands, or reforms. Five indicators were used: problematic; demands; solutions; program and change (see annex 1). This variable has a "Crombach alpha" of 0.747.

## Results

The first round discussion was complex because ten candidates participated in a dynamic of peer confrontation, with a lot of sarcasm and roughness. For the analysis, the intensity of the use of the three electoral frames,

before and after the first-round debates, was compared, incorporating a period of three days prior elections.

Regarding which frame was predominant during the first round, a greater presence of thematic frame was observed, the mean of which (0.58) was significantly higher than positional (0.41) and strategic (0.35 see Table 2) frames. These data show some differences from international literature, and studies such as Iyengar (1994) and Paterson (1994) described that the trend of electoral coverage prioritized game-strategic framing of coverage on thematic issues.

What was found would show the need of the media and the citizens to associate candidates, outsiders or new, with issues, solutions and proposals because each political leader personalizes his/her proposal in a weak party system and without re-election. So this prevalence of thematic framing in the first round would respond to the electoral dynamics of a volatilized multi-party political system.

With regard to positional framing, it was expected that the debate would stimulate positional framing with speeches of the winner/loser of the debate. But the results show the opposite, the average before the debate was 0.55, but after the debate it drops to 0.31 (see Table 2). It is possible that the reduction of the mean of positional framing is due to the greater predominance of the other frames.

In addition, the low presence of positional framing (0.31) at the pre-voting stage may be due to a ban on the dissemination of surveys during this period in Peru. In other countries, surveys are allowed up to 24 hours as in Canada, Colombia, France, Norway, Poland or there are no bans as in the United States, Brazil, Finland, United Kingdom, Denmark, Netherlands or Austria (ACE Project, 2020). Hence, the prevalence of positional framing would have a dependence on the polls that are part of the design of the electoral dynamics of each country.

Strategic framing is stable, and we note that there are no significant differences between the periods before and after the electoral debate, and neither in comparison with the three days before elections (see Table 2). The data show that this framing does not have the presence attributed to it in other studies (such as Patterson, 1994, Jamieson, 1993, Muñiz, 2015).

To measure strategic framing along with positional framing as one would only have increased the presence of these two dimensions at all stages of the elections by relegating thematic frame to the background. Therefore, we

checked the hypothesis of Aalberg *et al.* (2011) who argue that positional and strategic frames have different characteristics, but, in addition, we find that the debate influences the reduction of the average of positional frame.

**Table 2**  
*Difference in the means of frames according to the phase of the debate in the first round*

		Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-elections	First round
<i>Positional framing</i>	N	536	397	334	1267
	Mean	0.55	0.31**+	0.31**+	0.41
<i>Strategic framing</i>	N	536	397	334	1267
	Mean	0.32	0.31	0.43	0.35
<i>Thematic framing</i>	N	536	397	334	1267
	Mean	0.47	0.65**+	0.66**+	0.58

Note. \*Significant with respect to the pre-debate \*\*Significant with respect to the post-debate \*\* Significant at 0.01 \* Significant at .05.

The prevalence of thematic frame is a counterfactual outcome. In a ten-candidate debate, issues would have less attention, and subsequent media coverage should highlight personal attributes (strategic framing). On the other hand, we note that news that addresses proposals, analyzes, programs or solutions to problems is increasing.

We can conclude that the first-round debate has a positive impact as it is a public-opinion phenomenon that forces the media to produce more thematic news and reduce positional coverage.

In the presidential debate of the second round, where there were only two candidates Keiko Fujimori and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, the means for the three types of frames are increasing. In addition, positional framing prevailed during the observed period (.95), followed by strategic framing (0.80) and finally thematic framing (0.56) (see Table 3). These results differ from those of the first round and could be related to the different information needs of a fragmented party system. The high average of positional framing at the beginning of the second round may be due to the increase in political

competition found in the Khan study (1991) which can also be applied to the Peruvian case due to high polarization.

Regarding the impact of the debate on positional framing, Téllez *et al.* (2010) argue that the media use the results of the discussions for positional calculation; however, the results show the opposite, as the post-debate average is significantly reduced from 0.95 to 0.65 (see Table 3). These data are consistent with those of the first round, where positional framing also decreases.

Moreover, positional framing drops even more three days before elections. The electoral closure could be a strange explanatory variable, but it could also be concluded that the debate would have an undesirable positive impact, which is the decline in the use of positional framing in coverage.

As for strategic framing, its prevalence in the debate (0.8 in Table 3) would be related to the constant questioning that anti-fujimorist activists made against the Fujimorist candidate for the corruption on her father's government.

According to Holbert (2005), the media could focus on the candidate's deliberation attributes in the debate, thus increasing strategic framing. However, the data show that there are no significant differences in the presence of strategic framing after the electoral debate (see Table 3), which is like what was observed in the first round.

The presence of strategic framing is significantly reduced three days before elections. One explanation is that the prohibition of proselytizing activities 48 hours and political propaganda 24 hours before elections reduce strategic journalistic events. The media would therefore depend heavily on campaign activities for the construction of strategic frames.

As for thematic framing, its presence before the debate is less than in the first round. There are no significant differences in the prevalence of this frame due to the debate, nor with regard to the pre-voting period.

The lesser presence of thematic framing in the second round would be explained because the proposals and plans of government did not change substantially in either candidate, as they were confluent, and at many points they were only differentiated by populist forms or by the authoritarian profile of the Fujimorist candidate. The thematic would therefore not be a journalistic novelty as it was in the first round, nor was there the need to profile the candidate with certain proposals

**Table 3**  
*Difference in the averages of frames according  
to the phase of the debate in the second round*

		Pre-debate	Post-debate	Pre-elections	Total
<i>Positional framing</i>	N	441	310	215	966
	Mean	0.95	0.65**	0.39*++	0.73
<i>Strategic framing</i>	N	441	310	215	966
	Mean	0.80	0.62	0.34+***	0.64
<i>Thematic framing</i>	N	440	303	208	951
	Mean	0.56	0.46	0.44	0.50

*Nota.* \* Significant regarding the pre-debate ++ Significant regarding the post-debate \*\* Significant at 0.01  
\* Significant at .05.

## Conclusions

Regarding the first question, it is concluded that the presidential debates have an impact on the increase or decrease in the intensity of frames in post-debate news. Hence, changes in electoral dynamics can create conditions for coverage that prioritizes, for example, the greater presence of thematic framing.

The differences observed in the intensity of the frame can be explained by the different configuration of the electoral process in a political system with party fragmentation and high polarization such as the Peruvian one. The emergence in each election of new outsiders, without links to ideologies or government programs, requires the media to concentrate on the profile of candidates based on their proposals, which would explain the greater presence of the thematic frame in the first round.

As for the second question, we see that there are changes in the prevalence of framing, but the presidential debate does not affect all framing equally, some reduce (such as the strategic one) and others increase (such as the thematic one), but this will vary depending on the first or second round. Positional framing is the only one that reduces in both rounds, which seems to be in reverse with regard to events such as the electoral debate. Thus, the

relationships between electoral dynamics (such as debate) and the use of frames are not linear, the electoral context could influence on the fact that a particular frame predominates over another.

The prevalence of post-first-round thematic framing would be explained by the characteristics of the electoral process, with a fragmentation of candidates that would encourage the media to profile the candidate by associating it with thematic issues. By contrast, polarization between two candidates in the second round may influence the prevalence of strategic framing, which is less common in parliamentary systems. The results are consistent with recent studies that highlight the importance of the electoral phases and conjunctures on the framing (Muniz *et al.*, 2018; Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015).

On the third question, electoral dynamics would have an influence on the prevalence of framing. The ban on surveys and restrictions on advertising and pre-voting proselytizing activities are an unfavorable scenario for positional framing days before the vote.

The study shows that framing not only depends on the productive intentions of journalists to generate certain effects in audiences, as it has been mentioned (Scheufele, 1999; Lecheler & de Vreese 2019), but it also demonstrates that journalistic production processes interact with political processes. Therefore, these questions work only as independent variables that affect public perception of events. Instead, the framing is also affected—as dependent variables—by electoral events.

The results increase the complexity of understanding the relationships between electoral dynamics and frame production. As McMenamin *et al.* (2021) say, there may be a gap between electoral political dynamics and media framing, which may show greater media autonomy or perhaps a gap between political competition and media representation. In the case analyzed, the difference in the intensity on the use of frames may be because media prioritize strategic frames in favor of neoliberal or populist candidates of their choice.

In addition, the study highlights the centrality of presidential debates for democracy but suggests improving its design. The French debate model implemented in Peru is often more attractive to the public because it includes confrontation between candidates, but it could promote conflict framing analyzed by some authors (Bartholomé *et al.*, 2017; Macassi, 2019). By contrast, the presence of the panel of journalists and the non-direct confron-

tation between candidates, as Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) say, reduce the conflict and make it easier for the topic to be the focus of the debate.

It is also observed that, as Gauthier (1998) argues, presidential debates are triggers for political events, which often attract media attention to more substantive issues and generate a discursive extension to a wider audience (Verón, 2001). This would promote interpersonal deliberation during the elections and its subsequent contribution to democracy (Norris, 2000), but that would also motivate the reduction of positional framing as shown in this study.

An electoral process design that encourages debate can impact on more programmatic media coverage that contributes to the quality of democracy through a design of the electoral process that promotes debate and participation in media production and public, beyond the direct impact on production routines and patterns.

In the future, studies could be conducted to qualitatively specify the narrative frames present in the coverage of electoral debates to identify elements of the debates that stimulate the use of thematic framing.

## Support and financial support of the research

Entity: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima-Peru), grant DGI-2016-307.

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## **Annexed 1. Sub-indicators of each electoral frame**

### **Strategic framing**

- Competitive resources: the narrative refers to the candidates' resources, endorsements, favoritism or media coverage.
- Personalization: the narrative focuses on the advantages or disadvantages of their style, performance and personal attributes.
- Motivational attribution: the narrative refers to the candidates' reasons or strategies to perform their activities, speeches or behaviors.
- Campaign tactics and strategies: the discourse focuses on the elements of the campaign implemented by the candidates to improve their position in the elections.

### **Positional framing**

- Positional advantage: the discourse emphasizes that the candidates' actions or performance improve or consolidate his/her position.
- Positional advancement: the discourse shows how politicians are, their proposals or ideas in terms of whether they grow/decline; winners and/or losers; advance/regress.
- Language of competition: the narrative uses a language of metaphors, generally associated with sport, competition, race, games or even war.
- Prediction of results: the discourse focuses on the positive or negative results of elections with respect to the candidates or their party.
- Expression of public opinion: the discourse focuses on survey data, interviews, or refers to the prevailing opinion regarding political actors, their proposals or ideas.

## **Thematic framing**

- Programmatic: the discourse refers to the contents of the government plans or programs of the candidates or parties.
- Change: the discourse refers to institutional reforms, public policies, change of approaches, modification of laws.
- Problems: the news narrative focuses on general problems (health, education, crime).
- Demands: the news narrative refers to the needs, requests or complaints of the population (data, opinions).
- Solutions: the discourse emphasizes the proposals or solutions, social programs, public policies of the candidates to certain conditions, situations or problems.



MISCELLANEOUS

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MISCELÁNEA



## **Emotions, public space, and urban images in the context of COVID-19**

### ***Emociones, espacio público e imágenes urbanas en el contexto de COVID-19***

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**Received on:** 29/04/2021 **Revised on:** 17/06/2021 **Accepted on:** 05/09/2021 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

**Suggested citation:** Cabrera-Barona, P., Barragán-Ochoa, F., Carrión, A., Valdez, F., & López-Sandoval M. F. (2022). Emotions, public space, and urban images in the context of COVID-19. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 139-161. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.06>

### **Abstract**

*During the COVID-19 pandemic, confinement and mobility restrictions gave rise to different questions regarding the use and perceptions on public space, where the relational and contextual properties of this space may cause a diversity of emotions. We use machine learning and social network analysis to explore emotions in relation to the public space, based on attributes extracted from photos of the city of Quito, Ecuador, taken between April and June 2020. Our results show that an attribute of the urban landscape can be associated with positive and negative emotions, and that opposite attributes of the images (i.e., glossy and dirty) can both influence positive emotions regarding public space. This research inaugurates a new field of study in Latin America regarding urban emotions, and also supports a better understanding of citizen perceptions of the public space during the pandemic crisis.*

### **Keywords**

*Images, emotions, COVID-19, public space, machine learning, social network analysis.*

### **Resumen**

El confinamiento y las restricciones de movilidad durante la pandemia de COVID-19 han dado lugar a una serie de dilemas sobre el uso y percepción del espacio público, donde sus propiedades relacionales y contextuales pueden dar lugar a una diversidad de emociones. Con la aplicación de herramientas *machine learning* y *social network analysis*, exploramos emociones sobre el espacio público basadas en atributos de imágenes fotográficas en la ciudad de Quito, Ecuador, tomadas entre abril y junio de 2020. Los resultados muestran emociones positivas y negativas asociadas a un mismo atributo del paisaje urbano, mientras que atributos que pueden considerarse opuestos (como “brillante” y “sucio”) podrían tener mayor influencia en los sentimientos positivos sobre dicho espacio. Esta investigación abre un nuevo campo de estudio en la región sobre las emociones urbanas, y ofrece un mejor entendimiento de las percepciones de los ciudadanos sobre el espacio público durante la crisis de la pandemia.

### **Palabras clave**

*Imágenes, emociones, COVID-19, espacio público, machine learning, social network analysis.*

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## **Introduction**

In the framework of current disruptive technologies, the methods to study cities are increasingly based on data; human-central urban data science becomes the basis for truly intelligent city planning (Resch & Szell, 2019). In the human-environment relationship, the objective dimension of the ecological context (such as the economy or the environment) and the subjecti-

ve dimension of the sense of place and human emotions are related (Huang *et al.*, 2020). Human emotions are a type of psychological state expressed in response to events in the ecological context (Li *et al.*, 2020). The forms of encounter, contact, interaction and experience in certain places generate emergent properties that alter the perception of space, i.e., in the connection between the geography of emotions and psychology, beyond emotion as an individualized subjective experience, one must move toward localized relational perspectives (Bondi, 2005).

Tuan (1976, 1990), from a humanistic geography, emphasizes that the spatial dimensions adapt to the human sense of fit, purpose and position and not the other way round. In other words, there is a revaluation of experience and subjectivity as a constituent element of both subjects and places, taking into account that there may also be basic or primitive emotions (Ekman, 1999). In this scenario, there are pairs of relationships between positive and negative emotions, active or passive to appreciate and interact with the landscape: joy-sadness, tranquility-fear, hope-melancholy, success-frustration, love-hate, protection-apathy, certainty-doubt, pleasure-suffering, security-danger or belonging-anomia. However, affective and cognitive processes generate deep perceptions, memories, and anticipations, highlighting that emotions arise in specific situations and contexts (Izard, 2007).

In this sense, citizens can become “sensors” of space transformations by voluntarily providing geographic information (Goodchild, 2007), including their perspectives and emotions on the public landscape, thus facilitating citizen science for a better understanding of urban phenomena. Increasing access to mobile devices with navigation and satellite positioning systems allows spatial data to be generated, shared and exchanged. The rich and abundant information that citizens can provide, including perceptions, can be analyzed efficiently through machine learning techniques (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Machine learning (ML) is an automated learning that describes general patterns and inferences for a set of data. Voluntary geographic reference data, processed within ML techniques, can provide information to support new strategies for urban planning and management. On the one hand, the penetration of devices with Internet services and localization allows to generate data about interactions and everyday life in cities. On the other hand, the urban inhabitants can capture and register the ways of encounter and co-existence in the public space.

The urban public space includes a variety of places, such as parks, squares, sidewalks, playgrounds, among others. Thus, visual images of the public space are means that can offer possibilities for citizens to be active agents in the production and representation of the urban landscape in specific contexts, such as in the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, a complex web is established between places and human perceptions and representations. This configuration forms a network that, beyond its chaotic expression, is built on structural relationships, which can be evidenced through social network analysis (SNA). SNA as a paradigm of social science research has spread over the last decades with the idea that social life occurs by the relationships and patterns that form them (Marin & Wellman, 2014).

The COVID-19 disease, caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus, has mainly affected cities because of the high population that facilitate the spread of the virus. To curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease, governments implemented measures in early 2020 that included social distancing, quarantine, and mobility restrictions. In this context, urban public space becomes an emptied space (Cabrera-Barona & Carrión, 2020), which can disconnect from its human dimension, limiting attachment to the place. Attachment to the place is a concept that has different edges, being a field of study that encompasses various factors (Brown *et al.*, 2015; Hidalgo, 2013; Kamalipour *et al.* 2012; Lewicka, 2008; Ujang, 2012), including being understood as a determinant of human emotions, where the importance a person can give to a space is also taken into account when not in it (Hidalgo, 2013), and also the formation or construction of place identity (Ujang, 2012). Attachment to a place can be understood through two general dimensions, such as social and physical (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), which in turn are defining the public space.

The relevance of public space lies in that it is a collective space that facilitates social relations and interactions (Ricart & Remesar, 2013), and it gives life to the city as a system, and is a source of diverse urban social networks. The public space is the democratizing place of the human encounters of the city, and being interpreted as a social construct, it relates not only to attachment to the place or to the identity of the place, but also to its memory. Attachment, identity and memory of place can be studied through collective perceptions of the city or of different neighborhoods or districts of the city (Lewicka, 2008).

The drastic change that citizenship experienced during confinement and mobility restrictions originated different perspectives on public and private space (Cabrera-Barona & Carrión, 2020). Understanding how individuals perceived urban space in moments they could go out during confinement (for example to buy food), might contribute to a better understanding of the human-environment relationship through emotions, in specific moments such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploring these emotions allows to get ideas for thinking about a healthier, more resilient and inclusive city, not only during pandemic, but also for the future where we overcome the existing health crisis while writing this article.

Recently, various studies have been conducted to explore people's emotions in relation to the pandemic, through non-traditional techniques such as machine learning. For example, Choudrie *et al.* (2021) applied in-depth learning and natural language processing to better understand the emotions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic from social media data, finding an increase in feelings of concern and anger during the 2020 lockdown. An analysis of the feelings of press headlines about COVID-19 has also been conducted using the Canadian Emotional Words Lexicon to analyze positive, neutral, and negative feelings about the pandemic (Aslam *et al.*, 2020). The use of social network analysis has also allowed to evaluate the dynamics of emotions on COVID-19, mainly using social media data such as Twitter (Kaur *et al.*, 2020; Xue *et al.*, 2020). On the other side, studies have used photographs to better understand the impacts of the pandemic on society. For example, Woodford and Bussey (2021) used photo-provocation to capture the impacts of social distancing on the well-being of athletes, in aspects such as their training capacity and motivation during pandemic confinement.

An exploratory research was carried out, proposing a new methodological framework based on photo-provocation, techniques of machine learning and social network analysis (we use the English terms because are also known in Spanish) to analyze emotions in relation to photographs of the public space taken by residents of the city of Quito, Ecuador. Citizen science and the use of voluntary geographic information (VGI) provided through digital tools are still at an early stage in social studies in cities in Ecuador, and in Latin America in general. There are few experiences in this area, such as using collaborative data for mobility analysis, pedestrian accessibility and

public space (Orellana *et al.*, 2020). In fact, in a review of IGV's state of art in Latin America, Hernández Magaña and Güiza Valverde (2016)) identified what aspects of IGV have been addressed in participatory mapping, spatial data infrastructure, and risk analysis; thus, the analysis of other information with a spatial nature, such as geo-localized photographs expressing elements of urban space, have merely been analyzed from a quantitative approach applied to qualitative and subjective data. According to our knowledge and experience, this is the first research that analyzes a type of VGI, photographs, with techniques of machine learning (ML) and social network analysis (SNA), in order to explore human emotions associated with images, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following section of the article presents details of the different methods applied. Secondly we present the results obtained, and then we develop a discussion section, taking into account various concepts and perspectives on the city, the public space, and the pandemic. The article ends with a conclusion of general ideas from this research.

## Methods

(<https://survey123.arcgis.com/>) for residents of Quito, applying a snowball strategy and disseminating it through social networks with support from the Geographic Association of Ecuador. The survey was implemented from late April to early June 2020, when mobility and social distancing restrictions were adopted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the survey we requested to upload photographs of public spaces of the city, and to report the emotions that generated each image, also facilitating their geo-location. We obtained 46 answers, each with their photographic and emotional record.

Using the “wordcloud” and “tm” libraries of R software run through RStudio, we generate a word cloud of the emotions associated with photographs to qualitatively understand which words are the most outstanding in terms of the emotions expressed by the people who answered the survey. We then apply a deep convolutional neural network of the PlacesCNN model, previously trained using the Places databases (Zhou *et al.*, 2017) of the MIT Place2 initiative (<http://places2.csail.mit.edu/>). These databases have a little over 10 million photographs, labeled, taking into account more than 400 semantic scenic categories, covering almost every type of place a person can

find in the world (Zhou *et al.*, 2017). The neural network used in Place2 is a residual convolutional neuronal network, a type of neural network that has already been successfully used to predict emotions from visual elements or attributes of urban images (Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

A neural network is convolutional when filters are applied for better and more efficient image segmentation by reducing its size and extracting its most representative data. A neural network is residual when it has shortcut connections between layers of the network, where this type of connections between two layers adds the results of the previous layer to the results of the accumulated layers (He *et al.*, 2016). Neural network layers are reformulated as residual learning functions in reference to income layers. In other words, the result of a neuron in a superficial layer is added to an associated neuron located in a deep layer of the network. This process prevents degradation of information between different layers of the neural network.

Neural network analysis was applied to each of the photographs to obtain the different attributes or characteristics of each image. The neural network produces a set of words representing the attributes of the image. For example, one attribute may be “natural light” and another may be “asphalt,” depending on what real-world characteristics the neural network finds in each photograph. We then built a co-occurrence matrix, where the rows represented each image and the columns all the attributes found in the group of 46 photographs. The attributes were encoded in binary form, assigning 0 if an attribute does not appear in the photograph, and 1 if it appears in the photograph. One more column was added to the database, representing the positive emotions reported for each image, also expressing this in a binary way (Zhang *et al.*, 2018), using value 1 if the photograph was associated with a positive emotion, and 0 if it was not associated with a positive emotion. As can be seen, the different variables in this study are expressed in a dichotomous way, because binarization facilitates the operationalization of algorithms to perform classification and regression tasks (prediction) regarding photographic images and their associated emotions (Datta *et al.*, 2008; Datta *et al.*, 2006; Dhar *et al.*, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

Subsequently, the support vector machines (SVM) technique was used to identify the attributes that most influence the emotions of each image, taking as reference positivity (values of 1, as mentioned above). SVM is a computer-efficient ML technique, being able to efficiently and adequately

learn classification and regression tasks, even with small samples (Gholami & Fakhari, 2017; Meng & Zhao, 2015). It can be considered a powerful binary classification technique that allows the space of the data to be projected into higher dimensions, where two classes (for example, 0 and 1) can be separated linearly (Datta *et al.*, 2006). The R software library “e1071” run via RStudio was used for calculating SVM. An SVM-based regression was applied, with radial kernel function, cost of 1 (for more flexible margins in data separation), and epsilon of 0.1 (to minimize errors).

Finally, a SNA was applied in the free Gephi software to evaluate the multiple relationships between evoked emotions and the presence/absence of attributes in each image. Every emotion as well as every attribute of the images are nodes of the social network. The matches between the emotions reported by the people surveyed and the attributes of the images are expressed through “arcs” that show a link between those nodes. Viewing the network allows to see which nodes are closest to each other because of the strength of their links. In addition, a search for “modularities” was applied, allowing to determine subsets (subnets) characterized by the strength of their internal relations. The importance of nodes in the network was analyzed based on their “authority”, calculated from HITS (Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search) algorithm (Kleinberg, 1999). This indicator quantifies the strength and importance of links for each node in the network. In a second moment, network analysis focuses on established correlations that result in the shaping of modularities or subnets.

## Results

Figure 1 shows the word cloud of the emotions associated with photos. The most outstanding term is “hope”, while “peace”, “care” and “concern” are frequent emotions in respondents.

**Figure 1**  
*Word cloud of emotions*



Figure 2 shows an example of attributes obtained through the applied neural network. It is noted that the attributes of the photograph are: “natural light”, “human construction”, “open area”, “not horizon”, “trees”, “foliage”, “leaves”, “pavement”, “sunny”. In the case of this study, the attributes of “trees”, “foliage” and “leaves” were considered as one, “urban green”. It is important to remember that the attributes obtained through the neural network used are based on semantic categories comprising 98% of all types of sites found in the world (Zhou *et al.*, 2017), so it can be applied practically universally, including the images of the city of Quito from this research.

**Figure 2**

*Photograph of the Amazonas Avenue, in the sector of La Mariscal, Quito*



Photography is compared, as an example, to the results obtained in extracting attributes of a photograph through the convolutional neural network implemented in the PlacesCNN model (<http://places2.csail.mit.edu/index.html>)

As mentioned above, all these emotions were transformed into binary code for the SVM modeling. A mean quadratic error was obtained from the SVM regression model of 0.37, indicating that the model can predict emotions appropriately: a mean quadratic error lower than 0.5 indicates an appropriate ability of the model to predict data more reliably. Table 1 shows the results of the scores assigned to attributes of the photographs obtained from the SVM-based regression model. The higher the score, the more influence an attribute has to modify positive emotions of people. It is interesting how the Glossy attribute (glossy, shiny) stands out from others as the attribute that could influence or change more a positive emotion. Other significant attributes are Glass (glass, crystal), Dirty (dirty), Transportation (Transport), Plastic (Plastic), Wood and Enclosed area. On the other hand, Asphalt (pavement, asphalt) and Clouds (clouds) appear as the factors that least influence on positive emotions, showing which extreme visual approaches, such as seeing clouds or asphalt (top and bottom), has less influence on positive emotions, also suggesting that elements that most commonly enter a person's line of sight (see buildings, see trees, see flowers) are the ones that can influence their emotions the most.

**Table 1**  
*Results of the scores assigned to attributes  
of the photographs obtained from the SVM model*

Atributo	Puntaje
<i>Glossy</i>	9.48
<i>Glass</i>	6.94
<i>Dirty</i>	6.71
<i>Transporting</i>	5.93
<i>Playing</i>	5.30
<i>Wood</i>	5.30
<i>Plastic</i>	5.29
<i>Enclosed area</i>	5.00
<i>Flowers</i>	4.70
<i>Indoor light</i>	4.70
<i>Metal</i>	4.69
<i>Manmade</i>	4.64
<i>Foliage-Trees-Grass</i>	3.96
<i>Biking</i>	2.73
<i>Natural light</i>	2.53
<i>Open area</i>	2.48
<i>Working space</i>	1.64
<i>Driving</i>	1.18
<i>Sunny</i>	1.05
<i>No horizon</i>	1.04
<i>Clouds</i>	0.66
<i>Asphalt</i>	0.65

Figure 4 shows the graphical expression of network analysis that indicates the location and relationships between the different nodes. It is observed that the Manmade attribute (human manufacture) has the greatest authority,



Six subnets have been identified, as shown in Table 2. Subnets A and D have the most nodes and cover a significant area of the total network, especially at the bottom. It is followed by network F, covering a large area where it overlaps with subnet A, C and E. The latter two have the same number of nodes and are on the right side of the network: E to the top and C to the bottom. Finally, subnet B is the smallest and is located away from the others, in the lower part to the left without generating overpositions with others, except subnet D.

**Table 2**  
*Emotions subnets and spatial attributes*

Subnet	Emotions	Network and attributes
A	Company, enthusiasm, longing, faith, solidarity, abandonment, anger, enjoyment.	<i>Manmade, open areas, clouds, dirty, flowers.</i>
B	Hope, alternative.	<i>Plastic, playing, wood.</i>
C	Peace, love, beauty, satisfaction, compassion.	<i>Natural light, sunny.</i>
D	Anguish, sadness, loneliness, normal, commitment, concern, alert, patience, uncertainty.	<i>Driving, asphalt, transporting, biking, glass.</i>
E	Deception, surprise, insecurity, anxiety.	<i>No horizon, metal, working.</i>
F	Emptiness, fear, novelty, care.	<i>Foliage-Trees-Grass, enclosed areas, indoor light, glossy.</i>

There are several links inside the subnets that are interesting to mention. On the one hand, subnet A shows a fairly generalist view of the space in which both artificial spaces and open areas, clouds (sky) and dirt are articulated. There are a number of emotions linked to a positive expectation such as enthusiasm, faith and solidarity. Subnet D is closely related to mobility infrastructure space. Emotions are more linked to sadness, loneliness, and concern, among others. The places on this subnet are the ones that have expressed the greatest changes in the time of confinement, so they evoke different feelings clearly less hopeful. Subnet F includes green spaces, internal areas, and work areas. In the face of these spaces, emotions refer to emptiness, fear, novelty and care. The spaces that are part of this subnet also suffered important changes in the context of confinement, which is expressed in the sense of fear, although without reaching the sadness or concern of the previous subnet. Subnet E closely resembles the locations and feelings of Subnet F.

Closed and working places generate disappointment, surprise, insecurity and anxiety among the population. On the contrary, there are the spaces with natural and sunny light in subnetwork C that provoke feelings that are totally favorable to human development such as tranquility, love, beauty, satisfaction and compassion. This subnet underlines the importance of such spaces for social welfare. Finally, there are spaces in subnet B where material elements such as plastic and wood stand out with a playful purpose for which the population evokes emotions of hope and the search for alternatives.

## Discussion

This research presents information of human emotions in public spaces in Quito, during the restrictions of mobility and confinement in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Emotional behavior has been captured through feelings reported by people surveyed, who shared personal photographs of the urban landscape. An important contribution of our research is to support the debate on the role and situation of urban public space during the pandemic crisis. This study is one of the first contributions in Latin America on understanding the potential of considering urban residents as “sensors” or monitors of phenomena, taking into account context and location (Sagl *et al.*, 2015). In addition, as mentioned above, it is the first research that applies ML and SNA techniques to explore human emotions associated with images, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This enhancement of research has two key implications. First, traditionally applied approaches to big data are moved (our study is not a big data analysis) to a certain number of qualitative data provided by voluntary citizens in a complex situation, the COVID-19 pandemic, without losing methodological robustness. For example, if having a neural network trained to recognize virtually any attribute of a space in the world, why not applying it to images like those used in this study, without creating a new neural network just for the urban landscape of the city of Quito? The second implication is that it opens a field of study little explored in Latin America: the study of perceptions, emotions and urban feelings, applying quantitative methods.

Our results evidence that the COVID-19 context has created a diversity of emotions with respect to urban public space. The results of the ML and SNA analysis indicate that spatial attributes such as outdoor areas and clo-

sed areas have associations with people's feelings. One attribute that also influences positivity was "transport," and this is associated with emotions of anguish, loneliness, normal, commitment, concern, alert, patience, and uncertainty. These findings relate to the uncertainty and anguish about social distancing in public transport, the alert and concern that shared transport can have, and the commitment, loneliness and warning that micro-mobility devices and bicycles can cause. Understanding transportation-related emotions in "seeing COVID-19 as the city", can support decision-making to increase the safety and health of urban residents. Problems such as anxiety and perceptions of low security have already been reported as transport issues to be solved in the context of COVID-19 (Dong *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, the results of SVM also suggest that closed areas may influence positive feelings. Many people may have built the idea of cars and private spaces as safe shelters against the pandemic. Jasiński (2020) states that there has been an erosion of public space along with privatization of transport during the pandemic, while van Eck *et al.* (2020) affirm that the pandemic is part of the global marketing and privatization processes that eliminate public sense in urban space. In this sense, "protected" and open space, but also private closed space, may be acting as socio-spatial constructs of emotions during the COVID-19 crisis. In SNA, natural light attribute is related with positive feelings, while the open areas attribute is associated with both positive and negative feelings. This suggests that more than the space itself, it is its "quality" (for example, natural light) that changes positive emotions during confinement.

Urban public space facilitates social interactions; this capacity has been reduced during the pandemic, even more so in cases of spontaneous and informal interrelation (Honey-Rosés *et al.*, 2020). But it is complex to define the extent to which the pandemic will change the social configuration of public space. It is likely that a sort of "privatization" of this space will increase, where wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance, and going deeper into virtual spaces will undermine the qualities of public space, such as being surrounded by people and talking (Jasiński, 2020). In Latin American cities, the pandemic could exert pressure for a re-configuration of public space where some spaces will be more valued while others will be avoided for security reasons (Honey-Rosés *et al.*, 2020). Understanding emotions related to these re-configurations will be essential for proper urban planning. The challenge is that such emotions are and will be changing and dynamic, and

the identification of patterns of individual-urban feelings is key to delineating any planning action. Public space is a democratizing means of society, i.e., it is a means of equal, open, inclusive, and sometimes even unexpected encounters (Low & Smart, 2020). We had mentioned that public spaces are for example squares, parks and playgrounds. It is interesting how characteristics that may appear in these spaces (“bright”, “dirty”, “play”, “wood”, “plastic”) are attributes that have the highest weights in influencing or changing positivity during the pandemic. Does it mean a reaction to the “privatization” of the public space mentioned above? Possibly the people who responded to our survey put in their photos and emotions a willingness to value the qualities of public space as a democratizing and strengthening space of the urban collective.

Our results also indicate which open areas and characteristics, such as having flowers, are associated with positive feelings such as enthusiasm and faith. In this way we validate two aspects in the study of urban feelings: the relationship of urban green with well-being, and the possibility of representing emotions and their relationship with urban green using qualitative data such as photographs (Kothencz *et al.*, 2017). Green infrastructure in the city and public-social space are key to ensuring ecosystem services (such as provision, regulation, cultural services) during the pandemic (Hanzl, 2020), and these will remain critical in the post-pandemic city. Open and public urban areas, such as parks, can be considered fully democratic public spaces. For Low and Smart (2020) this kind of space is more open and inclusive; these are places where human encounters are democratized. Other fully democratic public spaces are squares, boulevards, and even walkways.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these spaces play a dual role: they become opportunities that are different from pandemic confinement (associated with feelings like enthusiasm and enjoyment), but they can also be seen as places that would affect human relationships (originating feelings like abandonment and anger). This phenomenon is called uncertainty and abandonment of the urban public place, and includes dichotomies of human emotions such as those identified, as well as distrust of finding an infected person in the public space, unintentionally. Especially in the time of significant restrictions of human mobility, time when photographs were taken, the public space was that place of abandonment, of the non-encounter with the other. The spaces in a city are heterogeneous, but they are also inequitable. In the COVID-19 crisis, a dialectic of placement-displacement happens,

showing the unequal distributions of power over access and exclusion of a place (Devine-Wright *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, the results obtained in this research demonstrate a cognitive location-displacement of the public space, where feelings denoting both attachment and exclusion can be expressed for the same element of the physical-environmental context of the city.

This double emotional sense is clearly found in the results of the SVM technique. Both “bright” and “dirty” are environmental qualities that are influencing people’s positive emotions during the pandemic, even though these environmental attributes have always been present in the city. As stated by Acuto *et al.*, (2020) we must “see COVID-19 as the city”, and this allows us to see that there are reactions of citizens to the disruptions of pandemic; and in addition to this crisis the city must not only be understood from its infrastructure (for example, hospitals) and its local government, as a social network that can offer community-based solutions. One of these solutions can stem from the very recognition that the value of public space as a social construct must be incorporated into inclusive and healthy city planning. Thus, one of the emerging questions regarding public space during the pandemic is how a renewed conception of “good citizen” can be built (Devine-Wright *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, in the pandemic, good citizens express their concern for their well-being, but also their concern for the well-being of others, and would possibly redefine the public space of the post-pandemic city, where social justice, social inclusion, and public health are key dimensions of smart cities.

This study provides useful information to better understand the emotions of urban residents during the pandemic to assess their relationship with public space, and offers an original and potential methodological approach, including the feasibility of transferring the methodology applied to other spaces and contexts. However, the exploratory sense of this research and its limitations allow conducting further research during and after the pandemic. While we have been able to identify various links between public space and emotions, we believe that future studies could identify in more detail and even validate certain associations between elements of public space and the individual feelings of people, incorporating spatial analysis of context-specific geo-localized emotions. People’s feelings depend not only on perceptions about an element of space, but also on a complex socio-spatial configuration based on previous experiences and cognitive schemes in relation to broader spatial representations.

In this regard, future research can also obtain information on feelings related to public space during crisis, which go beyond the specific scope of the pandemic. Emotions, feelings, perceptions and representations are dynamics that occur from experiential processes and levels of knowledge of the environment. Probably the feeling of fear after confinement is less, which is evident in the use of space. In addition, an upcoming research may also include more respondents and make a demographic characterization of them to offer other angles of analysis and understand more about the links between personal feelings and places. Another future research could generate typologies of public spaces and link such typologies to levels of attachment to the place in pandemic and post-pandemic contexts. In general, we believe that this study opens up a field of study of geographies of perceptions with artificial intelligence support, new in Latin America, with the idea that a better understanding of the links between emotions and spaces is and will be useful for urban management during and after the pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

Emotions are essential elements in building public space. Certainly, humanistic geography provides a framework for engaging with emotional dimensions in experiences and attachment to place. However, perceptions and representations of urban space go beyond the individual subjectivity of citizens, and constitute relational and emerging properties that provide dynamics to the use and transformation of the urban landscape through daily practices. In this regard, the collection of voluntary geographical information and its processing through quantitative techniques allows analyzing recurrent patterns that contribute to the understanding of urban space. We have found contradictory attributes (such as “bright” and “dirty”) and fundamental attributes in urban life (such as “transport” and “play”) that can change positive feelings during pandemic. Also, we identify which attributes, such as “open areas”, are associated with conflicting feelings, while others such as “natural light” and “sunny” are clearly related to positive emotions. In general, this research demonstrates diversity and complexity of emotion-attribute relationships in the landscape, and although some results may seem contradictory at first sight, the diversity of perceptions generated by the urban landscape at the time of the pandemic is demonstrated: a strong identi-

ty and at the same time an abandonment of the public space of the city. This inclusion-exclusion, this location-displacement, observed in the emotions analyzed suggest that the redefinition of urban space is necessary to make it resilient to global phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Engagement of the Spanish, English and German health ministries on TikTok

### *Engagement de los ministerios de sanidad español, inglés y alemán en TikTok*

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**Received on:** 29/11/2021 **Revised on:** 30/12/2021 **Accepted on:** 18/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

#### **Abstract**

During the pandemic caused by Covid-19, government-dependent institutions had to take on numerous challenges, including communication efforts to inform citizens about the situation. One of the main communication channels was social networks and, among them, the emerging social network TikTok. This study addresses the analysis of the engagement of three European ministries of health, that of Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany, on the social network TikTok. The objective of the study is to conclude which are the communication strategies of each profile and which content achieved greater engagement with users. These countries are the only ones that have a profile on the social network, and they were created during the pandemic caused by Covid-19, so the work of the ministries and the content created on TikTok was influenced by the health situation. In this study, the methodology used was content analysis, studying each of the profiles of the health ministries and each of the published videos. Each country took on the challenge differently, Germany was the profile that created the most content and the one that achieved the highest levels of engagement; The United Kingdom only published eight videos, but it achieved very high engagement figures and Spain, unlike its European peers, achieved more humble engagement levels.

#### **Keywords**

*Engagement, TikTok, Covid-19, politics, health, Spain, United Kingdom, Germany.*

**Suggested citation:** Forja-Pena T. (2022). *Engagement de los ministerios de sanidad español, inglés y alemán en TikTok. Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 163-182. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.07>

## Resumen

Durante la pandemia provocada por el Covid-19, las instituciones dependientes de los gobiernos tuvieron que asumir numerosos retos, entre ellos los esfuerzos de comunicación para informar a la ciudadanía sobre la situación. Uno de los principales canales de comunicación fueron las redes sociales, incluida la emergente red social TikTok. Este estudio analiza el *engagement* de tres ministerios de sanidad europeos, el de España, Reino Unido y Alemania, en la red social TikTok. El objetivo del estudio es concluir cuáles son las estrategias de comunicación de cada perfil y qué contenidos lograron un mayor *engagement* con los usuarios. Estos países son los únicos que tienen perfil en la red social y fueron creados durante la pandemia provocada por la Covid-19, por lo que la labor de los ministerios y el contenido creado en TikTok se vio influenciado por la situación sanitaria. En este estudio se utilizó la metodología de análisis de contenidos, estudiando cada uno de los perfiles de los ministerios de sanidad y también cada uno de los vídeos publicados. Cada país asumió el reto de manera diferente, Alemania fue el perfil que creó más contenido y logró los niveles, más altos de *engagement*; Reino Unido solo publicó ocho vídeos, pero consiguió unas cifras de *engagement* muy elevados y España, a diferencia de sus compañeros europeos logró unos niveles de *engagement* más humildes.

## Palabras clave

Engagement, TikTok, Covid-19, política, sanidad, España, Reino Unido, Alemania.

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## Introduction

Covid-19 has changed citizens' working routines. The health crisis affected all the institutions that were forced to fight an unknown virus and impose tough and complex measures to control it in the best way, while keeping the population informed. The ministries of health in each country were one of the actors responsible for this function. The methods of communication with the population were both through traditional channels and more innovative ones. Although many had profiles on several social networks, they took advantage of the situation to enter the emerging social network TikTok.

The target of this work is the European ministries of health which have a profile on the social network TikTok. In this case, Spain (@sanidadgob), the United Kingdom (@nhsuk) and Germany (@bmg\_bund). In this study, the engagement that these three profiles have generated since their creation

will be analyzed, taking into account the different strategies developed by the communication teams in each country and the type of content that generated the most commitment among TikTok users.

## **Topic contextualization and previous studies**

### *The TikTok phenomenon*

TikTok originated in China in September 2016 under the name Douyin, within ByteDance. The application made it possible to create music videos in which users performed lipsync. In November 2017, the company merged with Musical.ly and created TikTok, being Douyin version the one launched to the western market (Ballesteros-Herencia, 2020; Kumar & Prabha, 2019; Vázquez-Herrero *et al.*, 2020; Vintimilla-León & Torres-Toukourmidis, 2021).

As explained by Xu *et al.* (2019) the expansion of TikTok, Douyin in China, was possible by the strategy of the creative company ByteDance, which used four lines of action: promotion by recognized people, investment in marketing, online and offline activities and expansion to other countries. For the international presentation of the application, they chose to change the name to TikTok and began expanding it in the neighboring countries such as Japan, South Korea or Thailand. They would then access the Western market, where they placed among the applications with the most downloads and most active users (Xu *et al.*, 2019).

TikTok is a short video creation and broadcast application. This type of video is “broadcast to the public through mobile internet technology, with entertainment, science, singing and fashion being its main content” (Yang *et al.*, 2019, p. 340). Although social network content was linked to lipsync, it was diversified and included challengers, dances, anecdotes, recipes, but smoke videos became one of the most common themes (Wang, 2020).

According to the Digital Report 2021 of We are social (2021a), TikTok managed to position globally as the seventh most widely used social platform, with 689 million active users in January 2021. It was also placed in 2021 as the fourth social network where users spend the most time, about 13,3 hours a month. Focusing only on mobile consumption, in 2020, TikTok was the most downloaded application and the second where users spent the most time.

Looking at the data from the Spanish variant of the Digital 2021 report by We are social (2021b), it can be seen that TikTok is the tenth application with the most users monthly in 2020 and in the same year it was the mobile application with the most downloads, regardless of gaming applications.

### *Engagement and political participation in the age of digitization*

Participation is needed when talking about engagement. Carpentier (2011) explained that the concept of participation “is not a fixed notion, but is deeply rooted in our political realities and, therefore, it is the subject of intense and lasting ideological struggles” (p. 351). For this reason, a theoretical approach to the concepts of engagement and participation must be made.

Engagement can be translated as a commitment, although the term in English provides nuances that relate to motivation, enthusiasm, and involvement (Bergillos, 2017). The same author, Ignacio Bergillos (2017), also notes that engagement is interpreted as different from participation but understands them as complementary and the presence of both is necessary, since they are “two sides of the same coin”.

For its part, Nico Carpentier (2011) defined participation as “codecision,” which is “a situation where the actors involved in decision-making processes (formal or informal) are related with each other through power relations that (to some extent) are egalitarian” (Carpentier *et al.*, 2013, p. 132). Pateman, in his book *Democratic Theory and Participation* explained the concept of participation as “a process in which every member of a decision-making body has the same power to determine the outcome of decisions” (Pateman, 1970, p. 71).

Committed individuals have “feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness and pride” (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 4) generating engagement. This feeling or commitment is understood as cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal attachment (Guidry *et al.*, 2017; Johnston, 2014; Paek *et al.*, 2013; Yang & Kang, 2009).

### *Political communication and permanent election campaign*

Participation of citizens in political conversation on social networks is an essential part of political communication (Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2016). This participation is seen both in the production and in the dissemination of content in online environment. This role of creators and disseminators di-

rectly affects the strategic planning of the current political communication (Gil-Ramírez *et al.*, 2020).

What is now understood as active participation in politics goes beyond the electoral campaign, because it occurs in a context of a permanent campaign (Nimmo, 1999) that transcends elections and covers the entire political cycle. To be an active citizen, voting is essential but also participating in the campaign, being in contact with representatives and in lobbying (Verba *et al.*, 1995).

Applied to the online environment, the prosumer, who is the consumer, producer, and issuer of the content (Gil Ramírez *et al.*, 2020), modified the traditional power relations between the three spheres involved in political communication, the media, politics and the public. The first two held the power, since politicians and the media had the hegemony of speech, faced with a citizenship with little capacity for participation; this hierarchy disappeared because of the social media, allowing civil society the capacity to intervene in political information directly through the web 2.0 (Gil-Ramírez & Gómez de Travesedo, 2020). This intervention of the citizenry is related to the loss of the power of the traditional media to set the agenda and to the modification of the way political information is presented and disseminated (Mitchelstein *et al.*, 2018; Vargo *et al.*, 2014).

This figure of citizens as prosumers causes the messages planned by the political sphere to compete in a scenario where multiple ideas are present, complicating the effectiveness of the desired strategic communication (Gil-Ramírez *et al.*, 2020). This problem has forced political actors to modify the dynamics that governed political communication in the twentieth century but that no longer work and therefore they must adapt to the new context (Rúas-Araújo & Casero-Ripollés, 2018). This adaptation involves understanding that the prosumer is a new narrator and can build his/her own agenda, which complicates the control of communication planning in a strategic way for political actors (Cancelo-Sanmartín & Gadea-Aldave, 2013; Gil-Ramírez *et al.*, 2020).

Social networks are platforms that inform citizenship and build political thinking (Mouffe, 2000). According to Valenzuela (2013), there are three possible political uses of social networks, to inform, where the news is accessed; to express the political thinking and activism, i.e., to create a space to unite the causes with a mobilizing purpose.

This mobilization will also depend on the relevance and influence that individual has on social networks. Activity and popularity are considered in

determining this influence of the different actors (Riquelme & González-Cantergiani, 2016; Valerio *et al.*, 2015; Yoo & Gil de Zúñiga, 2014). The activity indicator refers to the amount of content created and disseminated and the capacity of the content to have an impact on the public agenda and political processes; popularity is related to visibility, i.e., the ability to be recognized by other users. This is related to the number of followers: the more followers, the more influence; and the digital authority occurs when the user has connections with other highly connected users on the network, having a voice in the digital debate (Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

This new digital environment has broken the media's monopoly on producing information (Chadwick, 2017), but it has also ended the media's monopoly on "exercising influence on public debate" (Casero-Ripollés, 2020, p. 36). Scholars have opposing ideas about this disruption of the Internet and the effects it can have on political participation. For authors such as Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009), social networks can have negative effects in this area, as homogeneous social networks are created, where components lack the variety of information to train politically and discuss with other individuals. On the contrary, other authors such as Farrell (2012) see Internet as a means that facilitates political participation to reach a wide audience, to create partnership between individuals and, in general, their democratic potential.

## **Research objectives**

This study analyzes engagement in TikTok accounts of the ministries of health of three European countries: Spain (@sanidadgob), the United Kingdom (@nhsuk) and Germany (@bmg\_bund). The aim of this research is to know the content each ministry creates, and which one generated the most commitment in the audience to point out similarities and differences, as well as to know the content creation dynamics of the three ministries.

## **Materials and method**

After a country search, it was found that only these three ministries of health had an account in this social network. The profiles are Spain (@sanidadgob), UK (@nhsuk) and Germany (@bmg\_bund).

The study is based on the objective of identifying and analyzing the strategies for achieving engagement used by the profiles of European health ministries in a social network such as TikTok. The motivation for choosing this social network is its novelty, especially because the three profiles chosen represent the only European countries that have an account created by their ministries of health because of the pandemic. All three were created either during the first months of the health crisis, or during the crisis. Germany was the first country that created it, which published a TikTok welcoming the account on 25 March 2020; the United Kingdom created it on 2 April 2020, and Spain had the first content published on 7 September 2020.

The methodology used is content analysis. This is a “research technique designed to formulate, on the basis of certain data, reproducible and valid inferences that can be applied to its context” (Krippendorff, 1990, p. 28).

Laurence Bardin (1986) explained content analysis as “a set of methodological instruments, increasingly perfect and constantly improving, applied to extremely diversified ‘discourses’ (contents and continents)” (p. 7). Bardin also points out that the analysis of content moves between two sides: objectivity and subjectivity.

To carry out this research, a detailed analysis of the profiles was done, and two tables of analysis were constructed, one aimed at the profiles of the ministries of health and the other to analyze each video individually. The profiles table analyzes the number of followers and followed, total views, generated content, and users’ global interactions with the profile.

A detailed analysis is carried out in the table of each video, attending to several groups: identification, engagement, theme, text of the publication, hashtags, audio, and video.

Subsequently, the data obtained were analyzed quantitatively and comparatively, placing the different contents in a decreasing way according to the number of interactions they had generated. This number of interactions along with the analysis of the content of the videos comments are the key to knowing the engagement of each account and its TikToks.

The data were collected from 14 to June 20, 2021, so the figures or values could vary from the time of collection to the time of publication.

## **Results**

### **Creation of profiles and first content**

The accounts of the ministries of health in Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain were created to provide information on coronavirus, which is observed in biographies in the United Kingdom and Germany. In the English case, their presentation is “Yes, the current NHS. We can’t give medical advice here. Don’t waste COVID tests” and in German: “Bundesministerium für Gesundheit. Aktuelle Informationen zum Coronavirus”. Spain shows a more general message: “Cuenta oficial del Ministerio de Sanidad, Gobierno de España”, but its content is largely about coronavirus.

As for the first videos, Spain presented its first video through animations, texts, and music to announce its arrival in the social network, the video has 4834 visualizations, 312 likes, 24 comments and 570 shared views. In the case of Germany, it is the Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, who presents the profile of the German Ministry of Health. The TikTok has 2,5 million views, 109 200 likes, 2531 comments and 2946 shared views. Finally, the United Kingdom presented its first video with the help of health workers who were working during the pandemic. The video has 1,7 million views, 235 600 likes, 6413 comments and 2244 shared views.

In most social networks, there are profile verification mechanisms, which are granted to relevant accounts. Out of the three accounts analyzed, Spain is the only one without the logo.

### **Videos that generated the most engagement based on their content**

It is interesting to know if the videos with the most views and interactions are related in some way to try to understand what kind of videos the audience is most interested in and interact with.

In the case of the views, the five most viewed TikToks of each profile were chosen and their contents were also included to see which are the most viewed.

**Table 1***The fifth @sanidadgob TikTokS with more views and their content*

	Views	Type of content	Link
1	123,5K	Press conference by Fernando Simón showing the pin with the symbol to fight against antibiotic resistance.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30uQbUb">https://bit.ly/30uQbUb</a>
2	89,9K	Press conference by Fernando Simón where he acknowledges the action of Pablo, a boy and his friends who cleaned up areas affected by vandalism after a demonstration against the curfew.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7">https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7</a>
3	88,8K	Mental health awareness campaign.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3EYaXuj">https://bit.ly/3EYaXuj</a>
4	85.6K	Wizard Héctor Sansegund does a card trick while explaining the 3M.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m73txN">https://bit.ly/3m73txN</a>
5	78.3K	Campaigns of previous years to fight AIDS and the advances made in raising awareness in society.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m5ylOU">https://bit.ly/3m5ylOU</a>

In the most seen TikTokS of @sanidadgob, it is observed that the first two include Fernando Simón, director of the Coordination Center for Health Alerts and Emergencies. In the third and fifth place, although the main theme is coronavirus, the TikTokS dealing with other health sectors are also viewed. The third most watched video is a mental health campaign and the fifth is the fight against aids. In addition, one of the videos featuring Fernando Simón, the most viewed in the profile, despite being part of a press conference to report on the pandemic, actually talks about the day of fighting antibiotic resistance. Also, there is a video that talks about 3M for virus prevention but is presented by a magician.

**Table 2***The fifth TikTokS of @nhsuk with more views and their content*

	Views	Type of content	Link
1	1,7M	A chief nurse is sentimental with the applause for health workers.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISOdy7">https://bit.ly/3ISOdy7</a>
2	139.2K	View of buildings and people applauding health workers during confinement.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV">https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV</a>
3	116,8K	A candle burning while observing a minute of silence for those who died of Covid-19.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30zjepG">https://bit.ly/30zjepG</a>
4	91,3K	Animation that explains the three basic standards of protection: Mask, distance and hand hygiene.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a">https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a</a>
5	12,6K	Vaccination campaign.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH">https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH</a>

Although the English profile only has eight videos, it is noted that the most viewed content of @nhsuk is the one that touches feelings, being in the first place the images of a chief of nurses excited by the support of the citizenry; in the second, the images of applause for health workers and, thirdly, the minute of silence in memory of people who died during the pandemic. Fourth and fifth are pandemic awareness videos that do not appeal so much to feelings.

**Table 3**

*The fifth TikToks of @bmg\_bund with more views and their content*

	Views	Type of content	Link
1	12M	First video of #TeamAntiVirus, a recreation of Nintendo's Mario Bros adapted to coronavirus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/33xQw9L">https://bit.ly/33xQw9L</a>
2	3.4M	Video #TeamAntiVirus, also inspired by Mario Bros but with a female character.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DY1YrC">https://bit.ly/3DY1YrC</a>
3	3,3M	Video of #TeamAntiVirus, a video game is played where the protagonist, @itsdyma, a German tiktoker, must dodge people to keep a safe distance.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ysbRwK">https://bit.ly/3ysbRwK</a>
4	2,5M	Profile presentation that includes Jens Spahn, German Minister of Health.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DSciBy">https://bit.ly/3DSciBy</a>
5	2,0M	The tiktoker @eduardbaka is hitting emerging messages where plans that are not safe or do not respect the rules of prevention of Covid-19 are proposed; it finishes when a good proposal appears.	<a href="https://bit.ly/33xSJSB">https://bit.ly/33xSJSB</a>

The German case is probably the clearest. The most viewed video of @bmg\_bund makes it clear that the #TeamAntiVirus campaign, where a series of videos that mimic video games trying to raise awareness and give information related with the virus, are a success. Almost all videos belong to the campaign of #TeamAntivirus, except for the fourth place, occupied by the video presentation of the account in which Jens Spahn, German Minister of Health, appears. The first video achieved 12 million views, well above the next most watched video that remained in 3,4 million views.

The #TeamAntiVirus campaign had 21,8 million views. Of the total profile views, i.e., 34,9 million, the reproduction achieved by the #TeamAntiVirus campaign represent 62,41%.

Beyond views, audience engagement can be analyzed through interactions, observing what content they like, what they comment on and what feelings the videos generate and what they share.

In this way, a table was created for each profile that collects the five videos with more likes, the five with more comments and the five with more shares. In addition, the table also refers to the type of content that each of the TikToks addresses, and the description was simplified for those that repeat.

**Table 4**  
*The fifth TikToks of @sanidadgob with more interactions  
divided into likes, comments and shares*

	Likes	Type of content	Link
1	3427	A starting video game where a personified coronavirus and its opponents in the fight are presented: the mask, alcohol, and a ruler.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3s5OhVd">https://bit.ly/3s5OhVd</a>
2	3106	Press conference by Fernando Simón showing the pin with the anti-antibiotic resistance symbol.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30uQbUb">https://bit.ly/30uQbUb</a>
3	1765	Wizard Hector Sansegund performs a magic trick to raise awareness of the 3M.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m73txN">https://bit.ly/3m73txN</a>
4	1297	Press conference of Fernando Simón where he acknowledges the action of Pablo, a boy and his friends who cleaned up areas affected by vandalism after a demonstration against the curfew.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7">https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7</a>
5	918	Video showing AIDS campaigns.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m5yIOU">https://bit.ly/3m5yIOU</a>
	Comments	Type of content	Link
1	114	Press conference by Fernando Simón on antibiotic resistance.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30uQbUb">https://bit.ly/30uQbUb</a>
2	101	Wizard Hector Sansegund performs a magic trick to raise awareness of the 3M.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m73txN">https://bit.ly/3m73txN</a>
3	89	Press conference of Salvador Illa announcing the beginning of vaccination in Spain on December 27, 2020.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3F0tOVE">https://bit.ly/3F0tOVE</a>
4	72	Fernando Simón thanking Paul and all “Pablos of Spain” for their gesture.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7">https://bit.ly/3m8hyL7</a>
5	61	TikTok simulating a coronavirus video game against 3M.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3s5OhVd">https://bit.ly/3s5OhVd</a>

	Shared	Type of content	Link
1	851	Awareness campaign “This is not a game” where health guidelines are presented.	<a href="https://bit.ly/320F6e3">https://bit.ly/320F6e3</a>
2	570	First video of the profile announcing the arrival of the Ministry of Health in TikTok.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m7urFp">https://bit.ly/3m7urFp</a>
3	559	How to store the mask properly when not in use.	<a href="https://bit.ly/324Us0S">https://bit.ly/324Us0S</a>
4	404	Video to encourage people to wear the mask properly.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8LLd1">https://bit.ly/3m8LLd1</a>
5	333	Awareness that the virus is everywhere even if it is not seen, so all security measures should be used.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DXwX7o">https://bit.ly/3DXwX7o</a>

The content that generated more interactions in the Spanish profile is not much different from the most viewed content. In fact, there is a significant relation between the three categories.

Fernando Simón’s video on antibiotic resistance is the most viewed, the second with more likes and the most commented. It should be noted that many of the comments were not positive, not so much because of the content, but because of the person who communicated the message. A similar thing happens with the third most commented video, in which Salvador Illa, former Minister of Health, announced the beginning of the vaccination campaign. Many of the comments are negative, the result of the mistrust that the vaccine generated in its early days.

Another video is the one by Fernando Simón, who congratulates Pablo, a boy who had helped clean up the vandalism acts produced after a demonstration against the curfew. This TikTok is the second most viewed, the most liked and the most commented. The video with the magician Héctor Sansegund is the fourth most viewed, the third most liked and the second most commented; in this case, it is observed that most of the comments relate to the magic trick performed.

Despite having 81 000 views, the video presenting the “fight” among the personified coronavirus, mask, alcohol gel and ruler, was the video with more likes, reaching 3427 interactions in this category and was also the fifth with more comments, with 61.

The most shared videos are the ones with no match with the other categories. It is noted that the decision to interact with these contents has a different logic than the previous ones. In this field, there are more awareness-raising content and more serious information. So, the first video of the

campaign “This is not a game” is in the first place, which appeals to individual responsibility for going to parties, events, or meetings with friends.

The video presentation of the account is in the second place, and two videos that show the correct use of the mask are in the third and fourth place. Finally, the video of the Ministry’s awareness campaigns, which refers to the fact that the virus is still present, although it is not seen.

**Table 5**  
*The fifth TikToks of @nhsuk with more interactions  
divided into likes, comments, and shares*

	Likes	Type of Content	Link
1	235,6K	A chief nurse is sentimental because of the applauses for health workers.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7">https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7</a>
2	20,2K	View of buildings and people applauding health workers during confinement.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV">https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV</a>
3	11,9K	A candle burning while observing a minute of silence for those who died of Covid-19.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30zjepG">https://bit.ly/30zjepG</a>
4	5905	Animation that explains the three basic standards of protection: Mask, distance, and hand hygiene.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a">https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a</a>
5	962	Vaccination campaign.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH">https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH</a>
	Comments	Type of Content	Link
1	6386	Chief nurse excited about the applauses for health workers.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7">https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7</a>
2	709	Minute of silence for those who died because of Covid-19.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30zjepG">https://bit.ly/30zjepG</a>
3	549	Applauses for health workers.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV">https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV</a>
4	148	Vaccination campaign.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH">https://bit.ly/3m8NgYH</a>
5	136	Dr. Karan Raj (@dr.karanr) explains the importance of vaccination against the virus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3yC9Qy8">https://bit.ly/3yC9Qy8</a>
	Shared	Type of Content	Link
1	2244	Chief nurse excited about the health applause.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7">https://bit.ly/3ISOdY7</a>
2	151	Applauses for health workers.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV">https://bit.ly/3q2KpBV</a>
3	54	Animation that explains the three basic protection standards.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a">https://bit.ly/3DXOM6a</a>
4	33	Candle, minute of silence for the dead.	<a href="https://bit.ly/30zjepG">https://bit.ly/30zjepG</a>
5	16	Video in favor of vaccination.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3oXXcX2">https://bit.ly/3oXXcX2</a>

There is a great coincidence between interactions in the profile of the UK National Health Service, something that can be influenced by the low number of contents created by the English profile. It is observed that the most watched and most liked videos match up in positions. In turn, the first four most watched and liked videos were the first to be published. So that the first video was the most watched and most watched, as well as the followings.

This trend changes with the fifth most watched and most liked video, which was not the fifth published video but the penultimate. This video is part of the English vaccination campaign and was also the fourth most commented.

There are also videos that were in other categories in the most shared TikToks, except for the fifth video that is the first out of the three published that address vaccination.

The eight published the videos in the profile belong to one of the categories analyzed, except one of them, which seeks to raise awareness of existing measures among citizens, especially young people.

The English TikToks were particularly well accepted in those published at the beginning of the account, but it is true that as content progresses, views and interactions decrease and reach lower numbers.

**Table 6**  
*The fifth TikToks of @bmg\_bund with more interactions  
divided into likes, comments and shares*

	Likes	Content type	Link
1	109,2K	Video presentation of the profile, which featured Jens Spahn, German Minister of Health.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DSciBy">https://bit.ly/3DSciBy</a>
2	107,1K	First video of #TeamAntiVirus, a recreation of Nintendo's Mario Bros adapted to the coronavirus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/33xQw9L">https://bit.ly/33xQw9L</a>
3	73,2K	Announcement of an initiative in the page <a href="http://www.zusammengegencorona.de">www.zusammengegencorona.de</a> to fight coronavirus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX">https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX</a>
4	53.7K	Tutorial on how to properly wash hands.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB">https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB</a>
5	44K	Video of #TeamAntiVirus, a reproduction of a video game where the protagonist, @itsdyma, a German tiktoker, must dodge people to maintain distance.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ysbRwK">https://bit.ly/3ysbRwK</a>
	Comments	Content type	Link
1	2.531	Video presentation of the profile	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DSciBy">https://bit.ly/3DSciBy</a>

2	1.426	First video of #TeamAntiVirus, a recreation of Nintendo's Mario Bros.	<a href="https://bit.ly/33xQw9L">https://bit.ly/33xQw9L</a>
3	742	Announcement of an initiative in the page <a href="http://www.zusammengegencorona.de">www.zusammengegencorona.de</a> to fight coronavirus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX">https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX</a>
4	699	Tutorial on how to properly wash hands.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB">https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB</a>
5	688	David Hasselhoff encourages people to get vaccinated.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3s5j44E">https://bit.ly/3s5j44E</a>
	Shared	Content type	Link
1	2946	Video presentation of the profile	<a href="https://bit.ly/3DSciBy">https://bit.ly/3DSciBy</a>
2	2683	Announcement of an initiative in the page <a href="http://www.zusammengegencorona.de">www.zusammengegencorona.de</a> to fight coronavirus.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX">https://bit.ly/3dSqlMX</a>
3	1426	First video of #TeamAntiVirus, a recreation of Nintendo's Mario Bros.	<a href="https://bit.ly/33xQw9L">https://bit.ly/33xQw9L</a>
4	1096	Tutorial on how to properly wash hands.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB">https://bit.ly/3ISc5SB</a>
5	931	David Hasselhoff encourages the German population to get vaccinated.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3s5j44E">https://bit.ly/3s5j44E</a>

In the profile of @bmg\_bund there is a greater similarity between the videos that have more interactions, likes, comments and shares than with the videos with more views. While in the most viewed, four of the five TikToks were part of the #TeamAntiVirus video group. We found some of these contents in the other categories, but they did not have so much impact in these fields. The second most watched video that reached 3,4 million views failed to enter any of the above interaction lists. The same happened to another video of #TeamAntiVirus, in which the tiktokker @eduardbaka appeared, which despite being the fifth most viewed of the account did not generate as many interactions as to enter the other lists.

Matches are found in the three lists in the first place, where the profile presentation video was positioned. The TikTok which presents an initiative of the website [www.zusammengegencorona.de](http://www.zusammengegencorona.de) to fight the virus, reached the third place of the videos with more likes, the third most commented and the second most shared. In the same way, the video that explained how to wash hands correctly generated great interest.

The video in which David Hasselhoff appeared to encourage the German population to get vaccinated, was not the most watched or the most

liked, but it positioned as the fifth most commented and shared, probably because of David.

In general terms, in the German case it is noted that the #TeamAntiVirus campaign is a clear success, especially the first video that was the most watched, the second with more likes and more comments and the third most shared. Leaving this aside, it is observed that there is a greater variety of content in the interactions in videos where the tiktoker @itsdyma appeared, being the fifth most watched.

Several of the most viewed content did not achieve a high rate of interaction, while others, with less views, encouraged users to comment or share.

## **Conclusions and discussion**

Social networks are a tool for institutions and for ministries of health to communicate with the public. This forced communication teams not only to create a social media communication strategy, but also to adapt this strategy to each of the platforms on which they are present. TikTok was the last network to appear, but because of its impact and number of downloads and users, some institutions understood the need to be present on it as well, being part of the communication strategy of government institutions that must be in an active election campaign.

First, the initiative of Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany to be present in a new social network that is different from the others should be highlighted. It is also important to note that this inclusion in the social network took place at a very difficult moment, the health crisis. At that time, institutions, plus ministries of health, were required to provide accurate and fast information about a virus that was increasing its rate.

In general, the three profiles analyzed provided real and proven information to the population to fight virus and its spread. In this way, the numerous videos published were very useful to explain in detail how the virus worked and how it could be combated.

In addition to having to communicate on these topics, the three profiles managed to adapt to the platform, its format, and the mechanisms of positioning existing contents.

Based on the engagement, differences were observed between the types of content that generated the most commitment in each of the countries. In Germany, the content with the most interactions were those of the #TeamAntiVi-

rus campaign and the profile's own video presentation. This shows that videos that are more relaxed but are informative are well accepted by users. Also, some of them included the participation of known people, which also helps to direct traffic from profiles with a good engagement to the profile of the ministry. In addition to these contents, others were also welcomed where the end was informative, and the video was a tutorial or a series of tips to follow.

In the UK, the videos that made the most use of the emotions lived during the pandemic were the ones that generated engagement among users. The great support they had on the part of users is striking, since the engagement achieved was very high for the number of contents published and its dispersion over time. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why they did not continue to exploit a social network from which they could profit and that could constitute a good channel of communication with their audience.

The lowest engagement data are found in the Spanish profile. The contents with the most interactions were, on the one hand, those in which Fernando Simón appeared, although the feedback in the comments was not always good, indicating problems with the government in part of the population. On the other hand, some of the contents that were not related to the virus also generated audience engagement, such as AIDS awareness campaign or more videos with the participation of people who are not part of the ministry.

The research concludes that TikTok's accounts of the ministries of Germany, the United Kingdom and Spain managed to start their journey on the social network at a very complicated time for a ministry of health, such as a public health crisis that became a global pandemic. In addition, research shows that users are willing to consuming content that comes from government institutions, especially those videos that, while being informative, address content clearly, and in a relaxed or even humorous way. All three accounts have a long way to go on the platform and must work to create content that generates engagement for users without losing their communication objectives.

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## **Worry about COVID-19 and its effects on the online political participation of citizens in the Ecuadorian context**

***La preocupación por el COVID-19 y sus efectos en la participación  
política online de la ciudadanía en el contexto ecuatoriano***

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**Received on:** 29/12/2021 **Revised on:** 20/01/2022 **Accepted on:** 16/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

**Suggested citation:** Zumárraga-Espinosa, M., Egas-Balseca, S., & Reyes-Valenzuela, C. (2022). Worry about COVID-19 and its effects on the online political participation of citizens in the Ecuadorian context. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 183-206. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.08>

### **Abstract**

*The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has generated worries in citizens due to the administration that Latin American States have been carrying out, especially in relation to political measures adopted to counteract its health, economic and social consequences. These official actions have elicited diverse responses in people to deal with the impact of the pandemic, which may vary in high worry and sense of vulnerability, diverse forms of emotional expression, solidarity actions or political participation. The aim of the study is to explore the role of individual worries experienced in the face of COVID-19 and its impact on political participation through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The empirical study was based on a non-probabilistic survey of 920 people residing in Quito-Ecuador, applied prior to the general elections held in February 2021. The results show, at a general level, a significant indirect effect of worry about the impact of the pandemic on digital political participation, mediated by political worries. Thus, the politicization of worry about COVID-19 operates as a mechanism that enables the mobilization of political actions through virtual media, which are more intense on Twitter and Facebook, while this mobilizing effect is weakened in the case of WhatsApp. The implications of these findings, regarding the forms of citizen political action that take place in a social context marked by the impact of the health crisis and an ongoing electoral process, are discussed.*

### **Keywords**

worry, COVID-19; online political participation, political concern, social media, Ecuador.

### **Resumen**

La pandemia provocada por el COVID-19 ha generado preocupación en la ciudadanía debido a la administración que están realizando los Estados latinoamericanos, especialmente en relación con las medidas políticas adoptadas para contrarrestar sus repercusiones sanitarias, económicas y sociales. Estas gestiones oficiales suscitan diversas respuestas en las personas para lidiar con el impacto de la pandemia, que pueden variar en una alta preocupación y sensación de vulnerabilidad, diversas formas de expresión emocional, acciones de solidaridad o participación política. El objetivo del estudio es explorar el papel de la preocupación individual experimentada frente al COVID-19 y su incidencia en la participación política a través de medios sociales como Facebook, Twitter y WhatsApp. El estudio empírico se basó en una encuesta no probabilística a 920 personas que residen en Quito-Ecuador, aplicada previo a las elecciones generales celebradas en febrero de 2021. Los resultados obtenidos evidencian, a nivel general, un efecto indirecto significativo de la preocupación por el impacto de la pandemia sobre la participación política digital, mediado por la preocupación política. Así, la politización de la preocupación por el COVID-19 opera como un mecanismo que posibilita la movilización de acciones políticas a través de medios virtuales, que son más intensas por parte de Twitter y Facebook, mientras que dicho efecto movilizador se debilita en el caso de WhatsApp. Las implicaciones de estos hallazgos se discuten en cuanto a las formas de acción política ciudadana que tienen lugar en un contexto social marcado por el impacto de la crisis sanitaria y un proceso electoral en marcha.

### **Palabras clave**

Preocupación, COVID-19, participación política online, preocupación política, medios sociales, Ecuador.

## Introduction

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, known as COVID-19, has had global consequences, not only in the economic and political sphere, but also in the emotional sphere. In Ecuador, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was presented in February 2020 in the city of Guayaquil (El Comercio, 2020), and due to accelerated increase in cases throughout the country, the national government issues various restrictive measures to confine the population (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, 2020). The state of emergency, the suspension of classes, the adoption of teleworking, the limitation of mobility, with the exception of food purchases or medical reasons, are established.

In addition, the emerging health crisis arose in an already existing political, economic and social crisis (Ramírez-Gallegos, 2021), characterized by the population's distrust in the management of Lenin Moreno's government, whose few social policies evidenced the abandonment to the public health system, among other things. In the following months, confinement continued and economic decisions were made, deepening social inequality (Ramírez-Gallegos, 2021). For example, the "Humanitarian Support Act" is approved, which presents a clear employment impact to employers and affects more popular sectors, while increasing levels of poverty and inequality, from 25% in 2019 to 32.4%% by the end of 2020 (INEC, 2020).

Regarding the health issue, 2021 began with 213378 confirmed cases and 14051 deaths (Ministerio de Salud Pública, 2021), and corruption in the procurement of equipment and supplies in hospitals was reported, as well as poor vaccine management, which were initially distributed among public officials and their relatives.

In this context of economic crisis, high political mistrust and health emergency, the 2021 presidential elections were held in a social climate of change in the form of participation and motivation of citizens for their involvement in political issues. On the one hand, in order to take care of the health of the population and also to guarantee the exercise of the right to vote and democratic participation, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS), creates a Guide to Organizing Elections in Times of Pandemic and urges governments to empower technological tools for all election processes. Social media was also configured as platforms that were critical to campaign strategies for various candidates, who used platforms such as Facebook and Tiktok to conduct their campaigns.

On the citizenship side, recent studies found that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most used networks in this election period in Ecuador (Zumárraga-Espinosa, 2021); these focus primarily as a means of exchange of political information and expression, while the use of Twitter has a greater impact on mobilization activities (Zumárraga-Espinosa *et al.*, 2021).

In this way, social networks became a strategic medium that enhanced the political participation of citizens during pandemic and in political, economic and social instability. For this reason, the aim of this research is the political participation of citizens through social media to inform about the effects that the pandemic has generated on this type of behavior, specifically in the Ecuadorian electoral context of early 2021. In this sense, the worry associated with COVID-19 — and its potential negative social, economic and health impacts — as a psychological variable, constitutes an important cognitive mechanism of influence through which a large-scale threatening event, such as the current health crisis, can affect individual political behavior.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to study the effects of COVID-19 worry on individual political participation developed through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.

## **The worry associated with COVID-19 and its types of influence on citizens' digital political behavior**

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the ways of political participation that citizens can adopt, favoring participation through the Internet, and discouraging offline modalities due to restrictions imposed on social movement and meetings for biosafety reasons. In view of this, individual online political participation behaviors, specifically those operating through social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp), are interesting as subjects of study in these circumstances. Likewise, while the phenomenon of political participation is among the main objects of study of political science (Teorell, 2006), the explanatory contributions generated from political psychology, as regards the cognitive and emotional processes that lead to political action, are increasingly relevant to specialized literature on the subject (Klandermans, 1984; Redlawsk, 2006). In turn, this is complemented by theoretical

contributions generated from political communication regarding the effects of the Internet and social media on democratic processes (Rojas, 2006).

A way in which the pandemic can influence the digital political participation of citizens is the individual worry that causes this scenario of health crisis. It should be noted that the worry as a psychological construct is characterized by a cognitive activity that is activated in the possibility of a problematic event, with potentially negative consequences. This is a mental process that focuses on the development of solutions and ways to prevent such adverse impacts (Prados-Antieza, 2004). This conceptualization implies that worry acts as a fundamental antecedent for taking action in the face of adverse or threatening situations, preceding the occurrence of negative emotional responses, responsible for acting as motivational forces for the adoption of concrete behavior (Redlawsk, 2006). In addition, one of the ways of assessing worry is to associate it with a particular object and its negative consequences (Prados-Antieza, 2004), such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its social, economic and health implications. Therefore, and because of the latter, the worry about the impact of COVID-19 is relevant as a construct of interest in explaining the effects of the pandemic on the political behavior of citizens through social media.

The study of the relationship between worry due to COVID-19 and participation through social media, adding an electoral context as is the case of Ecuador during the beginning of 2021, requires considering the close interaction between emotions and cognition acting on the individual when expressing opinions, sharing information, or trying to convince others to support a political cause or figure, since thoughts and decisions about candidates tend to be related to the emotionality of voters (Rivera *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, the contributions generated from political psychology regarding the cognitive and emotional processes that are triggered by worry for a threatening event or drastic change of circumstances are relevant. Bearing in mind that the health crisis caused by COVID-19, as a global threat, presents a number of features that have contributed to exacerbating worries of civil society, it leads to worry over the policy and government's capacity to cope with the ravages of the pandemic.

Thus, in the context of COVID-19, the processing of emotional and cognitive information of individuals was affected by a number of different situations. First, exposure to excessive or contradictory information on health risks and exposure to death and contagion led to a series of rumors, misinfor-

mation or false information, particularly spread on social networks (Galarza-Molina & Muñiz, 2021; Pulido *et al.*, 2020; Tsao *et al.*, 2021). Second, uncertainty over measures such as social isolation and the different mourning over the loss of family members, friends or abrupt economic changes, expressed in the significant reduction in income levels or job losses (Ramírez-Ortiz *et al.*, 2020; Rozo-Sánchez *et al.*, 2021). This can be explained in terms of what Leon Festinger, in the mid-1950s, theorized as “cognitive dissonance”, describing it as psychological discomfort because of the inconsistency between what people think and what they do. Cognitive dissonance produces psychological tension, so it is sought to reduce it through mechanisms such as justification or rationalization of contradictions (Festinger, 1957).

In this sense, if the information issued by the authorities and their acts contradict each other, as has happened with many of the Latin American governments, then dissonant situations are created, thus increasing anger, tension, fear, anxiety, depression and despair in people who must also face devastating effects on their economies, social relations and losses that in many cases are irreparable. This sets an emotional challenge for people to cope with COVID-19 (Dinić & Bodroža, 2021; Zajenkowski *et al.*, 2020) and the need to establish cognitive-emotional coping strategies (Rhodes *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, emotional states and efforts to reduce cognitive dissonance in contexts of uncertainty, overload, and high information ambivalence influence on how to act politically in the electoral process, which may be affected by fear, frustration, or uncertainty (Gil-Fortoul, 2021), as well as more prevalent mental affectations such as anxiety, depression, or stress (Tusev *et al.*, 2020). All of the above is initially triggered by the worry regarding the negative consequences of COVID-19.

Although the literature on political participation has been addressed to emotional processes as determining factor of political behavior, it is necessary to increase empirical research focused on worry —understood as a cognitive process that precedes emotional responses— and its effects on political action, particularly COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on political participation channeled online. Worry has been defined as:

A chain of thoughts and images loaded with negative and relatively uncontrollable affection... it represents an attempt to solve mental problems on a subject whose outcome is uncertain and it entails the possibility of one or more negative consequences. (Borkovec *et al.*, 1983, p. 10)

Although worry is related to anxiety, it is also relevant to associate it as a coping strategy to identify problems and ways of solving them (Vetere *et al.*, 2011). On a political level, worry has been linked to the possibilities of change and as a dynamizing element of action (Ema-López, 2004), although without knowing if such worry represents a disruptive emotional state or prosecution. The study of worry has gained interest since COVID-19, as associated with uncertainty over the impacts of the pandemic, which places it at a global level, as well as health effects, reduction of economic income or changes in labor rights (Bacon *et al.*, 2020; Guerrero, 2020; Ríos, 2021). Thus, due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 on issues such as the lack of an effective vaccine or medical treatment, the origin of the virus, mutability, its forms of transmission, risk factors, long-term repercussions, etc., worry is one of the initial mental states that people experienced in pandemics, understood as a threat to individual and collective well-being. Thus, political worry has emerged as a key aspect in the psychosocial approach to people's uncertainty about the impacts in various areas associated with the pandemic, but also about how their adverse effects are being managed by governments (Bacon *et al.*, 2020).

At this point, it is interesting to explore the relationship between the con-  
nAt this point, it is interesting to explore the relationship between the worry of COVID-19 and its potential mobilizing or discouraging consequences on the online political behavior of the population (Santana *et al.*, 2020), based on exposure to information about the pandemic, characterized by a highly political aspect (Burdman, 2020; Pérez-Curiel & Velasco Molpeceres, 2020; Rodríguez-Varela & Carbonetti-Parola, 2021). This paper presents the two ways worry about COVID-19 influences political action: first, as a demobilizing route, in which worry about the impact of COVID-19 is associated with a high emotional impact, preventing people from generating strategies of emotional regulation, especially regarding fear management (Muñoz-Fernández *et al.*, 2020; Rodas *et al.*, 2021). Through this first route, the worry for COVID-19 triggers emotional responses linked to fear, which discourages interest in participating in political actions and prioritizes the adoption of self-protection behaviors such as the use of mask, hand washing, the consumption of information concerning the evolution of contagion or biosafety recommendations by health authorities, among others (Renström & Bäck, 2021) and the political aspect will lose interest (Salaverria *et al.*, 2020). Regarding the demobilizing effect of fear, the research conducted by Santana

*et al.* (2020), based on a sample of countries that underwent elections during pandemic, revealed that the countries most affected by the pandemic, in terms of the volume of infections and deaths, the levels of electoral participation of citizens were reduced. This can be due to a greater fear of COVID-19 and its impact on public health, the economy and citizen security. Thus, fear favors the avoidance of any risk related to COVID-19 due to the reduction of the exercise of active citizenship through political participation.

Secondly, a mobilizing path toward political action is proposed, which is generated when this worry is associated with coping strategies that seek solutions to the uncertainty generated by the problematic situation, not just the personal impact. At this point, worry evolves toward a cognitive elaboration that leads to a critical stance toward the state and the measures implemented to deal with the health crisis, the formulation of concrete demands on the political and health authorities, as well as the channeling of those emotions, experienced around the pandemic situation through political expression. Unlike fear, this “politicization” of COVID-19 worry enables emotional responses that favor action, such as anger and anxiety (Zumárraga *et al.*, 2017).

According to the theory of cognitive evaluation, anger happens when the individual can identify the source or the person responsible of a threat and is able to counteract it through his/her actions (Valentino *et al.*, 2011). The responsibility of the State as the body responsible for providing solutions to the health crisis, allows citizens to be able to exercise some control over the pandemic, using political actions aimed at questioning or influencing the decisions of the government and the political system. Thus, anger acts as one of the underlying mechanisms that explain the connection between political worry and political participation. On the other hand, political worry can also lead to anxiety as an emotional response, since, unlike fear, anxiety is distinguished by future assessment of the consequences of a problematic situation (health crisis) and planning of actions to solve them (state action) (Brader & Marcus, 2013). Therefore, anxiety constitutes an emotional state conducive to political action, as has been evidenced in other studies (Renström & Bäck, 2021; Rudolph *et al.*, 2000; Valentino *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, the cases of corruption, prior to and during the pandemic, have overshadowed the government management of several Latin American countries, adding an additional feature to the political worry that citizens express regarding the health crisis, particularly during elections. This is evi-

dent in studies showing that electoral political participation has increased in Latin America due to COVID-19 (see Covid-19 dossier, Estado de derecho y Procesos Electorales en Latinoamérica, 2021). In addition, the politicization of the COVID-19 worry involves emotional states associated with the political aspect, found in social media such as Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp, a space to express emotional acts, regardless of whether or not they have a relevant impact on the political process (Zumárraga-Espinosa *et al.*, 2020). The way in which political information is being disseminated and expressed in different media, and especially in social media, during the electoral processes held in the midst of the health crisis by COVID-19 is revealed (Zumárraga-Espinosa *et al.*, 2021).

In addition, there is no opposition between emotional and cognitive motivations for the mobilization of different individual political behaviors. In other words, decisions can be guided both by the affective responses of people to different situations, actors or political parties, as well as by their reasoned reflections. Emotional and rational explanations of citizens' political attitudes are not exclusive, but constitutive (Arfuch, 2015). Regarding the latter, Anthony Downs Rational Election Model of 1957 (Montecinos, 2007), states that actors tend to make a rational choice based on maximizing their individual benefits and objectives. In an electoral context, this would enable people to order their reasoning to decide on government authorities based on their offers to solve problems in an environment. According to this approach, citizens would be mobilized by choosing an ideal candidate model, consistent with their thinking and offering attractive answers to their needs. In the psychological sphere, this rational order for decision-making would provide a benefit to people, by relieving anxiety in situations that exceed their capacity for response and by giving elected candidates the power of complex problem decisions faced by society. Therefore, in the midst of an electoral process and having the social media as the main route of political activity, the worry for COVID-19, once politicized, also favors digital political participation thanks to cognitive mechanisms based on the use of the vote as a tool to influence the government management of the health crisis, and thus intervene in the solution of this problem.

Based on the argument presented, this study explores the extent to which the worry produced by COVID-19 relates to the online political participation of the citizenry, which takes place through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. In this sense, it is stated that, on the one hand,

when the worry for COVID-19 is focused on state management, it becomes a political worry, acquiring a mobilizing nature that influences online political participation. However, when this politicization mechanism is not activated, the worry about the pandemic, focused only on personal risks, inhibits individual online political participation. Based on the above, the following assumptions are established:

Hypothesis 1: Worry about the impact of COVID-19 is directly related to political participation in social media.

Hypothesis 2: Political worry in a pandemic context is directly related to political participation through social media.

Hypothesis 3: Political worry is a mediator of the relationship between worry about the impact of COVID-19 and political participation in social media.

## **Method**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The quantitative study was performed on the basis of a non-probabilistic convenience sample made up of 920 people who were 18 years old or older, in the Metropolitan District of Quito (DMQ)-Ecuador. The study participants presented the following sociodemographic profile: female participation was 46.4%, average sample age was 27.5 years old ( $DT = 10.3$ )<sup>1</sup>, and 59.2% of participants have completed university studies or postgraduate. In addition, 70.7% of the sample reported family income from \$400 (minimum wage) to \$2000. <sup>1</sup> Considering the limitations of the type of sample carried out, and the sample profile described, it is reasonable that the findings generated by this research will be more representative for youth from urban areas, with higher studies and predominantly middle class.

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<sup>1</sup> The criterion established by the World Bank indicates that middle-class households receive a daily income of \$13 to \$70 (Banco Mundial, 2022). In recent estimates, this organism determined that the middle class in Ecuador experienced a contraction in 2020, from 33.3% to 30.4% (El Universo, 2021). Hence, it is possible to state that the sample analyzed is also overrepresented in relation to middle-class households.

The research carried out is non-experimental, cross-sectional, *ex post facto* and explanatory (Ato *et al.*, 2013). The data collection was conducted from an online questionnaire applied through encuestafacil.com platform. For the distribution of the survey, a database of people interested in participating in the study was constructed, to whom the link of the digital questionnaire was sent via e-mail, reaching a response rate of 84.4%. The data collection was from January to February 2021, prior to parliamentary and presidential elections in Ecuador, in the midst of a pandemic and health emergency due to the COVID-19 virus. Prior to the application of the questionnaire, participants were duly informed about the confidentiality criteria and the objectives of the research. It should be noted that prior to the dissemination and application of the online questionnaire, questions were evaluated to confirm its logical relevance. Study participants completed the digital survey as planned and no time limit was scheduled for this activity.

## Instruments

*Political participation in social media.* The degree of political activism developed through Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp was measured from five reactants, which correspond to expression activities and political mobilization that can be carried out on such digital platforms. For each social environment, participants were asked how often they had adopted the following policy behaviors using a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always): A) write opinions on elections or policy-related issues on their wall or personal profile (Facebook [M = 1.54, DT = .85]; Twitter [M = 1.36; DT = .77]; WhatsApp [M = 1.59; DT = .84]); b) comment on or respond to political or election-related opinions on other people's walls or pages (Facebook [M = 1.56, DT = .85]; Twitter [M = 1.37; DT = .79]; WhatsApp [M = 1.60; DT = .82]); c) share images, videos, links and content related to political issues, public interest issues, candidates or election campaigns (Facebook [M = 1.77, DT = .98]; Twitter [M = 1.38; DT = .80]; WhatsApp [M = 1.67; DT = .88]); d) chat with friends or acquaintances on political issues, issues of public interest, candidates or election campaigns (Facebook [M = 1.85, DT = .96]; Twitter [M = 1.33; DT = .73]; WhatsApp [M = 1.83; DT = .95]); and d) mobilize or attempt to convince other users/contacts to support or join political causes, candidates, or election campaigns (Facebook [M =

1.45, DT = .84]; Twitter [M = 1.29; DT = .71]; WhatsApp [M = 1.44; DT = .81]). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed the one-dimensional nature of the set of items, with an explained variance of 56.74% for Facebook ( $\alpha = .87$ ), 67.01% for Twitter ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and 61.36% for WhatsApp ( $\alpha = .89$ ). In this and future analysis, the EFA was performed with a factorial extraction for maximum plausibility and varimax rotation.

*Worry about the impact of COVID-19:* Participants were consulted on their level of worry about the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, and the impact it can have on their safety and well-being. To this end, an assessment scale was used with response options ranging from 1 (nothing) to 5 (very much). Specifically, worry was assessed on the following issues: a) the overall economic situation in the country and its potential for reactivation (M = 3.71; DT = 1.17); b) the economic and family situation (M = 3.84; DT = 1.12); c) the hospital system's response to cases of contagion (M = 3.81; DT = 1.23); d) citizen safety in the neighborhood and city (M = 3.69; DT = 1.29). By means of EFA, it was confirmed that the items have a unifactorial structure and an explained variance of 69.96% ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Political worry:* The individual worry associated with the response of the government and the political system to the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the electoral context, was measured by 4 reagents with an assessment scale: 1 (Nothing), 2 (Bad), 3 (Partially), 4 (a lot), 5 (very much). The reagents used address worry to the following issues: A) how the central government is managing the health crisis (M = 3.76; DT = 1.26); b) government management about the vaccination process at the national level (M = 3.76; DT = 1.35); c) the capacities and proposals presented by presidential candidates (M = 3.52; DT = 1.36); d) allegations of corruption against politicians and/or public officials (M = 3.76; DT = 1.36). The EFA performed yielded a unifactorial solution with an explained variance of 73.65% ( $\alpha = .92$ ).

*Control variables:* In order for multivariate analysis of interest to be carried out under control conditions, the control variables considered are the sociodemographic aspect, sex, age, educational level and family income of the participants.

## Results

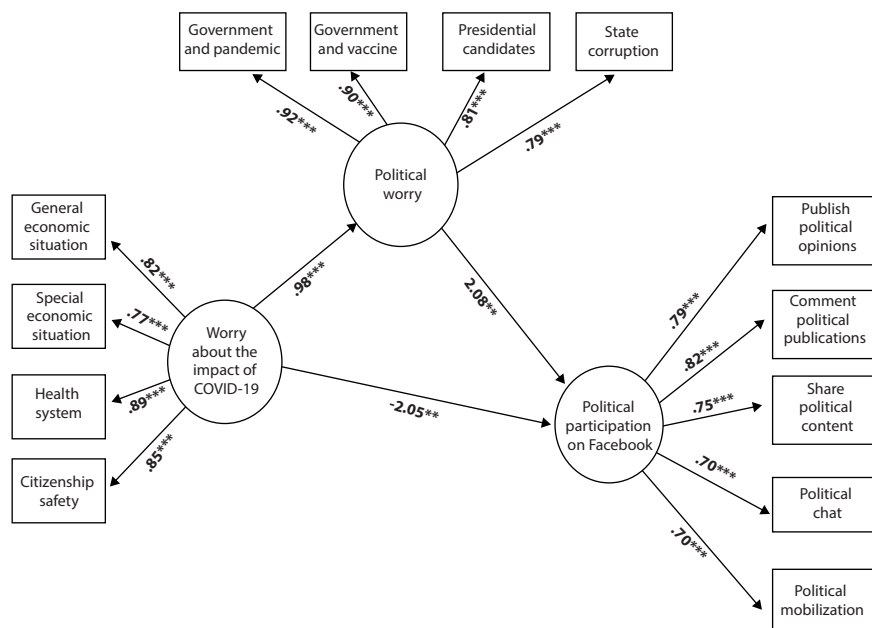
To evaluate the research hypotheses, structural equation models were created. In this sense, a simple partial mediation model is proposed, with political worry as a mediating variable of the relationship between worry for the impact of COVID-19 and political participation in social media. For a comparative reading, the hypothetical model presented will be analyzed for the political participation on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Finally, the statistical software used was AMOS 23 and the parameter estimation was made for maximum plausibility; the indirect effects were obtained by a bootstrap procedure, based on 5000 samples of re-sampling and 95% confidence intervals with bias correction. In all the analyses of structural equations developed, controls were introduced for sociodemographic variables.

Figure 1 shows the results of the structural equation model for political activism on Facebook. According to the revised goodness-of-fit indicators:  $\chi^2$  (112) = 549.86 [ $p < .001$ ]; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .951; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .941; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .951; Good Fit Index (GFI) = .935; Root of Root Mean of Approach Square Error (RMSEA) = .065; The proposed mediation model fits in an acceptable way to the data collected,<sup>2</sup> which is also the case with the other Twitter and WhatsApp. As can be observed, worry about the impact of COVID-19 influences positively on the worry generated about the response of the political system to the health crisis ( $\beta = .98$ ;  $p < .001$ ). In other words, people who are most worried about how the pandemic can affect their safety tend to report a higher level of political worry. On the other hand, there is difference as to the sign of the direct effect that the types of worries analyzed produce on political behavior on Facebook. Thus, while political worry is positively related to political participation on Facebook ( $\beta = 2.08$ ;  $p < .01$ ), worry about the overall impact of COVID-19 negatively affects participation through such a digital platform ( $\beta = -2.05$ ;  $p < .01$ ), all of this considering a political moment of presidential and parliamentary elections.

2 The conventional cut-off criteria for concluding that a structural equation model has an acceptable fit to the data are: CFI, IFI, TLI, GFI > .90; RMSEA < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel *et al.*, 2003).

**Figure 1**

*Worry about the impact of COVID-19, political worry, and political participation on Facebook: Partial simple mediation model*

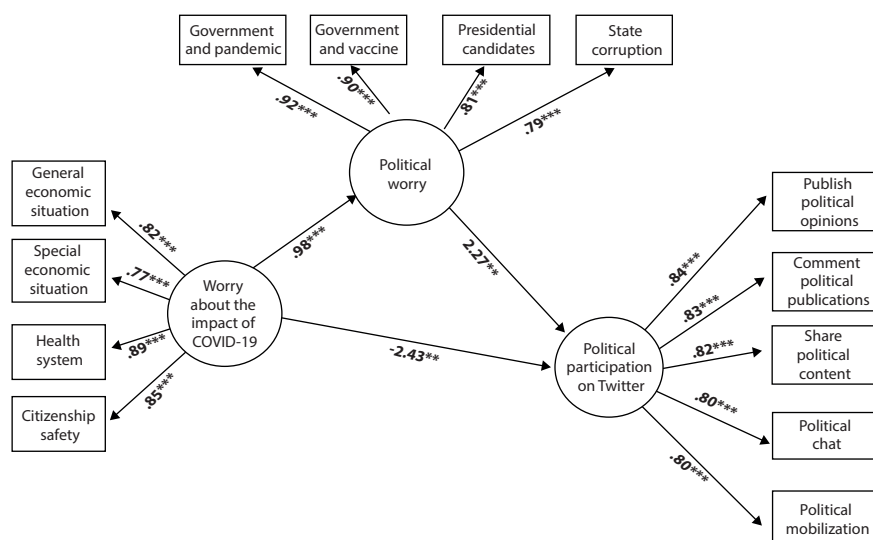


Note.\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .  $N = 920$ . Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2(112) = 549.86$  [ $p < .001$ ]; CFI = .951; TLI = .941; IFI = .951; GFI = .935; RMSEA = .065.  $R^2$  of political participation on Facebook = 17.3%. All factor loadings reported values equal to or greater than .70. Data collected digitally between January and February 2021, prior to the first round of the electoral process held in that year. Own elaboration.

The mediation analysis supports the existence of a significant indirect effect produced by worry about the impact of COVID-19 on digital political participation, mediated by political worry ( $\beta = 2.04$ ;  $p < .01$ ). This result indicates that once worry about the human, economic and social consequences of the pandemic become political, i.e., politicized, it ends up mobilizing political action via Facebook. In this regard, the partial correlation coefficient between worry for COVID-19 and political participation, controlling the effect of political worry ( $r = -.18$ ;  $gl = 917$ ;  $p < .001$ ), reveals that, worry about the health emergency discourages political behavior on Facebook by nullifying the politicization mechanism.

Regarding Twitter (Figure 2), although relationships of interest have the same pattern observed when analyzing political participation on Facebook, worry about political and governmental action in a pandemic has a relatively stronger mobilizing effect on political participation through Twitter ( $\beta = 2.27$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Something similar occurs with the inhibitory effect generated by the worry focused on the overall impact of COVID-19, which is also intensified regarding political participation in this digital platform ( $\beta = -2.43$ ;  $p < .001$ ). As a result, the indirect effect of COVID-19 worry as a threat to security and personal well-being is to mobilize political activism more forcefully through Twitter ( $\beta = 2.22$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

**Figure 2**  
*Worry about the impact of COVID-19, political worry and political participation via Twitter: Simple Partial Mediation Model*

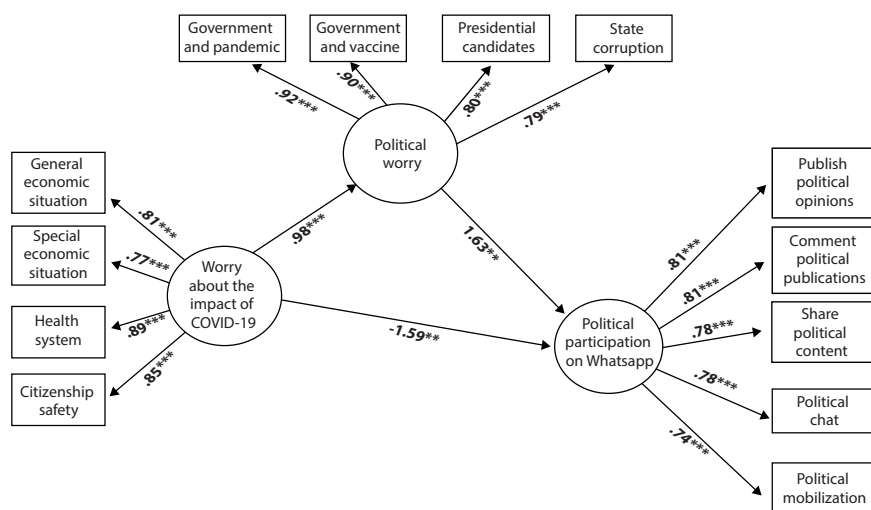


Note.  $^{**}p < .01$ ;  $^{***}p < .001$ .  $N = 920$ . Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2 (112) = 534.20$  [ $p < .001$ ]; CFI = .957; TLI = .948; IFI = .957; GFI = .937; RMSEA = .064.  $R^2$  Political participation on Twitter = 23.9%. All factory loads reported values above .70. Data collected digitally between January and February 2021, prior to the first round of the electoral process held in that year. Own elaboration.

Finally, Figure 3 presents the results of political behavior analysis through the WhatsApp instant messaging application. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, both worry about the overall impact of COVID-19 ( $\beta = -1.59$ ;  $p < .01$ ), as the worry about the political situation in the context of the pandemic ( $\beta = 1.63$ ;  $p < .01$ ), influence on a lesser extent the adoption of political behaviors via WhatsApp in an electoral context. Similarly, the indirect effect of COVID-19 worries, through political worry, on political participation in WhatsApp ( $\beta = 1.60$ ;  $p < .01$ ) has a lower magnitude, compared with that observed in social networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

**Figure 3**

*Worry about the impact of COVID-19, political worry, and political participation via WhatsApp: Partial simple mediation model*



Note.  $^{**}p < .01$ ;  $^{***}p < .001$ .  $N = 920$ . Standardized regression coefficients are presented. Goodness of fit:  $\chi^2 (112) = 540.29$  [ $p < .001$ ]; CFI = .954; TLI = .944; IFI = .954; GFI = .937; RMSEA = .065.  $R^2$  Political Participation in WhatsApp = 10.7%. All factory loads reported values above .70. Data collected digitally between January and February 2021, prior to the first round of the electoral process held in that year. Own elaboration.

## Discussion and conclusions

This work was intended to contribute to understanding how COVID-19 has influenced the political participation of citizens through social media. Considering an Ecuadorian context nuanced by an ongoing electoral process, the study focused on the mobilizing role that the individual worry associated with COVID-19 can play in the taking of digital political actions through social networks, such as Facebook or Twitter, and instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp. In this sense, the findings presented show that the orientation of this worry produces differentiated effects on digital political participation. On the one hand, the worry focused on the negative impact that COVID-19 can generate on security and welfare tends to disstimulate political behavior in social media, concluding that the data analyzed provide empirical support for hypothesis 1.

On the other hand, the worry that focuses on government action and political system in the health crisis, which we have stated as a political worry, mobilizes positively individual political participation on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp (scenario 2, empirically supported). In a context of political crisis and mistrust of the management capacity of institutions, along with the uncertainty generated by the effects of the pandemic, it is understood that the worry for the election of State representatives is relevant, especially on how they can respond to crises.

The findings in this paper evoke that those who report a greater worry about the overall impact of COVID-19 (e.g., economic, safety, public health, among others) tend to express a higher degree of political worry. According to the mediation analysis carried out, it is possible to state that there is a politicization of the worry caused by COVID-19, in which the worry for the pandemic becomes political worry, related to the response that the State is presenting to the health crisis. In other words, the various situations that have required a state action, especially when such measures are perceived as defficient, with high mistrust or that have deepened the problems associated with the crisis, stimulate favorably the involvement of people in the political-electoral debate and the taking of actions focused on mobilizing others politically.

Thus, while worry about the risks and ravages of COVID-19 turns out to be politically demobilizing, it becomes a mobilizing factor for digital political participation in social media. Therefore, the mediation hypothesis pre-

sented in this research (hypothesis 3), based on the sample studied, could be verified empirically. In this respect, the mistrust toward the state measures, at least in Ecuador, includes a violation of the right to health (Torres-Calderero, 2021), the lack of comprehensive public policies in the socio-economic aspect (Bastidas *et al.*, 2020), the suspension of constitutional guarantees, with an impact on the exercise of human rights (Orellana-Crespo, 2021), would reveal how different factors would explain such political mobilization. These impacts of state measures and how they generate political worry for the population in the pandemic context have also been reported in Argentina (Dettano & Cena, 2021) and Colombia (Rico *et al.*, 2020). In summary, all the proposed working hypotheses obtained favorable empirical evidence, highlighting the mobilizing effect in terms of politicized social media action produced by the worry for COVID-19 once politicized, i.e., transformed into political worry.

On the other hand, the comparative analysis carried out indicates that the health crisis and the worry it caused in the citizens have been critical for the adoption of political behavior through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. While it was channeled in a lesser extend through instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp. This may be explained because digital political behavior, associated with COVID-19 worries, was influenced by the flow of information, news, and even fakenews related to the pandemic, which took place mainly through social networks.

Finally, it is important to point out that these results are exploratory and must be analyzed cautiously. First, the notion of political worry requires a deeper study, particularly regarding the emotional states that involve greater or lesser worry. Second, this paper did not specifically ask about emotions, so confirmation is required about the impacts of fear, anger, or anxiety, among other emotions. In addition, as a third aspect, it is important that we explore whether such political behavior, beyond electoral processes, remains in those whose worry led to a mobilizing path and how they could be activated by other social media that are progressively presenting more use as a means of political diffusion (for example, TikTok). Also, as noted in the methodological section, the results presented here are not generalized to the entire Ecuadorian population, although they may have greater representativeness in citizenship that fit the sociodemographic profile of the sample studied.

For this reason, it is recommended that future work employ more powerful, probabilistic and national samples. Similarly, while this study employed negative emotions (such as anger, fear, and anxiety) as theoretical mechanisms to explain the relationship between different forms of COVID-19 worry and political behavior in social media, it is necessary to move toward the integration of these emotional responses as explicit variables in the empirical models analyzed, in order to achieve a greater understanding of how emotions influence the political responses that citizens are developing in the face of the current changing scenarios that a pandemic context poses.

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## New media in political campaign. The case of Madrid regional elections in 2021 on TikTok

### *Nuevos medios en campaña. El caso de las elecciones autonómicas de Madrid 2021 en TikTok*

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**Received on:** 30/12/2021 **Revised on:** 03/01/2022 **Accepted on:** 27/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

#### **Abstract**

*Due to the television revolution and the arrival of social networks, political communication has undergone a great transformation, both in Spain and in the rest of the world. The use that parties make of their corporative profiles on social networks is increasingly tending towards spectacularization and trivialization of content. TikTok has been the latest platform to burst on the political, media and electoral chessboard. This research explores the role that this social network plays in current political communication, as well as the possibilities it offers for so-called spectacularization and the degree of professionalization with which the different formations work. The publications made by the candidate parties during the campaign and pre-campaign periods of the Madrid 2021 regional elections were taken as sample. This election was the first in which TikTok becomes part of the communication strategies. The content analysis is combined through triangulation with in-depth interviews with the different political groups. The results show an experimental use of TikTok as an electoral tool, a strong commitment to confrontation and trivialization of messages and a better audience response to tendentious and spectacular elements. However, the use of this app remains still unprofessionalized and is not really decisive: what happens on TikTok stays on TikTok.*

#### **Keywords**

*Political communication, TikTok, spectacularization, election campaigns, political parties, social networks, trivialization.*

**Suggested citation:** López-Fernández, V. (2022). New media in political campaign. The case of Madrid regional elections in 2021 on TikTok. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 207-226.  
<https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.09>

## **Resumen**

Con la revolución televisiva y la llegada de las redes sociales, la comunicación política ha experimentado una gran transformación, tanto en España como en el resto del mundo. El uso que los partidos hacen de sus perfiles corporativos en redes cada vez tiende más a la espectacularización y a la trivialización de los contenidos. TikTok ha sido la última plataforma en irrumpir en el tablero político, mediático y electoral. Este trabajo explora el papel que TikTok juega en la comunicación política actual, así como las posibilidades que brinda a la llamada espectacularización y el grado de profesionalización con el que trabajan las distintas formaciones. Se toman como muestra las publicaciones realizadas por los partidos candidatos durante los períodos de campaña y precampaña de las elecciones autonómicas de Madrid 2021, que son las primeras en las que TikTok pasa a formar parte de las estrategias comunicativas. El análisis de contenido se combina por medio de la triangulación con entrevistas en profundidad a los distintos grupos políticos. Los resultados evidencian un uso experimental de TikTok como herramienta electoral, una fuerte apuesta por la confrontación y la trivialización de los mensajes y una mejor respuesta del público ante lo tendencioso y espectacular. Sin embargo, su uso sigue siendo poco profesional y tampoco es determinante, es decir, lo que ocurre en TikTok se queda, al menos de momento, en TikTok.

## **Palabras clave**

Comunicación política, TikTok, espectacularización, campaña electoral, partidos políticos, redes sociales, trivialización

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## **Introduction**

The research focuses on the campaign analysis of the regional elections of Madrid 2021 in TikTok and is presented as an exploratory approach that seeks to provide the first findings regarding the use of social network by political parties during elections. The work occurs in the era of digital communication in a scenario of hybrid actors and liquid procedures (García-Orosa, 2021). The results of this paper seek to provide information on the changing and complex scenario and sometimes it offers differentiated interpretations of similar phenomena. In the dichotomous perspective of recent decades related to the advantages or risks of technology for democracy, concern for manipulation or liberation of citizenship is now being placed. Concern about the use of technology through the creation of artificial public opinion

is increasing, especially in election campaigns (Frost, 2020) but, at the same time, there is growing doubt about the relevance of phenomena such as digital misinformation (Jungheer & Schroeder, 2021).

Technological determinism has marked the evolution of technological innovations in the different actors who promoted their use by the attraction of technology rather than by a rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness (Cheeseman *et al.*, 2018). This research focuses in this context, which seeks to analyze the entry of new technology into election campaigns: TikTok. This is a first approach to a phenomenon that has recently been studied in the field of journalism and communication.

The increased use of TikTok caused changes to the digital communication ecosystem. With a young audience usually under 25 years old (Digital Trends, 2020; Parra, 2020; Beer, 2019; Makarov, 2019), the social network is known not only as a place of entertainment videos but also as an interesting place for organizational communication and influence on the public from different social actors (Zhang, 2020). Institutions, political parties (Medina-Serrano *et al.*, 2020) and companies (Torres-Martín & Villena-Alarcón, 2020) have already taken their first steps.

## **The dissemination of the spectacular**

The consolidation of the Internet as the main gateway to political content has led to a slight evolution in the communicative approaches of parties and leaders. With television, infotainment, first in the United States and then in European (Brants, 1998) and South American countries, has gradually invaded political storylines and speeches. This fusion of genres that Thussu (2007) called politainment aims to trap and sensitize viewers (Carrillo, 2013) and its consequences involve frivolization and superficial treatment of politics (Valdez-López *et al.*, 2020; Berrocal *et al.*, 2012a). The broad response of the public and the immediate dissemination capacity thanks to the social networks (López-Rabadán *et al.*, 2016) have favored their proliferation and roots.

This trend toward spectacularization, personalization and trivialization of political affairs are now on top. The performance, technical and formal features of Twitter (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011), Instagram (Ekman & Widdholm, 2017; López-García, 2017) or the newly released TikTok (Medina-Serrano *et al.*, 2020) promote their use. Parties are attacking from their offi-

cial accounts (Lee & Xu, 2018) humor (Berrocal *et al.*, 2012b) simplicity or the presentation of certain aspects of the private life of candidates (Redondo *et al.*, 2020; Berrocal *et al.*, 2015) to try to obtain more visibility in the digital world and, consequently, in the media agenda of traditional media. In addition, more and more voters from their personal accounts nurture, share, and participate in this coverage.

The origins of the spectacularization of political communication go back to the American audiovisual, where it was experimented with the coverage of electoral campaigns, facing candidates in new formats and versions (Miguel-Sáez *et al.*, 2017). Television presented parties and audiences new humorous, debate or entertainment genres that showed a great welcome to show politics in a more trivial and close way. Years later, the Spanish media import the patterns of American political communication (Paniagua, 2004).

There is a growing interest in political communication in digital environments with the advent of the Internet and from 2000 (Filimonov *et al.*, 2016) and its influence is considerable, especially in election campaigns (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013). The phenomenon begins again in the United States, where public party events are broadcast (Paniagua, 2004). Before and after is marked by the 2008 White House presidential election (López-Meri *et al.*, 2017), in which Democratic candidate Barack Obama used social media to successfully mobilize younger voters (Lee & Xu, 2018). Since then, networks have consolidated as strong platforms for the viral distribution of political images and messages (López-Rabadán *et al.*, 2016) and their arrival has provided a springboard for an even more pronounced spectacularization policy event (López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018).

## Methodology

In this context, the campaign of the regional elections in Madrid held on May 4, 2021 was analyzed, in which the main political parties used TikTok as part of their communication strategies. The main objective was to know the use of this social network and, above all, to observe trends in the changes that it could cause in political communication in the campaign.

Literature review, content analysis and in-depth interviews with campaign managers were used. The study is carried out by selecting a sample composed of the official TikTok profiles of the five political parties repre-

sented at the Madrid Assembly prior to the last electoral call and the content published by them during the time frame established, which corresponds to the campaign and pre-campaign periods of the regional elections and represents a total of 198 videos analyzed manually and with the involvement of a single researcher.

In particular, TikTok's profiles of: Partido Popular de la Comunidad de Madrid, Más Madrid, Vox España (national account of the party), Unidas Podemos (national account of the party) and Ciudadanos (national account of the party) are analyzed.

As for the time zone, it is important to clarify that, although the last date of the videos to analyze is common to all users and is May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021, the last official day of the campaign, the starting point is somewhat volatile between the profiles, since the first publication of each account related to the elections of May 4 has been selected as the initial object. Thus, the initial date ranges between March 14 and 22 in all cases except Vox, whose first video about it is April 13.

This tab includes the main variables used in content analysis:

<b>Identification of the publication</b>	<i>Link</i>	
	<i>Date of publication</i>	
	<i>Pre-campaign/campaign</i>	
	<b>Duration:</b>	
	<b>Text:</b>	
<b>Mentions</b>	<b>Mentions</b>	
<b>Engagement</b>	<b>Coments:</b>	
	<b>Likes:</b>	
	<b>Views:</b>	
	Shares:	
	Engagement achieved (no views):	
<b>Hashtags</b>	<i>Hashtags used</i>	
	Identification of the tag with the highest engagement	<i>Hashtag with the highest engagement</i>
		Number of views:

Formal aspects	Elements used	Stickers/ <b>GIF</b> : <i>Yes/No</i>
		Emojis: <i>Yes/No</i>
		<b>Text</b> : <i>Yes/No</i>
		<b>Survey</b> : <i>Yes/No</i>
		<b>Transition</b> : <i>Yes/No</i>
	External editing: <i>Yes/No</i>	
Content adjusted to TikTok format (correct display): <i>Yes/No</i>		
Audio	Rating: <i>Location/Music/Environment/...</i>	
	Original or reused: <i>Original/reused</i>	
	Videos with the same audio:	
	Videos with the same audio:	
Theme	General theme:	
	Content framed in the 4M campaign: <i>Yes/no</i>	
	Issue frame: Electoral program and purely political issues	Program presentation and general proposals
		Social policy: <i>equality, housing, immigration...</i>
		Economy: <i>taxation, public spending, employment...</i>
		Education
		Health
		Democratic regeneration
		Culture and sport
		Other campaign issues
	Game frame: <b>show</b>	Attacks and confrontation
		Humor
		Personalization of the candidate
		Other: challenges, <i>backstage</i> politics, etc.
	Observations:	

The following variables were worked on in-depth interviews: TikTok's practice in the electoral campaign; motivations and objectives of its use; advantages and disadvantages for the production and circulation of political messages; characteristics of the content, narrative and language of the network; user profile; keys to success of messages; impact of their employment on political communication and democracy; role of audiences; role of supporters and affiliates; role of bots.

## **Results**

The results obtained confirm widespread use of TikTok, although with languages, narratives and strategies similar to the previous ones, and therefore without significant changes in communication, as it follows the guidelines in force on other digital platforms. It highlights a predominance of the spectacularization of political content over the exposure of electoral programs. This trend, original from American screens, penetrated other societies in the world, including the Spanish one. TikTok, for its codes, as well as for the youth of its audience, opened a new window to the spectacular themes and treatments of politics.







### **The arrival of the parties on TikTok**

The campaign of the regional elections in Madrid, which took place on May 4, 2021, was the first in which TikTok became part of the communication strategies of the Spanish political parties. Prior to the call for the elections, the training courses in the application was rather low and the electoral background was null and void.

No Spanish political party was registered on TikTok before 2020 (Table 1), when the social network experienced strong growth following the confinement decreed by the authorities to cope with the expansion of the coronavirus. The first group to join was Unidas Podemos, in January 2020. Vox joined in February of that same year and Ciudadanos a month later. In all three cases, these are corporate profiles for their use nationally, but once Madrid elections are called, they address part of their content into that campaign.

**Table 1**

*Dates of registration on TikTok of the political parties under analysis*

					
18-3-20	28-10-20	11-12-20	28-1-20	13-2-30	-

Something different happens with Más Madrid and Partido Popular de la Comunidad de Madrid, which joined TikTok in October and December 2020 respectively, but with specific accounts with content similar to the one at the borders of the region. In fact, Más Madrid does not show a dynamic activity in the implementation until the beginning of the electoral pre-campaign. For its part, PSOE still does not use its profile, explained in the interview with the limitations that it would imply to be a government party — national.

In most of the cases analyzed, little professionalization of TikTok's accounts is detected. This is seen in the use of recycled content from other platforms instead of specific pieces of the application, in the codes, times and languages used, or in the little adaptation of the videos to TikTok's visual logic. However, Vox and Más Madrid have best managed to adapt and work their messages, with 100% and 90% of their content adjusted to the display format and the requirements of TikTok respectively. Partido Popular de la Comunidad de Madrid stands at 10.8 %, presenting the vast majority of its publications horizontally and with a smaller edition, internal or external, than its opponents.

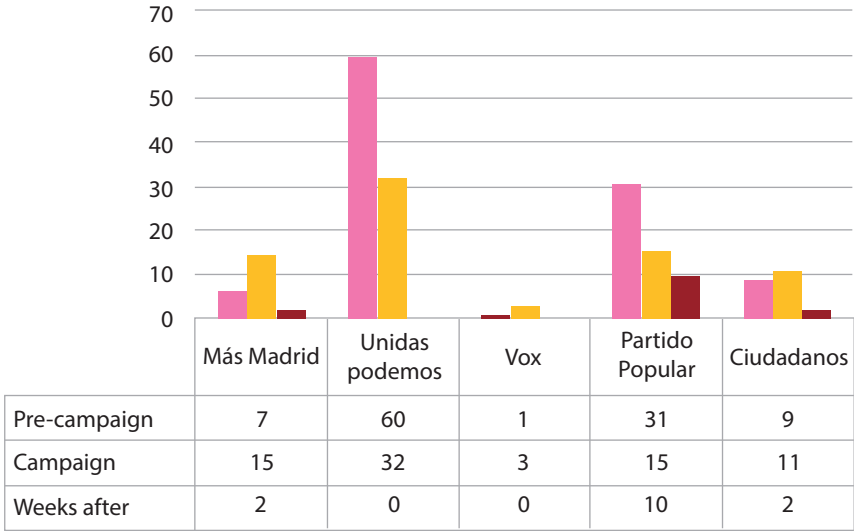
## Planning for the 4M campaign

Despite TikTok's recent addition to political and electoral communication strategies, parties agree that it is a tool that has come to stay. However, teams have worked practically from zero on this platform in this research, both in the planning and design of the messages.

All the political parties included in the sample mentioned in the interviews that had planned this campaign on TikTok on an experimental basis and without considering the decisive or conclusive application for the results of elections.

The audience they intend to reach, in the words of their networking and communication teams, is young—over 18. The idea of Más Madrid, for example, was to connect with new audiences who are not present on other networks and create a space that would not have the bubble effect like Twitter or Instagram, where only the users who follow others can be reached. The same is true with Partido Popular, whose aim is to reach young people from 18 to 23 who do not use media or other social networks.

**Figure 1**  
*Representation of the evolution of videos published by each of the parties during the two periods analyzed, including the week after elections*



During the campaign and pre-campaign periods, the publication rhythms that the parties maintain are very diverse (Figure 1). Más Madrid was more constant during the two weeks before the elections, uploading new content almost daily, but without saturating the viewers. It can be observed an excess of publications, accumulating up to four or five videos per day. The other side of the coin is Vox, which only published four pieces during the

two times analyzed. Partido Popular, which won, is the one that publishes the most videos once the elections are over.

## **Do parties interact with TikTok users?**

The degree of interaction between political parties and their followers and other TikTok users is virtually null compared to that seen on other social networks such as Twitter or Instagram.

Unidas Podemos shows a survey in one of its 92 posts and three responses to user feedback in three other videos. The remaining profiles do not identify any movement in these terms. Other interactions are limited to some mention of other users — usually party members or Ciudadanos show no interactions in the two periods analyzed.

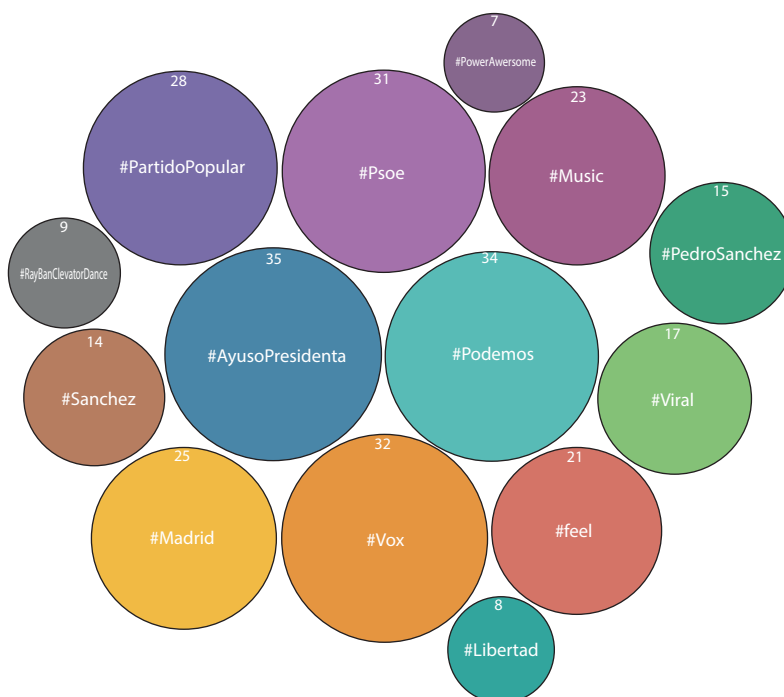
## **Using hashtags and stickers in campaign**

In terms of the inclusion of hashtags and tags in the publications observed, the strong commitment of all parties to their use must be emphasized. However, the way these tools are used differs from one political party to another.

Vox is party that best positions its own hashtags, i.e., those referring to its candidates, members or campaign slogans, integrating at least one of them in each of its four publications. The most widely used is #vox, which accumulated over 534 million views on TikTok during the campaign. In addition, its campaign slogan #ProtegeMadrid is featured in two of the four pieces released by the official account of the green formation, being the second label most used. The only one of their hashtags that refers to another candidate, issue or political party is #

Unidas Podemos and the Partido Popular of the Community of Madrid are the accounts that use the most labels in the descriptions of their videos. In fact, all content published by PP has several hashtags and ten of them do not even use text, i.e., limit their description to tags. However, the strategy adopted by each of these two parties is quite different. Unidas Podemos focuses its references on its own slogans and political leaders, as well as on the Madrid region or on the political adversary Vox.

**Figure 2**  
*Most used hashtags by the Partido Popular de Madrid during the campaign and pre-campaign periods studied*



For its part, Partido Popular very often uses hashtags completely out of the electoral date and the political world itself, as we often encounter labels with commercial challenges, trends or viral terms, such as #RayBanElevatorDance, #music or #PowerAwesome, in order to gain views (Figure 2). Reference to #podemos, #vox or the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez, are also common, appearing even without having any link with the pods.

Ciudadanos is the political group that used the least labels during the election campaign and Más Madrid the one that best combines the use of hashtags and text in the descriptions of their videos, since it always uses both tools and does so without abusing of them, as if occurs in any of the above cases.

As for the stickers, this is a phenomenon for which only Partido Popular is giving its whole, since Unidas Podemos and Ciudadanos hardly employ them and neither Vox nor Más Madrid use any element in all its publications relating to the campaign. As they are corporate accounts, it is believed that the image to be transmitted, closer to a serious and institutional profile, would try to avoid the use of these fun and entertaining elements. Conservative parties use lots of stickers in its profile, present in 82.6% of the videos included in this call for elections.

### **The militants, creators of content for parties?**

The analysis shows that political parties and their communication and networking teams are mostly the main creators of their own content for TikTok. The teams work with their own content, whether developed exclusively for this platform or directly dumped from other networks.

It should be noted that all parties, except Vox, often use their candidates or public representatives in the content creation process. Thus, it is normal to see in the account of Partido Popular pieces starring its leader Isabel Díaz Ayuso, or videos in the profile of Más Madrid focused on the figure of her candidate Mónica García. However, Unidos Podemos is the only team that has several videos produced, directly or indirectly, by militants or other users. Out of the 92 publications of the party during the pre-campaign and campaign weeks, 17 have been created explicitly and exclusively for TikTok by the user and militant @carlagaleote, representing 18.47%. The content is uploaded directly from Unidas Podemos account, a task that was not only carried out during Madrid elections, but was already part of the communication strategy.

### **The dominance of the spectacular**

Both parties and users use TikTok to content that tends to spectacularization or trivialization of today's topics, over those that are purely political or based on elections. In fact, it is striking that Partido Popular only refers to proposals from its electoral program in one of its 45 publications, even though all of them are broadcast in the middle of the campaign.






All parties from the sample bet on more than 50% of trivial, simplistic or spectacular content (Table 2). The most publications in this subdivision

are Vox, since spectacularization covers 100% of its contents. 90% of the videos uploaded by Ciudadanos are also considered trivial, a place completed by Partido Popular with 84.4%. The left-wing parties are the ones which use spectacularization less daring, but they also define more than half of the campaign content in both cases.

Regarding spectacularization, what seems to interest the parties is confrontation with political opponents, accounting for most of the videos in four of the five cases. Partido Popular resorts to attacks in 76.3% of its publications with spectacular content and almost always directs them to the left party, especially the central government (PSOE) and the candidate of Unidas Podemos, Pablo Iglesias. The second position is occupied by Vox (75 %), which also seeks to clash with the purple party. It is precisely Unidas Podemos which completes this ranking with 64% of its trivial pieces framed in this subdivision. In the latter case, the disputes are directed mainly toward the popular leader, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, and to the political group Vox and its representatives.

**Table 2**

*Videos with a tendency to spectacularization published by the parties on TikTok during the campaign and pre-campaign periods of Madrid elections*

Thematic \ Parties					
Attacks and Confrontation	8	6	29	32	3
Candidate Personalization	4	8	6	12	1
Humor	2	0	1	1	0
<i>Backstage</i> Policy	2	1	2	0	0
Retos y <i>challenges</i>	2	0	0	1	0
Challenges	0	1	0	4	0
Celebrity Appearance	18	16	38	50	4
Total videos published	20	22	45	92	4
Percentage of spectacularization	90%	72,7%	84,4%	54,3%	100%

For its part, Más Madrid is once again the exception and focuses its trivial contents on the personalization (50%) of its candidate Mónica García, and her role as health professional during the hardest months of the pandemic. However, confrontation and differences (37.5%) also have a gap on their TikTok profile, being the second category with the largest number of publications.

Also, what the public seems to like most is confrontation, either in *zasca* format—cut or sharp response—or humorous, because it is placed as the category with the best percentages of performance in the five cases analyzed. The most visited videos and with more engagement<sup>1</sup> achieved by Vox, Partido Popular, Ciudadanos, Más Madrid and Unidad Podemos are included in the category of “Attacks and Confrontation”.

Más Madrid, which was the group with the greatest growth of followers during the campaign, is also the party with the best results in the impact achieved, presenting a percentage of 349.1% in its publication with the greatest reach. It has three other publications with values higher than 200%, all under the matching and personalization aspects.

Challenges raised by the different parties are also remarkable. Thus, challenges reported by Ciudadanos not only fail to be replicated, but do not exceed 2.5% and 1.6% of engagement respectively. The same is true of the backstage policy — teaching the part of the policy that is not often seen — which, despite being a promising aspect and perfectly suited to TikTok codes, as the people responsible for networks and communication of the teams mentioned, it has not just taken off any of the three assumptions that resort to it — Partido Popular, Ciudadanos and Más Madrid. Nor do the videos created and generated exclusively for TikTok by Carla Galeote, a militant of Unidas Podemos, yielded good results: of the 17 pieces, only two exceeded 1% of engagement achieved. This could be due to the oversaturation of publications or to their extended duration—in no case they are less than 50 seconds, when the maximum allowed by the platform at that time was 59 seconds by content.

When they do not go the trivial trend, parties also have different attitudes: Unidas Podemos and Partido Popular are more inclined toward social policy issues, hovering around 40% in both cases of the total of videos

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1 Engagement is calculated based on *likes*, comments and shares of each videos, divided in the number of followers of the account and multiplied by 100.

lacking any spectacular content. While Más Madrid is mainly decanted by the presentation of its program and its government proposals, they make up 50% of these cases.

### **What happens in TikTok, stays on TikTok**

This research dismantles the idea that political parties can use TikTok as a key to media agendas, at least for now, as happens to other social networks like Twitter or Instagram. The recent incorporation of this application into election campaigns, as well as the transience of its contents and the lack of relevant issues, make it difficult to introduce it directly into the media and news, at least without any other external impetus, as viral as it may be. This creates a public sphere distanced from the media system, something that the teams could take advantage of in the future to launch more direct and spectacular messages.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

The results show an experimental and not too innovative use of TikTok in the political aspect, as well as a clear predominance of the spectacularization in the content presented by parties in their official profiles in the middle of the electoral campaign. Thus, personalization of candidates, humor, challenges or presentation of political aspects never presented before fit the rhythm and characteristic of the network, where confrontation and attacks between one and the other ideological forces fit perfectly, as showed in this study. TikTok is presented as a new digital alternative to show spectacular political content and speeches, also at the time of elections, a practice that has already being developed in other media lately.

The first of the conclusions calls for a fairly widespread use of TikTok by the political parties in the campaign for regional elections of Madrid 2021, the first in which the platform is part of the communicative plans of parties. Of the six candidate groups, only the PSOE has left TikTok on the sidelines of its electoral strategy, claiming the limitation of being a government party to delay its use on this social network as much as possible. This is due to a matter of image, since the party considers that it is a network that could take away seriousness and formality from its proposal.

It also certifies the low degree of professionalization that exists in most of the TikTok accounts included in this sample. The arrival of the parties into the application has been very recent, none of them registered before 2020. All the groups surveyed acknowledged having proposed the campaign of the Madrid elections in an experimental way and without putting any expectations on it as regards the decision to vote. The definition of its target audience is also unanimous: young people and people of voting age. However, the professionalization level of the profiles of Vox and Más Madrid, which are the parties experiencing the greatest growth of followers during the official campaign period, are above that of their opponents. Both have most of their content adapted to the display format and the requirements of TikTok. Moreover, regarding Más Madrid, the publication rates during the weeks before the elections are very constant and do not imply oversaturation.

The second conclusion, related to the previous ones, shows that the interaction degree of political parties with their followers is practically non-existent, even during the electoral period, especially when compared to other social networks such as Twitter or Instagram. Only Unidas Podemos present some interaction in some of its publications, but also non-significant.

The third conclusion reveals the strong commitment of Partido Popular de Madrid to the use of stickers — in 82.6 % of its videos — and hashtags, with the aim of obtaining a greater scope and number of visits in the application. Conservative party often uses viral challenge tags or commercial campaigns, totally align the campaign itself and the political reality, to gain visits and impact. Abusive use of hashtags is also common in Unidas Podemos, but in this case they are not used in a decontextualized way. The parties that used the hashtags the best are Vox and Más Madrid, since they prioritized those terms that refer to their own candidates, parties or campaign slogans.

The fourth and final conclusions show that both TikTok's parties and consumers prefer content with spectacular and trivial ideas, far exceeding the data obtained for all the electoral programs or the political reality. Spectacularization predominates in the communication of the five political parties sampled. All of them bet, with more than 50%, on videos and messages with a simplistic, theatrical or spectacular character. However, right parties prefer this type of format, since they account for 100% of the total publications in the case of Vox. 90 % for Ciudadanos and 84.4 % for Partido Popular de Madrid. In a lesser extent, left parties also prefer this type of format.

Confrontation with political opponents is what citizens like most, and it is what best works for the accounts of the five parties analyzed. Attacks and clashes predominate in the profiles of Partido Popular (76.3%), Vox (75%), Unidos Podemos (64%) and Ciudadanos (44.44%), in the total of their publications classified as spectacular. While left-wing groups focus their disputes on Isabel Díaz Ayuso, candidate of Partido Popular, or Vox, right-wing forces focus primarily on the image of Pablo Iglesias, a candidate of Unidas Podemos. The response of TikTok users is also unanimous, as confrontation is the most important impact in the five cases studied. Even Más Madrid, whose strategy is based on the personalization of its leader, Mónica García, presents a better performance in those videos that contain cuts, polemics or ideological contentions.

Nevertheless, the video sample available in some of the cases has been quite small—specifically Vox, Más Madrid and Ciudadanos and previous research was almost non-existent, hence it is advisable to be cautious with the percentages obtained on spectacularization and not to generalize the results. The most representative results were achieved by Unidas Podemos and Partido Popular, whose samples are considerably higher. It would be interesting to continue working along these lines, to confirm with future research the trivial trends that political communication can adopt on TikTok, as well as the real influence that this social network can have on citizens and their votes in future electoral processes.

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## **The political use of terrorism in the 2021 Peruvian presidential campaign**

### ***La utilización política del terrorismo en la campaña presidencial peruana de 2021***

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**Received on:** 6/12/2021 **Revised on:** 22/01/2022 **Accepted on:** 25/02/2022 **Published on:** 01/03/2022

**Suggested citation:** Mendoza, M. (2022). La utilización política del terrorismo en la campaña presidencial peruana de 2021. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, pp. 227-252. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.10>.

### **Abstract**

*The 2021 presidential elections constituted a turning point in the recent history of Peru. In a context of sociosanitary crisis and impugnations to the political system, the Bicentenary Elections evidenced the profound social fragmentation and polarization between the representatives of the neoliberal project and those who promote a reformist alternative.*

*In particular, the presidential campaign for the second round between the right-wing candidate Keiko Fujimori and the left-wing candidate Pedro Castillo configured a favorable scenario for the instrumentalization of the “terrorqueo”. This strategy, used by the dominant elites in the post-conflict period to discredit any person, act or group that constitutes a threat to the established order, was reconfigured at this juncture to avoid a potential victory of the Serrano candidate, constructing him as a terrorist threat that would put democracy at risk.*

*Through critical discourse analysis, it is analyzed which were the discursive resources used by the dominant elites to delegitimize the left-wing adversary, using for this purpose messages issued in the presidential debates, Keiko Fujimori’s government plan and the “anti-communist campaign” developed by the main right-wing representatives in the most important national and international media.*

*As main conclusions, it is observed that the three most widely used strategies were: 1. building a negative image of the left-wing candidate, presenting him as a terrorist enemy; 2. presenting the right-wing candidate as the protector of democracy and freedom against the communist threat; and 3. appealing to social memory about the internal armed conflict that fueled the fear of the return of terrorism. We maintain that these strategies managed to frame the media treatment of the presidential campaign as a confrontation between “us” the defenders of democracy and “them” the promoters of the communist dictatorship due to the persistence of socio-historical elements that systematically emerge in Peru in contexts of sociopolitical crisis.*

### **Keywords**

*Peru, terrorism, campaign, presidency, criminalization, bicentenary, internal armed conflict, internal enemy, terrorqueo.*

### **Resumen**

Las elecciones presidenciales de 2021 constituyeron un punto de inflexión en la historia reciente de Perú. En un contexto de crisis sociosanitaria e impugnaciones al sistema político, las Elecciones del Bicentenario evidenciaron la profunda fragmentación social y la polarización entre los representantes del proyecto neoliberal y aquellos que promueven una alternativa reformista.

En particular, la campaña presidencial para la segunda vuelta entre la candidata de derecha Keiko Fujimori y el candidato de izquierda Pedro Castillo configuró un escenario propicio para la instrumentalización del “terrorqueo”. Esta estrategia, empleada por las élites dominantes en el período posconflicto para desprestigiar a cualquier persona, acto o colectivo que constituya una amenaza al orden establecido, se reconfiguró en esta coyuntura para evitar un potencial triunfo del candidato serrano, construyéndolo como una amenaza terrorista que pondría en riesgo la democracia.

A través del Análisis Crítico del Discurso, se analiza cuáles fueron los recursos discursivos utilizados por las élites dominantes para deslegitimar al adversario de izquierda, utilizando para ello los mensajes emitidos en los debates presidenciales, el plan de gobierno de Keiko Fujimori y la “campaña anticomunista” que sostuvieron los principales sectores de derecha en los principales medios de comunicación nacionales e internacionales.

Como principales conclusiones, se observa que las tres estrategias más utilizadas fueron: 1. la negativización del candidato de izquierda mediante su construcción como un enemigo terrorista; 2. la presentación de la candidata de derecha como la protectora de la democracia y la libertad frente a la amenaza comunista; 3. y la apelación a la memoria social sobre el conflicto armado interno que avivó el miedo al retorno del terrorismo. Sostenemos que estas estrategias lograron encuadrar el tratamiento mediático de la campaña presidencial como un enfrentamiento entre “nosotros” los defensores de la democracia y “ellos” los impulsores de la dictadura comunista debido a la persistencia de elementos sociohistóricos que emergen sistemáticamente en Perú en contextos de crisis sociopolítica.

### **Palabras clave**

Perú, terrorismo, campaña, presidencia, criminalización, bicentenario, conflicto armado interno, enemigo interno, terrorqueo.

## Introduction

The year 2021 was one of profound mutations for the Andean country. In a context marked by the expansion of SARS-CoV-2 that crudely exhibited the consequences of neoliberalism on a health system overwhelmed by lack of investment and the effects of the political crisis unleashed at the end of 2020, general elections were carried out for the period 2021-2026, in which the president, two vice-presidents, one hundred thirty congressmen and five representatives to the Andean Parliament were elected.

The first round, carried out on Sunday April 11, was disputed between eighteen parties and party coalitions, evidencing the profound fragmentation of the party system and the difficulty to establish alliances between sectors with shared interests.

The polarization between representatives of the radical right-wing and of the left-wing deepened in the face of the second round, disputed on June 6<sup>th</sup> between Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular and Pedro Castillo Terrores from Peru Libre, who was elected president by a margin of 0.252 % against Fujimori.

The Bicentenary elections constituted a faithful reflection of the historical dispute between the coast —core of the political and economic power and essential pivot for the primary resources exporting model— and the mountains —which generate this wealth and are at a place of subsidiarity from the central state processes—. Similarly, they exhibited the deepening to the political party fragmentation that Peru experiences from the collapse of the party system occurred at the end of the 1980s.

In this electoral scenario another continuity element of Peruvian history also became present, heir of the internal armed conflict period (1980-2000): the instrumentalization of terrorism to discredit the adversary. Indeed, although the figure of the terrorist gains strength during this phase of escalating violence, it is in the post-conflict period where an instrumental use of terrorism on the different forms of dissidence is observed. This use becomes increasingly frequent on those persons or collectives that constitute a threat —real or fictitious— to the established order.

This research analyzes the political use of terrorism in the campaign for the first and second electoral rounds corresponding to the 2021 presidential elections in Peru, as a strategy to discredit the adversary and construct him/her as an enemy. Meanwhile, the dominant elites have been the ones that

have employed this characterization to delegitimize their leftist opponents or all who threatens the —neoliberal— established order; for the sake of developing this hypothesis, we will focus on the discourses and messages issued by the right-wing forces.

With the objective of elucidating which are the discursive strategies used by Peruvian dominant groups in the most recent presidential elections to erode the reputation of a candidate potentially dangerous for preserving their interests, a critical discourse analysis is conducted considering as elements the messages issued during the presidential debates, government plan, graphic campaign and public speeches of the right-wing candidates and forces in communication media. We inscribe this situational analysis in a long duration reading that enables to identify continuities and changes in the criminalization strategies deployed by elites, mainly from Lima, every time their privileges are questioned.

## **Studies about criminalization in Latin America**

The studies about criminalization have mainly focused on situations of social protest, which have been addressed from a diversity of perspectives in Latin American literature.

The predominant approach is the legal one, within which it is highlighted the new criminal law trend that warns about institutionalization of the criminal law of the enemy (Jakobs, 2006), focused on the preventive sanction of an individual considered dangerous, even when he/she has not committed any crime. The reflections by Máximo Sozzo (2016) are in this line of thought; he points out the increasing use of this sobering punitive model in South America, from the perspective of the Argentine critical criminology. Similarly, the Argentine sociologist and jurist Roberto Gargarella (2008) has denounced the judicialization of politics to control dissidence.

The works by Mirtha Vásquez (2015, 2018) stand out in the field of Peruvian legal studies; these works analyze the deployment of undemocratic mechanisms and the social protest “criminalizing policy” that Peruvian governments have implemented since Fujimori. Similarly, the work by Juan Carlos Ruiz-Molleda of the Legal Defense Institute (2020) performs a reconstruction of the legislations of the past two decades, which tended to an intensification of the penalties and a smaller tolerance to dissidence, espe-

cially related to the human rights defenders of the Andean country. These works are predominantly focused on the imprisonment rates and the prosecution procedures as an expression of criminalization.

In this paper, criminalization is understood as a process that includes imprisonment, but exceeds it, identifying other instances of isolation, stigmatization and persecution of criminalized groups to legitimate and naturalize the deployment of a violent response, such as the use of a qualifier that takes us back to the most recent period of social unrest to erode its legitimacy through its construction as a threat.

In coincidence with Calveiro (2012), terrorism is understood as a political, ideological and functional juridical construction to the actual forms of organization, accumulation and concentration of neoliberalism. The blurry borders exhibited by the term enable consolidating legal interstices that, although valid during states of emergency (Schmitt, [1932] 1991), are applied on populations identified as threats (Agamben, 2007).

This brings us to a specificity of the type of state violence typical of the region: its historical deployment not on a foreign enemy, but on an internal one (Centeno, 2014). From the second half of the twentieth century and up to the end of the 1990s, this internal enemy acquired the qualifier of subversive or terrorist, according to the terms delimited by the National Security Doctrine and under dictatorial political systems (Feierstein, 2014), and it was defined by its presumable link to communist groups. In the period analyzed in this paper, the use of the terrorist qualifier is reinterpreted, it is applied on different social subjects and, moreover, it takes place in a formal democracy scenario.

### **The political-media construction of the terrorist enemy in post-conflict Peru: genealogy and validity of the practice of “terruqueo”**

The research works that have focused on the political use of terrorism as a mean to delegitimize social struggles, expressions of dissidence or anti-neoliberal presidential candidatures, are scarce in the Peruvian field of study. However, some works contribute to understand the analysis proposed in this paper.

First, it is worth mentioning the work by Flores-Galindo, who in *Buscando un Inca* (1994) reflects about the Peruvian identity and the Andean imaginaries that conjugate in it. It is stated there that, during the internal ar-

med conflict, the language was slowly transformed in line with the tortures and murders perpetrated on Andean populations:

‘Senderista’ was replaced by ‘terrorist’ and this word became over time a synonym of “people from Ayacucho”, which in turn was equivalent to anyone who was Indian or mestizo, was poorly dressed, or made a deficient use of Spanish... To be called “people from Ayacucho” was to admit to have incurred in the antiterrorist law. In this manner, the end of the war in 1984, became an onslaught of the western side of Peru against its Andean region. (p. 334)

The doctoral thesis by Peralta-Ruiz (1996) entitled *Prensa, opinión pública y terrorismo en Perú (1980-1994)* stands out in a similar line; this work explores the news treatment of three newspapers with national (*El Comercio*) and international (*El País* from Spain and *The New York Times* from the United States of America) scope, about the political violence deployed by *Sendero Luminoso*. It concludes that the contents and comments of these media issued from the beginning of the internal armed conflict up to the capture of all the leaders of the organization contributed to spectacularize *senderista* political violence in front of public opinion.

In his analysis about the informative treatment of each media analyzed, he points out that the reference newspaper from Lima moved away from a “structural, historic and anthropological” discourse, as opposed to what he states was the discourse of the international newspapers analyzed, emphasizing on the “insane, criminal, resentful and polpotiana nature of *senderista* violence”. According to the author, this is in line with its identification with the current political power and, specially, with the Army and the national security doctrine.

On the other hand, Aguirre (2011) analyzes the mutation of the word terrorist to “terrucó” in the context of the internal armed conflict and its further use as an insult directed to a diversity of players, from “human rights defenders, relatives of detained people and other victims of political violence, and people of indigenous origin in general” (p. 103). He states that, although the origin of the word is not clear<sup>1</sup>, its colloquial and daily use contributed to the naturalization of the link between indigenous or serrano and terrorist. Furthermore, such naturalization, operated in the framework of the

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1 Aguirre explores the possible origins of the term and concludes that the two more feasible hypotheses are that it was a military term taken in ownership by the local population of Ayacucho or a “quechuization” of the word terrorist (2011, pp. 117-119).

counterinsurgency policy to frighten people about the threat represented by a change of system, operates since then to discredit both indigenous people as well as people identified with leftist values, progressivism or the defense of human rights. Indeed, he refers to the 2011 presidential campaign, when Ollanta Humala, who by then showed himself as the representative of the “turn to the left”, and in his political campaign proposed the “great transformation”, was branded as “terrucó”, even when he, in his post of Army commander, had participated in countersubversive actions.

Similarly, the own Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR, Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, 2008) states that it was the government of Alberto Fujimori which, after capturing the leader of Sendero Luminoso Abimael Guzmán in 1992, and after the self-coup that installed a sort of “democradura” or “dictablanda”<sup>2</sup>, terrorism started to be instrumentally used with propaganda purposes in operations directed by the National Intelligence Service (SIN, Servicio de Inteligencia Nacional), mainly against members of the opposition and, even, of his own government.

With respect to the electoral context being analyzed, it stands out the work by Bedoya-Forno *et al.* (2021), who explore the use of the “terrúqueo” by Fujimorists towards Pedro Castillo. The “terrúqueo” is defined by these authors as an imaginary construction employed to:

Discredit a group or an individual, converting them in a clearly identifiable target. Maliciously represented as terrorists, these people become enemies, or at least are presented as such in political, military and media discourses. (p. 13)

Similarly, the paper by Álvarez Chávez (2021) constitutes a fundamental contribution, as it analyzes the social imaginaries present in the speeches issued during the second electoral round between Castillo and Fujimori and identifies the use of the “ghost of communism”, which is automatically assimilated to the terrorist, to the serrano and opposed to development indigenous, as well as the threat of “Venezuelization” that his victory would represent. The onslaught against the figure of Castillo and his accusation of being

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2 In April 1992, after the refusal of the Congress of granting him extraordinary powers, Alberto Fujimori ordered its dissolution and established the so-called “Emergency and National Reconstruction Government”. Since then, it started a period that combined censorship and authoritarianism with a limited functioning of democratic institutions. This is why the term dictatorship is used frequently to characterize Fujimorism, and it has been demonstrated that during his government, under the pretext of antiterrorist fight, human rights violations were committed.

a terrorist by the Fujimorist party lead the author to state the possible emergence of a phenomenon that he calls “Neo-Fujimorism” or “new Peruvian style fascism” (p. 339).

Huanca-Arohuanca (2021a) also refers to the ghost of terrorism and its presence in the first electoral round of 2021. He concludes that it is possible to evidence the validity of the ideological fight between a new ascending left-wing and a radical and outdated right-wing, the discrimination of the coast towards the mountain and the disinformation present in Peruvian communication media (p. 3). In a later paper, Huanca-Arohuanca (2021b) concentrates on the media power and the manipulation exercised by the multi-media disseminating hatred and racism messages towards the serranas and indigenous communities in general.

Similarly, Pierina Pighi-Bel, in a journalistic article published six days before the second round (BBC, May 30 2021), provides a brief reflection about how the “terruqueo” has been used in the campaign between these two candidates. Besides referring to the use of the term during the 1990s, when it was mostly employed to refer to the opponents of Fujimorism, from 2000, states Pighi-Bel, it is used to discredit those who support the convictions due to human rights violation by the ex-president. She even adds a use of the term to refer to those who criticize the neoliberal economical model.

María Sosa-Mendoza (June 2021) adds that, in this electoral scenario, the word communist was presented as a “synonym of expropriation, of misery, of terrorism, of reduction of freedoms, of Cuba and Venezuela (...) was equivalent to being a social resentful, but also being “Andean and ignorant”. Consequently, any candidate, politician, intellectual, journalist or voter who assumed a position of relative acceptance to a proposal by Castillo, was subject to the same stigmatization campaign.

As it is evidenced in the following sections, in the post-conflict period these practices are not implemented randomly, but on those personalities, movements or expressions of change that erode or are perceived as potential threats to the neoliberal model.

## **Materials and methods**

This research uses a qualitative methodology and, as it prioritizes the analysis of social, political and media constructions about terrorism that

were disseminated in the framework of an electoral process, it is chosen the technique of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

The classical approach proposed by Van Dijk, oriented to explore, from a multidisciplinary focus, the relationships between discourse and society and, particularly, the incidence of the discourse in reproducing the inequalities, invites to retake one of the main questions: “How are dominant groups capable of establishing, maintaining and legitimating their power, and which discursive resources are deployed in such domination? (1999, p. 24). This question leads us to focus on the “manipulation and domination resources used by elites, since they have a specific control on public discourse”.

First, it is worth mentioning that the capacity to access the media resources necessary to canalize their interests and disseminate their messages was unequal in the case of Castillo and Fujimori. Indeed, the figure of Keiko Fujimori was not unknown in the electoral scenario analyzed, since besides being the daughter of the ex-dictator and occupying a position as congresswoman between 2006 and 2011, she finished second in the presidential race in three opportunities (2011 against Ollanta Humala, 2016 against Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and 2021 against Castillo)<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, Castillo had a low level of national visibility when the first round took place and was made invisible by large Peruvian communication media and polling firms in pre-election analyses.

Second, it is pointed out that the capacity to control the discourses issued and with capacity of reaching people was neither equitable, with an overrepresentation of the proposals of Fuerza Popular and their presentation as the “saviors of the Republic” in front of the communist danger represented by Castillo.

Ultimately, it is necessary to point out that these reflections pursue the purpose of making visible practices and discourses that exhibit the current existence of structural racism and the persistence of imaginaries that erode the democratic system and hinder the capacity of constructing alternatives to the neoliberalism prevailing from the 1990s. Then, elucidating how dominant elites contribute to reproduce racist and class-biased practices and discourses through the use of stereotypes and prejudices that takes us back to the era of armed conflicts with the purpose of propagating terror among people constitutes, thus, one of the main objectives of this research.

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3 In 2011 she obtained 48.55 % against Ollanta Humala and in 2016 49.88 % against Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

Based on these premises, it becomes evident that the focus of the “*terruqueo*” campaign was Pedro Castillo, his political allies and his supporters, being the right-wing supporters the ones who issued these messages. To develop the analysis, it is employed a combination of materials that enable constructing a diachronic reading about the use of these characterizations in the campaign official period, between March and June 2021<sup>4</sup>.

At first instance, the presidential debate corresponding to the first electoral round organized by the National Election Jury in three rounds on March 29th, 30th and 31<sup>st</sup>, transmitted through open television and the two debates corresponding to the ballotage carried out on May 1<sup>st</sup> in Chota (Cajamarca) and on May 30<sup>th</sup> in Arequipa constitute the core of the analysis<sup>5</sup>. The exploration of the proposals of the right-wing candidate, Keiko Fujimori, in her Government Plan, is added to the analysis, together with the posters that accompanied the “*anticommunist campaign*” and the public speeches and mediated messages of right-wing representatives for the second round, that contributed to the delegitimizing campaign of the “*antisystem*” candidate.

As a tool of political communication, the presidential debates enable, in articulation with government plans, to know the proposals of the candidates and their positioning around the main topics of the political agenda (Benoit & Henson, 2007), as well as analyzing the construction and representation of identities and alterities (Kanashiro, 2007).

In the case analyzed, as it is about a political scenario atomized by the political and social-health crisis, in a society with an endemic weakness of parties to solve people’s problems (Nercesian & Mendoza, 2020), this tool becomes useful to also make visible the discursive confrontation strategies between ideas and country models. Indeed, we agree with Giordano (2021) in that televised presidential debates constitute a tool “mostly used to legitimate certain positions in contexts of strong institutional, political and/or economic crisis” (Giordano, 2020).

On the other hand, the analysis of public speeches and campaigns of the right-wing representatives and forces aligned with the candidate who positioned herself as defender of the neoliberal model and the media treatment

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4 The campaign of the first round took place between March 12th and April 9th, while the second round extended between May 1st and May 31st.

5 The technical debate carried out on May 23rd between the members of the *Fuerza Popular* and *Peru Libre* teams are excluded from the analysis.

of the “anticommunist campaign”, enables to understand how such discourses circulated in the public arena.

## Results

### **First round: between the allegations of corruption, the “strong hand” discourse and the danger of “Venezuelization”**

The first electoral round was carried out on April 11<sup>th</sup> between eighteen lists and party coalitions. The effects of the political crisis that started in November 2020 would become present in the electoral scenario. In that opportunity, the street protests were quickly deployed in various cities of Peru —despite the social-health crisis— in light of the announcement of Martin Vizcarra’s removal of the presidency due to “permanent moral inability” and his replacement by an opposition leader —Manuel Merino— and a cabinet that people perceived as illegitimate since it had not emanated from a popular election.

Similar to other countries in the region, the protests combined with an impugnation of the neoliberal model that became a demand for a constitutional reform aimed at overcoming the Fujimorist Constitution of 1993 and start a refounding process. The year of the Bicentenary was headed towards becoming a hinge moment of Peruvian history. However, the elections would evidence more historical continuities than change signals.

Three processes articulated in the first round: multiple candidatures of different ideological expressions, dispersion of votes with low percentages obtained by every party coalition<sup>6</sup> and high levels of electoral abstention<sup>7</sup>. The polarization between right-wing and left-wing candidates started

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6 Among the six better positioned candidates, four of them obtained vote percentages close to 10%: Verónica Mendoza from Juntos por el Perú; 7.83 %; Yonhy Lescano from Acción Popular, 9.10 %; Hernando De Soto, from Avanza País, 11.65 %; Rafael López Aliaga from Renovación Popular, 11.68 %. The performance of the two candidates that reached the second round broke away by a bounded margin: Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular obtained 13,35 % and Pedro Castillo Terrones from Perú Libre, 19.09 %.

7 According to data of ONPE (2021), participation of people reached 70.048 %, equivalent to 17,713,716 voters of the 25 million in conditions of casting their vote. Similarly, there was 12.364

to draw a second-round scenario: on one side, the dictatorial right-wing in the figure of Keiko Fujimori, its corporate side represented by Rafael López Aliaga and its orthodox liberalism variant represented by Hernando De Soto; on the other side, the most radical left-wing, represented by Verónica Mendoza, Marco Arana and the own Pedro Castillo, peasant leader and teacher from Cajamarca.

### **First presidential debate**

For the first presidential debate, organized by the National Election Board and broadcasted by *TV Perú*, the eighteen candidates were divided in three rounds, carried out on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. Each event lasted for 2 hours and 20 minutes. The debate axes were: 1. Actions to face the pandemics, 2. Education, 3. Public security 4. Public integrity and fight against corruption and 5. Final arguments. For the purposes of this research, we focus on the speeches of the three right-wing candidates among the six that were better positioned in the first round:<sup>8</sup> Keiko Fujimori, Rafael López Aliaga y Hernando De Soto.

The first day were called César Acuña from Alianza para el Progreso, Keiko Fujimori from Fuerza Popular, George Forsyth from Victoria Nacional, Verónica Mendoza from Juntos por el Perú, Alberto Beingolea from the Partido Popular Cristiano and Marco Arana from the Frente Amplio.

In her intervention regarding the first axis, Keiko Fujimori stated that: “The pandemics has undressed two very significant facts: the fact that the presidents of the Republic are completely incapable, inefficient and have ideological limitations” (National Election Board, March 29 2021), referring to the pandemics management by Vizcarra and interim president Francisco Sagasti, who took office after the Merino’s resignation. The candidate of Fuerza Popular would explain that these “ideological limitations” had prevented the country from obtaining economic aid by the private sector and, when vaccines started to be commercialized, acquiring them from other laboratories besides the Gamaleya National Research Center in Epidemiology and Microbiology, from Russia.

After the speech by Marco Arana, who stated that the problems related to the social-health crisis had their origin in the Fujimorist Constitution,

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% of blank votes and 6.340 % of null votes.

8 See footnote 6.

Keiko responded with a defense of this Magna Carta, to which she attributed the capability of generating “peace and development”, in contrast with the 1979 Constitution that would have generated “chaos, violence, poverty”. According to the candidate, it was “thanks to the savings of this sustainable economy that have been possible thanks to the 1993 Constitution”, that bonuses could be given to the families mostly affected by the confinement preventive measures.

In the second axis, referred to education, she stated that it was necessary to eliminate the school books whose contents point out that “terrorism is an armed conflict. That is a barbarity”. In the public security axis, she proposed “a strong hand” to “stop crime and corruption”, and she invoked the need to reform the prison system and construct new jails that offer a solution to overcrowding, opportunity that she used to refer her own experiences as inmate, considered as unfair by the candidate.

Then, the candidate acknowledged “to the Armed Forces and to the National Police for giving us security during so many years, for helping us to overcome terrorism and for continuing to put the chest to face the pandemics”. She ended her intervention in this axis reiterating that the crime promoted by “weak and softy governments” could only be overcome with strong hand and concluded: “as Alberto Fujimori defeated terrorism, I, Keiko Fujimori, will defeat crime”.

In the hand in hand dialog with Arana, corresponding to the section of questions from people, the candidate directly related the left-wing with lack of investment, chaos and violence dissemination and destruction of economy: “We, from Fuerza Popular, will fight and we will not allow that You condemn Peru to poverty, to inequality, to poverty. I say no to radical left-wing.”

The second event occurred on March 30 between Daniel Urresti from Podemos Perú, Pedro Castillo from Perú Libre, Hernando de Soto from Avanza País, José Vega from Unión por el Perú — who retired at the beginning of the debate stating that it did not guarantee democracy — Andrés Alcántara from Democracia Directa and Ollanta Humala from Partido Nacionalista Peruano.

Hernando De Soto took Ollanta Humala as the axis of his main attacks and in various opportunities he made reference to his own contribution in the fight against terrorism and the capture of Abimael Guzmán, attributing such victory to himself and minimizing, at the same time, the participation of the candidate Humala in such fight, for not being a victim of SL as he had

been. Similarly, aligned with his economic thinking, he attributed to himself the liberal transformation of the country and his protagonist participation in the writing of the 1993 Constitution as his main political achievements.

The last day were called Rafael López Aliaga from Renovación Popular<sup>9</sup>, Julio Guzmán Cáceres from the Partido Morado, Yonhy Lescano from Acción Popular, Rafael Santos from Perú Patria Segura, Daniel Salaverry from the Partido Democrático Somos Perú and Ciro Gálvez from Renacimiento Unido Nacional.

Corruption occupied an important part of the first axis, with mutual accusations about who had been direct and indirect responsible of the social-health crisis, the lack of investment in health and the collapse of intensive care units.

In the axis of public security, López Aliaga stated that, if elected, he would propose a change in the Criminal Code to guarantee that minor crimes that “take off peace and tranquility to Peruvians” are punished with effective prison, major crimes are processed in the Colonia Penal Agrícola del Sepa<sup>10</sup> — which, therefore, implied its reopening — including life imprisonment to “rapists, presidents, congressmen, regional governors, majors, judges, prosecutors and other corrupt officials”, and expulsion to foreign people that commit crimes “against Peruvians” (JNE, March 30, 2021).

Similarly, he proposed to eliminate “the communist caviar laws<sup>11</sup> to defend our Police and Armed Forces from the abuse and persecution of civil judges as it occurs at present”. He closed his speech referring to the need of controlling the VRAEM<sup>12</sup> region “currently dominated by terrorists and drug dealers” and exploiting the region through agro-exporting and touristic activities and reestablish the self-defense committees against terrorism.

In his final arguments, he warned about the danger of “Venezuelization” of Peru: “Peruvians, this July 28<sup>th</sup> is different. Or we move on to be a world

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9 The participation of López Aliaga attracted the attention of both own and others, since he had to appeal to the reading of his notes for all his interventions, and in practically two hours and a half of debate he kept the eye on them, repeating even textually the same proposals.

10 The Sepa is a prison for inmates condemned to long sentences or recidivists, located in the Amazon jungle. It was created in 1948 during the military government of Manuel Odría and operated between 1951 and 1993.

11 In reference to the political left-wing (Calvo Pérez, 2016). *Diccionario de peruanismos*. Peruvian Language Academy).

12 Valleys of the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro River, considered as an area of confluence of terrorist remnants.

power or we move on to be Venezuela and we will continue with the same corruption after many years of corrupt presidents and congressmen”.

### *Government Plan “Rescue 2021”*

The second document used for this analysis is the Government Plan 2021-2026 of Keiko Fujimori called “Rescue 2021”. The Introduction, signed by the own candidate, makes reference to a categorical distinction between two models that have governed the country during the last fifty years. In line with her intervention in the presidential debate, this document distinguishes between a model, dominant between the 1970s and 1980s, that generated “poverty, insecurity and chaos” and a weak State that enabled “that terrorist groups impose violence and fear among the population”, whose germ may be found in the 1979 Constitution; and a model, established by her own father, whose essential pivot is the 1993 Constitution, axis for an open economy. This aperture evidenced that her space would not promote nor endorse a new Constitution.

In section 2.3 National Security and Defense (p. 39), the Government Plan makes reference to the new threats doctrine to point out that, in the fight against these new enemies, “our true heroes”, i.e., the members of the Armed Forces and of the National Police, “have been maltreated and are also maltreated today, not recognized, vilified and even humiliated by communist sectors that seek to destroy the institutionality and stability of the country (...) that sector that seeks to put us away and divide us”. Finally, the Vision of the Government Plan retakes the heroic rhetoric deployed in the presidential debate and establishes a line of historic continuity between the restoration process initiated by her father and the one that her government would develop: “Is the moment of rescuing our country. Fujimorism already made it before when we were in the middle of the terrorist attack and the hyperinflation generated by the populism always toxic for the economy of a nation” (p. 85)

During the campaign for the first round, Castillo was not the focus of the attack of his right-wing adversaries, in part because they did not expect that he would have a good performance. The result obtained in the first round by the peasant candidate surprised even political analysts and pollsters, who placed him below the fourth position. Indeed, experts predicted that the second round would be disputed between right-wing representatives (Global

South Observatory, 2021)<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, the target of the attacks were mainly Verónica Mendoza, who had already been a victim of a fear campaign in the 2016 elections and Marco Arana, who were pointed as apologists of terrorism and linked to communist ideas that would transform Peru into “another Venezuela”.

The analysis of these two elements enables us to visualize that, during the first round, it was configured a scenario of polarization between two country models that maintains continuity with the dynamics adopted by electoral campaigns in the post-conflict period: on one side, the representatives of the authoritarian neoliberal model proposed by Fujimori and, on the other side, those that hold a reformist standpoint, with larger presence of the State and people participation in decision making. The representatives of the dominant sectors issued a discourse invoking the past and the historic achievement of Fujimorism during the 1990s materialized in the defeat of subversion and the establishment of a neoliberal economic model.

The figure of Keiko was positioned, as in previous electoral scenarios, as the representative of such interests and both in the debate as well as in her government plan, she established a line of continuity between that process initiated by her father and his own historic achievement: the rescue of the country from the danger of “Venezuelization”. At this instance, the negation discursive strategies were focused on the link of the left-wing with lack of investment, violence and destruction of economy, and the presentation of economic liberalism, the strong hand and the defense of the 1993 Constitution as the safeguard against such threat.

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13 For a territorial analysis of the vote in the first round, see the Electoral Report of the Global South Observatory (2021). It is specified there that: “Castillo won in 16 departments (Cajamarca, Amazonas, San Martín, Áncash, Arequipa, Moquegua, Ayacucho, Tacna, Puno, Cusco, Apurímac, Huanacavelica, Junín, Pasco, Huánuco and Madre de Dios), whereas Keiko won in 7 (Callao, Ica, Lambayeque, Loreto, Piura, Tumbes and Ucayali). On the other hand, De Soto won in Lima and Cesar Acuña in La Libertad. The regions where Castillo had a greater percentage, especially the south and central mountains, are those that, in 2016, voted for Verónica Mendoza (in that election she ended in the third place with 18.74 %) and in 2011 voted for Ollanta Humala, there the anti-neoliberal and anti-Fujimori vote occurs with more strength”.

## **Second round: between the anticommunist campaign, the demonization of Castillo and the instrumentalization of terrorist imaginaries**

As established by the Peruvian electoral system, a party must obtain 50 % of the valid votes casted to be considered as winner in the first round. Since none of the lists obtained such percentage, June 6<sup>th</sup> was set for the development of the second round between the two candidates with the greater number of votes.

### *Second debate of presidential candidates*

The presidential debate between the two candidates was carried out on May 1<sup>st</sup> in the central square of the city of Chota, Arequipa (Cajamarca region), home of teacher Castillo. The topics addressed in this instance were: 1. Health, 2. Education, 3. Economy and economic recovery, 4. Security and fight against corruption. Many of the proposals disseminated by the candidates had been announced through other media. The fear campaign, however, was protagonist again.

In the axis of Economy and economic recovery, after the intervention of Castillo, Fujimori stated that “Communism has a policy to lie, lie, so that something remains in the people” (*La República*, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021), relating in the popular imaginary the candidate of Peru Libre with the manipulation exercised by the right hand of Hitler, Joseph Goebbels. In her final speech, she mentioned again the heroic crusade of Fujimorism and the “people united” to face terrorism.

After the debate, the journalists of *La República* in charge of covering the event pointed out the Fujimorist candidate as clear winner, by forcing Castillo to explain and clarify points of his government program and evidence the radicalization of his political discourse. With respect to the proposal of Keiko of directly distributing 40 % of the canon among the people from mining regions, the journalist qualified the measure as “revolutionary”, whereas Castillo “has moved more to the left of nationalization”.

Similarly, she accused Castillo of “ideologizing the topic of vaccines” and proposing unrealistic and counterproductive policies, such as the proposals of nationalization, in words of the journalist, of the extractive resources and “all private property”.

### *Third debate of presidential candidates*

The second and last debate was carried out on May 30<sup>th</sup> in Arequipa and lasted for three hours. The topics were organized in six blocks: 1. Peru of the Bicentenary; 2. Health and management of the pandemics; 3. Economy and employment promotion; 4. Education, science and innovation; 5. Fight against corruption and public integrity; and 6. Human rights, social policies and attention to vulnerable populations.

In block 1, Fujimori made Castillo responsible “for his language and messages of hate, division and class struggle” for generating aggressions against journalists and citizens that mobilized on Saturday May 29<sup>th</sup> in Lima in support of Keiko under the slogan “Civic Caravan for the Family and Democracy”. At the closure of block 2, dedicated to the state management of the pandemics, she stated that “Our sick people will not heal with communism, the COVID will not stop with class struggle, the pandemics is not debated with rocks”.

In block 3, aimed at debating their proposals about economy and employment promotion, the candidate Castillo exhibited two covers of *El Comercio* and *La República* newspapers referred to his proposal of modifying the pension system, in which it was evident a clear intention of the former of spreading the fear to communism and nationalization. Whereas *La República* stated that “Peru Libre proposes the reform of AFP without touching funds of the affiliates”, *El Comercio* titled “Castillo proposes a confiscation of the savings of the affiliates to the AFP”.

Besides the focus of the attack on the figure of Castillo, the use of the word confiscation showed a clear intentionality of linking the possibility of Castillo’s eventual presidency with a policy of nationalizations and expropriations. He continued his speech clarifying his proposals: “We are not going to take away the savings of the working people, we will respect private property (...). We will promote a popular economy with market, the market cannot control the State” (JNE, May 30, 2021).

The debate reached its most critical point in the dialog section belonging to block 5, aimed at the proposals to fight against corruption. Castillo stated that the candidate Fujimori had no moral authority to speak about this topic, accusation that Keiko responded to by faking a confusion of Castillo with Cerrón to make a direct reference to the regional ex-governor of Junín and founder of the party, accused and sentenced for corruption in 2019 (Chanian *et al.*, June 29, 2021).

Afterwards, Fujimori stated that:

I committed at all times, at the start of the campaign, to not “terrorize”, and I have complied that fully. Here the only ones that “terrorize” are yourselves, when media reports are published (...) where there are over 240 members of the MOVAREF<sup>14</sup> (...) actively participating in your party.

Throughout the entire campaign for the second round, the attack to Pedro Castillo progressively added adepts from different social, political and cultural sectors. He was accused of running for the presidency to install a communist dictatorship that enabled a takeover by the terrorism of Sendero Luminoso (Noriega, 2021).

In her multiple public speeches, Keiko accused him of being violent, a liar and aligned with corrupt people, and instilled among the people fear to poverty, unemployment and lack of investment, distorting the proposals of Castillo and turning them into threats of nationalization, closing of imports and shortage.

*The building of the “us” vs. “them” approach in political and media discourses*

The threat of a peasant and elementary school teacher, representative of a left-wing party, from the northern city of Chota (province of Cajamarca) could become president, activated all the alarms among the dominant elites, the big businessmen and the media conglomerates related with the neoliberal model, who aligned themselves in a firm support to Fujimori.

The possible reconfiguration of a “new us”, in words of Montoya-Rojas (2021) “identified with the others of before, the ignored, the invisible, the unnamed, the ‘fucking cholos’, ‘the fucking indians’, ‘the fucking blacks’”, promoted a campaign of hate, fear and racism to discredit the candidate and, by extension, his voters and supporters<sup>15</sup>.

In a press conference after the confirmation by the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE, Oficina Nacional de Procesos Electorales) of

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14 Movement for Amnesty and Fundamental Rights. It is considered the political arm of Sendero Luminoso. Since 2012 it tries, without success, to be recognized as a party to participate in democratic elections.

15 It would be interesting to resume the analysis laid out in this paper to investigate about the spread of racial and classist insults about Peru Libre, Castillo and his voters in social networks. An article by the EFE Agency proposes a preliminary analysis. See: Samon Ros (June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

her participation in the second round against Pedro Castillo, Fujimori issued a message of union and reconciliation. She even stated that she would avoid “acting the easy way” of building a fear campaign exploiting the “weaknesses” of her opponent. However, before the end of the conference she stated that “the opponent has laid out the old communist thesis of class struggle, hate and confrontation” (RPP, April 14, 2021).

Posters quickly appeared in the streets of Lima, Arequipa and Cajamarca with anticommunist slogans: “Protect your job and freedom. No to communism”, “Think about your future. No to communism”, “Did you know that a blank vote favors communism?”, “Communism breeds misery and poverty”, “Let’s protect investment and employment”, “I vote for democracy. No to communism”, “A blank vote is a red vote” and “10 soles, minimum wage in Venezuela. I vote for my family”.

Although Fuerza Popular denied the authorship of these posters and attributed it to their supporters, element that has little credibility because of the high cost of maintenance that they imply (Durand, May 27, 2021), further investigations revealed that one of the advertising agencies involved, particularly the one that put most of the posters in the city of Arequipa, was linked with Fujimorism (El Búho, May 12, 2021).

The right-wing presidential ex-candidates that lost in the first round aligned themselves to support Keiko, stating that they would launch a national campaign to explain “what is the communism proposed by Castillo”, as expressed by López Aliaga (Nodal, May 21, 2021). Twelve players for the national team also joined the campaign “No to communism”, showing their support of democracy in their social media<sup>16</sup>.

The writer Mario Vargas Llosa also called people to vote for Keiko Fujimori as she represented the “lesser evil”. In an extensive analysis published in the *Diario Crónica* of Mexico, he stated that Castillo would establish a popular economy with markets, inspired in the ideas of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. He also warned about the threat of what his eventual government could mean for the country: nationalization of companies and mining, oil and energy reservoirs, derogation of the Constitution and a re-founding of the country in a process “that copied the one unveiled by commander Chávez in Venezuela, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Socialism, that has forced over 5 mi-

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16 Fear of communism unites thousands in favor of Keiko Fujimori (May 30, 2021). DW. <https://bit.ly/3By6FsR>

lition Venezuelans to migrate to neighboring countries to not die from hunger” (Crónica, June 4, 2021).

In short, Vargas Llosa defined the possible victory of Castillo as the inexorable arrival of all bad: hunger, poverty, lack of investment, unemployment, electoral fraud. And an unavoidable coup to restore the order. In a video sent from Spain to support the candidature of Fujimori, he stated that Castillo would impose a dictatorship and his government would be synonym of backlog.

Thanks to the media and corporate support that Fujimorism has since the 1990s, the candidate was able to establish in the collective imaginary that Castillo’s presidency would be equivalent to a dictatorship, positioning herself as the protector of democracy. From the political arc of the right-wing, this campaign was accompanied by the statements by López Aliaga of “Death to communism, death to Cerrón and Castillo” in the rally held in May 8<sup>th</sup> under the slogan “Let us save democracy and our freedom”, as well as the call by Hernando De Soto to world leaders like Bush, Clinton and Macron to unite efforts against the “communist attempt to control Latin America” (RPP, May 29, 2021).

From an intellectual standpoint, the concerns of Vargas Llosa with respect to the threat of a coup as a consequence of Castillo’s victory; and from a media sphere, the support to Fujimori and the bigger coverage of the right-wing candidate, converged to a shared goal: spread terror around the figure of Castillo and present Fujimori as the representative of democracy.

Definitely, the strategy of creating a negative image of the left-wing that had operated during the first round was revealed in the instance of ballottage on the figure of Castillo, his allies and supporters. In the candidate debates, the central element of Fujimori’s discourse was the risk that a potential win of Castillo would represent for democracy and freedom, trying to capitalize on civilian discontent faced with the idea of impoverishment and unemployment that lies under the imaginaries about Venezuela and other countries of the region that opted for a reformist alternative, described by her and other representatives of the right-wing as “communists”. But in this stage, she takes it a step further and presents the figure of Castillo as a terrorist enemy, linked with “senderistas” remnants.

## Conclusions and discussion

The preceding analysis enables visualizing the discursive strategies that were deployed during the 2021 Peruvian presidential campaign by the dominant elites and their representatives. These were: 1. creating a negative image of Pedro Castillo, through his depiction as a terrorist enemy; 2. the presentation of Fujimori as the protector of democracy and freedom against the communist threat; 3. and the appeal to social memory about the internal armed conflict that revived the fears about the return of terrorism. These strategies did not occur in a linear manner, but were reconfigured as the campaign developed.

The critical discourse analysis enables us to understand this instrumental use of imaginaries, perceptions and social fears in a basic strategy of polarization and of establishing frontiers between us and them (Van Dijk, 2003), which operated through a media overrepresentation of the proposals of Fuerza Popular and their presentation as “saviors of the Republic” against the danger of communism represented by Castillo.

This polarization between us, the defenders of democracy, and them, their detractors that attempt to establish a communist dictatorship, it was evident with bigger emphasis in the second electoral round. To this regard, it is stated that social memory around the internal armed conflict and the reading of “the two demons” that dominated the CVR Report, shaped and still shapes the perceptions and popular imaginaries used to analyze almost every conflictive situation in contemporary Peru, from the one that occurred in the framework of an anti-extractivist protest<sup>17</sup>, popular demonstrations such as the one in 2020, or the ones that happen during a presidential election.

Similarly, the demonization of Castillo was constructed appealing to mental models present in people. It was through the instrumentalization of the fear to the return of terrorism that was possible to polarize the election as a situation of “heroes” and “villains”. The figure of a serrano teacher, from the left-wing, that proposed to end with the Peru of elites, was easily related to the figure of the “senderista” leader. Once Castillo was constructed as enemy, the attacks against his candidature and against him appeared legitimated in front of the threat that his government would represent.

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17 In a previous work, it is analyzed the criminalization of the indigenous and peasant-indigenous communities from Chile and Peru that opposed to extractive activities between 2000 and 2018, making visible practices and stigmatizing discourses typical of authoritarian neo-liberalization.

Although the “terrqueo” against the current president Pedro Castillo does not constitute a novelty in the post-conflict Peruvian history, the 2021 scenario was made visible as a historic opportunity, an inflexion point, both for those who advocated a deepening of extractivist neoliberalism as well as for those who proposed a change of system.

To the symbolic load represented by the Elections of the Bicentenary, we should add the impugnations to neoliberalism made visible in the 2020 protests occurred in the middle of a social-health crisis that revealed the limitations of the model. The elites as a whole perceived these events as real threats to the preservation of their interests, protected by the “economic model that concentrates wealth” (Durand, 2021) designed by the Fujimorism and their neoliberal Constitution, and articulated all the economical, political and media scaffolding<sup>18</sup> to safeguard them.

However, the proposed circumstantial approach, the previous analysis should be inscribed in a long duration reading that enables understanding the instrumentalization of terrorism in the political context of the 2021 elections. Indeed, the criminalization of serrano and jungle people through their homologation with terrorism responds to legitimated and naturalized practices of stigmatization and discrimination of these populations. Their transformation during the internal armed conflict period led to the passage from the “idle indian” to the “dangerous indian”, starting the “terrqueo” practices and their use in formal democracy contexts by dominant elites to delegitimize their adversary, constructing them as a dangerous enemy.

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18 Durand (May 27, 2021) points out that in this election the “scare of the riches” lead to increase the legal and illegal, informed and hidden donations to Keiko’s campaign.

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# EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

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## NORMAS EDITORIALES



## *Publication guidelines in «Universitas»*



ISSN: 1390-3837 / e-ISSN: 1390-8634

### **1. General Information**

«Universitas» is a bilingual scientific publication of the *Universidad Politécnica Salesiana* of Ecuador, published since January 2002 in an uninterrupted manner, with a semi-annual periodicity, specialized in Social and Human Sciences and its interdisciplinary lines such as Sociology, Anthropology, Social Psychology, Social Development, Communities, Latin American Studies, Political Studies, among others.

It is scientific journal, which uses the peer-review system, under double-blind review methodology, according to the publication standards of the American Psychological Association (APA). Compliance with this system allows authors to guarantee an objective, impartial and transparent review process, which facilitates the publication of their inclusion in reference databases, repositories and international indexing.

«Universitas» is indexed in the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of Web of Science, the LATINDEX catalog, Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal, is part of the Directory of Open Access Journals-DOAJ, belongs to the Ibero-American Network of Innovation and Scientific Knowledge, REDIB, Network of Scientific Journals of Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal, REDALYC, It is also part of the Information Matrix for the Analysis of Journals, MIAR and is being evaluated, in the medium term, to become part of SCOPUS.

The journal is published in a double version: printed (ISSN: 1390-3837) and digital (e-ISSN: 1390-8634), in English and Spanish, each work being identified with a DOI (Digital Object Identifier System).

## 2. Scope and Policy

### 2.1. Theme

Original contributions in Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as related areas: Sociology, Anthropology, Social Psychology, Social Development, Communities, Latin American Studies, Political Studies, and all related interdisciplinary disciplines with the central theme.

### 2.2. Contributions

“Universitas” preferably publishes results of empirical research on Human and Social Sciences, written in Spanish and / or English, as well as reports, studies and proposals, as well as selected state-of-the-art literature reviews.

All works must be original, have not been published in any medium or be in the process of arbitration or publication.

- **Research:** 5,000 to 6,500 words of text, including title, abstracts, descriptors, charts and references.
- **Reports, studies and proposals:** 5,000 to 6,500 words of text, including title, abstracts, charts and references.
- **Reviews:** 6,000 to 7,000 words of text, including charts and references. Justified references, would be specially valued. (current and selected from among 70 works)

“Universitas” has a biannual periodicity (20 articles per year), published in March and September and counts by number with two sections of five articles each, the first referring to a **Monographic** topic prepared in advance and with thematic editors and the Second, a section of **Miscellaneous**, composed of varied contributions within the theme of the publication.

## 3. Presentation, Structure and Submission of the Manuscripts

Texts will be presented in Arial 10 font, single line spacing, complete justification and no tabs or white spaces between paragraphs. Only large blocks (title, authors, summaries, descriptors, credits and headings) will

be separated with a blank space. The page should be 2 centimeters in all its margins.

Papers must be submitted in a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx), requiring that the file be anonymized in File Properties, so that the author / s identification does not appear.

Manuscripts must be submitted only and exclusively through the OJS (Open Journal System), in which all authors must previously register. Originals sent via email or other interfaces are not accepted.

### *3.1. Structure of the manuscript*

For those works that are empirical investigations, the manuscripts will follow the IMRDC structure, being optional the Notes and Supports. Those papers that, on the contrary, deal with reports, studies, proposals and reviews may be more flexible in their epigraphs, particularly in material and methods, analysis, results, discussion and conclusions. In all typologies of works, references are mandatory.

**1) Title (Spanish) / Title (English):** Concise but informative, in Spanish on the first line and in English on the second. A maximum of 80 characters with spaces are accepted. The title is not only the responsibility of the authors, changes being able to be proposed by the Editorial Board.

**2) Full name and surnames:** Of each of the authors, organized by priority. A maximum of 3 authors will be accepted per original, although there may be exceptions justified by the topic, its complexity and extent. Next to the names must follow the professional category, work center, email of each author and ORCID number. It is mandatory to indicate if you have the academic degree of doctor (include Dr./Dra before the name).

**3) Abstract (Spanish) / Abstract (English):** It will have a maximum extension of 230 words, first in Spanish and then in English. : 1) Justification of the topic; 2) Objectives; 3) Methodology and sample; 4) Main results; 5) Main conclusions. It must be impersonally written "This paper analyzes ...". In the case of the abstract, the use of automatic translators will not be accepted due to their poor quality.

**4) Descriptors (Spanish) / Keywords (English):** 6 descriptors must be presented for each language version directly related to the subject of the work. The use of the key words set out in UNESCO's Thesaurus will be positively valued.

**5) Introduction and state of the issue:** It should include the problem statement, context of the problem, justification, rationale and purpose of the study, using bibliographical citations, as well as the most significant and current literature on the topic at national and international level .

**6) Material and methods:** It must be written so that the reader can easily understand the development of the research. If applicable, it will describe the methodology, the sample and the form of sampling, as well as the type of statistical analysis used. If it is an original methodology, it is necessary to explain the reasons that led to its use and to describe its possible limitations.

**7) Analysis and results:** It will try to highlight the most important observations, describing, without making value judgments, the material and methods used. They will appear in a logical sequence in the text and the essential charts and figures avoiding the duplication of data.

**8) Discussion and conclusions:** Summarize the most important findings, relating the observations themselves with relevant studies, indicating contributions and limitations, without adding data already mentioned in other sections. Also, the discussion and conclusions section should include the deductions and lines for future research.

**9) Supports and acknowledgments (optional):** The Council Science Editors recommends the author (s) to specify the source of funding for the research. Priority will be given to projects supported by national and international competitive projects. In any case, for the scientific evaluation of the manuscript, it should be only anonymized with XXXX for its initial evaluation, in order not to identify authors and research teams, which should be explained in the Cover Letter and later in the final manuscript.

**10) The notes (optional) will go, only if necessary, at the end of the article (before the references).** They must be manually annotated, since the system of footnotes or the end of Word is not recognized by the layout systems. The numbers of notes are placed in superscript, both in the text and in the final note. The numbers of notes are placed in superscript, both in the text and in the final note. No notes are allowed that collect simple bibliographic citations (without comments), as these should go in the references.

**11) References:** Bibliographical citations should be reviewed in the form of references to the text. Under no circumstances should references not mentioned in the text be included. Their number should be sufficient to

contextualize the theoretical framework with current and important criteria. They will be presented alphabetically by the first last name of the author.

### 3.2. Standards for references

#### PERIODIC PUBLICATIONS

**Journal article (author):** Valdés-Pérez, D. (2016). Incidencia de las técnicas de gestión en la mejora de decisiones administrativas [Impact of Management Techniques on the Improvement of Administrative Decisions]. *Retos*, 12(6), 199-2013. <https://doi.org/10.17163/ret.n12.2016.05>

**Journal Article (Up to six authors):** Ospina, M.C., Alvarado, S.V., Fefferman, M., & Llanos, D. (2016). Introducción del dossier temático “Infancias y juventudes: violencias, conflictos, memorias y procesos de construcción de paz” [Introduction of the thematic dossier “Infancy and Youth: Violence, Conflicts, Memories and Peace Construction Processes”]. *Universitas*, 25(14), 91-95. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n25.%25x>

**Journal article (more than six authors):** Smith, S.W., Smith, S.L. Pieper, K.M., Yoo, J.H., Ferrys, A.L., Downs, E.,... Bowden, B. (2006). Altruism on American Television: Examining the Amount of, and Context Surrounding. Acts of Helping and Sharing. *Journal of Communication*, 56(4), 707-727. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00316.x>

**Journal article (without DOI):** Rodríguez, A. (2007). Desde la promoción de salud mental hacia la promoción de salud: La concepción de lo comunitario en la implementación de proyectos sociales. *Alteridad*, 2(1), 28-40. (<https://goo.gl/zDb3Me>) (2017-01-29).

#### BOOKS AND BOOK CHAPTERS

**Full books:** Cuéllar, J.C., & Moncada-Paredes, M.C. (2014). *El peso de la deuda externa ecuatoriana*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

**Chapter of book:** Zambrano-Quiñones, D. (2015). *El ecoturismo comunitario en Manglaralto y Colonche*. En V.H. Torres (Ed.), *Alternativas de Vida: Trece experiencias de desarrollo endógeno en Ecuador* (pp. 175-198). Quito: Abya-Yala.

## DIGITAL MEDIA

Pérez-Rodríguez, M.A., Ramírez, A., & García-Ruíz, R. (2015). La competencia mediática en educación infantil. Análisis del nivel de desarrollo en España. *Universitas Psychologica*, 14(2), 619-630. <https://doi.org.10.11144/Javeriana.upsy14-2.cmei>

It is prescriptive that all quotations that have DOI (Digital Object Identifier System) are reflected in the References (can be obtained at <http://goo.gl/gfruh1>). All journals and books that do not have DOI should appear with their link (in their online version, if they have it, shortened by Google Shortened: <http://goo.gl>) and date of consultation in the format indicated.

Journal articles should be presented in English, except for those in Spanish and English, in which case it will be displayed in both languages using brackets. All web addresses submitted must be shortened in the manuscript, except for the DOI that must be in the indicated format (<https://doi.org/XXX>).

### 3.3. Epigraphs, Figures and Charts

The epigraphs of the body of the article will be numbered in Arabic. They should go without a full box of capital letters, neither underlined nor bold. The numbering must be a maximum of three levels: 1. / 1.1. / 1.1.1. A carriage return will be established at the end of each numbered epigraph.

The charts must be included in the text in Word format according to order of appearance, numbered in Arabic and subtitled with the description of the content.

The graphics or figures will be adjusted to the minimum number required and will be presented incorporated in the text, according to their order of appearance, numbered in Arabic and subtitled with the abbreviated description. Their quality should not be less than 300 dpi, and it may be necessary to have the graph in TIFF, PNG or JPEG format.

## 4. Submission Process

Two files must be sent through the OJS system of the journal:

**1) Presentation and cover**, in which the title in Spanish and English will appear, names and surnames of the authors in a standardized form with ORCID number, abstract in both Spanish and English, descriptors and ke-

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**2) Manuscript** totally anonymized, according to the norms referred in precedence.

All authors must register with their credits on the OJS platform, although only one of them will be responsible for correspondence.

No author can submit or have in review two manuscripts simultaneously, estimating an absence of four consecutive numbers (2 years).



# NORMAS DE PUBLICACIÓN EN «UNIVERSITAS»



ISSN: 1390-3837 / e-ISSN: 1390-8634

## 1. Información general

«Universitas» es una publicación científica bilingüe de la Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador, editada desde enero de 2002 de forma ininterrumpida, con periodicidad fija semestral, especializada en Ciencias Sociales y Humanas y sus líneas interdisciplinarias como Sociología, Antropología, Psicología Social, Estudios Políticos, Estudios del Desarrollo, Estudios Latinoamericanos, Estudios de la Cultura y la Comunicación, entre otras.

Es una revista científica arbitrada, que utiliza el sistema de evaluación externa por expertos (*peer-review*), bajo metodología de pares ciegos (*double-blind review*), conforme a las normas de publicación de la American Psychological Association (APA). El cumplimiento de este sistema permite garantizar a los autores un proceso de revisión objetivo, imparcial y transparente, lo que facilita a la publicación su inclusión en bases de datos, repositorios e indexaciones internacionales de referencia.

«Universitas» se encuentra indizada en Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) de Web of Science, el catálogo LATINDEX, Sistema Regional de información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, El Caribe, España y Portugal, forma parte del Directory of Open Access Journals-DOAJ, pertenece a la Red Iberoamericana de Innovación y Conocimiento Científico, REDIB, Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal, REDALYC, además conforma la Matriz de Información para el Análisis de Revistas, MIAR y está siendo evaluada en mediano plazo para pasar a formar parte de SCOPUS.

La revista se edita en doble versión: impresa (ISSN: 1390-3837) y electrónica (e-ISSN: 1390-8634), en español e inglés, siendo identificado además cada trabajo con un DOI (Digital Object Identifier System).

## 2. Alcance y Política

### 2.1. Temática

Contribuciones originales en materia de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, así como áreas afines: Ciencias Sociales y Humanas y sus líneas interdisciplinarias como Sociología, Antropología, Psicología Social, Estudios Políticos, Estudios del Desarrollo, Estudios Latinoamericanos, Estudios de la Cultura y la Comunicación y todas aquellas disciplinas conexas interdisciplinariamente con la línea temática central.

### 2.2. Aportaciones

«Universitas» edita preferentemente resultados de investigación empírica sobre Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, redactados en español y/o inglés, siendo también admisibles informes, estudios y propuestas, así como selectas revisiones de la literatura (*state-of-the-art*).

Todos los trabajos deben ser originales, no haber sido publicados en ningún medio ni estar en proceso de arbitraje o publicación. De esta manera, las aportaciones en la revista pueden ser:

- **Investigaciones:** 5.000 a 6.500 palabras de texto, incluyendo título, resúmenes, descriptores, tablas y referencias.
- **Informes, estudios y propuestas:** 5.000 a 6.500 palabras de texto, incluyendo título, resúmenes, tablas y referencias.
- **Revisiones:** 6.000 a 7.000 palabras de texto, incluidas tablas y referencias. Se valorará especialmente las referencias justificadas, actuales y selectivas de alrededor de unas 70 obras.

«Universitas» tiene periodicidad semestral (20 artículos por año), publicada en los meses de marzo y septiembre y cuenta por número con dos secciones de cinco artículos cada una, la primera referida a un tema **Mono-gráfico** preparado con antelación y con editores temáticos y la segunda, una

sección **Miscelánea**, compuesta por aportaciones variadas dentro de la temática de la publicación.

### **3. Presentación, estructura y envío de los manuscritos**

Los trabajos se presentarán en tipo de letra Arial 10, interlineado simple, justificado completo y sin tabuladores ni espacios en blanco entre párrafos. Solo se separarán con un espacio en blanco los grandes bloques (título, autores, resúmenes, descriptores, créditos y epígrafes). La página debe tener 2 centímetros en todos sus márgenes.

Los trabajos deben presentarse en documento de Microsoft Word (.doc o .docx), siendo necesario que el archivo esté anonimizado en Propiedades de Archivo, de forma que no aparezca la identificación de autor/es.

Los manuscritos deben ser enviados única y exclusivamente a través del OJS (Open Journal System), en el cual todos los autores deben darse de alta previamente. No se aceptan originales enviados a través de correo electrónico u otra interfaz.

#### *3.1. Estructura del manuscrito*

Para aquellos trabajos que se traten de investigaciones de carácter empírico, los manuscritos seguirán la estructura IMRDC, siendo opcionales los epígrafes de Notas y Apoyos. Aquellos trabajos que por el contrario se traten de informes, estudios, propuestas y revisiones podrán ser más flexibles en sus epígrafes, especialmente en Material y métodos, Análisis y resultados y Discusión y conclusiones. En todas las tipologías de trabajos son obligatorias las Referencias.

**1) Título (español) / Title (inglés):** Conciso pero informativo, en castellano en primera línea y en inglés en segunda. Se aceptan como máximo 80 caracteres con espacio. El título no solo es responsabilidad de los autores, pudiéndose proponer cambios por parte del Consejo Editorial.

**2) Nombre y apellidos completos:** De cada uno de los autores, organizados por orden de prelación. Se aceptarán como máximo 3 autores por original, aunque pudieren existir excepciones justificadas por el tema, su complejidad y extensión. Junto a los nombres ha de seguir la categoría profesional, centro de trabajo, correo electrónico de cada autor y número de

ORCID. Es obligatorio indicar si se posee el grado académico de doctor (incluir Dr./Dra. antes del nombre).

**3) Resumen (español) / Abstract (inglés):** Tendrá como extensión máxima 230 palabras, primero en español y después en inglés. En el resumen se describirá de forma concisa y en este orden: 1) Justificación del tema; 2) Objetivos; 3) Metodología y muestra; 4) Principales resultados; 5) Principales conclusiones. Ha de estar escrito de manera impersonal “El presente trabajo analiza...”. En el caso del abstract no se admitirá el empleo de traductores automáticos por su pésima calidad.

**4) Descriptores (español) / Keywords (inglés):** Se deben exponer 6 descriptores por cada versión idiomática relacionados directamente con el tema del trabajo. Será valorado positivamente el uso de las palabras claves expuestas en el Thesaurus de la UNESCO.

**5) Introducción y estado de la cuestión:** Debe incluir el planteamiento del problema, el contexto de la problemática, la justificación, fundamentos y propósito del estudio, utilizando citas bibliográficas, así como la literatura más significativa y actual del tema a escala nacional e internacional.

**6) Material y métodos:** Debe ser redactado de forma que el lector pueda comprender con facilidad el desarrollo de la investigación. En su caso, describirá la metodología, la muestra y la forma de muestreo, así como se hará referencia al tipo de análisis estadístico empleado. Si se trata de una metodología original, es necesario exponer las razones que han conducido a su empleo y describir sus posibles limitaciones.

**7) Análisis y resultados:** Se procurará resaltar las observaciones más importantes, describiéndose, sin hacer juicios de valor, el material y métodos empleados. Aparecerán en una secuencia lógica en el texto y las tablas y figuras imprescindibles evitando la duplicidad de datos.

**8) Discusión y conclusiones:** Resumirá los hallazgos más importantes, relacionando las propias observaciones con estudios de interés, señalando aportaciones y limitaciones, sin redundar datos ya comentados en otros apartados. Asimismo, el apartado de discusión y conclusiones debe incluir las deducciones y líneas para futuras investigaciones.

**9) Apoyos y agradecimientos (opcionales):** El Council Science Editors recomienda a los autor/es especificar la fuente de financiación de la investigación. Se considerarán prioritarios los trabajos con aval de proyectos competitivos nacionales e internacionales. En todo caso, para la valoración científica del manuscrito, este debe ir anonimizado con XXXX solo para su

evaluación inicial, a fin de no identificar autores y equipos de investigación, que deben ser explicitados en la Carta de Presentación y posteriormente en el manuscrito final.

**10) Las notas** (opcionales) irán, solo en caso necesario, al final del artículo (antes de las referencias). Deben anotarse manualmente, ya que el sistema de notas al pie o al final de Word no es reconocido por los sistemas de maquetación. Los números de notas se colocan en superíndice, tanto en el texto como en la nota final. No se permiten notas que recojan citas bibliográficas simples (sin comentarios), pues éstas deben ir en las referencias.

**11) Referencias:** Las citas bibliográficas deben reseñarse en forma de referencias al texto. Bajo ningún caso deben incluirse referencias no citadas en el texto. Su número debe ser suficiente para contextualizar el marco teórico con criterios de actualidad e importancia. Se presentarán alfabéticamente por el primer apellido del autor.

### *3.2. Normas para las referencias*

#### PUBLICACIONES PERIÓDICAS

**Artículo de revista (un autor):** Valdés-Pérez, D. (2016). Incidencia de las técnicas de gestión en la mejora de decisiones administrativas [Impact of Management Techniques on the Improvement of Administrative Decisions]. *Retos*, 12(6), 199-2013. <https://doi.org/10.17163/ret.n12.2016.05>

**Artículo de revista (hasta seis autores):** Ospina, M.C., Alvarado, S.V., Fefferman, M., & Llanos, D. (2016). Introducción del dossier temático “Infancias y juventudes: violencias, conflictos, memorias y procesos de construcción de paz” [Introduction of the thematic dossier “Infancy and Youth: Violence, Conflicts, Memories and Peace Construction Processes”]. *Universitas*, 25(14), 91-95. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n25.%25x>

**Artículo de revista (más de seis autores):** Smith, S.W., Smith, S.L., Pieper, K.M., Yoo, J.H., Ferrys, A.L., Downs, E.,... Bowden, B. (2006). Altruism on American Television: Examining the Amount of, and Context Surrounding. Acts of Helping and Sharing. *Journal of Communication*, 56(4), 707-727. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00316.x>

**Artículo de revista (sin DOI):** Rodríguez, A. (2007). Desde la promoción de salud mental hacia la promoción de salud: La concepción de lo comu-

nitario en la implementación de proyectos sociales. *Alteridad*, 2(1), 28-40. (<https://goo.gl/zDb3Me>) (2017-01-29).

#### LIBROS Y CAPÍTULOS DE LIBRO

**Libros completos:** Cuéllar, J.C., & Moncada-Paredes, M.C. (2014). *El peso de la deuda externa ecuatoriana*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

**Capítulos de libro:** Zambrano-Quiñones, D. (2015). *El ecoturismo comunitario en Manglaralto y Colonche*. En V.H. Torres (Ed.), *Alternativas de Vida: Trece experiencias de desarrollo endógeno en Ecuador* (pp. 175-198). Quito: Abya-Yala.

#### MEDIOS ELECTRÓNICOS

Pérez-Rodríguez, M.A., Ramírez, A., & García-Ruiz, R. (2015). La competencia mediática en educación infantil. Análisis del nivel de desarrollo en España. *Universitas Psychologica*, 14(2), 619-630. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy14-2.cmei>

Es prescriptivo que todas las citas que cuenten con DOI (Digital Object Identifier System) estén reflejadas en las Referencias (pueden obtenerse en <http://goo.gl/gfruh1>). Todas las revistas y libros que no tengan DOI deben aparecer con su link (en su versión on-line, en caso de que la tengan, acortada, mediante Google Shortener: <http://goo.gl>) y fecha de consulta en el formato indicado.

Los artículos de revistas deben ser expuestos en idioma inglés, a excepción de aquellos que se encuentren en español e inglés, caso en el que se expondrá en ambos idiomas utilizando corchetes. Todas las direcciones web que se presenten tienen que ser acortadas en el manuscrito, a excepción de los DOI que deben ir en el formato indicado (<https://doi.org/XXX>).

#### 3.3. Epígrafes, tablas y gráficos

Los epígrafes del cuerpo del artículo se numerarán en arábigo. Irán sin caja completa de mayúsculas, ni subrayados, ni negritas. La numeración ha de ser como máximo de tres niveles: 1. / 1.1. / 1.1.1. Al final de cada epígrafe numerado se establecerá un retorno de carro.

Las tablas deben presentarse incluidas en el texto en formato Word según orden de aparición, numeradas en arábigo y subtituladas con la descripción del contenido.

Los gráficos o figuras se ajustarán al número mínimo necesario y se presentarán incorporadas al texto, según su orden de aparición, numeradas en arábigo y subtituladas con la descripción abreviada. Su calidad no debe ser inferior a 300 ppp, pudiendo ser necesario contar con el gráfico en formato TIFF, PNG o JPEG.

#### **4. Proceso de envío**

Deben remitirse a través del sistema OJS de la revista dos archivos:

**1) Presentación y portada**, en la que aparecerá el título en español e inglés, nombres y apellidos de los autores de forma estandarizada con número de ORCID, resumen, abstract, descriptores y keywords y una declaración de que el manuscrito se trata de una aportación original, no enviada ni en proceso de evaluación en otra revista, confirmación de las autorías firmantes, aceptación (si procede) de cambios formales en el manuscrito conforme a las normas y cesión parcial de derechos a la editorial (usar modelo oficial de portada).

**2) Manuscrito** totalmente anonimizado, conforme a las normas referidas en precedencia.

Todos los autores han de darse de alta, con sus créditos, en la plataforma OJS, si bien uno solo de ellos será el responsable de correspondencia. Ningún autor podrá enviar o tener en revisión dos manuscritos de forma simultánea, estimándose una carencia de cuatro números consecutivos (2 años).



## GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS OF «UNIVERSITAS»

The **Council of External Reviewers of «Universitas»** is an independent collegiate body whose purpose is to guarantee the excellence of this scientific publication, because the blind evaluation - based exclusively on the quality of the contents of the manuscripts and carried out by experts of recognized International prestige in the field - is, without a doubt, the best guarantee for the advancement of science and to preserve in this header an original and valuable scientific production.

To this end, the **Council of External Reviewers** is made up of several scholars and international scientists specialized in **Education**, essential to select the articles of the greatest impact and interest for the international scientific community. This in turn allows that all the articles selected to publish in «**Universitas**» have an academic endorsement and objectifiable reports on the originals.

Of course, all reviews in «**Universitas**» use the internationally standardized system of double-blind peer evaluation that guarantees the anonymity of manuscripts and reviewers. As a measure of transparency, the complete lists of reviewers are published on the official website of the journal ([www. http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/](http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/)) los listados completos de los revisores.

### 1. Criteria for acceptance/rejection of manuscript evaluation

The editorial team of «**Universitas**» selects those that are considered more qualified in the subject of the manuscript from the list of reviewers of the Council of Reviewers. While the publication requires the maximum collaboration of reviewers to expedite the evaluations and reports on each original, acceptance of the review must be linked to:

- a. **Expertise.** Acceptance necessarily entails the possession of competences in the specific theme of the article to be evaluated.
- b. **Availability.** Reviewing an original takes time and involves careful reflection on many aspects.

- c. **Conflict of interests.** In case of identification of the authorship of the manuscript (despite their anonymity), excessive academic or family closeness to their authors, membership in the same University, Department, Research Group, Thematic Network, Research Projects, joint publications with authors ... or any other type of connection or conflict / professional proximity; The reviewer must reject the publisher's invitation for review.
- d. **Commitment of confidentiality.** Reception of a manuscript for evaluation requires the Reviewer to express a commitment of confidentiality, so that it cannot be divulged to a third party throughout the process.

In the event that the reviewer cannot carry out the activity for some of these reasons or other justifiable reasons, he/she must notify the publisher by the same route that he/she has received the invitation, specifying the reasons for rejection.

## 2. General criteria for the evaluation of manuscripts

### *a) Topic*

In addition to being valuable and relevant to the scientific community, the topic that is presented in the original must be limited and specialized in time and space, without excessive localism.

### *b) Redaction*

The critical assessment in the review report must be objectively written, providing content, quotes or references of interest to support its judgment.

### *c) Originality*

As a fundamental criterion of quality, an article must be original, unpublished and suitable. In this sense, reviewers should answer these three questions in the evaluation:

- Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to justify publication?
- Does it contribute anything to the knowledge canon?

- Is the research question relevant?

A quick literature search using repositories such as Web of Knowledge, Scopus and Google Scholar to see if the research has been previously covered, may be helpful.

#### *d) Structure*

Manuscripts that refer to «Universitas» must follow the IMRDC structure, except those that are literature reviews or specific studies. In this sense, the originals must contain summary, introduction, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

- The ***title, abstract, and keywords*** should accurately describe the content of the article.
- The ***review of the literature*** should summarize the state of the question of the most recent and adequate research for the presented work. It will be especially evaluated with criteria of suitability and that the references are to works of high impact - especially in WoS, Scopus, Scielo, etc. It should also include the general explanation of the study, its central objective and the followed methodological design.
- In case of research, in the ***materials and methods***, the author must specify how the data, the process and the instruments used to respond to the hypothesis, the validation system, and all the information necessary to replicate the study are collected.
- ***Results*** must be clearly specified in logical sequence. It is important to check if the figures or charts presented are necessary or, if not, redundant with the content of the text.
- In the ***discussion***, the data obtained should be interpreted in the light of the literature review. Authors should include here if their article supports or contradicts previous theories. The conclusions will summarize the advances that the research presents in the area of scientific knowledge, the future lines of research and the main difficulties or limitations for carrying out the research.
- ***Language:*** It will be positively assessed if the language used facilitates reading and is in favor of the clarity, simplicity, precision and transparency of the scientific language. The Reviewer should not proceed to correction, either in Spanish or English, but will inform

the Editors of these grammatical or orthographical and typographical errors.

- Finally, a thorough **review of the references** is required in case any relevant work has been omitted. The references must be precise, citing within the logic of the subject at study, its main works as well as the documents that most resemble the work itself, as well as the latest research in the area.

### 3. Relevant valuation dimensions

«*Universitas*» uses an evaluation matrix of each original that responds to the editorial criteria and to compliance with the publication normative. In this sense, the reviewers must attend to the qualitative-quantitative assessment of each of the aspects proposed in this matrix with criteria of objectivity, reasoning, logic and expertise.

RESEARCHES	
Valuable items	P.
01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure)	0/5
02. Thematic relevance 03. Originality of the work 04. Review of the literature	0/10
05. Structure and organization of the article 06. Argumentative capabilities 07. Redaction	0/10
08. Methodological rigor 09. Research instruments	0/10
10. Research results 11. Advances 12. Discussion 13. Conclusions	0/10
14. Quotations (variety and richness) 15. References	0/5
Total	50

If the original is a review of the literature (status of the subject) or other type of study (reports, proposals, experiences, among others), the Editorial Board will send to the reviewers a different matrix, including the characteristics of Structure of this type of originals:

REPORTS, STUDIES, PROPOSALS, REVIEWS	
Valuable items	P.
01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure)	0/5
02. Thematic relevance	0/10
03. Review of the literature	0/10
04. Structure and organization of the article 05. Argumentative capabilities and coherence 06. Scientific redaction	0/10
07. original contributions 08. Conclusions	0/10
09. Quotations 10. References	0/5
Total	50

#### 4. Ethical Considerations

**a) Plagiarism:** Although the journal uses plagiarism detection systems, if the reviewer suspects that an original is a substantial copy of another work, he must immediately inform the Editors citing the previous work in as much detail as possible.

**b) Fraud:** If there is real or remote suspicion that the results in an article are false or fraudulent, it is necessary to inform them to the Editors.

#### 5. Evaluation of the originals

After the quantitative-qualitative evaluation of the manuscript under review, the reviewer may make recommendations to improve the quality of the manuscript. However, the manuscript will be graded in three ways:

- a. **Acceptance without review**
- b. **Conditional acceptance** and therefore review (greater or lesser).  
In the latter case, it is necessary to clearly identify which review is necessary, listing the comments and even specifying paragraphs and pages suggesting modifications.
- c. **Rejection** due to detected deficiencies justified and reasoned with quantitative and quantitative assessment. The report should be longer if a score of less than 40 of the 50 possible points is obtained.

## INDICADORES PARA REVISORES EXTERNOS DE «UNIVERSITAS»

El **Consejo de Revisores Externos de «Universitas»** es un órgano colegiado independiente cuyo fin es garantizar la excelencia de esta publicación científica, debido a que la evaluación ciega –basada exclusivamente en la calidad de los contenidos de los manuscritos y realizada por expertos de reconocido prestigio internacional en la materia– es la mejor garantía y, sin duda, el mejor aval para el avance de la ciencia y para preservar en esta cabecera una producción científica original y valiosa.

Para ello, el **Consejo de Revisores Externos** está conformado por diversos académicos y científicos internacionales especialistas en **Ciencias Sociales**, esenciales para seleccionar los artículos de mayor impacto e interés para la comunidad científica internacional. Esto permite a su vez que todos los artículos seleccionados para publicar en «**Universitas**» cuenten con un aval académico e informes objetivables sobre los originales.

Por supuesto, todas las revisiones en «**Universitas**» emplean el sistema estandarizado internacionalmente de evaluación por pares con «doble ciego» (doble-blind) que garantiza el anonimato de los manuscritos y de los revisores de los mismos. Como medida de transparencia, anualmente se hacen públicos en la web oficial de la revista ([www. http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/](http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/)) los listados completos de los revisores.

### 1. Criterios de aceptación/rechazo de evaluación manuscritos

El equipo editorial de «**Universitas**» selecciona del listado de revisores del Consejo de Revisores a aquellos que se estiman más cualificado en la temática del manuscrito. Si bien por parte de la publicación se pide la máxima colaboración de los revisores para agilizar las evaluaciones y los informes sobre cada original, la aceptación de la revisión ha de estar vinculada a:

- a. **Experticia.** La aceptación conlleva necesariamente la posesión de competencias en la temática concreta del artículo a evaluar.
- b. **Disponibilidad.** Revisar un original exige tiempo y conlleva reflexión concienzuda de muchos aspectos.

- c. **Conflicto de intereses.** En caso de identificación de la autoría del manuscrito (a pesar de su anonimato), excesiva cercanía académica o familiar a sus autores, pertenencia a la misma Universidad, Departamento, Grupo de Investigación, Red Temática, Proyectos de Investigación, publicaciones conjuntas con los autores... o cualquier otro tipo de conexión o conflicto/cercanía profesional; el revisor debe rechazar la invitación del editor para su revisión.
- d. **Compromiso de confidencialidad.** La recepción de un manuscrito para su evaluación exige del Revisor un compromiso expreso de confidencialidad, de manera que éste no puede, durante todo el proceso, ser divulgado a un tercero.

En caso que el revisor no pueda llevar a cabo la actividad por algunos de estos motivos u otros justificables, debe notificarlo al editor por la misma vía que ha recibido la invitación, especificando los motivos de rechazo.

## 2. Criterios generales de evaluación de manuscritos

### *a) Tema*

La temática que se plantea en el original, además de ser valiosa y relevante para la comunidad científica, ha de ser limitada y especializada en tiempo y espacio, sin llegar al excesivo localismo.

### *b) Redacción*

La valoración crítica en el informe de revisión ha de estar redactada de forma objetiva, aportando contenido, citas o referencias de interés para argumentar su juicio.

### *c) Originalidad*

Como criterio de calidad fundamental, un artículo debe ser original, inédito e idóneo. En este sentido, los revisores deben responder a estas tres preguntas en la evaluación:

- ¿Es el artículo suficientemente novedoso e interesante para justificar su publicación?

- ¿Aporta algo al canon del conocimiento?
- ¿Es relevante la pregunta de investigación?

Una búsqueda rápida de literatura utilizando repositorios tales como Web of Knowledge, Scopus y Google Scholar para ver si la investigación ha sido cubierta previamente puede ser de utilidad.

#### *d) Estructura*

Los manuscritos que se remiten a «**Universitas**» deben seguir obligatoriamente la estructura IMRyD, excepto aquellos que sean revisiones de la literatura o estudios específicos. En este sentido, los originales han de contener resumen, introducción, metodología, resultados, discusión y conclusión.

- El **título, el resumen y las palabras clave** han de describir exactamente el contenido del artículo.
- La **revisión de la literatura** debe resumir el estado de la cuestión de las investigaciones más recientes y adecuadas para el trabajo presentado. Se valorará especialmente con criterios de idoneidad y que las referencias sean a trabajos de alto impacto —especialmente en WoS, Scopus, Scielo, etc. Debe incluir además la explicación general del estudio, su objetivo central y el diseño metodológico seguido.
- En caso de investigaciones, en los **materiales y métodos**, el autor debe precisar cómo se recopilan los datos, el proceso y los instrumentos usados para responder a las hipótesis, el sistema de validación, y toda la información necesaria para replicar el estudio.
- En los **resultados** se deben especificar claramente los hallazgos en secuencia lógica. Es importante revisar si las tablas o cuadros presentados son necesarios o, caso contrario, redundantes con el contenido del texto.
- En la **discusión** se deben interpretar los datos obtenidos a la luz de la revisión de la literatura. Los autores deberán incluir aquí si su artículo apoya o contradice las teorías previas. Las **conclusiones** resumirán los avances que la investigación plantea en el área del conocimiento científico, las futuras líneas de investigación y las principales dificultades o limitaciones para la realización de la investigación.
- **Idioma:** Se valorará positivamente si el idioma utilizado facilita la lectura y va en favor de la claridad, sencillez, precisión y transpa-

rencia del lenguaje científico. El Revisor no debe proceder a corrección, ya sea en español o inglés, sino que informará a los Editores de estos errores gramaticales u ortotipográficos.

- Finalmente, se requiere una profunda **revisión de las referencias** por si se hubiera omitido alguna obra relevante. Las referencias han de ser precisas, citando en la lógica de la temática a estudiar, sus principales obras así como los documentos que más se asemejen al propio trabajo, así como las últimas investigaciones en el área.

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INVESTIGACIONES	
Ítems valorables	P.
01. Título y resumen (claridad y estructura)	0/5
02. Relevancia de la temática 03. Originalidad del trabajo 04. Revisión de la literatura	0/10
05. Estructura y organización artículo 06. Capacidad argumental 07. Redacción	0/10
08. Rigor metodológico 09. Instrumentos de investigación	0/10
10. Resultados de investigación 11. Avances 12. Discusión 13. Conclusiones	0/10
14. Citaciones (variedad y riqueza) 15. Referencias	0/5
Total máximo	50

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02. Relevancia de la temática	0/10
03. Revisión de la literatura	0/10
04. Estructura y organización artículo 05. Capacidad argumental y coherencia 06. Redacción científica	0/10
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Date of submission for evaluation:	Date of return of evaluation:	Article code: xxxx
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01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure)	Mandatory comments:	
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		Value 0 to 5
03. Review of the literature	Mandatory comments:	
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SECCIÓN: ESTUDIOS, PROPUESTAS, INFORMES Y REVISIONES		
01. Título y resumen (claridad y estructura)	Comentarios obligatorios:	
		Valore de 0 a 5
02. Relevancia de la temática	Comentarios obligatorios:	
		Valore de 0 a 10
03. Revisión de la literatura	Comentarios obligatorios:	
		Valore de 0 a 10
4. Estructura y organización artículo 5. Capacidad argumental y coherencia 6. Redacción científica	Comentarios obligatorios:	
		Valore de 0 a 10
7. Aportaciones originales 8. Conclusiones	Comentarios obligatorios	
		Valore de 0 a 10
9. Citaciones 10. Referencias	Comentarios obligatorios:	
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## **Abstract**

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