

Journalism in Cauca on the 2018 presidential elections: the cases of the newspapers *Diario del Cauca* and *Extra Cauca*¹

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Abstract

This article presents the results of an investigation carried out by the University of Cauca with the support of the Electoral Observation Mission. In a highly politically polarized country, the electoral contest for the presidency of the republic in 2018 in Colombia was dominated by eight candidates from different ideological currents, who revived the political debate and the public space as democratic scenes. However, the regional press in Cauca reported in no greater depth on the actors and issues of electoral information. The newspapers *Diarios del Cauca* and *Extra Cauca*, despite their apparent differences of style, favored the campaign of Germán Vargas Lleras, omitted the research on campaign financing, forgot to consult citizens about their regional priorities, and neglected the agenda in candidates political programs as an information axis for decision-making.

Keywords: Presidential elections; Monitoring; Journalism; Press.

1. Introduction

The article gives an account of the results of a research carried out by the Universidad del Cauca, more specifically from the Social Communication Program, with the technical support of the Electoral Observation Mission, MOE, an entity that coordinates a platform of several universities to monitor the journalistic coverage of electoral processes in Colombia.

1 This article is part of a book published in November 2018 by the Electoral Observation Mission EOM, *Media, Social Media and Democracy*. Bogotá: *Arte Litográfico*.

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The observation of the local newspapers *Diario del Cauca* and *Extra Cauca* about their coverage of the presidential campaign is obviously framed in a significantly particular electoral situation in which several factors stand out: the abundance of presidential candidates, in total eight, out of which six submitted to the popular vote (Viviane Morales and Piedad Córdoba pulled out before the vote). The six candidates who submitted to the popular vote were Sergio Fajardo, Humberto de la Calle, Germán Vargas Lleras, Jorge Trujillo, Gustavo Petro and Iván Duque. The last two faced off in a second round in which Iván Duque, candidate of the Democratic Center, was elected new president.

The contest was characterized by the return of political speeches to public squares, and that the distinction between right, center and left candidates was much more evident than in past electoral campaigns. This, in turn, caused a strong polarization of the country, agitated by the same candidates both in public speeches and in social networks. In the Cauca press, these electoral polemics were considered a priority on the media agenda, leaving aside more pertinent issues such as the elaboration on the particular proposals of the candidates, their views on political situations such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, JEP, environmental issues such as mining, or distinguished plans for the department of Cauca, in case of an eventual mandate.

Some of the characteristics that will be observed in this analysis are the journalistic asepsis evidenced in the non-signature of the great majority of the newspaper articles, the priority given to the consultation of state sources over civil society, electoral logistics as the most elaborated subject, and the obvious bias in favor of the candidate Germán Vargas Lleras in both newspapers. These trends and other details make up the analytical document on the journalistic treatment of *Diario del Cauca* and *Extra Cauca* to the campaign and the presidential electoral process at its initial moment, that is, until May 17, the date of the first round.

Regarding the newspapers chosen for monitoring, it is necessary to take into account that the journalistic coverage of the oldest and most consolidated newspaper in Cauca, currently called *El Nuevo Liberal* and originally called *El Liberal*, also was followed during three previous electoral processes. Thus, on this occasion it was considered convenient to contrast the content and monitor two other printed newspapers that are currently part of the informative panorama of the department and particularly of Popayán, and whose main characteristics are presented below.

Grupo Editorial El Periódico S.A.S, headed by Hernando Suárez Burgos and Lydia Stella Ceballos de Suárez, is the owner of *Diario del Cauca*, *Diario del Sur*, *El Periódico Deportivo*, the 18 *Extra* newspapers, HSB Radio and HSB Televisión. The circulation of these newspapers is distributed mainly in Cauca and Nariño, and HSB Radio has coverage in Alto Putumayo. In the case of the analyzed newspapers, the *Diario del Cauca* has a circulation of 500 copies per day while that of *Extra Cauca* is 3,500.

In addition to the press and radio, the business group also owns *Luber*, *Beverages La Cigarra* and *Sysco Appliances*, among others. The businessman Hernando Suárez Burgos was a councilor, deputy, representative to the Chamber and senator for the Liberal Party, but in 1994 he also supported the candidate for mayor of Pasto by the Conservative Union. The media monitoring of the Colombian Federation of Journalists says Suárez Burgos:

...on multiple occasions has been linked to investigations related to drug trafficking. He was mentioned in the book <The Horsemen of Cocaine> written by the journalist Fabio Castillo, who points him out as Carlos Lehder's trusted man in Pasto. He was also linked to the 8,000 Process and the National Prosecutor's Office linked him to an investigation of irregularities in the award of the *Diario Deportivo*, carried out by the National Narcotics Directorate in 2007 (Fecolper and Reporters without Borders).

Journalists who worked for his media have also denounced Hernando Suárez and his work practices. In 2015, in a column in *Las 20rillas*, Duber Ruiz Lasso, who was a journalist for the *Diario del Cauca*, presented the details of harassment, work overload and precarious working conditions that led to the resignation of seven journalists. The same year, the journalist Víctor Chaves Rodríguez published a report in the newspaper *Web Sur Tejiendo Territoreios*, in which Suárez is pointed out as an "[...] employer with an inquisitor profile and producer of articles and brands identified with one single colophon: the poor quality" (Chaves, 2015).

The newspaper *Extra Cauca* of the Editorial Group *El Periódico* is characterized by its sensationalist nature and for having the working class as its target audience. For its part, the *Diario del Cauca* tends to separate itself from this logic since its content aims to resemble that of the traditional press. However, in this search for journalistic seriousness, quality is affected by the number of notes per page, which in this case often doesn't allow the required depth for responsible journalism.

In view of the above, it was considered interesting to investigate the characteristics of the treatment of information during the 2018 presidential elections in newspapers whose journalistic protocols and target audience are assumed to be different, but are subject to same political and economic interests. One of the assumptions that we specifically wanted to analyze was that *Extra Cauca*, as a sensationalist newspaper, discloses uncritical political information and therefore lacks depth. On the contrary, it was assumed that *Diario del Cauca* would have better journalistic criteria in its coverage of the Colombian presidential elections of 2018.

2. Methodological aspects

To collect the information that led to the analysis of the journalistic treatment of the presidential election process in 2018, an online database was used, technically supported by the MOE and conceptually agreed upon among all the participants in the monitoring. Once the variables to be incorporated had been defined, the students who would carry out the review of the press for the chosen period were trained and subsequently the registration of data in the database began. Once the registration was completed, the MOE systematized the information and generated simple tables and graphs as well as crosses of variables according to demand, all of which served as input for the analysis presented from the following section.

The newspapers *Extra Cauca* and *Diario del Cauca* were monitored during an observation window that includes the editions from January 11 to May 28, 2018. This period stretches from the a point where there are free spaces in the media, until the day after presidential elections of the first round, but also incorporates the date of the elections to the Congress.

However, the analysis was carried out exclusively on the political information regarding the elections and presidential candidates. Although the observation window involves part of the campaign for parliamentary elections, only those journalistic articles including direct references to issues or institutions were registered in the database of the Electoral Observation Mission, MOE. I.e. articles with direct references to issues, institutions, activities or actors of the presidential campaign, such as for example presidential or vice-presidential candidates, their proselytizing activity, the content of the political programs of the candidates, or information from electoral bodies, among others.

The development of the follow-up to the observed newspapers, of the analysis of the electoral information and of the registration of the articles, were linked to activities of the course 'Analysis of the Political Communication' offered as 'Elective of Emphasis in Media Communication' in the Social Communication Program of the University of Cauca. Thus, 13 students studying their seventh and ninth semester respectively were part of the daily review of the press and were responsible for analyzing the information in a total of 138 days and 276 monitored editions, including all its sections. That amounted to a total 992 articles from *Diario del Cauca* and 709 in *Extra Cauca*. Additionally, a student was assigned as a research assistant for the initial review and correction of samples from the records of his classmates and the teacher in charge of the course performed a final debugging in the database.

For the writing of this article, some of the analytical reports that the students made at the end of the course from preliminary data were taken into account as contributions. Likewise, it should be taken into account that although all the data are of interest, the comparative analysis is carried out in three basic categories: *the assigned relevance, the dynamics of electoral information and the information actors*, which were configured based on the analysis of data such as: sections where information is published, presence of information on the first page, length of the articles, authorship of the information, journalistic genre, sources and information topics, protagonists in the information, candidates mentioned, and bias of mentions.

3. Analysis of the results

In the following, results are presented based on collected data that was considered to be of special interest. In particular, results from the three categories that was the focus of the analysis of the treatment of information by the *Diario del Cauca* and the *Extra Cauca* in the electoral process during the monitored period: *the relevance assigned to the presidential elections, the dynamics of electoral information and the actors of the electoral information*.

It is important to note that we shared and used Luis Ramiro Beltrán's assertion about the responsibility that corresponds to political journalism as a guide for our analysis:

Political communication has multiple functions in democracy; inform the population about the political event and provide guidance on it, notify citizens about their rights and duties, supervise the performance of the government, channel the demands of the population, facilitate understanding between rulers and governed, promote the ventilation of problems of collective interest and help to find solutions, underpin efforts to forge development, contribute to preserve peace and ensure order. And even encourage the participation of the people in the management of the public cause. It is important to reflect upon what kind of journalism the Cauca community is consuming. Although the information fan is necessary, it must be governed by some minimum conditions of ethical, formal and professional quality. It is not possible to imagine a better society, if the informative contents that are consumed do not favor the debate and the intellectual growth of the readers, if the contents do not defend the real plurality and social diversity. It is not about theatricalizing such diversity, but about exposing it openly to offer in the media scenarios of social, political and cultural debate, and the basis for this is the rigor of the journalistic profession (Beltrán, 2012, p. 63).

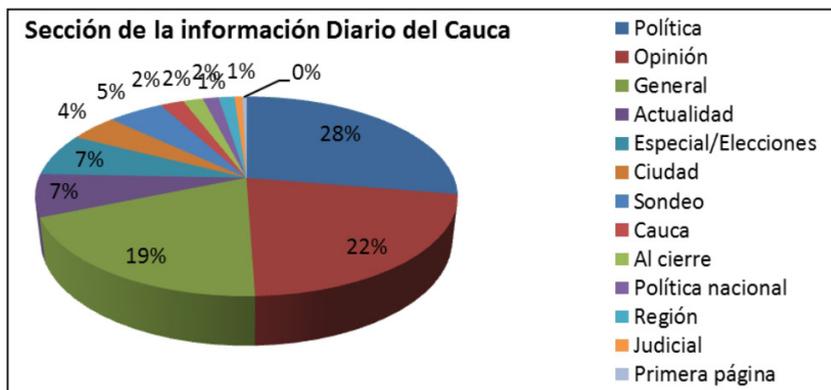
3.1. Relevance assigned. The importance of presidential elections

Three data are of crucial interest to the relevance assigned by the newspapers to the presidential electoral information: on the one hand, the sections where the journalistic articles were exposed and the presence or not within the structure of the newspapers in special sections dedicated to the electoral issue; secondly, the presence or not of the information on the first page, that is, whether they are articles that only appeared on the first page or that continue inside; and thirdly, the size of each article and the proportion of the newspaper that is assigned to the information of the topic in question.

The sections of the two newspapers are different and some of them are not permanent. However, the articles were classified bearing in mind the names of the sections that appeared in every edition of both newspapers. Hence, it is found that political issues, for example, might be located in different sections, since in addition to the political page, pages named as National Policy or even Local Policy occasionally appeared.

In the case of *Diario del Cauca*, the information registered on the presidential elections was concentrated in the Political and Opinion sections where half of all the articles were located. Thirdly, the general section stood out as a space where articles related to the presidential elections were published. It is worth noting that the special section on elections only amounted to 7% of the registered articles.

Figure 1
Sections where the monitored notes were published in the Diario del Cauca

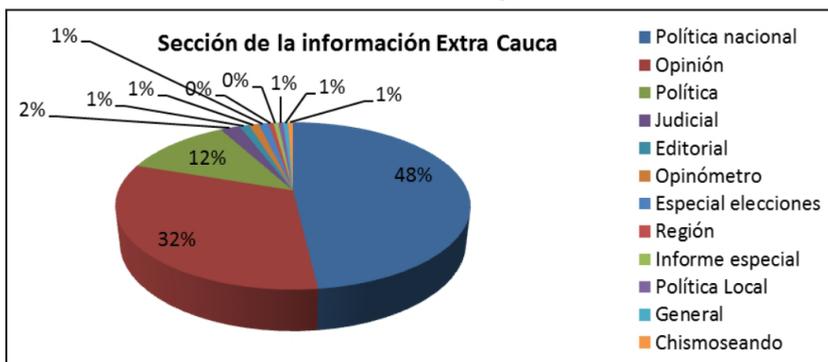


Source: MOE media monitoring platform, 2018

As for *Extra Cauca*, almost half of the articles, 48%, were published in national political section, while 32% of the articles related to the elections were published in the opinion section. Although there was a special section on elections, only 1% of the related articles were published in this section. There were also special reports, where 12% of the articles on the presidential electoral process were presented, as shown in Figure 2.

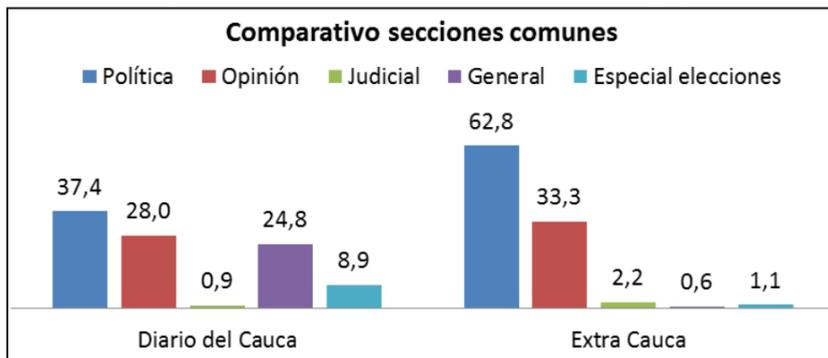
By aggregating sections with similar content and e.g. placing articles published in sections such as *National Policy*, *Local Policy* or *Politics* in a in a category called *Politics*, we allow for an interesting comparison that enables us to see that *Extra Cauca* basically placed articles referring to the subject of observation mainly in political sections and secondarily in opinion pages. Meanwhile the *Diario del Cauca* distributed the articles more heterogeneously and classified a good part of the recorded information as *General*.

Figure 2
Sections where the monitored notes were published in the Extra Cauca



Source: MOE media monitoring platform, 2018

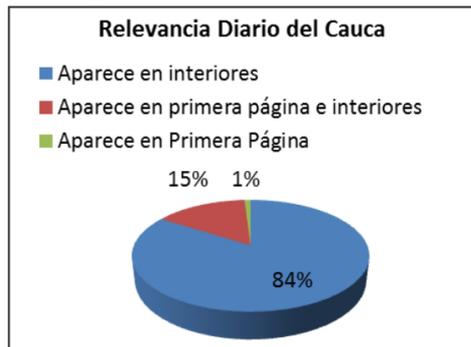
Figure 3
Comparison of common sections in both newspapers



Source: MOE media monitoring platform, 2018

However, the fact of appearing or not on the first page is also a variable that is part of the assigned relevance. In both newspapers, most of the notes appeared only on inside pages, but in the case of *Diario del Cauca* 15% of the recorded articles were recorded on the first page and led to interiors, while 1% appeared only on the first page. On the other hand regarding the *Extra Cauca*, the electoral information related to the process of defining the future national president had less relevance, as only 1% of its related articles were published on the first page and followed up on inside pages. In this regard, it is worth remembering the distinction made between the character of “serious press” when it comes to the *Diario del Cauca* against the yellow character of *Extra Cauca*. As the front page of the latter is used to display sensationalist content ranging from sexually explicit or judicial images with high visual impact, it is understandable that electoral information rarely appears on the front page.

Figure 4
Relevance of the notes by place of publication in *Diario del Cauca*



Source: MOE media monitoring platform, 2018

Figure 5
Relevance of the notes by place of publication in *Extra Cauca*



Finally, it is worth mentioning another finding that could be complementary when it comes to identifying the relevance assigned to the monitored topic: the space assigned to the articles. Of the 1,701 recorded articles, 58% were published in the *Diario del Cauca* and 42% in *Extra Cauca*. However, the allocated to each note related to the presidential election, measured in square centimeters, turn out to be - against all odds - on average larger in *Extra Cauca* (310 cm²) than in the *Diario del Cauca* (298 cm²).

Although the difference apparently might be insignificant, it's importance is more apparent when take into consideration that the design of the newspapers is half-sheet or *Berliner* in the case of *Diario del Cauca* (30 x 57 cm), while *Extra Cauca* is half of its size, the typical tabloid format (29 x 31 cm). This means that although *Extra* has fewer articles, it devoted a greater proportion of its newspaper to the electoral issue than the *Diario del Cauca*, whose brevity in the informative treatment of the elections does not coincide with the classification "serious press".

Although the electoral issue is neuralgic for a country at any time, this electoral process in the aftermath of the peace agreements and in light of the political polarization of its citizens and candidates is of particular historical importance in Colombia. This however, does not seem to have been recognized by either of the two newspapers, taking into account the above.

3.2. Electoral information dynamics

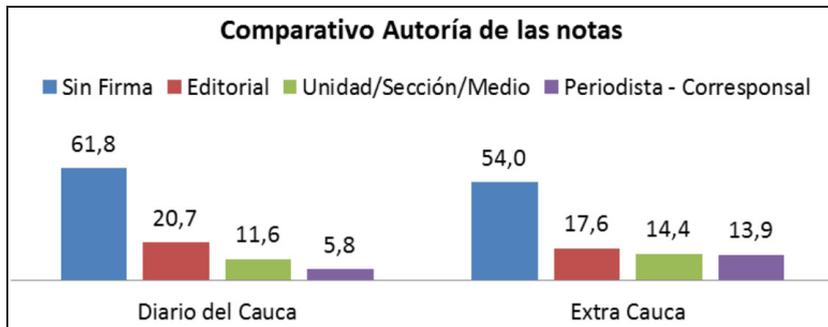
In this section, the dynamics of information is described based on the analysis of collected data such as the signing or assignment of authorship of articles, the journalistic genres used in the coverage, and the topics chosen as central to account for the election process.

The 1,701 registered articles in both the newspapers are characterized by mainly not being signed, distributed between articles that appear on editorial pages, or signed in a generic way by the corresponding section or unit. In both newspapers, the notes signed by a journalist or a correspondent are a minority, although the proportion in *Extra Cauca* is more than double those that are signed in the *Diario del Cauca*. This absence of signatures suggests a lack of commitment of the journalist as responsible for the information, while the newspaper itself is given prominence as author of the articles.

This is furthermore related to the tendency to opt for a "*plain article*" (*nota seca*) when it stems from a press release as an immediate source that saves the journalist the task of interpretation and analysis.

The raw material of the plain article is the wire, the circulars, the bulletins, the press releases. From this, information is constructed in which the author has no right to interpret anything because he has not seen anything or been in the place of the facts [...] and that is why the plain article is not signed (Gaviria, 2004, p. 8).

Figure 6
Comparison of Authorship of the notes in both newspapers



Own source

Half of the articles of each newspaper related to the issue of presidential elections correspond to the genre of news article. In the case of *Diario del Cauca*, the second and third most common are the opinion columns and the brief articles. On the other hand, in the case of *Extra Cauca*, it is the publishers that appear as the second most frequent genre and, thirdly, just as in *Diario del Cauca*, the brief articles, as shown in Figure 7.

The average 10% of brief articles that both newspapers opt for to report on a transcendental political issue such as the presidential election, shows the limited importance assigned because, as I propose in "Political Media and Society", they are indicative of "[...] the low depth of these articles, since in the brief ones, when containing one or two paragraphs, it is impossible to raise elements of context, contrast different sources of information, or perform other types of discursive strategies to give importance to information" (Ruiz, 2017, p. 120).

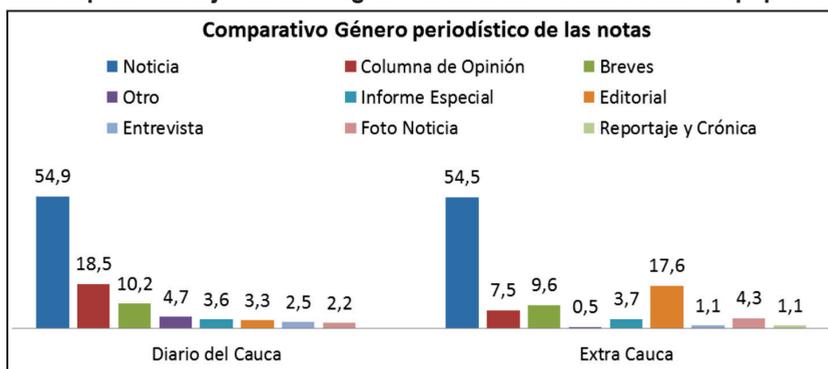
In this regard, it should be mentioned that the high proportion of articles located in the editorial section of Extra Cauca dealt with topics on electoral logistics for the most part and are located as editorials without meeting the journalistic criteria of this type of content, as they in fact appear as rather simple news. The same does not happen with *Diario del Cauca* where columns and editorials can indeed be classified as such.

On the other hand, the fact that genres such as the report, the chronicle, the interview or the special reports are not widely used is striking. Taking into account the fact that these allow for greater depth in the information and lend themselves to offer the reader a broad context of the actors, situations or news events and, ultimately, to provide greater rigor from different elements of analysis, those other genres should be more frequently used to narrate the development of campaigns, candidates and government proposals.

Another relevant aspect for the analysis of information dynamics is the management of sources, which were classified in the database as personal or documentary. The comparison of the newspapers allows us to see that there are no substantial differences between them, as in both newspapers, in most cases, it is suggested that there is a personal source, but it is not possible to identify the type of person from which the information arises, showing an

important disdain in the journalistic treatment. Most of the personal sources identified, apart from the candidates that were systematized as actors of the information, but who also operated as sources, as we will be seen later, are the official spokesmen of the public institutions. The low participation in the *Diario del Cauca* and the total absence in *Extra Cauca* of expert sources are highlighted, which also suggests a poor journalistic exercise that disadvantages diversity and the contrast of sources.

Figure 7
Comparison of journalistic gender of the notes in both newspapers



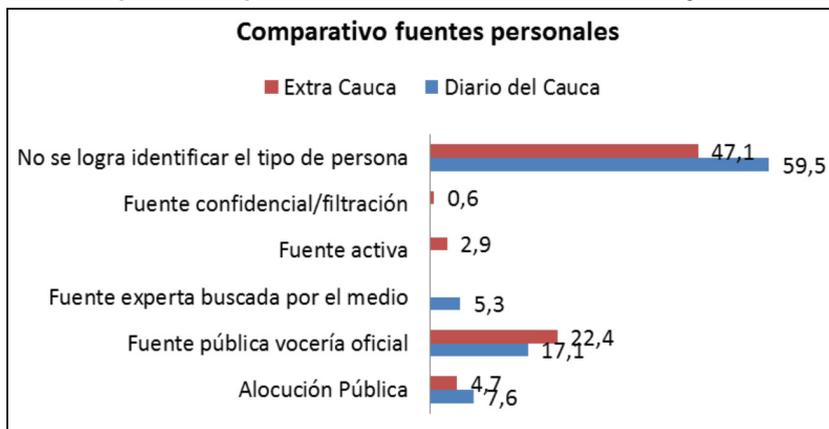
Own source

In relation to this, it is worth reviewing the complaint in Las 20rillas of one of the journalists of the *Diario del Cauca* that was part of the massive resignation. Ruiz (2015) points out that the directives of the newspaper “[...] maintained not very flexible ideas about journalism, they limited the creativity and the performance of our work. Moreover, the postponing for two or more days of the construction of the editions of the newspaper restricted the development of the daily report”.

This lack of sources, based on a linear and bilateral communication, is what Reyes (2011) qualifies as a Telegraph Model. It is about a lack in the search of contrasted live sources, of multiple voices that deepen and give rigor to the information, contrary to the basic standards of journalism. However, this is based on a practice that has become common in both newspapers and is largely due to the dynamics of the publishing house. In this regard, it is worth noting the statements made in the report by Chaves (2015):

[...] journalists must comply with loads of content that would be irrational in any media: more than 20 different news items per journalist every day, including Saturdays and Sundays, that is, about 600 news items per journalist each month. In the case of *Diario del Sur*, this burden leads journalists to practically not move from the newsroom unless (sic) it is strictly necessary, while information is collected from different networks, be it newsletters, press releases or doing rewrites of other pages. The ethics about access to certain information has long been forgotten.

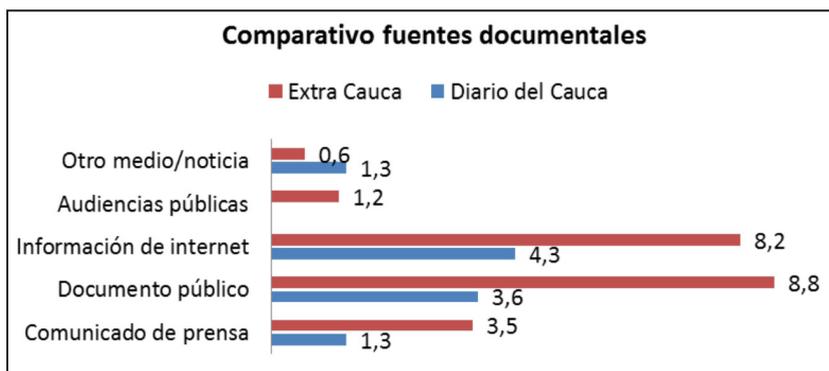
Figure 8
Comparison of personal sources of the notes in both journals



Own source

The second type of source is the documentary source. Although both newspapers favor information from the Internet, public documents and press releases, it is worth noting that *Extra Cauca* proportionally uses these resources twice as much as *Diario del Cauca* and that Extra in general uses more documentary sources than *Diario del Cauca*. In this regard, Chaves (2015) also describes this way of operating as a “[...] cheap journalism, supported by the Internet and in institutional bulletins, including security agencies, of course, since these are the central food for their pages [...]. Quality control is Pyrrhic”. Likewise, as the report denounces, an important assertion is that the media of this publishing house exert pressure on agents and officials when exchanging advertising guidelines for silence or informative noise, as required by the official instances, which may explain the abundance of public documentation and personal sources.

Figure 9
Comparison of documentary sources of the notes in both newspapers

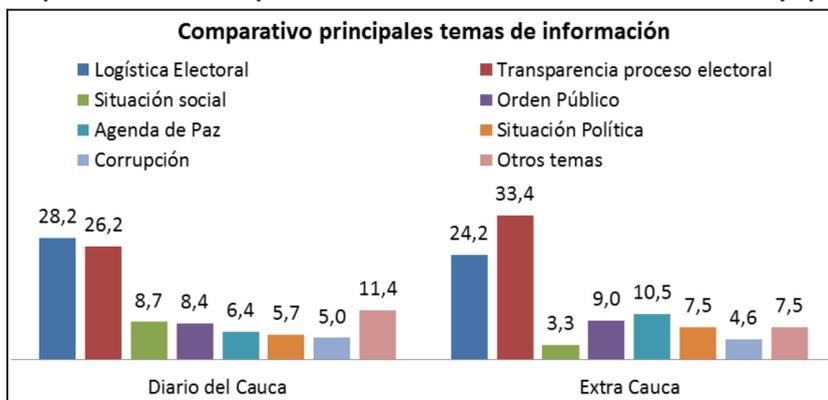


Own source

Regarding information topics, the database had 16 major topics, each of which was broken down into several sub-themes. A summary of these results is presented here, taking into account only the most significant issues, which for the two newspapers were the same seven as identified in figure 10. It can be seen that for both newspapers, the issues related to electoral logistics and with the transparency of the process were the most addressed in the journalistic articles related to the presidential elections. In both cases they account for more than 50% of total publications.

The other topics in both cases account for less than 11% of the articles. The third most frequent topic for the *Diario del Cauca* was the issue of the social situation, and for *Extra Cauca* that of the Peace Agenda. The issue of public order was in both newspapers the fourth most frequent topic. The political situation and corruption also constitutes some of the seven main themes of the monitored information.

Figure 10
Comparison of main topics of information of the notes in both newspapers



Own source

Now, as for the sub-themes that were highlighted in each of those seven main themes in the two newspapers, there are some common ones, such as electoral guarantees, ethics, and values, strengthening of the parties and corruption in politics. It should be noted that the articles on electoral guarantees in *Extra Cauca* were exaggerated and unnecessarily repetitive and, although their content corresponded with the news format, they were placed as editorials.

Concerning electoral logistics, *Diario Del Cauca* focused on citizen behavior, especially on polls, while *Extra Cauca* focused on electoral proselytizing activities. This is related to what Borreguero (2001) refers to as spectacularization of politics in the sense of synthesizing and entertaining this type of information, treating politics on an anecdotal level, and what Price (1992) describes as a journalism focused on the electoral pilgrimage, instead of fulfilling the journalistic role of being vigilant for its audiences.

In terms of electoral logistics, the *Diario del Cauca* focused content on threats to politicians and leaders, while *Extra* was more concerned with rural security. In the case of the Peace Agenda, the *Diario del Cauca* wrote more about the JEP, while *Extra Cauca* focused on the negotiations with the ELN. The subtle differences between the two newspapers, however, cannot be considered substantive; that is, they do not indicate any particularly different focus on the information, although they suggest that *Extra Cauca* highlights some topics of greater interest to a more popular sector of readers, located in rural areas, as negotiations with the ELN and rural security are of particular interest to rural populations in Cauca that are still beset by the armed conflict.

Table 1.
List of topics and subthemes in both newspapers

Topics	Privileged subtopics Diario del Cauca	Privileged subtopics Extra Cauca
Electoral Logistics	Citizen Behavior	Electoral Proselytizing
Transparency in the electoral process	Electoral guarantees	
Social situation	Ethics and values / Culture	
Public Order	Threats and attacks against politicians / social leaders	Rural security
Peace Agenda	Special justice for peace	Negotiation with the ELN
Political Situation	Strengthening of the parties	
Corruption	Corruption in politics	

Own source

Notwithstanding the apparent sub-mathematical variety, the particularities of the geographic area of influence of the monitored newspapers are not taken into account in the informational coverage of the campaigns or in the presidential electoral process. Cauca is characterized today by political, social and economic problems, in which serious problems converge, such as armed violence, the systematic murder of social leaders, drug trafficking, unemployment, land titling conflicts and poverty among others. Therefore, it was expected that the local or regional media would cover the electoral processes with special emphasis on the programmatic proposals of the candidates on topics of interest to the Caucasian reader and the requirements of the department, many of which are related to the six agreements of Havana.

By the way, it is worth remembering what María Teresa Ronderos and María Fernanda Moreno point out in "How to cover elections":

Covering the elections means also informing about the state of civil rights and the freedoms of citizens and proposals to strengthen them; people's quality of life and possible policies aimed to improve it. It also means looking critically at democratic institutions, whether state or not, assessing their legitimacy,

monitoring whether or not they are complying with the public interest (Ronderos & Moreno, 2011, p. 5).

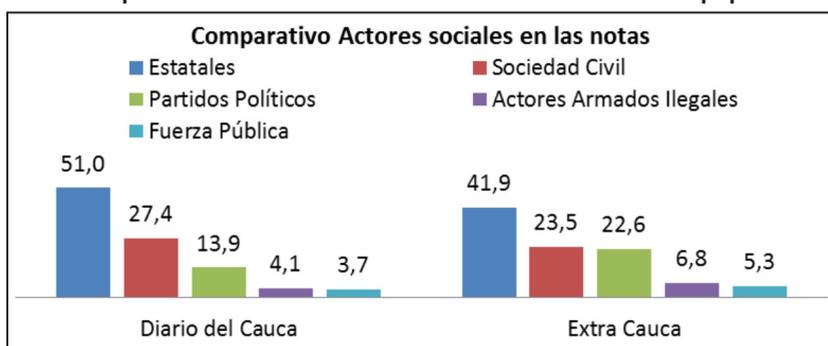
3.3. Information actors

Beyond the candidates, among the social actors mentioned in the articles related to the information on the presidential elections, those from the state stand out in both newspapers. In particular, those related to electoral bodies were important, but also ministers and authorities such as the Comptroller's Office, the Ombudsman's Office, and the Attorney General's Office.

Second, the actors featured in both newspapers are organizations and persons from civil society. Here it is necessary to point out that several times a week, the response of citizens to a question related to one of the news events of the moment in Popayán and Cauca are published in each of the newspapers. These sections, called *Survey* in the *Diario del Cauca* and *Opinometer* in *Extra Cauca*, include 10 or 12 people of civil society who have been questioned, which most likely intervene in the participation data of this type of actor in the information about the electoral process. This participation does not replace the critical and reflexive voice of civil society in the face of core issues, such as the requirements of the department and the expectations of citizens regarding the programmatic proposals of the candidates, which in turn, if having worked for the newspapers, would have contributed to a kind of citizen journalism of the kind that Miralles (2001) suggests as active and participatory.

Thirdly, for both newspapers there are political parties as actors, the proportion of them being much smaller in *Diario del Cauca* than in *Extra Cauca*. The illegal armed actors and the public force appear with very little prominence in the electoral information.

Figure 11
Comparison of social actors of the notes in both newspapers



Own source

As for the candidates, as obliged social actors of the articles, the count was made under another category, which allows for identifying the individual weight they had in the men-

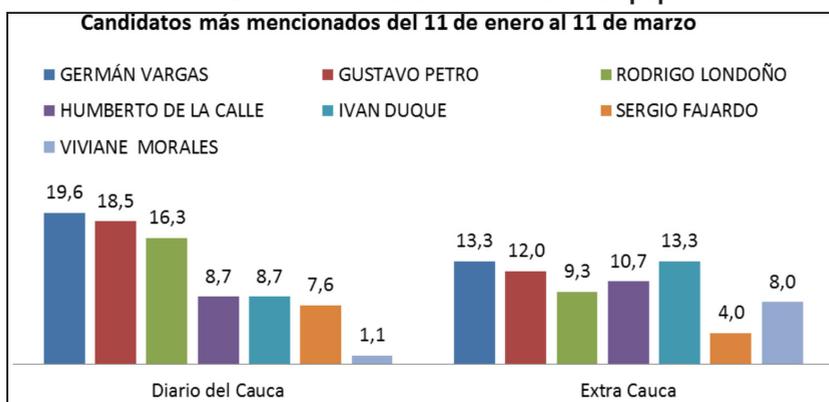
tions, and to compare the importance the newspapers assigned to each, although only the data of the presidential candidates are presented, while others from Congress that were counted are excluded, why the percentages in the graphs do not add up to 100% of the articles of each newspaper.

We can see in graph 12 that in both newspapers Germán Vargas Lleras is the privileged candidate in the coverage of the process during the campaign for the elections to Congress, as shown in the following graph, although with greater proportion in the *Diario del Cauca*, with 19,6%. In this regard, special coverage of the proselytizing activity is made with details and images that showed favoritism for the candidate, which were repeated in both newspapers.

In particular, in *Extra Cauca* Iván Duque occupies the same 13.3% of electoral information in the period as the first candidate. In third place, with 12%, is Gustavo Petro followed by Humberto de la Calle and Rodrigo Londoño, while Sergio Fajardo was almost invisible in *Extra Cauca*. With 8%, the number of mentions of the candidate Viviane Morales was the double of Sergio Fajardo in the registered articles.

In *Diario del Cauca*, Gustavo Petro had the second most mentions with 18.5%. It is striking that he is followed by the ex-combatant of the Farc, Rodrigo Londoño, amassing 16.3% of the mentions; that is, twice as many articles as those dedicated Iván Duque, Humberto de la Calle and Sergio Fajardo. Meanwhile, Viviane Morales was practically not taken into account in *Diario del Cauca*.

Figure 12
Comparison of the most mentioned Candidates from January 11 to March 11 in the articles in both newspapers



Own source

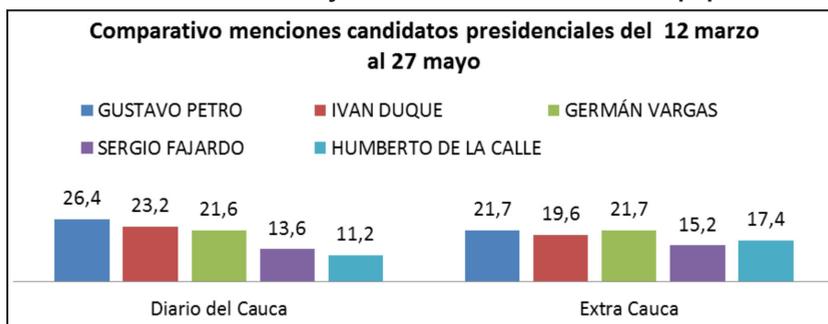
When the results of the parliamentary elections are already known, with a Congress mainly constituted by the political forces of the right and center right of the country (the opposition holding only 24 seats in the Senate and 24 in the Chamber), the tendencies of

newspapers change in the sense that some candidates lose or gain prominence. However, it seems that the changes are not related to results of the Congress, but rather to the published and most renowned polls, according to which Petro and Duque would go to the second round, because the opposition candidate didn't cease to be named despite the few seats obtained in the Senate and the House by those who support him.

In *Diario del Cauca*, the order of mentions start with Germán Vargas, Gustavo Petro and Rodrigo Londoño followed by Gustavo Petro, Iván Duque and Germán Vargas. Sergio Fajardo and Humberto de la Calle lack far behind, although they had a greater presence in the electoral information in this period than in the previous one.

In the case of Extra Cauca, the order of the Germán Vargas Lleras and Iván Duque followed by Gustavo Petro in the presidential pre-election period changes to: Gustavo Petro, Germán Vargas Lleras and Iván Duque. Also here Fajardo and De la Calle are secondary.

Figure 13
Comparison of the most mentioned presidential candidates
from March 12 to May 27 in the notes in both newspapers



Own source

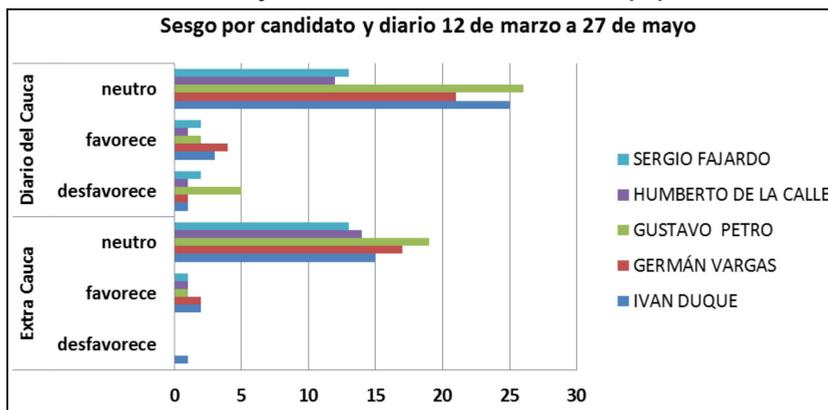
Apart from the referred data, it is essential to analyze how the newspapers referred to these candidates, since the amount of mentions does not necessarily reflect a positive role. There may be biases, such as unfavorable journalistic information regarding one candidate or another.

In the second observation window, the period prior to the first electoral round, Figure 14 shows that the toning of the articles in both newspapers were mostly neutral. However, it can be concluded from the qualitative observations that "neutrality" also appears a discursive asepsis, as it seems to be the camouflage of the mediocrity of the journalistic exercise that takes place in the observed newspapers, that is, the fear of commitment to the critical character and the debate in the published information.

In some few cases, The *Diario del Cauca* favored and disadvantaged the five candidates. It is evident that the greatest favor was given to the candidates favored by the publishing

house, that is Germán Vargas and Iván Duque, and on the other hand Gustavo Petro and Sergio Fajardo had the most disadvantageous mentions. Meanwhile, Extra Cauca favored every candidate in a few articles, although a bit more frequently in the case of Vargas Lleras and Duque, though the latter was also disadvantaged in a single article.

Figure 14
Comparison of Bias by presidential candidate between March 12 and May 27 in the articles in both newspapers



Own source

Due to the complexity of the database it was not possible to cross the topics and sub-topics of information with the candidates. It is however worth recalling the Manual for journalists, *“How to cover elections”*, which suggest journalistic stories that might of interest for citizens – stories that were not kept in mind regarding the five referred candidates, such as:

Which candidates have economic links with regional or national companies? [...] If it is not the first time that a candidate is running for office, review the accounts of his previous campaign [...] ¿How was the process of analysis of the finances of the parties in the Campaign Fund? (Ronderos and Moreno, 2011, p. 38).

Finally, it should be mentioned that although it isn't all that evident in the proportions of the information dedicated to candidates, when analyzing the characteristics of the articles in terms of the dedicated extension and the type of information provided, the bias in favor of Germán Vargas Lleras is seen above all in news and special reports. This can be seen as editorializing the position of *Diario del Cauca* and *Extra Cauca* in towards the candidate, an objective that is complies with the size of the articles dedicated to the candidate.

4. Conclusions

We wanted to compare a tabloid newspaper with a “serious” newspaper; in this regard, it turned out that the observed substantial differences were in fact limited. This is partly due to the fact that the newspapers belong to the same publishing house. In this sense, the political information of the two newspapers is not significantly dissimilar, since a good proportion of the content is recycled in both newspapers.

Although *Extra Cauca*, as a “yellow newspaper”, has a considerable amount of articles on the presidential elections, it is striking that the articles weren’t especially sensationalist, but in general held a discursive treatment similar to that of *Diario del Cauca*.

One of the most important common characteristics in the monitored newspapers was the lack of depth given to the political-electoral information, apparent in the absence of diverse sources, contextual elements, in-depth journalistic genres and complementary graphic elements such as infographics and cartographies. This is information that tends to have a narcotic effect, due to the transience and superficiality of what it exposes.

The wide media exposure of the presidential candidates in social networks and other media, in television debates, radio programs and other digital microformats, generated a great opportunity for a wide and detailed coverage, which was totally ignored by the monitored newspapers, who apparently were not interested in exploring alternative sources and themes to the easiest and best known.

The absence of the department of Cauca’s own issues was the predominant feature in the articles of both newspapers in relation to proposals or requirements of the region facing a new president. Even so, when reference was made to the general content of political programs, the newspapers took information from the official websites of the candidates, leaving it without analysis.

In general, it should finally be noted that the quality control in both newspapers appears to be very poor, evidenced in both in the titles and how articles are carried out, with editorial problems ranging from poorly written names to grammatical errors and incoherent structures of the text.

In terms of recommendations, it can be considered that, although there is journalistic neglect in the treatment of the presidential electoral process in both monitored newspapers, it is clear that it is difficult to demand contrasting sources, depth and informative rigor from poorly paid journalists burdened by work overload and sometimes even threats. The aforementioned harassment at the El Periódico Publishing Group demonstrates how the business perspective favors the quantity of journalistic articles more than the quality.

Although it is understood that a newspaper, as part of the cultural industry, is a business, this is no excuse for depriving journalism of its status as a critical and analytical

interpreter of reality, as is inherent in the profession. The lack of criticism and depth tends to turn journalists who work in these newspapers into mere transcriptionists and non-analysts of social reality instead of the professionals with multiple perspectives they should be. Thus, the recommendation, aimed more at the employers than the journalist, relates to guaranteeing decent working conditions in order to obtain better journalism and even to reach higher profit margins.

Finally, regarding the methodological aspects of the monitoring coordinated by the MOE and developed with the Universal Teacher Platform, it is important to conceive the inclusion of more qualitative aspects in the database to record rhetorical elements, discursive strategies and discourse functions that are used in the journalistic articles and have implications in the representation of the reality to which they refer, especially in the connotative plane.

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