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MEDIA ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN THE 2023 ECUADORIAN RUNOFF ELECTION

ANÁLISIS MEDIÁTICO DE LOS CANDIDATOS PRESIDENCIALES EN LA SEGUNDA VUELTA ELECTORAL ECUATORIANA DE 2023

Cómo citar el artículo:

Andraus C, Zambrano K, Dávalos T, (2024). Media Analysis of Presidential Candidates in the 2023 Ecuadorian Runoff Election. Derecho Global. Estudios sobre Derecho y Justicia, X(28) <https://10.32870/dgedj.v10i28.772>
pp. 347-370

Recibido: 29/05/24 Aceptado: 11/09/24

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the publications of presidential candidates Daniel Noboa and Luisa González in editorial media during the campaign period from September 24 to October 12 for the runoff election in Ecuador in 2023. Using a mixed methodology, all publications from “El Diario” related to the candidates during the runoff campaign were collected and quantified. Additionally, the publications were categorized and analyzed according to thematic axes provided in the presidential debate of the runoff (economic, security, social, political, campaign, debate); according to tones (positive, negative, neutral); and according to the type of content (news, opinion-editorial, interview, reportage) that allows revealing differences in the media presentation of both candidates. The results show a positive trend for Noboa and criticism towards González, suggesting that “El Diario” presents possible media biases. The results highlight the relevance of equitable coverage for the integrity of the electoral process, emphasizing the need for future research to delve deeper into the dynamics between the media, citizenship, and democracy. This analysis contributes to the understanding of how the media can influence voters considering “El Diario” as the object and the candidates as subjects of study.

KEYWORDS

Media analysis; public perception; democratic process; presidential elections; information bias.

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza las publicaciones de los candidatos presidenciales Daniel Noboa y Luisa González en medios editoriales durante el periodo de campaña del 24 de septiembre al 12 de octubre para la segunda vuelta electoral en Ecuador de 2023. Mediante una metodología mixta, se recolectaron y cuantificaron todas las publicaciones de “El Diario” relacionadas con los candidatos durante la campaña de la segunda vuelta. Adicionalmente, las publicaciones fueron categorizadas y analizadas según los ejes temáticos previstos en el debate presidencial de la segunda vuelta (económico, seguridad, social, político, campaña, debate); según tonos (positivo, negativo, neutro); y según el tipo de contenido (noticia, opinión-editorial, entrevista,

reportaje) que permite revelar diferencias en la presentación mediática de ambos candidatos. Los resultados muestran una tendencia positiva para Noboa y críticas hacia González, sugiriendo que “El Diario” presenta posibles sesgos mediáticos. Los resultados resaltan la relevancia de una cobertura equitativa para la integridad del proceso electoral, enfatizando la necesidad de futuras investigaciones para profundizar en la dinámica entre medios de comunicación, ciudadanía y democracia. Este análisis contribuye a la comprensión de cómo los medios de comunicación pueden influir en los electores considerando a “El Diario” como objeto y a los candidatos como sujetos de estudio.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Análisis de medios; percepción pública; proceso democrático; elecciones presidenciales; sesgo informativo.

Sumario: I. Introduction. II. Materials and Methods. III. The Appraisal Theory. IV. Results and Discussion. 1. Systematization of Publications. V. Conclusions. References.

I. INTRODUCTION

The background of recent Ecuadorian politics, marked by controversy and instability, such as the “Muerte Cruzada” incident and the assassination of Fernando Villavicencio, who was a presidential candidate during the first round of elections, contributed to the proliferation of information and the potential manipulation of reality by the media, as suggested by Califano (2015). This raises critical questions about the integrity of the information provided to voters and its effect on democracy. The role of the media during electoral campaigns, particularly presidential ones, is undeniable in the process of forming public opinion by highlighting issues and actors; informing the public about events related to the elections; persuading on the importance of voting; explaining and instructing how to vote; providing a space for the exchange of ideas; and meeting citizens’ need for guidance about the candidates, ensuring the right to information before casting their vote (Pereyra & Alonso, 2022). However, it is also essential to recognize the role of the media in local elections, where media coverage is crucial for political participation. Kübler and Goodman (2019) highlight that the territorial structure of newspaper markets and the congruence of these markets with municipal territories increase the likelihood

that citizens are exposed to locally relevant news. Using detailed data on newspaper readership, their study demonstrates that both a newspaper's readership in a municipality and the congruence of newspaper markets with municipal territories have substantial and positive effects on participation levels in municipal elections in Switzerland. These findings suggest that future research on local political behavior should better recognize the influence of the media environment, which can be adequately measured by newspaper readership and congruence. Moreover, they imply that current structural changes in the media system represent threats to local democracy through the territorial escalation of media markets.

Califano (2015) emphasizes that the media not only disseminate information about the proposals and profiles of candidates but also play a crucial role in shaping social reality through their coverage. The media direct public attention toward selected topics and political figures, contributing to shaping public agendas. This dynamic, marked by a condensed or selectively filtered presentation of information, establishes a framework that allows for indirect influence on public opinion by prioritizing certain issues over others.

In Ecuador, the term “muerte cruzada” (cross-death) colloquially describes the President of the Republic dissolving the National Assembly or the Assembly dismissing the President. These powers are granted under Articles 130 and 148 of the Ecuadorian Constitution (Redroban and Prado, 2023). The case of Ecuador is illustrative of this phenomenon. The dissolution of the National Assembly by former President Guillermo Lasso, invoking the “Muerte Cruzada,” triggered intense debates about political stability and the media's role in covering these events (López & González, 2023).

The application of the Muerte Cruzada decree in Ecuador has portrayed an image of political instability to other states and even more so within Ecuadorian society. This decision positioned the president a step above the National Assembly, thereby endangering state governance, as it has not been a beneficial action for the Ecuadorian citizens (Ramírez-Chávez, 2023).

Buenaño-Santo et al. (2023) points out that the Muerte Cruzada decree, which

resulted in the dissolution of the National Assembly in Ecuador, was institutionally harmful. This act not only suspended the legislative and oversight functions of the Assembly but also led to the removal of the president elected by popular vote. Such dissolution prevented the government from completing its term and its governance plan, resulting in significant economic losses for the country. Freire (2023) adds that, within the legal and constitutional framework established by the 2008 Constitution, the figure of the Muerte Cruzada underscores the need to understand the power interactions between state institutions and how these events are portrayed by the media.

Regarding the coverage of electoral campaigns, studies such as those by Del Orbe (2011) in Spain and Ninahuamán (2018) in Peru have analyzed how the media can favor certain candidates through Agenda Setting and news treatment. These investigations suggest that media coverage is not neutral and can have a significant impact on election outcomes. Other empirical research in the context of electoral campaigns, such as that by Sánchez (2023) in Argentina and Arselles & Díaz (2023) in Peru, have identified biases in the media coverage, favoring specific candidates, as well as disadvantaging others.

Research conducted by Montahuano and Albarrán (2021), Rojo (2023), Ultreras (2023), Cantos (2023), and Chavero (2020) within the Ecuadorian context have documented that the media adapt their communication strategies during electoral campaigns. These adaptations include personalizing the coverage with specific objectives, whether to highlight or diminish the visibility of a presidential candidate. The techniques employed range from meta-campaigning to the strategic use of memes and social media, demonstrating flexibility in the media approach to politics.

During the 2023 runoff election campaign in Ecuador, the interaction between digital and traditional media was decisive in promoting the proposals and image of the candidates Luisa González and Daniel Noboa. According to data from the National Electoral Council (2023), this communicative dynamic was reflected in the results of the first round, where Luisa González, from the Citizen Revolution movement (RC5), obtained 33.61% of the votes, while Daniel Noboa, from the National Democratic Action party (ADN), reached 23.47% of the votes. These results led to

a runoff election, scheduled by the National Electoral Council from September 24 to October 12, 2023, as stipulated in Resolution PLE-CNE-2-30-8-2023. Additionally, during this period, twenty-one representatives to the National Assembly were to be elected (Universo, 2023).

In a decisive moment for the presidency of Ecuador, the media continue to focus on informing the Ecuadorian citizens about the presidential candidates and their campaign activities. This process concluded with Daniel Noboa in the presidency of Ecuador with 51.83% of the votes, while Luisa González obtained 48.17% of the votes (National Electoral Council, 2023).

Given these results, the analysis of the presidential election publications in *El Diario*, taking that newspaper as a starting point, requires a detailed understanding of the interaction between the media, society, and democracy. This theoretical framework provides a starting point to explore how media coverage can influence the democratic process and electoral equity.

The general objective of this study is to analyze the publications about Luisa González and Daniel Noboa in *El Diario* during the second round campaign, to identify possible biases and assess equity in media presentation. Specifically, the study aims to collect and quantify the news published in relation to the candidates during the campaign period from September 24 to October 12; to categorize and evaluate them by thematic axis (economic, security, social, political, campaign, and debate), type of content (news, opinion/editorial, interview, and report), and tone (positive, negative, and neutral).

The methodology employed involves a mixed, quantitative, and qualitative approach for the comprehensive evaluation of the publications in *El Diario*. The literature review reveals a diverse landscape of research on media influence in electoral contexts, both nationally and internationally. Studies such as those by Del Orbe (2011), Ninahuamán (2018), and Sánchez (2023), among others, provide a valuable theoretical and empirical framework to understand the complexity of the relationship between media, politics, and public opinion.

This article, therefore, attempts to place its analysis within this broad context, contributing to the discussion on the role of media in contemporary democracies

during an electoral process. The findings are expected to shed light on the dynamics of media coverage of presidential elections in Ecuador, offering insights into equity, biases, and their potential impact on the Ecuadorian voter and electoral outcomes.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology used in this study was designed to allow its replication by other researchers, following the guidelines established by Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado, and Baptista-Lucio (2014), as well as Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018). A mixed research approach was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze the publications of “El Diario” about the presidential candidates Luisa González and Daniel Noboa during the campaign period of the 2023 runoff election in Ecuador.

The sample was selected through purposive non-probabilistic sampling. A total of 19 print editions anchored in the digital portal of “El Diario,” which mentioned the candidates from September 24 to October 12, 2023, was reviewed; this period corresponded to the allowed campaign time for the runoff election. The purposive selection of the publications allowed the analysis to focus on the content required for the research objectives, in line with the recommendations of Hernández-Sampieri and colleagues (2014; 2018).

For the quantitative component of the study, a registration form specifically designed for this purpose was used, which allowed counting the number of publications, classifying them by type (news, opinion-editorial, interview, report), thematic axis (politics, security, economic, social, campaign, debate), and determining the tone (positive, negative, neutral) of each publication.

As for the qualitative component, a content analysis guide was developed based on the methodology suggested by Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), which facilitated the limitation of interpreting the tones of the publications at the discretion of the author, allowing for the identification of patterns in the media presentation of both candidates.

The quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to determine the frequency and distribution of publications by type, tone, and theme. This approach allowed identifying trends in the publications about the candidates.

For the qualitative analysis, a thematic coding technique was applied to interpret the data, identifying patterns of bias or neutrality in the publications. This process involved a thorough review of the content to ensure a deep understanding of the media narrative surrounding the candidates (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014).

III. THE APPRAISAL THEORY

When it comes to categorizing notes as positive, negative, and neutral, these evaluative tones can be clarified in the Appraisal Theory developed by James Martin and Peter White, which is a theoretical perspective adapted from Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Martin, 1997; Martin & White, 2007; White, 2000).

The theory analyzes the linguistic resources broken down from texts and used to express or naturalize ideological positions based on the discursive semantic dimension. According to the appraisal theory, there are three subtypes or semantic domains.

Subsystem of Attitude

The appraisal of texts includes meanings by which they attribute value to actors or processes through emotional responses. Martin and White (2007) categorize emotions into three main variables: in/happiness, in/security, and in/satisfaction.

In/happiness encompasses emotions linked to sadness, hatred, happiness, and love. These emotions reflect the well-being and emotional state of individuals, ranging from profound sadness and intense hatred to joyous happiness and deep love.

In/security covers emotions related to well-being, including anxiety, fear, trust, and justice. This variable addresses the sense of safety and stability, capturing the spectrum from feelings of anxiety and fear to trust and a sense of justice.

In/satisfaction involves emotions associated with feelings of pleasure, such as

displeasure, curiosity, and respect. This category considers how individuals derive satisfaction or dissatisfaction from their experiences, ranging from feelings of displeasure and boredom to curiosity and respect

According to Martin and White (2007), judgment involves meanings used to evaluate human behavior positively or negatively according to a set of socially institutionalized norms. This process occurs when a speaker assesses a human participant based on their actions or dispositions, grading them according to criteria such as morality, legality, social acceptability, valuation, and normality. Judgments are crucial in understanding how individuals conform to or deviate from societal standards, providing insight into the moral and ethical dimensions of human behavior.

Appreciation, as described by Martin and White (2007), focuses on evaluating natural objects, manufactures, texts, and abstract constructions, such as plans and policies. This type of evaluation may center on characteristics such as harmony, symmetry, balance, or, conversely, twisted or curved aspects. From an aesthetic perspective, appreciation can judge objects in terms of their attractiveness, charm, and beauty, or their negative counterparts, such as being boring or monotonous. Appreciation allows for a nuanced understanding of how aesthetic and functional qualities of objects are perceived and valued.

By analyzing texts through these categories—emotions, judgment, and appreciation—researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of how values are communicated and perceived. This approach enables the identification of both explicit and implicit evaluative content, revealing the underlying attitudes and biases present in discourse.

Subsystem of Gradation

Although values are established by positive and negative poles, there is a spectrum of attitudes that moves between these two extremes. This theoretical perspective allows for the exploration of these attitudes not only in terms of positive and negative but also through intervals and scales (Martin & White, 2007).

Subsystem of Engagement

In this subsystem, particular attention is given to the sources of attitudes or the individuals who conduct evaluations, considering where the evaluation originates (Martin & White, 2007).

The Appraisal Theory and studies on Agenda Setting share a common interest in analyzing the affective load of texts, as identified by Krippendorff (1990) and White (2003). Both approaches recognize that, although determining appraisal in discourses with an explicit evaluative charge is relatively straightforward, there are texts in which these attributes are implicit and form part of the latent content of the messages.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Systematization of Publications

The interpretation of the results obtained from the analysis of the publications in “El Diario” focuses on the candidates Luisa González and Daniel Noboa during the campaign period for the 2023 runoff election in Ecuador, as detailed in Tables 1 and 2.

This study categorizes the news according to specific thematic axes: politics, security, economy, social issues, as well as debate and campaign topics. These latter categories were specifically included in this analysis due to their prevalence in the content examined from “El Diario”. The classification also considers the tone of the publications (positive, negative, neutral) and the type of content (news, opinion-editorials, interviews, reports), providing a detailed understanding of the media coverage of both candidates.

Table 1. Publications about Daniel Noboa in El Diario.

| Publication Date | News Title | Thematic Axis | Content Type | Tone |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|---------|
| 24/09/2023 | 19 days to promote | Campaing | News | Neutral |

| Publication Date | News Title | Thematic Axis | Content Type | Tone |
|------------------|---|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| 24/09/2023 | At the gates of the elections | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 25/09/2023 | Private companies cannot make contributions | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 25/09/2023 | The presidential campaign intensifies | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 26/09/2023 | Noboa offers housing at 4% interest for 25 years | Economic | News | Positive |
| 27/09/2023 | By draw, Noboa will open the debate | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 28/09/2023 | Pollsters give Daniel Noboa the lead | Political | News | Positive |
| 28/09/2023 | What Luisa and Daniel Noboa are made of | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 29/09/2023 | Noboa presents Phoenix Plan for security | Security | News | Positive |
| 29/09/2023 | Presidential debate: the preview | Political | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 29/09/2023 | Decanting | Political | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 30/09/2023 | Noboa executes 60% of his promotion | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 1/10/2023 | Noboa and González face to face today | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 1/10/2023 | What is expected from the next government? | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 2/10/2023 | Candidates expand their proposals in the debate | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 3/10/2023 | The 'how to do it' was missing in the debate | Debate | News | Negative |
| 4/10/2023 | Defining the agenda of provincial needs | Social | News | Positive |
| 5/10/2023 | List of requirements from Manabí delivered to Noboa | Social | News | Positive |

| Publication Date | News Title | Thematic Axis | Content Type | Tone |
|------------------|--|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| 5/10/2023 | Visit to the rival's "lands" | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 5/10/2023 | "The undecided will define the president" | Political | Interview | Neutral |
| 5/10/2023 | Political incongruity of politicians | Campaing | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 6/10/2023 | Noboa spread his proposals to ESPAM students | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 6/10/2023 | Daniel Noboa, new hater? | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 7/10/2023 | Noboa proposes to create daycares | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 7/10/2023 | Agrarian poverty in the presidential debate | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 8/10/2023 | The so-called debate... | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 8/10/2023 | Presidential election | Político | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 9/10/2023 | None | None | None | None |
| 10/10/2023 | "Virtual" campaign about to end | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 11/10/2023 | Reserved forecast | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Noboa and González will close the campaign in Guayas today | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Luisa confronts the system | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Daniel Noboa, wins in Manabí | Social | Opinion/editorial | Positive |

Table 2. Publications about Luisa Gonzalez in El Diario.

| Publication Date | News Title | Thematic Axis | Content Type | Tone |
|------------------|---|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| 24/09/2023 | 19 days to promote | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 24/09/2023 | At the gates of the elections | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 25/09/2023 | Private companies cannot make contributions | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 25/09/2023 | The presidential campaign intensifies González says she will | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 26/09/2023 | implement three types of actions. | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 27/09/2023 | By draw, Noboa will open the debate | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 28/09/2023 | Pollsters give Daniel Noboa the lead | Political | News | Positive |
| 28/09/2023 | What Luisa and Daniel Noboa are made of | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 29/09/2023 | Presidential debate: the preview | Political | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 29/09/2023 | Decanting | Political | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 30/09/2023 | Noboa executes 60% of his promotion | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 1/10/2023 | Noboa and González face to face today | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 1/10/2023 | What is expected from the next government? | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 2/10/2023 | Candidates expand their proposals in the debate | Debate | News | Neutral |
| 3/10/2023 | The 'how to do it' was missing in the debate | Debate | News | Negative |
| 4/10/2023 | Defining the agenda of provincial needs | Social | News | Positive |
| 5/10/2023 | List of requirements from Manabí delivered to Noboa | Social | News | Positive |

| Publication Date | News Title | Thematic Axis | Content Type | Tone |
|------------------|--|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| 5/10/2023 | Visit to the rival's "lands" | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 5/10/2023 | "The undecided will define the president" | Political | Interview | Neutral |
| 5/10/2023 | Political incongruity of politicians | Campaing | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 6/10/2023 | Noboa spread his proposals to ESPAM students | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 6/10/2023 | Daniel Noboa, new hater? | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 7/10/2023 | Noboa proposes to create daycares | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 7/10/2023 | Agrarian poverty in the presidential debate | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Negative |
| 8/10/2023 | The so-called debate... | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Positive |
| 8/10/2023 | Presidential election | Político | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 9/10/2023 | An hour-long interview tonight on Manavisión | Campaing | News | Positive |
| 10/10/2023 | "Virtual" campaign about to end | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 11/10/2023 | Reserved forecast | Debate | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Noboa and González will close the campaign in Guayas today | Campaing | News | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Luisa confronts the system | Political | Opinion/editorial | Neutral |
| 12/10/2023 | Daniel Noboa, wins in Manabí | Social | Opinion/editorial | Positive |

The data derived from the publications about Daniel Noboa in El Diario during the presidential runoff campaign in Ecuador reveal a distribution where 53% of the 32

publications were characterized by a neutral tone, 34.5% had a positive tone, and 13.8% had a negative tone, as detailed in Table 3. This variety in tone suggests that the coverage of *El Diario* towards Daniel Noboa was relatively balanced, with a tendency to present the candidate in a more favorable light.

In contrast, Luisa González, with a total of 31 publications, shows a distribution where 55% of the publications were classified as neutral, 19% as positive, and a significantly higher percentage, 26% as negative (see Table 3). This pattern of coverage indicates a tilt towards a more critical representation of González, which could significantly influence the public perception of her image.

The comparison of these tonal distributions highlights a distinct editorial approach taken by *El Diario* in its coverage of the two candidates. For Daniel Noboa, the higher proportion of neutral and positive tones suggests an effort to portray him in a largely impartial yet slightly favorable manner. This balanced coverage could enhance Noboa's public image by emphasizing his strengths and reducing potential negative impacts.

Conversely, the coverage of Luisa González with a notably higher percentage of negative tones suggests a critical stance taken by *El Diario*. The lower proportion of positive articles combined with a significant amount of negative coverage could undermine González's public image, potentially swaying voter perceptions unfavorably.

Table 3 illustrates these tonal distributions, providing a clear visual representation of the editorial choices made by *El Diario*. The data underscores the potential influence of media tone on public opinion, highlighting how differential treatment of candidates can shape electoral outcomes.

The impact of media tone on public perception is substantial, as positive coverage can bolster a candidate's image, while negative coverage can detract from their appeal. The relatively balanced yet favorable coverage of Noboa might position him as a competent and appealing candidate, whereas the critical coverage of González could hinder her campaign by focusing on her perceived shortcomings.

Table 3. Publications about Luisa Gonzalez in El Diario.

| Candidate | Total Publications | Tone | | |
|----------------|--------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| | | Positive | Negative | Neutral |
| Daniel Noboa | 32 | 11 | 4 | 17 |
| Luisa González | 31 | 6 | 8 | 17 |

The analysis of the types of content in the publications of El Diario regarding Daniel Noboa during the campaign for the presidential runoff in Ecuador reveals that news articles constitute the majority with 56%, followed by opinion articles at 41%, and only 3% are interviews, with no reports published about the candidate. This pattern indicates that El Diario favored a more neutral and less interpretative approach towards Noboa, focusing on disseminating his statements or proposals rather than delving into his personality or political stance, as observed in Table 4.

In contrast, the publications about Luisa González present a more balanced distribution between opinion articles (42%) and news (52%), along with a higher percentage of interviews (6%) compared to Daniel Noboa. These findings suggest that El Diario provided a broader space for exploring the ideas and personal perspective of González, as detailed in Table 4.

The disparity in content types between the two candidates highlights a nuanced approach by El Diario in its editorial coverage. For Noboa, the dominance of news articles suggests an emphasis on straightforward reporting of his campaign activities and policy proposals. This approach may aim to present Noboa as a candidate grounded in factual reporting, possibly enhancing his credibility through a focus on his statements and initiatives rather than subjective interpretations.

On the other hand, the balanced distribution of content types for González, including a higher proportion of interviews, indicates a more diverse portrayal that includes personal insights and detailed opinions. The increased presence of interviews allows for a deeper exploration of her viewpoints and personality, providing the electorate with a more comprehensive understanding of her candidacy. This broader coverage may help humanize González and connect her more personally with voters.

Table 4 illustrates these distributions, showcasing the editorial choices made by El Diario. The data suggests a strategic differentiation in coverage styles, potentially aimed at shaping distinct public perceptions of each candidate. The reliance on news articles for Noboa contrasts with the varied content types for González, reflecting different editorial priorities and possibly underlying biases in the newspaper's approach.

Table 4. Content Type of the Candidates' Publications.

| Candidate | Total Publications | Content Type | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|
| | | News | Opinion/editorial | Interview | Report |
| Daniel Noboa | 32 | 18 | 13 | 1 | 0 |
| Luisa González | 31 | 16 | 13 | 2 | 0 |

Regarding the thematic axes of the publications related to Daniel Noboa, there is a prevalence of political themes (31%), closely followed by economic issues (28%). Security topics represent 10% of the publications, while aspects related to the campaign and debate only cover 3%. This distribution suggests that El Diario projected Noboa as a serious candidate committed to nationally relevant issues, balancing its coverage across three of the main themes debated during the presidential runoff, as shown in Table 5.

In contrast, publications about Luisa González were more focused on politics (36%) and economics (32%), with significant attention to social issues (26%) and less concentration on the campaign (6%). Notably, there was no percentage assigned to debates and security in the case of González. This omission suggests that these topics were either not central to her campaign or did not constitute a focus for El Diario in its coverage. This pattern could indicate a possible media bias by the newspaper or a specific editorial decision, as indicated in Table 5.

The differences in thematic focus between the coverage of Noboa and González may reflect an underlying editorial strategy aimed at shaping public perception. The emphasis on political and economic issues for both candidates aligns with

the general priorities of the electorate, yet the disparity in attention to security and campaign-related themes highlights a significant divergence in narrative framing.

For Noboa, the balanced coverage of political, economic, and security issues portrays him as a well-rounded candidate capable of addressing multifaceted national concerns. This comprehensive approach may enhance his credibility among voters by demonstrating his engagement with a broad spectrum of critical topics.

In González's case, the concentration on social issues alongside politics and economics suggests a campaign narrative more attuned to addressing the electorate's immediate social concerns. However, the absence of security and debate-related coverage may imply a gap in the perceived completeness of her campaign platform. This selective coverage could potentially diminish her perceived readiness to tackle all aspects of national governance.

Table 5 further illustrates these thematic distributions, providing a visual representation of the editorial choices made by *El Diario*. The data suggests that the newspaper may have strategically curated content to align with specific narratives for each candidate. Such editorial decisions could significantly influence voter perceptions by highlighting certain aspects of a candidate's platform while omitting others.

Table 5. Thematic Axes of the Candidates' Publications.

| Candidate | Total Publications | Thematic Axes | | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------|--------|-----------|----------|--------|
| | | Economic | Security | Social | Political | Campaing | Debate |
| Daniel Noboa | 32 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 10 | 8 |
| Luisa | 31 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 | 11 | 8 |
| González | | | | | | | |

When comparing these findings with the existing literature, there is a consonance with previous studies suggesting that media coverage can construct or deconstruct candidates' images in the public eye (Del Orbe, 2011; Ninahuamán, 2018). This study supports the notion that the media has a significant influence on public perception by either enhancing or diminishing the reputation of political figures.

The percentage analysis of the data highlights the differential media treatment of candidates by *El Diario*. Daniel Noboa enjoyed a substantial proportion of positive coverage, while Luisa González faced a high volume of critical and negative coverage. This disparity in media tone underscores a potential bias in reporting, which could significantly influence public opinion and voter behavior.

Discussing the potential impact of these patterns on the democratic process is essential. Equitable media coverage is crucial for a healthy democracy, as it ensures that all candidates have an equal opportunity to present their platforms and viewpoints to the electorate. However, the presence of negative tones or uneven emphasis on certain issues raises questions about the fairness and impartiality of media presentations. Such biases could undermine the democratic process by skewing public perception in favor of certain candidates over others.

The impact of communicative practices on electoral processes has been extensively studied from the perspective of political communication. This line of research highlights the ability of social and political actors, including the media, to establish frames of interpretation, emphasize certain elements of reality, and influence voters' decisions. Studies by Garrido, Carletta, and Rioda (2011), Iyengar and Kinder (2010), and Weaver (1994) document the media's role in shaping public opinion through strategic framing and agenda-setting.

In terms of news content, beyond merely constructing a media agenda, it can also develop frames of interpretation of reality that benefit the discourses and positions of some candidates over others (De Vreese, 2003, 2005; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). From this viewpoint, it is argued that information can manipulate a citizen's vote by framing the news within matrices such as moral, political, economic, social, and even religious values. This framing can significantly influence voter perceptions and decisions by highlighting specific aspects of a candidate's character or platform.

The particularity of print media over other forms relates to the publication of news, analysis, and opinions. Trust in newspapers is often due to their long-standing history, traditions, renowned journalists, and the ethical codes they once represented.

The influence of newspapers on voters is substantial, as headlines about a candidate or political party can significantly highlight positive or negative aspects of the presented information (Hernández, 2023).

Sevilla (2021) contends that although voters seek to understand proposals to address national problems, the decline in the prestige of political parties has led to a shift in focus toward the personal qualities and actions of individual candidates. This phenomenon has shifted public attention from institutions to individual political figures due to the loss of credibility of the former. Consequently, media coverage has increasingly focused on politicians rather than party platforms, thereby altering the dynamics of voter influence.

The consequences of a media outlet leaning towards one candidate or another inevitably include the alteration of the vote. Studies by the aforementioned authors relate facts to each other, demonstrating how media bias can affect electoral outcomes.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the presidential candidates' publications in *El Diario* revealed patterns of bias and inequity. Despite a general trend towards neutral coverage, differences in positive and negative tones indicate unequal treatment. Daniel Noboa received more positive coverage compared to Luisa González, who faced fewer individual publications and a higher proportion of negative content.

Moreover, the predominance of “news” content in the publications of both candidates (56.0% for Noboa and 52.0% for González) shows an effort to keep the electorate informed about their current activities and positions. However, the scarce presence of interviews and the total absence of in-depth reports highlight a possible lack of depth in the coverage.

The categorization by type and tone of the news showed a higher proportion of negative content for González, suggesting a possible media bias. This differential coverage seems to influence the formation of public opinion, potentially favoring the public perception of Noboa with positive publications while negatively affecting González's image due to the frequency of critical content.

This study underscores the importance of continued monitoring and analysis of media coverage in electoral contexts to explore the relationship between the media, public opinion, and the democratic process in various electoral periods and media contexts. It provides valuable insight into the media coverage of presidential candidates in Ecuador, highlighting the need for equitable and diverse representation in electoral reporting to ensure a fair and balanced democratic process.

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