Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

Análisis comparativo de las agendas ciudadanas y mediáticas en Ecuador durante el primer año de mandato del presidente Guillermo Lasso.

8

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Abstract:

Ecuador is a country that, in the past fifteen years, has been characterized by the political polarization of the media. In that context, this investigation analyzes the correspondence of agendas that exists between the citizens agenda and the agenda of the media, both printed and digital, in Ecuador during President Guillermo Lasso´s first year in office (May 24th, 2021- May 23rd, 2022). Public agenda data from the polling company Click Research, a company allowed to do public opinion research by Ecuador´s Electoral Council, was retrieved and a topic content analysis of four Ecuadorian media, both digital (*Primicias* and *Radio La Calle*) and traditional (*El Comercio* and *El Universo*), was done, as well. The Matching Index proposed by Asp was used to analyze to what degree media and public agendas are corresponded. Results show that there is a correspondence between the agenda of different types of media and the public agenda. There is a bigger correspondence between public agenda and the printed media agenda in permanent topics for society; while the correspondence is bigger with digital media when it comes to inmediate, circumstantial events that mark the public agenda on occasions.

Resumen:

Ecuador es un país que, en los últimos quince años, se ha caracterizado por una polarización política. En este contexto, este estudio realiza un análisis de la correspondencia entre la agenda pública y la agenda mediática, tanto de medios tradicionales impresos como de medios digitales independientes, en Ecuador, durante el primer año de gobierno del presidente Guillermo Lasso (24 de mayo de 2021-23 de mayo de 2022). Se recuperaron datos de agenda pública obtenidos por la encuestadora Click Research, avalada por el Consejo Nacional Electoral para realizar encuestas de opinión pública, y se realizó un análisis de contenido temático de las principales noticias de cuatro medios de comunicación ecuatorianos, tanto digitales (Primicias y Radio La Calle) como tradicionales (El Comercio y El Universo). Se aplicó el índice de equiparación de agendas propuesto por Asp para analizar hasta qué punto se corresponden las agendas de los medios con la agenda pública. Los resultados demuestran que existe una correspondencia entre las agendas de los diferentes tipos de medios y la agenda pública, existiendo mayor equiparación de agendas con los medios tradicionales impresos, para temas más permanentes de agenda; y mayor equiparación de agenda con los medios digitales independientes, para temas inmediatos relacionados con acontecimientos coyunturales y específicos.

Palabras clave: *Agenda setting,* correspondencia de agendas, agendas mediáticas, agendas públicas, Ecuador.

1. INTRODUCTION

The media select several topics and events to cover. In doing so, they provide the public with talking points to build reflections and thoughts. This is known as the agenda-setting effect (McCombs, 2006). In today's academia, the question arises as to what extent the media select topics based on aspects such as the editorial line of the medium, the economic motivations of the owners of the press, or the closeness and relationship that these media have with the government in power.

This debate is supported by evidence from some Latin American countries, where media dynamics are governed by powerful economic groups that control the majority of media outlets. For this reason, the editorial line of press, radio, and television tends to be mostly aligned to the right of the political spectrum and critical of left-wing governments and political actors (Schuliaquer, 2021). In Brazil, for example, it has been observed that the mainstream media attempted to associate left-wing figures in the country with negative attributes. Meanwhile, right-wing figures in that country were associated with positive characteristics during the 2014 presidential election (Goldstein, 2016).

Ecuador is another example of this. During Rafael Correa's left-wing government, there was a dispute between the government and the media, which established an agenda of negative attributes around Correa's presidency and the members of his cabinet (De la Torre, 2014).

In 2021, a right-wing candidate, Guillermo Lasso, from the country's banking sector, won the presidential election in Ecuador. If we consider what Schuliaquer (2021) states about media dynamics in Latin America and the concentra-

tion of power by powerful economic groups, it could be understood that the press in Ecuador would play a less critical role towards this government. Thus, the media agenda would focus on positive issues for Lasso's administration.

Faced with this scenario, it is worth asking what agenda topics the media select to transmit to the public and to what extent these topics correspond to the main concerns of Ecuadorians. In this way, it is possible to know what agenda items the media place on the public sphere (Habermas, 2020) and outline whether there is a power of transference of relevance from the media to the citizenry.

To answer this question, we have taken the case of Guillermo Lasso's first year in office, which runs from 24 May 2021 to 23 May 2022. The level of correspondence between the public agenda, which is understood as citizens' concerns, and the media agendas of traditional print media and independent digital portals with a news section during the established time frame will be analyzed.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 AGENDA SETTING THEORY

The first authors to coin the term agenda setting were McCombs and Shaw (1972), who stated that the media do not seem to influence the direction or intensity of people's attitudes towards specific issues. However, they successfully influence the relevance or prevalence of these issues for the citizenry.

This influence is achieved through increased exposure to the specific content that the media presents to the public. The more people are exposed to an issue in the media, the more acces-

sible it becomes to the public, the more they start to care about it and formulate their opinions on it. This produces the agenda-setting effect (Ardèvol-Abreu, de Zúñiga & McCombs, 2020).

Why this agenda-setting effect occurs can be answered in several ways. However, from a theoretical point of view, one of the most accepted is explained by the need for orientation, in which each individual has to locate and understand a series of issues. When there is uncertainty, the media will play an important role in orienting the population (Chernov, Valenzuela & McCombs, 2011).

Therefore, Chernov et al. (2011) differentiate between permanent agenda items and immediate or circumstantial items. Many public agenda items remain present and stable over long periods in a society. These issues are categorized as permanent agenda items. On the other hand, issues suddenly appear on the public agenda, usually because of a specific event, and people do not know much about the issue, so their need for orientation is greater. These issues will often not remain stable for long periods on the public agenda. Thus, they could be categorized as immediate issues.

The media seems to have given some guidance on both issues. This occurs so citizens incorporate permanent and immediate matters into the public agenda (López-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998).

One of the criticisms of agenda-setting theory relates to how the public is conceived, especially in mass behavior. On the one hand, McCombs & Shaw (1972) conceive society as a quasi-homogeneous mass with more or less similar reactions to certain stimuli. On the other hand, Coleman & Wu (2021) consider that there are individual differences in citizenship

when it comes to establishing a public and personal agenda for each person, so it cannot be said that the whole of society reacts similarly to a stimulus.

Dalton et al. (1998) consider that the power given to *agenda-setting* theory throughout history has been overstated. There is not necessarily a relationship between the public interest in an issue and its presence in the media. Zhou et al. (2016) consider that one of the main challenges for the study of agenda setting is that, in the current media fragmentation, it is unclear to what extent it is still possible to speak of a unifying ability of the media to set the public agenda.

This phenomenon has become more acute with the expansion of social networks and the globalization of communications. Some authors affirm that on digital platforms, there is a balance of influential power between media agendas, political agendas, and citizens' public agendas (Gilardi et al., 2021).

Others, in contrast, maintain the position that traditional media, despite specific circumstantial and contextual changes, still set the agenda for the population (Tan & Weaver, 2013). However, some argue that, in the contemporary world, there is already a power on the part of social platforms such as Twitter to set the public agenda and even that of traditional media (Boynton & Richardson, 2016).

Agenda-setting theory has evolved from its origins and must now go beyond a simple model where the media talk about an issue and it is incorporated into people's lives. For example, Su & Xiao (2021) wanted to study to what extent social interactions on the Chinese social network WeChat could influence the content of partisan and metropolitan media in China. Therefore, it is necessary to talk about intermedial *agenda setting*.

2.2 INTERMEDIAL *AGENDA SETTING*

McCombs (2004) defined this phenomenon as the relationship between two or more media outlets regarding agenda setting. Generally, this relationship between two or more media outlets is established by the domination of the large traditional press, which transfers the thematic relevance of specific issues to small media outlets and local media outlets (Li, 2018).

However, this conception has been changing in recent years, and the debate has been opened on whether, through digital tools such as social networks, the public agenda can be said to have any influence on the communicational dynamics of media agendas (Guo, Mays & Wang, 2019).

Some authors consider that citizens' conversations and debates on Twitter depend on what is covered and disseminated by the media (Vargo et al., 2014). Other scholars point out that the conversations generated on Twitter can sometimes reach press and television media coverage (Meraz, 2015).

The literature indicates a bilateral relationship of influence between the public and the media. Above all, such influence will depend on the context and reality of the addressed news (Vargo, Basilaia & Shaw, 2015). The bilateral influence relationship evidences how the agenda-setting effect has become an international phenomenon. In the globalized context, agenda setting is due, in part, to citizens reporting on social networks about different realities that were previously not reached by the media (Guo, Mays & Wang, 2019).

This irruption of the citizenry in the intermedial relationship of the agenda through social

Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

networks evidences the importance of analyzing the public agenda and how it relates to the media agenda of a country or region. For example, Wang et al. (2023) conducted a study in which they demonstrated that there is an empowerment of the agenda of the general public against the agenda of journalistic elites on issues such as global warming and environmental preservation.

This paper will study the public agenda and the media agenda. The public agenda can be conceptualized as the importance people assign to each particular issue, compared to other topics related to the society in which they develop (Peter & de Vreese, 2003).

On the other hand, the media agenda should be understood as the set of issues presented in the media, as well as their frequency of appearance in the media and their relevance (Vargo, Guo & Amazeen, 2018).

2.3 MEDIA DYNAMICS IN ECUADOR AND LATIN AMERICA

Throughout history, Latin American countries' traditional print and television media have given right-wing governments and political parties more favorable coverage. Meanwhile, they have been more critical of left-wing governments and political parties (Schuliaquer, 2021).

Faced with this dynamic, left-wing Latin American governments have had to take various actions to balance the plurality of voices in the political spectrum and ensure their administration was covered positively. Actions of this type may be the strengthening of public media, which have become governmental, or changes in the media legislation of a country (Schuliaquer, 2021). To extend the exemplification,

we can talk about the case of Gustavo Petro, in Colombia, who had to use social networks such as Twitter and Instagram to disseminate and massify his campaign messages. In this way, he tried to counteract the narrative the country's traditional media imposed on his candidacy for the presidency in 2021 (Restrepo & González, 2021).

In the specific case of Ecuador, Rafael Correa disputed the media field with traditional actors through the creation of a network of public media in press, radio, and television (Buenaño, 2015).

Likewise, a Communication Law was implemented with greater control over the media. Some authors call it a de-democratic communication law in Ecuador (Ramos, 2013). This generated an ideological polarization in the country's media field, which has resulted in the establishment of two different narratives and, therefore, different media agendas (Zuluaga & Gómez, 2019). This, in turn, has led to a social divergence that seems irreconcilable in the short term (Altmann, 2020).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 INSTRUMENTS

Public Agenda:

To know the public agenda, it is necessary to access quantitative data obtained in one or more surveys and applied to a representative sample of the population studied (López-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998). The polling company Click Research, based in Quito, Ecuador, was contacted to obtain this data. This pollster was used because they present periodic re-

ports on the country's situation. These reports include the question that is usually considered the most important when it comes to knowing a public agenda, according to Asp (1983). That question is: What is Ecuador's main problem at the moment?

The public agenda issues are presented as a percentage, which indicates how many people, out of the total sample, indicated that a specific issue is their primary concern. Four of its social climate and citizen perception surveys on how Ecuadorians feel and conceive the reality of their country were accessed. These surveys were conducted in October 2021, January, April and May 2022.

Click Research conducts quantitative research using simple random sampling. In each study, 760 surveys were conducted with people over 18 years of age in Quito and Guayaquil, the two most populated cities in the country. In total, we worked with 3040 cases. The number of respondents results from weighting the population size of the areas investigated *(Click Research,* 2021).

This methodology guarantees a representativeness, or confidence level, of 95% and a margin of error of ±3% (Click Research, 2021). The information was collected through face-to-face surveys in the public space of the research areas defined by the polling company.

Media agenda:

To analyze the Ecuadorian media agenda, we resorted to a content analysis of the front-page news of two traditional print media outlets in Ecuador (*El Universo* and *El Comercio*) and the news of two independent digital media outlets (*Primicias* and *Radio La Calle*) that generated the most Likes, Retweets and Comments on Twitter.

The choice of newspapers is because, in the years before conducting this study, they were the two newspapers with the most significant physical circulation in the country. *El Comercio* had a print edition of 125 thousand copies, and *El Universo* had 112 thousand copies (Viveros and Mellado, 2018).

In the case of independent digital media, we chose media with more than 45 thousand followers on Twitter, the most widely used social network for disseminating news (García-de-Torres et al., 2011). The tweets had to include a link so the reader could review a complete news article; otherwise, they would not be contained in the analysis.

The content analysis examined the topics covered in the top three front-page stories in each traditional print media. A similar study was performed on independent digital media news. In the case of digital media, because there is no printed front page, the three daily news items that generated the most interaction (comments, retweets, and likes) with users on Twitter were selected.

Thus, it was proposed to apply a content analysis methodology derived from the work of Rodríguez-Díaz and Castromil (2020), which analyzes the general themes in which certain specific events are framed and allows observing the agenda that each media has and how it differs from other media. Therefore, the variable to be studied in the content analysis was THEME, which refers to the general and most relevant topic being addressed in a news item.

For this variable, 17 categories were identified in which each news item could be placed. These categories were: crime and insecurity; employment; economy and poverty; corruption; prison crisis; essential services; taxes and tax reforms;

political disputes and conflicts between state powers; gender violence; demonstrations and citizen protests; coverage of the work of the National Assembly; coverage of the work of the presidency; Covid and the vaccination process; migration to Ecuador; sports news; international news; and, finally, the category other issues, for those news items that did not fit into any other category.

These categories were defined through a deductive and observational process that made it possible to match the media agenda's topics with the public agenda's main issues. Other current news topics and the reality of media coverage in Ecuador were added to these categories *ad hoc.*

Specific parameters were established to categorize a news item into one or another topic to facilitate the coding of the news items and avoid overlapping between topics. These parameters concerned the central idea shown in the news item, with particular emphasis on its headline. In a second instance, to discern the category to which a news item belonged, we resorted to the terminology used in that news item.

For example, to differentiate between "crime and insecurity" and "gender violence," it was defined that news using terms such as feminicide or *machismo* would fit into gender violence since it was the most relevant topic in the news. In the same way, to differentiate between news items corresponding to "economy and poverty," "unemployment," or "taxes and tax reforms," the terminology used in the news item was read. When the news item talked about work or employment, it was attributed to the employment category. Likewise, if the news item used terms related to tax issues, it was assigned to the category of taxes and tax reforms.

Sports news, international news, and news related to other topics were discarded from the final analysis.

The front pages of the printed media between May 24, 2021, and May 23, 2022, were accessed to analyze the traditional printed media agenda. The three main headlines on the front page were identified, and the content analysis of these three news items was carried out.

Twitter's advanced search tool was used to analyze independent digital media. In this way, the tweets sent by the accounts *@radiolacalle and @Primicias* were obtained between May 24, 2021, and May 23, 2022. The three daily news items selected were those that had the most interaction with users each day. It was established that to analyze a tweet, it had to have a minimum of 30 interactions.

These parameters are obtained as a derivation of the work of Rolán & Otero (2017) and Meso-Ayerdi, Mendiguren-Galdospín & Pérez-Dasilva (2017).

Two thousand one hundred thirty-three news items from print media and 1,352 from digital media were analyzed.

As mentioned above, the main topic of each news item was identified, as proposed by Rodríguez-Díaz and Castromil (2020), and a record was kept in the SPSS database manager of each of the news items analyzed and their main topic. At the end of the information collection on media agendas, a percentage out of 100% was obtained for each of the issues presented in the news items.

3.2 CALCULATION OF THE LEVEL OF CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN AGENDAS

A matching index was calculated to analyze the level of correspondence between the public agenda and the media agenda, both traditional and digital, as proposed by Asp (1983). This matching index, also called the correspondence index, was obtained by calculating the difference in the percentages of each specific topic of the public agenda and the agenda of each analyzed media.

Once this difference in percentages was obtained for each medium, all the differences were added up, and the result was divided by the number of elements analyzed. This division was made by two for this work since two independent digital media and two traditional print media were analyzed. It is important to note that each media type will be analyzed separately. After this first division, the result obtained was subtracted from the value of 100 (which refers to 100%), and this value, in turn, was divided by 100.

This resulted in a number between 0 and 1, representing the level of correspondence between agendas. The closer the index is to 0, the lower the level of correspondence between agendas, and the closer the index is to 1, the higher the level of correspondence between agendas.

In Asp's original study (1983), for example, a correspondence value of 0.76 was obtained between the political agenda of the Swedish Communist Party and the media agenda of Swedish television. This means considerable correspondence existed between the issues addressed in these two agendas. In the same study, a correspondence index of 0.61 was found between the political agenda of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Swedish television media agenda. This indicates a lower correspondence of issues between television and the Social Democrats than the media had with the Communists.
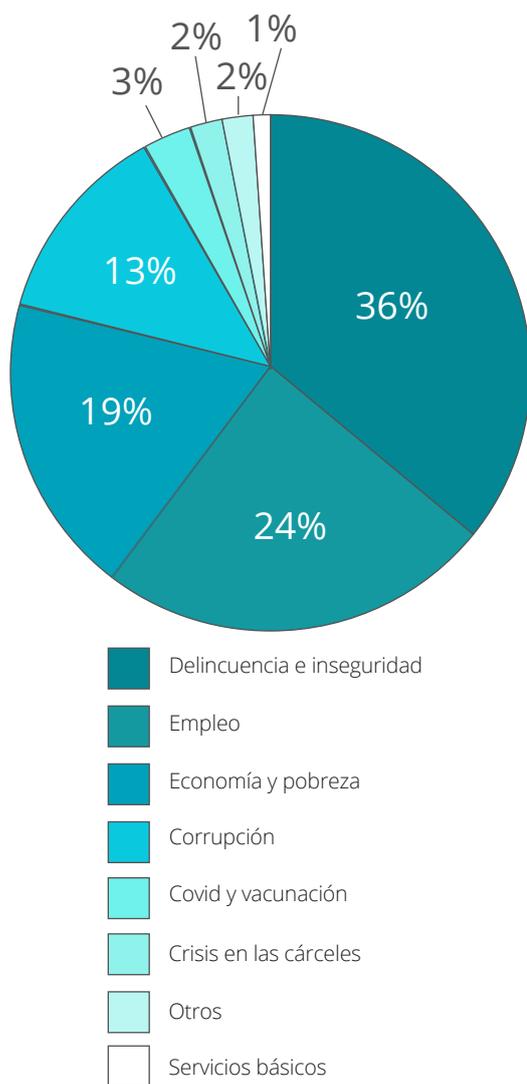
For this work, an index was obtained to compare the traditional printed media agenda with the public agenda. A specific index was obtained to compare the digital media and public agendas.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 PUBLIC AGENDA

As mentioned in the previous chapter, we worked with the social climate and citizen perception surveys of the pollster Click Research, which were carried out in October 2021 and January, April, and May 2022. The results are extracted from the question: What is Ecuador's current main problem? These results are presented as a percentage.

Figure 1 shows the average percentages for different issues across the four social climate surveys. The public agenda issues in citizens' concerns were crime and insecurity, employment, economy and poverty, corruption, prison violence, access to essential services, COVID-19 and the vaccination process, and others.

Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

36%

24%

19%

13%

3%

2%

2%

1%

- Delincuencia e inseguridad
- Empleo
- Economía y pobreza
- Corrupción
- Covid y vacunación
- Crisis en las cárceles
- Otros
- Servicios básicos

Note: Own elaboration based on data provided by Click Research (2021 and 2022).

The graph shows four main issues of concern to Ecuadorian citizens: insecurity and crime, employment, the economy and poverty, and corruption. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that the biggest problem in Ecuador when the surveys were conducted, was one of these four issues.

It is important to note that during the period analyzed in this paper (2021-2022), Ecuador experienced a crisis of insecurity and violence in different cities and the financial and unemployment ravages derived from the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, during that year, several officials from the country's last governments were involved in a series of corruption investigations.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that issues such as the pandemic or the crisis in the country's prison system, despite having a considerable percentage in some of the specific reports, proved to be temporary issues on the public agenda that ceased to be of concern to citizens once the crisis had passed.

4.2 TRADITIONAL PRINT MEDIA AGENDA

The three main news items on the front pages of *El Comercio* and *El Universo* were reviewed from 24 May 2021 to 23 May 2022.
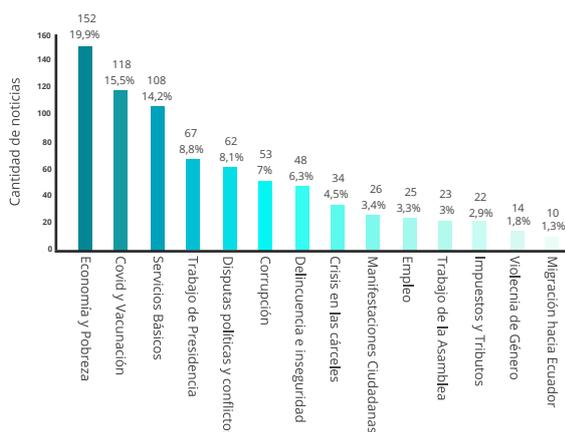
In total, 2,133 news items were analyzed. Of these, 1,054 were from *El Comercio*, and 1,079 were from *El Universo*. The disparities in the number of news items between each media are because, in some editions, the front page of one of the media presented less than three news items and dedicated its front page to a specific topic.

After discarding international, sports, and other news, we worked with 1,665 news items or 78.1 percent of the total news items on the front pages. Of these, 762 corresponded to *El Comercio* and 903 to *El Universo*.

The percentages of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined and which allowed us to analyze the level of correspondence with the public agenda are shown below.

As can be seen, the topic most covered by *Diario El Comercio* is the economy and the poverty situation in the country. Almost one in five news items on the front page referred to these topics (152, 19.9%). Another topic that is recurrently present is the Covid pandemic, where the Delta and Omicron variants are included. Hand in hand with the pandemic, there was also news about the vaccination process deployed by the government of Guillermo Lasso in Ecuador during the first months of his term. One hundred eighteen news items (15.5%) dealt with these issues.

As for the public agenda topics observed in the previous section of this chapter, in addition to the economy above, 48 news items (6.3%) discussed crime and insecurity; 25 news items (3.3%) dealt with employment; 53 news items (7%) discussed corruption; and 34 news items (4.5%) discussed the crisis of violence in Ecuador's prison system.

Figure 3

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda-Diario El Universo (903 news items).

Note: Prepared by the author.

Figure 2.

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda-Diario El Comercio (762 news items).
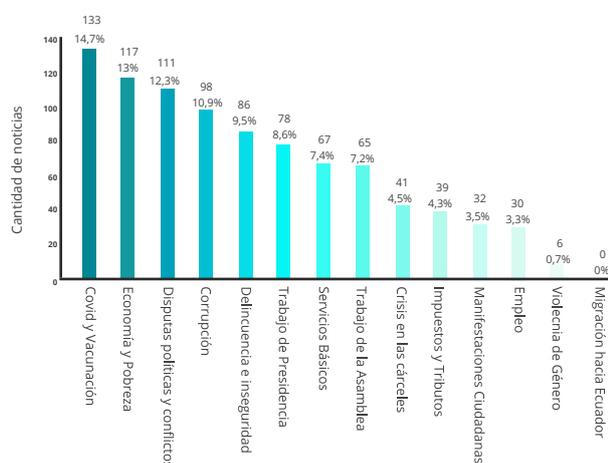
Note: Prepared by the author.

Regarding *Diario El Universo,* it can be observed that the most covered topic is related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccination process that took place during the first months of Guillermo Lasso's government. One hundred thirty-three news items (14.7% of the total) dealt with this topic. In contrast to the case of *El Comercio,* none of the issues accounted for more than 15% of the total news on the front page. The second most popular topic on this media agenda is the economic situation and poverty in the country. One hundred seventeen news items (13%) of its news items dealt with this topic.

In addition to the economy, which was reviewed in the previous paragraph, the results of the other main topics on the public agenda are presented. It is noted that crime and insecurity were the main topics of 86 news items (9.5%); employment appeared as the most crucial topic in 30 news items (3.3%) on the front page; corruption of politicians was present in 98 news items (10.9%); and the crisis in the penitentiary system appeared in 41 news items (4.5%).

4.3 INDEPENDENT DIGITAL MEDIA AGENDA

One thousand three hundred fifty-two news items from the two independent digital portals were reviewed; 561 belonged to *Primicias,* and 791 were from *Radio La Calle.* This corresponds to 41.5% and 58.5% of the total news analyzed in this media type, respectively. The differences between the amount of news analyzed in each press are related to the fact that there were days in which there were not three tweets that presented a news item that reached the minimum of 30 interactions with users.
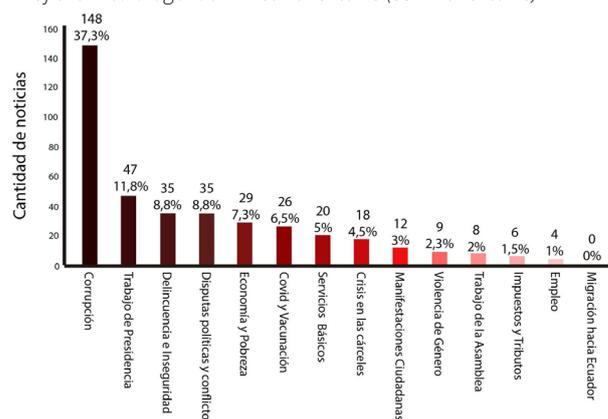
The thematic categories identified were the same as those used to analyze printed news-

papers' media agenda. In other words, there were 17 categories where a news item could be placed. Again, international and sports news, as well as those corresponding to other topics, will not be part of the analysis of this work.

Therefore, the digital media analysis worked with 1,114 news items assigned to one of the thematic categories mentioned above. This is equivalent to 82.4% of the total news items collected in the database. Three hundred ninety-seven of these news items belong to *Primicias* and 717 to *Radio La Calle.* The percentages of the total number of events that correspond to each of the central themes of the events are shown below.

Figure 4

Allocation of news items corresponding to each of the thematic categories defined for the analysis of the media agenda - First news items (397 news items).
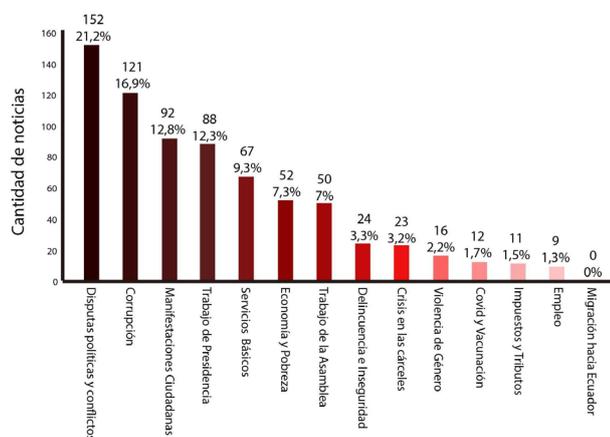

Note: Prepared by the author.

As can be seen, there is one topic that dominates *Primicias*' agenda, and that is corruption. One hundred forty-eight of its news items, 37.3% of the total, deal with corruption cases or judicial proceedings against public officials accused of corruption. The vast majority of the other topics do not reach 10% of the total news items analyzed.

Concerning public agenda issues, crime and insecurity is the central theme of 35 news items (8.8%); employment is present as the subject of only four news items (1%); the economic crisis

and poverty are the subjects of 29 news items (7.3%); and the crisis in the penitentiary system is the central theme of 18 news items (4.5%).

Note: Prepared by the author.

The topics most present in *Radio La Calle* are, in the first place, political disputes and conflicts between different branches of the Ecuadorian State. This topic is central in 152 news items (21.2%). In second place is corruption, which is present in 121 news items (16.9%).

Regarding the main public agenda topics, it is observed that crime and insecurity have 24 news items (3.3%); employment is the central theme of 9 news items (1.3%); the economic crisis and poverty have 52 news items (7.3%); and the topic of the crisis in the penitentiary system is covered in 23 news items (3.2%).

4.4 CORRESPONDENCE INDEX BETWEEN AGENDAS

The results of the application of Asp's (1983) methodology, presented in the methodological chapter of this work, to obtain a correspondence index will be explained below. The level of correspondence between the public agenda topics and the media agendas of traditional print and independent digital media will be observed.

It is worth remembering that the correspondence index is a number that ranges from zero to one. The closer this number is to zero, the lower the level of agenda correspondence. On the other hand, the closer the number is to one, the higher the level of correspondence.

Table 1

Level of correspondence between public agenda items and media agendas, both in traditional print and independent digital media.

Agenda Pública	Agenda Mediática	
Tema de agenda pública	Índice de correspondencia con medios tradicionales impresos	Índice de correspondencia con medios digitales independientes
Delincuencia e inseguridad	0,72	0,70
Empleo	0,79	0,77
Economía y Pobreza	0,97	0,88
Corrupción	0,96	0,86
Crisis en las cárceles	0,97	0,98
Servicios básicos	0,91	0,94
Covid y vacunación	0,88	0,98

Note: Prepared by the author. The topics were ordered from highest to lowest, according to their prevalence percentage on the public agenda. The highest correspondence index for each topic has been placed in bold type.

The correspondence index was carried out with the seven main public agenda items in Figure 1 of the previous chapter. The table has been ordered from highest to lowest, according to their percentage of prevalence on the public agenda.

Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

According to the categorization derived from Chernov et al. (2011), five of the seven public agenda items presented would be permanent: crime and insecurity, employment, economy and poverty, corruption, and essential services. The categories of prison crisis and COVID-19 and the vaccination process correspond to immediate agenda items.

In the first instance, it is evident that there is a level of correspondence in the agendas above 0.7. This indicates that there is a correspondence between Ecuador's media and public agendas. Although all the indexes are high, it should be noted that the two main public agenda topics, such as crime and employment, have the lowest levels of correspondence.

On the other hand, two topics that also had an essential percentage in the public agenda of citizens, such as the economy and the corruption of politicians, show higher correspondence indexes. Especially in the comparison between the public agenda and the traditional media agenda, this index is close to the value of one.

It should be noted that the two highest indexes obtained are between the public agenda and the digital media agenda. Compared with the independent digital media, these indexes correspond to topics with lower prevalence in the public agenda, such as the crisis in Ecuador's prison system and the pandemic. Both reached an index of 0.98 out of one.

It is worth noting that the top four issues on the public agenda correspond more closely with the print media agenda than with the independent digital media agenda. These four issues, which accounted for 92% of respondents' main concerns, have correspondence indexes ranging from 0.72 to 0.97 with traditional print media.

On the other hand, the other three public agenda items, which had little weight in the public's concerns throughout the year, correspond more with the agenda of independent digital media. For these three issues, which are the prison crisis, essential services, and the pandemic, the level of correspondence with the digital agenda ranges between 0.94 and 0.98.

It should be noted that there is little difference between the correspondence index that the public agenda topics have about the traditional printed media agenda versus the correspondence index between the public agenda and the digital media agenda. There is no subject where the difference in agreement exceeds 0.1.

5. CONCLUSIONS

If we consider that all the correspondence indexes obtained for each of the public agenda items exceed 0.7, we can speak of a considerable correspondence between the media agenda and the public agenda. This correspondence is independent of the nature of the media, whether they are traditional print or independent digital media.

In contemporary Ecuadorian communication dynamics, an agenda-setting effect generates concern for a specific group of topics. These topics on the public agenda are crime and insecurity, employment, the economic crisis, and the corruption of politicians. With less prevalence, there was also concern about the prison crisis, problems in access to essential services, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this sense, the idea that the media emphasize the events of a society on a group of issues that come to be considered important by the audiences seems to be fulfilled, as proposed by McCombs (2006).

This work demonstrates that, even though the media in Ecuador have different agendas, as stated by Zuluaga and Gómez (2019), the diversity of agendas corresponds to citizen concerns.

A reflection that can be derived from the analysis of the results has to do with the fact that there are higher levels of correspondence between public agenda issues and the agenda of traditional print media, such as *El Comercio* and El Universo, for specific issues; while, for other matters, the highest level of correspondence is between the public agenda and the agenda of independent digital media such as *Primicias* and *Radio La Calle.*

The four issues with the highest percentages in the public agenda correspond more with the agenda of traditional print media. In comparison, the three issues with the lowest percentages in the public agenda correspond more closely with the agenda of independent digital media.

To analyze this reality, it could be observed that two of the three topics where there is a greater correspondence with the digital media agenda are conjunctural or immediate topics, according to the categorization derived from Chernov et al. (2011). These topics address specific events that generate an emotional, viral, and immediate conversation. These topics are the prison crisis and the pandemic.

Once this has been pointed out, we proceed to analyze why, in these issues, which are very topical and with specific events that trigger the citizen conversation in the public sphere that Habermas (2020) mentioned, there is greater correspondence between the public agenda and the agenda of independent digital media.

This could be due to the logic of social networks themselves, which place a news topic that generates alarm and panic among citizens and provokes the immediate interaction of users in the digital environment. Here, the need for guidance discussed by Chernov *et al*. (2011) focuses on the uncertainty and fear that may exist among citizens.

That uncertainty can be resolved more quickly through independent digital media, which reports 24 hours a day, while traditional print media do so through their physical edition in the mornings.

In this media logic, independent digital media are favored, as they do not have to wait for their morning edition to be part of the digital citizen conversation. It corroborates, then, what Vargo, Basilaia & Shaw (2015) stated when they said that the power of the digital agenda depends on the news context and the journalistic reality of the news.

As the days go by, these last-minute issues are overshadowed by more traditional concerns rooted in society that transcend beyond a specific event, the permanent matters on the agenda. In the case of Ecuador, these concerns, which are rooted in society, are crime and insecurity, employment, the economic crisis, and the political system's corruption.

For these four points, it should be considered that the correspondence indexes of the public agenda are higher with the agenda of traditional print media. This could indicate that, in the

Comparative analysis of Ecuador's public and media agendas throughout President Guillermo Lasso's first year in office.

macro-spectrum of Ecuadorian events or the daily activity of the country, it is still the traditional media, such as El Comercio or *El Universo,* that set the public agenda. The power of the big media that Tan & Weaver (2013) talked about is maintained.

Once again, it is worth mentioning the need for orientation referred to by Chernov *et al.* (2011). This need for orientation in the face of more established topics that move away from the shocking and sometimes frightening novelty is reflected in the fact that the four main issues on the public agenda have a higher rate of correspondence precisely with the traditional print media such as *El Comercio* and *El Universo.*

There will be an agenda-setting effect, regardless of the new communication dynamics generated in the digital environment, as long as orientation is needed, both for permanent agenda items and for immediate and fleeting issues.

This research supports the idea that there has been a permutation in agenda-setting power. Traditional print media are ceding their ability to guide citizens in situations of high uncertainty, rapid development, and constant change. This guiding capacity falls over the media that operate in the digital environment.

Thus, it corroborates the idea presented by Gilardi *et al*. (2021) about the balance of forces between different types of media and even the power of social networks such as Twitter to set the public agenda about which Boynton and Richardson (2016).

Having mentioned this, it is also important to note that the difference in agenda-matching rates between traditional print and independent digital media is not overwhelming. Under no circumstances is this difference evident in favor of either type of media.

Looking at the results, one might wonder why the issues of most significant concern on the public agenda have the lowest correspondence indexes when contrasted with the media agendas. Insecurity has correspondence indexes of 0.72 and 0.70, while employment has indexes of 0.79 and 0.77. This could be due to the dynamics of journalism and the public's attention span.

While journalistic coverage presents a range of topics, citizens retain smaller portions of that range of issues despite the media's hierarchization of news. These smaller portions are the ones that are incorporated into their agenda. This reinforces the idea of Ardèvol-Abreu *et al.* (2020), who said that reducing topics in the media builds the public agenda.

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