

## Discourse and framing strategies of the media in the Peruvian second electoral round (2021)

### *Estrategias de discurso y framing de los medios de comunicación en la segunda vuelta electoral peruana (2021)*

**Héctor Daniel Quiñonez-Oré**

Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Perú

[hquinonezo@unmsm.edu.pe](mailto:hquinonezo@unmsm.edu.pe)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0266-3591>

**Received on:** 04/01/2024 **Revised on:** 22/01/2024 **Accepted on:** 10/02/2024 **Published on:** 01/03/2024

#### ***Abstract***

*This research analyzes the discourse and framing strategies used by the Peruvian media in the second round of the national electoral campaign. For this purpose, a quantitative analysis methodology was used, through the construction of a database with all the news about the second round of the 2021 presidential elections that appeared in the main national media and disseminated on Twitter (actually X). The main finding is that even though the coverage of the second electoral round can be considered mostly neutral, there was a differentiated informative treatment regarding the candidacies of Castillo and Fujimori, favoring a negative and conflictive framing of the former over his opponent. The context reported reflects that the second round of the presidential elections took place under a climate of political polarization as a consequence of the generation of speeches and narratives that have generated wide margins of distrust and a “friend-enemy” logic that has had consequences in current Peruvian politics.*

#### ***Keywords***

*Discourse, elections, framing, news, polarization, candidatures, vote, Twitter.*

**Suggested citation:** Quiñonez-Oré, H. D. (2024). Discourse and framing strategies of the media in the Peruvian second electoral round (2021). *Universitas XXI*, 40, pp. 219-249. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n40.2024.10>

## Resumen

El presente trabajo de investigación analiza las estrategias de discurso y *framing* utilizadas por los medios de comunicación peruanos en la segunda vuelta de la campaña electoral nacional. Para tal efecto, se utilizó una metodología de análisis cuantitativo, a través de la construcción de una base de datos con todas las noticias sobre la segunda vuelta de las elecciones presidenciales de 2021 aparecidas en los principales medios de comunicación de alcance nacional difundidas en Twitter (actualmente X), teniendo como principal hallazgo que aun cuando la cobertura de la segunda vuelta electoral puede ser considerada en su mayoría como neutral, existió un tratamiento informativo diferenciado en torno a las candidaturas de Castillo y Fujimori, privilegiándose un encuadre negativo y conflictivo del primero sobre su contendora. El contexto relatado refleja que la segunda vuelta de las elecciones presidenciales se desarrolló bajo un clima de polarización política como consecuencia de la generación de discursos y narrativas que ha generado amplios márgenes de desconfianza y una lógica de “amigo-enemigo” que ha tenido consecuencias en la política peruana actual.

## Palabras clave

Discurso, elecciones, enmarcado, noticias, polarización, candidaturas, Twitter.

---

## Introduction

In 2021, Peru held presidential elections, the results of which proclaimed Pedro Castillo Terrones constitutional president of the republic for the period 2021-2026. These elections meant the continuation of democracy in the country since the fall of the Fujimori regime in 2000. Although it is true that in 2020 Peru suffered a democratic crisis caused by the conflict between the Executive and the Legislative Power that led to the resignation of former President Martín Vizcarra, who was replaced by Francisco Sagasti, these events did not mean a break from the national democratic regime (Paredes and Encinas, 2020; Dargent, 2019).

The national elections were held in a climate of polarization (Campos, 2021; Helbig and Hügel, 2021; Fowks and Quezada, 2021; Falcón, 2021) and political fragmentation that confronted in the second round of the elections the representative of the “Popular Force” party, Keiko Fujimori Higuchi, daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori, with the left-wing candidate

Pedro Castillo Terrones, representative of the political party “Peru Libre”, a rural teacher and the leader of the national teachers’ strike that began in 2017.

The performance of the media in the coverage of these national elections was repeatedly questioned by public opinion and branded biased by the majority of citizens. Indeed, according to a survey conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies in June 2021, 70% of the population believed that the media was favoring a candidate, with 84% of the population considering that they supported Keiko Fujimori and only 10% Pedro Castillo (IEP, 2021).

This public perception agreed with the conclusions of the report of Electoral Experts of the European Union (2021) which, in the analysis of the media and electoral content in networks during the presidential elections, stated the existence of:

Clearly biased coverage of the presidential runoff campaign by most private media [which] favored Fuerza Popular and undermined voters’ right to receive balanced information [...]. (Misión de expertos de la Unión Europea, 2021, p. 23)

The situation described is more worrying when considering that there are systematic and repeated complaints in Peru over time regarding the existence of a high concentration of media led by El Comercio Group (Ojo Público, 2016; Gargurevich, 2012; Santillán, 2017). There is no doubt, therefore, that the study of the media is a relevant issue to Political Science, either as fundamental actors in defense of the rule of law or as relevant actors in the construction of the so-called media power that seeks to position and influence the topics discussed in the public agenda. The position of the media in today’s democratic societies becomes even more crucial due to the context of citizen distrust that encompasses democratic institutions, whether it be official public institutions and state powers, as well as political parties and the press in general. Regarding the latter, we should add the Latin American context characterized by historical situations of concentration around media ownership and media power (Mastrini and Becerra 2017; Gonzales, 2020).

Hence, this paper aims to answer the following research question: What were the strategies of *framing* and discursive treatment provided by the media in the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign in the scenario of political polarization during the national elections?

Likewise, the general and specific objectives are as follows:

- General objective: to determine what were the strategies of *framing* and discursive treatment provided by the media in the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign in the scenario of political polarization during the national elections.
- Specific object 01: to describe and analyze the media coverage used by the media during the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign.
- Specific objective 02: to examine the *framing* and discursive treatment strategies that the media used during this campaign to inform public opinion.

## Theoretical framework

### Speech and media

Starting from a constructivist approach, it is essential to examine through the construction of discourses, how the media contribute to the creation of representations that affect the social imaginary, giving rise, for example, to aspects related to the construction of news (Van Dijk, 1990). The analysis of discourse emerged with authors such as Stuart Hall (1997) and Teun Van Dijk (2009), who argue that the construction of narratives constitutes an exercise of power through which representations of reality are disputed. Because discourse is a fundamental tool that legitimizes representations that serve to maintain domination and inequalities, Van Dijk (2009) proposes a critical analysis of discourse through which attention is paid to those properties of discourse that are related to the expression, confirmation and reproduction of the social power of those who hold power.

Speech above all is a linguistic construction that is expressed through the signifier in oral or written reality. Hence, it is the word or set of words to which we associate the discursive expression. The determinant for the critical analysis of discourse is to determine the construction of meaning, i.e., the ideal representations that the signifier generates in the “mentalities” of people. Hence, it is evident that discursive construction is a space of political struggle in society (Errejón, 2012).

What is the relationship between media and speech? As discourse is a tool for the construction of realities and a space for the struggle for the granting of meanings, the media stand as relevant actors in the dissemination of

information, which is manifested through the creation and construction of discourses. Thus, following Van Dijk (2009) it is considered fundamental to understand who are the agents who have an active position in the creation of the speeches. In the case of the media we are facing one of the most influential forms of public discourse construction, for which it is crucial to ask questions such as:

Who has access to (production of) press news or television programs and who controls that access? Who can organize press conferences that many journalists will attend? What press releases are being read and published? Who are being frequently interviewed and quoted? Whose actions are defined as news? To whom do the opinion or readers' letters that are being published belong? Who can participate in a TV show? And, more generally, who is responsible for defining the political and social situation that is accepted and taken seriously? (Van Dijk 2009, p. 31)

In the speeches broadcast from the media through journalistic work it is necessary to consider the creation of the news, the context in which they are broadcast, the way in which they are presented, what they want to transmit and represent, as well as the impact they generate on public opinion (Van Dijk, 1990). Hence, it is stated that the analysis of discourse is an interdisciplinary tool, not being properly a method of analysis, but an academic practice that can lead to the use of various methodologies that contribute to the determination of senses and representations (Van Dijk, 1990; Meyer, 2003). Considering the aforementioned, from the methodological level the analysis of the discourse uses various tools ranging from the selection and collection of data and the interpretation of the texts to procedures such as surveys or studies from various texts that could be considered a sample (Meyer, 2003).

## **Media and *framing***

The theory of *framing* emerges with Goffman (2006), whose work theorized the discursive framing on various aspects of "the social". For Goffman, frames of reference contribute to making sense of the representations we make through the endowment of meaning. The social is built not only by objective material reality, but also by the frames of reference on which we interpret and value actions.

Goffman's theoretical contribution resulted in the social sciences using his postulates to understand the so-called framing acts, i.e., those acts that seek to frame certain actions or discourses. It has also been affirmed that the analysis of frames from political science constitutes a particular modality of analysis of political discourse (Viejo Viñas, 2008), since it contributes to the analysis of the political production process of ideological narratives, being that the object of the analysis of frames is to recognize the subjective character of the political discourse instead of attributing some form of objectivity to it.

Just as frame theory has been used to understand contentious politics and collective action, it is worth mentioning that it has also been used to analyze the content disseminated by the media and the speeches of political actors. Starting from the existence of various frame-discourses in society, the presence of master frames is highlighted, reflected by discourses that have a greater power and influence, being one of the master frames to which those provided by the media are referred (Viejo Viñas, 2008). In the field of political communication, this theory has been used to analyze the content disseminated by the media concerning the criteria of selection, treatment and analysis of news. It is possible to relate this postulate with the one pointed out by Van Dijk (1990) for whom the construction of information and news follows certain criteria that can be unveiled through the analysis of discourse in order to find the ideological and political factors that have motivated their selection, treatment and dissemination.

The *frame analysis* does not only focus on the analysis of news construction (*frame building*). In fact, although it is true that one of the most outstanding aspects of *frame analysis* has been focused on investigating how the construction of information is generated, the *frame analysis* has also been used to know the effects that the selection of news and information through the frame has on citizens and public opinion (*frame-setting*). Hence, to analyze the results of the *framing* carried out by the media in the citizenry to investigate if these actions have had a level of impact on public opinion (Piñero-Naval and Mangana, 2018). From the aforementioned, two fundamental aspects of *frame analysis* are considered: i) the analysis focused on the construction of news and information, through the study of the frames, the selection criteria and the presentation, known as the *frame-building* and ii) the analysis of the effects and the influence that the presentation of information and news have on the citizenry and public opinion, known as *frame-setting* (De Vreese, 2005).

However, starting from the analysis of contents and the strategies of framing the discourse of information, we can point out that there are various classifications on the types of framing. In general, perhaps the most used work is that of the types of frames proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who taking into account the various studies carried out in the framework of the communication on the types of *framing* in the United States and Europe, assume the existence of five types of framing that are common when presenting news: conflictive/economic/moral/emotional/responsibility, whose first four will be used in the analysis of media coverage in this research work.

## Materials and method

### Methodological design

As pointed out in the introduction, we ask ourselves the following research question: What were the strategies of *framing* and discursive treatment provided by the media in the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign in the scenario of political polarization during the national elections?

This research question has a general objective and two specific objectives, which will guide the development of this work. In this regard, three hypotheses have been formulated:

- Media coverage in the second round of the Peruvian presidential campaign was clearly biased against one candidacy (Pedro Castillo) over another (Keiko Fujimori). *H.1.*
- The *framing* strategies used by the media favored strategic approaches over thematic ones, as well as conflicting and economic framing during the development of the second round of the electoral campaign. *H.2.*
- The discursive strategies used by the media were clearly negative and biased against one candidacy (Pedro Castillo) over another (Keiko Fujimori). *H.3.*

In order to contrast the hypotheses raised, this paper uses a methodology of quantitative analysis, because a database was developed with all the news about the second round of the 2021 presidential elections in the main national

media that would have been disseminated by these media actors through the social network Twitter (currently X). The selection of the media was made following the criterion of greater traffic on the web in Peru; it is also necessary to mention that the media object of the sample are the main disseminators of political information, having a recognized prestige among the citizenry, since its specialty lies in the social and political coverage of the country.

The media that were the object of the sample are the following:

- El Comercio (@el comercio\_peru)
- The Republic (@larepublica\_pe)
- RPP Group (@RPPNoticias)
- Management (@Gestionpe)
- Mail (@diariocorreio)
- Peru 21 (@peru21noticias)

The database included all the news reports published between April 15 (three days after the first round of voting) and June 5, 2021 (completion of the second round of the electoral campaign in Peru) that had referred to the second round of voting and whose objective would have been to address the candidates' strategies, their proposals, the incidents and institutional speeches, among other aspects. The second selection criterion used for its inclusion in the database was that the news had been spread by the official Twitter account (currently X) of the media outlet. This criterion was taken into account for determining the units of analysis since it was considered that the news disseminated by this social network were those that the media object of study considered relevant to disseminate, initially granting them a greater interest (priority) over the rest of the publications. This social network was chosen because of the importance they have acquired in the country and because it is the one where information is constantly dynamized. The algorithms that Twitter has available to users were used to locate the tweets within the time frame of the investigation.

The exhibition privileged the journalistic notes elaborated by the media in the treatment of the second round of the electoral campaign, both in the format of news, interview or opinion. Notes that only sent graphic information such as videos and photographs (photo reports) were not considered, but only those that had text. The repetition of the news by each of the media outlets was ruled out, since it is common for a news story to be spread through Twitter more than once.



Once all the selection criteria were applied, the database for this research was built, which has 472 news items (N=472) from the six media sources for analysis. Each of these news items (units of analysis) was coded taking into account the variables presented in table 1, which also briefly specifies what it sought to measure and what were the values that each of them could assume.

**Table 1**  
*Variables and sample description*

Variables	Description
Media coverage	The focus of the note: Pedro Castillo/Keiko Fujimori/ Both candidates.
Type of column	The format of the prepared note: News/Interview/ Opinion.
Type of electoral <i>framing</i>	The <i>framing</i> that the academy considers to be used in electoral campaigns: Thematic/ Strategic.
Type of framing according to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)	Conflict/Economic/Moral/Emotional.
Position regarding candidature	Position of the journalistic note regarding the candidacy (For-Against Castillo/For-Against Fujimori/Against both/ Neutral).
Content and speech analysis	Main topics covered in media coverage: Democracy and leadership/terrorism and violence/Economic approach/ General statements and/proposals.

The variables and their categories were elaborated following the main types of *framing* used by the academy either in the framework of an electoral contest (strategic and thematic), as well as in the general analysis of messages and discourses (conflictive, economic, moral and emotional) (Goffman, 2006). In addition, a brief description of each of the variables used in the construction of the database is presented below:

- As a reference to media coverage, we have considered that the selected news focus on the statements of the candidates, their technical teams, political allies or any other actor whose statements are intended to analyze and comment on the participation of either or both candidates.
- Regarding the type of column, the sample has selected the format of news, opinion and interviews. It is worth mentioning that most of

the information collected in the sample is based on news, with very little presence in opinion columns and interviews. This is because Twitter favors an agile and direct information content like most social networks.

- In relation to the position with respect to a candidate, the selected news was reviewed and, based on its content and approach, the negative or positive position with respect to a candidate, its proposals, alliances, statements and actions was determined. This variable considers three groups: i) Neutral, when the journalistic note complies with reporting objectively and without issuing any value judgment in its content (title, subtitle and note), being considered a kind of report, ii) Against a candidacy, when the focus of the news is intended to criticize a candidacy, either through an interview, opinion column or a news story and iii) In favor of a candidacy, when the meaning of the news highlights positive aspects of this.
- Finally, around the discourse and content of the topics warned in the selected news set, we present table 2 that gives lights on the definition of each of the selected topics:







**Table 2**

*Topics and speeches in the news*

Topic addressed	Definition
Political alliances	News that refer to the construction of support networks for a candidacy: between parties, members of technical teams, opinion leaders.
Statements in general	News covering candidate statements on debates, campaign strategies.
Democracy and leadership	News that refer to the behavior and democratic leadership of the candidates around the maintenance of the rule of law.
Economic approach	News that analyze the economic approaches of the candidates in their government programs.
Proposals in general	News that analyze proposals established in government plans in various areas: health, education, corruption, etc.
Terrorism and violence	News with an impact on violent events by candidates and their supporters, as well as the maintenance of networks with people linked to violent acts.

For the purpose of visualizing the configuration of the data matrix in terms of the number of news items corresponding to each media outlet, as well as the type of news item analyzed, table 3 shows the information on the number of observation units included by each media outlet and their percentage over the total of the 472 that make up the base.

**Table 3**  
*Number and percentage of each media object of the sample*

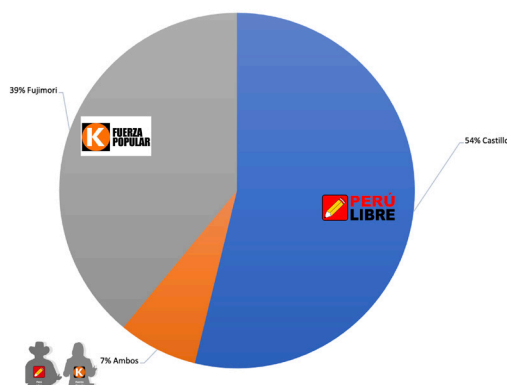
Media		Number of news items	Percentage of sample
	Correo	95	20 %
	El Comercio	60	13 %
	Gestión	103	22 %
	La República	37	8 %
	Perú 21	81	17 %
	RPP	96	20 %
	TOTAL	472	100 %

## Results

### 4.1. Media coverage

As a result of the review and analysis of the data contained in the matrix prepared for this research, a first result, in terms of media coverage, allows to observe that the candidacy of Pedro Castillo represented 54% of the information published by the national press, while 39% corresponded to Keiko Fujimori, and 7% focused on both candidacies (figure 1).

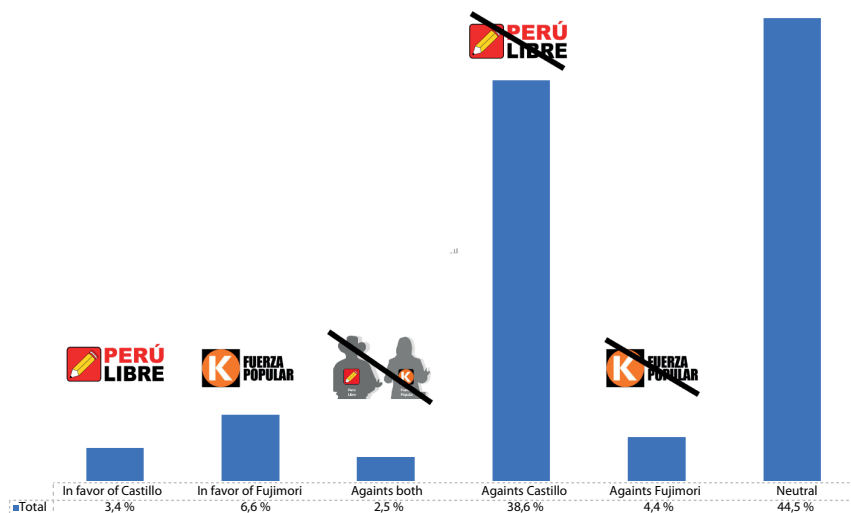
**Figure 1**  
*Media coverage*



As for this variable, it is possible to say that the greatest attention of the media in the second round of elections was directed towards Castillo, who was called the outsider because he was not among the main and favorite candidates to win the presidential elections, who was running a regional political party. The media treatment of his candidacy was mostly negative, since 39% of the analyzed notes included information oriented against him, compared to a small 4% that did it against Keiko Fujimori. Although 44 % of the sample examined had a neutral tone in the treatment of the information, the informative difference in relation to the treatment provided to both candidates is notable (Figure 2).

However, considering the analysis in each of the media, we observe that the difference in the treatment of information in terms of coverage and positioning with respect to some of the candidatures is more evident in some of these. Thus, we appreciate that Gestión (103 news), RPP (96 news) and El Comercio (60 news), are the media that had the most coverage towards Castillo, which was mostly negative. These outlets show the same results, i.e., even though most of their coverage was neutral in nature, there is a big difference in the tone of the news treatment when attention is paid to the position assumed regarding one of the two contested candidacies.

**Figure 2**  
*Position on candidature*



On the other hand, *Correo* (95 news items), is the only media outlet that has media coverage that focuses on Fujimori over Castillo. However, like *Gestión*, *RPP* and *El Comercio*, the coverage on Castillo was mostly negative, being that in this case its coverage against Fujimori was zero (32.6% against Castillo versus 0% for Fujimori).

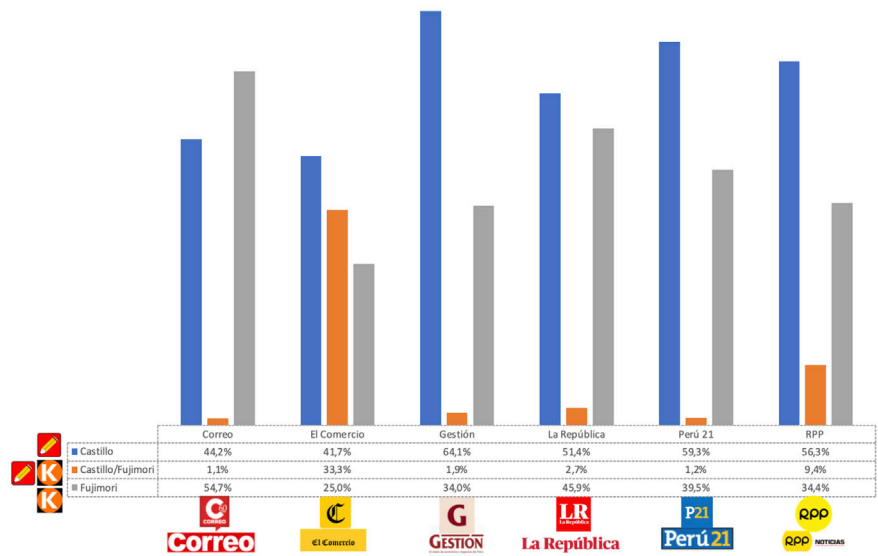
A very interesting case is *Peru 21* (81 news items), whose media coverage, although similar to the previous ones, with respect to which the majority focused on Castillo, presents as the only media that assumed a clear opposite position with respect to a candidacy over the neutral treatment of information. Thus, of all the news disseminated by this media, most present a position contrary to Castillo, this media outlet being the one that presents the greatest divergence in the information treatment with respect to the position around both candidacies.

From what has been discussed so far, concentrating only on the positioning against the candidacies, we warn that all the media outlets mentioned above had negative coverage about Castillo over Fujimori, drawing attention to the cases of *Gestión*, *Perú 21* and *Correo*, whose news against Fujimori ranges from 0% to 1.2% of their coverage.

Finally, La República (37 news items) which, although like the other media focuses mostly on Castillo, in relation to the position he adopts in front of each candidate, is the only media that shows a contrary position on Fujimori. It also showed a low neutral position which is explained by the *fact-checking* function it performed during the campaign.

In summary, the findings found by means of communication show that the media coverage of most of the media (with the exception of Correo) focused on Castillo (figure 3).

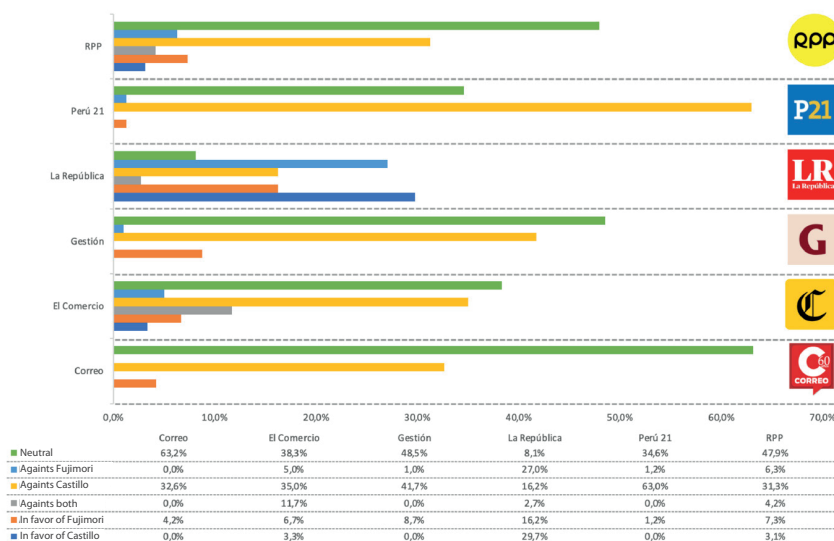
**Figure 3**  
*Media coverage*



As for the detail of each of the media and their orientation in the variable “candidacy position”, it is evident that most of the media, excepting La República, had a position against Castillo’s candidacy (figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Position of media outlets with respect to candidacy*



As for the presented finding and taking up the results of the public opinion study carried out at the end of the elections and to which we refer in the introduction (study conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies in June 2021), it is seen that 79% of the population considered that most of the media supported one candidacy (Fujimori) over another (Castillo). However, the same survey was carried out during the second round of elections, and 59% of respondents considered that there was an inequitable treatment of the elections and that, within this population, 79% considered that they were favoring Fujimori's candidacy. In this sense, we observe that during the second round of the electoral campaign and after its completion, the citizen perception perceived an unequal treatment of information with respect to both candidacies.

In summary, these findings meet the specific objective 01 of this research, establishing that although media coverage mostly focused on one candidacy (Castillo) over another (Fujimori), most of the news presented neutral coverage, which partially confirms hypothesis 1 established in the methodological design, since it can be stated that, considering only the positioning

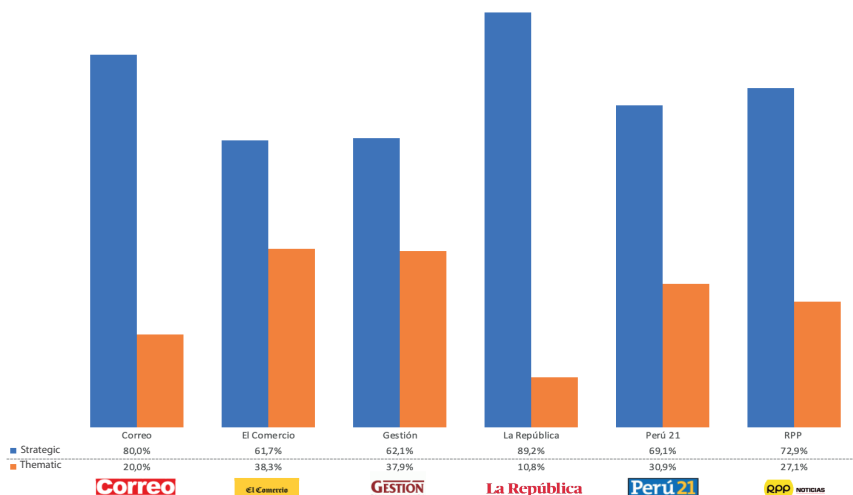
of media actors against the candidacies without taking into account neutral treatment, there was a greater negative coverage of one candidacy (Castillo) over another (Fujimori).

## 4.2 Framing strategies

However, regarding the *framing* strategies used by the main media, the analyzes of this work show clear results: 71% of the coverage was strategic, i.e., it was framed in the strategies and actions of the candidates above their electoral proposals, and only 29% focused on the dissemination and analysis of the proposals. Around each media object of sample, La República and Correo are the newspapers that used the most strategic *frame*. However, the differences between the other media are not significant, as they all used strategic *frames* above the thematic ones (Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*Electoral framing strategies through communication*



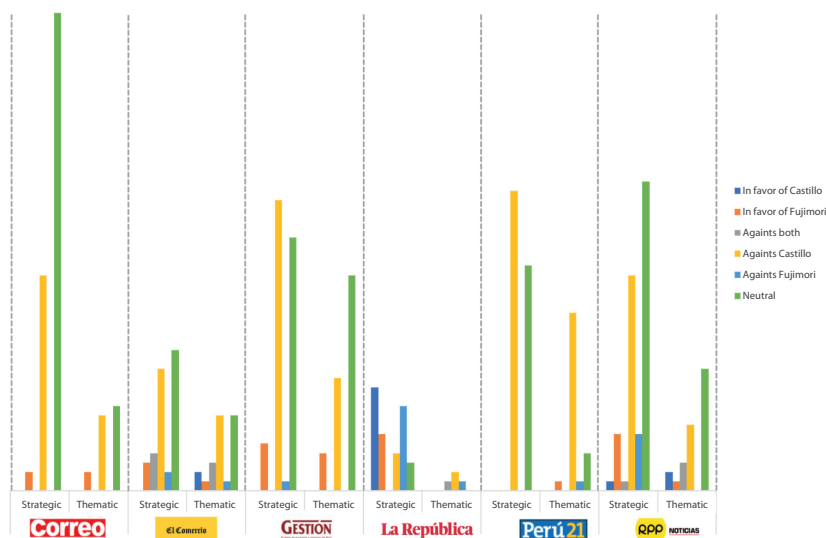
The use of strategic *frames* above the thematic ones is a recurrent point in electoral campaigns, being that the media privilege the actions of the candidates in campaign over the proposals that they present in their candidacies.



Regarding the use of this type of framing with respect to the position towards a candidacy, we observe (figure 6) that all the media, excepting La República, used them mostly to provide a neutral treatment and against Castillo's candidacy, being that both Correo, El Comercio and RPP assumed a neutral position followed by a contrary one towards Castillo in both framing, while Gestión privileged strategic framing against Castillo over the neutrals, which were predominant in the thematic *frame*. On the contrary, in the case of Peru 21, the use of both frames had a negative treatment around Castillo's candidacy over a neutral stance.

**Figure 6**

*Strategic and thematic frameworks used by the media in their positioning towards the second round of elections*

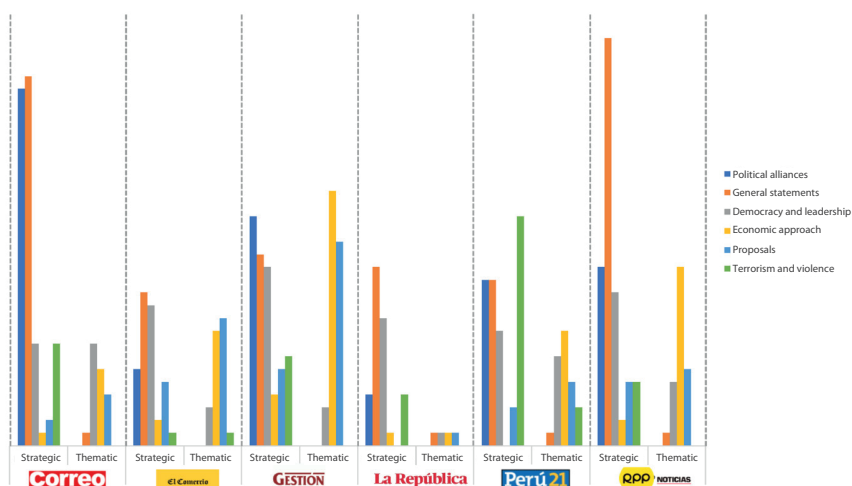


Analyzing how these two types of *frames* were used with respect to the subject of the news, we observe that this type of framing is presented differently depending on the media's approach (Figure 7). Thus, in the case of Peru 21, which was the outlet with a mostly negative coverage on Castillo, we observe that the strategic *frames* focused on news related to "terrorism and violence." As an example, the notes published under headlines such as

*The Bishop of Pedro Castillo in the Puno region is from Movadef (04-06-2021); Luis Alberto Sánchez: MRTA political arm participates in Castillo's campaign (03-06-2021); José Luis Gil: Intelligence informed authorities about the relationship between Movadef and Castillo (30-05-2021), suggest a relationship between Castillo's candidacy and terrorism in Peru. On the other hand, RPP, La República, El Comercio and Correo, used this type of framing to address the different statements of the candidates throughout the campaign, referring to the debates and the incidents that had a presence in the day to day of the presidential campaign.*

### Figure 7

*Strategic and thematic frameworks through communication and discursive content*



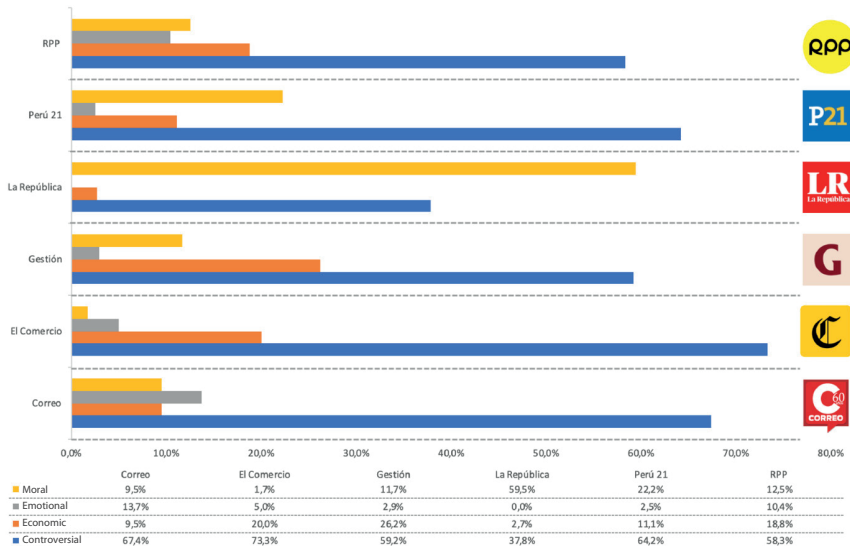
As for the thematic frame, an interesting finding is the case of Gestión that mostly affects the theme “economic approach”, which is in line with the editorial line of the newspaper. This type of framing is used against Castillo, as can be seen from the notes published with headlines such as *New promises of Castillo confirm the improvisation and disorder of his campaign, according to analysts* (03-06-2021); *Luis Castilla: “A bank could not manage pension funds”* (30-05-2021); *Lima Stock Exchange closed with profits after a new survey showing the proximity between Fujimori and Castillo* (28-05-

2021). This type of journalistic notes are not presented in the case of Fujimori who, on the contrary, has positive thematic *frames* in this aspect, as is warned from the notes published by Correo under the headlines *Plan of government of Keiko Fujimori in foreign trade highlights promoting multilateralism* (22-04-2021); *Fujimori: “Our economic proposals are bold, but we have the financial backs to execute them”* (04-06-2021).

Regarding the *framing* strategies proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the journalistic coverage preferred the conflictive framing (62%), being that the economic and moral frameworks were equal (16% each). Considering the results by means of communication (figure 8), we verify that the trends are met excepting La República where there is an advantage of moral *framing*, which can be explained in the *fact-checking* work that it carried out during much of the coverage, corroborating and denying some messages that circulated on social networks, such as the headline dated May 2, 2021 which states that it turned out to be false that Peru Libre had agreed not to participate in the debates organized by the National Election Jury.

**Figure 8**

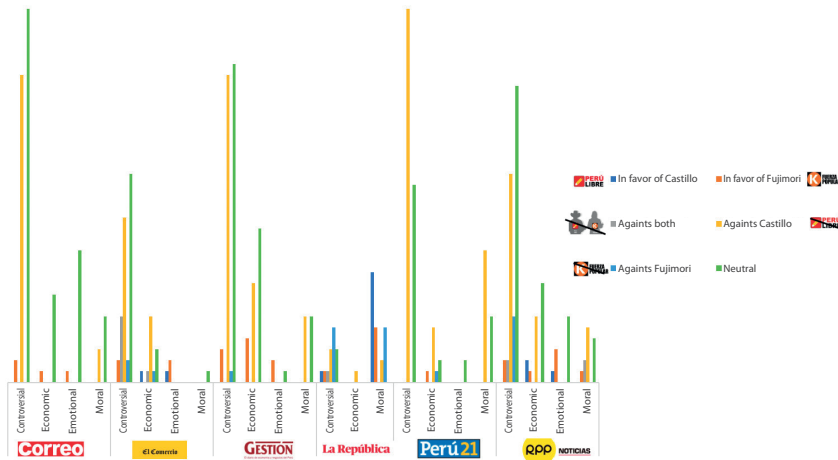
*Types of framing according to Semetko and Valkenburg (2002) by means of communication*



The other media privileged the conflictive framing, which was used, mostly for neutral and anti-Castillo coverage, being only the case of Peru 21 the outlet that privileged an anti-Castillo use over a neutral treatment under this type of framing (figure 9).

These findings present interesting results, since the strategies of strategic and conflictive framing coincide with scenarios of high political polarization, as is the case of the Peruvian presidential elections. Both the strategic and conflictive *frames* were predominant in each of the media that constitute the object of this study, being the substantial differences with respect to the other types of *frames* that has been detected, to which it is possible to achieve the specific objective 02 of this research with respect to the frames used by the media in the electoral contest, confirming also the hypothesis 2 established in the investigation, referring to the *frame* of electoral and conflictive type.

**Figure 9**  
*Frames according to S and V by means of communication in its positioning towards the second round of elections*



## About the speeches and narratives spread in the campaign

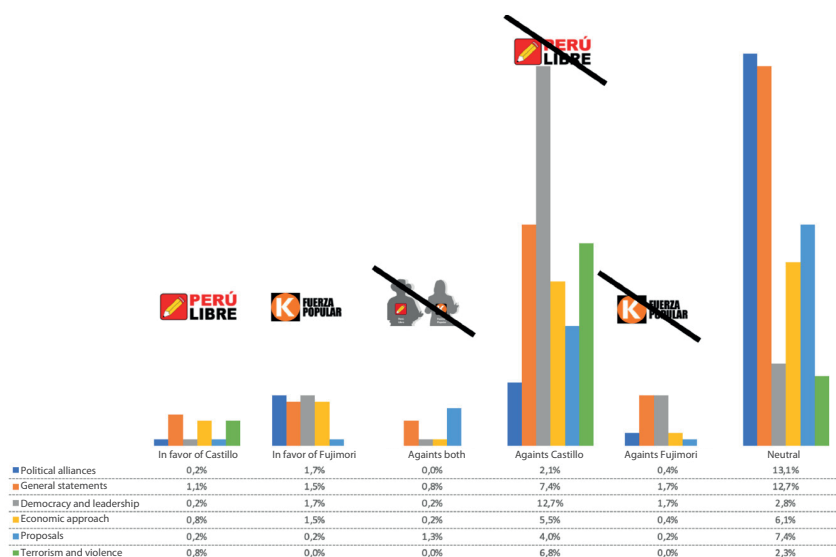
In addition to inquiring about media coverage and the position towards the candidacies and the *framing* strategies used by the media, we are inter-

ested in addressing the content of the news spread by the main media around the second round of the electoral campaign. Thus, from the analysis and reduction of data from the 472 news items, we noticed the presence of six major topics that were treated and disseminated, which have been presented in the methodological section.

Analyzing the content with respect to the position of a candidacy (figure 10) we affirm that, although the trend in terms of the neutrality of coverage in general is met, it is evident the difference in treatment between the candidacy of Castillo and Fujimori. In fact, considering the news that spread a stance against Castillo, we observed that these focused on the theme “Democracy and leadership”, followed by “Declarations in general”, “Terrorism and violence”, as well as criticisms of the “economic approach”.

**Figure 10**

*Content analysis of the news broadcasted*



In this regard, the themes found are noteworthy, given that the informative content that encompasses them criticized Castillo’s leadership, presenting him as a leader with few democratic credentials, close to populist and authoritarian measures and actions. Thus, it is evident that the informative

treatment provided highlighted its proximity to the Cuban model, to Chavismo, as well as to positions against the democratic institutionality of the country (Mendoza, 2022). Example of this are the headlines of Peru 21: María Werlau: “The evidence of Cuba’s penetration in Peru is solid” [INTERVIEW] (02-07-2021); *Cerrón a la cubana: tracing and copying of a model that failed in Junín* (06-07-2021); *Correo: Vargas Llosa ratifies his support for Keiko Fujimori: “It is important that Peru does not fall into the catastrophe of Venezuela or Cuba* (24-04-2021); *Gestión: Vladimir Cerrón: “The left has to learn to stay in power and that is what Venezuela has done”* (21-04-2021) and *RPP: Pedro Castillo: Know the main economic proposals of the presidential candidate of Free Peru* (19-04-2021).

Similarly, the theme related to “violence and terrorism” was linked in a negative way to Castillo, spreading news that affected their relationship and proximity to insurgent people and ideologies, appealing to the negative memory of the internal armed conflict that affected the country. Thus, the headlines of Peru 21 are suggestive: José Baella: “There is a conspiracy between Movadef and MRTA” (04-06-2021); Shining Path invokes not to vote for Keiko Fujimori (11-05-2021); Movadef militants support Pedro Castillo in the Ancash region (12-05-2021); Post: Keiko Fujimori: “Pedro Castillo and his group are those who are accused of being linked to terrorism” (25-05-2021); *ada to the MRTA joins Pedro Castillo* (04-06-2021); *RPP: Keiko Fujimori: “Pedro Castillo and his group are accused of being linked to terrorism”* (25-05-2021) and *Management: VRAEM Self-Defense Committee: “It is absolutely false” that Castillo fought Sendero* (01-05-2021).

This representation of Castillo’s candidacy motivated him to have been reluctant to present a large part of his technical team during the development of the campaign, due to the constant “terruqueo” to which their appearances and formulation of alliances were subject, which caused, even, negative headlines about this *position, as is the case of Peru 21, whose approach to the news was made under the following headline Pedro Castillo makes excuses and says that he will not expose his technical team* (06-05-2021).

Another important issue that was used against Castillo was that related to his “economic approach.” Indeed, the information treatment appealed to the dangers that Castillo’s economic proposal would cause to the detriment of national economic development, calling it a statist and communist that would limit the development of the free market, preventing the generation of wealth and resulting in a context of poverty and economic backwardness.

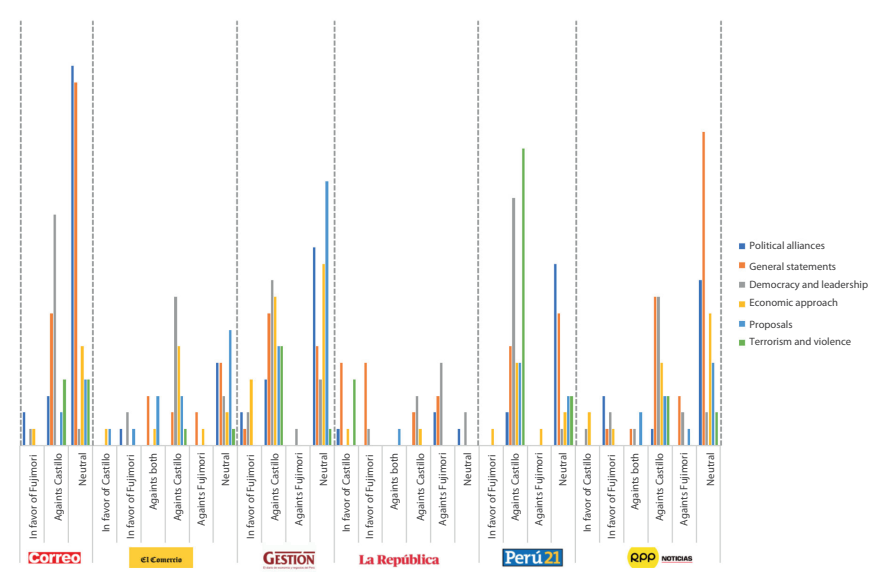
Headlines such as those of Peru 21: *Pedro Castillo's plan marks the route to poverty and unemployment* (30-05-2021); RPP: *More than 4 million Mypes reject Pedro Castillo's government plan* (01-05-2012), De Soto: *"I have met with Pedro Castillo to share my concerns about his government plan"* (28-04-2012), Diógenes Alva: *"We reject all these dictatorial measures"* by Pedro Castillo (26-04-2012); Management: *New promises of Castillo ratify the improvisation and the disorder of his campaign, according to analysts* (03-06-2021), Gonzalo Tamayo: *"Bolivian model for hydrocarbons sector would show its failure quickly"* (28-05-2021), WSJ Columnist: *If Castillo wins the bill will come later* (03-05-2021); The Republic: *RMP on the government plan of Free Peru: "It is a statist vision"* (16-04-2012); and El Comercio: *New government plan of Pedro Castillo: Tax proposals would be counterproductive, according to specialists* (17-02 - 2021), *Proposal of Pedro Castillo: Veto to imports of rice, wheat and corn would double prices, according to specialists* (28-05-2021), focused on the negative consequences that would occur of the victory of Castillo, undermining the economic growth that Peru has enjoyed since the new century due to the boom of extractive industries.

Contrary to what happened with Castillo, these issues had a minor impact on the news that addressed the approaches and actions of Keiko Fujimori. This finding presents polarizing discourses in the development of the candidacy, since while Castillo was identified as a leader with undemocratic characteristics, related to manifestations of violence and characters with an insurgent past, whose dangers to economic growth and development were latent, the discourse on Fujimori's candidacy did not, in general, have this type of connotation identifying it as a candidacy with more respect for democracy and against the manifestation of violent and insurgent acts, as well as the continuation of the economic model that brought benefits to the country. This aspect is striking, since Fujimori's candidacy is based on the social and political capital won during the 1990s by former President Alberto Fujimori Fujimori, whose regime dissolved the congress of the republic, seized various state institutions and had authoritarian and corrupt demonstrations (Degregori, 2014).

Focusing on the position of each media with respect to the thematic content (figure 11), although the coverage in general can be classified as neutral, we see that most of the media analyzed except for La República, had a negative coverage on Castillo, highlighting aspects such as violence and terrorism (Peru 21) and democracy and leadership (El Comercio, RPP, Correo

and Gestión). This can be explained by the ideological identification shown by each media outlet in its coverage. While La República is often identified as a left- and center-left media outlet, other media outlets are characterized by providing coverage by disseminating proposals from actors located on the right-wing political ideas. Also, taking into account the media group to which the media belong, El Comercio, Peru 21, Correo, La República and Gestión are part of the same group, in which El Comercio Group, as indicated in the introduction, is having a legal battle for purchasing the shares of the publishing house Epena (Correo), which would give it a position of dominance in the media market. It should be noted that, although La República belongs to the El Comercio group, its position is a minority in the directory, which explains the differences between the information treatment between this media outlet and the others that belong to the aforementioned media group.

**Figure 11**  
*Content analysis by communication*





Also striking is the informative treatment provided within the media that share the same editorial line against Castillo within the El Comercio Group, since the media Peru 21, Correo y Gestión present a more aggressive coverage than the media that bears the name of the media group (El Comercio). This could be explained by the traditional and historical importance of El Comercio, which is known as the “Dean” of the national press.

The findings present a very interesting relationship with the results of the public opinion survey prepared by the Institute of Peruvian Studies during the electoral campaign (May III) regarding the citizen’s perception of what each candidacy represented. Thus, when consulted about the reasons for voting Keiko Fujimori, it was obtained that 59% maintained as a basis the desire that the “left and communism do not come to power”, being that when it was consulted about the reasons for voting Pedro Castillo, 47% claimed to want “the changes that the country needs”.

These narratives have some overlap with the news content disseminated by the media during the second round. Although we cannot affirm a direct relationship, it is striking that the criticisms of Castillo related to his leadership, respect for democratic institutions, his links to terrorism and violence, as well as the economic approach of his program, are related to the reasons for the vote to Fujimori indicated in the poll analyzed, which encompasses the theme of “left and communism”, narratives that take into account each of the thematic contents mentioned above. This is also reflected when in the same poll 30% of Castillo’s anti-vote is related to his candidacy representing the “left and communism”.

Given the findings found in this paper, it is essential to ask whether there is any consequence regarding the behavior of the media and the informative treatment provided in the development and results of the second round of elections. In this regard, we state that it is not possible to state this aspect forcefully; however, it is interesting to note that the perception of the public about the behavior of the media, as well as the representations disseminated through its informative treatment (Hall, 1997; Van Dijk, 2009), are somehow related with the reasons that founded the determination of the vote with respect to both candidacies. However, when describing the discursive strategies by the media, it has met the specific objective 02 of the investigation, as well as it confirmed hypothesis 3 referring to the media discursive strategy was clearly biased against Castillo unlike Fujimori.

## Conclusions and discussion

The predominance of strategic frameworks on the issues in the development of electoral campaigns is confirmed in this work, being in agreement with most of the research found in this aspect (Muñiz, 2015; Berganza, 2008; Aalberg *et al.*, 2012; Coahila, 2019), confirming that the media emphasize the actions and statements of the candidates during the development of the electoral campaign over the thematic content of their proposals. Another interesting finding of this research is that although Castillo received a greater strategic framing during the electoral campaign, this did not prevent his electoral victory unlike what was established by Walter and Ophir (2020), for whom a greater strategic framing on a candidate is one of the factors that would determine the non-victory of his electoral proposal. Likewise, a conflicting framing by the media around the presentation of the news has been privileged, also typical of the scenario of political polarization that was experienced in the presidential elections.

This finding is very important, given that even though the coverage of the second round of elections was mostly neutral and that despite the differences in the information treatment around the candidacies of Castillo and Fujimori, there was a bias and negative coverage about the first; it is evident that despite the media effort of some media outlets to record negative representations in the information agenda against Castillo, these did not prevent his electoral victory. Although it should be noted that this was conceived with a very small difference despite the fact that, at the beginning of the second round, the distance between both candidates was 20% in favor of Castillo.

As for the discursive and narrative strategies during the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign with respect to both competing candidates, this research concludes the existence of a disparate and biased treatment in favor of a candidacy, being represented by the political proposal of Keiko Fujimori (right) over that of Pedro Castillo (left), which agrees with the analyzes carried out by Acevedo (2018), García (2021) and Ruiz (2016), who through the study of electoral campaigns in Peru, denote the existence of a marked bias in the treatment of information, confirming that in the Peruvian case, the media, even when they point to report based on objectivity they have a determined political position with the candidates participating in the electoral contest. However, unlike what García (2021) and Ruiz (2016) mentioned, the results present *El Comercio* as a medium that, although it maintains a ne-

gative coverage on a candidacy (Castillo), the intensity is lower than other media that belong to the same media group (Correo, Perú 21 and Gestión), which could lead us to conclude the existence of a media strategy, where small newspapers with less trajectory are those that assume a much greater intensity against a certain candidacy.

These findings meet the general objective of the investigation, since it has been possible to determine what were the strategies of *framing* and discursive treatment used in the second round of the Peruvian electoral campaign establishing that, although there was a treatment that can be considered as neutral, there was a treatment of a differentiated character, privileging negative framing over one candidacy (Castillo) over another (Fujimori).

This difference in informative treatment between both candidates could influence the existing political polarization scenario, contrasting discourses and narratives that reflect opposite values, such as democracy vs. authoritarianism, violence and terrorism vs. social peace, economic development vs. poverty, etc. These opposing discourses represented by both candidates make the polarized scenario to be maintained, as established by various investigations (Nigro, 2021; Castromil and Chavero, 2012; Carratalá and Valera-Ordaz, 2019; Baldoni and Schuliaquer, 2019; Crespo and Melero, 2022). However, we cannot affirm the existence of a negative campaign by the media evaluated, since most of the selected news stories complied with providing neutral information about the electoral contest, being unable to share the conclusions with similar investigations (Pérez, 2013; Portillo, 2012; Sankey and Diaz, 2010).

However, as for the incidence or not of the informative treatment by the media in the development and electoral contest, as previously pointed out, even though there are public opinion studies that have measured citizen perception, for whom there was a partial treatment in favor of a candidacy, as well as the presence of speeches and representations as reasons for the foundation of the vote (Fujimori) and the anti-vote (Castillo) on the candidacies reflected in topics such as “democracy”, “left”, “terrorism” and “communism”, this paper cannot conclude that there was indeed a causal and direct relationship. However, and given the presence of related topics such as those presented, the findings could serve as a basis for future research that measures the impact of the media strategy during the presidential elections in Peru.

The related context reflects that the second round of the presidential elections took place under a climate of political polarization as a result of

the generation of discourses and narratives that has generated wide margins of distrust and a logic of “friend-enemy” in current Peruvian politics. Even though Castillo’s candidacy was victorious despite the media’s position, it should be noted that his political position weakened throughout the electoral campaign. And even if it can be said that the positioning of the media agenda through the insertion of speeches and representation did not contribute to the electoral defeat of the candidate with the most negative coverage (Castillo), it is necessary to analyze and evaluate to what extent these representations contributed to the weakness of their political positioning, which may also be the subject of future research.

Given that we have been able to confirm the existence of a bias by most of the media in the informative treatment with respect to both candidacies, which is in line with Peruvian investigations that have addressed similar lines of investigation regarding previous presidential campaigns and taking into account the increasing presence of a media group (Grupo El Comercio), it is important to investigate what would be the direct effects that this position of current dominance produces in scenarios of political polarization (Gonzales, 2020), which are reflected not only in electoral contests, as well as what has been the role that this media group and the other aligned media outlets fulfill in this scenario.

In view of the aforementioned, we can appreciate that we are facing a fertile field of study, being that future researchers can use strategies that help measure the impact of the media strategy in electoral contexts, for which in addition to the construction of databases with news disseminated on social networks, it would be fundamental and important to know the position of the media, through the conduction of experiments through panels and surveys, as well as in-depth interviews with actors with decision-making power in the media.

## References

- Aalberg, T., Strömbäck, J. and de Vreese, C H. (2012). The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism* 13(2) 162-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427799>
- Acevedo Rojas, J. (2018). Los medios de comunicación como actores políticos. Cobertura de las elecciones presidenciales de 2016 en Perú. En *Comunicación para la resistencia. Conceptos, tensiones y estrategias en el campo*

- político de los medios* (pp. 99-126). FES, Ediciones EPC, CLACSO. <https://bit.ly/47NZZVO>
- Baldoni, M. and Schuliaquer, M. (2019). Los periodistas estrella y la polarización política en la Argentina. Incertidumbre y virajes fallidos tras las elecciones presidenciales. *Más Poder Local*. 40, 14-16. <https://bit.ly/3SAj09I>
- Berganza Conde, R. (2008). Medios de comunicación, “espiral del cinismo” y desconfianza política. Estudio de caso de la cobertura mediática de los comicios electorales europeos. *Zer* 13(25), 121-139. <https://bit.ly/3vLDJhV>
- Campos, M. (2021). Perú: Polarización e incertidumbre. <https://bit.ly/3ulENZv>
- Carratalá, A. and Valera-Ordaz, L. (2019). El pluralismo polarizado ante la nueva política y el columnismo digital. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 26(1), 71-83. <https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.67287>
- Castromil, A. and Chavero, P. (2012). Polarización política y negativismo mediático. Similitudes y diferencias en la prensa de derecha y la de izquierda en las elecciones autonómicas y municipales de 2011. *Redmarka. Revista de Marketing Aplicado*, 01(08), 55-81. <https://doi.org/10.17979/redma.2012.01.08.4734>
- Coahila, E. (2019). Framing en el debate presidencial de las elecciones peruanas de 2016 en redes sociales. *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública*, 14(26), enero-junio, 33-50. <https://doi.org/10.22201/fcpys.24484911e.2019.26.61557>
- Crespo, I. and Melero, I. (2022). El cambio de las agendas políticas y mediáticas en campaña electoral: El caso del 20-d y 26-j en España. *Estudios sobre mensaje periodístico* 28(1), 621-637. <https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.76689>
- Dargent, E. (2019). ¿El golpe? *El Comercio*. Perú <https://bit.ly/3SCNok6>
- Degregori, C. (2014). *La década de la antipolítica. Obras escogidas*. Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.
- De Vreese, C. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information Design Journal* 13(1), 51-62. <https://doi.org/10.1075/idjdd.13.1.06vre>
- Errejón, I. (2012). *La lucha por la hegemonía en el primer gobierno del MAS en Bolivia (2006-2009): Un análisis discursivo*. (Tesis Doctoral. Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid).
- Falcón, S. (2021). Perú: *El máximo exponente de la polarización* <https://bit.ly/42eJYah>
- Fowks, J. and Quesada, J. (2021). La extrema polarización divide Perú a una semana de las presidenciales. *El País*. <https://bit.ly/3SgcALG>
- García, M. (2021). El diario en la comunicación política. Los encuadres estratégicos de El Comercio sobre los candidatos presidenciales durante la segunda vuelta electoral de 2016 en Perú. *RISTI - Revista Ibérica de Sistemas e Tecnologías de Informação*, E40, 01, 152-165. <https://bit.ly/3SBisR6>

- Gargurevich, J. (2012). Los medios masivos de información en el Perú, 1980-2012 (Mass media in Peru, 1980-2012). *Conexión*, 1(1) 11-31. <https://doi.org/10.18800/conexion.201201.001>
- Goffman, E. (2006). *Frame Analysis. Los marcos de la experiencia*. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Gonzales, J. (2020). *Medios de comunicación: ¿al servicio de quién?* CLACSO Editorial, San Cristóbal de las Casas-Chiapas, Cooperativa Editorial Retos, Bilbao- Bizkaia: Mugarik Gabe.
- Hall, S. (1997). El trabajo de la representación. En S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage in association with the Open University.
- Helbig, R. and Hügel, J. (2021). Elecciones en Perú terminar en polarización y fragmentación. Recuperado de <https://dialogopolitico.org/comunicacion/elecciones-en-peru-terminan-en-polarizacion-y-fragmentacion/>
- Instituto De Estudios Peruanos. (2021). Informe de Opinión-Junio II 2021. Encuesta telefónica a celulares a nivel nacional. <https://bit.ly/3Om1hAv>
- Nigro, P. (2021). La responsabilidad del periodismo en la polarización política de las audiencias de las redes sociales. *Revista Más Poder Local*, 44, 34-53. <https://bit.ly/4bh9YpK>
- Mastrini, G. and Becerra, M. (2017). *La concentración infocomunicacional en América Latina (2000-2015)*. Universidad Nacional de Quilmes.
- Mendoza, M. (2022). La utilización política del terrorismo en la campaña presidencial peruana de 2021. *Universitas-XXI*, 36, 243-268. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n36.2022.10>
- Meyer, M. (2003). Entre la teoría, el método y la política: la ubicación de los enfoques relacionados con el ACD. En Ruth Wodak y Michael Meyer (comps.), *Métodos de análisis crítico del discurso*. Gedisa.
- Muñiz, C. (2015). La política como debate temático o estratégico. *Framing de la campaña electoral mexicana de 2012 en la prensa digital. Comunicación y Sociedad*, número 23, enero-junio, pp. 67-95.
- Ojo Público. (2016). Dueños de la noticia. <https://bit.ly/47VcEWU>
- Paredes, M. and Encinas, D. (2020). Perú: Crisis política y salida institucional. *Revista de Ciencia Política, volumen 40*(2), 483-510. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2020005000116>
- Piñeiro-Naval, V. and Mangana, R. (2018). Teoría del Encuadre: panorámica conceptual y estado del arte en el contexto hispano. *R. Estud. Mensaje Period.*, 24(2), 1541-1557. <https://doi.org/10.5209/ESMP.62233>

- Portillo, M. (2012). Campañas negativas y preferencias electorales: el caso de las elecciones presidenciales de México en 2006. *Razón y Palabra*, 79, 1-18, mayo-julio. Universidad de los Hemisferios. <https://bit.ly/49etX6G>
- Ruiz, M. (2016). *Medios y política en Perú: El caso del diario El Comercio en las elecciones del 2011*. Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar.
- Sankey, M. and Diaz, A. (2010). Los efectos de las campañas negativas. Un análisis microgenético. *Elementos: Ciencia y Cultura*, 17(80), 49-55. Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. <https://bit.ly/3Sg0D8H>
- Santillán Arruz, J. (2017). Acerca de la concertación de medios. *Cultura*, 31, 142-156. <https://doi.org/10.24265/cultura.2017.v31.07>
- Semetko, H. and Valkenburg, P. (2000). Framing european politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 93-109. <https://doi.org/2466.2000.tb02843.x>
- Unión Europea, Misión de Expertos Electorales-Perú. (2021). Informe Final. Elecciones generales 11 de abril de 2021, Segunda vuelta presidencial 6 de junio de 2021.
- Walter, D. and Ophir, Y. (2020). Strategy framing in news coverage and electoral success: an analysis of topic model networks approach. *Political Communication*, 38(6), 707-730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1858379>
- Van Dijk, T. (1990). *La noticia como discurso. Comprensión, estructura y producción de la información*. Paidós.
- Van Dijk, T. (2009). *Discurso y poder*. Editorial Gedisa.
- Viejo Viñas, R. (2008). *Frame Analysis: Encuadre teórico, operacionalización empírica, líneas de investigación*. Seminario Igop – Barcelona.