The Role of Social Forgiveness and Non-Forgiveness in Shaping the Political Discourse Around Gustavo Petro during the 2022 Colombian Presidential Elections

Constantin Treisch
Humboldt University of Berlin (Germany)

ABSTRACT. **Objective/context:** This article examines the use of emotional argumentation patterns of social forgiveness and non-forgiveness regarding Gustavo Petro's past in the M-19 movement in the context of the 2022 Colombian presidential elections. **Methodology:** An inductive media framing analysis of selected Colombian newspapers was carried out. The frames analyzed exemplify the relevance different newspapers have attributed to Petro's past in their pre-election coverage. **Conclusions:** This analysis demonstrates that those frames that project a negative view of Petro's past carried especially marked patterns of non-forgiveness and an accompanying delegitimization of his person and political ambitions. The negative portrayal in a particular newspaper presented clear patterns of emotional argumentation of politically ideological opposition to Petro in contrast to the media landscape in general. The other newspapers analyzed, however, revealed a predominantly neutral pattern of argumentation that paid attention to Petro's past but did not use it judgmentally against him. In relatively few cases, the argument of social forgiveness was even used in his favor. The results show that, especially for the ideological opposition to Petro, reference to his past in the M-19 was considered a legitimate means to undermine his political ambitions. However, considering the general overall coverage of the newspapers, Petro's past was of marginal importance. **Originality:** This analysis provides insights into how Colombian media framed the past of the current Colombian president in the M-19 during the 2022 presidential campaign, potentially influencing public opinion-making processes. The results can serve as a reference for more comprehensive analyses to better understand the role of forgiveness and non-forgiveness in the context of political discourses in post-conflict states.

KEYWORDS: Colombia; communication impact; elections; mass media; media framing analysis; public opinion; social forgiveness.

El papel del perdón social y la falta de perdón en el contenido del discurso político sobre Gustavo Petro durante las elecciones presidenciales colombianas de 2022

RESUMEN. **Objetivo/contexto:** este artículo examina los patrones de argumentación emocional sobre el perdón social y la falta de perdón frente al pasado de Gustavo Petro en el M-19 durante las elecciones presidenciales colombianas en 2022. **Metodología:** se realiza un análisis inductivo del enmarcamiento en los medios a partir de una muestra de periódicos colombianos. Los marcos analizados ejemplifican la relevancia que diferentes periódicos le atribuyeron al pasado de Petro en su cobertura preelectoral. **Conclusiones:** este análisis demuestra que los marcos que presentan una imagen negativa del pasado de Petro involucraban patrones especialmente fuertes de falta de perdón y la correspondiente deslegitimación de la persona y sus ambiciones políticas. La presentación negativa en periódicos particulares incluía patrones claros de argumentación emocional en la oposición ideológica hacia Petro en contraste con el conjunto de medios en general. Por otro lado, los demás periódicos analizados revelan un patrón predominantemente neutral de argumentación que prestó atención al pasado de Petro pero que no lo usó para hacer un juicio en su contra. En algunos casos, el argumento del perdón social fue usado incluso en su favor. Estos resultados muestran que, especialmente entre la oposición ideológica hacia Petro, la referencia a su pasado en el M-19 era considerada como una estrategia legítima para socavar sus aspiraciones políticas. Sin embargo, considerando en general el cubrimiento en los periódicos, el pasado de Petro tuvo una importancia marginal. **Originalidad:** este análisis ofrece una mirada a la forma como los medios en Colombia enmarcaron el pasado en el M-19 del actual presidente de Colombia durante la campaña presidencial de 2022, posiblemente influyendo el proceso de formación de la opinión pública. Estos resultados pueden servir de referencia para análisis más completos para comprender mejor el papel del perdón y su ausencia en el contexto del discurso político en estados en posconflicto.

PALABRAS CLAVE**:** análisis del enmarcamiento en los medios; Colombia; elecciones; impacto de la comunicación; medios de comunicación; opinión pública; perdón social.

O papel do perdão social e da falta de perdão no conteúdo do discurso político sobre Gustavo Petro durante as eleições presidenciais colombianas de 2022

RESUMO. **Objetivo/contexto:** este artigo examina os padrões de argumentação emocional sobre o perdão social e a falta de perdão em relação ao passado de Gustavo Petro no M-19 durante as eleições presidenciais colombianas de 2022. **Metodologia:** é realizado uma análise indutiva do enquadramento na mídia a partir de uma amostra de jornais colombianos. Os quadros analisados exemplificam a relevância que diferentes jornais atribuíram ao passado de Petro em sua cobertura pré-eleitoral. **Conclusões:** esta análise demonstra que os quadros que apresentam uma imagem negativa do passado de Petro envolviam padrões especialmente fortes de falta de perdão e a correspondente deslegitimação da pessoa e suas ambições

políticas. A apresentação negativa em jornais particulares incluía padrões claros de argumentação emocional na oposição ideológica a Petro em contraste com o conjunto de meios em geral. Por outro lado, os demais jornais analisados revelam um padrão predominantemente neutro de argumentação que prestou atenção ao passado de Petro, mas que não o usou para fazer um julgamento contra ele. Em alguns casos, o argumento do perdão social foi usado até mesmo a seu favor. Esses resultados mostram que, especialmente entre a oposição ideológica a Petro, a referência ao seu passado no M-19 era considerada como uma estratégia legítima para minar suas aspirações políticas. No entanto, considerando em geral a cobertura nos jornais, o passado de Petro teve uma importância marginal. **Originalidade:** esta análise oferece um olhar sobre como a mídia na Colômbia enquadraram o passado no M-19 do atual presidente da Colômbia durante a campanha presidencial de 2022, possivelmente influenciando o processo de formação da opinião pública. Estes resultados podem servir como referência para análises mais completas que busquem compreender melhor o papel do perdão e sua ausência no contexto do discurso político em estados em pós-conflito.

Introduction

In 2022, Gustavo Petro emerged victorious in the presidential elections. While politically known for his left-wing agenda, his past connection to the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19) raised questions about his character among some citizens. Concerning his political ambitions, his past affiliation with one of the principal guerrilla groups in Colombia not only caused serious concern in the country but also created a great stir internationally. Gustavo Petro's role is extraordinary, considering the country's recent history. Not only was he democratically elected as president of the country, but he also previously held high political positions, such as mayor of Bogotá. In opposition to his political success, his past involvement in M-19 has potentially triggered negative ressentiment and stigmatization against an ex-combatant in a post-conflict society that is still in an ongoing process of finding stability and consolidation. Researchers have invested a great deal of time trying to analyze and understand the reintegration processes of ex-combatants in Colombia (cf. Kaplan and Nussio 2018; López, Andreouli, and Howarth 2015; Orejuela and Restrepo-Plaza 2021; Porch and Rasmussen 2008; Rios Oyola 2018). The reintegration and consolidation processes are complex; an institutional framework, as well as support from society as a whole, are necessary for such processes to succeed. One concept of great importance in these processes, especially at the social level, is the possibility of forgiveness for past deeds, also known as social forgiveness. This concept does not refer to forgetting past deeds

but rather to critical engagement, not based on feelings of revenge and retribution. In a long-lasting peace process, forgiveness can enable the successful reintegration of different groups and foster a less divided society. Successful reintegration in such a complex process is not an easy task, as has already been demonstrated by many studies, including historical examples of the Colombian case (cf. Nilsson and Kovacs 2013; McMullin 2013a, 2013b; Kilroy 2015; Baez, Santamaría-García, and Ibáñez 2019). A complete coalescence of society after years of conflict can take years, and it is to be expected that emotionally deep-seated processes such as social forgiveness need a long time to take hold. Identifying the extent to which patterns of forgiveness or non-forgiveness can be discerned decades later in the context of political debates is the core approach of this article. To this end, a media framing analysis of Gustavo Petro was conducted to present the extent of the role of forgiveness or non-forgiveness in describing his candidacy for president of Colombia in 2022. In this way, this analysis aims to make a very specific contribution to the debate on the reintegration of ex-combatants by shedding light on the discourse of forgiveness in a post-conflict society. It also explores the political discourses promoted by mass media during an election campaign.

The article will start with a brief overview of Gustavo Petro's political integration after his M-19 membership. The concept of social forgiveness is explained next, which will be the basis for the subsequent media framing analysis. This framing analysis is introduced by a thorough description of the methodology, data, and findings. Next, the data and results obtained are discussed to answer the following question: How did parts of the Colombian media promulgate notions of forgiveness or non-forgiveness toward Gustavo Petro in the context of the Colombian electoral discourse? The results presented in this article can ultimately serve as a basis for a more comprehensive media discourse analysis concerning the past of political figures such as Gustavo Petro.

1. Gustavo Petro: An Exceptional Case of Political Reintegration

Several Colombian governments tried to reach agreements with militant groups and demobilize combatants (Orejuela and Restrepo-Plaza 2021). Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes in Colombia varied over time, and ex-combatants had been encouraged repeatedly to leave armed groups through incentives (Kaplan and Nussio 2018). Given the political mobilization of most guerrilla groups, part of the benefits granted were promises of political participation. This participatory approach sought to turn former fighters into citizens (López, Andreouli, and Howarth 2015). Guerrillas from the M-19 came

together with other like-minded groups and formed a political party, the M-19 Democratic Alliance. However, in light of the highly volatile political system, the M-19 Democratic Alliance quickly disbanded, and some of its members dispersed in smaller groups to other political camps (Söderström 2016). A detailed elaboration on the wide range of demobilization initiatives in Colombia's recent history would go beyond the scope of this research; however, a general understanding of the complex history of demobilization is necessary to understand today's political and social dynamics in the country. Porch and Rasmussen (2008) offer a comprehensive outline of the demobilization processes in Colombia during the twentieth century that affected several armed groups from different political directions. In their view, DDR processes in Colombia were dominated by three recurrent patterns: (1) the government usually negotiated peace and demobilization accords from a position of weakness, leaving power structures sound; (2) the transition to politics generally did not succeed (that includes the transition of the M-19 movement); and finally, (3) negotiation patterns were repeated, offering paramilitaries freedom from persecution and guerrilla groups political reforms or participation.

The case of the M-19 shows that promised political participation does not necessarily have to be crowned with success and that institutionalized political activity requires much more than its endorsement in a peace agreement. Although the political success of Gustavo Petro appears to be a rebuttal to that argumentation, one must consider that his success is not based on the political success of the M-19 Democratic Alliance but rather on his charismatic personality.[1] While Porch and Rasmussen (2008) noted the problem of institutional instability in the transition from guerilla movements to political parties, other studies focused on the characteristics of the Colombian party system itself. Söderström (2016) describes it as "personalized, clientelistic and rigid" (219); similarly, Albarracín, Gamboa, and Mainwaring (2018) offer a corresponding assessment in their analysis, identifying especially a rising personalization of the political process at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although Petro himself invoked the political legacy of the M-19 movement and its pledge to democracy after his election in 2022 (Janetsky 2022), Söderström (2016) affirms in her earlier analysis that "some saw the re-birth of the M-19 legacy in the form of the party Progresistas and their lead man, Gustavo Petro" (220). This does not necessarily indicate the effectiveness of DDR processes in incentivizing the political participation of ex-combatants.

---

1 This should not obscure the fact that there was political representation by former M-19 members. At the same time, the previously described case of the M-19 Democratic Alliance exemplifies that this representation was very limited. See Söderström (2016) for a comprehensive review of the political participation of former M-19 members.

Instead, it is a symptom of the changing party system in the country in recent years, which has opened the political stage to more personalized politics. Petro's political charisma not only led to an ex-combatant becoming mayor of Bogotá from 2012 to 2015 but also turning into the newly elected president of Colombia in 2022. Petro's political success should not be understood as an accomplishment of the institutionalized political participation of the M-19 Democratic Alliance; it should rather be connected to his personality and political ideology that had mass appeal. Part of this mass appeal was demanding an end to corruption, an improvement of the economic situation in the country, and a reduction in inequality for its citizens.

2. Social Forgiveness and Non-Forgiveness in the Context of Political Campaigns

As discussed in the prior section, political participation was and still is one key element of the Colombian DDR processes, in particular, to accommodate left-wing guerrillas negotiating peace and demobilization accords. Regardless of the institutional stability of political parties made up of guerrilla groups, some public support is necessary for any political initiative to be successful. When it comes to the political success of a politician such as Gustavo Petro, the question arises whether people would ever support political parties or characters without forgiving their violent actions in the past. The negotiation of the peace accord with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in 2016 could suggest that Colombian society might be divided on this sensitive issue. While the Colombian government and the FARC reached an agreement in September 2016, the peace accord failed twice when its final approval was made dependent on the success of a respective referendum. Only after the third attempt of the government and the decision not to hold a referendum but to take the peace accord directly to Congress in December 2016 was the agreement approved (Posada-Carbó 2017). The complications of winning a majority for a peace accord with the guerrilla group that has dominated the Colombian conflict for several decades might indicate that forgiveness is a very relevant factor for the complete reintegration of ex-combatants.

Scholars argue that social and psychological aspects are indispensable in any reintegration process. Social forgiveness, therefore, is a key part of rein-tegration and a necessary objective (López López *et al.* 2013). The concept of social forgiveness has already been studied in different contexts of civil war and political violence worldwide (cf. Noor *et al.* 2008; Allan *et al.* 2006; Cehajic, Brown, and Castano 2008). Similarly, the Colombian case has already motivated several scholars to focus on the level of social forgiveness among the Colombian

population and communities toward ex-combatants (cf. López López *et al.* 2013, 2018; Rios Oyola 2018; Domínguez de la Ossa and Aleán Romero 2020; Orejuela and Restrepo-Plaza 2021). Although some suggest that Colombians "have become more open to the idea of forgiveness to perpetrators of violence" (López López *et al.* 2018, 212), others indicate that the existence of various prejudices and "emotional and social wounds" still prevent the population from fully integrating ex-combatants (Orejuela and Restrepo-Plaza 2021, 46). Domínguez de la Ossa and Aleán Romero (2020) come to further ambiguous conclusions, stating that communities would be willing to forgive past offenses due to the need to overcome grief caused by violence; however, forgiveness also requires true repentance from the perpetrator of violence (73f.). For their part, López López *et al.* (2018) underline the contrasting attitudes of people forgiving left-wing guerilla combatants and right-wing paramilitaries. In their analysis, the issue of whether a former guerrilla was sentenced has not proven to be of great importance (212f.). These results, which differ in some regards, illustrate the difficulty in capturing social forgiveness in Colombia.

Researchers have proposed several definitions to explore the concept of forgiveness in relation to the exercise of political violence. Rye and Pargament (2002) defined forgiveness "as letting go negative affect, negative cognitions, and negative behavior in response to considerable injustice" (419). Worthington and Drinkard (2000) specified the concept of forgiveness in greater detail by clearly separating it from reconciliation, pointing out that reconciliation would be an active interpersonal process, whereas "[f]orgiveness is granted" by the person or group who have suffered injustice (94). However, the interpretation of Audrey Wells (2022), focusing on contemporary international politics, appears to be the most practical definition for this research:

> Forgiveness does not mean ignoring and forgetting a harmful action or, if the action is illegal, not punishing it by due process of law, but it does mean giving up all ideas of revenge, bitterness, and hatred towards the wrongdoer. […] Whatever form forgiveness takes, it always means a disciplined refusal (which sometimes requires enormous willpower) to give way to the desire for revenge and harm the person or country that has harmed you. (Wells 2022, 1)

Wells' interpretation of forgiveness can also be applied to the context of political debate and discourse. Attempting to undermine a political campaign by invoking past membership in guerrilla groups aims to delegitimize the candidate. Thus, the concept of forgiveness becomes a key to the success of ex-combatants'

political participation or their acceptance into leading political positions, as is Gustavo Petro's case. Social forgiveness in political discourse requires the opposition not to take advantage of the past of a politician in a guerrilla group. A sign of non-forgiveness, on the contrary, would be to use the past argumentatively to delegitimize the candidate. A possible manifestation of non-forgiveness of past actions, however, does not necessarily reflect an honest opinion. These recriminations could be rather consciously used as a political calculation to raise negative ressentiments that eventually "hurt" the political campaign of the other. Furthermore, the focus on past deeds would occupy a great deal of attention and potentially hamper a fair but critical discourse on the political agenda of the candidate.

The here-described concept of social forgiveness shall be the basis for the following media framing analysis. This analysis evaluates whether the reproduction of value frames in the Colombian media indicates patterns of social forgiveness or non-forgiveness in the political discourse around Gustavo Petro and his past in the M-19.

3. Media Framing Analysis

In conflict and post-conflict regions, media can play a distinctive role in the context of reconciliation. For example, García-Perdomo, Harlow, and Brown (2022) analyzed the role of Colombian media during the Colombian peace process and, in particular, its influence on the 2016 referendum on the peace agreement with the FARC. Furthermore, Rincón-Unigarro *et al.* (2020) examined the characteristics of media framing processes related to forgiveness and reconciliation during the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC to identify social beliefs inherent to contexts of prolonged conflict in the media discourse in Colombia. This media framing analysis seeks to follow up on this research and provide a specific focus on the representation of Gustavo Petro's past in parts of the Colombian media in the context of the Colombian presidential election 2022. In particular, the focus will be on the discourse on Petro's social forgiveness, considering the election of an ex-combatant as the new Colombian president, to identify reflections of patterns of forgiveness or non-forgiveness.

a. Methodology

Language use is a principal element for the media to create social images and promote social legitimation or delegitimization processes. Information and public opinion are crucial factors not only in maintaining a specific political order but also in influencing political change (David 2022). Rhetoric and linguistic patterns can be used to depict someone in a positive or negative light and to allocate

the adversary in certain social categories, which can influence the processes of general opinion-making. The usage of such patterns in the discourse around the Colombian peace process has already been analyzed with a focus on rhetorical elements on Twitter (Barreto-Galeano *et al.* 2021). Framing, along with the agenda-setting function, can be considered one of two effects of the media, also referred to as cognitive theories (Linström and Marais 2012). Consequently, a media framing analysis can be beneficial for understanding the impact of media outlets in societies (Giles and Shaw 2009) and be a starting point for studying the image of specific groups or individuals and for the effects of media in society in general (Wimmer and Dominick 2008).

Conducting media framing analysis can be traced back to Erving Goffman (1986), who described a frame as "principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them" (10). He continues to define frameworks as "schemata of interpretation" that help "locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences" (21). In the context of news framing, one definition presented by Entman (2007) describes it as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights the connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (164). From these definitions, it becomes evident that a frame in the media context can be considered a cognitive categorization of certain events. Through a deliberate interpretation, the media can classify social events positively or negatively, legitimize or delegitimize them, and strongly influence thus the public opinion-forming process. Framing is not about what the audience should think but how the public should think about something (Walter and Ophir 2019). This can have a direct impact on the perception of media consumers. For instance, an analysis by Lynch and McGoldrick (2012) showed that people exposed to war-framed news in the media, characterized by an aggressive and fearful portrayal, tended to blame the other side for a conflict, unlike those exposed to hopeful and optimistic frames. Thus, a media framing analysis represents a noteworthy approach to examining the interpretation of Gustavo Petro's past in the Colombian media landscape in the context of highly polarizing interpretations of the country's recent history.

The framework used for this analysis is influenced principally by the methodological suggestions of Linström and Marais (2012). Researchers aiming to identify frames in political news regularly rely on the inductive approach of framing analysis, which means they refrain from using previously defined news frames in their studies to produce knowledge about the specific issue of interest (Lecheler and Vreese 2019). Consequently, this analysis was conducted inductively; that is, the creation of operation definitions and the identification of frames was

done in a simultaneous analytical process through repeated rounds of reading and analysis. Frames are indispensable for organizing ideas and help disseminate certain sequences of interpretations and perceptions. As part of the cognitive interactions between the media and readers, news framing behaviors ensure that the representations and interpretations conveyed by the frames are part of an "ecology of influence" between the media and the audience (D'Angelo 2018, xxv). Thus, part of this article will present the interpretations and representations (hereafter referred to as underlying valuations) of the subject of analysis mediated by frames. To simplify the presentation of these underlying valuations, they are classified on a 5-level scale, which will be described further in the paper. The combination of the identified frames and underlying valuations will ultimately lay the foundation for the discussion of these findings.

b. Data

Considering the importance of news in the context of electoral campaigns for information-gathering processes of voters outlined by Richter and Stier (2022), this framing analysis focuses on traditional Colombian newspapers chosen for their accessibility from outside the country through the help of data archives. The Nexis Uni online newspaper archive was mainly used for data collection. After evaluating the accessibility of Colombian newspapers in the Nexis Uni data archive and the newspapers' online archives, the final list of newspapers for which analysis was deemed possible consisted of *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *El Nuevo Siglo*, *El País*, and *El Colombiano*. While one must acknowledge that traditional newspapers play an increasingly minor role in the overall media and information landscape, national-reach newspapers such as *El Tiempo* or *El Espectador* still possess a wide range of audiences[2] (Newman *et al.* 2021). At the same time, according to the 2022 Colombia Media Landscape Guide, a number of regional newspapers dominate regional reporting, including *El Colombiano* (northwest) and *El País* (southwest) (CDAC Network 2022). Irrespective of its comparatively lower readership reach, *El Nuevo Siglo* was selected as a cross-regional newspaper because of its clear conservative orientation compared to the other chosen newspapers. Apart from *El Nuevo Siglo*, sufficient articles from the other newspapers were accessible through the Nexis Uni database. However, *El Nuevo Siglo* has an online archive with easy data access. The first voting round of the Colombian presidential elections was on May 29. This analysis aimed to examine media coverage in the

2   The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2021 identifies these newspapers as the two largest national dailies with the broadest reach. At the same time, both newspapers are the most visited national online news portals.

run-up to the elections regarding its possible impact on opinion-making during the electoral process. For this reason, the study period was set between March 1 and May 28, one day before the first round of voting.

Data collection used a keyword search. In the first step, the search was very general, seeking to identify articles containing the keyword "Gustavo Petro," which turned out to be too general, as expected. The results ranked between 240 and 670 hits and exceeded the available resources. Consequently, the subject of analysis was defined more precisely in the second step, through a combined keyword search that focused on Gustavo Petro's past as a guerrilla member. Thus, the keywords "guerrillero," "ex-guerrillero"/"exguerrillero," "M19"/"M-19," and "guerrilla" were added. At least one of these keywords had to be mentioned in the article, along with Gustavo Petro's name, to be eligible for analysis. This second data collection step resulted in a sample of between 8 and 29 articles per newspaper and proved appropriate for further research. The set of articles identified included different types, such as news stories, news updates, interviews, or newspaper columns.

An initial reading of these articles evidenced that some contained the relevant keywords but did not refer to Gustavo Petro. Thus, no reliable framing analysis could have been possible regarding his past membership in the M-19. After this filtering process, only a handful of articles were eligible for study from the newspapers *El Tiempo* and *El País*; nevertheless, they were removed from the list of articles to be analyzed. This decision was purely based on the desired comparability of the number of articles analyzed per newspaper when conducting the study. Thus, the final framing analysis only included articles from *El Espectador*, *El Nuevo Siglo*, and *El Colombiano* (Table 1).

Table 1. Identification of units of analysis for the media framing analysis

Newspaper	# articles retrieved after combined keyword search	# articles with no reference to Gustavo Petro's past	# articles useful for the framing analysis
El Tiempo*	8	3	5
El Espectador	21	4	17
El Nuevo Siglo	29	3	26
El País*	9	5	4
El Colombiano	27	10	17

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: *Newspaper not admitted for final analysis.

c. Identified Frames and Underlying Valuations

As outlined before, an inductive approach was chosen for this media framing analysis. Therefore, this study did not rely on previously defined frames; instead, the process involved several rounds of reading and analysis to identify a set of frames used by different newspapers to "promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2007, 164). In this article, this can be understood under the concept of underlying evaluations introduced above. It should be clarified that some articles were written in a broader context and that some references analyzed comprise only a short part of the article. Thus, the evaluated frames refer only to the interpretations of newspapers about Gustavo Petro and not to the entirety of the articles as such. Ultimately, the study has shown that four frames repeated across all units of analysis: fact-based analysis, valuing past perspective, valuing future perspective, and debunking of reality (Table 2). The frames described are ideal types that could be identified in the newspapers. It should be noted, however, that these frames can occur not only as ideal types but also in hybrid forms. The analysis showed that of the 60 articles with identified frames, 72 % (43) represented ideal types, and 28 % (17) were hybrids of different forms.

Table 2. Operationalization of frames

Frame	Definition
Fact-based analysis	The unit of analysis refers to the subject of analysis in a neutral manner, only mentioning facts (What? When? Who? Where? How?), without any direct or implied positive or negative connotation.
Valuing past perspective	The unit of analysis refers to the past of the subject of analysis or past incidents connected to the subject of analysis. These references contain a valuation with a positive or negative connotation.
Valuing future perspective	The unit of analysis refers to the possible future of the subject of analysis or incidents possibly occurring in the future connected to the subject of analysis. These references contain a valuation with a positive or negative connotation.
Debunking of reality	The unit of analysis aims to expose the allegedly real identity of the subject of analysis. These references contain a valuation with a positive or negative connotation. This may include a line of reasoning that reflects on the past or possible future of the subject of analysis; however, such a link is not presupposed.

Source: Own elaboration.

While frames describe the contextualization and provide an interpretative framework for the reader, they also express and illustrate valuation toward Gustavo Petro. Whether positive or negative, these are evaluated on a 5-level scale of underlying valuations identified during the analysis (Table 3). Apart from a neutral valuation, positive and negative valuations are characterized in two levels: directly positive/negative and indirectly positive/negative. This distinction was necessary to indicate whether a newspaper actively promotes a frame containing a particular valuation or whether, intentionally or unintentionally, it indirectly promotes a frame with a specific valuation, e.g., by citing particular actors without contextualizing such quotes. Even if a newspaper does not actively support quoted frames, the frame persists through non-active engagement and a lack of contextualization, thus positively or negatively affecting readers and their interpretive processes toward Gustavo Petro. The combination of the identified frames and underlying valuations allows researchers to analyze the framing processes of newspapers and assess how notions of forgiveness or non-forgiveness can be interpreted through the findings.

Table 3. Five-level scale of underlying valuations

Underlying valuation	Definition
Directly positive	In the respective frame, the unit of analysis creates, by rhetorical means, a positive image directly connected to the subject of analysis.
Indirectly positive	In the respective frame, the unit of analysis creates a positive image, for instance, by quoting selected sources without additionally contextualizing them. Thus, the underlying message is not generated by the unit of analysis but, willingly or unwillingly, is indirectly supported through it.
Neutral	In the respective frame, the unit of analysis conducts a purely factual account of events. The reference contains no direct or indirect valuation.
Indirectly negative	In the respective frame, the unit of analysis creates a negative image, for instance, by quoting selected sources without additionally contextualizing them. Thus, the underlying message is not generated by the unit of analysis but, willingly or unwillingly, is indirectly supported through it.
Directly negative	In the respective frame, the unit of analysis creates, by rhetorical means, a negative image directly connected to the subject of analysis.

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Findings

Before discussing the identified frames in combination with their underlying valuations for each studied newspaper, it is possible to draw some general observations from the distribution of the frames' underlying valuations in the newspapers (Table 4).

Table 4. Underlying valuations cumulated for the newspapers analyzed

Newspaper x underlying valuations	Directly positive	Indirectly positive	Neutral	Indirectly negative	Directly negative	Total
El Colombiano	/	/	11	5	1	**17**
El Nuevo Siglo	2	/	4	9	11	**26**
El Espectador	2	1	11	3	/	**17**
Total	**4**	**1**	**26**	**17**	**12**	

Source: Own elaboration.

While *El Colombiano* and *El Espectador* appear rather neutral at first glance, *El Nuevo Siglo* stands out due to its more negative interpretations. Solely focusing on the numbers presented in the table, *El Espectador* seems to take an impartial stance with a majority of frames with neutral underlying valuations but also has a nearly identical distribution between positive and negative interpretations. One could even point out a more direct positive stance compared to the negative cases. However, this only refers to a small number of articles analyzed and is not significant enough to ascribe a more positive positioning toward Gustavo Petro's past to the newspaper. Similar conclusions, but in reverse, can be drawn for *El Colombiano*. While, for the most part, it also promotes a neutral framing without any underlying valuation of Petro's past, a slight tendency toward a rather negative framing can be detected. However, only one direct negative framing by *El Colombiano* is not enough to attribute a per se negative framing to it. Although *El Colombiano* features five indirect negative frames, the newspaper cannot be placed on the same level as *El Nuevo Siglo*, given the marked quantitative difference in their negative frames. Furthermore, as the five indirect frames are characterized mainly by quotations, the framing of *El Colombiano* was classified as tending to be neutral.

El Nuevo Siglo, on the contrary, provides a very different picture. A significant majority of 77 % (20) of the frames contains an indirect or direct negative evaluation, and a negative bias of Petro's past is undeniable. Although the newspaper also promoted positive framing in two individual exceptions, these cases

are too few to balance against the abundant negative interpretations in most articles. Furthermore, the significantly low number of neutral perspectives suggests a predominantly negative view of Gustavo Petro's past.

a. El Colombiano

As previously discussed, 17 articles from *El Colombiano* were deemed relevant for the final framing analysis. A careful regular data assessment and continuous comparison with information retrieved from the other newspapers eventually resulted in the identification of four frames, two of which are ideal and two hybrid types (Table 5). Eleven articles (65 %) were identified carrying the fact-based analysis frame with no underlying valuation and were thus considered neutral. The newspaper repeatedly referred to connections between Petro and his past; however, these references, for the most part, did not go beyond a purely factual and neutral presentation. For instance, even though there were mentions of his lasting connection to former M-19 members, it was not valued positively or negatively:

> En su primer anillo de seguridad, el líder del Pacto Histórico cuenta con personal de la UNP. En él hay antiguos miembros del M-19 que lo rodean adónde va. [9, Annex I]

This news update and similar articles refer to Gustavo Petro's current political life, private security arrangements, and political profile in general. Aside from transparently displaying his M-19 connection, they did not include any direct or indirect valuation. Even though Petro's past in the M-19 is highlighted as noteworthy, it is not discussed further and, therefore, does not evoke positive or negative emotions. What stood out in another news story was the rhetorical use of military and martial terms in Petro's description:

> Gustavo Petro: Un llanero solitario. […] Llega con una mezcla explosiva de apoyo de personajes políticos cuestionados, una sofisticada campaña en redes sociales […] y un menú de propuestas populistas que nunca antes se habían hecho en el país. […] Y que él es capaz de dar todas las batallas porque lo anima una convicción muy grande: la de llegar a ser Presidente. [17, Annex I]

The title refers to him as a lone ranger and describes the means of his election campaign as explosive, highlighting his ability to fight any battle. Whether consciously or unconsciously, *El Colombiano* aims to describe Petro's past and experiences as a militaristic guerrilla. Such attributions continue to

shape a specific image, but it must be clear that they are used neutrally and do not evoke positive or negative emotions, unlike later articles. The reader is exposed to the reality of Petro's past but also allowed to decide how to evaluate it. Despite the colorful language used in the last example, all the identified articles that carried a neutral underlying valuation mentioned Petro's involvement in the M-19. However, these articles did not link this past to negative descriptions and emotions that could aim to actively harm his political ambitions, previously identified as a core component of non-forgiveness.

Table 5. Frames and underlying valuations, *El Colombiano*

Frames x underlying valuations	Directly positive	Indirectly positive	Neutral	Indirectly negative	Directly negative
Fact-based analysis	/	/	11	/	/
Debunking of reality	/	/	/	3	/
Valuing past perspective + Valuing future perspective	/	/	/	1	/
Valuing past perspective + Debunking of reality	/	/	/	1	1
Total	**0**	**0**	**11**	**5**	**1**

Source: Own elaboration.

On the contrary, three different frames were identified that indirectly triggered a rather negative assessment of Petro's past (Table 5). With three identifications, the debunking of reality frame had the highest frequency. In the context of a social media controversy between Petro and his opponent Federico Gutiérrez, *El Colombiano* quoted Gutiérrez in a news update saying:

> Claro que tenemos información que las disidencias de las [FARC] y la guerrilla del [ELN] están ordenando votar por Gustavo Petro. [10, Annex I]

Although the newspaper did not actively promote this opinion, the above statement was not placed in any context, promoting thus possible negative attitudes toward Petro, suggesting cooperation or receiving support from the FARC and ELN. A lack of contextualization in the quote could lead to a suggestive interpretation for the reader. Moreover, a different news update reported on an

uncontextualized pamphlet sent to Petro's vice presidential running mate that accused Petro of, among other things, continuing to be a guerrilla member [4, Annex 1]. This article had the potential to arouse negative resentment against Petro and his "real" identity. Even if this had not been the newspaper's intention, such polarizing statements possibly remained in the readers' minds without further contextualization.

Finally, a direct negative valuation stands out very clearly. This valuation was created by a hybrid frame that included valuing past perspective and debunking of reality, and it is the only unit of analysis in *El Colombiano* where the frame actively promotes an emotional connotation. This news story referred to Gustavo Petro's role in the creation of the 1990 Constitution, which occurred after the demobilization of the M-19:

> Antonio Navarro Wolf le confirmó a El Colombiano que lo dicho por Petro no es verdad y que –oficialmente– el aspirante del Pacto no estuvo en ninguno de los grupos que se conformaron para renovar la carta política colombiana tras la desmovilización del M-19. […] Desde que se realizó la Constituyente –en la que Petro busca montarse tergiversando una realidad histórica– han pasado ya 31 años, por lo que en la memoria colectiva, y en especial en la de las nuevas generaciones, puede que el recuerdo de quienes la lideraron y participaron esté borroso. [1, Annex I]

Petro is portrayed as a liar who paints a false picture of the past, thus putting himself in a better light in the context of the demobilization of the M-19, which stirs negative emotions toward his past and intends to expose his flawed personal account. The source cited in the article is Antonio Navarro Wolf, who, as the article goes on to say, is the only surviving member of the political negotiations. Navarro Wolf's statement is meant to lend more weight and credibility to the accusations against Petro. In these frames, Petro's past is directly and indirectly linked to negative emotions, with no direct connection with his political agenda in the article. The goal, in this case, is clearly to create delegitimizing accounts referencing Petro's past, inevitably assuming that there will be some damage to the candidate's reputation regardless of his political agenda, which can be understood as a symptom of embedded non-forgiveness of his past in that regard.

b. El Nuevo Siglo

With 26 out of 29 articles retrieved as relevant for the study, *El Nuevo Siglo* presented the highest number of articles analyzed. Data assessment evidenced

a clear bias toward a rather negative framing of Petro's past during his electoral campaign (Table 6). The fact-based analysis frame showed similar tendencies to those already highlighted in the case of *El Colombiano* and will therefore not be examined again. Instead, the focus here will be on the most dominant frames, namely the valuing past perspective, the debunking of reality, and a combination of the valuing past and future perspectives. With four directly negative underlying valuations, the valuing past perspective frame could be considered one of the most useful frames to trigger resentments. The analysis revealed that, by creating a negative attitude, this frame was used to make Petro accountable for his dishonorable actions in the past:

> Su sola hoja de vida debería bastarnos para convencernos de que un exguerrillero de su calibre no puede convertirse en nuestro guía político. [21, Annex I]

Through rhetorical means, the column authors undermine Petro's past by describing him as an ex-guerrilla member of a particularly high "caliber." Later in the same article, they accuse him of committing crimes against humanity and being part of terrorist attacks. Thus, *El Nuevo Siglo* develops a clear stance of what readers should think about Petro's past during the election campaigns. This negative attitude toward him and his past was actively promoted by *El Nuevo Siglo* in further examples from other columns:

> Su líder, Gustavo Petro, […] excomandante del M-19 que "nunca" disparó un arma, pero no se necesita dispararla para ser asesino, ni activar bombas para ser terrorista, ni secuestrar para ser secuestrador, cuando se es "comandante" de un grupo de asesinos, terroristas y secuestradores. [31, Annex I]

By using quotation marks in the statement that Petro allegedly never fired a gun, this part of his past is presented as implausible. Additionally, it is emphasized that Petro is equally guilty as the former leader of M-19. A similar rhetorical device is used when the article suggests that Petro had access to money from questionable sources in the past, ultimately attributing a mafia-like character to him. Similar accusations in two other articles imply that Petro never paid for his committed crimes while part of M-19.

Table 6. Frames and underlying valuations, *El Nuevo Siglo*

Frames x underlying valuations	Directly positive	Indirectly positive	Neutral	Indirectly negative	Directly negative
Fact-based analysis	/	/	4	/	/
Valuing past perspective	1	/	/	1	4
Valuing future perspective	/	/	/	/	1
Debunking of reality	/	/	/	5	2
Valuing past perspective + Valuing future perspective	1	/	/	2	3
Valuing past perspective + Debunking of reality	/	/	/	1	/
Debunking of reality + Valuing past perspective	/	/	/	/	1
Total	**2**	**0**	**4**	**9**	**11**

Source: Own elaboration.

A similar negative valuation dominates the debunking of reality frame identified seven times in *El Nuevo Siglo*, of which two created a direct and five an indirect negative valuation. The indirect frames contain quotes published in the same way as in the cases of *El Colombiano*; therefore, these cases are not highlighted again here. Additionally, two debunking of reality frames, including a direct negative valuation, employ two rhetorical devices of varying intensity to cast Gustavo Petro's past in a bad light. In the rhetorically weaker variant, Petro is portrayed as "the director" of the Pacto Histórico, who had already performed as a fictional character in several self-directed "plays." The use of theatrical language is noticeable ("la dirección," "del actor," and "algunas obras"), and it is employed to ridicule his person and portray him as unrealistic and far from reality [32, Annex I]. The most straightforward column, however, is even more direct in trying to expose Petro's "real" identity:

> El candidato Gustavo Petro parece forjado a "imagen y semejanza" del déspota ruso; son igual de mentirosos, astutos y calculadores. Ambos vienen de posiciones donde la tortura y la muerte era su pan de cada día, el uno, como jefe de la brutal KGB soviética, hoy la FSB rusa, el otro, como guerrillero del M-19. [18, Annex I]

The author of the quoted article seeks to allege similarities between Vladimir Putin and Gustavo Petro, stating that they are both cunning, calculating, and liars. Petro's membership in the M-19 is equated with Putin's past in the KGB, indicating that this article seeks to present Petro as not being much different from a "Russian despot."

Additionally, a hybrid form combining the valuing past and future perspectives was also used in articles from *El Nuevo Siglo*. What makes this combination of frames noteworthy is the connection drawn between Petro's past as a guerrilla and his potential electoral victory, as observed in the following quote from a column:

> Primero fue terrorista y luego guerrillero. Se metió de lleno a la política activa y para él todas las formas de lucha son viables y ejecutables. […] Si su triunfo se concretara, Colombia jamás volvería ser la misma y nuestra democracia estaría en grave riesgo. [30, Annex I]

By assuming that "any way of fighting" would be viable for Petro, his past is associated with his current political career, implying that he would potentially use illegitimate means to achieve his electoral goals. Thus, his potential win would put Colombia and its democracy at high risk. This suggests that voters should learn from Petro's past and recognize the dangers he represents to the country as president. Similarly, another news ticker that creates an indirect negative valuation suggests that a person with "blood on their hands" would not be a suitable president [28, Annex I]. The explicitness of the examples given here shows how deeply rooted negative feelings about Petro's personality can be, even after more than 30 years of his membership in the M-19. These portrayals have nothing to do with his current political aspirations but, for the most part, invoke a negative image of his past to fuel fear and anxiety. This depiction of him with an ultimate negative focus on his past seeks to show that his deeds cannot be forgiven and that they allegedly continue to shape his character and political agenda up to this day.

The predominant negative connotations toward Gustavo Petro's past become evident through these examples. However, the positive frames deviating from this trend should not be forgotten. The headlines of the following two

columns already imply what line of argumentation these articles use to create a rather positive valuation of Petro: "A superar los temores" [36, see Annex I] and "Petro y el perdón social" [41, Annex I]. The call to overcome fears and, especially, the reference to social forgiveness toward Petro shed an optimistic light on his membership in the M-19 during the electoral campaign. One of the positive valuing past perspective frames refers to fears within military forces toward Petro and, with the help of a rhetorical question, asks readers to remember that his affiliation with the M-19 was over 30 years ago. Emphasizing this long period implicitly suggests that his past should no longer be a basis for hasty conclusions [36, Annex I]. The second positive example aims to highlight Petro's past in the M-19 as a positive aspect of his presidential election campaign, thus constituting a hybrid form of valuing past and future perspectives:

> Y en este orden de ideas podemos afirmar que a personas como el candidato presidencial Gustavo Petro, la mayoría de la sociedad colombiana le ha otorgado dicho perdón social. Y Petro, tanto por sus vivencias cuando fue guerrillero como por el perdón social que ha venido recibiendo, es el más apto para liderar la sociedad hacia mejores estadios de convivencia. [41, Annex I]

After all, Petro has experienced social forgiveness in society, and his experiences as a guerrilla would make him just the right candidate to reunite Colombian society. The reference to social forgiveness is very significant here, as the column does not deny Petro's past but deliberately presents it as a positive characteristic of his candidacy. It is the first and only time that the concept of social forgiveness is openly addressed in one of the studied newspapers. These examples represent a small counterpoint to the strongly negative frames in the newspaper, but they present a view that should be considered. They reinforce the call for social forgiveness for Petro, implying that the debate about his candidacy should not focus on condemning his past but rather on his current political agenda. Nevertheless, these two positive frames from *El Nuevo Siglo* cannot obscure the prevailing negative frames used by the newspaper in relation to Gustavo Petro's past.

c. *El Espectador*

El Espectador appears to have the most neutral stance on Gustavo Petro, considering the majority of neutral frames and a fairly equal distribution of three rather positive and negative valuing frames (Table 7). The neutral and indirectly negative frames show similar patterns to the findings of *El Colombiano* and *El Nuevo Siglo*.

Consequently, this section will only focus on further examples of frames that create a positive valuation to avoid repetition.

Table 7. Frames and underlying valuations, *El Espectador*

Frames x underlying valuations	Directly positive	Indirectly positive	Neutral	Indirectly negative	Directly negative
Fact-based analysis	/	/	11	/	/
Valuing past perspective	1	/	/	/	/
Valuing future perspective	/	/	/	1	/
Debunking of reality	1	1	/	2	/
Total	**2**	**1**	**11**	**3**	**0**

Source: Own elaboration.

The debunking of reality frame creating an indirect positive evaluation comes from a quotation by the vice-presidential candidate of Federico Gutiérrez, an opponent of Gustavo Petro during the elections. In an interview with *El Espectador*, the politician was asked about Petro's past and answered the following:

> Sí, entonces vamos a decir que Gustavo Petro es hoy guerrillero porque lo fue hace 30 años. ¿Es justo eso? Creo que no. Miremos hacia adelante: cómo estamos, cómo nos hemos comportado, cómo hemos gobernado, porque si no, arrastremos todo el lastre. […] Miremos el momento que cada uno juega, o sino digamos que nos estamos enfrentando a un guerrillero, porque lo fue. [60, see Annex I]

Of course, there is no denying that a candidate would not want to promote his opponent; however, by refraining from exploiting Petro's past for political gain, the discourse is directed toward Petro's current political agenda and not his past. Even though these phrases were only quoted by the newspaper, the interview produces a rather positive valuation of Petro's past, representing a particular example of the debunking of reality frame as it challenges previous primarily negative portrayals of his past. In another news story, identified with the valuing past perspective, the idea of forgetting and forgiving was used to present Petro's identity in a more favorable light. Through rhetorical questions, the article raises the issue of whether his actions in the past could be forgiven. Also, by asking

whether this kind of stigmatization would last forever, this news story highlights the injustice of instrumentalizing Petro's past. Past deeds should remain in the past, and forgiveness should play a more significant role [48, Annex I]. Compared to the mainly negative representation by *El Nuevo Siglo*, such frames create a deliberately positive perspective around the notion of forgiving a person such as Gustavo Petro for his past deeds. However, it must be noted that this emphasized positive framing remains an exception, and most frames are kept neutral or indirectly promote a negative valuation. A predominance of neutrality, however, can also be understood as a symptom of embedded social forgiveness, as will be addressed in more detail in the final discussion.

5. Discussion

This paper has demonstrated that *El Colombiano* and *El Espectador* have a neutral stance in most of the articles analyzed, given the dominance of the fact-based analysis frames in these newspapers. Of course, outliers towards a negative and positive valuation of Petro's past need to be acknowledged; however, it should be remembered that, for the most part, these valuing frames are created indirectly via quotations and not directly through the wording of the articles. When assessing whether characteristics of social forgiveness are embedded in the frames analyzed, the neutral stance of the fact-based analysis frame becomes a significant factor. At the beginning of this paper, social forgiveness was defined as refraining from seeking revenge or harming a person who has harmed others in the past (Wells 2022). In this research, the idea of "harming someone" was extended to a more political context, in the sense that social forgiveness should also mean refraining from intending to sabotage the political career of the person concerned. Considering the electoral discourse in the newspapers analyzed, the idea of forgiveness becomes visible through non-visibility. By not referring to Gustavo Petro's past through a judgmental frame, these newspapers, while being representatives and propagators of a particular political ideology, actively turn away from a rhetoric that reflects characteristics of an attitude of non-forgiveness. As a result, the main focus of reporting is not on his past but on critical coverage of his political agenda. Petro's past is a well-known fact; thus, mentioning and referring to it in a neutral and especially fact-based manner is part of journalistic duty. What becomes more important is the politician behind Gustavo Petro; this includes his political achievements, agenda, and ambitions. These aspects certainly must be commented upon and criticized to foster a healthy political discourse. Refraining from valuative framings regarding Petro's past helps promote these aspects of political discourse, signaling that the idea of social

forgiveness is embedded in daily political coverage by media outlets. Although the findings indicate that *El Colombiano* and *El Espectador* have not only published articles containing a fact-based analysis frame, they have also occasionally quoted political opponents with polarizing opinions about Petro's past. They do not significantly change their rather neutral overall stance, however.

Nevertheless, this supposed neutrality is not meant to be deceptive about the second major finding of this analysis. It must be emphasized that, in total, 29 articles, and thus only slightly less than half, presented Gustavo Petro's past in a negative light. The valuations of these articles lead to the conclusion that the idea of social forgiveness is not all-embracing. Criticism is especially true concerning his past in the M-19, which inspired a generation of negative frames, especially in *El Nuevo Siglo*. In a sometimes more subtle and sometimes more polarizing way, his role in the past is rhetorically instrumentalized to delegitimize his political agenda, as well as his credibility and trustworthiness as a person. Continuing to foment negative resentments demonstrates that the political opposition of Petro has not forgiven him for his actions. Regardless of whether the statements made in the articles are truthful or contrived, the negative emotions implied or directly highlighted by the frames show that the logic of non-forgiveness is a powerful tool used by the opposition to damage the candidate. The emotion of non-forgiveness toward his actions is reinforced several times and, in some instances, even used to infer a possible future that would harm the country. These negative portrayals evidence the problem of achieving an all-encompassing social forgiveness in society. Even if one part of society has already taken up critical but not necessarily vindictive attitudes toward the past, other parts of society still foment condemnatory attitudes. Whether this condemnation is ultimately based on conviction or political opportunism is a different question. Either way, through the public articulation of these attitudes, these views can logically spread or manifest themselves in society and be grounds for division.

Despite the coverage of *El Nuevo Siglo*, the general attention to Gustavo Petro's past is relatively low compared to the total number of articles published by the newspapers over three months. The represented results, and especially the recognition of the marginal attention to his past, can be interpreted as a reflection of the state of social forgiveness and an indication that society has already taken a major step in forgiving Petro's past in the M-19. In particular, the marginal and mostly neutral consideration of Petro's past by several major national and regional newspapers strongly suggests that this pattern could be confirmed in other national and regional media outlets. At the same time, it would be worth analyzing more deeply the extent to which small media houses like *El Nuevo Siglo* occupy a different position in both supporting or opposing to Petro's past.

El Nuevo Siglo stands out in comparison to the other newspapers, providing an example of how the media negatively framed Petro's past in the context of social forgiveness. In this specific case, the framing of *El Nuevo Siglo* could be interpreted in the context of influential ecologies, potentially affecting the readers' understanding of Petro's past in relation to his candidacy. Especially in a strongly polarized society, such processes may never entirely cease. Based on the analysis of these data, however, it is only possible to speculate how significant such an influence might have been.

The results presented in this study, and perhaps precisely the, at first glance, limited depth of data, can be a sign of optimism and hope regarding the peace process with the FARC. A sign of optimism that the wounds of the past can fade into the background, and debates about the future of Colombia and necessary political steps come to the fore. At the same time, the framing processes of media houses such as *El Nuevo Siglo* should not be neglected and deserve continued attention in the future to gain a better understanding of ongoing polarizing tendencies in society.

6. Limitations

The assumptions drawn from this inductive media framing analysis must be handled with caution due to its methodological limitations. This analysis has by no means had sufficient resources to conclusively suggest reliable and generalized assumptions about the framing of the entire Colombian media landscape in the context of the 2022 presidential elections in Colombia. The decision that led to the selection of the newspapers studied was highly biased by the accessibility and availability of research resources from outside the country. Therefore, the results provide exemplary insights into different framing patterns connected to social forgiveness. Although it is impossible to make generalizations about the Colombian media system as a whole, it was a clear tendency that the major national and regional newspapers paid little attention to Petro's past during the study period. It can also be suggested that this tendency could be confirmed in other major national and regional media. The role of polarizing media outlets such as *El Nuevo Siglo* would have to be examined in more detail in a further step. A broader study would be needed to gain further insight and clarity on this issue. The findings and conclusions can serve as a reference point for a more comprehensive analysis of the Colombian media landscape and discourse around the concept of social forgiveness, especially in political campaigns.

The inductive nature of this analytical approach may further hamper future attempts to replicate the findings (Lecheler and Vreese 2019). On the other hand,

the identified frames could be used as a benchmark in further analysis and could serve to conduct a deductive media framing study. However, it must be kept in mind that the definition of the identified frames is highly subjective and depends on the researchers' assessment (Linström and Marais 2012). Therefore, there can be no guarantee that the frames and valuations identified in this analysis can be successfully used to conduct subsequent research in the same or similar context.

Conclusion

This article provides an overview of how parts of the Colombian media landscape framed Gustavo Petro during the 2022 electoral campaign in light of his past in the M-19. The media framing analysis presented here, in conjunction with an assessment of the underlying valuations, shows a double-edged picture regarding the debate on social forgiveness. On the one hand, the large number of neutral frames that do not make evaluative judgments about Petro's past may be a sign of built-in conciliation in the debate about Petro's role in Colombian politics. The predominance of neutrality in two of the studied newspapers suggests that Petro's past in the M-19 had less importance in the opinion-forming process for some Colombian newspapers than his political ideas and agenda. The clear lack of coverage of Petro's past in major newspapers such as *El Tiempo* and *El País* also confirms the minor relevance of his past in large dailies and regional newspapers. On the other hand, however, the findings from *El Nuevo Siglo* are examples of opposing viewpoints. In a newspaper that appears to be politically opposed to Petro's political vision, his past was often framed in a strongly negative way. Thus, the discourse around the current political agenda can quickly fade into the background, and an emotional debate around identity can gain the upper hand. However, this effect appeared rather marginal and only applicable to a smaller newspaper with reduced readership and a more polarizing political orientation when compared to large national and regional media outlets.

These contradictory findings show that larger national and regional newspapers reflected the ideal of social forgiveness—intentionally or not—through neutral framing or complete non-consideration. In extreme cases of political dissent, as evidenced in *El Nuevo Siglo*, the ex-combatant identity was used as an argumentative tool to delegitimize the politician's intentions. The intensity and number of negative reviews in the respective newspaper could indicate that the emotion of non-forgiveness in the election campaign was especially displayed by those who openly opposed Petro's political ideology. This could contribute to a polarization of opinions toward Gustavo Petro and the role of an ex-combatant in politics in general. To what extent this statement can be confirmed as a general

trend for the Colombian media landscape would have to be determined in a more comprehensive analysis, especially considering smaller media outlets with a rather polarizing orientation. In any case, the results of this research have provided initial insights into the role of emotional reasoning regarding social forgiveness, which may play a crucial role in the discourse surrounding politicians such as Gustavo Petro in the process of claiming political responsibility in a post-conflict society. One thing has become evident as a result of this analysis: Although a high density of supposed neutrality and the general tendency of marginal consideration of Petro's past might be a good indicator of a possible internalization and embracement of social forgiveness in the political discourse, it has become equally visible that competing political camps exploit arguments based on the emotion of non-forgiveness and try to use these as a justification to delegitimize the aspirations of a politician. Although this effect seems marginal compared to the neutral representation or non-representation of Petro's past by major national and regional newspapers in Colombia, it should not obscure the fact that these processes continue to exist. Nevertheless, it is a positive sign for the growing cohesion of Colombian society and a hopeful finding of this analysis that the major newspapers studied here did not draw attention to themselves by polarizing Petro's past. This aspiration should remain in place when reporting on political initiatives and the involvement of the former FARC in the future.

References

1. Albarracín, Juan, Laura Gamboa, and Scott Mainwaring. 2018. "Deinstitutionalization Without Collapse: Colombia's Party System." In *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutioanlization, Decay, and Collapse*, edited by Scott Mainwaring, 227–254. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2. Allan, Alfred, Maria M. Allan, Debra Kaminer, and Dan J. Stein. 2006. "Exploration of the Association Between Apology and Forgiveness Amongst Victims of Human Rights Violations." *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 24 (1): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.689

3. Baez, Sandra, Hernando Santamaría-García, and Augustín Ibáñez. 2019. "Disarming Ex-Combatants' Minds: Toward Situated Reintegration Process in Post-Conflict Colombia." *Frontiers in Psychology* 10: 1–17. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00073

4. Barreto-Galeano, María Idaly, Amalio Blano-Abarca, Éric Maurice Lair, Iván Felipe Medina-Arboleda, José-Manuel Sabucedo-Cameselle, and Sonia Zambrano-Hernández. 2021. "Rhetoric, Political Ideology and the Peace Process in Colombia: A Twitter® Analysis." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 44 (11): 920–937. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1615256

5. CDAC Network. 2022. "Colombia Media Landscape Guide: March 2022." London: CDAC Network.

6. Cehajic, Sabina, Rubert Brown, and Emanuele Castano. 2008. "Forgive and Forget? Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Forgiveness in Bosnia

and Herzegovina." *Political Psychology* 29 (3): 351–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00634.x

7. D'Angelo, Paul. 2018. "Prologue - a Typology of Frames in News Framing Analysis." In *Doing News Framing Analysis II: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, edited by Paul D'Angelo, xxiii–xl. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

8. David, Yossi. 2022. "Public Opinion, Media and Activism: The Differentiating Role of Media Use and Perceptions of Public Opinion on Political Behaviour." *Social Movement Studies* 21 (3): 334–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2021.1875321

9. Domínguez de la Ossa, Elsy Mercedes Domínguez de, and María Angélica Aleán Romero. 2020. "Narrativas para la emergencia del perdón, la reparación y la reconciliación en víctimas del conflicto armado en Colombia." *Aposta: Revista de ciencias sociales* 84: 62–78. http://apostadigital.com/revistav3/hemeroteca/maalean.pdf

10. Entman, Robert M. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." *Journal of Communications* 57 (1): 163–173. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00336.x

11. García-Perdomo, Víctor, Summer Harlow, and Danielle K. Brown. 2022. "Framing the Colombian Peace Process: Between Peace and War Journalism." *Journalism Practice.* https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2022.2062428

12. Giles, David, and Rachel L. Shaw. 2009. "The Psychology of News Influence and Development of Media Framing Analysis." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 3 (4): 375–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00180.x

13. Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience.* Boston: Northeastern University Press. With a foreword by Bennett M. Berger.

14. Janetsky, Megan. 2022. "Before He Was a Politician, Gustavo Petro Was Part of an Urban Guerrilla Group." *New York Times*, June 19, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/06/19/world/colombia-election-results

15. Kaplan, Oliver, and Enzo Nussio. 2018. "Community Counts: The Social Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Colombia." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35 (2): 132–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215614506

16. Kilroy, Walt. 2015. *Reintegration of Ex-Combatants After Conflict: Participatory Approaches in Sierra Leone and Liberia.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

17. Lecheler, Sophie, and Claes H. de Vreese. 2019. *News Framing Effects.* New York: Routledge.

18. Linström, Margaret, and Willemien Marais. 2012. "Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology." *Communitas* 17: 21–38.

19. López, Maivel Rodríguez, Eleni Andreouli, and Caroline Howarth. 2015. "From Ex-Combatants to Citizens: Connecting Everyday Citizenship and Social Reintegration in Colombia." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3 (2): 171–191. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v3i2.388

20. López López, Wilson, María Camila Murcia León, Diana Carolina Perilla Garzón, Claudia Pineda-Marín, and Etienne Mullet. 2013. "Forgiving Perpetrators of Violence: Colombian People's Positions." *Social Indicators Research* 114 (2): 287–301. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0146-1

21. López López, Wilson, Gonzalo Sandoval Alvarado, Sebastián Rodríguez, Camila Ruiz, Juan David León, Claudia Pineda-Marín, and Etienne Mullet. 2018. "Forgiving Former Perpetrators of Violence and Reintegrating Them into

Colombian Civil Society: Noncombatant Citizens' Positions." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 24 (2): 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000295

22. Lynch, Jake, and Annabel McGoldrick. 2012. "Responses to Peace Journalism." *Journalism Practice* 14 (8): 1041–1058. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912464175

23. McMullin, Jeremy R. 2013a. *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State: Challenges of Reintegration.* Rethinking Political Violence. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

24. McMullin, Jeremy R. 2013b. "Integration or Separation? The Stigmatisation of Ex-Combatants After War." *Review of International Studies* 39 (2): 385–414. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000228

25. Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Anne Schulz, Simge Andi, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. 2021. "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021." 10th ed. Digital News Report.

26. Nilsson, Desirée, and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs. 2013. "Different Paths of Reconstruction: Military Reform in Post-War Sierra Leone and Liberia." *International Peacekeeping* 20 (1): 2–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2013.761825

27. Noor, Masi, Rubert Brown, Roberto Gonzalez, Jorge Manzi, and Christopher Alan Lewis. 2008. "On Positive Psychological Outcomes: What Helps Groups with a History of Conflict to Forgive and Reconcile with Each Other?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34 (6): 819–832. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208315555

28. Orejuela, Luis Murillo, and Lina Restrepo-Plaza. 2021. "Reintegration and Forgiveness to Ex-Combatants in Colombia." *Development Studies Research* 8 (1): 36–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2021.1873158

29. Porch, Douglas, and María José Rasmussen. 2008. "Demobilization of Paramilitaries in Colombia: Transformation or Transition?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31 (6): 520–540. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100802064841

30. Posada-Carbó, Eduardo. 2017. "The Difficult Road to Peace in Colombia." *Current History* 116 (787): 74–76. https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2017.116.787.74

31. Richter, Simon, and Sebastian Stier. 2022. "Learning About the Unknown Spitzenkandidaten: The Role of Media Exposure During the 2019 European Parliament Elections." *European Union Politics* 23 (2): 309–329. https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211051171

32. Rincón-Unigarro, Camilo, Andrea Correa-Chica, Wilson López López, María Pilar Del Morales-Sierra, and Sara Rivera-Escobar. 2020. "Encuadres mediáticos del perdón y la reconciliación en el contexto del conflicto armado colombiano." *Revistas Colombiana de Psicología* 29 (1): 105–123. https://doi.org/10.15446/rcp.v29n1.81505

33. Rios Oyola, Sandra M. 2018. "Religious Emotions and Forgiveness in the Context of the Peace Process in Colombia." In *The Sociology of Compromise After Conflict*, edited by John D. Brewer, Bernadette C. Hayes, and Francis Teeney, 207–228. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

34. Rye, Mark S., and Kenneth I. Pargament. 2002. "Forgiveness and Romantic Relationships in College: Can It Heal the Wounded Heart?" *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 58 (4): 419–41. https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.1153

35. Söderström, Johanna. 2016. "The Resilient, the Remobilized and the Removed: Party Mobilization Among Former M19 Combatants." *Civil Wars* 18 (2): 214–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2016.1205565

36. Walter, Dror, and Yotam Ophir. 2019. "News Frame Analysis: An Inductive Mixed-Method Computational Approach." *Communication Methods and Measures* 13 (4): 248–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2019.1639145

37. Wells, Audrey. 2022. *The Importance of Forgiveness and the Futility of Revenge: Case Studies in Contemporary International Politics.* Cham: Springer.

38. Wimmer, Roger D., and Joseph R. Dominick. 2008. *Mass Media Research. An Introduction.* 8th ed. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth.

39. Worthington Jr., Everett L., and Dewitt T. Drinkard. 2000. "Promoting Reconciliation Through Psychoeducational and Therapeutic Interventions." *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 26 (1): 93–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2000.tb00279.x.

—•—

Constantin Treisch is pursuing an MA in International Relations at three universities in Berlin: Free University, Humboldt University, and University of Potsdam. He has a BA in Political and Social Studies and Business Management and Economics from the Julius-Maximilians-University at Würzburg. His research interest focuses mainly on the functions and impacts of international organizations as well as international humanitarian assistance. ✉ treisch.constantin@gmail.com

Annex

Annex I. List of articles analyzed

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Title
1	*El Colombiano*	24.03.2022	Navarro desmiente a Petro: "No fue miembro de la Asamblea Constituyente"
2	*El Colombiano*	28.03.2022	"Petro, cuente con nosotros", el mensaje de Rodrigo Londoño al candidato del Pacto
3	*El Colombiano*	30.03.2022	Francia Márquez rechazó cualquier vínculo con el ELN
4	*El Colombiano*	05.04.2022	Francia Márquez denuncia tercera amenaza en un mes de campaña
5	*El Colombiano*	05.04.2022	"Ya está bueno de las amenazas", Francia Márquez denuncia y rechaza su tercera intimidación en un mes de campaña
6	*El Colombiano*	09.04.2022	Así es el anillo de máxima confianza que mueve los hilos de la campaña de Gustavo Petro
7	*El Colombiano*	19.04.2022	Así fue la Alcaldía de Gustavo Petro en Bogotá
8	*El Colombiano*	03.05.2022	Gustavo Petro es una de las cinco personas más protegidas del país; ante riesgo, Gobierno reforzará su seguridad
9	*El Colombiano*	06.05.2022	¿Por qué Gustavo Petro estaba con chaleco antibalas y escudos en plaza pública?
10	*El Colombiano*	07.05.2022	El agarrón de 'Fico' y Petro en Twitter por presunta infiltración de campaña
11	*El Colombiano*	11.05.2022	"Hay más polarización en la contienda que en la guerra": José Luis Esparza
12	*El Colombiano*	18.05.2022	Fico dice que no solo lo infiltran, sino que lo espían

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Title
13	*El Colombiano*	18.05.2022	"Es el candidato del brazo armado del castrochavismo": Uribe arremete, sin mostrar pruebas, contra Petro
14	*El Colombiano*	25.05.2022	Piedad Córdoba fue retenida en Honduras cuando trataba de salir con $267 millones en efectivo
15	*El Colombiano*	25.05.2022	"No estoy retenida", asegura Piedad Córdoba tras intentar salir de Honduras con $247 millones en efectivo
16	*El Colombiano*	25.05.2022	"No estoy retenida, es dinero de una asesoría": asegura Piedad Córdoba tras intentar salir de Honduras con $267 millones en efectivo
17	*El Colombiano*	28.05.2022	Gustavo Petro: Un llanero solitario
18	*El Nuevo Siglo*	01.03.2022	¡Una semana de lágrimas!
19	*El Nuevo Siglo*	05.03.2022	Más alianzas y más agua lustral
20	*El Nuevo Siglo*	07.03.2022	Caleidoscopio
21	*El Nuevo Siglo*	11.03.2022	Pensando en Colombia
22	*El Nuevo Siglo*	13.03.2022	Pacto Histórico: Petro supera los 4 millones 400 mil votos
23	*El Nuevo Siglo*	25.03.2022	Federico, escogido para ser elegido
24	*El Nuevo Siglo*	25.03.2022	Off the record
25	*El Nuevo Siglo*	25.03.2022	¿Quiénes están detrás de cada candidato presidencial?
26	*El Nuevo Siglo*	29.03.2022	Las cartas marcadas de Petro
27	*El Nuevo Siglo*	29.03.2022	¿Por qué atraen las propuestas de Petro?
28	*El Nuevo Siglo*	31.03.2022	Caleidoscopio
29	*El Nuevo Siglo*	08.04.2022	¿Dónde está el enemigo?
30	*El Nuevo Siglo*	08.04.2022	La muerte de la geografía
31	*El Nuevo Siglo*	10.04.2022	Dios los hace…

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Title
32	*El Nuevo Siglo*	22.04.2022	El gran cambio
33	*El Nuevo Siglo*	27.04.2022	Enfrentado
34	*El Nuevo Siglo*	29.04.2022	Comentarios sobre la revolución
35	*El Nuevo Siglo*	01.05.2022	¡Exijo respeto!
36	*El Nuevo Siglo*	02.05.2022	A superar los temores
37	*El Nuevo Siglo*	06.05.2022	Comentarios sobre la revolución (II)
38	*El Nuevo Siglo*	08.05.2022	"Sus aliados nos quieren muertos": Fico por video de Zuleta
39	*El Nuevo Siglo*	09.05.2022	Iglesia pide a candidatos parar agresividad verbal
40	*El Nuevo Siglo*	16.05.2022	ELN anuncia alto al fuego por elecciones presidenciales
41	*El Nuevo Siglo*	22.05.2022	Petro y el perdón social
42	*El Nuevo Siglo*	22.05.2022	Un talante renacentista
43	*El Nuevo Siglo*	27.05.2022	Los candidatos en el cuadrilátero
44	*El Espectador*	03.03.2022	Enrique Gómez inscribe oficialmente su candidatura a la Presidencia
45	*El Espectador*	13.03.2022	Análisis: consultas interpartidistas, un filtro para las presidenciales
46	*El Espectador*	14.03.2022	Pacto Histórico, el gran ganador en la Cámara por Bogotá
47	*El Espectador*	29.03.2022	El enfrentamiento de Petro contra Noticias RCN y la FLIP
48	*El Espectador*	01.04.2022	Análisis: la política electoral, lejos de la renovación
49	*El Espectador*	07.04.2022	Presidente del Senado ratificó comentarios en contra de Francia Márquez

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Title
50	*El Espectador*	17.04.2022	Lenguaje de campaña: cuando el odio opaca las propuestas
51	*El Espectador*	24.04.2022	Campaña de Petro niega que el candidato estuviera nuevamente tomado en tarima
52	*El Espectador*	07.05.2022	Gustavo Petro y su estilo versátil: de Ferragamo a prendas típicas colombianas
53	*El Espectador*	07.05.2022	Representante Vallejo se tuvo que retractar por comentarios contra Francia Márquez
54	*El Espectador*	07.05.2022	Campaña de Federico Gutiérrez denuncia supuesta infiltración del régimen Maduro
55	*El Espectador*	13.05.2022	¿Cuáles son las "marcas personales" de los candidatos presidenciales?
56	*El Espectador*	16.05.2022	"No estoy obsesionado con ganar en primera vuelta": Gustavo Petro
57	*El Espectador*	16.05.2022	Caso Gloria Lara: no hay evidencias contra el M-19 y Gustavo Petro
58	*El Espectador*	20.05.2022	Gustavo Petro: "El arte es lo que perdura"
59	*El Espectador*	22.05.2022	Perfil de Gustavo Petro: gobernarse a sí mismo para gobernar a los demás
60	*El Espectador*	26.05.2022	"La lucha anticorrupción no es un tema solo de Rodolfo": Rodrigo Lara S

Annex II. List of translations in order of appearance

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Translation
9	*El Colombiano*	06.05.2022	"In his first security ring, the leader of the Historical Pact has UNP personnel. Former M-19 members surround him wherever he goes."
17	*El Colombiano*	28.05.2022	"Gustavo Petro: A lone ranger. [...] He arrives with an explosive mix of support from questioned political figures, a sophisticated social media campaign [...] and a menu of populist proposals that have never before been made in the country. [...] And that he is capable of fighting all the battles because he is driven by a very strong conviction: that of becoming President."
10	*El Colombiano*	07.05.2022	"Of course, we have information that the dissidents of the [FARC] and the [ELN] guerrillas are ordering people to vote for Gustavo Petro."
1	*El Colombiano*	24.03.2022	"Antonio Navarro Wolf, confirmed to *El Colombiano* that what Petro said is not true and that—officially—the Pact aspirant was not in any of the groups that were formed to renew the Colombian political charter after the demobilization of the M-19. [...] Thirty-one years have passed since the Constituent Assembly was held—on which Petro seeks to ride by distorting a historical reality—so that in the collective memory, and especially in that of the new generations, the memory of those who led and participated in it may be blurred."
21	*El Nuevo Siglo*	11.03.2022	"His curriculum vitae alone should be enough to convince us that a former guerrilla of his caliber cannot become our political guide."

No. of reference	Newspaper	Date of publication	Translation
31	*El Nuevo Siglo*	10.04.2022	"Their leader, Gustavo Petro, [...] a former M-19 commander who 'never' fired a gun, but you don't need to fire a gun to be a murderer, or set off bombs to be a terrorist, or kidnap to be a kidnapper, when you are a 'commander' of a group of murderers, terrorists, and kidnappers."
18	*El Nuevo Siglo*	01.03.2022	"The candidate Gustavo Petro seems to be forged in the 'image and likeness' of the Russian despot; they are just as lying, cunning and calculating. Both come from positions where torture and death were their daily bread, the one, as head of the brutal Soviet KGB, today the Russian FSB, the other, as a guerrilla of the M-19."
30	*El Nuevo Siglo*	08.04.2022	"First, he was a terrorist and then a guerrilla fighter. He got right into active politics and for him all forms of struggle are viable and feasible. [...] If he were to win, Colombia would never be the same again and our democracy would be at serious risk."
36	*El Nuevo Siglo*	02.05.2022	"Overcoming fears."
41	*El Nuevo Siglo*	22.05.2022	"Petro and social forgiveness" "And in this order of ideas we can affirm that the majority of Colombian society has granted this social pardon to people like the presidential candidate Gustavo Petro. And Petro, both for his experiences as a guerrilla fighter and for the social forgiveness he has been receiving, is the most suitable person to lead society towards better coexistence."
60	*El Espectador*	26.05.2022	"Yes, so let's say that Gustavo Petro is a guerrilla today because he was a guerrilla 30 years ago. Is that fair? I don't think so. Let's look ahead: how we are, how we have behaved, how we have governed, because if not, let's drag all the ballast with us. [...] Let's look at the moment that each one of us is playing, or else let's say that we are facing a guerrilla, because he was one."