

Perspectives of Corruption and Economic Action in the Ecuadorian Digital Press during Authoritarian Neoliberalism (2017-2019)

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Abstract

This research characterises the role of the frames of political scandals of corruption and economic action, present in the news of the newspapers *El Comercio* and *El Telégrafo* during the first two years of Lenin Moreno's government (2017-2019) in Ecuador. Three theoretical currents are addressed: political scandal as a product of media visibility transformations (Thompson, 2001) and as a contest between the powerful (Narváez, 2004); framing as a message framing phenomenon (Entman, 1993); and authoritarian neoliberalism as the use of state apparatus to promote neoliberal reforms

through authoritarian mechanisms (Bruff & Tensel, 2019). In the quantitative methodology, we opted for content analysis, which involves the analysis of a corpus of 1449 units of analysis (687 news items on corruption and 762 on economic measures). The main finding is that the media frames allowed for the justification of a strong intervention and mobilisation of the state apparatus on a legal and judicial basis, bursting into spaces of citizen participation and political opposition to the neoliberalisation of the state.

Keywords: political scandal, political corruption, framing, authoritarian neo-liberalism, print media

Perspectivas de Corrupción y Acción Económica en la Prensa Digital Ecuatoriana durante el Neoliberalismo Autoritario (2017-2019)

Resumen

La presente investigación caracteriza el papel de los *frames* de los escándalos políticos de corrupción y de acción económica, presentes en las noticias de los diarios *El Comercio* y *El Telégrafo* durante los dos primeros años del gobierno de Lenin Moreno (2017-2019) en Ecuador. Se abordan tres corrientes teóricas: el escándalo político como producto de las transformaciones de visibilidad mediática (Thompson, 2001) y como una contienda entre poderosos (Narváez, 2004); el *framing* como un fenómeno de encuadre de un mensaje (Entman, 1993); y el neoliberalismo autoritario como el uso del

aparataje estatal, para promover reformas neoliberales a través de mecanismos autoritarios (Bruff y Tensel, 2019). En la metodología, cuantitativa, se opta por el análisis de contenido, que implica el análisis de un corpus de 1449 unidades de análisis, (687 noticias de corrupción y 762 de medidas económicas). Como principal hallazgo, destaca que los encuadres mediáticos permitieron justificar una fuerte intervención y movilización de los aparatos estatales sobre la base legal y judicial, irrumpiendo espacios de participación y de oposición política ciudadana frente a la neoliberalización del Estado.

Palabras clave: escándalo político, corrupción política, *framing*, neoliberalismo autoritario, prensa gráfica

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Perspectivas de Corrupção e Ação Econômica na imprensa digital equatoriana durante o neoliberalismo autoritário (2017-2019)

Resumo

Esta investigação caracteriza o papel dos enquadramentos promover reformas neoliberais através de mecanismos autôscandalos políticos de corrupção e de ação econômica, toritários (Bruff e Tensel, 2019). Na metodologia quantitativa, presentes nas notícias dos jornais El Comercio e El Telégrafo, optamos pela análise de conteúdo, que envolve a análise durante os dois primeiros anos do governo de Lenin Moreno de um corpus de 1449 unidades de análise (687 notícias sobre (2017-2019) no Equador. São abordadas três correntes teóricas: corrupção e 762 sobre medidas econômicas). A principal hipótese: o escândalo político como produto das transformações da constatação é que os enquadramentos midiáticos permitiram visibilidade midiática (Thompson 2001) e como disputa entre justificar uma forte intervenção e mobilização do aparelho de poderosos (Narváez 2004); o enquadramento como fenômeno Estado com base legal e judicial, irrompendo em espaços de de enquadramento da mensagem (Entman, 1993); e o neoliberalismo participação cidadã e de oposição política à neoliberalização autoritário como o uso do aparelho de Estado para do Estado.

Palavras-chave: escândalo político, corrupção política, enquadramento, neoliberalismo autoritário, imprensa escrita

1. Introduction

This research delves into the specific case of Ecuador during a period of significant political and economic transformation. During this time, President Lenin Moreno distanced himself politically and ideologically from his predecessor, Rafael Correa. This divergence was especially evident in Moreno's adoption of a neoliberal political agenda and his efforts to align with the country's major economic, business, and financial stakeholders.

As a result, these influential groups began to wield considerable influence over economic decision-making within the country. This period is characterized by a notable fusion of political and economic power in the management of the state. Consequently, Lenin Moreno's leadership marked a significant shift towards neoconservatism and neoliberalism, which, in turn, had consequences for political rights and social welfare for the majority of the population (Bizberge & Goldstein, 2014). During this era, the priorities of private economic actors were given precedence, further emphasizing the transformation in Ecuador's political landscape.

Hence, this study is centered on analyzing how media frames were constructed around political corruption scandals and the economic policies of the Ecuadorian government during the initial two years of Lenin Moreno's administration (2017-2019). This investigation provides valuable insights into the media's portrayal of events, shedding light on the narrative landscape in which the establishment of an authoritarian neoliberal political agenda unfolds.

This research focuses on examining the Ecuadorian print media as a subject of investigation due to its significant influence on public discourse. Media outlets construct specific frames around political and social events, as highlighted by Entman (1993). These frames can be utilized by political institutions to create polarizing narratives, often targeting their adversaries, as suggested by Thompson (2001).

In this regard, our study aligns with the theoretical framework of authoritarian neoliberalism. This theoretical approach allows us to analyze the interpretations and perspectives advanced by the print media regarding political corruption scandals and government economic policies. These media representations serve the dual purpose of marginalizing and controlling both political participation and state economic management, as elaborated by Bruff & Tensel (2019).

The significance of this research lies in its capacity to shed light on the broader Latin American political landscape, particularly concerning the emergence of authoritarian tendencies within political systems. Moreover, it underscores the pivotal role played by the press in the neoliberalization of the

state. Within this context, our study scrutinizes how political corruption scandals and the government's economic actions are depicted, revealing the underlying power dynamics at play, specifically within structural power relations, as outlined by Narváez (2004).

In the different research on this topic, we find a recurrent component of authoritarian neoliberalism, which underlies control apparatuses to marginalize and condemn opposing political actors and sectors. In recent years, this instrument of control has been expressed in political judicialization, in order to contain and isolate social groups that question the economic measures adopted (Borjórquez 2024). Similarly, the exploitation of the legal scaffolding of the State to promote neoliberalization in the name of fiscal disciplining.

Vollenweider and Romano (2017) present case studies on state authoritarianism against political actors in Argentina against Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (the K money route) and in Brazil against Dilma Rousseff and Lula Da Silva (Lava Jato). In both cases, the press played a political role in the construction of a narrative of moral panic related to corruption. Authoritarian neoliberalism expressed in the use of the judicial apparatus, to condemn the election of political projects that promote the welfare state. This use underlies the triad composed of: the judiciary, made up of judges and prosecutors; the legislative branch - which played an important role in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the sentencing of Lula Da Silva -; and the media, who construct interpretative frameworks around corruption.

At that time, this comparative study adopts an exploratory approach, primarily because there is a limited body of research that intertwines the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism with the media's coverage. It aims to delineate the exercise of authoritarian neoliberalism by analyzing the construction of specific narratives surrounding corruption and economic decisions, as well as the connections between these narratives in the context of implementing an authoritarian neoliberal transformation of the State. In essence, this study delves into the role played by print media within an authoritarian political system, particularly its contribution to the adoption of economically unpopular policies.

This research is situated within a contemporary political context characterized by the rise of far-right governments and political figures. These entities advocate for uniform reforms geared towards privatization and the dissolution of the State, as exemplified by figures like Milei in Argentina and Bolsonaro in Brazil. They incorporate authoritarian elements by leveraging the structures of the State, including the legislative and judicial branches, to enact radical measures that impact both political participation and the management of the State's economy, as articulated by Bruff (2014).

In this regard, it becomes evident that authoritarian narratives are on the rise, particularly within Latin American political systems. This trend is marked by the growing utilization of a punitive state apparatus, where the focus is placed on law and order, often strategically wielded to target critics of neoliberalism (Bruff & Tensel, 2019). These narratives are channeled through the media, which function as ethical entities in shaping the discourse surrounding responsible economic governance within the States.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1. Political scandal and the media

When it comes to mediation, the media has played a pivotal role in shaping our social reality by presenting facts and events from our everyday lives through information products. Thompson (2001) characterizes this process as mediated quasi-interaction, highlighting that the public's comprehension of reality is constrained by geographical and temporal limitations. As a result, individuals cannot fully grasp the entirety of reality due to these constraints. Thompson (2001) identifies this limitation as par-

ticularly significant in the context of political scandals. The development of political scandals is intricately linked to the transformation of media visibility and its technological capabilities, which enable information to spread widely and rapidly, transcending the boundaries of time and place.

In this context, according to Thompson (2001), a scandal takes on political dimensions when it emerges as a direct consequence of media visibility. In his words, “media scandals aren’t merely scandals that the media merely report on, independent of the media themselves; they are instead incited, in various ways and to a certain extent, by the mechanisms of media communication” (54). In essence, political scandals are intricately tied to their coverage in the media, relying heavily on media publicity. This interdependence between political scandals and media visibility is further underscored by the technological transformation of media visibility, as explained by Thompson (1998). This transformation has empowered the media to actively shape the visibility of political affairs, making them inherently mediatic.

Additionally, Thompson (2001) elaborates on how authoritarian governments can strategically exploit political scandals to target their political and ideological adversaries. As he notes, “scandal can be wielded as a weapon to discredit rivals or to politically isolate opponents” (137). Consequently, analyzing political scandals necessitates an examination not only of their portrayal in the media but also an exploration of the motivations behind seeking media attention within the broader context of power structures.

2.1.1 Scandal in the power struggle

According to Thompson (2001), actions in political life are categorized as political scandals only when they fulfill the criteria of media visibility. This perspective arises from Thompson’s recognition of the profound technological and social changes within the media landscape, which have given rise to pervasive media presence, shaping the foundations of contemporary democracies. However, Narváez (2004) offers a critical perspective on this notion. He challenges the idea of regarding political scandals solely as outcomes of media visibility, divorced from the underlying structural power dynamics. Narváez contends that this viewpoint portrays the media as passive actors, failing to acknowledge their intricate relationship with the social and power structures. He argues that such a perspective tends to depict the media as isolated agents in the struggle of interests, positioned above conflicts and, consequently, above power relations (216).

By contextualizing political scandals within the broader landscape of power dynamics, media visibility takes on a more active significance. It enables us to delve into the reasons why these scandals garner attention in the media. As argued by Narváez (2004), “the expansion of media visibility to new social sectors isn’t solely due to the emergence of new media; it primarily results from the emergence of new social sectors endowed with a certain degree of power that renders them significant within the public sphere” (217). In this context, media visibility is not merely an inherent trait of political scandals; it also represents the emergence of novel social sectors, vested with influence, economic resources, and the means to attain visibility and propagate their messages.

On the other hand, by considering the informative coverage of political scandals and government economic decisions within a correlation of forces of particular interests of various actors. In this sense, Waisbord (2013) argues that much of Latin American political journalism serves as “a platform for economic and political elites, rather than a horizontal mechanism for citizen expression and participation” (116).

Regarding communication studies and Latin American political culture, Waisbord (2013) mentions that when presenting closed governmental communication systems, as in the case of Argentina, the me-

dia are subordinated to the role of replicators of the governmental political discourse, given that in the choice of official sources, especially governmental, journalists follow the official agenda, leaving aside the investigative initiative of the journalist.

It is in this way that in political journalism through the choice of certain sources traces the discursive and ideological route of the news, therefore from a “Marxist current, the journalist and media are agents of legitimization of the dominant powers and functional to corporate interests” (Waisbord, 2013, 97).

In this context, it is important to recognize that political scandals do not become visible solely through an assumed democratic power of society channeled by the media. Instead, as outlined by Narváez (2004), their visibility hinges on specific conditions and resources possessed by influential groups. He aptly notes that “scandals emerge when there are individuals or entities with a degree of power, access to information, and the capacity to disseminate information—essentially, a certain level of visibility—who are motivated to orchestrate the scandal with the aim of weakening the affected party’s authority” (218).

2.2. The media framing

In the realm of media communication studies, framing theory stands out as a valuable theoretical tool. It serves as a means to characterize the analysis of how media constructs frames around the social realities they portray. Tankard (1991) defines framing as “the guiding concept behind news content, an idea that provides context and communicates the essence of the subject by selecting, emphasizing, excluding, and elaborating on specific aspects” (5). Reese (2001) offers a broader definition that encompasses the cultural dimension of frames, noting that they are “collectively held organizing principles that endure over time, functioning symbolically to give structure and meaning to the social landscape” (11).

Conversely, Entman’s (1993) definition holds particular significance within the realm of mass communication studies. It allows us to scrutinize media messages as a process that accentuates and arranges the various components within an informative text. This process is typified by its capacity to:

Select some aspects of the perceived reality and make them more relevant in a communicative text, so as to promote a certain definition of the problem, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation and/or a treatment recommendation for the described issue (52).

In the context of this current research, Entman’s (1993) theoretical framework is employed as it offers a robust foundation for the examination of how political corruption scandals and government economic actions are portrayed in the media. This framework facilitates the diagnosis of issues, attribution of responsibility, and the proposition of potential solutions. It does so by highlighting the concept of “frames,” which involve the repetitive and reinforcing use of words or images to emphasize specific ideas while downplaying others and rendering certain ideas entirely invisible (Entman, 1991, 7).

2.3. Authoritarian Neoliberalism

This theoretical perspective is relatively recent, originating in response to the financial crisis of 2008. During this period, traditional neoliberalism underwent a significant transformation, adopting authoritarian practices aimed at both regulating the political landscape and overseeing the economic affairs of citizens and the state. In essence, it represents an economic-political process characterized by

the utilization of the state's institutional framework to suppress democratic citizen participation, all with the objective of steering anti-popular economic reforms that favor the free market. As Bruff & Tensel (2019) contend, authoritarian neoliberalism "spotlights the way contemporary capitalism is governed, emphasizing its tendency to reinforce and depend on practices designed to marginalize, discipline, and control dissenting social groups and oppositional political movements" (234).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, this theoretical framework proves invaluable as it enables us to dissect the contours of a fresh phase of neoliberalism. This phase retains the hallmark elements of the free market but introduces certain authoritarian practices tailored to the current stage of capitalist development. To this end, Bruff & Tensel (2019) delineate two scenarios in which authoritarian neoliberalism comes into play: **a)** within an 'economic crisis' narrative, and **b)** using state apparatuses.

The crisis, serving as the primary narrative underpinning the adoption of authoritarian neoliberalism, proves effective in imbuing economic governance with moralistic overtones. It helps to promulgate narratives emphasizing greater fiscal responsibility and economic rectitude in the face of public spending. This narrative often relies on "constitutional and legal changes in the name of 'economic necessity'... as well as the reconceptualization of the State as progressively less democratic, as it becomes subordinated to the constitutional and legal tenets deemed indispensable for achieving prosperity" (Bruff, 2014, 115-116). Consequently, the crisis narrative functions as a catalyst for authoritarian governments, enabling them to present unpopular economic measures as indispensable for responsible state management. In this context, economic policies are often framed as negotiations in the name of the "national interest," growth, and prosperity (117).

In this sense, authoritarian neoliberalism is characterized by the use of the State structure through changes in economic legislation, pointing out as justification the investment of private capital in the generation of economic prosperity. For which, authoritarian State institutions are adapted to the interests of financial and business corporations to the detriment of the common good of citizens (Borsuk et al., 2021).

This perspective advocates for a more substantial curtailment of the State's involvement in social programs, often characterizing them as "public spending." As articulated by Bruff (2014), it also places greater ethical responsibility on individuals. Regarding the role of States, their perceived inability to regulate effectively is seen as leading to the "immoralization of finances and, consequently, their own budget deficit" (121). According to the tenets of authoritarian neoliberalism, crises are attributed to what is viewed as irresponsible overspending by both governments and citizens, primarily driven by their prioritization of public expenditure.

Neoliberalism takes on an authoritarian character when it necessitates the instrumentalization of the state apparatus, encompassing the legal, administrative, and judicial structures, primarily to steer neoliberal policies and, more importantly, to quell oppositional politics. This leads to a discernible "trend towards prioritizing constitutional and legal mechanisms over democratic debate and participation... involving the mobilization of state machinery to suppress dissenting social forces" (234).

As a result, neoliberalism employs authoritarian tactics with the objective of marginalizing dissenting viewpoints or social transformations that do not align with the interests of a neoliberal political agenda. Piehwe and Dodge (2019) contend that authoritarian governments with neoliberal inclinations exert significant state control to enforce participatory restrictions, often through a selective enforcement of law and order. This results in citizens who deviate from the prescribed path facing limitations on their legal and political rights, in addition to diminished social rights (1).

Hence, the neoliberal authoritarian model underlies a process that undermines democratic participation, repressing citizen participation through the State apparatus. For such reason, for Bruff (2014), "the forms in the authoritarian tendencies of neoliberalism, present an increasingly punitive nature of

politics, in the criminalization of politics (...) towards constitutional and legal mechanisms to seek the consent of hegemonic projects” (116). Consequently, this political current increasingly presents a moral and punitive nature towards opposition groups.

It is in this way that the components of authoritarian neoliberalism resort to the use of the different institutions of the State for the consent of hegemonic economic projects:

are marked by a significant escalation in the state’s propensity to employ coercion and legal/extra-legal intimidation, which is complemented by ‘intensified state control over every sphere of social life ... (and) draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called “formal” liberties (Poulantzas, 2014, 203–204).

Consequently, for the present research, this theoretical proposal allows us to reflect on how the graphic press contributed discursively, through the construction of media frames around political corruption scandals and the government’s economic action, to the use of the State structure as an authoritarian mechanism. These tendencies are articulated through legal and judicial narratives that seek to discipline political and social sectors, but, above all, to moralize the economic management of the State, making the choice of public spending on social programs irresponsible.

3. Methodological proposal

This study poses the research question “What role did the frames of the political corruption scandals and the frames of the government’s economic action constructed in the news published in the newspapers El Comercio and El Telégrafo play in the installation of authoritarian neoliberalism in the first two years of Lenín Moreno’s government? “In this sense, the main objective is “to characterize the role played by the frames of the political corruption scandals and the frames of the government’s economic action constructed in the news published in the newspapers El Comercio and El Telégrafo in the installation of a neoliberal project in the first two years of Lenín Moreno’s government”.

The focus of this study centers on the analysis of news articles published in the newspapers El Comercio and El Telégrafo. Specifically, we examine the coverage related to political corruption scandals and observe the media’s portrayal of neoliberal measures. Our investigation extends to news stories concerning the economic policy adjustments implemented by the government of Lenín Moreno during its initial two years in office, spanning from May 24, 2017, to October 3, 2019.

The selected cases for this study were chosen because they held a prominent position on the agendas of the analyzed newspapers and received sustained coverage over an extended period. Regarding political corruption scandals, the selected cases encompassed: 1) The Odebrecht-Jorge Glas case; 2) The Petrochina case; 3) Corruption within state-owned companies; and 4) The Green Rice case involving bribery. To assess economic actions, the focus was on the following topics: 1) The Law for Economic Reactivation; 2) The Law for Productive Promotion, Investment Attraction, and Employment Generation; and 3) Negotiations with multilateral financial organizations, such as the IMF, WB, and IDB. Consequently, the corpus comprises 1449 news articles.

In the context of this research, we operationalize Entman’s (1993) framing definition. To achieve this, we adopt an operational framework that has been utilized in previous studies (Matthes and Kohring, 2008; David, 2011; Koziner, 2015; Aruguete and Koziner, 2017). This framework enables us to translate Entman’s (1993) framing concept into quantifiable variables and indicators, facilitating the identification and tracking of frames within the news articles. This approach ensures a methodical and systematic coding process based on frame elements, as opposed to a subjective and disorganized coding procedure lacking clarity (Matthes and Kohring, 2008).

Problem definition: For Matthes & Kohring (2008) and David (2011), the definition of the problem refers to components such as: **a)** Central theme, the overall idea of the text; **b)** Topics, the most relevant issue reported within the news text; **c)** Sources, actors providing information; and **d)** News actors.

Causal interpretation: Seeks to investigate the actors or factors to which responsibility is attributed, i.e. what caused the problem.

Moral evaluation: when moral judgments and values are made about the problem.

Solution proposal: suggests some kind of treatment for the described problem.

3.1 Method

Therefore, for this work, a quantitative methodology was chosen, such as content analysis, a method that establishes measurements around numerical frequencies, as well as the correlation between different variables, in order to obtain representative results and greater descriptive depth (Cea 2001). Likewise, this method is adapted to the stated objectives, given that it is “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Bardin 2002, 13). In other words, this methodological instrument allows us to break down and classify the different elements contained in communicative texts (Marradi 2008).

As a global strategy for the content analysis, 2 codebooks were made: one on the political corruption scandals, and the other in relation to the government’s economic measures. Both share a similarity in terms of formal variables (the formal parts of the news), while they differ in the critical variables. It should be noted that the critical variables are the product of: a) a theoretical approach, so that theoretical statements were used to adapt them to categories as coding schemes and, b) an a priori approach was made to the units of analysis.

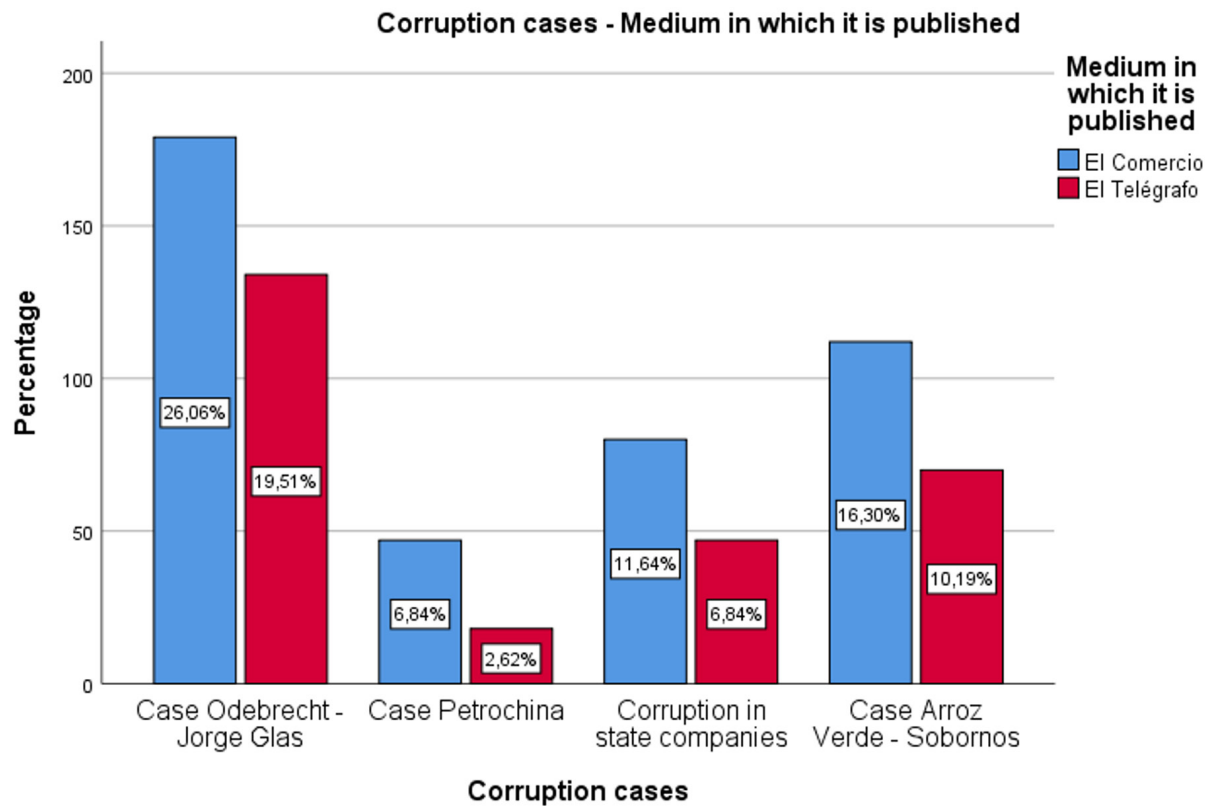
On the other hand, for the correlation between variables, Pearson’s Chi-square of “,000” was used in order to obtain strong correlations and high significance between the different variables. Thus, in the present study, residues were checked for statistical significance, in ranges of: 1.96 or -1.96 = 95% and 2.58 or -2.58=99%, in order to obtain stronger correlation threads.

In order to characterize the frames of political corruption scandals and economic measures, we proceeded to perform cluster analysis, since this allows us to group significantly representative values as homogeneously as possible. In this sense, it allows “managing different mixed fields and large data sets efficiently (...) There are no right or wrong answers for these models” (IBM 2012). All this was done in the IBM SPSS Statistics program.

4. Analysis of the results

This section interprets the results obtained regarding the frames of the political corruption scandals and the frames of the government’s economic action constructed in the informative treatment of the Ecuadorian print media. For this purpose, we analyze the topics, protagonists and sources to which we mainly resorted. In such a way that they allow us to answer the research question.

4.1. Political Corruption Scandals

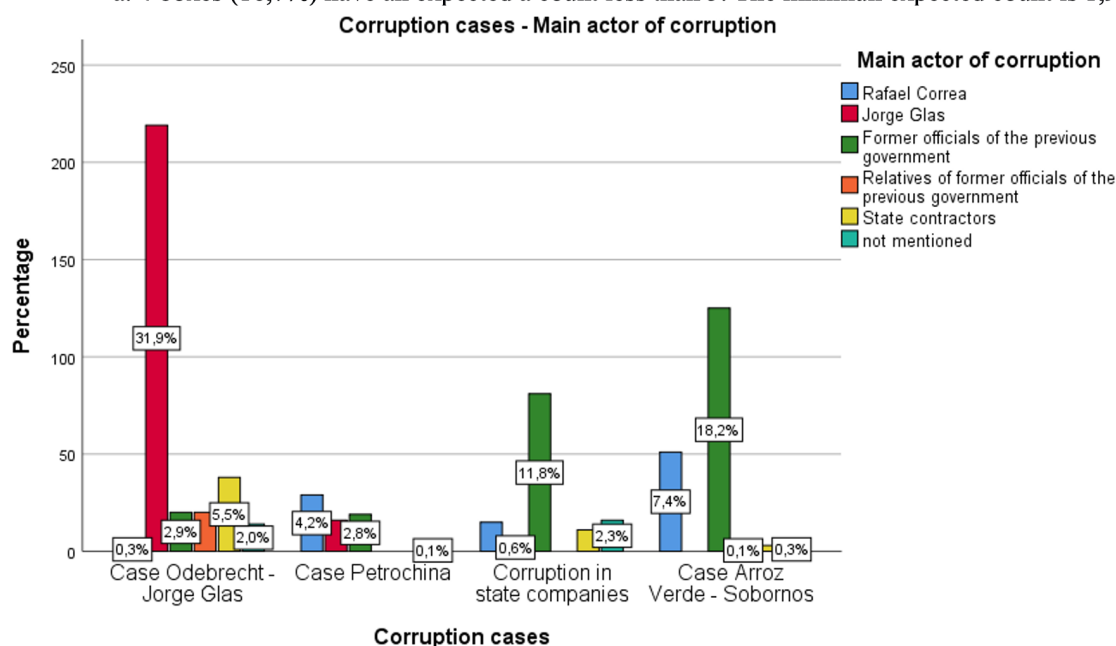


Graph 1.- Corruption cases – medium in which it is published
Source: Author's own compilation

In this frequency (graph 1), we can observe that for the private press (El Comercio) as well as for the public press (El Telégrafo), the political corruption scandal called “Odebrecht - Jorge Glas” had great relevance within their agendas. This case was the most highlighted by both media, this may be due to the media commotion of a vice-president being involved in corruption cases, but, in addition, the Green Rice Case - Bribes (name assigned by the media), follows it. According to these data, we can observe that the press gives greater coverage to cases in which corruption can be personalized; on the one hand, the *Odebrecht* case associating it with Jorge Glas, as well as Arroz Verde with the political party *Alianza País* of the so-called political project *Revolución Ciudadana*. Therefore, “scandal can be a weapon to discredit rivals or to ostracize opponents, the enemies of the people” (137).

Chi- square test			
	Value	df	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-squared	547,342 ^a	15	,000
Likelihood ratio	652,830	15	,000
Linear by linear association	,232	1	,630
N of valid cases	687		

a. 4 boxes (16,7%) have an expected a count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,99.



Graph 2.- Corruption cases – Main actor of corruption
Source: Author's own compilation

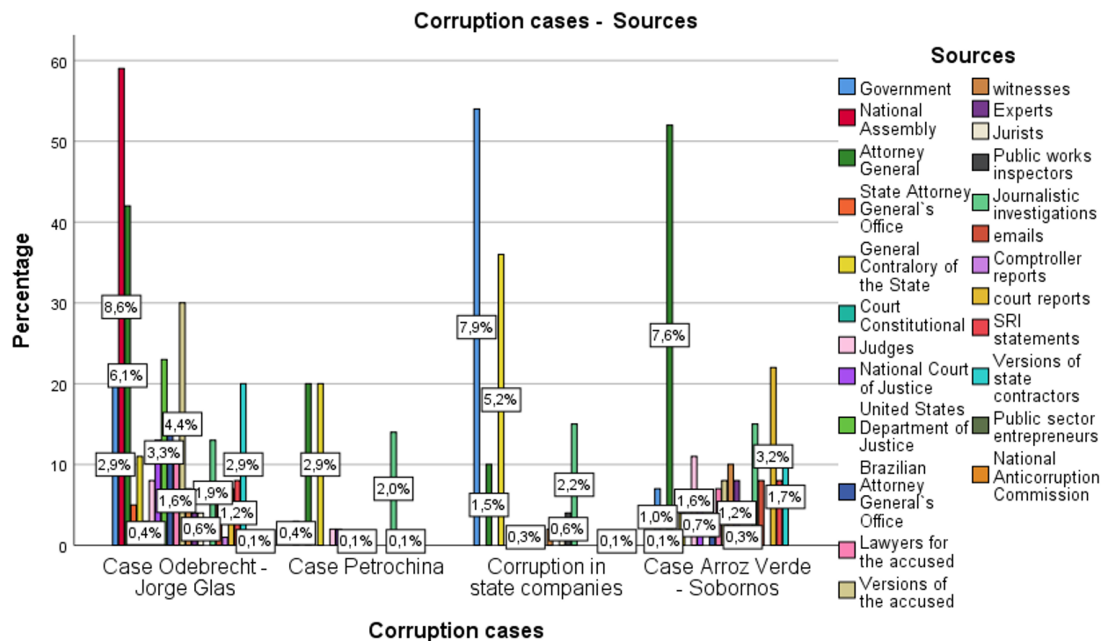
On the other hand, we found a strong correlation between corruption cases and the main actor of corruption (graph 2). In this sense, we observe that in the *Odebrecht-Jorge Glas* case, Jorge Glas is the main actor responsible for corruption (31.9%), while only 5.5% of those responsible are state contractors. In the *Petrochina* case, Rafael Correa (4.2%) and former officials of the previous government (2.8%) are held responsible, while there is no news about the responsibility of state contractors in this case. Likewise, according to these data, it can be observed that former officials of the previous government are mostly held responsible in corruption cases: State-owned enterprises (11.8%) and *Arroz Verde-Sobornos* (18.2%), followed by Rafael Correa.

Therefore, it is possible to identify a certain tendency of the press to place as responsible for corruption, exclusively, former officials of the correísmo as well as its main representatives: Rafael Correa and Jorge Glas. In this sense, there is a tendency to personalize corruption in political actors, while some responsibility of business capital is omitted or obscured.

Chi- square test

	Value	df	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-squared	519,139 ^a	69	,000
Likelihood ratio	529,589	69	,000
Linear by linear association	4,810	1	,028
N of valid cases	687		

a. 53 boxes (55,2 have a expected a count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,19.



Graph 3.- Corruption cases – Sources

Source: Author's own compilation

Similarly, there is a strong correlation between corruption cases and sources (graph 3). In the Odebrecht - Jorge Glas case, it can be observed that the predominant source is the National Assembly (8.6%) and the Attorney General's Office (6.1%). In the case of corruption in State-Owned Enterprises, the predominant sources are the Government (7.9%) and the Comptroller General's Office (5.2%). Regarding the Arroz Verde - Bribes case, the sources are the Attorney General's Office (7.6%) and judicial reports (3.2%). According to these data, we can evidence that, in the informative treatment of political corruption scandals, the print media mobilized the legal and judicial discourse, through the voices of state officials, promoting a strong state intervention (legislative and judicial resources) in the name of law and order (Bruff, 2014).

4.1.1 Analysis of Frames in Political Corruption Scandals

Because of the analysis of clusters, we obtained two predominant frames of political corruption scandals in the two years analyzed. The first frame is made up of 315 cases, i.e. 45.9% of the universe. This frame has as its main subject the Odebrecht-Jorge Glas case. As for the second frame, it groups 188 cases, or 27.4% of the universe, which refers to the Corruption in State-Owned Enterprises case.

Frame: Odebrecht - Jorge Glas Case

This framing places “Criminal Trial” (26.3%) and “Political Trial” (22.5%) as the main topics. According to these data, it is evident that this framing is constructed from meanings of criminal matters, but also from political implications. It is in this way that sources such as the Attorney General’s Office (22.5%) and the National Assembly (18.7%) are resorted to. A significant fact is the personalization of corruption exclusively on Jorge Glas, given that the case involves irregular contracts with Odebrecht, but the graphic press frames Glas as the main responsible, with 70.7%, while Odebrecht, with 11.7%.

On the other hand, this frame does not mention (42.5%) causes or motives that produced corruption, but when it does, it is established as a product of the “search for private benefits” (24.1%). From these data we can see that the press omits to name structural causes that produced corruption, and when it does, it resorts to situating it as an individual motivation of the private sphere, so that “the frames work to give more relevance to certain ideas in the texts, less to others and make others completely invisible” (Entman 1991, 7).

On the other hand, for this frame, the valuation of corruption was structured according to meanings that hold the public administration responsible, by establishing meanings related to “abuse of the public function” (25%) and “public immorality” (24.1%). According to these data, it can be observed that the graphic press evaluates the public as prone to and generator of corruption, while corporate responsibility is omitted.

In this context, the proposed solutions set forth by the Ecuadorian print media are more punitive than preventive, given that they demand “criminal actions for the corrupt” (24.1%), as well as “removing political rights from those accused of corruption” (20%). According to these data, we can identify that the press demanded criminal punishments, but also political punishments. The latter is evidence that in the informative treatment of political corruption scandals, the intervention of the judicial and legislative apparatus was demanded, in order to establish a punitive scenario of politics, in the name of a media narrative of law and order (Bruff 2014). Hence, the sources have been institutional, such as the Attorney General’s Office and the National Assembly.

Frame: Corruption in State-Owned Enterprises

As evidenced by the data, it is observed that the press has a certain tendency to define this problem as a mismanagement of public funds, since it is associated with postulates that allude to “overpricing in State contracts” (42.2%) and “embezzlement” (38.8%). In this frame, the press cites sources that have to do with institutions administered by Moreno’s government, these being “Government” (29%), “Comptroller General of the State” (29%), but, in addition, the press resorts to citing as a source: “Journalistic investigations” (17.2%).

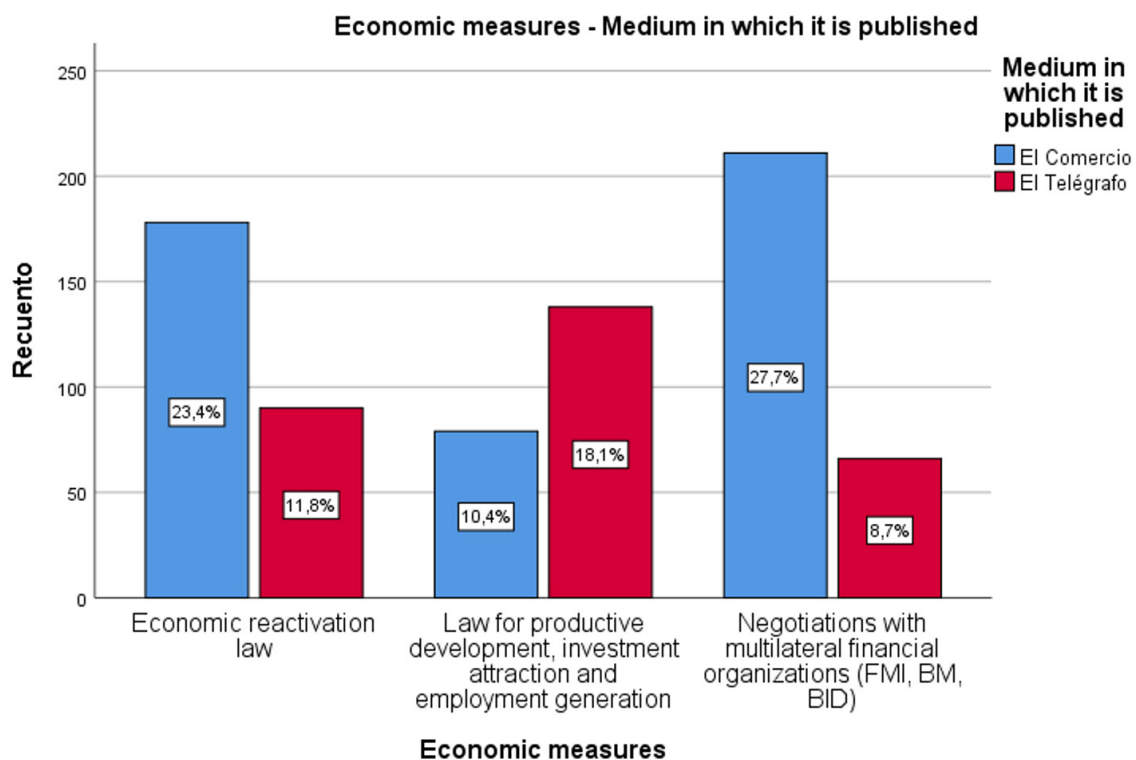
On the other hand, in this framework, “former officials of the previous government” (57.7%) and “Rafael Correa” (22.8%) are placed as the main actors of corruption. Therefore, it is evident that the press shows a certain tendency to hold exclusively responsible the administration of the political project of the Citizen Revolution and, above all, its maximum representative. Consequently, we can observe that political corruption is attributed to Correism, “discontent is mobilized around a call of rejection towards modes of government that obey the culture of welfare dependency and the overburdened State” (Bruff, 2014, 117).

As for the causes that produced corruption, it can be observed that public works are negativized, since the press established as main causes “State investments not technically justified” (29.7%) and

“Contracts not audited” (23.9%) and “Inefficiency in the management of public spending” (19.1%). This shows that the press established public investment as a cause of corruption, translated in neoliberal terms as “inefficient” and “poor management for fiscal balance” (Friedman, 1995).

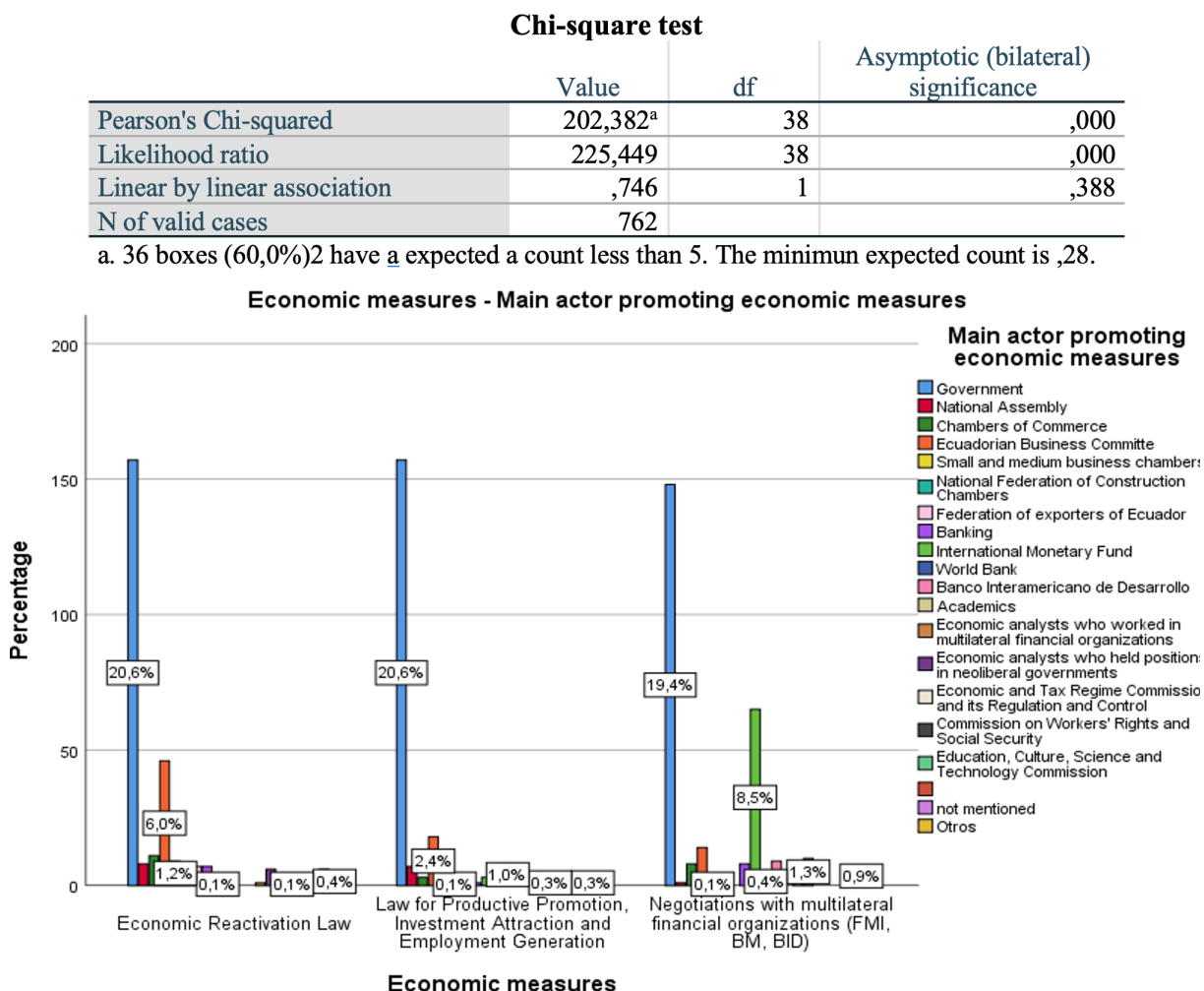
On the other hand, the evaluations of this framework are constructed by associating it with a political project that did not plan resources, given that the main evaluations were “economic damage to the State” (38.8%) and “State resources were subjected to political ideals” (36.7%).

4.2. Government Economic Measures



Graph 4. Economic measures topic – medium in which it is published.
Source: Author's own compilation

According to these data, it is observed that El Comercio, with 27.7%, highlights in its coverage the topic “Negotiations with multilateral financial organizations (IMF, WB, IDB)”, while in the agenda of El Telégrafo newspaper the topic “Law of Productive Promotion, Attraction of Investments and Generation of Employment” was the most relevant topic, with 18.1%, within its news coverage. From these data, we can see that, for El Comercio, the meetings and agreements of the government with multilateral organizations are relevant, being, for this private newspaper, the most significant topic of the economic action of Moreno’s government in the two years analyzed. On the other hand, for the public newspaper El Telégrafo, it is observed that it highlights more in its coverage the economic laws proposed by the government, which could be due to an advertising line of the government’s discourse.



Graph 5. Economic measures – main actor that promotes the measures
Source: Author's own compilation

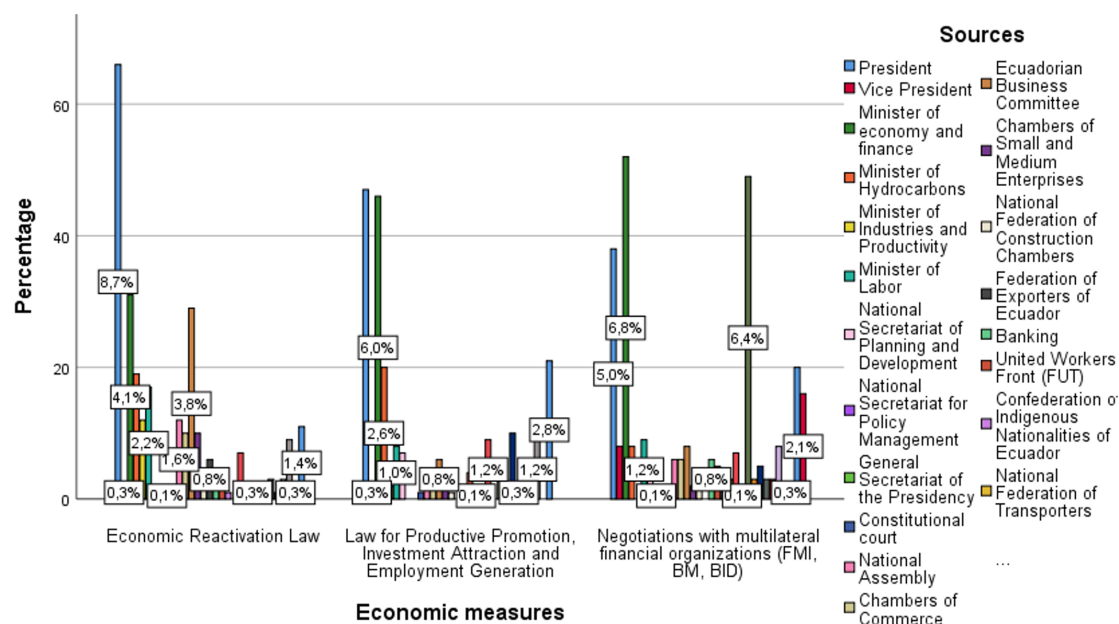
On the other hand, because of crossing variables, we found a strong correlation between the topic of economic measures and the main actor promoting their adoption (graph 5). It is significant to find that the government of Lenín Moreno is the greatest promoter and sponsor of the adoption of structural reforms in economic matters, within the informative coverage of the Ecuadorian print media. In the Law of Economic Reactivation (20.6%), Law of Productive Promotion, Attraction of Investments and Employment Generation (20.6%) and Negotiations with Multilateral Financial Organizations (19.4%), it is the main actor in support of these reforms. According to these data, we can see that the economic path of the executive responds to the neoliberalization of the State. Likewise, other actors that stand out in promoting these reforms are the Ecuadorian Business Committee, as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (8.5%), which supports the negotiations with the Moreno government.

Then, these data show, a coalition between the political power and the economic business and financial power of the country, in the economic direction with neoliberal policies, through anti-popular economic reforms promoted as prosperous and necessary for the development of the country (Bruff & Tensel, 2019).

Chi-square test

	Value	df	Asymptotic (bilateral) significance
Pearson's Chi-squared	246,525 ^a	62	,000
Likelihood ratio	270,348	62	,000
Linear by linear association	25,509	1	,000
N of valid cases	762		

a. 54 boxes (56,3%) have a expected a count less than 5 The minimun expected count is,28.



Graph 6.- Economic measures – sources
Source: Author's own compilation

Similarly, we found a strong correlation between the topic of economic measures and sources. As can be seen in graph 6, for the treatment of the economic measures, the press relied heavily on official sources, i.e., to a large extent, on statements by President Lenin Moreno and the Minister of Economy, Richard Martínez (former president of the Ecuadorian Business Committee). According to these data, there is a predominance of institutional voices in favor of structural adjustments, which define the narrative and informative route around the treatment of economic measures.

4.2.1. Analysis of the frames of government economic measures

Within the period analyzed, two frames were identified. A first frame grouped by 372 cases, 48.8% of the universe, referring to the “Economic Reactivation Law”. The second frame is grouped by 390 cases, 51.2% of the universe, referring to “Negotiations with multilateral financial organizations (IMF, WB and IDB)”.

Frame: Economic Reactivation Law

According to these data, it is possible to identify that the graphic press sets topics of interest for the private sector, since they represent demands of the economic and financial sector of the country,

being these “modification of tax laws” (31.1%) and “privatization of companies and businesses of the State” (22.3%). This may be due to the fact that this framework has been sustained since the beginning of Moreno’s government, a period in which he has been close to the country’s economic power (15%). Therefore, these data show a certain tendency to agglutinate the demands of the private sector in order to achieve a greater role in the State’s economy.

Consequently, the sources for this framing are, to a greater extent, official and private sector sources, the official ones being “President” (21.7%) and Minister of Hydrocarbons (9.9%), while the predominant private sector source is “Ecuadorian Business Committee” (11%). From these data, it can be seen that the political and economic power of the country coincided in supporting economic reforms focused on the interests of economic groups.

In the context of the reasons presented within this framework for the adoption of these economic measures, we observe that the top three motivations are “promoting competitive businesses” (31.2%), “energizing the State’s economy” (15%), and “decentralizing the State’s economy” (14.7%). These statistics reveal a clear alignment of the graphic press with the private sector’s perspective. The emphasis on bolstering business competitiveness underscores the media’s support for reducing and neutralizing the State’s role as a key economic player. These measures are framed with the objective of creating a favorable environment for the free market, achieved through legal mechanisms such as the Economic Reactivation Law.

In addition, in this framework, the evaluations of economic measures are constructed as decisions that will bring benefit and economic prosperity to the country, being these “greater openness to markets and foreign investment” (25.8%), as well as measures that “promote the economic prosperity of the country” (25.1%). In this sense, the evaluations of the press were due to the legal security surrounding foreign investment, seeing them as positive for the liberalization of the market. The latter, through the legal and moral system of economic management, since in the name of “economic necessity”, the “State is subordinated as increasingly undemocratic through legal measures that are considered necessary to achieve prosperity” (Bruff, 2014, 116-117).

Similarly, we can see that the proposals or recommendations are established in relation to generating greater profitability for the business and financial sector, given that there is a demand to “generate tax incentives to reactivate the economy” (20.7%). Likewise, the demand for a greater role of the private sector in economic decision-making; recommending, “The private sector be a strategic ally of the Government” (18.5%). In addition, that there be adequate conditions for the development of the free market, since it is proposed to “generate the conditions for self-sufficiency and business competition” (17.7%).

Frame: negotiations with multilateral financial organizations (IMF, World Bank, IDB).

The topics to which this framework resorted were crucial for the government to be able to access financing from the multilaterals. First, “Austerity of the State” (21.7%), which in the beginning of Moreno’s government is deepened; budget cuts, dismissal of public servants and reduction of public spending. Second, “Targeting of subsidies” (20.7%), that is, the liberalization of fuels, without their prices being regulated by the government. Third, “Reforms to labor laws” (11%), a greater flexibility in contracts and salaries for workers, under the assumption of greater business competition. Consequently, the Ecuadorian graphic press sets topics that turn out to be government tasks in order to access financing.

In this framework, official and documentary sources stand out, so that space is given to the statements of the minister of economy and finance (25.6%), as well as those of the “president” (17.9%). This may be because the person in charge of the negotiations with the multilaterals was Minister Richard

Martínez - former president of the Ecuadorian Business Committee - who evaluated these approaches favorably. But, in addition, the press resorts to technical reports from the International Monetary Fund (14.1%) to argue the need for negotiations.

On the other hand, in this framework, the main actor promoting economic measures is the “government” (65.9%), followed, with a lower percentage, by the IMF (17.1%). Thus, these actors are the main ones interested in evaluating and implementing economic tasks, in order to reach financing agreements.

On the other hand, for the adoption of these economic reforms, the press establishes as the main reasons: “to access financing from multilateral organizations” (25.4%), justifying the need to implement these reforms, based on the agreements of the letter of intent signed with the IMF. Likewise, evaluating them as necessary to balance the “fiscal deficit” (20.5%), as well as the “indebtedness of the State” (14.8%). Thus, the press articulated causes based on an ethical management of the economy, in other words, the State’s finances are ‘immoralized’ in order to negotiate with international capital (Bruff, 2014).

Meanwhile, the evaluations in this framework are constructed because of the benefits that the rapprochments with the multilaterals will bring, since it is established that they “promote the economic prosperity of the country” (23.8%). Similarly, they are evaluated on the moral ground of economic management, in that they “keep public spending in balance” (21.2%) and “promote the optimization of the State’s resources” (21%).

In this context, the economic decisions of Moreno’s government are emphasized as necessary and successful, in order to avoid indebtedness because of “the choice of public spending”. Thus, with a significant percentage, it is recommended that “a responsible State with regard to public spending” (49.5%). Likewise, the government is asked to mark a route guided by the logic of the free market, that is, “to generate conditions of self-sufficiency and business competition” (19.7%), for which it is recommended “to seek advice from multilateral organizations” (17.1%).

5. Conclusions

This research shows that the Ecuadorian print media, through the construction of particular frames around political corruption scandals and economic measures, promoted the authoritarian intervention of the State structure, in order to marginalize opposing political groups and actors and to discipline the economic management of the State by adopting unpopular measures.

According to Narváez (2004), the media effectively amplified the voices and concerns of various interest groups and economic sectors within the country. This amplification ultimately fueled demands for a more assertive state intervention, with the aim of reshaping the political and economic landscape in preparation for the neoliberalization of the state during the initial years of Lenín Moreno’s administration.

Within the frames of the political corruption scandals, it is noted that the sources that prevailed are, to a large extent, State institutions, the government of Lenín Moreno and, above all, journalistic investigations. For this reason, we can identify the mobilization of the State structure, as well as the power of the media, since they are the main voices that directed the discussion of these frames. It is also suggestive that the press established this issue mainly within the political scenario, obscuring the discussion of business capital as responsible for corruption.

Similarly, it was observed that the framing of political corruption scandals promoted the use of the State structure (legal, administrative and judicial), in order to repress the democratic participation of political sectors, but also condemned the economic management of state investment as one of the main causes of corruption. The latter, marginalizing and disciplining dissident visions or social transformations that bet on public spending (Bruff & Tensel, 2019).

Meanwhile, in the frames of the government's economic action, the economic and financial sector was promoted as the main economic actor in the country, in order to decentralize the economic management of the State, with proposals linked to the privatization of its companies and businesses. In this sense, these media frames were built on the basis of demands from the economic power (business-financial), for such reason these particular media readings sought to motivate "the mobilization of institutional power in a variety of forms, in parallel to more obvious and rhetorically compatible reforms such as privatization" (Bruff, 2014, 114).

Likewise, the graphic press sought to guide the Moreno government on the economic decisions to be fulfilled in the letter of intent signed with the IMF, in order to be able to access multilateral financing. In this sense, the frames evaluated these anti-popular economic measures as essential purposes to "negotiate with international financial capital on behalf of the national interest" (Bruff, 2014, 117).

One of the findings is that the Ecuadorian graphic press, by resorting to official sources, especially governmental, prevailed the tendency of a governmental political journalism, which obeyed an agenda of the political and economic elites, in order to condition the State institutions to achieve economic objectives. Thus, the graphic press played the role of a reproductive apparatus of the governmental discourse, with a predominance of governmental sources in its frames. Thus, we can observe the presence of a political journalism anchored and functional to governmental communication, focused on the defense and support of institutional activities, as well as generating a positive image of economic programs of the political and business elite (Waisbord, 2013).

In conclusion, characteristics of authoritarian neoliberalism were found to be transversal in both themes. First, the strong intervention of the State apparatus; in the frames of corruption, criminal and political actions are promoted demanding the intervention of the State structure (Prosecutor's Office and National Assembly), while the frames of economic measures promote the use of the legal and administrative system, to condition structural adjustment policies in the name of necessity and prosperity. Second, economic disciplining; in the corruption frameworks, public investment is condemned as one of the main causes of corruption ("oversized works", "inefficiency in the management of public expenditure", etc.), while in the economic frameworks the disciplining component is established in the responsible management (keeping public finances in balance), in order to implement neoliberal economic measures.

With this research we can observe the role played by the print media in terms of the insertion of hegemonic political programs in Ecuador, characterized by an authoritarian process through the use of the State structure with a legal and judicial scaffolding, in order to use coercion and legal intimidation as a control mechanism against groups and political sectors critical of the implementation of neoliberal adjustments (Poulantzas, 2014). Thus, the data obtained in this research can be generalized in future studies of political communication in Latin America, since it allows us to reflect on the exercise of the press within authoritarian processes marked by a significant coercive propensity in the implementation of unpopular structural adjustments.

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