Understanding how the Colombian media intervened in the 2012-2016 peace negotiation process: a mediatization approach

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Abstract

This research investigates how the Colombian news media intervened in the peace process (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, Spanish acronym). Through applying and testing the utility of the theoretical framework on mediatization (Couldry and Hepp, 2013), particularly the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b), this study examines the media discourses around the peace dialogues, the journalistic practices that generated them, and the media-related practices from political actors who participated in the negotiations. To do so, the study follows a mixed-method approach. Quantitatively, it performs a computational text analysis by applying Structural Topic Modelling - STM - to a corpus of 17.688 online news articles. Qualitatively, it conducts a thematic analysis on some of the key topics identified by the STM as well as semi-structured interviews (**n**=26) with political actors (the government delegation, the FARC delegation, and the opposition party) and journalists who reported on the negotiations.

The findings illustrate that alongside an 'elite driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010), the news media often incorporated the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013) to report about the peace process. Pertinently, other journalistic attitudes more focused on professional norms (e.g., serving the public interest) were also prevalent. For instance, 'protecting the peace process' became a key (journalistic) criterion for some journalists when reporting on the negotiations. Moreover, this study shows that news media considerations influenced the political actors' *routines* and *strategies* as they all perceived the media as a key influential actor. However, the varied political actors were influenced differently and to different extents by the news media, suggesting the importance of understanding the mediatization of politics as a matter of degree. Finally, the empirical data reveals that the adoption of news media logic by political actors did not necessarily mean a power shift from the latter towards the news media, as politicians often adopted media considerations instrumentally or through what is known as 'self-mediatization'.

Overall, this research provides a rigorous and multiperspectival examination of the relationships between media actors and political actors in the context of a peace process in Colombia, an area of study that has been under-researched.

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List of abbreviations

AP   Associated Press

AUC   United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Spanish Acronym)

BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation

CNN   Cable News Network

DIJIN   Direction of Criminal Investigation and Interpol (Spanish Acronym)

ELN   National Liberation Army (Spanish Acronym)

FARC   Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Spanish Acronym)

FLIP   Ideas for Peace Foundation (Spanish Acronym)

IHL   International Humanitarian Law

LDA   Latent Dirichlet Allocation

NHCM   National Center for Historical Memory (Spanish Acronym)

PR   Public Relations

STM   Structural Topic Modelling

UK   United Kingdom

US   United States

To my parents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Back in 2014, when pursuing a PhD was not part of my life plan, I had a conversation about the peace process with one of my best friends (Alejandro) over some beers. Very quick into the discussion, I realized that I did not know much about the process as I found myself asking multiple questions: 'How does this process work?'; 'How long will the government negotiate with FARC?'; 'What are the policies that they are negotiating?' Since the wave of questions never stopped, the look of my friend (a combination of surprise and annoyance) alerted me that the conversation was going to take a turn. Displaying his impatience, and after taking a sip of his beer, Alejandro looked in my eyes and without hesitation told me, almost in a commanding tone: 'You should read the news, Jose, you should read the news'. I tried to process his advice, but it 'tasted' as bitter as the long sip of beer that I took to cope with the overwhelming feeling which came with having been exposed as ignorant at that moment: 'I definitely should know more about this political process', I told myself.

This anecdote has 'chased' me since I started my PhD studies. Beyond the personal frustration for not knowing something I should have at that time, my friend's advice reveals a key aspect of my research project: the news media plays a pivotal role in *interpreting* and *explaining* peace negotiations. This is particularly important for negotiations that are carried out under strict confidentiality, since journalists are one of the few actors that have access to relevant information surrounding the bargaining process. Alejandro did not suggest finding information somewhere else; he specifically directed me to read the news as the media are a key source through which citizens *learn* about public affairs, in this case a peace process. Consequently, and acknowledging the importance of media portrayals during these types of political events, the first key aspect of my research focuses on *media discourse*: I examine *how* the Colombian news media represented the peace process (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)[1]. Besides studying the news media representations around this historical political event, I also examine (as the second key aspect of this study) the journalistic

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[1] The peace process, which was held in Havana (Cuba), started its public phase on August 2012 and lasted for more than four years until December 2016 when the Colombian Congress finally approved and ratified the peace agreement. The negotiations were guided by the discussion of a six-point agenda that was prior agreed by the two parties: 1) 'Comprehensive Rural Development'; 2) 'Political Participation'; 3) 'End of Conflict'; 4) 'The Problem of Illicit Drugs'; 5) 'Victims'; and 6) 'Implementation, Verification and Endorsement'.

practice which generated them: how Colombian journalists approached and reported the negotiations. Looking at both the media discourse and the journalistic practice allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the media during the peace dialogues.

Nonetheless, although my friend's suggestion to read the news implies a positive influence of the news media (they could have helped me to learn about the peace process), political actors involved in these types of negotiations tend to have a more antagonistic outlook around the role of the news media. For instance, former President Juan Manuel Santos wrote in his book '*The Battle for Peace*' (2019) that one of the key lessons from a previous failed peace negotiation with FARC was the "inconvenience of conducting a peace process under the permanent spotlight of the media and public opinion". According to him, "[t]his made the negotiators more concerned with producing statements that favoured their positions than with making serious progress at the negotiation table" (Santos, 2019, p.1552). In line with this, Humberto de la Calle, the government chief negotiator, pointed out in his book '*Revelations at the end of a War*' (2019) that the government could not afford to not communicate through the news media, given their importance. In other words, even though he shared the perspective of President Santos that the constant media scrutiny was problematic, he argued that a more realistic strategy was needed: "we need[ed] to 'feed the beast' without falling into the media frenzy" (De la Calle, 2019, p.941). These two politicians perceived, in short, that the news media was a key actor (and obstacle) for the success of the peace negotiations.

Consequently, the third aspect in which my study focuses is on the examination of *how* political actors involved in the negotiations (the Colombian government, FARC, and the opposition party) interacted with the news media during the peace negotiations. Since I understand the media/politics relationship as interdependent, I assess what were the political actors' communications strategies to cope with the intense media scrutiny, but also how these strategies may have had an influence in the news media performance. In other words, I examine how the relationship between the political actors and journalists who reported on the negotiations affected each other's roles. Taking these three aspects together - *media discourse*, *the journalistic practice* and *political practices related to the news media* - **the main goal of my research project is to examine the ways in which the Colombian news media intervened in the peace negotiation**

(2012-2016) that brought an end a civil war of more than fifty years between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group FARC.

To do so, theoretically, I apply and test the utility of the theoretical framework on mediatization (Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Lundby, 2014), particularly the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Kepplinger, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008), which is briefly understood as a long-term process through which the significance of the media on political organizations, institutions and actors has significantly increased (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014a). Since my project understands the mediatization of politics as a 'dialectical process' (Blumler and Esser, 2018; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019), this theoretical approach becomes particularly useful to interpret the interdependent relationship between media actors (and their logics) and political actors (and their logics). Moreover, I see Wolfsfeld's theoretical tools (1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 2004), particularly his '*Politics-Media-Politics*' model (2004), as an appropriate complement to the mediatization of politics framework to better understand the impact of the news media in this historical process. On the other hand, methodologically, I adopt a mixed-method approach in which I combine computational text analysis ('Structural Topic Modelling') and thematic analysis of the news coverage in conjunction with semi-structured interviews with politicians and communications officers who participated in the peace process and journalists who reported on the negotiations.

In the following **Section (1.1)** I turn to explain how my approach contributes to knowledge and understanding in the field of media and communication.

1.1 Significance of the study and contribution to scholarship

In terms of the relevance of my study, I see the contribution to the field of media and communication as threefold. Firstly, there is an existing gap in understanding the relationship between media actors and political actors during peace negotiation processes in Colombia. Even though the Colombian state has over three decades of experience of negotiating peace with varied guerrilla and paramilitary groups, there is virtually no research (rooted in media theory) that has comprehensively investigated the role of the news media in these processes. The few studies in this area have focused on extracting the frames employed by the media to portray the peace negotiations (Charry, 2013; Richard and Saffon, 2016), or the discourses employed by political actors to communicate their perspectives and motives (Richard and Llano, 2017; Ríos and Cairo, 2018). Most importantly, these studies have not examined the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians during the peace dialogues. Consequently, by combining the interview data with the news media analysis, my study provides a rigorous and multiperspectival examination of these relationships.

Secondly, studies that have applied and tested a mediatization theoretical framework outside European and North American contexts are scarce (Orchard-Rieiro, 2015, on the mediatization of Chilean political elites is one exception). This research will hence shed light on understanding if the assumptions of the mediatization of politics framework are applicable within the Colombian media and political systems, and within a peace negotiation process. Moreover, since empirical studies rooted in mediatization theory have either focused on interpreting the degree to which the news content is mediatized (Zeh and Hopmann, 2013; Takens et al., 2013) or the perception of media influence by political actors (Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Isotalus and Almonkari, 2014), there is a need to address mediatization as a concept by embracing an actor-centred approach to examine the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians (see Blumler and Esser, 2018 for an exception). This research will consequently contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the mediatization of politics by not only examining both the news coverage and the relationship between Colombian journalists and politicians, but also by emphasizing the micro aspects of these complex relationships. More specifically, this study embraces the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) as a sensitizing framework to acknowledge that the logics of political and media actors are ultimately

put into practice in their interactions. In short, by combining the strengths of the institutionalist tradition of mediatization with some of the tools provided by social constructivist theories I also contribute to a more *nuanced* understanding of this theoretical framework.

Finally, this research also intends to contribute methodologically to the study of political communication by applying a comprehensive methodological approach that combines computational tools (specifically Structural Topic Modelling - STM -) with more interpretative methods such as thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As I will explain in detail in **Chapter (4)**, I employ a replicable five-step approach (that can be used to analyse other phenomenon) to collect, inspect, and analyse a corpus of more than 17.000 news articles in relation to the peace negotiations. I therefore demonstrate that 'STM' is a powerful 'sorting' computational tool that can be enhanced by combining it with other interpretative strategies. I advocate consequently for a human-centered analysis approach to extract more meaningful interpretations of the data when applying these types of computational tools. Moreover, it is important to highlight that STM has not yet been applied to the field of media and peace and it displays significant potential to examine and understand more comprehensive and larger news corpuses about peace negotiations and other political communication processes.

1.2 Research questions

In line with the key objective of my thesis presented above, the main research question guiding my study is:

How did the Colombian news media intervene in the peace negotiations (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and FARC?

In order to properly answer this question, I have proposed a series of sub-research questions that can be divided into questions regarding media discourse, the journalistic practice, or media-related practices from politicians (which are the three key aspects in which this study is focused on). Regarding media discourse, there are two sub-research questions. While **SRQ1** inquiries about how the news media portrayed the peace negotiations, **SRQ2** focuses on a key notion within the mediatization of politics framework: how the 'news media logic' may have influenced the news stories produced by journalists.

SRQ1: *How did the Colombian news media represent the peace negotiations?*
SRQ2: *How did forms of 'news media logic' affect the coverage?*

In terms of the media-related practices from political actors, I propose a sub-research question that inquiries about the way in which media considerations may have affected their role during the negotiations. **SRQ3** consequently investigates the perceived level of influence attributed to the news media by political actors and how this perception may have determined the adoption of 'news media logic'. Most importantly, through examining the *impact* of the news media for political actors, **SRQ3** also inquiries about the degree to which the adoption of 'news media logic' by political actors may imply (or not) the loss of their autonomy and influence.

SRQ3: *How did the 'news media logic' impact the role of political actors during the peace process?*

Finally, in relation to the journalistic practice, I ask in **SRQ4** about the prevalent logics that Colombian journalists followed or adopted when reporting on the peace negotiations. This question places special emphasis on understanding which aspects of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) 'led the way' when journalists approached the peace process.

    SRQ4: *What were the aspects of the 'news media logic' that prevailed for journalists during the peace process?*

1.3 Overview of the thesis

This study is organized in ten chapters. **Chapters (2)** and **(3)** provide the theoretical framework of the research, while **Chapter (4)** introduces the methodological approach of the study. **Chapters (5)** to **(9)** provide they key empirical findings of my research. **Chapter (5)** and **Chapter (6)** mainly focus on media discourse in order to address SRQ1 and SRQ2 by providing an analysis of the news media coverage and how the news media represented the peace negotiations. **Chapter (7)** and **Chapter (8)** address SRQ3 through examining the communications strategies employed by the government delegation, the FARC delegation and the opposition party (the Democratic Center). **Chapter (9)**, which focuses on the journalistic practice, mainly deals with the SRQ4 by examining how journalists approached the peace negotiations. Finally, **Chapter (10)** contains the main conclusions of the study. An overview of each chapter is presented as follows:

Chapter (2) examines the theoretical foundations of mediatization theory (Couldry and Hepp, 2013), giving a particular emphasis to the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). Since the notion of 'media logic' (within the institutionalist tradition of mediatization) is the key mechanism through which the news media exercise their power over other fields (including politics), I provide a thorough conceptualization of this notion highlighting that the operationalization of 'news media logic' proposed by Esser (2013) is the most useful for my research. Moreover, although my study mainly follows an institutionalist tradition, and it is located within a meso-level of analysis (both empirically and theoretically), I stress in **Chapter (2)** the need for institutional approaches to mediatization to take account of micro-level interactions, as emphasized within constructivist social theories. I consequently introduce and describe the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) as a helpful sensitizing framework to better grasp how the 'news media logic' is ultimately put into practice by political and media actors in their interactions, and how these interactions may have a significant impact on their relationships in the context of a peace negotiation.

Chapter (3) explores the role of the news media in peace negotiations and examines the key features of the Colombian media system. Since the field of media and peace has been under-researched, emphasis is given to the work of Wolfsfeld (1997b; 1997a; 2004) as he has provided one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks to understand the influential role of the

news media in peace processes. Consequently, by explaining Wolfsfeld's (2004) key theoretical tools such as his '*politics-media-politics*' cycle model, I identify the instances in which the news media exercise both a negative and a positive influence during peace negotiations. I also discuss in **Chapter (3)** how the Colombian news media has represented the Colombian conflict, highlighting how the media has historically relied on official sources to report on the conflict (Rey and Bonilla, 2004; Rey et al., 2005; Rey and Bonilla, 2005). Finally, at the end of **Chapter (3)** I explain that the media system in Colombia, as argued by Montoya (2014), seems to be moving towards a 'Captured Liberal' model (Guerrero, 2014) given that journalistic professionalism, and more specifically journalistic autonomy, has been captured by the interests of corporations, the state, and some illegal organisations.

Chapter (4) provides the methodological framework for this study. It explains that I adopted a mixed-method approach and a *convergent parallel* design in which both methodological strands of my research are prioritized equally and the findings of each method are combined throughout the overall interpretation of the study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). It also describes the strategies of both data collection and analysis for each of the selected methods. I explain that I performed a computational text analysis of 17.688 online news articles by specifically applying Structural Topic Modelling - STM - (Roberts et al., 2019); this quantitative method was paired with a qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of some of the key topics identified by the STM. Additionally, I describe how I conducted the semi-structured interviews with political actors (the government delegation, the FARC delegation, and the opposition party), and journalists from varied media outlets. At the end of **Chapter (4)** I outline some of the limitations of my research project.

Chapters (5) to **(9)** provide the key findings of the research project. **Chapter (5)** examines both quantitatively and qualitatively how the news media represented the peace negotiations. I introduce here the results yielded by the STM by providing a typology that allowed me to identify the key themes which the news media focused on when reporting on the peace negotiations. Through a more qualitatively oriented analysis, I also explain how the news media specifically reported on the 'pacing of the peace negotiations' and the 'critical moments' of the peace dialogues, as these were two of the most prevalent topics identified by the STM analysis. In the case of the

former, I examine how the news media navigated the aspect of time which became a very contested issue during the peace negotiations. In the case of the latter, I focus on examining how the news media represented one of the key crises of the negotiations: the kidnapping of Army General Rubén Alzate. Overall, the findings of **Chapter (5)** demonstrates that the Colombian news media embraced an 'elite-driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) when reporting on the peace process and were highly driven by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013)

Chapter (6) examines how the Colombian news media represented the issue of 'Victims' as this was a central aspect to the legitimacy of the peace negotiations. To do so, I qualitatively assess the news media portrayals of three key moments at the beginning of the discussion of the victims as a dimension of the peace agenda. Firstly, I inspect the announcement that both delegations made about the 10 principles that guided the discussion on the issue of victims at the negotiation table. Secondly, I assess the selection process that FARC and the Colombian government announced to explain how the victims' delegations were going to be chosen to participate at the negotiation table. Finally, I examine the initial visit of the first victim delegation to meet the peace delegations in Havana, Cuba. I demonstrate in **Chapter (6)** that the news media focused on the *conflict* aspect of the issue (they prioritized the voice of well-known victims that *opposed*, *criticized,* and *problematized* the selection process), and overlooked the responsibility of the Colombian state in the armed conflict by communicating vaguely and inconsistently the crimes committed by agents of the Colombian state.

Chapter (7) explores the communication strategy employed by the government delegation to manage the news media during the peace negotiations. I explain that the government delegation was more prone to resort to the news media when either the legitimacy of the peace process was threatened or when the public opinion towards the negotiations deteriorated. I illustrate this through a case study in which, by referring to Wolfsfeld's (2004) '*politics-media-politics'* model, I examine the role of the Colombian news media in one of the main 'political waves' of the peace negotiations: the worst escalation of the conflict (2014) during the peace dialogues. This case study serves to further illustrate, amongst other things, the 'elite-driven' approach adopted by the news media as they aligned with (and consistently) amplified the government's narrative throughout the crisis. Overall, **Chapter (7)** also serves to demonstrate that although media considerations did not

entirely determine the behaviour of the government delegation, they were at the centre of the government's negotiation strategy.

Chapter (8) examines the communication strategy adopted by the 'challengers' (Wolfsfeld, 1997b) of the peace negotiations: the FARC delegation and the Democratic Center. With regards to FARC, I illustrate that they arrived at the peace negotiations with a very antagonistic outlook toward the news media, a situation that complicated their relationship with journalists at the beginning of the negotiations. However, I also demonstrate that FARC's media relationship management evolved as the peace dialogues progressed since they had the chance to regularly interact with reporters. These interactions allowed them to, amongst other things, identify the nuances and complexities within the news media organizations. Moreover, by describing a television newscast bulletin that the FARC delegation designed and produced during the peace process, I highlight in this **Chapter (8)** the influence that the 'news media logic' had on FARC's own processes of communication and consolidation as a legitimate political actor.

In terms of the opposition party, I describe in **Chapter (8)** that the Democratic Center displayed strong media-savvy skills during the peace negotiations, including a highly organized and coherent communication strategy. Given their knowledge around the media dynamic, the Democratic Center consciously adopted the 'news media logic' to execute its communication strategy and gain some attention from the news media that was mostly in favour of the peace negotiations. More specifically, by describing their 'Civil Resistance Process' campaign that they designed and executed before the peace referendum in 2016, I illustrate that this political party resorted to a conflicting and controversial type of narrative to appeal to some of the news media values such as negativity, conflict and drama. Overall, **Chapter (8)** describes *how* the 'news media logic' had an influence in the behaviour of 'challengers' during the peace negotiations.

The last empirical **Chapter (9)** deals with the journalistic practice and how Colombian journalists approached the peace negotiations. Similar to **Chapter (5)**, I illustrate in this chapter that practices of news production driven by economically motivated rationales have become dominant within Colombian newsrooms. As a consequence, the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013) prevailed when journalists reported on the negotiations. However, and

interestingly, I also highlight that different journalistic attitudes towards the peace dialogues also coexisted. More specifically, I show how 'protecting the peace dialogues' became a key (journalistic) criterion for some journalists when reporting on the negotiations. Overall, I explain in **Chapter (9)** that the logics of news production around the peace process were complex, full of nuances and can be better understood as a matter of emphasis. While some reporters were guided by distinct journalistic professional norms, others relied more on constructing news by resorting to commercially driven rationales.

Finally, **Chapter (10)** addresses the main conclusions of the study by providing the answers to the research questions, discussing the implications of the key findings and suggesting three key areas for further research. I highlight that the news media management strategies employed by all the political actors cannot be understood as separate actions from their roles: they were tightly intertwined with their political strategies and goals during the peace negotiations. However, I explain that the adoption of 'news media logic' did not necessarily mean a loss of autonomy for political actors (as some accounts within the mediatization framework argue), or a power shift from the political actors towards the news media, given that the adoption of news media considerations was for the most part an instrumental process. Crucially, my study empirically demonstrates that the mediatization of politics needs to be understood as a matter of degree because the varied political actors were influenced differently and to different extents by the news media. The political communication culture within Colombia, I argue, became a key factor that moderated the mediatization process among the political actors during the peace process.

Chapter 2: Mediatization Theory

This **Chapter (2)** examines the theoretical foundations of mediatization theory in five sections, giving particular emphasis to the mediatization of politics (the focus of my study). Since the concept of media logic (within the institutionalist tradition of mediatization) is the main mechanism through which the news media exercise influence over other fields (including politics), I offer a detail discussion **in Section (2.1)** on the theoretical conceptualization of this notion; in **Section (2.2)** I turn to the empirical research on the mediatization of politics, explaining how media logic has been used empirically to give an account of the influence of the news media in political organizations, processes and actors. I argue at the end of these two sections that although the news media display certain logics in their functioning (which can indeed have an influence in how politics are conducted), these logics are ultimately put into practice through *social interaction*.

Consequently, although my study mainly follows an institutionalist tradition, and is located within a meso-level of analysis (both empirically and theoretically), I acknowledge the importance of bringing some of the tools provided by social constructivist approaches to interpret some of the micro level aspects of the complex relationship between media actors and political actors. I do so by embracing - and explaining in **Section (2.3)** - what has been coined as the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010). This approach puts forward the idea that "institutions are not inert categories of meaning; rather they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance" (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006, p.213). Highly rooted in symbolic interactionism, this perspective provides me with a sensitizing framework to better grasp how the news media logic is put into practice by actors in their interactions and how these interactions may have a significant impact on their relationships in the context of a peace negotiation.

Following this, I briefly discuss **in Section (2.4)** how the concept of 'media autonomy', as a condition for mediatization (the media is said to have increasingly become independent from the field of politics), needs to also be understood in relation to both structural and individual conditions. I mainly second here Sjøvaag's (2020, p.164) argument that journalistic autonomy is better conceived as a "fluid and moving concept" which is constantly adapted by journalists during their

routines. This section is followed by a discussion on the main criticism towards mediatization theory - **Section (2.5)** - and how I position myself within these debates. The concluding **Section (2.6)** of this chapter summarises the key take away points from the theoretical revision on the mediatization of politics framework, emphasizing how I am planning to contribute to some of the current gaps in the field with my research.

2.1 An institutionalist approach to mediatization: conceptualization of 'media logic'

Broadly speaking, mediatization theory proposes an account of the transformative power of the media in different fields of our society. It is conceived as a long-term process in which the transformations of media technologies and institutions have contributed to create changes in our culture and society (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.197). Within this theoretical framework, three main traditions have emerged: the social constructivist perspective,[2] the materialist perspective and the institutionalist perspective (for a detail discussion on these approaches see Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Lundby, 2014). As I mentioned before, from a theoretical point of view, I intend to complement the institutionalist tradition of mediatization with some of the tool sets provided by social constructivist theories, mainly their broad perspective on the importance of the construction of meaning through communication (as a form of interaction). Here it is important to note, however, that I am not drawing on a constructivist approach to mediatization. Instead, I am stressing the need for institutionalist approaches to mediatization to take account of micro-level interactions, as emphasized within constructivist social theories. This means that in my thesis I do not examine "the role of various media as part of the process of the communicative construction of social and cultural reality" (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.196) but rather I interpret (and emphasize) the micro level aspects of the complex relationship between media and political actors by embracing the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) - as I explain in detail in **Section (2.3).**

Although I mainly follow an institutionalist tradition, it is important to review some of the key characteristics of the social constructivist tradition of mediatization to better understand how the former theorizes the influence of the media in other fields. Briefly, the social constructivist tradition understands mediatization as a notion designed to "capture both how the communicative construction of reality is manifested within certain media processes and how (...) specific features of certain media have a contextualized 'consequence' for the overall process whereby sociocultural reality is constructed in and through communication" (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.196). Within

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[2] Lundby (2014, p.10) understands the social constructivist approach as a "theoretical approach under a general 'cultural perspective' on mediatization". Therefore, he identifies three traditions: cultural, material, and institutional perspectives.

this perspective, mediatization is understood more as a meta-process (e.g., globalization) in which changes in culture and society are directly linked to changes and developments in the media (Krotz, 2014). On the other hand, the institutionalist approach refers to mediatization as the process by which different social institutions accommodate or adapt to the logics of the media - which is conceived as an independent institution (Hjarvard, 2008, p.105). While the social constructivist often locates mediatization as a process across human history, the institutional tradition regards mediatization as a 'High Modernity' process in which the media field has experienced its greatest influence over other social fields (Livingstone and Lunt, 2014).

It is precisely in the mechanisms through which the media has come to influence or affect other fields where these two traditions considerably differ to one another. While the institutionalist tradition argues that the mechanism is the adaptation or adoption from institutions to a 'media logic' (Hjarvard, 2008), the social constructivist offers a more open approach to understand the influence of the media as a highly contextual moment in which *communication* is key (Hepp, 2013). My position here is that the media, particularly the news media (in which my project is focused on), displays certain logics in their functioning, but they can be both highly contextual and relational. This means that even though there are certain patterns guiding how journalists produce news, these patterns always occur in interaction. Consequently, I argue that embracing an approach that intends to explain media influence over other fields through the adoption of a media logic requires attention to the relational aspect of these logics. However, before discussing the relational element - and my approach to it in **Section (2.3)** - it is important to first offer a detailed discussion on how this notion ('media logic') has been conceptualized both theoretically and empirically.

Hjarvard (2013; 2014) has been one of the main proponents of the 'institutionalist tradition' within mediatization. Drawing upon theories of structuration and institutions from Giddens (1984), 'new institutionalism' (March and Olsen, 1984; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), and 'institutional logics' (Thornton et al., 2012), Hjarvard (2014, p.204) argues that mediatization can be conceived as a 'double-sided development' because "the media have become institutionalized within other social domains at the same time as they have acquired the status of a social institution in their own right". In line with this, Schrott, (2009, p.47, italics in original) posits that the core mechanism of mediatization is the "*institutionalization of media logic in social spheres* that were previously

considered to be separate from the mass media". Both authors suggest that the media have become an autonomous institution capable of influencing other social fields to the extent that those fields may end up embracing the institutional logics of the media in the way they act.

When this framework – the institutionalist tradition – is applied to the relationship between the media and politics, one can refer to it as the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Meyer 2002; Schulz, 2004; Schrott 2009; Kepplinger, 2002; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). This notion is commonly associated with Mazzoleni and Schulz's (1999, p.250) work in which they defined 'mediatized politics' as "politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media". Since the media is understood here as a relatively independent social institution which functions and follows a specific set of norms (Benson, 2006; Sparrow, 2006), Strömbäck and Esser (2014b, p.6, italics in original) define the mediatization of politics as a "*long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors have increased*". Central to the mediatization of politics, then, is the idea that political institutions (and their actors) have been permeated by the media logic: that is that their actions are not necessarily guided by their specific institutional (political) logics but rather by the "modus operandi of the media" (Hjarvard, 2008).

The concept of 'media logic' was formally introduced by Altheide and Snow who stated that, in a general sense, "*media logic* consists of a form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information" (1979, p.10). Based on Altheide and Snow's (1979) conceptualization around 'media logic', other scholars have developed their own definitions in relation to processes of mediatization. For instance, while Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999), Hjarvard (2008) and Schrott (2009) refer to 'media logic', Strömbäck & Esser (2009) and Asp (2014) prefer 'news media logic'. Other terms employed are 'mass media logic' by Meyen et al. (2014) or 'news logic' by Thorbjørnsrud et al. (2014a) . These variations show, amongst other things, that there has been an effort in scholarly work to delimit (and therefore differentiate) the norms and guidelines which guide the *news* media (compared to other forms of media such as books or music). These specificities in the notion are particularly important for those advocating for an institutionalist approach to mediatization as the media, in its broadest conceptualization, cannot

really be understood as an institution with a set of stable and consistent rules (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014b, p.407).

Taking a closer look at the definition to identify the differences among these conceptualizations, Hjarvard (2008, p.113) understands the concept as "the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules". As Orchard-Rieiro (2015) rightfully explains it, the aspects of this definition (material and symbolic resources) are directly linked to the key elements that define social institutions, including implicit and explicit rules guiding organizational action (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; March and Olsen, 1989; Friedland and Alford, 1991). Consequently, 'media logic' should be understood here as the guiding principles of action for the media (when is regarded as an institution).

On the other hand, in an attempt to better operationalize the notion of 'media logic' – and anchored in a neo-institutionalist perspective, Esser (2013) and later Strömbäck and Esser (2014b), proposed that the process of news production is mainly composed of three dimensions: professional aspects (journalistic criteria), commercial aspects (economic motivated rationales), and technological aspects (the conditions of the *type* of media). Since this conceptualization is rooted in the idea of the '*logic of appropriateness*' (March and Olsen, 2011, p.478), that is that institutional rules and procedures are followed because they appear as "natural" and "legitimate", Strömbäck and Esser (2014b, p.381) argue that the concept of 'news media logic' (as well as 'political logic' as it will be explained later) should be "understood as appropriate behavior that is reasonable and consistent within the rules and norms of the respective institutional context". In other words, that these are notions that cannot be 'set in stone' and which may be subject of further conceptual shifts depending on specific contextual features.

Therefore, a distinct set of professional norms, such as objectivity, neutrality, the 'watchdog' role of the news media, among others, can be placed within the professional aspects, while 'spectacularization' and 'confrontainment' can be regarded as the implications of the news media being (mainly) guided by economic motivated rationales. In regards the technological aspects, the differences in how political reality is translated depending on the media format

constitute some of the consequences of this dimension. As Esser (2013, p.173) explains, "television formats for instance are arguably more linear, more visual, more affective, and less cognitively complex than print formats". These three elements, then, condition the way in which news media construct political reality. In a very similar vein, Schrott (2009, p.47) argues that media logic is "based on the type of media, on the processing routines of journalistic work, on the technological possibilities and capacities, and finally on the economic organization of the media system".

On the other hand, Landerer (2013) proposes that there are two theoretical notions that better grasp (empirically) the behaviour of media actors. He argues that media (as companies) are not only profit-oriented, so commercial logic should not be the only factor guiding the selection and organization process. For him, 'normative considerations', rooted in ideas of the public responsibility of journalism, also need to be included when thinking in news production. Nonetheless, Landerer gives more weight to the market-logic as he conceives that the mediatization of politics takes place when political actors' behaviour is predominantly guided by "audience-oriented market logic over normative logic" (2013, p.253). Similarly, Asp (2014) argues that news media logic is composed by professional norms and professional standards in which market and non-market considerations need to be considered.

Among these constellations of conceptual definitions about 'media logic', I align with the definition of 'news media logic' proposed by Strömbäck and Esser (2014b) in which they identify *professionalization, commercialization and technology* as the three main dimensions of news production. However, I do acknowledge that this conceptualization may not encapsulate the more individual conditions (the micro-level factors) that can influence the way in which journalists both construct political reality and interact with actors of other institutions or fields. Here is where the 'inhabited institutions' approach - which I explain in detail in **Section (2.4)** -, provides some conceptual tools to better decode these relationships.

In regards the notion of 'political logic', there are fewer academic discussions. Following Meyer (2002), Esser (2013) has identified a triad of dimensions (policy, politics and polity) that acts as an analytical tool to differentiate the political and non-political aspects of this notion.

Briefly, the 'policy' aspects have to do with implementing long-term solutions to a variety of issues; the Colombian peace process, for instance, could be categorized within this aspect as it was a political effort to put an end a civil war through agreeing a series of laws and policy changes between the two parties. The 'politics' element, on the other hand, is related specifically to self-representation: the way governments make use of communication tools to gain the support from the public in regards a specific initiative. Finally, the 'polity' refers to the broad institutional framework (rules, norms, laws, etc.) in which politics takes place (Esser, 2013, pp.164-165).

2.2 Empirical research on the mediatization of politics

In order to assess whether political institutions (and their actors) have been mediatized, Strömbäck (2008, p.234) has proposed four phases of mediatization - which he argues are a matter of *degree*. These phases of mediatization have been employed by different scholars to try to capture empirically the notion of mediatization, but more specifically the manifestations of media logic in other institutional fields. The first phase refers to the degree to which the media is considered the most important source of information; the second phase deals with the degree to which the media has become more independent and autonomous from the political field; the third phase relates to the degree to which the news media coverage is mainly guided by 'media logic' (as opposed to 'political logic'); and the fourth phase refers to the degree to which political actors, instead of acting based on their institutional logics, are mainly guided by the 'media logic'.

For instance, a great deal of empirical research on the mediatization of politics has focused on evaluating the extent to which elections news coverage has been mediatized (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Zeh and Hopmann, 2013; Takens et al., 2013; Cushion et al., 2015). Rather than comprehensively trying to decode the dynamic relationship between media actors and political actors (Bastien, 2018), these studies have mostly focused on media content: how journalists have represented a particular political phenomenon (elections campaigns) and whether these representations are indicative of mediatization. As I mentioned above, the majority of these studies (see Zeh and Hopmann, 2013; Takens et al., 2013;) rely on Strömbäck's (2008) third dimension of mediatization to determine the degree to which the news coverage has been mainly guided by 'media logic'. This notion is operationalized by resorting to indicators such as the prominence of 'horse-race' or strategic frames over issue-policy ones, for example, or by measuring variables (e.g., *'personalization'* in reporting politics) that represent the particular ways in which the media constructs news.

On the other hand, when trying to look at how political actors relate to the news media logic, research has mainly focused on assessing the perceptions that political actors hold about the media (see Strömbäck, 2011; Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Isotalus and Almonkari, 2014). In this regard, Blumler and Esser (2018) have argued that "it is not the news media which cause changes in political organizations, but it is the organizations themselves that decide, on the basis

of their own perceptions, to make changes" (p.2). This is in line with the idea of the 'invisible power of the media' suggested by Asp (2014, p.257) in which he explains that the power exerted by the media is rather latent: the very existence of the media *may* condition institutions to act in a certain way. In a similar vein, Schrott (2009, p.48) argues that the effects of mediatization are mainly latent as, for example, political actors may not be aware that their actions have been oriented through what he calls the 'orientation frame' of media logic.

A manifestation of the latter would be the implementation of media management strategies (e.g., daily media monitoring) by political organizations as a result of their actors regarding the news media as a powerful and influential actor within the field of politics. Esser (2013, p.163) has labelled this as 'self-mediatization' and refers to it as "a reflexive response by the political system to the media-related changes in their institutional environment". For instance, Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski's study that aimed to clarify the extent to which bargaining behaviour (within a domestic political negotiation in Germany) was related to the media, concluded that the mediatization of the negotiators manifested mainly through a process of self-mediatization (2010, p.5). The study found out that even though politicians have a simultaneous awareness of the need to deal with the negotiation and media scrutiny, the media *per se* did not push nor harm the negotiation process (Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski, 2010, p.15). In other words, the news media dynamic created some adaptation within the negotiations (media management, for example) but did not influence the outcomes of the bargaining process.

Nonetheless, although measuring the level of influence that politicians attribute to the news media is relevant for mediatization research, one cannot forget that the responses that political actors give to the different pressures coming from the media also need to be identified. To put it differently, the analysis should also capture how that perceived influence is translated by political actors – and their organizations - to either deal or cope with the media. In this regard, Donges and Jarren (2014) have proposed a comprehensive institutional approach to mediatization at an organization level that helps to identify, empirically, the manifestations of 'media logic' in political organizations.

They argue that the mediatization of politics is mainly a 'reaction' of political organizations (given that they perceive the media and mediated communication as important in their environment), and that the 'reaction' is mainly manifested (or visible) in "*changes in organizational structure (rules and resources for communication) and behaviour (degree and form of communication output)*" (Donges and Jarren, 2014, p.188, italics in original). After implementing this approach empirically to the mediatization of political parties (in the UK, Germany and Switzerland), they concluded that, although mediatization did take place among the organizations they observed, the way in which it happened was highly dependent on the country-specific context, the media structures and the institutional media arrangements. Consequently, they argue that both political organizations and political systems "will never be completely mediatized but will rather be characterized by islands of greater or lesser mediatization" (Marcinkowski, 2005, cited in Donges and Jarren, 2014, p.196).

That the mediatization of politics is a matter of degree is also advocated by Strömbäck and Esser (2014b), and Voltmer and Sorensen (2019). The latter argue that, in contrast to the view of Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) - described above - in which politics has lost all of its autonomy to the media, "mass media interact with institutional structures, practices and communication cultures in a more complex, less uniform and non-linear way" (p.40). Because of this, these scholars suggest that different political processes interact (and therefore merge) with 'media logic' in different ways. While an election campaign may be more prone to be mediatized given its dependency on public support, the development of policy may attract less the attention of the media and the public (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b). Therefore, Voltmer and Sorensen (2019, p.40) suggest that "mediatization (…) is better understood as a dialectical process where layers of highly mediatized and unmediatized, largely traditional modes of political communication coexist, even within the same institution"

A relatively recent mediatization study from Blumler and Esser (2018) displays this dialectal approach in its analytical framework. Their research, framed within an election campaign context (the 2015 general election campaign in the UK), proposed a dual perspective on the mediatization of politics: a *political actor-centric* perspective (what they have called '*pull forces'*) and a *media actor-centric* perspective (what they have called '*push forces'*). The political actor-

centric perspective goes in line with the idea of 'self-mediatization' (Esser, 2013) described above or the "anticipatory behaviour of political actors" (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b, p.21); here political actors strategically adopt news media logic in order to achieve their goals. On the other hand, the media actor-centric perspective is built upon concepts of journalistic interventionism in which the news media, understood as an independent institution following its own rules, push back the efforts of political actors in limiting journalists' autonomy. Employing this approach, Blumler and Esser (2018, p.5, italics in original) define mediatization as: "a combination of *push forces* (where news media demonstrate autonomy from political considerations) *and pull forces* (where political behaviour is expanded in scope by integrating media logic-related activities in a calculated move)".

This idea of understanding the mediatization of politics as both a 'matter of degree' and a 'dialectical process' is key when testing empirically this theoretical framework. As it has been shown hitherto, a great deal of empirical research on the mediatization of politics has focused on the third phase of mediatization (measuring the degree to which the news coverage is governed by media logic) or on the fourth phase of mediatization (the degree to which political actors' behavior is guided by media logic). However, it is important to embrace a more integrated approach that besides interpreting the news content, also considers the dynamic relationship between political actors (and their logics) and news media actors (and their logics). This dual approach not only offers a better understanding of these relationships, but it also makes one aware that there are a variety of factors (e.g. nature of the process under research) that may affect the degree to which a process or an institution rely (or not) on resorting to the logics of the media. Therefore, identifying *when* mediatization is more likely to happen (what are the key factors triggering it) should also be a primary objective of studies firmly rooted on the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b).

Finally, another important area of investigation within the mediatization of politics has been the study of public organizations. Within this body of inquiry (Schillemans, 2012; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Schillemans, 2016; Garland et al., 2018), studies have focused more on assessing and interpreting the degree to which political actors are governed by media logic rather than political logic, following the fourth dimension suggested by Strömbäck (2008). Here, looking

at indicators such as news management, for example, it is relevant to observe the different ways in which bureaucracies (and their employees) can end up adapting their routines to the demands of the media. Consequently, this type of research has been informed by what is known as the 'professionalization' of political communication: "the realization that governments (…) can no longer take a disinterested approach to the generation, production and dissemination of information" (Negrine, 2008, p.118). In other words, and due to the changes that the media has experienced in the last decades (the increase in media outlets, for example), political actors have had to professionalize some skills and to introduce some changes into their practices: acquiring more media savvy-skills (including self-presentation) and "upgrading 'media relations' units and staffing with experts whose task it is to tailor all political output to media logic" (Esser, 2013, p.162).

This professionalization of public communication involves actors beyond those narrowly defined as 'political actors'. For instance, Garland et al. (2018) looked at how different communications specialists and senior policy workers, within state bureaucracies in the UK, integrated and responded to media considerations. The preliminary results suggest that the UK government is mediatized and that "media impacts are increasingly becoming institutionalized and normalized within state bureaucracies" (p.496). Likewise, Schillemans (2012, p.149) found that "larger public organizations are strongly aware of their media environment and that reputational issues are extremely important to their executives", after conducting interviews, focus groups, and surveys with more than 80 senior practitioners working for public agencies, government departments or third sector organizations. Interestingly, the author concludes that the process of 'organizational mediatization' "does not follow a fixed trajectory along historically stable indicators" (Schillemans, 2012, p.142) but rather varies depending on factors such as organizational type, the resources employed to deal with communication matters, the strategy used by the organizations, among others. This is in line with the idea that mediatization should be considered, then, as a matter of degree (Strömbäck and Van Aelst, 2013)

2.3 Logics that manifest through interaction: an 'inhabited institutions' approach

Given that I also understand mediatization as a 'dialectical process' (Blumler and Esser, 2018; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019), I argue that the *relational* aspect is not so well grasped by the concept of 'media logic' conceived within the institutionalist tradition. While there are instances in which 'media logic' can help explain media-related behaviour, there are other circumstances (given its meso analytical nature) in which this concept become less effective in explaining the more specific aspects of the complex and nuanced relationship between media actors and political actors. Although an institutional perspective on mediatization proposes mainly a meso-level of analysis - as explained by Hjarvard (2014) - I advocate for an approach that also includes a micro-level of analysis.[3]

One could argue that including a micro-level of analysis when assessing the concept of media logic would not be appropriate as the notion is trying to encapsulate (and therefore explain) the institutional rules, norms and routines of the news media. In other words, that if the level of analysis is too specific, then it is not reflecting what could be considered an 'institutional order'. However, I argue here that institutional logics (in this case the logics of the media) ultimately manifest themselves and are put into practice ***through interaction* between actors.** Ignoring this aspect would, in one way or another, neglect the idea that organizations and institutions are constituted, ultimately, by human beings who bring institutional norms to life. This specific perspective, which integrates micro and meso factors (and how they are connected to more structural conditions), is encapsulated in what has been coined as the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010).

This is a model which emphasizes the agency of the actors when constructing meaning through daily interactions and how these interactions can enact the institutional order where those

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[3] See for instance Shoemaker and Reese (2014) and their Hierarchy of Influences Model, which includes an 'individual' category to interpret the process of news production. They argue that this level of analysis is important because "individual traits may become relevant to their [journalists] larger professional roles" (p.204). The same could be said for political actors: individual traits of FARC members, for instance, could have been important for their larger political roles within the peace negotiation.

actors are embedded (Everitt and Levinson, 2016, p.116). In other words, an 'inhabited institutions' approach acknowledges that institutions are innately 'inhabited' by people who are the ones negotiating the prevailing logics within their institutional environments.

A key claim of this approach is that "institutions are not inert categories of meaning; rather they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance" (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006, p.213).This means that although institutions provide the general guidelines - logics - for the interactions to happen, the people who compose these institutions constantly negotiate these logics - and create meaning - through these interactions. Since the logics are 'brought to life' by people within institutions through interactions, these interactions can either "enact the institutional order" (Everitt and Levinson, 2016, p.116) or perhaps even subvert or modify it. Consequently, this model provides me with a sensitizing framework to better grasp, on a more micro sociological level, the way in which political actors and media actors relate to one another *within* institutional environments.

As Hallet and Ventresca (2006, p.231) explain, an 'inhabited institutions' approach "focuses on *'meaning'*, not only on macro-logics terms" but also (and perhaps most importantly) "in terms of the interactions through which the contours of these logics are negotiated to create meanings and lines of future action". This means that the actions of the people within institutions are always assessed in relation to the more macro institutional order and vice versa. They explain, consequently, that these actions can have implications for the situation (referring specifically to the interaction) or the organization in question. Although this approach can be applied to different institutional settings, I argue that in the context of a peace negotiation, and particularly during transitional periods - from war to more peaceful settings - it is highly relevant to look at the specificities of the relationships between journalists and political actors.

For example, since journalists in Colombia have also been subjects of the conflict (see **Chapter 3.2**), their individual attitudes and beliefs may have had an impact in the way they both represented the peace negotiations and interacted with the government and FARC delegations - see Şahin and Karayianni (2020) for a discussion on this on the Cyprus peace process. To better understand this analytical and theoretical position, we can take a closer look at an empirical case

from my project (see the full discussion in **Chapter 8.1**) in which the inclusion of the 'inhabited institutions' model helps us to identify patterns in the media/politics relationship that otherwise would not be grasped by only resorting to the meso analytical level of the notion of media logic.

When FARC arrived at the peace negotiations, they had a very antagonistic outlook on the Colombian news media. According to the guerrilla group, the Colombian media was an 'enemy' that had misleadingly and negatively portrayed them during the conflict, contributing to a distorted version of the guerrilla struggle. This negative perception meant that, amongst other things, the relationships with journalists at the beginning of the negotiations were rather difficult. However, as time passed by, the FARC delegation started to have more encounters with journalists in Havana. These **interactions** with journalists made them aware of the nuances within news media organizations: they became aware that discrepancies between the editorial approach of a media outlet and the personal and political beliefs of their journalists could exist. In other words, that a journalist who was in favour of the success of the peace process could also work for a media outlet that was either skeptical or highly critical of the negotiation. Therefore, this growing awareness by FARC contributed to improving relationships with journalists, who in turned acknowledged that as the negotiations progressed, they built more trust with members of the FARC delegation.

This example (briefly summarized) helps to illustrate how the change of attitude of FARC members towards the traditional news media occurred, in part, given the social interaction that they experienced with journalists. As FARC members built more trust with journalists given their 'new understanding' of how the Colombian news media operated, they also adapted their media behaviour (e.g., exclusive interviews were given proactively to the media outlets that they considered at first the 'enemy'). These interactions were indeed highly important in the context of the peace negotiation as the guerrilla had not had much direct contact with the press during war times; speaking directly to journalists helped them to change their perception of the news media, which in turned influenced how they addressed the press. This can be clearly seen in the example of FARC described above: the construction of meaning of the guerrilla around the way in which the Colombian news media operated had implications for both their communication approach and the relationships with the reporters responsible for representing the peace process.

Therefore, the very acknowledgement of the importance of *how meaning was constructed through communication* - which is a form of social interaction as explained by Hepp and Hasebrink (2014, p.251) - affords a different analytical lens to better grasp the relationship between FARC and the reporters during the peace process (which could also be applied to the case of the Colombian government). I argue that applying the broad understanding of social constructivist theory, and more specifically the 'inhabited institutions' model, allows us to not lose sight of the relevance of the communication process, as a form of interaction, between media actors and political actors in the way they influence one another, construct meaning and negotiate their distinct institutional logics. Even though the institutionalist approach addresses the interplay between 'media logic' and 'political logic', it does so on a meso-level that may obscure the more individual conditions under which these logics take place.

2.4 News media autonomy as a condition for the mediatization of politics

As it was explained in **Section (2.1)**, one of the conditions for the media to be able to exercise influence over other institutions is its independence from the latter: the "media becomes a social institution in their own right" (Hjarvard, 2008, p.113). Similar to the previous discussion on the logics of the media, and in order to fully grasp the notion of media autonomy or media independence, one needs to pay attention to both the macro and the micro structures conditioning journalistic autonomy. The concept of the 'duality of structure' developed by Giddens (1984) is helpful to comprehend that institutional settings (as guidelines for individuals to act) can be both 'enabling and constraining' (p.169). This means, amongst other things, that although levels of autonomy from agents (e.g., journalists) are greatly shaped by the institutional norms (both formal and informal), the agents can either transform or maintain those guidelines by using the institutional resources at their disposal (Sjøvaag, 2020, p.162). In other words, "institutions may enable and constrain the individual to reproduce the existing social order, but they may also be the medium through which alternative rules and distributions of resources occur" (Hjarvard, 2014, p.207).

Within this context of a 'dual structure' in relation to journalistic autonomy, Sjøvaag (2020, p.164) argues that "the level of autonomy enjoyed by journalists is therefore a fluid and moving concept - continuously adjusted according to what is needed to perform the task of reporting the news". This is in line with Ryfe's (2009, p.208) idea that the level of journalistic autonomy is continually negotiated through interactions among reporters and editors in the newsrooms. As with institutional logics, autonomy is also exercised at the level of individuals and, consequently, should not be conceived as a pre-existing condition of institutions (Orchard Rieiro, 2015) but rather as a constant struggle (Bourdieu, 2005)

This idea of journalistic autonomy as 'fluid' or as a 'struggle', which I second in this thesis, connotes that the news media cannot be considered as fully independent from, for instance, the political field. In other words, the media is not exempt from external pressures than can challenge their independence. Strömbäck (2008), and also Hjarvard (2013), express this when referring to the media as a 'semi-independent' institution. Despite the media having some control over the

news content and offering some resistance to the political influence over the news, Strömbäck explains that the mass media does not achieve a full independence from politics but rather that their relationship should be understood as mutually interdependent (2008) - as it has also been explained above through the idea of mediatization as 'dialectical process'. What are then some of the external pressures that constrain or challenge journalistic autonomy?

Though not necessarily linked to issues of autonomy, new institutionalists have tried to explain the macro-forces that influence the process of news production. On one side, Sparrow argues that "news routines mediate primarily economic factors"; on the other hand, Cook, Kaplan and Ryfe identify the state or 'polities' as the key external force affecting news production (see Ryfe, 2006, p.138). Benson (2006) has proposed, following an approach which integrates new institutionalism and field theory from Bourdieu, that journalistic autonomy sits between two opposing poles: a state-civic and state-economic. For him, and in line with the authors outlined above, "autonomy is (…) an ongoing, contested space somewhere between nonmarket and market-oriented forms of state regulation" (Benson, 2006, p.199).

It is important to note, nonetheless, that these different pressures on the news media work differently in different contexts, hence the notion of autonomy needs to also be understood as highly contextual. For instance, Hallin and Mancini (2004, p.35), who see autonomy as a result of journalistic professionalization (among other factors), argue that the "degree of journalistic autonomy varies considerably over time, across media systems, and often within media systems, from one type of news organization to another". They explain that in a 'Liberal' media system model journalistic autonomy may be more prone to constraints related to commercial pressures rather than political instrumentalization (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p.75). This means, amongst other things, that even if the news media becomes more independent from the political field in some media systems (as mediatization theory suggests), this may also make the news media more dependent from other external pressures - such as market demands related to, for instance, economic sustainability (Magin and Geiß, 2019, p.545). Champagne (2005, p.51) also refers to this issue by arguing that the press is no longer dominated by political forces, but there are still some other equivalent constraints on news production such as profitability.

This idea of media autonomy as highly contextual is indeed very important for my research project. As I will explain in detail in **Chapter (3.1)**, the Colombian media system, as Montoya (2014, p.77, emphasis added) argues, has come closer to what has been named the '*Captured Liberal'* model: liberal as it presents "medium levels of press circulation, external pluralism and **market dominance**" and captured by "the state, corporate, and illegal interests". This means that journalistic autonomy in Colombia is highly constrained due to an increasing commercialised environment and the historical ties between the political elite and the media. As my thesis will illustrate in the empirical chapters, the news coverage of the peace process was highly mediated by these two poles: content heavily influenced by commercial rationales but also very lenient towards the government's accountability throughout the peace process.

I will then understand media autonomy in this study as a highly contextual notion that is shaped by market demands and journalistic professional norms, and which in the field is constantly negotiated both among journalists and between journalists and politicians.

2.5 Criticism of mediatization theory

The theoretical framework on mediatization has been subject to some criticism. Perhaps the most prominent one has come from Deacon and Stanyer (2014). They point out three main areas of concerns around the theory: "how causal processes are thought about, how historical change is understood, and how concepts are designed" (p.1032). In regards the causal processes, the scholars are primarily concerned about the apparent media-centric nature of mediatization and how the media or ICT's are seen as 'innately powerful' (despite 'power' not being properly defined). Even though they acknowledge that the 'agents' of mediatization can have a significant effect in other social fields, that effect may only happen "when combined with other cultural, political and social variables" (p.1035).

In respect to this area of criticism, I agree that the influence of the media in other institutions has to be assessed in tandem with other societal factors. However, mediatization theory does not discard the possible influence of other factors in the changes of our culture and society; on the contrary, it welcomes multidisciplinary approaches to try to understand these phenomena. What mediatization does is to put the media at the centre of the analysis to comprehend how it may influence society (on the broader level). This idea has been explained by Hepp et al. (2015) when distinguishing between 'media-centric' and 'media-centered'. The first approach - the one described by Deacon and Stanyer (2014) - discards other possible factors (besides media influence) when understanding processes of change, whereas the second approach (the one advocated by mediatization) acknowledges the different social forces at stake but allowing "to have a particular perspective and emphasis on the role of the media in these processes" (Hepp et al., 2015, p.316). We, as media scholars, need to first understand the role of the media in these different societal processes if we actually want to engage in multidisciplinary research.

This first area of criticism also points out that even though the media are seen as 'innately powerful', the notion of 'power' seems not to be well defined within mediatization theory. In other words, that although this theoretical framework argues that the media has come to intervene in other spheres of society given its increasing power, there is a lack of conceptual tools to truly explain how that power is exercised by the media in other institutions. Even though these claims can be considered fair criticism - not all mediatization studies give accounts on how the media

exerts its power - there have been some theoretical developments (beyond the idea of 'media logic') that can also capture the way in which the media exercise its influence and power over other institutions.

Some of this work has been done by Couldry (2003, 2014), which has brought together field theory and mediatization. Broadly speaking, field theory (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1983; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) could be seen as an appropriate 'candidate' to help capture the growing influence of the media in other spheres of society. In his latest work, Bourdieu was making significant claims that are of great relevance to mediatization research. For instance, he hypothesized that the journalistic field "[was] more and more imposing its constraints on all other fields, particularly the fields of cultural production (…) and on the political field" (Bourdieu, 2005, p.41). Given this, there has been some interest from other scholars to also integrate mediatization and field theory in a constructive dialogue: Rawolle and Lingard (2014) have employed field theory in the mediatization of education policy; Jansson (2015) has incorporated the notions of field and doxa from Bourdieu to develop what he refers to as a 'critical perspective on mediatization'. Couldry (2003; 2014), on the other hand, has developed the concept of meta media-capital to explain what he refers as the 'transversal effects of the media' which mediatization is particularly invested in - Rawolle and Lingard (2014) refer to this as the 'cross-field effects'.

Media meta-capital appears then as a promising mechanism to explicate the way in which the media exercise its influence (power) over other fields. Couldry (2014) mainly argues that media institutions can have an influence over what counts as capital in other fields, similar to what Bourdieu attributes to the state (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp.110-115). He explains that although this concept is related to the idea of media-related capital that agents accrue in specific fields, the media meta-capital has to be considered as a distinct form that only operates on a macro-institutional level. Therefore, Couldry (2014, p.235) hypothesizes that "the greater the media sector's meta-capital, the more likely the salience of media-related capital for action in any particular field". Since he has always been a critic of the notion of 'media logic' (see Couldry, 2008), he makes clear that the notion of media meta-capital, rather than describing a 'general logic' is illustrating the transformation of different fields in which the accruing of media-related capital has risen in importance. I would argue here that Couldry's approach can give us additional

'theoretical tools' to explain the ways in which the media may indeed influence other fields. However, it is important to clarify that given that my project is mainly located on a meso-level of analysis (and the notion of media meta-capital operates on a macro-institutional level), I am only mentioning this theoretical approach to demonstrate that there have been important theoretical developments, rooted in mediatization theory, to encapsulate the power that the media exercise in other fields (hence addressing the criticism to this point).

The second area of concern from Deacon and Stanyer (2014) relates to how historical change is understood within mediatization given that not all empirical studies employing this theoretical framework conduct either comparative or diachronic types of research. In this respect, the scholars argue that there seems to be no clarity about "when mediatization started and where things currently stand" (p.1033). In this regard, I need to firstly clarify that I distance myself from academic perspectives that advocate for a long-term historical perspectives on mediatization such as Verón (2014) who argues that it is a process "resulting from the sapien's capability of semiosis"; I see mediatization more as a late modernity process (Thompson, 2011; Livingstone and Lunt, 2014). Having said this, I acknowledge that my project is not particularly focused on measuring *change* over time. Even though I am examining a peace process that lasted for almost five years (August 2012 – December 2016), and I could pinpoint as to how the relationship between the news media and some of the different political actors (i.e., FARC) *evolved* or *changed* throughout time, this would not be enough to make significant claims on the allegedly increasing power of the media over time.

However, and in line with Voltmer and Sorensen (2019), I understand the mediatization of politics as a 'dialectical process' (rather than a linear process), where the specific social and political contexts in which the relationships of news media actors and political actors take place are key to determining how mediatization processes are conducted. Given this understanding, I do not see it as problematic to examine the relationship between media actors and political actors in a delimited timeframe. On the contrary, focusing on a specific political process (a peace negotiation) within a specific timeline can expand our understanding of how the news media can influence (differently) political organizations depending on contextual features. In other words, not all mediatization studies need to have a longitudinal and historical approach to shed light on

how the news media can impact political processes: delimited studies (as it is the case of this research) can contribute to the broader understanding of the mediatization of politics. For example, despite my project focusing specifically on a peace negotiation in Colombia, its findings can contribute to a better understanding of the role of the news media in political bargaining. In brief, the mediatization framework that is applied to some specific cases can also help in describing a diverse range of political processes with comparable features

Finally, the third area of concern deals with an allegedly weak conceptualization of mediatization, "a container in which different things can be placed" (Deacon and Stanyer, 2014, p.1039). In this respect, I argue that the specific framework on the mediatization of politics has had important developments, both theoretically and empirically, that has reduced the risk of using an 'all-encompassed' notion. Its research boundaries have been well-defined by focusing on understanding the interdependent relationship between media and politics, but more specifically assessing the degree to which political organizations and their actors have institutionalized media logic within their processes. As an example of one of these developments, instead of referring to 'media logic', I make use of the concept of 'news media logic' to specifically point at the *professional*, *commercial* and *technological* dimensions (following Strömbäck and Esser (2014b) operationalization of 'media logic') that guide the news production process.

Apart from these general criticisms of mediatization theory, the notion of 'media logic' has also been subject of some concerns given its centrality in the theoretical framework on the mediatization of politics. Overall, the criticism has been focused on arguing that the notion suggests linearity and singularity. For example, Couldry (2008, p.377) points out that the influence that the media can exert on institutions is seen as too broad and heterogeneous to be reduced to a single media logic (Couldry, 2008, p.377). In other words, that embracing a media logic approach presupposes a 'linear-nature' understanding of the concept in which change is directly linked (and reduced) to the adoption of media formats. In line with this, Lundby (2009) argues that although some scholars acknowledge that there are a wide range of variables (in plural) at stake in the configuration of the media logic, the notion is always conceived as a *unified* concept and the usage of the term appears to be a matter of "presentation tactics".

In this respect, I argue that the notion of news media logic should not be perceived as a linear notion. Firstly, as I discussed earlier in this **Chapter (2)**, the concept of 'news media logic' developed by Esser (2013), and later by Strömbäck and Esser (2014b), is rooted in the idea of the *logic of appropriateness* (March and Olsen, 2011) which establishes that the actors who pertain to an specific institution (i.e., news media) will behave in a way that is perceived to be natural and legitimate. However, even though actors follow a set of institutional rules, these rules are not necessarily set in stone and they can have actual variations depending on, for instance, organizational factors. For example, the adherence to professional norms in the journalistic field can differ from organization to organization within the same media system. Despite these differences, nonetheless, I acknowledge that there still a 'guiding framework' which journalists follow to construct reality. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for this area of criticism, I am embracing an approach ('inhabited institutions') in my study that acknowledges that these logics are put into practice through *interaction*. It is by looking at *how* these logics are practiced by actors that one can see that they function not as static 'frameworks of action' but rather as guidelines that can be modified precisely during those interactions.

Moreover, it is also important to note that depending on the type of media (public broadcasting or commercial media, for example), some of the news media logic dimensions will be more emphasized in the behaviour of journalists. While journalists pertaining to a commercial newspaper will most likely be driven by commercial rationales, journalists from a public broadcasting institution may display more professional conducts in their behaviour (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b). This highlights the idea that despite different media organizations behaving differently, the issue should be then discussed in terms of the *degree of emphasis*; that is, identifying which rationales are driving news production, rather than ignoring or invalidating the notion of news media logic to understand the news production process.

2.6 Concluding remarks

This **Chapter (2)** has reviewed the theoretical foundations of mediatization theory, particularly the mediatization of politics. I have explained that although my research mainly follows an institutionalist tradition, my aim - from a theoretical point of view - is to integrate this perspective with some of the 'toolbox' offered by social constructivist theories. More specifically, I am applying the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010), which combines symbolic interactionism and new institutionalism, to argue that although the news media displays certain logics (aka 'news media logic') in their functioning, these logics manifest themselves, ultimately, through interaction. This means for my research project that some of the micro aspects of the relationship between media actors and political actors will be taken into consideration when interpreting, for instance, the way in which journalists interacted with politicians during off the record meetings. As it was shown through one of the empirical examples that I provided in this chapter (how FARC changed its perception of the Colombian news media), communication - as a form of interaction - did matter for the media-related behaviour displayed by the guerrilla group.

The above does not mean, nonetheless, that my empirical analysis will 'get lost' in the specificities of the micro sociological factors influencing the media-politics relationship. As Hjarvard (2013, Chapter 2)[4] explains, there is a risk in dismissing 'media logic' and solely emphasizing social interaction when conducting research on mediatization: this "may obscure the question of how to grasp the specificities of the media". Hjarvard points out that although every kind of social influence (including the media's) has to be instantiated by and through social interaction, this does not necessarily answer how the media - with its special internal characteristics - may be able to influence other fields (2013, Chapter 2). In line with this, my study embraces the 'inhabited institutions' approach mainly as a sensitizing framework to not lose sight of the importance of communication and interaction when interpreting the institutional logics of the media.

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[4] Please note that a page number has not been provided as I consulted this material in Perlego, an ebook website that does not provide page number for its books. The Leeds Harvard guidelines advice in these instances to include the section where the quote was taken. Please also consider that you may find other very few instances, similar to this, throughout the document.

In this chapter I also reviewed both the theoretical conceptualization and the empirical application of 'media logic' in media studies as this is the main mechanism, within the institutionalist tradition, through which the media is able to influence other spheres of society. Three key remarks need to be addressed here. Firstly, that I see Strömbäck and Esser's (2014b) conceptualization of 'news media logic' - with its three dimensions – as the best fit for my research project. Besides being a concept that can be measured empirically, it is also rooted in the idea of the *logic of appropriateness* (March and Olsen, 2011, p.478). This gives it an important conceptual 'elasticity' as it understands that the adoption of rules and norms is subject to specific institutional contexts. In other words, that the notion of 'news media logic' is not set in stone and that some variations may apply depending on contextual features. Testing the effectiveness of the concept of 'news media logic', that is, how well it captures and explains the news production process in Colombia, is then a key part of my research study.

Secondly, that there is a need to keep addressing mediatization studies that embrace an actor-centered approach. As I showed in **Section (2.2)**, there are few studies (Orchard-Rieiro, 2015; Blumler and Esser, 2018), rooted in mediatization theory, which strictly follow this perspective. They either focus on interpreting the degree to which the news content is mediatized (Zeh and Hopmann, 2013; Takens et al's 2013) or the perception of media influence (Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Isotalus and Almonkari, 2014), but they do not necessarily focus on empirically analysing the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians. Even if studies embrace an actor-center approach, they tend to focus on one side of the equation (either media actors or political actors) instead of examining the dialectical aspect of the mediatization of politics. In my research, I intend to contribute to this gap by providing a more comprehensive understanding to mediatization by not only looking at the degree to which news content could have been mediatized but also by putting at the center of my study the relationship between Colombian journalists and politicians during the peace negotiation (and how they influenced one another).

Thirdly, that besides understanding the mediatization of politics as a 'dialectical process', I also align with the idea that mediatization is better understood as a matter of degree (Stromback, 2008) or that any type of political organization or system, rather than being completely mediatized will be "characterized by islands of greater or lesser mediatization" (Marcinkowski, 2005, cited in

Donges and Jarren, 2014, p.196). This rejects the apparent idea that mediatization suggests a linear process or that political institutions have become 'media slaves'. On the contrary, as Strömbäck and Esser (2014b, p.8) explain, "the degree to which politics has become mediatized is (…) contingent on a host of factors at different levels of analysis that may be vary within and across countries". Therefore, a key focus of my research will be to identify *when* mediatization was more likely to happen in the context of the peace negotiation, recognizing the factors that may have differently triggered this process for the different political actors involved in.

Finally, I discussed the notion of media autonomy within the mediatization framework. I agree with both Hallin and Mancini (2004) when they argue that journalistic autonomy is highly contextual and with Sjøvaag (2020,p.164) when explaining that the level of autonomy that journalists experience is "a fluid and moving concept" that is constantly negotiated in their newsrooms. In terms of the macro structures conditioning autonomy, mainly in the context of Colombia, I explain in the following **Chapter (3.3)** that a commercialized media environment has heavily conditioned how journalists construct news. Similar to the focus on identifying *when* mediatization is more likely to occur, the focus of my study in this regard will be to try to determine in which circumstances the autonomy of journalists is challenged by political actors as well as under which circumstances the autonomy of politicians, in their role, is seen to be affected by the intrusion of the logics of the news media.

Chapter 3: The role of the news media in the prospects of peace

> *"Getting out of a war takes a long time. It is a process of cultural change, a very deep transformational process, and that is not newsworthy. Cultural changes and social transformations are not very newsworthy. We are used to telling the news of war, how are we going to construct the news of peace? I think that's where the question comes from: what is the role of journalism in a peace process? Giving context about the negotiations, interpreting the agreements (...) there are not black and whites in a peace process. We have to reflect about many things before publishing whatever we are going to publish about a peace process. Every single piece of information related to a negotiation is paramount"*
> (Senior Political Reporter, J-SPR 7).

This **Chapter (3)** examines the role of the news media in peace negotiations and describes the key characteristics of the Colombian media system. To do so, I divide the chapter in four sections. **Section (3.1)** provides an overview of the role of the news media during peace processes. Since this has been an under-researched area, a particular emphasis is given to the work of Wolfsfeld (1997a; 1997b; 2004) as he has provided one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks to understand the way in which the news media can influence peace negotiations. I focus here on explaining how his framework is useful in providing theoretical tools to identify the instances in which the news media can play either a constructive or destructive role during peace processes. For example, I explain how the news values (*immediacy, drama, simplicity, and ethnocentrism*) that journalists follow to report on peace negotiations, according to Wolfsfeld (2004), can have negative consequences for what he has identified as the four key roles of the media during these processes (see from **page 55** in this chapter).

In this **Section (3.1)** I also briefly introduce the notion of 'peace journalism' and explain how this research agenda contrasts to that of Wolfsfeld (1997, 2004) in one key aspect. Whereas 'peace journalism' tends to attribute a lot of power to journalists (and the news media more broadly), overlooking some of the internal and external factors that influence the news production process (Hanitzsch 2004; 2007), Wolfsfeld (2004) argues that the political process (the negotiations) is more likely to influence the news media than the other way around. In **Section (3.2)** I turn to examine the specific case of the Colombian news media during peace negotiations. This section highlights a key contradiction that also becomes an opportunity for this research study:

even though Colombia has over three decades of experience of negotiating peace with varied guerrilla and paramilitary groups, there is virtually no research rooted in media theory that has comprehensively investigated the role of the news media in these processes.

I show that the few studies in this area have solely focused on identifying the narratives used by the media to represent the peace negotiations (Charry, 2013; Richard and Saffon, 2016) or the discourses employed by political actors to communicate their perspectives and motives (Richard and Llano, 2017; Ríos and Cairo, 2018). However, these studies have looked at particular moments of the negotiations (e.g. the peace plebiscite), instead of examining the processes as a whole and, more importantly, they have not examined the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians during the negotiations (a key focus of my study). Moreover, since this review is brief as there are few studies to refer to, I also provide an overview on how the Colombian news media has represented the internal armed conflict, highlighting how the media has historically relied on official sources to report on the war (Rey and Bonilla, 2004; Rey et al., 2005; Rey and Bonilla, 2005)

Section (3.3) provides an overview of the Colombian media system. I explain that large economic conglomerates, with strong political alliances, have come to dominate the ownership of the news media in Colombia. I describe how this process has affected, for instance, journalistic autonomy, which is a key aspect of journalistic professionalism that has also been largely affected by the armed conflict in Colombia, as practicing journalism in Colombia remains a very dangerous activity. Given this background, I conclude this **Section (3.3)** by arguing that, as suggested by Montoya (2014), the Colombian media system seems to be moving towards the 'Captured Liberal' model proposed by Guerrero (2014). This means that the media system in Colombia presents medium levels of press circulation and a market dominance (with low state intervention), hence the 'liberal aspect', but has also been 'captured' by the interests of corporations, the state and even illegal organisations (Montoya, 2014, p.77).

Finally, in the concluding remarks **Section (3.4)** I focus on explaining how I intend to use some of the theoretical concepts reviewed in this **Chapter (3)** for my analysis, placing a particular

emphasis on how they interact with some of the notions of the mediatization of politics that I examined in **Chapter (2).**

3.1 The role of the news media in peace negotiations

Back in 2004, Wolfsfeld stated that there was not a single study that examined the role of the news media in an ongoing peace process (2004, p.8). A decade after this, Hoffmann and Hawkins (2015, Introduction) pointed to a similar situation: "the recognition of links between communication, conflict and peace are nothing new, but academic efforts to understand them have tended to focus primarily on the links between communication and conflict, rather than on peace". Currently, things have not changed much: studies that focus on examining the relationship between media and peace are still the exception (not the norm). In fact, more than 15 years after its original publication, the theoretical framework proposed by Wolfsfeld (2004) is still regarded as one of the most comprehensive approaches to understanding the role of the news media in peace processes.

After conducting several studies (see Wolfsfeld, 1997a; Wolfsfeld, 1997b; Wolfsfeld, 2001), and drawing on data from three peace negotiations - the Oslo peace process, the peace process between Israel and Jordan, and the Good Friday Agreement between Northern Ireland and the UK, Wolfsfeld (2004) developed a theory which aimed to determine in which instances the media was more likely to play either a 'constructive' or a 'destructive' role in peace negotiations. Given that his framework examines this issue from the outlook of governments' efforts in trying to achieve peace, his theory is mainly focused on explaining "when the news media are more likely to either facilitate or frustrate government efforts to move forward" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.11).

Before describing the scenarios in which the news media can play a constructive role, it is important to clarify that a central argument of Wolfsfeld is that "all other things being equal, the news media generally play a negative role in attempts to bring peace" (2004, p.220). The main reason for this, he explains, is because there is a fundamental contradiction between the nature of a peace negotiation and news values. While peace processes are very complex, take time to make progress (the Colombian peace process lasted for almost five years, for instance), and can be considered as tedious negotiations, journalism requires simplicity, demands immediate results and asks for drama (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p.67). In fact, Wolfsfeld argues that when constructing news around peace negotiations, journalists tend to be guided by four major values: *immediacy* (the reporting of events over providing context)*, drama* (focus on violence, crisis, etc.)*, simplicity* (two-

sided conflicts, focus on images, major personalities) and *ethnocentrism* (portraying the *other* as the enemy).

A good way to understand how some of these values can negatively affect the role of the media in peace processes is to explain what Wolfsfeld (2004, pp.12-37) refers as the four influences of the media in peace negotiations. Firstly, he argues that the media 1) *can define the political atmosphere that surrounds the negotiations*. Is the process moving forward or backwards? To what extent is the general public supporting the efforts of the government to pursue peace in a particular process? The news media contribute to answer these (and other) questions through their reporting which, in turn, helps to determine whether or not the negotiations (and their political atmosphere) are conducive of achieving peace. Consequently, if there is an emphasis on *drama* in the news, the political atmosphere characterized by the media will be more likely negative, heated, and pessimistic. More specifically, "presenting conflict between the two sides in dramatic terms serves to inflame the political atmosphere" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.19)

The second major influence of the media in peace processes identified by Wolfsfeld is 2) *the impact on the nature of the debate about the peace negotiations*. As it is common in the news production process, the media gets to select the voices that participate in the debates surrounding the negotiations. Wolfsfeld understands the news media as a central arena where these debates take place and argues that they should "serve as a forum in which proponents and opponents are encouraged to express their views in an open and reasoned fashion" (2004, p.12). Since this scenario is an ideal and cannot be necessarily achieved by the media, the key aspect here is to be able to identify the 'structures' and 'processes' that restrict the scope of discourse within the news media. In terms of how the news values may negatively affect this role, an emphasis on *immediacy* (the constant search for a simple message as opposed to providing comprehensive context of the issues) can affect the quality of public debate and deliberation.

The third major influence deals with how the news media 3) *can affect the strategies and behaviour of antagonists*. Wolfsfeld explains that since antagonists (this is how he refers to 'political actors') attribute the news media with great importance during peace negotiations, they will always try to adapt their strategies and behaviour to coincide with the media needs. This is

indeed in line with key claims within the mediatization of politics because, as explained in **Chapter (2.3)**, political actors will tend to adopt news media logic to achieve their political goals as they perceive the news media as an influential force in their field. A negative consequence of journalists constructing news by resorting to *drama* is that the antagonists (particularly those not in power or considered 'weak' actors) need to be more 'extreme' in their tactics to get media exposure (Gitlin, 1980; Wolfsfeld, 1997b). For instance, they will resort more often to the use of conflict frames to communicate their initiatives.

However, the strategies of political actors in power (e.g. governments leading the peace negotiations, for example) can also be affected by the news media. Wolfsfeld (2004) explains that this can happen, for instance, during what he refers to as 'political waves': "when critical events (…) lead to a dramatic increase in the amount of public attention focused on a particular issue or event" (p.2); an instance of a 'political wave' could be a violent attack that occurs in the middle of a peace negotiation. Since the news media can create a sense of urgency around these events through the amount of media coverage given to them, the higher the extent of the coverage and the amount of time devoted to report on the type of crisis, the more likely those in power will feel pressured to deal with the situation.

Finally, the last major influence of the media refers to how they 4) *can shape the public perception of the various antagonists involved in the peace process*. As Wolfsfeld (2004) explains, "media portrayals of proponents and opponents to a peace process are important factors in the overall struggle for political support" (p.11). Within this role, *ethnocentrism* (as a news value) plays a pivotal role. Ethnocentrism can be understood as the "tendency to view the world (…) through the perspective of one's own ethnic group, and (…) reject others who are culturally different" (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). When journalists construct news resorting to an ethnocentric type of reporting, that is following specific cultural conventions, they will tend to focus on news stories about '*us*' - our beliefs -, instead of news stories about '*them*' as they are seen as the *other*. Even when the *other* (that is constantly perceived as the *enemy*) is part of the story, the media is likely to focus on "how they affect us", placing the emphasis on 'our suffering' (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.22) .

In crisis scenarios (e.g., violent attacks) during peace negotiations, this type of *ethnocentric* reporting is even more relevant as the media will tend to vilify the enemy: "we are always the victims, they are always the aggressors" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.22). Importantly, Wolfsfeld reminds us that the effects of the news media in the efforts of achieving peace begins much earlier than the peace negotiations. As I briefly explained in the previous **Chapter (2)** and I will explore in more detail in **Chapter (8.1),** the way in which the news media represented FARC during the internal armed conflict had important implications for the relationship between FARC members and journalists at the beginning of the peace negotiations. Since the former perceived that the latter constantly portrayed them in negative terms (as the enemy, as the *other*), the FARC delegation did not particularly trust reporters and this greatly affected their relationship.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the aim of this theoretical framework is also to identify *when* the news media is likely to exercise a positive role in peace negotiations. Firstly, Wolfsfeld (2004) argues that the greater the degree of elite consensus during a peace negotiation, the higher the chances of the news media to play a positive role. When government leaders are able to garnish support from different political forces in favor of the peace attempts, it is easier for the media to 'come along for the ride' (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.26). A different challenge is presented if a peace negotiation is faced with multiple criticism coming from a divided elite: this can become a conflictual scenario which the media will be more likely to amplify in their reporting (given that, as explained above, there is a tendency to focus on *drama* and *simplicity*). More specifically, when there is elite consensus "one frame [the importance of achieving peace] tends to dominate media discourse" whereas "if the level of opposition grows, alternative frames emerge" and this contest is reflected in the news media coverage (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.28).

Wolfsfeld compares this argument to Hallin's (1986) study about the behaviour of the US news media during the Vietnam war. In the early stages of the war, given the overall consensus about the need to stop the spread of communism in South-east Asia, the media was supportive of the war and the *'cold war'* frame dominated the public discourse (anti-war frames were ignored, for instance). However, in later stages of the conflict, the disenchantment with the war among elites increased, and so did competing frames, so the news media started to focus on more negative aspects of the war. As Hallin (1986) argues, the conflict entered what he has labeled as the 'sphere

of legitimate controversy'. For Wolfsfeld (2004), consequently, understanding and examining the level of elite consensus during a peace negotiation is pivotal as it can determine the prominence (or not) of 'pro-peace' frames within the media discourse.

Another instance in which the media can play a more positive role is related to a dimension of the media environment. For Wolfsfeld (2004, p.42, emphasis in original), "*the greater the extent of shared media, the more likely it is that the news media will play a constructive role in a peace process*". He understands the notion of 'shared media' as the degree to which political actors involved in a peace negotiation consume their news from the same media organizations. Following this, Wolfsfeld argues that there are political, commercial, and cultural factors involved within this dynamic. On the political aspect, he argues that political leaders will tend to focus on a less extreme rhetoric if they have to address a wider and varied audience; the opposite would occur if they had to only address to their own audience: more sectarian messages would be the norm.

In terms of the commercial factors, Wolfsfeld explains that under a shared media environment, media outlets will tend to be cautious not to "offend major segments of the audience" (2004, p.42). In other words, they will be careful enough with the language and the framing of their stories to try to speak to or represent the largest portion of the readers/viewers/listeners. Finally, in regards the cultural aspects, when there is not shared media (or too little), Wolfsfeld explains that the media will tend to represent issues following the cultural conventions of *ethnocentrism* (which, as explained above, can have negative consequences for the peace negotiations). If on the contrary there is an environment with greater shared media, "the underlying theme concerns what can be done to resolve conflict within "our" community" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.42)

Contrary to these positive implications, there is another dimension of the media environment - *sensationalism* - which Wolfsfeld identifies as a factor driving the news media to play a more destructive role. When journalists construct news resorting to a 'melodramatic' kind of style, they will most likely play a rather negative role in peace negotiations. This basically occurs because the emphasis is given to construct news reports based on the four major values discussed above (immediacy, drama, simplicity and ethnocentrism) which can also be understood

as indicators or *forms* of sensationalism. Similarly, a research agenda known as 'peace journalism' has also pointed out how certain news values and news selection criteria (e.g., negativism, personalization) can have a negative consequence in the prospects of peace (Galtung and Vincent, 1992, p.7)

The term 'peace journalism', that was coined and introduced by Johan Galtung in the 1970's, more than providing theoretical tools to understand the role of the news media during peace negotiations, can be better understood as a war reporting orientation that perceives itself as an alternative to what could be considered a more traditional way of reporting on conflicts. For example, Youngblood (2017, Chapter 1) explains that while a journalism oriented to war/violence would place the emphasis on reports characterised by 'us vs them' narratives, victory-oriented and elite-oriented approaches, a peace type of journalism sits on the opposite side: "humanizes the other side, gives voice to everyday people, and discusses solutions".

Although there is no consensus on a unified definition to peace journalism, most of them point to the decisions made by journalists to frame the conflict in a way that can be beneficial in the aims of achieving peace. For example, the Center for Global Peace Journalism, (2022) has defined it as "when editors and reporters make choices that improve the prospects for peace", and Lynch and McGoldrick (2005, p.5) have referred to it as "when editors and reporters make choices - of what to report, and how to report it - that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict". In both definitions it can be seen, however, that journalists are attributed a great sense of power when it comes to decide *how to frame* issues. In other words, there does not appear to be a recognition of the multiple factors (both internal and external) influencing the news production process.

This has indeed been one of the key criticisms of peace journalism formulated by Hanitzsch (2004; 2007). He points out that this approach, which he perceives as 'overly individualistic', does not take into consideration other key factors that affect the way in which the news is constructed (e.g. organizational variables) and suggests that "the advocates of peace journalism must address the structural constraints of news production" (p.7). Based on this, Hanitzsch (2007) argues that peace journalism seems to overestimate the power of both the news media and journalists over

political decisions. This seems to be in line with one of the key arguments within Wolfsfeld's work (1997, 2004). While he acknowledges that the news media does indeed play a central role in peace negotiations, he mainly argues that "they [the media] are not the most important players because they are far more likely to react to events than to initiate them" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.43).

For Wolfsfeld, the best way to understand how the political environment and the news media interact with one another is to see their relationship as part of a cycle: "in which changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance that lead to further changes in the political environment" (2004, p.2). In other words, that in the media/politics relationship the *politics* aspect comes (more often than not) first, rather than the *media* one. He has referred to this as the 'politics-media-politics' cycle which I employ in **Chapter (7.2)** to explain the role of the Colombian news media at the moment of the worst escalation of the conflict (2014) during the peace process.

Similarly, Spencer (2004), who conducted a study to determine the role of the television news media in the Northern Ireland peace process, seems to also be in line with this idea of 'the politics comes first' in the relationship between the media and politics during peace negotiations. He argues that the political process - but more specifically how well political institutions (e.g. political parties) are organized - exert a significant influence over the media - rather than attributing to the latter an inherent ability to determine what politicians do (Spencer, 2004, p.621). Moreover, he also points out that even though the news media are important players during these types of processes and maintain an interdependent relationship with politics, this interdependency becomes more significant in what he labels as 'turning points'. Within his research on the Northern Ireland peace process, examples of 'turning points' comprise the release (leaked) of important documents or the negotiation of the Good Friday agreement. During these events, Spencer (2004, p.620) argues, the news media can exert significant pressure on the political actors through the news coverage, which then means that confidentiality and exclusion towards the media become the default responses from political actors towards the media.

Finally, in an earlier study which focused on examining how television journalists interacted with key politicians during the Northern Ireland peace process, Spencer (2001) also

identified an additional role of the news media during peace negotiations: that of being mediators between political actors. He explains that for "political groups who feel unable to engage in direct contact with their opponents, news becomes a useful conduit" (Spencer, 2001, p.73). This means that political actors can use the news coverage to identify the political stances of their opponents and, based on that, anticipate what their next moves or strategies could look like.

Having described the key aspects of the role of the news media during peace negotiations, in the following **Section (3.2)** I turn to examine the specific role that the Colombian news media has played in both peace processes and the armed conflict.

3.2 The role of the Colombian news media in war and peace

Despite the long experience of Colombian governments in conducting peace negotiations with different (illegal) armed groups, there are virtually no studies that have employed a framework rooted in media theory to understand the role of the news media during these processes. To put this into perspective, in the last four decades, since the administration of former President Belisario Betancourt, the Colombian government has engaged in a series of peace processes with different guerrilla and paramilitary groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN, Spanish acronym), the Movement April 19 - M19 -, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC, Spanish acronym), amongst many others (Villarraga-Sarmiento, 2015). The very little research in this area has only focused on extracting the narratives employed by the media outlets to portray the peace negotiations (Charry, 2013; Richard and Saffon, 2016) or the discourses employed by political actors to communicate their perspectives and motives (Richard and Llano, 2017; Ríos and Cairo, 2018).

Something of significance is that the Colombian studies have looked at specific moments during the negotiations instead of analysing the processes as a whole to, for example, observe the development of narratives over time. For instance, Richard and Llano (2017) focused on the peace narratives employed by the Colombian government and the opposition party during the last four elections campaigns (2002-2014), including the Colombian peace plebiscite campaign that took place during the 2014 presidential election. Therefore, the narratives that the study analysed specifically in relation to the peace process (2012-2016) are considerably limited: the research only looked at the plebiscite issue through interpreting the speeches that both the Colombian government and FARC made during the peace agreement signing event.

In line with this tendency, Charry (2013) studied the Colombian media (television and press) representations about the last peace process only during its first year of negotiations (2013). However, two important considerations need to be highlighted from this study: firstly, that the media focused on reporting the day-to-day development of the negotiations instead of communicating the outcomes and the peace agenda items, and secondly, that the coverage was influenced, to a great extent, by other external affairs such as the death of the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (Venezuela supported the peace process since its beginning) (Charry, 2013, p.647).

Similarly, Lopez (2005) points out, when referring to the failed peace process between the Colombian government and FARC back in the early 2000's, that the Colombian media gave more relevance to news related to the conflict (i.e. armed clashes) rather than reporting on the outcomes of the negotiations. According to him, a dramatic and sensationalist kind of journalism prevailed, one in which only the official sources were used to give context to the citizens (Lopez, 2005, pp.17–18).

In relation to the use of sources, one of the key findings from the largest three Colombian studies about the Colombian media representations around the internal armed conflict was that nearly half of the news pieces (out of a corpus of 4000 pieces from the press and TV) were constructed using only one source (Rey y Bonilla 2004; Rey, Bonilla, Tamayo y Gómez 2005; Rey y Bonilla 2005); in the majority of the cases this voice was either from the Colombian government or the Public Force (Tamayo, 2016). In contrast to this, even though illegal-armed groups appeared in 46% of the news coverage related to the conflict, only in 6% of the cases they were used as a source (Rey et al, 2005, p.31). In other words, the media significantly talked about these organisations, but their perspectives on the conflict are somewhat unknown as they have been hardly quoted in journalistic reports. In this respect, and referring specifically to the case of FARC, Tamayo (2016, p.30) concludes - referring to the findings of these studies - that "there has been no direct participation of FARC voices in the media narratives (…) which has generated [amongst other things] that public opinion has had only access to the official version of the Colombian armed conflict".

Having a lopsided or inaccurate representation of the armed conflict by the media can have serious and negative consequences for the overall understanding of the war by the general public. For instance, García-Marrugo (2013) explains that according to two different opinion polls (Ipsos-Napoleón Franco, 2007; Urtak, 2010), paramilitary groups were seen as minor agents in the armed conflict by a significant percentage of Colombians even though, as reported by the National Center for Historical Memory (NCHM), paramilitaries have been responsible for the majority of the deaths throughout the conflict (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013, pp.33-34). In fact, there has been a tendency within the Colombian press to conceal the responsibility and legitimize the violence coming from paramilitary groups (Pardo, 2005; Pardo, 2007; García, 2008; García, 2012).

García-Marrugo (2013; 2021) illustrates this by showcasing the key differences between news reports about paramilitary actions and news reports about guerrilla actions in the Colombian press. While the representations of paramilitary actions tend to be vague, the representations of the actions committed by the guerrilla groups (such as FARC) are frequently more explicit. More specifically, she explains that attacks committed by paramilitary group were more likely to be described employing undifferentiated terms (e.g., an armed group carried out an attack), whereas in the reports of the attacks by guerrilla groups the specific organisations responsible for the actions were differentiated (e.g. FARC committed an attack) (García-Marrugo, 2013). In a similar fashion, García-Marrugo (2021, p.16) found that the media representation of FARC victims was characterised by more frequent examples of personalisation (e.g. names, kinship, etc.) whereas the representations of victims from the paramilitary groups were characterised by the use of generic terms (e.g. the dead) and less personalising tokens (e.g., occupation).

More recently, in an article I co-authored with Brendan Lawson and which draws upon the data collected for this thesis, we examined the way in which the Colombian news media reported on the number of deaths (220.000) that the Colombian conflict *approximately* left between 1956 and 2012, after the NHCM released a report (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013) about the ravages of the war during this timeframe. One of our findings is also in line with the tendency described above: the news reports misrepresented those accountable for the deaths: "FARC was consistently positioned - often through the omission of information - as the main illegal armed organisation responsible for the death toll" (Ortega and Lawson, 2022, p.2). As mentioned above, paramilitary groups were responsible for a higher number of deaths. We highlight in this study the implications that such reporting can have in the process of memory formation in post-conflict societies, arguing that journalists should adhere to practices oriented to represent the conflict accurately, instead of resorting to practices of vagueness that contribute to create distorted versions of the conflict.

A good way to understand why the Colombian news media have represented the conflict in such a lopsided and inaccurate fashion is to look at the structural factors that have shaped the news media in Colombia. In the following **Section (3.3)** I turn to examine this.

3.3 The Colombian media system within the Latin America region

In order to better understand the interplay between the media and politics in Latin America, it is necessary to take into consideration both global and local specificities (Fox and Waisbord, 2002, p.xxii). This entails paying attention to the degree to which processes such as globalization have come to interfere in the development of media policies and regulations, as well as looking at the unique socio-political characteristics of the countries that comprise a region as diverse and complex as Latin America. Following this line of argumentation, and referring specifically to the case of Colombia, it is necessary to examine the way in which neoliberalism (as a global trend) has affected the development of media policies within the country as well as to analyse the impact of the internal armed conflict (a local specificity) in the practice of Colombian journalism. This section focuses on key aspects of these two elements to give an overview of the Colombian media environment.

A variety of scholars (Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Mastrini and Becerra, 2007; Lugo-Ocando, 2008) argue that the implementation of neoliberal programs has been a crucial factor for the configuration of the media systems in Latin America. One of the main consequences of this in the Colombian media landscape is that, as Guerrero (2014, p.47) explains, over 70% of the media outlets are controlled by only two economic conglomerates: the Santo Domingo and the Ardila Lulle groups.[5] As in the Latin America region, this process began (fiercely) in the 1990's when the government of former President César Gaviria and the Constitution of 1991 "brought with them the privatization of television and telecommunications and their consequent co-opting by Colombia's most powerful economic groups" (Montoya, 2014, p.69). This has created an environment in which, amongst other things, the media can become instrumentalized by those who own it.

For example, Melo (2016) describes that the information that some Colombian media outlets publish in relation to their own companies is biased by commercial interests rather than by

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[5] The Santo Domingo Group owns, amongst others, Caracol Television - one of the two private television channels in Colombia - and the national broadsheet *El Espectador.* On the other hand, the Ardila Lulle groups owns, amongst others, the other private TV channel - RCN Television – and the RCN Radio Network (which comprises more than 160 radio stations across the country).

strict criteria of information balance. This happens because the companies that own the media are also the owners of big infrastructure, finance and insurance corporations in Colombia. For example, the businessman Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo is the owner of Casa Editorial El Tiempo, the publishing house of the largest broadsheet in the country: *El Tiempo*. Sarmiento Angulo also owns different types of organizations which includes the largest and most powerful bank conglomerate in the country (AVAL group) that controls the 33% of the finance market in Colombia (Reporteros Sin Fronteras, no date). Given his power status within the country, mainly attached to his economic capital, Sarmiento Angulo has also developed close relationships with the political elites, including former presidents since the administration of Virgilio Barco in 1986 (La Silla Vacía, 2022); Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002, p.177) refer to this issue as the media being "controlled by private interests with political alliances".

In this respect, Bonilla and Narváez (2008, p.95) point out that "media, political and economic power [in Colombia] are essentially one and the same to the extent that the media identify with the same political project that defines corporate interests". They explain that the Colombian media, particularly those who functions as 'businesses', find themselves actively defending political projects that can secure their development (but also its status as monopolies). In a sense, as Guerrero (2014, p.45) explains, all these neoliberal reforms have reduced the regulatory capacities of the state since the logics of the markets are the ones that prevail to regulate the media environment. Consequently, "the news agenda is deeply compromised by the political ambitions of some of the most powerful economic elites in the country" (Bonilla and Narváez 2008, p.96). Montoya (2014, p.73) also illustrates this by explaining that these economic groups and owners of the media, besides funding diverse political campaigns, may also intervene in editorial policies as the media may avoid outlooks that work against their own companies.

The current situation in the media landscape in Colombia is then characterized by these strong ties between the political elites and the economic conglomerates that own the media. However, this is not entirely novel. The history of the Colombian media has always been marked by the close ties between political families and media outlets. A notable example is the press in Colombia, as it was originally founded by families with undeniable links to political activities. As Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002, p.200), and also Montoya (2014) explain, the owners of the

newspapers in Colombia were the same families that led the Conservative and Liberal parties, making the press mainly an instrument of party politics.

Perhaps a good example to illustrate this relationship is that of the Santos family. Eduardo Santos, who was President of Colombia between 1938-1942, bought the newspaper *El Tiempo* in 1913. The Santos family owned the media outlet for multiple generations until they decided to sell some of the shares to Grupo Planeta in 2007 and then to Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo in 2012 (Reporteros Sin Fronteras, no date). Juan Manuel Santos, former President of Colombia and who led the peace negotiations with FARC, is the son of Enrique Santos who was the Director of *El Tiempo* during the same decades. In fact, Juan Manuel Santos himself was Assistant Director of *El Tiempo* back in the 1980's until he became Minister of Foreign Trade in 1991 (La Silla Vacía, 2021). Although this trend of political families owning the media has shifted towards what was described above as economic conglomerates (with political alliances) owning the media, there are still current examples of (mainly) regional media outlets whose ownership belongs to political families. This is the case of *El País* newspaper from Cali, *La Opinion* newspaper from Cúcuta and *Vanguardia* newspaper from Bucaramanga (Montoya, 2014, p.73).

These relationships have indeed important implications for the functioning of the media in Colombia. One of these implications is that journalistic autonomy can be constrained. At first glance, this aspect of the concentration of media organizations in a handful of economic groups could suggest that the media in Colombia has become more independent from the political field and more dependent on the economic field. Although the latter is partially true and partisan parallelism has considerably weakened [in Colombia], "the news media still reflects the prevailing political forces in the country" (Montoya, 2014, p.73). In a sense, this can be viewed as what Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002, p.177) refer to as the tradition of advocacy reporting from media systems within the 'corporatist model' (in which they locate Colombia): a tendency from the newspapers to represent distinct political points of view.

Nonetheless, journalistic autonomy can also be co-opted by advertisement revenue. As showed by a general survey from the firm Cifras & Conceptos (2015), which polled 612 journalists, journalistic independence is greatly influenced by the allocation or withdrawal of advertisements.

For example, 62% of the respondents stated that they are aware of colleagues that have changed their editorial position in exchange for receiving more advertising for their media outlets and 60% of the respondents believe that official advertising was not assigned in a transparent fashion for their media organizations. In fact, the dependence on official advertisements within regional media outlets is a serious issue as their dependency on advertising income is greater given their lower economic power (compared to national outlets). The following two testimonies from Colombian journalists for the Press Freedom Foundation (FLIP) clearly illustrate this. On the one hand, John Vargas claims that "journalists in Putumayo are not truly trusted (…) sometimes journalists make the mistake to deliver light and brief information that is there to serve the state organization that is paying the ads" (FLIP, 2016, 00:24:20-00:24:49); on the other, Jesús Bernal states that "when you talk about certain topics related to politics, for example, politicians then say and decide not to give money anymore for advertising because the media 'becomes' their enemy" (FLIP, 2016, 00:22:35-00:22:48).

Moreover, the internal armed conflict in Colombia has also played a pivotal part in how journalism is exercised within the country. According to the FLIP (2016, 00:01:26), "153 journalists have been killed in the last 40 years; drug traffickers, paramilitary bands, guerrilla groups (…) have treated journalists with enormous cruelty". In line with this, in a survey of 235 journalists, Gómez and Hernández (2008, p.113) found that 88% of the respondents (n=207) considered that the freedom of the press in Colombia was at risk or threatened. For example, within the same survey, 77% of the respondents claimed that the degree of the threat towards freedom of the press coming from guerrilla groups such as FARC and ELN was high, and 72% claimed the same in regards paramilitary groups. Not in vain, a recent report from Reporters Without Border places Colombia 130th out of 180 for freedom of the press (Reporteros Sin Fronteras, 2018) which demonstrates what Colombia is still regarded as one of the most dangerous places to exercise journalism in the world (Montoya, 2014).

If we take into consideration some of these characteristics surrounding the news media environment in Colombia - 1) large economic conglomerates, with strong political alliances, owning the news media; 2) a journalistic autonomy constrained by, amongst others, commercial motives and conflict-related issues, Montoya's (2014) argument that the Colombian media system

appears to be moving towards what has been labeled as the 'Captured Liberal' model proposed by Guerrero (2014, p.57) seems appropriate. Within this model, there are two key characteristics: a low regulatory efficacy (which can be caused by trends that favour the concentration of media markets), and a high degree of obstruction in the practice of the watchdog role of the media (which can be caused by the influence of external pressures coming from the political and the corporate world) (Guerrero, 2014, p.57). In the specific case of Colombia, Montoya (2014, p.67) explains that there are two key features that help understanding the media system under this umbrella model.

Firstly, Montoya points out that even though there is a clear commercial orientation within the system (as it has been described above), many media outlets have not yet become really competitive which can have a negative impact on both diversity and pluralism. Secondly, that journalistic professionalism (and consequently journalistic autonomy) has been greatly influenced or co-opted by multiple factors including the interests of political actors, media owners, and other social actors (which include those involved in the armed conflict); this situation, Montoya explains, is aggravated by the lack of state regulation (as also mentioned above). Therefore, the Colombian media system can be regarded as both 'liberal' because "Colombia has medium levels of press circulation, external pluralism (…) market dominance and low state intervention" and 'captured' as it has been constrained by "state, corporate, and illegal interests" (Montoya, 2014, p.77). Consequently, Montoya's work is pertinent for my study as, amongst other things, it provides a conceptual framework to identify the structural conditions that have influenced the way in which the news media operate in Colombia and to understand how these conditions may have affected the work of journalists when they reported on the peace negotiations.

3.4 Concluding remarks

This **Chapter (3)** focused on, firstly, examining and identifying the different roles that the news media can play during peace negotiations. As argued by Wolfsfeld (2004, 1997), the news media tend to play a rather negative role as there is a key contradiction between the nature of peace processes and news values: while peace negotiations take a long time and can be considered very complex processes, journalism relies on simplicity, demands immediate results and asks for drama (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p.67). Consequently, for my research project it will be pivotal to investigate both if the news coverage of the peace negotiations was dominated by the key values identified by Wolfsfeld (2004) – *simplicity, immediacy, drama and ethnocentrism* – and if journalists followed or were driven by these values during the news production process. In a sense, these news values could also be placed under one of the dimensions ('commercial aspects') of the notion of 'news media logic' defined by Esser and Strömbäck (2014b) that I explained in detail in **Chapter (2.3)**. In other words, by assessing the presence of these values (particularly *simplicity*, *immediacy,* and *drama*) in the news coverage of the peace negotiations, I am also assessing the degree to which the news production process was dominated by the news media logic.

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that there is a key contradiction between one of the central arguments from Wolfsfeld's (2004) theory around the role of the media in peace negotiations and one of the key postulates of the mediatization of politics. While the former argues that the political process (in this case the peace negotiation) is more likely to affect the news media performance (than the other way around), the latter suggests that the actions of political institutions are not necessarily guided by their specific political logics but rather by the 'modus operandi of the media' (Hjarvard, 2008). To put it differently, the mediatization of politics suggests that the news media would be more likely to influence the political process. Even if new accounts of the mediatization of politics have rejected the idea that politics has completely lost its autonomy, and they advocate for a framework that understand the media and politics relationship as a mutually interdependent and dialectical process (Blumler and Esser, 2018; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019), it is realistic to point out that within mediatization theory the media tends to be the one 'ahead' in this relationship.

Therefore, for my research project it will also be pivotal to test if the Colombian news media 'led the tango' during the negotiation process or if, on the contrary, the Colombian peace process – given its nature - was more likely to have an effect on the media outlets' performance. As I also mentioned in the concluding remarks of **Chapter (2),** a key objective within my study is to understand if the mediatization of politics framework can be applied to the specific context of a country as complex as Colombia but also to the specific context of a peace negotiation. Consequently, I see Wolfsfeld's theoretical tools, particularly his '*politics-media-politics*' model and the four key roles that the news media can play during peace negotiations (that I explained in detailed in **Section 3.1**), as an appropriate complement to the mediatization of politics framework to better understand the impact of the news media in this particular process.

In this chapter I also examined the specific role of the Colombian news media in the country's long history of peace processes. However, as it was explained in **Section (3.2)**, research in this area has solely focused on identifying the narratives employed by the news media to portray the peace negotiations (Charry, 2013; Richard and Saffon, 2016) or the discourses of political actors to communicate their motives during these processes (Richard and Llano, 2017; Ríos and Cairo, 2018). This means that studies have not comprehensively examined the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians during the peace negotiations in Colombia. This offers a significant opportunity for this research project as I plan to investigate how the varied political actors (FARC, the Colombian government and the opposition party) interacted with the news media during this historical process, and how that interaction might have influenced or impacted the negotiations.

Finally, I also described in this chapter the key characteristics of the Colombian news media environment. I align with Montoya (2014) who argues that the media system in Colombia is moving towards a 'Captured Liberal' model (Guerrero, 2014) as journalistic professionalism, and more specifically journalistic autonomy, has been captured by the interests of corporations (mainly those owning the news media), the state and also some illegal organizations, as the armed conflict in Colombia has greatly affected the practice of journalism. As it was indeed described in **Section (3.3)**, the independence of the Colombian news media from the political field, for example, is not clear-cut: although partisan parallelism has considerably weakened [in Colombia], "the

news media still reflects the prevailing political forces in the country" (Montoya, 2014, p.73). As far as my project is concerned, then, assessing the aspect of journalistic autonomy will be key as one of the main preconditions of the mediatization of politics is that the news media is indeed regarded as a powerful institution that has become independent and autonomous from the political field.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As I described in the previous **Chapter (3)**, empirical research on understanding the role of the news media in peace processes have been rather scarce, and so there is a need to conduct such research to examine this subject thoroughly. Consequently, in this **Chapter (4)** I introduce the mixed-method design that I adopted to collect the data and understand how the news media intervened in the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC. The selection of this approach was influenced by the three key aspects in which my project is focused: 1) the analysis of media discourses around the peace negotiations, 2) the examination of the journalistic practices that generated them, and 3) the assessment of the media-related practices of political actors who were involved in the peace process. I therefore combined quantitative methods (computational text analysis) with qualitative strategies (thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews) to be able to provide a rigorous and multiperspectival examination of this under-researched phenomenon.

This **Chapter (4)** is divided into three main sections. In **Section (4.1)** I outline the research design and introduce the research questions. In **Section (4.2.1)** I describe the computational text analysis of news that I employed by implementing 'Structural Topic Modelling' -STM- (Roberts et al., 2019) in conjunction with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in a replicable five-step approach. Through explaining this five-step approach, I demonstrate that STM is a powerful 'sorting' computational tool that can be enhanced by combining it with other interpretative strategies. I argue that although STM allows researchers to group and make sense of truly large datasets, a human-centered analysis approach is required to extract meaningful interpretations of the data. In **Section (4.2.2)** I explain how I conducted and analysed the semi-structured interviews with both journalists (**n=11**) and political actors (**n=15**) from the government delegation, the FARC delegation, and the opposition party (the Democratic Center). Finally, in **Section (4.3)** I outline some of the limitations of my research study.

4.1 Research design and research questions

As I described above, this study adopted a mixed-method design. Quantitatively, I performed a computational text analysis by specifically applying STM - (Roberts et al., 2019) to a corpus of 17.688 online news articles from four media outlets: *El Tiempo, El Espectador, Semana* and *La Silla Vacía*. Qualitatively, I conducted a thematic analysis on some of the key topics identified by the STM and I also conducted semi-structured interviews with varied journalists (**n=11**) and political actors (**n=15**). This design was chosen based on the premise that "the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, can provide a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p.5). Therefore, I embraced a *convergent parallel* design, also known as simultaneous triangulation (Morse, 1991) or convergence model (Creswell, 2003). This means that: 1) both methodological strands were prioritized equally, and 2) the findings of each method were mixed during the overall interpretation of the study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, pp.70–71).

This methodological approach interrogated the main question guiding this research study:
How did the Colombian news media intervene in the peace negotiations (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and FARC?

In order to properly answer this question, I proposed four sub-research questions that are related to the three key aspects of my study - as it was explained in **Chapter (1**): media discourses, the journalistic practice that generated them and the media-related practices from politicians. Regarding media discourse, there are two sub-research questions. While **SRQ1** inquires how the news media portrayed the peace negotiations, **SRQ2** focuses on examining a key notion within the mediatization of politics framework: how the news media logic may have influenced the news stories produced by journalists.

> **SRQ1:** *How did the Colombian news media represent the peace negotiations?*
> **SRQ2:** *How did forms of 'news media logic' affect the coverage?*

In terms of the media-related practices from political actors, I proposed a key sub-research question that inquiries how news media considerations may have affected their role during the negotiations. **SRQ3** consequently investigates the perceived level of influence attributed to the news media by political actors and how this perception may have determined the adoption of news media logic. Most importantly, through examining the impact of the news media on political actors, **SRQ3** also asks about the degree of the adoption of news media logic by them.

SRQ3: *How did the 'news media logic' impact the role of political actors during the peace process?*

Finally, in relation to the journalistic practice, I inquire in **SRQ4** what were the aspects of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) that 'led the way' when journalists reported about the peace process.

SRQ4: *What were the aspects of the 'news media logic' that prevailed for journalists during the peace process?*

4.2 Research methods

4.2.1 Structural Topic Modelling: a replicable five-step approach

As I outlined at the beginning of this **Chapter (4)**, I followed a replicable five-step approach to perform the computational text analysis of the online news articles. These steps were: 1) collecting the online news articles through *screen-scraping* using R; 2) filtering and cleaning the data in R; 3) applying and testing the STM to the corpus of online news articles; 4) manually inspecting each of the topics generated by STM to define them; and 5) conducting a thematic analysis of the key topics within the corpus (a step that is not commonly employed when applying this type of computational tools). However, before describing each of these steps, it is important to explain what STM is and how it facilitates the analysis of large corpus of text.

Briefly speaking, topic modelling allows for the discovery of "hidden thematic structures in large collection of documents" (DiMaggio et al., 2013, p.577) by employing algorithms that categorize these documents into a set of interpretable 'topics'. These topics can be better understood as a "constellation of words that tend to come up in a discussion (…) and (…) occur more frequently than they otherwise would" (Mohr and Bogdanov, 2013, p.547). Consequently, these type of models use the co-occurrence of words across documents, regardless of the words' relation with language complexities such as syntax or narrative, to estimate the topics (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). Although STM is a type of topic modelling, it differs from other methods (such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation -LDA-) in that it allows researchers to examine the relationship between the identified topics and different covariates or metadata such as dates, authors, etc. (Bail, 2018). For instance, I employ this feature of STM in **Chapter (7.2)** to illustrate how the topic of 'violent attacks' received considerably more attention by the Colombian news media when the conflict escalated between May and July 2015.

Having explained the key features of STM, the following sections detail each of the five steps that allowed me to answer SRQ1 and SRQ2.

4.2.1.1 Collecting the online news articles

All the news articles were collected from the news websites of four media outlets: *El Tiempo, El Espectador, Semana* and *La Silla Vacía* using R. This means, amongst other things, that I excluded regional and local media outlets from my news sample. The reasoning behind this methodological decision mainly lies on my theoretical approach[6]. As this research is rooted in the mediatization of politics and is particularly interested in comprehending the way in which political actors adopted media considerations and how these may have affected their roles, it was pivotal to select the media outlets that they consider to be the most relevant and influential. According to the largest opinion leaders' poll in Colombia (1812 respondents that included senators, politicians, and CEO's), the most consulted media by these opinion leaders are: *El Tiempo* (27%), *Semana* magazine (22%), and *El Espectador* (19%) (Cifras y Conceptos, 2018, p.44). In contrast, regional and local media outlets reach very low percentages. For example, 3% of the respondents acknowledged to obtain the news from *El Colombiano* and *El Heraldo*, while only 2% of the respondents said to read news from other regional media outlets such as *El Universal*, *La Opinión*, and *La Patria*. This means, amongst other things, that the political elites in Colombia (the actors this research is focused on) obtain the news mainly from the media outlets that I have chosen for my study and tend to overlook news constructed by regional and local outlets.

Nonetheless, the above does not indicate that this exclusion may not have implications for my research. I acknowledge that by not including regional and local media outlets in my sample my analysis may miss news representations of the peace negotiations that may be different to those representations constructed by the elite media. Despite this issue (that can be read as a limitation of my study), I believe that the validity of my findings is not compromised since (as explained above) my research is mainly invested in comprehending how political elites adapt to the news media that they regard as the most influential.

Having explained this limitation in my sample, it is important to characterize the chosen media outlets. *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* are the oldest broadsheets in Colombia, circulate

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[6] Please also note that there are technical difficulties to access to the news content of the websites of some regional media outlets. For example, *El Heraldo* (one of the most important media outlets of the coast region) only allows to retrieve news within the last year.

nationwide and possess the highest audience rates in both print and online. While *El Tiempo* reaches a daily audience of 958.000 in its print version (Centro Nacional de Consultoría, 2016) and its news site is the most used - 40%- (García-Perdomo, 2021), *El Espectador* reaches a daily audience of 259.000 (Centro Nacional de Consultoría, 2016) and its news site is the second most consulted on a weekly basis with 27% (García-Perdomo, 2021). *Semana*, on the other hand, it is the only political magazine in the country. Interestingly, however, *La Silla Vacia*, which is an independent online journalistic project founded in 2009 with funds from the Open Society Institute, reaches a significant 14% in the same poll mentioned above (Cifras y Conceptos, 2018, p.44). They describe themselves as a "media outlet that rather than pertaining to the power seeks to reveal how it operates" (La Silla Vacia, 2019), suggesting high levels of independence from the political forces. Including this media outlet, then, was important to the current study to comprehend if the mediatization of politics works differently within a non-commercially oriented outlet.

In order to collect the articles from these media outlets, I implemented a technique called *screen-scraping* which "refers to the process of automatically extracting data from web pages" (Bail, 2018). The data collection started from the date that the peace negotiations were publicly announced (26 August 2012) until the date on which the final peace agreement was approved and ratified by the Colombian Congress (02 December 2016). Before scraping the articles and storing them in R, I used the website search log of each media outlet to filter the news (using key words) within the aforementioned timeframe.[7] At first, the key words 'FARC' and 'Peace Process' were used to retrieve the relevant articles related to the peace negotiations. However, this approach proved to be inaccurate as there were many articles that referred to the peace dialogues without mentioning the key word 'Peace Process'. Since none of the four media outlets search logs provided the feature "or" to retrieve articles that contained the word 'FARC' **or** 'Peace Process' **or** 'Peace Negotiation', for instance, I decided to retrieve all the news articles containing only the key word 'FARC'. This approach allowed me to collect as many news articles that referred to the

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[7] The search log of the websites of *El Espectador* and *La Silla Vacía* did not allow me to filter the news by dates. In the case of the former, after applying the key words, the results were shown chronologically (since 2009 until the day I was conducting the search) in multiple webpages. Therefore, I had to verify manually the timeframe I had decided to use so I could only collect those URL's. In the case of *La Silla Vacía*, the results were not shown in a chronological fashion but rather randomly. Consequently, for this media outlet, I scraped all the news articles that appeared after using the key word FARC. Once I stored them in R, and using the metadata of their dates, I applied a simple filter to only select those between 26 August 2012 and 2 December 2016.

peace process as possible, but it also retrieved many articles that were not relevant for my project. Therefore, I then used R tools to refine my selection and extract only the news articles related to the peace negotiations (as it will be explained in **Section 4.2.1.2**).

After using the key word 'FARC' within the 4-year timeframe, I scraped a total of **54,532** news articles (which included straight news, opinion columns, editorials and interviews) from the four news media outlets. However, a first inspection allowed me to see that the scraping process also collected articles such as 'letters from the readers', 'readers forums' or repeated news which I then had to exclude and delete, along with the articles from *La Silla Vacía* that did not belong to the chosen timeframe (as explained in footnote 6 below). This brought a new number of **47.233** news articles: **16.374** from *El Tiempo,* **18.770** from *El Espectador,* **10.038** from *Semana*, and **2.051** from *La Silla Vacía.* Once I stored the articles in a data frame in R, I began to filter my dataset by applying a text classifier that would recognize multiple key words in the articles with the **'or'** feature.

4.2.1.2 Filtering and cleaning the data

I built a simple classifier in R that allowed me to select news articles containing multiple key words within my data frame. At first, I used a set of three key words ('Peace Process', 'Peace Negotiation' and 'Peace Dialogues') to filter the relevant articles. When I inspected some of the articles that had not been selected by this classifier, I found that there were still many important articles missing that referred to the peace process in multiple different ways: 'the accord with FARC', 'negotiation in Havana', 'negotiation with FARC', etc. Consequently, I decided to start a random close reading of news articles from each media outlet to document the different ways in which they referred to the peace negotiations. The latter process was particularly relevant to understand, for example, how opinion columnists talked about the peace process as they did so in a less formal and systematic fashion than straight news.

After concluding this process, I created a set of 37 key words (please see **Appendix 1**). I again applied the text classifier with the new set of key words and reviewed those articles that had not been selected. Although this approach significantly reduced the loss of relevant articles, it also increased the selection of news in which the overall content was not related to the peace negotiation

between the Colombian government and FARC. In order to overcome this issue, I therefore decided that instead of applying the text classifier to the whole text I would only apply it to the first 150 words of each news article. This approach proved to be the most successful as can be seen from the results of a pilot test that I conducted to assess its accuracy.

The pilot test consisted of reviewing one week of coverage (1 November - 7 November) for each year of the timeline (2012-16) to determine if the selected articles were relevant for my project. The main criterion was to assess if the overall content of each news article focused on the peace negotiation between the Colombian government and FARC. In total, I manually inspected 341 news articles and the main results are shown in **Table 4.1** (please see **Appendix 2** for the weekly results of each media outlet).

Table 4.1 - Results of pilot test to assess the accuracy of the selected news articles

Media Outlet	Reviewed Articles	Relevant Articles	Accuracy Rate
El Tiempo	133	128	96.2%
El Espectador	102	92	90.1%
Semana	92	86	93.4%
La Silla Vacía	14	12	85.7%

The results of the pilot study were convincing as, firstly, the relevant articles were all completely pertinent to my project: the core content of all of them was about the peace negotiation; this is particularly relevant given the achieved accuracy rate. Secondly, even though the 'non-relevant' articles did not have the peace negotiation between the Colombian government and FARC as their main theme, the majority of them were highly related to the peace process. For instance, some of these news articles were mainly about the attempt of the Colombian government to start a peace negotiation with another guerrilla group (ELN), so the experiences around the peace dialogues with FARC were always brought to the discussion. **Therefore, applying the text classifier (with the 37 key words) to the first 150 words of each article was appropriate to have a comprehensive news data set for the peace dialogues. This process left a final number of 17.688 news articles to be analysed; Table 4.2** summarises the number of articles per chosen media outlet.

Table 4.2 - Selected news articles across all four media outlets

Media Outlet	Initial Scraped Articles	After having deleted repeated articles	Selected articles using the text classifier within first 150 words
El Tiempo	19.712	16.374	6027
El Espectador	18.940	18.770	7332
Semana	10.620	10.038	3563
La Silla Vacía	5.260	2.051[8]	766
Total	**54.532**	**47.233**	**17.688**

After I finished the process of collecting the news articles, I started organising them in a data frame in R. One of the advantages of conducting screen-scraping is that it allows the collection (all at once), besides the text of the news articles, other type of metadata (e.g. dates) that is present in the media outlets' websites' html source code. In the case of my project, in addition to the news texts, I also scraped (for each article) their headlines, lead paragraphs, URLs, dates of publication, authors and news sections (e.g. politics, opinion, etc.); these were the elements that encompassed my data frame. At first, I planned to use the 'news section' variable to classify the different articles into straight news, opinion columns, editorials and interviews. However, once I inspected the information within that variable, I found out that the data was not consistent enough to make this type of classification.

Consequently, I had to implement different classification strategies for each media outlet in order to properly categorize the articles. Since this process requires a long and detail explanation, I have included it in my thesis as an **Appendix (3).** Once this step was concluded, I managed to classify all the news articles into 'Straight News', 'Opinion Columns', 'Editorials' and 'Interviews' (see **Table 4.3** for the final number for each chosen media outlet). As it can be seen from the **Table (4.3)**, however, there is a significant difference in the numbers of editorials collected in *Semana* (**n=1**) and *La Silla Vacía* (**n=0**). In the case of *Semana*, their editorials only appear in the printed version of the magazine; in the case of *La Silla Vacía*, their website did not have a specific section

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[8] This number is the result of both deleting the repeated articles and excluding the news that did not belong to the chosen timeframe.

for 'editorials' when I was collecting the data. Most of the time their editorial position was given through columns published by its Director, but this was not always the case. In order to be consistent, I decided to classify all these columns within the 'Opinion' category.

Table 4.3 - Number of selected articles per category

Media Outlet	Type of Article	Number of Articles
El Tiempo	News	4791
	Opinion	985
	Editorial	79
	Interviews	172
	Total	**6027**
El Espectador	News	5941
	Opinion	1216
	Editorial	93
	Interviews	82
	Total	**7332**
Semana	News	2802
	Opinion	649
	Editorial	1
	Interviews	111
	Total	**3563**
La Silla Vacia	News	567
	Opinion	180
	Editorial	0
	Interviews	19
	Total	**766**

Once I classified the articles into the four categories, I compiled the information of all four media outlets into one single data frame (see an example in **Table 4.4** below). I deleted some variables that I did not use for my project (e.g. leads) and I added others (e.g. Article ID) that were necessary to implement the STM. In total, I used seven variables for my final news data set: 'Article ID', 'Headlines', 'URL', 'Date of Publication', 'Text', 'Type of Article' and 'Media Outlet'

Table 4.4 - Example of an entry of the data frame with the metadata

Article ID	Headline	URL	Date	Text	Type	Media
1505	'Let's not history repeat itself'	https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-16593981	5/15/2016	'The peace process is coming to an end…'	Opinion	*El Tiempo*

Finally, and before getting ready to conduct the STM, I had to implement a final step: cleaning my dataset. As Bail (2018) explains, most of the data that is in digital format is not well structured and data scientists spend around 80% of their time cleaning data. This is particularly certain for information that is obtained through *Screen-Scraping* as the text that is collected from the websites comes with further 'noise' or extra elements (html language tags, for example). Luckily, researchers in the field of computational methods have developed some lines of code that make the job of cleaning data sets much simpler. Indeed, I employed those freely available codes to eliminate common 'noise' such as links inside the text, strange encoding, html language ads, and many others. The work of Silge (2020) on her blog was of great help to achieve this.

Nonetheless, I also had to conduct some more manual cleaning as there were some data that I could not remove by using the available code. In order to do this, I had to review my data frame and identify patterns of data (e.g. repetition of symbols and useless text - 'written by El Tiempo' and 'El Tiempo.com' - at the end of some news articles) to eliminate them. I mainly employed the function 'gsub' in R to implement this type of cleaning.

4.2.1.3 Testing and applying STM to the corpus of online news articles

In order to estimate and run the topic models in R, it is necessary to first apply some text pre-processing steps to the data frame to be analysed. I preprocessed my corpus following the common steps for automated text analysis (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013). I firstly removed punctuation from the text of the news articles (which included removing hyphens), numbers and capitalization from my corpus. I then removed stop-words: "words that are extremely common but unrelated to the research topic such as 'and' or 'the', etc." (Terman, 2017, p.496). To implement

these preprocessing steps, I used the 'Quanteda' package in R that, among other things, allows you to easily select the language (in my case Spanish) that you want to apply for the dictionary to remove the stop-words.

Another important step to follow before conducting the topic modelling is to also remove very uncommon words and extremely common words (different to the group of stop-words mentioned above) in the corpus. As Denny and Spirling (2018, p.171) explain, "if the researcher is interested in patterns of term usage across documents, very infrequently used terms will not contribute much information about document similarity". Moreover, by discarding infrequent terms (that do not contribute much to finding patterns), the size of the vocabulary is reduced significantly and therefore helps to speed up different corpus analysis tasks. I then employed the utility function *PlotRemoved* from the 'stm' package that allows to visualize and assess the number of words and documents that would be removed by applying different document thresholds. To put it differently, if a word does not appear in more than x number of documents (the threshold), that word would be eliminated from the corpus and would not be analysed in the topic models.

Figure 4.1 shows how many documents (left image), words (center image) and tokens[9] (right image) would be removed from the corpus by applying different document thresholds ranging from 1 to 100. For instance, it can be seen from **Figure 4.1** that setting up a threshold at 10 documents (that is that a word needed to appear in at least 10 documents in order not to be removed) would discard between 50.000 and 60.000 words from the corpus. In other words, this would mean that the corpus had between 50.000 to 60.000 words that appear in no more than 10 documents. Nonetheless, the **Figure (4.1)** shows that at a threshold of 20 documents the number of eliminated words starts radically decreasing, indicating a good and convenient verge. Research (Hopkins and King, 2007; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013) has indicated that omitting terms that appear in less than up to 1% of the documents is the rule of thumb; in the case of my project 20 documents corresponds to 0.11% of the total of news articles so I was in a safe threshold.

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[9] **Documents** here are equal to every single news article I collected in my dataframe:17.688; **words** are every unique word that is part of that corpus ('peace', 'government', 'president', etc.); **tokens** are the number of times that a word is repeated throughout the corpus. For example, 'peace' is a unique word that could have been repeated 45.000 times (tokens) in the corpus.

Figure 4.1 Plot to determine document lower threshold to remove infrequent terms
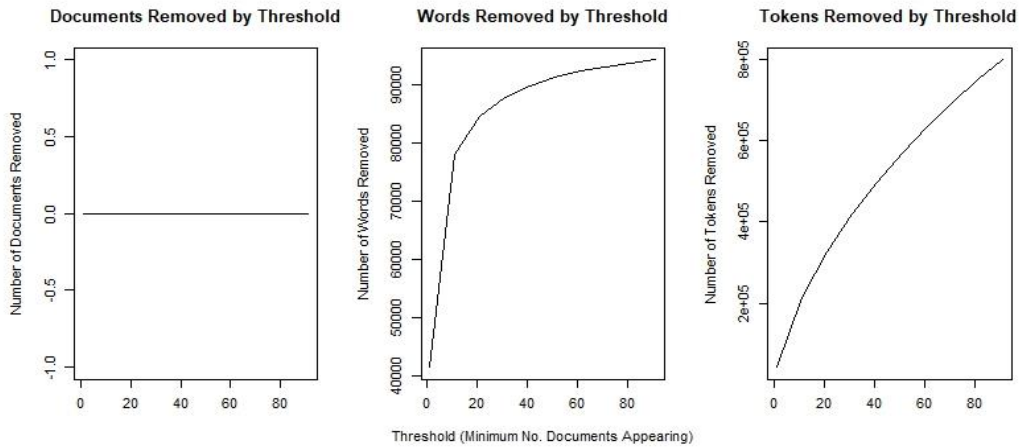
Regarding the very common terms, I employed the utility function *prepDocuments* from the 'stm' package to set up different upper thresholds and identify the type of words I would be discarding. The following **Table 4.5** shows the results of the different thresholds.

Table 4.5 - Document upper threshold to remove very frequent terms

Threshold	Words that would be removed	Number of words
Words that appear in more than 90% of the documents	'Peace' and 'Farc'	2
Words that appear in more than 80% of the documents	'Peace', 'Farc' and 'Government'	3
Words that appear in more than 70% of the documents	'Peace', 'Farc', 'Government', 'Process'	4
Words that appear in more than 60% of the documents	'Peace', 'Farc', 'Government', 'Process', 'Accord', 'Havana', 'Country', 'President', 'Santos'	9

Words that appear in more than 50% of the documents	'Peace', 'Farc', 'Government', 'Process', 'Accord', 'Havana', 'Country', 'President', 'Santos', 'Colombia', 'Conflict', 'Juan', 'guerrilla'	13

I opted for choosing the 70% threshold because it contained the terms that were more obvious or extremely common when referring to the peace process. Therefore, after applying both the lower and upper thresholds, a total of 84.094 of 100.469 words were discarded; 84.090 terms were deleted due to the lower threshold and 4 terms were deleted due to the upper threshold. The final document-term matrix then contained **17.688 documents**, **16.375 unique terms** and **3.702.154 tokens**.

Once I concluded pre-processing the text to be analysed as well as removing the very uncommon words and extremely common words, I started estimating the number of topics to run the model. STM, as well as other forms of topic modelling such as LDA, requires the researcher to specify the number of topics that a given corpus may be divided into. As Grimmer and Stewart (2013) point out, there is not a "correct" answer to the number of topics that are appropriate for a given corpus. In this sense, Bail (2018) suggests that although in practice this is a very complicated decision, there are some procedures and tools that can be used to determine the appropriate number of topics to a given corpus. Indeed, the 'stm' R package has a function called *SearchK* that "uses a data-driven approach (…) to perform several automated tests to help choose the number of topics" (Roberts et al., 2019, p.11).

I consequently used this tool to test how the model would perform with different number of topics for my corpus. **Figure 4.2** shows the results of the test after I input into the software a range of topics (*k*) from 10 to 100. Silge (2018) explains that a good number to look at would be where the 'Held-Out Likelihood' variable is high, the Residuals variable low and the semantic coherence still not the lowest. As it can be seen from **Figure 4.2**, topics between 40 and 70 meet these three requirements. However, as Bail (2018) points out, it is important to take into consideration that:

these measures are very imperfect, and are not a superior alternative to human validation of the topic models by carefully inspecting not only the top words associated with each document, but also conducting more focused analyses of the documents themselves

Therefore, I decided to choose 40, 50, 60, and 70 topics to run the models and subsequently manually inspect the results to determine which was the most appropriate number of topics for my corpus. Here it is also important to mention that besides the variables described above to make this decision, I also took into consideration the guidance provided by the manual of the stm R package (Roberts et al., 2014) that states that "previous application in political science with medium sized corpora (10k to 100k) have found 60-100 topics to work well" (p.65). Hence, the following section explains the process of how I inspect the models and determined that $k = 70$ was the best fit for my dataset.

Figure 4.2 Diagnostic test to determine the number of topics of the corpus

Diagnostic Values by Number of Topics
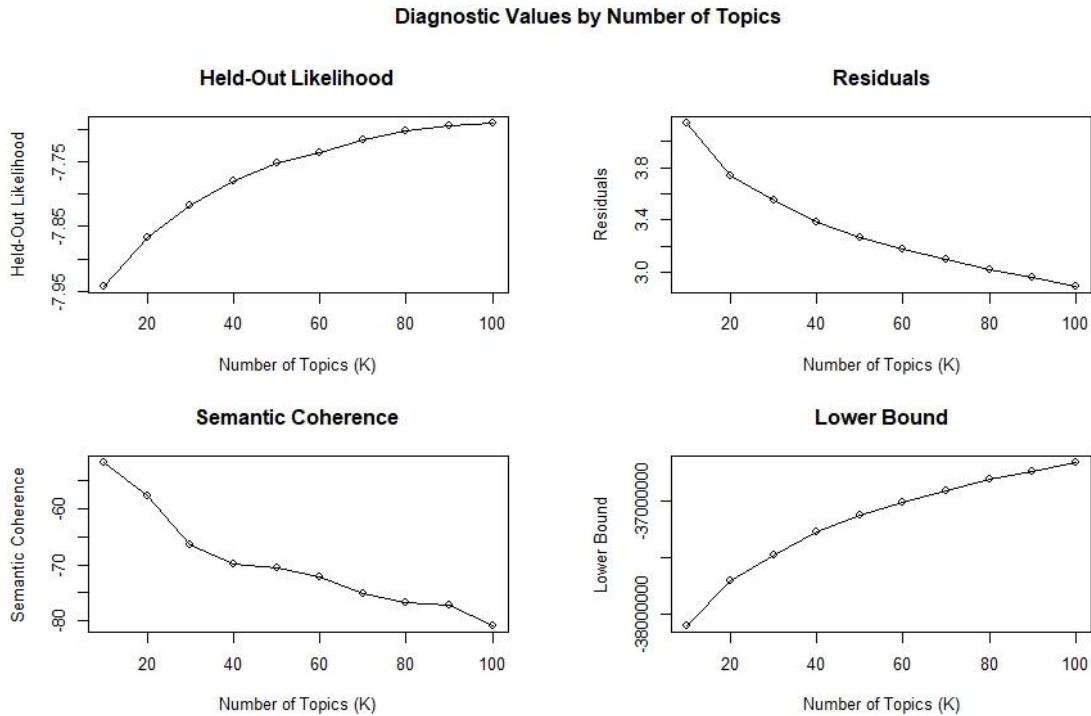
4.2.1.4 Inspecting the topics generated by STM to define them

Within STM, there are two main approaches to explore the topics that have been estimated: 1) "to look at collections of words that are associated with topics" or 2) "to examine actual documents that are estimated to be highly associated with each topic" (Roberts et al., 2019); inspecting these documents is particularly helpful for understanding the content of a topic and decoding its meaning. I conducted both approaches simultaneously by employing the very useful R package '*stminsights*'. This is a R package that allows the researcher to export the results of the models into a website application and inspect them all-at-once: the highest probable words for a given topic; the exclusive words for a given topic; review the documents that best represent a given topic, among others. By showing how I defined one of the topics, I will illustrate how I executed the whole process and concluded that 70 topics were the best fit for my news corpus.

The following **Figure 4.3** shows the results for 'Topic 18'. In the bottom left side of the image, the **probability** column highlights the three terms with the highest probability to appear in that given topic: 'participation', 'political', 'accord'; in the web application you can edit the information to see up to the 50 words with the highest probability to appear in a given topic. In the bottom right of the image, the '**FREX'** column indicates the terms that are more likely to be exclusive for that particular topic: 'constituencies', 'guarantees', 'movements'. With this information, someone could quickly infer that the given topic is about '**Political Participation'**, one of the six agenda items of the peace process between the Colombian government and FARC. Nonetheless, the researcher can make further inspections to appropriately define the topic.

Figure 4.3 - Highly probable words for 'topic 18' in the '*stminsights*' web application
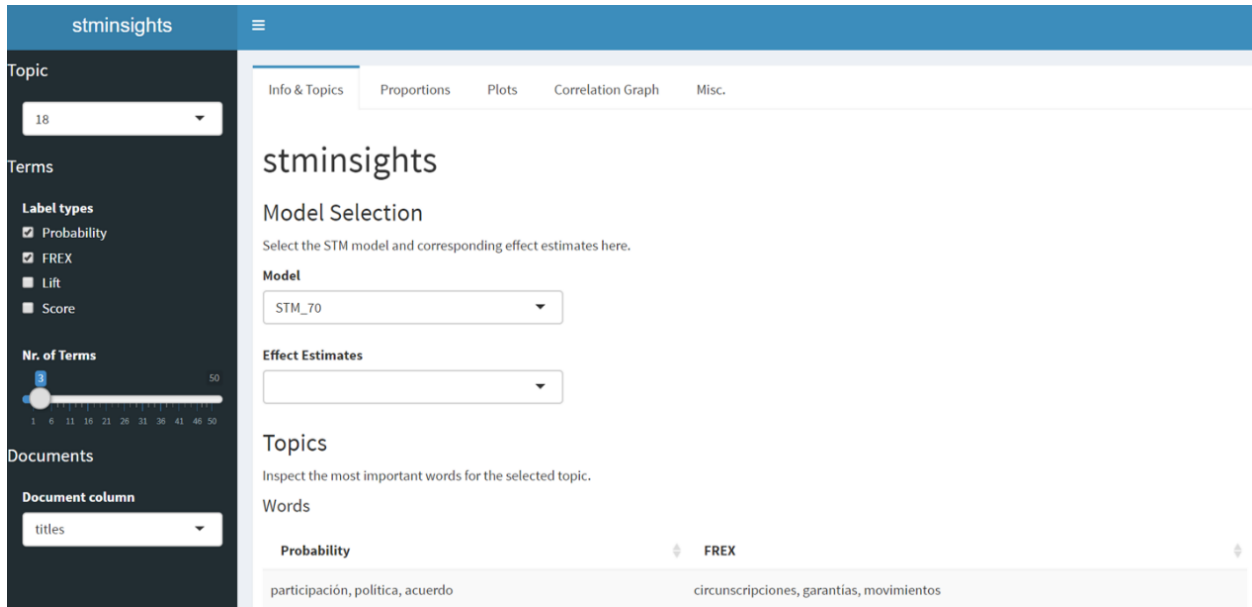
For example, the '*stminsights*' package automatically weights all the documents and highlights the ones that are highly associated with each topic or that better represent them; this can also be reviewed within the *stminsights* web application. I then looked at the documents that best represented 'Topic 18' by reviewing, firstly, the headlines of the documents and, secondly, reading the content of the news articles. **Figure 4.4** shows the 5 headlines of the 5 documents that are highly associated with the 'topic 18' **('Political Participation')**. Reviewing the headlines I could further confirm my initial thoughts: "Read the joint press release after the reached accord about political participation"; "This is the reached agreement between Government and FARC"; "These are the 15 elements of the accord about Political Participation"; "Government and FARC reach accord about Political Participation"; "These are the key elements about the accord on Political Participation"

As I mentioned above, a key aspect of the web application is that it allows for an increase in the number of terms (up to 50) that the researcher would like to inspect for each topic. This is particularly relevant for topics that are less obvious. Inspecting more terms (particularly the ones that are more likely to be exclusive to a topic), in conjunction with reading the documents that better represent a topic, proved to be the best approach to decode the majority of the themes. To read the documents, I simply access to the URL of the news article (see **Figure 4.5** below).

Figure 4.4 - Headlines of the documents highly associated with 'Topic 18'
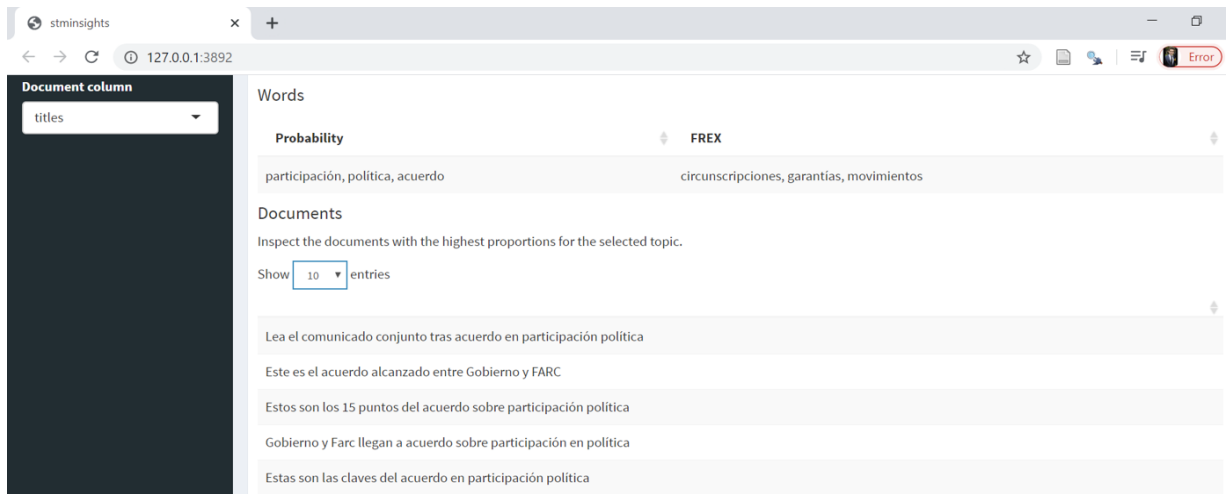
Figure 4.5 - Links of the documents highly associated with 'Topic 18'
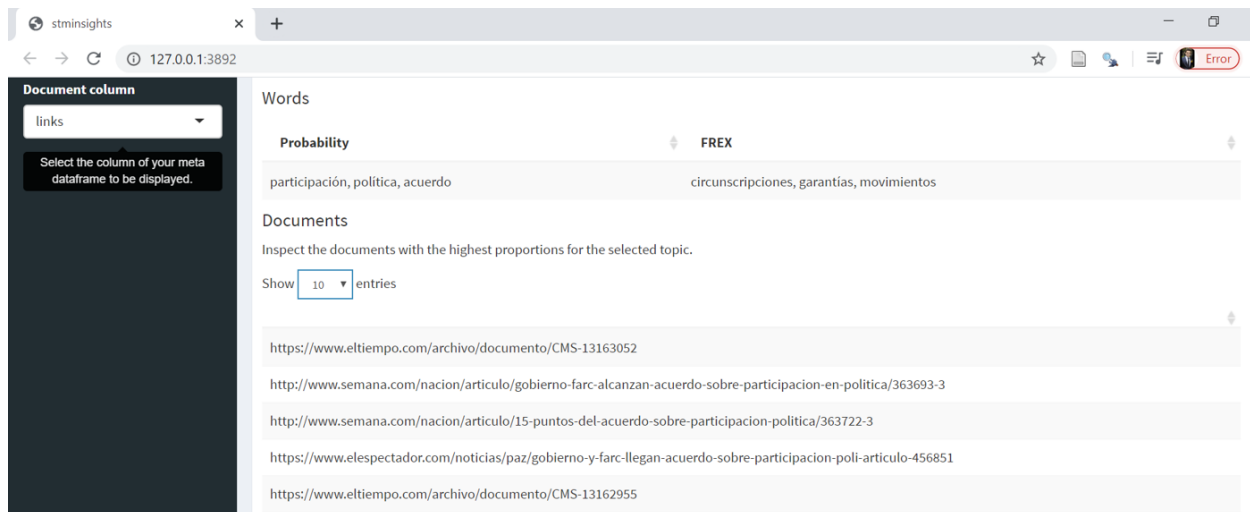
I conducted this process for each of the models (k =40; k =50; k =60; k =70) to determine the topics in each of them. After carefully comparing the results, I found out that the model with k=70 much better defined and identified specific themes that were not present in the other models. For example, only within this model, I obtained relevant topics such as the '*critical moments'* of the peace process (news articles describing periods of crisis that the negotiations experienced) or the '*pathways to peace'* (news articles discussing the alternatives for the peace process to succeed).

In Chapter (5.1) I present a detail overview of the topics by introducing a typology that I created to group the different topics into broader categories (see **Page. 107**).

4.2.1.5 Conducting thematic analysis on some of the key topics of the news coverage

Once I determined the number of topics in my corpus and labelled them, I conducted a qualitatively oriented analysis of some of the news articles. Here I mainly followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach of thematic analysis to interpret and extract meaningful interpretations from some of the topics. As it can be inferred from the detailed process described above in **Section 4.2.1.4**, I deeply immersed myself in inspecting the corpus of news articles as I had to manually inspect hundreds of documents to determine the right topics within each of the models that I executed. This process allowed me to be very familiar with the corpus and identify some interesting themes within the news coverage.

One of these themes was, for example, the '*political atmosphere*' (Wolfsfeld, 2004) of the peace process: the news media considerably reported on the 'climate' surrounding the negotiations. This theme was encompassed by five prominent topics identified by the STM. In **Chapter (5.1)** and **(5.2)** I provide the results of a thematic analysis that I conducted to two of these topics: the 'pacing of the negotiations' and the 'critical moments' of the peace process. Through this qualitative method, I was able to have a more accurate picture of *how* the news media represented the peace process, in this instance the 'political atmosphere' of the negotiations. However, it is important to mention that this example is only one of the ways in which I analysed my corpus of news articles. For instance, after I conducted the interviews (which I will explain in the following section), some other relevant and interesting themes emerged, such as the 'issue of victims' within the negotiations.

Since I already had organised my data frame of news articles, I was able to come back to my corpus to further examine this and other instances multiple times. In fact, I see this as one of the key advantages from implementing STM, and particularly using the R package 'stminsights': it really facilitates the process of inspecting ('reading') large datasets as the news articles are organised by relevant topics that can be easily accessed to further review the documents that best represent those topics. Given the size of my dataset (17.688 news articles in a period of almost

five years), I was able inspect different moments of the peace negotiations very easily through applying these tools. This also highlights the value of having a mixed-method approach which involves iterations where I could go back and forth between datasets and enrich my understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

4.2.2.1 Data collection and sampling

In total, I conducted (**n**=26) interviews between May and August 2020. Since my study is focused on interpreting the interdependent relationship of media and politics during a peace negotiation, I interviewed both media actors and political actors. In the case of the former, I interviewed (**n=11**) journalists from all the media spectrum (television, radio, press, and online media) and different levels of experience within their media organizations: from junior reporters, to experienced political reporters, to (senior) editors (see **Appendix 4** for details). As it can be seen from Appendix 4, priority was given to journalists who work at news organizations with a national reach. Since there are virtually no studies that have employed a framework rooted in media theory to understand the role of the news media during peace negotiations in Colombia, I was interested in looking at this phenomenon from a national perspective. In other words, since there is no research on the role of the Colombian media in this type of processes, it was appropriate to start examining the role and the influence of the media from a national outlook to later explore (in future studies) the type of influence that local and regional media may have had on this political process.

The above means, similar to my news sample, that I excluded journalists from regional and local media outlets from my interviews. Although I argue that this exclusion does not affect the validity of my findings as my study is mainly focused on understanding how political elites reacted to the news media that they consider the most influential (see **Section 4.2.1.1** for details), I acknowledge that this exclusion has some implications for my research. Most importantly, the lack of interviews with journalists working for regional and local media outlets means that I could not examine the prevailing logics for these journalists when constructing news about the peace negotiation and how these may vary from the logics of news production adopted by my interviewees (which, as explained, mainly work for national media outlets).

In regards to political actors, I focused on interviewing politicians from the three key actors involved in the peace negotiations: the Colombian government and FARC (who were directly negotiating the peace accords), and the opposition party: the Democratic Center. Interviewing politicians from the opposition party was also relevant since, firstly, they were the key political force in the Congress (in terms of seats) and, most importantly, they exercised a sustained and 'fiery' opposition to the peace agreement throughout the process.

From the Colombian government, I mainly focused on the peace government delegation that was designated to negotiate with FARC. I interviewed (**n=10**) political actors from this delegation, including negotiators who directly participated at the negotiation table, political advisors (e.g. law advisors) of the negotiation, and media advisors (see also **Appendix 4** for details). From FARC, I interviewed (**n=2**) two media and communication advisors who helped the FARC delegation with its media management strategy during the peace process. Finally, from the Democratic Center, I interviewed (**n=3**) three of the congressmen with the greatest media activity and visibility (e.g. appearances in media interviews) among members of the political party.

I employed a snowball sampling to reach most of my participants. Since I have a background in public relations, I have a professional network within the PR industry that allowed me to get access to some political reporters. Once I reached and interviewed some of them, they referred me to other colleagues. However, I need to stress that social media networks such as Twitter and LinkedIn (and even Instagram) were also important platforms to reach potential respondents; this was particularly helpful to make initial contact with some of the political actors. Once I initially reached my respondents through these different methods, I strictly adhered to the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy to recruit participants for my research (see details in next section).

4.2.2.2 Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting the interviews, I received ethical approval from the University of Leeds.[10] In order to adhere to the University ethics policy, I followed two strict ethical positions.

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[10] The ethical approval was granted by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Committee on 19 September 2019 under the reference number **FAHC 19-009.**

First, I sent to the participants (by email) 1) an information sheet to share the details about my project and 2) a consent form. Since all the interviews were conducted online due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see details in the following section), I obtained verbal consent from each participant in the day that the interview took place. Second, and following the University research data management policy, I stored all the data from the interviews securely. Steps to accomplish this included: 1) storing the data only in the University's drives, 2) deleting the interviews' audio files from devices as soon as they were safely stored and 3) pseudo-anonymizing all the interviews by removing direct and indirect identifiers of the data and replacing them with a coding system.

Finally, since I granted participants with anonymity (a process that was explained through the information sheet), I was aware that using certain information could lead to the identification of my interviewees. Consequently, besides correctly employing the coding system when referring to the interviews in the empirical chapters of my thesis, I made sure that any specific and potentially identifiable details from the participants were omitted from my findings (e.g., the name of the organizations that journalists work for).

4.2.2.3 Conducting the interviews

As I mentioned above, due to the Covid-19 pandemic (which started right before I intended to begin my field work), I had to conduct all the interviews online from the UK. The majority of interviews were conducted in Zoom, with the exception of two that were conducted in Skype and Teams. On average, the interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with very few exceptions (n=2) that lasted only for 15 minutes given the schedule of the interviewees. All interviews were audio-only recorded and then fully transcribed in Spanish using the software MAXQDA, the same software that was employed to conduct the interviews analysis (see **Section 4.2.2.3** below for details on this process).

To conduct the semi-structured interviews, I employed an interview protocol that was tailored depending on the actor to be interviewed (media actor or political actor). These two protocols (see **Appendix 5**) mainly functioned as guidelines to encourage and direct the conversation, but I was flexible enough to ask other types of questions in relation to some topics of interest that emerged during the encounters. Overall, the design of these interview protocols

responded to two main considerations: 1) framing the questions under the umbrella of my theoretical framework on the mediatization of politics, and 2) addressing the key issues to successfully respond to my research questions. However, since I conducted the computational text analysis and the thematic analysis of the news articles before conducting my interviews, my interview questions were also informed by some of the key findings identified during this process. For instance, I found out some of the key crises during the peace negotiations (e.g. the Kidnapping of an Army General), which allowed me to follow up these issues during my interviews to have a better understanding of both the perspective of journalists on reporting on these crises and how the political actors employed the news media during these political waves.

The set of questions I used for interviewing the Colombian government, FARC and the Democratic Center, that aimed at collecting data to answering SRQ3 (see **Section 4.1**), was structured under three key categories; the work of Orchard-Rieiro (2015), on the mediatization of Chilean political elites, was very useful to define these categories. I therefore designed questions to inquire about the 1) *Perception of Influence and Media Oriented Practices* of the politicians; 2) the *Autonomy and Control* of their roles during the peace negotiation in relation to the news media; and 3) the *Goals and Objectives* of the politicians when using the news media during the negotiations. The first category was useful to collect data about the extent to which politicians perceived the news media as a relevant actor for both the peace negotiation as a political process but also for their role within the negotiations.

However, as I explained in **Chapter (2.2),** although measuring the level of influence that politicians attribute to the news media is relevant for mediatization research - see for example (Strömbäck, 2011) - one cannot forget that capturing how that perceived influence is translated by political actors - and their organizations - to either deal or cope with the news media is also key. Consequently, this category also inquired about the *media related practices* from FARC, the Colombian government delegation, and the opposition party to understand the type of responses (e.g., structural organizational changes) that these political actors gave to the different 'pressures' (or perceived pressures) coming from the news media.

The second category focused on collecting data around the extent to which the *autonomy* of political actors was affected by the news media operation. As I also described in **Chapter (2),** a key claim within the mediatization of politics framework is that the autonomy of politics has been considerably affected by an apparently more powerful media. Therefore, I paid particular attention to this category and set out questions to understand the interdependent relationship between journalists and politicians, placing a special emphasis on how the actions of the latter could have been guided by the 'modus operandi' of the media (Hjarvard, 2008), by the news media logic, instead of their own institutional (political) logics.

Finally, the last category allowed me to inquire about the *goals* of politicians when using the news media during the peace negotiations to understand, amongst other things, what kind of uses were given to the media by the political actors during the peace process, but also under which circumstances they were more inclined to resort to the news media. The latter was of great relevance for my study as comprehending *when* mediatization is more likely to happen among different political groups is pivotal for research on the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014a)**.**

In regards the interview protocol for interviewing journalists, that helped me to answer SRQ4 (see **Section 4.1**), the questions were structured under two broad categories: 1) *the news production process* and the 2) *journalistic autonomy.* Within the first category, I mainly inquired about the aspects of the 'news media logic', following Strömbäck and Esser's (2014b) conceptualization on this notion. Therefore, I attempted to collect data, amongst other things, about the news routines that journalists followed to report on the peace negotiations, what were the journalists' interests around the negotiation and, more broadly, whether the reporters followed professional or commercial considerations when reporting on the peace negotiations. In the second category, similar to what I did when interviewing the political actors, I inquired about the journalists' relationship with politicians to particularly understand the extent to which journalists operated according to their own institutional logics.

4.2.2.4 The analysis of the interviews

I employed different strategies to analyse the data collected in the interviews. Firstly, I kept an interview journal in which I recorded my first initial impressions of the interviews. I would create an entry in the journal for each interviewee as soon as the interview was finished to better capture my preliminary thoughts (that were also recorded in notes that I took during the encounters with the participants). Since all interviews were conducted online from home, I could strictly commit to this practice of 'feeding' my journal right after the interviews took place (I did not have to commute elsewhere).

The second strategy I employed was to try to transcribe the interviews before another interview was about to take place. This approach allowed me to deeply immerse myself with the collected data but it also helped me to identify key themes within the interviews that I could follow up with the next participants. This aspect was of particular relevance for the analysis of my interviews as I was able to, amongst other things, contrast particular positions of politicians towards the peace negotiations to that of journalists when reporting on the peace process. In fact, given that I interviewed people from, for example, the communications team of the government delegation with different roles (and level of experience), I could also contrast and compare their different approaches to the news media during the negotiations. However, I was constantly aware not to deviate my interviews from the main themes of my research - this is where the interview protocol was of much help. Moreover, while transcribing the interviews, I also complemented my initial thoughts in the journal with other impressions that only emerged during the process of transcription; I also strictly committed to this practice.

Finally, once all the interviews where fully transcribed in MAXQDA, I conducted a thematic analysis following Braun and Clark's (2006) six phases. It is important to clarify, however, that in the initial phase of generating the codes I created some labels or tags under the already existing categories that I employed to design the interview protocol (as I explained above). This approach allowed me to keep a focus on my main theoretical framework on the mediatization of politics. For instance, under the category of '*News Production Process'*, I created a label called 'Professional and Commercial Aspects' where I created codes such as 'Journalistic Values', 'Commercial Practices', 'Selection of Sources', amongst others. For the case of political actors,

under the category of '*Perception of Influence and the Media Oriented Practices*', I created a label called 'Media Perception and Media Impact' in which I created codes such as 'Perception of media Influence' or 'Positive Media Impact'.

However, and naturally, I also developed additional codes that did not fall into any of the existing categories within the interview protocols but that could also point to interesting findings; I did this process of coding in parallel with reviewing my notes from my interview journal. After I finished the process of generating the initial codes, I used the 'logbook' tool from MAXQDA to organize the codes into *themes*. During this process, I found Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) 'Hierarchical Influence Model' very useful to situate my findings under the right 'level of analysis' (whether individual, organizational, systemic, etc.). After narrowing down these themes, I selected the excerpts that better represent them. Here it is important to note that since all interviews were conducted in Spanish, the quotations employed in the empirical chapters are my own translations.

Some of the key themes that emerged after this process were: 1) *The tension between the complexity of a peace process and the highly commercialized environment of newsrooms* (see analysis in **Chapter 9.1**), or how *protecting the peace process became a superior journalistic value: between the scoop and the defense of peace* (see analysis in **Chapter 9.2**).

4.3 Research Limitations

There are certain limitations to my research that are important to address. Firstly, the number of interviewees from the FARC delegation (**n**=2) and the Democratic Center (**n**=3) can be seen as low in comparison with the political actors that I interviewed from the government delegation (**n**=11). This could have had an impact on my overall understanding of the communication strategies employed by these political actors. However, the number of interviews that I conducted with journalists (**n**=10) also helped me to understand how FARC and the opposition party interacted with the news media and therefore allowed me to triangulate their media related practices (which was a key aspect of this project). Moreover, in the case of the opposition party, even though I only interviewed three Congressmen, I reached a good level of saturation manifested in how the same themes and ideas characterized these three interviews.

Secondly, I conducted the interviews around four years after the peace agreement was signed in December 2016 and almost eight years after the beginning of the peace process in October 2012. Considering this significant gap in time between my field work and the political process I examined, some of the recollections of the events from my interviewees may lack some detail and accuracy (which overall may have also had an impact on how I re-constructed specific moments of the peace negotiations through their testimonies). Nonetheless, given that I performed the analysis of the news coverage before conducting the interviews, I was able to identify key moments of the peace process (e.g. the kidnapping of an Army General) and use them during my interviews as a vehicle to help my interviewees locate themselves in more concrete situations for the recollection of the events. Likewise, I employed specific news stories about the peace negotiations to discuss key features of the coverage with journalists; this strategy was particularly useful when employed with journalists that had written the story as this helped them to trigger memories around the context of the news production process.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the classification of the news coverage into 'topics' was conducted by a computer algorithm (with all that implies). Although all the topics were humanly validated by an extensive reading of key documents (as I also detailly explained in this chapter), I mainly relied on the results yielded by the STM to subsequently categorize the coverage into the different themes. This means, amongst other things, that given the complexities of the

language some relevant topics may have not been identified by the computational tool. Moreover, as Bail (2018) points out, topic models do not necessarily provide a highly nuanced classification of text. Therefore it is pivotal to acknowledge when employing these type of tools (as I did in my research design strategy) that "[r]ather than replace humans, computers *amplify* human abilities" (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013, p.270) and that these tools "might be more accurately described as 'tools for reading'" (Bail, 2018). I need to point out, nonetheless, that I was often surprised by the accuracy by which STM sorted the corpus of news into specific themes as my validation process corroborated that the classification had been very precise.

Chapter 5: News media representations of the peace process

This **Chapter (5)** examines how the Colombian news media represented the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC. As I explained in **Chapter (4.2.1),** I employed Structural Topic Modelling - STM - to identify the main themes in which the media focused their attention when reporting on the peace process. However, I argued that although STM is a very effective tool to group, organize and inspect big data sets (in this case a corpus of news articles), it does require additional qualitative methods to reach more nuanced and meaningful interpretations. Consequently, the findings of this chapter are the result of a combination of STM and a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2019) conducted to determine and examine some of the most relevant topics. Since the examination of these topics also partly informed my interview questions, I also include excerpts from my interviews to complement the discussion and better illustrate my arguments.

The **Chapter (5)** is divided into two main sections. **Section (5.1)** introduces both the topics (**n=65**) identified by the STM[11] and the typology that I created to better organise them. By doing so, I explain one of my key findings: that the traditional news media gave more prevalence to discussing the *procedural development* of the peace negotiations rather than explaining the substantive issues of the peace agenda. There was predominant attention from the Colombian news media on the 'political atmosphere' of the peace dialogues, which was described very often in negative and pessimistic terms. Interestingly, I show how this trend did not necessarily apply to the independent media outlet (*La Silla Vacía)* which, on the contrary, was the outlet that discussed the fewest topics related to the 'political atmosphere' and gave more prevalence to some of the peace agenda items such as the issue of 'rural development'. Moreover, I also show in **Section (5.1)** that the news media prioritized the viewpoints of the Colombian government as they devoted the most space to amplifying the 'president statements' about the negotiations.

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[11] Please note that although the best STM model was the one with k=70 as it allowed me to identify key topics that other models did not (as I explained in detail in **Chapter 4.2.1.4**), the final number of chosen topics was 65. When applying STM, it is common that some of the identified topics by the computational tool are either not very well defined or repetitive. As I also mentioned throughout **Chapter 4.2.1**, human validation is very important when performing these types of methods. Therefore, after a carefully inspection of the 70 topics yielded by the STM, I found out that five of them were not very well defined (hence the final number - 65 - of chosen topics).

Consequently, given that the topics related to the procedural development of the negotiations were significantly prevalent in the news coverage and that one of the key roles of the news media within peace negotiations is to indeed define or shape the 'political atmosphere' (Wolfsfeld, 2004), I qualitatively examine in **Section (5.2)** two of the key topics within this category: the 'timing of the peace negotiations' and 'the critical moments' of the peace process. In the case of the former, I show that the news media constructed a lopsided coverage in which FARC tended to be deemed accountable for either the delays that the peace process experienced or for issues related to the pacing of the peace dialogues. This was of particular importance as the element of time became a contested aspect between the government delegation and the FARC delegation. While the government delegation wanted to reach a peace agreement in a faster fashion - the longer it takes, the less likely the public will support a peace process - the FARC delegation did not have this public pressure. The lopsided coverage was then aligned with the interests of the Colombian government since a key aspect of their strategy was to repeatedly employ the element of time to pressure FARC to speed up the pace of the dialogues at the 'negotiation table'. Interestingly, even though the government was the actor who constantly set up deadlines (which were not met), the news media did not make them accountable nor challenge their positions.

Within the 'critical moments of the peace process', I focus on the kidnapping of Army General Rubén Darío Alzate as this was one of the greatest crises during the peace negotiations. I illustrate that, similarly to what occurred when communicating about the pacing of the peace process, the traditional news media overlooked the government's responsibility in the crisis. Even though the government was the political actor who constantly rejected the idea of reaching a bilateral ceasefire with FARC - they argued the military pressure in the field was important for the success of the dialogues - the implications of this decision (in this case the kidnapping of an Army General) were not questioned by the traditional news media. This highly contrasts, however, as to how *La Silla Vacía* - the independent media outlet - reported on the crisis. They displayed a more 'independent' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) as they held the government accountable for its decision to suspend the negotiations and challenged them for not having done so when two other soldiers were kidnapped or when two indigenous people were assassinated by FARC.

Overall, the findings of this chapter highlight two key arguments. Firstly, I argue that the 'news media logic' - as opposed to 'political logic'- (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) prevailed in the news coverage of the peace negotiations. More specifically, the news coverage presents strong signs of the 'commercial aspects' of this logic, namely: the focus on news stories characterized by conflict, but also news stories that could be placed within the category of what is known as 'depoliticization' (Esser, 2013): the marginalization of substantial issue discussion, as the traditional news media focused on communicating the *developments* of the peace process instead of explaining the peace agenda issues. Secondly, I argue that the traditional news media mainly embraced an 'elite-driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) when reporting on the peace negotiations. This was mainly manifested in 1) how the news media chose to overlook the Colombian government's responsibility in moments of crisis and 2) how they did not challenge some of the government's decisions around the negotiations, leaving FARC deemed to be accountable in the majority of the instances.

Pertinently, these two arguments do not necessarily apply to *La Silla Vacía* because not only did they give more prevalence to the specific issues of the peace agenda, but they also held the government accountable during the crisis of the kidnapping of the Army General Rubén Darío Alzate. I will address in the concluding remarks of this chapter **(Section 5.3)** what the implications of these findings are, placing an emphasis on how despite the news coverage being mainly guided by the 'news media logic', the way in which the media represented the negotiations does not indicate independence from the political institutions (specifically from the Colombian government).

5.1 Overview of the news coverage around the peace negotiations

As I mentioned at the beginning of this **Chapter (5)**, the topic modelling yielded a total of 65 topics (see **Figure 5.1** below) that were discussed by the Colombian news media when reporting on the peace negotiations. Although these topics show a better 'picture' of the news coverage if they are organised in a typology system (as I illustrate in **Table 5.1** below), there are two considerations that are worth discussing from **Figure 5.1 itself**. Firstly, from the top 10 most frequent topics, **only one topic** is directly related to the agenda of the peace negotiations. Before the Colombian government and FARC decided to make public the peace dialogues, they secretly negotiated - for a year and a half - the terms and conditions under which the peace process was going to be carried out. One of the most important decisions from this secret phase was the definition of a limited 'peace agenda' that would focus the negotiation on only six main issues: 1) Comprehensive Rural Reform; 2) Political Participation; 3) End of the Conflict; 4) Solution to the Problem of Illicit Drugs; 5) Victims; and 6) Implementation, Verification and Endorsement.

Interestingly, only the topic **'peace legislative act'**, which mainly refers to the Congress' debates around the legal viability of the peace negotiations, reached the top 10 most frequent topics (it ranked 9th). The rest of the most frequent topics are either link to particular moments of the negotiations (e.g. 'the signature of the peace deal') or the 'political atmosphere' of the peace dialogues (e.g. 'critical moments' and 'the timing on the negotiations'). Interestingly, and as I illustrate in **Section (5.2)**, these topics from the 'political atmosphere' were commonly described in a negative fashion. While I do not want to centre my argument around the differences of frequencies between topics (as they are mostly minimal), it is fair to argue that the news media gave more prevalence to discussing the *procedural development* of the peace negotiations rather than explaining the six agenda items that the Colombian government and FARC agreed to discuss during the dialogues.

However, this predominant focus on the political atmosphere does not necessarily apply to the independent media outlet (*La Silla Vacía)*. Even when they did so, as it happened when they reported on the kidnapping of Army General Alzate, their *way of communicating* the crisis was different to the rest of the traditional news media (as I explain in detail in **Section 5.3**). As I mentioned in the methodology **Chapter (4)**, one of the advantages of implementing STM is that

it allows the researcher to include metadata in the analysis. This allowed me to identify that *La Silla Vacía* was the media outlet that discussed the least topics related to the political atmosphere (e.g. 'round of talks') but, on the contrary, it was the media outlet that discussed some of the topics that were directly related to the peace agenda (as it can be seen in **Table 5.2** below).

Figure 5.1 - Topics of the news coverage about the peace negotiations

Topics by prevalence
With the top words that contribute to each topic

Topic	Top words
1.President Statements	santos, dijo, presidente, juan, manuel
2.Views on the Negotiations	si, va, cómo, hacer, puede
3.Timing on the Negotiations	si, negociación, habana, punto, puede
4.Round of Talks	habana, conversaciones, guerrilla, diálogos, agenda
5.Pathways to Peace	sociedad, ser, debe, acuerdo, puede
6.Critical Moments	si, negociación, mesa, colombianos, diálogos
7.Signature Peace Deal	acuerdo, firma, final, fecha, habana
8.War and peace narratives	si, guerra, tan, país, sino
9.Peace Legislative Act	congreso, ley, proyecto, legislativo, reforma
10.Uribe and Opposition Party	uribe, democrático, centro, expresidente, álvaro
11.Transitional Justice	justicia, transicional, corte, penal, tribunal
12.Forgiveness and Reconciliation	guerra, país, colombia, colombianos, reconciliación
13.Bilateral Ceasefire	cese, fuego, bilateral, armas, zonas
14.General Attorney	procurador, ordóñez, general, alejandro, fiscal
15.Armed Forces	militares, fuerzas, general, militar, defensa
16.Violent Attacks	acciones, unilateral, guerrilla, cese, fuego
17.Plebiscite and Constitutional Court	corte, constitucional, plebiscito, si, decisión
18.Posconflict	seguridad, posconflicto, grupos, criminales, bandas
19.Crimes and Amnesty	delitos, cárcel, guerrilleros, crímenes, delito
20.Economy	país, economía, millones, año, inversión
21.Constituent Assembly	constituyente, acuerdos, acuerdo, referendo, refrendación
22.New Peace Deal Process	acuerdo, nuevo, plebiscito, presidente, santos
23.FARC delegation	márquez, timochenko, iván, jefe, habana
24.Plebiscite Electoral Process	plebiscito, campaña, acuerdos, votar, colombianos
25.Hacker Scandal	fiscalía, información, sepúlveda, inteligencia, investigación
26.Political Parties	partido, vargas, liberal, conservador, presidente
27.Government Delegation	calle, negociador, humberto, jefe, equipo
28.Political Ideologies	santos, presidente, política, uribe, poder
29.Truth Commission	víctimas, verdad, comisión, conflicto, justicia
30.News Media and Social Media	medios, comunicación, redes, diario, información
31.Peace Forums	foro, nacional, sociedad, mesa, propuestas
32.Victims	víctimas, habana, víctima, perdón, mesa
33.Personal Testimonies from War	años, después, familia, dos, vida
34.Political Participation	participación, política, acuerdo, nacional, garantías
35.Guerrillas and Peace Processes	guerra, política, armas, guerrilla, negociación
36.ELN Peace Dialogues	eln, diálogos, guerrilla, negociación, mesa
37.Latin-American Support	colombia, cumbre, países, chile, ecuador
38.Rural Development	tierras, rural, tierra, desarrollo, campo
39.FARC as Guerilla Group	alias, frente, bloque, guerrilleros, guerrilla
40.Concentration Zones	zona, municipio, municipios, san, departamento
41.Peace Demonstrations	marcha, bogotá, plaza, ciudad, bolívar
42.Kidnaping	secuestro, general, alzate, liberación, secuestrados
43.Patriotic Union	política, elecciones, electoral, partido, patriótica
44.UN Oversees Role	onu, naciones, unidas, misión, general
45.EE.UU Involvement	unidos, colombia, obama, santos, presidente
46.Human Rights	derechos, humanos, derecho, violaciones, internacional
47.Former President Pastrana	pastrana, expresidente, gaviria, presidente, andrés
48.Academia and Peace	universidad, educación, profesor, nacional, colombia
49.Changes New Peace Deal	acuerdo, especial, jurisdicción, nuevo, jep
50.Opinion Polls Santos	ciento, encuesta, santos, colombianos, imagen
51.EU Support	colombia, europea, unión, apoyo, posconflicto
52.Congressmen	córdoba, cepeda, senador, lópez, piedad
53.Guarantor Countries	mundo, países, internacional, colombia, américa
54.Children Recruitment	menores, niños, personas, reclutamiento, casos
55.FARC Arrest Warrants	trinidad, simón, oslo, unidos, captura
56.Zuluaga Presidential Campaign	zuluaga, campaña, iván, candidato, santos
57.Narcotrafic and Illicit Drugs	cultivos, narcotráfico, drogas, ilícitos, coca
58.Indigenous and Ethnicities	indígenas, comunidades, sociales, organizaciones, social
59.Venezuela	venezuela, chávez, maduro, colombia, presidente
60.Colombian State Visits to Europe	colombia, españa, santos, país, presidente
61.Local Government's Support Plebiscite	petro, alcalde, bogotá, campaña, dos
62.Pope and Catholic Church	iglesia, papa, francisco, colombia, católica
63.Gender Approach	mujeres, género, mujer, enfoque, ideología
64.Demining Process	minas, desminado, humanitario, acuerdo, antipersonal
65.Opinion Polls Peace Process	ciento, muestra, ciudades, medellín, selección

0.0%   2.5%   5.0%   7.5%
γ

Table 5.1 - Typology of the news coverage of the peace negotiations

Typology	Ranking	Topics/Themes	
Political Atmosphere	5	Pathways to Peace	
	3	Timing on the Negotiations	
	6	Critical Moments	
	2	Views on the Negotiations	
	4	Round of Talks	
Political Actors/Institutions	1	President Statements	
	27	Government Delegation	
	15	Armed Forces	
	14	General Attorney	
	26	Political Parties	
	10	Uribe and Opposition Party	
	47	Former President Pastrana	
	23	FARC Delegation	
	39	FARC as Guerilla Group	
	43	Patriotic Union	
	62	Pope and Catholic Church	
	30	News Media and Social Media	
	52	Congressmen	
Peace Process Agenda	38	**Comprehensive Rural Reform**	Rural Development
	31		Peace Forums
	63	**Political Participation**	Gender Approach
	34		Political Participation
	58		Indigenous and Ethnicities
	13	**End of Conflict**	Bilateral Ceasefire
	40		Concentration Zones
	64		Demining Process
	18		Posconflict
	57	**Problem of illicit drugs**	Narcotrafic and Illicit Drugs
	11	**Victims**	Transitional Justice
	19		Crimes and Amnesty
	32		Victims
	29		Truth Commission
	54		Children Recruitment
	17	**Implementation, verification and endorsement**	Plebiscite and Constitutional Court
	9		Peace Legislative Act
	21		Constituent Assembly
	44		United Nations Oversees role
	22		New Peace Deal Process
	49		Changes New Peace Deal
	7		Signature Peace Deal

Typology	Ranking	Topics/Themes
Peace Process Issues	16	Violent Attacks
	42	Kidnaping
	55	FARC Arrest Warrants
	25	Hacker Scandal/Illegal Surveillance
	41	Peace Demonstrations
	46	Human Rights
Electoral Process	24	Plebiscite Electoral Process
	56	Zuluaga Presidential Campaign
	61	Local Government's Support Plebiscite
	65	Opinion Polls Peace Process
	50	Opinion Polls Santos
Diplomacy	37	Latin-American Support
	45	EE.UU Involvement
	51	European Union Involvement and Support
	60	Colombian State Visits to Europe
	53	Guarantor Countries
	59	Venezuela
Narratives	8	War vs Peace
	12	Forgiveness and reconciliation
	28	Political Ideologies
	35	Guerrillas and Peace Processes
Others	20	Economy
	36	ELN Peace Dialogues
	48	Academia and Peace
	33	Personal testimonies from war

Table 5. 2 - Differences of coverage between *La Silla Vacía* and the traditional media

Coverage on the 'Political Atmosphere'	Coverage on the 'Peace Agenda'

Topic: 'Round of Talks'

Topic: 'Rural Development'

Topic: 'Timing on the negotiations'

Topic: 'Political Participation'

Topic: 'Critical Moments

Topic: 'Truth Commission'
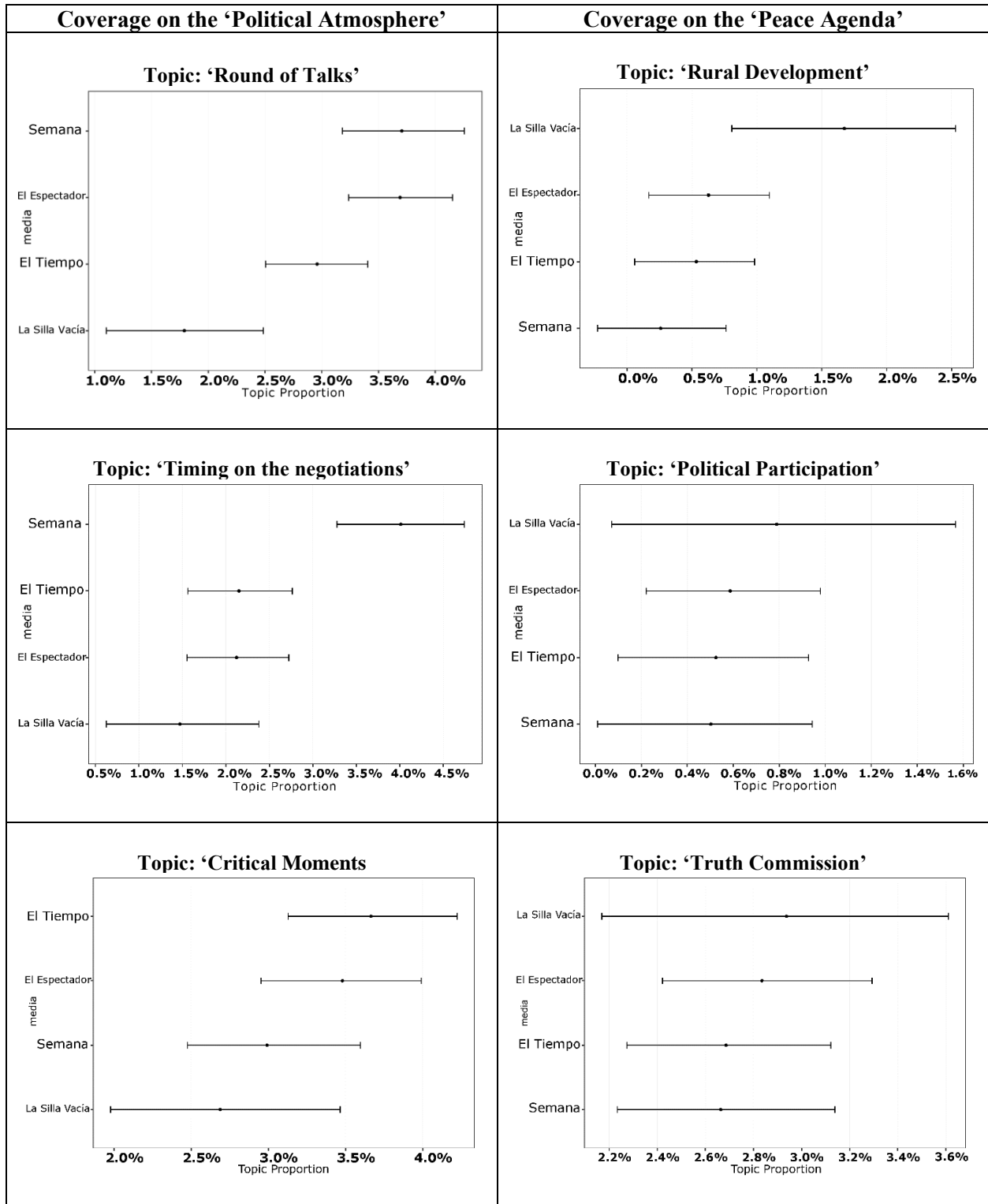
The second element worth discussing from **Figure 5.1** is that the most prevalent topic of the entire corpus is the topic of 'President Statements'. As it will be illustrated in the following sections, the Colombian news media embraced (more often than not) an elite-driven approach (Robinson et al., 2010) to report on the peace negotiations. The significant amount of voice given to former President Santos (in comparison to main leaders of FARC, for instance) in the news coverage is one of the signs of this. From the 'critical moments' of the peace negotiations to key discussions of the peace process, the President's messaging outgrew the rest of the political actors involved in the peace negotiations. Although this finding may not come as a surprise, since the news media in Colombia still reflects "the prevailing political forces" (Montoya, 2014, p.73), it highlights the disadvantages and challenges that the counterparts in the peace negotiation in Colombia, as well as those who opposed it, faced when trying to communicate their voice through the media. In fact, this aspect of constantly communicating the government's narrative, in conjunction with a supportive attitude towards the negotiations, also affected the communications strategies of the opposition party - the Democratic Center - (as I discuss in **Chapter 8.3** and **8.4**).

However, and as I acknowledged at the beginning of this chapter, **Figure 5.1** (in itself) does not illustrate a very clear picture of the news coverage about the Colombian peace process; when topics are organized and presented in a typology system, a better 'portrait' of the news coverage emerges. Therefore, **Table 5.1** above shows the seven main themes in which the media placed the emphasis when communicating about the peace negotiations. These themes are: 1) The political atmosphere of the peace negotiations; 2) the political actors and institutions involved in the process; 3) the peace process agenda issues; 4) some of the peace negotiations problems; 5) the electoral processes during the negotiations; 6) the diplomatic issues surrounding the peace dialogues; 7) some of the narratives around the peace negotiations; and 8) other topics that cannot be placed in a particular category. Since giving a detailed account of each of the topics that composed these themes would exceed the scope of this study, the following **Section (5.2)** presents the results of the thematic analysis that I conducted for the 'the political atmosphere' category.[12]

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[12] I also conducted a thematic analysis for the category of the 'Peace Process Agenda' (see **Table 5.1**) in which I particularly focused on analysing the issue of 'Victims'. This analysis is introduced and explained in **Chapter (6).**

I decided to mainly focus my examination on this category because, as mentioned earlier, determining the *political atmosphere* is one of the key roles of the media during a peace negotiation (Wolfsfeld, 2004), so examining the way in which the Colombian news media represented the climate surrounding the peace dialogues was key. Moreover, as can be seen from **Table 5.1** in the 'ranking' column, all the topics that encompass this category are in the top 10 most frequent topics, so there was a prevalence aspect that could not be overlooked. It is important to stress, nonetheless, that I also examined other topics to complement some of my analyses in other chapters. For instance, in **Chapter (7.2)**, where I discuss the government's strategy in relation to the escalation of the conflict, I reviewed the topics of 'violent attacks', 'bilateral ceasefire' and 'de-mining process' to develop and illustrate my argument. This highlights that one of the advantages of topic modelling is the ease with which well-clustered topics can be examined in a systematic fashion.

5.2 The 'Political Atmosphere' of the peace negotiations

5.2.1 Negotiating against the clock: time as an enemy of a peace process

Time is a key element in a peace process. Given the dependency on public support, the parties involved in the dialogues need to prove that the negotiations are moving forward in a timely manner. If time passes by without reaching agreements, the public can start becoming skeptical about the process. This is particularly the case in contexts where other peace negotiations have failed as it can be difficult for society to trust (again) in a dialogue solution to the conflict - as was the case of Colombia. The previous negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC in the early 2000's, which lasted for around three years, did not yield any results. On the contrary, it strengthened the guerrilla group (both militarily and territorially), leaving a troubled feeling among Colombians. President Santos did not want to repeat the same story.

Therefore, during the speech in which the peace process was publicly announced, Santos made a public commitment: he stated that the peace negotiations were only going to last a few months instead of years. However, given that a peace negotiation is a very complex process in which highly contested issues are discussed, the (very) short deadline imposed by Santos seemed like a 'clumsy' political move. It was hard to believe that the conflict with FARC, the longest civil war in the Americas, could be resolved in less than a year (as it was later proved since the agreement took almost five years to be reached). As it was perhaps expected, the news media quickly picked up on this issue as seen in the following excerpt from *Semana*.[13] Only three months after the President announced the deadline, the media outlet started to highlight the unfeasibility of reaching an agreement in such a short period of time:

> The 'General Agreement for the end of the conflict' [the pre-liminary accord to start the negotiations] was signed on August 26, in Havana. That the negotiation around that document begins **almost three months** after having signed it is symptomatic. Beyond what should be attributed to this delay, **for a negotiation that the government wishes to last "months", a quarter-year is not a small issue** (ID13297, *Semana*, 2012-11-17)

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[13] Please note that all the news articles used in the empirical **Chapters** (**5-9**) can be reviewed in **Appendix 6** following their corresponding ID.

In the same news article, *Semana* also pointed out a key aspect in relation to the issue of time: the Colombian government and FARC had different understandings around how long the peace process should take. "There is an evident contrast between the 'times of the jungle' managed by FARC and the urgencies of the political and opinion times in which the government must move", the article stated. Moreover, it highlighted that FARC had acknowledged that, contrary to the government, they did not have any deadlines: "FARC have said that they do not set deadlines for the process and have hinted that if it took a year and a half to agree on the agenda [referring to the secret phase of the dialogues], the negotiation could need more" (ID13297, *Semana*, 2012-11-17). This discrepancy around the pacing of the peace negotiations is not only observed in the news coverage, but also from the testimony of journalists who could interpret the negotiation strategies that political actors employed throughout the process. The following quotations from a senior editor and a political reporter illustrate this:[14]

> **The Government constantly pressured FARC to speed up the pace**. For FARC [on the contrary], what was most convenient was all the public exposure they had as a result of the issue of the length of the negotiation. So there was an initial incompatibility: **the government wanted fast and FARC didn't, both for reasons of their own political interest**. And that was very clear in the behaviour of the two [delegations] (J-SE 10, Elite Newspaper)

> Without a doubt, the element of time was something that crossed Havana (…) While the government had a bit of eagerness, the eagerness of electoral times, FARC had, on the contrary, a time in which they did not want to rush and wanted to take it [slowly] and said that peace had to be above electoral interests (J-PR 9, Elite Newspaper).

Taking into consideration these different approaches of the government and FARC delegations around the pacing of the negotiations, I examine in this **Section (5.2)** how the Colombian news media referred to the issue of time. I argue that the media contributed to create pressure on FARC delegation around this issue as they constantly attributed the accountability of the delays to *only* the guerrilla group. This lopsided coverage was aligned with the interests of the Colombian government since a key aspect of their strategy was to repeatedly employ the element of time to pressure FARC to speed up the pace of the peace dialogues. Crucially, even though the government was the actor setting up constant deadlines, the guerrilla group was the one blamed for not reaching them.

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[14] Please note that an Index of the interviewees can be found in **Appendix 4**.

To illustrate my argument, I mainly focus on examining the news coverage of the second half of 2013. Even though the theme of 'pacing' was a constant throughout the coverage - it ranked 3rd in the STM -, close to the end of 2013 the element of time took centre stage in the news agenda as the peace agreement was supposed to be reached by November 2013 (according to the deadline set up by President Santos). This can be seen from **Figure 5.2** that shows that between April 2013 and November 2013, the topic of the 'timing of the negotiations' reached its highest peak. Despite the minor fluctuations overall, this period of time is also the only moment where the topic surpassed its average topic proportion.

Figure 5. 2 - Proportion for the 'timing of the negotiations' topic throughout the coverage
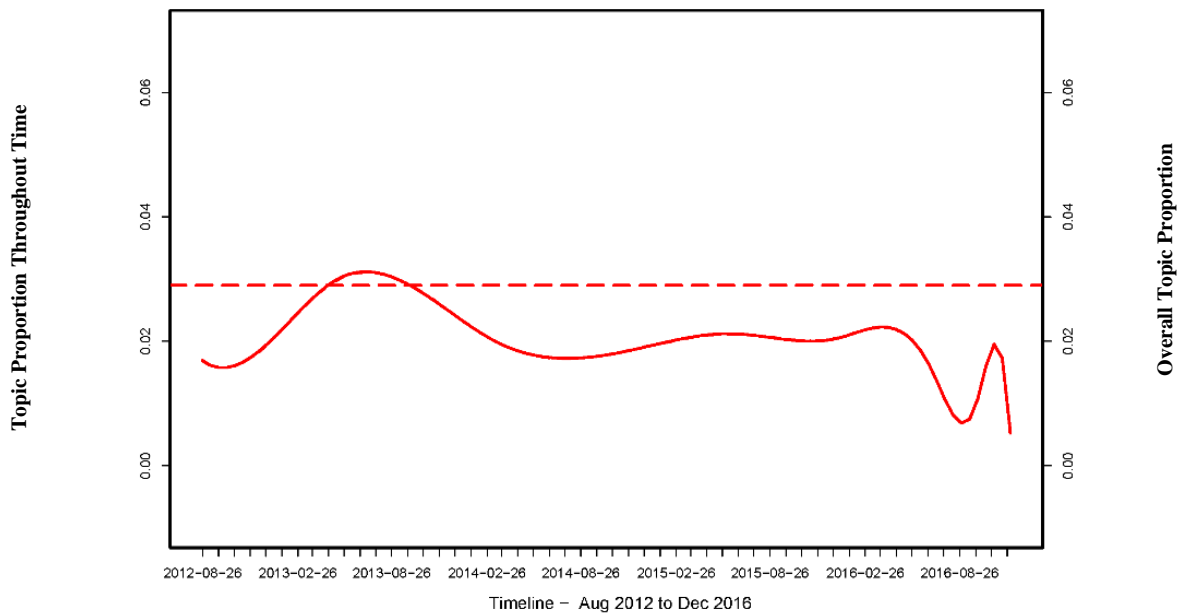
5.2.1.1 Time as a negotiation strategy to put pressure on FARC

In September 2013, two months prior to the original deadline that President Santos established to finish the peace process, the Colombian news media started to amplify the messaging of the government in regards the importance of accelerating the pace of the negotiations. On 3 September 2013, in an article titled '*The reasons of the government to give a new pace to the process with FARC*', *El Tiempo* shared different excerpts of a speech from Santos in which he stated the need of progressing faster with the dialogues: "'We are in a critical moment; this process cannot take much longer (…) **time is short, people want peace but demand that we move faster**'"

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(ID 3983, *El Tiempo*, 2013-09-03). The reason for speeding up the negotiations, according to the government, was that the people were demanding the process to be more expeditious. In other words, the Colombian government started to embrace a 'speaking-on-behalf-of-the-public' narrative to refer to the issue of time. The news media also put forward this narrative by interpreting that the reason for changing the pace of the negotiations was that the public was already dissatisfied with the negotiations: "[T]he presidential palace [the government] began to feel the demands of the Colombian people to see results since there are already signs of the discontent that the [peace] dialogue[s] generates" (ID 3983, *El Tiempo*, 2013-09-03). Interestingly, the news media made these types of claims without backing them up with, for instance, public opinion poll results around the negotiations.

Likewise, on 19 September 2013, *El Espectador* gave visibility to the voice of the government chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle. De la Calle, besides addressing the need of speeding up the negotiations and speaking on behalf the public (like President Santos did before), also blamed FARC for the delays. "The government chief negotiator (…) **asked FARC for less rhetoric and more efficiency to reach agreements because the patience of Colombians is not infinite**" (ID 10678, *El Espectador,* 2013-09-19). This shows, as stated at the beginning of this section, that the Colombian government employed the argument of time to put pressure on FARC at the negotiation table; this pressure was intensified since the news media not only amplified the messages from the government, it also played a part in holding FARC accountable (as it will be illustrated later). However, to better understand how the government employed the argument of time at the negotiations, we can take a closer look at one of the interviews I conducted with a government advisor who directly participated in the peace negotiations.

She explains that time is one of the main 'enemies' of a peace process as it can affect the legitimacy of the negotiations: the longer it takes to reach agreements, the less likely the public will support the dialogues. However, political times, such as the calendars of democratic elections, are also quite relevant considerations as a change of an administration can narrow the possibilities of peace:

I think one of the main lessons from the process is that we took a very long time and that cost us a lot (…) We knew that we needed 'momentum' from the same President to start implementing the peace accord (…) so even if we were to reach an agreement, the possibility of the new administration not willing to implement it was quite high. **So we always used the argument of time [with FARC at the negotiation table]**. We also use the time of the EEUU government as an argument to insist to them [FARC] that it was one thing to negotiate with Obama and another with the upcoming U.S. president. And we were not wrong. Trump's administration did not have the same interest as the Obama's administration. **So yeah, of course that [time] was a frequent argument [at the negotiation table] as it is one of the enemies of a peace process** (P-GNA 4).

This testimony is relevant as it illustrates the complexity and nuances of the issue of time during a peace negotiation. On the one hand, the Colombian government had (one could argue) some legitimate reasons to want to speed up the pace of the dialogues with FARC. They were facing the possibility of the opposition party - the Democratic Center - coming to power after the elections in June 2014, a scenario in which the future of the peace negotiations would have been very uncertain; the Democratic Center had fiercely opposed the peace dialogues since the very beginning. On the other hand, reaching a peace agreement to put an end a conflict of more than 50 years is a very complex process in itself that should not respond (entirely and necessarily) to electoral schedules, which also highlights some of the challenges of a democratic system in the prospects of peace. In any case, and here is where I want to put the emphasis of my argument, the Colombian government decided to speak on behalf the public when asking to accelerate the dialogues to give much more 'weight' to the issue of time and therefore attempt to put more pressure on FARC at the negotiation table (even though there were other legitimate reasons for doing so).

In fact, during his speech at the 68th United Nations General Assembly on 23 September 2013, President Santos kept accusing FARC of being responsible for the delays on the peace process and mentioned the 'people' as the main reason to speed up: "It is time for decisions. I am still optimistic, **but the patience of the Colombian people is not infinite**. **The guerrillas will have to decide if they opt for an honorable and lasting peace, or if they repeat the war'**" (ID 10661, *El Espectador,* 2013-09-24), Santos declared before the leaders of 192 nations in New York. In response to his speech, and particularly around the exposure and reach that the President's declarations had achieved due to the news media coverage, FARC Commander in Chief - Rodrigo Londoño - (alias 'Timochenko') wrote a letter to the President in order to present the guerrillas'

standpoint. In the letter, FARC announced that they were going to prepare a report about the negotiations to start 'presenting the truth' to the Colombian people around the peace dialogues. The Colombian news media assessed this action of FARC as a 'possible crisis' for the negotiations.

For instance, *Semana*, in an article that titled '*FARC threatens to reveal the secrets of Havana',* claimed in the lead that "the peace process could enter into a deep crisis if the threat made a few hours ago by (…) 'Timochenko' is met; he announced that he ordered his men in Havana to break the confidentiality agreement between the parties" (ID 13681, *Semana,* 2013-09-25). From the beginning of the article, the outlet focused on the element that could be considered most problematic: an *alleged* breach of the peace negotiation confidentiality between the Colombian government and FARC (by the latter). In other words, *Semana* interpreted FARC's statement through what could be considered 'dramatic lenses': by declaring (already) a potential crisis, defining the report of FARC as a 'threat' to the confidentiality of the negotiations and blaming the guerrilla group for the whole situation. However, if we take a closer look at what the letter mentions in this regard, the 'threat' does not appear as clear cut as *Semana* reported:

> 'In the face of such a large discursive and media offensive against us and what is happening at the negotiation table, with the sole purpose that the country and the world really know what is happening, **I have decided to authorize our spokesmen in Havana to prepare a report', said Rodrigo Londoño in his letter** (ID 13681, *Semana,* 2013-09-25).

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that although FARC Commander in Chief Rodrigo Londoño did mention the making of a report in his letter, it is difficult to infer (as *Semana* did) that he 'ordered his men (…) to break the confidentiality' of the peace process or that the content of the report was going to do so. In fact, this confidentiality agreement was about not disclosing information about the temporal accords between the parties, but the delegations were still able to separately communicate to the public other matters around the dialogues. Moreover, even though the news article also included excerpts from the letter in which the FARC leader listed some of the motives as to why President Santos may have wanted to accelerate the negotiations, these motives (contrary to FARC's statement) were not assessed by the news media outlet. In other words, while the statement of FARC, and more specifically their idea of creating a report was 'translated' by the media outlet as a deliberate 'threat' and a 'potential crisis', the reasons that the Colombian

government may have had to speed up the peace dialogues listed by the FARC leader were only presented as his opinion and the outlet did not comment or take a position on them.

For example, Rodrigo Londoño pointed out that one of the reasons as to why the government needed to speed up the negotiations was because President Santos needed to make a decision around his candidacy for the re-election as President of Colombia (the deadline to announce this to the electoral regulatory body was November 2013). *Semana* introduces this and other reasons listed by the FARC leader employing phrases such as 'according to', 'for FARC', etc. without engaging with them, as it can be seen in the following passage:

> **For FARC,** Santos needs to change his 'arrogant and petty attitude'. **According to Timochenko**, Santos pressures FARC 'with the story that the time and patience of the Colombians are running out; what is actually shortened is the time to define his candidacy for reelection. His eagerness to show the country a peace agreement is evident, but not even for this reason does he assume a position that enables agreement', **says Timochenko** in an extensive piece of writing that he published on the Internet entitled '*So much rhetoric hurts, Santos'* (ID 13681, *Semana,* 2013-09-25).

Therefore, despite the news media amplifying the position of FARC in this matter, their assessment was lopsided: the initiative of the guerrilla group to create a report around the negotiations was presented as a deliberate effort to breach the confidentiality of the peace dialogues, while the government's reasons to speed up the peace process were not challenged or even commented upon by the news media. What is also significantly relevant is the lopsided treatment by the media in relation to issues of accountability. Although FARC's letter was a *response* to the speech (and the media coverage generated by it) given by President Santos at 68th United Nations General Assembly, only FARC was deemed accountable for the alleged crisis that the situation could create. This issue of attributing the responsibility to only one of the parties was also predominant in relation to how the news media communicated the delays of the peace negotiation.

In the following news stories, it can be seen how the news media, besides portraying the negotiations pessimistically, held FARC accountable for the delays in the peace process. An editorial from *El Tiempo* on 3 October 2013, exactly one month after the Colombian government started to position this topic on the news agenda, clearly exemplifies this. The editorial describes

the 11 months of negotiations as a **prolonged time** in which "it has **only been possible to reach a partial agreement** on one of the six points of the road map". The 'prolonged' measurement is given in relation to the deadline set up and announced by President Santos because the media outlet claims that achieving only one partial agreement is "a pace well below the original expectations which referred to months rather than years". The editorial adds (and here the pessimistic reporting is clearly seen) that "**in the absence of results, the clear and optimistic outlook of a year ago has given way to dark clouds that bring a certain skepticism**" (ID 5841, *El Tiempo,* 2013-10-02). Interestingly, even though the pessimistic assessment came from the fact that no other agreements had been reached *within the deadline established by the government*, the editorial presents FARC as the *only* one accountable for the delays. Moreover, it claims that FARC should see the negotiations as an 'act of generosity' from the Colombian government, demonstrating that the media outlet was not treating both parties involved in the peace dialogues equally:

> Decisions must take the place of delays. It is about ensuring that this attempt at peace is sustainable, that what has been done so far does not go to the ruin, dragging the illusion of millions of Colombians. For this not to happen, it is paramount that strong reasons arrive from Havana so that society surrounds the process. Strong reasons that have their own name: **demonstrations by the FARC that they are willing to advance at greater speed**. Needless to remind this organization that the fact that they are in the Caribbean today [negotiating] is not because they achieved an imbalance to its favor on the battlefield. Quite the opposite. **The strategic advantage achieved by the Public Force was the factor that allowed this new attempt [of peace] (…) which should be read as an act of generosity that is not foolproof**. The ball is in the FARC's field (ID 5841, *El Tiempo,* 2013-10-02).

Consequently, the news media (in this specific case *El Tiempo*) aligned with the government's narrative to give pressure to FARC at the negotiation table in relation to the issue of time. In fact, the news coverage that immediately followed the editorial date of publication suggests that FARC had to react (again) to this pressure by trying to provide an explanation to the delays. On 3 October 2013, *El Espectador*, *Semana* and *El Tiempo* shared the excerpts of a press release from Ivan Márquez, FARC chief negotiator, in which he specifically addressed the critics of the Colombian government in regards the delays. The press release was titled '*First Report about the State of the Peace Talks*'. This press release was the 'materialization' of the 'warning' made by 'Timochenko' previously on 25 September 2014 in which he announced that FARC was going to start publishing a series of reports around the progress of the negotiations (as explained

above). A significant amount of space was devoted in this press release to counterargue the issue of time:

> The FARC delegation said that "[t]he delays that may have arisen due to the changing of the order around the discussion of the peace agenda issues, or because of the analysis of other matters of national interest, are not FARC's responsibility (…) this cannot be taken as a factor (...) to urge us to speed up the pace as [the negotiations] have never lacked this". This was based on the repeated criticism from the government chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, in the sense that the [peace] dialogues lack pace and results (ID 10632, *El Espectador*, 2013-10-02)

However, and despite that there were other factors involved in the delays of the negotiations, the news media kept attributing the responsibility of the delays to only the guerrilla group. The media also started to draw relationships between the delays and a loss of support from public opinion towards the peace dialogues, as well as reinforcing the 'speaking-on-behalf-of-the-public' narrative from the government. For example, on 12 October 2013, *Semana* stated that "[c]ertainly the negotiations in Havana are advancing at a pace that begins to bring despair to many people and erodes support towards the [peace] process from the public opinion". Moreover, and without contesting the idea or explaining other scenarios, the news article mentions that the slow pace "is attributed to the fact that FARC have 'stepped on the brakes'". This attitude of going at a slower pace is interpreted by the media as a deliberate action from FARC since, according to the outlet, they were capitalizing on some opinion polls with negative results for President Santos and a series of social protests against his administration that were occurring in Colombia. The deliberate delays, the media outlet argues, "strengthen them [FARC] at the table" (ID 13706, *Seman*a, 2013-10-12).

As I have argued hitherto, this type of lopsided news coverage in which one party is both presented and held accountable for the delays did indeed create pressure on the FARC delegation. Not only the written responses from the guerrilla group are a sign of this (as shown earlier), but a testimony from one of its communications advisors that I interviewed further proves it. Even though his testimony is related to later stages in the negotiations, as he refers to "many years", it is interesting to see how the element of time was a recurring topic both in the news coverage and at the negotiation table. Therefore, when I asked him if he believed that the constant news coverage around the delays affected the delegation, the advisor answered me:

Of course the news media was making a lot of pressure. Firstly, because they were also tired of being in Havana for so many years. 'We may have to come to live in Cuba', [journalists would say]. So all that creates an acceleration [a pressure] to finish the peace dialogues in a faster fashion, which also yielded multiple issues that we are seeing right now with regards to the peace agreement implementation (C-FCA 6).

The role that the news media played in communicating the delays of the peace negotiations was as full of complexities as the issue itself. It is realistic to argue, however, that the media contributed to mainly create pressure on the FARC delegation around the issue of time. As illustrated in this section, the government was the one who initiated the conversation in the news agenda to try to speed up the pace of the negotiations. Moreover, the news media also aligned with the government's narrative in which FARC was presented as the only actor accountable for the delays in the progress of the peace negotiations. Overall, I would argue that a more balanced news coverage was needed to explain to the public the complexity of the issue and the different factors that affected the pace of the negotiations.

5.2.2 Critical Moments: the kidnapping of Army General Alzate.

'We negotiate as if there were no conflict in Colombia and we fight war as if there were no negotiations in Havana' was one of the mottos of the Colombian government during the peace process. The government was very reluctant to agree on a bilateral ceasefire with FARC during the development of the peace dialogues as they argued that doing so would lift the military pressure that they had exercised against the guerrilla; the government firmly believed, as Santos (2019) has pointed out in his book, that the change in the military balance was a necessary condition for the negotiations to occur. On the contrary, the guerrilla group always insisted that a ceasefire was a paramount condition for the success of the dialogues. Given than a bilateral truce was only reached in the last year of the peace process, the continuing conflict in Colombia did indeed affect the developments of the negotiations.

In fact, the examination of the 'critical moments' topic allowed me to identify that the key crises during the peace dialogues were mainly derived from the fact that the negotiations took place amidst the conflict. From here on, I will refer to these crises as 'political waves' following Wolfsfeld's (2004) definition of this notion: "when critical events lead to a dramatic increase in the amount of public attention focused on a particular issue or event" (2004, p.2). Commonly, these political waves are preceded by major triggering events such as a terrorist attack, and the news media play a key role on increasing their political impact, defining them, and providing them with a narrative structure (Wolsfeld, 2004). Indeed, one of the key political waves[15] was caused by the triggering event of the kidnapping of Army General Rubén Darío Alzate in November 2014, who was captured alongside the First Corporal of the Army Jorge Rodríguez Contreras, and the Advisor for Special Projects, Gloria Urrego. It was the first time in the long history of the conflict that a guerrilla group had kidnapped a General of the Republic. President Santos, once the kidnapping was confirmed both by the military and FARC, decided to suspend - for the first time since the negotiations had started - the peace dialogues.

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[15] The second political wave that I identified through examining the 'critical moments' topic was the worst escalation of the conflict during the peace negotiations, between April and July 2015. The role that the media played in that particular moment is discussed in full in **Chapter (7.2)**.

Consequently, this political wave seriously put into question the legitimacy of the government's decision to negotiate amidst the conflict because it was a 'tangible' proof that the war was indeed directly affecting the negotiations. However, as I will show throughout, and as I mainly argue in this **Section (5.2.2)**, the traditional news media overlooked the government's responsibility in the crisis. Even though the government constantly refused to agree on a bilateral ceasefire with FARC, the consequences of this decision (in this case the kidnapping of an Army General) were not questioned nor challenged by the traditional news media. On the contrary, the independent media outlet - *La Silla Vacía* - did hold the government accountable for its decision to suspend the negotiations and challenged them for not having done so when two other soldiers were kidnapped or when two indigenous people were assassinated by FARC.

What is also interesting from this event is the amount of news coverage that it received in comparison with other issues related to the conflict. For instance, only one week prior to the kidnapping of General Alzate, the guerrilla group had assassinated two indigenous people - Daniel Coicué and Manuel Antonio Tumiñá - and had also kidnapped two soldiers - Paulo César Rivera and Jonathan Andrés Díaz. As I will show below, the news coverage around these two events was minimal compared to that of the kidnapping of the Army General. Moreover, President Santos did not suspend the peace dialogues when these two events happened, only when FARC captured Alzate. Therefore, the rule of 'we negotiate as if there were no conflict in Colombia and we fight war as if there were no negotiations' applied to only some cases. This may be related to the fact that the news media play an important role in increasing the political impact of (certain) political waves. In the **Sections** below **(5.2.2.1** and **5.2.2.2)** I discuss this case in detail.

5.2.2.1 An imbalance of attention to events: the victims that matter for the media

The first element worth discussing is the amount of attention than the news media gave to the kidnapping of General Rubén Darío Alzate. During a 15-day period (from 17 November to 1 December 2014), the timeframe that the crisis lasted, the Colombian news media published **a total of 173 stories** around the issue of the kidnapping. That corresponds to **69% of the total coverage (255 stories) related to the peace negotiation** during that specific timeframe. As can also be seen from **Figure 5.3**, with the exception of very few days, the news agenda during this two-week period was highly focused on the kidnapping. For instance, out of 36 news stories about the peace

negotiations reported on 18 November 2014, 31 were about the kidnapping; similarly, out of 25 news stories about the peace process on 19 November 2014, 21 were about this crisis.

Figure 5.3 - News articles about the kidnapping of Army General Alzate vs news articles about the peace process during a two-week period
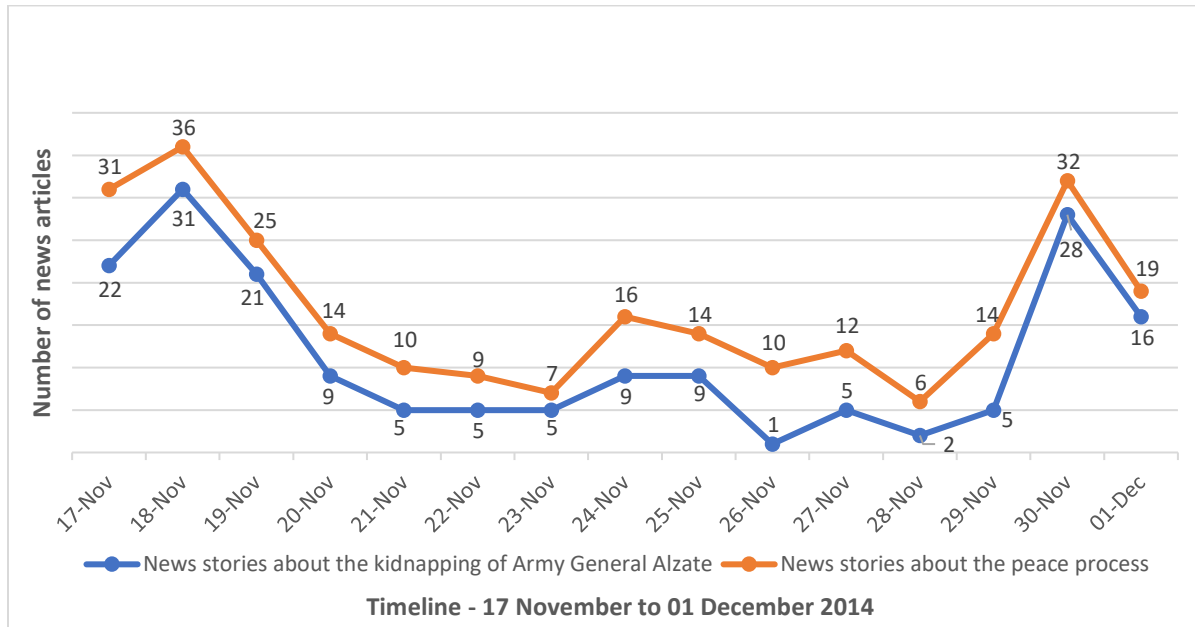
However, if we compare the attention than the news media gave to the kidnapping of Army General Alzate in comparison to other two events derived from the conflict - the assassination of two indigenous people (Daniel Coicué and Manuel Antonio Tumiñá) or the kidnapping of two soldiers (Paulo César Rivera and Jonathan Andrés Díaz) -, one can better understand the role of the media in increasing the political impact of (certain) political waves. For instance, on 9 November 2014, just one week before the kidnapping of Army General Alzate, two soldiers were kidnapped by FARC after some clashes with the Colombian Army. The news media mentioned this issue in only **16 news articles**; many of these were not solely focused on their kidnapping but appeared as mentions within the news articles from the kidnapping of Army General Alzate. Likewise, and also on 9 November 2014, two indigenous people were killed by the guerrilla group. This event only got the attention of 7 news stories during the month of November (as it can be seen from **Figure 5.4**).

Figure 5.4 - News articles about the kidnapping of Army General Alzate in comparison with other events of the conflict in November 2014
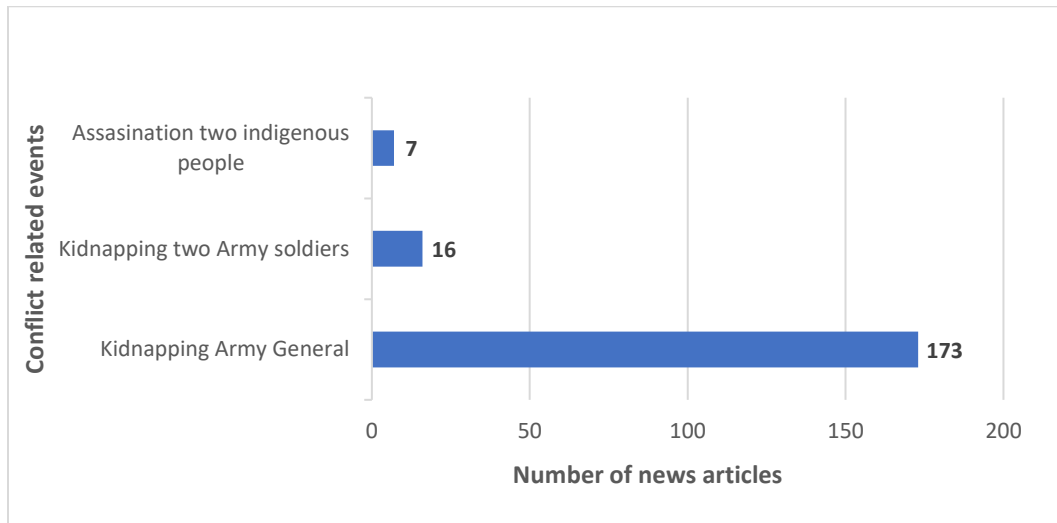
The difference in media attention given to these events is important as one could argue that one of the reasons why President Santos may have decided not to suspend the peace dialogues when these two other events occurred is because they did not reach a significant amount of news coverage. For instance, in **only three days** (17, 18, 19 November 2014), the news media had published 74 news stories around the kidnapping of Army general Alzate, which corresponds to 10 times the whole coverage given to the assassination of Daniel Coicué and Manuel Antonio Tumiñá, and 4.5 times the coverage given to the kidnapping of Paulo César Rivera and Jonathan Andrés Díaz. Although this study cannot find a causality relationship (which is also not the goal) between the decision of President Santos on suspending the peace dialogues and the amount of coverage given to the kidnapping of General Alzate, the trends described above show that the coverage could have contributed to, at least, creating some pressure on the Colombian government to interrupt the negotiations. However, the pressure was not linked to *how* the traditional media reported on the event – they did not challenge the government - but rather on the amount of attention given to the issue itself (as I explain in the following section).

5.2.2.2 A 'narrative structure' that overlooked the government's responsibility

As I mentioned before, the kidnapping of the Army General represented a challenging moment for the Colombian government's narrative (and more broadly for their strategy at the negotiation table). The challenge was particularly evident when President Santos decided to suspend the peace dialogues once both FARC and the military intelligence confirmed that the guerrilla group had indeed kidnapped General Alzate. The motto from the government was not legitimate anymore: the government did not keep negotiating as if there were no conflict in Colombia. Aware of this contradiction - the conflict in Colombia was indeed affecting the development of the negotiations in Havana - the government tried to protect its narrative by making FARC appear as the one and only accountable for the crisis. "Upon ratifying this Monday that the talks with FARC will be suspended until they release Alzate, (…) President Santos made it clear that the solution of the current crisis of the peace process depends on this guerrilla" (ID 3052, *El Tiempo,* 2014-11-17). Interestingly, in a later article titled '*Kidnappings, an end to previous attempts to achieve peace', El Tiempo* aligned with the government in blaming FARC as the only accountable actor:

> Two of the four peace attempts in Colombia have been ended by the outlawed practice of kidnapping. **Everything depends on the response that the FARC give to this new crisis**. If they decide to keep these people deprived of their liberty, a new blow could end the fourth effort that we have had in our history to end the conflict. If they decide not to repeat the mistakes of the past, the only way is to release them" (ID 3056, *El Tiempo,* 2014-11-17).

Moreover, since the beginning of the political wave, President Santos made clear that reversing the principle of negotiating amidst the conflict and agreeing on a bilateral ceasefire was not an option - not even under the circumstances of an Army General being kidnapped: "'We are talking about stopping the war once and for all. This is achieved by ending the conflict, not with a simple truce'", Santos said in one of his speeches. This attitude and his responses towards the situation were assessed by *El Tiempo* as an 'anticipation' to a "**a predictable explanation from FARC** (…) **as they will surely say that the kidnapping of the General and his companions is a natural event in the middle of a negotiation that occurs amidst the war** (ID 3052, *El Tiempo,* 2014-11-17). Although the news article implies that that the kidnapping of the General Alzate was not a consequence of the conflict - therefore aligning somewhat with the government's narrative - it is reasonable to think that with a bilateral ceasefire in place this event may not have happened.

The latter is not to say that FARC should not be held accountable for what they did; kidnapping is an atrocious practice that should always be strongly rejected. However, the media's assessment is also required to question the Colombian government since, firstly, they were breaking the principle of negotiating amidst the conflict (they suspended the dialogues) and, secondly, they fiercely advocated to negotiate in the middle of the war - with all that implies. Therefore, a more balanced and nuanced news coverage was needed to understand an issue that should have not been portrayed in black or white colours (as *El Tiempo,* for instance, did). To better illustrate this point, I present how *La Silla Vacía* (the independent media outlet), employed different lenses to interpret the political wave.

The differences in the reporting of *La Silla Vacía* rests on two main features. Firstly, they indeed contested the decision of the government to suspend the peace dialogues after confirming the kidnapping of General Alzate. Secondly, by reaching out to anonymous sources within the government (and not necessarily relying on 'official public sources'), they tried to present the public with possible explanations for the government's decision-making process. The following excerpt, for instance, illustrates the way in which this news media outlet challenged the Colombian government's decision of interrupting the negotiations:

> (…) the suspension opens the door for FARC to make similar decisions if they are attacked by the Army. **It is also problematic that he [Santos] has decided to suspend [the negotiations] when they kidnapped a General, something that could be legitimate under the International Humanitarian Law as part of the rules of war** (without undermining this cruelty) because he is a combatant; and that he [Santos] has not done so when they killed two indigenous people or when they kidnapped two soldiers in Arauca last week, **to name just two cases** (ID 16590, *La Silla Vacía*, 2014-11-18).

La Silla Vacía pointed out, firstly, that the suspension of the peace dialogues could be counterproductive as the guerrilla group could have the freedom to make similar decisions - putting the negotiations on hold - if the military attacked them in the field. In other words, the Colombian government was (also) putting at risk the future of the peace negotiations by suspending them after the kidnapping of General Alzate. Secondly, the media outlet brought to the discussion that the kidnapping executed by FARC, if interpreted through the International Humanitarian Law, could be understood as a legitimate action; this highly contrasts with the assessment made by *El Tiempo* which entirely rejected the idea that the kidnapping of Alzate was a consequence of the conflict.

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, *La Silla Vacía* highlighted the fact that President Santos did not put the peace dialogues on hold when the guerrilla group kidnapped two soldiers or killed two indigenous people. Therefore, they directly challenged the differentiating treatment that the government was giving to the actions within the conflict; they were questioning the idea of the government having some 'more important' victims than others for the negotiation.

The reporting from *La Silla Vacía* also contrasts to that of the traditional news media outlets because they suggested two possible reasons as to why the government may have decided to suspend the dialogues after the kidnapping of the General and his companions; both of the explanations are linked to anonymous sources' testimonies from the government that the media outlet reached out to. The first explanation is that "they [the government] had been discussing concrete measures (…) with FARC for weeks to de-escalate the conflict (…) and were already very close to reaching an agreement". According to the anonymous government source interviewed by the media outlet, "[t]he President considered that the fact that this kidnapping happened right in the middle of that discussion cast doubt on the seriousness of what they were discussing". The second explanation is that the news may have had a negative impact among the military: "As someone who knows the military very well told *La Silla*, although there was no threat of a massive resignation (...) - as it has been rumored in certain circles - there was a 'strong outbreak of opposition [among the military]' (ID 16590, *La Silla Vacía*, 2014-11-18).

While the traditional news media opted for overlooking the decision-making process of the Colombian government during the political wave, *La Silla Vacía* chose to hold the government accountable for its decisions and the possible consequences on the peace negotiations. This then illustrates that the news media does play a significant role in shaping and defining the 'political wave' (Wolfsfeld, 2004). However, and as it was explained earlier, before the events can be shaped, they need to be prioritized to be part of the news agenda. A government negotiator advisor that I interviewed allows us to see that the media may have prioritized to report on actions (concerning the conflict) executed by FARC - but not those committed by the military. The advisor, who directly participated in the peace negotiations, told me that even though for them was transparent that these type of events could occur as a consequence of the conflict, every time that FARC executed an action there was 'a scandal in Colombia' - as it happened with the Kidnapping of

Alzate. Very interestingly, she acknowledges that even though the government bombed 'FARC every other day', there were no news stories about it:

> Although the government was the one that had decided to continue without a ceasefire, as it's obvious every time the FARC did something (…) and one could legitimately say that they had the right to do so, there was a great scandal [in Colombia] and that is what happened when General Alzate [was kidnapped] (…) that did a really terrible damage to the negotiating table because [people would say] 'well, you are negotiating there [in Havana], but here [in Colombia] they continue to kidnap Generals…. **We bombed them [FARC] every other day and nothing happened**. It was more because of this logic that we had assumed to negotiate in the context of the conflict, that it was foreseeable that at some point it would begin to play against [us] (P-GNA 2).

The excerpt above also allows us to see that the Colombian government was aware that the principle of negotiating amidst the conflict could also, at some point, affect the peace negotiations - 'play against [them]'. As another government negotiator advisor explained to me, the rule of negotiating amidst the conflict could 'backfire' the longer the negotiations lasted. "By the time the General was kidnapped, that principle [negotiating amidst the conflict] created a crisis; people were not going to resist that logic anymore. They would say - you have been negotiating all that time, those guys cannot keep doing those things" (P-GNA 4). One could argue, then, that due to the attention that the Colombian news media gave to this political wave, the Colombian government may have felt pressured to make a decision to show the public that they were not going to tolerate this type of actions from the guerrilla group (as contradictory as it sounds given the fact they advocated to negotiate amidst the conflict). However, the same advisor above attributes the seriousness of the crisis to the nature of the event itself but not necessarily to the pressure that the news media may have created:

> FARC also acted [quickly] as they realized that the crisis was very serious, that if we did not get the General to be safe and sound (…) the process was going to end; there was a moment in which the crisis was very, very serious. But I would say more for the reality [its nature] than for the media (P-GNA 4).

Although I discuss in detail some of the motives from FARC to quickly liberate General Alzate in **Chapter (8.2)** - they created a news media strategy around it - the fact that the government did not feel particularly pressured by the media during this political wave is an interesting point worth discussing (given the significant amount of coverage). This is related, as I have illustrated in this section, to the lack of contestation from the traditional news media to the

government's response to the political wave. A senior communication advisor from the government better explains this. Reflecting on the kidnapping of General Alzate, she recalls that she did not find that particular moment of the peace process as a difficult one with the news media: "I think there were other different tensions with the media; it seems to me not this one [the kidnapping] because *we tried to go hand in hand in this*, because there was too much at stake" (C-GSCA 4). Her testimony shows how there seemed to be a cooperative work between the government and the media to explain what had happened. She adds that "in this issue, **we went *with* the media** trying to protect the General".

These interviews I conducted with some government advisors illustrate that the *way* in which the traditional news media reported on the kidnapping of General Alzate did not overly concern the government delegation. In terms of the story around the crisis, the government managed to direct the conversation towards FARC's responsibility and deviate the attention around 1) the role they played for that event to happen and 2) how they responded to the political wave. Although the principle of negotiating amidst the conflict was important, amongst other things, not to lose military leverage in the field against FARC, the Colombian government had to be held accountable for its decisions. Different government advisors, as shown above, were aware of the possible negative consequences of the principle they fiercely advocated for. Luckily for the peace negotiation, this political wave lasted for a short period of time and FARC decided to return General Alzate within 15 days of being kidnapped.

5.3 Concluding remarks

In this **Chapter (5)** I provided both a quantitative and a qualitative examination of how the Colombian news media represented the peace negotiations between the Colombian government and FARC. In **Section (5.1)** I argued that the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) prevailed in the news coverage of the peace negotiations. More specifically, the news coverage presents strong signs of the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' which can be identified through two key indicators: the 1) the overall attention to news stories characterized by conflict and crisis, and 2) the overall prevalence of news stories discussing the *developments* of the peace negotiation over news stories explaining the key policy issues about the peace dialogues. The latter is coined by Esser (2013, p.172) as the 'depoliticization' of news because the discussion of substantial issues gets 'marginalized' in the coverage. These indicators, moreover, can be also a sign of the presence of two (out of the four) major news values identified by Wolfsfeld (2004) when the news media report on peace negotiations: *immediacy* and *drama.*

In regards the first indicator, the news media consistently pointed to the delays experienced by the peace process as a very negative aspect of the peace dialogues (that could even lead to significant crisis scenarios). In fact, the news media both embraced a very pessimistic tone to describe these delays (mainly because the deadlines imposed by the Colombian government were not met) and cast doubt about the prospects of peace if the delays persisted. As Wolfsfeld (2004, p.17) points out in relation to the value of *immediacy*, "journalists are not in the business of waiting". Moreover, as was also explained in **Section (5.2.1)**, the element of time became a contested and conflicting issue between the Colombian government and FARC because both actors had different approaches in terms of how fast the negotiations should progress. These two elements (the contestation and the conflict), that were also present in *how* the news media refer to 'the pacing of the peace negotiations', demonstrate that the news media resorted to 'dramatic lenses' (emphasis on conflict, crisis, danger) when describing these issues.

In relation to the news stories that composed the topic on the 'critical moments', and more specifically to the stories about the kidnapping of Army General Alzate, it is also clear that the Colombian news media was driven by the value of *drama* to report on the peace negotiations. As Wolfsfeld (2014, p.18) explains "[e]very act of violence, every crisis, and every sign of conflict is

considered news", which can be corroborated, amongst other things, by the amount of coverage given to this topic (it ranked 6th in the STM). Moreover, as shown in **Section (5.2.2)**, the coverage given to the story of the kidnapping of the Army General represented, for example, 69% of the total negotiations-related news coverage of the two weeks that the crisis lasted. Interestingly, these two indicators - the attention to conflict and the focus on the *development* of the negotiations - do not necessarily apply to the independent media outlet *La Silla Vacía.*

Firstly, as it was shown in **Section (5.1)**, *La Silla Vacía* reported the most on specific policy issues related to the six peace agenda items such as 'rural development' and 'political participation'. Secondly, and most importantly, the way in which this outlet reported on the kidnapping of the Army General Alzate contrasts significantly as to how the traditional news media outlets (*El Tiempo, El Espectador* and *Semana*) communicated about this crisis. While the traditional news media opted for overlooking the responsibility of the Colombian government during the political wave, *La Silla Vacía* decided to hold the government accountable for its decisions: mainly the suspension of the peace dialogues once the kidnapping was confirmed, and the possible consequences that those could have on the peace negotiations. As it was explained, the principle advocated by the government to negotiate amidst the conflict was highlighted by *La Silla Vacía* as one of the reasons as to why the kidnapping may have occurred.

This difference supports the second key argument of this **Chapter (5)**: that the traditional news media followed an '*elite-driven*' approach when reporting on key aspects of the peace negotiations while the independent media outlet displayed a more '*independent* model' (Robinson et al., 2010) or adversarial and 'watchdog role' (McNair, 2018, p.24). This means, amongst other things, that *El Tiempo, El Espectador* and *Semana* embraced consistently a favourable attitude towards the Colombian government and were constantly aligned with its strategy and goals. This can be seen by 1) the consistency with which the news media amplified the government messages (the 'president statements' was the most prevalent topic within the news corpus) and, more importantly, 2) by the absence of critique towards the government's decisions and actions during key political waves.

This finding is relevant for academic debates about the mediatization of politics because it highlights that adherence to the news media logic by journalists does not necessarily translate into a news media that is more independent from the political institutions. As the empirical evidence described in this **Chapter (5)** suggests**,** although the news coverage presents strong signs of the commercial aspects of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013), the traditional news media did not display a high degree of autonomy or independence from the Colombian government; in multiple instances, the goals of the latter were aligned with *how* the former reported on the negotiations. As I explained in **Chapter (4.2),** this seems to have its roots on the fact that the Colombian media has historically had strong ties to the political field. Although partisan parallelism has considerably weakened [in Colombia], it appears that "the news media still reflects the prevailing political forces in the country" (Montoya, 2014, p.73)

In conclusion, the traditional news media were more driven by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' - economically motivated rationales – while *La Silla Vacía* constructed news more driven by the 'professional aspects'. More specifically, the independent media outlet opted for a more account-holding type of journalism: they displayed a more interpretative, analytical and watchdog type of reporting (Esser, 2013, p.170) when communicating about the peace negotiations.

Chapter 6: The news media representations of the victims

During the inauguration of the peace process in Oslo (Norway) in October 2012, a reporter asked Jesús Santrich - one of FARC's leaders - if they were ready to ask their victims for forgiveness. He smiled to the camera and alluding to a famous 'bolero' song he replied singing: "perhaps, perhaps, perhaps" ['quizás, quizás, quizás']. His response, besides being a cynical and disrespectful act toward their hundreds of thousands of victims, it was also a clear sign that the discussion around the issue of the victims of the Colombian conflict was going to be one of the toughest in the peace negotiations. In fact, while other agreements from the peace agenda such as the 'political participation' took about six months to be reached, the discussion of the 'victims' issue took the longest: one and a half years (from June 2014 until December 2015).

The consideration of the victims included the discussion of very contested issues, including the debates of whether FARC members needed to go to prison for the crimes they had committed throughout the conflict. The government and FARC had the great challenge of creating a solution that could both satisfy the victims' rights and be perceived by Colombian society as a fair and legitimate way to judge the guerrilla group. In order to try to overcome this challenge, both delegations decided to put the victims at the centre of the negotiations. For the first time in the history of peace processes in Colombia, and as a pioneer model for the rest of the world, the victims of the Colombian conflict had the chance to have a direct participation in the negotiations through the creation of five victims' delegations who travelled to Havana (Cuba) to have face-to-face encounters with the negotiators.

Consequently, I examine in this **Chapter (6)** how the news media represented the discussions around the issue of victims as this was a central aspect to the legitimacy of the peace negotiations. First, I argue that the Colombian news media consistently overlooked the responsibility of the Colombian state in the armed conflict when reporting on the issue of victims. Most notably, the news media was inaccurate and inconsistent in communicating the victimizing crimes committed by the State. There were instances in which even though the perpetrator was already known (e.g., the Military), the media either omitted to mention who the culprit was or gave

a vague description that made it difficult to identify. This highly contrasts with the descriptions of the victimizing crimes committed by FARC as in every instance the guerrilla group was clearly identified and mentioned by the news media as the perpetrator. These findings are in line with studies that have shown how the Colombian press has systematically concealed the responsibility of some of the actors in the conflict, most notably that of the paramilitary groups (Pardo, 2005; Pardo, 2007; García, 2008; García, 2012).

Second, I argue that the news media prioritized the voice of public and well-known victims of FARC when discussing the selection process of the victims' delegations. These were the same victims that throughout the selection process constantly criticized or opposed the idea of having victims from other armed groups different to FARC in the peace dialogues. These criticisms did indeed influence the decision of the Government and FARC to delegate to autonomous organizations (the United Nations and the National University of Colombia) the role of selecting the victims' representatives that would travel to Havana to participate in the negotiations. Therefore, I suggest that the news media contributed to the increased pressure created by these group of victims, as the media significantly amplified their demands through the news coverage.

In order to present my argument, I inspect three key moments at the beginning of the discussion of the victims as a dimension of the peace agenda. The first moment is the announcement that both delegations made outlining the 10 principles that were going to guide the discussion on the issue of victims at the negotiation table; the announcement was made on 7 June 2014 in a press conference. The second is related to the selection process that FARC and the Colombian government announced on 17 July 2014 to explain how the victims' delegations were going to be chosen. The process to select the victims created some controversies around representativeness as the Colombian conflict had left millions of victims and only a handful of them (60 in total) could travel to the Cuban capital. The third moment is the first trip (16 August 2014) of the victims' delegation to Havana to participate in the peace dialogues.

As it can be seen from **Figure 6.1**, these three moments (from June to August) also coincide with the highest number of news articles in relation to the issue of victims in 2014. It is important to clarify, however, that **Figure 6.1** only shows articles that contain the word 'victims' in their

headlines as this allowed me to centre my analysis in news stories that had as their main focus the discussion of the victims issue. In other words, this approach helped me to narrow the examination to articles that did not treat the issue of victims as a secondary topic but as the main theme of the new stories.

Figure 6.1 - Number of news articles about the issue of 'Victims' in 2014
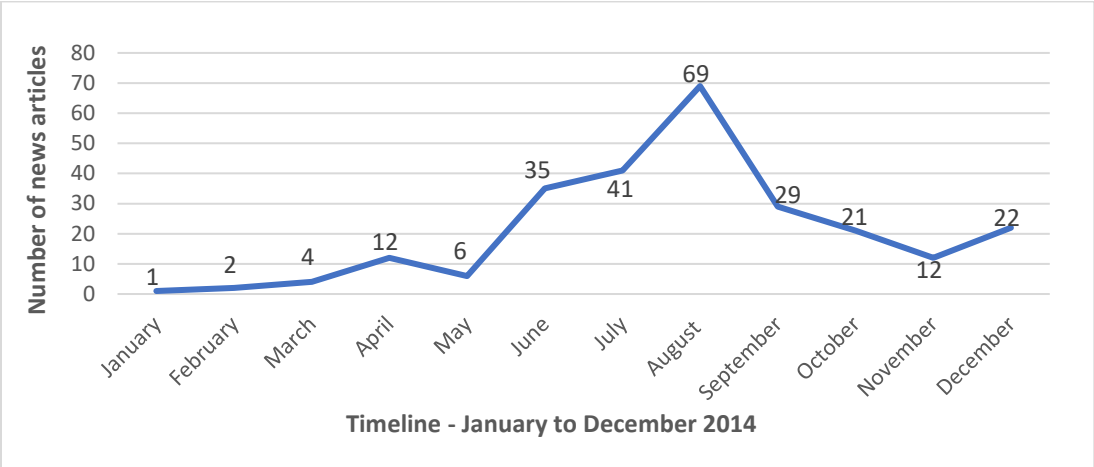
6.1 On the announcement of the 10 principles

As stated above, on 7 June 2014, the government and FARC announced 10 principles that were going to guide the discussion of the issue of victims in the negotiations.[16] These were: 1) the recognition of the victims, 2) the recognition of responsibility ('who did what'), 3) the satisfaction of victims' rights, 4) the participation of the victims, 5) the clarification of the truth, 6) the reparation to the victims, 7) the guarantees of protection and security, 8) the guarantee of non-repetition, 9) the principle of reconciliation, and 10) an approach centred on rights. From these 10 principles, the news media particularly placed the emphasis on the first two: the acknowledgment of the victims and the acknowledgment of responsibility. However, the news stories focused on highlighting FARC's recognition of their victims rather than explaining, in a more nuanced fashion, that both the Colombian state and the guerrilla group needed to acknowledge their part in the conflict.

For instance, in the press release about the 10 principles, the government and FARC explained that any discussion on the principle of 'recognition of responsibility' "must start from the recognition of responsibility towards the victims of the conflict; we are not going to exchange impunities" (ID 3464, *El Tiempo,* 2014-06-07). In other words, and as explained by Mendes (2019, p.288), "[t]his meant that both parties had to recognise their responsibility in the victimisation of the Colombian population throughout the conflict". However, as it can be seen from the following two headlines of *El Tiempo* (ID 3464, 2014-06-07) and *Semana* (ID 13954, 2014-06-07)*,* the news media placed the emphasis on FARC's recognition of their victims: '*Historic step: for the first time the FARC recognize their victims*' and '*The FARC recognize their victims for the first time'*. Given the background on how reluctant FARC had been historically about accepting their part in

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[16] The history of victims' rights in Colombia has had important developments in the last two decades. In 2005, the government introduced the Justice and Peace Law (Law 975), a transitional justice tool that sought the individual or collective reincorporation into civil life of members of illegal armed groups - paramilitary groups - guaranteeing the rights of the victims to truth, justice and reparation (Delgado Barón, 2011; García-Godos and Lid, 2010); the law was introduced as part of a peace process between the Colombian government and paramilitary groups under the administration of Former President Álvaro Uribe. Moreover, in 2012, under the administration of former President Juan Manuel Santos, the Law of Victims and Land Restitution (Law 1448) was also approved. Besides including the aspects of truth, justice and reparation, the Law also introduced guarantees of non-repetition for the victims as well as some measures to restore land stolen by illegal armed groups to its original owners (Montoya Londoño and Vallejo Mejía, 2018). Most importantly, and different to Law 975, the Law 1448 acknowledged for the first time the existence of an internal armed conflict in Colombia. This meant that the Law recognized that the Colombian state have also been a perpetrator in the conflict, acknowledging then that there were also victims of the State.

the conflict (as described at the beginning of this chapter), it was perhaps 'natural' for the news media to highlight that it was (indeed) the first time that the guerrilla group had recognised their victims.

However, when referring to the Colombian state responsibility in the conflict, the attribution of responsibility was not very clear. An editorial from *El Tiempo,* published a day after the announcement of the 10 principles, expresses that FARC had a direct responsibility for the victims of the conflict and suggests that the government responsibility (and that of other actors different to the guerrilla group) needed to be clarified through the implementation of a truth commission. By the time of the publication of the editorial, some official reports had already illustrated the responsibility of the Colombian state in the victimization of the Colombian population (see Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013), so the media outlet could have been clearer with its statements. The emphasis was again in stating FARC's responsibility rather than communicating clearly that all actors - including the state - have played a part in the conflict:

> The FARC and the Government have understood it well: **the guerrillas, by admitting their responsibility for the damage suffered by hundreds of thousands of Colombians**, without conditioning that other actors do it first; **and the Government, by opening the door to a clarification commission whose mission is to determine who, in addition to the FARC, are guilty of the tragedy that Colombia has experienced in the last 50 years** (ID 5834, *El Tiempo,* 2014-06-08)**.**

Likewise, when referring to the victims that would travel to Havana to participate in the negotiations, the editorial only places the emphasis on FARC's responsibility (even though victims of the Colombian state were also going to be part of those trips): "It will be pivotal (…) that FARC look into the eyes of the victims and listen to what those who will travel to Cuba have to say" (ID 5834, *El Tiempo,* 2014-06-08). This contrast with what could be considered a more nuanced and balanced explanation on this issue from a news article from *El Espectador* (which was more the exception when communicating the announcement on the 10 principles). The article from *El Espectador* does state that both denial type of narratives from FARC and the Colombian state were going to be left in the past as the 10 principles were trying to mitigate this. To illustrate these denial narratives, the article mentions both the event described in the introduction of this **Chapter (6)** when the FARC leader cast doubt about their willingness to acknowledge their victims by singing

the famous 'bolero' song ('perhaps, perhaps, perhaps'), and the recurring phrase among government officials when asked about the state responsibility in the conflict: 'there are no crimes of the State but of some agents':

> In a joint press release, the FARC and the Government specified what for many represents the most awaited announcement in almost two years of the peace process in Havana: the recognition of the victims. **Left behind was the defiant 'perhaps, perhaps, perhaps' of the guerrilla chief -Jesús Santrich - when asked him if they would put their faces to their victims, or the reiterated official phrase that 'there are no crimes of the State but of some agents'**. As of yesterday, at the dialogue table, the pace of the conversations will be that of the victims, with a clear objective: truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition (ID 9953, *El Espectador,* 2014-06-07)

In addition to the lopsided version of the responsibility, which more often than not overlooked the accountability of the Colombian state in the conflict, the news media also prioritized governmental sources when communicating the announcement of the 10 principles. There were 13 news articles that exclusively talked about this announcement; a direct quote from FARC was included in only 3 of them whereas direct quotes from the government were found in 8 articles. By looking at the number of quotes, this gap is more evident: while the government had 17 quotes throughout, FARC only was given 4 (more than 4 times less). Therefore, the debate around the issue was constructed by the news media by employing an elite-driven approach (favouring consistently the government's narrative). This can be illustrated in a testimony from a political reporter that I interviewed in which he explains that prioritizing the government, during a peace negotiation, is a normal practice within newsrooms as the government is "the legal institutionality in Colombia".

He pointed out that that they indeed gave priority or more relevance to government sources: "I would probably say 60% vs 40%, or even 65% vs 35% [in relation to quoting sources from the Government or FARC respectively]; but let's not tell lies: there was not a 50-50". In regards the reason as to why this occurred, the reporter explained to me that even though it was important "to give voice to the sector [FARC] that came from illegality to join the negotiation (…), the priority in that moment, for a political negotiation, it is the governmental, the institutional" (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper). The following **Section (6.2)** also shows the imbalance when giving voice to different actors, this time among the victims of the conflict, as the news media prioritized the demands of

victims of FARC who did not want other victims of the conflict to have the same participation as them in the peace negotiations.

6.2 The selection process of the victims' delegations

The selection of the victims' delegations was a very complex process given the nature of the Colombian conflict. As Mendes (2019, p.287) explains, "a wide variety of actors committed a wide variety of crimes against a wide variety of people". Perpetrators include paramilitary groups, guerrilla groups and the Colombian state itself, and victims include people from different ethnicities, genders and social classes. With regards the victimizing crimes, there have been kidnappings, homicides, internal displacement, sexual violence, recruitment to minors, among many others. Therefore, selecting a handful of victims that could represent both the entire universe of victims - the official figure in 2014 amounted to 6.5 million of victims – (Historic Memory Group, 2013) and the variety of victimizing crimes was a truly challenging task.

In a first instance, it was thought that the victims' delegation was going to be encompassed by a group of 10 to 15 delegates from the 'Mesa Nacional de Víctimas' ['National Table of Victims'], an organ created after the ruling of the Law of Victims to identify and group victims of the Colombian conflict (see footnote 13 above). However, since the organ was composed of all types of victims (including victims of the paramilitaries and the Colombian state) and not only by victims of FARC, concerns were raised by the latter. These victims' organizations started to create public pressure around how both delegations should handle the selection of the victims that would participate directly at the negotiation table and the Colombian news media did considerably amplify their demands.

More specifically, the news media reported significantly around a meeting that took place in 'El Nogal Club', a place where FARC committed a terrorist attack (a bomb) on 7 February 2003. Different delegates of groups of victims of FARC met with the Higher Commissioner for Peace and the government chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, to share their concerns around the participation of the victims in the peace negotiation. As it can be seen from the excerpts below from *Semana* and *El Tiempo* respectively, there were two key demands from these groups of victims. Firstly, they wanted to increase the participation of victims of FARC in the forums that the 'negotiation table' designed to collect and include the victims' considerations into the peace

agreement.[17] Secondly, they asked the government to give priority to the victims of FARC as they argued that the peace negotiation was specifically with this guerrilla group and not with the rest of the (illegal) armed actors. In both demands, the voice of Retired Police General Luis Mendieta – an already known victim by the public - is given the priority:

> One day before the forums began in Villavicencio, different associations representing FARC victims met in northern Bogotá to show disagreement with [their] participation in the peace process. The first call of attention was on the forums. General Luis Mendieta, kidnapped for 12 years by that guerrilla, **assured that these encounters put all the victims 'in the same bag' and explained that many did not have space to speak. 'Those who go have strong biases, and the forums are held in areas where there are victims of other armed groups other than the guerrillas'[FARC],** he said in an interview with *Semana.com* (ID 13995, *Semana,* 2014-07-15).

> 'We acknowledge the victims of other armed actors and ask that their rights be recognized, but in this particular case **we demand to be listened to with respect and pre-eminence [priority] because it is a peace process with FARC and not with all the armed groups'**. Retired Police General Luis Mendieta, who was kidnapped by the armed group for almost 12 years, said on behalf of the organizations (ID 3403, *El Tiempo,* 2014-07-03).

The traditional news media, overall, focused almost entirely on communicating and amplifying the demands of these specific groups of victims without providing some necessary context around the selection process of the victims' delegation (the issue at stake). This significantly contrasts with how *La Silla Vacía* reported on the meeting in 'El Nogal Club', particularly in two key aspects. Firstly, the independent media outlet offered a broad contextualization around the development of the selection process of the victims' delegations. While the traditional news media did not specifically link the meeting itself with previous events that had been influencing how the selection process was going to be decided, *La Silla Vacía* gave a detail explanation of these events. A political reporter from this media outlet that I interviewed referred to this as the *'tree or the forest'* issue. He explained to me that during peace negotiations, journalists are constantly presented with the dilemma of either seeing the tree (in this context the event/meeting) or seeing the forest (in this context the selection process of the victims'

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[17] Even though the peace dialogues were mainly a bilateral negotiation between the Colombian government and FARC, both delegations created some instances so the civil society could submit their considerations to the 'negotiation table'. One of those instances was the creation of thematic forums held a at a regional and national level during the discussion of the 6 main peace agenda issues. During the discussion of the victims' issue, 3 regional forums and 1 national forum were conducted so victims of the conflict could submit their suggestions. Victims of FARC were demanding more participation - compared to other victims - in these instances.

delegations). To put it into the reporter's terms, then, the traditional news media was more interested in describing the *tree* while *La Silla Vacía* put more effort on trying to picture the whole *forest*.

Therefore, *La Silla Vacía,* when communicating the demands of these groups of victims, also offered some relevant context. First, that the government delegation had met with 'The National Table of Victims' to explain to them how the selection process was meant to work. Second, that around mid-June, "[t]he 52 victims' leaders that composed the 'National Table of Victims' (…) among whom there [were] victims of Farc, (…) guerrillas, paramilitaries and the Armed Forces - met in Bogotá to work on their proposals to present [to the peace delegations]". During these meetings, the National Table selected the 15 delegates that could travel to Havana to represent the victims. *La Silla Vacía* explains that the government just needed to review and approve the process to select the victims, but "the meeting ['in El Nogal Club'] with the 270 victims (…) took place" (ID 16576, *La Silla Vacía*, 2014-07-09). In other words, the independent media outlet suggested that this event influenced or contributed to changing the selection process as it was first thought to be conducted. While at first only 15 victims from the 'National Table of Victims' were going to travel to Havana, FARC and the government decided (in part due to the pressures that emerged from the victims' organizations) to create 5 delegations of 12 victims (as it will be explained later in this section).

It is important to highlight that the paragraph above does not necessarily imply that the traditional news media did not report separately on those events before. However, in the context of communicating the demands of victims of FARC during the meeting with the government at 'El Nogal Club', they barely brought them to the discussion. Linking this meeting with previous developments around the selection process of the victims' delegation was important to comprehend the issue and how it could be influenced or changed (as it indeed happened and as *La Silla Vacía* pointed it out). Overall, I suggest that the independent media outlet did a better job at providing the necessary information and context so the readers could have a better comprehension of a very complicated and multi-layered issue.

Moreover, besides the discussion of relevant context related to the meeting, *La Silla Vacía* also provided a clearer explanation of *who* summoned the meeting and also suggested some

possible political interests linked to the event. These following excerpts (the first from *La Silla Vacia* and the second from *El Tiempo*) clearly illustrate this. The excerpt from *El Tiempo* does not explain that the foundation 'Visible Victims' was the organization responsible for summoning the 270 victims that participated in the meeting with the government. Moreover, it only focuses on describing the event and communicating the demands of the participants but does not suggest any political interests behind it. On the contrary, *La Silla Vacía* openly states that the foundation responsible for organizing the event has an "ideological closeness with the Democratic Center" and that one of the Representatives from the opposition party was also present at the event. Again, these nuances provided the reader with a better context to understand the political process:

> Last Thursday, a group of 270 FARC victims, who are not in the 'National Table of Victims' and **who were summoned by the Visible Victims Foundation**, met at the 'El Nogal Club' with the High Commissioner For Peace (…) and the government Negotiation Leader to tell them that they felt marginalized from the dialogues (…) In the **Visible Victims Foundation, which groups exclusively victims of the FARC and was founded at the Sergio Arboleda University, the relatives of soldiers and policemen kidnapped by this guerrilla have great influence, as well as an ideological closeness with the Democratic Center**. In fact, at the meeting in El Nogal last Thursday, their elected Representative, María Fernanda Cabal, was present (ID 16576, *La Silla Vacía*, 2014-07-09).

> Representatives of 37 organizations that bring together people who have suffered damage from that armed group demanded direct participation in the dialogues in Havana to 'talk face to face with the guerrillas' and ask them for the truth about 'thousands of Colombians kidnapped and disappeared'. In one act at the 'El Nogal Club', where there was a tribute to the victims of the attack on this place, they told the government delegation leader, (…) and the Peace Commissioner, that they have felt invisible in the process taking place in Havana (ID 3403, *El Tiempo,* 2014-07-03).

Consequently, the pressures brought by the victims' groups of FARC, which were considerably amplified by the Colombian news media, did indeed influence the decision of how the peace delegations decided to conduct the selection process of the victims' delegation. On 17 July 2014, the government and FARC delegations announced that the United Nations and the National University of Colombia, in conjunction with the Episcopal Conference of Colombia - as an institution to ensure compliance with the selection criteria - would be responsible for selecting five delegations in total, each of them composed of 12 victims. Even though this process increased the number of victims that would participate directly in the peace negotiations and commissioned the selection process to (more or less) autonomous organizations outside from the negotiation table,

the process was still subject to criticism. Interestingly, victims of FARC were the ones that again led these debates, in this instance by requesting the importance of including military and soldiers as part of the victims' delegations.

More specifically, the voice of General Luis Mendieta was again prevalent in the news media coverage. On behalf of the victims of FARC, Mendieta claimed that the National University was not planning to include in the victims' delegations any members of the military as they were considered war prisoners (and not victims) by FARC. Resorting to a dramatic type of reporting, *Semana* titled one of its news stories '*Controversy burns around which victims will go to Havana'*. In it, the media outlet suggested that this was an issue that considerably pressured the government delegation as, according to them*, "it was the first time since the peace negotiations had started that the government reacted to an issue by issuing a unilateral press release*" (ID 14014, *Semana,* 2014-07-29). Although *Semana* referred to the government's response as a consequence of a more general debate created around the importance of including the military in the victims' delegations, *El Tiempo* was more explicit in claiming that the government's statement was a direct response to General Mendieta's accusations (as it can be seen in the following excerpt):

> The government delegation issued (…) a statement in which it refers, without mentioning it, to the criticism made by General Mendieta, who was kidnapped for almost 12 years, that public servants [military] are not allowed to participate in the dialogues (ID 3374, *El Tiempo,* 2014-07-29).

The government denied in the statement the accusations made by General Mendieta, arguing that they had never vetoed the participation of any victim in the peace dialogues and stated very clearly its standpoint in this regard: "'[a]s a result of their participation in the armed conflict, there are members of the public force who have been victims of serious human rights violations and breaches of the IHL [International Humanitarian Law], and consequently should not be excluded due to their status as public servants'" (ID 3374, *El Tiempo,* 2014-07-29). In other words, the government was adhering to the selection criteria that they had previously announced when communicating that the UN and the National University were going to select the victims' delegations: the delegations should reflect the whole universe of human rights violations and IHL infractions that have taken place throughout the internal conflict.

As it was perhaps expected, the FARC delegation did not agree with this viewpoint and also tried to influence the debate as to who should also be included in the victims' delegations. For instance, FARC criticized the government position of acknowledging some of the military as victims of the conflict. *El Espectador* (ID 9783, 2014-08-03) reported that "FARC argued that if the government wants its military and police to be listened to in the victims' hearings [forums], it must have 'full disposition to that the guerrilla combatants are also heard'". More specifically, they were demanding that their 'prisoners' (convicted combatants) should also be treated as victims, and therefore could participate in the dialogues, given the overcrowding issues in the Colombian prisons (they argued). Moreover, FARC criticized the reporting from the news media which they assessed as 'inappropriate and unseemly' and complained that, according to them, the media wanted to make the military appear as victims and heroes. Even though the news media did amplify the demands of the retired military, they only referred to them as victims if they had been subject of any violation of the IHL (as that was the selection criteria). However, the attention that FARC's demands received (despite their inaccuracies) in the news media were considerably much lower than those comments from the government (and the victims of FARC).

In any case, the fact that this debate around whether the military (or FARC combatants to a much lesser extent) should be included in the victims delegations took centre stage in the news media is interesting since according to the report 'Basta Ya' ['Enough Already'] "approximately eight in every ten deaths [in the conflict] have been civilians which, consequently, leave them (…) as the most affected by the violence" (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013, p.32). This without mentioning that from the whole universe of victims, forced displacement (which happened particularly to civilians) amounts to around 5.7 million people – more than the 85% of the total of victims (Historic Memory Group, 2013). This is not to say that armed actor victims (including both military and FARC combatants, if they were subject of IHL violations) should not have had a voice within the news media since their percentage of victimhood is lower. However, and this is what I want to stress here, the Colombian news media should have also focused on amplifying the perspectives and thoughts of other less known (civilian) victims around the selection process of the victims' delegations.

Did these victims oppose the selection criteria? Did they think it was a fair or an unfair process? Communicating the voice of other victims would have enriched the debate in the news media since mostly the already public victims (such as the General Mendieta) were the ones given the majority of the space in the news agenda. This voice, as it was illustrated earlier, opposed the selection process and, most importantly, asked openly to reduce the participation of other victims of the conflict so that FARC victims could be prioritized in the negotiation. Consequently, the traditional news media focused on prioritizing the conflicting perspectives among the victims during the debates of the selection of the victims' delegations rather than showing other viewpoints that could have been perhaps more supportive. This is in line with both the findings that I discussed in **Chapter (5)** in which the news media prioritized news stories characterized by conflict and the findings that I will discuss in **Chapter (9.1)** in which I argue that given the commercial pressures embedded in the Colombian media system, journalists have come to increasingly construct news driven by 'dramatic lenses'.

Here it is worth mentioning that even though *La Silla Vacía* also gave voice to the already known public victims demanding prioritization, they also shared the perspectives of victims that were less publicly known. They did so to illustrate that despite some of the differences and discrepancies, all the victims seemed to agree on a key element: they wanted to know the truth of what had happened in the conflict. Although the traditional news media also broadly highlighted this 'meeting point' - 'truth' - between the different victims of the conflict, they did not show the 'faces' of these victims. In other words, the traditional news media would refer to a generic 'victims' notion to claim that 'they all' agreed that getting access to the truth was paramount. In the following three excerpts, *La Silla Vacía* shared the cases of three victims who suffered from victimization crimes such as sexual abuse, murder and displacement. Given the rarity of these examples in the news coverage, I am sharing these in full as examples that could enhance the news coverage of victims during a peace negotiation process and, consequently, the public debate around it:

'If I had to choose, I would prefer that they tell the whole truth. As a direct victim, I would like to know why they raped me when I was 11 years old and why they murdered my mother when she, to defend me, went to argue with them. What matters most to us is the truth and the real guarantees that this will not happen again', says Yolanda Perea, who arrived in Antioquia displaced from Riosucio (Chocó) and who works mainly on cases of sexual violence, the victimizing act with the greatest underreporting'

'We, as an LGBTI population, want to understand why they have victimized us. To me, that my trans brother was killed by FARC, it will only reassure me to know it', says Quindian Nora Vélez, who represents the LGBTI victims in the National Table

'It is not about them saying 'I'm sorry and forgive me' but rather that there is a real reconstruction of the events, which allows us to complete our memory and take it to all corners of our communities', says Débora Barros, a leader of victims of La Guajira and of the Wayúu community that lived through the paramilitary massacre of Bahía Portete.

(ID 16576, *La Silla Vacía,* 2014-07-09)

6.3 The first trip of the victims to Havana, Cuba

After the debate around the selection process, The National University and the United Nations, the organizations commissioned to choose the victims' delegations, announced the names of the first 12 victims who would participate in the peace negotiations. The first delegation was composed by eight women and four men: five victims of FARC (Jorge Vásquez, Nelly Gonzáles, Ángela Giraldo, Constanza Turbay and Leyner Palacios); four victims of the state (Alfonso Mora León, Janeth Bautista, Luz Marina Bernal and José Antequera), two victims of the paramilitary groups (Jaime Peña and Débora Barro) and one victim of mixed armed groups (María Eugenia Cruz). Even though victims of FARC received the majority of the 'seats', the selection committee stuck to the rule of including victims of all the actors involved in the conflict, despite the pressure coming from some victims' organizations (as explained in **Section 6.2** above).

Therefore, this first encounter offered the news media a great opportunity to report on the cases of victims of all the different actors within the armed conflict. It was also an opportunity to contribute to memory formation (Kitch, 2008; El Guabli, 2017) through amplifying the stories of those who suffered due to the conflict and explaining the responsibility of the different actors involved in the conflict. However, even though the news media shared the stories of the 12 victims, there were some inconsistencies when communicating who the perpetrators of the victimizing crimes were. Most notably, there was a tendency in which the crimes committed by agents of the Colombian state were not accurately and consistently communicated throughout the news coverage compared to those crimes committed by FARC (which in all instances were clearly identified as the culprits).

The following news excerpts illustrate the three main ways in which the media outlets communicated the crimes suffered by the victims of the Colombian state: 1) *the perpetrator cannot be identified*; 2) *there is not enough information to truly identified the perpetrator*; 3) *the culprit*

is clearly identifiable. These excerpts are related to the case of Luz Marina Bernal whose son - Fair Porras - was killed by the Military in what is known as the 'False Positive' wave.[18]

In the first excerpt, the case is associated with a generic 'false positives' notion that is not explained to the reader and consequently there is no clarity around who the perpetrator of the crime was. In the second instance, even though the case of the 'False Positives' is somehow linked to the Military, there is not a clear statement that explains that Fair Porras was actually killed by them. In the third excerpt, on the contrary, the news article clearly states who the perpetrator of the crime was:

> Luz Marina Bernal, mother of Fair Porras, **victim of the 'False Positives'** (ID 9739, *El Espectador*, 2014-08-15)

> Luz Marina Bernal. Mother of Fair Leonardo Porras Bernal, 26 years old, with mental disability, who disappeared from the neighborhood 'Compartir' in Soacha and then his body was found in 'Norte de Santander' in a common pit. **It is one of the cases known as 'False Positives' from the Military** (ID 3324, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14)

> Luz Marina Bernal is one of the mothers from Soacha whose **sons were killed by military in a wave that is known as 'false positives'** (ID 3321, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-16)

Likewise, the same inaccuracies can be found in the case of Alfonso Mora León, the father of Jenner Alfonso Mora who was killed by the DIJIN (Direction of Criminal Investigation and Interpol - Spanish acronym), an institution ascribed to the Colombian Police. By then, Jenner was a member of FARC when the DIJIN arrested him with another group of combatants; he was kidnapped, tortured, and later killed by the Police institution. As in the previous case, the first excerpt does not mention the perpetrator, the second instance claims that he is a victim of the state but does not specify the institution that committed the crime, and the third example mentions the perpetrator (although, again, it could have mentioned the DIJIN as the specific organization ascribed to the Police who committed the crime):

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[18] The 'False Positives' wave is a case in which the Military was involved in the extrajudicial killings of innocent people that were then falsely labelled as enemy combatants. As Palau (2020) explains, this was a consequence of "the ministry of defence and the army [putting] out directives that prioritised body counts above all other results". For example, according to Human Rights Watch (2018), they offered different types of rewards that included additional holiday leave and money to military units that achieved high body counts. A recent report from the Special Jurisdiction for Peace showed that 6,402 innocent civilians were killed between 2002 and 2008 under this criminal scheme (BBC News, 2021)

Alfonso Mora León, father of a FARC' militiaman murdered and tortured during the Mondoñedo massacre in 1996 (ID 9739, *El Espectador*, 2014-08-15)

Alfonso Mora León is father of the FARC militiaman murdered in Mondoñedo, in 1996, after having been kidnapped and tortured along with five other young people. There is currently a ruling from the Council of State on the case. Mora is a retired Army NCO. He is considered a victim of the state (ID 3324, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14)

Alfonso Mora – his son was killed by policemen after having been arrested (ID 3321, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14)

Finally, the case of Janeth Bautista shows exactly the same pattern as shown above in the previous two instances. Janeth's sister - Nidya Erika Bautista – was disappeared in 1987 and later found dead in a cemetery. After some investigations conducted by the General Attorney's office, it was determined that the Military was involved in the forced disappearance of Nidya. In the first example, only the victimizing crime is mentioned (enforced disappearance) but not who the perpetrator was. In the second instance, even though more details are given, these details are vague (e.g. 'several men in civilian clothes who forced her to get into a car') and do not allow the reader to identify who the culprit was. The third example, as in the previous cases, establish clearly who committed the crime:

Janeth Bautista, sister of Nidya Erika Bautista, **victim of enforced disappearance** (ID 9739, *El Espectador*, 2014-08-15).

Yaneth Bautista is the sister of Nidia Érika Bautista, who on August 30, 1987 was approached by several men in civilian clothes who forced her to get into a car and disappeared. Her family searched for her for three years until an Army noncommissioned officer confessed the whereabouts of her body, which was later exhumed on May 27, 1990 in Guayabetal - Cundinamarca - (ID 3324, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14).

Janeth Bautista – her sister was disappeared by the Army in 1987. After 3 years of searching, a noncommissioned officer of the Army revealed the whereabouts of the body (ID 3321, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14).

Interestingly, an article from *Semana*, when referring to the Colombian state as the perpetrator, used the label of "corrupt agents from the state": "all [members of the first victim delegation] are direct or indirect victims of FARC guerrilla, paramilitaries or **corrupt agents of the state**" (ID 14050, *Semana*, 2014-08-16). In fact, the media outlet, instead of communicating clearly who the perpetrators were in the cases of Luz Marina Bernal and Janeth Bautista (shown

above), referred to the perpetrator also as 'corrupted military'. As it was explained before, this label can be a very problematic expression as it can foster the narrative that 'there are not crimes of the State but of some agents' when it has been clearly demonstrated that the State has structurally participated in the killing of innocent civilians (the 'False Positives' are an example of this):

> Bautista is the sister of a member of the now pacified M-19 guerrilla movement who was kidnapped in 1987 before being assassinated by **corrupt soldiers**

> Luz Marina Bernal, whose son with a mental disability was deceived, taken to the northeast of the country and murdered by **corrupt soldiers** when he was 26 years old

> (ID 14050, *Semana*, 2014-08-16).

On the contrary, if we take a closer look at how the cases of the victims of FARC were communicated, we can see that the news media was consistent and stated clearly (in every instance) that the guerrilla group was the one who committed the crime and therefore the reader could identify the perpetrator. Here it is important to clarify that this pattern was consistent in all news articles mentioning the victims of FARC, including the same news articles that omitted to mention the state as the culprit:

> Angela María Giraldo. Sister of Francisco Javier Giraldo, deputy from the valley **kidnapped and assassinated by FARC** (ID 3324, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14)

> Constanza Turbay, from Caquetá, her entire family of political character **was assassinated by FARC**

> Jorge Vásquez, **displaced by FARC in Huila**

> Leyner Palacios, Afro-descendant, **leader of the victims of the Bojayá massacre committed by FARC**

> (ID 9739, *El Espectador*, 2014-08-15)

> Nelly González, mother of Lieutenant Alfonso Rodríguez, **commander of Toribio's post, assassinated by FARC in 2001** (ID 3324, *El Tiempo,* 2014-08-14)

These findings are in line with the results of García-Marrugo (2013, p.440), whose study shows that there is a significant difference between the reports of guerrilla and (in her case) paramilitary groups' actions by the Colombian press: while the representation of the actions of the paramilitaries can be characterized by vagueness, the representation of the actions committed by

guerrilla groups are frequently more explicit. She explains that the news media tended to use differentiated terms when reporting on FARC actions (e.g. FARC' 12 front carried out the attack) and undifferentiated terms when reporting on paramilitary actions (e.g. armed men murdered the sisters) (García-Marrugo 2013, pp 330-332). These inaccuracies - which were also present in my examination when the news media communicated the crimes committed by the Colombian state – significantly contribute to creating a distorted picture of the conflict among the citizens. I therefore argue that this type of reporting from the Colombian news media was (and can be) very detrimental to processes of memory formation within societies transitioning to more peaceful settings.

However, since I am also interested in revealing instances in which the media play a more constructive role, and in order to conclude this section, the following excerpts from a news article of *El Espectador* (ID 9731, 2014) illustrate what I believe can be regarded as a better way to represent the victims, their victimizing crimes and those responsible for the crimes. Given the limited space in this thesis, I only share two instances (two of them victims of the Colombia state), although the same level of detail and accuracy was given to all victims of the first victims' delegation within the news story.

The first excerpt explains the case of Alfonso Mora. Not only did it mention that the crime was perpetrated by the DIJIN but it also included the Commander (and his name) who was responsible for the operation of the institution who committed the crime. Moreover, it also explains that the crime is rooted in a retaliation action as FARC had taken over a municipality and attacked a Police station prior to the crime. The second excerpt follows a similar pattern. It describes the case of Bautista's sister and it mentions specifically the Brigade of the Military who actually committed the crime. As I argued in an article co-authored with Brendan Lawson, in which we examined how the Colombian news media reported on the number of deaths of the Colombian conflict (Ortega and Lawson, 2022), although this level of detail may not be possible in every single news article, journalists should adhere to practices oriented to represent the war accurately, instead of resorting to vagueness which can contribute to distorted perceptions of the conflict. Accuracy, as a realistic expectation within this context, means that the news media should name the perpetrator of the crime, since this is a key aspect for the people to understand the complexity

of the Colombian conflict. This is precisely what the following excerpts do when representing the victims:

> Retired Army noncommissioned officer and father of Jénner Alfonso Mora, one of the victims of the massacre committed on September 7, 1996 at the 'Fute' farm in Mondoñedo (Cundinamarca) by members of the Dijín under the command of then Lieutenant Héctor Édison Castro. The members of the urban network of the Antonio Nariño front from FARC were kidnapped, tortured and later murdered in retaliation for the taking of 'Las Delicias' (Putumayo), perpetrated by that guerrilla just a week before, and for the attack against a police station in Kennedy (Bogotá).

> Sister of M-19 activist Nydia Érika Bautista, who disappeared on August 30, 1987 and whose remains were found three years later in a cemetery in Guayabetal (Cundinamarca). In 1994, the Attorney General's Office was able to establish that members of the Army's "Charry Solano" Military Intelligence Brigade XX, commanded by then-General Álvaro Velandia Hurtado, participated in the event, who was dismissed in 1995 for the disappearance, torture and extrajudicial execution of Bautista. Her family's struggle to find the truth in this case was the first step towards the creation of Asfaddes (Association of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared).

(ID 9731, *El Espectador,* 2014)

6.4 Concluding Remarks

In this **Chapter (6)** I discussed how the Colombian news media represented the issue of victims during the peace negotiation. More specifically, I examined three pivotal moments that influenced how the bargaining of this issue was carried out by the government and the FARC delegation: 1) the announcement of the 10 principles that guided the discussion of the issue of victims at the negotiation table; 2) the decision on creating a mechanism to select five victims' delegations that would later travel to Havana (Cuba) to represent the victims' universe of the Colombian conflict; and 3) the first trip of the first victim delegation to Havana in which 12 victims met with the negotiators. Through the interpretation of these three cases, I put forward two arguments.

Firstly, and in line with the findings of **Chapter (5)**, I argued that the Colombian news media consistently overlooked the government's responsibility in the conflict. For example, I showed in **Section (6.1)** that when the news media communicated the 10 principles that guided the discussion on the issue of victims, they placed the emphasis on FARC recognition of their victims and their responsibility with them, rather than explaining, in a more nuanced fashion, that both the guerrilla group and the Colombian state (including its military) needed to acknowledge their part in the conflict. As the 10 principles established, it was pivotal not to exchange impunities between FARC and the government as the truth needed to be the guiding tenet to reach an agreement on the issue of victims. However, the news media, by only highlighting the importance of the guerrilla group acknowledging their victims, did not provide a more comprehensive forum to identify the responsibilities from other actors beyond the guerrilla group.

This overlooking of the responsibility of the government in the conflict was even more evident when the outlets communicated the crimes suffered by the 12 victims that composed the first victim delegation. As I showed in **Section (6.3)**, the news media was inaccurate and inconsistent in communicating the victimizing crimes committed by the Colombian State. More specifically, there was a tendency in which the crimes committed by agents of the Colombian state were communicated vaguely so the culprit could not be clearly identified in the majority of the cases. This highly contrasts with how the crimes committed by FARC were communicated by the news media as in all instances the guerrilla group was clearly identified as the perpetrator.

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These type of vague representations of the conflict can have negative implications for the understanding of the conflict that the public can obtain from the news media. For instance, this ambiguous type of reporting has resulted in a systematic concealment of responsibility and legitimation of violence of paramilitary groups in the Colombian press (Pardo, 2005; Pardo, 2007; García, 2008; García, 2012). As García-Marrugo (2013) explains, according to the results of two opinion polls (Ipsos-Napoleón Franco, 2007; Urtak, 2010) conducted in the first decade of this century, paramilitary groups were seen as minor agents in the conflict by a significant percentage of Colombians, even though they have been responsible for the majority of the deaths throughout the conflict - as illustrated by the report of the National Center for Historical Memory (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013, pp. 33-34).

The second argument I put forward in this **Chapter (6)** is that the Colombian news media prioritized the voice of public and well-known victims of FARC when discussing the selection process of the victims' delegations. Interestingly, these were the same victims that throughout the selection process constantly criticized or opposed the idea of having victims from other armed groups different to FARC in the peace dialogues. Interpreted through the lenses of the mediatization of politics framework, we can see some of the reasons as to why this may have happened. As I argued in the previous **Chapter (5),** the 'news media logic'**,** and more specifically its 'commercial aspects' (Esser, 2013), prevailed in the news coverage of the peace process. Something similar could be said of the way in which the news media communicated the selection process of the victims' delegations: the news media focused on giving voice to those victims that *opposed, criticized,* and *problematized* the selection process. In other words, the media focused on the *conflict* aspect of the issue.

The voice given by the news media to these specific victims, particularly to the General Mendieta - as described in **Section (6.2)** - is also important because it shows, as argued by Wolfsfeld (2004), that the news media can have an influence on the nature of public debate during peace processes. Since the news media "determine who gets to speak and what is considered an appropriate form of argument" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.12), the Colombian media decided to choose the well-known victims of FARC over less known victims. I argue that this decision had important

implications for the debate on the issue of victims because the victims that were prioritized by the media mobilized two problematic set of messages.

Firstly, they were not comfortable with the decision of the peace delegations to include victims from all the actors involved in the conflict within the victims' delegations. They argued that given that the peace process was being negotiated with FARC, only the victims of this guerilla group could participate directly at the negotiation table. As I explained in **Section (6.2)**, the news media considerably amplified their demands, and consequently this idea of 'less worthy' and 'more worthy' type of victims, without providing the public with a more balanced debate that would include the opinion and thoughts of other groups of victims on the matter. Secondly, they misleadingly positioned in the news agenda that one of the institutions responsible for selecting the victims' delegations (the National University) did not want to include military as part of the victims. Even though this was later clarified by the government, the news media ended up giving space to this debate instead of, for instance, giving voice to civilian victims (which accounts for the majority within the Colombian conflict) in the news agenda.

Nonetheless, and similar to what I illustrated in **Chapter (5)**, the independent media outlet (*La Silla Vacía*) performed differently when communicating these issues. More specifically, they also provided space in their news articles to less known victims to explain that despite the differences and discrepancies between victims of different actors and organizations, they all were united by their right (and desire) to know the truth of what had happened in the conflict. Although the traditional news media also communicated this 'meeting point' – the desire of seeking the 'truth' - they did not show the 'protagonists'. In other words, the traditional news media commonly referred to a 'generic victims' notion (García-Marrugo, 2021) to claim that 'they all' agreed that getting access to the truth was paramount.

Moreover, *La Silla Vacía* did a better job of focusing much less on the conflict aspect of the selection of the victims' delegations and provided a necessary context to understand both the motives of the victims of FARC when asking for more representation and also some of the implications of their demands. To put it into the analogy described by one of the reporters I interviewed and that I described in **Section (6.2)**, while the traditional news media was more

interested in describing the *tree, La Silla Vacía* put more effort into trying to capture the picture of the whole *forest*. Therefore, this media outlet displayed, as also argued in **Chapter (5),** some 'professional aspects' of the 'news media logic', more specifically a interpretative and analytical type of reporting that could have contributed to a more informed citizenship (Esser, 2013, p.170).

It is important to mention before concluding this **Chapter (6)**, however, that *El Espectador* also displayed some aspects of the professional dimension of the 'news media logic' when representing the victims and their victimizing crimes, which ultimately can be beneficial for a more accurate representation of the conflict and its consequences. This point is of particular significance because, as I will argue in **Chapter (9)**, I was able to identify multiple journalistic attitudes towards the peace negotiations: while some journalists focused on reporting the controversial aspects of the peace dialogues, there were other reporters who acknowledged that a key aspect of their role was to explain the policy issues around the peace negotiations and that they distanced themselves from journalistic approaches that would favour sensationalism.

Chapter 7: The government delegation and its (media) logics of operation

It was (…) as if Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel and people were constantly shaking his scaffold or throwing stones or water at him and then again shaking the scaffold. I mean, making an artwork surrounded by so many difficulties affects the [artist]
(Communications advisor on the impact of the news media on the negotiations, C-GCA 3)

Although in previous **Chapters (5** and **6)** I briefly outlined some of the communications tactics used by the Colombian government during the peace dialogues, this **Chapter (7)** focuses entirely on examining the communication strategy that it employed to manage the Colombian news media during the negotiations. Since I agree with the idea that political organizations, instead of being completely mediatized, are characterized "by islands of greater or lesser mediatization" (Marcinkowski, 2005, cited in Donges and Jarren, 2014, p.196), a key focus of this chapter will be to illustrate *when* the government was more likely to adopt 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b). This is relevant because, as I explained and argued in **Chapter (2.6)**, answering the question of *when* political actors are more prone to resort to the media is pivotal to better understand how mediatization works (differently) depending on both the context and the organizations being examined.

To illustrate the above, and drawing upon both the news coverage and interviews analysis, I divide this **Chapter (7)** in two main sections. In **Section (7.1)** I describe the confidential communications approach that the government embraced at the beginning of the peace negotiations. I explain that the government attempted to keep this approach throughout the process by implementing regular off the record meetings with journalists that would allow them to share their positions and keep the citizenry informed in a cautious fashion. However, since a peace process depends heavily on public support, the government delegation started to struggle with having a balance between secrecy and keeping the citizens well-informed. This situation worsened for the government since, on the contrary, the FARC delegation opted for the opposite approach: they held daily press conferences to communicate a variety of political positions around the negotiations that had an impact on how the general public perceived the negotiations.

Consequently, at the end of **Section (7.1)** I introduce one of the key arguments of this **Chapter (7):** that the Colombian government was more inclined to resort to the news media and adapt to its logics when the climate of opinion around the peace dialogues worsened or when the legitimacy of the negotiations was threatened. To further illustrate this, in **Section (7.2)** I employ Wolfsfeld's (2004) 'politics-media-politics' model to examine one of the main 'political waves' of the peace negotiations: the worst escalation of the conflict (2014) during the peace dialogues.

I show that given the rise in violence during this crisis, the public opinion towards the negotiations considerably worsened which, in turn, prompted the government to open up their communications approach: they gave, for the very first time since the beginning of the peace negotiations, a public interview. I argue that similarly to what occurred during the kidnapping of Army General Alzate (see **Chapter 5.2.2**), the Colombian news media adopted an 'elite-driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) to report on the events as they tended to deem only FARC accountable for the loss of trust around the negotiations during the crisis. Interestingly, this was aligned with the government's narrative as they aimed to attribute all the political responsibility of the events to the FARC delegation.

Finally, throughout the whole chapter, I describe multiple instances that illustrate that although media considerations did not entirely determine the behaviour of the government delegation, they were at the centre of the government's negotiation strategy. Daily media management activities were a key part of the routines for negotiators, who strategically and consciously adapted to the 'news media logic' to better cope with the intense media scrutiny. I consequently argue that the Colombian news media, rather than conditioning the government's delegation behaviour, *disrupted* their ways of working during the peace process.

7.1 The challenge between keeping information confidential and feeding the (media) 'beast'

The confidential approach that the Colombian government embraced was a key aspect of its communication strategy during the peace negotiation. Although secrecy is not rare when it comes to peace processes, the Colombian government had already had other experiences negotiating with guerrilla groups that reinforced this approach as their openness with their communications proved to be problematic. Indeed, one of the key lessons that former President Santos highlights on his book *'The Battle for the Peace'* (2019) from the failed peace process with FARC back in the early 2000's is the inconvenience of having the media and the public opinion constantly scrutinizing the negotiations. He argues that this situation "made negotiators more concerned with producing statements that would benefit their positions rather than advancing seriously in the dialogue table" (Santos, 2019, p.1548).

In a similar fashion, a negotiator from the government delegation that I interviewed also acknowledges that one of the reasons why they decided to embrace a discreet approach was related to their previous experiences negotiating with guerrilla groups. He recalls the peace negotiations that the Colombian government held in 1991 with the 'Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera' (all the guerrilla groups that had not yet come to a peace agreement). Back then, the government decided to hold a daily press conference at 3:00 pm to inform the news media about the progress of the negotiations. He describes this decision as a great mistake "because after some days there was nothing really different to report on and (…) that created even more frustration for the press because [despite the openness] we were still making some effort not to communicate some things to the news media" (P-GN 3).

Consequently, the government communications strategy was based on providing journalists with the right amount of information without compromising the secrecy of the dialogues or "'to feed the beast' without falling into the media 'frenzy'" as the Chief Negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, once declared (De la Calle, 2019, p.937). However, and although this decision was made to avoid issues and keep the negotiations 'safe', maintaining the balance between keeping information confidential and sharing relevant material to the media proved to be a great challenge for the government delegation and their communications team. In fact, when I asked if

confidentiality should be the strategy to follow during a peace negotiation, a government communications advisor answered that the challenge will always be telling what is necessary without telling everything: "How do you keep people informed without revealing secrets and harming the negotiations? That is the challenge. I think that we did not achieve it completely despite having a very good team." (C-GCA 2).

Likewise, another communications advisor also acknowledges that the government failed in communicating 'effectively' and in a 'timely manner'. She claims that although their main priority as a communications team was to protect the peace negotiations, it was difficult to maintain the right balance between keeping information confidential and the right of the public to be informed. Interestingly, as many of the members of the communications team had practiced journalism before, their previous experience as journalists made them more aware about that tension:

> Communicating was not only challenging but very difficult (…) o**ur priority was that the confidential dialogues were protected by the discussions that could take place in the news media**. However, since a lot of us [the communications team] were journalists (many of whom had already worked in news media), we knew about the importance of the right to be informed; a fundamental right that the country has as we are a democratic country and not a dictatorship. **And that combination proved to be very difficult. So communicating in a timely manner, with a clear voice that people could understand was extremely difficult and we never achieved it.** (C-GCA 3)

This tension between confidentiality and openness, then, created an additional issue for the Colombian government: their 'silence' was taken over by the FARC delegation. Contrary to the government, FARC decided since the very beginning of the peace process to make statements to the press in an almost daily press conference. They tried to take advantage from the confidential approach of the government to, amongst other things, set or influence the news agenda in their favour. The following testimony from a FARC communications advisor describes this open approach and shows that the Secretariat [FARC leadership team] would strategically choose the issues to be discussed within those statements. They would aim to select topics that could be seen as a weakness for the government since, according to him, there was an implicit 'media war' in which each side would try to highlight the weaknesses of their counterpart. Interestingly, FARC's

communications advisor refers to this practice of giving daily statements to the press as 'the little snack' strategy, since the information they would disclose was a sort of 'candy' for the media:

> We were the ones producing the news, we were the center of attention. So the idea was to release information faster than them [the government]. 'What are we going talk about today? That there is a serious problem because there was an increase in taxes, let's talk about taxes then'. And **this would obviously come from the secretariat [FARC leadership team] who would determine the focus where attention needed to be placed**. Obviously the government also tried to focus the attention on our weak sides: children, women, kidnappings, truth, all these issues that they have always mentioned.
>
> They always tried to set these topics and **we also tried to impose other issues to counter that 'media war' that was implicitly established**. So (…) 8:00 am (…) was the moment to let's say set the [news] agenda. At least to give something to the media which is what they always look for: news. We called that 'the little snack', let's give them 'the little snack' so they can talk and don't waste their time here. So 'the little snack' was ultimately that 'candy' for the media to talk about things that were related to what was being debated.
>
> (C-FCA 6).

This daily routine from FARC had different implications for the government. Firstly, it had a direct impact on the daily work of their negotiators and the communications team. One communications advisor from the government recalls that someone from the communications team needed to always be present at FARC's press conferences where they would communicate the daily statements "to send (in real time) the audio of what they [FARC] were saying to the government negotiating team who would be [listening] in another room to know how to react". She acknowledges that although this was a very routine and tiresome task, "it was a key activity because based on it the news agenda would be shaped" (C-GCA 5).

In addition to the disruption on their daily work dynamic, the government delegation perceived these morning press conferences of FARC as a practice that negatively affected the perception of the peace negotiation by the public. A senior communication advisor describes this daily routine as "very exhausting" because even though the government would very quickly deny or clarify the statements when necessary, "the public opinion had already been left with that information". By 'that information' she means that, in some instances, FARC would give inaccurate details about what was being negotiated: "they would say that we were going to reform the military doctrine, that we were going to end the military service. False! That was one of their

proposals but it was not really going to happen" (C-GSCA 4). So the risk for the peace process image, according to the government delegation, was that that the public could understand that everything that FARC was mentioning at their press conferences was something that it was either part of the peace agenda or going to become an agreement between the two parties.

In a similar fashion, a member of the communications team (first excerpt below) and a government negotiator advisor (second excerpt) claim that FARC statements had a negative impact on the image of the peace process. The first excerpt highlights that given that FARC statements were full of 'hatred' and 'resentment', the Colombian people did not receive their messages well. The second excerpt, besides coinciding with the negative impact that their statements had on the peace dialogues, adds that their declarations worsened the image that the public had around FARC as a guerrilla group:

> With each thing they said we were like 'can you please help us with the process'? Because it was a barrage of hatred, a barrage of resentment…they spoke there [Havana] and the flame would light here [Colombia]. And trust me that the table tried to protect itself from that, but the public opinion here [Colombia] was on fire with everything that FARC said (C-GCA 2).

> It seemed to us that what they caused, giving opinions everyday about different issues that were not related to the table, was to increase the hatred that already existed against FARC. **And I do believe that FARC brought us (and themselves) a lot of harm with their daily press conferences. So yes, it seems to me that this really did have an impact, a great negative impact on the process**, but also on their image, which was already negative, and I think it helped to worsen the perception about them (P-GNA 2).

This perception of the negative impact of the statements may come from the fact that the Colombian news media did indeed amplify FARC declarations. A communications advisor from the government told me that given that the news media, and particularly news agencies, were tired of waiting for new and relevant information, they ended up reporting on FARC's daily statements: "the media ended up publishing and publishing because when FARC said something, if EFE [agency] would not report on it, Reuters would; if Reuters would not publish, AP agency would." (C-GCA 2). This is in line with multiple testimonies from reporters who acknowledge that in some cases they had no option other than constructing the news stories based on FARC, as it was the only political actor supplying information. As one political reporter puts it: "the news was only

provided, for some time, by the guerrilla group. So the Colombian media somehow did echo [their statements] because they were they only source of information at that time" (J-PR 2).

Indeed, the following networking graph (**Figure 7.1**) also indicates that this daily routine from FARC may have influenced the news media agenda. The **Figure 7.1** shows some of the most common combination of bi-words (words that follow one another) in the headlines of my news corpus. The grade of the colour of the arrow indicates the number of co-occurrences of the two words: the darker the arrow, the more occurrences of combinations of those bi-words. From the **Figure 7.1**, then, it can be noticed that 'Santos' (Former Colombian President) and 'FARC' form very common center nodes. However, 'FARC' is the node with more connections (see words highlighted in yellow). Interestingly, the majority of these connections are related to FARC's daily practice of communicating statements to the media. For example, the most common combinations are FARC 'says' ('dicen') and FARC 'asks' (FARC 'piden'), but **Figure 7.1** also shows instances such as FARC 'proposes' ('proponen'), FARC 'wants' ('quiere') and FARC 'announces' ('anuncian').

Figure 7.1 itself helps to show why this routine became an issue for the government: the news media amplified those declarations from the guerrilla group and the government had to reactively respond to them to also tell their side of the story.

Figure 7.1 - Co-occurrence of words in news articles headlines
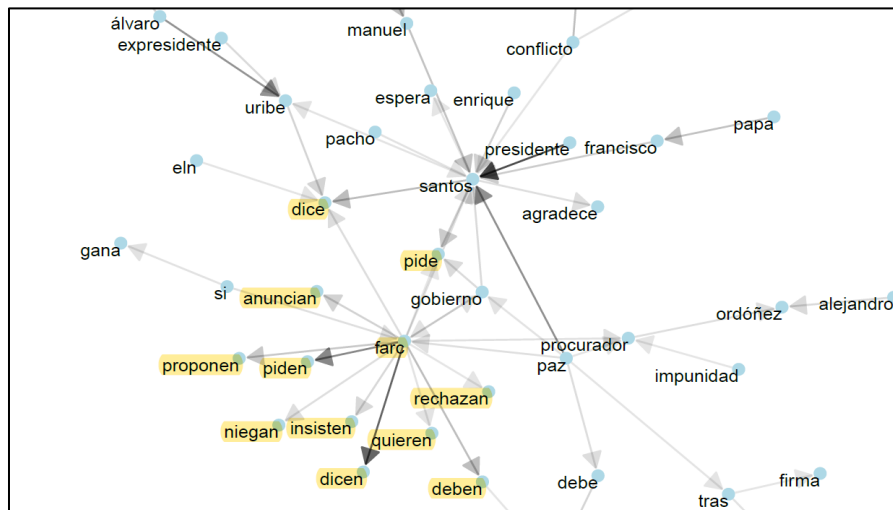
Nonetheless, the fact that the government did not publicly communicate on a regular basis does not mean that they did not employ other communication approaches to both deal with the constant communication coming from FARC and keep the citizens informed about the progress of the peace negotiations. They resorted to off the record meetings as their main communications tactic to keep journalists informed, so the news media could amplify their messaging. As one senior communications advisor from the government puts it, "the off the record approach became an essential tool because we could openly talk about what was happening; journalists highly complied with the rules in those encounters" (C-GSCA 4). This means that the government wanted to have the opportunity to tell their side of the story ('openly') without publicly compromising with specific information around the negotiations such as admitting that they could be acquiescing to some of the agenda items proposed by FARC. Interestingly from the excerpt, the advisor acknowledges that journalists 'complied with the rules' implying that the reporters adapted to this way of communication and did not break the confidentiality of what was being shared.

These off the record meetings with journalists were used by the government for both reactive and proactive communication scenarios. As explained above, FARC constantly made public statements that tried to influence the news agenda and the government had to react to this situation by telling journalists their own version of the issues. For instance, a communications advisor recalls that one of the first crises of the peace process occurred when the FARC delegation severely criticized the Minister of Agriculture. She explains that in order to mitigate these sort of issues (e.g. critics by FARC to the government cabinet), the communications team would pressure the High Commissioner for Peace (Sergio Jaramillo) and the Chief Negotiator (Humberto de la Calle) to call the news media (off the record) to explain their side of the story:

> **We did a lot of off the record work with the media when these types of things happened**. I remember that what we did was bring Sergio Jaramillo and Humberto de la Calle and start calling (…) *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador, Semana* (…) to explain to them the notions of food security, agricultural frontier, the land bank, etc. **and they would talk with them [journalists] for half an hour or an hour** (C-GCA 3**).**

Likewise, a proactive communications scenario is well-described by a senior communications advisor from the government delegation. She explains that, given that the press

would publish analytical pieces around the negotiations during the weekend, it was mandatory for some government negotiators to hold off the record meetings with some key journalists every Friday in order to share the government positions. This clearly shows a high degree of media adaptation from the government: its negotiators had to adapt their political activities to the news media's timetable. In this particular instance, the government delegation adapted their schedule to the timings of publication of the press to try to make sure that the news articles also included the governmental perspective around the negotiations:

> **Regardless of the moment of the negotiation cycle, on Fridays, De la Calle and Sergio would give us [the communication team], they had no option, at least two hours to talk with journalists because this was the moment in which** *El Tiempo, Semana* **and** *El Espectador* **were closing their analytical stories for Sundays**. For example, *El Tiempo* always published an analytical article on Sundays. We would then talk to its peace editor (someone with whom you could handle the off the record rule), we would tell her what had happened in the negotiation cycle and we tried to give the government perspective; in other words, that the weekend article also included the government position. We would do the same with *Semana* and *El Espectador*. **So the off the record conversations on Fridays were 'non-negotiable' [mandatory] because it was the moment in which we gave the basic line for all opinion articles** (C-GSCA 4)**.**

The government delegation, then, tried to maintain this confidential approach throughout the whole peace process by keeping journalists informed mainly through off the record meetings. However, given the dependence of the peace dialogues on public support, it was difficult to keep implementing this approach as the peace process progressed without reaching a final agreement; Colombian people were not willing to fully support a peace negotiation during a long period of time while the armed conflict was still ravaging the country. Since one of the key aspects of the Colombian peace process was that the negotiations took place amidst the conflict,

Consequently, when the armed conflict in Colombia heavily escalated and the public opinion towards the negotiations worsened, the government delegation was obliged to open up their communications approach. Off the record meetings were no longer the only option to deliver the government message to convince the Colombian people that waiting for a final agreement was worth it; they needed to communicate more directly to the citizenry to explain to them why even though they were trying to come to a peace agreement, there were still people dying as a consequence of the conflict. The following **Section (7.2)**, then, presents a case study of the worst escalation of the conflict during the peace negotiations in order to explain how the Colombian

government was more inclined to resort to the news media in moments of crisis when the legitimacy of the peace dialogues was greatly compromised.

7.2 The worst escalation of the conflict during the peace process as a case study

As I outlined above, I introduce in this **Section (7.2)** the worst escalation of the conflict during the peace negotiations as a case study. I employ Wolfsfeld's (2004) *'politics-media-politics'* model (see **Chapter 3.1** for details) as an analytical framework to interpret the role of the Colombian news media during this 'political wave' that was originated by a triggering event: an attack from FARC on the military, in which 11 soldiers were killed. To better explain the role of the news media, I divide the section into the three elements of the model (Wolfsfeld, 2004, pp.31-37). The first part discusses the changes of the political environment around the peace negotiations: I mainly describe the background and the causes of why the conflict intensified.

The second part describes what the changes in media performance were as a response to the changed political environment. Here I examine what Wolfsfeld (2004, p.32) refers to as the three roles of the news media during political waves: 1) they increase the political impact of political waves, 2) they provide them with a temporal structure, and 3) they also give a narrative structure for such events. Taking these three elements together, I show that the Colombian news media considerably amplified the escalation of the conflict, marshaled sustained attention to the crisis and provided a pessimistic narrative regarding the future of the negotiations. Interestingly, and this is what I mainly argue, the news media tended to only deem FARC accountable for the loss of trust around the negotiations during the escalation of the conflict, despite the government also engaging in violent attacks. Importantly, this was in line with the government's strategy that aimed to hand over to FARC the entire political responsibility for the events.

In the third part I further explain what the other changes in the political environment were as a consequence of the changes in the media performance. Since the news media significantly amplified the events and resorted to a pessimistic narrative structure about the future of the peace dialogues, the public support towards the negotiations indeed worsened. This negative perception, that was reflected in a series of opinion polls, alongside the prominence of the coverage around the violent attacks, created pressure on the government delegation and led to a change of their communication strategy. They decided to concede, for the first time, a public interview to the news media. This interview marked the beginning of the end of the crisis, as after three days of being

published both delegations made an agreement to start de-escalating the conflict. I argue, consequently, that the news media contributed to the positive outcome of the crisis by creating pressure on both delegations to engage in dialogues that could lead to a more comprehensive and verifiable ceasefire.

This pressure, however, and as suggested above, may have worked differently for each of the delegations: while the government was pressured to engage in the dialogues given the amount of negative coverage on the events (and its negative effects on public opinion), the FARC delegation may have been pressured because the news media tended to only deem them accountable for the events around the political wave.

7.2.1 The changes in the political environment: the armed conflict intensifies

One of the key aspects of the Colombian peace process, as also discussed in **Chapter (5.2.2)**, was that the negotiations took place amidst the conflict. Since the announcement of the peace dialogues, former President Juan Manuel Santos instructed the army to keep fighting FARC on the field as if there were no negotiations. This meant that the peace process started without a bilateral ceasefire. The Colombian government firmly believed that agreeing on a ceasefire instead of moving the peace process forward would stall the conversations and it would also give some military leverage that FARC could use at the negotiation table.

However, FARC never agreed on this decision (not publicly at least). In fact, on the very first day of the inauguration of the peace negotiations in Havana (19 November 2012) and breaking the press protocol that had been agreed with the government, Ivan Marquez (FARC Chief Negotiator) announced to the news media a unilateral ceasefire for two months. It was a political decision which showed that FARC wanted the government to engage, as soon as possible, in dialogues that could lead to a bilateral ceasefire agreement. But despite the multiple attempts from FARC (they declared a total of six unilateral ceasefires throughout the negotiations), President Santos remained very tough with his position and never conceded a bilateral ceasefire (not until the very end of the negotiations).

One of those six unilateral ceasefires of FARC was announced on 17 December 2014. The announcement came less than a month after both parties had overcome the crisis caused by FARC's kidnapping of Army General Rubén Alzate, which concluded with his liberation and no major issues for the peace process (see **Chapter 5.2.2**). In the announcement of the indefinite unilateral ceasefire, FARC highlighted that the procedure could be terminated if it was found that any of their guerrilla structures had been the object of attacks by the Armed Forces. In other words, it was an ambiguous ceasefire because it was never clear what was considered an 'attack' and the government never ceased its military operations.

Under these ambiguous circumstances, on 15 April 2015 FARC attacked an Army squad in which 10 soldiers and 1 sub-officer were killed. This event, considered in this case study as the triggering event for the 'political wave', marked the beginning of the escalation of the conflict. Just two days after the attack took place, the government decided to resume the bombings (which had been put on hold in March 2015 as a positive response to the unilateral ceasefire) against FARC. As the conflict intensified, and as an action that could be understood as a retaliation from the soldiers' killing, the Colombian Army executed an attack against a FARC camp on 21 May 2015 in which 26 guerilla combatants were killed. Just one day after this event, FARC decided to fully suspend the unilateral ceasefire that it had initiated on December 2014, which led to June 2015 being the most violent month since the peace negotiations had started.

Indeed, data from the Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC, 2015) - **Figure 7.2 -** shows the variations on the offensive actions executed by FARC and the Armed Forces against FARC between December 2014 and July 2015. There is a significant increase in attacks committed by FARC between May (when they cancelled the unilateral ceasefire) and July, reaching its highest peak in June 2015. Here is important to clarify, nonetheless, that the offensive actions executed by the Armed Forces are not exclusively actions that led to killings. For instance, the seizure of weapons and the destruction of explosives are non-violent actions that are also counted within this category.[19]

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[19] Since the database from CERAC is being updated, it is not possible to know in detail how many of the offensive actions by the Government were actually violent.

Figure 7.2 - Offensive Actions by FARC and Offensive Actions by the Armed Forces against FARC between December 2014 and July 2015

Offensive Actions against FARC by the Armed Forces
Offensive Actions by FARC
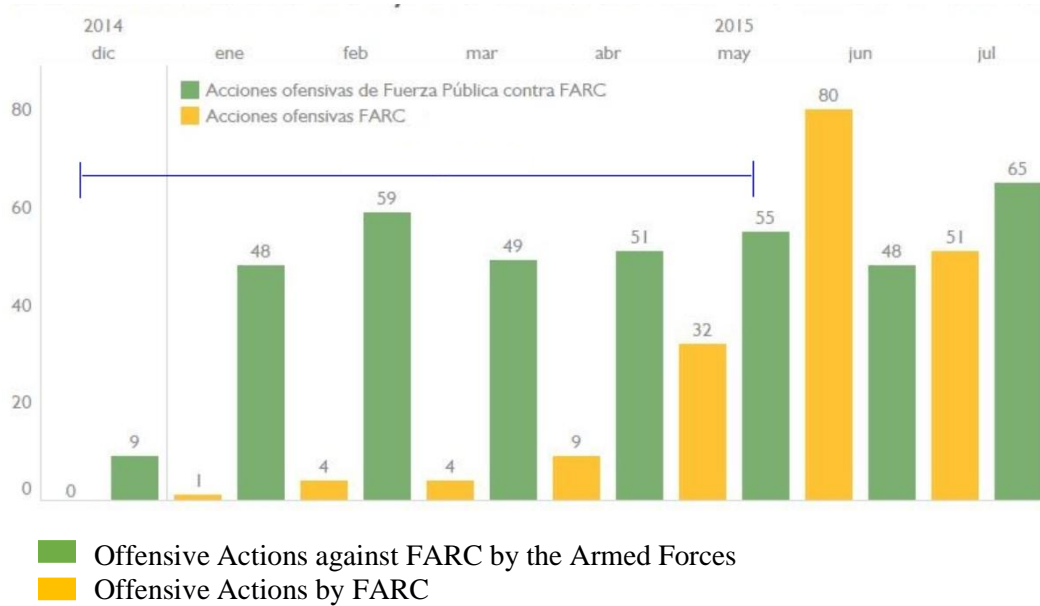
The following **Table 7.1** summarizes the timeline with the key events which led to an important change in the political environment (e.g., the escalation of the conflict) which, in turn, caused a change on the news media performance (as it will be discussed in the following section).

Table 7.1 - Key events that led to a change in the political environment

Date	Key Event
17 December 2014	FARC announces a unilateral ceasefire on the premise that none of their guerrilla structures can be the object of attacks by the public force
07 March 2015	The government decides to put the bombings against FARC on hold as a de-escalation gesture following FARC's unilateral ceasefire

15 April 2015	FARC attacks an Army Squad in which **10 soldiers and 1 sub-officer are killed**
17 April 2015	President Santos decides to resume the bombings against FARC as a consequence of the previous attack
21 May 2015	The Colombian Army, as a retaliation action, attacks a FARC camp in which **26 guerrilla combatants are killed**.
22 May 2015	FARC decides to suspend the unilateral ceasefire that had initiated on December 2014
June 2015	The armed conflict intensifies, and June 2015 is considered the most violent month since the peace negotiations started.

7.2.2 The changes in media performance: a sustained coverage and a lopsided narrative

As a consequence of the changes in the political environment of the negotiations in which both parties engaged in violent confrontation, the news media devoted a significant amount of coverage to report on the escalation of the conflict and considerably amplified these events. In **Figure 7.3**, which combines the frequency of the topics generated by the STM and the variable of time (see **Chapter 4.2.1** for details), it can be seen that the frequency of news coverage on the '**violent attacks' topic** increased markedly between January 2015 and July 2015, reaching its highest peak in May 2015 (the month in which 26 FARC combatants were killed in a military operation executed by the Colombian Army). This also allows us to see that the 'temporal structure' that the news media provided around these events was relatively long. As Wolfsfeld explains (2004, p.33), "when the major event is followed by a series of related episodes, media attention will continue". This is precisely what it occurred in this political wave: the attack that FARC committed against the 11 Army soldiers (the triggering event) was followed by a series of related events which

included, amongst others, the resuming of bombings by the government and an attack by the Army to a FARC camp. As seen in **Figure 7.3**, the dates of these two violent events also coincide with the highest peak of news coverage that was given to the increase on violence.

It can also be seen from **Figure 7.3** that news reports about the violent actions were considerably more prominent than other issues that were being discussed within the negotiation table: the demining process (the removal of anti-personnel mines placed by FARC during the conflict) and the creation of a truth commission, for instance. The demining process was announced on the 7 March 2015 and reached important milestones afterwards: on the 14 April 2015 the first place to start the demining pilot test was chosen; and on the 29 May 2015 the first results of the pilot test were presented before the negotiation table (OACP, 2018). On the other hand, the creation of a truth commission was announced on the 4 June 2015. Therefore, not only did the news media report on the escalation of the conflict, but it also prioritized its coverage over other more positive aspects of the negotiations.

Figure 7. 3 - Proportion of four topics throughout four years of coverage
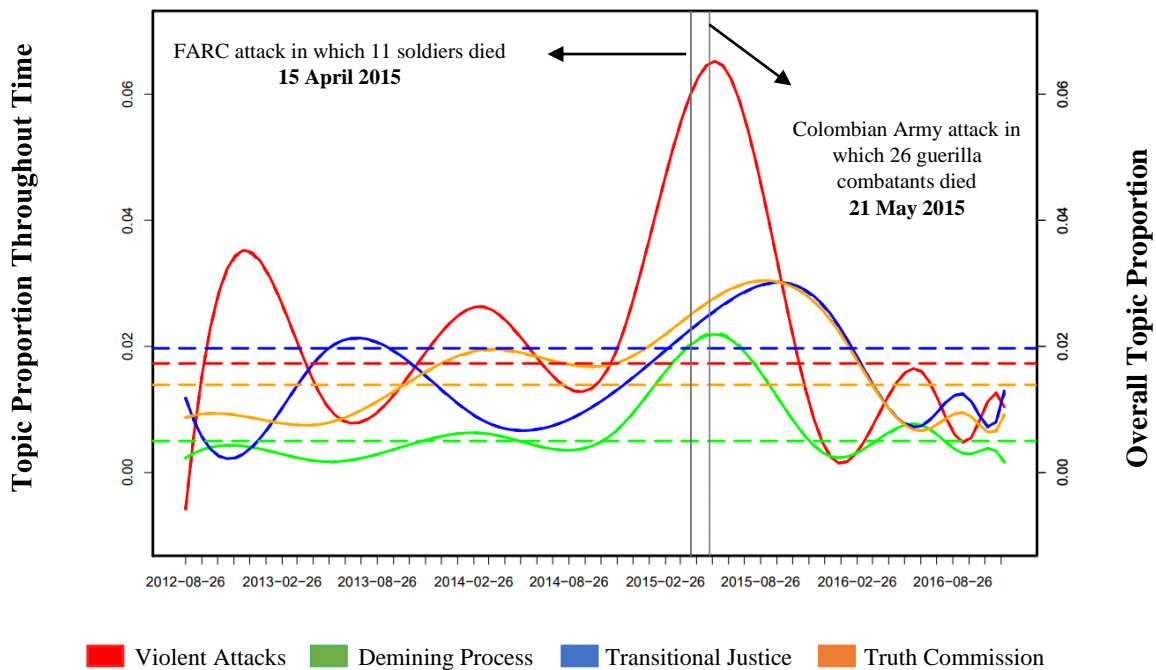
In regards the narrative structure provided by the Colombian news media during the escalation of the conflict, this encompasses two main considerations. Firstly, it represented the events as a crisis and gave a pessimistic outlook on the future of the peace dialogues. Although at the beginning of the escalation (in April 2015) the news media assessed the situation as an issue that would not break the negotiations, this perspective radicalized with the subsequent events. At the peak of the violent confrontation (when FARC decided to finish the unilateral ceasefire), the news media reports described the future of the peace process as truly uncertain. Secondly, even though the escalation of the conflict involved actions from both the Colombian government and FARC, the latter was the one that the media blamed for the loss of support from the public towards the peace process. FARC's violent actions were assessed by the news media as an attack on the trust placed by the Colombian citizens on the peace negotiations whereas the military operations executed by the government were either assessed neutrally or justified as a legitimate use of the public force. In other words, according to the news media, FARC was the political actor deemed responsible for the crisis around the escalation of the conflict.

To better illustrate the above two points, in the following **Section (7.2.2.1)** I describe how FARC's attack on the Army Squad and the Army attack on FARC's camp (see **Table 7.1** above) were reported by the news media.

7.2.2.1 The news media representations of FARC attack to an Army Squad

The following news report excerpts illustrate the crisis narrative provided by the news media when reporting on the killing of the 11 Army soldiers. The first excerpt describes the situation as 'undoubtedly' the 'most difficult moment' for the negotiations since the peace dialogues started and points out that there was going to 'surely' be a military response to the actions of FARC. This shows that the news media was *interpreting* the events and creating an expectation for the audience in which the government was supposed to take a military action against FARC as a consequence of the killings. In other words, the media was creating pressure (towards the government side) around the decision-making process of what should happen next. Likewise, the second excerpt embraces a pessimistic narrative towards the negotiations. Interestingly, it shows that the news media took on the role of speaking on behalf the public: the article interprets that the general 'feeling' in Colombia was that that the 'trust' around the dialogues had been 'ruined':

Once again, peace, or at least the political negotiations that seek to achieve it between the government and FARC, **are at the crossroads.** The seriousness of the facts demands it. However, based on the comments on both sides, it is noted that this will not be the definitive crisis. Although the unrest among the military cannot be hidden and t**here will surely be a military response to the actions of the guerrillas**, for now the peace process continues. In a country where for almost 30 years excuses have always been sought for war to prevail over dialogue, **the current one is undoubtedly the most difficult moment for the current negotiation since it began in Oslo** (Norway) in 2012 (ID 8687, *El Espectador*, 2015-04-15)

In the end, **the feeling that remains in the country is that the trust** that had been gained after more than two years of dialogues in Cuba - and that had been strengthened in various gestures from both sides seeking the de-escalation of the confrontation - **was ruined** and now the urgency is to rebuild the path, again, rowing against the current (ID 8688, *El Espectador*, 2015-04-15)

Moreover, as stated above, some news reports explicitly blamed FARC for the loss of trust on the peace negotiations. The following excerpt from a news article from *El Tiempo* clearly illustrates this situation. The article emphasizes, in multiple instances, that FARC is deemed accountable for the loss on the public opinion support towards the peace dialogues. According to the news article, FARC 'smashed the growing support' that the process had gained and they are pointed out as precisely the 'cause' of the 'distrust situation' around the negotiations. Interestingly, the news article implicitly asks FARC for 'an act of audacity' in order to reduce the consequences of the attack that is defined by the news report as a 'political clumsiness' from the guerrilla group:

As serious as the step backwards that FARC took this week in the military de-escalation of the conflict with the violent attack in Cauca, **is the setback that this event caused in the support of public opinion towards the peace process**. But in political terms, the result could be even more devastating, because **FARC smashed the growing support that the negotiations had been gaining with the unilateral truce that they declared on December 2014.** (…) The new situation of distrust of the country on the negotiations, **caused precisely by the guerrillas, demands from it an act of audacity** that reduces the impact of the political clumsiness that was attacking a group of soldiers while they were resting (ID 2627, *El Tiempo*, 2015-04-18)

In a similar fashion, and particularly in relation to the news media demanding actions from FARC after the events, another article from *El Tiempo* states that "the assassination of the soldiers broke the trend of support (…) around the process (…) which forces FARC to determine what type of actions they are willing to apply to speed up the negotiations" (ID 2620, *El Tiempo*, 2015-04-20). Broadly speaking, one could argue that this type of assessment from the news media, in this particular event, is following a correct logic: FARC executed the attack and killed the soldiers hence they are the ones to blame. However, the escalation of the conflict had many nuances that the news media seem to have overlooked when explaining the events.

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For instance, the government never ceased their military operations against FARC even when the latter put in place a unilateral ceasefire. Although the government showed some signs of trust in this regard by, for instance, suspending the bombings against FARC, the Military continued other types of operations that could have potentially interfered with the ceasefire decreed by FARC. For instance, **Figure 7.2** shown above illustrates that on April 2015 (when FARC executed the attack that killed the 11 soldiers) the Armed Forces executed a total of 51 actions against the guerrilla group. Regardless of the nature of these actions (violent or non-violent), it is realistic to think that it was difficult to maintain a ceasefire under these circumstances, particularly when FARC had announced that if one of their military structures was the object of attack they could terminate the truce. In other words, having explained these nuances and complexities would have been key for the public to better understand the events. However, the traditional news media did not provide this context when reporting on the attack but rather focused the blame on one of the political actors involved. This is even more relevant because, as it will be shown later, when the Colombian government executed the attack against FARC, the assessment from the news media followed another logic in which the actions of the military where legitimized.

Moreover, if one takes a closer look at the communications strategy from the Colombian government when the attack took place, some other power dynamics (in which the news media played a central role) emerge. A communications advisor from the government delegation acknowledges that when they were preparing the media statement to respond to FARC's attack, they realized that 'it was the moment to hand over responsibility to FARC'. She explains that the government plan in that scenario was to communicate the idea that FARC was the actor who needed to give explanations to the Colombian people for what they had done. An important part of the plan was to communicate these ideas through the news media as, according to her, making the messages public 'gave them much more weight'. Indeed, she recognizes that they constantly sent messages to FARC through the public opinion:

> You would give messages, through the public opinion, to FARC. A good example of this is when they attacked the soldiers in Cauca, that is perhaps one of the most critical moments of the peace process. **When we had to write and make a public statement about this issue, we thought that it was the moment to hand over responsibility to FARC**. The idea was that in that moment the conversation was not anymore between the country and the government delegation but rather between FARC and the public opinion.

Because **they were the ones who needed to give an account to the public that after having negotiated for two years, they did what they did [the attack]. So through the statements and the interviews we sent strong messages, not only to the public that needed them, but also to them [FARC]**. It was another way to do it. Of course, we did it privately as well, but making them [the messages] public gave them much more weight and responsibility. It was not easy, but we tried to demonstrate them that they were already becoming accountable not only before the government but also before the Colombian people

(C-GCA 5)

The above scenario allows us to see two key considerations. Firstly, that the Colombian government employed the news media to create pressure on FARC delegation at the negotiation table. Their strategy was to make them accountable before the Colombian people (and not only before the government delegation), so the media served as the 'megaphone' to amplify this view and make the public aware of what FARC had 'negatively' done to the negotiations. Secondly, that the narrative of the government delegation and the narrative provided by the news media around the events were aligned. **The news articles clearly described FARC as the political actor responsible for the loss of the negotiations' trust, which coincides with the government's approach of making FARC politically accountable**. This is even more relevant when we analyse how the media reported on the attack of the government. As stated before, contrary to what happened when FARC executed the killings, the government's attack is assessed either neutrally or as a legitimate use of the Public Force.

7.2.2.2 The news media representations of the Colombian Army attack on FARC's camp

The following news report excerpts show that the *crisis* narrative remained when reporting on the Army attack against FARC, but a more pessimistic outlook on the future of the peace negotiations was introduced. The first excerpt describes the situation as a 'critical moment' that if not handled appropriately could lead to the 'rupture' of the negotiations and to an 'unpredictable cycle of war and death'. The second excerpt, in a similar vein, claims that given the scale of the events, 'the resurgence of war is imminent' and the 'direction of the peace process is unknown'. These descriptions are relevant because as Wolsfeld explains, "a more sensationalist, emotional coverage serves to dramatically increase the social and political impact of the wave" (2004, p.65)":

FARC decreed a unilateral ceasefire, which lasted 153 days and was lifted this Friday, after 26 of its men were killed in a shocking bombardment. The truce was broken, and the peace process was wounded. What is not known is if it was mortally wounded. Although at first glance it is said that what happened is nothing more than a return to the starting point, which consisted of negotiating in the middle of combat, **the truth is that the process has reached a critical moment that if not handled with a cool head, could lead to its rupture and to a new and unpredictable cycle of war and death** (ID 1449, *Semana*, 2015-05-23).

The bombing (…) in which 26 guerrillas (…) died, and the subsequent announcement by FARC to suspend the unilateral cessation of hostilities, declared since last December, present deep dilemmas for the peace process. **The resurgence of the war is imminent, the consequences for the pace and the discussions at the negotiating table are unpredictable**. **The truth is that today the direction of the peace process is unknown**, especially when it has persistently been said that the rule is to negotiate in the midst of confrontation (ID 8555, *El Espectador*, 2015-05-22).

Different to the killings of the 11 soldiers, however, in this event the news media did not deem the government accountable for a possible loss on public support towards the peace process. In fact, an editorial from *El Tiempo* on the 23 May 2015 (two days after the attack) used multiple linguistic resources to legitimize the government military operation. Firstly, it framed the government attack within the 'constitutional duty of the Public Force to undertake' such actions. Secondly, as a form to excuse the military action, the editorial mentions that the camp that was bombarded by the military was 'one of the most committed to cocaine trafficking'. In other words, it was a legitimate action as the attack took place in a zone where FARC was breaking the law. Moreover, the article also shows that the news media kept demanding actions (only) from FARC to overcome the crisis (even though the attack was executed by the Armed Forces). Interestingly, the editorial adds at the end a comment from the Chief Negotiator from the government delegation, Humberto de la Calle, who claims that the "FARC's problem, more than with the Colombian state, is with the people". As it was explained before, the government communications strategy was to hand over responsibility to FARC, and the news media clearly contributed to amplify this narrative:

Beyond the considerations that can be made 1) about the fact that the FARC were inferior to their commitment around the ceasefire, 2) about **the constitutional duty of the Public Force to undertake actions like the one last Thursday in Cauca against a FARC camp - one of the most committed to cocaine trafficking** - , 3) or regarding the weakness of a unilateral silencing of rifles, it will always be bad news to know that progress on the de-escalation path has been set back, reaching the starting point. Therefore, in the face of the difficult situation that is looming today (…) **there is nothing left but to ask FARC for demonstrations that allow to believe that they are willing to build an agreement that respects the dignity of the victims**.

The key point here is that, ultimately (…) it will be the Colombian society which will have the last word regarding whether the agreements that are reached are legit and viable. Then, **it is convenient to remember what Humberto de la Calle said recently: today, the problem of FARC, more than with the Colombian State, is with the people**

(ID 5816, *El Tiempo*, 2015-05-23)

7.2.3 The impact on the political environment: public opinion worsened

After the government's attack on FARC's camp in which 26 combatants were killed, the guerrilla group decided to end the unilateral ceasefire. In the weeks following this decision, FARC considerably increased the attacks against infrastructure and the civilian population. In fact, according to CERAC (2015), whereas in May 2015 FARC executed a total of 32 violent attacks, in June 2015 that number increased to 80 (see **Figure 7.2** above). The news reports about these events maintained the crisis narrative as it can be seen by the following article from *Semana* when referring to the events: "Eight terrorist attacks in less than 24 hours, the cruelty against the electrical and oil infrastructure **(…) not only generated rejection and indignation but have also put the future of the peace process in check**" (ID 14533, *Semana,* 2015-06-12).

Moreover, the news media kept reinforcing the messaging that FARC needed to be accountable before the Colombian people for their actions by prioritizing the use of sources from the government who consistently communicated this narrative. For instance, one article from *El Espectador* (2015a) highlights a quote from the Minister of Defense who declared that "'**these people [FARC] are discrediting the important peace efforts** that have been achieved up to now'" and described FARC leaders as having a "'donkey [dumb] mentality'" for committing such attacks (ID 8474, *El Espectador,* 2015-06-11). In a similar vein, another article quotes the Colombian Army Commander in Chief who pointed out that "'FARC not only attack the infrastructure and the civilian population **but also affects the trust of the Colombian people in the peace process'**". The Commander in Chief adds that FARC attacks were "the responses that the Colombian people receive to the trust they have placed [on the negotiations]" (ID 8512, *El Espectador,* 2015-06-03). Again, the Colombian government consistently attributed the political responsibility of the events to FARC, and the news media (also continuously and consistently) contributed to amplify this narrative.

As a consequence of the escalation of the conflict and coinciding with the amplification of these events by the news media, the public support towards the peace process decreased considerably. In June 2015 (right at the peak of the political wave), the opinion polls registered one of the lowest levels of support from the public towards the peace negotiations. For instance, **Figure 7.4** (FIP, 2016) which combines data from four different pollsters, shows either the support or approval of citizens around the decision to initiate a peace process with FARC.[20] Two different polls from Gallup (orange and blue lines) illustrate that the support towards the dialogues dropped from more than 70% in March 2015 to less than 55% in June 2015. Similarly, the Datexco poll (gray line) shows that the support decreased by 10% (from 65% to 55%) between March 2015 and July 2015.

Figure 7.4 - Opinion polls results on the public support towards the peace process
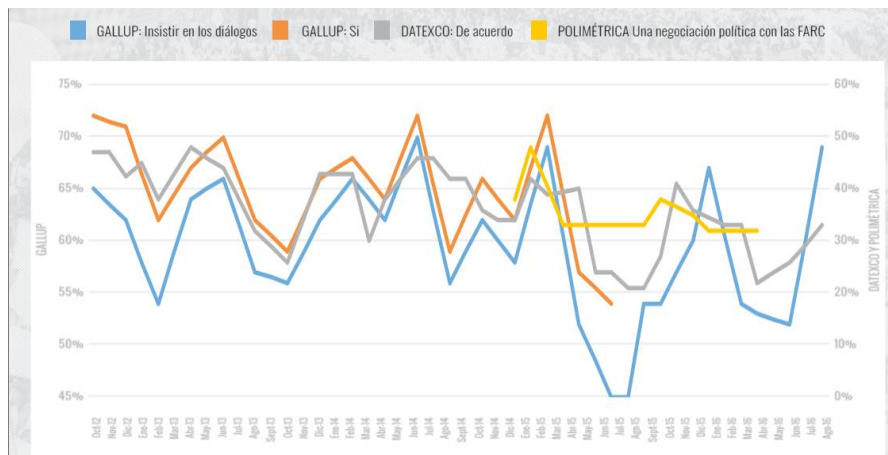
■ Gallup: Yes
■ Gallup: To insist on the dialogues
■ Datexco: I agree that the dialogues are the best way to end the conflict with FARC
■ Polimétrica: A political negotiation is the best way to end the conflict with FARC

Likewise, **Figure 7.5** (FIP, 2016) shows the responses to the question: 'Do you believe that FARC has legitimate intentions to reach a peace agreement?' As it happened with the support towards the peace process, the trust on FARC was also affected on June 2015 since 80% of the

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[20] Since the data comes from different institutions, the questions that were asked to the respondents also varied (although all of them inquired about the support towards the negotiations). Hence, **Figure 7.4** displays the variation in the responses of those who support the process and consider that the dialogues were the best way to solve the conflict with FARC.

respondents considered that FARC did not have legitimate intentions to reach a peace agreement with the Colombian government.

Figure 7. 5 - People's opinion on FARC intentions to reach a peace agreement

No, it does not have legitimate intentions
Yes, it has legitimate intentions
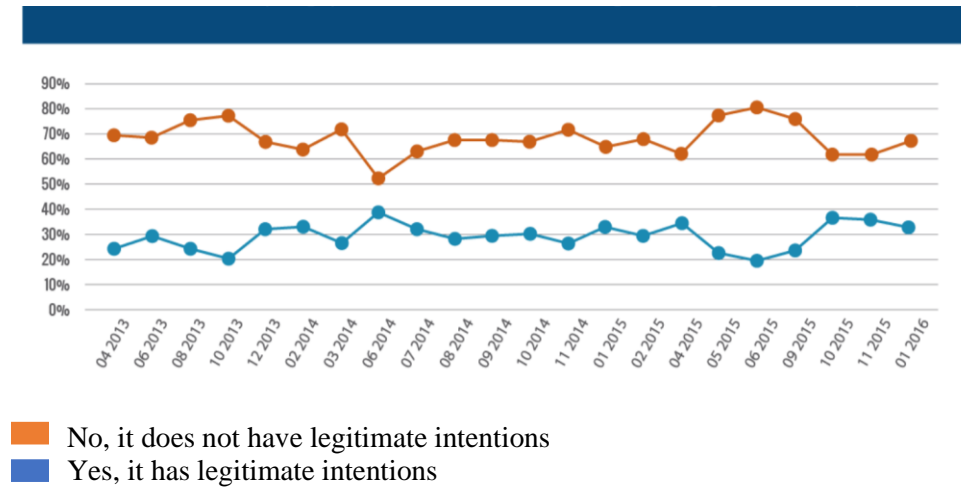
Consequently, and given the lack of trust around the peace negotiations, the Colombian government decided, for the very first time since the peace process had started, to concede an interview with its Chief Negotiator, Humberto de la Calle. As explained by one of the communications executives of the government delegation, this marked a change in the government's communication strategy approach that until then had remained very confidential: "the day when we had a turnaround to start bringing much more specific information to the [public] debate was when De la Calle gave the first interview (…) this was the moment when we opened up to the news media" (C-CE 1). A testimony from a senior communications advisor of the government delegation better explains the process of how they planned the interview, the intention behind this tactic and the results they achieved after conducting it.

She explains that the government delegation decided to give the interview to a well-known Colombian journalist (Juan Gossaín) who had an opinion column in *El Tiempo.* However, she points out that when the communications team reached out to him, they explained that the interview was not exclusive for *El Tiempo.* "This is an interview for you, the journalist 'Juan Gossaín'; you can share it wherever you want but you cannot edit it, you give back the text to us as it is and we will distribute it so all the media can have access to it", she describes. This situation

demonstrates, amongst other things, that the government delegation remained very much in control and did not lose their autonomy even when they resorted to the news media in scenarios where the latter was supposed to 'lead the way'. More specifically, the government delegation was the one defining the rules of *how* the interview needed to be both conducted and distributed. Interestingly, the advisor acknowledges that this situation created some discomfort among the journalists (whom she refers to as 'colleagues') as they had attempted to have an interview with the government delegation for a long period of time, and the sole media interview was handled in such a way that they could only replicate the content.

In terms of the intentions and the results of their 'move', the senior communicator advisor points out that the interview was the 'way out' of the critical moment that the peace negotiations were experiencing. The advisor acknowledges that the interview was successful and 'changed the dynamic of the table' as it was an effective way to deliver a strong message: that the government could finish the negotiations at any time. She recalls that the interview was published by 'all the media outlets' in Colombia and she highlights that given that it was the first time that the government made such remarks in a public fashion, that helped them to put more pressure on FARC delegation.

> We were at a very critical moment in the negotiation, very critical. We were not moving forward, we had reached a dead end (…) and I must confess that that [the interview] was the way to convey the message. De la Calle said [in the interview] (…) 'the day will come when FARC will not find us at the table'. And that was key, **that changed the dynamic of the table, that interview was replicated by all media outlets** (…) **there was clearly an intention behind, and it was that we had to send a very powerful message.**
>
> **And yes, it was effective (...) FARC understood that it was serious**, that it was not a threat. That for the first time we were notifying the country that the process could end. **And it was the first time in three years that that was said publicly, and that we publicly put them on the ropes. So when we returned to Havana**, obviously there were frictions at the beginning, but **the conversations moved forward**.

 (C-GSCA 4)

This interview was not a separate action from the government's negotiation strategy. As explained below by a negotiator from the government delegation, there was an implicit articulation between his interventions at the table and the messages that were sent out to the public through the news media. In other words, the government would use the media to deliver messages that then

would be reinforced during the negotiations' meetings with the FARC delegation. Moreover, he points out that the objective of that particular interview was twofold: to deliver the strong message to FARC but also to persuade the citizenry that the government was the most concerned about the critical situation of the negotiations as negative opinions around the peace dialogues had increased:

> **There was a certain coordination, tacitly at least, between the interview and these attitudes of mine at the table that would converge in the same direction**. But the interview, in addition to seeking to achieve the desire result with FARC (…) it was also collaterally a message to the public because it was a moment when (…) a cascade of opinions of impatience and delegitimization of the process had vehemently emerged. So it had also, collaterally, an intention towards the public because we explained that we were the first ones concerned with the necessity to achieve concrete accords (P-GN 3).

Only three days after the interview was distributed to all Colombian media outlets, on the 8 July 2015, FARC's Chief Negotiator announced another unilateral ceasefire that would start on the 20 July 2015. Four days after this announcement, the Colombian government and FARC also declared that they had come to an agreement to start de-escalating the conflict and on the 25 July 2015 President Santos suspended, once again, the bombings against FARC. Interestingly, then, the crisis was surmounted and led to a positive outcome: both parties engaged in dialogues that brought agreement to start seriously de-escalating the conflict.

Consequently, I illustrated in this **Section (7.2)** that the news media played a significant role in this outcome by creating pressure on both delegations to start considering the relevance of implementing a more comprehensive and verifiable truce and ceasefire. The pressure, nonetheless, worked in different ways for each of the delegations. On the government side, the negative aspect of the news coverage was something they could not afford. They needed the support of the citizenry and the high volume of negative news was not contributing to this purpose. They realized that the media was going to keep giving negative accounts of the negotiations if the peace process continued with the logic of negotiating amidst the conflict. In the long run, it was something that could affect not only the legitimacy of the peace process but also its success.

On the other hand, the fact that the media aligned with the government's narrative during the crisis, that of blaming FARC for the loss on trust around the negotiations, also contributed to create pressure on the FARC delegation. This was more evident when the government delegation

employed a more aggressive communications approach that used the news media as a mean to threaten FARC about the possibility of putting an end to the peace dialogues. The empirical data presented in this section suggests that this moved the negotiations forward when they had been stalled for some time.

7.3 Concluding Remarks

In this **Chapter (7)** I examined some of the key aspects of the communication strategy of the government delegation during the peace negotiations. Taking together the findings of **Section (7.1)** and **Section (7.2)**, I put forward two key arguments that have important implications for academic debates around the mediatization of politics. Firstly, I argued that the government delegation was more inclined to resort to the news media when either the public opinion towards the negotiations deteriorated or the legitimacy of the peace process was threatened. Crisis scenarios, such as the escalation of the conflict discussed in **Section (7.2)**, were clear examples of the latter, but moments when great media attention was given to FARC also proved to be instances of a more mediatized environment for the government as they perceived that the guerrilla group was negatively affecting the public perception around the peace process. This illustrates how the dependence of the peace process on public support highly conditioned the government delegation to appeal to the news media, demonstrating that, as Strömbäck and Esser (2014b, p.20) explain, political institutions that have a greater need of public support are more likely to be mediatized.

Nonetheless, the above also suggests that the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013) seems not to have led the way but became more of an *intervention* actor when the negotiations experienced some issues. For instance, in **Section (7.2)** I explained that the Colombian news media contributed to worsen the political atmosphere of the peace process during the escalation of the conflict by providing negative and pessimistic outlooks of the events which, in turn, negatively affected the public perception towards the negotiations. In other words, once the political environment of the negotiations shifted (negatively), the news media *intervened* by both amplifying and inflating the crisis. These findings seem to be in line with the 'politics-media-politics' cycle proposed by Wolfsfeld (2004, p.31) in which he argues that "politics almost always comes first" or with the 'policy-interaction' model proposed by Robinson (2000, p.614) in which the media is able to influence on policy when "there exists (…) policy uncertainty".

Interestingly, even in circumstances in which the Colombian government appealed to the news media, they remained very much in control of the narrative and did not lose their autonomy. The first public interview of the government delegation, that I discussed in **Section (7.2),** is a clear instance of this as the government managed to impose the rules during a (media) moment in which

the news media was supposed to 'lead the way'. Moreover, since the news media adopted an 'elite-driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) when reporting on the negotiations, the government felt more comfortable communicating, even during crisis scenarios, as the traditional media tended to be aligned with both their strategy and goals. Given this, the government managed to position in the news agenda that FARC was politically responsible for either the worsened climate of opinion or some of the negative outcomes of the political waves.

All the above is not to say, however, that the 'news media logic' did not have any impact on the government delegation during the peace negotiations. On the contrary, the news media were at the centre of the government's negotiation strategy as they *perceived* that it was a critical actor. This seems to be in line with Donges and Jarren's (2014, pp.188-189) institutional approach to mediatization, that I introduce in **Chapter (2.2)**, in which they define mediatization as a reaction of political organizations, triggered by the perception of the media and mediated communication as important in their environment. Given that the government delegation attributed the news media with great relevance for their success, they had a dedicated communications team that *structured* a series of daily media management activities that also involved the routines of negotiators. However, these activities were *strategically* and *consciously* adapted by the government delegation, demonstrating that this was more of a 'self-mediatization' process (Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski, 2010; Esser, 2013). Consequently, the second major argument I put forward from this **Chapter (7)** is that the Colombian news media, instead of fully conditioning the government's delegation behaviour at the negotiation table, *disrupted* their ways of working.

Chapter 8: The media strategies of the 'challengers' of the peace negotiations

This **Chapter (8)** examines the communications strategies employed by the actors that Wolfsfeld (1997) refers to as the 'challengers' (those not in power): the FARC delegation, who were the counterpart of the government delegation at the negation table, and the Democratic Center, the political party who fiercely opposed the peace dialogues. To do so, I divide the chapter in four sections. **In Section (8.1)** I explain that FARC arrived at the peace process with a very antagonistic outlook towards the traditional news media. According to the guerrilla group, the Colombian media was an 'enemy' that had misleadingly and negatively portrayed them during the conflict, contributing to create a distorted version of the guerrilla struggle. Likewise, FARC perceived that journalists consistently constructed news about them resorting to sensationalist lenses during the negotiations, which also negatively affected the trust of the guerrilla group toward the media. Consequently, their relationships with journalists, particularly at the beginning of the negotiations, were rather difficult.

Nonetheless, I argue in **Section (8.1)** that the FARC delegation had a significant evolution in its media relationship management as the peace process progressed. A key aspect that triggered this shift was the frequent interactions with journalists in Havana (Cuba) as these encounters allowed the guerrilla group to be aware of the nuances within news media organizations. For instance, FARC members started to be aware that a journalist who was in favour of the success of the peace process could also work for a media outlet that was either skeptical or highly critical of the negotiations. Likewise, since the delegation started to have regular access to the news content about the peace negotiations, they also realized that not every single journalistic piece was misleadingly reporting about them. Significantly, I also explain in **Section (8.1)** that neither FARC's antagonistic view towards the media nor the sensationalist type of news coverage prevented the guerrilla group from perceiving the news media as a key actor in helping them to achieve their goals.

In **Section (8.2),** to further illustrate FARC's media management evolution, I introduce the 'Insurgent Bulletin' [Informativo Insurgnte], a television newscast that the FARC delegation designed and produced in Havana (Cuba) during the peace negotiations. Through describing this initiative and its changes during the peace process, I highlight two important considerations for my study. Firstly, I argue that FARC resorted to the 'news media logic', particularly to the commercial and the technological aspects of it (Esser, 2013), to produce the news bulletin which became a key strategy to keep their combatants in the jungle informed. To better exemplify how some of the commercial aspects permeated the production of the bulletin, I describe the way in which the FARC delegation broadcasted the release of Army General Ruben Alzate who they kept captive for two weeks (see **Chapter 5.2.2** for details). Secondly, I explain that the aspirations of FARC to transitioning to their new political stage prompted a transformation in the bulletin initiative: they changed its name to 'New Colombian News' and the slogan became 'reporting for peace' (instead of the older and much more aggressive version of 'breaking the media siege'). This transformational process illustrates, amongst other things, the influence of the news media in FARC's own processes of communication and consolidation as a (legitimate) political actor.

In **Section (8.3)** I turn to examine the communication strategy employed by the Democratic Center during the peace negotiations. I argue that the opposition party was highly aware of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013), particularly the interest of the news media in controversial stories and 'personalization' (Van Aelst et al., 2012). Given this awareness, and the perception that the national news outlets were very supportive of the negotiations, they found in regional media outlets and social media networks the best alternative to disseminate their political viewpoints. In the case of the former, testimonies from varied senators of the party suggest they were well-aware that their political perspectives (very controversial and fiercely opposed to the negotiations) were attractive to the regional media as they gave them 'more audience'. In the case of the latter, they used and exploited the image of their party leader, former President of Colombia Álvaro Uribe, to try to influence the news agenda as they were conscious about his highly mediatic value.

To further illustrate how the opposition party adopted some of the 'news media logic', I introduce in **Section (8.4)** a campaign from the Democratic Center that they called 'Civil Resistance Process'. This initiative, which mainly consisted of calling for marches around the

country against the negotiations and summoning citizens to the streets to collect signatures to show their discontent with the peace deal, was launched a few months prior to the peace plebiscite to convince the citizenry to oppose the peace agreement. I argue that it was a campaign that highly focused on appealing to the commercial aspects of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013), particularly to news values such as drama, negativity and conflict, to generate news coverage. The very name of the campaign - 'Civil Resistance' - resorted to a confrontational type of narrative that it was indeed interpreted and described as 'controversial' by the Colombian news media. As I explain in more detail in the concluding remarks **(Section 8.5)**, the findings around this initiative are in line with research that has identified the compatibility between a populist communication style and 'media logic' (Mazzoleni, 2003; Mazzoleni, 2014; Esser et al., 2018; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019).

In addition to illustrating the opposition party's knowledge and awareness of the news media operation, **Section (8.3)** and **Section (8.4)** also serve to show that the Democratic Center had a well-coordinated media management strategy. Multiple journalists acknowledge that their communications work was very organized and that the party did an excellent job at being consistent - repetitive - with their messaging. Consistency was indeed a pivotal element in their communications strategy as members of the party themselves describe their narrative as coherent, convincing, and most importantly recurring (which can also be noted in the execution of the 'Civil Resistance' Campaign). Overall, these two sections illustrate the media savvy skills from the Democratic Center that allowed them to navigate a Colombian news media that, broadly speaking, were in favour of the peace negotiations.

8.1 Working with the 'enemy': employing the news media as a megaphone

At the start of the peace negotiations, FARC had a very antagonistic perspective around the traditional news media. One of FARC's communications advisors recalls that a journalist, funded by a private media organization - *RCN Television* - and who was making a documentary about the peace negotiations, approached them to assess the possibility of getting access to the delegation. He explained to me that even though she tried for almost two years to convince the delegation to give her access, FARC denied it because they were very skeptical about the type of content that could be produced by a private media outlet. According to the advisor, the journalist was not completely aware about the negative perception of FARC towards the traditional media: "she did not comprehend the distance we kept with these types of media outlets that 'hit us' so hard during the war". Moreover, he explains that it was not only about the content of the documentary itself but also about the "prejudice of the previous years of the conflict in which the media played a key part" (C-FCA 6).

This prejudice came mainly from how FARC perceived that the Colombian news media had represented them (and guerrilla groups in general) during the war. The communication advisor, besides claiming that the media was an integral part of the 'war strategy', hinting to a mediatized conflict (Cottle, 2006), also points out that the news media played a significant part in 'dehumanizing' the guerrilla members and contributing to make the term 'guerrilla' associated with only negative labels such as 'drug traffickers' and 'terrorists'. To emphasize how negative he believes the news media portrayed the guerrilla, he indicates that it would be better to be called a 'rapist' rather than a 'guerrilla member':

> During the war, **the media played a key role in dehumanizing the guerrilla and the insurgence**. **The term, the symbol of guerrilla in Colombia is terrible. 'Guerrilla combatant? How scary! I prefer they call me rapist, right?'** [It is] different to the concept of guerrilla in the seventies and the eighties. That was a work [of the media] of many years focused on destroying the integrity and the struggle of the guerrilla groups. 'They are simply drug traffickers, terrorists, they do not have any political argument'[the media would say]. **So the news media has played, unquestionably, a key role in the war, particularly in stigmatizing and possibly in fuelling the war**. So I believe that the media themselves are as important as the army (…) logically they were not a separate piece, they were also part of the war strategy **(C-FCA 6)**.

These prejudices towards the news media were indeed identified by journalists who reported on the peace dialogues. A senior political reporter highlights that FARC arrived to the negotiations with multiple 'prejudices' around the Colombian media. Since FARC had historically assessed the media as part of their enemy, she explains that "they (…) believed that any type of report, interview, or approach to them was to disqualify them and not to listen to them, to question and judge them instead of letting them expose their ideas" (J-SPR 7). In line with this, and given the distrust on the news media, a senior editor points out that "FARC were very selective in terms of who they would talk to and what they would tell them". He acknowledges that even though he thinks FARC did not particularly perceive his media outlet to be an 'anti-FARC' type of media, there was still an initial barrier to overcome as "they would identify the big media outlets in Colombia as the media of the 'establishment' as they referred to them" (J-SE 10, Elite Newspaper).

The selectiveness from FARC towards the news media can be better exemplified in the following testimony from a political editor who worked for two different media outlets during the peace negotiations. She acknowledges that she feels it was easier to get access to the FARC delegation when she was working for *Television News* than when she worked for *Radio News*;[21] she provides two explanations for FARC's more friendly attitude towards the television outlet. Firstly, the media outlet had done some field work during the war that allowed FARC to get to know some of their reporters; the guerrilla group was familiar with their journalistic work and valued the fact that they reported from 'their territories'. Secondly, the political editor explains that FARC started to be more open when they had the opportunity to watch the reports produced by *Television News,* implying that the delegation felt comfortable with the news stories constructed by this television media outlet. Nonetheless, and as the previous senior editor also pointed out above, this journalist highlights that it was still difficult to build a relationship with FARC due to them perceiving the media as their enemy:

> I feel my media outlet was a little bit more at an advantage because they have always seen *Television News* as a news program different to others, because they [FARC] had a lot of aversion to, for example *RCN, Caracol,* but particularly *RCN*. I know it was very difficult for them. **But when I said 'I work for *Television News*', it was easier than when I said 'I work for *Radio News*'; I experienced that change [in their attitude].** Why? Because for them [FARC] *Television News* had done some reports in the field before the negotiations started. So it was a bit different, **but still meant hard work for us because they told us 'the news media for us have always been**

our enemy and they have never listened to our version, they have always given the official version from the government'.

At first they would not tell anything, **but little by little they started to trust as the negotiations progressed and particularly as they had the chance to watch the reports, the angles of the reports**. They have a team that monitors absolutely everything you talk about them, so based on that they would decide whether to give you a long or exclusive interview. So at the end, when trust was already gained, they looked for us, they told us things (J-PE 4, TV and Radio).

Therefore, it is clear that particularly at the beginning of the peace negotiations, the relationship between journalists and FARC delegation was rather complicated. On the one hand, as it has been explained hitherto, FARC perceived the traditional news media as an enemy that had both misleadingly and negatively portrayed them during the conflict. On the other hand, FARC also perceived that the attitude from journalists at the start of the peace dialogues was 'aggressive'. A communications advisor who joined the FARC delegation since the commencement of the negotiations acknowledges that "particularly at the beginning (…) they [journalists] were very aggressive, the questions they would ask were offensive (…) there was a kind of persecution against the delegation". He explains that at the start of the peace talks some sensationalists news stories (e.g. 'FARC members were drinking beer at a pub') around them went viral in Colombia. He adds that "journalists were in the streets finding out what we were doing **and everything was controversial** (…) **they were not going to Havana to seek for information but rather to find a way to discredit us as much as they could** (C-FCA 6)**.

Interestingly, a communications executive from the government delegation also highlights this attitude from journalists towards the FARC delegation. She points out that journalists were particularly interested in the social life of FARC negotiators in Havana: "they [journalists] would say that they [FARC members] were on holidays in Havana, that they were having a ride in a yacht, and those sort of things that harmed the credibility of the negotiations" (C-GCE 1). Therefore, it would be realistic to argue that the emphasis on the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' that journalists embraced - very often - when reporting on the peace negotiations could have contributed to reinforce FARC's outlook that the traditional news media's main goal was to discredit them. However, as the following testimony shows, the antagonistic view of FARC around the traditional news media, worsened by the sensationalist type of news coverage during the peace

negotiations, was not an obstacle for them to acknowledge that they still *needed* the media to be able to reach a wider audience with their message:

> Well, logically, our distrust towards *Caracol* and *RCN* media outlets was absolute until the end of the peace dialogues. **What we tried to do was to give information to media outlets such *Caracol* and *RCN* in order for us to get the greatest coverage because it is undeniable that they have the largest number of viewers in Colombia. So we gave them very concrete stuff**. 'We need everyone to know about this specific thing', so **we would use them to give them an exclusive interview to spread that specific message.** We would try to avoid, however, because they did it, that the publication would end up being about Timochenko's [FARC Chief Officer] Nike shoes **(C-FCA 6).**

The excerpt above from FARC's communications advisor highlights two important elements worth discussing. Firstly, the testimony shows that FARC had no other choice but to also appeal to even the media outlets that they highly distrusted as these were 'undeniably' the media with the highest audience rates. Therefore, although the communications advisor emphasizes that the issue of trust persisted until the end of the negotiations, they aimed to approach these type of media in very specific ways to spread their message. One of these approaches consisted of giving the media exclusive interviews to provide them with 'very concrete stuff' and 'use them' to amplifying their narrative. However, and this is the second element worth discussing, it appears that FARC did not have much influence over the message produced by the news media as there were some commercial logics that prevailed in the construction of the news stories. As stated by the testimony, in some instances the news media prioritized the sensationalist side of the story (e.g. a guerrilla member wearing an American brand) and not on the message that FARC delegation wanted to communicate.

The latter can be clearly seen when the communication advisor expands a bit more on this issue. He claims that during the interviews with members of the FARC Secretariat [Leadership Team] the media played a complicated role as they felt that the discussion would suddenly deviate to topics such as 'why is he [FARC Commander] wearing a New York cap?'. "The whole issue was always to judge us that if we are left-wing oriented and communists, we need to be poor and look as such", he adds. Consequently, he explains that after some of the interviews they "would 'crossed fingers' to see what was going to be the publication" and he also admits that in those sort of moments they "were at the mercy of the news media" (C-FCA 6). Acknowledging this is a sign

that FARC delegation struggled controlling the media message, although the communications advisor also describes that they employed some strategies to cope with this situation and try to be more in control.

He points out that in some instances, instead of giving interviews, they would record an audio or record on video one of FARC's leaders to distribute these materials exclusively to a media outlet. With this type of strategies, the advisor explains, "there was no way to ask them [FARC leaders] counter questions, so that is how we made sure that [the news story] was specifically about this or that". Additionally, once the video or the audio was released by the media outlet, he explains that "we would distribute the original material elsewhere so people would know where the material was coming from" (C-FCA 6). This kind of strategy (rooted in FARC distrust) to cope with some of the news media logic was also identified by the journalists who reported on the negotiations. For instance, a political reporter highlights that whenever an interview was done with FARC, their communications team was always there to have their own records of the interview. He points out that they did it at the beginning of the peace dialogues "as a back-up or 'plan B' because they were very afraid that their words were going to be edited or manipulated" (J-PR 2, Radio and TV).

Nonetheless, it is important to mention that, as seen by the excerpt above and the majority of the testimonies shown in this section, there seems to be an emphasis that this complicated relationship between the media and FARC delegation was much stronger at the beginning of the peace negotiation. There is indeed an element of 'evolution' highlighted by some journalists who acknowledge that as the negotiations progressed, FARC allowed more contact with the news media. For instance, a senior editor claims that "one of the most interesting aspects of the peace process was FARC's evolution; they evolved a lot in terms of how they related to the media" (J-SE 10, Elite Newspaper). He explains that they became much more flexible in terms of allowing the media to get access to their delegation, even though they knew that some of the media outlets would be hostile with them. The editor also adds that even aspects that FARC were completely against at the beginning of the peace process, such as having meetings with media Directors, they allowed them to happen as the negotiations progressed.

Another element that allows us to see the evolution on the relationship is a testimony from a different FARC's communications advisor who joined FARC delegation in the latest stages of the peace negotiations (at the beginning of 2016). When asked to describe his relationship with the news media, his answer considerably differs from his colleague (see C-FCA 6 above) who joined at the very beginning of the peace dialogues. While the latter referred to journalists as very 'aggressive' and use the word 'complicated' to define the relationship with them, the former framed his relationship with journalists as a 'very nice companionship':

> I can tell you, to be very specific, that those conversations and those relationships were always of a fraternity and a very nice companionship. For instance, I made many personal friends there [in Havana], just like other of my comrades. I made many journalists friends who I still talk with today (C-FCA 7).

There seems to be, then, two aspects that conditioned the change in those relationships. The first one is described by a political reporter who explains that FARC evolved when they realized they were always appearing in the news coverage. The reporter points out that they started to say "'well, these people [journalists] are only constructing news, they are not passing judgment on us, they are not accusing us of anything'" (J-PR 2, Radio/TV), implying that this allowed FARC to have a different approach towards the news media as his antagonistic perspective was being indirectly challenged: the news media was not exclusively there to discredit them. The second aspect is that as the peace negotiation progressed, the FARC delegation had more time to interact with journalists. These interactions allowed them to be more aware of the nuances within news media organizations. For example, they were aware that there can be inconsistencies between the editorial approach of a media outlet and the personal and political beliefs of their journalists, as the following testimony from the FARC communication advisor who joined the negotiations in the latest stages showcases:

> Being in Havana allowed me to talk to journalists who worked for *Caracol*, journalists who worked for *RCN* (…) **so one realizes that although the media**, let's call them mass media, those that belong to economic corporations, **although they have a very clear editorial line, the people who work for them sometimes distance themselves from that perspective**. They work there because the need the job, they need a salary, they see the opportunity to build a name/reputation [as journalists] within that media. But evidently they also have their critical perspectives (…) in conversations with them I could notice their interest and desire (…) that we could sign the agreement (C-FCA 7).

Moreover, and in line with the excerpt above, FARC's communications advisor points out that one of the most interesting learnings from the negotiations was to realize that "we are all humans, and journalists, despite they work for *Caracol TV* and *RCN TV* and have a 'script' (which they may or may not agree), they are [also] employees". That realization, as stated above, improved the relationship with journalists in Havana. In fact, the advisor acknowledges that "**once we became more friends, they [journalists] would explain us how the communications process worked and we would later put it into practice**". One of the examples that best illustrates how FARC put into practice what they learned from their interactions with journalists, and more broadly with their frequent contact with the news media, it is the news bulletin that they designed and executed two years after the negotiations had started and that they called 'Insurgent Bulletin' [Informativo Insurgente]. In the following **Section (8.2)** I discuss how the FARC delegation created this bulletin and how their understanding of the news media and the interactions with journalists influenced this process.

8.2 The Insurgent Bulletin: adopting the 'news media logic'

The 'Insurgent Bulletin' embraced the format of a traditional television newscast (as it can be seen in **Figure 8.1**). The production of the bulletin, including its aesthetics and duration, evolved as time passed by. "At first it was broadcast [online] every three days, then it happened at the end of each cycle of the conversations; since March [2015] it began to be broadcast in Spanish on Sunday and a version with English subtitles every Monday" (Verdad Abierta, 2015). In terms of the content, Fattal (2017, p.3839) explains that it fluctuated between:

> Updates from the negotiation table, spin on front-page news in Colombia, stories that narrate the group's history, segments decrying misinformation by corporate media, a social media that highlighted favourable tweets, and an unabashedly politicized sport section

Figure 8.1 - 'Insurgent Bulletin' news anchor format

*Anchors of the Newscast (*Verdad Abierta, 2015*)*

In words of a communication advisor from FARC, the goal of the news bulletin was to "inform the national and international community (…) about the development of the [peace dialogues], what was being accorded and what not - that was the key objective" (C-FCA 6). The advisor highlights, however, that the 'Insurgent Bulletin' was also a "way to communicate particularly with the guerrilla [members] and explain what was happening at the [negotiation] table". This aspect of communicating more directly with members of the guerrilla that were still in the jungles of Colombia was indeed pivotal since the FARC delegation believed that the

Colombian government was deliberately creating doubts among FARC's combatants. As the communication advisor puts it: "[the government delegation] took advantage of the blockade of Cuba [internet limitations] and of the lack of dynamism in our communications to start creating doubts and dissatisfactions in the field; they would say we were giving up everything and betraying our people" (C-FCA 6).

Based on the testimony above, the news bulletin can be understood as a strategy that FARC employed to, amongst other things, keep their combatants' trust in both the FARC delegation and the peace dialogues. In other words, the FARC delegation needed to expose their fighters to alternative waves of information in relation to the negotiations, particularly in relation to that coming from the traditional news media. To put it into FARC's own words and using the slogan of the 'Insurgent Bulletin', they wanted to **'break the media siege'** which, according to the communications advisor, "[the government] had set up (…) as a way of imposing things [negotiating positions] on the [negotiation] table" (C-FCA 6). The following excerpt not only describes the interesting process of how FARC made the newscast available to their combatants in the jungle, it also highlights some of the features they believed were important to create engagement with its internal 'stakeholder':

> It would be uploaded to the [social] networks. We would tell people to download it online and save it (…) on usb devices so they could play [the newscast] in the [guerrilla] camps. Logically it would have a delay of one month, two months, because we were at war in Colombia. But **it was the only way to explain [the peace negotiation] more briefly but also 'putting a human face' [being accountable] to it**. **Not only a 40-pages long press release that nobody reads, but a bit more dynamic, very alike to the format of the newscast** (C-FCA 6)**.**

Accountability was one of the relevant features of the news bulletin when communicating with FARC members outside Havana, Cuba. As described by the excerpt above, 'putting on a human face' when explaining the developments of the peace negotiations was important to create engagement with their internal audience, something that a tedious long press release could not achieve. Interestingly, the testimony also highlights that the news program aimed to be a more dynamic way to inform guerrilla combatants about the peace dialogues; FARC found in news media logic, particularly its technological aspect (the format of the traditional television newscast), a good fit to fulfil this purpose.

In this regard, in an interview conducted by Fattal (2017, p.3839), Sergio Marín, FARC's Director of 'Distribution and Propaganda' points out that they decided to follow the classic format of the newscast in Colombia, which consists of two presenters, one male and one female (as seen in **Figure 8.1** above), since they had "gotten used to turning on the news and seeing two presenters". Marín adds that even though it would be hard to find this type of format in CNN, BBC or Russia Today, it is still the format that Colombian news employ so it was culturally important to embrace that same style. These comments allow us to see that the adoption of this media format was a conscious process in which even other international types of media with different formats and styles were also taken into consideration. However, to better understand how FARC members embraced some of the news media logic in the production of the news bulletin, we can take a closer look at the way in which they communicated, through 'Insurgent Bulletin', a key event during the peace negotiations: the kidnapping and release of Army General Rubén Darío Alzate in November 2014 (I discussed this event in detail in **Chapter 5.2.2**).

According to *Verdad Abierta* (2015), the most watched broadcast of the newscast (with 53.000 views at the moment of their publication) was the special bulletin edition about the release of Army General Ruben Darío Alzate. From the very introduction of that newscast edition made by one of the anchors of the bulletin, one can notice the adoption of a language (confronting and dramatic) commonly used in the news media: "A General of the Republic [of Colombia], and a member of the [FARC] secretariat**, seated face to face, in the middle of the implacable winter of the forests of Chocó".** In the concluding section of this newscast edition (Reyes, 2018), FARC's perception on the traditional news media is also clearly unveiled: corporations that represent a particular reality that serves to cover what needs to be told and known. They understand their news bulletin, consequently, as a form to 'show the hidden realities' (particularly to those combatants in the jungle):

> **Instead of listening to the media conglomerates that 'paint' reality for us in colors chosen by them, from their luxurious offices in the country's capital, we must listen to the voices of everyone**; from the depths of the jungle, to the heights of the mountain ranges, from the Choco plains, to the place where you are watching this report. There is the key to peace with social justice. **We will continue to show hidden realities, we will continue to tell what has to be told**. **We will continue to 'break the media siege'**

FARC perceived, therefore, the kidnapping of Army General Alzate as a media opportunity. They did so as, by then, they were more familiar not only with the news media dynamic but also with using (more confidently) some media technology, including social media. As pointed out by the communications advisor, when this event occurred, "we already had a bit more experience in communications. Two years had already passed, we had already had some courses in Cuba about how to manage social media, how to manage the information, the scoop, all that". This comment highlights that there was an evident learning curve and evolution in terms of how FARC dealt with media communication themselves, and it also illustrates that there was a genuine interest in 'learning the craft'. This knowledge made FARC see in the releasing of the Army General an opportunity to lead the conversation in the news media as they considered they had the scoop:

> **We then had the 'scoop'**: we had [in captivity] the General Alzate. **We could take the first pictures, we could interview him; something that** *Caracol* **and** *RCN* **could not have access to.** Different to what happened before when we were at war that (…) nobody would know what was happening [with the kidnapped], **we now had the possibility to tell the world our [story] (…) they [the media] could take our images because there was no other source** (C-FCA 6)**.**

This excerpt shows the level of awareness of FARC in relation to how they could utilise, from a media perspective, the kidnapping and release of the Army General. It shows they consciously thought about the process and assessed the (media) options at hand: take pictures of the prisoner or interview him to tell the world *their* story. Resorting to FARC's own words above, they were "painting a reality in colours chosen [this time] by them". They indeed distributed some of the images of Felix Muñoz - alias 'Pastor Alape' - (a member of FARC secretariat) posing next to General Alzate to the news media some days after the release took place. In the picture, published in an article of *El Tiempo* (2014) titled 'Unpublished photo of General Alzate with alias Pastor Alape' (see **Figure 8.2**), both the FARC Commander and the General can be seen embracing each other in a friendly fashion (the colors that FARC decided to choose to tell this story). It was a historical moment captured purposely by FARC.

Figure 8. 2 - Picture of FARC leader Felix Muñoz and Army General Alzate

El Tiempo (2014)

It was historical because it was the first time in the history of the Colombian conflict that FARC had an Army General as a prisoner; and they captured (the moment) purposely because it was a military advantage that they used as a negotiation strategy. FARC decided to release the Army General as a sign that could help them build trust, not only with the government delegation, but more broadly with the citizenry. A government negotiator recalls that when the events occurred, he thought the negotiation had come to an end: "when we knew about the kidnapping of General Alzate my personal view was that the [negotiation] table had broken; (…) it was impossible to keep negotiating with an Army General kidnapped". However, he acknowledges that he perceived that FARC wanted to 'save' the negotiations as the crisis was solved in a quick fashion: "One of the indications for me that FARC was interested in preserving the table [the negotiation] was the quick way in which this crisis was resolved by appealing to the Red Cross and the immediate releasing of the General" (P-GN 3).

In line with this testimony, the communications advisor from FARC points out that there was an internal debate to decide whether to release the Army General or not. He explains that there was a difference between what FARC combatants still fighting in Colombia wanted to do in comparison to FARC delegation in Havana. While the former wanted to exchange Alzate for some 'war prisoners', the latter wanted to keep building trust as the conflict has come to a 'point of no return'. As expressed above by the government negotiator, FARC decided to quickly release the Army General and overcome the crisis:

Logically, the voice within FARC was to retain and exchange him for our prisoners of war. But one thing was what people in Colombia who were in combat were thinking and another thing was what the peace delegation in Havana was thinking (…) [which] was trying to seek for trust because the conflict [has reached] an absolute degradation. So (…) even though it turned into a crisis, I think it [also] turned into an opportunity to gain trust, especially with the army (C-FCA 6).

The 'Insurgent Bulletin' edition around the release of the Army General was consequently an important element of FARC's strategy at the negotiation table. But just as FARC evolved in its media savvy skills, the 'Insurgent Bulletin' also went through a series of changes that reflect, amongst other things, FARC intentions to transition to their new political life. The 'Insurgent Bulletin' became in 2016, after a thoughtful process, 'New Colombia News' [Nueva Colombia Noticias – NC Noticias]. From their old slogan of 'breaking the media siege', FARC opted for a much more nuanced motto: 'reporting for peace'. Even the colours that identified the news bulletin were changed: from black and red in 'Insurgent Bulletin' to white and blue in 'New Colombia News'. These changes are better explained by one of FARC's media advisors who recalls this transition process.

He explains that he met with what he refers to as the 'Collective Communication Department' to brainstorm about how they could approach the changes to the news bulletin. The first element he highlights is the need of reaching a greater audience given that the negotiations were about to finish and they needed to start their political transitioning process. "So we said: 'well, we are going through a moment of our own story of our political, propaganda and communicational development that demands other things, that requires a greater openness and a greater perspective to reach other audiences'". Aware of this need for openness, they decided not only to focus on issues directly linked to the peace dialogues but also to start discussing some broader topics that could better speak of their political perspectives. In fact, this element can be interpreted as a sign that FARC was consciously thinking about their political legitimacy (for the transitioning period) when renovating their news bulletin initiative:

> We decided (…) that we had to transition to a more journalistic 'space' in which we could inform about many more issues, not only [those] related to the progress of the Havana dialogues but [also] everything that implies the development of those [peace dialogues]; for instance, the structural causes that generated the dialogues. So we decided that we were going to inform about the social problems of our country, the economic problems, the political and cultural problems, etc. That is where the idea of New Colombia News [Nueva Colombia Noticias - NC Noticias] was born (C-FCA 7).

Besides these content decisions, the communications advisor also describes the rationales behind some of the 'form' choices around the new news bulletin. FARC was aware that in order to achieve a greater audience they also needed to change *how* they were going to present the information: "so now we no longer present to people those red and black colours, and that name of 'Insurgent Bulletin', but instead something with which people feels a bit more invited to watch the content and share it". Engagement with the audience was pivotal for the new initiative as FARC needed people not only to feel comfortable with consuming their content but also replicating it. The advisor explains that given some stigmatization issues, the audience in Colombia was reluctant to connect, and therefore to share content that was visibly labelled as 'revolutionary'. He better explains this idea by describing a hypothetical scenario:

> If someone sees one with its smartphone watching 'the Insurgent Bulletin', with those colours (red and black), they would say right away: 'that person is a guerrilla [combatant]'. And many people, even though they feel identified with our postulates and ideas, they are going to say 'no, I do not share that in my Facebook wall because people will say I have become a guerrilla [combatant]'. So we said 'let's give it a much more open character, a more journalistic one and, above all, let's change the form. So we employed other colours, we used the white and blue, we used a new name and the slogan: 'Reporting for Peace' (C-FCA 7).

This excerpt clearly illustrates FARC awareness of portraying themselves differently as they were approaching the transition to their new political life after the peace negotiations. They wanted to start distancing themselves, gradually, with some ideas that could be seen as 'too revolutionary' to connect with a wider spectrum of citizens. Better connection with the citizenry was paramount as they were entering to a stage on their political career where they could participate in democratic elections. The transformational process from 'Insurgent Bulletin' to 'New Colombia News' reflects, consequently, FARC's political aspirations to become a political actor with which Colombians could identify. Interestingly, embracing and putting into practice some of the 'news media logic' was a key aspect for the guerrilla group to start delivering their new political ambitions.

8.3. The Democratic Center's awareness of the 'news media logic'

A senator from the Democratic Center answers, without hesitation, that the relationship with the news media was "very tense, very tense". "The news media magnified everything that the government did and minimized or despised what we did; they distorted the information", she adds (P-OPS 7). Another senator from the party points out that "it was a very difficult relationship because the news media were very harsh; they 'mistreated' us and consistently treated us as liars". She explains that during the debates in the media, the editorial approach of the news outlets and the comments from journalists were very against their political claims, a situation they had to cope with since "the beginning [of the peace process] until the end and beyond" (P-OPS 6). In line with this, a different congressman points out that one of the negative aspects of the media during the negotiations was that the "vast majority of national news media were completely in favour of Juan Manuel Santos [the President] and the [peace] agreement". She explains that it was very difficult to find objectivity in many newspapers, radio and television outlets and concludes that "the news media were very biased" (P-OPS 8).

Interestingly, however, politicians from the Democratic Center party make a clear distinction between national and regional news media outlets: "We did not campaign in the media because in general they were, **particularly the national media, very hostile**. **What we did do was a lot of interviews with regional media outlets, constantly,** to deliver our message" (P-OPS 7)**.** In relation to this, another Senator from the party acknowledges that the "most receptive news outlets for us were the regional ones, the small radio stations, the small local television channels, they were the ones who opened the door for us, not the big radio and television outlets" (P-OPS 8). Another congressman from the party, besides recognizing that it was easier to approach this type of media, also points out that the regional media would grant them access as doing so would bring them (the media outlets) more audience:

> One finds much more echo in the regional media. In other words, if I was going to do a media tour around Quindio, Pereira, Valle del Cauca [counties], they [journalists] would 'give' me the microphone. **They would do so because you give them audience**, even journalists that don't agree with you, they would allow you to talk and have the discussion. **So yeah, it was much easier with regional media, thousand times, than with national news outlets** (P-OPS 7).

The opposition party, then, was well-aware of the 'value' they were bringing when being invited to the news media. The same Senator from the extract above explains that the news media would invite them to debate programs around the peace negotiations "not because they wanted but because of the 'rating' [audience figures] issue". Even though the congressman does not give an explanation about why they would bring more audience when being invited to the news outlets, a testimony from a senior political reporter allows us to understand that this issue may be related to the news production practices driven by economically motivated rationales. As it was illustrated in **Chapter (5)** and it will further be explained in **Chapter (9)**, journalists constantly looked for controversial and dramatic news stories when reporting on the peace negotiation. As shown in the excerpt below, having two opposing sides discussing during a radio debate ('talk-show') program becomes, then, the perfect scenario for this type of stories:

> At the radio debate programs there was an 'Uribista' [supporter of Uribe, the leader of the opposition party], a left-wing, a freethinker…**but there always had to be a 'Uribista', one in favour and one against the peace process**. In Blu Radio, I was part of those who defended the peace process. Even today if I say something in favour of the peace process, **the [media] organization would tell me 'you have to put someone who also balances'. So are we balancing or are we polarizing?** Because there is not dialogue [under these circumstances] (…) so I believe that us, the news media, perhaps without wanting to, stirred up polarization (J-SPR 7, TV).

As pointed out by Wolfsfeld (2004, p.84), since many news articles are based on conflict frames (and two sides are required to create conflict), the talk-shows on radio and television are particularly prone to embrace those 'confronting' approaches. Based on this, Wolfsfeld argues that "the opposition [during a peace negotiation] has a much better level of access [to talk shows], for most of these shows are dedicated to public debate" (2004, p.85). This is well illustrated by the excerpt above, mainly when the journalist acknowledges that "there always had to be a 'Uribista'" in the radio debate programs. This is interesting since even though the journalist does not agree with this approach, she had to comply with it, as it appears to have become the norm within her media outlet ('**you have to** put someone who balances'). In other words, the rule that there always had to be a member of the opposition party seems to come from a higher sphere within her editorial board that she cannot refuse (despite being an experienced journalist).

Another important element from the excerpt above is the fact that the journalist openly claims that she was part of those who advocated for the peace negotiations. This claim seems to be in line with the general perception from the opposition party that the news media was in favour of the peace process. In fact, a junior political reporter reflects that one of the critiques she can make to the role of the Colombian news media during the peace process was "the excessive media support towards the peace negotiations that, in some instances, was very noticeable". She explains that due to this 'excessive support', the Democratic Center had to "use a lot the new media such as social networks, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter to share their points of views (…) since they did not have that much visibility in (…) the mass media" (J-JPR 1).

This general tendency of the Colombian news media to be in favour of the peace dialogues, then, led the opposition party to seek for alternative channels to deliver their message. Even though being invited to talk-shows could have been the norm, having a presence in other types of media outlets (such as quality newspapers) may have been more difficult for the Democratic Center. In this regard, in addition to reaching regional media outlets (as described above), the party turned to social media to spread their messaging (as explained by one of its senators):

> I have to say that it was very difficult that the news media granted us with access. **It was very difficult, but we still managed to deliver our message. Why? Because we had social media: Twitter, Facebook** (…) **each of us as congressmen had our own social networks so we would spread [information] on Twitter, or Facebook, or Instagram** (P-OPS 6).

The communication strategy of the opposition party during the peace negotiations relied, to a high degree, on employing social media. They did it not only for communicating more directly with the citizenry and expanding their message, but also to try to influence the news agenda. In order to do so, they exploited as much as they could the image of their leader, former President of Colombia Álvaro Uribe. One of the Senators from the party acknowledges that any opinion of Uribe had great media coverage so she explains that "when you retweet President Uribe, when you give visibility to a message with a picture of Uribe, that has much more impact that if you do it alone- until you have your 'own market'". This shows that members of the opposition party strengthened their own voice and presence in the media environment through utilizing their leader Uribe as an endorser of their messages. Consequently, the Senator adds that they always tried to

promote in the strongest social media accounts of the party "an intervention from Uribe, or a press release from the party" and concludes that they used "a lot of videos" (P-OPS 7).

Another important element within their social media strategy to influence the news agenda was to constantly upload to their accounts (particularly Facebook and Twitter) either the speeches that Representatives and Senators would give at the Congress or their appearances in news programs. For instance, a Senator points out that "when we were invited to a radio program, to a three-vs-one type of debate (…) we would replicate that in our social media accounts" **(P-OPS 8).** In line with this, another Senator (P-OPS 7) recalls that one of her interventions in a debate at the House of Representatives had a great number of views once the video was uploaded to Facebook: "I had an intervention [criticizing the negotiations] which had an impressive number of reproductions, an unusual amount; suddenly the message resonated. We would upload that [content] to Facebook". Interestingly, excerpts from this intervention can be found in a news article from *El Espectador* within my news corpus. This could suggest, amongst other things, that members of the opposition party may have adapted their speeches at the Congress to make them more appealing to the news media as they realized journalists could create news stories based entirely on them.

In line with the latter, I argue that the Democratic Center internalized some of the 'news media logic' to design and execute their communications strategy. For example, as described above, they consciously employed the image of their leader, former President Uribe, in order to appeal to the personalization approaches that the news media embrace when reporting on political issues. This shows, once again, that the opposition party was not only aware of the media dynamics, but that it utilized them in their favour to achieve their political goals. The following anecdote from a political reporter better exemplifies, for instance, the adoption of 'news media logic' from their leader - Uribe - (and more broadly from their political party):

They [the Democratic Center] manage the media very well. Álvaro Uribe (…) is a 'wizard' [very smart communicator] when he communicates. **One of the exercises that he does as a politician is to calculate how long his answers are when he is speaking to the media in a press conference**. He does so because if he gives a 30-second statement, that is the full [piece] that is going to be air on television and radio, so he needs it to last 30 seconds, maximum 40. What for? So they do not cut it off. A 'wizard'! (…) **so he knows very well how to handle that [the media] and that has an effect on the rest of the party's [media management]** (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper**).**

Despite this testimony being very anecdotal, it illustrates a key aspect: Colombian journalists perceived that the Democratic Center managed the news media very well. For instance, a junior political reporter recalls that the opposition party was one of the first political parties that created an official press office that centralized all their communications: "the press officer would ask you 'what topic do you want to talk about? Okay, then you need to speak to this Representative or that Senator'; she would always direct you'". The reporter stresses that this centralization approach made their communications very coordinated during the peace process and concludes that "they did manage very well their communications" (J-JPR 1, Radio).

In a very similar fashion, a political reporter emphasizes that the Democratic Center had a very strong media management during the negotiations which, according to him, was even better than the government management as "the person responsible for their communications was very organized and would unify their message; she made all congressmen [from the party] point in the same direction". In regards to unity, the reporter adds that the opposition party was very consistent with their messaging: "if the message was 'A', everybody would say 'A, so that made their message convincing; (…) they always had the same message, the same message…and it resonated" (J-PR 2, Radio/TV). Consistency was indeed a very important element of the Democratic Center communication strategy. The following testimony from a Senator of the party clearly illustrates it:

We were united and had coherence (…) the party in the congress was very organized, particularly the congressmen in the Senate as they were the first group that was with President Uribe as Senator. **When a debate was going to be held, you could see that the interventions were successive, coherent interventions, so the people [members of the party] who were invited to the news media always had a coherent, convincing, and recurring speech.** That served to further delve into the ability to make opposition, despite not having the news media [support] (P-OPS 7).

Another interesting way to see the level of consistency in their messaging is by looking at the first answer from three senators from the party when I asked them which of their messages they believed were highly amplified by the news media? All of them answered quite consistently that **impunity** was a well-received issue by the Colombian news media:

> Impunity, we considered that those responsible for crimes against humanity had to pay some kind of penalty (P-OPS 6).

> I believe that the message of peace without impunity (…) it was above all that, impunity. **It is what hurts and bothers the most, impunity.** Free seats [for FARC in the congress], we warned about that. (P-OPS 7).

> First, it was that the FARC were not going to jail, and we know that the vast majority of FARC leaders have committed crimes against humanity, such as kidnapping, forced recruitment, rapes, or terrorist acts. Then, **the first of our concerns is that an agreement or a process that would lead to the reincorporation of the civil life of some ex-combatants could not be done on the basis of impunity**, among other things because it gave a very bad example for the future (P-OPS 8).

8.4 The 'Civil Resistance Process' campaign: appealing to the 'news media logic'

This consistency with their narrative was particularly pivotal for the Democratic Center during the plebiscite electoral process as they needed to convince the citizenry to vote against the peace agreement. Therefore, on 9 May 2016 (five months before the peace referendum), the party launched a (media) initiative/campaign that they named 'Civil Resistance Process'. The initiative was the preamble of their plebiscite campaign that they called later 'No More'. As a Senator from the party recalls: "That movement ['Civil Resistance Process'] was then linked to the 'No More' [campaign]". She points out that the campaign was "very effective and efficient" as they could spread the critical points of the peace agreement such as "peace is not above justice and there cannot be peace with impunity". Very interestingly, she concludes her remarks by stating: **"that was like parrots: repeating"** (P-OPS 7).

In words of one of the Democratic Center Senators, the 'Civil Resistance Process' campaign "was a mechanism through which we began to summon citizens to the streets and also began to collect signatures, we collected millions of signatures as proof of the citizenry endorsement of our points" (P-OPS 6). With 'points', the Senator refers to the core elements of their critique towards the peace process, those that they 'repeated like parrots' very consistently. A member of the party briefly summarizes them:

> We had a brief document (…) that contained our positions in relation to the agreement between Juan Manuel Santos and FARC. Based on that document, we created our messages: '**No to impunity'; 'No to the political eligibility of those who have committed heinous crimes'; 'No to equate the military with the guerrillas'; 'No to drug trafficking being related to a political crime'**. Those were our messages and we toured the country [distributing them] (P-OPS 8).

The Civil Resistance Process initiative, then, consisted of three main actions. Firstly, and as described by the Senator above, they summoned citizens to the streets to collect signatures to show their discontent with the peace agreement but also to formally ask President Santos to resign. Secondly, the opposition party called for marches around Colombia against what they described as the 'Havana impunity agreement'. Finally, the Democratic Center announced they were going to vote against the bills presented by the government before the Congress in relation to the peace

agreement (ID 17034, *La Silla Vacía*, 2016-05-12). The origins of the campaign, nonetheless, seem to have their roots in the perception of the lack of the media support.

A senator from the Democratic Center acknowledges that they felt "helpless" because there was "not much room for maneuver other than what you could speak in congress and echo it through social media". She then adds that this situation "makes one more creative and during that creativity spark we came up with the name of 'Civil Resistance'". Notably, the Senator concludes that the initiative had "a very important impact; a lot of news media had to report on it" (P-OPS 7). Indeed, the Colombian news media devoted a significant amount of coverage to report on the campaign (as shown in **Figure 8.3** below)**.**

Figure 8.3 displays the number of news articles that either solely reported on the opposition party initiative (n=34) or at least mentioned it once (n=18), during a 4-week period (9 May – 05 June 2016). To put this number of articles into perspective, between the 9 May 2016 (the day in which the 'Civil Resistance' was first communicated by the opposition party), and the 5 June 2016, a total of 345 news articles were written in relation to the peace process. This means that the opposition party managed to gain around 14.5% of the whole 4-weeks news coverage with its media strategy. Most notably, if one looks at the first week in which the initiative was launched, this percentage increases. Between Monday 9 May and Sunday 15 May 2016, a total of 103 news articles were written about the peace negotiations. From those 103 articles, 18 news stories solely focused on the Democratic Center campaign and 12 more mentioned it at least once, which leaves a 29.1% of the whole week coverage devoted to report about or mention the campaign.

Figure 8.3 – News articles of the 'Civil Resistance' initiative during a 4-week period
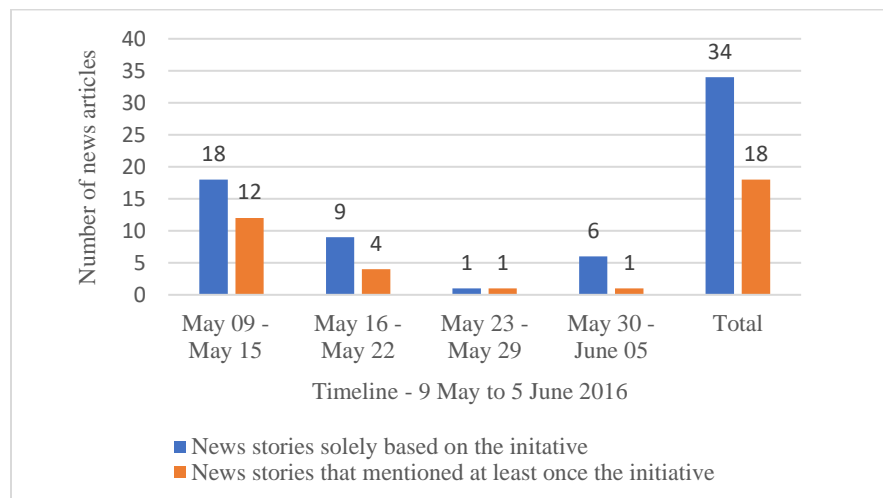
This data shows that the Democratic Center achieved, at least, getting the news media attention with its initiative. I argue here that given that the opposition party was well-aware of the 'news media logic', they created a controversial campaign that highly focused on appealing to news values such as drama, negativity and conflict. The very name of the initiative 'Civil Resistance' resorts to a confronting type of narrative that it was indeed interpreted as controversial by the media. For example, a headline from *El Tiempo* reads, 'A battle royal week for the dialogues with FARC' and describes the campaign as follows:

> The Havana peace process has just had one of its most eventful weeks. **The one who ignited the discussion** was former President and Senator Álvaro Uribe, leader of the opposition party Democratic Center, **who on Monday launched a controversial proposal calling for a "civil resistance"** against the peace process (ID 1487, *El Tiempo,* 2016-05-14).

In a very similar fashion, an article from *El Espectador* explains that "**great controversy has met the proposal presented by the Senator of the Democratic Center to call a 'civil resistance'** as a form of protest against what has been considered the signing of impunity in the final [peace] agreement" (ID 7288, 2016-05-11). Likewise, *Semana* also employed the word 'controversy' to refer to the issue: "Many have viewed with suspicion **the controversial proposal of (…) Álvaro Uribe, leader of the Democratic Center to summon the citizens to a civil resistance in the face of the signing of the agreemen**t" (ID 15162, 2016-05-12).

Besides the notable description of the initiative as a controversial movement, the news excerpts above also allow us to see another deliberate effort from the opposition party to gain the news media's attention: the campaign was first communicated by their leader, former President Uribe. As it has been discussed hitherto, the Democratic Center was aware of the mediatic value of its leader. Therefore, Uribe was always responsible for 'kicking off' their initiatives and then the rest of the party members would 'join the conversation' and replicate his messages throughout their social media accounts. As a Senator from the party points out in relation to this, "the social media networks were the ones who helped us to have more presence and prominence" (P-OPS 7).

As in many other instances of the peace negotiation, Uribe employed Twitter to communicate and amplify the campaign. As it can be read in *El Tiempo* in one if its news stories around the initiative: "Former president and Senator referred to the issue through his Twitter account where he wrote: 'the civil resistance begins with resisting provocations'" (ID 1493, 2016-05-13). In this regard, a political reporter explains that: "Uribe got fully immersed in Twitter [during the peace negotiations]; look at all what he achieved, to the point that our current President was the candidate he endorsed" (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper). By looking at other testimonies from journalists, one can understand why Uribe (and more broadly the Democratic Center) highly focused on disseminating their messages through social media (and particularly Twitter): it has become a pivotal tool for journalists when reporting.

"Twitter became another source", points out a reporter. She claims that Twitter was "paramount" and "influenced a lot" on their reporting work during the negotiations to the point that all of them [journalists] had to "activate the notifications in Twitter and be very aware [of the platform]" (J-PR 2). In a similar fashion, a junior reporter highlights that many of her colleagues used single tweets to construct whole news stories during the negotiations (something she personally does not agree with). However, she explains that in many circumstances this was the only option left when it came to report on former President Uribe as approaching him directly was not possible in many circumstances. The following testimony highlights, again, some of the media strategies employed by the leader of the opposition party to cope with the news media:

For example, Uribe did it a lot - and still does it: he does not give statements. I mean, you can call him or call his press officer and persist for one month [to try to get a statement] and he won't talk. **He uses two means to communicate. Firstly, a press conference, where there is not space to even ask questions; he reads a press release and you need to leave with what he said. Or [secondly] he posts a tweet**. So at the end you have to pretend as if his tweet was his statement, so in that way it makes sense to me that some of my colleagues write a whole story based on a tweet. But there is not excuse that you do the same with everyone because there are congressmen that you can actually approach, even ministers" (J-JPR 1, Radio).

The excerpt above shows that there was a deliberate effort from the leader of the opposition party to try to have control over the media message; avoiding counter questions from journalists is a sign that what Uribe wanted was his message to be distributed by the media without alterations. As Mazzoleni (2014, p.52) describes: "[populists leaders] do not hesitate to apply clever strategies to secure media attention (…) they have often shown themselves to be truly media-savvy, to perfectly understand the imperatives of the media". In fact, the media management strategy of the Democratic Center and the design and execution of the 'Civil Resistance Process' campaign explained in these **Sections (8.3)** and **(8.4)** are clear signs of both the opposition party's media-savvy skills and its understanding of the imperatives of the news media.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

In this **Chapter (8)** I examined the communication strategies employed by the 'challengers' (Wolfsfeld, 1997b) of the peace negotiations: the FARC delegation and the opposition party (the Democratic Center). On the one hand, I explained in **Section (8.1)** that the relationship between FARC and journalists at the beginning of the negotiations were rather difficult, amongst other things, because the guerrilla group perceived that the media had misleadingly portrayed them when reporting on the Colombian conflict. This situation highlights, as Wolfsfeld (2004, p.23) rightfully points out, that the influence of the media on the prospects of peace starts long before peace processes even take place. As I explained in **Chapter (3.2)**, several studies found that the news media has represented the Colombian conflict relying mainly on official sources (Rey y Bonilla 2004; Rey, Bonilla, Tamayo y Gómez 2005; Rey y Bonilla 2005) and that there has not existed direct participation of FARC voices in the media narratives (Tamayo, 2016). My findings suggest that this 'elite driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010), which was also present in the media representations of the peace process as described in **Chapter (5),** had important implications for how the FARC delegation related to the media at their arrival to the peace negotiations.

Moreover, since I argued in **Section (8.1)** that FARC media relationship management evolved as the peace process progressed given their constant interaction with the reporters, I want to stress the importance of embracing the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) to interpret (and emphasize) some of the micro level aspects of the complex relationship between media actors and political actors (as explained in detailed in **Chapter 2.3**). The change of attitude of FARC members towards the traditional news media was highly influenced by the social interaction that they experienced with journalists. These interactions were relevant as speaking directly to reporters on a regular basis (something the guerrilla group could not do during war times) allowed them to both perceive the media differently - more positively - and adapt their media behaviour. In short, FARC constructed meaning about the nuances of the news media (e.g., the discrepancy between journalists' viewpoints and the media organizations editorial positions) through interacting with the reporters.

In **Section (8.2)** I argued that FARC adopted the commercial and the technological aspects of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) to design and produce the

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'Insurgent Bulletin'. It is interesting to see that even though the guerrilla group was highly critical of the way in which the media represented them (and the negotiations) resorting to sensationalist and dramatic lenses, they embraced a very similar approach when constructing the news of their television newscast. Moreover, it is also interesting to see that among the different media formats at their disposal, the FARC delegation opted for producing a television newscast. This may have been related to two reasons. Firstly, they needed to better engage with their internal stakeholder (the combatants), so resorting to the newscast could have contributed to this end (as expressed by FARC testimonies). Secondly, the guerrilla group also wanted to impersonate the news media through this initiative - they wanted to be recognized as the source of news-, something that could have been more difficult to achieve by employing other media formats. In any case, this highlights the influence that the 'news media logic' had on FARC's own processes of communication and consolidation as a legitimate political actor, something that it was further illustrated when I described in **Section (8.2)** the adaptations of their news bulletin over time.

On the other hand, in **Section (8.3)** and **Section (8.4)** I illustrated the media-savvy skills displayed by the Democratic Center during the peace negotiations. I argued that the opposition party adopted the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) to execute its communication strategy and obtain the news media's attention. More specifically, the party employed a conflicting and controversial type of narrative to appeal to some of the news values which were clearly reflected in the campaign that they called 'Civil Resistance Process'. Likewise, they also resorted to the figure of their leader Álvaro Uribe Uribe when communicating their messages as they were highly aware of both his mediatic value and the interest of the media in personalization (Van Aelst et al., 2012). Consistency was also paramount for them to be able to deliver this narrative successfully. A highly organized communications strategy allowed them to better interact with the news media (despite the majority of news outlets being in favour of the peace negotiations).

The findings of these two **Sections (8.3** and **8.4)** are in line with research on the affinity between a populist communication style and 'media logic' (Sorensen, 2021; Esser et al., 2018; Mazzoleni, 2003) or what Mazzoleni (2014) refers to as 'mediatized populism'. In this regard, Voltmer and Sorensen (2019, p.55) argue that populist politics "shapes its rhetoric, messages and organization around 'media logic'" as it depends to a high degree on the resonance of the media. Likewise, Mazzoleni (2014) explains that the "overarching concept that embraces both the process and impact of mediatization on the rise of political populism is (…) that of media logic" (p.47). In the case of the Democratic Center, "specific news values such as conflict framing (…) and personalisation that populism speaks to" (Sorensen, 2021, p.201), were clearly evident in their 'Civil Resistance' campaign execution.

Moreover, even though the work of Wolfsfeld (2004) does not particularly refer to the compatibility between these two notions, his view on the impact of the news media on antagonists' strategy and behaviour also resonates with these findings. He argues that "[b]ecause most antagonists attribute so much importance to the news media, they often find themselves adapting their plans and actions in accordance with the media needs" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.13). Particularly for the case of the 'challengers', he points out that they might even feel more pressured to resort to more 'extremist' strategies to grab the attention of the news media, which in turn implies that "radical voices will often get preference over temperate ones" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.20). Even though the 'Civil Resistance' initiative cannot be considered 'extremist', the campaign can be seen as 'unconventional' in the sense that it summoned people to the streets to collect signatures against the peace agreement. Moreover, as also explained throughout this **Chapter (8),** the campaign attempted to get the news media's attention by appealing to news values of negativity, conflict and drama that were employed (very often) by journalists when reporting on the negotiations.

Overall, this **Chapter (8)** highlighted *how* the 'news media logic' had an influence on the behaviour of 'challengers' (Wolfsfeld, 1997b) during the peace negotiations. Contrary to what happened to the government delegation, the Democratic Center and the FARC delegation struggled more to influence the news media during the peace process. For the case of the guerrilla group, since the news media consistently aligned with the government's strategies and goals, it was more difficult for FARC to position some of its key messages in the news agenda during important

'political waves'; this may have been one of the reasons why they decided to 'impersonate the media' and create their own news television newscast resorting to the 'news media logic'. In the case of the opposition party, given that the majority of the Colombian media outlets were in favour of the negotiations, they had to resort to their knowledge of the news media dynamic to create strategies to appeal to the news values and obtain news coverage. In both cases, the logic of news production impacted how these two political actors approached the negotiations.

Chapter 9: The logics of news production around the peace process

In this final empirical **Chapter (9),** drawing upon both interview data from political and media actors and news articles excerpts, I examine the logics that prevailed in the news production process around the peace dialogues. In **Section (9.1)** I show that practices of news production driven by economically motivated rationales have become dominant within Colombian newsrooms and I discuss some of the negative implications of this in the reporting about the peace negotiations. More specifically, I explain that these practices led to the construction of news that may not have positively contributed to a healthy deliberation environment around the negotiations, since there was a special emphasis on controversial and negative news stories. To illustrate this, I describe both the news values that journalists followed when reporting on the peace dialogues but also how these values were translated into the news stories. In brief, I argue that the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) prevailed when journalists reported on the negotiations (as I also explained in **Chapter (5)** when examining the news coverage).

Nonetheless, at the end of **Section (9.1)** I highlight that different journalistic attitudes towards the peace dialogues also coexisted. While some journalists seem to have focused on reporting on the controversial aspects of the negotiations, other reporters stress that they distanced themselves from sensationalist approaches of journalism to focus on what they described as more important: explaining the policy issues. This suggests, among other things, that even within the heavily commercial environment in which the Colombia media exist, journalists still displayed some agency to detach themselves from the commercial practices and rely more on the 'professional aspects' of the 'news media logic' such as to serve the public interest. For instance, I argue in **Section (9.2)** that 'protecting the peace dialogues' became a key (journalistic) criterion for some journalists when reporting on the negotiations.

I explain that the defence of peace as a universal ethical value highly shaped how some journalists approached the negotiations. More specifically, since journalists held multiple off the record meetings with both the government delegation and the FARC delegation (given the secrecy

of the dialogues), they employed the attitude of 'defending' the peace process as an assessment tool to decide which stories were worth publishing. Interestingly, reporters practiced self-censorship in instances when they believed that disclosing particular information around the negotiations could negatively affect the development of the peace process - even when they also acknowledged that the public had the right to be informed.

Overall, I demonstrate in this **Chapter (9)** that the logics of news production around the peace process were complex, full of nuances and can be better understood as a matter of emphasis. While some journalists were clearly guided by distinct journalistic professional norms, other relied more on constructing news resorting to commercially driven rationales. As I will also show in **Section (9.1.2)**, the physical nature of the media, that is the 'technological aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013) also conditioned the type of news stories constructed by journalists. This was particularly relevant for television media outlets as they constantly struggled with producing content because there was a key contradiction between the nature of the negotiations (their confidentiality) and the format limitations of this type of media (e.g. the need to show images).

9.1 The tension between the complexity of a peace process and the dynamic of newsrooms

A good starting point to understand how some commercially driven imperatives have permeated journalism in Colombia is to look at certain routines within news outlets that appear to have become normalised. The following excerpt from a junior political reporter highlights, for instance, what she describes as a day-to-day dynamic in the radio news outlet she worked for when reporting on the peace negotiations. From the language she uses to describe the routine to the very nature of the practice, there seems to be a close relation with what could be considered a commercial-oriented ritual:

> What is the dynamic when you are working in the media? You arrive with news every morning and you have an editorial board **and you have to get to sell topics, it is literally selling them**. **So you are a seller** (…) What does a salesperson do anywhere in the world? You try to do your best and **take things a little bit to the extreme** so if you have something that is not truly newsworthy you try to sell it as if were the most important news ever. **This sometimes becomes a bit like a competition among journalists within the same newsroom** because you are also competing to see who is going to get the headline of the day, who is going to have the most important news of the day (…)
>
> **So if you are thinking all the time how I am going to sell my news you look for polarization**, **you look for there to be a trigger to attract attention**. So, on the one hand, **it is that pressure that obviously exists all the time, and that comes from the management, I don't think there is any doubt about that**. And also because **it becomes somehow a natural issue**, it is your form of survival within the media (J-JPR 1, Radio).

There are two elements worth discussing from the excerpts above. The first one, and perhaps the most important, is the impact that this 'business dynamic' can have on the content of news reports. The reporter acknowledges that because she has to wear the hat of a seller, she needs to take into consideration a specific criteria to be able to sell her stories to the editor. The first criteria is related to overstating the events ('taking things to the extreme'); stories need to be exaggerated in order to become (relevant) news. The second criteria she refers to is 'polarization', which implies that there may be a direct relation between news that would be better received by the editor and how polarized they are framed by the journalist. The third criteria she points out is the need to find a 'trigger' to 'attract the attention'.

By looking at these three criteria, that come directly from the 'selling' practice that take place during the editorial boards, one could argue that there is a direct sign of how a commercial practice (the need of selling news stories) can directly influence news content (in this context by resorting to, for example, polarizing frames). Interestingly, and as pointed out by the reporter, there is an element that may even exacerbate the use of these criterion: competition among colleagues. If there is competition for who is going to have the 'headlines of the day', one may resort to a more polarizing approach of news to win over their colleagues.

The second element worth discussing is that the reporter describes this process as a 'pressure' coming from the management of the news organization. This also implies that the criteria to exaggerate the events and to look for polarization is something that the news outlet has indirectly set as a kind of guideline for journalists to construct the news stories. Indeed, she refers to this practice as something that has become a 'natural issue' and a 'form of survival'. This situation, then, raises a relevant question: what are the negative implications of this practice of 'selling news'? One could argue that the practice itself is not problematic as long as it follows what could be considered normatively the appropriate criteria, that of serving the public. Nonetheless, the situation described by the reporter is not driven by any apparent value that aims to benefit the public. On the contrary, the situation is driven by a competitive environment that, based on the testimony, rewards polarizing news (to name an example). And although a competitive environment could encourage journalists to do a better job, in this scenario it increases and exacerbates elements that can have a negative impact on the content of the news stories.

To illustrate how this can have a direct negative influence on news content, we can look at the following excerpt from a senior editor of an elite newspaper that describes the way in which a 'selling' type of approach has influenced the headline construction process of news stories during peace processes in Colombia:

Firstly, I think that (unfortunately) **what is controversial and crises are what is considered newsworthy**. If you compare the headlines from [the peace process of] El Caguán with the headlines from Havana you would find the same: 'Controversy in El Caguán', 'Crisis in Havana'; it's what journalism likes. Secondly, I think it is an easy way to come up with headlines. These elements became a 'common place' when creating headlines. First **because it is what sells the most** (…) and also to attract attention, **remember that journalism is not innocent, journalism makes headlines to get the attention** - this is key - **(J-SE 8, Elite Newspaper).**

In line with what the junior political reporter said above, the senior editor describes a situation in which there is a direct link between 'selling news' and some criterion that helps to achieve this. In the excerpt above, resorting to using 'controversy' and 'crisis' when constructing the headlines responds to two factors. Firstly, because it is what 'sells the most' and, secondly, because in journalism there is an important need to 'attract the attention' (one of the criteria the junior reporter also mentioned). Something that helps to illustrate how these types of commercial imperatives have permeated the journalistic practice is to look at the news stories that journalists describe as interesting (from a journalistic point of view). When asked about what the most interesting moments of the peace dialogues were, there is a pattern in the reporters' answers: many of them described situations in which commercial values are at the core of the stories:

I don't know if you remember that Márquez appeared in some photos on a motorcycle, on a Harley Davidson (…) **that caused a lot of outrage**. Journalistically speaking what else? Another moment is when there is a change in FARC delegation and alias 'Romaña' arrives, that was a very valid journalistic moment because it was thought that 'Romaña' had died **and there was a legend about him** that he had fallen into a river (…) and the piranhas had eaten him. **So when he shows up there [in Havana] parading with his beret, that was another interesting moment**.

When he got there [to Havana] that first day, FARC wanted to make a photographic record of his arrival and we managed to record that and it became like a parade of him, they never realized that we were there. So that **generated a lot of controversy here in the country because the image people had about him was about someone kidnapping people to the mountain, robbing them, extorting them (…) so that was a very valid journalistic moment.**

 (J-PR 2, Radio/Television)

From the excerpts above, there are three elements worth discussing. The first one is the key criterion for the political reporter to define whether a story was interesting from a journalistic point of view: the reaction it creates on the audience. He claims that these two stories were worth reporting because they either caused 'outrage' or 'controversy' in Colombia. The second important

element from the excerpt is the fact that both stories have visual elements at their core. The first story is a picture in itself: a guerrilla member using what it could be considered by the general public as a symbol of capitalism (hence the controversy). The second story is a secret photographic recording of the arrival of a guerrilla member to the negotiation complex in Havana. Since the negotiations were held in a big complex of multiple buildings in Havana (known as 'El Laguito'), journalists were able to secretly record the delegations (when they thought it was worth it). In this context, it means that the reporters knew about the arrival of 'Romaña' beforehand and prepared to create the news material in a secret fashion (knowing that it would generate controversy in Colombia as it was a well-known guerrilla member that had committed multiple crimes).

The third important element is that both of the examples shared by the reporter are very specific events. Neither of the instances are related to core aspects of the peace negotiations but rather episodic moments of the negotiations. Similar to this, a political reporter from a press outlet also resorts to visual elements and specific events as the criteria for defining interesting stories from a journalistic point of view. He mentions the main event in Cartagena in September 2016 where President Santos and FARC Commander in Chief, Timoleón Jimenez, signed for the very first time the peace accords. He describes this event as 'exciting' because people could actually see that 'the peace was signed' (a historical moment, no doubt). Interestingly, however, he adds a key criterion for defining what stories may be less interesting from a journalistic perspective: 'technical discussions' are less interesting to report on. He even gives an example to illustrate how technical discussions could never be as exciting as the shaking of hands between the President and FARC leader:

> As with everything, information always has ups and downs; there are moments in which is really exciting to be and there are moments in which is less exciting but you (also) need to be there. So for example **the event in Cartagena**, that moment was exciting, **we saw that peace was signed**. Tiring moments, or a bit less interesting, when **the discussion around how many seats would FARC get in congress started because it is a very technical discussion**. So for instance: 5 seats are required, but why 5 instead of 10? And if 10 is decided why not 20? And if 20 seats are decided where the resources will come from because the Congress will have to be expanded. But if the congress, but…**so technical discussions arise and although they are necessary, it is not as exciting as the event with the picture of the President and the Commander in Chief of the guerrilla shaking hands to sign peace** (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper)**.**

From these examples above, one could identify key contradictions. The first one, and perhaps the most obvious, is that there is a clear tension between the complexity of a peace negotiation and the values and criteria that some journalists follow to report on it (Wolfsfeld, 2004). So on the one hand there is the negotiation, which involves (amongst many other things) the discussion and creation of very complex political and legal reforms. On the other hand, there are journalists who are interested in reporting on very specific events, crises or situations around the negotiations that can be perceived as controversial. All these elements hinder the practice of a journalism that can both better explain the accords to the citizenry and provide a healthier deliberation environment around the negotiations.

9.1.1 News stories about the peace process that reflect the (commercial) news values

We can see that some of these (commercial) values described by journalists above were indeed employed when constructing the news stories about the peace negotiations. Particularly, the Colombian news media were overly reliant on the word '*controversy*' to either describe important political events that could have put the peace dialogues at risk, or less relevant situations that were not strictly related to the peace dialogues (as a policy issue) and whose nature was more on the entertaining side. For instance, *El Espectador* reported on a picture that FARC leader, José Lisandro Lascarro (alias 'Pastor Alape') shared on his Twitter account in which he appeared with his partner at a Rolling Stones concert in Havana, Cuba (where the dialogues were held).

The media outlet titled the news story as *'Controversy over photos of 'Pastor Alape' at concert of the Rolling Stones in Cuba'* and the news article described the situation as "the **pictures caused great controversy** on the social media, where they have been the target of all kinds of comments: from criticism for their attendance, jokes and even support" (ID 7423, *El Espectador*, 2016-03-26). Later on, the article describes that the news media had previously amplified the images and pictures of FARC delegation leisure activities, which, in turn (the media outlet points out) had contributed to create some controversy. Interestingly, *El Espectador* suggests that the 'outrage' towards the pictures had an ideological origin: since FARC was a Marxist-communist guerrilla group with 'anti-imperialist' values, they were not supposed to be using symbols that would strongly represent the US capitalism such as a Harley Davidson motorcycle.

It has been usual, since the process began, that the images and photographs released by the members of the guerrilla negotiating team in their spare time **cause controversy**. One of the most remembered photographs was taken in November 2013 and it shows several FARC leaders on board of a ship in the Caribbean. Another photograph, published by *Semana* magazine in February 2013, shows Iván Márquez on a Harley Davidson motorcycle [as described by the reporter above]. At the time, **the outrage came from the fact that while FARC foster an anti-imperialist discourse, the chief negotiator posed with one of the classic American motorcycles that somewhat represents the imperialist 'power'** (ID 7423, *El Espectador*, 2016-03-26).

The excerpt above illustrates the point made earlier by the political reporter who pointed out that the pictures of FARC negotiation leader Iván Márquez on a Harley Davidson motorcycle caused outrage in Colombia. This element was precisely what made him see this moment of the peace negotiation as an interesting one to report about: that it could create outrage in the audience. Although there is a real moral tension at play here, similar to what could happen when journalists expose leaders who are outwardly committed to some religious faith but commit acts which would be considered sinful, the journalistic significance of the story lay in the fact that the reporter knew that the image would cause outrage in Colombia and it would hence receive attention. Moreover, it is important to note that (as explained in **Chapter 8.1**), these type of stories may have negatively affected the legitimacy of the negotiations. This attention (and interest) from journalists in talking about FARC 'leisure' activities and reporting about them using controversial lenses was something that members of the FARC delegation were aware of.

In one of my interviews, when discussing the relationship with journalists during the peace dialogues, a FARC communications advisor told me that he remembers different instances in which reporters commented negatively about their activities. He points out that he felt that "there was a kind of 'persecution' towards the delegation; I remember that there were like scoops such as 'the delegation is dancing' or 'the delegation is drinking beer' that went viral". By reflecting on these situations for a moment, he added: "So we are next to the sea [in Havana, Cuba] (…) we have never seen it (…) but we cannot go because we are terrorists who have to remain locked up?" The advisor concluded his remarks on this issue by claiming that "journalists kept looking for us in the streets to see what we were doing and **everything [we did] was reprehensible"** (C-FCA 6).

However, and as explained above, the term *'controversy'* was also employed to describe more relevant events in relation to the peace negotiation. One of these events was the pedagogical visits that members of the FARC delegation conducted in 2016 across some regions of Colombia to explain the peace accords to their troops. The Colombian government had allowed the guerrilla group to conduct these visits as the peace process was coming to an end and it was important that FARC combatants - in the field - could understand (and endorse) what it was being negotiated. During one of these visits (in the city of La Guajira), some pictures of FARC leaders, escorted by armed members of the guerrilla, and talking face-to-face to citizens, were leaked to the press. Since the leaders of FARC were not allowed to meet or talk with the citizenry as this could be regarded as an action of participating in politics, the Colombian news media described this situation (again) as a controversy:

> **After the controversy** caused by the visit of the FARC negotiators in La Guajira - accompanied by armed guerrillas and without any Public Force, doing politics - the guerrilla delegates will return to Cuba this Wednesday. The presence of the FARC leaders, **beyond the political storm** in the country, caused a stumbling block in the final stretch of the negotiations (ID 7529, *El Espectador*, 2016-02-24).

> On February 18, a **bitter controversy** was created after several FARC leaders, including 'Iván Márquez', were escorted by armed guerrilla members during the pedagogical missions carried out in La Guajira. This situation led to the Government to temporarily suspend this pedagogical activity (ID 7446, *Semana,* 2016-03-16).

One could argue that the event could have not been described otherwise: the pedagogical visits were designed for FARC leaders to explain the accords to their troops and not to talk directly with citizens as this action could be (and it was) regarded as exercising politics before the signing of the peace process. However, it is interesting that although the visits had been occurring for a while, the news media decided to report on them only when there was a negative (controversial) element. As *El Espectador* (ID 7550, 2016-02-19) describes in one of its news articles, "last year, it was announced the authorization given to FARC representatives to (…) explain to their troops the reached agreements; in fact, there have already been five [visits] (…) all of them with the corresponding security measures". This case illustrates that the news media not only described some events as controversial but also placed the attention on issues that could be regarded as such. Given the importance of these visits for the future endorsement and implementation of the peace negotiation - seeing FARC explaining the accords to their troops was a positive sign in the direction

of peace - the news media could have also reported on the previous visits to explain to the citizenry the significance and relevance of them for the prospects of peace.

However, if we take into consideration the criteria of 'interesting news stories to report about' described above by some of the reporters, one could understand why the news media decided to focus on this 'controversial' side of the story. The issue itself has multiple elements that could indeed create outrage (and hence attract the attention of the audience). One of the political reporters I interviewed (who happened to remember writing about this specific issue), told me with a mixture of frustration and annoyance that "seeing these people [FARC members] after knowing what they had done, and seeing them so calmly [walking around] in different regions of the country, that actually bothered many people". He adds that when people saw the "pictures of this guy Joaquin Gomez [one of FARC leaders] in which he could be seen armed, doing politics, that had a great connotation because you know the political trouble with that here [in Colombia], so everybody would say 'you see, that is the reason why this [peace] process is happening so they can do politics, and look at them with those guns'" (J-PR 2, Radio/Television).

This testimony is interesting as it illustrates, as suggested above, that these type of news stories could have negative consequences on the public perception around the peace negotiations. He is aware, for example, that the images could contribute to worsen the negative opinion of some citizens who did not like or support the idea of FARC participating in politics after the signing of the peace agreement. Although I would argue that it was important to call for attention around the issue since FARC did not follow some of the guidelines for these visits (they spoke directly to citizens, for instance), the news media could have also placed attention on the significance of the event rather than focusing entirely on the controversial aspect of the issue. In other words, a more balanced reporting showing both how FARC broke the rules around the guidelines and the importance of theses pedagogical visits for the future of the peace negotiation could have been achieved. Most importantly, because the news media also had a key role to play in explaining to the citizenry that one of the outcomes of the negotiations was going to be FARC becoming a political party with the rights to exercise politics in Colombia. The images and the controversial lenses could have given a somehow distorted version of this: that the peace accord was going to give FARC the possibility of exercising politics outside the existing lawful framework.

This balancing aspect was indeed described by another political reporter as a challenge for journalists who reported on the peace negotiation. Although he acknowledges that the situation could have not been described differently (as a controversy) as he believes the guerrilla group should not have done the visits with armed escorts, the reporter also recognizes that it could be reasonable to accept that FARC visited those regions being protected by their men (hence the challenge to report in a more balancing fashion). It is important to clarify that even though he links the armed escorts issue with a laydown of weapons agreement, that particular agreement was not reached until the very end of the peace negotiations. By the time the visits took place, there was not a unilateral nor a bilateral ceasefire between the Colombian government and FARC in place:

> Of course these visits created a controversy! This happened when there were dialogues [among delegations] that there was [going to be] a laying down of arms and they [FARC] went to the regions with fully armed escorts. **Those are the kind of informational challenges one has as a journalist who reports on this kind of [issue]**. Who you go with to these types of regions? Well, with your people, those close to you, those who take care of you. Who else are you going to go with? **But there is also another side [to the story]** and that is that the peace negotiation had a legal framework in which the laying down of weapons had to be agreed, so if you go public with guns to do peace pedagogy, is that stopping using them? No, that is breaking the rules of what had been accorded (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper)

In an attempt to explain *why* this type of reporting occurred during the peace negotiations, the same political reporter told me that the conflict in Colombia has not been easy for everyone (including reporters), and that in some instances journalists found themselves struggling to both understand some of the issues at stake and explain them. Interestingly, the reporter mentions that this struggle was even more challenging as people in Colombia were used to seeing FARC as the 'enemy', so it was difficult to start regarding them (suddenly) as a legitimate political actor:

> How do you explain that the symbolic reparation for a victim who suffered from sexual abuse during the conflict is going to be a [forgiveness] speech in a public square? That is still controversial. So they are like those adjectives that are used because they are really thorny topics to handle and to make them understandable. **(…) especially when a society that always saw this illegal group as an enemy and later it turns out that they have to understand it or accept it. For everyone, it has not been easy, regardless of the reasons either politically or personally.** How do you disarm a guerrilla of 12 thousand recognized men-in-arms, who have a political interest, without giving them the possibility of that political space in Congress? And that is controversial, what other adjective can you use? (J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper)

This excerpt highlights two relevant considerations worth discussing. Firstly, and as mentioned before, an important role of the news media was to explain to the citizenry the complex issue of FARC legally entering to the world of politics in Colombia. However, it is problematic to see that journalists resorted to describe it as 'controversial' because, in the reporter's words, "there were no other adjectives" to choose from. I would argue that this understanding (seeing FARC participation in politics as controversial) can have negative consequences for the possibilities of peace since this outlook can considerably narrow the angles from which a journalist could report on the issue. Framing the possibility of a guerrilla group laying down arms to participate in politics as 'controversial' does not help people understand the issue at stake but rather conditions (in a negative way) their comprehension.

Secondly, in relation to the way in which the reporter refers to how the Colombian society has always perceived FARC as the enemy, it is important to remember that, as explained by Wolfsfeld (2004, p. 23), "some of the most important effects of the media on the prospects for peace take place long before the negotiations begin". In other words, the Colombian news media has also played an important part in people's construction of FARC as the *enemy* during the conflict (as it was also discussed in **Chapter 8.1**). Even during the depiction of these events, which happened in the latest stages of the peace negotiation - when FARC was closer to become a legal political actor - one can notice that the news media embraced an *ethnocentric* type of approach:[22] "enemies are only of interest as threats, and thus such news stories focus almost exclusively on the level of danger posed by the other side" (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p.22). As it has been illustrated, the news stories around the pedagogical visits focused on the negative aspects rather than the benefits, without mentioning that they only got the news media's attention when there were controversial elements attached to it.

The representation of relevant events of the peace negotiations resorting to negativity and controversial lenses is even more problematic as journalists themselves acknowledge that one of their key roles during a peace process is to do pedagogy around the negotiations. They recognize

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[22] Perhaps it would be better to refer here to 'state-centrism' as the conflict I am examining is a domestic conflict, and the notion of '*ethnocentrism*' employed by Wolfsfeld (2004) has been mainly applied to international conflicts involving different nationalities. Nonetheless, the concept of ethnocentrism is still useful in pointing at how the Colombian news media referred constantly to FARC as the 'other' and to the harm they could posit for 'us'.

that translating the complexity of the negotiations into simple words is paramount so the public can understand what is at stake. As seen from the following three excerpts, there seems to be a consensus around two ideas: 1) that the role of journalists should be that of being pedagogues (to deeply explain the negotiations) and 2) that although this is necessary, not every media outlet or journalist actually does it:

> **I focused a lot on doing pedagogy around** what was happening and what was agreed upon, and about the main issues that were being discussed. I never resorted to sensationalist approaches (that other media did resort to), such as that Iván Márquez was seen in the pub 'La Bodeguita del Medio' or that the bodyguard of De la Calle was seen with a prostitute; I never wrote those type of stories. I never turned to 'celebrity journalism' as a tool to report on the Havana process. I always worked on the issues being discussed at the table, on the historical contexts, the relevant stuff (J-PR 9, Elite Newspaper).

> Since I was responsible for writing the political news stories, **I tried to do as much pedagogy as possible** because I felt that there was a responsibility from us as a media to inform the people what they were going to sign and what they were doing. But not everyone did it (J-PE 4, Television)

> **I dedicated myself to do pedagogy about the peace process** because the country was very divided. My main task was to do pedagogy and analysis: to explain to the people 'if this occurs then these are the possible scenarios'. So to do a lot of pedagogy, to do a lot of explanation because the country was entirely polarized (J-SE 8, Elite Newspaper).

The role of being 'pedagogues' of the peace talks clearly clashes with both the commercially driven practices to construct news and some of the values (e.g. simplicity and ethnocentrism) that some journalists embraced during the negotiations. However, the testimony from the political reporter (J-PR 9, Elite Newspaper) shows that even within the commercial environment in which the media have engaged, journalists still have agency and autonomy to focus on what seems more relevant: the policy issues. This reporter clearly points out that he distanced himself from any kind of sensationalist approach, such as 'celebrity journalism', to report on what he considered were the key issues around the peace process.

9.1.2 Different journalistic attitudes within the Colombian newsrooms

The question that this situation raises, then, is why these multiple types of journalistic attitudes can coexist within the same media environment during a peace negotiation? Unraveling the contradictory relationship between the peace process (as a non-event) and the 'news media

logic', particularly the 'technological aspects' of it (Esser, 2013), helps us to find some clues. On the one hand, a peace negotiation is a process that takes a long time to finish, the issues are discussed behind closed-doors and the negotiating parties make public announcements sporadically. As a consequence, there is not much relevant information available for journalists to construct news stories. The following excerpt from a political reporter who worked for an independent online news outlet better explains it:

> A negotiation is per se, by nature, an event that is very difficult to cover because it is **a non-event.** The media that depend the most or the types of media that depend the most on covering events (which I think is television) had great difficulties to do it [report on it]. Why? Well, **because there is nothing that happens that they can actually show**. I had the fortune to work in a media outlet where, first, well-done journalism does not depend on having to show the protagonist, that is, the reporting did not depend on me managing to put Humberto de la Calle in front of a camera to tell me nothing, because what could he tell me that was a 'bomb' [scoop]? (J-PR 5, Online Media)

On the other hand, as also highlighted above by the testimony, there are some characteristics of the news media (the media formats) that makes the lack of information even more problematic. He indeed points out that television media appeared to have the most difficulties when reporting on the peace process as it is a medium that relies to a great extent on showing images (something difficult to obtain during a secret negotiation in which politicians are not available for interviews). This issue was not only highlighted by journalists, but also by some Colombian government officials who also perceived that television, due to its technological limitations, focused on what was not relevant for the peace dialogues. The following is an excerpt from a government negotiator when reflecting on the role of the news media during the peace process:

> Television is a much more complex matter because it seems to me that the shortness of space available on television ended up trivializing the information in multiple occasions. Many times the most striking information was not really the substantial one, so I could say that there was a certain degree of superficiality due to the limitation of the 30-40 seconds of the news stories. This ended up depriving the viewer of a more serious and deeper knowledge [around the negotiations] (P-GN 3).

Consequently, it appears that this contradiction of the complexity of a peace negotiation and the news values (Wolfsfeld, 2004) is much more apparent in television media as there are

further format limitations (e.g. time) that obstruct the practice of a journalism that better explains the relevant issues to the citizenry. Indeed, the type of medium can have direct implications on the type of news stories that the media publish about the peace negotiations. A senior political reporter, when reflecting on the role of journalism, acknowledged that during a peace negotiation it is very important to have a thorough discussion process before publishing any kind of information as, according to her, every single piece of information in a negotiation matters. However, depending on the type of media, these types of discussion can have different characteristics:

> Newsrooms varies from one another. If you have these types of conversation in *El Espectador*, you can actually have the conversation. You can listen and can have the serenity of the debate, the serenity of talking, of balancing things out. 'If we do not publish, it is censorship, if we publish, what kind of consequences can we have, who are we benefiting'? **It is more difficult in the immediacy of a television newscast. I would probably think that *Semana* could also have a more considered reflection, because it is a weekly magazine, you can work more on the information**. **The truth is that a peace process is not a daily television news piece**. I understand the difficulty for online media, radio, television to be there trying to say something. **The truth is that nobody can stand five years of a peace negotiation in television news every day** (J-SPR 7, Television)

Journalists indeed struggled to find news stories to write in relation to the negotiation as there was not much to talk about in such a confidential environment, so they started seeking out other kinds of stories. In some scenarios, as seen in the following excerpts, this meant that they resorted to a 'statement kind of journalism' to gather the opinions of politicians in relation to the peace dialogues (J-JPR 1, Radio), or they looked for political stories that somehow were intertwined with the process (J-PR 2, Radio/Television). In both cases, one could argue that although irrelevant to the peace process, they were still in the realm of the political field:

> There were moments in which the negotiations did not progress, so journalists did not have anything new to tell. So it was difficult because due to the secrecy there was absolutely nothing new to share so you had to look for other voices and seek for right, left and center politicians to ask them 'what is your opinion?' (J-JPR 1, Radio).

> There were negotiations cycles that were really 'dead'. I suppose they [the negotiators] were having progress internally at the table, but journalistically speaking there was nothing. What did one use? Sometimes an issue would arise: The United States' blockade of Cuba, for instance. Then one would go and start doing those stories or one would look for other types of stories, but there were cycles that were totally 'journalistically dead' (J-PR 2, Radio/Television).

However, when more commercially driven rationales took place, the content around the dialogues became completely irrelevant to the peace negotiations, as the following testimony from a political reporter clearly illustrates:

> Part of my job was to write some more 'light' news stories. I remember that there were two or three dogs in the complex of the negotiations, and they were always present in the entrance when FARC and the government were negotiating. So I made a story around them because one of the dogs was adopted by one of the communicators from the government so it became like the mascot of the peace process. Someday it did not show up and it was known that it had been hit by a car, so I made a specific written story about that dog. These were the type of things that we did apart from the main information, like the 'curious stories of the process', like some events that could be highlighted outside of the negotiations (J-PR 6, Radio and Television).

Therefore, the nature of the peace process (e.g., the secrecy and the lack of information) conditioned some of the journalistic approaches towards the peace dialogues. Journalists resorted to different strategies to construct news around the dialogues, despite the absence of relevant information around the negotiations. In the following **Section (9.2)** I explore these different journalistic attitudes further by describing how some journalists, instead of embracing the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic', adopted 'the defence of peace' as a key criterion to report on the peace negotiations.

9.2 Protecting the peace process as a superior journalistic value

As mentioned before, Colombian journalists, when reporting on the peace process, not only relied on constructing news resorting to commercially driven rationales. They were also guided by some professional norms closely related to the defence of peace as a universal ethical value. This seems to be related, amongst other things, to the fact that the Colombian news media, broadly speaking, was in favour of the peace negotiations. For instance, when asked if they believed that the Colombian news media supported the peace agreements, a government negotiator answered without hesitation: "Absolutely, absolutely. I think that without the media, popular support would have been impossible" (P-GN 5). In a similar fashion, a negotiation advisor and a communications advisor recalled:

> I think that in general terms I feel that there was always a lot of awareness of the importance of supporting the [peace] process. And I think that they [the media] made enormous efforts to get information from us because the process was so 'armoured' that it was very difficult to actually obtain information. So what they [the media] did all the time, in my opinion, and I am generalizing because not all media behave in the same way, was to support the peace process (P-GNA 2).

> The media that was in favour of the government and was supporting the peace process, were very benevolent. They supported us and opened us the doors, and they endured ('quotation marks') 'the very extreme forms of communications' that we used (…) I believe that in Colombia, in general, the media tried to help. For example, in the plebiscite the media played a generally supportive role to the process and support to the plebiscite, and support to peace. And we all lost, including the media [since they supported the 'Yes' in the referendum campaign and the 'No' won] (C-GCA 5).

One could say, based on the excerpts above, that the Colombian news media wanted the government and the guerrilla group to come to a successful agreement. Therefore, to better understand the influence that embracing an advocacy approach to peace had on the reporters during the peace negotiations, it is important to examine how this approach played out during the off the record meetings that journalists held with both the government delegation and FARC delegation. Since the peace negotiations were private and confidential, the off the record meetings became a primary resource for reporters to know about the close-door developments of the peace dialogues. As the following testimony from a senior editor illustrates, protecting the peace process was a key aspect when approaching these encounters:

There is a first thing that is important to point out which is that, (and I think that all the journalists with whom you will speak will mention it to you), with very few exceptions, almost a nominal exception, most of the media had as an editorial policy a certain, let's say, sympathy for the negotiation, to see it in a positive way. **This emerges from a basic ethical assessment which is that peace is much better than war**, and that anything that led to dismantling the armed conflict in Colombia was seen as favorable. I mention this (…) in the context of the 'off the record' meetings because the approach, at least my personal approach (…) was to talk, to try to get to know the best possible the status of the negotiation and **be very careful when publishing, thinking above all about the progress and the health of the [peace] process** (J-SE 10, Elite Newspaper)**.**

It is interesting to see that the senior editor employed the broad ethical consideration of 'peace is better than war' as a kind of professional guidance and as an assessment criterion: the most important thing, when publishing, was to be careful about the 'health of the peace process'. This would imply that he may have used these 'ethical lenses' to determine what kind of news stories were worth sharing with the public (because they would be beneficial to the negotiations) and what kind of stories were better kept as confidential (not to affect the 'health' of the dialogues). In a similar fashion, a political reporter also acknowledges (more openly and directly) that he had to keep some information confidential when he understood that it could harm the peace process. For this political reporter, the main journalistic premise was also 'to take care of the [negotiating] table'. Here it is important to add that these remarks are also discussed within the context of the off the record meetings:

I have always had a journalistic position, a position that has never been seen as 'official' [from the government]. I am a person who has built a critical vision, related to left-wing ideas, related to democratic and social ideas; this is a position that I have defended despite its costs. My thesis on this is that it is more important to say what the journalist's positions are and for readers to be clear about them **because I don't believe in objectivity as a principle, I don't think it exists**. So this always led me to pursue a journalistic premise: **for me the most important thing was to take care of the process.**

Since for me, and it was never a secret, the interest was that the process went ahead and peace was signed, **more than once I had to keep information that was harmful and that I kept it when what I understood about the information was that the information was being filtered to harm**. So, as I told you, the premise was to always 'take care of the table', I never wanted to play on either one or the other side. I understood that journalism was a field where the last battle was being fought so I followed the premise I just mentioned.

(J-PR 9, Elite Newspaper)

There are two considerations worth discussing from the previous excerpts. Firstly, his rationale for protecting the peace process appears to emerge for his own ideological construction of the world. He acknowledges that the foundations of his 'critical vision' are ideas that resonate with left-wing principles, as well as social and democratic beliefs. This critical vision, he points out, is the cause of him deciding to be open with the readers about his journalistic positions, particularly about the fact that he decided to be in favor of the peace agreements. To put it simply, his very own experience as an individual had a direct influence in how he approached the peace negotiations (journalistically speaking). Secondly, the reporter is very open in acknowledging that in multiple instances he decided to keep some information confidential when 'he understood' that the information had been shared to harm the peace process. Just as the senior editor did, the political reporter's key premise of protecting the peace accord helped him to identify when it was beneficial (for the negotiations) to make the information publicly available.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that this approach to keep information confidential based on a very specific criteria (that of taking care of the peace dialogues) could be subject of some criticism as one could argue that the public has the right to access relevant information around the negotiations (regardless of the consequences from disclosing it). There is then a clear tension between the act of self-censorship that some journalists exercised in the name of defending the peace dialogues and the public service of journalism that would be more inclined to disclose the information in the name of the public. In fact, as seen from the following testimony from another senior editor, one could argue that some journalists, when reporting on the peace negotiations, were actually serving the greater goal of peace rather than responding directly to the public's right to access information:

> It is very important to say that (…) a journalist who reports on a peace process sometimes knows more than he can tell. I in particular knew much more than I could tell. Now, why didn't I tell it sometimes? Because it wasn't worth it**, not because the public didn't need to know, [but because] I knew that if I said that at that moment it would probably damage a point on the [peace] agenda**, I would damage a next agreement. So I had to balance: 'if I say it now I can break an agreement, if I do not say it, what happens to the country? Nothing happens, it is just an internal fight'. (J-SE 8, Elite Newspaper)

What is interesting from this testimony is that the editor acknowledges that in some circumstances, even though the public could have needed to know some information, she decided not to disclose it as it could affect an issue that was being negotiated at the table. Again, the main criteria here was the defense of peace. However, not all journalists may have used the same criteria as some others could have been driven by a combination of other factors (e.g., publishing information first than other outlets) than just keeping the negotiations safe. The following testimony from a political reporter illustrates this in detail:

> When we had information that was too sensitive, **always the criteria was the right of society to be informed**. However, we would go through an assessment with our general Editor, with the Peace Editor and the Senior Management (the Director of the newspaper) to determine the best timing of the publication (because everything was always published). **What I want to make clear is that nothing was ever stopped being published, but we assessed the timings to be able to do it at a suitable time so that the negotiation would not be damaged but also for us not to lose the information.**
>
> Because it is very difficult to access to privileged information since it involves sources work, verification, confirmation. There is also a risk that while you are confirming [the information] with someone [a politician], that someone will tell another colleague and it turns out that what you had another news outlet publishes it first. But, to be clear**: publications were never kept, what was always done was to analyse the situations so as not to screw us up as journalists (...) but also not affecting a political process such as a peace negotiation.**

(J-PR 3, Elite Newspaper)

Interestingly, even though the previous two testimonies (J-SE 8 and J-PR3) come from the same news media outlet, the journalists have opposing perspectives in regard to the issue of keeping information confidential: while the senior editor (J-SE 8) points out that she did not disclose information on several occasions, the political reporter (J-PR3) emphasized in multiple instances that they always made the information publicly available; they just needed to assess the best moments for releasing it. Moreover, although the political reporter also mentions the importance of not damaging the political process, he is also concerned with other criteria. In fact, he points at a balance between protecting the negotiations and competing with other media to be the first in making privileged information publicly available.

This issue of competition indicates that getting access to privileged information from the peace negotiation could be considered of a high journalistic value given the very confidential aspect of the dialogues and the work required to get the job done (work sources, verification of

data, etc.). Therefore, journalists seemed to have experienced a tension when reporting on the peace process: they had to decide whether to follow the game of the scoop and being recognized as the first media to disclose some information or keep it confidential to try to protect the political process. This is indeed in line with the following testimony in which a political reporter describes this situation as a 'constant ethical dilemma' and the 'main danger' around reporting on the peace negotiations:

> It was a bit like the ethical dilemma in which the journalist was constantly involved: whether to make public the "chivas" [scoops] (…) that was the main danger, for me, for the process. Because uncovering things that would come later (…) what it could generate were effects contrary to the negotiation success and the possibilities of peace (J-PR 9, Elite Newspaper).

Further evidence of this tension is described by a communications advisor from the government delegation who acknowledges that they were very selective when giving information to journalists during the off the record meetings. She points out that not every journalist was given the same amount of information as it was clear that some of them would use it to publish 'decontextualized scoops':

> The level of depth [on sharing information] depended on the type of journalists. For example, we gave [journalist X] much more information because she had much more criteria and context to know how to use it. You can't give other journalists so much information because they were going to publish decontextualized scoops. When you went to media directors like [Journalist Y], you gave a lot of information because he knew what to do with that information. To the reporter who was going to do field work you give them less because there was a risk that they would publish an additional detail (that the other reporter did not have) because of the scoop competition (C-GCA 5).

These testimonies further showcase the multiple journalistic attitudes that coexisted during the peace negotiations. While some journalists were clearly guided by the criterion of 'protecting the peace' process and employed it as a guidance to determine whether to publish or not, other reporters point out that they could not afford not to release some of the information that they have obtained about the highly secret dialogues. In other words, access to privileged information during the peace process was considered for them as a very important 'journalistic asset' that always needed to become publicly available news. As shown above, these different journalistic approaches even occurred within the same newsrooms, highlighting the nuance of the logics of news production around the peace negotiations.

9.3 Concluding remarks

I discussed in this **Chapter (9)** the logics that prevailed in the news production process around the peace negotiations. In line with what I argued in **Chapter (5),** where I examined the news coverage of the peace dialogues, I demonstrated in **Section (9.1)** that journalists were highly influenced by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) when constructing news about the negotiations. More specifically, I explained that reporters were particularly interested in controversial and negative news stories, but also in very specific moments of the negotiations characterized by their visual prominence. These findings highlight two important considerations. Firstly, that journalists resorted, more often than not, to construct news characterized by dramatization, confrontainment and spectacularization which, as indicated by Esser (2013, p.171), can be considered as some "effects of [the] commercial imperatives in political communication". Secondly, that journalists were guided by some of the key (problematic) values identified by Wolfsfeld (2004, p.15) when journalists report on peace processes: immediacy, drama and simplicity (see **Chapter 3.1** for details.)

Nonetheless, I also explained that despite Colombian newsrooms being permeated by commercial practices and routines, one can find other journalistic attitudes towards the peace negotiations that were more guided by the 'professional aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b), more specially that of serving the public interest which Hallin and Mancini (2004) identified as the third dimension of 'journalistic professionalism'. Therefore, I explained that while some journalists focused on reporting the controversial aspects of the peace dialogues, there were other reporters who acknowledged that a key aspect of their role was to explain the policy issues around the peace negotiations and that they distanced themselves from journalistic approaches that would favour sensationalism. For these reporters, providing a comprehensive coverage about the peace dialogues that would allow citizens to better understand the complexity of the negotiations was paramount.

Interestingly, and as I argued in **Section (9.2)**, 'protecting the peace dialogues' became a key (journalistic) criterion for some journalists when reporting on the negotiations. They embraced

the defence of peace, which could be considered a universal ethical value ('peace is better than war'), as an assessment criterion to determine what kind of information they needed to make publicly available. In fact, some journalists practiced self-censorship in some instances when they believed that the information could bring serious and negative consequences to the negotiations. Importantly, this self-censorship was practiced by journalists while also acknowledging that the public had the right to be informed. In short, the criterion of protecting the peace dialogues prevailed as the key guideline.

This practice embraced by some journalists seems to be in line with the journalistic role known as the 'advocate', which aims to 'value judgments according to political, social, or moral standards' (Donsbach and Klett, 1993, p.64). In fact, these findings seem to resonate with a study on the role perceptions of Colombian journalists, in the face of the conflict, which found that reporters hold a strong active stance and perceive the role of the 'advocate' as important and indeed unproblematic (Prager and Hameleers, 2021). (A position that could be considered counterproductive to the journalistic norm of objectivity by some other reporters). Likewise, protecting the peace process also appears to resonate with the broad claims of 'Peace Journalism' as this can be defined as to "when editors and reporters make choices that improve the prospects for peace" (Center for Global Peace Journalism, 2022). Although this approach focuses on the *way* that journalists *should* report on conflict 'to improve the prospects of peace', it is clear that some Colombian journalists did make some decisions (e.g. not to publish) with the same aim in mind.

Overall, I demonstrated in this **Chapter (9)** that even though the news coverage of the peace negotiations was highly dominated by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic', the testimonies from varied journalists highlight that other journalistic attitudes, more focused on professional norms, can coexist (even within the same newsrooms). Likewise, there is clear empirical evidence to suggest that some of the journalistic approaches towards the negotiations were also conditioned by the contradiction between the nature of the peace process and the 'news media logic', particularly the 'technological aspects' of it (Esser, 2013). Television, given its format constraints, struggled the most to construct news due to the confidentiality of the peace dialogues. The findings of this **Chapter (9)** then suggest that is pivotal for studies on the

mediatization of politics to examine the news media representations in conjunction with the journalistic practice to gain a more accurate picture and a better understanding of the nuances and complexities of the 'news media logic'.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

This research investigated how the Colombian news media *intervened* in the peace process (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group FARC. I focused on examining: 1) how the news media represented the peace negotiations (*media discourse*); 2) how Colombian journalists approached and reported about the negotiations (*journalistic practice*); and 3) how key political actors involved in the negotiations (the government, FARC and the Democratic Center) interacted with the news media (*political practices related to the media*). To do so, I applied and tested the utility of the theoretical framework on mediatization (Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Lundby, 2014), particularly the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b). However, although my study mainly followed an institutionalist tradition, I also employed the 'inhabited institutions' approach (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006; Hallett, 2010) as a sensitizing framework to emphasize the micro aspects of the interdependent relationship between media and political actors. This approach was particularly helpful in providing a more nuanced understanding of mediatization processes during the peace negotiations.

This **Chapter (10)** brings together the conclusions of this study in three sections. In **Section (10.1)** I systematically provide the answers for each of the sub-research questions by linking them to a brief summary of the key findings discussed in the preceding empirical **Chapters (5 to 9).** At the end of this section, and in order to provide a succinct answer to the main inquiry of this research, I highlight three ways in which the Colombian news media ***intervened*** in the peace negotiations**:**

1) The news media *influenced the political actors' strategies.*
2) The news media *pressured the peace delegations during 'political waves'.*
3) The news media *disrupted the ways of working of the peace delegations.*

Subsequently, in **Section (10.2)** I turn to discuss the implications of my findings for both the theoretical framework on the mediatization of politics and the role of the news media in peace processes. I explain that I have demonstrated empirically that the mediatization of politics needs to be understood as a matter of degree (see Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) given that the different

political actors were influenced by the Colombian news media in different ways and degrees. Consequently, I highlight that the Colombian political communication culture became an important factor that influenced the processes of news media logic adaption by the different political actors involved in the negotiations. Moreover, I suggest that although the news media's 'modus operandi' shaped the political strategies of politicians, this did not necessarily mean that political actors lost their autonomy, since embracing media considerations was for the most part an instrumental process to achieve political goals. Finally, in **Section (10.3)** I suggest three key areas for further research in which I highlight the importance of understanding how a much more complex media ecosystem, the 'media manifold' (Couldry and Hepp, 2016), may alter the relationship between the news media and politics during peace negotiations, as well as the relevance of conducting studies that examine the aspect of *change* within the mediatization of politics: whether the Colombian news media has increased its importance (over time) over political institutions/actors during these type of political processes.

10.1 Media discourse, media-related practices from politicians and the journalistic practice

One of the three key aspects of this study was to examine the *media discourses* around the peace negotiations; this aspect was explored in SRQ1 and SRQ2. With regards to the SRQ1 (*how did the Colombian news media represent the peace negotiations?)* I demonstrated that, overall, the traditional news media adopted an 'elite-driven' approach (Robinson et al., 2010) to report on the peace negotiations. This was mainly manifested by 1) how the news media representations of the peace process were consistently aligned with the government delegation's narrative and 2) the absence of critique towards the government's decisions and actions during key 'political waves' (Wolfsfeld, 2004). For example, in **Chapter (5.2.1)** I illustrated how the news media sided with the government in using the element of time to pressure the FARC delegation at the negotiation table.

Likewise, I described in **Chapter (5.2.2)** how the traditional news media opted to overlook the responsibility of the Colombian government during the kidnapping of Army General Rubén Alzate as they did not question the government's decision of negotiating amidst the conflict. In a similar fashion, I showed in **Chapter (7.2)** how the news media, in line with the government's strategy that aimed to hand over to FARC the entire political responsibility for the events, tended to deem FARC accountable for the loss of trust around the negotiations during the worst escalation of the conflict (2014) that the peace process experienced (despite the government also engaged in violent attacks). Finally, another sign of this elite-driven approach was illustrated in **Chapter (5.1)** by explaining that the most prevalent topic of the entire corpus of news - with a significant frequency percentage - was the topic of 'President Statements', highlighting the substantial amount of voice that was exclusively given to former President Santos (in comparison to other political actors).

Alongside this elite-driven approach, the traditional news media often incorporated the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013) to report about the peace negotiations. Consequently, and in regards SRQ2 (*how did forms of 'news media logic' affect the coverage?),* I demonstrated that the news coverage focused on news stories characterized by conflict, drama and

negativity, but also on news stories that could be placed within the category of what is known as 'depoliticization' (Esser, 2013): the marginalization of substantial issue discussion. For example, I explained in **Chapter (5.1)**, through discussing the results of the Structural Topic Modelling, that the news coverage focused on discussing the *procedural development* of the peace negotiations rather than explaining the substantive issues of the peace agenda. Moreover, besides the significant prevalence of negative news stories such as those related to the 'critical moments' of the peace process, the news coverage was frequently characterized by drama and conflict when describing these type of issues. More specifically, I explained in **Chapter (5.2.1)** that given that the element of time became a contested and conflicting issue between the government and FARC, the news stories focused on these two elements to describe the 'pacing of the peace dialogues.' In a similar fashion, and also affected by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic', I showed in **Chapter (6)** how the news coverage, when referring to the issue of victims, focused on the conflict aspect of the matter: giving voice to those victims that *opposed*, *criticized*, and *problematized* the selection process of the victims' delegations. The focus on the 'commercial aspects' led to the construction of news that may have not positively contributed to a healthy deliberation environment around the negotiations (as I will discuss in **Section 10.2**).

It is important to clarify, however, that these two elements - the 'elite driven' approach and the high reliance on the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' - does not necessarily apply to the news stories that *La Silla Vacía* (the independent media outlet) constructed to represent the peace negotiations. As I explained in **Chapter (5.3),** the news coverage from *La Silla Vacía* was more characterized by the 'professional aspects' as their news stories illustrate an account-holding kind of journalism in which the media outlet displayed a more interpretative, analytical and watchdog type of reporting (Esser, 2013, p.170) when communicating about the peace negotiations. This was particularly apparent when, contrary to the traditional news media, their news stories held the government accountable for its decisions during the crisis of the kidnapping of Army General Ruben Darío Alzate.

The second key aspect of this project was to examine the *media-related practices* from the political actors involved in the peace negotiations. To inspect this issue, I inquired in SRQ3: *how did the 'news media logic' impact the role of political actors during the peace process?* As I

illustrated in **Chapters (7)** and **(8),** media considerations were at the centre of all political actors' strategies since they all perceived the news media as a key influential actor either for the success of the peace negotiations or their own political interests. Given this perception of influence, which is very important for mediatization to occur, all political actors adapted their '*organizational structures'* (Donges and Jarren, 2014, see also Strömbäck and Van Aelst, 2013) in response to the news media. This level of adaptation, which granted high relevance to the role of the dedicated communications teams of all political actors, meant that media-related activities took a central role in the daily matters of political actors. For instance, in **Chapter (7.1)** I described how, instructed by the communications team, the government negotiators *needed* to meet every Friday, during the cycles of the negotiations, with key editors from *Semana, El Espectador* and *El Tiempo,* to try to influence the content of the opinion articles publish on the Sunday editions of each media outlet. In a similar fashion, I also explained in **Chapter (7.1)** how the FARC delegation, in conjunction with its 'communication division', would plan the selection of the topic of their daily press conferences based on the news media needs. In the case of the opposition party, I described in **Chapter (8.3)** how journalists perceived that the Democratic Center had a very organized media management and how centralized their communications were: all media inquiries were always handled by their press officer who would direct the news media to a specific member of the party depending on the topic of the inquiry.

Although these are only a handful of examples of media adaptation from political actors (I highlighted others throughout the empirical chapters), it is clear that the 'modus operandi' of the media (Hjarvard, 2008) impacted on both the *routines* and *strategies* of the government delegation, the FARC delegation and the Democratic Center during the peace negotiations. However, it is important to note that the adoption of 'news media logic' took different forms and had different implications (on different levels) depending on the political actor and its role within the negotiations. In the case of the government delegation, the news media did not necessarily condition their behaviour but rather became more of an *intervention* actor when the negotiations experienced some legitimacy issues. More specifically, the news media *intervened* by both amplifying and inflating the crisis scenarios which prompted the government to react as the coverage negatively affected the public perception of the peace negotiations.

However, since the traditional news media adopted an 'elite-driven' approach to report on the peace process (including the media representations of key 'political waves'), the government delegation managed to position their narrative in the news agenda comfortably without having to resort to tactics to appeal to the logic of the news media. Overall, the government delegation remained very much in control and did not lose their autonomy even when they resorted to the news media in scenarios where the latter was supposed to 'lead the way'. This was the case in the first public interview given by the government delegation during the negotiations in which they defined the rules of *how* the interview needed to be both conducted and distributed - as I explained in detail in **Chapter (7.2.3)**.

For the 'challengers' (Wolfsfeld, 1997b) of the peace negotiations, although the news media did not also fully condition their behaviour, the 'news media logic' had a greater impact on their role as political actors. For the case of the guerrilla group, and on the one hand, 'the news media logic' had an influence on its own processes of communication and consolidation as a (legitimate) political actor. As I explained in detail in **Chapter (8.2),** the FARC delegation decided to adopt the format of a television newscast to both communicate the development of the negotiations to their combatants and try to connect with a wider audience in light of its soon-to-be new political stage. This highlights, amongst other things, that FARC saw in the 'modus operandi' of the media the best way to effectively communicate: while the guerrilla group could have adopted other means of communication, they decided to impersonate the news media and their logics. On the other hand, and given that the Colombian news media consistently aligned with the narrative and goals of the government delegation, FARC struggled more to position its narrative in the news agenda during key 'political waves'. Besides this being one of the reasons as to why the guerrilla group may have decided to 'impersonate the news' through its television newscast (they needed to disseminate their messaging), this also explains (in part) why the guerrilla group resorted to a more proactive communication approach in which their tactic of having a daily press conference (that would be guided by the media needs) was paramount.

In the case of the Democratic Center, the 'news media logic' influenced how they both designed their communication strategy and constructed their narrative during the peace negotiations. Given that the majority of the Colombian media outlets were in favour of the

negotiations, the opposition party had to resort to their knowledge of the news media dynamic and their media savvy-skills to create strategies to appeal to news values of negativity, conflict and drama in order to obtain news coverage. More specifically, the party employed a conflicting and controversial type of narrative that was clearly manifested in, for example, their 'Civil Resistance Process' campaign that I explained in detail in **Chapter (8.4)**. These findings seem to be in line with research on the affinity between a populist communication style and 'media logic' or what is known as 'mediatized populism' (Mazzoleni, 2014). As Voltmer and Sorensen (2019, p.55) explain, given that populist politics depends to a high degree "on the resonance of the media, [it] shapes its rhetoric, messages and organization around 'media logic'".

Finally, the third aspect addressed by this research was the *journalistic practice*: the way in which Colombian journalists approached the negotiations and reported about them. In this regard, the study inquired in SRQ4: *what were the aspects of the 'news media logic' that prevailed for journalists during the peace process?* Similar to what I argued about the news coverage of the peace negotiations, I demonstrated in this study that journalists were highly influenced by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) when constructing news about the peace dialogues. More specifically, I illustrated in **Chapter (9.1)** that practices of news production driven by economically motivated rationales have become prevalent within Colombian newsrooms. Given the predominance of these practices, journalists resorted very often to construct news characterized by dramatization, confrontainment and spectacularization which, as highlighted by Esser (2013, p.171), can be considered as some "effects of [the] commercial imperatives in political communication". Likewise, journalists were guided by some of the key (problematic) values identified by Wolfsfeld (2004, p.15) when journalists report on peace processes: immediacy, drama and simplicity. Consequently, the findings of the news coverage (media discourses) can be seen as a mirror of the logics that prevailed for journalists during the news production process (journalistic practice) around the negotiations.

However, even though Colombian newsrooms have been permeated by commercial practices and routines, this study also showed that other journalistic attitudes, more focused on professional norms, can coexist (even within the same newsrooms). I explained in **Chapter (9.2)**

that although some journalists focused on reporting on the controversial issues of the peace dialogues, there were other reporters who acknowledged that a key aspect of their role was to explain the policy issues around the negotiations so citizens could have a more comprehensive understanding around the political process. In other words, there were some journalists that instead of being influenced by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' were more guided by its 'professional aspects', particularly that of serving the public interest or what Hallin and Mancini (2004) refer to as 'journalistic professionalism'. A manifestation of the latter was how 'protecting the peace process' became a key (journalistic) criterion for some reporters as they embraced the defence of peace as an assessment principle to determine what kind of information they needed to make publicly available. Taking all these elements together, one can notice that the logics of news production around the peace process were complex, full of nuances and can be better understood as a matter of emphasis.

All the above leads to the main inquiry of this research: ***How did the news media intervene in the peace negotiations (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and FARC?*** As I mentioned at the beginning of this **Chapter (10)**, there are three key aspects in which the news media intervened in the negotiations. Firstly, and since the news media was regarded by all the political actors examined in this study as a key influential actor for the peace negotiations, they ***influenced the political strategies*** of the government delegation, the FARC delegation and the 'Democratic Center' throughout the whole process. This means, amongst other things, that media considerations were at the centre of the role of the political actors who saw the news media as both a vehicle to achieve their political goals or as an obstacle to pursue their interests at different times. Consequently, the news media management strategies employed by these actors cannot be understood as separate actions from their roles: they were tightly intertwined with their political objectives during the peace process.

Secondly, even though the news media remained a critical actor throughout the whole political process, they took center stage during the critical moments of the peace negotiations. Consequently, ***the news media intervened in moments of crisis*** by both considerably amplifying the 'political waves' (Wolfsfeld, 2004) and providing them with a narrative structure that worsened the political atmosphere of the negotiations as was illustrated in detail in **Chapters (5.1.2)** and

(7.2). Given that journalists were often guided by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' (Esser, 2013), they resorted to 'dramatic lenses' to represent these critical moments. Interestingly, even though the negative coverage of these events may have contributed to worsen the perception of the public towards the negotiations (as it indeed happened during the worst escalation of the conflict in 2014), the pressure coming from a continued attention to the crises by the media also created significant pressure on both delegations to compromise and find solutions to resolve the 'political waves'. In other words, the news media may have contributed to the resolution of crisis scenarios by pressuring the government and FARC delegations through a sustained negative coverage of the events. (Please see **Chapter (7.2)** for an explanation on how the pressure coming from the news media worked differently for the Colombian government and FARC.)

Finally, the news media representations (characterized by negativity and conflict) around the political atmosphere of the peace process, and the overall attention of the news media to crisis and dramatic events, ***disrupted the ways of working of the peace delegations***. "It was (…) as if Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel and people were constantly shaking his scaffold or throwing stones or water at him", pointed out one of the communication advisors from the government delegation, a statement that can easily summarize how the rest of the political actors perceived the impact of the news media in both their role and the peace process. Although this seem a minor or 'nuisance' media effect at first glance, it should not be overlooked because it shows how the news media operation *affected* the work of the political actors that were trying to reach an agreement to put an end to a conflict of more than 50 years. In other words, it highlights that the news media can contribute to create a complex (and negative) atmosphere at the negotiation table for the politicians trying to precisely achieve some agreements and compromises.

Based on all the above, I suggest that although the political actors involved in the peace process were mediatized to a significant extent - they adapted to the news media requirements -, the impact of the news media in the peace process itself was rather limited. Despite political actors reacting to media considerations very often, the peace process (as a closed-door bargaining policy process) did not necessarily respond to the news media needs. Although my empirical data illustrated some specific instances in which, for example, the strategy of the government delegation

at the negotiation table was intertwined with their media strategy (e.g. the statements of a public interview would be used during cycles of negotiations to create pressure on the FARC delegation), the negotiation process was mainly guided by the 'political logic', particularly the 'policy aspect' (Esser, 2013): it strictly responded to the six-point agenda agreed by the two parties at the beginning of the peace negotiations.

10.2 Implications of my findings

A key aspect of my project was to **apply** and empirically **test** the framework on the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b) in a specific political context: a peace negotiation conducted in Colombia. Overall, my findings demonstrate that the key postulate of the mediatization of politics, that is (briefly speaking) that the news media have become an autonomous institution capable of influencing how the field of politics operates, can be applicable to the context of the peace negotiations. As it was explained in **Sections (10.1)** and **(10.2)**, the news media shaped and altered the political strategies of the political actors involved in the negotiations as they regarded the news media as a key actor for their political success. However, I aligned here with Strömbäck and Esser (2014b, p.10) when suggesting that although the news media seems to be increasingly permeating all aspects of political life, this does not necessarily mean that "political (…) actors and institutions have lost all their autonomy and influence".

My empirical data illustrated that, for the most part, political actors *consciously* and *strategically* embraced media considerations within their roles to achieve their political objectives. In other words, even though media considerations shaped some of the processes of the political actors, they remained more or less autonomous as they adapted the 'news media logic' instrumentally. However, and as it has been greatly exemplified throughout this study, there were variations in how the news media influenced the role of the varied political actors. Consequently, this research also served to illustrate empirically that the mediatization of politics needs to be understood as matter of degree (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019), given that the different political actors involved in the negotiations were influenced by the Colombian news media in different ways and degrees. Following Strömbäck and Esser's (2014) call about the importance of identifying some of the factors influencing the variations in media adaptation, I suggest that some aspects of the Colombian political communication culture played a very important role in how political actors managed the news media during the peace negotiations.

More specifically, the different attitudes of the Colombian news media towards the varied political actors affected the degree of adaptation of 'news media logic'. For instance, since the Colombian news media aligned with the government's narrative and goals - they embraced an 'elite driven approach' (Robinson et al., 2010) to report on the negotiations - the government delegation needed to resort to the news media mainly when the climate of opinion surrounding the negotiations worsened. Even under these circumstances, and also given the historically tight relationship between the Colombian press and political elites within the country (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Montoya, 2014,), the government delegation was able to manage the news media with a high degree of autonomy. On the contrary, given that the news media was much less favourable when representing the FARC delegation during the peace process, the latter adopted a more open communications approach during the negotiations in which accommodating their discourse to the news media needs was pivotal to including their narrative in the news agenda. This proactive approach (the need to communicate *through* the news media) was also determined (in part) by previous representations of the Colombian conflict in which FARC perceived that the media portrayed them, consistently, in a negative fashion; research has shown that the Colombian media has represented the conflict by resorting almost exclusively to official sources, excluding, amongst other things, the voice of FARC (Rey y Bonilla 2004; Rey, Bonilla, Tamayo y Gómez 2005; Rey y Bonilla 2005).

On the other hand, the findings of my research around the media discourse highlight that the Colombian news media may have not provided a healthy deliberation environment around the peace negotiations. The fact that the news coverage was greatly guided by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' as opposed to 'political logic' meant that, overall, the news media did not provide the citizenry with news stories that may have helped them to better understand the policies negotiated between the Colombian government and FARC. This is of particular relevance during a peace process as the media becomes one of the few *vehicles* through which citizens can learn about these type of negotiations that are held under strict confidentiality. Consequently, I have empirically illustrated in this study that the commercially driven practices that have permeated some of the Colombian newsrooms had a negative impact on the role of the news media in the peace process since they constantly focused on the conflict and negative aspects of the negotiations (even when dealing with news stories around the policy issues). My friend Alejandro

would be perhaps surprised to know that although I could have learned about the procedural development of the peace negotiations when reading the news, understanding the peace agenda issues through the news media would have been a much more complex task.

However, journalists were not the only actors that relied on the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic'. My findings also illustrated that political actors (particularly those that were not in power such as the opposition party and FARC) constantly internalized and adopted these 'commercial aspects' in order to be able to influence the news media agenda. This meant that in multiple instances these political actors led initiatives focus on news values of conflict and drama to get the news media attention. Therefore, taking these two elements together (a news coverage mainly guided by the 'commercial aspects' of the 'news media logic' and the internalization of these 'commercial aspects' by political actors in their behaviour), it is realistic to argue that a higher degree of mediatization (driven mainly by commercialization forces as explained above) can be detrimental for peace negotiations and the prospects of peace (more broadly). This is an important contribution for debates within the mediatization of politics as it shows the practical implications for journalism and democratic processes.

Finally, it is important to note that some inaccuracies and ambiguities in the news coverage around the peace process may have had negative implications for the prospects of peace in Colombia. The lopsided coverage provided by the Colombian news media in which FARC was consistently positioned as the only one responsible for the 'political waves', or the overlooking of the responsibility of the Colombian state in the internal armed conflict, could contribute to foster narratives anchored in the 'good guys' and the 'villains' that does not positively contribute to processes of reconciliation and forgiveness in the post conflict scenario in Colombia. A negotiation that is trying to put an end a conflict of more than 50 years is a very complex process that should also be represented by the news media encompassing its different complexities. This starts by, amongst other things, acknowledging the different responsibilities of the different actors (including the state) involved in the conflict. Consequently, I argue here that the elite-driven approach embraced by the traditional Colombian news media may have been detrimental for the prospects of peace as it may have contributed to, for example, delegitimizing the political aspirations of FARC when entering to their new political stage as a legitimate political party.

10.3 Directions for future research

I divide the directions of future research in three key areas. Firstly, I suggest that there is a need to understand how social media platforms (with their particular logics of operation) may affect the mediatization of peace negotiations. In the context of the peace process between the Colombian government and FARC, which took place between 2012 and 2016, social media appear to have had a role towards the end of the negotiations, particularly during the peace plebiscite (October 2016). In fact, as I also explained in **Chapter (8.3),** the opposition party turned to social media to counter the overall news media support towards the negotiations and used them as a key element for their communication strategy. Consequently, understanding how a much more complex media ecosystem, what Couldry and Hepp (2016) refer to as the 'media manifold', may influence the relationship between the news media and politics during peace negotiations is key for debates within the mediatization of politics. This approach can be adopted for future media studies within the Colombian context as there is a possibility of a negotiation (in the near future) between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Colombian government.

Secondly, I argue that it is important to conduct studies that focus on comparing the role of the Colombian news media in different peace negotiations: with the paramilitary groups back in 2003, for example, or with the guerrilla group FARC back in 1998. Adopting this type of studies would contribute significantly to a key element within the mediatization of politics: the aspect of *change* over time; that is, if the news media has increased its importance over political institutions/actors within this type of processes. For example, and despite the methodological challenges that it poses, interviewing political actors who participated in previous negotiations could shed light on understanding if the media embeddedness in political routines and strategies has increased over time. Moreover, examining and comparing the news coverage of these peace processes could also contribute to comprehending, for instance, if the media discourses around the peace negotiations have been increasingly permeated by some of the commercial practices identified in this thesis or if, on the contrary, the 'political logic' had a more predominant influence in the construction of news in previous peace dialogues.

Finally, I see the work of bringing together field theory and mediatization (see Couldry, 2014; Rawolle and Lingard, 2014; Jansson, 2015) as a truly promising endeavour to explicate (on

a macro level) how the news media exercise its power over other fields. More specifically, and as I outlined in **Chapter (2.5),** the concept of 'meta media-capital' developed by Couldry (2003; 2014) can contribute to explaining what he refers as the 'transversal effects of the media', a primary goal within the theoretical framework of mediatization. As this research illustrated throughout, the political actors embedded media considerations in their daily routines and political strategies. However, some of these adaptations were not necessarily an adoption of a particular news media logic but rather the response from political actors to a perceived **pervasive** media influence. For example, that the government delegation held a daily meeting to monitor the news coverage during the negotiations does not necessarily denote the adoption of a news media logic but rather the media embeddedness in their daily processes due to the attributed relevance given by politicians. Consequently, the notion of 'meta media-capital' could help to explain "the keyways in which media flows transform (…) what counts as resources for action" in other fields (Couldry, 2014, p.236).

10.4 Closing remarks

This research examined how the Colombian news media *intervened* in the peace process (2012-2016) between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group FARC by applying and testing the theoretical framework on the mediatization of politics. In doing so, I have contributed to produce new knowledge in an area - media and peace - that has historically been under-researched. More specifically, I provided an extensive empirical analysis of the media-related practices of some of the key political actors involved in the peace negotiations – an element that had been overlooked by other media studies that also studied peace processes in Colombia. Likewise, I provided a comprehensive examination of the news media representations of the peace negotiations by combining computational methods, specifically Structural Topic Modelling, with more qualitative strategies. I have demonstrated that this methodological approach of combining computational tools with qualitative approaches (such as thematic analysis) holds significant potential for a thorough and rigorous understanding of media discourses around peace negotiations and other political communication phenomenon.

On the other hand, this thesis also contributed to some existing knowledge by empirically testing some of the key claims within the mediatization of politics. More specifically, I provided robust empirical data to suggest that news media considerations were at the centre of the political actors' strategies and objectives as they adapted some of their 'organizational structures' to respond to the news media needs. However, my empirical data also served to illustrate both that the mediatization of politics needs to be understood as a matter of degree (Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Esser, 2014b; Voltmer and Sorensen, 2019) and that the adoption of 'news media logic' by political actors does not necessarily mean a power shift from the latter towards the news media. In fact, through the confirmation of Wolfsfeld's (2004) '*politics-media-politics*' model in some of my empirical chapters (which is another contribution of this study to existing theoretical knowledge), I highlighted that the political environment of the peace process had a greater impact on the media performance (than the other way around) in some instances of the negotiations.

Taking these elements together, my research has further highlighted the importance of empirically applying the framework of the mediatization of politics to specific case studies as there are situational factors influencing how political institutions and processes may (or may not) adapt

to the news media needs. In fact, my study showed that although the political actors involved in the negotiations were prone to adapt 'news media logic' in their operation, the peace dialogues (as a public policy bargaining process) were not mediatized. In this endeavour, I hope to have made a significant contribution to understanding the role of the news media during peace negotiations, particularly in the way that they influence the strategies and routines of political actors and contribute to shaping the political atmosphere of the negotiations through their representations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Key words set to filter the news articles in R

Number	Key words
1	Peace Accord
2	Peace Accords
3	Peace Process
4	Accord with FARC
5	Accords with FARC
6	Accord between the government and FARC
7	Accord between FARC and the government
8	Habana accord
9	Habana accords
10	Dialogues with FARC
11	Dialogues in La Habana
12	Habana dialogues
13	Peace dialogues
14	Peace dialogue
15	Peace signing with FARC
16	Negotiation with FARC
17	Negotiations with FARC
18	Negotiation in La Habana
19	Negotiations in La Habana
20	Government and FARC negotiators
21	FARC and government negotiators
22	Peace negotiation
23	Peace negotiations
24	Negotiation table
25	Government and FARC delegations
26	FARC delegation
27	Government delegation

28	Chief government negotiator
29	Chief FARC negotiator
30	Comprehensive Rural Reform
31	Political Participation
32	Special Jurisdiction for Peace
33	Transitional Justice
34	Bilateral Ceasefire
35	End of the conflict
36	Plebiscite
37	Agenda item

Appendix 2

Pilot test results to verify the selection of news articles

Media Outlet	Timeline	Total Articles	Relevant Articles
El Tiempo	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2012	8	7
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2013	34	34
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2014	37	36
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2015	11	10
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2016	43	42
	Total	**133**	**128**
El Espectador	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2012	8	7
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2013	20	17
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2014	10	7
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2015	37	36
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2016	27	25
	Total	**102**	**92**
Semana	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2012	11	9
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2013	19	18
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2014	14	14
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2015	15	13
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2016	33	32
	Total	**92**	**86**
La Silla Vacía	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2012	**1**	**1**
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2013	**1**	**1**
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2014	**3**	**3**
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2015	**0**	**0**
	01 Nov – 07 Nov 2016	**9**	**7**
	Total	**14**	**12**

Appendix 3

Strategies to classify the news articles in each chosen media outlet using R

Strategies to classify the articles from *El Tiempo*

After scraping the news articles from *El Tiempo,* the 'news section' variable showed multiple labels such as 'politics, 'justice', 'peace', 'international news' 'government', 'columnists', among others. Although these labels would have been enough to divide the articles between straight news and opinion columns, for example, there was one problematic label that prevented the categorization of all articles using this component: 'archive'. Since within this general label of 'archive' it was possible to find any kind of articles (news, opinion columns, interviews), I opted for using the variable of 'author' to divide them up. The following table shows an example of the type of information I had on the data frame:

Headline	Lead	News Section	URL	Text	Date	Author
'Uncertainties'	Peace deal signature	Archive	https://www.eltiempo .com/archivo/docume nto/CMS-16762942	'The peace process is coming to an end'	30 Nov/2016	'Politics'

Nonetheless, the information contained in the 'author' variable also presented some challenges. Two types of data were shown within this category: general labels as 'Written by El Tiempo', 'ElTiempo.com', 'Politics', etc. and the names of the authors who had written the articles. The names could pertain to columnists who had written opinion columns or journalists who had written straight news. After further inspecting these labels, I found a pattern that allowed me to build a classifier to divide the articles: the general labels were always linked to straight news. In other words, any article whose 'author' was 'Written by El Tiempo' or 'Justice' or 'Politics', etc. was a straight news article.

I consequently then designed a simple classifier in R that contained all these general labels to be able to classify within the 'author' variable some of the straight news. After completing this process, I then had to manually inspect the URL's that were linked to the other types of information (the names of either journalists or columnists) to check if the content was related to straight news

or opinion columns. While doing so, I was building a second classifier containing the names of the columnists and adding to the first classifier (the one with the general labels) the names of journalists who had written straight news. In other words, and to sum up, I built two classifiers that contained key words to filter the straight news and the opinion columns. The classifier of the straight news was composed of general labels as 'Politics', 'Written by El Tiempo', etc. and the names of journalists that I had reviewed had written straight news. The classifier of the opinion columns, on the other hand, only contained the names of columnists that I had also previously checked.

In regards the classification of interviews, I found out that the word 'interview' was part of the URL's of the news articles featuring an interview. However, after filtering the articles using this method, I only identified 25 interviews; this suggested I was missing a significant number of articles. I decided then to conduct a close reading of those 25 interviews to identify and document what kind of key words and expressions were used to inform the reader that the article was an interview. After documenting this, I created a classifier with 7 key expressions (e.g. 'in dialogue with El Tiempo', 'in an interview with El Tiempo', 'In an exclusive interview with El Tiempo', among others) that allowed me to locate 172 interviews (147 more than in the first attempt).

In the case of identifying the editorials, the process was straightforward as the label 'editorial' was part of the variable 'author'. Therefore, after applying the classifiers, from the total of **6.027** articles, **4.791** were straight news, **985** opinion columns, **72** editorials and **172** interviews.

Strategies to classify the articles from *El Espectador*

The process to classify the articles from *El Espectador* was much simpler as I did not have to carry out long manual inspection of the news. In order to classify the straight news, the opinion columns and the editorials I used the information provided by the media outlet URLs: the straight news articles would contain in the URL the word 'news', the opinion columns would contain the word 'opinion' and the editorials would contain the word 'editorial'. With a simple key-word classifier in R I was able to separate these types of articles. For the case of the interviews, I implemented the same strategy as for *El Tiempo*: I created a classifier with 7 key expressions because I retrieved very few articles featuring interviews by filtering the URL's with the word 'interview'.

At the end, from the total of **7.332** articles, **5.941** were straight news, **1.216** opinion columns, **93** editorials and **82** interviews.

Strategies to classify the articles from *Semana*

To classify the articles for *Semana* I had to only inspect two variables: the 'news section' and 'URL'. The 'news section' category allowed me to locate all the interview articles as they were assigned the word 'interview' by the media outlet website. In terms of the opinion columns, I was able to filter them by looking for the word 'opinion' in the URL. After filtering these two types of articles I then obtained the straight news; since I did not collect editorials for this media outlet (the editorials only appear on the printed version of the magazine), I was sure the remaining articles corresponded to news articles. Indeed, in order to double check the latter situation, I further inspected the variables. I found out that opinion columns were assigned the name of the person who wrote the piece whereas straight news only were assigned with the generic label of 'Other Authors'.

I therefore classified the total **7.337** articles into **2.802** straight news, **649** opinion columns, **1** editorial and **111** interviews.

Strategies to classify the articles from *La Silla Vacia*

I was able to classify all the articles of this media outlet by using the variable 'news section'. The opinion columns, within this category, had either the label 'opinion' or 'La Silla Llena' ('the Full Chair') – how the media outlet refers to the section in which experts (e.g. professors) share their thoughts on a particular topic (in this case the peace process). In regards the interviews, I created a classifier with key expressions (e.g. 'La Silla Vacia talked to') as these types of articles did not have any label that would have allowed me to identify them otherwise. Since this media outlet does not have an editorial section, all the remaining articles were categorized as straight news.

I therefore classified the total 766 articles into 567 straight news, 180 opinion columns, and 19 interviews. The following table summarizes the classification of the articles into the four categories:

Appendix 4

List of Interviewees

Number	Respondent	Role	Index	Organization	Date of Interview	Location
1	Journalist 1	Junior Political Reporter	J-JPR 1	Radio media outlet with national reach	8 May 2020	Zoom
2	Journalist 2	Political Reporter	J-PR 2	Radio and Television media outlets with national reach	14 May 2020	Zoom
3	Journalist 3	Political Reporter	J-PR 3	Elite Newspaper with national reach	13 May 2020	Zoom
4	Journalist 4	Political Editor	J-PE 4	Television and Radio media outlets with national reach	14 May 2020	Zoom
5	Journalist 5	Independent Political Reporter	J-PR 5	Online Independent Media Outlet	15 May 2020	Zoom
6	Journalist 6	Political Reporter	J-PR 6	Radio and Television media outlets with national reach	2 June 2020	Zoom
7	Journalist 7	Senior Political Reporter	J-SPR 7	Television media outlet with national reach	20 May 2020	Zoom
8	Journalist 8	Senior [Peace] Editor	J-SE 8	Elite Newspaper with national reach	23 June 2020	Zoom
9	Journalist 9	Political Reporter	J-PR 9	Elite Newspaper with national reach	4 July 2020	Zoom
10	Journalist 10	Senior Editor	J-SE 10	Elite Newspaper with national reach	8 July 2020	Zoom

11	Journalist 11	Senior Editor	J-SE 11	Elite Newspaper with national reach	28 July 2020	Zoom
12	Politician 1	Senior Public Servant	P-SPS 1	Colombian Government	6 May 2020	Skype
13	Politician 2	Negotiation Advisor	P-GNA 2	Colombian Government	25 May 2020	Teams
14	Politician 3	Negotiator	P-GN 3	Colombian Government	17 June 2020	Zoom
15	Politician 4	Negotiation Advisor	P-GNA 4	Colombian Government	17 July 2020	Zoom
16	Politician 5	Negotiator	P-GN 5	Colombian Government	24 August 2020	Zoom
17	Politician 6	Senator	P-OPS 6	Opposition Party	2 July 2020	Zoom
18	Politician 7	Senator	P-OPS 7	Opposition Party	13 July 2020	Zoom
19	Politician 8	Senator	P-OPS 8	Opposition Party	9 July 2020	Zoom
20	Communicator 1	Comms Executive	C-GCE 1	Colombian Government	5 May 2020	Zoom
21	Communicator 2	Comms Advisor	C-GCA 2	Colombian Government	7 May 2020	Zoom
22	Communicator 3	Comms Advisor	C-GCA 3	Colombian Government	13 May 2020	Zoom
23	Communicator 4	Senior Comms Advisor	C-GSCA 4	Colombian Government	19 May 2020	Zoom
24	Communicator 5	Comms Advisor	C-GCA 5	Colombian Government	23 July 2020	Zoom
25	Communicator 6	Comms Advisor	C-FCA 6	FARC	12 May 2020	Zoom
26	Communicator 7	Comms Advisor	C-FCA 7	FARC	21 May 2020	Zoom

Appendix 5

Interview Protocols

Political Actors

Perception of Influence and Media Oriented Practices

1. What did you find most challenging about the peace negotiations?

2. How relevant was the news media within the negotiations? To what extent did the topic of the news media come up during political discussions?

3. How do you think the news media interest in the peace dialogues affected the negotiations?

   a. In general, how did you cope or handle the attention of the news media during the peace negotiations?

4. What do you think it was the news media role in the peace process? How would you describe it?

5. Many people have talked about the negative effects the news media can have on negotiations while others have said there could also be positive effects. What do you think? Can you give any examples of either negative or positive influences that the media had on the negotiations?

6. How did you and your delegation handle the media during crisis periods (e.g. the kidnapping of the General Alzate, for example)? Did the media create some pressure on the dialogue table around these critical moments? How?

7. The element of time was quite significant in the news media coverage: news articles constantly referred to the delays on the negotiations. Would you say that this influenced the peace dialogues?

Control-Autonomy

8. How would you describe the relationship that you and your delegation established with the news media (journalists) during the peace negotiations?

   a. Would you say that relationship changed during different periods of the process?

   b. How often did you talk to journalists or editors?

9. Would you say that you generally understand the dynamics and priorities of news organizations?

   a. What kind of criteria do you think journalists applied when reporting stories about the peace process?

10. Based on your experience, what kind of strategies did they use to try to steer media coverage in your delegation's favour?

11. At what moments did you and your delegation spend more time looking proactively to appear in the media or reacting to calls or requests from journalists?

12. Who would you say that had more power in negotiating content that was published during the peace dialogues: you as a source or the news organization? How come?

Goals

13. What did you and your delegation use the news media for during the peace negotiations?

    a. Did you see news organizations as a space for communication with the public mainly or as space for communicating/influencing with other politicians or your counterpart?

14. What were the main goals (or goal) that you and your delegation pursue in your interaction with news organizations during the peace dialogues? What are the main benefits of having media exposure?

Journalists

News Production Process

1. What do you consider were the greatest challenges when reporting on the peace dialogues?

    a. How did you cope with the elements of secrecy and confidentiality from the delegations?

    b. What about the 'isolation' of the delegations in La Habana (Cuba)?

2. From a journalistic point of view, were there more and less interesting moments during the peace process? Why?

    a. a. News coverage in the print media shows that a significant amount of coverage was given to stories framed as 'controversial' or 'conflicting'. How would you explain this?

    b. b. The news coverage also shows that the element of time was quite relevant. There are many articles that focused on describing the delays on the negotiations. How would you explain this? How do you think this type of coverage had an influence at the negotiation table?

3. How did you select your sources when reporting on the peace dialogues?

    a. The news media coverage shows that, generally, official sources (like the President voice) were prioritized when reporting on the peace negotiations. How would you explain this?

4. In the last years, news media organizations have gone through multiple changes due to economic factors. To what extent do you consider these changes have affected your role as a journalist during the peace negotiations?

Journalistic Autonomy

5. What do you think it was the role of your news organization in the peace dialogues? Did this role change over time?

6. What about your role as a journalist?

   a. Would you say that you got involved, intervened and tried to promote change through your reporting on the peace process? Or your role was more about reporting impartially and objectively?

7. How would you describe your relationship with the Colombian government delegation over the course of the peace process? What about FARC and those who opposed the peace negotiations?

   a. Would you say that relationship changed during different periods of the process?

   b. Would you say that you assessed equally the different political actors involved in the peace negotiations when reporting about them?

8. What do you think was the government strategy to promote their messages in the press? What about FARC and those who opposed the peace negotiations?

   a. How did you cope with these different strategies?

9. From your perspective and experience, who has more power in negotiating content that is published: you as a journalist or your sources?

   a. Was this the case during the peace process?

10. Were you ever forced to modify or not publish contents due to external political pressures? (And what about other pressures from within the organization you work for?)

Appendix 6

News articles Index

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5	13681	Semana	2013-09-25	https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/farc-revelara-secretos-proceso-de-paz/358878-3/
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