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Places, topics and sources of insecurity. A Study About the Argentinian Press

Territorios, tópicos y fuentes de la inseguridad. Un estudio sobre la prensa argentina

Territórios, tópicos e fontes da insegurança. Um estudo sobre a imprensa argentina

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity is one of the issues of greatest concern for Argentine citizens and one of the most included in the media agenda. This study aims to analyze the media treatment on this issue in electoral and non-electoral contexts. Through a content analysis on three national mainstream newspapers, we concluded that the 2015 presidential elections did not increase the frequency of crime pieces, although a relevant change was observed in the topics covered and the frames used on them. Finally, official sources predominated in coverage.

RESUMEN

La inseguridad es uno de los asuntos de mayor preocupación de la sociedad argentina y uno de los temas más incluidos en las agendas de los medios. El objetivo de este estudio es analizar el tratamiento informativo sobre este tema en contextos electorales y no electorales. Mediante un análisis de contenido sobre tres diarios de importancia nacional, se concluye que las elecciones presidenciales de 2015 no incrementaron la frecuencia de piezas de este tipo, aunque sí se observó un cambio importante en los tópicos cubiertos y los modos de encuadrarlos. Finalmente, las fuentes oficiales predominaron en las coberturas.

RESUMO

A insegurança é um dos assuntos de maior preocupação da sociedade argentina e um dos temas mais incluídos nas agendas dos meios. O objetivo deste estudo é analisar o tratamento informativo sobre este tema em contextos eleitorais e não eleitorais. Por meio de uma análise de conteúdo sobre três jornais de importância nacional, pode-se concluir que as eleições presidenciais de 2015 não incrementaram a frequência de peças deste tipo, embora se observou uma mudança importante nos tópicos tratados e os modos de enquadrá-los. Por último, as fontes oficiais predominaram nas coberturas.

Keywords: insecurity; crime; media; agenda; sources.

Palabras clave: *inseguridad; delito; medios; agenda; fuentes.*

Palavras-chave: insegurança; delito; meios; agenda; fontes.

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INTRODUCTION

In Argentina, insecurity is a matter of daily concern that hegemonizes, along with economic problems, public, political and media agendas (Kessler, 2014; Sozzo, 2016). Different studies show that, in the last twenty years, there has been an increase in the media representation of crime (Martini, 2007; Calzado, 2013; Fernández Pedemonte, 2010) that goes hand in hand with the increase in the feeling of insecurity, i.e., the feeling of defenselessness of individuals against a random threat, which operates with relative autonomy regarding criminal acts (Kessler, 2014)[1]. These statements, far from looking for causality, try to unravel the place occupied by the media at this conjunction. We understand that there are nuances in the news' representations on the subject, and that the different journalistic companies approach the events related to the crime in different ways, although with certain recurrences.

This study aims to analyze the informative treatment of insecurity in the Argentine graphic press. Therefore, we made a quantitative content analysis of three national maninstream newspapers: *La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Página/12*, on news published during October 2015 (electoral context under the presidency of Cristina Fernández) and October 2016 (non-electoral context under the presidency of Mauricio Macri). Thus, in addition to the general investigation into the media coverage of crime, this study adds among its objectives to infer whether the variable *electoral context* affected the informative perspective on insecurity.

Specifically, we sought to investigate: 1) if the electoral context is decisive for increasing the frequency of crime news; 2) which topics predominated in each of the contexts; 3) what are the territories (or spaces) in which media representations of insecurity prevail, and 4) what were the sources of information that managed to structure a dominant view of the events represented in the news.

CRIME AND MEDIA

The thesis that the media is responsible for the feeling of insecurity has been questioned based on the analysis of variables linked to the environment, culture and experience. However, there is consensus that they play a significant role in the creation of a risk state that usually entails demands for greater social control and punitiveness (Entel, 2007; Kessler & Focas, 2014; Martini, 2012).

Some studies state that the frequency of coverage of the crime increases during electoral processes, moments in which the problem is expressed in the form of demands towards public officials, who usually place it among their main campaign axes (Calzado, 2013; Martini, 2007). As Altamirano Molina (2007) says, candidates find an opportunity in crime, since it is a topic that generates great receptivity in public opinion.

Journalistic pieces about crime constitute a place of intersection between reality and fiction that usually falls on sensationalist coverage. In these certain biases operate, such as personalization and decontextualization (Bennett, 1991), so the facts tend to be presented in isolation and their causes are attributed much more to the individual motivations of criminals than to their complex structural determinants. Meanwhile, the sources consulted by journalists are reduced almost only to official ones, especially the police and judicial officials, which contributes to decontextualization and bias in the interpretation of the facts.

According to Kessler (2014), insecurity also has its own spatiality and temporality. The slums –and their inhabitants– are stigmatized, drawing a separation between safe and unsafe territories. In addition, the insecurity story is constructed in reference to a mythical past of security and freedom that is opposed to a present of risks and fears. In this plot of spatialities and temporalities, the media, politicians and the public relate and negotiate, although not on equal terms, the frameworks of the security issue.

One of the perspectives that delved into the evolution of the media agenda and its relationship with the public and political agendas is the agenda-setting theory, coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972). According to this theory, the media, based on routine processes that are developed in the newsrooms, build an informative agenda that has a potential impact on public opinion (McCombs, 2006; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). Through active processes of selection, emphasis, omission and hierarchy, they give importance to certain issues or topics and less visibility to others (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004; Zunino, 2015). In addition, the issues that constitute the media agenda are accompanied by a series of attributes that define the problems. These are mainly based on affective components and nouns displayed in the news that promote a moral evaluation of the problems and actors (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; McCombs, Lopez Escobar, & Llamas, 2000).

The relationship between media, electoral processes and crime is present in numerous studies that use this perspective. From the seminal work of the agenda-setting, in which McCombs and Shaw discovered that in the 1968 US elections, *law and order* was the second most important issue for the media and public opinion of Chapel Hill, North Carolina (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), many other studies have specifically addressed the relationship between media and crime (Lowry, Tarn ChingNio, & Leitner, 2003; Schlesinger, Tumber, & Murdock, 1991; Valkemburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999).

While crime has become a central issue on the Latin American information agenda (Bonilla & Rincón, 1998; Calzado, 2015; Martini, 2012), some studies argue that the media are able to increase the fear levels of population by overrepresenting crime in their information agendas (D'Adamo & García Beaudoux, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This would be amplified in electoral contexts, since politicians find in crime a campaign axis due to the receptivity that the subject acquires in public opinion. In those moments, the specific relationship between the political, media and public agendas usually generates an increase in the punitive demands to which candidates are usually permeable (Altamirano Molina, 2007).

When defining the media agenda, the first-hand information deliverers, the sources of information, are crucial. According to the Indexing theory (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007), the structuring of issues and sources is usually elaborated based on the dominant view of governments about a given topic, due to the greater power that official sources possess with a higher level of institutionalization. There is usually a symbiotic relationship between journalists and sources (Bagdikian, 1985): the media need the sources to obtain the information and the sources depend on the journalists to impose their version of the facts. According to Bennett et al. (2007), by transferring the news monopoly to public officials, the media restrict the diversity of voices to the detriment of a broad and contextualized view of the information.

Based on the conceptual framework deployed, we propose the following objectives:

General objective: analyze the media coverage of insecurity in the Argentine graphic press in electoral and non-electoral contexts.

Specific objectives:

1. Determine the frequency of publication of news related to the security issue in electoral and non-electoral contexts.

2. Establish which topics were most included in the news in both contexts.

3. Identify the territories on which the media coverage of crime was focused.

4. Investigate what kind of sources were privileged by the media to define the security issue in each of the contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological strategy aims to make possible the achievement of the specific objectives within the framework of an exploratory case study with descriptive aspirations. We developed a content analysis of the insecurity media coverage, more precisely of the information published in the main body of the *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página/12* newspapers in two periods: 1) from October 1 to 31, 2015 and 2) from October 1 to 31, 2016. The decision to work with two identical months of consecutive years is that, by doing so, the evolution of the agenda can be identified based on the time variable and of electoral and non-electoral contexts. The length of the periods for the corpus collection is based on the seminal works of each of the first two levels of the agenda-setting theory and another pioneer of this perspective in Argentina, who worked with temporary periods of similar length (Casermeiro de Pereson, 2004; McCombs et al., 2000; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The results of the study are restricted to the comparison of a case in two different contexts, without ambitions of generalization of the findings to the whole of the years 2015 and 2016.

Based on the temporary period proposed, we collected a corpus of 1328 journalistic pieces (644 of *Clarín*, 489 of *La Nación*, and 206 of *Página/12*). Being a large universe, it was essential to reduce it to an approachable dimension. Thus, we structured a simple random sample that, considering a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, reduced the corpus to 299 cases[2].

The choice of graphic press is based on the agreement that it has a strong agenda effect (McCombs, 2006) and, despite presenting substantial drops in reading levels, is regularly consulted by politicians and replicated

by the rest of the media (Altamirano Molina, 2007; Becerra, 2015; Casermeiro de Pereson, de la Torre, & Téramo, 2009). In addition, this format stands out for its ease of recovery and handling. Newspapers, context units of the research, were selected for their importance in terms of circulation[3] and their ability to influence political and public agendas. *Clarín* and *La Nación* are the two mainstream newspapers in the country (Martini, 2007).

La Nación was founded in 1870 by former president Bartolomé Miter. It is a newspaper characterized by a pedagogical view of politics and a guiding will of the ruling class (Sidicaro, 1998). *Clarín*, meanwhile, is part of the largest multimedia group in the country. Created in 1945 by the rancher and former socialist party senator, Roberto Noble, it is a multitarget newspaper that currently accounts for 40% of the advertising (Becerra, 2015) and is a leader in circulation. The choice of *Página/12* is based on other reasons. Originally thought of as a counter-information journal (Ulanovsky, 1997), the newspaper transformed its appearance over the years. Aimed at a middle- and upper-class audience with high educational levels, although it does not have the same capacity as others to install the main concerns in public opinion, it is considered a medium with an impact on opinion makers (Amado, 2007).

In this work, we related a series of variables that integrated an extensive category system that exceeds the objectives of this article. The variables analyzed are based on the following research questions: 1) How often did the topics related to the security issue in the context of the 2015 presidential elections in Argentina and during the first year of Mauricio Macri's term appear in the graphic press? 2) What were these topics in each of the contexts? 3) In which locations did the news occur in both periods? 4) What kind of sources had the greatest opportunity to access the informative agenda of the main Argentine newspapers?

To answer these questions, we studied the journalistic articles that in public opinion and in the media are usually included in the notion of insecurity, i.e., against property (theft and robbery, successful or not), against people (injuries and other malicious aggressions) and homicides (Kessler, 2014).

Thus, the following were included in the selection: 1) all the news pieces located in the police or security sections of the newspapers; 2) all the news pieces that, outside these sections, included the issue of insecurity from the cross between violence and crime, refer to specific cases or statements of officials or relevant social actors on the matter, and 3) all the news pieces that, although did not include the commission of a crime, presented a social behavior (individual or of a group) explicitly as a threat to citizen security. All the news recovered were from the Argentine territory.

Once the corpus was collected and the sample was extracted, we coded the units of analysis, i.e., the text of each of the news pieces that made up the sample. The variables analyzed in this work were the following:

- **Media:** 1) Clarín; 2) La Nación; 3) Página/12.

- **Context:** 1) Electoral context; 2) Non-electoral context.

- **Topic:** 1) Robbery or theft; 2) Kidnapping; 3) Murder; 4) Sexual violence; 6) Femicide; 7) Child violence; 8) Institutional violence; 9) Violence in prisons; 10) Violence in the streets; 11) Threats: against officials, citizens or institutions; 12) Domestic violence; 13) Transit; 14) Drugs and drug trafficking; 15) Human Rights; 16) Suicide; 17) Violence in sports; 18) Terrorism; 19) Security policies; 99) Others.

- **Location:** the location of the central fact of the news piece is coded according to the following values: 1) Buenos Aires City; 2) Gran Buenos Aires and rest of the province; 3) Misiones; 4) Corrientes; 5) Chaco; 6) Formosa; 7) Salta; 8) Jujuy; 9) Tucumán; 10) Santiago del Estero; 11) Catamarca; 12) La Rioja; 13) San Juan; 14) Mendoza; 15) San Luis; 16) Entre Ríos; 17) Córdoba; 18) Santa Fe; 19) La Pampa; 20) Neuquén; 21) Río Negro; 22) Chubut; 23) Santa Cruz; 24) Tierra del Fuego.

- **Sources:** the first five sources or all that exist until the first five are coded, directly or indirectly cited in the note, without repeating them and in order of appearance: 1) Police; 2) Judiciary; 3) Executive Power; 4) Legislative Power; 5) Attorney of the victim; 6) Attorney of the perpetrator; 7) Family members; 8) Neighbors; 9) Political parties; 10) Social movements; 11) National Gendarmerie; 12) National Prefecture; 13) Companies; 14) Victim; 15) Perpetrator; 16) Church institutions; 99) Others.

To establish the reliability of the data, 30 journalistic pieces (10% of the sample) were recoded. The average

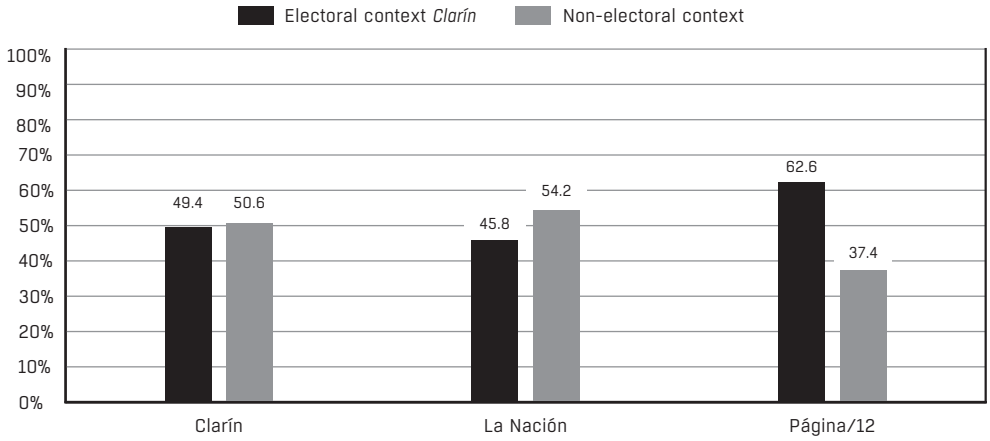

Figure 1. Coverage of crime in Argentina according to the newspaper analyzed. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

level of agreement was estimated using Spearman's[4] Rho correlation coefficient, which yielded a result of $\rho = 0.811$, acceptable for this type of work.

RESULTS

ELECTIONS, SECURITY ISSUE AND POLITICAL FIELD

The first issue problematized in this article addresses the links between the security issue and the field of politics. In different works, researcher Stella Martini (2007, 2012, 2017) shows the ways in which police news is linked to politics, especially after the return to democracy in 1983 in Argentina, when allegations of torture at police stations or threats to lawyers (who defend political prisoners), for example, are included in the police section. However, it will be after 1999 when insecurity is positioned as a central issue in the discourses of presidential candidates. For the author, the police news has always been, more or less explicitly, a political news built from diverse events (Martini, 2007).

The first question of this work was whether the variable electoral context affected in a decisive way the media agenda of crime in Argentina. In the analysis of newspapers that we conducted, we used the 2015 elections as a cut-off criterion, considering that this variable could have some type of impact on the modes and hierarchy that the media gave to security. The data show that the frequency of security coverage did not vary substantially in the electoral and non-electoral contexts. Indeed, 49% (n=672) of the news collected correspond to the electoral period and 51% (n=656) involve events distant from the elections, during the first year of Mauricio Macri's presidency. Specifically, there are no significant differences associated with this variable, which in principle tinges, for this case, that the electoral context has favored the security debate and, therefore, a greater relevance of the issue in the media agenda.

If the same variable is analyzed by distinguishing its behavior in each newspaper, it is possible to observe that the parity of publications in both contexts is similar in *Clarín* and *La Nación*, Argentine mainstream newspapers (Martini & Luchessi, 2004) and there is only a difference in *Página/12*, newspaper in which we can see that, in electoral contexts, the security issue became more relevant. However, the cases covered by *Página/12* in this period did not focus on the campaign security discussion, but were a series of isolated cases, especially of gender violence and institutional violence, two of the most relevant topics for its historic editorial line. "The rape in Chacarita" (La violación..., 2015), "A project against abuse" (Carbajal, 2015) and "The police network of sexual abuse" (La red..., 2015) are some examples of headlines published in that period.

THE TOPICS OF INSECURITY

The analysis of the main topics present in the media coverage on insecurity allowed us to elucidate

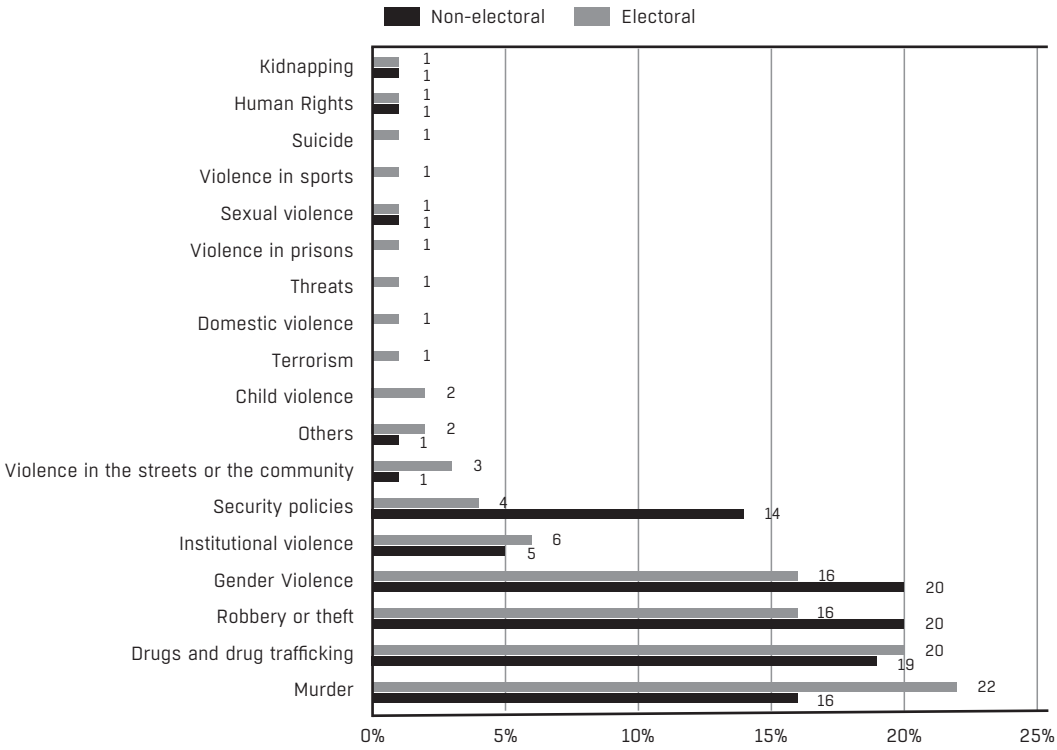

Figure 2. Topics of insecurity according to context. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

a transition that takes place in the media agenda in relation to how to address the issue. The data show that, in a non-electoral context, during the first months of the government of Mauricio Macri, newspapers gave hierarchy and frequency to news related to security policies to the detriment of those of urban insecurity. Although, as seen in figure 2, murders, drug trafficking and robberies and thefts dominate the media agenda, it is interesting to analyze, more than the continuities between one period and another, the most important ruptures or changes. The case of security policies is demonstrative of the opening of a new stage of government action against crime that has a specific media correlate.

Both during the electoral campaign and when already in government, the issue of security was relevant in the political discourses of PRO[5], to the point of declaring the security emergency two months after assuming. In fact, in those months, the media reduced the daily share of insecurity news and in the first weeks of government they focused almost fictionally on the monitoring and subsequent capture of the triple crime fugitives6. In that context, insecurity became a topic of public interest, and generated a political controversy over the meaning of a period in which "the struggle is nodal to establish the agenda of the issues, and the parameters from which evaluate the era" (Kessler, 2014, p. 14).

We hypothesize that the growth of insecurity in the political agenda may have had some influence on the coverage of the topic of security policies. Among other measures, in 2016 the National Executive Power expressed its intention to increase punitive actions to combat both organized and amateur crime. Some of them marked continuities with the previous government, such as sending federal forces to "hot zones" (Rodríguez Alzueta, 2014), such as the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. Others, based on old concepts promoted by various political sectors –including some belonging to the old government– were condensed into a project to lower the imputability of minors, from 16 to 14. Finally, concrete measures related to the control of migrations were adopted,

such as the Passenger Advance Information Program (API, by its Spanish acronym), by which airlines are requested to report on the foreigners they move, and Decree 70/17 (Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina, 2017), which modifies the Migration Law 25,871, and promotes abbreviated procedures to expulse foreigners convicted of having committed a crime in the country or abroad, the denial or withdrawal of permanent residence and the impediment of entry or re-entry for different periods of time.

The facts included in this topic represented in the news generally consisted of the coverage of punitive government initiatives, such as the deployment of repressive forces. This increase in the punitive activity of the new government, actively including the issue on the political agenda, coincides with an increase in media attention on these initiatives. In the coverage, there is a predominant treatment that places the Executive Power as an actor committed and active in solving the problem, without questioning, most of the time, its openly repressive approach. "Rodríguez Larreta showed the equipment and uniforms of the new city police" (Rodríguez Lareta…, 2016), "At the request of Vidal government will send federal forces back to Gran Buenos Aires" (Orteli, 2016), "The federal forces requested by the province arrive" (Cornejo, 2016), are some of the headlines on this topic that account for the way in which the deployment of the repressive apparatus of the State throughout the country constitutes a central node of Macri's security policy .

Another relevant issue in both electoral and non-electoral context was drug trafficking, especially news related to reinforcements in the fight against drugs. This issue, which is important in the security agendas of the entire continent, began to thematize national security coverage from the establishment of drugs nuclei in the national territory and the State action in its persecution. Indeed, one of the crimes currently most fought by the State –and that justifies a great deployment of the security forces– is the war on drugs (Baratta, 2004; Zaffaroni, 2016).

In turn, this type of crime explains most of the current incarcerations in Latin America. Although the Organization of American States (OAS) aims to address the problem as a matter of public health, reality shows that it is addressed as a criminal and penal issue. Although different initiatives have been developed throughout the continent that tend to decriminalize micro-trafficking, the activity that most promotes incarceration in the region usually falls on the weakest links of the chain. Likewise, the war on drugs is producing a noticeable rise in the imprisonment of women throughout the region, including Argentina (Boiteux, 2015; Sozzo, 2016).

Both the government of Cristina Fernández and Mauricio Macri developed actions against this type of crime. Thus, drug trafficking defines a new physiognomy of the national security agenda. "Arrested 32 narcos that produced methamphetamines in two laboratories" (Carabajal, 2015), "There are already 11 detainees for marijuana in Formosa" (Ya son…, 2016), "They carried 240 kilos of cocaine in a van, 4 detainees" (Llevaban 240…, 2015) are some of the headlines on this topic included in both the electoral and non-electoral period.

Finally, gender violence stands out as a topic increasingly associated with the security agenda, both in electoral and non-electoral contexts. In Argentina, 235 women were victims of femicide in 2015 and 254 in 2016 (LCDE, 2018). Macho violence, while charging new victims, generated a social and political movement that won in organization and demands. Along with this, the media coverage began to include the issue in their agendas as a topic with its own characteristics, decoupling it from the regular police topic, although the recommendations for dealing with this issue are not always met. However, the topic is among the most important in relevance and its increase in 2016 compared to 2015 is explained by two main reasons: the increase in the number of reported cases and the less competition with other types of issues that this one finds in non-electoral contexts.

However, the analysis of the evolution of the different topics in the different media accounts for the similarities and differences in their agendas.

Table 1 allows us to analyze four central issues. First, as stated above, robberies and homicides are at the top of the media agendas in both contexts, although with sensitive variations. *Clarín's* security agenda is based mainly on these two types of events in both contexts, with some stability in the percentages. Second, that drug trafficking appears as a central issue of the national security agenda. It is located as the first topic in *La Nación* and the third in *Clarín*. The high relevance in the two most widely read media in the country expresses the centrality of the issue on the agenda and, therefore, its importance in the media definition of insecurity. Thirdly, it is evident that the greater activity of the Macri government in the formulation of public policies on the subject was strongly visible in *Clarín* and *La Nación*,

	Clarín		La Nación		Página/12	
	Electoral	Non-electoral	Electoral	Non-electoral	Electoral	Non-electoral
Robbery/theft	25.7	23.1	11.8	18.2	8.6	7.7
Murder	23	17.9	17.7	16.4	17.1	
Drugs/Drug Trafficking	17.6	21.8	36.4	20	2.9	
Gender violence	13.5	5.1	4.5	10.9	25.7	23.1
Institutional violence	4.1		4.5	3.6	11.4	38.5
Femicide	2.7	6.4	2.3	14.5	2.9	23.1
Violence in the streets or in the community	2.7	1.3	6.8	1.8		
Security politics	2.7	16.7	6.8	14.5	2.9	
Child violence	1.4				5.7	
Threats	1.4				2.9	
Violence in sports	1.4					
Terrorism	1.4		2.3			
Kidnapping		2.6			2.9	
Sexual violence		2.6			5.7	
Violence in prisons			2.3		2.9	
Domestic violence			2.3		2.9	
Human rights				7.7	2.9	7.7
Suicide			2.3			
Others	2.7	2.6			2.9	

Table 1. Media treatment of insecurity. Topics according to newspaper and context. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

newspapers that included government actions in their agendas and presented them as tending to solve the security problems.

Finally, table 1 shows the editorial differences between *Clarín* and *La Nación*, on the one hand, and *Página/12*, on the other. The historic editorial position of *Página/12* that placed it as a progressive, center-left and currently opposed to the Macri government, generated an agenda in which the focus was on gender issues, femicides, issues related to institutional violence and the defense of Human Rights. In this regard, it is interesting to note how *Página/12* tended to include a smaller number of pieces on the characteristic topics of insecurity such as robberies, murders and drug trafficking, and even made the actions of the national government to combat such crimes invisible. Instead, in both contexts it put the focus on gender violence and femicide. Meanwhile, this media clearly augmented the coverage of cases of institutional violence, practically quadrupled it, if we compare the frequency in the Macri government –whom the media opposes– and in Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's management – government with which the media agreed.

DANGEROUS TERRITORIES

Another objective of this work was to establish the territories in which media representations of insecurity focus. In the analysis we conducted, the data is eloquent, since in the three newspapers more than 90% of the representations focus on urban areas. In fact, in *Clarín*

the news that occurred in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) and its surroundings corresponds to 92%, in *La Nación*, to 97% and in *Página/12*, to 100%. While in suburban areas, the representations have very low percentages (*Clarín*, 6%; *La Nación*, 2%, or null, as in the case of the newspaper *Página/12*).

If we break down those percentages, we find that a large number of news pieces place police events in the City of Buenos Aires, with an average of 29%, with 27% for *Clarín*, 27% for *La Nación*, and 38% for *Página/12*. This overrepresentation starts from a *porteño-centric* (focused on Buenos Aires) look and collaborates in the construction of the impression of an insecure metropolis.

In the same vein as our findings, a work by the National Directorate of Criminal Policy on Justice and Criminal Legislation of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, conducted in 2010 on the three newspapers with the greatest circulation, highlights that the police issue occupies an important space. The proportion of news about criminal acts that each newspaper provided to their readers is the following: *Crónica*, 34%; *Clarín*, 30%; *La Nación*, 22%, and finally, *Página/12*, 14%. At the same time, although all the newspapers are presented as of national scope, they concentrate the great majority of their news about crimes in CABA, Gran Buenos Aires (GBA) and the interior of the province of Buenos Aires, reinforcing the perception that criminal acts in general, and in particular violent ones, occur primarily in those districts.

The results of our investigation are also related to a recent report by the Public Defender's Office[7] on TV newscasts, which indicates that 34% of the news and 37.2% of the news time refer to events in the city of Buenos Aires. Another interesting fact is that 21.2% of the news and 18.5% of the news time is based on events in Argentina as a whole country, followed by Gran Buenos Aires (15.2% and 18.8% respectively), CABA with 10% of the news and 6.7% of the time, and the province of Buenos Aires (8.5 and 8.7%). In summary, if we add the percentages of the topics of CABA, the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) and the province of Buenos Aires, we can conclude that 67.7% of the news and 71.4% of the news time are based in events that occurred in the capital and province of Buenos Aires. Thus, the results on graphic press are consistent with those obtained in the TV analysis. Therefore, the media discourse of the insecurity of the big cities is overlapped and resignified in the small city, despite the fact that real crimes increase there to a lesser extent, and in general there are no daily situations of violence.

However, the most eloquent data showed by the analysis of the corpus of this article is that the greatest amount of insecurity news has its epicenter in the Buenos Aires conurbation[8], with a total, among the three newspapers, of 42% (*Clarín*, 48%, *La Nación*, 40% and *Página/12*, 31%). These data indicate that the territory represented to a greater extent as dangerous is the suburbs of the Province of Buenos Aires.

In an analysis of the main websites of newspapers, Álvarez (2015) finds that this spatial reference is mainly used in dramatic, spectacular and negative headlines, closer to the social and territorial. In fact, "the greater association with the strange/barbaric as opposed to the known/civilized, is mostly related to the 'threatening' conurbation" (p. 38). In other words, regarding spaces, there is a design of a fear topology (Segura, 2009) that moves between the security and privacy of private space, represented by the house, towards the insecurity and the anonymity of the public space, with the neighborhood, a mediating, transitional environment between both extremes. In the words of Segura (2009), although the city is interaction, flows and exchanges, the stories work in the opposite direction, "reterritorializing fear and danger, circumscribing them, restoring an urban ecology with good and bad places, safe and insecure, passable and impassable" (p. 69).

In the same vein, the criminal news that focuses on the Buenos Aires conurbation are associated with a figure of the perpetrator that inspires fear: the young, poor man. This chain of equivalence between poverty-delinquency-insecurity (Rodríguez & Seghezzo, 2013) configures a discourse in which the danger is associated with popular sectors, but this identification is not massive, but underlines the distinction between *good poor* and *criminals* (Dallorso, 2017).

However, considering the objectives of this work, it is pertinent to analyze the incidence of contexts (electoral and non-electoral) in the location of the crime.

Table 3 allows analyzing that, in general terms, the representation of urban crime in Gran Buenos Aires and the City of Buenos Aires increased its visibility in non-electoral contexts. This is largely due to the fact that Mauricio Macri's government was very active in the fight against crime in these areas once he had assumed his mandate. While it is true that the percentages show a prevalence of the security issue

	Clarín	La Nación	Página/12
Gran Buenos Aires	48	40	31
CABA	27	27	38
Santa Fe	6	13	8
Tucumán	5	2	4
Córdoba	5	2	4
Misiones	2		
Formosa	2		
Chaco	1		
Salta	1	4	
La Rioja	1		
San Juan	1		
Mendoza	1	8	
La Pampa	1		
Río Negro	1	3	2
Corrientes			2
Jujuy		1	
Santiago del Estero			2
Catamarca			4
Entre Ríos			4

Table 2. Media treatment of insecurity according to province. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

in these areas in both periods, mainly related to the coverage of robberies, thefts and homicides, the large deployment of security policies on these areas triggered the coverage of newspapers. Again, *Página/12* presented a much more stable agenda that showed, in both areas, a greater representation of the crime associated with the electoral discussion and a lower agenda on the security issue based on the policies implemented by the government of Mauricio Macri[9].

THE SOURCES OF INSECURITY INFORMATION

However, the selection, omission and ranking processes not only include the thematic dimension, but the actors included in the news as sources of information are also actively selected by the media (Bennett et al., 2007). This selection has noticeable implications in the informative treatment.

The media, in addition to selecting a list of topics in the process of building their agenda, provide certain perspectives on the issues they report. The information included in the informative treatment is proposed, most of the time, by sources of information external to the newsrooms. As Bennett et al. (2007) say, journalists strengthen relationships of mutual dependence with sources. The former need the latter to access first-hand information. The latter require the former to make their version of events relevant and successful at the level of public opinion.

If we group the information sources listed in figure 3, it is possible to note that 59.6% of the sources consulted by the media were official[10]. Among them, the Judiciary stands out, especially in the case of Página/12. Second, security forces appear as usual contributors of information. The third place is occupied by the relatives

	Clarín		La Nación		Página/12	
Localization of the fact	Electoral	Non-electoral	Electoral	Non-electoral	Electoral	Non-electoral
CABA	48.8	51.2	38.5	61.5	66.7	33.3
Gran Buenos Aires	45.8	54.2	36.8	63.2	66.7	33.3
Misiones	66.7	33.3	0	0	0	0
Corrientes	0	0	0	0	100	0
Chaco	100	0	0	0	0	0
Formosa	0	100	0	0	0	0
Salta	100	0	50	50	0	0
Jujuy	0	0	100	0	0	0
Tucumán	12.5	87.5	0	100	100	0
Santiago del Estero	0	0	0	0	0	100
Catamarca	0	0	0	0	100	0
La Rioja	0	100	0	0	0	0
San Juan	100	0	0	0	0	0
Mendoza	100	0	25	75	0	0
San Luis	0	0	0	0	0	0
Entre Ríos	0	0	0	0	100	0
Córdoba	85.7	14.3	50	50	100	0
Santa Fe	55.6	44.4	83.3	16.7	100	0
La Pampa	0	100	0	0	0	0
Neuquén	0	0	0	0	0	0
Río Negro	100	0	100	0	0	100
Chubut	0	0	0	0	0	0
Santa Cruz	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tierra del Fuego	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3. Media treatment of insecurity according to province. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

of the victims. If we add family members, victims and neighbors of the crime, they provide 21.1% of the testimonies included in the news.

According to Calzado (2015), it is common for victims or their families to become media spokespersons. "As the journalistic dispatch occur, the victims become the best spokesperson with the most mediatic impact" (Calzado, 2015, p. 223). According to the author, this operation, which the media consciously seeks and enhances, reinforces the subjectivity of the other

citizen-victim spectator, producing an identification that reinforces the feeling of constant danger on any social subject. That is, the story of the direct victim or his/her family reinforces identification mechanisms with the spectators.

The state of shock in which these discourses take place tends to promote irrational solutions and sanctions that the media reproduce and propagate. Thus, the solutions to the security issue promoted by the media tend to be based on the states of violent emotion of those affected.

The analysis of the sources of the information allows to see that the State agents and the direct victims of the insecurity narrate in a preponderant way the stories about the crime. In this scenario, the media do not usually resort to voices that go beyond the victim and his/her circle, the Judiciary, the police or the Executive Branch. Specialists or other actors with resolving potential are absent in the debate. Thus, the structural and contextualized presentation of the security problem becomes unlikely in the informative agendas and, in the same way, proposals for structural and complex solutions are scarce in media discourses.

However, if the sources of information are analyzed according to the context –electoral or non-electoral– it is possible to see a change that only affirms a finding that we have already explained at the beginning of this section: a greater role of the National Executive Power in the Argentine security agenda since the assumption of President Mauricio Macri. Figure 4 shows that in the non-electoral context (coinciding with the Macri presidency) the frequency of appearance of the Judiciary and the police as sources of information decreases while the presence of the voice of the government itself in the news increases.

The increase of news pieces on security policies is one of the explanations of this behavior. When security policies acquire a greater presence in the media agenda, it is understandable that the government voice also increases its visibility. However, the greatest presence of government sources occurred in the different topics. This shows that one of the main differences between the period of Cristina Fernández and that of Mauricio Macri is the imprint that the government itself decided to take on the matter. While the security issue was not comfortable for Kirchnerism, so it preferred to avoid it discursively, the government of Mauricio Macri made this theme one of the core pillars of his administration. This implies not only the development of public policies of a punitive nature associated with the issue, but also a greater presence of government actors in situ, an important and explicit reference and opinion of the President and ministers on certain cases that shock and an explicit *iron fist* rhetoric expressed through the media and that aims to be the rector of the vision that the other powers and agencies of the State (including the Judiciary and security forces) should have on the subject.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first place, we showed that the frequency of security coverage did not vary substantially in the electoral and non-electoral contexts. Specifically, no important differences associated with this variable were observed, which refutes for this case the assumption that the context of the elections would favor the security discussion and, therefore, a greater relevance of the issue in the media agenda. However, this approach allowed us to elucidate a qualitative transition linked to the issues included by these three newspapers in one period and another around the so-called insecurity. The data shows that, in a non-electoral context, during the first months of the government of Mauricio Macri, the media gave hierarchy and frequency to the news related to security policies, to the detriment of those of urban insecurity.

Another issue of relevance in both contexts was drug trafficking, especially news related to reinforcements in the fight against drugs. We hypothesize then that these issues are relevant from the stamp that the government sought to give in terms of security, a turn in the agenda, which shows active public policies.

Second, we inquire about those territories where the information related to urban crime prevailed. We found that a large number of news pieces had the city of Buenos Aires as epicenter, where an average of 29% of the total was accumulated. However, the most eloquent data that the corpus analysis shows is that the greatest amount of insecurity news has its epicenter in the Buenos Aires conurbation, with a total within the three newspapers of 42%, which shows it as the unsafe site par excellence.

Finally, we studied the presence of information sources in the news. As numerous works state (Calzado, 2015; Entel, 2007; Martini, 2007), official sources dominated views on the facts in both electoral and non-electoral contexts, especially the Judiciary and the security forces. The most important finding on this point is that in the non-electoral context –during the presidency of Macri– there was an increase in

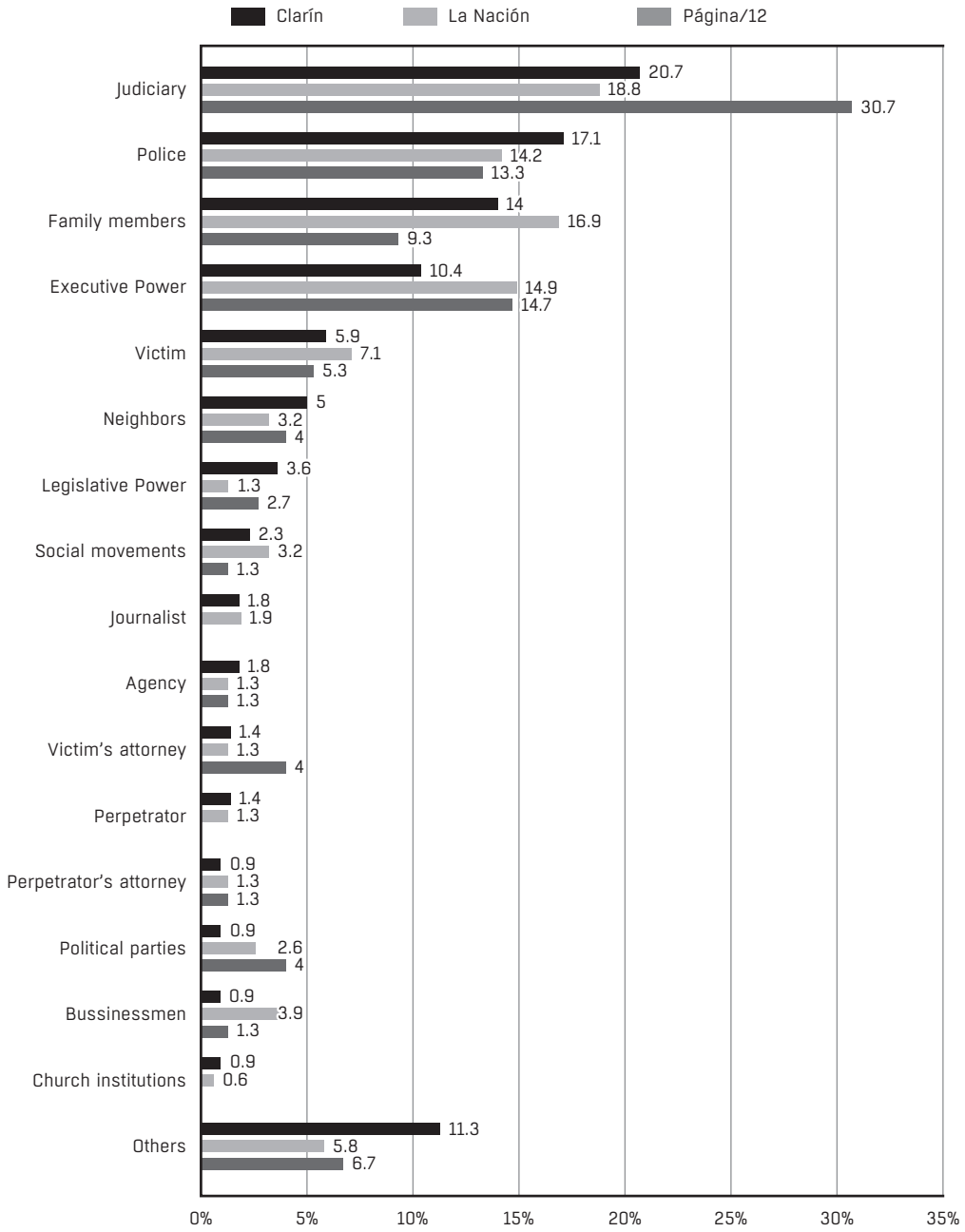

Figure 3. Sources of information according to newspaper. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

the presence of the Executive Branch as a source of information, data consistent with the most active role that the government decided to take in security matters, promoting public policies, above all, of a punitive nature.

In summary, the main finding of this work is that there is a break point between one context and another after the assumption of Mauricio Macri, on December 10, 2015. The adoption by the new management of the security issue as main axis of its speeches, concerns and

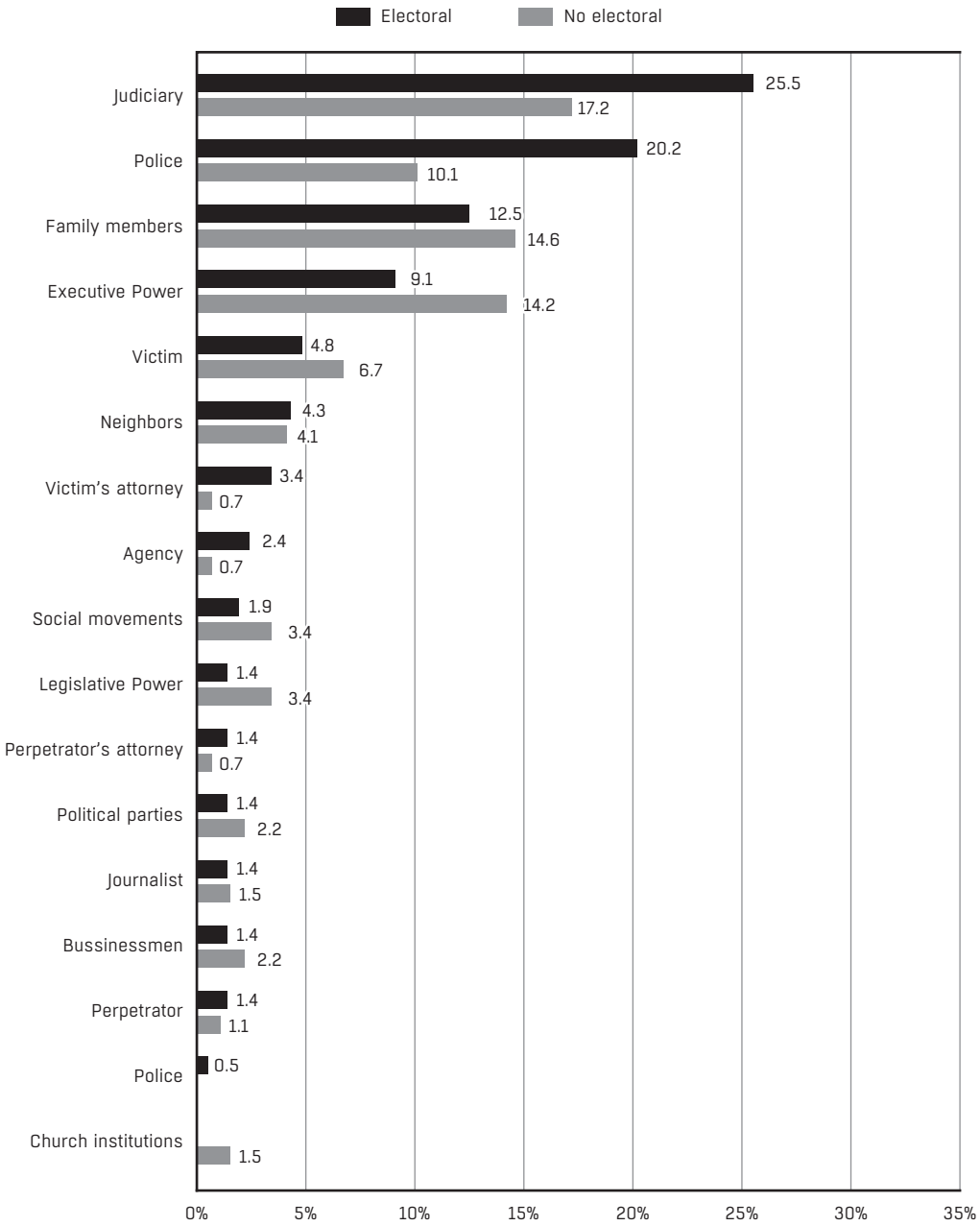

Figure 4. Sources of information according to context. October 2015 - October 2016. *Clarín, La Nación* and *Página/12*

Source: Own elaboration.

actions, influenced media coverage, especially those of the two most important newspapers in the country –*Clarín* and *La Nación*–, both editorially aligned with government policies. The leap in coverage of security policies is explained, above all, by the active generation by the government of Mauricio Macri of key events (Brosius & Eps, 1995) that are newsworthy for the press. In contrast, the absence of this issue in the coverage during Cristina Fernández's government speaks more of the political agenda than of the media: insecurity was not among the priorities of the Kirchner government and the political responses on the issue

were irregular and pendulous, subject in general to specific and shocking cases (Sozzo, 2016).

DISCUSSION

The study of the informative treatment of insecurity is relevant, since the issue is among the main concerns of citizens. In electoral contexts, insecurity as a topic is retaken by politicians and media, promoting a discussion that has implications for the construction of political, public and media agendas. However, this work evidences the absence of substantial differences in one context and another.

The empirical work developed for this study could account for certain topics that were predominant in the media construction of insecurity. In general, these were the most dramatic events that especially affect urban middle sectors. These types of cases are selected and ranked to occupy the most visible newspaper spaces, determining a typical physiognomy of the crime and insecurity that does not coincide with victimization surveys, in which popular sectors appear at the top. Thus, homicides, robberies and thefts constitute recurring cases in the security media agendas when they affect the middle sectors, which constitutes a biased representation of the crime.

The previous reflection is consistent with the finding of a look focused on the illicit events that occur in the City of Buenos Aires and in the Buenos Aires conurbation. We hypothesize that this overrepresentation in comparative terms from a *porteño-centric* and class perspective collaborates in the construction of the belief of an insecure metropolis related to a fear topology (Segura, 2009) that goes from the security and privacy of private space –represented by the house– towards the insecurity and anonymity of public space, with the neighborhood as a transitional mediator between both extremes. That is, although the city is interaction, flows and exchanges, the stories work in the opposite direction, "reterritorializing fear and danger, circumscribing them, restoring an urban ecology with good and bad places, safe and insecure, passable and impassable" (Segura, 2009, p. 69). Thus, in the Argentine case, Buenos Aires and its periphery are built media as the territory of fear par excellence.

Finally, the verification of the predominance of official sources, a typical situation in the media treatment of crime, is enhanced by an unusual visibility of the Executive Power as a permanent generator of newsworthy events linked to security. Both the formulation of public policies and the repeated statements of the officials on the subject express the importance of the matter as the central axis of management of the Macri government, a situation that, presumably, is repeated in other center-right governments in the region. This panorama leads to reflect on regime changes and the presence of the security issue as a daily concern that articulates new relationships between police news and the political situation.

This research, which focuses on the insecurity information agendas, attempts to account, based on the collection of data provided by the contents of the newspapers, for the current representation of insecurity in three powerful Argentine newspapers. The proposal, however, does not imply a simplification of the public opinion construction processes. The media and the audiences maintain a tense relationship in which issues and points of view are permanently negotiated. The restriction of this work to the media content has the limitation of not being able to cover the entire complex process. This task is pending for future research that may, based on the evidence that was collected, address the dimension of reception and the production processes of the news. These lines of research will allow greater clarity about the complex social construction of insecurity in contemporary Argentina.

NOTES

1. The latest official victimization surveys show that 27.5% of Argentine households had one of their members as a victim of a crime. According to data from INDEC (2017), 85.1% of the population of the country considers insecurity in their city of residence as a quite or very serious problem, and 85.4% of households have some measure of prevention. Along with these data, most of the interviewees agreed that the problem of insecurity is very serious in the country, and that they lived in fear of being victims of a crime.

2. In the simple random sample, no quotas were introduced per period, since this type of sampling guarantees a representative distribution of the cases regarding the periods and newspapers studied. This decision is further supported by the fact that the number of cases in each of the periods was similar: non-electoral period 672 cases, electoral period 656 cases.

3. According to the Circulation Verification Institute (IVC), their averages of net circulation are: Clarín, 241,603 issues; La Nación, 152,204 issues and Página/12, 27,814 issues (www.ivc.org.ar).

4. Spearman's coefficient is a measure of the correlation between two continuous random variables. The indicator ranges between values of -1 and 1. An acceptable level of agreement is when the result is greater than Spearman's Rho = 0.7.

5. Propuesta Republicana (PRO) is a political party founded in 2005 by the current Argentine president, Mauricio Macri, with which he won the government of the City of Buenos Aires in two successive periods (2007-2011 and 2011-2015) and that today is part of Cambiemos, the political alliance that led him to the presidency of the nation.

6. The triple crime of General Rodríguez refers to the murder of the pharmaceutical businessmen Sebastián Forza, Damián Ferrón and Leopoldo Bina, found dead in August 2008. In the case, which has links to the illegal trafficking of ephedrine, Cristian Lanatta, Martín Lanatta, Víctor Schilacci and Marcelo Schilacci were sentenced to life imprisonment. On December 26, 2015, they escaped from the Buenos Aires prison where they were being held and were on the loose for 13 days; all this implied great media coverage.

7. The Public Defender's Office is an Argentine public body whose mission is to promote, disseminate and defend the audience's right to democratic communication by the audiovisual media throughout the national territory. More information: http://defensadelpublico.gob.ar/

8. The Buenos Aires conurbation is a strip of territory that surrounds the Federal Capital of Argentina. It is divided territorially into 229 localities and neighborhoods, within the 24 municipalities that compose it. It has an area of approximately 2,480 km2, 1% of the total area of Argentina, where a quarter of the entire national population lives (9,916,715 inhabitants according to the 2010 national census).

9. The high percentages of representation of the crime in the rest of the provinces in one or another context are due to the small number of pieces about events that occurred in those provinces published by national newspapers.

10. This paper uses the definition of Steele (1997), for whom the official sources are those that depend on State agencies.

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