

## Antecedents of strategic game and issue framing of local electoral campaigns in the Mexican context

*Factores antecedentes de los encuadres de  
juego estratégico y temático en la cobertura  
de campañas electorales locales en el  
contexto mexicano*

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Research into which factors in the media coverage are associated with the issue frame and which with the strategic game frame can help with understanding the causes of the proliferation of both styles of reporting. In this article, radio and television coverage of local electoral campaigns in the Mexican context were analyzed. Our findings show a greater presence of the issue frame in comparison with the strategic game frame, and confirm that the ownership and sector of the media organization, the type of election, the candidate's gender, along with temporal-contextual variables predict the use of both news frames significantly.

**KEYWORDS:** framing theory, political campaigns, political communication, news frames.

*La investigación sobre qué factores en la cobertura de los medios están asociados con los encuadres temático y de juego estratégico puede ayudar a comprender las causas de la proliferación de ambos encuadres periodísticos. En este artículo se analizó la cobertura de radio y televisión de las campañas electorales de 2018 en el estado de Jalisco (México). Nuestros hallazgos muestran una mayor presencia del encuadre temático en comparación con el encuadre de juego estratégico, y confirman que el tipo de concesión y sector de la organización de medios, el tipo de elección, el género de la candidatura y variables temporales-contextuales predicen el uso de ambos encuadres periodísticos de forma significativa.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** teoría del framing, campañas políticas, comunicación política, encuadres de noticias.

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## INTRODUCTION

Not all media coverage is the same. The term *framing* is used in Communication studies to refer to the object produced after the packaging of information in a way that emphasizes a particular element (Entman, 1993). Aalberg et al. (2012) report that the strategic game frame—which emphasizes who is winning the election and the strategies followed by candidates—predominates in most of the countries where media coverage of electoral campaigns has been analyzed (which, coincidentally, are mostly Western countries). According to these authors, its main determinants are temporal factors, such as the public policy phase. The strategic game frame tends to appear mainly during electoral campaigns, but it can also appear in the media coverage of any political issue (Aalberg et al., 2012; Lawrence, 2000); in particular, during the climax of the public policy process (for example, on the eve of a legislative vote) and when there is conflict between elites (Lawrence, 2000).

However, not much is yet known about the factors that influence media organizations to prefer strategic game over issue coverage (Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013; Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015; Schmuck et al., 2016). In addition, most of the evidence refers to media coverage in Western Europe and the United States. Researchers have advised to be cautious before universalizing results (Jackson, 2011) and have raised the need to conduct electoral framing research in contexts other than Western Europe and the United States to find out if the patterns that have been found so far occur in other parts of the world (Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013). In particular, Echeverría Victoria (2018) is skeptical about explaining electoral coverage in the Mexican context by applying models based in highly developed countries.

Hence, we ask: Are trends found in Western countries transferable to the Mexican context? Although frame-building factors have recently begun to be researched by Latin American researchers (Rodelo, 2019; Rodelo & Muñiz, 2016), we have no news yet of studies that account for the factors that influence the construction of frames during electoral campaigns. Therefore, in this article we examine the role of different influencing factors of electoral coverage in the Mexican context: media

sector and media ownership (organizational factors); type of election, political preference of the candidate's party, and candidate gender (factors related to political actors); and days before election, political events and extra-political events (temporal-contextual variables).

This article adds to the existing literature on frame-building during elections in three ways: First, by testing the universality of the strategic game and issue frames in a Latin American context. In other words, by observing outcomes similar to those observed in Western European countries and the United States, we can infer that analogous media processes are at play. For example, as our data is about coverage of elections at different levels, we replicate the principle that observes that the importance of the election drives strategic game coverage. Second, by testing if media ownership type and media sector reflect in the news frames that are used in electoral coverage. In particular, this paper provides elements to ascertain the potential of public media to distinguish themselves from private media and stimulate the creation of public service contents in the media system in the Mexican context. Third, by improving our understanding of the significance of the candidate's traits, which include the importance of the election, the degree of their party's political preference, as well as the candidate's gender, and contextual factors, such as political and extra-political events, for influencing the framing of electoral coverage.

The structure of the rest of this article is as follows: the theoretical frame guiding framing research is provided, with a special focus on the existing knowledge of the three sets of electoral frame antecedents featured in this study. Next, we explain the particularities of the case study, and provide the necessary details regarding the methodological procedure adopted. Finally, the findings and contributions of this study are discussed.

## MEDIA FRAMING OF ELECTIONS AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

Media coverage of electoral campaigns is relevant in modern democracies mainly because: 1) voters need timely, accurately and reliably reported information on public issues, and the media organizations, even with their many limitations (Graber, 2003;

Lippmann, 1922), are the institutions best equipped to provide it. In addition, 2) the media function as a communicative space for public debate and dialogue –usually construed as a public sphere (Habermas, 1974)– that is essential for different social actors to be able to express their ideas and for these to get to be known by the public.

Theories of framing and agenda-setting have been the most successful in explaining the nature of journalistic coverage of public affairs and its effects. Framing theory posits that the form and emphasis of news messages has an impact on the formation or reinforcement of people’s mental frames and, therefore, on social debates (Entman, 1993). Framing theory encompasses both the processes of building news frames (frame-building), and the processes through which these frames are set in people’s minds (frame-setting). For the study of both processes it is also essential to identify and document the frames used in the different journalistic cultures of the world.

The most important frames identified in media coverage of electoral processes have been the strategic game frame and the issue frame. News articles with a strategic game frame are those centered on describing the candidates’ viability and their strategies, such as their use of campaign resources (Aalberg et al., 2012). In contrast, news articles with issue framing present “proposals for the problems, information about who is advocating which policy alternative, and consequences of the problems and proposals” (Rhee, 1997, p. 30).

The predominance of the strategic game frame has been considered problematic because it takes attention away from the candidates’ proposals and platforms (Aalberg et al., 2012). Cappella and Jamieson (1997) provided evidence that news articles focused entirely on strategy activate political cynicism in people, a condition characterized mainly as an “absence of trust”, based on beliefs about the actors’ motivations, and suspicions about “the lack of honesty of [political] actors and groups” (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, pp. 141, 166). Despite the latter, other researchers have pointed out that treating elections as sports competitions can make them more interesting and attractive for the electorate (Aalberg et al., 2012), and, in this sense, have proposed distinguishing between the concept of a horse race frame (the treatment of elections as sports competitions, also known as a *game frame*) and

the concept of a strategic game frame (emphasizing the motivations and strategy of political actors), arguing that the latter is the frame responsible for activating political cynicism among voters (De Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008). Likewise, it is assumed that the issue frame is essential to promoting the understanding of public affairs by the public, and that it is necessary during electoral campaigns, if the electorate is to be in a position to cast an informed and reasoned vote (Aalberg et al., 2012).

Predominance of the strategic game frame over the issue frame in the media coverage of electoral campaigns has been documented mainly in the United States and Western European countries (Aalberg et al., 2012; Dimitrova & Kostadinova, 2013; Zeh & Hopmann, 2013), possibly associated with the prevalence of majority political systems in these regions and with the macro process of mediatization, as it is argued that presence of the strategic game frame in media coverage is one indicator of mediatization (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011). A longitudinal study (1994-2010) comparing Danish and German coverage of presidential elections reports a stable prevalence of about 60 per cent of horse race coverage in both countries during the period (Zeh & Hopmann, 2013). Studies conducted in Mexico –with an electoral system that can be categorized as mixed because of its combination of relative majority and proportional representation posts– have also found that the strategic game frame prevails during presidential campaigns (Echeverría & González, 2018; Muñoz, 2015).

To better understand the frames that emerge during the electoral season, it has been considered relevant to investigate which factors are associated with the presence of the strategic game and which are associated with the issue frame. In the categorization of factors explaining frame-building processes in news content, Dimitrova and Kostadinova (2013) have noted that factors can be classified in two levels of analysis: *systemic* (features of the country's media and political system) and *organizational* (characteristics of the media organization). Temporal-contextual factors and factors related to political actors are two additional sets of determinants featured in frame-building studies. In the next pages, we will focus on three sets of factors: attributes of the media organization (identified in the literature as organizational

factors), factors related to political actors, and temporal-contextual factors.

*Media sector and media ownership type  
as attributes of the media organization*

Many factors that influence the production of media content have been identified at the organizational level (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In the following paragraphs we will examine two organizational factors: media sector and media ownership type. Why would media sector influence differences in news framing? A study comparing television with newspaper coverage on poverty, found that television coverage is more oriented toward episodic reporting, and newspaper reports more inclined toward thematic coverage (Kim et al., 2010). In other words, newspapers were most inclined to address a complex topic –poverty– in a substantive way. Cross-media differences in the presence of frames such as the latter may be explained by considering that each media sector has its own style, language, and routines, which in turn may predispose their personnel towards the use of different news frames.

Turning to studies on the strategic game frame, a study conducted in a non-electoral period found a greater presence of the strategic game frame in online newspapers compared to print newspapers (Schmuck et al., 2016). Meanwhile, in a comparison of television and newspaper coverage in a non-electoral context, television coverage was more likely to frame reporting on the Euro in strategic terms (Jackson, 2011). On the other hand, the comparative study by Schuck, Vliegenthart et al. (2013), conducted with data from European Union countries, did not find that the origin of the news item –whether it came from television or a printed newspaper– explained the presence of conflict and horse race frames. This evidence makes it clear that the media sector has the potential to influence the types of frames used within the media coverage, due to the preference of each sector towards particular formats and reporting styles.

Now, in terms of a specific distinction between radio and television, there are no studies that have compared frames in one sector with frames in the other. However, there are differences between the two sectors that may be relevant for the frame-building. For example, radio content on

politics tends to be dialogic, which is seen in the frequent interviewing and reading of comments from the public, whereas television content on politics, on the other hand, tends rather to be monological, which is seen in television's preference for the news story. This may be due to the fact that the costs of production are higher and that television tends to have a greater audience reach, which makes it more important for producers to exercise strict control over aired contents (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). A growing trend that can attenuate this condition is media convergence, particularly that of "traditional" media sectors, with some form of transmission over the Internet (either live or on demand), that is also seen in the existence of cross-platform media –radio-television and even radio-television-Internet hybrids–. This phenomenon could blur the differences between these media sectors. On the basis of which, we ask:

Cross-media question [RQ1]: Are news items from television programs and radio programs equally likely to present a strategic game frame? Are news items from television programs and radio programs equally likely to present an issue frame?

Given the public funding and non-lucrative purpose of public service media, one would expect their contents to have a larger proportion of substantive reporting in comparison with commercial media. Indeed, the top news programs from public service channels in the United States and Sweden tend to offer issue coverage to a greater extent compared to the top news programs from commercial channels in the same countries (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012). Similarly, more policy than game coverage was found in Irish public television and morning radio in comparison with their private counterparts (Rafter et al., 2014); in addition, metaframing of politics as a game rather than as issues was more common in commercial than in public service TV news of Sweden and Belgium (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). However, this trend is not always there: in a comparative study of European Union countries, the ownership profile of television channels (public or private) did not explain the presence of conflict and horse race frames (Schuck, Vliegthart et al., 2013). Likewise, a study on non-electoral coverage

in Austria and Switzerland did not find evidence of more strategic game framing in commercial media in comparison with public media (Schmuck et al., 2016).

The available evidence on the role of media ownership type in the framing of electoral coverage is, therefore, inconsistent. But this may be due to the fact that the contents analyzed in the studies come from media organizations operating in countries with variations in legal regulations, professional standards, and journalistic cultures, producing contrasting versions of public service media. In addition, scholars point out that in different countries the leading commercial media devote time –despite their ownership type– to substantial news reporting (Rafter et al., 2014). Two influences may account for the latter: First, substantial news reporting may improve the overall credibility of the media. Second, it is argued that strong public media may influence the whole media system, promoting substantive reporting among the private media and acting “as a buffer against the dominance of commercial pressures” (Rafter et al., 2014, p. 445). However, the latter explanation also implies the possibility of influence in the opposite direction: with private media promoting market orientation values in the public media programming (Rafter et al., 2014). For our study, we propose that:

Public media hypothesis [H1]: News items from public media systems are less likely to present a strategic game frame and more likely to present an issue frame compared to those from private media.

### *Importance, viability and gender of candidates*

Among the scarce research that reports findings for factors of this type, a study based on data from the United States found that high levels of race competitiveness are associated with greater use of the game frame (Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015). However, the same study found no evidence that the candidate’s gender, their status as an incumbent seeking re-election or the type of electoral contest (gubernatorial or Senate) had an effect on the frames used in the media coverage.

Other factors associated with greater electoral competition, such as the concurrency of elections, seem to positively influence horse race coverage (Schuck, Vliegenthart et al., 2013). A multiparty system

such as that of Mexico organizes elections with a large number of candidates that vary enormously in their levels of viability (or candidate competitiveness), it being frequently the case that viability is associated with the party's level of political preference among the public. In the light of which, it is hypothesized that candidate traits directly or indirectly associated with viability (such as the party's level of political preference among the public) and newsworthiness (such as type of election) will be among those that can predict the use of the strategic game frame, as follows:

Importance of election hypothesis [H2]: News items on gubernatorial candidates are more likely to have both a strategic game frame and an issue frame compared to news items on legislative and municipal candidates.

Viability hypothesis [H3]: News items on candidates from parties with greater political preference are more likely to have a strategic game frame compared to the news items on candidates from parties with lesser political preference.

There is an extensive literature documenting various kinds of gender bias in the coverage of electoral campaigns. For example, in the Mexican context, male candidates obtain on average a greater share of media coverage than that given to female candidates (Rodelo, 2016, 2019). Gender biases have been attributed to factors concerning media organizations and to factors to do with political organizations (Lühiste & Banducci, 2016). However, evidence associating candidate's gender with the use of strategic game and issue frames is scarce. An early study focusing on the United States campaigns for the Senate found a greater use of the horse race frame associated with male candidates (Kahn, 1994). Recent studies have reported either no evidence of candidate gender influencing the choice of frames (Dunaway & Lawrence, 2015) or mixed results depending on the frame and the type of elections (Vidal-Correa, 2020). It may be that the influence of gender on framing is related to the perceived viability of competing women, as a study on presidential elections coverage in the Chilean context found a greater use of the horse race frame for the winning presidential candidate

Michelle Bachelet (Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). As there is scant evidence regarding the influence of candidate gender on strategic game framing the following research question asks:

Gender question [RQ2]: Are news items on female candidates equally likely to present a strategic game frame and an issue frame compared with those on male candidates?

### *Temporal and contextual factors*

As timeliness is one of the most important principles in journalism, it is natural for studies to coincide in finding that media coverage of public issues is greater on the dates closest to the triggering events (Snow et al., 2007). Consequently, studies have shown that campaign coverage increases as election day approaches (Vliegenthart et al., 2010). Moreover, it has been pointed out that temporal-contextual variables are the main predictors of strategic game coverage (Aalberg et al., 2012). In effect, it has been argued that horse race coverage increases as election day approaches because electoral surveys in the period closest to election day become more relevant for predicting the election outcomes (Schuck, Vliegenthart et al., 2013; Vliegenthart et al., 2010). Likewise, other studies have found that the use of the game frame increases as election day approaches (Dekavalla, 2016; Dunaway et al., 2015). From the above, we propose that:

Election day hypothesis [H4]: As election day approaches, there are more news items with a strategic game frame.

Which other temporal-contextual factors can trigger strategic game coverage? Literature points also to political events, which vary depending on the region. For example, strategic coverage increases in the United States during the Republican and Democratic conventions (Vliegenthart et al., 2010). In the Mexican context, important media events include the mandatory debates of presidential and gubernatorial candidates –organized by the electoral authorities– and the launch and closure of electoral campaigns.

Another circumstantial factor that provokes controversy refers to the effect of the programming of important extra-political events in days close to election day. In particular, casual observers have suggested that the programming of important soccer matches in days close to election day takes the public's attention away from politics and hence causes a decrease both in the public interest in electoral campaigns and in voter turnout (Baños, 2018). Aside from that, we argue that as important sports events make considerations about winning/losing, competition and strategy more salient in the environment (especially for media workers), they could be positive predictors of the strategic game frame. In view of the latter, and given the lack of studies regarding political and extra-political events, we chose to ask the following questions:

Political events question [RQ3]: Are news items published the day after the mandatory gubernatorial debates and during the start and end of campaigns equally likely to present the strategic game and the issue frame compared with those published on any other day?

Extra-political events question [RQ4]: Are news items published the day after important extra-political events such as sports events equally likely to present a strategic game frame and an issue frame compared with those published on any other day?

## CONTEXT OF STUDY

Enormous political and technological changes in the Mexican context have increased the relevance of testing the association of attributes of media organizations, political actors' traits, and context with the presence of strategic game and issue frames. Mexican regulators' efforts at leveling the field for candidates and parties have impacted the radio and television sectors. The political-electoral reform of 2007 prohibited the purchase of political advertising during campaigns, while guaranteeing fair access by candidates to the electronic media through the equitable distribution of "State times". Subsequently, the 2013 telecommunications reform prohibited the purchase of advertising disguised as content. Media consumption surveys show that

television and radio, in that order, continue to be the most important sources of information about politics in Mexico (Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones [IFT], 2016; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2013). Most radio and television outlets in the country are private; and the few public service broadcasters struggle with underfunding and accusations of being co-opted by the current government.

Furthermore, political reforms have allowed new actors to participate in popular elections under conditions of greater equality: the 2014 Mexican constitutional reform legalized the figure of independent candidates (that is, candidates without the support of a political party). The same constitutional reform turned the gender quota into an obligation of gender parity (fifty percent of each gender) for candidates to the federal legislature. Afterwards, a reform in the state of Jalisco (Mexico) made legislative parity possible at the local level, as well as having vertical parity in the lists of candidates to municipal positions. For the next electoral cycle (2018 local elections), gender parity was extended to the municipal candidates heading the municipal lists, a feature known as horizontal parity. However, huge gender imbalances remain in political participation, as in the gubernatorial election there were seven candidates, six of them male.

In the 2018 local electoral process in Jalisco there were three types of popularly elected positions to be voted for: head of the state government, mayors, and local legislators. The electoral process was concurrent with elections to three federal positions: president of the Mexican Republic, senators and federal legislators. The concurrence of federal elections distinguishes this electoral process from the “intermediate” elections: the perception that there is “more at stake” causes greater competition, which is a factor that influence greater horse race coverage (Schuck, Vliegenthart et al., 2013).

## METHOD

This study relies on the data produced by the monitoring of radio and television coverage of the campaigns of the 2017-2018 electoral process in the state of Jalisco (Mexico). A sample of 48 radio and television programs broadcast by thirteen different media organizations, eleven of them with private use licenses and two operating with public service

licenses, was content analyzed. The 48 programs were selected using criteria of relevance (political significance, audience levels) and maximum variability.<sup>2</sup>

To carry out the analysis, only the items disseminated between March 30<sup>th</sup> and June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (the official period for electoral campaigns) with a single actor as protagonist were considered ( $n = 25$  663 monitored news items); that is to say, for the purposes of this study, units that mentioned candidates in different elections, from different parties or with different genders were discarded.

### *Intercoder reliability*

A total of 21 trained coders and two trained supervisors participated in the analysis of news programs. Following the content analysis guidelines suggested by Lombard et al. (2004), the intercoder reliability procedures are described below: after training, all participant coders analyzed a separate sample of episodes of a news radio program until every one of them reached an agreement of at least .90 Holsti's formula in all

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<sup>2</sup> The following programs were sampled: Radio: *Buenos Días Metrópoli*, *Buenas Tardes*, *Metrópolis al Día*, *Forma y Fondo*, *Política en Directo*, *Así las cosas*, *Jalisco*, *Zona Tres Primera Emisión*, *Zona Tres Segunda Emisión*, *Cara a Cara*, *Líder Informativo Primera Edición* (previously *Noticias 1070*), *Líder Informativo Segunda Edición* (previously *Noticias 1070*), *Cosa Pública 2.0*, *Señal Informativa Ocotlán*, *Señal Informativa Colotlán*, *Señal Informativa Puerto Vallarta*, *Noticiero en Punto*, *Tela de Juicio*, *MVS Radio Jalisco*, *Radio Fórmula Tercer Cadena Primera Emisión*, *Imagen Jalisco*, *Noticias El Faro*, *La Red Vallarta*, *Señal Informativa Autlán*, *Señal Informativa Lagos de Moreno*, *Señal Informativa Zapotlán El Grande*, *Señal Informativa Primera Emisión*, *Señal Informativa Segunda Emisión*, *Señal Informativa Tercera Emisión*, *C7 Noticias al Momento*, *C7 Noticias de Verdad*. Television: *Despierta con Más*, *Noticiero GDL Matutino*, *Noticiero GDL Contigo*, *Noticiero GDL Nocturno*, *C7 Noticias al Momento TV*, *C7 Noticias de Verdad TV*, *Señal Informativa Primera Emisión TV*, *Señal Informativa Segunda Emisión TV*, *Señal Informativa Tercera Emisión TV*, *En Controversia*, *Hechos Jalisco*, *Hechos Meridiano Jalisco*, *Meganoticias*, *Ocho TV Informativo* (morning), *Ocho TV Informativo* (afternoon), *Informativo con Jonás*, *Desde la Barrera*, *Elecciones 2018*.

variables with a supervisor. This occurred typically after 1-2 complete episodes (1-3 days). During the coding of the full sample, the two supervisors routinely revised the codings for typing and logical mistakes. During the monitoring, doubts about coding criteria were resolved via open discussion between coders, supervisors and researcher.<sup>3</sup>

### *Operationalization of variables*

Studies of this topic have adopted different criteria to identify the strategic game frame and its derivatives. Aalberg et al. (2012) distinguish between studies that seek to code the presence of the frame or its dominance (both through dichotomous or categorical variables) and those that seek to estimate the level of presence of the frame (through a metric variable). Measuring the presence of a frame implies that the same unit of analysis can present different frames at the same time, while coding the dominance of frames forces the coder to decide in a reasoned manner which frame predominates within the unit of analysis. For this analysis, coders recorded the presence or absence of the strategic game frame and issue frames in each news item.

In the present study, the strategic game frame subsumes frames that other authors consider separately: the game frame or horse race frame and the strategy frame. The presence of a strategic game frame was coded in news items that mentioned surveys or metaphors of sport and/or war, or mentioned campaign resources and/or strategies. On the other hand, following Dan and Iorgoveanu (2013), the presence of the issue frame was coded in news items with explanations of problems or solutions for public issues, or that mentioned a proposal on how to resolve a particular public issue.

Regarding the independent variables, the public or private ownership of the media organization was coded according to the type of license granted by the Federal Telecommunications Institute (public or private use). The three political forces that obtained the highest percentages of preference in the elections for head of the state government, according to surveys published during the campaign period, were coded as parties with a greater political preference. These were Movimiento Ciudadano

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<sup>3</sup> The reader can obtain upon request the full coding instrument from the author as well as the full coding data on which this study is based.

(MC), the Morena-PT-PES coalition, and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in that order.

For the influence of the debate factor, we coded broadcasts on the working day following the mandatory debates of gubernatorial candidates, as these were the debates that enjoyed the highest audience and media interest in the local electoral process. They were held on May 13<sup>th</sup>, May 27<sup>th</sup> and June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018. To measure the impact of the beginning and the end of the campaigns, the starting and finishing dates were coded (March 30<sup>th</sup>, April 29<sup>th</sup> and June 27<sup>th</sup>), as well as a day after these. Each of the three matches of Mexico's male soccer team in the FIFA World Cup, which took place on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, were also included as a temporal factor in this electoral process; in the case of the first two games, which took place at the weekend, the next working day was coded (June 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, respectively).

### *Statistical analysis*

Two multiple logistic regressions were applied. As mentioned earlier, the dependent variables were the presence of a strategic game frame in the news item and the presence of an issue frame in the news item. Multiple logistic regression is used when there is a nominal dependent variable and more than one independent variable. This statistical analysis allows the use of nominal variables as independent variables (McDonald, 2014). Although this analysis does not account for the multilevel structure of the data, one study found that the results of multilevel analysis converged with those of conventional methods (Lau & Rovner, 2009).

## RESULTS

The study identified 7 484 news items with a strategic game frame (29.2% of the sampled news items), while the number of news items with an issue frame was 11 163 (43.5%). Table 1 shows the results of the multiple logistic regression applied to predict the use of the strategic game frame in electoral coverage, while the results of the multiple logistic regression applied to predict the use of the issue frame in electoral coverage are shown in Table 2. The significant coefficients reported in both tables reveal that all of the independent variables of interest are significantly related (in a positive or negative

way) to the presence of the strategic game and issue frames, with the exception of “day after gubernatorial debate” (a temporal-contextual variable) and “male candidate” (a candidate trait variable), both of which do not predict the use of the strategic game frame.

As previously implied, the variables related to features of the media organization predicted the use of both strategic game and issue frames. Answering the cross-media question (RQ1), Tables 1 and 2 reveal that radio programs are more likely to use the strategic game frame, while television programs are more likely to use the issue frame. On the other hand, results support the public media hypothesis (H1), as we found that, compared with private media, public media are less likely to use the strategic game frame, and are more likely to use the issue frame.

The variables related to candidate traits predicted both strategic game and issue frames, except for “male candidate”, which only predicted the issue frame. We will examine the three variables separately: First, being a gubernatorial candidate was a positive predictor for both the strategic game and issue frame, a result that supports the importance of election hypothesis (H2). Second, being a candidate from a party with greater electoral preference was a positive predictor of the strategic game frame, but a negative predictor of the issue frame; this result supports the viability hypothesis (H3) and adds a twist to it, as in this case viability seemed to penalize substantive reporting. Third, and answering the gender question (RQ2), the findings reveal a gender bias that is detrimental to female candidates, as being a male candidate did not predict the use of strategic game frame, but it positively predicted the issue frame.

The temporal-contextual variables predicted both strategic game and issue frames, except for “day after gubernatorial debate”, that predicted only the issue frame. The complete results are as follows: First, we found, as expected, that the number of days until election day negatively predicted both the strategic game and issue frame (or, in other words, news items closest to the election day were more likely to present both frames). This result supports the election day hypothesis (H4). Second, and answering the political events question (RQ3), the findings show that being published during the day of start/end of campaigns and the day after that was a positive predictor of the strategic game frame but a negative predictor of the issue frame. Third, and answering the extra-

political events question (RQ4), the results show that being published the day after an important extra-political event of a sporting nature was a positive predictor of the strategic game frame and a negative predictor of the issue frame. Finally, it was surprising that being published after the mandatory gubernatorial debate was only a negative predictor of the issue frame, as it did not predict the use of the strategic game frame.

Following the latter results, we distinguish several variables that show a similar pattern, positively predicting use of the strategic game frame while negatively predicting the issue frame (hence sort of “penalizing” substantive reporting): 1) candidate from party with greater political preference; 2) day of start/end of campaigns; and 3) day after an important extra-political event; 4) Radio programs; and 5) private media also acted in a manner congruent with this pattern.

On the other hand, two variables show a pattern promoting both the strategic game and issue frames: “days immediately before the election” and “gubernatorial candidate”. In this manner, results indicate that timeliness and relevance were forces that promoted both frames in these elections.

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF THE MULTIPLE LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH FACTORS  
PREDICTING THE STRATEGIC GAME FRAME

Variable	B	Standard error	Sig.	Exp(B)
Television program	-.399	.028	.000	.671
Public media program	-.581	.032	.000	.559
Gubernatorial candidate	.288	.030	.000	1.334
Party with greatest preference	.078	.029	.008	1.081
Male candidate	-.052	.041	.205	.949
Days before the election	-.006	.001	.000	.994
Day after gubernatorial debate	.085	.053	.108	1.089
Day of start/end of campaigns	.327	.055	.000	1.387
Extra-political event	.347	.066	.000	1.415
Constant	-.515	.048	.000	.597
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup> = .042				
n = 25 663				

Source: The author.

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF THE MULTIPLE LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH FACTORS  
PREDICTING THE ISSUE FRAME

Variable	B	Standard error	Sig.	Exp(B)
Television program	.257	.026	.000	1.293
Public media program	.161	.028	.000	1.175
Gubernatorial candidate	.153	.028	.000	1.165
Party with greatest preference	-.139	.027	.000	.871
Male candidate	.241	.037	.000	1.273
Days before the election	-.004	.001	.000	.996
Day after gubernatorial debate	-.220	.049	.000	.802
Day of start/end of campaigns	-.273	.051	.000	.761
Extra-political event	-.512	.063	.000	.599
Constant	.116	.044	.008	1.123
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup> = .019				
n = 25 663				

Source: The author.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate predominance of the issue frame over the strategic game frame in the coverage of local elections in the Mexican context. Some possible explanations of this outcome are referred to in the literature on political communication: Several researchers have opined that the dynamics influencing strategic game coverage are mostly related to actors and campaigns at the national level (Aalberg et al., 2012; Schuck, Boomgaarden et al., 2013) –that is, where there is more at stake. It has been affirmed that the use of mass media as information channels is more critical at the national level (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012), which increases the probability of finding actors trying to influence public opinion through the use of strategic game coverage. Additionally, an important trigger of this style of reporting –public opinion surveys– is more frequent at the national level. Other possible explanation derive from a contextual feature of the case study: competitiveness predicts use of the strategic game frame (Dunaway

& Lawrence, 2015); however, most newsworthy local elections in our case study were not competitive, as the leading candidates in the largest elections won by a large margin.<sup>4</sup>

The findings of this study account for factors that significantly predict the use of strategic game and issue frames in local electoral coverage in radio and television programs in the Mexican context. For some factors, we observed outcomes congruent with those observed in Western European countries and the U. S. in a way that supports the assumption that analogous media processes are at play. Regarding organizational factors, this article adds to the evidence establishing the potential for cross-media comparisons to find differences in the use of frames (Jackson, 2011; Kim et al., 2010; Schmuck et al., 2016). Most of the evidence establishes differences between print and television coverage (Jackson, 2011; Kim et al., 2010), or between print and digital media coverage (Schmuck et al., 2016). This is the first study ever to compare between radio and television contents: we found that, compared to radio, the news items produced by television were more likely to have an issue frame and less likely to have a strategic game frame. Differences detected by this study may be explained by tighter control in television than radio (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In contrast with television, radio tends to be more spontaneous and open to audience participation. It has been noted that the study of radio coverage has been neglected (Rafter et al., 2014). Radio's higher preference towards the strategic game frame in comparison with television is another call for more research into radio contents.

This study found that the news items produced by public media were more likely to have an issue frame and less likely to have a strategic game frame. Private media's preference for strategic game framing can be understood as part of the market orientation and commercialism of private media (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Schmuck et al., 2016; Rafter et al., 2014), whereas public media's preference for issue framing can be interpreted as the fulfillment of their public service goal (Dekavalla, 2016; Rafter et al., 2014). This result confirms the potential of

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<sup>4</sup> That was the case of the largest elections by number of voters: state government, and the Guadalajara and Zapopan municipalities.

public media in a Latin American context to realize a coverage that significantly differs from that made by private media and that provides more and better opportunities to acquire political knowledge (Strömbäck, 2016). However, the context of this case study must be considered before transferring this result to other settings, as Jalisco is home to two relatively strong public service broadcasting systems.

This study confirms that in the news production process candidate traits can influence the selection of news frames. News items about gubernatorial candidates were more likely to have both issue and strategic game frames, whereas news items about candidates from parties with the greatest political preference were more likely to have a strategic game frame and less likely to have an issue frame. Newsworthiness and viability, respectively, may be the drivers that explain both outcomes. On the other hand, this study contributes to the literature on gender biases in electoral coverage by identifying gender differences in frame selection that are detrimental to female candidates, as news items about male candidates were more likely to have an issue frame, while gender was not significant for predicting the strategic game frame. The literature points to two main categories of factors influencing gender biases in electoral reporting: the ones deriving from media organizations (e. g., gender stereotypes among media staff) and the ones deriving from political institutions and that are mirrored by media contents (Lühiste & Banducci, 2016). We can count among the latter gender differences in campaign resources and capacities; for example, gender differences in the placement of candidates. Most of the gubernatorial candidates—a factor positively predicting issue coverage—in our case study were male. This leads us to infer that there is at least one factor deriving from political institutions (candidate placement) that contributes to gender bias in the selection of news frames. Hence, gender bias research that controls for factors associated with relevance and perceived viability of candidates must be conducted to understand if those factors are the drivers of gender biases in the selection of news frames.

Finally, our results confirm the enormous influence of temporal-contextual factors in predicting the selection of news frames. In

accordance with previous studies (Dekavalla, 2016; Dunaway et al., 2015; Schuck, Vliegenthart et al., 2013; Vliegenthart et al., 2010), the significance of the proximity of election day for selection of the strategic game frame was supported. This same factor also positively predicted the use of the issue frame. This means that coverage lacking both frames (e.g., mini-stories mentioning candidates but not exploring issues or political strategy) is avoided towards the end of campaigns. In a manner similar to what is seen in the United States' party conventions (Vliegenthart et al., 2010), this study also found that events of opening and closure of campaigns attract a strategic game coverage. Surprisingly, publication on the day after the gubernatorial debates negatively predicted news items with issue frames and did not predict a strategic game frame. Hence, more research is needed to better understand the role of electoral debates on the media framing of campaigns.

Our findings suggest extra-political events of a competitive kind –e.g., popular sports– may influence the likelihood of a strategic game frame and reduce the likelihood of issue coverage. This may be a consequence of the extra-political event filling the media and the social milieu with ideas and messages related to competition: winning and losing, scoring, strategy, performance, etc. –precisely the same notions that strategic game coverage transfers to electoral settings (Aalberg et al., 2012). In this way, we hypothesize, an important soccer match exacerbates the already popular use of the game metaphor to understand and report the political campaigns. Another explanation is suggested by Schmuck et al. (2016): strategic game framing is exacerbated when stories have to compete for attention with sports and entertainment. Hence, important sports events drive journalists who work on electoral topics to compete for attention by choosing a strategic game frame.

The present study was made from a sample of radio and television news items about candidates competing in a local process that involved elections for different positions. Due to the way it was designed, the reader must take into account the possibility that the results reflect the idiosyncrasies of the media organizations and political system of Jalisco, as well as characteristics and processes particularly related to elections of officials at the subnational level.

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