COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

Esteban Zunino
ezunino@mendoza-conicet.gov.ar
Professor and researcher.
Universidad Nacional de
Quilmes, Universidad Juan
Agustín Maza, Instituto de
Ciencias Humanas, Sociales y
Ambientales, Consejo Nacional
de Investigaciones Científicas y
Técnicas). Argentina.

Brenda Focás
bfocas@conicet.gov.ar
Professor and researcher.
Instituto de Altos Estudios
Sociales, Universidad Nacional
de San Martín, Consejo
Nacional de Investigaciones
Científicas y Técnicas.
Argentina.

The media's coverage of "insecurity" in Argentina: victims, victimisers and lawsuits

Abstract

Fear of crime and media influence on citizen risk perception is an issue that has grabbed the attention of the academia, approaching it from different perspectives. However, there are not too many case studies that address the current dynamics of this problem in Latin America from the perspective of quantitative content, although studies show that the topic has become a public concern in many Latin American countries. The overall objective of this paper is to analyze "insecurity" media coverage in the Argentinean newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and *Página/12*, both in electoral and non-electoral contexts. Based on concepts provided by the Agenda Setting and Framing theories, we will try to establish: 1) the relevance of different issues associated with crime in the national press; 2) the actors referenced by newspapers as victims and perpetrators and the attributes they are associated with; and 3) the frames that prevail in their coverage.

Keywords
Media, crime, risk, elections, agenda.

1. Introduction

Crimes, which are included within the concept of "insecurity", dominate the high-profile political and public agendas of Latin America in general and of Argentina in particular. Social concern for the growth of crime has taken on new meanings that go beyond the boundaries determined by law and are far from an automatic response to the increase of crimes. In other words, the feeling of insecurity (Kessler, 2009) or frustration with lack of safety (Castel, 2004) is not proportional to the real dangers that threaten a society. This feeling is not a direct result of the conscience; in fact, security and insecurity are related to the type of protection that a society can or cannot provide.

This study aims to analyse the media coverage of crimes associated with the idea of "insecurity", that is, those involving property (thefts and robberies successfully or unsuccessfully carried out) and involving people (injuries, homicides and other intentional assaults) (Kessler, 2014). In order to do so, every news item covering the issues associated with insecurity in the Argentinian newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página/12* during the months of October 2015 and 2016 was analysed

(Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was president during the 2015 period while Mauricio Macri was in 2016). This decision came about based on the fact that, during the first month of analysis, the electoral campaign and the elections that brought to power the current president of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, took place. As such, in addition to the general enquiry of the media coverage of crime, this study also aims to investigate whether the "electoral context" variable affected the development of information as regards "insecurity".

2. Context of the investigation: insecurity and the media in Argentina

Over the last decade, various surveys carried out throughout the Latin American region have placed insecurity at the top of national concerns, beating problems such as unemployment, corruption or inflation. In fact, a public opinion survey carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation shows that crime is the main problem of importance in the region, which has grown from the year 2004 onwards.

The Latinobarómetro data (2013) show that there is not necessarily a relationship between the level of crime in the country and the homicide rate, as there are countries with high crime rates (such as Peru and Argentina) and relatively low homicide rates. A lack of public safety also has significant consequences for Latin American society, with high costs in terms of GDP, public spending and even life expectancy (UNDP, 2014). Public perception of insecurity has increased over the last ten years throughout the region reaching as high as 43.2% in 2014 which is why the problem has become so central to the design of public policies (Americas Barometer, 2014).

In Argentina, the number of criminal acts doubled during the period 1991–2002 and began to fall steadily in the political, economic and social crisis of 2001, the point at which crimes in the country reached their peak, according to data of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights in Argentina. In the year 2015, with the latest published official data, there was a slight increase in crime, both against individuals and against property. Meanwhile, concern for crime is high in all major Argentinian cities, according to data from recent victimisation and public opinion surveys (Muratori & Espindola, 2016).

The growing sensitivity to insecurity is, according to Kessler and Merklen (2013), the effect of "a discrepancy between a socially constructed expectation of safety and the effective capacity of that society to provide it" (p. 30). Individuals feel vulnerable and demand that the government provide safety. In this regard, Castel (2004) warns that "if a rule of law is desired, this quest for total safety can only fail as it is not compatible with absolute respect for the law" (p. 31). If the supposedly avoidable can not be avoided, frustration with insecurity becomes the predominant social perception. In this sense, the author reports an "increase in concern for safety" which results in greater importance given by citizens to the need for safety. This phenomenon cannot be underestimated as a "structure largely of our social experience" (p. 12).

In this context, Garland (2005) highlights the central role of the victim in this setting of insecurity, in contrast to other times where they were the hidden and forgotten outcome of crime. This importance acquired by the victim of crimes can most clearly be seen in the media with the generalised cultural rise of victims in the west (Best, 1999). The size of the drama centred on the victims and their suffering adds a strong emotional weight to the news about the crime, increasing its relevance.

The same movement that positions victims at the centre of the scene simultaneously drives another predominant media technique, which tends to focus on a dangerous figure: the indigent, young man as the victimiser. This is a stereotyped figure that appears natural and essential but it reinforces social archetypes around insecurity. At the same time, this labelling of the involved parties as "victims or victimisers" condenses the semantic field that places them in the media: they form part of the criminal field. This leads to a reinforcement

of social prejudices about the danger of subjects who have been historically vulnerable, invisible to society or labelled in accordance with police language. The grisly details of the victim, specificity with regards to space, and the reiteration of other similar events is the basic formula for police news stories.

3. From police news to news about insecurity

One of the characteristics of the problem of insecurity is what is known as vicarious victimisation: the sensation of fear generated from the exposure of citizens to events that do not affect them directly and which are usually published in the media. Although there is no agreement between studies that show a direct relationship between the relevance the media gives to news related to crime and the increase in public feelings of fear, there is consensus that they contribute to creating a social agenda on existing crimes and risks (Tyler & Cook, 1984; Bergman & Kessler, 2008; Martini 2007).

The media, via production routines developed in the editorial offices, builds an information agenda that has a potential impact on public opinion (McCombs, 2006). Through actively selecting, emphasising, omitting and prioritising, they attach importance to certain issues and take the limelight away from others (Zhu, 1992).

The relevance of the news, that is to say,"the visibility of the information according to its location, its size, its disposition (...) or its greater frequency of coverage" (Amadeo, 2008, p. 191) is a central concept used by the theories of *Agenda-Setting* and Framing to measure the prominence of a subject in the media agenda, starting from the systematisation of the frequency with which an issue is covered and the priority that it acquires, the estimate of which arises from the analysis of dispositional indicators of the news.

In addition to being powerful in the establishment of an agenda on public affairs, the media provide a particular look at the issues they address. The news found in newspapers is usually accompanied by certain emotional attributes which give an axiological bent to news events and their protagonists (McCombs, Lopez Escobar, & Llamas, 2000).

Framing theory argues that the media frames the news by including a definition of the problem, a causal explanation, a moral evaluation and a protocol for covering the different issues in the future (Entman, 2003). Frames are "socially shared organising principles which are persistent in time and which work symbolically to structure the social world in a meaningful way" (Reese, 2007, p. 11). In other words, framing is a non-linear process which relates to the ways in which media companies, communicators, sources and culture combine to produce coherent ways of understanding the world, which are developed using all available verbal and visual symbolic resources (Koziner, 2013).

Now, what are the characteristics of media coverage of issues associated with "insecurity"? For some years, we have witnessed a modernising of the most important media companies in Argentina which assign greater relevance to the problem of "insecurity" (Calzado, 2012). This is in response to changes in structural conditions (the growth of crime) but also to an editorial formula that guaranteed a greater number of readers and loyalty of readership/audience.

It is true that in the last ten years there has been an increase (in quantity and space) of the representation of crime, both in graphic and audiovisual media (Calzado, 2015). Quantitative growth was accompanied by a qualitative transition; traditional police news has become "insecurity news" and has acquired new characteristics: generalisation (we are always at risk everywhere and everywhere), fragmentation (an episodic account of each event, without context or general causes), and an increasing focus on the victims. Meanwhile, the debate on criminality is given a strong emotional focus, while the young, poor, male criminal is represented as an object of fear and the appeal to "crime waves or tendencies" (a type of crime that seems to be the most frequent at any moment) (Calzado,

2015, Fernández Pedemonte, 2008, Martini, 2012). This change in the system that represents crime feeds back into intense social sensitivity to the issue (Kessler & Focas, 2014). Several studies all point out this transition between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s and some of the dominant features of the police news story, now a story about insecurity, such as talk of a "new delinquency", more violent images and new expositional techniques (Martini, 2012; Rodríguez Alzueta, 2016).

4. Objectives and hypotheses

The general objective of this paper is to analyse the coverage of illegal activities associated with the notion of "insecurity" in the Argentinian newspapers *La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Página/12* in electoral and non-electoral contexts. In specific terms, the aims are: 1) to analyse the relevance of the different topics and issues associated with "insecurity" in each of the contexts; 2) to identify which agents were included as protagonists of the news and what role they occupied; and 3) to establish what kind of frames prevailed in the media's coverage of the news.

From these specific objectives, the following hypotheses are posed:

Hypothesis 1: the topics associated with crimes that fall under the banner of "insecurity" acquired high levels of visibility due to their frequency and prioritization, especially in contexts of the electoral campaign.

Hypothesis 2: the young, the poor and males are more commonly represented as victimisers while the victims are predominantly middle- and upper-class adults.

Hypothesis 3: dominant frames tended to define problems due to individual motivations in order to structure a negative view on certain parts of society associated with crime and to promote a punitive solution.

5. Methodology

The methodological strategy is designed with the purpose of making possible the achievement of the specific objectives. The contents of the media coverage of "insecurity", and more precisely of the information published in the main body of the newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página/12*, was carried out over two periods: 1) from the 1st to the 31st of October 2015 (electoral context) and 2) from the 1st to the 31st of October 2016 (non-electoral context).

For the collection of pieces to be studied, all those located in the "police" sections of the newspapers (when they had them) were looked at, as well as those in other sections which referred to crimes falling within the definition of "insecurity" specified in this paper. Also included was information on governmental actions aimed at resolving the crisis and statements by politicians, civil society organisations, and other social agents that referred predominantly to the same issue.

The Content Analysis allows for the examination of the media's messages, reconstruction of its architecture, knowledge of its structure, its basic components and its operation; and allows for reproducible and valid inferences to be made about phenomena other than those directly observed (Neuendorf, 2002). Through logical mechanisms, the analyst draws inferences about the portion of reality to which the information alludes, as well as the context in which it is produced (Krippendorff, 1990).

From the proposed time cut, a corpus of 1,329 articles was collected. Being an extensive selection, it was essential to take reduce this to a manageable size. As such, a simple random sample was taken which, considering a margin of error of 5% and a level of confidence of 95%, reduced the corpus to 299 articles.

The choice of graphic press relies on the agreement that there is a clear agenda (McCombs, 2006) and that is the most consulted by politicians and replicated by the rest of

the media (Altamirano Molina, 2007). In addition, this format makes it easy to recover and handle the data.

The newspapers, units in the context of the research, were selected for their importance in terms of circulation (According to the Circulation Verification Institute (IVC), their net circulation averages are: *Clarín*, 241,603 copies; *La Nación*, 152,204 copies and *Página/12* 27,814 copies. April 2017)[1] and their ability to influence political and public agendas. *Clarín* and *La Nación* are the country's two top newspapers (Martini, 2007). *La Nación* was founded by Bartolomé Mitre in 1870. It is a newspaper that is characterised by a pedagogical view of politics and a guiding will of the ruling class (Sidicaro, 1998). *Clarín*, meanwhile, is part of the largest multimedia company in the country.Created in 1945 by Roberto Noble, it is a multitarget newspaper that currently accounts for 40% of advertising spots (Becerra, 2015) and is top in terms of circulation. The choice of *Página/12* is for other reasons. Originally thought of as an alternative information newspaper (Ulanovsky, 1997), this morning newspaper has evolved, although it still maintains strong links with the centre-left. Aimed at a middle and upper-class public with high educational levels, although it does not have the same capacity as the others to install major concerns into public opinion, it is considered a medium with impact on opinion formers (Amado, 2007).

5.1. Reliability

In order to establish the reliability of the data, 30 journalistic pieces (10% of the total) were codified for the second time, taking into account that the new codifier differed from the original. The average level of agreement was estimated using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient[2], which yielded a result of $\rho = 0.811$. The use of this coefficient is based on the type of sample being studied and on previous studies that used the same technique (McCombs, 2006). The recoding level of agreement is within statistically acceptable limits (Baranger, 1992).

6. Analysis

This study aims to analyse the evolution of the media's coverage of crime in the Argentinian press during electoral and non-electoral contexts. The first finding of relevance in this respect is that, in the different media analysed, the topic of "insecurity" was marginal compared to other issues in the context of the 2015 presidential elections in Argentina.

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[1] Source: www.ivc.org.ar
[2] The Spearman coefficient is a measure of the correlation between two continuous random variables. The indicator oscillates between values of –1 and 1. An acceptable level of agreement is when the result is greater than Spearman's rho = 0.7.

Figure 1. Topics of the electoral campaign 2015. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
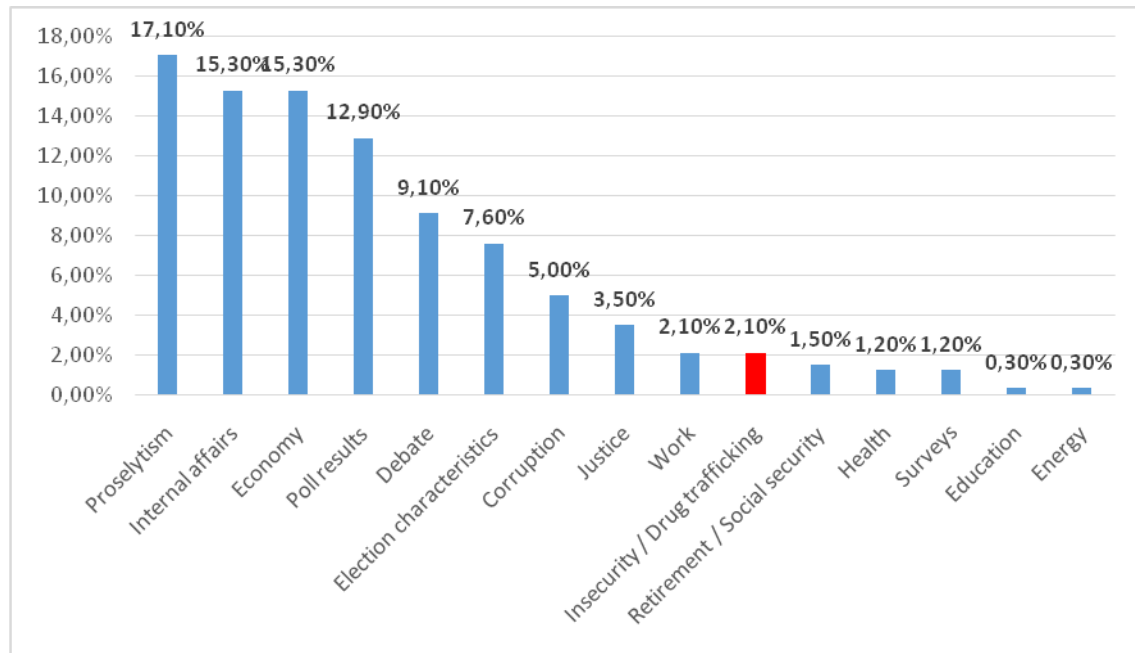
Source: own elaboration

As can be seen in figure 1, only 2.1% of the journalistic pieces related to election campaign issues were centred on the topic of insecurity. Contrary to what certain studies say about a thematic prominence associated with crime during elections, a product of the possibilities that the issue generates for the leaders to establish position on common sense (Altamirano Molina, 2007), in the context of the 2015 presidential campaign, although the candidates included the topic in their platforms and speeches, this was marginal compared with other types of media discussion.

During the period analysed, a total of 1,329 pieces were collected, of which 644 corresponded to the newspaper *Clarín* (48.5%), 489 to *La Nación* (36.8%) and 206 to *Página/12* (14.7%). This shows that in terms of frequency of coverage, *Clarín* was the newspaper which placed more importance on the issue. However, if the frequency is analysed according to the period, of the 1,329 pieces, 671 (50.5%) corresponded to October of 2015 during the electoral campaign. Meanwhile, 658 (49.5%) were published in October 2016. This data shows that the frequency of publication did not increase substantially due to the elections. This finding partially contradicts hypothesis no. 1, which states that the space dedicated by the media to the topic of insecurity would increase in this context.

However, to establish the prioritisation of the news, ten variables were analysed in order to determine which dispositional elements of the information contributed to its media relevance.

**Table 1.** Priority of information. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

	Newspaper		
	Clarín	*La Nación*	*Página/12*
Appears on cover	7.9%	12.1%	12.5%
Opens section	18.4%	20.2%	14.6%
Defined value	90.1%	86.8%	95.8%
Odd page	31.6%	58.6%	58.3%
Large	38.2%	40.4%	52.1%
Sub-headline	41.4%	58.6%	54.2%
Image	55.3%	30.3%	56.3%
Name appears	30.5%	47.5%	33.3%
Headlines	53.9%	41.4%	58.3%
Upper half	65.1%	56.6%	70.8%

Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 expresses ten variables measured in order to determine the importance of the news related to crime in the media. Once processed in the importance index created by Zunino (2015) four out of ten pieces turned out to be of marginal importance, but four out of ten also reached medium importance. Finally, two out of ten pieces on average were classed as having maximum visibility.

The importance index (Zunino, 2015) consists of a scale ranging from 0 to 25 points. Each of the ten variables measured assigns a score to the piece. Low importance is considered to be from 0 to 8 points, average importance from 9 to 17 points, and high importance from 18 to 25 points.

Figure 2. Information hierarchy according to the importance index (Zunino, 2015). Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
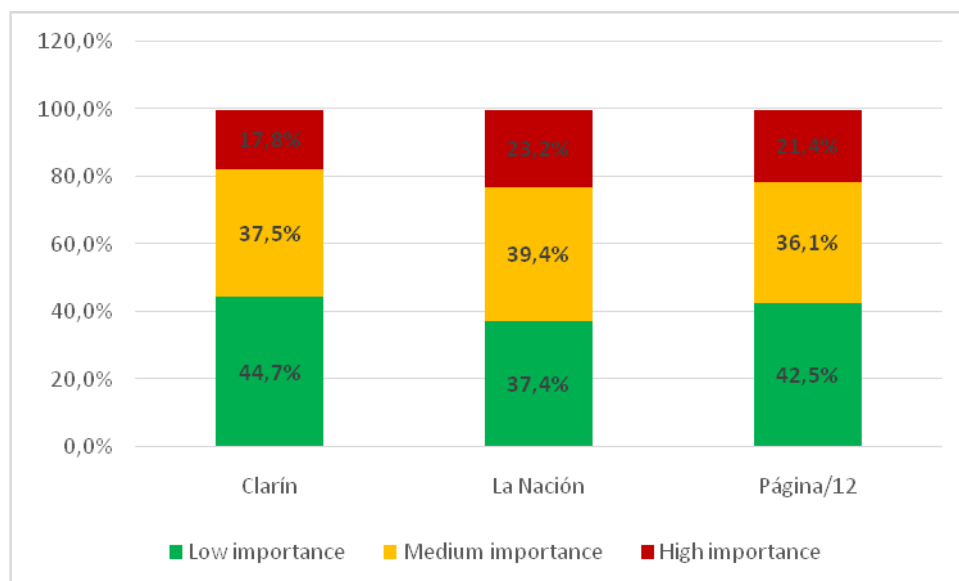
Source: own elaboration.

When analysing the types of topics that the different newspapers decided to include in their papers, it is possible to observe a thematic correspondence between *Clarín* and *La Nación* and a difference between these two and *Página/12*.

Figure 3. Main topics related to "insecurity". Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
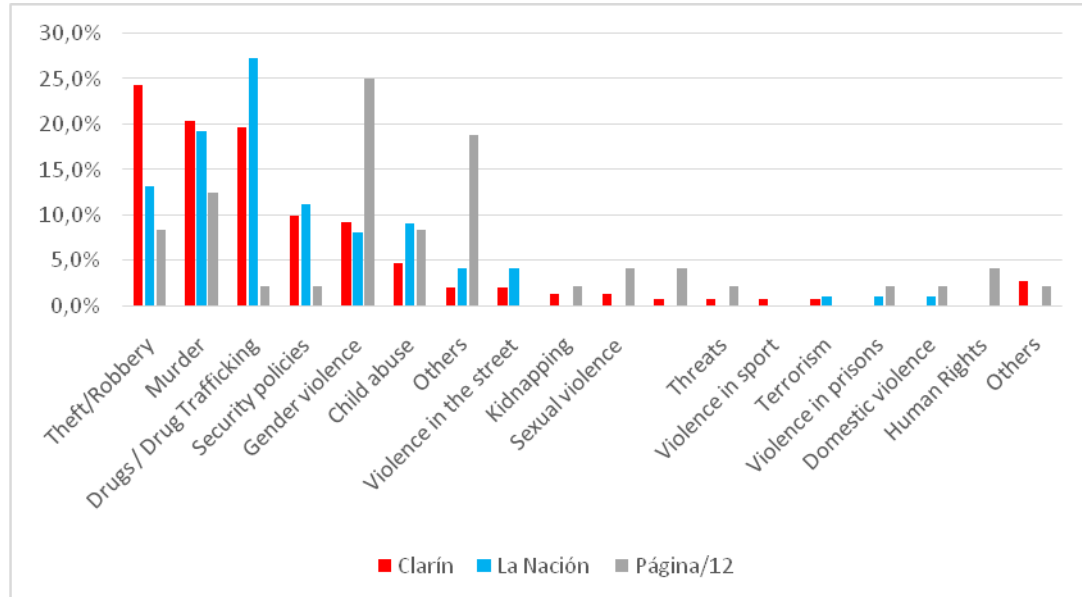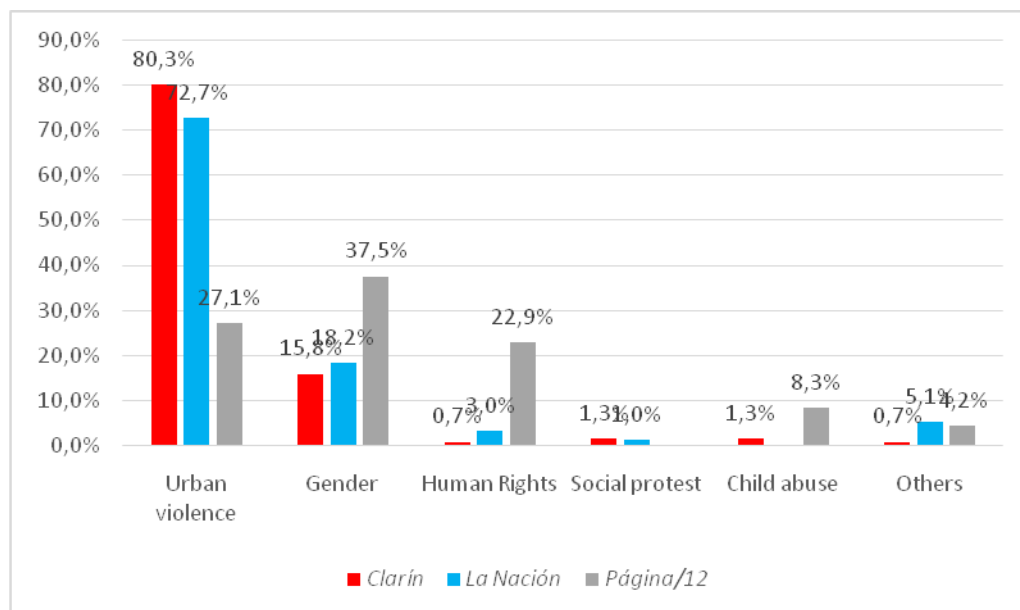

Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen in figure 3, while the topics most often included by *Clarín* and *La Nación* were "robberies and thefts", "murders" and "drug trafficking", while *Página/12* mainly covered issues of "Gender violence" (While "femicides" are part of the general theme of "gender violence", they were considered separately analytically in order to obtain specific data on the former) and "institutional violence".

For Donald Shaw (1977), one issue is the accumulation of a series of related events that are involved in media coverage and which are likely to be grouped into a broader category (Cited in Dader, 1992, p. 302). If a re-grouping of the different topics is attempted, it is possible to determine the central themes that guide the media coverage of insecurity in Argentina. These are shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. Main issues related to "insecurity". Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

Source: own elaboration.

While in the newspapers *Clarín* and *La Nación* the types of crimes most often covered were those included under the banner of urban violence, that is to say, crimes against property or people with the purpose of personal gain (Kessler, 2009), *Página/12* turns out differently. Although crimes of this type make up 27.1% of the coverage of this newspaper, the pieces referring to these topics usually do not occupy prominent spaces. On the other hand, news items associated with gender issues (gender violence and feminicides) are both more frequent (37.5%) and given higher priority. To round off the matter of insecurity items in *Página/12*, it is interesting that the pieces relating to police violence, prison violence and crimes against humanity – topics included under Human Rights – are very abundant (22.9%), and this was so in both electoral and non–electoral contexts. Finally, cases of domestic or intra–institutional violence associated with child abuse were also frequently included in this newspaper (see figure 3).

However, the second specific objective of this work aims to analyse the agents linked by the media with the criminal world.

Table 2. Agents according to role. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

	Agents	
	Victimiser	**Victim**
Civilians/citizens	54.6%	75.2%
Security forces	16.4%	5.7%
Gangs	14.3%	0%
Foreign citizen	2.7%	4.0%
Judicial authorities	2.1%	1.0%
Social movement	1.8%	1.3%
Companies	1.8%	1.0%
Provincial government	1.5%	1.3%
Ecclesiastical Institutions	0.9%	2.0%

Relative of Victimiser	0.9%	0.7%
Relatives of the victim	0.6%	1.0%
National Executive Branch	0.3%	1.0%
Journalist	0.3%	1.0%
Politician	0.3%	1.0%
Armed Forces	0.3%	0%
Public institutions	0.3%	0%
Native peoples	0%	1.3%
Neighbours	0%	1.0%
Legislative Branch	0%	0.7%
Private security	0%	0.7%
Others	0.9%	0.3%

Source: own elaboration.

In more than half of the items released, the victimisers were presented as civilians or anonymous citizens who, in general, commit isolated crimes for personal gain. This shows predominantly that newspapers focus on crimes that are not perpetrated by "organised crime", but are mostly random assaults, robberies, or burglaries that tend to become more important when they result in armed clashes or end with fatalities. Meanwhile, pieces about crimes perpetrated by gangs of criminals, organised crime, are usually linked to drug trafficking and represented 14.3% of coverage.

75.2% of the victims were anonymous civilians. The crimes mostly covered in the media are robberies, thefts and murders committed by and against ordinary people and not planned by large gangs. This randomness, according to Gabriel Kessler (2008, 2009), is a central factor in the general sense of insecurity since it instils a constant threat that intimidates and generates fear independently of exposure to specific cases of victimisation.

One striking fact is that 16.7% of the events reported had members of the security forces as victimisers, a percentage that, in *Página/12*, reached 54.6% of coverage. Within this item, it is most often provincial police officers that are associated with the commission of crimes, with the province of Buenos Aires commiting the most (11.6%), followed by the Federal Police (4.2%), community police officers (0.3%) and the Armed Forces (0.3%), the latter especially linked to crimes against humanity during the period of the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). One salient fact is that the federal forces (the Prefecture and the Gendarmerie) do not appear as agents guilty of crimes (only the Gendarmerie appeared in 0.3%). Meanwhile, 5.7% of the pieces had police officers as victims of crimes, in most cases murdered or injured in clashes with criminals, but also robbed while off-duty.

Although the percentages of the rest of the agents were lower, it is interesting to analyse the case of foreign citizens, especially Bolivians, Paraguayans and Peruvians, since they are usually stigmatised as responsible for "insecurity" and there are often specific policies of repression and persecution against them. During 2016, Mauricio Macri's government adopted specific measures related to migration control, such as the Advance Passenger Information Program (API), which requests airlines to report on the foreigners they transport, and Decree 70/17, which modifies Migration Law 25,871, and promotes abbreviated procedures for expulsion for foreigners convicted of having committed offences in the country or abroad, denial or withdrawal of permanent residence and the impediment of entry or re-entry for different periods of time.

Firstly, it is worth pointing out that the majority of the time that foreign citizens appeared in media coverage did so as victims (4%). Secondly, the crimes included in the newspapers that had citizens of other countries as the victimisers were very marginal (2.7%).

Now, what about the presence of the different powers of the government in the news associated with crime? The judicial authorities had the highest number of appearances as victimizer (2.1%), mainly linked to cases of collusion of judges or judicial officials with gangs

of offenders. The appearances of the Executive Branch and the Legislative Branch were marginal.

When determining the characteristics of victims and victimisers, determining their social class is relevant. One first interesting fact in this regard is that, in most cases, this central piece of information is absent from the news items. Although the majority of the authors agree that the figure of the victimiser is usually associated with young lower-class males, in 61.2% of the pieces, there are no explicit mentions of the criminal's class. Meanwhile, the social class of the victims is present in 50.5% of the pieces.

Figure 5. Social class of victims and victimisers (when present in the news item). Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
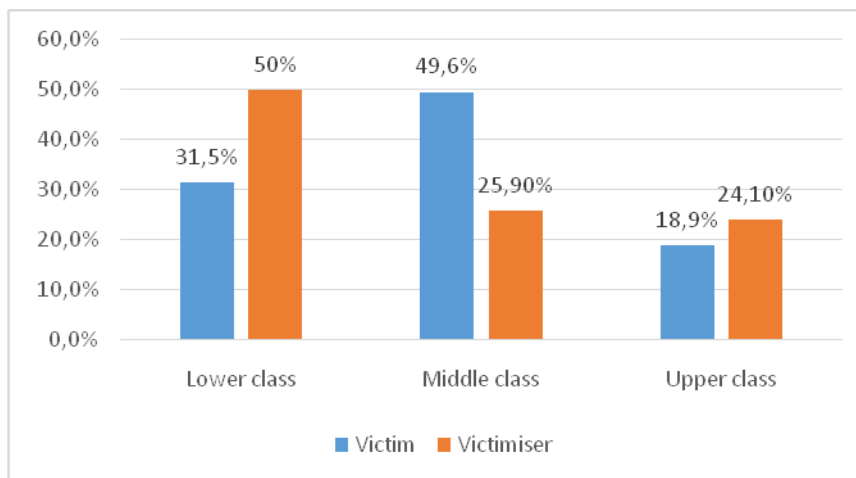
Source: own elaboration.

Among the pieces in which the social class of victims and victimisers could be identified, there are some revealing facts to be found. In fact, 50% of the victimisers were lower class. However, the percentages of middle and upper class victimisers were significant. 25.9% of the crimes represented were committed by middle-class victimisers. Meanwhile, 24.1% were perpetrated by upper class victimisers. Therefore, while it is true that, in half of the cases, the victimisers came from the lower classes, which contributes to the process of stigmatisation of these sectors, it is no less true that half of the crimes represented in the news were committed by individuals from the middle or upper classes.

With regard to the victims, 49.6% of the news items referred to crimes committed against middle-class subjects. Meanwhile, 18.9% were against upper-class people. What is striking is that the crimes against lower-class victims represented in the media is very important. The lower classes were victims in 31.5% of the news items. In other words, even in media coverage, the representation of crime against the lower classes is very high, although in general the items that were given greater visibility were those that were committed against sectors of the urban middle classes.

Now, looking at the age of the victims and victimisers present in the news, what emerges from the analysis is that, again, this information is usually absent, especially in the case of the victimisers. In 64.5% of cases, the age of the offender was not included, whereas that of the victim was not given in 45.8% of the cases.

If only the pieces in which these data were present are analysed, understanding that this information helps to construct a full picture of the roles of the whole set of items, we can see that 28.6% of the perpetrators represented in the sample were 25 years old or younger. Adding victimisers of between 26 and 40 years, the total shows that 63.7% of crimes

were committed by persons up to the age of 40. The percentage of offences committed by victimisers between the ages of 40 and 60 is 28.3% and generally falls to cases of collusion by police or judicial officers with gangs.

Figure 6. Age of victims and victimisers. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
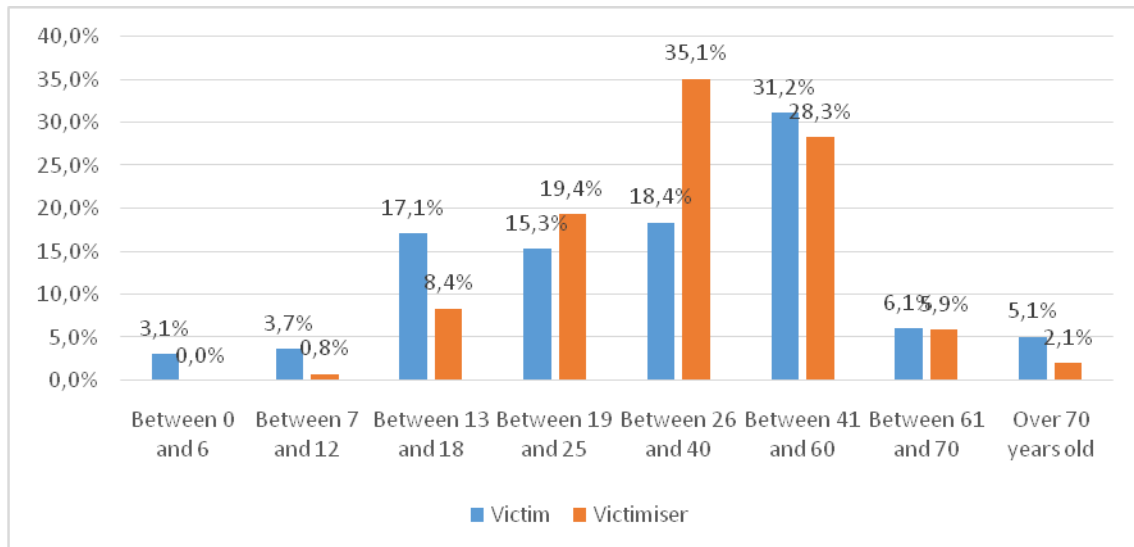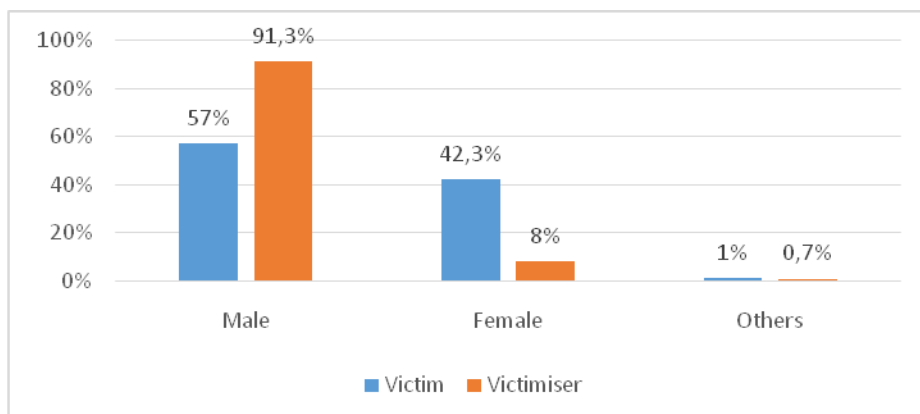

Source: own elaboration.

The victims are usually aged between 40 and 60 years, a total of 31.2%. Meanwhile, it is possible to notice that the percentage of victims between the ages of 0 and 40 in the items represented by the media constitute more than half of the cases, 57.6% of all appearances. Finally, the percentage of victims over the age of 61 is also fairly high, accounting for 11.2% of the cases.

Another interesting piece of socio–demographic data to be analysed is the gender of the agents.

Figure 7. Gender of victims and victimisers. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.
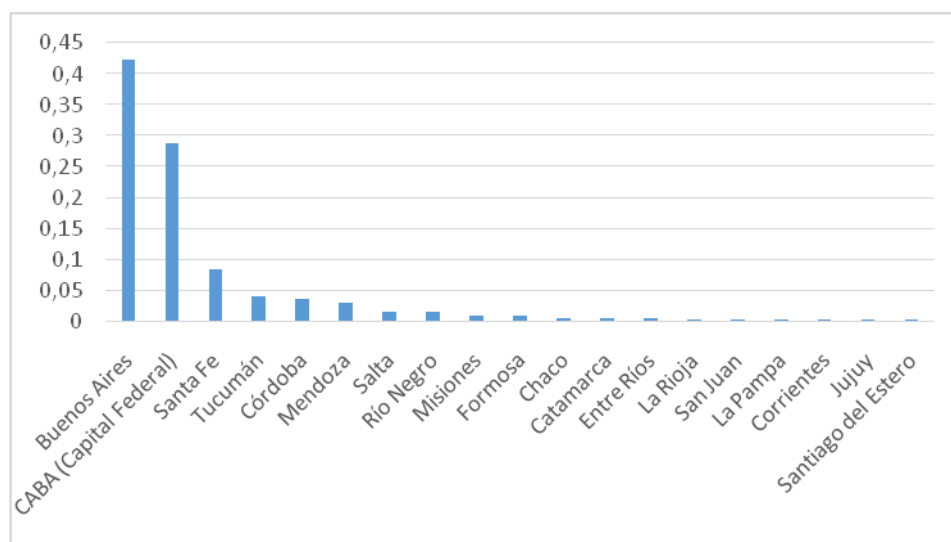

Source: own elaboration.

In accordance with the literature on crime and the media (Calzado, 2012, 2015; Martini, 2007), 91.3% of the time, the victimisers were male. On the other hand, the distribution of male and female victims was even, with 57% and 42.3% respectively.

However, the media tends to focus their coverage on safe and unsafe areas geographically. Figure 8 gives an account of this geographic variable.

Figure 8. Crime locations. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

Source: own elaboration

There are two factors which come together to mean that most of the cases included in the news have taken place mainly in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (the Federal Capital) and in the Province of Buenos Aires. In the first place, both urban conglomerates include almost half of the country's population. But more importantly, although they are distributed nationally, the newspapers analysed are produced in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA). To a large extent, this explains the fact that the focus of crime coverage has been concentrated on these two localities.

The province of Santa Fe, third in population, was given 8.5% of coverage. The media attention on this territory was mainly concentrated in the city of Rosario, the largest city and most populated area in the province. In this district most of the cases were related to drug trafficking, since large gangs dedicated to this activity have settled in the city recently.

The following provinces in order of appearance were Tucumán, Córdoba and Mendoza. The first of these is the sixth province in terms of population. Most of the mentions related to this territory were linked to a single case: the dubious death of a priest of the Catholic Church who had systematically denounced drug gangs, so the different newspapers presumed – although they could not confirm – that the crime was related to revenge.

In the case of Cordoba, the second province in terms of number of inhabitants, the items related to waves of common crimes (robberies, thefts and robbery). In the case of Mendoza, the fifth most populated Argentine province, the coverage was mainly associated with cases of femicide, since within the period observed, there were a series of shocking cases that grabbed the attention of the national media.

A recent report by the Public Defender's Office (2013) indicates that 34% of the audiovisual news items and 37.2% of news time refer to events in the city of Buenos Aires. As such, it is possible to hypothesise that the over-representation of criminal cases from a

"*porteño*-centric" or "metropolitan" point of view contributes to the belief of an insecure metropolis. The media coverage of the insecurity of large cities overlaps with and is redefined in small cities, despite the fact that there, real crimes increase to a lesser extent, and in general there are no everyday cases of violence.

However, the framing of news is a constructive activity that the media carry out on the information they include in their papers. This active participation of news agencies on the material that acquires news status is based on complex processes involving selection, emphasis and omission of topics, themes and attributes regarding related events.

According to Entman (2003), framing is the selection of some aspects of our perceived reality and giving them relevance in a text so as to promote a particular definition of the problem, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation and/or a recommendation for coverage of the described item (Entman, 1993 , p.52).

To determine the predominant frames in media coverage, the concept of a frame in its observable dimensions was created. Firstly, the causes attributed by the newspapers to the different types of security issues were compiled.

Table 3. Causes of the problem. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

	Are causes mentioned?								
	Causes are not mentioned	**Social**	**Institutional**	**Political**	**Legal**	**Individual**	**Personal gain**	**Religious**	**Others**
Insecurity	14.1%	3.9%	9.7%	3.9%	0.5%	16.0%	49.5%	1.0%	1.5%
Gender	6.7%	20.0%	5.0%	8.3%		60.0%			
Human Rights	13.3%		80.0%	6.7%					
Social protest		33.3%	33.3%	33.3%					
Child abuse			16.7%			83.3%			
Others	12.5%				12.5%	62.5%	12.5%		

Source: own elaboration

Most of the time the explanation of the cause was rooted the victimiser's individual desire, associated with personal gain from the crime. In this sense, the media coverage of "insecurity" consists of a pile of separate cases that all focus the will and motives of the victimisers. The common decontextualisation of the security problems of structural explanations is one of the characteristics of this type of coverage and can be verified in the case under study.

Gender violence has differential borders. It was consolidated in the first decades of the 21st century as a shared way of defining patriarchal violence by broad social sectors, as a category around which groups are organised to demand specific policies against male violence (Galar, 2016).

Although six out of ten news items attributed responsibility to people motivated by strictly individual reasons, a percentage which is greater in *Clarín* and *La Nación* (66.6% in both newspapers), this type of explanation falls to 44% in *Página/12* in which the matter was explained from social (16.7%), institutional (11.1%) and political (11.1%) points of view.The percentages in which the newspapers *Clarín* and *La Nación* represented this problem based on social causes were similar to those of *Página/12* (20.8% and 22.2% respectively). However,

what was usually absent in their coverage – and which is present as a strong argumentative line in *Página/12* – was the description of gender violence based on state inaction due to the lack of public policies or because of the scarce budget set aside to solve existing ones.

The topic "Human Rights" – which is predominant in *Página/12* – is proof of diverging causal explanations regarding the other issues. As can be seen in Table 3, the cause of this type of crime was attributed to state institutions (80%) and, to a lesser extent, to political agents (6.7%).

Social protest, when it is criminalised (as is predominant in *Clarín* and *La Nación*), is usually attributed in equal measure to social factors, political motivations or mobilisation strategies driven by political establishments.

Finally, child abuse was explained by the individual motivations of the abuser when they occurred within the victim's family. On the other hand, when it came to abuse committed by church officials, the cause was generally attributed to the institution rather than the individual.

Another of the important issues to be analysed is the way that the newspapers evaluate the morals of the events reported.

Table 4. Moral evaluation of the topics. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

	Evaluation of the matter		
	Positive	**Negative**	**Undefined**
Security policies	48.1%	14.8%	37.0%
Drugs / drug trafficking	29.3%	46.6%	24.1%
Gender violence	11.8%	70.6%	17.6%
Murder	10.7%	71.4%	17.9%
Robbery/theft	7.4%	64.8%	27.8%
Femicide	5.0%	85.0%	10.0%
Sexual violence		50.0%	50.0%
Institutional violence		75.0%	25.0%
Violence in prisons		100.0%	
Violence in the streets or in the community		100.0%	
Threats		100.0%	
Domestic violence		100.0%	
Human rights		50.0%	50.0%
Violence in sport		100.0%	
Terrorism		100.0%	

Source: own elaboration.

If table 4 is analysed, it is clear that negative evaluations were the majority in most of the topics, reaching maximum values in femicides (85%), in murders (71.4%), in cases of gender violence (70.6%) and in robberies and thefts (64.8%). Meanwhile, the positive valuations associated with these types of facts were directly related to coverage of events in which the news dealt with the resolution of a crime or other positive actions, generally by the security forces or the judicial authorities, in terms of repairing the damage caused by the crime or its prevention.

The only topic that acquired a considerable positive evaluation was "security policies" (48.1%). In general, the newspapers positively evaluated the measures that the Executive Branch implemented to combat crime. However, the positioning of the media varied over the different periods contemplated. In the first five weeks, corresponding to the month of

October 2015 (i.e. electoral context), security policies were not a salient issue. This is largely due to the fact that the government of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007-2015) did not have security problems at the top of her political agenda. On the other hand, public discussion on this issue became much more visible during the first year of Mauricio Macri's term.

The remaining positive assessments associated with drug trafficking (29.3%), gender violence (11.8%), murder (10.7%), theft (7.4%) and femicide (5%) are explained in all cases either by resolutions of specific cases or by the announcement of measures or policies designed to resolve those matters.

The development and launching of the police of the City of Buenos Aires and the policy of police saturation structured with federal forces in different provinces was positively evaluated. Especially *Clarín* and *La Nación* gave widespread coverage to these events and framed them based on a reading that saw a sign of governmental proactivity and a possible solution behind these policies. However, while *Clarín* and *La Nación* gave abundant coverage to the policies implemented by the government of Mauricio Macri, there were no pieces about these in *Página/12*, which again highlights the editorial differences.

Figure 9. Frequency of coverage of the topics by weeks. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, *La Nación* and *Página*/12, 2015-2016.
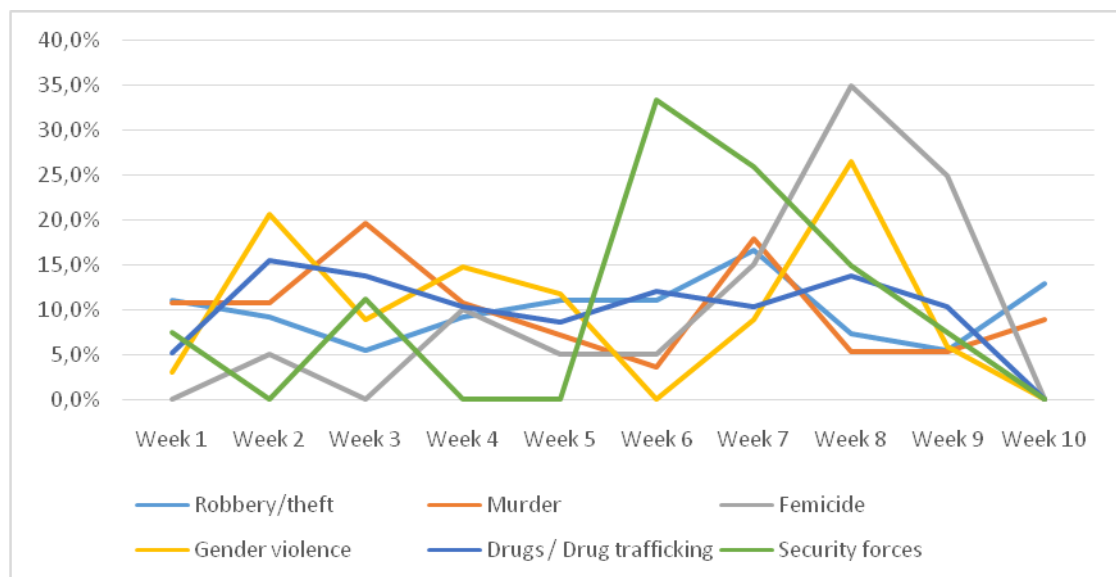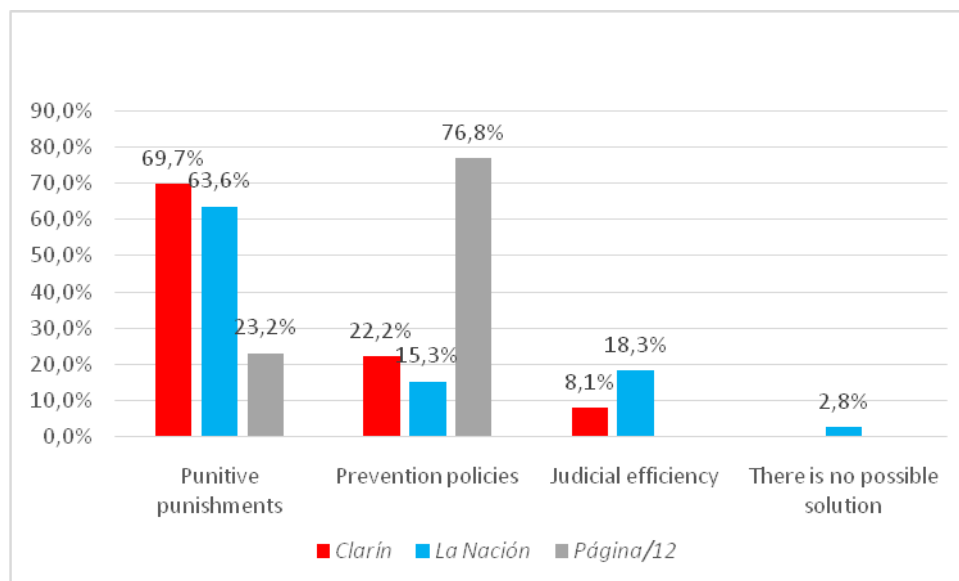

Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen in figure 9, the public policy coverage curve peaked in week five and maintained high levels of visibility in the later weeks.

Something similar happened with the topic of "gender violence", which reached its peak in week eight. This important news presence was due to the fact that, in the same week, a series of highly shocking cases occurred in different parts of the country. The rest of the topics, on the other hand, show more stable curves during both electoral and non–electoral periods.

The definition of framing proposed in this paper argues that the media, in addition to defining the causes of the problems and actively assessing the events that they print, often provide proposals for solving the problem posed.

Figure 10. Solutions promoted by the media for insecurity. Media coverage of "insecurity". Clarín, La Nación and Página/12, 2015-2016.

Source: own elaboration.

When it comes to these possible solutions, differences in approaches reappeared. *Clarín* and *La Nación* mainly focused on punitive outcomes. Measures such as harsher sentences, lowering the age of criminal responsibility, and the persecution of the lower classes and immigrants were their go-to proposals. Another of the possible outcomes raised by these newspapers, although to a lesser extent, was "judicial efficiency". This is a better application of existing laws by the judicial authorities and preventive protocols by the security forces. *Página/12*, again, was substantially different on this. This morning paper generally proposed the integral and structural approach of the problem through prevention policies designed and promoted by the State for the crimes included in its pages.

Now, it is also interesting to analyse which agents or institutions were identified by the media as capable and responsible for solving the problem. The judicial authorities and their officials were the main agents of resolution presented by the media (34.1%). In second place were the police forces (23.4%) and then the Executive Branch (13%). With this in mind, it is interesting to consider that an outcome that involves multiple agents and that addresses the problem in a complex manner was, in general terms, very marginal (2.7%).

7. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to analyse the media's narratives of insecurity. To this end, an analysis of the content of crime news published in the newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *Página/12* was carried out during the months of October 2015 (in an electoral context) and October 2016 (a non-electoral context). Here we propose some provisional conclusions which are the product of this study and which are presented as trends to be considered in future work.

In the first place, the "electoral context" variable was used not only to delimit the object of study, but also because in recent years it has been a dimension closely linked to insecurity. In this sense (and in line with previous studies on the subject), hypothesis number one indicated that the topics associated with crimes that fall within the notion of "insecurity" acquired high levels of visibility as a result of their frequency and priority given, especially in electoral campaign contexts.

However, in this case it was found that, although the issue was present, it was not the central focus of the media's representations. This is largely due to the fact that the government of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner did not have security problems at the top of her political agenda. On the other hand, public discussion on this issue became much more visible during the first year of Mauricio Macri's term.

Public opinion polls show that, in Argentina, insecurity is the first concern of citizens, for at least the last twenty years. This leads to the hypothesis that perhaps the different political platforms have not been able to address the issue of increasing crime adequately.

The second hypothesis stated that young and poor young people are represented in the police news more regularly as victimisers, while the victims tend to be middle- and upper-class adult citizens. The work shows that 49.6% of the news referred to crimes committed against middle-class victims. Meanwhile, 18.9% were against upper-class victims. What is striking is that the crimes against lower-class victims represented in the media is very important. The lower classes were victims in 31.5% of the news items. However, although the representation of crime on the lower classes was very high, in general, the events that were more visible and which appeared more frequently and with greater importance are those that are committed against the urban middle classes. This finding is interesting because, although the media includes a variety of news about crime, those that stand out tend to reinforce, from their greater visibility, the stereotypes that stigmatise certain social sectors as the causes and to hide those with similar predispositions to commiting crimes.

This is in line with the local studies on the subject that have shown that the media stigmatise young men from the lower classes as victimisers. At the same time, victims are generally stereotypes of the common individual; the scene of the criminal act is usually recognisable because it is a neighbourhood which is more or less close to or similar to the readers', and the timeline of events reinforces the perception that there is no moment in which one is not exposed to potential crime (Martini, 2007).

Another finding of the work is related to the fact that, although half of the victimisers were from the lower classes, the percentages of middle- and high-class offenders were also significant. Therefore, although the media stigmatises certain groups of people or groups identified as "dangerous", especially poor, young males, they also contribute to a certain awareness of the risks by promoting a generalised presumption of danger (Llianos & Douglas, 2000), which promotes the idea of the poor, young male as the only type of victimiser. In short, news stories tend to focus the general feelings which often misidentify (Kessler, 2009) the figures that generate fear. That is to say that crimes can be committed by any person and that is why it is necessary to maintain a certain generalised suspicion when moving through urban areas (Focás, 2016).

In relation to the victimisers, another of the findings relates to the fact that, in the analysed sample, it was observed that 16.7% of the reported events had members of the security forces as the offenders. In general terms, this type of offender was represented as part of drug trafficking networks, or a framework where the institution absorbs the individual. That is, it is organised crime, white collar crimes, and is framed differently compared to a traditional victimiser. In this sense, Tonkonoff (2012) argues, that access to crimes is unequally distributed: at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid, the most profitable illegal acts and with the least legal and criminal risks; at the base, the most persecuted and (in general) the least profitable.

Finally, hypothesis number three was verified. The predominant frames on the insecurity problem tended to define the problems based on individual motivations, to build a negative vision about certain segments of society associated with crime according to their class membership and to promote a punitive solution to combat crime. The paradox is that the demand for a greater quantity of security forces collides with the characterisation of this institution as corrupt, weak and criminal.

In the words of Pegoraro (2000), the government, on the one hand, "seeks to legitimise itself with the symbolic use of criminal law and a hardening of the specific criminal response, while, on the other hand, failure of such policies is evident (due to the increase in criminal behaviour). This does nothing more than enhance or restore the feeling of insecurity" (p. 7). This requires a revision of the focus (also within the media) on police forces in security policies (Rodríguez Alzueta, 2014) to be able to look at other public security policies that manage to avoid punitive punishments as the driver for combating the advance of crime.

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