

Mediatization of Political Discourses: News Gap, Criminalization, and Restriction of Migration Rights in Argentina (2018-2019)

Mediatización de discursos políticos: brecha informativa, criminalización y restricción de derechos migratorios en Argentina (2018-2019)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes a set of television news that reported on different regressive measures regarding migration rights at national and provincial levels, aired during the second biennium of Mauricio Macri's government (2018-2019) in Argentina. Here we delve into the mediatization of official discourses, and their legitimization to modify current legislation, as well as into the dissemination of news that criminalize the migrant population, aimed at justifying the implementation of such policies. Given the scarcity of studies on the representation of migrants on television, this study examines how officials use the screen to pave the way for their political decisions. From the analysis of the discourse conveyed in this corpus of news, is revealed, among other things, an articulation between media and political discourses, and the existence of an information gap on migration rights, all of which results in hurdles for the construction of a communicational citizenship of migrants.

Keywords: 1. media speech, 2. immigration policies, 3. communicational citizenship, 4. Latin America, 5. Argentina.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analiza un conjunto de noticias televisivas que, durante el segundo bienio del gobierno de Mauricio Macri (2018-2019) en Argentina, informaron sobre distintas medidas regresivas en materia de derechos migratorios a nivel nacional y provincial. Se indaga la mediatización de discursos oficiales y su legitimación para modificar la legislación vigente, así como la difusión de noticias que criminalizan a la población migrante para justificar la implementación de dichas políticas. Ante la escasez de estudios sobre representaciones de migrantes en la televisión, se examina cómo los/as funcionarios/as utilizan la pantalla para allanar el camino para sus decisiones políticas. A partir del análisis del discurso de un corpus de noticias se corrobora, entre otras cosas, una articulación entre discursos mediáticos y políticos, y una brecha informativa sobre los derechos migratorios, todo lo cual redundará en obstáculos para la construcción de una ciudadanía comunicacional de las personas migrantes.

Palabras clave: 1. discurso mediático, 2. políticas migratorias, 3. ciudadanía comunicacional, 4. América Latina, 5. Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims at analyzing the mediatization of the official political discourse on the restrictions imposed on the right to migration during the second biennium of Mauricio Macri's government (2018-2019) in Argentina. From the discursive analysis of a set of open television newscasts between 2018 and 2019, in which different aspects of migration policy were thematized, we intend to account for the discursive articulation between media and political power. This synergy constituted one of the vectors aimed at legitimizing through the media those regressive measures implemented in the access to rights of migrants.

In the period studied, some of the policies implemented since the inauguration of the *Cambiamos* coalition government in December 2015 were consolidated, policies that implied a differentiation with respect to the preceding Kirchner governments (2003-2015). This distinction was both discursive—with denunciations against *populism* and *corruption* permeating the media—and in terms of economic policy—with an increase in the transfer to concentrated sectors, debt, and capital flight— (Canelo et al., 2018); all this altogether with an increase in the repression of social protest (CELS, 2017).

In terms of public policies, some rights obtained during previous governments were affected. As addressed in other works (Beccaria & Fraiman, 2013; Beccaria, 2020), immigration and communication legislation in Argentina suffered almost parallel ups and downs during the last forty years. During the government of *Cambiamos* coalition, the amendments to the Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual (LSCA) (Audiovisual Communication Services Law) (Law 26.522 of 2009), and the Migration Law (Law 25.871 of 2004), operated by limiting access to rights for audiences and migrants. In the first case, the Decreto de Necesidad y Urgencia (DNU) (Decree of Necessity and Urgency) 267/15 (Decree 267 of 2015) rolled back the legislation on deconcentration of licenses of the LSCA, and governmentalized the enforcement authority by means of the creation of the Ente Nacional de Comunicaciones (ENACOM) (National Communications Entity), among other measures adopted altogether with the creation of a commission that would draft a bill on communicational convergence, which was never presented.

As for migration policies, the announcement in August 2016 of the creation of a Detention Center for Migration Law Violators in the City of Buenos Aires stands out, based on an agreement between the Ministries of Security of the Nation and of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA, acronym in Spanish for Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires), and the National Directorate of Migration (DNM), which was anyhow never enacted (Canelo et al., 2018). Another milestone of restrictive policies was DNU 70/2017 (Decree 70 of 2017), which limited the right of defense of foreigners who had committed any type of illicit act—when the Migration Law (Law 25.871 of 2004) specified so for a series of serious crimes—, and streamlined the mechanisms for their expulsion (Canelo et al., 2018; Penchaszadeh & García, 2018).

On March 22 of 2018, following a filing by the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS, acronym in Spanish for Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales), the Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF, acronym in Spanish for Comisión Argentina para Refugiados y Migrantes),

and the Collective for Diversity (Colectivo por la Diversidad), the “Chamber V of the Federal Contentious Administrative Division declared the ‘constitutional invalidity’” of DNU 70/2017 (CELS, 2018, subsection 1). The State appealed, and the measure remained in force until ruled by the Supreme Court of Justice (Decree 70 of 2017). Finally, the DNU was repealed during the term of Alberto Fernández, by Decree 138 of 2021, published in the Official Gazette on March 5, 2021.

But while its constitutionality was debated, in October 2018, the national government resorted to the legislative route to shore up its restrictive policy with the announcement of a bill to create a migratory jurisdiction, which would expedite the expulsions of those migrants who had incurred in criminal activity. The bill received wide media coverage, with the participation of the then National Director of Migration, Horacio García, in different open television programs. The project drafted by the DNM was issued for consideration of the opposition blocks in the Senate in November 2018, and brought up again in January 2019 (Dinatale, 2018, 2019), but it was not finally submitted through administrative channels.

In that period, some provincial governments acted along the same line, promoting restrictive migratory regulations in relation to issues such as access to health and security. These measures were supported by a media agenda that associated migration with “lack of public safety” (Defensoría del Público de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual [DPSCA], 2019, p. 87), which contributed to socially legitimize the migration policies that were intended to be implemented.

Our article focuses on the representation of migrants in these television newscasts, and on the promotion of their rights by means of audiovisual media. The information gap (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2015; Becerra & Mastrini, 2017) in this matter is one of the factors that hinder the development of a communicational citizenship (Reguillo, 2000; Mata, 2006; De Charras et al., 2013; Uranga, 2013) among these groups, being both audience and political actors (Venier, 2019, p. 127).

The presence, visibilization, and representation of migrant communities in the public and media space have been widely studied in academia during the last two decades (Grimson, 1999; Caggiano, 2005; Halpern, 2009; Melella, 2016; Beccaria, 2020). Other studies focused on the political and media discourses addressed the first migration policies of the Cambiemos coalition government from different methodological approaches (Canelo et al., 2018; Meccia, 2017). This paper follows this line, aimed at investigating the ways in which the media constructs its representations of migrants and, therefore, also the representations of subjectivities and citizenship promoted by the media as well.

METHODOLOGY

The corpus of analysis for the present work was the news recorded by the Monitoring of Open TV News Programs carried out by the DPSCA, an agency created by the LSCA (Law 26.522 of 2009). This monitoring has been carried out since 2013, and covers the news programs of CABA's open TV channels (América TV, Televisión Pública, Canal 9, Telefe, and Canal 13), in their four time

slots (morning, noon, evening, and midnight), aired during the first week of the even months of each year (February, April, June, August, October, and December).

We analyzed the period between October 2018, when the Executive Branch announced that it would present a bill for the creation of a jurisdiction on migration, and June 2019, a few months after the restriction of rights established by Law 25.871 of 2004 in the provinces of Jujuy and Chubut. In this period, according to the data of the aforementioned DPSCA study, there was an increase in news about migration policies, with a wide participation of official sources, and news criminalizing migrants in Argentina; this is especially relevant taking into account that presidential elections were to be held in the second half of 2019. The sample was complemented with other news aired by the same newscasts in that period, but during the weeks that fell outside the monitoring record.

Based on the analysis of the discourses found in this corpus of news (Steimberg, 1993; Van Dijk, 2007), our work focused on two axes: on the one hand, the hegemonic representations of otherness constructed by the national mass media, and on the other, the need to understand migration as a right inseparable from the right to communication, insofar as without information there is no possibility of knowing, exercising, and promoting the basic rights of migrants.

A critical perspective was also accounted for (Van Dijk, 2007), according to which discourse is a resource of power to reproduce meanings and imaginaries, and to control the access to these public discourses. The growing mediatization of politics as a staging of the public arena (Uranga, 2013) led to an approach to discourses from a communicational perspective. That is to say that, despite the necessary differentiation between media discourses and political-institutional discourses, we analyzed how the former frame the latter so as to materialize, legitimize, and promote the social reproduction of regressive measures implemented or to be implemented.

On the other hand, we also aim at contributing to the scarcity of studies on audiovisual news concerning migration. According to the National Survey of Cultural Consumption (Sinca, 2017), television broadcasts are still one of the media most consumed by the public, and the television screen is the main support to carry out these practices (95%).

Finally, the relevance of interdisciplinary research between communication sciences, studies on migratory processes, and the human rights perspective is accounted for, especially when these issues are addressed during periods of regression in terms of rights (Gottero, 2020). This approach makes it possible to contrast the obstruction or promotion of access to migration rights enabled by the media; at the same time, it exposes the actions and omissions of the State as guarantor of these rights. It also postulates a state of affairs in terms of the effective exercise of communication rights of the part of the migrant population.

Rights, Representation, and the Information Gap

The mediatization of the punitive political discourse against migrants in Argentina is not exclusive to recent years. Already during the 1990s, the media had represented Bolivian, Paraguayan, and Peruvian migration flows as disruptive agents to social harmony: diseases, unemployment, and

crime were attributed to migrations that did not respond to the aspirations of Argentine neoliberal power (Caggiano, 2005). The criminalization of regional migrants became one of the hallmarks of the “media-political power” articulation of those years (Halpern, 2009, p. 64), and constituted these migrants as “cause of the country’s ills” (García, 2009, p. 20) and as “conjunctural representatives of otherness” (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 33). This exclusionary discourse had a strong backing with the enactment of Decree 1117/98, which strengthened the security aspects of migration policy and restricted the entry of low-income people.

As can be seen from the analysis developed below, this perspective returned to the media and public agenda in recent years. New regional migration flows, especially those from Colombia and Venezuela, had a disparate representation in the audiovisual media, while the political situation in the countries of origin—added to occasional demands to the receiving State—led to protests by migrant collectives in Argentina that had no precedent in terms of public-space occupation (Beccaria, 2020).

On the other hand, the exercise of the right to migration is inseparable from the access to information on the legislation on the subject, yet “the information produced and disseminated by the Argentinian State regarding the migrant population is insufficient” (Ceriani Cernadas et al, 2014, p. 241). This right can be found in Article 9 of the Migration Law (Law 25.871 of 2004), which obliges the State to provide information to migrants on their rights and obligations, requirements for their admission, stay, and exit, and on issues that facilitate compliance with administrative formalities. Similarly, and although the Law does not legislate on political rights, Article 11 establishes that the Ministry of the Interior shall inform foreigners about the conditions and requirements for exercising their right to vote. Along this line of analysis, “Law 25.871 represents a typical case of the gap between the enforcement of the law and adequate information in order to ensure its application” (Ceriani Cernadas et al., 2014, p. 246).

Likewise, as a response to media criminalization and the scarce presence of migrant voices able to counteract said discourses, it becomes necessary to refer to the importance of migrant media for the political and identity construction of these groups (Melella, 2016; Beccaria, 2020), and to the constitution of a migrant group organized as a social movement (Modonesi & Rebón, 2011).

In terms of this, the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE, acronym in Spanish for *Relatoría Especial para la Libertad de Expresión*) (Lanza, 2019) stated in a specific report on social protest that demonstrations are resources used by historically marginalized and/or vulnerable social groups (such as migrants) that do not have access to media and institutional channels to resolve their demands, and whose action can have an impact on the implementation of public policies by the State. Thus, and as a reaction to the sanction of Decree 70 of 2017, in March 2017 the first Migrant Strike took place, and then in 2018 and 2019, relying on the articulation of different collectives and organizations, which transcended the national and ethnic factor of its members, their identification being rather anchored in terms of belonging to the working class (Rho, 2021).

These actions of visiblization and occupation of public space constitute aspects of a communicational citizenship (Mata, 2006; Uranga, 2013; Venier, 2019; Beccaria, 2020) that aspires to take part in those political decisions involving migrants, and which requires information as a necessary tool for its achievement.

Political Discourse and Media Discourse

What follows is the analysis of the news that constitute the corpus of this paper, detailed in Table 1. First, those linked to the draft bill with which the Macri administration sought to create a migratory jurisdiction through Congress, almost two years after the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017) was sanctioned, are grouped together.

Then, the news referring to provincial norms that restricted health rights, in the province of Jujuy, and defense rights, in the province of Chubut, are described. Finally, a series of complementary news items pertaining the application of the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017), and the consequent expulsion orders against foreign individuals for the commission of crimes are given.

Table 1. Corpus of News on Migration Policies in Open Television
Newscasts in CABA (October 2018-June 2019)

Headline	Date	Program	Channel
Expedited proceeding and deportation	10/25/18	TVP Noticias 3rd Edition	Public TV
Project to limit the entry of immigrants	11/05/18	TVP Noticias 2nd Edition	Public TV
Expelling foreigners who commit crimes	01/07/19a	TVP Noticias 3rd Edition	Public TV
1 000 foreigners could be deported from Argentina	01/08/19a	Telenoche	Canal 13
Expelling of Colombian motorcycle thief confirmed	02/04/19a	América Noticias	América TV
Expelling of Colombian motorcycle thief signed	02/05/19a	Buenos Días América	América TV
Chubut: decree to expel foreign criminals is ready	02/06/19b	Telenoche	Canal 13
Jujuy to charge medical care to foreigners	02/07/19a	Buen Telefe	Telefe
Jujuy to charge foreigners medical care	02/07/19a	Telenuve Central	Canal 9
Foreigners with criminal records will be expelled	02/07/19b	Telenuve Central	Canal 9
Chubut will expel foreigners with criminal records	02/07/19b	Buenos Días América	América TV
“We must expel foreigners who steal”	02/07/19c	Buenos Días América	América TV
Controversy over foreigners who commit crimes	02/07/19d	Buenos Días América	América TV
She was deported and separated from her children	02/07/19b	Buen Telefe	Telefe
Chubut: entry with criminal record prohibited	02/07/19b	TVP Noticias 3rd Edition	Public TV
Argentinean cure, foreign eyes	02/08/19a	Telefe Noticias	Telefe
How many foreigners are criminals?	02/08/19b	Telefe Noticias	Telefe
4 Colombians arrested for stealing cars	02/14/19a	Telenuve al Amanecer	Canal 9
Two Chileans arrested	04/02/19c	Telenuve Central	Canal 9

(continue)

(continuation)

Pakistan's futsal team detained	04/02/19d	Telenueve Central	Canal 9
Are they or are they not?	04/03/19b	Telenueve al Amanecer	Canal 9
The alleged Chilean terrorists were artists	04/03/19c	Buen Telefe	Telefe
Foreigners, between controversy and the law	04/03/19e	Buenos Días América	América TV
The two Chilean artists were charged	04/03/19b	América Noticias	América TV
Terrorists? No, artists	04/03/19	Síntesis	Canal 13
Detained Chilean artists were released	04/04/19f	Buenos Días América	América TV
The situation of the Chilean artists who were detained and released	04/05/19	Arriba Argentinos	Canal 13
Charges against Chilean artists dismissed	06/04/19d	Buen Telefe	Telefe
Charges against Chilean artists dismissed	06/04/19	TVP Noticias 2nd Edition	Public TV

Source: Own elaboration based on the newscasts analyzed in the Monitoring *What is news for open television newscasts?* (DPSCA, 2019).

Sources that Legitimize Policies

After the declaration of unconstitutionality and the appeal by the national government, the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017) remained in force, in wait for a ruling by the Court. In the meantime, the Executive Branch sought to enable another legal mechanism to restrict migration rights, this time through the Legislative Branch. Thus, it sought to correct one of the points in the unconstitutionality ruling, referring to the lack of parliamentary discussion on the matter.

In October 2018, during the session that gave half sanction to the 2019 budget, the repression of a protest in the surroundings of the Congress in CABA resulted in 27 people arrested; among them, two Venezuelans, one Paraguayan, and one of Turkish origin. Some news reports focused on these particularities, due to the statements of national officials that the government would ask for an expedited proceeding in order to deport the four foreign detainees.

Televisión Pública's newscasts aired an excerpt of the press conference given by the Minister of the Interior, Rogelio Frigerio, and the Minister of Security, Patricia Bullrich, in which they highlighted the increase in deportations during the last year as a positive fact, and associated foreignness with crime. "The increase in deportations of criminals in Argentina has been exponential [...] There were more deportations this last year than in the previous ten," Frigerio stated (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2018, 2m7s). On her part, Bullrich stated:

The decree [70 of 2017] is in effect. It is not always made public when someone is expelled, but there are expulsions at the border, there are expulsions of people who have a criminal record, people with a criminal record cannot enter, they used to be allowed to enter before, this is a very important progress. In this case, these people did not have a criminal record. In the case of Venezuela, sometimes we have no access to the background of those who enter (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2018, 2m22s).

Next, the host presented an audio recording with statements made by the opposition senator, Miguel Ángel Pichetto:

I hope that the four foreigners [...] and I don't say this from any xenophobic perspective, not from any of those stupid claims they always make, but the two Venezuelans that we Argentineans have generously received -according to this very optimistic vision that the government has, under which more than 80,000 have entered-, the Paraguayan and the Turkish should already be in the immigration department ready to leave the country. A serious country should act like that. But well, surely they must already be at home, absolutely nothing is going to happen, and they will attend the next demonstration (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2018, 3m33s).

While Rogelio Frigerio and Patricia Bullrich claimed the validity of the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017) and the increase in deportations was “a paramount progress” (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2018, 2m43s), they still pointed out deficiencies in the transfer of information on migrants' criminal records, stating that some countries in the region did not facilitate such. On the other hand, Senator Pichetto's statement highlighted the criticism of the government's “very optimistic vision” (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2018, 3m47s) on statistics related to the entry and settlement of foreigners, and to the lack of clear policies regarding the potential crimes they could commit. It should be clarified that both the requirements for settlement and the grounds for expulsion were already defined by the Migration Law itself (Law 25.871 of 2004).

However, this case exposed the agreement between the Executive Branch and sectors of the opposition in the Legislative Branch, in relation to the criminalization of social protest, which was aggravated by the national status of the detainees.

Starting in the last months of 2018, the National Director of Migration, Horacio García, began an extensive campaign visiting the studios of CABA's open television channels, with the aim of justifying the government strategy to modify Law 25.871 of 2004. On November 5, 2018, García was interviewed on the studios of Televisión Pública about a project sent to Congress. There he said that such project did not imply a tightening in the framework of deportations, but that it was about “making effective an ordinance that the State had already defined” (TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2018, 0m29s), evidently referring to Decree 70 of 2017. In turn, he argued that the expulsion of foreigners who had committed a crime was something that “happens in every country in the world: what we are concerned with is to do it expeditiously” (TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2018, 0m42s). On the other hand, he clarified that “we are talking about a small population that comes to commit crimes” (TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2018, 1m38s). He also reported, as an argument against the idea that it was a restrictive measure, that Argentina had already granted 587,000 residency permits during the two and a half years of Alianza coalition administration. When asked by the host about the fact that migrants from Venezuela had reported difficulties to carry out the procedures for residency, and that this implied a double standard between those who regularized and those who did not, García argued that Venezuelans were the majority group among migrants, with 100,000 residency permits granted. He then pondered the advantages of the new

interface to carry out the procedures, called Radex, and sentenced: “we fight against irregularity” (TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2018, 6m27s). A rather ambiguous comment, given that it was a news item about a bill that restricted rights, and that he did not clarify whether this fight was meant to increase the number of regularizations or to penalize them. This is particularly the case if one takes into account that migrant and human rights organizations denounced that the Radex presented difficulties for low-income people, or those with difficulties in accessing connectivity, in addition to being characterized by delays in appointments and an increase in fees. Precisely, the third Migrant Strike of 2019 consisted of a mobilization to the DNM and added to its slogans the demand to reverse the Radex (Rho, 2021).

At another point in the interview, the host asked: “In other cases, where there are illegals or people who are not regularized and commit crimes, is [regularization] also being carried out?” (TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2018, 4m31s). This comment, usual in the journalistic discourse, reveals ignorance on Migration Law, which makes no use of the term illegality, but rather speaks of irregularity in residence procedures (Law 25.871 of 2004). This deficit in the quality of information has several implications. On the one hand, it enables the reproduction of stigmatizing discourses against the migrant population; and on the other hand, it wastes a possibility of disseminating rights to a sector of society that cannot exercise them, precisely because they are unaware of having them.

In another newscast, months later, García stated:

When talking about migration, we have to talk about the great majority: those who come to work, to produce, to study. And not constantly talk about restrictions. That is why we have to solve the restrictive part. In this case, we are talking about people who have come for other reasons, who have been sentenced in 101 cases, and we are going to expel them when we find them. We have 254 people who have violated the law on migration, and we are to expel them too. And then we have 600 that we are going to ask the courts to detain. It is a joint effort that complies with the guidelines set by Minister Rogelio Frigerio (Telenoche, 2019a, 0m00s).

The official discourse on the presence of good and bad migrants was another of the pillars that the Executive Power built when it came to establish a base for its migration policy. In the words of the official, in order to stop talking about “the restrictive part” (0m07s) of this policy, it was first necessary to “solve that part” (Telenoche, 2019a, 0m10s).

Then, two journalists in the studio, backed by a screen displaying graphic support with photographs of Minister Patricia Bullrich, specified that there would be “around 1,000 people in conditions of being expelled” (0m53s), and that it was not only for the commission of serious crimes, but also for “violation of the migration law, which is also a reason to be expelled from the country” (Telenoche, 2019a, 1m10s). However, they did not specify what type of infraction to Law 25.871 had been committed in those cases, nor did they differentiate what the migratory norm established before the sanction of Decree 70 of 2017 with respect to the crimes that were grounds for expulsion.

Then, with the headline “Criminals or who have entered illegally,” the columnist reported:

What the government wants is to expel, actually deport, those people who committed crimes or who transgressed the rules you were describing, who entered the country illegally [...] This comes with a bill that the government is promoting and is about to send to Congress in the next few days, and that sets forth a slightly broader reform (Telenoche, 2019a, 1m15s).

Once again, the discourse generalized on a supposed “illegal entry into the country” (Telenoche, 2019a, 1m15s) that criminalizes migrants, and avoids holding the State responsible for its obligation to establish mechanisms for regularization. On the other hand, the host alluded to the bill presented by the Executive to create a migratory jurisdiction within the Judiciary and expedite deportations:

There are some things that the government can already begin to implement without the need for this law, which has to do with a decree and so on. The decision to have a specific jurisdiction, a specific court that deals with migration issues, has to be approved by law. Now, what net number are we talking about? How many people? Is this a problem that would solve, for example, crime in Argentina? In principle, of course not. Only 20 percent of those detained in federal prisons are foreigners (Telenoche, 2019a, 1m35s).

In this case, the journalist mentioned Decree 70 of 2017 tangentially and nuanced the responsibility of migrants as a source of crime in Argentina. However, he appealed to data taken from the recitals of the cited DNU, according to which the foreign population in custody of the Federal Penitentiary Service had increased in 2016 to 21.35% of the total, reaching 33% in crimes linked to drug trafficking (Telenoche, 2019a). According to CELS (2017, p. 182), “the government presented statistical data in a misleading manner” to induce an alleged security emergency situation in relation to migrants. There, with data from the National Penitentiary Statistics System, the organization sustained that foreigners detained in federal and provincial prisons represented six percent of the total.

The difference between desirable and undesirable foreigners was addressed again in a Televisión Pública report, in which the host constructed a binomial between *tourists* and *criminals*:

Based on what happened last week with the Swedish tourist, whose leg ended up being amputated, having being shot by a Peruvian criminal, this government idea of expediting the expulsion of foreign criminals is once again established. There are around 1,000 people in this situation (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2019a, 0m00s).

Shortly afterwards, García again alluded in an interview to the restrictive element in migration matters: “Of course, such an open system has to have a counterpart, which is a very rigid and very clear system with respect to dealing with those who break the trust agreement” (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2019a, 1m48s).

As can be seen, official sources were the unanimous resource of the news programs for the construction of news about immigration policies and representations on what type of migrants

could exercise their rights. For its part, the references to the current law were vague, and so it was not specified which rights were actually granted to these groups.

Provincial Restrictions on the News Agenda

At the same time that the national government sought to institutionalize its migration policy, some provinces promoted restrictive measures on immigration rights on their own. Thus, on February 6, 2019, without public or parliamentary debate, the Legislature of the province of Jujuy sanctioned Law 6.116, which created the Provincial Health Insurance System for Foreigners. According to the rule, foreigners without permanent residence and who stayed temporarily in the province would be obliged to pay for public health services, if they needed them (Law 6.116 of 2019). This way, it contradicted the provisions of Law 25.871 and international legislation, which guarantee access to health as a universal right, beyond conditions of nationality or immigration status (Law 25.871 of 2004).

In the news programs of the CABA channels that reported on this measure, it was presented as a response to what had happened to a young Argentinean injured in Bolivia, who had had to bear the costs of medical care in that country. The need for reciprocity in health policy between both nations was justified in this way.

In a telephone interview with the provincial Minister of Health, Gustavo Bouhid, the official stressed that they had never been able to sign a health reciprocity agreement with Bolivia, and reported several cases of Argentinean tourists in that country who were denied medical assistance because they could not pay the fees (Buen Telefe, 2019a). With images of the reading of the bill in the Jujuy Legislature and its approval, another presenter clarified that it was insurance that the province would charge for foreigners “in transit,” and not for residents (Buen Telefe, 2019a, 0m15s). Furthermore, she alluded to the negotiations between the Argentinean and Bolivian foreign ministries to achieve reciprocity (Telenuve Central, 2019a).

Regarding this, another news program showed a report with testimonies from migrants who gave a positive opinion about free health care in our Argentina, unlike the situation in their countries of origin, where they had to pay such. Likewise, data from the Foreign Ministry was cited that the majority of foreign patients came from Bolivia and Paraguay (Telefe Noticias, 2019a).

One day after the sanction of that law in Jujuy, Chubut governor Mariano Arcioni signed Provincial Decree 136/2019, which established the expulsion and prohibition of entry into the province to those foreigners who had a criminal record (Decree 136 of 2019).

“The eye has been on foreigners this week, due to the use they make of health services, but also due to insecurity,” commented a driver referring to the measure (Telefe Noticias, 2019b, 0m00s). With plaques on screens, figures were shown about “How many foreigners are criminals?” (Telefe Noticias, 2019b, 0m36s). Next, according to data from the CABA Ministry of Security, it was reported that, in that district, of the 24 945 people detained in 2018, 4,360 were foreigners (17%); and in the province of Buenos Aires, out of 105 933, 1.4% were foreigners. They also provided

data on people detained at the national level, this time taking the data from the National Penitentiary Statistics System (not from Decree 70 of 2017). “Looking at these figures we have to ask ourselves, are foreigners really the source of insecurity in Argentina?” said the host (Telefe Noticias, 2019b, 1m39s); then he emphasized that it was a risky issue if understood as an electoral measure, because it could “feed xenophobia, and that path is never healthy in democracy” (Telefe Noticias, 2019b, 2m49s).

For his part, a columnist stated that the decree was rather “controversial” (Telenoche Noticias, 2019b, 0m03s), as it was a power of the federal government. “But he made it happen, Chubut made it happen,” the host added in a clear gesture of support for the measure (Telenoche, 2019b, 0m50s). Another program showed the governor's testimony explaining the measure. The presenter said that “a controversy had arisen due to its unconstitutionality” (Telenoche, 2019b, 0m07s), since it enabled expulsion without a final sentence, and such could only be legislated at the national level. Then an interview was shown with constitutionalist Daniel Sabsay, who criticized both the Chubut decree and the measure voted in Jujuy (Telenoche Central, 2019b).

A host, meanwhile, editorialized: “The truth is that this is a very important measure for Chubut, it has of course had its detractors, and it has had many people for it [...] A great measure by the governor of Chubut” (Buenos Días América, 2019b, 0m02s). In another section, a columnist expanded on the information: “The argument has to do with the increase in the number of crimes in relation to the increase in foreigners. No figures were given, it was an argument, but it is not like statistics were given” (Buenos Días América, 2019b, 2m01s). Another columnist specified the federal power of the policy, although the host stated that the province could order his expulsion from the provincial limits: “Why do they have to finance the crimes of foreigners with the taxes of the people of Chubut?” he stated. For his part, the crime columnist stated that, of the 188 people detained in CABA so far this year, 133 were foreigners (Buenos Días América, 2019b, 3m45s). He also commented that the head of government, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, had expressed himself along the same lines (Buenos Días América, 2019c).

Later, they returned to the topic with a video compiling statements from officials, specialists, and victims of crimes, some of them committed by people of Argentinean nationality. Among the highlighted phrases, the one issued by criminal lawyer Eduardo Gerome stands out: “And what are they going to do on the street, like this Colombian? They are going to commit crimes” (Buenos Días América, 2019d, 0m46s). Likewise, Senator Miguel Ángel Pichetto stated that “the Colombians who come here come with a history of drug trafficking, of dangerous criminality, most of them are those who ride motorcycles, and the same with the Peruvians” (Buenos Días América, 2019d, 0m57s). In turn, the host stated that “Chubut has received the largest number of foreign criminals”, without citing his source (3m14s), and then added: “What the governor of Chubut is doing seems fantastic to me” (Buenos Días América, 2019d, 4m10s).

In turn, Televisión Pública quoted Minister Patricia Bullrich and Minister Frigerio about the fact that the decree “shares philosophy with the national government” (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2019b, 0m21s). In another section, they interviewed constitutionalist Félix Lonigro in the studio,

who was “philosophically” in favor of the measure (3m52s), yet pointed out that the power to decide the expulsion of a foreign person was a power delegated by provinces to the national jurisdiction upon the establishment of the Constitution. In turn, they issued a recorded report with the testimony of Diego Morales, CELS lawyer, who described the measure as a “legal nonsense” (6m55s), given that provinces should not be able to establish rules on this matter. Although he did give credit to the argument, the guest still disagreed with the CELS representative in terms of understanding the right to migration set forth in the Migration Law (Law 25.871 of 2004) as an “absolute right” (8m21s), and agreed with the “good policy” of the national government (TVP Noticias 3rd Edition, 2019b, 9m20s).

In these cases, journalistic opinions and assessments about the measures implemented were both positive and negative, although the extensive coverage did help position the issue on the agenda. In some cases, the arguments were distorted in order to justify the measures (“Why do Chubut residents have to finance the crimes of foreigners with their taxes?” [Buenos Días América, 2019b, 3m45s]). On the other hand, the statistics disseminated varied in the different channels, and was in some cases even confusing. As with the news about the national bill, in this case the sources were also predominantly official and in favor of the spirit of the regulations. Still, the testimonies of constitutionalists questioned the validity of these measures, even when they were followed along the line of the national government's immigration policies. The only source that spoke out against the Chubut decree was partially questioned by one of the constitutionalists. Meanwhile, the voice of migrants was barely recorded, only appearing in a report on access to public health in Argentina in contrast to that of their countries of origin.

Criminalization and Media Punishment

At the same time, supporting this official discourse legitimized by the television news, these broadcasts made prominent different criminal events involving foreign people and actions by the State for their expulsion. This logic confirms the existence of a policing matrix in the construction of news regarding migrants.

During 2019, among the news aired by open television news programs that focused on migration, those referring to deportations of foreigners abounded, this within the framework of the validity of Decree 70 of 2017 (DPSCA, 2019). A piece of news that marked the media agenda in this regard was the judicial measure by which a person of Colombian nationality accused of committing a robbery, and who was on the run, would be deported. Regarding the incident, a host pointed out: “The truth is that we do not like Argentinean criminals, much less imported ones” (América Noticias, 2019a, 0m02s). One headline stated that “he stole a cell phone and was released after paying 700 [Argentine pesos],” and that he would be deported at the request of the DNM (América Noticias, 2019a, 0m39s). In another newscast, the host stated that the accused had entered as a tourist and his period of stay in the country had expired. He then added, confusing *illegality* with *immigration irregularity*: “As he was still an illegal, and also dedicated himself to stealing, he was a criminal; hence the expulsion” (Buenos Días América, 2019a, 1m40s).

The week after that, a newscast reported on the case of “four Colombians detained for stealing cars”, with images of the police raid in the municipality of Vicente López (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019a, 0m14s). The headlines reported that “they will be deported” and that “they will be expelled from the country” (5m17s). Then they showed photos of the four detained people: “They had a criminal record in Colombia [...] How were they allowed to enter in 2016 if they already had a criminal record [...] Because Colombia did not report it to Interpol when Argentina requested the information,” commented the columnist (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019a, 6m20s). Regarding another person, it was reported that “although she has no record [...] she is being investigated by the DNM because apparently she would not have regular status in Argentina,” equating immigration irregularity, once again, with serious crimes and showing lack of knowledge of the Law 25.871 (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019a, 7m42s).

All of them with an irregular status and so the issue of foreigners who commit crimes is raised again, right? How many questions. They commit crimes, they enter the country, the situation is such that it is not clear how they are allowed in, whether by error or omission, but the point is that, it happened as had happened with the Uruguayan and so many others (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019a, 8m04s).

The focus is once again on the nationality of criminals, thus supporting the official discourse and legitimizing restrictive measures in immigration matters. To complement this mechanism of articulation between media and political discourse, the columnist concluded: “The mayor of Vicente López, Jorge Macri, addressed the issue [...] and said that he is supporting the deportation trend for criminals who commit crimes” (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019a, 8m58s).

In April 2019, the news reported the arrest of two artists of Chilean nationality, who had traveled to give a workshop within the framework of the Language Congress in the city of Córdoba; they were accused of leaving an explosive device in the hotel where they were staying. “They ended up detained as suspected terrorists or suspected anarchists,” described a Telenuvee Central host (2019c, 0m15s). The political columnist of the newscast criticized the detention of both people for 48 hours, without communication allowed, and without assigned defense, while she showed front pages of Chilean newspapers covering the case (Telenuvee Central, 2019c). Next, and as a serialization of cases, another columnist asked: “Is there excess zeal behind the security forces, is there overreaction?” (11m41s). He went on to report the retention, “for reasons of national security,” of the Pakistani futsal team that had arrived in Argentina to participate in the World Cup, and on the deportations of a Colombian cyclist, and a of couple of Iranian nationality (Telenuvee Central, 2019d, 0m15s).

Whether the Chilean artists were really *terrorists* was a matter that permanently haunted journalistic discourses, even though no official information had presented them as such, nor had the content of the Anti-Terrorist Law that defines this type of crimes been verified. A columnist even stated that no official had clarified “whether they are extremist guerrilla fighters or not,” thus putting out a new criminalizing label (Telenuvee al Amanecer, 2019b, 1m22s).

On another channel, they denied that the Chilean artists were terrorists, but then they aired the testimony of one of the police officers who carried out the operation at the hotel, who stated that the detonated element was an incomplete bomb. Then, from a mobile phone in Palermo, they interviewed a friend of the artists, with an opposite point of view (Buen Telefe, 2019c). For its part, one news program called the case “unexplainable” (América Noticias, 2019b, 0m38s), while another aired a brief news item about the release due to lack of evidence (Synthesis, 2019). The next day, they reported that the two people would not be able to leave the country until the investigation was closed. Likewise, a columnist criticized “the attitude” (Buenos Días América, 2019f, 1m14s) of the defendants for having allegedly left the hotel without paying, because said action led to the activation of the “anti-terrorist operation” (1m11s). Months later, it was reported that both people had been dismissed (Buen Telefe, 2019d; TVP Noticias 2nd Edition, 2019). An interview was also aired with Minister Patricia Bullrich, in which she defended the government's actions in the cases of athletes and artists (Arriba Argentinos, 2019).

In a smaller number of cases, some points about the restriction of rights were addressed in a tone of denunciation. Such was the coverage of a news program on the case of a Peruvian woman who had served a sentence for drug trafficking in the Ezeiza Prison, and who was anyway deported with her youngest son and separated from two of her children who stayed in Argentina. The host presented an interview in studio with the woman's lawyer: “The relationship between the Argentinean State and foreigners has undergone redesign, if they have a criminal record there's nothing else to say” (Buen Telefe, 2019b, 0m00s). In turn, the lawyer referred to the restrictions that the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017) imposed on the principles of “family unity” (5m53s) and “family reunification” (Buen Telefe, 2019b, 4m41s). He argued that “the procedure was deceptive,” and that the children were Argentinean, which meant that the aforementioned principle of reunification guaranteed by the Migration Law should be taken into account, in addition to keeping in mind that the woman had already served her sentence (Buen Telefe, 2019b, 1m41s).

Regarding this chain of news events, the National Director of Migration was interviewed again in the studios of a news program. The section was presented with a set of images accompanied by statements from officials criticizing the supposed flexibility of the immigration system, whose framework was given by the aforementioned deportations. The official once again resorted to statistics to show a positive aspect of the government's immigration policies, although with some aspects that, according to García, needed to be corrected. There he highlighted that there had been 700,000 settlements in three years, of which 83% had settled in CABA and Greater Buenos Aires (GBA), this being a demographic problem for which he proposed redirecting the migration flows towards the provinces, precisely when rights were also restricted there. He stated that they had consulted several governors to find out about the unmet demand and highlighted the “young, vigorous, educated” migration from Venezuela (Buenos Días América, 2019e, 5m21s). The journalists asked about the system for monitoring foreigners who commit crimes and the fight against terrorism, alluding to the issue of Chilean artists, about which the official explained that “1 637 people were deported” (Buenos Días América, 2019e, 11m59s).

Just as it happens when a government intends to establish a regressive measure in terms of rights, it must seek its legitimacy through media channels that reproduce often stigmatizing and discriminatory meanings (Caggiano, 2005). The increase in criminalizing news about migrants in 2016—a year before the sanction of the DNU (Decree 70 of 2017)—and 2019—the year in which its constitutionality was settled—(DPSCA, 2019) shows the complementarity of political and journalistic discourses when it comes to establishing an agenda to validate certain measures. Matter of fact, in this group of police news, official sources that defend regressive immigration policies once again stand out.

On the other hand, there was no news about the Migrant Strike that had as its slogan “Migrating is not a crime,” whose first demonstration took place in March 2017, and then again in 2018 and 2019.

Next, Table 2 describes the axes from which the news analyzed in the three preceding sections were constructed.

Table 2. Analytical Comparison Between the Set of News Described in the Sections

Issue	Characterization
DNU 70/2017 and Migration Jurisdiction project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exclusivity of official sources (DNM and ministries of Interior and Security). -Opinionated official statistical data. -No migrant and human rights organizations as sources. -Justification of the measures by officials and journalists. -Construction of representations about <i>desirable</i> and <i>undesirable</i> migrants.
Province regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Official sources justifying the measures, and of others (constitutionalists, human rights organizations) with a critical vision. -The journalistic discourse fluctuated between a positive editorialization on security and health policy (framed according to Decree 70 of 2017), and one more prone to questioning from a legal point of view. -Inaccurate or confusing statistical data to justify measures.
Criminal events involving migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Framed in Decree 70 of 2017, in the migration jurisdiction project and in statements by officials. -They highlight the nationality of the migrants. -Conjectures and the attribution of criminal neologisms and hyperboles abound. -Ignorance of immigration rights and emphasis on illegality upon entering the country.

Source: Own elaboration based on the newscasts analyzed in the Monitoring *What is news for open television newscasts?* (DPSCA, 2019).

IN CLOSING

This article has set out to analyze the link between media and political power within the framework of a series of government measures that restricted immigration rights during the last years of the Macri government. Based on the news covered, it was observed how, in order to achieve its goal, the official discourse made use of different tools. The presence of officials as sources of television news information on immigration policies, with almost no other voices to contrast them, is a mark

of this articulation of interests that is forged in moments of public debate. This article has also highlighted the positive editorialization of journalistic discourse, and the presentation of statistical data that often appears distorted, or provided in a confusing manner, as reinforcement of said arguments. These same issues are then taken away from the spotlight again once the goals set are achieved, or when the political avenue to sustain the implementation of these measures is exhausted.

Likewise, the media scene becomes a space where tensions are resolved or consensus is sought among officials from different jurisdictions. From the demographic redistribution that should be established on migration, to the potential unconstitutionality of national and provincial policies, through the moralizing construction of migrants, the debate converges in an articulation between media and political discourse that serves as a form of legitimation.

Both the marginality of immigration issues in television news, as well as the criminalization of this population in these few news items, are a symptom of the deficit of information socially necessary for migrants. This gap exists both in media discourses and in the public information campaigns run by the State. The scarcity of relevant data in the media is evident in relation to the immigration rights set forth in Law 25.871 of 2004, which enables us to establish two hypotheses: lack of knowledge of immigration legislation on the part of media communicators; or the omission and/or manipulation of that information to justify, in the news construction, everything from criminalizing stereotypes to political and judicial decisions that violate rights. In any case, this data evidences how news programs not only make invisible—or negatively visible—the discourse of migrants, but also do so with respect to the citizen construction of their audiences. That is to say, they do not take into account the possibility that among the public there are migrants who require useful information for the thriving of their life in a democratic society. For its part, the State is obliged by the Migration Law (Law 25.871 of 2004) to carry out information campaigns on the rights set forth through it, and the absence of these public policies constitutes the aforementioned gap between that which is established by law and the adequate information to guarantee its full exercise.

The right to communication of migrants, despite being enshrined in the LSCA since 2009, continues to be violated in the audiovisual media. Still, when addressing the construction of communicational citizenship of this social group, we not only refer to the right to communication, but also to all those civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that expand and consolidate citizenship, which require public communication with a human rights perspective for its promotion. This interdependence can be exemplified, once again, with the scarce information on the Migration Law, which establishes the rights and obligations of migrants. Resulting from this, such principles are unknown to the majority of people who migrate to Argentina, as well as to society in general. The growing occupation of public space and media made by and for migrants, together with the greater institutionality of their organizations, has marked for some years now a new horizon to shorten this gap.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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