

Problems in the Production of Journalistic Knowledge During an Election: Between Partisan Overrepresentation and the Crisis of the Press

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Abstract

The article addresses the role of journalism and the media in producing and distributing political knowledge during the 2021 concurrent elections in Mexico. It examines how journalistic practices face significant structural and commercial challenges, highlighting the relevance of journalism in generating both empirical and vicarious political knowledge. The text presents the results of a content analysis of print media in Jalisco during the 2021 elections. Problems are identified in the centralization and crisis of the media system, exacerbated by the commercial logic and an electoral organization that could have foreseen the communicational effects of concurrent elections, resulting in unequal and limited news coverage. This situation affects the ability of citizens to exercise an informed vote due to the need for more equitable information about candidates and political parties. The study concludes that current journalistic practices, restricted by the structure and crisis of the media system, have failed to guarantee an adequate flow of information, negatively impacting the democratic process. The article ends by proposing possible solutions to this problem, such as reconsidering the electoral organization and strengthening the public media system to improve information coverage and effectively contribute to citizens' political knowledge.

Introduction

In 2021, Mexico held concurrent elections in which, for the first time, federal deputies and mayors of all municipalities of the 32 states and governors of 15 states were elected simultaneously. These elections were publicly described as "the largest in history." The parties nominated more than 20 thousand candidates who campaigned for two months.

A central process in the life of contemporary democracies is the production and distribution of political knowledge among the inhabitants of a community. Political knowledge contains the norms and values that structure power distribution and social organization. In this framework, the media and journalists are institutions and agents with the social task of producing and distributing part of this political knowledge.

One juncture in which this process of production and distribution of political knowledge can be observed occurs during electoral campaigns. At these junctures, the media and journalists seek to report on what a series of candidates for elected office are doing and communicating

to win the race. From this information, citizens gain political knowledge about who can represent them at the different levels of government, as well as what their work proposals are. With this information in mind, citizens come to cast their vote for this or that candidate.

How does the above theoretical assumption operate in a concrete case? Are the media and journalists able to fulfill these epistemic-communicative tasks? Thus, this article presents a case analysis of journalistic production in one of the 32 Mexican states where electoral campaigns occurred in 2021.

The case analysis, then, is the coverage that print media, radio, and television made of the campaigns held in the state of Jalisco (Mexico) that occurred during April and May 2021. The content analysis shows that the media were unable to fully cover the campaigns of all the candidates who participated in the race and that, in addition, they privileged the coverage of specific campaigns over others. During the campaign, some candidates were never mentioned in the media. There were campaigns, such as those for local deputies, with little or no coverage.

The root of these epistemic dysfunctions, as explained in the article, is to be found in an electoral organization that did not consider the negative communicational impacts of holding concurrent elections, the commercial logic, and the financial crisis that the media have been going through in the last decades, which has caused a reduction in the number of people in their editorial offices and with it their capacity of informative production.

The results of the case analysis are considered in the article in the light of the understanding of political communication as a set of epistemic-communicative practices, a key aspect in the production and distribution of political knowledge in a community, and a discussion is held on the damage that a democratic political system in which a large number of candidates compete simultaneously implies for the realization of such practices.

The first section presents the essential elements of the social function of journalism from the perspective of contemporary democracies, followed by a discussion of the elements that characterize the political and media systems in Mexico. In a later section, the results of the analysis of the case of the state of Jalisco are presented to finally reflect on the challenges that the organization of elections will face.

Journalism as an epistemic practice

One of the fundamental tasks of a political system is the production of knowledge that communicates to the members of a society the rules and values that structure the distribution of power. This epistemic production is structured by political communication practices and systems (Larrosa-Fuentes, 2017). From these communicative processes, the inhabitants of a neighborhood, a municipality, a city, a state, a country, or other community demarcation agree on how to distribute power and channel public affairs.

This epistemic production, structured based on communicative practices, can be observed, for example, in a neighborhood assembly, where neighbors agree on the management of their affairs before the municipality or the public deliberation of ministers of the Supreme Court

of Justice regarding women's rights over their bodies and sexual life. In both cases, the groups produce knowledge about the rules and values that should govern the collective course.

In large-scale communities, such as a country of 130 million inhabitants, the political communication systems that structure the production of political knowledge are much more complex and include hundreds or thousands of actors who do highly specialized work in the field of communication and who also work from highly sophisticated assemblies of technologies and infrastructures (Chadwick, 2017; Habermas, 2006). For example, organizing a national election requires the participation of politicians, technicians, public relations specialists, and journalists, who, through diverse communicative practices, produce and distribute knowledge about the political system.

The article focuses on the practices made by journalists in a political communication system during an electoral period. Journalists are an epistemic community that, through their daily practices, construct political knowledge about the environment (Gomis, 1991; Patterson, 2018; Tuchman, 1980). In this sense, journalists can construct at least two types of knowledge. The first is empirical knowledge, in which journalists go to where an event that merits reporting occurred and then, through their testimony, produce information about it (Tuchman, 1980). In other words, journalists are public witnesses. In an election campaign, for example, journalists attest that a particular candidate gave a speech in a municipality where she promised to do specific work if she won the race.

The second type of knowledge is vicarious when journalists generate knowledge about the political environment by collecting testimonies from people. For example, a journalist may use a group of citizens' testimony to generate knowledge about a member of Congress's good or bad performance. Although the journalist cannot directly attest to the MP's mismanagement, he or she can attest to the legitimate testimony of people who experienced the mismanagement.

The epistemic work of journalists is fundamental for a democratic political system. This labor can be observed throughout an electoral campaign, where journalists disseminate what other actors have produced in addition to producing knowledge. Journalists go to party assemblies where they decide who will be the candidate; they travel with the candidates to their territorial tours and report on what happens there; they research the public life of those who are running for elected office; they poll people's opinions on this or that decision that affects the public life of a community; they mediate events such as rallies and debates, among many other things.

Electoral democracy implies that people who meet specific requirements, such as being of legal age and not having lost civil and political rights, decide who will concentrate political power during a given period. In this sense, from a theoretical-normative dimension, citizens have two fundamental tasks: 1) to evaluate the options of people who are presented to them to concentrate power and 2) to choose who is the candidate who will best be able to fulfill their public and governmental tasks.

Faced with these tasks, citizens do not have the time or the capacity to investigate the candidates presented in an election by their means. Therefore, the work of journalists is

fundamental since they have the social task of producing and disseminating knowledge about the political system, as well as the actors who seek to concentrate power in this system (Downie & Schudson, 2011, p. 58). From this perspective, a community with independent, autonomous, and professional media and journalists will have information that allows rational political decision-making.

Mexico's electoral and media systems

In the previous section, we argued that journalism is a fundamental practice for producing political knowledge in a society organized based on a democratic system. In particular, during electoral campaigns, the media and journalists, through their daily work, attest and report on the political actions of candidates and parties, their proposals and vices, and their encounters and disagreements.

However, journalistic practices do not occur in a historical and social vacuum. On the contrary, practices occur in specific historical moments and are organized under specific structural conditions. In this sense, and for the case of this article, the following sections briefly develop some features of the political-electoral and media systems in Mexico. These structural features offer an explanatory framework for the crisis in producing political knowledge.

The electoral political system: concurrent elections and multiple parties

Since the beginning of the partisan transition in Mexico, one of the debates that have marked the agenda of electoral reforms has been the economic cost of organizing the elections. The debate is wide-ranging and includes the salary of the board members of what is now the National Electoral Institute (INE), the cost of producing incorruptible voter credentials, the large sums of public money spent on financing political parties, as well as the expenditure of public resources involved in organizing elections for the executive and legislative branches at the federal, state and municipal levels.

Regarding the last point, the electoral system has tended, in the last decade, to concentrate the organizational power of elections in INE. In particular, the 2014 political-electoral reform entailed the modification of several articles of the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures. As part of this reform, Articles 22 and 25 of said law established that ordinary elections, both federal and local, "shall be held on the first Sunday of June of the corresponding year."

In addition, the electoral reform established that the INE would be mandated to organize all electoral campaigns in the country from then on. Although the local institutes remained, the new rules took away many of their attributions and political power (Zamitiz Gamboa, 2017). Thus, for example, the 2021 elections were concurrent elections in which the citizens of Jalisco elected, on the same day, local and federal deputies, as well as municipal president; in other states, they even elected governor (Martínez López & García Pérez, 2021).

On the other hand, as is well known, the Mexican system allows for the proliferation of political parties. In the 2021 elections, at the national level, voters could vote for seven different political institutions. This figure increased at the state level as local political parties

participated. For example, in the case of Jalisco, we found that voters could vote for 13 different parties.

These two features of the Mexican electoral political system, i.e., a) the concurrence of elections and b) many political parties, represent a tremendous logistical and organizational challenge. Before and during the 2021 political campaigns, in daily public discussions, it was common for journalists and opinionators of national life to refer to these elections as "the largest in history" since they were the elections in which the most significant number of popularly elected positions were in dispute.

This political-logistical problem has an epistemic-communicative counterpart at the center of this text. The 2021 elections posed a significant challenge to producing political knowledge for media and journalists. For example, at the national level, in a single day, 300 deputies of relative majority and 200 of proportional representation, 15 governors, 1,063 local deputies, 1,923 municipal presidents, along with other local positions such as councilors and regidurías were elected. In total, more than 20,000 elected positions were at stake.

If we focus on the case of Jalisco, the local media and journalists had the challenge of producing information on thirteen political parties that competed for 20 relative majority deputies and 18 proportional representation deputies, both for the Local Congress as well as for 125 municipal presidencies, 942 relative majority council seats, and 539 proportional representation seats. In other words, a journalistic organization that has proposed to generate information on all the candidates in the elections in Jalisco had to prepare itself to cover a campaign for 1,519 elected positions (IEPCJ, 2021a), in which more than six thousand candidates participated (see Table 1).

Table 1. Total number of candidates for elected office in the 2021 local elections, by party, in the state of Jalisco.

Party or coalition	Number of candidates
National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN)	912
Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI)	18
Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD)	280
Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo, PT)	380
Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM)	502

Citizens' Movement (Movimiento Ciudadano, MC)	956
Movement for the National Regeneration (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, MORENA)	861
We are (Somos)	90
Social Encounter Party (Partido Encuentro Social, PES)	570
Let's do it (Hagamos)	828
Future (Futuro)	330
Progressive Social Networks (Redes Sociales Progresistas, RSP)	240
Front for Mexico (Frente por México, FXM)	470
Independent Candidates	156
Total	6,593

Source: own elaboration with IEPCJ data (2021b).

The media system: centralized and in permanent crisis

The communication system in Mexico, like the political system, is also complex. In general terms, it comprises 1,580 television channels, 2,126 radio stations (IFT, 2021a), 335 printed news media (SEGOB, 2021), and an unquantified number of news sites on the Internet. Although, at first glance, one may think that the media system is numerous, it is necessary to consider the characteristics that configure it. On the one hand, it is a centralized system in which most of the media are based in the country's capital, or from this geographical location, they feed content to the regional media. This implies that the information published, especially in the case of television, does not necessarily correspond to local information.

On the other hand, it is a system in which commercial logic predominates and which, in recent years, has experienced a crisis that has resulted in the closure of companies and news spaces and in the reduction of personnel who, in addition, work in increasingly precarious conditions in terms of salaries, as well as the public insecurity of which they are victims. Data that may help to assess the dimension of the reduction of personnel in the information system is offered by the Federal Telecommunications Institute, which shows, in the statistical report "Economic Indicators of Telecommunications and Broadcasting" (IFT, 2021b), that in 2010 92,392 people were working in the broadcasting sector. In 2020, there were only 49,565; that is, there was a drop of 46% in the number of people employed.

The features of centralization and crisis of the business model in the media system on a national scale are also present in the state of Jalisco. In Jalisco, there are 117 radio stations, of which 40 (34%) are located in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, 17 (15%) in Puerto Vallarta, 6 (5%) in Ciudad Guzmán, and the remaining 54 (46%) scattered in 35 localities. This means that 82 (56%) municipalities in Jalisco do not have local radio stations. Regarding television, the data show a greater centralization. There are 61 television stations in the state of Jalisco, of which 34 (56%) are located in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, 10 (16%) in Puerto Vallarta, 5 (8%) in Lagos de Moreno, and the remaining 12 (20%) television stations are in five different municipalities. This means that most municipalities in the state of Jalisco listen on the radio or watch television content produced in the state capital or the capital of the country and that 113 municipalities do not have locally produced television.

Regarding print media, the team of ETIUS, Observatorio de Comunicación y Cultura del ITESO, which has conducted the monitoring for the Instituto Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana del Estado de Jalisco (IEPCJ), has found a significant decrease in the number of media to be monitored. In the 2015 election, 53 media were monitored, of which 15 were edited in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara and 28 in 14 municipalities; while in the 2021 election, only 28 print media were analyzed, 13 from the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara and 15 edited in 9 municipalities in the interior of the state. In other words, there is a drop of almost 50% in the number of printed media in the state, at least of those considered by the IEPCJ for monitoring. This could lead to infer that there are fewer print media and a lower frequency and regularity in the circulation of newspapers. This phenomenon is due, in part, to the economic impacts of COVID-19, as well as technological change and the migration of readers to other media. The data on print media also show centralization, as almost half are published in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara.

On the other hand, there needs to be more precise data regarding the number of personnel working in local media. However, in the annual report of ETIUS, Observatorio de Comunicación y Cultura, called *Medios de Comunicación y Derecho a la Información en Jalisco* (Blas Alvarado, 2012, 2013; Rodelo, in press), it has been documented that in the last decade, the dismissal of journalists has been a constant phenomenon.

Jalisco elections as a case study

As previously mentioned, on June 6, 2021, local and federal elections were held in all states and municipalities of Mexico, and the media and journalists were challenged not only to report on the thousands of popularly elected positions that were contested but also the political campaigns that preceded these elections.

According to the theoretical framework presented above, the starting point is that a democratic political system requires an information system that helps citizens fulfill their expectations of exercising an informed vote. As Echeverría, Andrade, González, López, Martínez, Muñiz, and Paláu (2020, p. 23) point out, the media have the task of providing voters with information on the political options presented in order to build an "enlightened understanding," that is, knowledge about the harm or benefit that each of the political options means about their interests and the consequences of their political decision.

In this context, the objective of this article is to show, with empirical evidence, that media and journalists need to generate sufficient knowledge about the 2021 concurrent elections. For this purpose, Jalisco is presented as a case study. This state is the third largest economy in the country, has a population of more than eight million inhabitants, and has a media system similar to the rest of the Mexican states. The results of this analysis can lead to a logical generalization of what happens not only in Jalisco but also in most of the country's states.

In order to evaluate the electoral coverage made by the media and journalists in Jalisco, information is gathered from the content analysis carried out by ITESO and the University of Guadalajara at the request of the Electoral and Citizen Participation Institute of Jalisco (ITESO & IEPCJ 2021; UDG & IEPCJ, 2021). These studies analyze the electoral content published in printed media and local radio and television news spaces. The methodology can be consulted directly in the reports of these monitoring studies (ITESO & IEPCJ, 2021; UDG & IEPCJ, 2021).

News coverage of the 2021 electoral campaigns in Jalisco

A first element that shows the difficulties, in communicational terms, of offering complete information to voters on a vast number of candidates and diverse elections in Jalisco is the need for more media in many state localities. As noted above, there is an uneven distribution of print media and radio and television stations in the state's municipalities.

Similarly, news coverage of the electoral campaigns was uneven in geographic terms. According to the monitoring reports of the electoral campaigns conducted for the IEPCJ (ITESO & IEPCJ, 2021; UDG & IEPCJ, 2021), the coverage was concentrated in a few municipalities. Table 2 presents data on the percentage of coverage of municipal elections in print media, radio, and television, ordered from highest to lowest and by municipality.

Table 2. Percentage of coverage of the municipal elections in print media and radio and television news programs

Municipality	Print media	Radio and television**
Guadalajara	26%	33%
Zapopan	18%	20%
Puerto Vallarta	12%	8%
Zapotlán el Grande	7%	2%
Chapala	5%	0%
San Pedro Tlaquepaque	5%	7%
Arandas	5%	0%

Tlajomulco de Zúñiga	3%	6%
Tonalá	2%	7%
Tepatitlán de Morelos	2%	0%
Tamazula de Gordiano	2%	0%
Jocotepec	1%	0%
Other municipalities	13%	17%
	100%	100%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

*Percentage of number of pieces in print media. The total number of pieces was 8,172.

**Percentage of number of minutes on radio and television. The total number of minutes was 13,848.

As can be observed, the above table shows that the municipalities of Guadalajara, Zapopan, Puerto Vallarta, and Zapotlán el Grande concentrated 63% of the articles published in printed media and a percentage of minutes in radio and television. A much lower proportion of news pieces published in printed media are in other municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara: San Pedro Tlaquepaque (5%), Tlajomulco de Zúñiga (3%), and Tonalá (2%). In the case of radio and television, San Pedro Tlaquepaque and Tonalá reached 7% while Tlajomulco de Zúñiga 6%. In light of these data, it is evident that the media gave greater relevance to the municipalities of the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara.

In this same geographic dimension, but considering the electoral geography, that is to say, the one referring to the electoral districts, Table 3 shows the percentage of coverage in the local deputy elections by print, radio, and television media, ordered from highest to lowest. As can be observed, the data show an imbalance similar to that of the municipal elections.

Table 3. Percentage of coverage of local deputy elections in print media and radio and television news spaces

District	% of printed pieces	% of radio and TV minutes
District 5	15%	11%
District 19	13%	1%
District 9	7%	10%

District 10	6%	9%
District 6	6%	9%
District 8	6%	9%
District 14	5%	3%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of number of pieces in print media. The total number of pieces was 1,684.**

****Percentage of number of minutes on radio and television. The total number of minutes was 2,654.**

The media focused its resources and efforts on the coverage of a few electoral districts. Six districts concentrated half of the stories published on local elections, and four correspond, once again, to municipalities of the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area. The order in the ranking, that is to say, the relevance given to the districts, is different when comparing the data of printed media vs. electronic media. In the latter, there is a marginal presence of candidates from District 19, which corresponds to Zapotlán el Grande. Even so, it is clear that many voters in at least 14 electoral districts did not receive, from the informative spaces of the media, the information they required to decide their vote.

The simultaneity of the type of elections generates another area for improvement in offering comprehensive information to voters. As mentioned above, in two months, there were electoral campaigns for candidates for the executive branch, i.e., municipalities, and for the legislative branch, both local and federal deputies. Table 4 shows the percentage of coverage during the electoral campaigns according to the type of election and media type.

Table 4. Percentage coverage during the campaigns by type of choice and medium

Type of choice	Print media*	Radio **	Television
Executive branch (municipalities)	61%	75%	78%
Legislative branch (local deputies)	6%	16%	9%
Both powers	19%	9%	13%
General process	14%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of area in square centimeters in printed media. The total number of square centimeters was 2'078,473.**

****Percentage of number of minutes on radio. The total number of minutes was 14,916.**

****Percentage of number of minutes on television. Total minutes were 3,434.**

As can be seen, the imbalance in coverage by type of election is present in all three media types. However, it is more significant in television, which dedicates 78% of its time to the executive branch elections and only 9% to the legislative branch. The data show that news coverage of local electoral campaigns was concentrated on those of the executive branch. In contrast, candidates for local deputies received less attention from the media; therefore, voters needed more relevant information about the candidates for such positions.

Another analyzed dimension was the coverage offered to each political party in the race. Table 5 shows the media coverage of the different political parties that competed in the 2021 elections. The data were ordered by type of media outlet and by party from highest to lowest.

Table 5. Percentage of coverage of political parties in print, press, radio and television media

	Print media	Radio	Television
PAN	10%	6%	6%
PRI	9%	6%	6%
PRD	4%	2%	4%
PT	2%	3%	4%
PVEM	4%	5%	6%
MC	25%	18%	14%
Morena	22%	18%	12%
PES	3%	2%	3%
RSP	3%	2%	3%
FM	4%	3%	4%
We are	1%	1%	3%
Let's go to	9%	9%	7%
Future	6%	9%	7%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of number of mentions in print media. The total number of mentions was 3,995.**

****Percentage of number of minutes on radio. The total number of minutes was 14,916.**

****Percentage of number of minutes on television. The total minutes were 3,434.**

An important regularity is that only two political parties, Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) and Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), had more than single-digit percentage coverage in print, radio, and television media. In all three media, MC was the party with the highest percentage of appearances; in particular, in print media, it had a quarter of the total coverage. Although it is not possible to find a statistical correlation with the study carried out, it is notable that the two parties with the most significant media coverage were the ones that won the most popularly elected positions during these elections. On the other hand, the table shows how the rest of the media coverage was fragmented among the rest of the political parties, ranging from 1% to 10%.

In order to review the behavior of the media coverage, Table 6 is presented. This table shows the print media coverage and radio and television coverage of municipal candidates in the 2021 Jalisco elections. The full version of this table includes hundreds of candidates who competed for the 125 municipal presidencies of the state of Jalisco. However, for the sake of space, only the ten candidates who received the most mentions in the media are included.

Table 6. Percentage of coverage of municipal candidates in print, radio and television media

Candidates	Print media	Radio and television**
Pablo Lemus (Guadalajara, MC)	9%	8%
Carlos Lomelí (Guadalajara, Morena)	8%	7%
Pedro Kumamoto (Zapopan, Future)	4%	4%
Juan José Frangie (Zapopan, MC)	5%	4%
Alberto Uribe (Zapopan, Morena)	4%	3%
Salvador Cosío (Zapopan, PVEM)	1%	3%
Tonatiuh Bravo (Guadalajara, Let's Do)	2%	3%
Alberto Maldonado (Tlaquepaque, Morena)	1%	3%
Sofia Garcia (Guadalajara, PRI)	2%	2%
Dolores Perez (Guadalajara, Future)	1%	2%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of number of mentions in print media. The total number of mentions was 8,172.**

****Percentage of number of minutes in radio and television. The total number of minutes was 13,848.**

In this table, we can observe two types of concentration. The first is a political-geographic concentration. All the candidates in this table competed for municipal presidencies in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area, that is, in the city of Guadalajara, the capital of the state of Jalisco. The media concentrated on the elections in Guadalajara and Zapopan, the two most essential municipalities in the state in political and economic terms. They left the remaining candidates in the other 123 municipalities of Jalisco with less than 1% of mentions.

On the other hand, a political-partisan concentration can also be observed. Thirteen different political parties participated in the local elections. Table 6 only shows the coverage of six political parties and clearly shows a greater coverage of MC and Morena, the two political institutes that were the most powerful during the election and that, in the end, won the most significant number of political posts in the election. In particular, Table 6 shows that two candidates, Pablo Lemus and Carlos Lomelí, were the candidates who received the most coverage.

Tables 7 and 8 show the ranking of the ten candidates for local deputy who received the most coverage on radio and television, as well as in print media. In this case, we do not place both tables together because they do not match the candidates who received coverage by type of media. This difference in coverage by type of media is likely due to the geographic location of the media, which may have prioritized coverage of candidates from their localities.

Table 7. Percentage ranking of the ten candidates for congressmen and women with the highest radio and television coverage

	Radio and television
Mara Robles (Let's Do, District 9)	8%
Julio Hurtado (PAN, District 2)	5%
Lucía Almaraz (Future, District 6)	4%
Marcela Padilla (MC, District 2)	4%
Denise de Font (Let's Do, District 10)	4%
Mónica Magaña (MC, District 10)	3%
Maximiliano Ramos Castillo (CI, District 8)	3%
Claudia Salas (MC, District 8)	2%
Enrique Velázquez (Let's Do, District 4)	2%
Javier Gallo (Future, District 11)	2%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of number of minutes on radio and television. The total number of minutes was 2,654.**

Table 8. Percentage ranking of the ten candidates for congressional seats with the highest coverage in the print media*.

Candidates	Print media
Arturo Dávalos Peña (MC, District 5)	3.41%
Mara Nadiezhda Robles Villaseñor (Hagamos, District 9)	3.23%
Laura Gabriela Cárdenas Rodríguez (MC, District 6)	1.61%
Mónica Paola Magaña Mendoza (MC, District 10)	1.17%
Maximiliano Ramos Castillo (CI, District 8)	1.17%
Edgar Enrique Velázquez González (MC, District 4)	1.17%
Juncal Solano Flores (Morena, District 6)	1.17%
Higinio Del Toro Pérez (MC, District 19)	1.17%
Claudia Gabriela Salas Rodríguez (MC, District 8)	1.08%
Priscilla Franco Barba (MC, District 14)	1.08%

Source: own elaboration, based on IPECJ monitoring (2021; 2021).

***Percentage of number of mentions in print media. The total number of mentions was 1,684.**

As previously explained, the campaigns for male and female deputies had significantly less coverage than those dedicated to municipal presidencies. In comparison with the coverage of the municipal candidates, in this campaign, there is a more significant fragmentation in the informative coverage. The candidate with the highest coverage reached 8% of the total, but the regularity is 1% or less coverage. With such fragmented coverage, it is not easy to imagine how the citizens of Jalisco could have had valuable information to decide who to vote for in the election of the legislative branch.

Discussion and conclusions

From a normative-theoretical perspective, in an electoral democracy, citizens must have access to information about all political parties, all candidates, and all their proposals. This flow of information is vital for them to be able to reason and exercise an informed vote. Based on the data published in the content analysis elaborated by the IEPJ, it is possible to affirm that the media and journalistic system could not guarantee a sufficient flow of information for Jalisco citizens to make an informed vote as long as their only source of information is through printed media, radio, and television.

The data shows that most of the journalistic coverage focused on reporting on municipal elections. The counterpart of this fact is that legislative elections received very little attention. A more granular approach to the coverage of municipal elections reveals another imbalance that has to do with a geographic concentration of coverage. In print media, radio, and television, the campaigns in the municipalities of Guadalajara and Zapopan received much more coverage than the rest of the 123 municipalities. At the same time, there was a political-partisan concentration since the coverage in these municipalities was concentrated on the candidates of two political parties, Movimiento Ciudadano, and Morena, leaving aside the remaining 11 political parties. In this order of things, many candidates were not even mentioned in all the media coverage.

There are multiple reasons for the deficiencies in journalistic coverage and flow. In this article, we identify three: a) changes in the electoral rules of local organizations, b) the permanent crisis experienced by the local media, and c) commercial logic. First, the changes in the electoral organization favoring the "concurrence" of different elections created a problem that legislators did not foresee. When municipal elections are paired with local and national legislative elections, and even with the gubernatorial election, the result is that the media and journalists see an exponential increase in the number of races and candidates they have to follow. In the Mexican case, this concentration of elections has led to saving money in organizing the elections but has triggered a critical problem in their journalistic follow-up.

The electoral competition brought a tremendous professional challenge for the media and journalists. This challenge has been difficult due to a highly centralized media system in a permanent economic crisis. On the one hand, many radio and television stations operating in Jalisco are national and repeat what is produced in the country's capital. On the other hand, the local stations mainly operate in the A Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara MG. This means there are enough media outlets to report what happens in the Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara, but they are insufficient to produce information about the rest of the state territory. Added to this are the constant layoffs of journalists that have led to fewer reporters in the newsrooms.

The third reason is due to the commercial logic of the media, which conflicts with the ideals of democracy. On the one hand, democracy implies the coverage and dissemination of information on all candidates, parties, and proposals of the contenders in dispute. On the other hand, the logic of journalistic coverage implies the selection of that which could have greater news value or more journalistic relevance (e.g., candidates with greater possibilities of winning), as well as that which guarantees the interest of audiences and readers in order to achieve sufficient advertising investment. These two logics point in different directions, and even having a media system that could attend to and report what is happening in the whole territory, there would be a commercial interest in presenting only that which generates more significant income. It is also necessary to consider that the media have limited resources in two ways. There is only a certain number of pages or minutes to present the information, and there is only a certain number of reporters to cover all the issues where elections are one among others. In the last two decades, there has been a considerable decrease in the number of people working in the newsrooms of the media, and this, as we have already said, responds to the changes in the business model due to the transformation of the consumption practices of the audiences and more recently, the worsening of this difficulty due to the pandemic.

In the face of these difficulties, creative actions are needed to help resolve the contradictions. A first step could be to critically rethink the economic, political, and communicational impacts of the concurrence that, to reduce costs, was established in the 2014 reform. In communicational terms, concurrence in elections implies that an ordinary citizen receives information from the media or seeks information on many candidates by other means. This task would be challenging to accomplish and require a high commitment on the part of individuals, in addition to access to other sources of information. Elections on separate dates and years allow the media to provide more complete coverage. They would better contribute to citizens' political knowledge, not only in terms of the parties, candidates, and proposals but also about the type of positions in dispute and the functions and attributions of each separately.

Another task that should be addressed is the revision of the criteria for the creation of political parties. One of the difficulties observed is that, with the current requirements, many parties are created whose interests are not necessarily to benefit, from an explicit political stance, the communities they should serve. It is highly complex for the media to expose information on candidates from various parties that differ little from each other regarding programmatic proposals. There has been experience in Mexico for years of parties constituted to obtain resources and whose representativeness is marginal. Without reaching the absurdity of having only two political parties, as in the United States, more demanding criteria should be established in Mexico so that the new parties represent a significant group of citizens with precise purposes and proposals that differentiate them from the existing ones. Additionally, the media would have to work more on disseminating information about such parties' political platforms and focus less on individual figures.

In another vein, one way to contribute to resolving this political- communication problem is to strengthen the public media system. Jalisco has two public media systems. The Sistema Jalisciense de Radio y Televisión has operated in the state since 1991. This system has two television channels and five radio stations. On the other hand, the University of Guadalajara's University Radio and Television System has three television channels and nine radio stations. This infrastructure could be put at the service of citizens and respond to their information needs during electoral periods. With the necessary financial support, Jalisco's public media could expand its television and radio stations network to expand geographic coverage. Additionally, it would be necessary to work on the refined design of a coverage of the electoral processes that would allow the exposure of the proposals of all political parties and their candidates.

Another way to provide solutions to the epistemic problem is by creating and strengthening local media. It is costly for national or state media to generate information from localities far from urban centers. One possibility to overcome this problem is the creation of local media that can produce information about their immediate environment. This would allow for sufficient and quality information in all those municipalities where, in 2021, there was simply no news coverage. These initiatives would have to be funded with a mix of public and private resources through experiences such as community radio and television stations or municipal print media funded with public resources, taking care of their editorial autonomy.

Finally, another possible solution is the creation of collaboration strategies among the different media for electoral coverage. The media could enter into journalistic and commercial alliances that would allow them to develop a broader coverage. For example, a newspaper in the state capital could partner with media outlets in municipalities far from Guadalajara to provide information from those regions it cannot reach. Alternatively, media with different audiences could divide the work of gathering information, sharing it among themselves, and then processing it to present it according to the tastes of each of their audiences. Here, the general idea is to think of a much more rational division of the work of epistemic-journalistic production.

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