Analysis of the Second Presidential Debate in Ecuador 2021: Lasso vs Arauz

Nina Lulushca Aguiar Mariño[✉], Camila Coral García,
and Roberto Sánchez-Montoya

Universidad Politécnica Salesianon, Quito, Ecuador
naguiar@ups.edu.ec

Abstract. The presidential debate held during the second ballot between Guillermo Lasso and Andrés Arauz was a defining moment for the 2021 elections. Featured on national television, the debate resulted only in discussions between the candidates. It was structured in 5 main topics present in a synthesized way, the main proposals of both candidates. The Organic Law on Elections and Political Organizations of the Republic of Ecuador, Code of Democracy, on its article 202, number 2, determines that: "Electoral debates are the different forms of public discussion in which the candidates contrast their government programs and programmatic proposals, submitting to the questioning of their rivals, moderators and citizens, through the media and the public (…)"; likewise, it is stated that the National Electoral Board "(…) will hold a mandatory debate in the first and second ballots (…)" in the Presidential elections [1]. In this sense, the presidential candidates participated in at least two mandatory public debates, during the first and second ballots, in order to publicize their proposals and work plans. This work analyzes, from the communicational point of view, that the candidates could favor or harm their image at the time of making the decision both in the narrative development and in the handling of their audiovisual planning during the televised broadcast.

Keywords: Presidential elections · Ecuador · electoral debate · Guillermo Lasso · Andrés Arauz

1 Introduction to Electoral Debates in Latin America

Most Latin American countries adopted democracy as a political system since the 1980s [2]. Progressively, the electoral bodies included the presidential debates as mandatory for the electoral campaigns [3]. In Ecuador, democracy and an electoral system returned when Jaime Roldós was elected in 1979, therefore, it was necessary to establish citizen participation processes, generating spaces for opinion and conversation [4]. Ever since, presidential debates were not mandatory instrument of communication and dissemination, but it became mandatory for the elections of 2021 [5].

This technique has been replicated on a regular basis in Latin American following the example of the United States, since the debate between Richard Nixon and John F.

Kennedy in 1960 [6], especially in recent decades [7]. For Gallego, public communication through debates is essential for developing and strengthening democracy, since it promotes constant interaction between information, politics, and public opinion [8].

Presidential debates are pivotal in this process, as they persuade voters in their choice. In this way, debates can be critical for voters to switch from one vote to another on Election Day. Anstead argues that the model of debate adopted by a country can evolve and transform to adapt to the context in which it will be used [9]. For example, the debate model in the United States has evolved over time. This idea is related to the theory of evolution, which suggests that specimens with similar characteristics may be affected when exposed to different environments, known as allopathic speciation. In the context of presidential debates, the media must consider the evolution of political parties and government systems to remain relevant [9].

Once televised, the presidential debates have become processes of political marketing. Television has acquired great power in the transmission of presidential debates and political parties are aware of this importance. [10].

The media can create a subjective reality to persuade the citizenry and orient the elections towards strategic objectives that align with the preferences of the candidates. Therefore, the campaign's coverage by journalists is often used to spread propaganda, making it a strategic tool. [11] In this sense, televised debates are not only a tool for electing the president, but also a sample of the evolution of political communication and the role of the media in the construction of the public image of the candidates.

1.1   Social Networks and Latin American Politics

Globalization and technological advances have brought about significant changes in electoral processes and presidential debates. Social networks, news websites, and digital media have broadened the reach of political communication, allowing greater interaction and citizen participation. 'Media convergence brings together traditional media such as television and social media. Phenomena such as the 'dual screen' are perfect examples of the use of social networks to improve the audiences of television content' [12].

The inclusion of digital tools has allowed real-time interaction, enriching the debate and allowing greater feedback between candidates and citizens.

However, there is still a widespread perception that the quality of the discussions, the arguments used and the overall content of the debates in the traditional media and social networks are not of high quality. Therefore, the fact that these media have been considered by citizens as more inclusive spaces does not imply that this is thought as an argumentative contribution [13, 14].

Despite technological advances and the expansion of political communication, there are still challenges and limitations in the organization and conduction of presidential debates. The influence of the media in the construction of the image of candidates is still controversial, and the regulation of political advertising and the financing of political campaigns are issues that require further attention and discussion.

There is a serious problem in countries like Ecuador related to the ideological polarization of political candidates and the influence of their personal interests in televised debates, which can lead to division and a biased analysis of candidates and their work

proposals by citizens. "Ideologies are no longer exclusive to political science, but are now debated in politics, even if in a distorted way" [15].

Communicative intention can influence the configuration of discursive spaces. The choice of the type of speech act determines the intentional strategy of the discourse. [16]. The discursive strategy of politicians implies a new way of generating speeches for voters, being even more emotional and with the presence of political-ideological intentions.

The illocutionary types participate, (…) ethos, pathos and logos. Although the three levels must be understood as interdependent and must show balance in the discourse (Aristotle). It is well known that the public discourse of the last decades (not only the political) has evolved, breaking that balance and opting for the emotional, personalistic and narrative aspects of this triad. In Charaudeau's words, political discourse offers "a persuasive staging in which, with imaginaries of truth in the background, ethos and pathos obtain the best part, leaving logos the worst parts [17].

Gallardo provides an integrative panorama of some of the relevant socio-communicative phenomena for analyzing public and political discourse. This approach is based on six socio-discursive phenomena, three of which were proposed by Fairclough as outstanding features of the discourse of the 21st century [18]. These include the personalism of politicians, the spectacularization of politics by the media, the ideologization of citizenship, the democratization of discourse, the technological and commodification of discourse. These technological and communicative factors have changed the traditional norms that regulate the relationship between journalists, politicians and citizens, and have influenced the way in which presidential debates are conducted. Strong political education is essential to enable a fair and impartial assessment of the applicants and their proposals.

2   Methodology

The objective of this research is to analyze the quality of information provided to citizens about the government plans proposed by each candidate, or to see if it was mediated by ideological and personal issues. To this end, a thorough analysis of the content and responses of each candidate was carried out during the debate, evaluating if the main problems of the country were adequately addressed as well as their concrete proposals.

The typical aspects that were raised to analyze the content of the presidential debate in the second ballot of elections in the televised media of Ecuador include: the number of candidates who participated, the format of the debate, the rules and the distribution of time to ask questions by the moderator and between the candidates, the thematic axes, the questions and answers of the candidates and the type of answers. The research question that guided the analysis is: How was the mandatory presidential debate between the candidates Andrés Arauz and Guillermo Lasso developed in the second ballot in terms of its structure and communication content? The research hypothesis suggests that although the communicative process in the presidential debate can influence the decision-making of voters, the lack of an adequate model of information distribution can limit its impact and influence. In this case, the debate focused more on personal, emotional and ideological aspects, reducing its relevance in terms of political communication and its impact on society.

The analysis was carried out following these steps: first, the content analysis technique with matrices[1] was used to examine the debate between the candidates for the presidency of Ecuador. The debate is divided into five sections, each focusing on a specific thematic axis. First axis: Economy and employment; Second axis: Health, vaccination, social security and child nutrition; Third axis: Democracy and State institutions, independence of powers, citizen participation and transparency; Fourth axis: Education, human development and technology; Fifth axis: International relations, human mobility and sustainable development.

Each segment was developed with the following times: 1 min 30 s for Candidate A, 30 s for Candidate B, 1 min for Candidate B's questioning and 30 s for Candidate A's counterpart. In addition, three other blocks were reviewed in matrix: an initial block (greeting) with 30 s for Candidate A and 30 s for Candidate B; Block 6 with question formulation, with a time of 1 min 30 s for Candidate A, 30 s for Candidate B and 30 s for Candidate A's counterpart; Block 7 with an emotional question, with a time of 1 min 30 s for Candidate A, 1 min 30 s for Candidate B; and finally, Block 8 with a final message, with a time of 1 min for Candidate A and 1 min for Candidate B. The main objective of this first procedure using a matrix technique was to identify the structure and format of the debate. As a second procedure, the content of the debate was analyzed. The selection of the information included in the analysis matrix was based on current issues and problems that are relevant to citizens and were repeatedly mentioned by the candidates. For this, information was collected from the whole debate and divided according to the five axes and to the questions raised.

As a third procedure, the content of the matrices was examined using the Voyant Tools program, which is an open-source online application designed to help users analyze digital texts through data visualization [20].

The corpus of the presidential debate of the second ballot in Ecuador was uploaded, and the information was reviewed through the multiple analytical tools of Voyant Tools to determine and verify the content of the matrices, as well as to extract a coherent and clean set of keywords that helped during the analysis. The results generated by this method provided a deeper understanding of Ecuador's second-round presidential debate.

3   Results

Presidential candidates Arauz and Lasso made it to Ecuador's second round of elections and attended the country's second nationally broadcast mandatory presidential debate in the televised media. The results of the elections favored the current ruler and president of the Republic, Guillermo Lasso, who obtained 4′656.426 votes, beating the candidate of the Alliance Union for Hope (UNES - Alianza Unión por la Esperanza), Andrés Arauz with 4'236.515 votes. [21].

---

[1] The results obtained in this study are based on the use of a systematization matrix applied in the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections by the Research Center of the University of the Pacific (CIUP) and the School of Government and Public Policy of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (EGPP-PUCP) [19]. On this occasion, the matrix has been adapted according to the thematic axes addressed in the Second Debate Ecuador 2021, as well as the estimated times and the organization of compliance with the rules established by the National Committee of Debates 2021.

The analysis of the interventions of Guillermo Lasso (CREO) and Andrés Arauz (UNES) shows that both candidates share established cognitive frameworks. At this stage, it has been verified that each framework corresponds to appropriate categories related to the most important issues addressed in the debate. After an open count of the second presidential debate in Ecuador 2021, several descriptive categories can be identified, which summarize the issues addressed by the candidates. To carry out this analysis, the speeches of the candidates were collected, and the descriptive categories used were examined. Once identified these categories, an analysis was carried out to determine which were the most recurrent themes. To present the analysis, a first figure is made to show the frequency and distribution of the descriptive categories used by the candidates (Fig 1).

Frequency refers to the number of times a category is mentioned in a time period. On the other hand, "trends" refer to patterns or changes in the frequency of categories during the debate. It is possible to observe an increase or decrease in the number of categories or terms mentioned. If there is a sustained increase in the frequency of a term during the debate, it can be said that there is an upward trend of certain categories or terms.

Based on the results of open coding, the possible relationships between the identified descriptive categories were explored. Inductive codes related to each descriptive category were found, for example: Education: equal opportunities in education. Rights: human and gender. Health: Covid-19 pandemic, vaccine distribution. Labor: policies to create jobs and revive the economy. Economy: economic policies for the revival of the country. Politics: institutionality, tax reform, judicial reform and fight against corruption.

Various relationships and connections can be established between the descriptive categories identified in the text. For this purpose, the context of the text has been summarized to facilitate the establishment of links.

In addition, an analysis of the descriptive categories and pragmatic mechanisms used by politicians Guillermo Lasso and Andrés Arauz to persuade the electorate in relation to
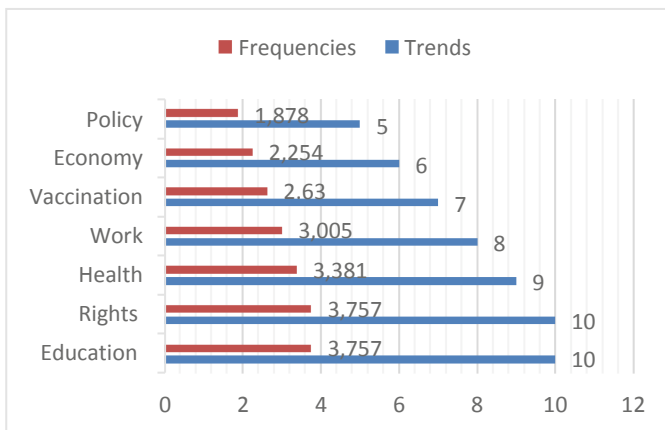

Fig. 1. Analysis of the descriptive categories used by the candidates to summarize their topics addressed . Source: Ecuador Presidential Debate, (2021) / Own elaboration

the other candidate has been carried out. These pragmatic mechanisms refer to linguistic tools (descriptive categories) that go beyond the literal meaning of words and are used by speakers to convey additional meanings (Fig 2).

Guillermo Lasso used pragmatic mechanisms to reinforce a negative image of his opponent Andrés Arauz, using linguistic resources that appealed to the emotion of the audience. During the debate, Lasso used the slogan "Andrés, no mientras otra vez" (Andres, don´t like again) as an effective communication strategy that remained on the unconscious of voters and was trendy on social networks.

From the results obtained, it is possible to explore the possible relationships between the identified descriptive categories and the pragmatic tools used by Lasso. Inductive codes relating each descriptive category with these mechanisms were found, suggesting that their communication strategy was focused on generating a negative image of their opponent and promoting feelings of fear in the audience through the construction of imaginaries.

Discursive links:

– *Correa-Arauz-adversary*

Regarding the link between his opponent and former President Rafael Correa, Guillermo Lasso repeatedly recalled the corruption that existed during his mandate, as well as the indirect prohibition of freedom of expression and press in the country.

– *Venezuela - Maduro-Arauz*

Nicolás Maduro is the president of Venezuela, and his government has come under fire in Ecuadorian politics. Lasso compared Arauz to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, pointing out similarities in his ideologies and political practices. This strategy was used by Lasso to question Arauz's ability to lead the country and build trust among voters.
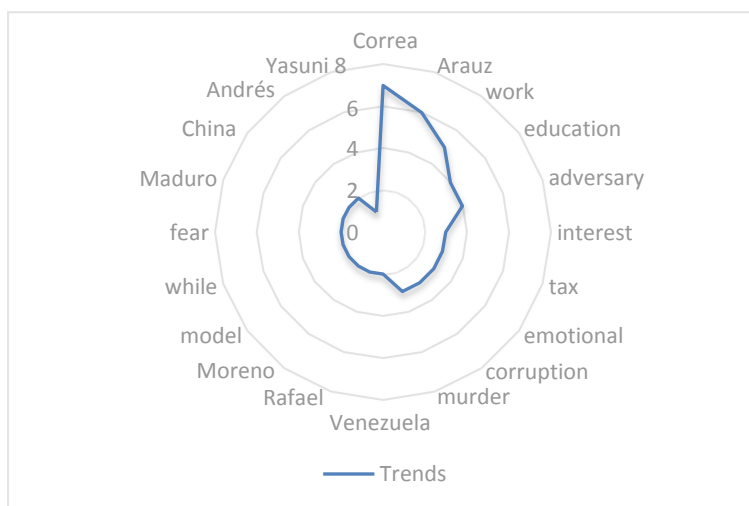

Fig. 2. Descriptive categories of pragmatic mechanisms used by Guillermo Lasso. Source: Ecuador Debate Presidencial, (2021) / Own elaboration.

– *Moreno- Rafael -Arauz*

Lenín Moreno succeeded Rafael Correa as president of Ecuador and his government was also mentioned in the electoral debate. According to Lasso, more than 70% of officials who worked in Correa's government continued to serve during the Moreno administration.

Importantly, Correa supported Moreno's candidacy and is currently backing Arauz's candidacy.

During the debate, candidate Guillermo Lasso aimed to attract the attention of voters who were undecided, who had decided not to vote or who opposed Correa's government and its continuation with Andrés Arauz, establishing an emotional connection with them. In addition, Lasso mentioned corruption and the lack of democracy and press freedom under the previous government to argue against the opposing candidate. On the other hand, the candidate mentioned his experience in the banking sector to build trust among those voters who value economic and financial stability.

Meanwhile, Arauz defended his relationship with Correa's government and denied any links with authoritarian regimes like Venezuela's (Fig 3).

As for the differentiation strategies, a contrast can be observed between both candidates. Guillermo Lasso used a more emotional approach to get the electorate's attention, while Andrés Arauz used a more cognitive approach, highlighting the specific proposals in his government plan in areas such as technology and education. These elements pointed towards a transformation in the country and sought to attract voters who wanted concrete solutions.

As was done with the categories to analyze candidate Guillermo Lasso, the results obtained through the relationship of the identified descriptive categories and the pragmatic mechanisms used by Andrés Arauz to generate discursive links are analyzed.

Fig. 3. Descriptive categories of pragmatic mechanisms used by Andrés Arauz. . Source: Ecuador Debate Presidencial, (2021) / Own elaboration

Unlike Lasso, there were inductive codes that suggest that Arauz's communication strategy focused on generating an image of a country in transformation rather than directly on its adversary, reducing any sense of fear in the audience.

However, the emotional relationships produced by Arauz against Lasso related to the "feriado bancario" do not seem to have caused much impact due to the indirect focus of these statements and the emphasis on science and technology.

Discursive Links

– *Technology-Education-University- Senecyt-Development*

In terms of education, human development and technology, Andrés Arauz proposed to reinvigorate the Millennium Educational Units, which were the banner of educational reform during President Correa's administration, as well as to maintain the current model for university admission through an evaluation. He also said the goal will be to strengthen education in three languages of the future: music, art, English and computer programming. As for SENECYT, he said, it is responsible for the management and administration of the higher technological institutes, and support will be provided for the fulfillment of this task. It is also proposed to restructure the university entrance exam, increase the budget for funding scholarships at universities both in Ecuador and abroad, and encourage investment in science, technology and innovation.

– *Rights-Labor-Vaccines-Health-Justice-Safety-Prevention*

Andrés Arauz proposes the defense of the rights of migrants, the recovery of dignity through security and a health system for all, and the prevention of child malnutrition in Ecuador. He also focuses on strengthening the Social Security System and balancing the sanctioning powers of the Council of the Judiciary. He seeks the independence of the judiciary and the prosecutor's office and highlights the importance of transparency of information and the application of open data.

– *Moreno-Dollarization-Bankers-Lasso*

Arauz also mentioned that Lenin Moreno was elected in the last elections, but that his government was co-opted by the bankers, leading to a de-institutionalization of the country. He also denounced the fraudulent elections that, in his opinion, caused great damage to the nation, and stressed the need to stop being governed by bank interests. Finally, regarding the pandemic, Arauz noted that $2 billion was allocated to pay banks in Switzerland and the United States, with the aim of satisfying bankers.

4   Discussion

In presidential debates in Ecuador, it is essential that candidates present their proposals clearly and objectively, without resorting to personal or emotional attacks. The goal is to reach consensus and avoid polarization and violence among citizens who support different candidates. It is important that debates are organized fairly for all candidates, so that citizens can know the proposals of all candidates and make an informed choice in the elections.

Presidential debates in Ecuador should be a space for constructive dialogue. While it is common for candidates to express their ideological positions during debates, it is

important to keep in mind that personal attacks and offenses against other candidates can create an environment of polarization and violence.

Polarization can have serious consequences for the country's democracy and stability, so it is essential to foster a constructive and respectful debate that promotes the exchange of ideas, without confrontation, between candidates and their supporters.

5   Conclusions

On March 21, 2021, the second round of the presidential elections in Ecuador occurred. The central themes were the defense of dollarization, the vaccination plan, the independence of state functions, the reduction of the state, education, and access to universities. The economic and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was an important topic [22].

Guillermo Lasso focused his strategy on economic revival and his vaccination plan, while Andrés Arauz highlighted specific proposals in areas such as technology and education. Both candidates used pragmatic mechanisms to persuade voters, with a more emotional approach on Lasso and a more cognitive approach on Arauz.

In conclusion, although there were differences when using the information and in the pragmatic mechanisms used by both candidates. It cannot be said that the debate fulfilled its task of informing citizens about their work plans. Instead, ideological and personal stances guided the debate, and it turned more emotional at the end.

References

1. Asamblea Nacional. Ley Orgánica Electoral Código de la Democracia. (3 de febrero de 2020). Obtenido de https://www.igualdadgenero.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Ley-Org%C3%A1nica-Electoral-C%C3%B3digo-de-la-Democracia.pdf
2. O'donnell, Guillermo. "Transiciones, continuidades y algunas paradojas." *Cuadernos políticos* 56.1. (1989).
3. Giordano, Verónica. "Derechas, comunicación política y debates presidenciales televisados en América Latina en el ascenso del neoliberalismo." *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación. Ensayos* 112 (2022).
4. Adúriz, Isidro, and Pablo Ava. "Construcción de ciudadanía: experiencia de implementación de un índice de participación ciudadana en América Latina." *América Latina Hoy* 42 (2006).
5. Barredo, Daniel, Daniel Javier de la Garza Montemayor, and Juan Pablo Trámpuz. "Un análisis comparativo en la construcción y gestión de debates electorales televisados en Colombia, México y Ecuador." *Debates electorales en televisión y redes sociales en España.* Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones, (2021)
6. Ortega-Gunckel, C; Proust, V. Porath, W. Characterization of the journalistic exercise in Chilean presidential debates: A comparison between women and men in their role as interviewers. Revista de ComunicacionOpen AccessVolume 20, Issue 1, Pages 153 – 174. March (2021).
7. Daviu, S. Los partidos políticos a la conquista del espacio mediático: del mítin al plató de televisión. (2020). Obtenido de https://eprints.ucm.es/id/eprint/64220/1/T42115.pdf
8. Gallego, M. El regreso del cara a cara en España: la organización profesional de los debates electorales televisados entre candidatos a la presidencia del gobierno en 2008. (2017).

9. Anstead, N. A different beast? Televised election debates in parliamentary democracies. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 508–526. (2016).
10. Quintas, N., & Quintas, E. Cara a cara electoral televisado: análisis audiovisual de los debates presidenciales. MHCJ, 20–39. (2010).
11. Gerstlé, J. La comunicación política. Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones. (2005).
12. Arce-García, S., Vila, F. & FondevilaGascón, J.-F. Analysis of the Twitter discourse in the 2019 electoral debates in Spain: a comparative algorithmic study. Communication & Society, 35(1), 45-61. (2022).
13. Rodríguez Hidalgo, Claudia, Javier Herrero, and Ignacio Aguaded Gómez. "Journalistic verification against lies in the electoral processes of Ecuador and Spain." *Universitas-XXI* 34 (2021).
14. Sánchez-Montoya, Roberto, and Narcisa Jessenia Medranda Morales. "Medios de Comunicación durante la Elección Presidencial 2021 en Ecuador." *Emociones, Política y Comunicación en Ecuador*. 2022.
15. Ribeiro, Centeno. A. Presidential candidates in the ideological debate: content analysis of economic programs in 2018's elections. Opiniao Publica.Volume 27, Issue 3. (2021).
16. Gallardo Paúls, Beatriz. Usos políticos del lenguaje. Barcelona: Anthropos, 2014.
17. Gallardo, Paúls. B. Convencer mirando a cámara: el minute de oro de los debates electorales como refugio de condensación retórica. RILCE 37.2 (2021): 590–620
18. Gallardo Paúls, B. Tiempos de hipérbole. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, (2018).
19. CIES Perú. Guía para Estructurar los debates presidenciales. Plataformas Electorale: Fortaleciendo las capacidades para incidir en el ciclo electoral, 1–3. (2016).
20. Nahotko, Marek; Zych, Magdalena; Januszko-Szakiel, Aneta, Jaskowska, Małgorzata. (2023) Big data-driven investigation into the maturity of library research data services (RDS). The Journal of Academic Librarianship 49:1, pages 102646. Crossref
21. Garzón, K. Serie Análisis de Elecciones 2021. (marzo de 2021). Obtenido de https://reform aspoliticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Analisis-sobre-Elecciones- Generales-Ecuador-2021-version-2.-2.pdf
22. El Comercio. Debate Presidencial: Andrés Arauz y Guillermo Lasso se confrontaron en cadena nacional este 21 de marzo. (21 de marzo de 2021). Obtenido de https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/debate-andres-arauz-guillermo-lasso.html