



Data journalism in the contemporary political sphere between 2015 and 2025: scoping review

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Abstract. Data journalism has emerged as a specialisation associated with strong democratic potential. Newsrooms increasingly rely on data visualisation to show social and political trends, drawing on public information from state institutions and private companies. This process has been accelerated worldwide by information and communication technologies. This article presents a scoping review of the relationship between data journalism and politics over the past decade. Using the SALSA methodology (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis), it maps 101 academic sources to examine how data journalism contributes to political communication, transparency and democratic accountability. The analysis delineates seven research fronts: democracy; disinformation and social media; visualisation and political race; investigative and collaborative journalism; automation and objectivity; open data and literacy; and studies from the MENA region. The concept of democracy emerges as the central axis, with data journalism being positioned as both a methodological innovation and a democratic watchdog. The findings reveal geographical asymmetries, with Western scholarship prevailing while research from Asia, Africa and Latin America remains limited. The study also highlights the ethical tensions between algorithmic dependence, political influence and objectivity. Data journalism functions as a technological and political praxis, engendering transparency, civic engagement and democratic renewal.

Keywords. Disinformation, Data journalism, politics, media system, precision journalism

ES El periodismo de datos en la esfera política contemporánea entre 2015 y 2025: scoping review

Resumen. El periodismo de datos se ha consolidado como una especialización asociada a un fuerte potencial democrático. Las redacciones recurren cada vez más a la visualización de datos para mostrar tendencias sociales y políticas, apoyándose en información pública procedente de instituciones estatales y empresas privadas. Este proceso se ha visto acelerado en todo el mundo por las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación. Este artículo presenta una revisión exploratoria sobre la relación entre el periodismo de datos y la política durante la última década. Mediante la metodología SALSA (búsqueda, evaluación, síntesis y análisis), analiza 101 fuentes académicas para examinar cómo el periodismo de datos contribuye a la comunicación política, la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas democrática. El análisis delinea siete frentes de investigación: democracia; desinformación y redes sociales; visualización y carrera política; periodismo de investigación y colaborativo; automatización y objetividad; datos abiertos y alfabetización; y estudios de la región MENA. La democracia es un eje central, posicionando el periodismo de datos como su guardián con una pujante innovación tecnológica. Los resultados revelan asimetrías geográficas al predominar estudios occidentales, mientras que los procedentes de Asia, África y América Latina siguen siendo limitadas. El estudio también destaca las tensiones éticas entre la dependencia algorítmica, la influencia política y la objetividad. El periodismo de datos funciona como una praxis tecnológica y política, que genera transparencia, compromiso cívico y renovación democrática.

Palabras clave. Desinformación, periodismo de datos, política, sistema mediático, periodismo de precisión

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1. Introduction

The contemporary era is marked by the datafication of social life, which has transformed journalistic practices and given rise to data journalism as a key specialisation within the digital information ecosystem. This field combines technological tools, statistical analysis, and journalistic ethics to produce verifiable narratives from complex datasets, positioning it as “one of the most successful variants of digital journalism today” (Salaverría *et al.*, 2019, p. 3). The computational turn in journalism (Parks, 2020) has reshaped media systems (Treadwell, 2016), whose characteristics are tied to national political and cultural contexts (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, the credibility of news media faces threats from disinformation (Rid, 2021; Dice, 2017), audience fragmentation, and news deserts (Abernathy, 2016), as well as political capture at the local level (Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2025).

In this environment, data journalism becomes a means to uphold democratic values. Schudson (2011, p. 34) reminds us that the press is “the bastion of free expression in a democracy”. Data journalism thus contributes to regenerating the democratic public sphere (Wu, 2025) as in the case of general elections (La-Rosa & Sandoval-Martín, 2016). The public sphere itself, once defined by Habermas (1974, 1991) as the realm of collective discourse, has evolved with the rise of alternative media that foster greater participation (Makagon, 2000) and a digital, decentralised and interactive environment (Castells, 2009; McNair, 2018). Civic participation now spans traditional and social media (Nah & Chung, 2020), drawing on social capital (Hess & Waller, 2017) and extending to hyperlocal contexts (Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2024).

Within this plural landscape, journalists require specialised skills (Wihbey, 2017) to interpret and visualise data for public deliberation, translating complex phenomena into comprehensible narratives (Cairo, 2011; Spiegelhalter, 2019). Data journalism plays a particularly critical role in politics (Wu, 2025) and has also been used in Spain to improve transparency in the press (Teruel-Rodríguez & Blanco-Castilla, 2016), where it enables scrutiny of institutions and decision-making. The concept of democracy being rooted at the local level (Hess & Waller, 2017) is evidenced by the emergence of collaborative news models, a notable example of which is the BBC Local Democracy Reporting project (Hess & Ross, 2022). In the Spanish-speaking countries, there are relevant initiatives to adopt the global standardisation of data outlined in the Open Data Charter. Colombia and Ecuador have taken this initiative (Guaycha & Ordóñez, 2020). The latter is defined as “a collaborative process between governments and non-governmental organisations to open data” (Guaycha & Ordóñez, 2020, p. 305). Another noteworthy exemplar is *La Nación*, a newspaper in Argentina which has been a pioneering proponent of user-generated content within the Hispanic media landscape (Palomo *et al.*, 2019) and automated newsroom initiatives during COVID-19 (Montaña-Niño & Burgess, 2024), illustrate adaptive responses to the crisis in local journalism.

In more restrictive contexts, collaboration also serves as a form of resistance (Lipman, 2021), using

digital and data-driven methods to promote civic engagement (Adjin-Tettey & Etrud, 2025). For example, Factual in Mexico runs a programme called “Data Talents”, which teaches young Latin American journalists how to use data to create news reports. Sembramedia granted ValparaData in Chile an initial fund through the Google News Initiative to create an open-data investigative media on local issues. In Spain, Civio and OpenKratio are fighting against the lack of transparency in public administrations. These organisations support the use of data journalism to make things clearer and address issues like human rights (Kohli, 2018). Ultimately, the convergence of data journalism and politics signifies both a technological and democratic transformation, expanding oversight, participation, and the construction of the public sphere.

The digital public sphere has been colonised by algorithmic logic, where information noise, virality and polarisation hinder rational deliberation (Aparici & Alvarez-Rufs, 2023). The propagation of misinformation on social media has once again become a prominent issue, which has been termed an “infodemic” (Guan & Wang, 2024) also with the use of AI (Mayoral-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023). Concurrently, technical reports, including those from the Reuters Institute, suggest that content in the digital domain can be influenced by the prevalence and existence of echo chambers through passive tracking data (Arguedas *et al.*, 2022, p. 13). The deployment of screen technologies driven by generative AI poses a significant challenge, because it “has become increasingly integrated into the public sphere” (García-Orosa *et al.*, 2026, p. 2). In this scenario, data journalism functions as a form of informational counterattack (Herrero-de-la-Fuente *et al.*, 2022) that, through verifiable narratives, can discredit manipulation campaigns that might shape the public sphere (Lanuza & Ong, 2024). This phenomenon has emerged because of the crises of democracy in the West (Rid, 2021).

2. State of the art

2.1. Data journalism

The concept of data journalism can be traced back to the tradition of precision journalism, which was defined by Meyer (2002) as the integration of social research methodologies within newsrooms. In the contemporary era, this practice has evolved into a specialised field that combines skills in statistics, coding and visualisation design to tell complex stories based on large volumes of data (Richards, 2023) including last-minute TV bulletins (Lim, 2018) and digital media (Rubio-Jordán, 2021). The value of data journalism lies not only in its technical capacity, but also in its normative potential: transparency in the process of data collection and analysis, as well as the traceability of the information product, are central elements of its professional ethos (Coddington, 2015).

Journalists across the globe are compelled to function within a collaborative milieu, thereby empowering them to report on information that has historically been obscured within intricate datasets. The ability to present data in a comprehensible manner to the typical reader within the context of teamwork flows is a key capability (Wu, 2025), such as in the case of entertainment topics as sports (Al-

caraz-Martínez *et al.*, 2025). This development signifies the fruition of the aspiration articulated by a “growing subset of journalism practitioners, researchers, and funders” who have adopted the principle that journalism must evolve to become more collaborative (Mesquita, 2023; Nelson, 2021). Due to its performance, in the actual digital era, data journalism skills are increasingly being taught in journalism degrees around the world (Hannaford, 2023).

Technological developments have precipitated profound transformations in cultural, social and political structures. This enabling ecosystem has enhanced profiles with programmers and visualisers (Dowling & Vogan, 2015) and data scientists, including at the local level (Stalph *et al.*, 2022), this has culminated in the production of reports that wield significant social and political influence with the advent of interdisciplinary teams has facilitated the integration of diverse domains, as evidenced by the union of cartography with information (Hulstein *et al.*, 2023) and the convergence of computer science with journalism on the subject of collaborative cultures with transnational focus (Dodds *et al.*, 2024).

Interactive visualisations and accessible narrative design have been identified as pivotal components in the process of translating technical information into public understanding. This empathetic dimension of journalism necessitates an examination of the digital literacy competencies of its audience (Reilley & Sunne, 2022), thereby presenting challenges to both professional training and data pedagogy. In the context of movements for government openness and the philosophy of open source, this ethical dimension is linked to values such as participation, collaboration and reuse, which are characteristic of open-source culture (Lewis & Usher, 2013; Porlezza & Splendore, 2019) and have strongly influenced the methods and values of contemporary digital transformation of journalism.

For example, global scale events marked pivotal moments in the growth of data journalism such as 2010 Wikileaks disclosure (Sandoval-Martín & La-Rosa, 2018) or Panama Papers (Arroyave & Garcés-Pretel., 2023) fostering collaborative journalism and emphasising the capacity of open data to unveil opaque power structures and governmental practices (Wu, 2022). In a similar vein, the increasing accessibility of government datasets, the emergence of open data portals, and the advancement of collaborative libraries for the extraction and processing of information (Reilley & Sunne, 2022) have enabled access to data that was formerly restricted.

Data journalism has been successful in positioning itself as an effective tool for combatting misinformation (Rogers, 2021) and to monitoring power and denouncing structural injustices in a variety of contexts. In Latin America, for instance, networks such as Red PALTA have demonstrated how open data can be used to highlight local issues that, thanks to collaborative journalism, gain international resonance (Colman & Villatoro, 2021) with huge conglomerates as *La Nación* in Argentina and Brazil's alternative media demonstrates that this specialisation is not confined to large newsrooms, but can also be practised by small teams (De-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2021). However, as Araya and Elórtogui-Gómez (2020) contend, there is still some way to go in Chile's

case, as it is not common practice due to the weak presence of journalistic oversight. Even within a single nation such as Italy in the Global North, there exists a heterogeneity of realities. In some regions, there are newsrooms in areas where open data is readily available, such as small news agencies. In contrast, in other regions, accessibility to such data is less straightforward, as observed in the case of established newsrooms (Porlezza & Splendore, 2019) while in Germany, data journalism is a specialisation that has become pivotal in local news niches and has succeeded in bringing authorities under public scrutiny (Stalph *et al.*, 2022). In other regions of the world, such as Asia, there has been a notable increase in the practice of data journalism in the context of authoritarian regimes (Wu, 2024, 2025).

The digital environment has facilitated the emergence of collaborative initiatives between media outlets, independent journalists, developers, and civil society organisations. These networks have been instrumental in overcoming structural barriers such as censorship, lack of resources, or institutional limitations, especially in contexts with limited press freedom (Mesquita, 2023). As Ar noted, the application of data journalism appears to be in accordance “with the increasingly intensive use of data by various companies and institutions (...) in politics” (2024, p. 75).

2.2. Political sphere and media

As Arendt (1990) established, politics is the sphere in which human plurality becomes visible and operational, where in this scenario there is a dialog between different ideas. This concept refers to a space where diverse individuals, each with unique experiences, perspectives and opinions, exchange discourses, converge to engage in deliberation and collective action for a shared global environment. As Arendt (1990, p. 80) asserts, “the assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man.” Consequently, the concept of mutual recognition and the ability to act together without negating differences are a perspective that links freedom “in terms of participation and common action” (Cooper, 1976, p. 147).

Politics, in its fundamental essence, can be assumed as the administration of public power. In this sense, it is vital that this issue is addressed through rigorous journalistic scrutiny, in order to ensure the continued health of democracy. Yates (2016) argues that public managers need to be political, due to network governance, non-government actors more prominent in policy-making and service-delivery and to interact with them as stakeholders and partners. For instance, these several factors have increased the importance of political activities for public managers.

This ideal, as it pertains to media systems, has yet to be realised. The political regime of a nation exerts a direct influence on the form that journalism can assume by particular set of ideas and practices (Hanitzsch, 2007), so “the link between political system and journalism cultures cannot be overstated” (Wu, 2025, p. 1485). In liberal democracies where regulations are in place to preserve democracy and access to information is actively facilitated, journalists are better placed to obtain useful data and exercise social control. Conversely, within authoritarian contexts,

data is frequently restricted or manipulated, thereby constraining the efficacy of this practice also in the digital sphere (Morozov, 2011).

Also, we can find political parallelism through media systems, which consists of a pattern or relationship whereby the structure of political parties is reflected in some way in media organisations (De-Albuquerque, 2018) and media laws (Fayoyin, 2017). It is relevant given the preponderance of mass media in society and its close relationship with power (Castells, 2009). In this context, media can be actors of power in connection with their embedding in different political systems and parliamentary situations but can also be institutionalized forms from counter or alternative media (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023).

Politics demands a nuanced understanding of the formations of public opinion and policies through and with the news media in pluralistic democratic settings and in structural change processes of societal institutions (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023). Despite the contemporary societal fragmentation of audiences due to digitalisation, it is noteworthy that there exists an inherent “individual diversity” that can influence the selection of information sources. The utilisation of social media by politicians to engage with their audience is a salient phenomenon. This phenomenon is characterised by a progressive dissolution of the conventional boundaries that once separated the public sphere from political figures. This process has been aptly described as “increasingly blurred” (Grantham *et al.*, 2025, p. 17).

Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognise that the utilisation of data within a political milieu does not inherently maintain a neutral posture. The intricate nature of the data is closely linked to the reconfiguration of multiple domains of influence (Ruppert *et al.*, 2017). In response to the fractal nature of politics in the automated age, data journalism has the potential to provide “accessible evidence” to rebalance public debate (Lowrey & Hou, 2021), including countries

from the Global South (Khalfan *et al.*, 2024). However, it must also contend with environments of low symbolic capital and high fragmentation (Leigh, 2019).

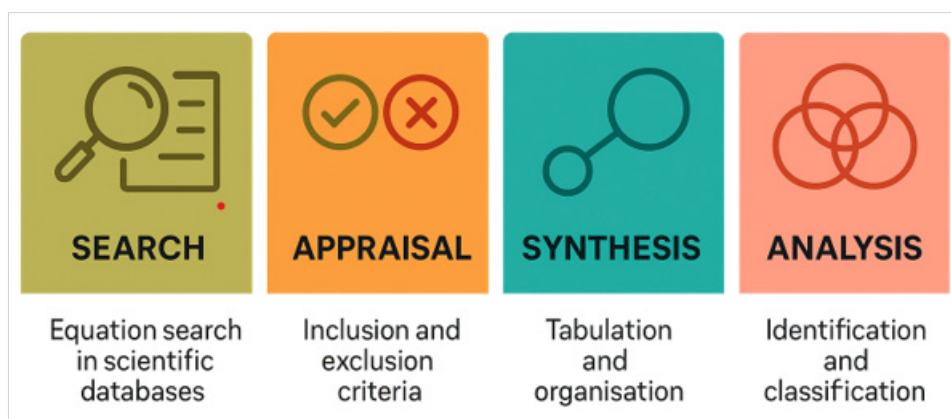
3. Objectives and methodology

The present paper is concerned with the discussion of three objectives. The initial step is to examine the dimensions associated with the concepts of data journalism and politics. The first objective is to comprehend the primary keywords associated with thematic clusters, thereby ascertaining the composition of terms and specialisations. The second objective is to identify the territories that emerge from the thematic map and assess the potential of each territory in terms of volume of publications and main contributions to the global discussion. The third objective is to establish the main areas of research and define them, delineating their boundaries and making projections about the potential of data journalism from a political perspective.

In addition, to achieve this objective, the present research employs a scoping review as its research methodology. The purpose of a scoping review is to synthesise information regarding emerging areas, key concepts, specific methodologies, and gaps in the information in published studies (Tricco *et al.*, 2016). This offers a valuable opportunity to understand the limits of knowledge generated by academia and to detect new opportunities for its expansion. Scoping reviews are utilised to collate evidence from the commencement of studies within a scientific domain, in addition to establishing definitions (Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2024) and their progression, as evidenced by the evolution of scientific publications (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2024).

The methodological process adopted in this scoping review is summarised in Figure 1, which illustrates the main stages followed in the identification, selection, organisation, and analysis of the literature.

Figure 1. Thematic map constructed using keywords and their interconnections via clusters.



Source: Own elaboration.

The primary benefit of this systematic review is its transparent nature, facilitated by rigorous standards that ensure the reliability and replicability of the employed methods. This makes it a valuable tool for bringing together studies with complementary perspectives (Valkenburg *et al.*, 2022). This assertion is

supported by scientific databases and the synthesis of knowledge from literature using various frameworks, becoming an “attractive review type in social science disciplines, where many methodological approaches are used to investigate questions about social phenomena” (Logan *et al.*, 2024, p. 952). These

reviews have also been successful in fostering trust among researchers by providing guidance on the management of scientific information.

Although scoping reviews have a long tradition in health-related research (Codina, 2024), they have been increasingly implemented in the field of social sciences and communication in recent years to identify trends that are consolidating. Some studies that have implemented this scientific method seek to understand the relevance of hyperlocal journalism as a solution to the advance of news deserts worldwide (Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2024), the analysis of incidental exposure to news in digital media environments (Schaefer, 2023), as well as detailed studies focused on national academy demarcations, such as the analysis of Australian research on digital childhoods (Mannell *et al.*, 2025) or the situation of datafield news work in the Nordic sphere (Kammer *et al.*, 2025).

3.1. SALSA Framework applied to data journalism and politics

We implemented the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, Analysis) framework for our study. This framework is characterised by the declaration of the main phases of a review, implying “traceability and replicability” (Codina, 2024, p. 8). The relevance of this framework stems from the fact that Grant and Booth (2009) laid the foundations for the use of objective techniques in literature reviews. Price (2022) acknowledges these theorists’ contributions, as they identified the absence of a common framework among researchers worldwide for categorising reviews into descriptive typologies. Recently, this protocol has been adopted by high-impact journals in the field of journalism (Lopezosa *et al.*, 2024; Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2024).

It is imperative to acknowledge that familiarising oneself with the common ground between the two concepts is driven by two distinct yet interconnected motivations. In accordance with the investment of well-resourced media organisations in the field of data journalism, these scholars have been able to leverage technologies and tools to advance new practices and norms that enhance journalistic production (Herrero-de-la-Fuente *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, the role of journalism in politics is of particular significance in the context of objectivity, a value that is of paramount importance to the democratic process. This is since objectivity enables the media to report political events accurately, fairly and independently (McNair, 2018).

In our case, we explore the intersection between data journalism—a specialisation that has grown in recent years within the current digital ecosystem—and politics, the field corresponding to decision-making and the powers that govern a country or nation. Ar identified in his literature review an initial approximation of the relationship between data journalism and politics as a field of study that is clearly linked to electoral processes and events. Furthermore, the author observed a correlation “to political events such as presidential election activities that occur in various re-

gions” (Ar, 2024, p. 84). However, given the broad scope of politics, we propose further study in this area.

In our initial research phase, the search, we focused on the equation “(‘data journalism’ AND political*)” as a research topic in itself to identify the associated concepts. We applied the following inclusion criteria in our Scoping Review: both concepts had to be present in the title, abstract or keywords of scientific publications in leading scientific journals, including those in interdisciplinary databases such as Web of Science (Clarivate) in the “Communication” category and Scopus (Elsevier) in the “Social Sciences” subject area. We used a refined query¹ (Herrero-Solana & Castro-Castro, 2022; Rodríguez-Urra *et al.*, 2024) to search these databases, including the world’s leading journals and publishers in scientific production.

The present study is situated within the timeframe spanning from July 2015 to July 2025, thus delineating a period of ten years. This phenomenon is predicated on the proliferation of the open data movement and the consolidation of the network society, as well as the advent of data-driven investigations and the uncovering of transnational scandals (Arroyave & Garcés-Prettel., 2023) and polarization (Palau-Sampio, 2023). These events have demonstrated the capacity for investigative journalism by teams situated in various regions globally, thereby transforming the philosophy of open data into a movement (Sandoval-Martin & La-Rosa, 2018) that aims to safeguard democracy and promote accountability.

In the Appraisal phase, we applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria specific to the SALSA protocol parameters. Here, we selected documents such as peer-reviewed scientific publications, as well as book chapters and books. In this process, we identified 87 files in Web of Sciences and 94 in Scopus. This gave us a total of 181 records.

Subsequently, we set aside those documents that were irrelevant to the topic. In addition, duplicates were detected in the Zotero bibliographic management software, exporting the final record with the final files. We then totalled 101 documents², of which 80 were publications in scientific journals, 12 book chapters and 9 books.

In the synthesis phase, the results were tabulated and organised in an Excel file with descriptions of the files. Aspects such as the title, abstract, document type, authors, year of publication and access URL were taken into account.

Finally, in the Analysis phase, we classified the files based on their main contributions to identify areas of research, as well as categorising the geographical dimension into regions based on the authors’ origin and academic performance, considering their places of study according to the affiliation used in each document.

A visualisation was carried out to identify where the two terms intersect. VOSViewer³ software was used for this, as it is often employed for document exploration and bibliographic map consolidation. This step identified 315 words, 32 of which were addressed in our study. Previously, we grouped together

1 Query available at ugr.es/~victorhs/tquery.txt

2 Dataset available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18896485>

3 Software available at <https://www.vosviewer.com/>

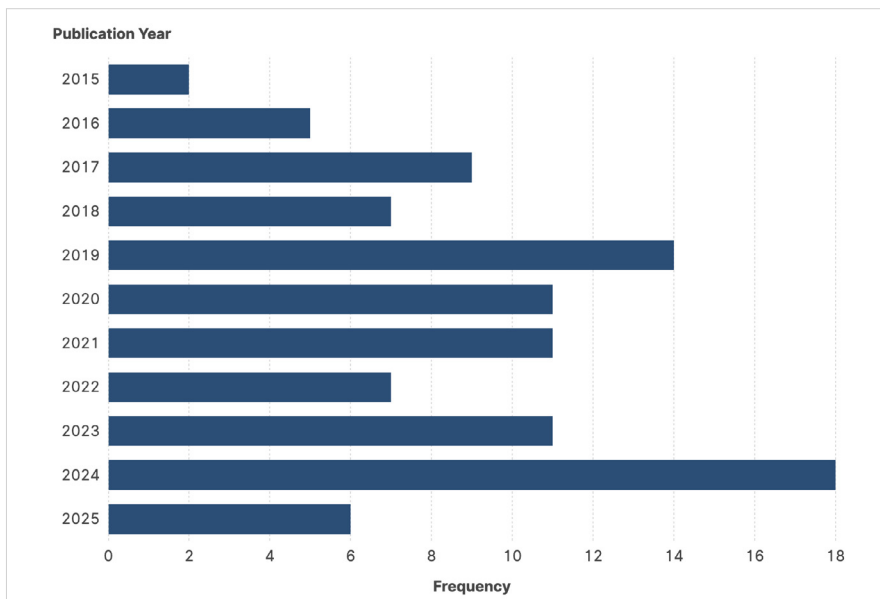
repetitive words with subtle variations around “data journalism”. Furthermore, we conducted a manual review of the documents to identify themes by continent, with a view to considering how data journalism intersects with politics.

The previous classification was an interpretation of the automatic clustering of VOSViewer of the 32 most reiterated terms. A manual review of the database was therefore carried out to classify the documents from these fronts. This was based on the individual nature of each investigation and the overlap between topics. For the graphical representation, we used the open-source Scimago Graphica⁴ software.

4. Results

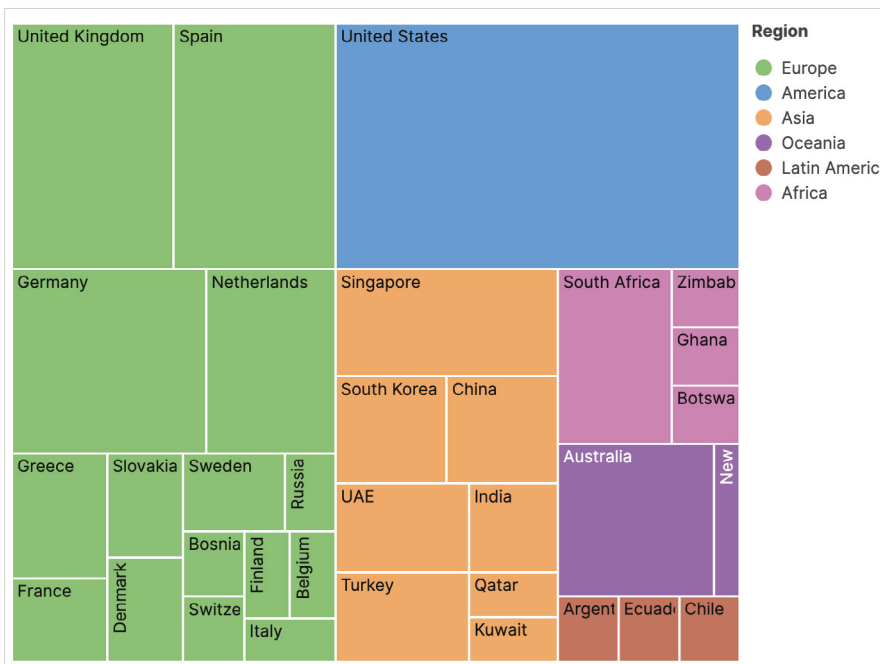
The subsequent section provides an overview of the evolution of the relationship between data journalism and politics. Figure 2 shows sustained, albeit stationary, academic interest in the intersection of these two topics, which has grown steadily from 2015 to 2025. This reveals a connection between the two fields insofar as they interact through the monitoring work of data journalism in relation to politics and the media’s representation of public interest.

Figure 2. Temporal evolution.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3. Treemap by countries and regions of origin.



Source: own elaboration.

4 Software available at <https://www.graphica.app/>

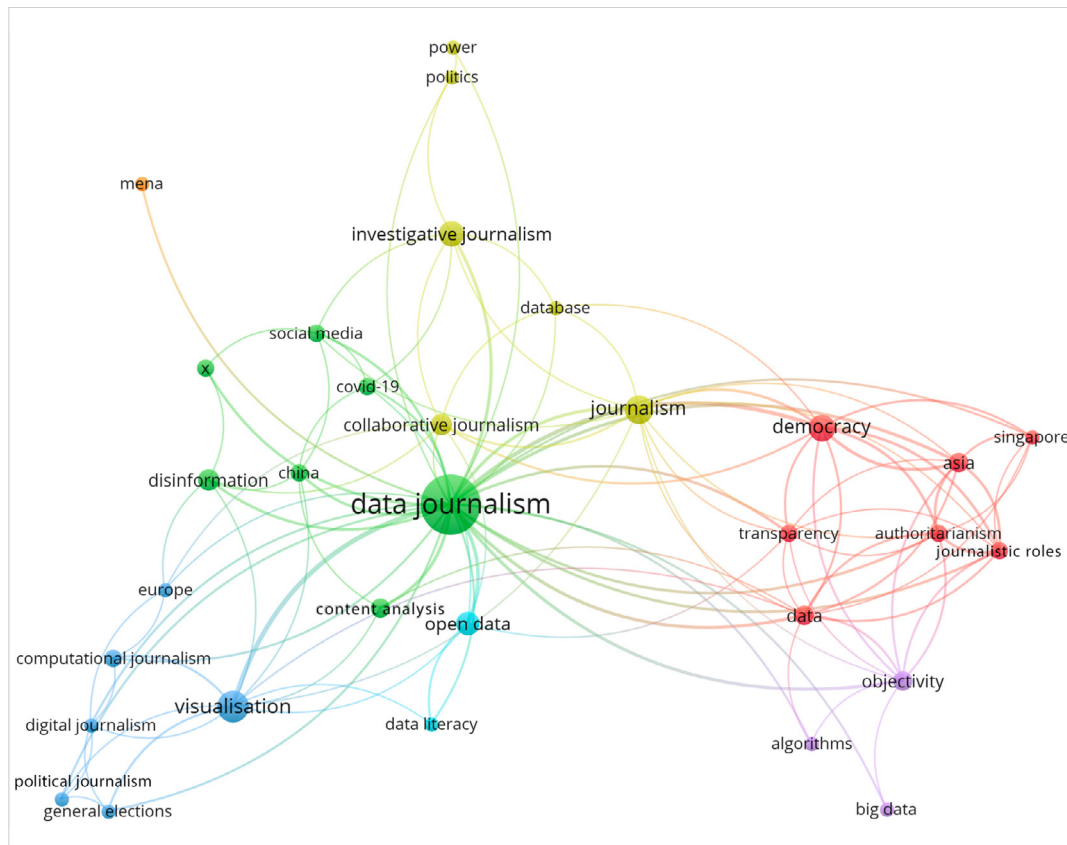
In Figure 3 we can observe that 33 countries are identified across six distinct geographical regions. The analysis indicates that Europe accounts for most of the objects of study (44.5%), followed by America (21.4%) and Asia (21.4%). The remaining regions are Africa (6.6%), Oceania (6%), and Latin America (2.6%).

From this categorisation, an analysis of the contribution of each country is provided, revealing that the United States accounts for 21.4% of the total records among all countries. Spain and the United Kingdom are the next two largest contributors, each with

8.54%, followed by Germany with 7.69%. A comparison of Asia with other regions reveals Singapore as 5.12%. Meanwhile, in Oceania, Australia is noteworthy with a percentage of 5.12%, while in the context of Africa, South Africa is 4.27%. Finally, in the context of Latin America, the distribution is uniform between Argentina, Chile and Ecuador (0.85% for each country in relation to the world total).

The results of the keyword co-occurrence analysis are presented in Figure 4, which illustrates the thematic map and the interconnections among the main research areas identified in the study.

Figure 4. Thematic map constructed using keywords and their interconnections via clusters.



Source: own elaboration.

The co-occurrence analysis identified seven areas of research. The first (red) revolves around the concept of democracy, intertwined with the notion of journalism as a professional pursuit and the principles of transparency and data utilisation as indispensable practices to defeat authoritarianism. The subject of Asia is frequently addressed within academic discourse, with Singapore in particular being noted for its promotion of forums and research on media, transparency and political systems.

The second (green) focuses on Data Journalism, the central theme of the map. This phenomenon is intricately linked to the analysis of social media, wherein journalism assumes a pivotal role as a conduit of information and a response to the dissemination of misinformation that surfaced during the pandemic. In the context of China, social media functions as an alternative channel of information in the face of censorship, thereby consolidating a space for obser-

vation of the political use of data. For instance, the concept of focused data journalism is linked to democracy from the previous cluster.

The third cluster (blue) focuses on data visualisation, a technique that promotes understanding and transparency through graphics, maps and visual narratives. The present study explores the relationship between digital and computational journalism as an expression of the technological transformation of the media. Its application in the domain of political journalism facilitates the real-time dissemination of election results and trends, thereby enhancing public analysis.

The fourth cluster (yellow) focuses on investigative and collaborative journalism, supported by the use of databases. Collaboration between journalists is paramount in combating misinformation and exercising vigilance with regard to power and to subject politics to close scrutiny. This front consolidates the

value of collective work and political analysis through journalistic investigation.

The fifth (purple) brings together the concepts of objectivity, algorithms and big data. Objectivity is associated with the utilisation of data as a foundation for impartiality, while algorithms facilitate the identification of patterns within vast informational sets, which are commonly referred to as “big data”. This contemporary information environment is distinguished by the sheer magnitude of the data available. This group has been instrumental in raising the tension between technology, ethics and professional judgement.

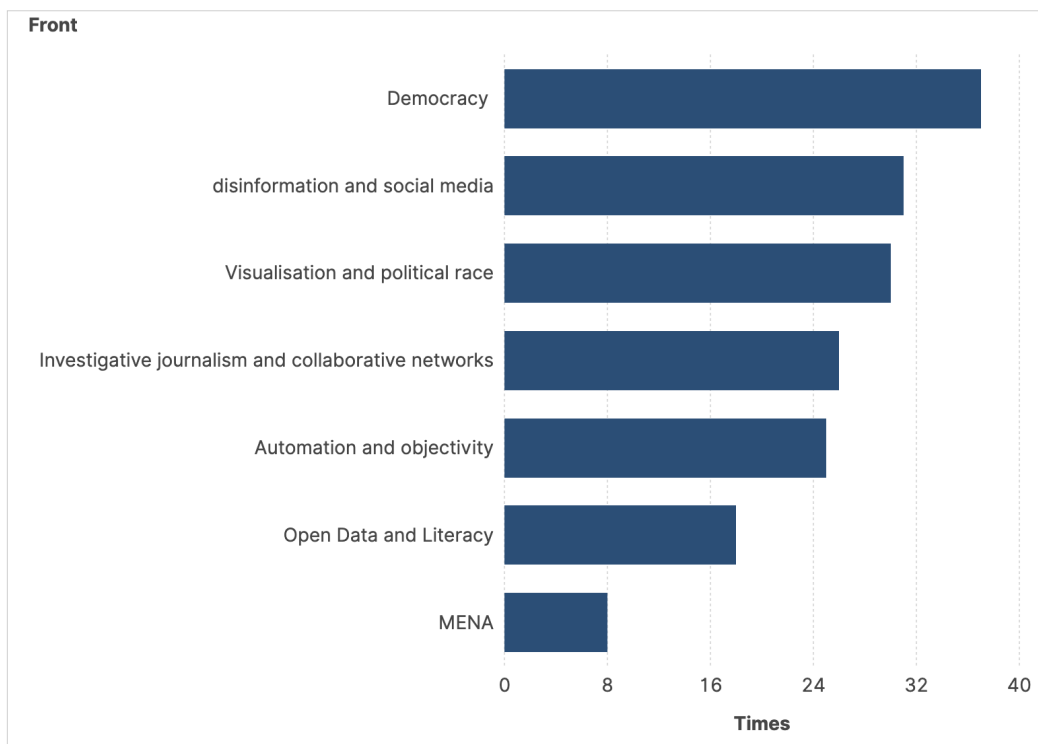
The sixth cluster (light blue) encompasses the subject of open data and data literacy, thereby underscoring the technical and educational dimensions of journalism. The concept of open data, in principle, aligns with the principles of transparency policies. However, it is important to acknowledge that the interpretation and utilisation of open data necessitates a certain degree of civic competence. In addition to their reporting functions, journalists also serve an educational role, informing audiences about the processes for requesting and using public information, thereby contributing to the enhancement of democratic participation.

It is evident that the seventh cluster, which is represented by the colour orange, corresponds to the geographical area encompassing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In this context, data journalism is associated with politics and the condemnation of authoritarian regimes, as it facilitates public scrutiny and accountability.

The figure section presents the results of the categorisation of the research fronts detected by each cluster, and their association with data journalism and the political dimension as an overarching concept. The initial concept is of a particularly broad nature and functions as the central axis of the thematic map (data journalism). For this reason, it has been decided to set it aside in order to avoid redundancy.

A review of the common ground shared by data journalism and politics reveals seven areas of research with varying degrees of intensity. Figure 5 presents a bar chart illustrating the relative intensity of the clusters identified through the recurrence of keywords and their interrelationships, thereby enabling a visual comparison of the intensity of the different clusters, while Table 1 provides the absolute frequency count derived from the repeated occurrence of the concepts identified in the analysis.

Figure 5. Thematic map constructed using keywords and their interconnections via clusters.



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 1. Thematic map constructed using keywords and their interconnections via clusters.

Cluster no.	Research front	Times
1	Democracy	37
2	Disinformation and social media	31
3	Visualisation and political race	30

Cluster no.	Research front	Times
4	Investigative journalism and collaborative networks	26
5	Automation and objectivity	25
6	Open Data and Literacy	18
7	MENA	8

Source: Own elaboration.

In comparison to the other subjects under consideration, democracy is a particularly prominent topic (21.2%), followed by disinformation and social media (17.7%). The subsequent categories are Visualisation and political contestation (17.1%), Investigative journalism and collaborative networks (14.9%), and Automation and objectivity (14.2%). Finally, and with less presence, are Open data and literacy (10.3%) and MENA (4.6%).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The intersection between Data journalism and politics has a number of interpretations due to the emergence of the digital sphere and is now an inseparable complement to journalistic practice. Treadwell (2016) indicated in his study that although the use of data in journalism was not a new practice, there was a lack of studies that analysed the use and impact of quantitative techniques, such as the use of statistical data, within newsrooms.

Ar (2024) points out that data journalism as a specialisation has been addressed by academia through practical and applied studies, as well as theoretical studies from a political and educational perspective, and technical aspects such as visualisation and storytelling, together with broad concepts such as new media, objectivity, sports, innovation and crime reporting. In our case, we have focused on data journalism from the perspective of its intertwining with politics, given its growing interest in academia (Samalis *et al.*, 2023; Wihbey, 2017; Wu, 2024, 2025). This discussion is highly relevant, given that it is an issue that involves power and how its abuse can affect countries' information infrastructure and their idiosyncrasies (Ruppert *et al.*, 2017).

The democratic sphere, one of the key concepts of our thematic map, appears repeatedly in the studies reviewed. Talking about data journalism implies recognising its role as a guarantor of democracy, given that its practice promotes transparency, accountability and public scrutiny of power. The strength of this link lies in the fact that the most pluralistic media systems tend to correspond to nations with higher levels of freedom (Wu, 2024). Here, authorities are evaluated through the impartiality of data and the verifiability of information (Porlezza & Splendore, 2019). In consolidated democracies, data journalism plays a key role in monitoring public policies, evaluating government commitments and exposing corrupt practices (Wu, 2025).

Misinformation on social media (cluster 2) is another issue that has been identified, reflecting concerns about the impact on decision-making and the distance between citizens and the work of institutions. The proliferation of disinformation is associat-

ed with socio-political consequences due to its negative influences (Guan & Wang, 2024), where data journalism seeks to resolve this problem that is part of the digital public sphere (Rogers, 2021).

We take the lead in "Visualisation" in terms of its use to graph political election processes. It is a technique used to convey complex information and is a vital vehicle for communicating large volumes of information to audiences instantly, as part of the evolution of journalism and its transformation to incorporate new skills supported by technological progress, which has also enabled the automation of processes. Exactly, "in concrete terms the objectivity ethic has gradually evolved into a set of signifying practices and conventions" (McNair, 2018, p. 77).

These techniques have been used in television in various styles and forms in both Asia and America (Lim, 2018) to publicise trends and samples in election polls (Fayoyin, 2017). These formats are also available in the digital sphere on social media (Adjin-Tetty & Etrue, 2025) as alternative spaces (Roslyng & Dindler, 2023) to report on the run-up to elections.

There is concern about restricted media systems (Guan & Wang, 2024), contexts in which data journalism strengthens democratic values in alternative spaces in the digital sphere and consolidates the collaboration of national and even transnational networks of journalists (Mesquita, 2023). This perspective is linked to human rights and the use of data journalism (Kohli, 2018) in these contexts of restrictions on freedom of expression. Collaborative journalism in these adverse scenarios emerges as a form of protest, while the use of data journalism to promote "its democratic functions and create a more informed and participatory citizenry may be significantly hindered in societies where there is stricter government control of the press" (Wu, 2025, p. 1495).

In local contexts, collaborative networks are being woven, not only among journalists but also within civil society (De-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2021; Lipman, 2021). Data literacy has given citizens greater access to large volumes of information, thanks to transparency and open data. This ties in with Rodríguez-Urra (2024) when he points out that hyperlocal journalism is gaining momentum around the world because of its impact on local democracy, social cohesion and the monitoring of power. These alliances have made it possible to uncover global scandals linked to economic power and political influence (Arroyave & Garcés-Prettel, 2023), as is the case in Latin America.

In terms of geography, although authors such as Colman and Villatoro (2021) argue for the potential of data journalism. Concurrently, this research underscores the enduring presence of asymmetries in

global academic production. The preponderance of Western authors, predominantly from Europe and the United States, stands in stark contrast to the emergent perspectives emanating from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In these regions, data journalism has been instrumental in challenging authoritarianism and controlling economic influences, monitoring governmental activities, and championing open data policies. It is becoming increasingly apparent to South Global countries that data-driven journalism is an effective tool for oversight.

These regional variations demonstrate that the practice of data journalism is inevitably shaped by political systems, degrees of press freedom, and institutional transparency. However, it is important to acknowledge the role of journalists in establishing strong collaborative networks to overcome the challenges posed by the absence of public data policies or key institutions. They have achieved this by strategically leveraging data usage as a technicality to maintain impartiality.

In the field of politics there is still some way to go in certain contexts, such as Chile, where data journalism is weak (Araya & Elórtégui-Gómez, 2020). Meanwhile, in Argentina, there is more room for innovation and a greater tradition of dataviz in conventional media (De-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2021). In this regard, it is possible to identify different realities in the development of data journalism in neighbouring countries in the same region.

We found that the countries where the research potential of data journalism in politics has been reflected upon are mostly the United States and European countries, an issue already identified by Wu (2024) in previous research on the predominance of Western countries in scientific production associated with data journalism. There are some regional contexts that the number of publications on the subject increased over time, as in the case of the Nordic Sphere (Kammer *et al.*, 2025).

In countries of the Global South, as evidenced in certain African and Asian countries, specialisation in data journalism can be a means of monitoring totalitarian regimes or systems of government that do not adhere to full democracy (Wu, 2025). In such cases, digital media are often viewed as authentic organisations with the potential to effect change, in contrast to traditional media that are perceived to have a weak ethical commitment and constant conflicts of interest. Africa reflects journalistic practices and political communication as a whole where the digital sphere is the focus of discussion regarding the legal frameworks provided by media laws (Fayoyin, 2017). Similarly, data journalism is being used in the MENA region, where innovations in data use include automating processes through coding (Khalfan *et al.*, 2024) to break the information hegemony of undemocratic governments. In contrast from Global North, Nordic Sphere has a proven track record of enhancing data reliability and operational efficiency, contributing to the financial stability of news organisations.

As Kammer *et al.* (2025) have highlighted, the organisation's success in the field is rooted in its capacity to deliver services to advertisers that are comparable to those offered by industry leaders such as Google and Facebook. This demonstration presents a novel research avenue concerning the utilisation of

big data and algorithms concepts from our thematic map. The focus of this demonstration is on the online positioning of media organisations. Moreover, the ramifications of search engines in the evolving AI era could be thoroughly investigated, particularly in the context of the recent focus on the challenges of the AI in the digital sphere (Mayoral-Sánchez *et al.*, 2023).

Ultimately, data journalism finds itself at a crossroads between technological innovation and political responsibility. The practice in question embodies both the promise and the limits of transparency in contemporary democracies. Although it aspires to objectivity through data, it is inevitably influenced by the political and institutional context in which it operates. This dual nature requires constant reflection on the part of journalists, who must balance algorithmic logic with ethical judgement and democratic responsibility. The challenge is not limited to optimising technical skills or access to data but also lies in strengthening the critical and civic dimensions of this practice, so that data journalism continues to serve as a relevant instrument of public control and democratic renewal.

The categorisation, selection, and presentation of data can be influenced by ideological or economic interests. Consequently, data journalism cannot be regarded as apolitical. Rather, it is a situated practice that necessitates constant critical reflection on its social function (Rubio-Jordán, 2021). The strategic utilisation of quantitative data by journalists has been shown to raise public awareness, challenging established power structures, unveiling injustices and cultivating forums for collective deliberation (De-Lima-Santos & Mesquita, 2021), as well as providing a means of scrutinising politicians, even in authoritarian contexts (Wu, 2025).

There are seven main research fronts, namely: democracy, disinformation and social media, visualisation and political race, investigative journalism and collaborative networks, automation and objectivity, open data and literacy, and the MENA region. Collectively, these research fronts reflect the multidimensional nature of this field. The prevailing theme that emerges is that of democracy, thus confirming that data journalism functions both as a methodological innovation and as a democratic instrument of accountability.

The study also exposes an ethical tension at the heart of data journalism: the aspiration for objectivity through data coexists with the influence of algorithms, political pressures, and digital sphere logic. In order to maintain its democratic potential, data journalism must continue to cultivate transparency, interdisciplinarity, and critical literacy, not only among journalists but also among citizens to improve data literacy.

According to Ruppert (2017), the realm of politics, as it pertains to data journalism, encompasses a multitude of technical intricacies. These include degrees of power, influence, and rationality. These technicalities are intricately interwoven with the evolution of professional practices, which are associated with data science, data mining, data storage, and data analysis, among other pertinent domains. Consequently, the discussion of data journalism necessitates the consideration of a specialisation that is ex-

perienicing a period of growth, and which possesses a distinct terminology.

Data journalism can be regarded as both a technological and a political act. The ability to translate data into public knowledge renders it a vital instrument for civic oversight, public deliberation, and democratic renewal. It is recommended that future research endeavours concentrate on extending the empirical approaches through the conduction of surveys of professionals and interregional comparisons. Such efforts should also include the formulation of data journalism practices at local or hyperlocal di-

mensions. This will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of how data journalism adapts to different political ecosystems and technological dependencies.

In light of the mounting scholarly focus on data journalism and its intersection with politics, a discernible interrelation between data journalism and politics has come to the fore. This interrelation is not merely technical in nature, but rather normative, encompassing the capacity of mediated data practices to foster transparency, deliberation, and civic accountability.

6. Authors' contribution

Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Data curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	Authors 1
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesize study data.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	Author 1
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	Author 1
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	Author 1
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.	Author 1, 2, 3
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	Author 1
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.	Author 1
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.	Authors 1, 2, 3
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	Author 1
Writing / original draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	Author 1
Writing / review & editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision –including pre- or post-publication stages.	Authors 1, 2, 3

7. Statement on the use of artificial intelligence

The generation of the flowchart in Figure 1 has been facilitated by the utilisation of artificial intelligence tools, specifically Chat GPT 5.1.

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