



## Shifting perceptions or shifting attention? The local press, Venezuelan migration, and hostile perceptions in Colombia

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**ENG Abstract:** Social protests were crucial to the election of Colombia's progressive government in 2022. However, its role in the violence against Venezuelan migrants that preceded it is still unclear. This paper examines racial bias in media responses to Venezuelan migrants during Colombia's 2019–2021 social protests. Theorists suggest that structural changes like migration can normalize hostility against vulnerable groups when specific conditions increase hostile perceptions. Colombia's press has not been scrutinized for misanthropic and hostile views, focusing on xenophobic urban riots that occurred alongside social protests in November 2019. We conducted a content analysis of Colombian newspapers, linking migration, violence, and protests, along with public migration data from Venezuela. Our findings reveal that social movements in Colombia intersect with contemporary Venezuelan migration, highlighting the ambivalence of social protests. While protests may have shifted attention away from racist attributions toward Venezuelan migrants, they do not signify a new perception of vulnerable populations.

**Keywords:** Migration; racist hostilities; media; Venezuela; Colombia

### ES ¿Cambio de percepción o cambio de atención? Prensa local, migración venezolana y percepciones de hostilidad en Colombia.

**Resumen:** Los cambios estructurales, como la migración, pueden normalizar la hostilidad hacia grupos vulnerables cuando se aumentan las percepciones hostiles. Examinamos estas percepciones en Colombia, analizando los principales medios impresos del país durante las protestas sociales de 2019–2021. Basándonos en teorías sobre el problema de la misantropía, preguntamos si la prensa colombiana es una aproximación a las percepciones cambiantes en la sociedad colombiana sobre la migración venezolana. Realizamos un análisis de contenido de los periódicos colombianos y relacionamos la migración, la violencia y las protestas con datos públicos sobre la migración procedente de Venezuela. Nuestros resultados muestran que la prensa inicialmente vinculó erróneamente la violencia durante las protestas en Colombia con la migración venezolana. Posteriormente, a medida que aumentaba la violencia policial contra los manifestantes nacionales, la prensa se centró menos en la migración. Concluimos que, si bien las protestas pueden haber desviado la atención de las atribuciones racistas hacia los migrantes venezolanos, no representan una nueva percepción de las poblaciones vulnerables.

**Palabras clave:** migración; hostilidades racistas; media; Venezuela; Colombia

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## 1. A “Night of Fear” in Bogotá

The night of November 22, 2019 was a night of fear for Colombia’s Capital Bogotá. Colombians feared for their belongings while Venezuelan migrants feared for their lives because of racist violence in major cities in Colombia. The “night of fear” came shortly after nationwide protests began to spread. In the evening, alarming messages and videos were spread across social networks about acts of vandalism to residences. Right-wing politicians, such as Senator Maria Fernanda Cabal, published videos apparently showing groups of Venezuelans climbing the walls of houses. Venezuelans were vilified as criminals. As a result of these videos, families and entire neighborhoods in Bogotá armed themselves with baseball bats, clubs and machetes to defend their properties. These groups spent the whole night waiting behind the door for the vandals who never arrived. Over the next days, different reports showed the racist hostility against Venezuelans in the “night of fear” (Grattan, 2019; Moros et al., 2019; Panayotatos, 2019; Pérez, 2019; Quintana, 2021).

More generally, theories of racist violence warn against the normalization of violence. Heitmeyer (2018, p. 21) argues that explanations of violence and authoritarianism should take into account both social structure and action levels. Perceptions of the macro level of societies play an important role. Authoritarian perceptions of structural changes and right-wing politics run the risk of promoting further violence against stigmatized groups. The danger is that violence takes on a life of its own and becomes normalized. Violence then leads to more violence and a pull effect emerges. Violence can stabilize social environments that produce even more violence. At the end, a spiral of violence against marginalized groups develops further and further.

What makes the case of the “night of fear” in Bogotá special is that this stabilization of racist violence against Venezuelans did not occur during later protests. The racist hostilities in the “night of fear” in 2019 gave reason to fear similar outbreaks of violence against people from Venezuela in the protests of 2020 and 2021. Anyhow, neither 2020 nor 2021 saw riots against the Venezuelan population comparable to the events of the “night of fear”. Why did openly racist violence against Venezuelans not return in 2020 and 2021? This question is relevant to the assumption of self-stabilization formulated by the theory of violence. Did the spiral of violence and racist hostility brake in 2020 and 2021?

Scholars have just begun to analyze the protests between 2019 and 2021. The protests are widely acknowledged because of their civil strength and creativity (Archila Neira et al., 2020). Furthermore, the historical increase of police violence against younger persons is documented (Hormaza Jimenez & Ciesielski, 2021). The “night of fear” is a part of the Colombian protests that receives little attention by research. Actual debates are still lacking research

that also considers the phenomenon of the “night of fear” to understand more integrally the protests in Colombia. This lack of research also counts especially for the question of racist hostilities against Venezuelans that did not occur during the protests in 2020 and 2021.

The question we raise in this paper is: Can a shift of perception of Venezuelan migration explain the reduction in racist hostilities during the protests between 2019 and 2021? We argue that analyzing Colombian print media is a pragmatic approximation to see if the spiral of violence was broken, or at least paused, due to changed perceptions of Venezuelan migration towards the Colombian society.

After introducing the context of social protests in Colombia and the theory of misanthropic violence, we will explain our empirical methodology. For this paper, we use the contributions of Colombia’s most important newspaper. We analyze topics related to Venezuelan people and conduct a content analysis. As a result, our paper shows that the media put less attention on the Venezuelan migration. We show that this change does not concern the pejorative references regarding migrants from Venezuela. Even if racist hostilities against migrants did not repeat in the same form as what happened on the “night of fear” in 2019, it is questionable if the fear has disappeared altogether.

## 2. Social protest in Colombia between 2019 and 2021

The strikes between 2019 and 2021 occur in the historical context of several social mobilizations that have taken place in Colombia. Colombia’s social protest are not spontaneous, nor unexpected. According to the database of social struggles of the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP), social protest in Colombia has increased since records began in 1975 (CINEP, 2014, p. 5). The citizens’ strike of 1977 is one of the most important references in the history of social protest in Colombia. It was not limited to the participation of trade unions. Peasants, neighborhood residents, students and youth, housewives, the unemployed, street vendors, etc. also participated with their own demands (García Velandia, 2017, p. 19). Following protests between 1980 and 1990, according to Archila et al. (2002, pp. 22–27), were led by the student sector but also by workers, peasant, and civic sectors, with demands mainly related to land, working conditions, public services, and infrastructure.

Colombia’s armed conflict experienced its most violent phase from 1990 to 2005. Some of the worst massacres took place during this decade. This period includes the 1994 protests by coca farmers against glyphosate spraying, which paralyzed the country’s southern departments for nearly three months (Londoño Botero et al., 2016, pp. 516–517; Torres, 2018). The protests between 2006 and 2011 were mainly directed against the violence of the armed conflict with the FARC guerrillas and

included demonstrations against the kidnappings. Occasionally, victims' organizations, coca farmers, oil company employees, and civil society initiatives protested against the exploitation of natural resources (Londoño Botero et al., 2016, p. 520). In 2011, university students returned to the streets to protest former President Juan Manuel Santos' education reform, which intended to establish market logic even in Colombia's few public universities. The Broad National Student Table (*Mesa Amplia Nacional Estudiantil*, MANE) was created with the explicit purpose of leading the fight against the proposed reform, which was finally withdrawn after about six months of protests (Cruz Rodríguez, 2012). Only one year later, the Santos administration faced an additional agrarian strike, that began in the rural region of Catatumbo and quickly spread to the metropolis and Colombia's capital Bogotá D.C. (Londoño Botero et al., 2016, p. 545). Rejecting free trade agreements and the certification of seeds, a protest developed in which over 200,000 people participated. According to Roa-Clavijo (2021, p. 117) little attention was given to the agrarian negotiations that were initiated following the agrarian strikes of 2013–2014. In the following years, there were protests around mining projects. The anti-government protests took a rather unexpected turn when, in October 2016, a small majority of the Colombian population rejected the peace agreement with the FARC (Gallego et al., 2019). The shock of the supporters turned into active support for a peaceful solution to the armed conflict. Protesters also took to the streets in the regions in support of peace and Santos' agreement with the FARC combatants.

## 2.1. Protests 2019 and the “night of fear”

Ivan Duque's assumption of the presidency in 2018 did not mean an end to anti-government protests. At the end of 2019, the unions called for protests against Duque's right-wing policies, and other social sectors joined this call with specific demands regarding the fulfillment of the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC, the problem of corruption and political participation, gender inequality, and the preservation of the environment (Umaña Hernández, 2021a, p. 3). To restore order to the unexpectedly large demonstrations, which included riots, the president declared a curfew on November 22, a repressive measure the country had not seen since 1977, when the Citizens' Strike involved unions, peasants, neighborhood residents, students, youth, housewives, the unemployed, and street vendors (García Velandia, 2017, p. 19). On the night of the curfew of 2019, people from Venezuela were denigrated as criminals. The “night of fear” had begun. Social media attributed the riots during the protest to Venezuelans (Grattan, 2019; Moros et al., 2019; Panayotatos, 2019). Local television stations showed Colombian families and neighborhood groups arming themselves with clubs, baseball bats, and machetes, saying they had to take their security into their own hands (Pérez, 2019; Quintana, 2021). The next day, reports indicate that Venezuelans were insulted, persecuted, and attacked. Although there was no evidence of “vandals” entering homes or apartment complexes, nor were there any individuals prosecuted for the alleged

vandalism, there were cases of people being injured by neighbors who thought they were looters. Just a few days after the “night of fear,” the United Nations expressed its concern “[...] about the increase in discrimination and xenophobia against the Venezuelan population in the context of the current situation” (ONU Colombia, 2019). The sad climax of the 2019 protests was the death of student Dilan Cruz. The day after the “night of fear”, a police officer from the anti-riot unit ESMAD shot him in the head with what appeared to be non-lethal ammunition.

## 2.2. Protests 2020 and 2021

With the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, the concerns of the population in Colombia intensified. The accumulated general discontent erupted again in September 2020. After five months of strict quarantine and growing discontent, the killing of lawyer Javier Ordóñez by police officers triggered the population, which was still under the impression of the protests against the murder of George Floyd in the United States. Just as in the previous year, there was a night of violence in 2020. On the ninth of September, there were at least 13 civilian deaths. During the following protests, 214 police posts in Bogotá were burned in rejection of police violence (Negret-Mosquera, 2022, p. 13).

Seven months later, in the last days of April 2021, Colombia witnessed the “strike of strikes” (Saade Granados & Benavides Mora, 2022). The protests spread against the tax reform announced at the beginning of the year by the Duque administration. They were based on the petitions made in 2019 that intensified with the consequences derived from the Covid-19 pandemic. At the very beginning the demonstrations were peaceful with a massive citizen participation that made possible to demand social and economic rights of the youth and the feminist and LGBTIQ movement (Fajardo Carillo, 2021, p. 1).

Anyhow, it was only the first day of protest, when three people were killed. The mostly young protesters were confronted with the violence of the state as the “enemy within,” when the police's goal shifted from protecting the protests to harming protestors. Up to the end of June there was unexpectedly violent escalations against the protesters. Young people were abducted during the protests and were victims of sexual violence. The human rights organization Indepaz names at least 68 deaths during the strike of 2021 (INDEPAZ, 2021). The alleged perpetrators belong to police units. Similar to the protest in 2020, there was a clear escalation of violence during the strike of 2021.

Unlike to the protest of 2019, however, there are no comparable reports of hostility against Venezuelans. Whereas in the “night of fear” in 2019 entire neighborhoods spread hostilities against people from Venezuela, this did not occur in the same form in 2020 or in 2021. In 2019, there were racist hostilities against the Venezuelan people and a sharp increase in police brutality against the demonstrators. In 2020 and 2021 the increase of police brutality continued under Duque's government. During the protests, however, the racist hostilities of the “night of fear” did not return. Half a year later, a systematic documentation of the 2019 “night of fear” confirmed what had been

suspected the day before: A journalist who reported on that night found the right words: “we were chasing ghosts all night” (Cancino & Caballero, 2020, p. 3).

## 2.2. Venezuela and the protests 2019 – 2021 in politics and mass media

Before the “night of fear” there was already a hostile environment against people of Venezuela. Umaña Hernández (2021b, p. 211) shows this resentment through statements made by members of the Colombian executive. The director of the Colombian Migration Agency Migración Colombia, Christian Kruger, expressed speculative suspicions even before the strike that Venezuelans would bring chaos to Colombian cities. On November 19, the government ordered through Decree 2087 of 2019 the closure of land and river border crossings. Colombia's ex-vice president Martha Lucía also in public announced that violence in Colombia was coming from Venezuela and that protests were being infiltrated. Finally, even ex-president Ivan Duque reproduced this prejudice on television before the strike (Umaña Hernández, 2021b, p. 211).

It is also crucial to mention stigmatizations of media in the context of the protest. During the strikes, different reports called attention to acts of violence against the press and self-censorship. Fear of reprisals has led several journalists to decide not to go out to report or choose not to wear their press identification (Umaña Hernández, 2021a, p. 16).

Evidence exists about the influential role of media on public opinion about the fear of Venezuelan people towards the protests in 2021. Ortiz and Lemos (2021, p. 98) work with media in the context of the Colombian strike of 2021. They conclude two intellectual currents in the debates around the violence of the strike: the reformists and the rupturists. The reformists recognize certain effectiveness of institutional strategies to solve conflicts and process social demands. They reject violence as a legitimate means to achieve collective objectives. The rupturists question institutional arrangements and relate violence and social demands. Correa (2021) analyzed private television between April and July 2021. The national strike was the most important topic, followed by news of vandalism and violence, which also relate to the national strike. The main protagonists were the demonstrators and the government. Most of them were related using an informative tone. However, there was also pejorative invectives. Vargas (2022) identified actors, repertoires, moments and media discourse in several national news from November 19 to 27, 2019. She concludes that the role of the media was definitive in the violent outcomes of the protest. Cely (2021) analyzes in print media how the anti-riot police ESMAD responded to the mobilizations during the national strikes of 2019 and 2021. Cely concludes there were less news presented during the national strike of 2019 compared to the large number of news exposed during the strike of 2021. While the newspaper *El Tiempo* criminalized and stigmatized the protest scenarios, legitimizing the actions of the public force to restore order, on the contrary, the weekly journal *Voz* reported the strike from the problematic of the Human Rights crisis, questioning the actions of the police.

To sum up: Different scholars highlight the role of massive media for the protests and the violence in particular. However, the existing literature raises the question of print media coverage of Venezuelan migration in the protests of 2019 and 2021.

## 2.3. The role of mass media for racist hostility

It should contradict the theories of misanthropic violence that the racist hostilities against the Venezuelan population during the “night of fear” in 2019 have not been repeated during the strike of 2020 and 2021. The danger of violent stabilization was to be feared. Theories of violence warn against the development of the violence spiral where an environment of hostility emerges. However, in 2020 and 2021 the racist hostilities from the “night of fear” did not return.

Heitmeyer et al. (2020) work theoretically on racist violence and focus empirically on the role of misanthropic and hostile perceptions of societal structural changes for different forms of racist violence. The context are contemporary racist riots in Germany where the group-focused enmity is on the rise. However, other contexts such as Colombia might apply when working with a general conceptual framework that includes actors, a structural and also a societal action level.

Racist violence is directed against the same groups of people that new-right parliamentary and extra-parliamentary groups describe as a “threat to society”. The entanglement of different actors brings the risk of a feedback loop when political actors with (new-)right agendas legitimize themselves in the context of this racist violence. Consequently, democratic mechanisms might be undermined by actors that promote an authoritarian agenda. These actors improve their chances of access to political powerful positions and from this point influence the societal structural level through political work. When certain structural changes, such as migration, are perceived as a danger to individuals their actions can result in violent aggressions. These violent aggressions are directed against the same group of persons that anti-migrant politics declare as enemies to their anti-pluralistic societal model (Heitmeyer, 2018).

Media studies are concerned with thread-based perceptions of changes in society. Since the existence of mass media the scientific question of media impact on public opinion has been discussed (Becker & Roberts, 1992). Early studies such as “Invasion from Mars” gave evidence on public panic and the role of mass media (Cantril et al., 1940). More recently, the general relation of violence in mass media and violent behavior is a complex issue for empirical psychology. Violence in media is seen as a risk factor for adolescent violence (Fagan & Hawkins, 2013, p. 281). A positive correlation between mass media violence and offending behavior is shown by many scholars dedicated to USA, Europe, Oceania, and Asia. Fewer studies show a not significant relationship between exposure to mass media violence and offending behavior and no study was listed to show a negative effect regarding offending behavior. However, a simple causality between media and violence is not proved (Ellis et

al., 2019, pp. 236–237). This might be a reason why mass media studies are working with different approaches (Vogelgesang, 2018, pp. 295–297). Some approaches argue that perceptions of violence in mass media can reduce, or even inhibit violent behavior (catharsis or inhibition). On the contrary, other approaches stress habituation to violence, its suggestive effects, and the learning that can be associated with the consumption of violent depictions. This has led to an intensified debate on the impact and logic of media, in which “[...] growing role of new global communication technology in enabling today’s media events” cannot be ignored (Sumiala et al., 2018, p. 16). A more in-depth discussion requires a review not only of media representations of violence, but also of representations of violence in general. For the sake of space, we will limit ourselves here to the tip of the iceberg of this research and note that representations of violence always promote a “Manichean conflict between good and evil” (Choe, 2022, p. 6).

For Colombia, the media are now expected to engage with the peace process starting in 2016. In the decade before, there was a “mediatic subordination and obedience to power” (López de la Roche, 2021, p. 93). As a result of the peace negotiations with the FARC guerrilla, the Colombian Truth Commission calls the media to know, disseminate and give continuity of the final reports about the Colombian armed conflict. This includes Commission’s recommendation not to stigmatize or discriminate, to guarantee the right to information and to overcome racism in order to confront the naturalization of violence (Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia, 2022, pp. 890–893).

These debates give reason to understand mass media – like newspapers and print media – as a pragmatic approximation to analyze social perceptions. Mass media is a performative construction of reality, it results from certain social positions that are not available to every member of society. But as a good offered in markets it seeks also to represent how possible consumers could perceive, think, and act in society.

### 3. Racist hostility and the protests 2019–2021: Towards an analysis of mass medias topics

Violence and hostile perceptions in society tend to stabilize violent environments. The mass media provide an approximate outline to those perceptions. This research suggests a focus on possible changes in perceptions. This article engages with changes in perception of Colombia’s structural level. We argue that analyzing Colombian print media is a pragmatic approximation to understand why the racist hostilities of 2019 were not repeated during the 2020 and 2021 strikes.

For our analysis we explore the references to Venezuela in print media during the three protest periods from 2019 to 2021. Regarding the protests of 2019 we consider the “night of fear” as starting point and analyze the press related to Venezuela until December 13. In the following year 2020 we focus on the time between September 9 to 30. On September 9, the Colombian police lethally wounded Javier Ordoñez. In this time span we analyze print

media regarding the references to Venezuela. Finally, in 2021 we planned to consider the time from May 3 to 24 for our analysis. However, preliminary results gave reason to extend this time span until December 2021.

For our analysis, we considered the newspaper selection of the Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP). This includes the newspapers *El Colombiano*, *El Espectador*, *El Herald*, *El Mundo*, *El Nuevo Siglo*, *El País*, *El Tiempo*, *Vanguardia Liberal* and the newspaper *Voz*. *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* are the most important newspapers with national scope.

Through the OCSAL group, Carlos Sarmiento Angulo is involved in *El Tiempo*. Through the Valorem-group Alejandro and Andres Santo Domingo are involved in *El Espectador*. Both entrepreneurs belong to the top of the Colombian economic elite (Pearce & Velasco Montoya, 2022).

*El Nuevo Siglo*, *El Colombiano* and *El País* are smaller newspapers with a conservative tradition and coverage for Bogotá, Medellín or Cali. Liberal newspaper are *El Herald* (Barranquilla), *El Mundo* (Medellín) and *Vanguardia Liberal* (Santander). The *Voz* newspaper is a left-wing niche newspaper.

The CINEP’s digital press archive includes print media articles on topics of social and political relevance for Colombia. While CINEP does not archive newspaper issues in their entirety, the selected articles are subject to a methodology developed over 30 years. The archive of CINEP allows full text searches.

We have selected articles that contain the word Venezuela (root and variants). We have chosen this approach in order to include a wide range of print media references to Venezuela. However, it is important to emphasize that this can only be an approximation of perceptions about Venezuela. Since we are interested in perceptions about migrants, we did not choose more specific approaches, such as only migrants or even Venezuelan migrants, which would have resulted in a more limited scope. In doing so, we obtained a total number of 207 newspaper articles. We excluded 16 articles for irrelevance. Among the selected articles, we used the program AntConc (version 4.1.0) to determine the contexts of the word Venezuela and its variations. The contexts are before and after the word and include a maximum of 25 words (token). This procedure resulted in 604 contexts (before and after the search word). It should be noted that contexts within an article may overlap. Next, we created word lists over the contexts. From these lists, we identified words with negative connotation. First, the authors made the selection independently, then the list with 157 words was consolidated. These words were subsequently included in categories that represent the topics of the contexts. To avoid ambiguities we excluded 18 words (problem, fire, legal, etc.).

We explored seven categories: delinquency, drug traffic, migration, phobias (xenophobia etc.), political situation in Venezuela, protest, and violence. These seven thematic references are closely related to Venezuela in the analyzed articles. Each of these topics covers words that appear in the context of references to Venezuela in the Colombian

newspapers. For this reason, we consider the articles covered by at least one of the seven topics as articles with reference to Venezuela and a problem or pejorative background. To control the results of the analysis, the authors read each one of the contexts in which Venezuela was mentioned. Contexts that explicitly mentioned Venezuela or Venezuelans in a positive way or referred to positive progress in the care and assistance of the Venezuelan migrant population were classified as “non-pejorative”. In this way, both actions of violence against Venezuelans and media reports on social problems and the Venezuelan population were classified as “pejorative”. Sports-related contexts and international news not related to Venezuelan migration were excluded.

#### 4. Migration, protest and print media in Colombia 2019-2021

At least three structural changes marked the Colombian society between 2019 and 2021: First, the Venezuelan migration continued because of the ongoing multiple crisis in Venezuela. Second, there were massive social protests against the ex-president Ivan Duque who did not set the conditions for implementing the historical peace agreement with the biggest Colombian guerrilla. These social tensions got worse when the number of people killed in new protests between 2020 and 2021 reached unimagined proportions. Third, the years of 2019 to 2021 fall in the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. Such changes could promote environments where racist hostilities against the migrants from Venezuela emerges. However, the “night of fear” of 2019 did not return in the following years. We will now relate this observation of migration to an analysis of the Colombian print media.

##### 4.1. Migration as a structural change in Colombian society

Colombia has experienced migration due to more than 50 years of armed conflict. More than eight million people have been internally displaced. According to official data, Colombia was a net emigration country between 1973 and 2005. Migration flows between Colombia and Venezuela have been negative. The high standard of living in Venezuela, generated by the oil bonanza of the 1970s and 1980s, and the increase in internal displacement since 1997 have forced many Colombians to migrate to Venezuela (Bernal Márquez et al., 2020, pp. 100–101).

Since 2015, the political, economic and social crisis in Venezuela has led to a massive migration of Venezuelans that has changed Colombia’s migration trends in an unprecedented way: More than five million refugees have left Venezuela since 2015. With 1.8 million refugees, Colombia has been the main host country (R4V Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Regugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela, 2022). When the Venezuelan government reopened the border in August 2016 after a year of closure, Colombian authorities registered the passage of 400,000 Venezuelans into the national territory in just two weeks. The Venezuelans came mainly to buy food and basic household goods

(Consejo Nacional De Política Económica y Social, 2018, p. 15).

From 2014 to August 2021, the flow of Venezuelan migrants to Colombia increased from 23,573 to 1,842,390 in just seven years (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2022, p. 115). The accelerated increase in such a short time put a strain on the institutions in charge of the border and the care of migrants, which did not have sufficient capacity to keep up with the growing number of people. The flow of migrants from Venezuela challenged the international human rights protection framework in the Latin American region, as a phenomenon of this magnitude had never been seen before. Most Latin American countries responded to the crisis by creating more comprehensive migration laws (Rodríguez Rodríguez, 2022, p. 104).

##### 4.2. References to Venezuela in the Colombian print media 2019 – 2021

Although Colombia and other Latin American countries have made progress in recognizing and expanding rights, the integration of Venezuelans has triggered xenophobia and racism. In the case of Colombia, a particular dynamic of racist prejudices against the population can be observed: At the end of 2019, migration from Venezuela was highly present in Colombian print media, but as the number of deaths in protests increased exponentially through 2021, Venezuela lost its presence in Colombian print media. This change in perception occurred at a time when migration from Venezuela continued and even peaked in 2021. However, the print media paid less attention to Venezuelan migration.

We will now show that the topic of migration was never lost, but the print media’s coverage of the issue had diminished. However, the Colombian print media perceived Venezuelan migration as a threat to society. While the overall attention to migration has decreased, the remaining perceptions are pejorative towards people from Venezuela.

###### 4.2.1. Quantitative references to Venezuela

While the number of deaths in the protests increases exponentially until 2021, Venezuela lost its presence in the media. Figure 1 shows that Venezuela plays a more important role in the newspaper articles of the 2019 observation period than in the observed periods of 2020 and 2021. There are 195 analyzed articles. The average accumulated share of articles with Venezuelan reference is 66.7% in the observation period of 2019. In 2020 it decreases to 21.5% and in 2021 to only 11.8%.

Our analysis shows that the conservative press refers more frequently to Venezuela than the liberal press (Hetzer, 2017). Almost three quarters of the registered contributions are published by newspapers *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *El Nuevo Siglo* and *El Heraldo*. Table 1 shows the smaller share of contributions by *El Colombiano*, *El País*, *Voz*, *Vanguardia Liberal* and *El Mundo*. These newspapers have an accumulated share of 26%. If considering the conservative press, a share of 32% can be observed (*El Nuevo Siglo*, *El Colombiano*, *El País*). The liberal press has a 16% share (*El Heraldo*, *Vanguardia Liberal*, *El Mundo*).

Figure 1. Newspaper reports on Venezuela and protests in Colombia

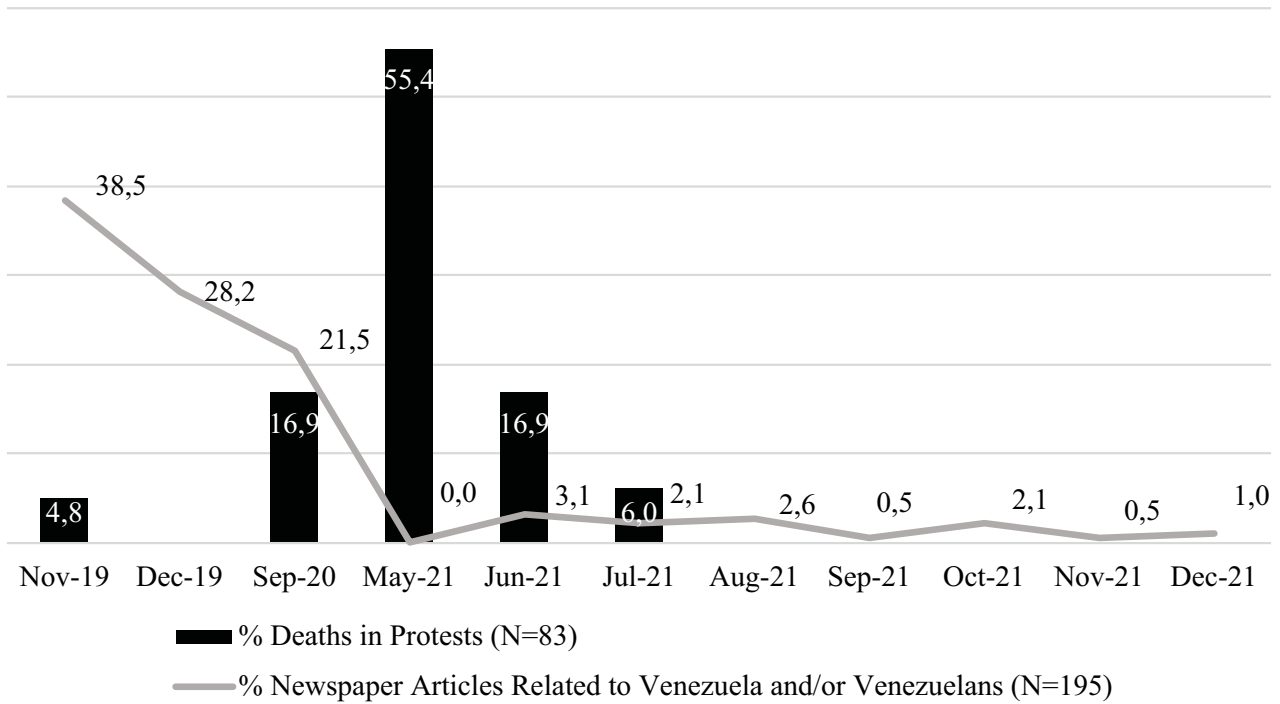


Table 1. Analyzed Newspaper.

Name newspaper	Newspaper Articles	%
<i>El Tiempo</i> (National)	47	24,1
<i>El Espectador</i> (National)	46	23,6
<i>El Nuevo Siglo</i> (Bogotá, conservative)	29	14,9
<i>El Heraldo</i> (Barranquilla, liberal)	22	11,3
<i>El Colombiano</i> (Medellín, conservative)	19	9,7
<i>El País</i> (Cali, conservative)	15	7,7
<i>Voz</i> (National, leftist)	8	4,1
<i>Vanguardia Liberal</i> (Santander, liberal)	7	3,6
<i>El Mundo</i> (Medellín, liberal)	2	1,0
TOTAL	195	100

Even if the presence of Venezuela in the Colombian print media is decreasing, this does not mean a reduction of pejorative content in newspaper articles. When the Colombian press speaks

about Venezuela, it refers to problems. As shown in Table 2, we identify in the print media seven topics which bring Venezuela close to social or political problems.

Table 2. Topics and covered words form wordlists (selection). Words with asterisk are pejorative neologisms. Topics cover 84 % of the 195 analyzed articles

Topic	Included Words
Delinquency (27.2 %)	accuse, attack, attempt, capture, crime, criminality, danger, escape, expel, extortion, flagrant, fraud, guns, illegal, impunity, infiltrate, insecurity, investigate, judicial, justice, murder, perpetrate, police, riot, security, shoot, steal, suspect, theft, thief, trap, unscrupulous, usurp, vandalism, victimizer, weapon
Drug traffic (17,7 %)	AUC, ELN, (EX)FARC, Marquetalia, cartel, clan, coca, cocaine, coltan, conflict, demobilize, dissidence, drug, drug trafficking, extraction, fall, gaitanistas, grenade, grenade, guerrilla, golfo, illicit, military, mining, missiles, paramilitary, seize, smuggling, trafficking, war

Topic	Included Words
Migration (16,1 %)	impact, massive, alert, atrocious, abandon, blood, chronic, concern, deport, exodus, exploitation, explosion, flee, foreign, informal, invasions, irregular, massacre, need, poor, pressure, scourge, standardization, take advantage, torture, unsupportive
Protest (12.6 %)	ESMAD, abuse, demonstration, inconvenience, marches, disinformation, mobilization, movement, outrage, panic, protest, riots, solidarity
Violence (12.6 %)	femicide, homicide, death, deceased, dying, rape, terror, threatening, victim, violence
Political Situation Venezuela (11.0 %)	castromadurista*, dictatorship, maduro, regime
Phobias (Xenophobia etc.) (2,8 %)	discrimination, fuckers, idiots, phobia, shit, stigma, veneco*, xenophobia

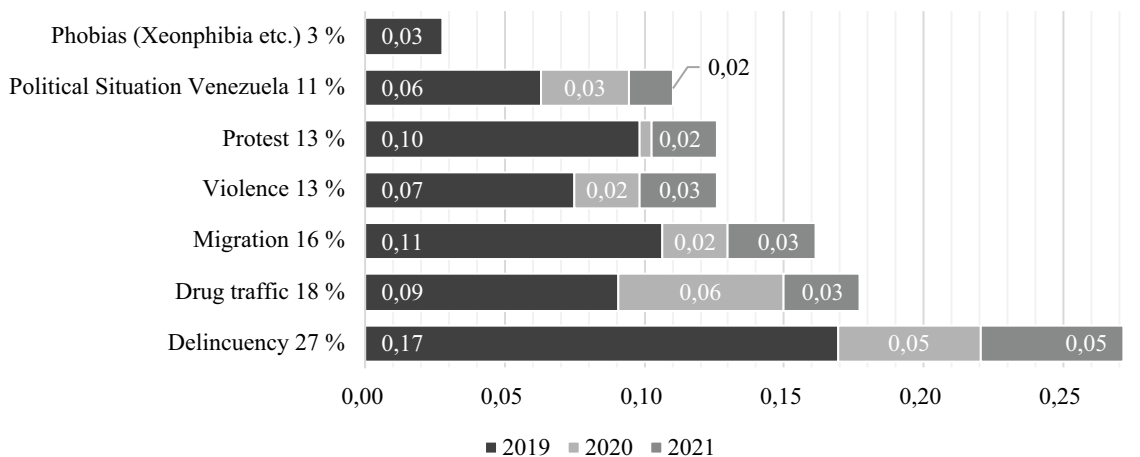
In the newspapers, 134 of the 195 articles show themes that link Venezuela to problems of a social or political nature (69%), such as crime, drug trafficking or violence. 31% of the articles have no thematic reference. While 166 were problem-related topics, an additional check helped to prove that not all articles put Venezuela and/or Venezuelans in the context of social or political problems. However, the ratio of articles with a problem context to articles without a problem context remains high at 1.45.

88 of the 134 articles with a problematic context were published in 2019, 30 in 2020 and 16 in 2021. On the contrary, of the 61 articles that do not put Venezuela in a pejorative context: 42 of these articles were published in 2019, 12 in 2020, and 7 in 2021. The ratio of articles with a problematic context to articles without a problematic context changes from year to year. In 2019, there were about three non-pejorative articles for every seven articles with problem context (ratio=2.1). In 2020, there were 10 pejorative articles for every four nonpejorative articles (ratio=2.5). In

2021 there were 16 pejorative to 7 non-pejorative articles, the ratio was 2.3.

Figure 2 explores the thematic references of the Colombian print media between 2019 and 2021. With a share of 27.2 %, delinquency is the topic that appears most frequently in the articles. This topic includes newspaper articles with thematic references such as “arms”, “(in)security”, “steal”, “shoot” and many more. Together, drug traffic and migration account for 33.8 % of the topics in the analyzed newspaper. Drug traffic is the second most common topic. Words like “cartel”, “cocaine” or “dissidents” are part of these articles that refer to Venezuela. With 12.6 % each, the topics violence and protest have the same presence in the print media. They cover words like “femicide” and “victim” (violence) or “demonstration” and “riots” (protest). The political situation in Venezuela is represented with 11 %. Phobias is the topic with the lowest presence under the applied topics. With 2.8 % phobias includes words like xenophobia, but also invective.

Figure 2. Articles with problem context, counts per topic. N=254



The identified topics show strong correlation, as shown in Table 3. The strongest correlations are related to the topics delinquency, migration, drug traffic, phobias, violence and protest.

The disaggregated data show the dynamics of newspapers on the comparatively highly correlated topics of crime and migration (Pearson 0.87). As shown in Figure 3 both topics show peaks in newspaper articles of 2019. In 2020 a correlated loss of presence applies to all newspapers.

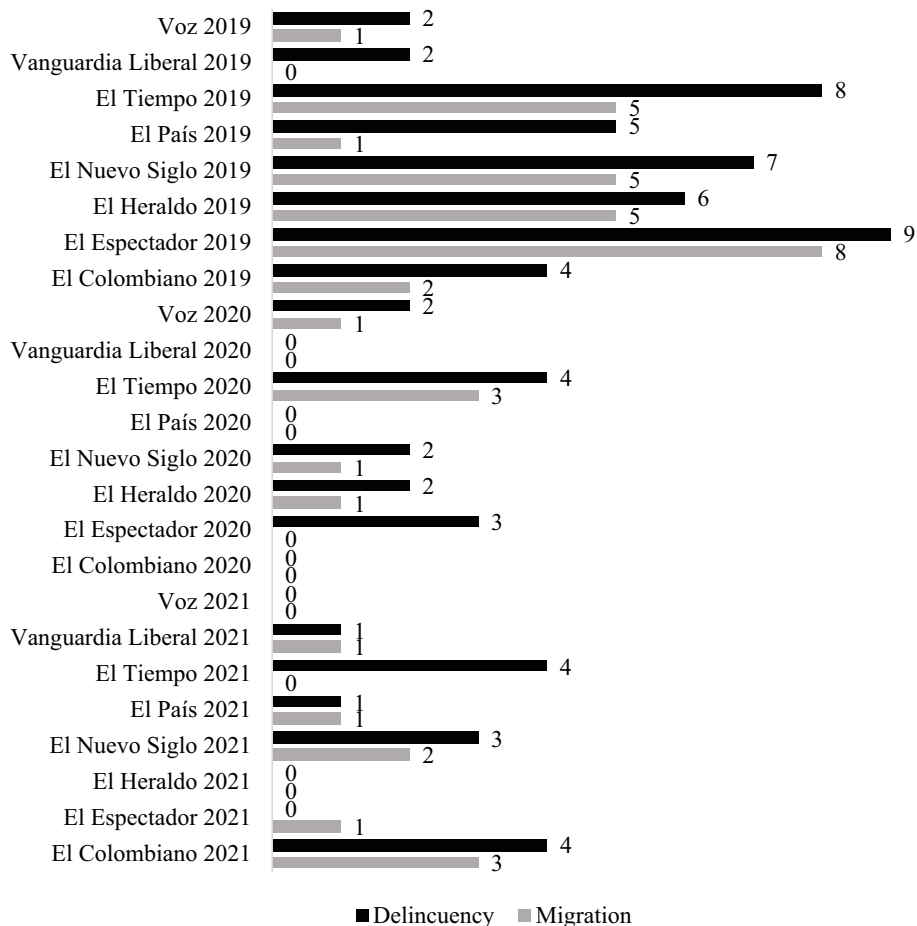
From 2020 to 2021 the presence of the topics migration and delinquency increased again. Most visible is this movement in the articles of the newspaper *El Colombiano*. In 2021 *El Colombiano* returned to relate Venezuela to delinquency and migration. The newspaper *El País*, *Vanguardia Liberal* and *El Nuevo Siglo* did also show an increase in a correlation of the topic migration and delinquency. The newspapers *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* show a less strong correlation of both topics between 2020 and 2021.



Table 3: Topic Correlation (Pearsons).

TOPIC 1	TOPIC 2	Correlation
Delinquency	Migration	0,87
Delinquency	Drug traffic	0,86
Protest	Delinquency	0,85
Drug traffic	Migration	0,83
Protest	Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	
Protest	Violence	0,82
Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	Delinquency	0,79
Delinquency	Violence	0,75
Political situation Venezuela	Drug traffic	
Political situation Venezuela	Migration	0,73
Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	Migration	
Political situation Venezuela	Delinquency	0,70
Protest	Migration	
Political situation Venezuela	Protest	0,59
Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	Violence	0,57
Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	Drug traffic	0,56
Migration	Violence	
Drug traffic	Violence	
Protest	Drug traffic	
Political situation Venezuela	Phobias (Xenophobia etc.)	0,50
Political situation Venezuela	Violence	0,41

Figure 3. Counts of topics Delinquency and Migration per newspaper and year. Without El Mundo

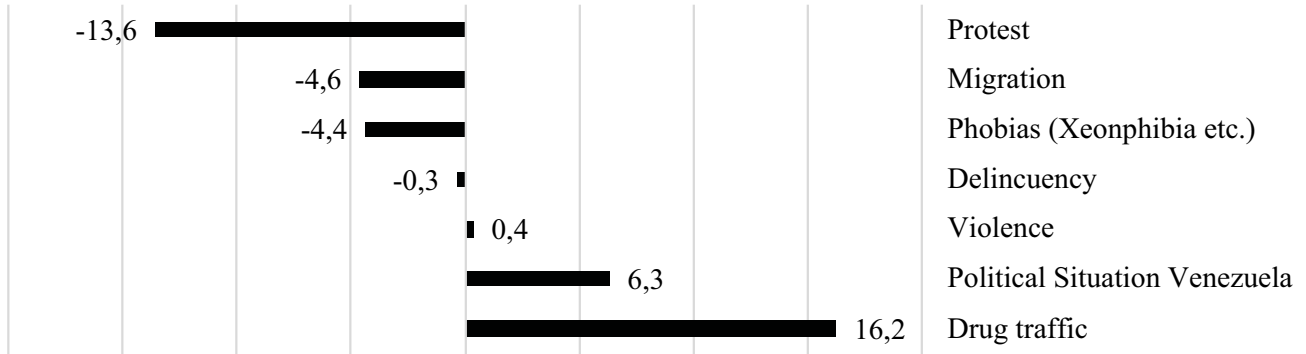


### 4.2.2. Topical dynamics related to Venezuela between 2019 and 2020

The most frequent topic in which the press relates to Venezuela is crime and the least frequent is phobias. While the topic of delinquency remains constant

between the three periods, topics such as protests and drug trafficking win or lose presence considerably between 2019 and 2021. As shown in Figure 4 there is a group of topics that win presence from 2019 to 2020.

Figure 4. Percentage decrease and increase of topics related to Venezuela in Colombian print media 2019 – 2020



The topics violence, political situation in Venezuela and drug traffic gain coverage when the Colombian print media is referring to Venezuela. Whereas drug traffic accounts in 2019 for only 14.4 % of the topics, in 2020 it accounts for 30.6 %.

The rise of references to drug traffic could be related to the organization for FARC-dissidents that left the peace agreement or did never support it. These groups concentrated their operation close to the border with Venezuela and are often suspected for having links to drug traffic. In his speech at the 75th Assembly of the United Nations, Ex-president Ivan Duque claimed the Venezuelan government of Nicolas Maduro as a dictatorial regime supported by resources from drug trafficking (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2020).

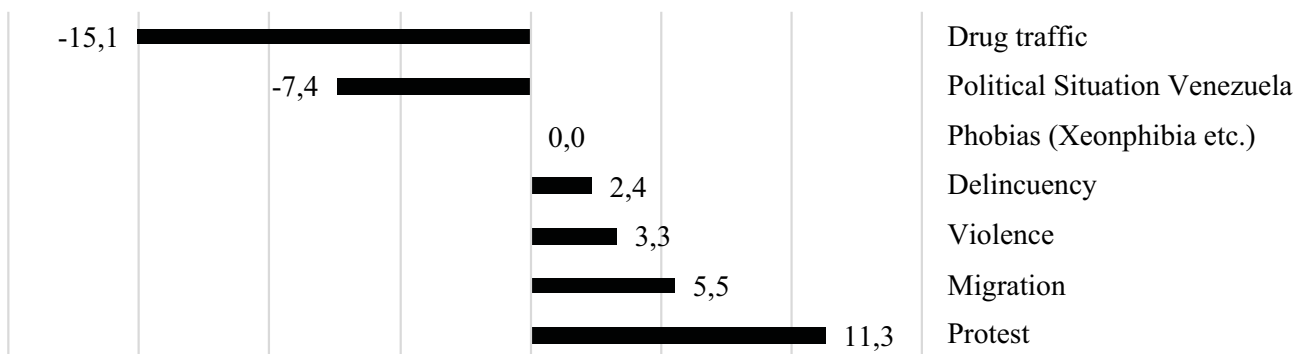
Although delinquency slightly decreases presence, in 2020 it is still the second most important topic with a share of 26.5 %. It is part of the second group that comprises topics with decreasing presence. Protest, phobias, and migration lose presence from 2019 to 2020. The most noticeable loss of presence in the print media is that of protest. Whereas in 2019 protest accounts for 15.6 % of the topics, this share falls to only 2 % in the following year. Regarding phobias, a less pronounced decline of -4.4 % can be observed. However, this change is enough to make the issue disappear by 2020. The peak of phobias in

2019 is explained by public critics towards racist hostilities against people from Venezuela. In the press of 2020 and 2021 phobias do not appear, which implies that reflections on xenophobia and discrimination practically disappear from media reports on Venezuela, while reports on crime are constantly on the rise.

Figure 5 shows the thematic changes between 2020 and 2021. Once again, there are two groups of topics. Additionally, the topic phobias remains without application. Drug traffic and political situation in Venezuela lose their presence from 2020 to 2021. Drug traffic reduces its presence by half. The topic falls most visibly by -15.1 % from a share of 30.6 % presence in 2020 to a share of only 15.6 %. The presence of political situation in Venezuela decreases from 16.3 % in 2020 to 8.9 % in 2021.

The topics of increased presence are delinquency, violence, migration and protest. Even though delinquency increases by only 2.4 % it reaches a share of 28.9 % of the topics in 2021. Delinquency is the topic that most frequently can be found in the articles of 2021. Migration and violence climb to a presence of 17.8 % (migration) and 15.6 % (violence). Most visible is the increase of the topic protest. Until 2020 it fell to only 2 %. However, by 2021 it grew by 16.2 % and reaches a presence of 13.3 %.

Figure 5. Percentage decrease and increase of topics related to Venezuela in Colombian print media 2020 – 2021



## 5. Out of the view? Migration, print media and racist hostilities against Venezuelans

Whereas the number of deaths in the protests increased exponentially in 2021, Venezuela lost its presence in the media. In comparison to the situation in the “night of fear” in 2019, in 2021 there was much more violence on the streets but less coverage regarding migration from Venezuela. In terms of the theoretical framework applied in this paper, this is a structural change that could be related to the stabilization of violence and hostility (Heitmeyer, 2020). However, public attention to migration has diminished, while migration from Venezuela has continued and even increased.

The protests of 2021 showed an unpredicted lethal violence against civilians. Media focused primarily on the violence during the protests of 2021 (Cely Morales, 2021; Correa Hernández, 2021; Ortiz Lemos & Sarango Reyes, 2021). The protests caught the media attention and less coverage was left for the topic of migration. Whereas print media covered the violence during the protests of 2020 and 2021, the attention for migration falls continually in these time spans.

The analysis of print media is helpful to explore the public perception of migration in Colombia. However, this approximation is only one approach that should be complemented by alternative methods. The Colombian public attention to Venezuelan migration is decreasing. This might explain why people from Venezuela were not equally exposed to racist hostilities in 2020 and 2021. On the contrary, in 2019 during the “night of fear”, Venezuelans have been present in public perception. In 2020 and 2021 there is not such a strong link between migration and protests. This may indicate that the perceived primary threat was public disorder and violence. Such a finding is also important for a theoretical reflection on violence. It shows that the stabilization of group-focused enmity should not be considered a necessary consequence of violence. Moreover, complex social situations, such as the public mobilizations in Colombia in 2020 and 2021, can have multiple outcomes and do not necessarily have to follow a logical script of stabilized hostile perceptions.

However, for Colombia this situation might not be durable. The remaining presence of Venezuela in the Colombian print media became more pejorative. Crime is the most frequent and persistent topic when reporting on Venezuela. Other harmful topics, such as drug trafficking and protest are correlated but change considerably. While reports on problems involving Venezuelans continue to oscillate, the critics on racist hostilities against people from Venezuela were abandoned.

What the media did was to non-report the topic. This indicates a change in attention, but does not necessarily mean a change in perception. Although we cannot show a change in perception about migration through the press, it is important to highlight a change in media attention. A change in perception would be evidenced by a clearer change in the topics related to Venezuela. Instead, the link between Venezuela and crime persists in the press.

Can a change in media attention explain the reduction of racist hostilities against Venezuelans? We can say that, if the press does not focus pejorative attention on Venezuela in critical contexts such as protests, these may not become additional spaces for collective hostilities of racism. It is uncertain and difficult to predict what would happen when the media returns to focus on Venezuelan migration. However, the pejorative context in which Venezuela has been reported in the press in recent years is not a very hopeful outlook.

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