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Local media perception of the EU and US
Foreign Policy in the Colombian
post-conflict era

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Abstract

This research explores the Colombian media perception of the EU and the US in the case of post conflict Colombia. Both actors' important role in the Colombian conflict resolution granted them prominence in the peacebuilding process the country is going through, an open invitation for them to deploy their respective and commonly juxtaposed foreign policy tools. Following a news media analysis informed by the cascade activation framing theory (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2003), this study argues that despite there's a significant salience of both EU and US's foreign policies - especially in the news in which the actors were involved in the Colombian domestic issues. The major degree of centrality and emotive charge in which the US is framed ultimately makes it a more outstanding international actor – a result that may be related to the US-Colombia longstanding and stable partnership. Still, although the EU is not the most salient, perceptions in the Colombian media show the recognition of the EU's distinctiveness as normative actor and in the environmental, energy, migration, and human rights fields. This is ultimately coherent with the areas of soft power approach it wants to project to the world and represents the EU's successful mediated public diplomacy and ability to penetrate in a country highly influenced by the US. Finally, the findings of the research also call attention to certain inconsistencies found between the EU self-representations and Colombian perceptions that have the potential to degrade its positive external images. Overall, the present research seeks to contribute to the relatively new field of EU perception studies and seeks to bring attention to the opportunities and constraints of the EU's “other” transatlantic relations that often go unnoticed.

Key words: *perception studies, EU and US comparison, Colombian post conflict period, global actor*

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Local media perception of the EU and US Foreign Policy in the Colombian post-conflict era

Introduction

The Colombian armed conflict, one of the longest in the world, officially ended with the ratification of a historic peace agreement between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), in 2016. The achievement was celebrated throughout the international community involved in the peacebuilding process since 1998 when Colombian president Andres Pastrana summoned multiple international actors to support the conflict resolution. His policy "Diplomacy for Peace" marked the internationalization of a conflict that caused more than 800.000 deaths, 7,75 million displaced, and brought light to a series of non-solved historical structural problems (Chevalier, 2022).

Literature on Colombian peacebuilding calls attention to the often juxtaposed approach the EU and US deployed during the peace process (Castañeda, 2012; Castañeda, 2014; Ioannides, 2019). Their respective political interests influenced both actors' roles, perception of threat, and understanding of the conflict. Hence, while the US mainly adopted a hard security approach through the "war on drugs" – a position supported by the Colombian government; EU's initiatives looked to address the root causes of the conflict and instead worked closely with the civil society. These two opposing strategies to reach peace, both in their goals and instruments, made them determinant external actors during the conflict resolution and guaranteed them a prominent role in the post-conflict period.

For its part, perceptions of the EU's foreign policy initiatives in Colombia have given the EU considerable recognition (Castañeda, 2012; Castañeda, 2014). The rise of a civic approach when the national programs were military-oriented represented a strategy that differentiated it from the other global players, showed its ability to serve as a counterbalance to US's unipolarity in the post-9/11 world, and matched its ambitions set through the Lisbon Treaty to consolidate as a more consistent and coherent player in the international arena. Yet, even though the EU's approach is considered more relevant after the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016- since the EU's support is explicitly mentioned (Acuerdo Final, 2016). Besides the growing efforts to strengthen the bilateral ties with Colombia in the environmental, social, economic, migration and multilateralism fields (European Commission, 2021). Perceptions of the EU's role and influence during the Colombian post-conflict period have been scarcely investigated.

The debate over the EU's new phase of international diplomacy and role in the world has often been overtaken by the consecutive Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, the refugee and migrant crisis, and Brexit (Chaban & Holland, 2014; Chaban & Holland, 2019). Nowadays, this is enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic that has marked a global shift of power that has tested the pillars of globalization and solidarity (Roloff, 2020). In this context of prolonged and ongoing crises, in which the EU continues to reframe its role as a global actor. The present study proposes to fill a gap in the academia by analyzing the framing of the EU's foreign policy and influence in the Colombian post-conflict period through perceptual and comparative lens by exploring:

To what extent are the EU and US actions in the Colombian post-conflict period salient in the Colombian media? And how can the EU's perceived identity in the Colombian media be differentiated from the US?

The essence of these questions departs from the premise that external perceptions constitute a valuable method for scrutinizing the EU's foreign identity and capability. At the same time, it is considered that comparing the EU vis-à-vis the US can offer valuable insights to evaluate the EU's potential and distinctiveness compared to other international actors. To this end, taking into account the variety of theories that informed the field of perception studies and the scope of the present research, the study opted for a news media analysis methodology according to the cascade activation framing theory developed by Entman (1993, 2003).

In this sense, the present research is divided into four sections. The first part considers the theoretical reflections based on the importance and development of the perception studies field and, following Entman's theory, the process and main actors of the international news framing. Based on the idea that framing is influenced by the geopolitical context in which news is produced, the second part develops more insights into the dynamics of news production in Colombia. The third section will describe the methodology for conducting the content media analysis. Finally, the fourth section discusses the EU and US foreign policy dominant frames in Colombian news.

1. Theoretical reflections

1.1. Why perceptions of Others matter

The present study departs from the assumption that perceptions matter for the behavior and interpretation of an actor in the international arena. A conception that draws upon a constructivist approach that has been developed since the end of the Cold War and has reshaped conceptions

of the relationship between the international system and its agents. Unlike the core tenets of the traditional theories, such as realism and neoliberalism, constructivism sees the world as a project under construction. It shows that the interconnection between structure and agency is not only influenced by material terms but also by external factors to the actor. In this regard, besides its material objects, opportunities and constraints of an actor's foreign policy also depend on intersubjective processes (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999/2006). Social communication is, in this sense, an important element for a political actor – whose identity, interests, and behavior are shaped by collective meanings granted to them (Adler, 2013).

The influence of the external environment of ideas and events on an actor's identity formation and role is well explained by Wendt (1992). Wendt describes the construction of an actor's identity and interests as "inherently relational: Identity, with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality, is always identity within a specific, socially constructed world" (Berger, cited in Wendt, 1992, p. 398). In other words, since identity is an "inherently social definition," a person or, in this case, an actor can have multiple ones. Which one is more salient varies according to the structure that corresponds to the "actors collectively hold about themselves and one another" (Wendt, 1992, p. 399). Accordingly, Bretherton and Vogler's analysis of global politics concluded that the EU's identity and role in the international scenario could be multiple. Since it is influenced by the formal or informal social interactions in which the actor is engaged – "the EU is a multifaceted actor; indeed, it can appear to be several different actors, sometimes simultaneously" (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999/2006, p.21).

Overall, external perception studies from a constructivist approach help to understand the significance of the "Other" viewpoint in the identity formation and international role of the "Self" and gained relevant attention in the IR literature (Neumann, 1996). Even though the growing importance of the public opinion from abroad motivated a variety of perception studies, European researchers were more focused on inner perceptions aiming to understand EU self-images and international presence. Hence, since the 1970s, different studies that focused on exploring the role of the EU in the world have granted it labels such as a civilian power (Duchene, 1972; Whitman, 1998; Orbie, 2006), normative power (Manners, 2002) or gentle power (Padoa-Schioppa, 2001). In general, the academics highlighted the EU's uniqueness as an actor based on its integration process, the development of its institutional and normative framework, and its capability to share universal values. Views that matched the rhetoric used by the EU institutions that portrayed itself as a leader in the new world order - an actor that "needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalization" (European Council, 2001).

Nevertheless, over the years, scholars started questioning this EU's "distinctiveness" found in the academic literature, the EU's self-representation, and even the public debate. Consequently, new literature was published to evaluate Europe's "true" effectiveness, capability, presence, and coherence in the world (Allen and Smith, 1990; Hill, 1993; Vogler and Bretherton, 2006). Literature that gave valuable information on the EU's performance as an international actor. However, not until recently the gap regarding how Others interpret the EU's performance and how the EU's actions impact the images it projects abroad was filled (Elgström, 2007, Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010; Chaban et al., 2013; Chaban & Holland, 2019).

1.2. Literature gap in the perception studies

Since the beginning of the 21st century, EU perception studies have developed into a multidisciplinary field that acknowledges various theories. For instance, Lucarelli and Fioramonti (2010), two of the pioneers in studying the external views of the EU in the world based on social identity theory, stated the importance of evaluating the cognitive dissonance between the EU's self-representation and outsiders' perception; as well as the influence of external perceptions on the process of European identity-building. In their work, the relationship of the EU with external Others is conceived as one of the most important factors that influence the EU's political identity, thereby their role in the world. The relevance of the other's perception is based on four aspects for which identity formation is shaped: recognition, distinctiveness, labeling, and bordering. (Lucarelli & Fioramonti, 2010, p. 4).

Similarly, Ole Elgstrom (2007), by describing and analyzing how outsiders picture and evaluate the EU's role in the WTO, described external images as "important indicators of how well intentions have been translated into observable actions" (Rhodes, as cited in Elgstrom, 2007, p. 950). Elgstrom argues external perceptions as a source of knowledge about EU Foreign Policy that transcends the common Euro-centric approach found in the field, represents the interconnection between external views and EU identity and roles, and finally, shows how the impact of EU's external policies partly depends on how third relevant actors evaluate them (Elgstrom, 2007, p.952). Further research on the importance of the external perception in the EU identity formation has been made by Chaban and Holland (2018), who propose the theory of othering as a unifying model. They transcend the traditional interpretation of othering and develop the responsive Other notion by conceptualizing the EU as the "Other" to the world. Equal to Lucarelli, Fioramonti, and Elgstrom, they conclude that external perceptions of the EU are important for their contributions to understanding the EU's identity and role in the international scenario. At the same time, it hints at how the EU's influence impacts the external actors.

Despite having their basis on different theories, these three major research projects provide valuable insights into how international actors see the EU. Not only do they contribute to understanding the significance of external perceptions from a constructivist approach, but also, they identify the main problems for the EU as a global actor. By the same token, Larsen (2014) criticizes one common main finding among the EU perception literature that presents as a challenge the difference between the EU-self rhetoric and how others perceive it. The gap is articulated as a major problem for the EU. It is considered a result of the communication deficit between the EU and third actors- an indicator of the EU's inability to meet other actors' expectations and a signal of the need to incorporate other's imagery into the EU's foreign policy strategy to have a further impact (Larsen, 2014).

According to Larsen (2014), the major drawback of this discourse is that the existing gap between the EU's self-understanding and the outside world's perception is taken as a fundamental obstacle to the EU's international agency, leaving out the fact that the same gap prevails among the majority of actors in the world. Larsen suggests that any foreign actor should interpret this context as ambivalent and criticizes the "disproportionate focus on EU gaps vis-à-vis the gaps of states actors in international relations." Subsequently, he concludes this "may be linked to the frequently expressed uncertainty towards non-state actors in foreign policy analysis – not least the EU" (2014, p.17). In light of this, the present study assumes that a perceptual evaluation of the EU's potential as an international actor can be more fruitful through a comparative approach - to measure whether the EU, in fact, has a disadvantage in this respect over other international actors.

1.3. Image formation

The concept of perception can be defined as the "result of the subjective or psychological cognition of the observer rather than the objective reflection of the object that is being observed" (Shiming, as cited in Chaban & Holland, 2014, p.8). Perception should essentially be viewed as a process where "stimulation is translated into organized experience" (Epstein et al., 2018), meaning that the large amount of information perceived is then organized in categorizations and stereotypes- natural cognitive processes that guide our understanding of the world. Both derive in images, understood as "representations of the outward form of a persona or thing, or a mental picture" (Harris, as cited in Chaban & Holland, 2014, p. 10). Commonly, the traces of the images are done through an analysis of the news media, general public, and elite discourse. Considering the scope of the present study, the analysis of news media's framing has been selected as the main source to acknowledge the images of the European Union and the United States visualized

by the Colombians. Consequently, this study applies the "cascade activation" framing theory (Entman, 2003), an analytical model that explains how the foreign policy news is spread throughout society and the dynamics between the actors involved in the framing process.

1.4. Media and framing

When an actor gets their idea covered by the media, the information shown will not be comprehensive but instead highlights of the issue or event they wanted to spread – an exercise known as framing. The concept of framing has been studied since the late 1970s by social psychologists (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 2003; Gitlin, 1980) in order to understand the social construction of reality through language and a way to acknowledge one of the mechanisms through which media exerts influence. To frame, according to Entman, implies "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution" (2003, p.417). For his part, Saffron O'Neill remarks framing as a negotiated process in which "media outlets offer an array of interpretative packages which audiences use in order to conceptualize an issue" (Gamson and Modigliani, as cited in O'Neill, 2018, p.10). Following these ideas, and important for the present study, Chaban and Bain (2014, p. 138) define framing of international news as the organization of a foreign story based on a certain perspective of some issues, resulting in a narrative about a foreign actor where certain issues are more prominent than others.

The roots of framing come from the sociological conception that is in human nature - classifying, organizing, and interpreting our life experiences and information about the outside world to make sense of them (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Frames, in other words, "organize everyday reality" (Tuchman, 1978). During this process of organizing ideas that provide meaning to a particular event or issue, certain elements get a greater allocation according to the individual's cognitive resources. As a consequence, the more salient elements have a better capacity to influence the individual's judgments (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). This conception of framing reveals the great power of the choices and organization of words that conform to the news stories when translated into news production. Accordingly, news framing can limit the context, define issues, summon moral judgments, and propose solutions of a specific event (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70; Entman, 1993, p. 52). This involves the selection and salience of some aspects of a reality that affect the audience's perception.

1.5. Framing as a contestation process

The cascading activation theory is based on the idea that even though media is available to the different collective actors of a society interested in obtaining media coverage to gain political resonance and influence; not all of them have the same ability to promote their ideas so that they ultimately appear as "news." On this matter, the words and images spread across the different media are not arbitrary but instead the result of a contestation process. According to Entman (2003), the negotiation dynamic can be explained by assuming that the information that wants to be promoted usually trickles down an imaginary cascade- a process that follows a "top-down" sequence. Here, the ideas of the top level of a society represented by the national administration flow to the elites – which serve as a media source, to the media networks and journalists - who finally construct the texts and visuals published and that are received by the public. Accordingly, the network in which ideas flow follows a hierarchy in which the government has the greatest power to spread its messages. Nonetheless, the author highlights each level can potentially impact the final frame and feedback on other levels of the network. For instance, when an idea gains enough importance among the public opinion, the media can function as a "pumping mechanism" that spreads the information back to the elites and the government. (Entman, 2003, p.420).

Media, in other words, is a competitive field, where the main player in the process of news production is the national administration, while the lowest in capacity to spread foreign policy frames is the public. Compared with other political actors, the national political institutions have better accessibility to journalists, making them the major news sources. Furthermore, they often make more efforts to mobilize their claims and shape the information according to their interests, so their ideas have more probability of being part of the final new story (Entman, 2003; Koopmans & Statham, 2010). Similarly, Entman (2003) grants the media a central role by considering it the primary public space that channels the perceptions and interpretations of foreign events by different members of a society. In this sense, the reporters, columnists, producers, editors, and publishers in charge of the national media are considered the key transmission point of information – the intersection where the "top-down" or "bottom-up" spreading of frames occurs. Since their decisions directly affect the news content, the main contestation process inevitably occurs between the government officials and journalists trying to exert influence over each other and the public.

On this point, Entman (2008) highlighted that despite the independent power of the journalist network over the framing of the news stories, the norm usually is the passive acceptance of the

administration frame. Likewise, when studying the factors that influenced images of other countries in the US media, Saleem concluded that "in every democratic society, despite private media ownership, government influence on media is visible" (Saleem, 2007, p. 141). In this sense, it can be argued that even though it is assumed that the network of journalists is committed to the norm of objectivity, inevitably the news production is shaped by external and internal factors like "ownership, market shared, and a nationally specific relationship between the media and political system" - that ultimately influence the organizational culture of the journal (Koopmans & Statham, 2010, p. 127).

1.6. Reader's perception

It has been mentioned that the theory premises that media framing can exert influence by suggesting people to think about an issue in a particular way. However, when measuring the extent of this influence, it should be considered that multiple factors increase or decrease the possibility that a frame will be remembered as it is. For instance, Pan and Kosicki (1993) suggest considering the audience's knowledge and life experiences related to the news presented. Accordingly, it can be argued that the audience's existing schemata will influence how they notice, interpret and remember the new story. Then, news framing does not always guarantee to influence how the audience thinks. However, based on former studies, it is safe to suggest that even though it does not have a universal effect, it does shape large portions of the reader's interpretations (Entman, 1993).

Similarly, it is important to consider that the political power of framing relies upon calling attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements. Suppose the audience possesses little information about the issue in question or does not know about alternatives. In that case, it is assumed that the frames – the salient elements- will dominate their perception (Entman, 1993). In this regard, when talking about the framing of international actors, it is assumed media framing will have a major influence since most people do not travel internationally and the best resource available for ordinary citizens to gather information about other societies and their peoples are the news coverage (Saleem, 2007). This assumption, however, will depend on how advanced is the access to new technologies in the country in question, considering that the rise of digital platforms and government-sponsored news media platforms such as Russia's RT, Qatar's Al Jazeera or China's CGTN have considerably expanded the means of influencing public opinion abroad (Golan et al., 2019).

1.7. Framing in the International communication process

Based on the preceding discussion, when the cascade activation theory is extended to the international communication process, another actor to consider among the ones that influence media production are the expert foreign officials, who act according to their countries' media and public diplomacy strategies (Entman, 2008). However, public diplomacy research has been continuously redefined in the academic debate, and several models and theoretical perspectives have been presented over the years. Thus, the literature lacks a universal explanation of what it comprises and a theoretical foundation to follow. In spite of this, when analyzing public diplomacy research, a common assumption has been found under the link between public diplomacy and soft power (Nye, 2019).

Soft power helps to understand that coercion terms are no longer sufficient to obtain preferred outcomes in world politics, and instead, it turns into international cooperation (Nye, 2019). The importance of the soft power approach is rooted in the spreading of the nation's legitimacy among other actors. A way to increase the attractiveness of one nation's foreign policies, cultures, and values (Nye, 2008). In this sense, public diplomacy is considered one of the tools to increase soft power by influencing foreign governments through their foreign elites and ordinary citizens; Golan et al. (2019, p. 3) argue public diplomacy's purpose is the "cultivation of positive public opinion in foreign nations."

Broadly speaking, public diplomacy aims to increase the potential of the nations to exert influence over foreign governments through the creation of an attractive image of a country. Thereon, Nye (2019) describes three important aspects of public diplomacy based on: i) daily communication to explain the government's decision or counter misleading information; ii) strategic communication to reinforce central themes and policies; iii) the creation of lasting relationships with key individuals. All these aspects of public diplomacy are partly based on the capacity of the officials to access and influence the foreign media; on their ability to mediate the public diplomacy efforts. Entman (2008, p. 88) further describes the practices of mediated public diplomacy by defining them as the short-term and target efforts to use "mass communication (including the internet) to support of a country's specific foreign policies among audiences beyond that country's borders."

It is important to consider that changes in the global communication infrastructures and political transformations that came with the post-Cold War era have called for increased efforts in transforming and modernizing the mediated public diplomacy strategies. For countries like the US, this has signified a replacement of a nearly 50-year old tradition of public diplomacy policies

that played an important role in America's Cold War victory but no longer met the needs of the 21st century (American Security Project, n.d.). The reorganization led to the dismantling of the US Information Agency, the only entity in charge of the US public diplomacy policies until 1998, which for many, translated into the loss of successful programs and talented Foreign Service officers (Reinhard, 2009). Today, the US public diplomacy practices are under the charge of the Department of State bureaus and offices and the US Agency for Global Media (USGM). Yet, the goal of rebooting the US image around the world has represented a challenge for the relatively new public diplomacy bodies, partly because the multitude of actors has led to a lack of consensus and consistent practices across the various bureaus and locations where the US operate (Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2021).

Similarly, the European Union Public Diplomacy (EUPD) has gone through profound changes with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 (Duke, 2013). The fragmentation characteristic of pre-Lisbon public diplomacy policies sought to be transcended with the incorporation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the introduction of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) - bodies that are considered the facilitators of the EU's foreign relations and creators of overall communication culture. However, the Lisbon Treaty that seeks to answer the need for a more effective, coherent, and visible EU; still turned into structural and administrative confusion regarding the image projected abroad. This was further complicated by the consecutive financial crisis, migration crisis, and Brexit phenomenon, which undermined the efforts to define the EU's role in the world (Duke, 2013).

Despite these challenges, the last decades' transformation of the US and EU (mediated) public diplomacy policies pursue the same goal - to more effectively foster a positive image of the foreign public actors to gain legitimacy for their foreign policies and identities as international actors. In the case of the US, its general foreign policy goals have maintained stable over the past 70 years and can be divided into four key elements that describe the US role in the world: global leadership, defense, and promotion of the liberal international order, defense and promotion of freedom, democracy and human rights and prevention of the emergence of regional hegemony in Eurasia (O'Rourke, 2021). Another dimension of US public diplomacy more relevant to the present study is the US public diplomacy plan in Colombia, settled under the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs goals. Accordingly, the WHA's has set as main priorities for the Latin American region to leverage strategic communication to advance national security through the counter of illicit networks and criminal organizations; strengthen the rule of law and democracy; promote human rights protection, trade, investment, and secure energy sources (Walker & Baxter, 2021).

In pursuing the above-mentioned public diplomacy goals, the US looks to project a role in the world that combines the pursuit of material interests with the promotion of universal values such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. This particularity of the US as a global actor has generated debates over which dimension of its power, whether soft or hard, should highlight (O'Rourke, 2021). Over the years, the weight given to them has varied according to the changes in the administration and the international security environment encouraged by the post-11 attacks or the increasing authoritarian influence strategies (Walker & Baxter, 2021). To date, the Biden administration has promised a foreign policy more attuned to the soft power notions, focused on improving America's reputation, which was highly damaged by Donald Trump's presidency (Cull, 2022). Biden's statement "diplomacy is back at the center of our foreign policy" (Biden, 2021) has translated into a recommitment to a multilateral approach, a budget increase in public diplomacy, and a review of field-based public diplomacy operations and infrastructure (Walker & Baxter, 2021; Cull, 2022).

For its part, although the EU image is trying to project to third countries is still imprecise due to its nature as an ongoing project (Duke, 2013), certain aspects that reinforce the construction of their identity and narratives can be defined under three descriptors according to Sandrin and Hoffmann (2018). First, the EU articulates itself as a zone of peace, prosperity, and democracy in front of its partners, as a peace project that transcended the horrors of the two world wars (European Commission, 2020) and positions itself as a greater actor in the international scenario. The second narrative concerns the EU's diversity; the motto "united in diversity" highlights its variety of actors that share the same mix of goals based on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights (European Union, n.d.). Finally, the EU is trying to project itself as an exemplar among its allies. The "EU as model" narrative intends to set the EU as a different international actor that transcends military instruments to rely on soft tools and values (Sandrin & Hoffmann, 2018). These dominant discourses constitute a uniform narrative in which the EU is presented as a benevolent actor, a civilian power, a potential exemplar to the world and are highlighted through several texts such as the Treaties, the EU strategy for international cultural relations, the Communication and Visibility Manual for European Union, the EU Global Strategy, among others.

Overall, the EU's external communication has notably improved since the Lisbon Treaty, and significant funds keep being destined to raise its public diplomacy projects (Baumler, 2019). The founding goals of the current EU public diplomacy approach are described in the EU Global Strategy, which further calls for more consistent messages of the EU principles and actions

(EEAS, n.d.). Concerning the bi-regional relations with Latin America and the Caribbean countries, the EGS establishes the EU's interest in fostering multilateralism in the region, cooperation in migration, climate change and energy, disarmament, and countering organized crime and terrorism. Furthermore, special relevance is given to the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements in the region, like the Colombian (EEAS, 2016).

When specifically reviewing the US and EU mediated public diplomacy goals in Colombia, it must be known that the efforts to communicate the before mentioned EU's and US's FP goals and values are done through two strategies: a passive way through publications and websites or actively, by officials visits or through the US and EU local delegation staff present in Colombia since 1823 and 2011, respectively (Duke, 2013). In this sense, the information the EU directly provides to the Colombian press is through the Political, Press, and Information Section, while the US is based on its Public Affairs Section. These actions, along with those mentioned earlier, more general efforts to raise public diplomacy, will probably translate into better communication of the politics both the EU and the US are developing inside and outside Colombia. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that, ultimately better communication will not necessarily lead to better news framing and reception of the positive image the EU and the US want to project (Entman, 2008).

As further explained below, the success of a country's mediated diplomacy strategy depends on the defined roles and dynamics of the domestic actors involved in news production, which differs across different countries. Following the cascade activation theory by Entman (2008), it can be supposed that favorable conditions for the US and EU media public diplomacy in Colombia would depend on the degree of congruence with the Colombian government's political culture. This assumes the political motivations behind the local leaders to actively promote a positive image of the foreign country in question. A context that enhances or diminishes according to the government's influence over the media system, as well as the foreign public motivation to believe their local mass media. The dynamics of all these factors in the particular context of the Colombian post-conflict era will be analyzed in the following chapter.

2. Geopolitical considerations when analyzing news framing in Colombia

As mentioned before, framing is a contestation process in which the foreign government's strategies focused on media frame building, and promotion of a favorable image of their policies will compete against the different local actors' attempts to influence the media. In this sense, Entman (2008) suggests that the results of external actors' mediated public diplomacy strategies will depend on a variety of local conditions; inter-related factors such as the congruence with the political culture, the media system, and the public opinion of the country in question. With this in mind, the following lines will be dedicated to the domestic particularities of the Colombian landscape in order to understand how favorable is the domestic geopolitical context that encapsulates the US and EU's images framed in the local news.

The chapter begins by reviewing the Colombian government's interests and affinities towards the US and the EU, a valuable input considering the premise that the national administration priorities are the most influential factors in the media framing process (Entman, 1993). In the specific case of Colombia, since its international relations have been interpreted in terms of their support for conflict resolution and the later peacebuilding process; it will be particularly important to explore the roles and approaches both the US and EU have developed over the peacebuilding transformation of the country and their respective political congruences with the Colombian government strategies.

2.1. Political congruence between Colombia and the US

Unlike most South American countries that have distanced themselves from the security policies of the United States, over the last two decades, Colombia has systematically aligned with the US operations and has openly encouraged the US presence in the country. The development of *Plan Colombia* by the government of President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) in consultation with US officials laid the foundation of the US-Colombia strategy by developing an approach that pursued the strengthening of the Colombian security and state presence in the midst of the armed conflict and the rise of illegal drugs production (Beittel, 2021).

The later inclusion of the Colombian conflict in the global fight against terrorism, after the September 11th attacks, guaranteed a tougher military strategy and a greater involvement by the United States. This translated into the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) and George Bush closely developing a security approach that significantly expanded the Colombian state's control

over the national territory and reduced terrorist attacks, homicides, and kidnappings (Beittel, 2021). Furthermore, the aggressive military strategy against the FARC encouraged by Uribe's administration through *Plan Patriota* (Patriot Plan) – also financially supported by the US government- pushed the FARC corps away to remote rural areas and deployed a series of successful operations that further undermined FARC morale.

The military-based- policy, however, gained many critics, who considered the program as an initiative purely *made in the US*, closer to US interests, and far from solving the structural problems of the Colombian conflict (Tickner, 2008). For instance, one of the biggest weaknesses of the strategy was its results on counternarcotics, as there were some significant but not sustained reductions in cultivations (Beittel, 2021; UNODC, 2021). On top of that, different operations carried out under Plan Colombia, and Plan Patriota has been highly controversial due to their impact on the common civilian population (Beittel, 2021; Cosoy, 2016; WOLA, 2016).

Even so, the special and close relationship between the US and Colombia has not been undermined in the face of these controversies. While the excessively oriented approach towards military actions has obviously brought serious problems of human rights issues, Plan Colombia has still been considered "one of the most successful US assistance efforts in history" (DeYoung, 2016). The alignment of the war against drugs with the war against terrorism ensured a greater commitment from Washington at a point it has provided a total of \$12 billion for carrying out Plan Colombia and its follow-on strategies since the year 2000 (Beittel, 2021). Support very much needed to achieve Colombian's government priority to reestablish legitimacy through its national territory and to increase national security.

Ultimately, this has made a country, once on the verge of becoming a failing state, more propitious to investment. Today, Colombia is one of the most attractive locations for foreign direct investment in Latin America and the third member country in the LAC region to join the OECD. Even more importantly, the aggressive strategy pursued against the insurgent forces weakened the FARC in a way that they were more disposed to start the peace process (Cosoy, 2016). Facts like the visit to Washington in 2016 of then-Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) to celebrate the 15th anniversary of Plan Colombia, and the compromise of the Barack Obama administration to increase the aid provided (Buelvas & Gehring, 2017), also suggest the recognition of the US strategy as a success.

Transcending an asymmetric relation

Throughout the years, Plan Colombia has grown as a signature of the US policy in the country and has been labeled as an expression of post-Cold War US imperialism (Tickner, 2008). In fact, there was pressure on the Colombian government to follow a plan that went accordingly to the US national security interest of reducing the influx of illegal drugs into the US and ceasing the armed forces' main source of income (Aviles, 2008). A reason why the assistance to the plan maintained an uncommonly strong bipartisan support for more than two decades (DeYoung, 2016). However, Colombia's behavior should not be simply understood as a case of submission to a larger power. The Colombian Foreign Policy attempted and successfully managed to influence the US behavior to involve it in the solution of the armed conflict. Arlene Tickner refers to the US in Colombia as an "intervention by invitation" case (2008, p. 69), meaning that for the Colombian government is favorable to enabling US interference in the country's domestic affairs.

By focusing on pursuing US's main interest in the war on drugs, the Colombian government ultimately achieved its main goal of strengthening the Colombian state and weakening the FARC. Furthermore, while after 9/11, Latin American countries went off the radars, Colombia still benefited from high US attention (Castañeda, 2014). Today, Colombia is one of the US's closest allies in the region, and the proximity of both countries remains a permanent feature of Colombian foreign policy. Consequently, despite US cooperation still possesses a strong military component; the US is also the biggest provider of economic assistance to Colombia (Vargas, 2022), the main trading partner and the largest investor in the country (Portafolio, 2021).

Regardless of the fruitful US-Colombia relationship, the existent asymmetries in power are still a subject of concern. On the one hand, the high level of US solidarity has generated significant profits for Colombia; on the other hand, its position as a weaker state has forced Colombia to compromise with the US in order to obtain its assistance and left important gaps that ultimately crashed against the country's interests. For instance, the alignment with the US cost Colombia a series of concessions in favor of the United States during the signing of the FTA in 2012, as actions such as the public declaration of the Colombian government for signing it weakened Colombia's negotiating position (Tickner, 2008). Similarly, the numerous drug traffickers' extraditions to the United States, a focal point of counter-drug collaboration between Bogota and Washington, continue to hinder the processes of justice and reparation for the victims in Colombia (Carrillo, 2022).

In this sense, throughout history, Colombia and US interests have shown to be compatible but not totally harmonious. The existent asymmetrical relation has forced the Colombian government to constrain some of its priorities to obtain resources. This two decades-long tendency suggests that the dependency on US aid will continue to affect how the Colombian government redefines its strategies and goals. Nevertheless, recent events indicate there is a growing pressure to reduce the security approach of the cooperation, and during the Biden administration, a new tone, more supportive of the peace accord implementation, has been adopted (Isacson, 2021) – overcoming, in this way, the stagnation suffered during the Trump era.

After all, the current state of the US focus in Colombia is marked by a redefinition of the bilateral relations, with growing non-military cooperation that calls for investing more in development programs. This is facilitated by US decisions like removing the FARC from their terrorist list, allowing agencies like USAID to support alternative development activities, demining operations, and any other programs where the former FARC combatants are involved (AFP, 2021, November 30). Regarding the level of congruence between the current US and Colombia's government priorities, Biden's administration's shift to a stronger emphasis on human rights has not favored the current Colombian President Ivan Duque (2018-2022), who ran an election critical of the peace accord. Duque's alignment to Trump's "iron hand" strategy based on counternarcotic efforts perpetuated the longstanding programs to eradicate coca and confront the remaining armed forces, even though the indicators show their effect in the illegal drug market is limited (Isacson, 2021; Gil, 2022).

Despite the fact that the initial encounters between Washington and Bogota were marked by a distant tone, to date and revealing once again the significant mutual importance of the cooperation, Biden has recognized "the unique and close relationship that exists between (both) nations" (Arredondo & Agobian, 2022) by naming Colombia a strategic ally outside NATO. Similarly, he has also encouraged the support for Colombia to deal with the influx of approximately 40% of the Venezuela exodus that now resides in the country and the economic reactivation after the coronavirus pandemic. It is expected that the stagnation of the peace process will be overcome by supporting the pacific transformation of the country through economic development (Birke & Kurtenbach, 2021). Finally, for the first time, a Colombian has a role as an adviser for Latin American issues in the US National Security Council (Gutierrez, 2021). After all, it can be argued that during the Biden administration, the historical ties between both countries kept Colombia as the "*cornerstone* of Washington's foreign policy in Latin America" (Torrado, 2021).

2.2. Political congruence between Colombia and the EU

Similar to the US, EU engagement in Colombia is influenced by the search for the pacification of the armed conflict in the 90s. The EU's involvement in Colombia responded to the EU's political goal of participating in global affairs and showing its capacity as an international actor by supporting the stability in the Latin American region. Moreover, Colombia represented a new market rich in valuable commodities and with a strategic location - as it is the meeting point of Central and South America. And even more importantly, the EU approach was a response to the US influence through the war on drugs in Colombia and the Andean region (Ioannides, 2019).

Yet, the way the EU approached the conflict resolution distanced from Plan Colombia and focused more on creating opportunities for peacebuilding in the regions most affected by the conflict through civilian tools. Even though the Colombian government intended to engage all the foreign support in Plan Colombia, the EU Parliament declared a joint statement of its stance against it and conceived the development of an European initiative through the development of Peace Laboratories during the years 2002 – 2012 (B5-0087/2001 from European Parliament). This policy lacked, at least during the initial stage of EU-Colombia relations, the full support of the central Colombian State. In this sense, and contrary to the US, the biggest support of the EU involvement came from the civil society organizations and government bodies that perceived the EU as the US counterbalance (Castañeda, 2012; Ioannides, 2019).

In brief, Peace Laboratories and other EU programs aimed to combat the structural causes of the conflict represented an aid of €230 million that was invested in 1108 economic, regional development, and human rights projects that reached approximately 280 000 persons in the violence-affected areas. (Ioannides, 2019). However, their progress was influenced by the complexity of the Colombian conflict and the EU's Foreign Policy in consolidation, which brought a series of difficulties. For instance, the 9/11 attacks hindered the EU's support for the negotiation process with the guerillas since they started to be considered narcoterrorist groups. A major problem for the EU since one of the pillars of the Peace Laboratories was to create a platform of peace dialogues with armed actors and that divided the members' states into two tendencies: the ones that wanted to keep the human rights approach and members asking for the alignment with Uribe's security strategy (Castañeda, 2014). Furthermore, the EU's initial reluctance to include the FARC and ELN guerrillas in the terrorist groups, precisely to keep its role as a mediator, gained high criticism from the part of the Colombian government and the local media. Unfavorable

for the EU, the Colombian government started to see with mistrust the local initiatives (and its donors) that took place in the conflict zones (Castañeda, 2014).

Shift to a more compatible approach

Since the internationalization of the conflict, it was clear that the main priority of the national authorities was to follow a military approach based on the belief that the security conditions were required before focusing on development programs. Consequently, much of the needed civil society and institutional strengthening came from international cooperation (Moreno, 2009). The results achieved for the EU part, even though they did not create a significant impact on the resolution of the Colombian conflict but mostly on the localities, are still considered by the EU as "an emblematic example of EU development cooperation assistance" (Ioannides, 2019, p.16) – ultimately, a reflection of the construction of its foreign policy and how the EU wants to be seen in the international scenario. This EU civic approach, which initially contrasted with the Colombian government's understanding of the conflict, has become an essential part of the Colombian peacebuilding tools since the peace negotiations started in 2012.

The process regarding the signing of the peace agreement can ultimately be conceived as an inflection point in the Colombian domestic and international approach toward a more peaceful and political solution to the conflict. Hence, a more compatible stance with the EU's strategy (Buelvas & Gehring, 2017). Consequently, the initial discrepancies with the Colombian government seemed to be overcome, and the EU has gained a renewed relevance in the post-conflict period. The current EU support to the peace agreement has combined direct assistance to the national public policies for the economic development of rural areas in Colombia, rapid response programs, the development of a Trust Fund, and the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for the peace process (European Commission, 2018). As mentioned above, the weight of the US assistance is still visible in the post-conflict era; nevertheless, Colombia is still a country where the EU has mobilized a broad spectrum of its Foreign Policy tools and over €650 million only in support of the peace process (EEAS, 2022). This has made the EU one of the most important international actors in the peacebuilding process and suggests its strong commitment to Colombia.

Over the years, the EU Foreign Policy identity has been influenced by its liberal nature, combining development assistance and trade cooperation (Castañeda, 2014). In the case of Colombia, the EU has enhanced its economic presence in the country by signing a free trade agreement (FTA)

in 2012, in light of the growing US and Chinese presence in the region (Dominguez, 2015). To date, the EU is the third trading partner of Colombia, after the US and China, amounting to a total net worth of bilateral trade of €10 billion in 2021 (EEAS, 2022). Furthermore, during the Duque administration, and despite the issues raised by a renewed inclination towards a security approach, the level of congruence of the EU-Colombian relations has still been shown through common positions towards the Venezuelan migration crisis, the development of green diplomacy, and the promotion of multilateralism initiatives, like the Pacific Alliance (Banchón, 2022). The Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2021 and Duque's visit to the EU in February 2022 also reveal the mutual interest in deepening the relationship (European Commission, 2021). Moreover, the relevance of the EU also resides in the individual cooperation of its member states. For instance, countries like Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands have also made important political and economic contributions to the post-conflict era (Buelvas & Gehring, 2017).

Yet, there are still clear differences that affect the EU-Colombian approach. In terms of national security, the EU has called for governmental reforms in light of the high level of violence that now is facing the former combatant of the FARC and right defenders (Gil, 2022). Similarly, it has condemned the alarming issues of police brutality against mass protests that sparked over a government tax reform in April 2021 and that resulted in 60 deaths and thousands of injuries (Beittel, 2021). Furthermore, a major concern has been Duque's stance toward the peace agreement- which has distanced from the Santos administration. The intention of Duque to modify the peace agreement pressured the EU to follow up on the agreement's implementation (DW, 2018; Caracol Radio, 2018). While Duque's government has maintained a rhetoric of rejection against the agreement and has encouraged the renewal of a security approach, the EU has called for Duque's administration to comply with the agreement and present it as a success - as "the most complete and ambitious agreement that has been signed anywhere in the world" (El Espectador, 2021).

To sum it up, the surge in human rights violations in Colombia and the substantial delays in implementing the peace agreement is a matter of concern in the context of EU-Colombian relations. However, it is important to consider that, regardless of who is in charge of the Colombian administration, the Peace Agreement implementation is constitutionally anchored, and there are instruments to enforce the human rights conditions available for the US and the EU part. Besides, the shift in the Colombian Foreign Policy that started during the administration of Juan Manuel Santos has set the Colombian path towards growth in autonomy from the US while deepening

ties with the rest of the world (Buelvas & Gehring, 2017). All in all, it makes it possible to argue that Colombia and the EU have overcome the period of relative distance and that a growing convergence between the EU approach and the Colombian domestic policy will keep shaping bilateral relations in the post-conflict era.

2.3. The state of freedom of the Colombian press media

This part is based on the premise that mediated public diplomacy draws on the assumption that media plays a key role in international relations, as a tool for foreign governments to reach larger portions of a foreign population and as a crucial platform for foreign audiences to learn about foreign affairs (Golan et al., 2019). In this sense, despite the rise of digital and online technologies as the main platforms to disseminate information, traditional media is still considered to have a key role in communicating local politics (Molina-Rodríguez-Navas & Muñoz, 2021). These assumptions gain more relevance in countries with a low percentage of internet connectivity, as it is the Colombian case with only 56,5% of households with internet access (Colombia Forbes, 2021). In societies with network disadvantages, traditional media becomes one of the main sources for people to find out about public issues (Arroyave, 2020). Moreover, in the context of the multiethnic and multicultural nature of Colombian society, the media outlets serve as one of the main platforms to canalize the plurality of interests of a country that is composed of afro, indigenous and rom communities, along with the demands of the collectivities affected by the conflict (Molina-Rodríguez-Navas & Muñoz, 2021)

In this sense, when analyzing the role of traditional media in Colombia, grows in importance the agenda the local press set and how they report the news stories. Similarly, the role of the administration as the main media source is essential – by providing politically and socially relevant information at the time guarantees an environment where the local media can freely describe and interpret the reality for a plural audience. Nevertheless, Colombia's media conditions are far from ideal, and the growing press deterioration and the state of freedom have become a matter of international concern. Accordingly, the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2022) has situated Colombia in a position 145/180. Considering it one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in the western hemisphere. Likewise, The Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP, 2021) observes that the censorship and violence against the press in Colombia have reached similar levels to the conflict period at a point the country is considered the second most lethal in the continent after Mexico.

Counterintuitively, the intimidation of journalists has multiplied after the signing of the peace agreement. This is partly due to the Colombian post-conflict's particularities that involve the subsistence of dissident groups that have created a scenario of localized conflicts in rural areas with a lack of state presence (Pardo, 2021). Barrios and Miller (2021) mention that the local journalists covering stories from dangerous territories live in a constant sense of vulnerability, making them prone to self-censorship. Nevertheless, according to Garcés-Prettel et al. (2019), a deeper look into the actors that constraint the Colombian journalists' autonomy in the post-conflict era reveals that: the government, national armed forces, political and economic elites, criminal gangs, and the clergy and churches as those who most violate the freedom of the press in the country. This reality goes in line with FLIP's last report that denounces that most of the 768 assaults against journalists in the year 2021 were committed by members of the public forces (FLIP, 2022). On the other hand, it has been reported that the autonomy to talk about the guerrillas' activities, victims of the conflict, poverty, inequality, and any other theme related to the root causes of the conflict has grown, thanks to the demobilization of the paramilitaries and the peace process with the FARC (Garcés-Prettel et al., 2019).

In this scenario of threats that directly affect the freedom of expression and journalism practices in Colombia, one conclusion can be drawn: the violence is still present in many regions where the armed groups have control; nevertheless, they are much lower than during the conflict period (Avila, 2019). Nowadays, the freedom of the press in Colombia is mostly limited through self-censorship, and one of the reasons behind it is the collusion between media ownership and journalists' routines. In this regard, academia and civil society highlight as the main concern the concentration of media ownership in three main business conglomerates that control 57% of the press, internet, and radio (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.). According to Garcés-Prettel et al. (2019), the economic elites' influence ultimately affects the published stories since most media editors pressure the journalists not to go against the owners' interests based on other companies or political parties. Similarly worrying is the influence of the political forces in the exercise of journalism through advertisement dependency, since journalists mostly have to rely on selling advertising space to official sources to get a living wage (Barrios & Miller, 2021). Practices like media heavily relying on official sources, according to Molina-Rodríguez-Navas and Muñoz (2021), ultimately limits the information provided to the society's dominant ideology. Creating a reality that lacks plural representation and multiple visions since there are often no diverse sources or opinions about the issue in question.

Historically, many journalists in the country have resigned from journalism or gone to exile due to threats from the guerrillas, drug gangs, paramilitary groups, or corrupt political forces that were affected by their investigations (Arroyave, 2020). Nowadays, among the main tools for external actors to exert direct power over what is disseminated in the media outlets are judicial or online harassment. For instance, in its latest report, FLIP (2022) denounces congress's efforts to approve an article that imposed sanctions on those who insult or defame officials or former public officials. Likewise, journalists are often threatened with judicial processes when influential people get discomforted with their publications (Barrios & Miller, 2021). Overall, according to FLIP (2021), the cases of physical aggression against journalists, obstruction of access to information, and the economic hardship of the press increase yearly. The ever-present fear in light of the threats and acts of violence against the journalists, along with the lack of resources, have reduced their capacity to report freely, limiting their critical and independent stance.

Given this, it is clear that the news media production in Colombia is increasingly influenced by the political and economic elites that use their resources to control the information provided to the public to frame a reality according to their interests. An environment that leads to press self-censorship and journalistic malpractices. On the other hand, the evident lack of a plurality of voices of the diverse realities of the Colombian society increases the disconnection between the political, economic, and media elites and the citizens. For instance, Gómez and Cárdenas (2019) reveal through a study of the Colombian plebiscite that the public opinion published by the Colombian press - through the newspaper columns, readers' letters, editorials, comments, and featured phrases - displayed a public opinion posture in favor of the plebiscite, contrary to what in reality happened in the polling stations. This suggests a local media where the interests of the public are not being reflected or promoted. A situation that added to the precarious connectivity conditions already mentioned increases misinformation and affects the freedom of expression of the society.

Even though the Colombian national press, as the majority analyzed in the present study, in contrast with the local and regional press, has remained more independent and with more significant resources for investigations. The perceived media lack of autonomy and pluralism by the citizens makes no distinction between the media networks and leads to a generalized image of little freedom of the press in the country (OBS Democracia, 2017). All in all, although Colombia is considered "among the longest-standing democracies in Latin America," there is a growing perception that external pressures are transforming the media into a political tool, far from the citizens' interests and at the service of the Colombian partisan or economic powers (Rodríguez &

Muñoz, 2021). Consequently, the increasing public mistrust suggests a panorama where the media is losing its credibility and legitimacy among Colombians (Fundacion Gabo, 2020).

2.4. The Colombian public opinion

According to Nye (2019), promoting a foreign country's positive framing depends not only on better communication on the part of the officials but also on better listening. With this in mind, this section focuses on a better understanding of the Colombian audience that involves a need to review the goals and values of the public, as well as their existing schemata regarding the foreign actors in question (Entman, 2003).

When it comes to Colombia, analyzing the society's opinion regarding the needs and ways to achieve peace in the country becomes important since from it derives the support or opposition to the US and EU contributions to the Agreement implementation. In this sense, it should be noted that society is usually portrayed as a polarized one regarding the Peace Agreement. Nevertheless, the reality seems to be different as the latest survey concerning local perspectives of peace in Colombia shows a common vision of peace that involves three key elements: respect, justice, and tranquility, as well as a majority approval of the Peace Agreement (Birke & Kurtenbach, 2021).

On the other hand, a matter of concern does rely on the different conceptions of peace between the society and the Colombian government. According to Birke and Kurtenbach (2021), Duque's conception of peace focuses on security and legality, while the transformation of the root causes of the violence is not taken into consideration. This differs from Santo's promotion of a comprehensive and transformative peace based on reducing violence, recognizing human rights, and conflict transformation. In this sense, Duque's political priorities have underfunded, slowed down the peacebuilding process, and instead renewed the long-standing policies against drug trafficking. A stance that has crashed against the integral transformation the civil society is looking for (Birke & Kurtenbach, 2021) and ultimately led to increasing disapproval of his administration - reaching 69.8% at the end of 2021 (Telesur, 2021).

The discontent with the slow implementation of the Agreement aimed to deal with open issues such as reconciliation, extreme inequality, poverty, and discrimination, became more evident through the collection of protests that began in November 2019. In which social leaders, ex-combatants, migrants, and indigenous communities also grouped to canalize claims regarding the increase in food insecurity, the deterioration of personal finances as a consequence of the pandemic, and general dissatisfaction with democracy - based on a growing perception of a

Central government represented by corruptive authorities and powerful elites (Arnson, 2022). Over the years, civil society - in response to the public forces' repression of the protests, the lack of open dialogue, and chances to participate in national politics- has developed a more defensive strategy against the government. Initiatives like the Defendamos La Paz (Let's defend Peace) movement encompass different sectors of the civil society, facilitators of the process, conflict victims, politicians, and international activists, and have grown into tools to defend the political agenda of the Agreement implementation. This has translated into a series of communications, letters, and claims to the government and international organizations, besides the recent mobilizations (Birke & Kurtenbach, 2021).

The compromise of the society with the Peace Agreement represents an opportunity for the external actors involved in the Agreement implementation, such as the EU and the US, to foster a positive image among the Colombians. On this point, the latest investigation about the perception of the US and the EU across Latin America revealed a considerable knowledge and positive conception of both actors in the country (Romero et al., 2022). This information might not be the perfect reflection of the Colombian society since the authors specify that the received data come from highly educated respondents. Nevertheless, it is relevant for the present study as it serves as a reference point to understand Colombian citizens' existing images in relation to the role of the EU and the United States as international actors.

In this sense, several findings are worth highlighting. First, the Colombians' perception of the European Union and the United States is generally positive, as the majority contemplate them as influent actors in the international scenario (Romero et al., 2022). It is highlighted as well that 52% of the population perceived the EU actions as independent from the US (Nuso, 2022a). A second important point relies on the perception of the EU and the US as leaders in specific areas that can be connected to the soft and hard power they respectively aim to promote. In this sense, the EU is considered by the Colombians as a leader in three main themes: environmental defense (61%), human rights defense (60%), and peace promotion (56%). Conversely, the US stands out as a military power (63%), economic power (47%) and in its role to combat terrorism (60%).

A third important result (Nuso, 2022b) is the positive perceived image by the Colombians of individual European countries. For instance, among the three countries with the best public opinion are highlighted: France (52%), the US (51%), and Germany (49%). Likewise, Germany and France also stand out as democracies and development models (Nuso, 2022c). Finally, concerning the general presence of the EU and the US in the country, the US is considered by a large majority (90%) as the most influential economic actor in the country; while, Europe is

perceived by 55% of the population as the most convenient region for Colombia to reinforce relations (Nuso, 2022d).

Overall, Romero et al. (2022) research has revealed that the public image of the EU, EU member states, and the US project is positive for Colombian society. Also, as results suggest, both are in line with the areas of foreign policy that each actor aims to stand out - the EU as a soft-power actor that contrasts with the military-economic dominant US. Furthermore, there are clear opportunities for the EU as it is perceived as an influential and independent actor with whom it would be favorable to strengthen relations. Nevertheless, as stated before, due to the particularities of the population surveyed, this cannot be generalized, and further conceptions of the EU and US should be considered.

First of all, it should be noted that anti-American sentiments are often the foreign public's response towards US-related news (Entman, 2008). Accordingly, a recent study suggests a growing population in the world that shares the perception of the US influence and power as a major threat in their country (Gramlich & Devlin, 2019). Moreover, in the particular context of Latin America, it has been suggested that the Trump era undermined the trust in US leadership (Johnson, 2018). Still, a deeper look into the public opinion polls in Colombia indicates a different situation as the perception tends to hold a positive view of the US. However, it is a trend that has been declining over the years, according to Romero (2021). To this, it should be added the scandals over human rights abuses committed under Plan Colombia and Plan Patriota, which is highly condemned by civil society and international organizations (Isacson, 2021).

Generally, the EU is conceived in positive terms in Latin America, and the civil society seems to be in sync with the EU's principles and values. A feature that is enhanced according to the country's cultural and historical ties with Europe. However, despite the cultural affinities, former studies have also highlighted a negative perception linked to Europe's colonial past, and characteristics such as "arrogant, hypocritical and aggressive" has been attributed to it (Sandrin & Hoffmann, 2019, p.51). The EU's actions, inconsistency with its norms and values, and lack of capacity to address the simultaneous crisis have also undermined EU images in the continent (Dominguez, 2019). Moreover, Latin Americans' perception of the EU's absence in the region is growing (Borrell, 2020). Recently, in the particular case of Colombia, EU images have proven not to be entirely positive since, in the frame of the last Duque's visit to Brussels, different organizations have criticized the European institutions that received the Colombian president with complacency, wasting the opportunity to claim over the human rights violations in the country and the lack of the Agreement implementation (Banchón, 2022).

2.5. Discussion and hypothesis

H1. The current account of the geopolitical context encapsulates Colombian media allows to hypothesize a favorable political and cultural congruence towards the US and the EU. In the analysis, however, it could be observed that the Colombian and US government have a longstanding and more stable partnership compared to the EU, based on several security-economic key issues that foster Colombia's dependency on the US. Furthermore, despite the implementation of controversial policies that raise critics among the citizens and international organizations, the influence of the US in the Colombian peace process and general development is still undeniable and has led to a solid partnership based on mutual benefits. Following Entman's (2008) argument, it can be assumed that the Colombian government has enough motivations to promote from a neutral to positive framing of the United States. Furthermore, the degree of success of a neutral or positive framing in the news is elevated by the Colombian government's strong influence over the Colombian media networks.

H2. For its part, it has been shown that the EU's capacity as a peace actor made it possible to penetrate in a region highly influenced by the US while following a distinctive conflict resolution approach. Although initially, EU-Colombia relations were clearly more recent and superficial than those with the US, the relations have strengthened based on a more harmonious foreign policy that started with the former Juan Manuel Santos administration. In this sense, in spite of Duque's pursuit of peace based on justice and security has wreaked havoc on the relationship with the EU. EU presence in the country in multiple fields, the constitutional shield of the agreement, and Biden's turn into non-military cooperation with Colombia set a political context favorable for developing the EU's foreign policy. All in all, perhaps to a lower degree than the US, this constitutes enough promising conditions for assuming a neutral or positive news framing of the EU image.

H3. On the other hand, it is important to consider that US and EU commitment to the Peace Agreement implementation has proved to be a favorable approach, congruent with Colombian citizens' conception of peace and main needs. Besides, the review of Colombian's existing schemata reveals that at least the most educated part of the population has considerable knowledge of both actors. In fact, they hold a positive perception that distinguishes the US and the EU according to the hard and soft power tools they have been respectively employing and promoting as international actors. Nevertheless, since this posture is not representative and further studies on perceptions suggest negative assessments regarding the EU and the US

approaches in the region and in Colombia, it is rather to assume the presence of mixed perceptions towards both actors among the public opinion.

H4. On this point, it should be noted that considering the natural public lowest capacity to access the media and the deterioration of the interaction between the Colombian media networks and the citizens, the findings of the present study may not be representative of the general public perceptions. Finally, it should be stressed that considering the increasing public mistrust of the local media, it will also remain uncertain if what is framed about the EU and the US by the Colombian media influences the public's thinking. With this in mind, the following chapter now turns into the outline of the procedure for analysis of the EU and US news in the Colombian media.

3. Methodology

3.1. How to identify dominant frames

The identification of the images projected by the media involves the analysis of the most salient information – the dominant frames. According to Entman (1993, 2003), there are two essential ways to recognize the bits of information that are more salient: through analyzing the *magnitude* and *cultural resonance* of the texts. Magnitude criteria estimates the prominence and repetition of a frame that makes the narratives and images more outstanding. While cultural resonance intends to evaluate how noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged a frame is in relation to the audience's culture. Accordingly, it is argued that "the more resonance and magnitude, the more likely the framing is to evoke similar thoughts and feelings in large portions of the audience" (Entman, 2003, p. 417).

When analyzing how foreign countries are portrayed in the local news, the elements of cultural resonance gained even more significance. In this context, resonance involves making an impression on the public consciousness by linking the foreign story directly to the local economy, culture, business, or issues - giving to "people explicit reasons why they should take care of a [foreign] place" (Ginsberg, 2002, p. 53). This strategy calls the audience's attention to foreign actors and events that otherwise might have been unnoticed. In much the same way, Chaban and Bain (2014, p.127) highlight how foreign news with a local angle has a greater ability to influence as they resonate better with the audience and the local political realities "due to a more pronounced presence of motivation, power, and strategy, and cultural congruence" in the frames.

Considering that foreign news with a local angle makes the international news more attractive to the audience and grants the external actors higher relevancy. Chaban and Bain (2014), when evaluating the EU media reflections in Asia-Pacific media, considered it valuable to add another variable to the identification of dominant frames developed by Entman (1993). And with the aim to distinguish between the external and local news, they established the *focus of domesticity* criteria.

3.2. Key Research criteria

With this in mind, the present study's method will be based on Chaban and Bain's (2014) model to assess media representations of the EU in north-east Asia-Pacific countries. Viewed in this way, three key research criteria can be used to distinguish the dominant frames in the news: focus on domesticity, visibility, and cultural resonance (see Table 1). Overall, it is considered that these

three criteria form the indicators that make the words and images more salient and, therefore, more influential. Thus, it is argued that considering them will help to identify the dominant local perceptions and interpretations of the EU and US foreign policy.

Following Chaban and Bain's methodology (2014), the present study will organize the news according to the main category division - *focus on domesticity*, which permits differentiating the EU' and US news with a local angle. At the same time, in each category of domesticity, the news items will be coded according to the criteria of *visibility* and *cultural resonance*.

Table 1. The key research criteria

Variable	Indicator
Focus of domesticity	External news
	Domesticated news
Visibility	Magnitude
	Degree of centrality
Cultural resonance	Themes
	Emotive charge
	Sources

Note. Adapted from *Framing the EU in a Time of Crisis: Media Reflections from EU Strategic Partners in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 118-142), by Chaban, N., & Bain, J., 2014, Palgrave Macmillan.

3.2.1. Focus of domesticity indicators

The focus of domesticity framework allows for a distinction between the external and domesticated news (see Table 2). As external news are considered those EU and US stories, without any involvement of Colombia and EU and US actions in third countries and in the LAC region. On the other hand, domesticated news comprises the news with a local angle that directly involves the EU and the US with internal Colombian issues.

Table 2. Operationalization of the focus of the domesticity indicators.

Indicator	Sub-indicators	Description
External news	EU and US-focused news	Stories about EU and US, without any involvement of Colombia
	EU and US in third countries	Stories about the EU and US in third countries
	EU and US news in the region	Stories about the EU and US in the LAC region

Domesticated news	News with a local angle	Local stories with EU or US involvement
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Note. Adapted from *Framing the EU in a Time of Crisis: Media Reflections from EU Strategic Partners in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 118-142), by Chaban, N., & Bain, J., 2014, Palgrave Macmillan.

3.2.2. Visibility Indicators

The visibility variable involves the *magnitude* and *degree of centrality* indicators (see Table 3). Magnitude means the volume of news. While the *degree of centrality* examines the level of presence of both actors in the news - depending on whether the actor is the dominant theme (major role), is mentioned along with other actors (secondary role), or is partly mentioned (minor role).

Table 3. Operationalization of the visibility indicators

Indicator	Sub-indicators	Description
Magnitude		Volume of news
Degree of centrality	Major Role	Dominant actor in the news
	Secondary Role	The actor is mentioned along with other actors
	Minor role	The actor is partly mentioned

Note. Adapted from *Framing the EU in a Time of Crisis: Media Reflections from EU Strategic Partners in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 118-142), by Chaban, N., & Bain, J., 2014, Palgrave Macmillan.

3.2.3. Cultural resonance indicators

The cultural resonance variable comprises *thematic framing*, *emotive charge*, and *sources* indicators (see Table 4). The *thematic framing* aims to identify the themes for which the EU and US are more salient. It will be classified according to 10 different fields that correspond to the categorization developed by PPMI et al. (2015). The sub-themes were added as they surfaced in the data gathering.

Furthermore, *emotive charge* criteria allow identifying how the locals evaluate the EU and US's actions. This is considered a contentious way to evaluate news framing since it will require interpreting the literal and metaphorical judgment and tone of the EU and US representations. Nevertheless, it is widely used in communication studies to hint at the affective elements of the frame (Chaban and Bain, 2014). Under these criteria, the findings will be classified according to neutral, negative, and positive criteria. Finally, the indicator of cultural resonance involves that

news frames will be analyzed according to the *sources*- if the main source comes from another country or was produced by a local journalist or agency.

Table 4. Operationalization of the cultural resonance indicators

Indicator	Sub-indicators	Description
Themes	Politics and security	Institutional affairs Policies and strategies Security (ex. Counter-terrorism) Multilateralism Sanctions Extraditions
	Economy and trade	G-20 reunion Infrastructure Investment Economic growth Exports/imports Labor force
	Development	Humanitarian aid SDG
	Environment and energy	COP26 Sustainability Energy supply
	Normative actor	Human rights Global governance Democracy
	Covid-19	Vaccination Restrictions
	Migration and human rights	Migration Integration Refugees
	Culture	History Arts (ex. Music, literature) Lifestyle, values and norms
	Education	Research Cooperation
	Technology	Research cooperation Innovation
Emotive charge	Positive	Appraisal, respectful, amiable language
	Neutral	Generic language
	Negative	Critical, accusatory, complaining language
Sources	Local	Local news sources
	International	Non-local news sources

Note. The theme indicators were adapted from *Analysis of the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad* (pp. 17-18), by PPMI et al., 2015. The emotive charge and sources indicators

were adapted from *Framing the EU in a Time of Crisis: Media Reflections from EU Strategic Partners in Asia-Pacific* (pp. 118-142), by Chaban, N., & Bain, J., 2014, Palgrave Macmillan.

3.3. Media Sample

The present study analyzes the news frames from five influential newspapers (Table 5) that references the EU, EU institutions, EU countries, and leaders of the EU and Eurozone institutions. For the US part, it will focus on the US, US institutions, and US leaders. The time frame will cover six weeks (Oct 18-Nov28) of daily observations, a total of 170 newspapers.

The newspapers shown in Table 5 have been chosen based on the latest public opinion survey on the most consulted print media to stay informed, developed by the firm Cifras y Conceptos (2021, p.22). They represent diverse ownership, differing political stances, the highest national outreach, and the highest circulation. Four of them have different political stances, and one (La Semana) is focused on economics and business. Except for la Semana- of weekly circulation, the rest of the newspapers have daily circulation. All are in the local language (Spanish) and have unrestricted online access to print circulation.

Table 5. Colombia Observed Press.

Colombia Observed Press
El Tiempo ¹
El Espectador ²
El Colombiano ³
El País (de Cali) ⁴
Semana ⁵

The period of six weeks covered (Oct 18- Nov 28) included relevant international events such as the G-20 reunion (Oct 30 -31) and the COP 26 (Oct 21 - Nov 12). It is argued these events will facilitate the comparison of how the EU is profiled in big international events concerning the US.

¹ El Tiempo is the most widely read newspaper with national circulation in Colombia. It has the 16% of readers in the country. Of liberal tendency, however, it is considered that economic interests has influenced the editorial line (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.)

² El Espectador is the second most widely read national newspaper, after El Tiempo. It has 4% of readers in the country, of a liberal tendency and considered one of the most independent newspapers. (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.)

³ El Colombiano is a regional newspaper edited in Medellin, the second most important city in Colombia. Originally of a conservative tendency, has the 4% of readers in the country (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.)

⁴ El Pais is the a Colombian newspaper with a largest circulation in southwestern Colombia. Originally of a conservative tendency, has the 4% of the readers in the country (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.)

⁵ Semana is the main analysis and opinion magazine in Colombia. It is of weekly circulation and has the 16% of the readers in the country (Monitoreo de medios, n.d.)

The time frame also considers the fifth anniversary of the Signing of the Peace Agreement in Colombia (Nov 24), a period in which local news gave special attention to the compliance of the Agreement provisions, including the international community contributions. The evaluation after five years is also considered to give substantial evidence of the state of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Finally, it is believed that daily coverage in this specific time period – when the pandemic-related news is no longer a trend - will allow the observations of the regular reporting of a variety of EU and US foreign policies that are not totally influenced by COVID-19-related issues.

4. Empirical Analysis

This chapter presents the data collected over six weeks of daily observations (18 Oct – 28 Nov 2021) of Colombia's most influential newspapers. The volume of the articles analyzed corresponds to 311 articles that referenced the EU and its member states and authorities. And 430 articles referenced the US and its representative bodies and personalities (Table 6). The following lines will describe the findings according to the main criteria of focus of domesticity, which is analyzed according to the magnitude, degree of centrality, themes, evaluations, and sources indicators.

Table 6. Volume of the EU and US-related news articles

Volume of articles	
EU related news	311
US related news	430

Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

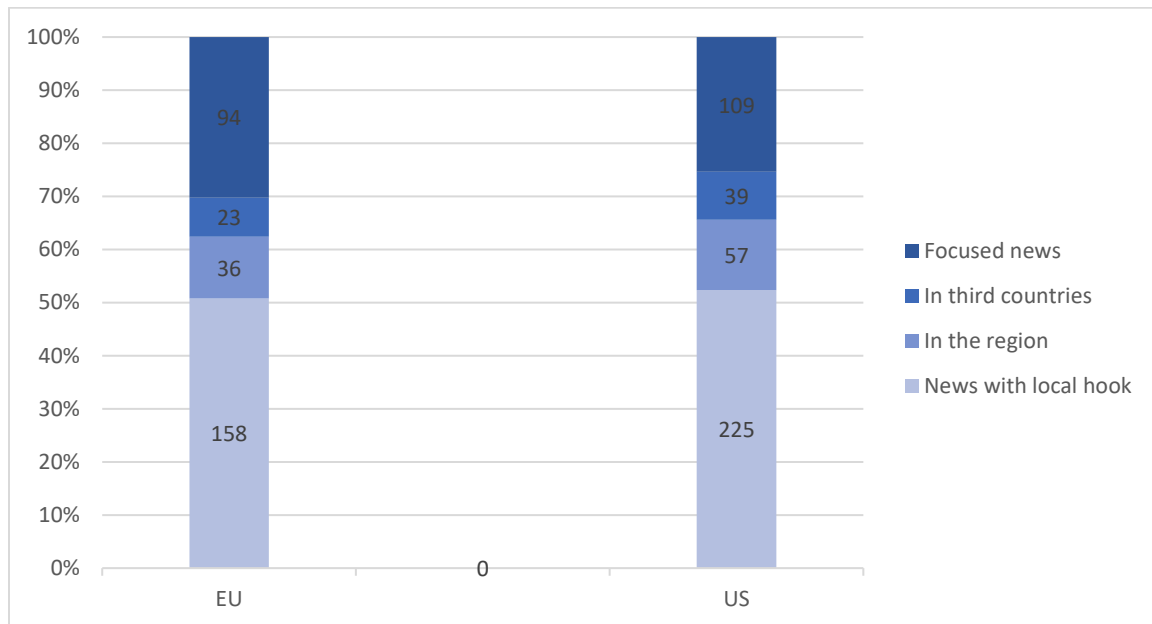
4.1. Magnitude

In terms of magnitude, the 119 difference in the number of articles shown in Table 6 represents significantly more coverage of the US in the Colombian media. According to the geopolitical context discussed above, the prominence of the US in the Colombian news can be interpreted as a result of the US economic and political presence in the country; and the consequent Duque's administration's interest in promoting US activities. Furthermore, previous studies suggest that on a global level, US features often get much greater news attention than the rest of the countries (Segev, 2015). Hence, US newsworthiness in Colombia is further enhanced due to variables such as the US geographical proximity to the country in question, its global political, economic, and military size, and US presence in global affairs (Wu, 2000, as cited in Segev 2015).

On the other hand, a better convergence between the EU and US is shown in Figure 1, which presents a major prominence of both actors in *locally hook news* compared to the other variables of the focus of domesticity criteria. Accordingly, more than half of the sample of news with a local angle was devoted to the reporting of the EU (51%) and the US (52%).

Furthermore, a significant percentage of the news was dedicated to the *EU and US own affairs* - 30% and 25%, respectively. In contrast to the lowest interest devoted to the EU and the US news originated in *the LAC region* or *in third countries*.

Figure 1. Magnitude of the EU vs. magnitude of the US



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

4.2. Degree of centrality

As shown in Figure 2, with a total of 205 articles, or 48% of the total, a major degree of centrality was the most prominent attribute of Colombian news about the US. In contrast, while the US is often profiled as a "main character," with a total of 124 articles, or 40% of the total, a secondary degree of centrality is the most notable feature of the EU news - meaning that the EU and representative bodies are usually reported along with other actors.

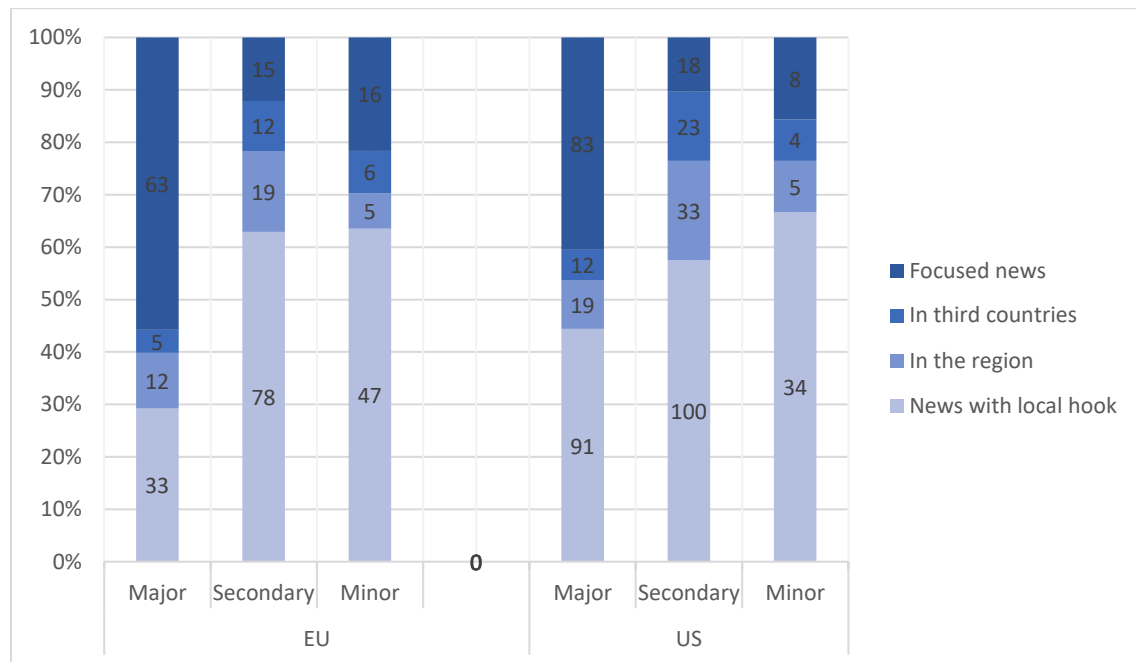
In terms of the news with a local hook, the US was reported with a significant major degree of centrality (91 articles) and a secondary degree of centrality (100 articles). Conversely, a secondary degree of centrality (78 articles) and a minor degree of centrality (47 articles) predominated EU reporting. In this case, despite the numbers still show a significant dialogue of the EU with the Colombian domestic actors, especially the news where a minor degree prevailed may leave the EU with an image of low importance.

On the other hand, a major degree of the EU and US were found in the context of *their own affairs*. The prominent representations raise the overall profile of the EU and the US internal affairs among Colombians. However, in the case of the EU, it is important to consider that EU member states were occasionally covered more prominently. Countries like Germany, France, Poland, Spain,

and Sweden were salient. This corresponds to the significance of each country's individual ties with Colombia but also risks leaving the EU on the periphery of the reportage.

Finally, US and EU news *in third* and *LAC countries* are relatively congruent; they heavy on the major and secondary degree of centrality. Showing the prominence of both actors in their respective international relations.

Figure 2. Degree of centrality of the EU vs. degree of centrality of the US.



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

4.3. Themes

Figure 3 shows that the majority of articles, 99 articles on the EU (or 32% of the total) and 254 articles on the US-related news (or 59% of the total), reported topics about *politics and security*. In particular, features of the EU (52 articles) and the US (140 articles) as political actors were prominent in the *news with local hooks*. Common topics concerned both actors' involvement in implementing the Peace Agreement. Accordingly, the press highlighted the visit of the EU Special Envoy Eamon Gilmore; at the same time, it celebrated the removal of the FARC from the US list of foreign terrorist groups. Similarly, special attention received the support of the US and some EU member states towards intelligence operations against drug lords and Colombian drug lords prosecutions in the US, the transformation of the US new counternarcotic strategy, and changes

in the US Southern Command. Moreover, the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's official visit to Colombia gained high coverage.

In addition, the EU political frame significantly covered Duque and other Colombian representatives' meetings with the EU and EU member states' authorities in the framework of the COP26. However, in the context of COP26, the reporting emphasized Duque and Biden's encounters and the announcement of a possible visit of Biden to Colombia. Among other issues, in the context of *EU and US own affairs*, Colombian news highly covered Biden's Foreign Policy transformation after the Trump era. For the EU part, Merkel's accomplishments and leadership in the EU were highly reported. Finally, for both actors were salient the news related to the criminalization of the abortion and the rise of the far right.

Despite both actors' relevance around political themes, it is important to consider that the total difference of 155 articles dedicated to politics and security raises the US's profile as a more outstanding political actor than the EU. For its part, the EU can be considered more notable in topics related to the *environment and energy*, with a total of 57 articles compared to the 34 US news. EU and US own affairs related to the environment and energy involved both actors' climate change commitments to COP26 in Glasgow; nevertheless, the reports also focused on issues such as the US carbon emissions and the EU energy crisis. Closer to home, among the news with a local hook, the EU dominated with 43 articles, in contrast to the 22 articles dedicated to the US. Colombian media gave special relevance to the EU member states' contributions to combat climate change and protecting biodiversity in the country. Furthermore, the EU appeared frequently as a support of the national "BIBO" environment campaign.

In the *economy and trade* frame, the US again appeared as the most prominent actor. Here its articles amount to 46, in contrast to the 34 articles dedicated to the EU. In the context of the news with a local hook, were highlighted the EU and US economic relations with Colombia during the pandemic. Similarly, it also gained relevance to US own affairs, in which multiple articles specially covered economic trends in the US, such as the Great Resignation and Biden's plan to rebuild infrastructure and reshape the economy. Finally, the US and some EU member states gained visibility within the G20 reunion.

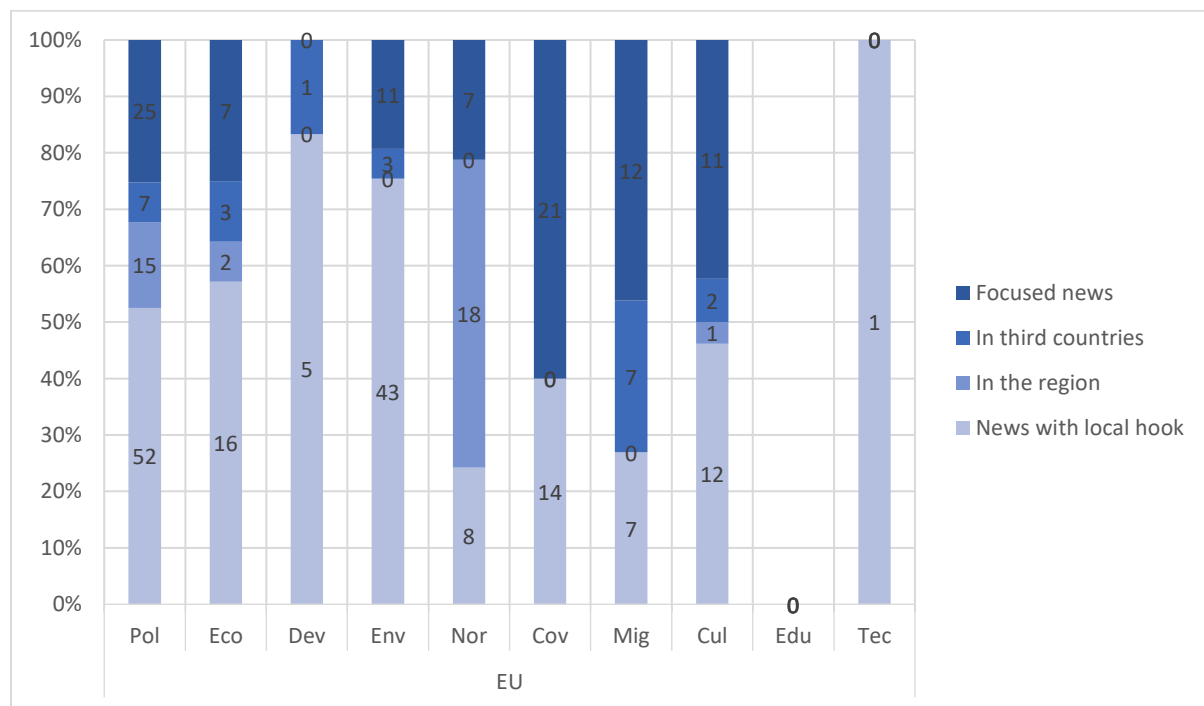
In the *migration and human rights* fields, the profile of the EU was raised in the context of its own affairs, which at that time was characterized by the Belarus migration crisis. Colombian press highly reported on the EU sanctions against Belarus and covered the crisis at the Belarus-Poland border. In the same line, few articles commented on the death of migrants crossing the English

Channel. For the part of the US, the news with a local angle focused on the migration trends and crisis between Colombia-Panama-Mexico-US. In contrast, the local focus framed, both the EU and the US, in regards of their support for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Colombia.

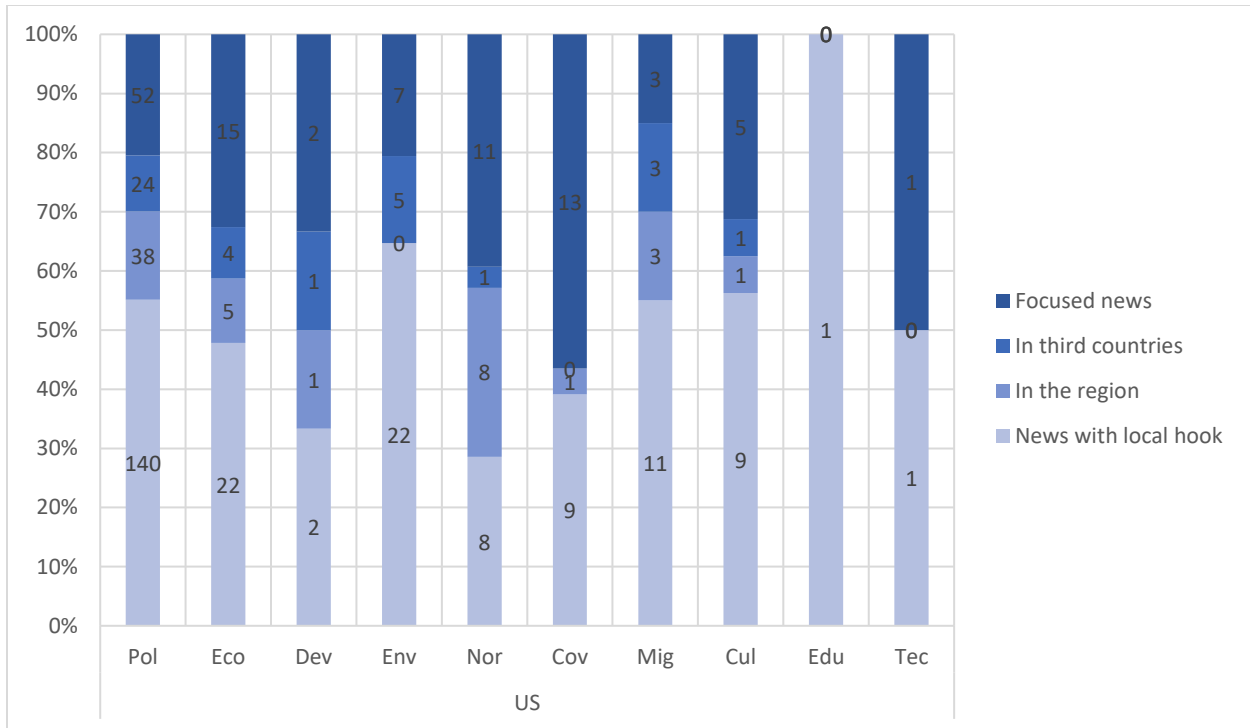
Concerning both actors in the context of the region and third countries. The US again was featured with a highly political profile. The dominant political orientation was based on issues such as sanctions against the Nicaraguan, Cuban and Russian governments. At the same time, it covered the consequences of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the encounter between Biden and different leaders such as China, Canada, and Mexico. Conversely, the EU was depicted as a more prominent normative actor. A characteristic related to its role in promoting human rights in Nicaragua and the election observation mission sent to Venezuela.

As expected, the COVID-19-related topics were also present in the framing of both actors who were going through a new wave peak. There was also relatively convergence in framing the EU and the US cultural representations. Both actors were visible on news that covered their historical heritage, lifestyle, and arts, among others. Finally, the EU and US registered less dominance in the context of development, technology, and education-related topics.

Figure 3. Thematic framing of the EU vs. thematic framing of the US.



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

4.4. Emotive charge

When analyzing the emotive charge of the EU and US media images in Colombia, Figure 4 shows that most articles have a *neutral tone* towards both actors- 235 articles about the EU, or 76% of the total; and 304 articles about the US, or 71% of the total. As suggested by Sheaffer (2007), this is usually the norm since most media networks aim to pursue values of neutrality and objectivity, especially when it comes to international actors. Moreover, the fact that neutral evaluations were the most visible for both actors does not necessarily mean indifference towards them. Nevertheless, in line with Jain and Pandey (2019), a neutral tone still can negatively influence the audience as it usually makes the articles factual but not analytical. A particularity that limits the explanation and, consequently, the receivers' better understanding of the issue in question.

On the other hand, in terms of *positive* evaluation, for both actors, the news with a local angle attributed them a more positive tone in contrast with the other cases. Yet, the US led the positive assessments with 59 articles vs. the 28 articles dedicated to the EU. For its part, the EU was praised mainly due to its environmental and migration cooperation with the country. In relation to the latter, the EU was portrayed as a referent of migration policies and “one of the most valuable

allies of Colombia to face its own migratory challenge”⁶. Then again, the US was positively presented in a variety of topics related to its intelligence cooperation to capture drug lords. At the same time, it was celebrated for the new U.S.-Colombia counternarcotics strategy that represents Biden’s “real intention to show social results on a fight against drugs in Colombia” and “that the forced eradication programs are not the solution”⁷. Moreover, it positively covered the progressive rapprochement between Biden and Duque and Blinken’s official visit to the country. Which for some it “marks the beginning of a new stage in the relationship between both nations” and assures that Colombia “continues to be one of the strategic allies for the US”⁸

Other *positive* evaluations could be found in the region and third countries context. Topics related to the EU election mission in Venezuela were portrayed as a “significant act, considering that the EU had not monitored an election in this country for fifteen years”⁹. While from the US part, China and US commitments were highlighted in the context of the COP26. Furthermore, both actors were praised for their stances and sanctions against the Nicaraguan administration. Finally, in the context of the US own affairs, Biden’s infrastructure plans and return to multilateralism were positively salient. Biden was occasionally praised- in one article was portrayed as a “ leader of those before, defender of the principles and agreement that occur in democracies”¹⁰. For its part, in the EU context, Merkel was positively presented as a monument of the EU “that marked an era of Europeanism”¹¹. While Germany, as “an example for Europe and the world, of a respectful and efficient State”¹².

In contrast, despite generally, a *negative* tone was not highly displayed towards the EU and US representations in the local news - 18 articles and 22 articles, respectively. Due to Colombia’s

⁶ “La UE no solo es un referente en el desarrollo de políticas para sacarle provecho a la migración (...) sino que ha sido uno de los aliados más valiosos de Colombia para hacerle frente a su propio desafío migratorio” (Gomez, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

⁷ “En el entorno de Biden hay una intención real de mostrar resultados sociales sobre una lucha antinarcótica en Colombia, que (...) muestren que la vía de erradicación forzada no es la solución”. (Pardo, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

⁸ “Uno de los propósitos de la visita oficial de Blinken es el inicio de una nueva etapa de la relación entre ambas naciones”. “El mismo Blinken (...) aseguro que Colombia sigue siendo uno de los aliados estratégicos para EEUU” (Arbodela, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

⁹ “Esta vez la Unión Europea acompañó el proceso con 130 observadores; un hecho significativo, teniendo en cuenta que la UE no vigilaba una elección en este país desde hacía quince años”. (Redacción Mundo, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁰ “El presidente Biden ha mantenido su pulso de líder de los de antes, de defensor de los principios y de los acuerdos que se dan en las democracias” (Opinión, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹¹ “Angela Merkel, la saliente canciller alemana que marco una era de europeísmo” (Soto, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹² “Alemania (...) ha dado ejemplo a Europa y al mundo sobre la forma en que debe funcionar un Estado respetuoso y eficiente” (Villar, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

high vulnerability to climate change, topics such as the lack of consensus among the EU members and the US on climate cooperation still attracted negative assessments. For instance, while the EU was portrayed as one that “promises a lot but its internal quarrels are a constant threat”¹³; the US was presented as among the biggest polluters, part of the rich nations that only “invest in protecting their economies”¹⁴. Furthermore, few articles criticized US security emphasis on the peace implementation and drug lords extraditions to the US – considered a “mockery for the victims in Colombia and their rights to truth and justice”¹⁵.

Similarly, both actors received some *negative* evaluations in the context of the EU and US own affairs. For the EU part, concerns were reported over Merkel's retirement, which leaves a “vacuum at the heart of the bloc”¹⁶. On the other hand, the labor conditions that led to the Great Resignation in the US were condemned as a “return to the primitive capitalism” that “has degraded wages and working conditions”¹⁷. Furthermore, both actors received negative assessments regarding the repercussions of the abortion ban in Poland and Texas, and concerns were raised around the rise of the far-right. Finally, in the context of its relations with third countries, the way the EU managed the Belarus migration crises brought negative assessments, as one article highlighted the EU’s “old dichotomy of shielding its borders, but maintaining a friendly hand discourse with migration”¹⁸. Similarly, the US migration crisis was also criticized and labeled as the “nightmare of the American dream”¹⁹.

To conclude, even though there's a general congruence in the evaluations given to both actors since neutral evaluations are the most frequent and negative portrayals are considerably lower than the positive ones. Still, it is important to consider that the negative assessments usually capture more attention than the positives. In this way, the topics that were given negative affective

¹³ “La Unión Europea promete mucho, pero sus rencillas internas son una amenaza constante” (Opinión, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁴ “Hoy podemos verificar que frente al CC las naciones ricas solo invierten para proteger sus economías y el bienestar de sus ciudadanos” (Ruiz, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁵ “Su extradición (...) sería una burla a las víctimas en Colombia y sus derechos a la verdad y la justicia” (Escobar, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁶ “Hay un vacío en el corazón del bloque por una sencilla razón: la Unión Europea ya no puede ser liderada. Nadie se convertirá en la nueva Merkel” (Thompson, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

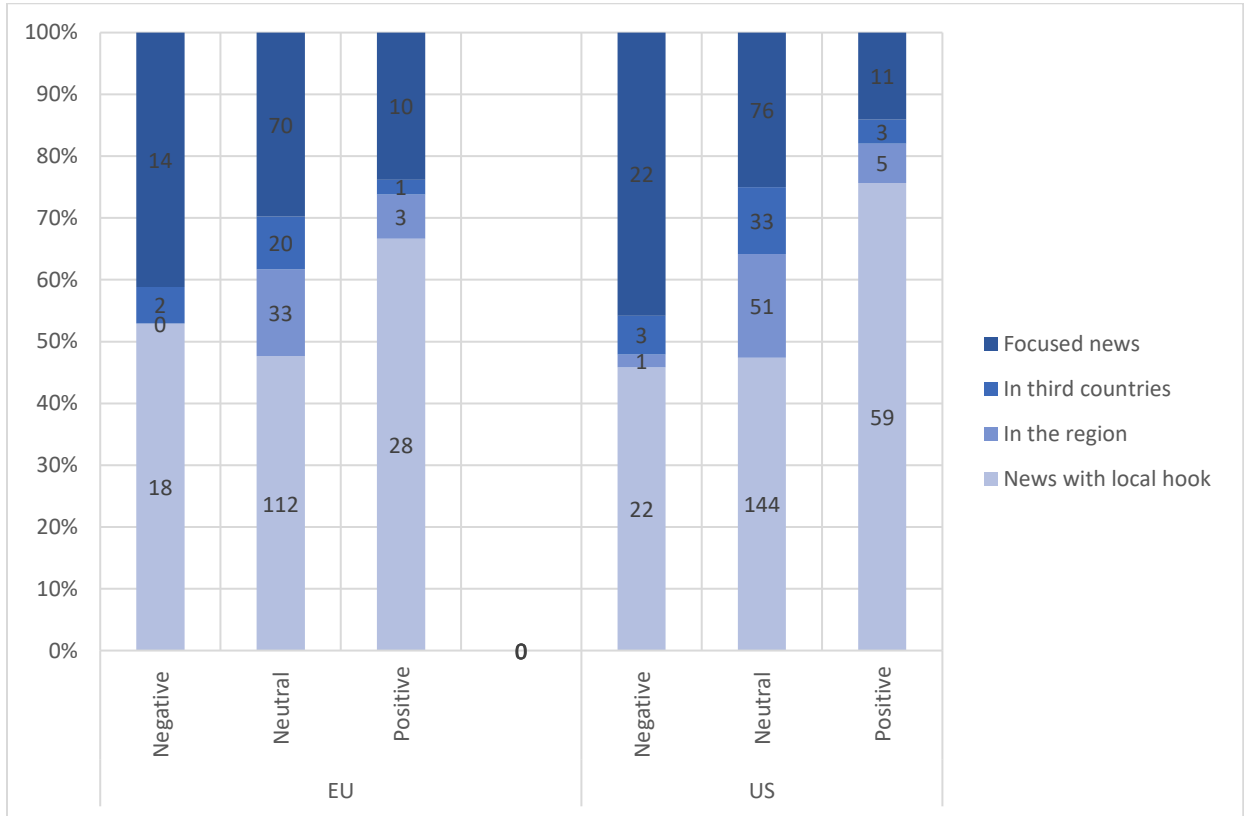
¹⁷ “El retorno al capitalismo primitivo, su grosera concentración de riquezas y mercados en ese país, ha degradado salarios y las condiciones de trabajo” (De la Torre, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁸ “Una Unión Europea con la dicotomía de antaño de brindar sus fronteras, pero sostener un discurso de mano amiga con la migración” (Internacional Informe, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

¹⁹ “La pesadilla del sueño americano” (Pasatiempos, 2021). Translated into English by the author.

attributes often increase in importance, while those with a positive tone do not possess much of an effect (Sheafer, 2007).

Figure 4. EU's emotive charge vs. US' emotive charge



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

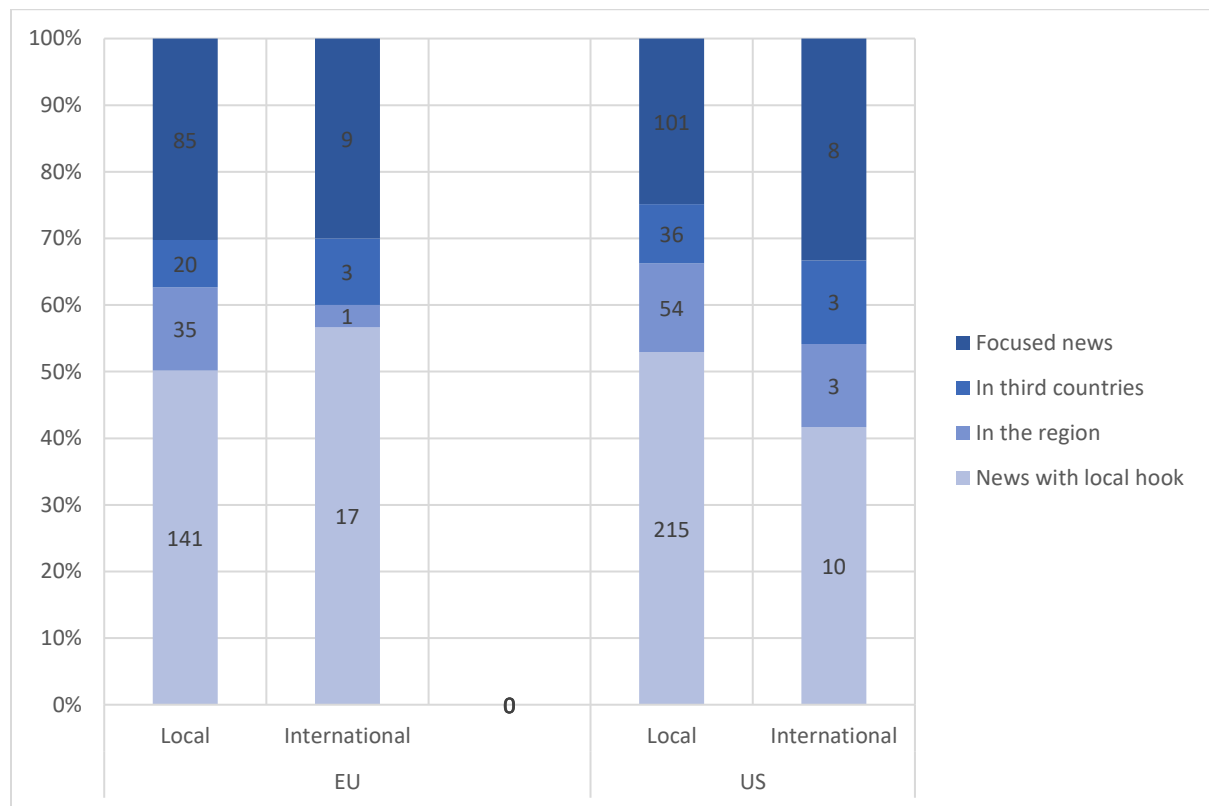
4.5. Sources

Lastly, Figure 5 shows that most news with a local hook was written by *local sources* -141 EU articles and 215 US articles - revealing a heavier reliance on national journalists than international ones.

When analyzing the sources, there are a couple of points to take into account: First, a couple of articles written by local sources covered interviews with EU and US representatives. Secondly, for the EU part, the remaining 17 articles about the EU news with a local angle that utilizes international sources came from the EU delegation in Colombia or EU member states embassies. Finally, generally, for the reporting of both actors, common international sources such as the New York Times, El Pais, AFP Agency, EFE Agency, and Europa press were also used.

A deeper look into the sources reveals that the presence of both actors through local interviews or as main news sources ultimately shows their efforts to promote their foreign policy frames in foreign media, a clear reflection of its mediated public diplomacy strategies. On the other hand, considering former studies have identified a hierarchy among the media outlets depending on their leadership, size, or reputation, making them more likely to have an impact on other media (Entman, 2008) - it is not unexpected that news stories from the NY Times or El Pais generate more attention among the Colombian media.

Figure 5. Sources of the EU news vs. sources of the US news.



Note. Data retrieved from the Colombian Observed Press specified in Table 5.

4.6. Discussion

The media analysis explores how Colombia sees the EU and the US by identifying the most salient images of both actors and the factors that may affect their reception. To this end, the methodology followed the perception study of Chaban and Bain (2014), informed by the concepts of cascade activation theory (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2003). And assumes that those news frames with a particular emphasis on a local angle, better visibility, and more intense cultural

resonance will better impact how the audiences imagine the EU and the US as foreign actors. The following lines are the results of the analysis conducted.

This study found as the most "capable" frames the EU and US news with a local hook, those in which the actors are involved in domestic issues. The first theoretical section mentioned the national administration as the most influential actor in the media framing process. An assumption elevated in the subsequent geopolitical analysis, which revealed the Colombian government's strong influence over the media networks. In this context, it can be argued that the most "capable" frames reflect the Colombian government's interests and political agenda. And that Duque's administration is promoting EU and US foreign policies as they're both political and culturally congruent with the Colombian. Indeed, as shown through the thematic framing results, there is a particular interest in topics involving EU and US initiatives in the framework of COP26, coordination of high-profile visits, migration crisis, and support for the Peace Agreement implementation.

Despite the relative salience of both actors in the Colombian domestic issues, the results also show clear contrasts in how they are framed. For instance, both are highly visible in terms of magnitude; however, the US was usually reported with a significant major or secondary degree of centrality while the role of the EU predominated in a secondary or minor role. Moreover, US news with a local angle was framed with a more relevant degree of emotive charge (both positive and negative). These findings corroborate the first and second hypotheses that compared to the EU, the US's longstanding and more stable partnership with Colombia based on security and economic ties situates the US as a more important and fruitful ally. Consequently, the Colombian government is motivated to report US policies and initiatives in the country (especially in the field of politics, security, economy, and trade) with better prominence and emotional charge, while the EU is reduced to a second role. Moreover, it was argued that the US distinction is enhanced due to variables such as its size, presence in global affairs, and geographical proximity that naturally call the local media attention (Segev, 2015).

A deeper look into the way it was framed the EU and US support to the Peace Agreement implementation also confirmed the more outstanding image of the US in comparison to the EU. Despite the data suggests a recognition of the EU and US roles and contributions, as well as the commitment to the Peace Agreement in both actors' political agendas. Both actors' approaches were framed according to different levels of prominence. Indeed, it was found that US security-related policies were more salient in terms of the magnitude and emotive charge of the reporting of drug lords' prosecutions, drug-trafficking intelligence operations, and changes in the

counternarcotic strategy and US Southern Command. Conversely, for the part of the EU, although it was highlighted the visit of the EU Special Envoy Eamon Gilmore, specific EU initiatives regarding the peace-building process in the country were absent from the reportages.

This result is in line with most of the geopolitical analyses that revealed that the Colombian government's priorities to reach peace based on security and legality tend to diminish the importance of the actions toward a more comprehensive and transformative peace (Birke and Kurtenbach, 2021). Moreover, despite it was found that the public ideas to reach peace and development may be more harmonious with the EU approach. It can be assumed that the great exert of influence over the media by the Colombian government, in contrast with the little capacity of the public to access it, constituted enough conditions for a more dominant framing of the US's security strategy. In this sense, the results of this research do not recognize the EU's distinctiveness as a peace actor suggested by previous studies (Castañeda, 2012; Castañeda, 2014; Ioannides, 2019). In fact, the results suggest that the EU's civic approach is being overtaken by other international actors, such as the US, whose visibility is stepping forward in the peace-building process of Colombia.

This result, however, does not apply to all the fields of the EU's foreign policy deployed in the country since the media analysis proved that in local topics such as environment and energy, the EU got a more outstanding profile than the US. Considering that the analysis of the political congruence between the EU and Colombia suggested that despite Duque's controversial stance towards the peace process, EU-Colombia relations have evolved to cooperation in multiple fields. It can be assumed that besides the higher congruence between Colombia and the US, the EU presence in the country has granted it a distinction as an important external actor whose role goes beyond the Peace Agreement implementation.

The analysis of the themes framing also corroborates this assertion. The data revealed that in the context of the EU and the US news with third countries and countries in the LAC region, the US dominated in topics related to politics and security, while the EU was better highlighted as a normative actor. Similarly, when studying the EU and US news focused on their own affairs, the US again dominated in the politics and security field; meanwhile, the EU's profile was raised in the migration and human rights fields. These results suggest the recognition of the EU as an independent and different actor from the US. In fact, a more general overview of the thematic framing allows concluding that in Colombia, the US has a more outstanding profile in the politics, security, economy, and trade field; while the EU is more prominent as a normative actor and in the areas of environment, energy, migration, and human rights. This is ultimately a recognition of

their distinctive hard and soft power approaches in foreign policy and goes in line with the findings of the most recent public opinion survey described above (Nuso, 2022a).

The Colombian media analysis also showed possible constraints that may affect the reception of the EU and US frames. In the context of the EU and US own affairs, among the salient personalities, the US was better profiled as a political actor through high coverage of Biden's shift in foreign policy from the Trump era. Instead, the EU in the political scheme was relevant due to the German Chancellor Merkel leaving office and Germany's future role in the bloc. On the one hand, Merkel's reports show the parity between Germany and the US in global economic and political relations and ultimately reveal the strength of Colombia's bilateral relations with individual EU member states mentioned in the geopolitical analysis (Buelvas & Gehring, 2017). On the other hand, the case of the salience of Germany and Merkel represents well the higher visibility and relevance of some EU member states and personalities in the media and ultimately demonstrates the EU's complex nature and the difficulties that come with it to project as one. Thus, it can be assumed that a major prominence of the EU member states or personalities often sets the risk of leaving the EU on the periphery of the reportage.

A more general analysis reveals other important factors that may affect how the EU and the US are projected. Although the media analysis revealed a majority of positive and neutral perceptions towards the EU and the US in general, this research calls attention to the negative visions that highlighted practices where both actors contradict their self-proclaimed values and narratives. For instance, it can be assumed that EU and US commitments in the COP26 framework were diminished by the articles condemning US CO2 emissions or the EU's lack of consensus on climate cooperation. Similarly, while their exemplary condemnations and actions against the Nicaraguan or Venezuelan authoritative practices were praised, the abortion ruling in Poland and Texas may focus the attention on the EU and US regressive developments. Finally, the controversial migration crisis in their respective borders may weaken US and EU's prominent role in supporting the Colombian-Venezuelan migration crisis.

For both actors, these inconsistencies can potentially negatively influence their perception among the audience. For the EU part, these results confirm the existing gap between the EU's self-representations and the outside world's perceptions that former perception studies have found. Nevertheless, the present comparative account proved that the same gap prevails in the US and validates Larsen's (2014) argument that the gap does not constitute a major disadvantage for the actor's agency. Still, more attention should be paid to them since negative coverage has proven

to capture more attention and may reinforce some of the existing negative images found in former public opinion studies that see the US with mistrust and the EU as inefficient.

For its part, reviewing the media sources also helped identify different actors' capability to spread foreign news in the Colombian media. The data showed that the observed national daily often relies on international sources such as the EU delegation. Similarly, it was found a couple of articles where local journalists granted interviews to the EU and US representatives. This direct use of Colombian mass communication by the EU and the US is taken as an indication of both actors' interest and successful efforts in communicating a positive image through mediated public diplomacy strategies. Furthermore, the data also revealed that newspapers such as NY Times, El Pais, or AFP redaction possess a high hierarchy that makes them influential actors in the Colombian framing contestation process. On the other hand, although most of the media analyzed were produced by local sources, it was not clear the role that the local public had in promoting the frame. Yet, some exceptions were found under the victims' pledge to avoid the extradition of certain drug lords, which ultimately confirms Entman's (1993, 2003) argument that the public possesses the lowest capacity to spread foreign policy frames, except for when an idea gains enough importance among the public opinion.

Finally, the analysis of the EU and US relations with Colombia has also revealed certain aspects of Colombia's identity. Colombia is an outstanding partner due to the signing of the Peace Agreement, its agenda on the environment, its solidarity with the Venezuelan diaspora, its economic weight in the region, and its commitment to multilateralism. Yet, the geopolitical context showed that it is also a country in a situation of growing human rights violations and deterioration of press freedom. The scope of the present study found limits on measuring the negative assessments attributed to the EU and the US by the civil society, which has criticized both actors' complacency with the Colombian government's violations of international human rights law and the comprehensive implementation of the Peace Agreement. Furthermore, this research also considered that considering the proved limited public access to the media and the growing deterioration in the relationship between civil society, the government, and the media networks, the EU and US framing identified here will not necessarily influence the public's thinking. Results that confirmed the limitations stated in hypotheses three and four.

Conclusions

Throughout this work, it was shown that both the EU and US's actions in the Colombian conflict resolution granted them prominence in the peacebuilding process the country has been going through since 2016. A context that offered an ideal platform for both actors to deploy their commonly juxtaposed foreign policy tools and initiatives. In this sense, through a perceptual and comparative lens, this thesis has attempted to measure the EU's salience and distinctiveness as an international actor in Colombia vis the US. Additionally, it has sought to contribute to the debate on the EU as a global actor that has often been overtaken by the prolonged and ongoing crises of the last decades. Furthermore, this research has sought to expand the current literature on perception studies in the context of the scarcely investigated Colombian post-conflict period. The findings summarized in the following lines are the result of the media analysis informed by the cascade activation framing theory (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2003) and the methodology developed by Chaban and Bain (2014).

The results of this thesis demonstrated two main points. Firstly, even though there is a clear salience of both EU and US's actions deployed during the Colombian post-conflict period in the Colombian media, mainly in terms of their involvement in Colombian domestic issues. Still, it was found that the longstanding and more stable partnership between the US and Colombia translated into a higher degree of centrality and emotive charge attributed to the US-related news, ultimately making the US more outstanding as a global actor. Secondly, although the Colombian context favors the US salience, this research also shows that it is not necessarily the case in all the areas of foreign policy reviewed. Consequently, this study argues that the EU's perceived identity in Colombia is, in fact, different and independent from the US. While the US, as a foreign actor, is influential in the issues of politics, security, economy, and trade, the EU's prominent role is as a normative actor and in the issues of environment, energy, migration, and human rights.

In this sense, this research contributes to understanding some of the opportunities and constraints of the EU's role in the Colombian post-conflict period. On the one hand, it is important to consider that Colombian local perceptions recognize the EU's capability and distinctiveness as an international actor. As mentioned, the results could not prove the salience of specific EU peacebuilding initiatives suggested by former studies; however, it did find a perceived identity of the EU as a global actor that ultimately goes in line with the attributes of soft power it has been trying to project in the world and specifically in the region (Sandrin and Hoffmann, 2018; EEAS, 2016). Furthermore, it proved the development of common priorities and interests between the EU and the Colombian government that guide the bilateral relation and that transcend the Peace

Agreement implementation. All in all, these results ultimately show EU's successful deployment of its mediated public diplomacy tools and its ability to penetrate a country and region traditionally influenced by the US.

On the other hand, the study also showed some constraints that may affect the reception of both actors' positive framing. For instance, despite the emotive charge resulted in a majority of neutral and positive news framing. The study calls attention to the visible negativity assigned to both actors regarding topics such as the mishandling of their respective migration crises, lack of consensus towards climate change commitments, and regressive developments such as the rise of the far-right or the abortion ban. The overall results refute former literature on the EU's perception that categorized these inconsistencies between self-representations and external perception as a major obstacle to the actor's agency. Yet, it is considered that, since the negative assessments are often more memorable, they set the risk of reinforcing some of the existing negative perceptions.

Among other findings that reveal the comparative research is the perception of the complex nature of the EU. The results suggest that the prominent presence of certain member states due to their individual ties with Colombia or general significance as global actors occasionally relegates the EU to a second role and constitute a major disadvantage as a bloc. Moreover, it should be considered that the very low degree of emotional charge in which the EU is framed risks limiting the explanation of its initiatives and policies and, consequently, the better understanding by the audience.

Finally, this thesis has allowed filling a gap by giving insights into the scarcely investigated perceptions during the Colombian post-conflict period. Nevertheless, considering the deterioration of the relationship between civil society, the government, and the media networks, besides the limited public access to the media. Further multi-layered perceptions research involving the elite, civil society, and the general public are suggested to get a more comprehensive Colombian perception of both actors in question. Such insights could gain more relevance in the foreign policy and peace approach shift that the new Gustavo Petro administration may bring to Colombia.

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