

# Comparative Populist Communication: AMLO and Gustavo Petro in Their Relationship with the Media

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**R**aul Cortés, holding a degree in Journalism from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, has built a robust two-decade career as a correspondent and media executive across Latin America, serving as director of the EFE News Agency in Bolivia, Uruguay, and Mexico, while currently contributing to Reuters and teaching at the Escuela de Periodismo Carlos Septién García (Cortés, 2022). This extensive fieldwork experience, combined with his deep understanding of regional media dynamics, grants him the authority to analyze, in his work *“El choque inevitable”*, the complex and fraught relationship between political power and the press under the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). The text goes beyond a mere chronicle of clashes; instead, it advances a central thesis: the confrontation with the media is not a circumstantial accident, but rather the cornerstone of a governance strategy built on deliberate polarization, control of the media agenda, and the reshaping of public truth (Cortés, 2022, p. 5).

However, the phenomenon of media populism and tension with the fourth estate is by no means exclusive to the Mexican reality. For this reason, the present review proposes a comparative politics exercise between two figures who, despite operating in different contexts, share a common discursive and tactical matrix: AMLO in Mexico and Gustavo Petro in Colombia. Drawing on the analytical categories established in the book, such as “institutionalized post-truth” and the “militant use of social media” (Cortés, 2022), this review identifies how both leaders have instrumentalized communication in their attempts to consolidate themselves as the sole legitimate interpreters of national reality. In this regard, it is particularly illuminating to observe how, while one dominates the “ritual boxing ring” of the “mañaneras” (Cortés, 2022, p. 14), the other wages an eristic, or combative verbal, relationship from the social media platform X (Olave Arias, 2025) with both contributing to the “deliberate erosion” of traditional journalistic mediation (Cortés, 2022; Olave Arias, 2025).

The book examines the complex relationship between political power and the media in Mexico during AMLO’s administration, a relationship defined by constant confrontation, mutual dependence, and the strategic use of communication as a tool for polarization. From the early stages of his political career, the president maintained a tense relationship with the

country’s major traditional media outlets. As the text itself notes:

It is widely known that since the beginning of his political career, several decades ago, the politician from Tabasco has maintained a strained relationship, to say the least, with the majority of national media companies. If we consider his combative rhetoric and the way in which the press has historically attacked him, we might say, broadly speaking, that we are looking at a picture of permanent confrontation, but also of mutual dependence. A perfect example of “I cannot live with you, but I cannot live without you either”. (Cortés, 2022, p. 5)

The analysis covers primarily the first half of the presidential term (2018–2021) and several months of 2022, a period during which AMLO transformed this conflictive relationship into a “central axis of his administration” (Cortés, 2022, pp. 4–5). His political style, born out of a “long and relentless strategy of rupture” with traditional forms of governance, positioned him as an adversary of the established system, including a press that had historically displayed an “inappropriate subordination” to the dictates of whichever government was in power (Cortés, 2022, p. 3).

The morning press conferences, known as “mañaneras”, constitute the core of the book’s analysis. These daily sessions represent one of the most extraordinary exercises in political communication in recent Mexican history, having sustained public attention over an extended period of time. They function simultaneously as a tool of control and as an inexhaustible source of content for media analysis, with their principal achievement being the “magnet effect” that allows the government to intervene directly in the construction of the news agenda. On this point, the book highlights the following:

The magnet effect of the event held every morning at the National Palace is one of its greatest successes. Carlos Elizondo, professor at the Escuela de Gobierno of TEC de Monterrey and author of the book *“Y mi palabra es la ley”*, focused precisely on the current presidential figure, stressed in an interview with the Spanish news agency EFE that the mañanera demonstrates “an enormous creativity on the part of the president”. For Elizondo, “it is the best act of propaganda

one could imagine, because every day we are all talking about what he wants”. (Cortés, 2022, p. 13)

This dynamic explains the overwhelming prominence he occupies in the text, whose constant pronouncements have been amplified by the media, at times turning them into unwitting allies of the president

The author delves into AMLO’s political discourse and its relationship with post-truth. His narrative presents reality in Manichean terms, reducing circumstances to a dichotomy between “good and evil” and omitting inherent complexities (Cortés, 2022, p. 108). His iconic phrase “I have other data” exemplifies his ability to slip out of uncomfortable situations with dialectical ease, while his use of a strategy akin to Orwellian doublethink allows him to simultaneously hold contradictory positions (Cortés, 2022, pp. 62, 77). AMLO wields language as a “high-precision weapon aimed directly at the hearts of the people” (Cortés, 2022, p. 14), drawing on anecdotes and grammatical imprecisions that, according to Jesús Silva Herzog, have permeated common speech under the term “pejeñol” (Cortés, 2022, p. 123).

His obsession with the Cuarta Transformación (4T) serves both to justify his governing agenda and to polarize the country, as he aspires to be remembered alongside historical figures such as Benito Juárez and Lázaro Cárdenas. As the author explains:

Before examining the state of the Mexican press, I will attempt to illustrate with examples that, while the way in which AMLO handles official information is in many respects unique, it bears important similarities to the stratagems of other contemporary presidents, such as Donald Trump and Hugo Chávez, and draws from earlier experiences belonging to the very era he habitually labels as abominable, even as he constantly imitates it, whether unknowingly or deliberately. The president’s Manichean approach to presenting reality, and his tendency to place greater value on personal beliefs and emotions than on hard data (Cortés, 2022, p. 8).

The work also critically examines journalistic ethics and media credibility, drawing on an extensive body of academic literature on communication ethics. It calls into question the lack of ethical rigor among certain representatives of the Mexican and international press, a factor that helps explain the progressive loss of credibility experienced by the profession at a global level. The text underscores that holding the president accountable is an “inalienable duty” of the media, one that requires strict adherence to basic ethical principles (Cortés, 2022, p. 95). However, the risks are considerable: violence against the press reached record levels during this administration. In the first three years of government, 1,945 attacks were recorded, including 30 journalist murders and

two disappearances; in light of this situation, press freedom organizations have accused the president of “irresponsibly inflaming hatred toward the profession” (Cortés, 2022, pp. 15, 495).

The analysis also addresses the new media landscape, in which AMLO has strategically leveraged social media and cultivated an army of allied communicators, including YouTubers, bloggers, and Twitter users, whose militant and uncritical stance undermines the open dialogue the president claims to seek. He has publicly described social media as “blessed”, turning these platforms into a polarized battlefield between “chairs” and “fifís” (Cortés, 2022, p. 10). At the same time, the reduction of official government advertising is presented as a strategy to weaken critical media outlets, under the argument that in previous administrations the press had been “bought” or “rented” through public budget allocations (Cortés, 2022, pp. 11, 230).

## **The Positioning of the Media Agenda**

The political communication models of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and Gustavo Petro reveal deeply personalistic and confrontational strategies that, while sharing an ideological core rooted in Latin American populism, deploy differentiated tactics according to their respective contexts. Both leaders have transformed the presidential platform into an instrument of emotional mobilization that prioritizes loyalty over informational rigor, positioning themselves as the sole vector of all political messaging. In this scenario, the head of state ceases to be a mere sender of information and becomes the “supreme arbiter of truth”, a judge who determines what counts as reality within a polarized media environment.

The operational heart of the Mexican model is the daily morning press conferences, known as “mañaneras”, an exercise that Cortés (2022) defines as a “political boxing ring” in which the leader subdues his opponents. These sessions operate through a “magnet effect”, capturing public attention so forcefully that they compel the press to focus exclusively on the topics the Executive wishes to address. This centralization grants López Obrador such an overwhelming prominence that he dominates the construction of public opinion, forcing traditional media outlets to act as “unwitting allies” by reproducing his agenda and his linguistic terms.

Several analysts have agreed that the morning conferences transcend the informational format and operate according to a “reality show” logic, in which the president “responds, defends himself, mocks, laughs, insults, scolds, and makes decisions in front of the cameras” (Cortés, 2022, p. 54). This dynamic generates sharply divergent views: for his supporters, it represents an unprecedented exercise in transparency; for

his critics, it constitutes a spectacle of political illusionism designed to saturate the media space and redirect public scrutiny away from effective accountability, channeling it instead toward a narrative of loyalties (Cortés, 2022, p. 408).

In alignment with this model, Gustavo Petro's discourse manifests in a highly performative manner, seeking to mobilize the masses through an "epic accent on the idea of the journalism-politics confrontation" (Olave Arias, 2025, p. 183). This strategy gives rise to a "spectacularization of the dispute" (Olave Arias, 2025, p. 174), one that privileges emotional adhesion and the affective conditioning of the audience over rational persuasion (González, 2024, p. 97).

Under this premise, both political projects converge in a pronounced charismatic personalism. As Cortés (2022) warns, the Lopezobradovist model grants the leader such an "overwhelming prominence" (p. 7) that it ends up subsuming the very social movement he leads. This absolute identification between the leader and the nation reaches its rhetorical climax when AMLO casts himself as the embodiment of the collective, declaring: "I no longer belong to myself; I belong to you, I am the people of Mexico" (Cortés, 2022, p. 83). Ultimately, both leaders instrumentalize communication not to inform, but to position themselves as the "sole legitimate interpreters" of a national reality that they themselves shape, day after day (Cortés, 2022; Olave Arias, 2025).

## Narratives of Legitimation and Rupture

The political project of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) has been built upon a long-term strategy aimed at dismantling what he calls the "old regime". His administration erected the fight against corruption as a foundational pillar, aspiring to place the Cuarta Transformación (4T) alongside the great historical ruptures of the nation: Independence, the Reform, and the Mexican Revolution. As Cortés (2022) observes, López Obrador is a "politician passionately devoted to History with a capital H, the History of Mexico of which he wants to be a part" (p. 75), seeking to position himself in the national pantheon alongside Benito Juárez and Lázaro Cárdenas. This obsession is not merely symbolic; the president employs a vision of history that reduces national reality to a Manichean battle between "good and evil", portraying the past as a permanent clash between "progressive liberals" and "reactionary conservatives".

Following a similar logic, Gustavo Petro's narrative frameworks are oriented toward justifying political confrontation as a necessary defense of popular will against antidemocratic forces. Petro frequently reiterates that his mandate is the fruit of a historic rupture achieved at the ballot box in 2022, warning that the "oligarchy" and the "money mafias" seek to

assassinate or overthrow the president in order to restore their hereditary privileges. As in the Mexican case, this rhetoric seeks to lend an epic quality to administrative governance, turning the continuity of the government into a matter of democratic survival and justice for the marginalized, the so-called or "nobodies".

The legitimacy of both projects is further nourished by the constant invocation of unresolved historical traumas, which serve to fuel present-day polarization. While AMLO systematically revisits the electoral fraud of 2006 and the legacy of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) to discredit his critics, having mentioned former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari 566 times through June 2021, Petro invokes the fraud of April 19, 1970, and the political genocide of the Colombian left to cast his opponents as heirs to a Nazi or fascist mindset.

Ultimately, this militant use of history allows both leaders to consolidate what Olave Arias (2025) terms an "eristic relationship" with the media environment. By positioning themselves as the only worthy interpreters of both past and present, any journalistic or judicial questioning is reframed as an act of "perfidy" or an attempt at a "soft coup". In this way, the narrative of rupture with the past not only legitimizes their power, but also immunizes the leader against public scrutiny, under the premise that truth resides not in data, but in the historical struggle they themselves embody.

## Between Other Data and Perfidy

Polarization constitutes the primary engine of mobilization in both models, functioning as a governance axis that seeks to capture the meaning of public truth. AMLO frames reality in Manichean terms, reducing national history to a binary battle between "good and evil, progressive liberals versus reactionary conservatives and traitors to the homeland". Petro's discourse, for its part, is structured around equally sharp oppositions, in which the people, as a legitimate and transformative subject, confront an establishment described as a corrupt oligarchy that perceives itself as the hereditary owner of eternal power. This narrative transforms administrative governance into a permanent confrontation, in which any questioning is interpreted as an attack on the popular mandate.

Since his rise to power, the relationship between Gustavo Petro and the Colombian media has moved toward an intense and progressive hostility. Far from being an accidental phenomenon, this confrontation is a constant throughout his political trajectory, one that has evolved into an explicit government policy against the traditional press, which the president identifies as an appendage of economic power. The architecture of this dispute is explained, in part, by the high degree of media concentration in Colombia, where the "cartelized discourse"

of outlets controlled by large corporate holdings exerts a power that Tolcachier (2022) defines as “practically coercive”.

Against this backdrop, Petro opts for an asymmetric war to counter what he perceives as a media latifundio in which eight groups concentrate 78 % of cross-platform audiences. Unlike the Mexican model, where Cortés (2022) notes that AMLO could afford a ritual confrontation given that the press was already fractured and historically inclined toward officialism, Petro faces a media opposition he perceives as a monolithic bloc of capital interests. This structural distrust leads him to label media outlets as mafia like powers attempting to silence the advance of democracy.

In the Mexican case, López Obrador’s presidential discourse privileges ambiguity and emotion over empirical rigor, adopting post-truth strategies in which personal beliefs prevail over documented evidence. His iconic phrase “I have other data” is the hallmark of a narrative that seeks to construct a parallel reality in contrast to technical data. The scale of this informational deviation is quantifiable: studies by the consulting firm Spin revealed that, through November 30, 2021, AMLO had made 66,868 false or misleading statements, averaging 89 per session, a figure that doubles the documented falsehoods of Donald Trump over four years in office. Furthermore, this model systematically deploys “smoke screens” to overshadow security or public health crises, as occurred in June 2020 when the revelation of the alleged Bloque Opositor Amplio (BOA) conspiracy diverted media attention away from the most violent day of the year in Mexico.

While AMLO challenges verifiability through dialectical nonchalance (Cortés, 2022), Petro employs accusations of “perfidy” and “soft coup” to morally delegitimize criticism. Faced with any sensitive judicial or journalistic investigation, such as the revelations surrounding the case of his son Nicolás Petro, the Colombian president activates what Olave Arias (2025) calls “metadiscursivity in an eristic key”. Rather than refuting the facts, Petro shifts the discussion toward the moral and economic illegitimacy of the source, transforming neutral reporting into an arbitrary and biased narrative.

This rhetorical device allows the leader to dismiss journalistic revelations as mere instruments of the oligarchy, freeing him from any obligation to respond with data. By introducing the premise that independent journalism is impossible under the current ownership model, Petro institutionalizes a form of post-truth in which criticism is no longer a democratic exercise, but an act of betrayal against the popular will. Ultimately, both leaders converge in their ambition to redefine the rules of the media landscape, positioning themselves as the sole arbiters of reality in deeply polarized environments.

## **The Fiff Press and Media Oligarchies**

Institutionalized stigmatization constitutes a pillar of governance in which AMLO labels critical media outlets as the “public enemy number one of the people”. To this end, he deploys an aggressive lexicon that includes pejorative terms such as “conservatives”, “neoliberals”, “bought press”, and “corrupt press”. In a documentation exercise, Carlos Loret de Mola compiled an alphabetical list of nearly 200 insults hurled by the president, among which terms such as “chayotero”, “fiff” and “journalism’s underworld” stand out. According to Cortés (2022), this tactic seeks to reinforce the transgressive profile of the charismatic leader against an institutional framework that he himself portrays as deeply corrupt.

This offensive reached a legal and ethical breaking point in 2021, when the president publicly disclosed the alleged income of 35 million pesos earned by Loret de Mola. This act, framed under a pretense of transparency, was denounced by analysts as an illegal act of personal retribution from a position of political power, intended to punish the journalist for exposing alleged conflicts of interest within the presidential family. To systematize this control of the narrative, the weekly segment “Who’s Who in the Lies” was introduced, a space that has been described as inquisitorial and Orwellian due to its lack of technical methodology in fact-checking and its evident political bias.

In keeping with this model, Gustavo Petro has adopted an analogous delegitimization strategy in Colombia, though one adapted to the digital era and to the country’s media ownership landscape. Petro uses the social media platform X to project a deep distrust of the press, presenting it as the operational arm of mafia-like forces opposed to social change. This narrative has translated into highly stigmatizing labels; for instance, the president has referred to certain media sectors as the “Mossad press” and has gone so far as to describe women journalists with the derogatory term “mafia dolls”. According to monitoring of the platform X, these official attacks typically trigger waves of massive digital harassment that persist for weeks.

On the other hand, while AMLO uses his weekly segment to “burn his adversaries at the stake”, the Petro administration has sought to centralize official truth through the public media system RTVC, which the president has described as the “beacon of truth”. Under the direction of Hollman Morris, RTVC has been denounced by the FLIP (2024) for implementing an intimidation strategy that discourages workers from reporting internal abuses, reducing any criticism to a conspiracy of powerful interests. This phenomenon reflects a broader tendency in which those in power are no longer

content to participate in public debate, but instead aspire to become the “supreme arbiter of truth”, deliberately eroding the watchdog function of independent journalism.

Gustavo Petro’s most severe confrontations have emerged when journalistic work moves beyond opinion to expose sensitive judicial investigations affecting his immediate circle of power. In this scenario, the president transfers the antagonism from the media sphere to the institutional one, transforming legal scrutiny into a political battlefield. A paradigmatic case was the coverage of the corruption scandals involving his son, Nicolás Petro, in 2023, an episode that dominated the digital conversation under a predominantly negative tone (Infobae, 2023). Faced with the gravity of the revelations, the president not only launched what various sectors described as violent attacks against the magazine *Semana*, blaming it for orchestrating a strategy to tarnish the name of the Gobierno del Cambio (Revista *Semana*, 2023), but also instrumentalized the public media system RTVC to impose a response framework that reduced the crisis to a conspiracy of powerful interests (FLIP, 2025).

This defensive narrative was not confined to the communicational sphere, but escalated to the constitutional level through the adoption of the concepts of “soft coup” and “lawfare” (Montealegre Lynett, 2023). Under this logic, Petro has publicly accused adverse judicial decisions of being acts of perfidy, suggesting a systemic disloyalty toward the popular will (Baquero Mattar, 2024). By shifting the discussion away from the validity of the evidence and toward the alleged moral illegitimacy of the judges.

This strategy of systematic hostility provoked an unprecedented response from the Judicial Branch. In December 2024, the Council of State issued a categorical statement rejecting the president’s grave, systematic, and disrespectful messages, warning that such accusations distort reality and threaten the autonomy of the magistrates (Consejo de Estado, 2024). The Court was emphatic in stating the following: To characterize the rulings and pronouncements of this Court as acts of soft coup and perfidy, that is, as disloyalty or betrayal of democratic principles, disregards the function of the Judicial Branch, which operates free from all forms of pressure. (Baquero Mattar, 2024, p. 4)

This clash of powers reveals a transition from communicative populism toward a crisis of checks and balances. While organizations such as the SIP (2025) warn that this hostile environment poses a structural risk to democracy, the government persists in an eristic rhetoric that seeks to neutralize judicial and journalistic mediation, positioning the leader as the sole interpreter and guarantor of social justice

against what he calls a mafia-like oligarchy entrenched within the institutions (Petro, 2024; Swissinfo & EFE, 2025).

The populist language of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), crafted with precision to connect with the masses, has popularized a series of terms and idiomatic expressions that make up the vernacular known as “pejeñol”. According to analyst Jesús Silva Herzog, no politician has been as successful as the Mexican president in “colonizing our expression” and embedding himself in the common rationality of citizens. In this model, systematic repetition plays a crucial role, a process the president himself defines as a pedagogical endeavor: “a leader must repeat and repeat, because his work is pedagogical, it is about raising consciousness”. To discredit the criticism of his opponents, AMLO frequently resorts to aggressive historical analogies; in fact, through June 2021, he had referenced Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels on 18 occasions, invoking his maxim about the repetition of lies to stigmatize the media practices of the traditional press.

For his part, one of the most powerful tools in Gustavo Petro’s narrative is the moralizing hyperbole, deployed to shift technical discussion toward an absolute ethical confrontation. When referring to the language of what he calls the “extreme right”, the Colombian president associates it directly with fascism, citing as an example the use of the word “desechable”, meaning “disposable”, to refer to homeless people. Petro argues that this term is not a mere word, but the expression of a “murderous mindset” that hierarchizes human beings and once applauded the appearance of the corpses of vulnerable populations. By employing this rhetoric, the president charges political conflict with an extreme emotional weight, positioning his government as the only legitimate defense against a historical barbarism.

## Digital Militancy

Social media platforms are celebrated by Andrés Manuel López Obrador as “blessed”, constituting an ecosystem in which the president claims to have found his most effective tool for countering the traditional media blockade. This digital environment functions as a polarized battlefield where followers of the government project, known as “chairs”, clash against its detractors, labeled “fiffs”. Within this framework, an army of allied communicators has emerged, including YouTubers, bloggers, and Twitter users who, adopting a militant stance, tend to occupy the front rows of the morning press conferences. According to Raúl Cortés, these actors undermine the open dialogue proclaimed by the president by asking softball questions, designed specifically to allow the president to shine or to avoid placing him in uncomfortable situations.

This digital loyalty in Mexico has not come without a price, having given rise to a system of institutional rewards. López Obrador has appointed key sympathizers of his movement to positions of significant international relevance; paradigmatic examples include the designation of journalist Isabel Arvide as consul in Istanbul and of the founder of the newspaper “*La Jornada*”, Carlos Payán, as press attaché in Barcelona (Cortés, 2022, pp. 256, 259). These appointments, described by analysts as a “form of belated reward”, reveal a stark contradiction with the promised rupture from the clientelist practices of the past (Cortés, 2022, p. 262).

In an analogous fashion, the Petro administration has deployed a sophisticated strategy within the digital ecosystem, aimed at mobilizing its support base while simultaneously punishing critical media outlets. Petro himself has acknowledged that social media allowed him to build his own communicational power to resist what he describes as smear campaigns by the major media conglomerates. However, this model has transitioned from organic defense to a professionalization of propaganda through the mass hiring of influencers. According to reports by the Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) and outlets such as *El Colombiano*, the Executive branch allocated approximately 662 million pesos to contract figures such as Wally Opina, Don Izquierdo, and Lalis Smile, who operate as digital operators in defense of the government.

This troop of influencers, which by 2025 already numbered at least 18 activists with contracts exceeding 700 million pesos, serves the function of amplifying presidential narratives and coordinating trending topics. The firm Toro Digital, after analyzing more than 24 million messages in 2023, determined that the government led the digital agenda through intense polarization and smear campaigns against the press. In this regard, the hashtags with the greatest impact were #CaracolMiente, #RCNMiente, and #SemanaMiente, which surpassed 36,000 mentions and were directly associated with the defense of Petro.

Looking ahead to the 2026 elections, the transition of state-contracted digital activists toward direct candidacies for Congress under the Pacto Histórico banner marks a significant development. A paradigmatic case is that of Walter Alfonso Rodríguez (Wally), who, after receiving contracts exceeding 45 million pesos from RTVC to produce legal content, obtained the highest vote count in the internal Senate primary with more than 143,000 votes. A similar phenomenon is seen with Laura Daniela Beltrán (Lalis), who, after signing significant contracts with public entities during the Petro administration, secured a prominent position on the list for the Chamber of Representatives for Bogotá. This ascent, according to academic Patricia Muñoz Yi, illustrates how prior support for presidential policies, financed with public funds, grants these

figures a competitive advantage over traditional politicians within the digital ecosystem.

### **Punitive Austerity and Budget Redistribution**

In the economic sphere, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) reconfigured relations with the media through a drastic cut in official advertising spending, disbursing only 3.246 billion dollars in his first year, a figure representing one third of what his predecessor had spent (Cortés, 2022, p. 228). This reduction functioned simultaneously as an austerity measure and as a financial punishment directed at the conventional press, under the argument that media outlets had been “bought” or “rented” through public budget allocations (Cortés, 2022, p. 230). However, this model of “suffocation” was not absolute, as spending continued to concentrate in traditionally allied companies, suggesting that advertising placement was used as a mechanism of editorial control (Cortés, 2022, p. 235).

By contrast, Gustavo Petro’s strategy in Colombia has escalated toward a policy of structural refoundation through Bill No. 128 of 2025, known as the “Law of Thirds”. This initiative proposes a tripartite distribution of the state budget: one third for private media, one third for public media, and one third for alternative, community, and digital outlets (Gaceta del Congreso, 2025, p. 3). Petro justifies this move by identifying himself as an “alternative communicator politician” and asserting that “to fund is to empower” the sectors historically silenced (Presidencia de la República, 2024). In practice, this directive has entailed a radical cut for major private media outlets, whose share of official advertising from DAPRE fell to 0%, while the public media system RTVC saw its share of resources increase from 18% to 84% (Infobae, 2023).

Under the direction of Hollman Morris, RTVC has consolidated itself as the operational arm of this new information matrix, described by the Executive branch as the “beacon of truth”. However, the Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP) has denounced a “climate of censorship and anti-pluralism” within the institution, documenting testimonies from workers pointing to editorial pressures and the silencing of critical voices (FLIP, 2025). At the same time, the public media system has been instrumentalized to strike back against the traditional press; a notable case was the demand for a retraction from *Revista Semana* over reports concerning multimillion-peso contracts, an episode that Petro described as a “systematic action based on slander” (Radio Nacional de Colombia, 2026).

Finally, the incident involving the Servicio Geológico Colombiano (SGC) exemplifies the overreach of state infrastructure for proselytizing purposes. The Tribunal Administrativo de Cundinamarca ordered the institution to cease dissemina-

ting messages of support for the president, after concluding that the SGC had diverted personnel and technical resources to coordinately replicate political narratives unrelated to its scientific mission (Infobae, 2026). In response to this ruling, Petro issued a direct challenge to judicial authority, declaring that in order to prevent his communication with society, “they would have to change the Constitution” (Infobae, 2026). This clash of powers underscores that the budget redistribution does not merely seek to democratize information, but rather to consolidate a communicative environment in which state entities act as instruments of validation and propaganda for the political project (FLIP, 2025; Infobae, 2026).

## Final Thoughts

The political communication models of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Gustavo Petro, defined by centralization, polarization, and post-truth, transform the presidential platform into a megaphone of mass persuasion that prioritizes loyalty and emotion over informational rigor. As has been analyzed throughout this review, both leaders have chosen to position themselves as the “supreme arbiter of truth”, casting themselves as the sole legitimate judges of reality within deeply fractured media environments. This rhetoric justifies drastic measures of control and budget redistribution, under the premise that the only way to combat the threats posed by the old regime or the oligarchy is through militant, state-funded communication.

The tactical differences between both models arise from their specific contexts, yet converge on a shared ideological core: communication as a weapon of battle and the leader as the sole vector of political messaging. While AMLO leverages the “magnet effect” of his morning conferences to dominate a ritual boxing ring before a weakened press, Petro wages an asymmetric war from the social media platform X to bypass traditional mediation, resorting to a metadiscursivity in an eristic key that morally delegitimizes any criticism. In both cases, populist language, whether through “pejeñol” or moralizing hyperbole, seeks an epistemological rupture in the audience, rendering the factual content of any accusation irrelevant if it originates from a source labeled as conservative or fascist.

The analysis further reveals a transition from rhetorical confrontation toward an institutionalization of propaganda. In Mexico, this manifests in a system of rewards for allied communicators and the reduction of official advertising as a form of punishment. In Colombia, the strategy has escalated toward a structural refoundation through the Law of Thirds and the co-optation of RTVC, a system that has shifted from being a public media outlet to an instrument of editorial pressure and censorship. This phenomenon has even enabled a political me-

tamorphosis, in which influencers funded with public resources transition toward direct congressional candidacies in 2026, consolidating a competitive advantage built on governmental branding.

Finally, this clash of powers transcends the communicational sphere to generate a crisis of checks and balances. By labeling judicial and journalistic decisions as acts of “perfidy” or “soft coup”, the autonomy of institutions is eroded and a climate of hostility is fostered that incentivizes self-censorship. As the comparative analysis concludes, if journalism and the justice system yield to the ethical monopoly of the ruler, society risks losing its capacity to discern truth, compromising the stability of democracy in the face of projects that present themselves as the only defense of the people against the elites.

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