

PEACE STUDIES
JOURNAL

Volume 13, Issue 1
May 2020

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Guest Editor

Annie Bernatchez

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CHILD PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES: IDENTIFYING GAPS BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND ACTION

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Keywords: Children, Conflict, Mediation, Participation, Peacemaking

Abstract

In Resolution 2427 (2018), the United Nations (UN) Security Council called upon Member States, UN entities, the Peacebuilding Commission, and other parties concerned to take into account children's views, where possible, in all peace negotiations, and ceasefire and peace agreements. For the first time, the Council acknowledged the importance of children's views in peacemaking and introduced child participation into the peace and security arena. Building on the assumption that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without inclusion of all sectors of society, children too, this article investigates the reasons why actioning the Council's commitments has been challenging for Member States and the UN when it comes to ensuring child participation in peacemaking. It finds that the lack of expertise, political will and resources, and the fear of "doing harm" to children prevent honoring their civic right to participate as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I. Introduction

Speaking to Sweden's theme of "Protecting Children Today Prevents Conflicts Tomorrow," ninety-one of the 193 Member States intervened at the United Nations (UN) Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict on July 9, 2018. The Chair of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (2017-2018), the Government of Sweden, successfully led negotiations on Resolution 2427 (2018), co-sponsored by ninety-eight countries. The resolution was unanimously adopted at this debate, in which the Council stressed the importance of giving due consideration to child protection issues from the early stages of all peace processes (Security Council, 2018, p. 2). Through the resolution, the Council encouraged consideration and facilitation of children's views in these processes (Security Council, 2018, p. 6), building on the notion that children have a stake in ending violent conflict in their country, and also have the potential to act as positive agents of peace and change in their societies. However, contrary to the Council's asks in the resolution, words have not been translated into action, particularly with respect to consulting children in peacemaking.

This paper investigates the reasons why actioning the Council's commitments has been challenging for Member States and the UN when it comes to ensuring child participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding. It posits that the lack of expertise, political will and resources, as well as fear of "doing harm" to children, stand in the way of honoring children's civic right to participate as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC). The paper identifies ways forward for breaking down the myth that child participation is impossible for these reasons.

II. Children's Participation as a Right

Articles 12, 13, 15 and 17 of the UN CRC, the most universally ratified treaty, enshrine children's civic right to be heard, organize, access information, and participate in different spheres of society (UNICEF, 2008, pp. 12-13). The UN CRC General Comment 20 elaborates that "States should ensure that adolescents are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of all relevant legislation, policies, services and programmes affecting their lives, at school and at the community, local, national and international levels" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 7). Furthermore in this General Comment, the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that "adults' understanding and awareness of adolescents' right to participation is important for adolescents' enjoyment of that right, and it encourages States to invest in training and awareness-raising, particularly for parents and caregivers, professionals working with and for adolescents, policymakers and decision makers" (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 8). The Committee explained the importance of adolescents' right to participation as a means of political and civil engagement where they can negotiate and advocate for the realization of their rights but also as means of accountability towards Member States for the realization of those rights (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016, p. 8). Finally, the Committee urges State parties to,

ensure the adolescents are provided with systematic opportunities to play an active role in the development and design of protection systems and reconciliation and peacebuilding processes. Explicit investment in post-conflict and transition reconstruction should be seen

as an opportunity for adolescents to contribute to the economic and social development, resilience-building and peaceful transition of the country. (*ibid*)

In addition to the UN CRC and its General Comment 20, a series of UN resolutions build on the notion that children are a key component of civil society and have a stake in promoting and monitoring their own rights. At the UN General Assembly level, Resolution 62/126 entitled “Policies and Programs Involving Youth: Youth in the Global Economy – Promoting Youth Participation in Social and Economic Development” explicitly states that, “Governments should encourage the involvement of young people, where appropriate, in activities concerning the protection of children and youth affected by armed conflict, including programmes for reconciliation, peace consolidation and peacebuilding” (General Assembly, 2008).

III. UN Security Council Framework on Child Protection in Peace Processes

Since the creation of its Children and Armed Conflict agenda¹ in 1999, marked by the passage of Resolution 1261, the UN Security Council has consistently called for integration of child protection into peacemaking and peacebuilding. Notably, ten out of 12 children and armed conflict resolutions the Council has adopted to date reflect specific calls for integrating children’s concerns into peace processes. Generally, these calls have focused on urging all parties to account for the protection, welfare and rights of children during peace negotiations, as found in resolutions 1261 (1999), 1460 (2003), and 1612 (2005) (see Appendix for table with detailed language).

As early as 2000, in Resolution 1314, the Council further requested that parties to conflict include specific “provisions” related to child protection in peace negotiations and peace agreements, including in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or groups (Security Council, 2000, p. 3). This was followed up in resolutions 1379 (2001) and 2143 (2014). In resolutions 1882 (2009) and 1998 (2011), the Council expanded the ask to include that these concerns be a part of post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programs and strategies, prioritizing issues concerning children affected by armed conflict. Notably, these two resolutions expanded the language on prioritizing the protection, welfare and rights of children to include “empowerment” as well. Here, the Council specified its calls from “all parties” to include “Member States, United Nations entities including Peacebuilding Commission and other relevant parties” (Security Council, 2009, p. 4).

Remarkably, as early as 2000 in Resolution 1314, the Council requested parties to involve children in peace processes whenever possible in operational paragraphs 11 and 19:

Requests parties to armed conflict to include, where appropriate, provisions for the protection of children, including in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child combatants, in peace negotiations and in peace agreements and the involvement of children, where possible, in these processes. (Security Council, 2000, p. 3)

¹ A comprehensive framework composed of (to date) 12 resolutions and 13 presidential statements for addressing and preventing grave violations of children’s rights in armed conflict, rooted in the core principles of international humanitarian and human rights law. These violations are recruitment and use of children; killing and maiming; rape and other forms of sexual violence; attacks on schools and/or hospitals; abduction; and denial of humanitarian access.

Calls on Member States, relevant parts of the United Nations system, and civil society to encourage the involvement of young persons in programmes for peace consolidation and peace-building. (Security Council, 2000, p. 4)

This call for considering children's views whenever possible was once more repeated in Resolution 1379 in 2001 in operational paragraph 8e (Security Council, 2001, p. 3). However, after these requests were made, the Council dropped the language on incorporation of children's views until 2018 when Resolution 2427 not only echoed the original calls under Sweden's leadership, but it further elaborated on them.

Resolution 2427 introduced several significant elements into the Council's calls. Firstly, it stressed the importance of timing by giving due consideration to child protection issues from the early stages of peace processes, including through having specific provisions in peace agreements considering the best interest of the child, the treatment of children separated from armed groups as victims, and focus on family and community-based reintegration (Security Council, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, Resolution 2427 called upon States and the UN to "mainstream child protection into all relevant activities in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations with the aim of sustaining peace and preventing conflict" in operational paragraph 3 (Security Council, 2018, p. 3). In very concrete terms, the resolution welcomed the launch of a process by the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict of compiling practical guidance on integration of child protection issues into peace processes in operational paragraph 22 (Security Council, 2018, p. 5). It expanded on the inclusion of child protection provisions into ceasefire agreements as well as peace agreements, and in the provisions for ceasefire monitoring, while taking into account children's views where possible, thus bringing back the original language from 2001².

Most significantly, in operational paragraph 23, the Council calls upon Member States, United Nations Entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned to:

ensure that the views of children are taken into account in programming activities throughout the conflict cycle, and to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated and prioritized in all post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programs and strategies as well as in efforts on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in these processes. (Security Council, 2018, p. 6)

Of the twelve children and armed conflict resolutions where language was analyzed, two included no language on peace processes and child protection, namely resolutions 1539 (2004) and 2068 (2012).

IV. Exploring the Tension Between Commitment to Integrate Versus Not Doing So

Across the relevant UN entities, Member States, and civil society organizations, experts consulted for this paper shared a common analysis behind factors that blocked children's participation in

² The analysis of factors that led to inclusion of language at certain points or not depending on the Security Council dynamics is a subject for a separate investigation and not directly relevant to this paper.

peacemaking and peacebuilding. The below sections summarize key impediments and factors that would enable integrating children's views (interview questions #1, #2 and #5). When asked to point out specific examples of success or failure to integrate children's views in peacemaking and peacebuilding (interview questions #2 and #4), no respondents felt comfortable to say they thought any of the efforts known to them would qualify as having been examples of success. Specifically, with peacemaking, no respondents cited cases of children's participation to their knowledge. With respect to peacebuilding, several spoke about youth inclusion (persons above 18 years old) in peacebuilding programs or transitional justice efforts they were familiar with (ex. Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation process, Nepal Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration program); however, these experts were explicit to state the efforts warranted mixed results in terms of success as measured by meaningful participation of young people that generated transformative results arising from their inclusion. The example of Colombia was targeted as a case study to illustrate the point on use of alternative means of consulting children to ensure their views were represented in the only known peace process to date to have proactively involved children's views in some way.

Key Impediments: Why Children are Not Consulted

Firstly, all respondents fundamentally spoke to perceptions of children and what they are poised to contribute. Simply put, children are not taken seriously. One respondent said the perception is that children should not be a part of decisions, or even questioned, reasoning that children need to be in school and not a part of political processes (and even in schools, they do not have a say). Another respondent explained that there is also a fear of what children might come up with and how governments could meet their demands – this is a perception that children come up with unrealistic ideas that adults cannot realize. In addition, partners who developed methodologies to consult children and raise their points in the Havana peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP said that parties viewed children affected by conflict as needing protection rather than viewing them as rights holders, which took away their agency and undermined the value they added to the peace process.

Secondly, respondents strongly felt that there is a lack of understanding or know-how in terms of how child participation was practically done, which makes the UN and Member States sideline consulting children. In addition to the issue of not having any training in child participation, there is the compounding issue of prioritization by mediators. For instance, one respondent said that mediators often state they have too much on their plates, and asking them to integrate child protection, let alone children's views in complex negotiations, takes away the mediators' flexibility and freedom as a result of having to consider child-specific guidelines on top of their already stretched time and resources. Mediators wish to preserve that freedom as much as possible, and there is a sense that they already have too many guidelines to consider, which they experience as a hindrance.

A few have gone as far as to note that mediators view peacemaking in a very traditional sense, namely two or more warring parties coming to the table to negotiate putting down arms. This is a narrow view of what it takes to build sustainable peace they expressed, namely inclusion of all sectors of society, including children, to ensure participation and ownership of the process. This creates the buy-in and facilitates reconciliation along the way, which is crucial for peace to take

hold and to break the cycles of conflict. Some respondents noted mediators' plain lack of interest in thematic issues or what children would be able to bring to the peace process, taking a hard line on who makes peace happen. One experienced practitioner in the field of mediation and peacebuilding went as far as to say that mediators themselves do not have any substantial understanding of peacemaking or how to incorporate children's views to begin with, therefore exhibiting a huge need for training in mediation, to be followed by other areas. Finally, one respondent explained that mediators still view children through protection lens, rather than participation lens, seeing child protection as something entirely unrelated to peacemaking.

One respondent with a breadth of experience of involving youth in peacemaking on behalf of the UN said that the system has resisted consultations with children because it is 1) complicated, 2) costly (ex. travel budget for a child and a chaperone), and 3) there is a lack of simple protocol available, including child safeguarding at the UN. The system is simply not equipped for child participation, and mediators do not have the supporting mechanisms to do it. Oftentimes, several respondents noted, consultations with children are ascribed to civil society if they take place in the context of peacemaking or peacebuilding, as this is construed as something that non-governmental organizations do. One respondent questioned who would organize a children's consultation if for example, the Special Envoy visits Yemen – he only visits Sana'a with limited time, therefore a network around him is needed to accomplish this as he has no means or staff to do it.

Thirdly, the lack of expertise, political will, and infrastructure necessary to ensure child participation are coupled with several particular anxieties that mediators / negotiators exhibit. Firstly, the UN and Member States wish to avoid doing any harm to children as a result of not having been equipped to do it properly, which is a legitimate fear and one that creates a sense of reluctance to engage children at all. Several respondents spoke about the question of representation in identifying children who can meaningfully represent all children in their society, which poses a question of legitimacy of children's engagement. For instance, one respondent felt that children who are embedded in formal institutional spaces such as national youth councils might be being coopted by their Governments and are often not representative of those most marginalized or at the very grassroots levels of their society. Additionally, age must be considered when determining which children may be consulted and how, as given their evolving capacities and views, contributions vary between nine-year versus 15-year old children in any given process of consultations. This is another legitimate consideration.

Finally, respondents addressed the implications of a growing Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda of the UN, following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015). One practitioner expressed that we simply have too many mandates going from initially having child protection, to Women, Peace, and Security, and now YPS, which mediators themselves acknowledge because each of these protection agendas now mandates considerations of views of children, youth, and women in peace processes. In their view, this goes back to the point above that managing a complex political process is difficult enough and, given these mandates, it becomes increasingly difficult to integrate everything. One respondent said that the attention to youth as something new has given the impression that children's agenda is old, somehow in competition with the other, but in reality, those working on these issues understand that engaging a broad range of stakeholders (women, children, youth) moves us closer to an integrated approach to peacebuilding and YPS is a "noise, distraction." Practitioners still use the language of "young

people” when referring to children, adolescents and youth, and this respondent criticized creating new siloes. The UN’s separation of the YPS and children’s agendas was a political decision, but several respondents felt this came at the cost of child participation because the “noise” around youth carried institutionalization of new spaces and resources for youth while inadvertently overshadowing child participation.

Key Factors: Enabling Child Participation

Regarding the way children are perceived in terms of being consulted and their potential for contributing to peace, most respondents indicated that a shift is required in terms of how mediators view conflict resolution and sustainable peace that includes all sectors of society as mentioned above. To move away from the “old men in locked rooms” paradigm, several spoke about the inclusion of children as being both a correct thing to do given countries’ legal obligations under the UN CRC and resolutions explained above, but also a smart thing to do in recognition of the fact that only inclusion of all sectors of society will give any peace process legitimacy. In a context where fifty percent of a country’s population is composed of children, they should be listened to in order to achieve the sustainable peace the whole population can live with, especially as under 18-year-olds in that country will soon be adults, and deserve to own that peace.

According to two respondents, in order to action this shift, political will and leadership is needed for all stakeholders to be convinced that including children is beneficial. As warring parties and mediators are reluctant to include women and children, a few respondents suggested demonstrating the benefits of involving children from the beginning of a peace process, and that the impact of this in any society is essential. This step requires awareness-raising and showcasing examples with Member States and mediators themselves.

Save the Children’s findings from a long-term project summarized in “Children and young people as actors in peace processes and peacebuilding” directly showed that children and young people’s participation led to the following positive changes: 1) at the individual level, increased self-confidence to raise their voice for peace and other matters concerning them increased communication, problem-solving, conflict resolution and negotiation skills; reduction in violence, discrimination and early marriage, increased access to education and increased respect by adults; 2) at the family level, improved communication among parents and children and increased respect for children’s views and a reduction in corporal punishment and family violence or conflict; 3) in more safe and inclusive schools, a reduction in corporal punishment and discrimination in schools, increased conflict mediation by children, and children’s views being heard; and 4) at the community level, increased awareness on peace and child rights, a reduction in violence, abuse and discrimination facing children in the community, and increased respect for children’s views (Save the Children, 2012, p. 6). This project is one of many that demonstrated the impact of children’s participation contributing positively to peace and reconciliation in communities coming out of war. What enabled long-term engagement and consultation with children was the existence of structures where children were already active at the grassroots level, specifically child clubs, which could be easily tapped into.

Insofar as practical implications of involving children in peacemaking and peacebuilding go, there were several concrete ways respondents recommended surpassing impediments such as a lack of

understanding of and expertise in child participation, high costs, and lack of clear mandates. Firstly, in spite of their reluctance, most respondents agreed there is a need for the UN and mediators to come up with concrete guidelines and tools to achieve child participation that explains the very basics of child safeguarding and how this could be practically done. It became apparent in the course of this research that the UN has no single place or policy that explains child participation, nor have efforts to integrate consultative mechanisms into existing mechanisms in peacemaking and peacebuilding been in any way systematized. Meanwhile, there is a wealth of expertise on child participation by UNICEF and international non-governmental organizations (ex. Save the Children, World Vision, ChildFund, International Center for Transitional Justice) that have done child participation for decades, including in the fields of peacebuilding and truth and reconciliation. These entities have firmly founded their understanding of involving children in decision-making upon the principles of prioritizing the best interests of the child, considering their evolving capacities, including relevant safeguards to prevent doing any harm, understanding it is not always in the interest of the child to be a part of a peace process, and protecting them from all risks if they are included.

These organizations have found alternative methodologies for engaging children as was done in Colombia, for instance, to ensure children's views are taken into account even where they could not be present in person. In Colombia, to ensure children were consulted in the peace negotiations in Havana, civil society actors developed these five strategies, showing that alternative ways to engage children were possible, namely: 1) they supported victims of the conflict who were now adults able to tell a story of conflict when they were a child in formal negotiation roundtables to effectively depict first-hand experiences of child victims; 2) produced videos and images with children that were sent directly to negotiators in Havana with their messages; 3) spoke at public hearings in Congress, bringing information to facilitate understanding of the views of children they consulted with; 4) promoted inclusion of children's messages on the website where civil society was able to post in order to feed into the peace negotiations; and 5) with the support of the UN in victims' forums, pushed for the creation of spaces for children to participate in the debate of the peace agreement in roundtables organized around the country beforehand, with child victims of different crimes committed in the context of conflict. The final peace agreement reflected two important aspects that children advocated for in these various consultations, firstly including the best interests of the child from the UN CRC as criteria for parties throughout the entire agreement, and secondly mandating an education program for demobilized children in rural areas. While partners are cautious to say the matters children raised in various fora were included because of them, the soul of the final agreement captured their specific concerns and demands.

At the time of drafting, the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is finalizing a 20-page UN-wide guidance note for mediators on how to integrate child protection in peace processes as mandated by Resolution 2427 (2018), in collaboration with the UN Department of Political Affairs (Mediation Support Unit), Department of Peace Operations, and UNICEF. The guidance is a welcome opportunity to ensure child participation is embedded within the UN, which the Office intends to do, but the rollout of this guidance will require training of mediators and piloting in order for it to be meaningful. Following development of child participation policies and guidelines, mediators need to be trained on child protection and participation to be able to do it properly.

One respondent raised the important point of where the mandate on child participation should come from in the context of a peace process. With political leadership – a willing government, Resident Coordinator, Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) of a UN peace mission, or an Envoy sent to negotiate by the African or European Union – a child participation mechanism could be set up, in collaboration with civil society. This mechanism could be financed by governments who believe in mediation and take a broad view of peacemaking, namely sustainability versus just a putting down of weapons. A set up of a resourced consultative mechanism for children would ensure doing no harm and account for representation to overcome the issue of legitimacy from the beginning, namely inclusion across age and gender groups and across the country's geographic areas down to the grassroots level. One respondent mentioned that there are many examples where the UN and Member States have attempted to integrate or create consultative mechanisms into existing mechanisms, but there was never a separate coordination or consultation platform for children. One such example is the Youth Promotion Initiative by the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office, for which 40-50 million US dollars were awarded to the UN and civil society to implement. In Yemen's National Dialogue, there was inclusion of committees of youth and women, thanks to an SRSG who saw value in it. One respondent noted that conducting a better conflict analysis would allow for a better design of a peace process from the beginning where specific consultations on child protection issues could be included.

Another respondent pointed out that the UN can tap into the diverse and wide range of children by means of digital technologies, "inside, around and outside the negotiating room," which takes steps toward ensuring that the most marginalized actors are included, and surpasses risks of actually including children and youth around the table. A mediator can be asked to do this. Finally, to broaden peace processes and peacebuilding away from the conception of "men in the closed room," one respondent proposed having a bigger role for civil society including organizations working on children's issues.

Ultimately, in the words of one respondent, participation does not necessarily mean having a child at a negotiating table but having their views meaningfully engaged, including in shaping the setup of any mechanism or process. As the above-mentioned study by Save the Children shows, the benefits of children's engagement are in a process that generates their leadership and conflict resolution skills as well as facilitates reconciliation and contributes to lasting conflict resolution. Borrowing from the field of transitional justice, more can be done to treat children and young people as citizens rather than victims. Shedding their identity as a child and young person to a citizen, this respondent argued that while it is important to have child and youth spaces, it is important not to imagine that a young person can only speak up in a space that is for young people. Their participation should be based more on their experiences as children, not only as future adults. Recent initiatives have been cognizant of children's issues but there is still a challenge of having deeper engagement. Creating safe spaces to tell their story has been important, as in the case of Sierra Leone, where children's views could not have been ignored in truth and reconciliation efforts given the breadth and gravity of violations they disproportionately suffered, but initiatives in peacemaking and reconciliation should involve children at the earliest stages in order to create those spaces to ensure that their engagement is meaningful.

V. Conclusion and Next Steps

Not only a mere mapping of gaps between the commitments and practice in accounting for children's views in peacemaking and peacebuilding as exemplified by language in relevant legal instruments including UN Security Council resolutions, the research conducted for this paper signals a broader need for a paradigm shift and systemic change in the field of mediation and peace processes with respect to child participation.

In the age of climate activism by children like Greta Thunberg as just one internationally known example of 16-year old children challenging existing power structures, and the notion that children have no say but are their own agents, it is time to revisit the way the mediation community views child participation and recognize that sustainable peace is peace inclusive of all sectors of society, children too. To truly honor children's right to be heard as enshrined in the UN CRC, another paradigm shift is needed, namely from seeing children as passive recipients of adults' decisions to one where they have a say in the decisions that directly shape their lives including in ending violent conflict and sustaining peace. In their report "A Second Revolution: Thirty Years of Child Rights and the Unfinished Agenda" published in June 2019 to mark the 30th anniversary of the UN CRC, six leading child-focused agencies found that attitudes towards children's participation are evolving but that more needs to be done. They specifically call upon governments, in collaboration with other stakeholders, to:

Listen and respond to children by making sure that all children, responsive to their age and capabilities, know and understand their rights; have the space to regularly and safely express their views and needs; and receive full responses on how their views have been taken into account. Governments should work with civil society to support children's participation and voice at the family and community level, recognising that it is a right that must be respected and fulfilled, and uphold the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, and to peaceful assembly and association, and access to information. (Child Rights Now, 2019, p. 45)

In order for this to happen, mediators must recognize the value of including children. To challenge the system, two concrete actions can be taken at this time:

- 1) UN Security Council Member States should be directly briefed on the status of child participation in peacemaking to raise awareness of these gaps regarding child participation and its own commitment to account for children's views in Resolution 2427 (2018); and
- 2) Complementary to the paper entitled "We are here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes", a similar paper should be commissioned specifically from a child participation perspective to source examples of children's involvement and demonstrate impact.

Member States and UN entities already have the mandate to act in the legal framework behind child participation as described in this paper, which should be complemented with further policies and practice. Relevant entities need to be shown how children can be safely and meaningfully

consulted in peacemaking, and why it is a good idea for them to consult children backed with examples and data on impact. Taking a long-term view, a shift that is necessary is also possible.

VI. Methodology

To map out key impediments to, and enabling factors for, integrating children's views into peacemaking and peacebuilding (see Appendix for interview questions), this paper uses key stakeholder interview methodology. Primary research included 15 interviews with carefully-selected targets, including: three Member States (current and former Chairs of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict); current and former experts from core UN agencies and offices, namely the Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, Peacebuilding Support Office, and the UN Department of Political Affairs' Mediation Support Unit; and representatives from relevant local and international civil society organizations with firsthand experience in engaging children and youth in peacemaking, peacebuilding, and truth and reconciliation efforts. The paper begins with a desk review of international legal instruments framing child participation, including twelve existing UN Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict for analysis of language on child participation in peace processes (see Appendix for a table listing the resolutions).

This paper adopts the UN CRC definition of a "child" as any person below the age of 18 years. In the spirit of the UN CRC, this paper views "child participation" as children's right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, in collaboration with adults. For the purposes of this research, "peacemaking" is defined to include measures that address conflicts in progress and usually involve diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement (<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/terminology>). The paper adopts the UN definition of "peacebuilding" as efforts to assist countries and regions in their transitions from war to peace and to reduce their risk of (re)lapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development (<https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/peace-and-security/>).

Appendix

Interview Questions: Exploring Tension Between Commitment and Practice to Take into Account Children's Views in Peacemaking and Peacebuilding

1. What are three key impediments you see to UN and the Member States integrating children's views in peacemaking (ex. cessation of hostilities, peace accords, follow up processes to monitoring peace agreements)?
2. Are you familiar with specific examples where efforts to integrate children's views into peacemaking succeeded or failed?
3. What are three key impediments you see to UN and Member States integrating children's views into peacebuilding efforts (different from peacemaking)?
4. Are you familiar with specific examples where efforts to integrate children's views into peacemaking succeeded or failed?
5. Are there any factors that might enable successful integration of children's views into peacemaking and/or peacebuilding to overcome these challenges / make advocacy succeed?

UN Security Council Action on Child Protection in Peace Processes, Children and Armed Conflict Resolutions		
1999	Resolution 1261	“OP 7: <i>Urges</i> all parties to armed conflicts to ensure that the protection, welfare and rights of children are taken into account during peace negotiations and throughout the process of consolidating peace in the aftermath of conflict;”
2000	Resolution 1314	“OP 11: <i>Requests</i> parties to armed conflict to include, where appropriate, provisions for the protection of children, including in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child combatants, in peace negotiations and in peace agreements and the involvement of children, where possible, in these processes;” “OP 19: <i>Calls on</i> Member States, relevant parts of the United Nations system, and civil society to encourage the involvement of young persons in programmes for peace consolidation and peace-building;”
2001	Resolution 1379	“OP 8e: [Calls upon all parties to the conflict to:] Provide protection of children in peace agreements, including, where appropriate, provisions relating to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers and the reunification of families, and to consider, when possible, the views of children in those processes;”
2003	Resolution 1460	“OP 12: <i>Calls upon</i> all concerned parties to ensure that the protection, rights and well-being of children are integrated into the peace processes, peace agreements, and the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phases;”
2004	Resolution 1539	No relevant language.
2005	Resolution 1612	“OP 14: <i>Calls upon</i> all parties concerned to ensure that the protection, rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict are specifically integrated into all peace processes, peace agreements and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning programmes;”
2009	Resolution 1882	“OP 15: <i>Calls upon</i> Member States, United Nations entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are integrated into all peace processes and that post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies prioritize issues concerning children affected by armed conflict;”
2011	Resolution 1998	“OP 19: <i>Calls upon</i> Member States, United Nations Entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned to ensure that the protection,

		rights and well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are integrated into all peace processes and that post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning, programmes and strategies prioritize issues concerning children affected by armed conflict;”
2012	Resolution 2068	No relevant language.
2014	Resolution 2143	“OP 9: <i>Further urges</i> Member States, United Nations entities and other parties concerned to ensure that child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, are integrated into all peace negotiations and peace agreements;”
2015	Resolution 2225	“OP 9: <i>Continues to urge</i> Member States, United Nations entities, regional and sub-regional organizations and other parties concerned to ensure that child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associate with armed forces or armed groups, are integrated into all peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements, and in provisions for ceasefire monitoring;”
2018	Resolution 2427	<p>“PPs: <i>Stressing</i> the importance of giving due consideration to child protection issues from the early stages of all peace processes, in particular the integration of child protection provisions, as well as of peace agreements that put strong emphasis on the best interest of the child, the treatment of children separated from armed groups as victims and focus on family and community-based reintegration,”</p> <p>“OP 3: <i>Calls</i> upon States and the United Nations to mainstream child protection into all relevant activities in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations with the aim of sustaining peace and preventing conflict;”</p> <p>“OP 22: <i>Welcomes</i> the launch of a process to compile practical guidance on the integration of child protection issues in peace processes and underlines the importance of engaging armed forces and armed groups on child protection concerns during peace processes and in the peacebuilding process and calls upon Member States, United Nations entities, the Peacebuilding Commission, and other parties concerned to integrate child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups, as well as provisions on the rights and well-being of children, into all peace negotiations, ceasefire and peace agreements, and in provisions for ceasefire monitoring, and taking into account children’s views, where possible, in these processes;”</p> <p>“OP 23: <i>Calls</i> upon Member States, United Nations Entities, including the Peacebuilding Commission and other parties concerned to ensure that the views of children are taken into account in programming activities throughout the conflict cycle, and to ensure that the protection, rights, well-being and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict are fully incorporated and prioritized in all post-conflict recover and reconstruction planning, programs and strategies as well as in efforts on peacebuilding and sustaining peace and encourage and facilitate consideration of the views of children in these processes;”</p>

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PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 13, Issue 1
May 2020

THE MEDIA, VIOLENCE AND PEACEBUILDING IN MEXICO. QUANTITATIVE PHASE OF THE RESEARCH

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Keywords: Peacebuilding, Peace Journalism, Psychosocial Effects, Mass Media, Violence in Mexico

Acknowledgements

We thank the Lexia Insights & Solutions quantitative team for their essential collaboration in this study.

Abstract

Mexico is one of the 25 least peaceful countries on Earth, which has had significant psychosocial impacts on the population. The present study explored those psychosocial impacts in a national representative sample. In addition, a statistical model was developed to determine the factors which had the greatest impact on generating negative or positive feelings after contact with the news. Results indicate that most Mexicans prefer to distance themselves from the traditional news media and use other means to socially construct their understanding of their surroundings or, even, opt to avoid being informed. The perception that the government and the media manipulate information, as well as perceived sensationalism, predict the prevalence of negative feelings after contact with the news. In contrast, the perception that a media outlet contributes to peacebuilding diminishes negative feelings. This study contributes evidence to support suggestions designed to address these circumstances, including recommendations for peace journalism.

I. Introduction

We usually tend to understand peace based on what it is not; we consider it the state in which there is no war or violent conflict. However, we do not always evaluate the active components of peace that produce and sustain peaceful conditions. Following authors such as Galtung (1985), the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2018) explains that there is an angle or aspect of peace that is negative and another that is positive. Negative peace—that which must not be present in order for a society to be living in peace—involves the absence of violence as well as the absence of fear of violence. In contrast, positive peace consists of the factors that compose, activate, and sustain peaceful societies. The IEP has conducted research demonstrating eight basic areas measured by 24 indicators that are present in the most peaceful societies around the world. These are known as the eight pillars of peace or, in other words, the DNA of peace: “(A) A well-functioning government; (b) Equitable distribution of resources; (c) Free flow of information; (d) Good relations with neighbors; (e) High levels of human capital; (f) Acceptance of the rights of others; (g) Low levels of corruption; (h) A sound business environment” (IEP, 2018, 52). Ekanola (2012) put it this way: several conditions, both objective and subjective, must be met for a society to be deemed peaceful. Objective conditions include physical safety, material prosperity and social harmony, while subjective conditions involve the emotional wellbeing of people.

Mexico has, for several years, been among the 25 least peaceful countries in the world (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2018). This has very diverse causes and implications. On one hand, as stated above, the weakness of the active components of peace lie at the bottom of the structural factors that produce such circumstances. On the other, a fear of violence is produced among the population, with all of the psychosocial and political repercussions this entails. However, peace or its absence, comprises interconnected variables: Violence produces fear. Fear, in turn, has negative impacts on inclusion, democracy, and structural peace (Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009; Ceobanu, Wood, & Ribeiro, 2010; Demombynes, 2009; IEP 2018, 2019; Ley, 2015a, 2015b; Morris, 2012, 2013; Siegel, 2007; Wilson, 2004; Wolf, 2016). Likewise, a lack of structural peace is an essential component of the conditions of violence, which, once again, produce fear (IEP 2018, 5). Where, then, do we begin to break the circle?

The best answer is probably that there is no single answer. Peace, as we said, consists of multiple components. Therefore, it makes sense to study, understand, and work to build, correct, or activate those components. One of those components has to do with how we perceive violence, how we communicate it, how we understand it, the psychosocial effects it produces and, ultimately, the political impact that all of the above generate.

This study seeks to contribute to this area by complementing a series of prior investigations carried out and published over the years by the Mexico Research Center for Peace (Centro de Investigación para la Paz México [CIPMEX]) using a quantitative instrument applied with the collaboration of Lexia Insights & Solutions (LIS) to a representative national sample in Mexico about perceptions and conceptions regarding the most important media outlets in the country, regarding how violence is communicated and understood by the population, and regarding the role said media play or should play in building peace. Thus, this study cannot be understood in an isolated manner, without telling the story of which it is a part. In the following pages, we will tell that story and discuss the background that contextualizes this investigation in order to provide

relevance for the reader. We will then describe the methodology, followed by the findings, a discussion, and recommendations.

Our aim can be summarized as follows: if Mexico (or countries such as Mexico, unfortunately subsumed by violence due to different causes) wants to understand and reverse its peaceless situation, it is essential to study, more in-depth, the different problematics it experiences. This understanding cannot be reduced to high rates of murder or violent crimes but, rather, involve structural factors such as institutional weakness, socioeconomic inequality or prevailing corruption, and also include the psychosocial impact that is generated as a result of how violence is communicated and perceived. This is what the following sections deal with.

II. Background and Conceptual Framework

As we have stated, this study is the quantitative phase that complements a series of prior studies. Therefore, rather than carrying out statistical tests based on a pre-existing theoretical framework, we seek to validate results obtained from these previous qualitative studies and perform statistical research to better understand those results. In this section we describe the conceptual framework on which this project is based in addition to explaining how these studies evolved throughout these years.

All of the investigations described in this section take a comprehensive view of structural peace, including the system that creates and sustains positive and negative peace (Galtung, 1985; Alger, 1987; IEP, 2018). From among all of the components of negative peace and positive peace, the series of studies of which this quantitative study is a part, has been grounded in the need to explore two central topics: (a) fear and its psychosocial effects in Mexico, and (b) the perceived absence of the free flow of information, with the ultimate goal of contributing evidence to support recommendations for peacebuilding. These factors matter because, based on the evidence, the prevalence of fear and environments of stress tends to produce negative impacts on issues such as democracy, inclusion, respect for the rights of others, tolerance, trust in democracy and institutions of justice, and, in general, support for peace processes (Bateson, 2009, 2012; Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009; Carreras, 2013; Ceobanu, Wood, & Ribeiro, 2010; Demombynes, 2009; IEP, 2018, 2019; Ley, 2015a, 2015b; Morris, 2012, 2013; Siegel, 2007; Wilson, 2004; Wolf, 2016).

As we progressed and expanded on our own studies carried out in Mexico (2011-2017), we detected the presence of several of those effects among our participants. However, as of late 2018, none of our studies had been applied to a representative sample at the national level. Therefore, our findings remained in the category of exploratory. From there came the need to carry out a new study capable of verifying whether these themes were present in broader cross-sections of the Mexican population, and use the instrument to perform specific statistical tests to better understand the previous findings. To understand this process better, it is necessary to briefly discuss the series of studies we had conducted up to the present one.

1. Exploratory study on the symptoms suggestive of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the Mexican population (2011-2012)

This study, carried out among participants from 25 states throughout the country, found a very high incidence of symptoms suggestive of PTSD among those we surveyed as a result of the increase in violence associated with organized crime experienced in Mexico since 2006. Despite a lack of representativeness and difficulties comparing the results with the results of more ambitious and in-depth studies prior to 2006, this study seemed to suggest that the level of PTSD among the Mexican population was 20 times higher than that in years prior to the aforementioned increase in violence. Notably, our study found a very high correlation between exposure to media and symptoms suggesting PTSD, even among participants from the least violent states in Mexico. Those findings suggested the existence of a stress contagion and the presence of trauma among many of those we surveyed, caused by “learning” about violent events through the media and social networks. One out of two participants believed that the media were the principal transmitter of stress; 90% reported contact with news outlets, and 75% reported feeling worse after that contact. Among other transmitters of stress, we highlight rumors of violent acts/everyday conversation (45% of participants) and incidents experienced by people one is close to (44.5%) (Meschoulam & Calderón-Abbo, 2019, 50).

To explore these types of factors in greater depth, to understand more about the process of the social construction of values, perceptions and conceptions of violence and peace, and to further understand the role of experiences, everyday conversation, the media, the government and organized crime in the social construction of these perceptions, we initiated a series of qualitative research studies based on in-depth interviews with Mexican participants.

2. Qualitative Studies, Phases 1, 2 and 3 (2013-2015)

Phase 1 of the qualitative interviews was conducted among 15 persons residing in a Mexico City neighborhood (Meschoulam, 2014, 1). In Phase 2, we interviewed 65 more participants from another 28 different neighborhoods in Mexico City as well as 13 different states throughout the country (Meschoulam, et al. 2015, 3). Phase 3 was a case study in which we applied the same interview protocol to 25 employees of one of the best companies to work for in Mexico, seeking to determine to what extent the results could vary if the work environment were more favorable than the national average for Mexican companies (Meschoulam, et al. 2018, 2).

Despite not having used representative national samples, the most relevant aspect of these three phases of qualitative research was the frequency of repetition of 15 main categories during the interviews, regardless of the gender, occupation, geographic location, age, or socioeconomic level of the participants. These categories are summarized as follows:

- a. The main components of the social construction of participants regarding their perceptions and conceptions of the situation of violence experienced by the country and possibilities for peace, were their own experiences and observations, the conversations they had with their friends, families, work colleagues, and associates, and the experiences of people with whom they were close. These three categories alone addressed more than 60% of the content of the themes the participants discussed during the interviews.
- b. The above showed a significant contrast with the written press, radio and television as factors of social construction. These three components appeared with much lesser frequency as influential

pieces in the perceptions and conceptions of participants regarding violence and peace. This does not mean that the traditional media were not used, but that participants indicated that these media were not reliable sources for them to find out and learn about what was happening in the country compared to their own experiences, observations, and conversations with the people that they did believe. On the other hand, they expressed a great number of negative feelings such as anger, rejection, and even rage against those media, which were perceived as being part of the corrupt system that, in their view, characterized Mexico.

c. Similarly, the greatest elements of social construction of the feeling of fear or terror, one of the topics that was most present in the interviews, were personal experience and conversations with and the experiences of people with whom one is close. However, in their view, the media also played an important role in the propagation of fear, for they were sensationalist, showed too much violence and “intentionally” spread terror to control public opinion for their own interests or the interests of the government (Meschoulam, et al., 2015).

Because of the relevance of those factors in terms of the possibilities for building peace in Mexico, we decided to expand the investigation further, focusing more specifically on the issue of the media.

3. Qualitative Study, Phase 4 (2016-17): Media, Violence and Peace

The final qualitative phase (Meschoulam, et al. 2017, 1-17) consisted of in-depth interviews using an interview protocol that recaptured some of the elements of the previous protocol but, this time, exploring the media factor in much greater depth through the following questions:

To which specific TV networks, radio stations, programs, newspapers, or journalists were the participants referring? Are certain media outlets perceived differently than others? Which media sources were perceived differently and for what reasons? What makes participants respect certain media outlets and what repels them from other media? What causes frustration, apathy, anger, rage, or other negative sentiments about certain media outlets or specific journalists and how are those sentiments socially constructed? What role do social media play in this environment? What, according to study participants, should the media or journalists do to become more reliable? What topics should the media report and how should these topics be reported for the participants to decide to contact those media? From the perspective of participants, how should mass media report violence? (Meschoulam, et al. 2017, 4).

Without using a representative sample but obtaining the greatest possible diversity among our respondents, in-depth interviews with 80 participants, 40 in 35 different neighborhoods in Mexico City, and 40 in 21 different states in the interior of the country, were conducted; the participants had different ages and occupations, were from different socioeconomic sectors, and had different political preferences.

The findings of this fourth phase can be summarized as follows:

a. The distancing participants expressed with respect to the traditional news media, such as the two main television networks and the most popular radio stations and newspapers in the country, had

to do with two basic factors: (1) a lack of trust these media outlets seemed to inspire based on the perception that those media sources were manipulated by the government (which they mistrusted enormously) or by the elites in power in the country; according to that perception, the media were part of the structure of corruption, crime, and violence; and (2) a series of negative feelings that, in their view, the media produced on them, such as anger, stress, anxiety, fear, despair and apathy, among others, due to the sensationalism of those media outlets, the excessive display of violence and blood, and a lack of respect for victims of the situation Mexico was experiencing in the years in which these interviews were carried out.

b. Upon in-depth investigation, nearly all of the participants stated that despite the occasional or frequent use of the main television channels, radio stations or newspapers, they preferred to distance themselves from the news and instead access programs related to entertainment, sports, or culture. The participants, once again, told us that they had much greater trust in their own experiences and observations, their conversations with people whom they were close, and the experiences of people they knew, vis-a-vis what was published in the traditional media.

c. In contrast, the majority of the participants indicated that they felt attracted to media outlets and journalists that showed distance from the government, that demonstrated objectivity and journalistic rigor, that were capable of promoting critical thinking, that questioned the authorities, and that promoted investigative journalism unmasking corruption scandals. Likewise, the participants seemed to value, in particular, those media outlets that demonstrated respect for the victims of violence, that were not sensationalist, or did not excessively use bloody images and videos, and that, instead, promoted informed debate regarding the structural causes of violence and potential solutions for building peace in the country.

d. In the topic of social media, we detected mixed attitudes. On one hand, social networks were valued by many of our participants as alternative media for obtaining information given their strong mistrust of the corrupt system and traditional media. Social networks were also viewed by many participants as a mechanism for talking about public affairs, and the participants tended to believe their contacts on those networks—even those they did not know or had not met in person—more than the traditional media. On the other hand, however, nearly half of those we interviewed mentioned feeling mistrust in social media given the spread of fake news and the lack of mechanisms to control what is shared on those platforms. Many participants also mentioned that political actors from the corrupt system that they mistrusted, and from the traditional media, appropriated social networks through bots and fake accounts or, even, through their official accounts, making these spaces inhospitable for conversation.

The quantitative research presented in this article stems specifically from the findings of Phase 4.

III. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study sought to answer whether the findings from Phase 4 described above were confirmed in a national sample, and also sought to find out what were the most important contributors to the distancing between participants and the news media. First, was there a correlation between distrust in government and distrust in the media associated with perceived manipulation of information? Secondly, did such distrust in the government and the media have

any impact on the generation of negative feelings after contact with the news in traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers) such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness, and hopelessness? Thirdly, to what extent the perception that there is a high level of yellow journalism or sensationalism, could be found among participants of a national sample and how did that perception impact on the generation of negative feelings after the contact with the news in those media such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness, and hopelessness?

Finally, we sought to find out whether the trust in specific media sources, and the perception that they were not sensationalist and instead, contributed to peacebuilding, and generated a lower level of negative feelings among participants after their contact with those specific media sources.

Our hypotheses were (a) that there was a correlation between distrust in government and distrust in the main Mexican traditional news media associated with perceived manipulation of information; (b) that this distrust was one of the main sources of the generation of negative feelings such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness, and hopelessness among participants after their contact with the news from the mainstream traditional media of the country; (c) similarly, we assumed that another predictor of prevalence of negative feelings after contact with the news in the mainstream traditional media was the perception that these media sources display violence excessively and they are disruptors of peace; and (d) in contrast, because our study sought to explore the level of trust and closeness with specific media sources, as well as with alternative news sources such as certain Internet news portals, we assumed that as trust in specific media outlets grew as well as the perception that those specific media outlets contribute to peacebuilding, to that extent the said negative feelings were less present after contact with them.

IV. Methodology

Participants and Sampling Strategy

The target population of this survey consisted of Mexican men and women ages 18 to 65 living in the central, western, northern and southern regions of the country (that is, all regions of Mexico) whose socioeconomic level corresponds to ABC+, C, C-, D+, and DE (Asociación Mexicana de Agencias de Inteligencia de Mercado y Opinión [Mexican Association of Marketing and Public Opinion Research or AMAI], 2016) and who are exposed to more than one media outlet. In total, the target population is an estimated 59,007,333 people (CONAPO, 2018).

To represent this population, we used a stratified sample, randomly inviting participants to respond to our survey, and participants were accepted only if they were located within the desired socioeconomic and demographic strata based on the proportions designated to achieve the traits being sought. Based on national demographic data (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática [National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics or INEGI], 2015), the participants in our sample included 30.0% from the central region; 25.0% from the west; 23.0% from the north; and 22% from the south. Approximately 47.9% were men, and 52.1% were women. Different age ranges were represented as follows: 18 to 25 years of age, 23.0%; 26 to 35 years of age, 25.2%; 36 to 45 years of age, 22.4%; 46 to 55 years of age, 17.6%; and 56 to 65 years of age,

11.7%. Socioeconomic levels, in line with the existing data, were represented as follows: AB and C+, 17%; C and C-, 27.0%; and D+ and DE, 56% (CONAPO, 2018; AMAI, 2016).

Considering all of the above data, the margin of sampling error for 1,000 effective cases was estimated at 3.1% with 95% confidence, and the confidence intervals we expected were 0.56 and 0.43.

Data Collection

To verify the aforementioned hypotheses, we developed an instrument with closed questions and scaled responses, such as those provided in Table 1.0. The high repetition of the patterns detected in the earlier qualitative phases of this research conferred, at the qualitative level, a considerable level of reliability to those investigations. However, with the purpose of avoiding confirmation bias, all of the questions on the questionnaire offered different options to those surveyed. For example, one question asked participants to rank on a scale from 0 to 4 their level of identification with the statement “I trust the information published on a certain platform or media outlet,” which allowed them to reflect on both their level of trust as well as their possible level of mistrust. Other questions were expressly inserted into the questionnaire to introduce elements of the alternative hypotheses to the ones we assumed.

Table 1. Example of a question from the quantitative instrument

	Completely agree			Completely disagree
I like hearing the news	4	3	2	1
I prefer not to find out what is happening in the country because the news stresses me out	4	3	2	1
I do not have time to watch / listen to / read the news	4	3	2	1
If I turn on the radio or television, I prefer programs related to music, culture, entertainment or sports rather than news	4	3	2	1
I trust the news broadcast on television	4	3	2	1
I trust the news broadcast on the radio	4	3	2	1
I trust the news published in the newspapers	4	3	2	1
I trust the news published on social media	4	3	2	1
I trust the information I acquire through my own experiences and the people I know more than I trust the information that appears in media such as television, radio or newspapers	4	3	2	1
I trust the information I acquire through my own experiences and the people I know more than I trust the information that is published on social media	4	3	2	1

Regardless of whether you usually watch / hear / read the news, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Using scales similar to those showed in Table 1, we investigated issues such as the feelings of those surveyed following contact with news outlets, traditional media, websites and social media, that they trust most; their attitudes toward specific media outlets (such as Televisa, TV Azteca, and specific radio stations and newspapers); to what extent the information from the media is

perceived as manipulated by the government or by the media companies' own interests; the attributes most valued by participants in determining whether to access and remain in contact with a specific media outlet; which media outlets and journalists they trust most and what attributes create that trust; and other similar issues.

Considering that 65.8% of the population over age six in Mexico use the internet (INEGI, 2018), the type of survey used was an online access panel with 1,000 self-administered surveys. That is, the surveys were carried out through a closed panel in which participants received personal invitations to take the survey one time. Through this panel, the survey sample was monitored continuously to guarantee compliance with the quotas established in the sample design.

As we indicated, this platform functions through random invitations via email. Those willing to sign up fill out a form with their data and a series of questions regarding their social, economic and demographic profile. The panel we used has a high level of reliability and rigor, achieving ISO 26362 certification (Netquest, 2017, 1-6). This entails controlling the people invited through different methods that guarantee that the profile the person indicates having is effectively the profile of the person registered. As an additional filter, the panel ensured that the participants were not repeat users, that is, that they did not participate in related surveys over short periods of time.

This methodology (online access panel) and sampling strategy have been employed commonly both in Mexico as well as in other parts of the world for the application of quantitative instruments in representative samples in order to measure perceptions, attitudes, public opinion and similar issues (e.g., Hitchman, et al. 2015; IAB México, 2018; Peña & Aiassa, 2018; Rodríguez, Zorzano, Hernández, Jurado, Contreras, & Rasco, 2017; Sánchez & Segovia, 2008; Vara-Miguel, Megredo, Amoedo & Moreno 2019). Bearing this in mind, the CIPMEX team, which carried out the studies mentioned in the background section, collaborated with a team from Lexia Insights & Solutions who are experts in the use of this technology and have applied this methodology successfully, achieving publications of national relevance (Flores Thomas, 2018; Grupo de Asesores Unidos SC [GAUSSC SC] & Lexia, 2011; Lara, 2018; Robles & Salmón 2018). Finally, this study adhered to the ethical standards imposed by the Universidad Iberoamericana, with which CIPMEX is associated, as well as Mexican regulations and international regulations related to data protection and the privacy of participants. Each participant, before signing up for the online panel, read and signed an informed consent document concerning the nature of the panel and the research being carried out as well as the protection of their identity and personal information. This consent form was again authorized by each participant once they decided to answer the applied instrument.

Data Analysis and Statistical Model

In processing the data obtained in the survey, we used Survey Reporter. Additionally, the confidence level was set at to identify significant variations in responses among groups (by socioeconomic level, gender, age, and region). The statistical analyses were generated through the platform R, a specialized software.

In addition to verifying the correlation between trust in government and trust in the traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers) associated with manipulation of information, a statistical model

was designed to find out what were the characteristics attributed to the media by the participants which had the greatest impact on generating negative feelings in these participants after their contact with the news in those media outlets. For this purpose, an index was developed that we named “Negative Feelings” (NEGFeelings) (including stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness, and hopelessness, among others, that participants said were produced in them after contacting news media). Parallel to this index, a second index was developed to encompass the level of the participant’s contact with traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers). A linear regression model was then generated, in which the independent variable was the index of negative feelings (NEGFeelings), and its dependent variables were the attributes assigned to the media by participants, seeking to answer which of all the investigated attributes were the attributes that had more relevance in the provocation of negative (or positive) feelings.

Date of application of the questionnaire and why it is relevant

This study was applied between November 20 and December 5, 2018. The dates of application are relevant to the Mexican case since only on December 1, 2018 there was a change of government in the country, which is considered historical. The arrival to power of a leftist administration headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who contended for the presidency on three occasions and who was perceived for almost two decades as the main opposition to the system (Gómez Vilchis, 2013; Lajous, 2012; Muñoz Canto 2012; Valdiviezo, 2012) could have considerable impacts in terms of what this study and its background found: When our participants talked about the “government” or the “system,” or the manipulation of the media by the “government,” their reference is not to the administration of AMLO, but to what it expresses opposing. Therefore, it would be necessary to make a new application of our questionnaire after a period of that government and review whether the findings presented below change.

Profile of Our Respondents Regarding Media Consumption

The following describes the participants in terms of media consumption based on the sections of the survey that investigated this topic.

Among our participants, to obtain news, 81% use the internet; while 80% watch television; 40% listen to the radio; 30% read newspapers; and 11% read magazines. One percent stated that they did not watch, listen to or read the news.

A total of 91% read news on social media, and 9% do not use social media for that purpose. Among those who do use social networks for news, 93% do so on Facebook, 55% on YouTube, 33% on Twitter, 17% on Instagram, and 5% on Pinterest.

Sixty-seven percent obtain news from Televisa (TV network): 66% from TV Azteca, 19% from other open TV channels, and 7% from Channel 11 (Instituto Politécnico Nacional, a public university TV channel); 28% use subscription television services to watch the news, including international channels such as CNN (10%). Several of these specific media sources were used for specific questions on our survey.

Eighty-three percent listen to FM radio stations to obtain news. The most popular stations were those belonging to Radio Fórmula, EXA and Televisa Radio (which includes W Radio); 11% listen to AM stations, and 2% listen to online radio stations. As with television stations, several of these specific radio stations were used in specific questions on our survey.

Sixty-one percent indicated reading national newspapers to obtain news, and the most frequently mentioned were *El Universal*, *Milenio* and *Excélsior*; 64% use local newspapers, notably *El Norte* and *Reforma*. A total of 38% of respondents access the websites of national newspapers to obtain news. Of these, the most visited were websites for *El Universal*, *Reforma* (included here as a national website), *Milenio*, *Excélsior*, and *La Jornada*. These media are also part of what we investigated in our survey. Additionally, 21% of participants obtain news through the websites of local newspapers; 5% use the websites of international newspapers; 21% use the websites of television outlets such as CNN, Televisa or TV Azteca; and 5% use the websites of independent communicators such as Aristegui Noticias or other websites such as Animal Político.

In terms of frequency of consumption, 63% of those who use social media, 58% of those who watch television, 43% of those who listen to the radio, 23% of those who read newspapers, and 40% of those who use the internet indicated that they used them daily. Outside of television and social media, the majority of those we surveyed indicated that they consumed news media only sometimes during the week. The average news consumption among those surveyed was 104 minutes (including the use of social networks). Of note are those in the age range of 55 to 65 years of age, who consumed more than two hours of news per day.

V. Results

The results of this study indicate that the majority of Mexicans tend to mistrust the traditional news media more than they trust them (see Figure 1.0). This refers to outlets such as Televisa and TV Azteca, the country's two main television networks, and, to a lesser extent, other types of media such as the newspapers *El Universal* and *Reforma* or companies such as W Radio or Radio Fórmula, two of the country's most popular radio broadcasters. Eighty-four percent of the participants in our survey believed that the information broadcast by Televisa is manipulated by the government, while 71% believed this to be true of TV Azteca, 44%, 44%, 35% and 33%, for *Reforma*, *El Universal*, Radio Fórmula and W Radio, respectively. In a similar sense, 78% of our respondents believed that the information broadcast by Televisa is manipulated by the company due to its own interests. A total of 65%, 44%, 43%, 36%, and 34% believed that the information on TV Azteca, *El Universal*, *Reforma*, Radio Fórmula and W Radio, respectively, is manipulated by those media sources due to their own interests (see Figure 2.0). In contrast, only 5% believed that the information on Televisa is not manipulated by the government (the rest of the sample—11%—indicated that it did not have enough information to answer); 11% believed the same regarding TV Azteca. Although newspapers, such as *El Universal* and *Reforma*, and radio stations were more favorably ranked in our survey, they were only trusted by between 15 and 23% of the sample.

Interestingly, when we asked about media such as “television” or “radio” without mentioning a specific company, the level of trust among those surveyed tended to increase; 58% of our participants expressed that they trusted “television,” and 68% expressed that they trusted “the radio.” However, when we asked questions about specific traditional media outlets and included

the names of television, radio or newspaper companies, in 100% of the cases of the private national media that we investigated, our survey respondents mistrusted those media outlets more than they trusted them (see Figure 1.0). The public media outlet Channel 11, which belongs to the public university Instituto Politécnico Nacional, obtained different results: 32% of those surveyed trusted that what is broadcast by this media outlet is not manipulated by the government, and only 27% believed that the information broadcast by Channel 11 is manipulated. Finally, 39% of respondents perceived the international news network CNN as not manipulated by the government, while 25% believed that it was manipulated (which is certainly relevant, given that this 25% associates even CNN, an international media outlet, with being manipulated by the Mexican government).

Figure 1. Trust on the traditional news media (perceptions of manipulation by the government)

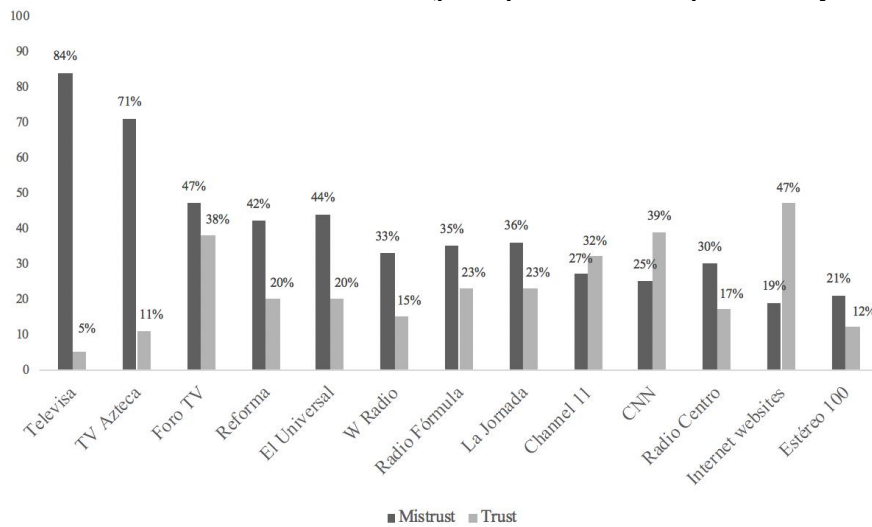
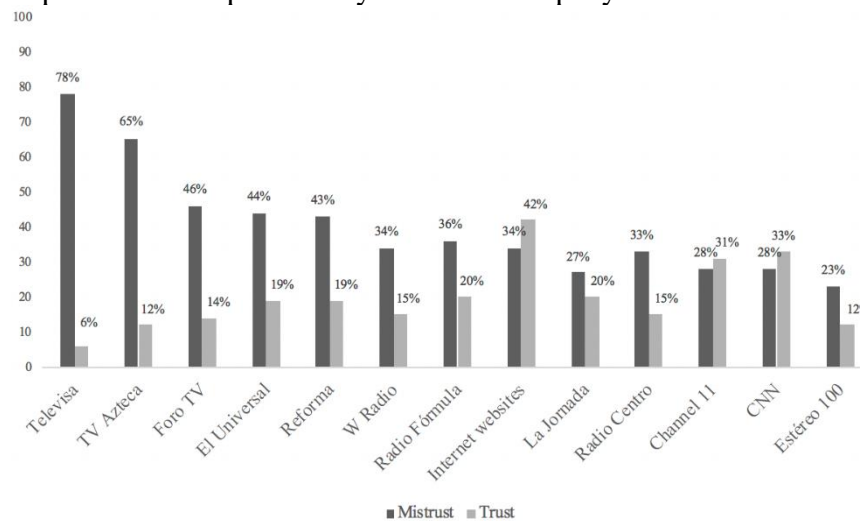


Figure 2. Trust on the traditional news media (perceptions of manipulation by the news company due to its own interests)



Consistent with all of the qualitative studies we have carried out (Phases 1 to 4 described above), 57% reported that they have more trust in the information they acquire through their own experiences and conversations with people they know than they do in the information that is transmitted through media such as television, radio or newspapers.

Beyond a lack of trust due to political factors or potential biases among the traditional news media, 62% of those surveyed stated that the media display excessive violence; 72% thought the media were sensationalist; and 73% thought the media were only seeking to sell their product and did not care about the quality of information they present.

These factors appear to influence the fact that a majority of respondents (55%) prefer programs related to music, culture, entertainment, or sports over accessing news.

With regard to the feelings the respondents perceive as the result of their contact with the news media, some of the results we found include annoyance in 28% of the sample, anger in 26%, stress due to fear in 22%, anxiety in 21%, sadness in 18%, despair in 15%. One in ten participants expressed apathy and repulsion after their contact with news media. These indicators are consistent with our exploratory PTSD suggestive symptoms investigation, which, as described above, detected those symptoms in approximately 20% of participants of a non-representative sample (Meschoulam & Calderon-Abbo, 2019).

Meanwhile, 19% indicated that the media produced in them feelings of calm, and 11% reported that the media give them feelings of happiness. This may be due to specific media with which the participants are in contact (as shown in the results from the statistical model described below). In this regard, consistent with the qualitative phase, those surveyed indicated that they felt drawn to media that demonstrate reliability (95%) and objectivity (93%), those that question the government or demonstrate distance from it (83%), and those that demonstrate journalistic rigor (83%). This quantitative investigation demonstrated a feature that was not detected in our qualitative phase, which is that 92% of respondents indicated that they felt drawn to media that publish information immediately following a certain event.

An essential topic that does maintain high consistency with the qualitative phase is that 90% of participants in the present study indicated that they valued media outlets that demonstrate respect for victims of violence; and 85% reported that it is the responsibility of the media to contribute to building peace but that they normally do not do so. Similarly, as was found in the qualitative phase, 74% of those surveyed preferred media outlets that combine news with entertainment (a factor that may be derived from the choice mentioned above to distance oneself from the news and instead opt for programs related to entertainment, sports or culture). Likewise, 73% of those surveyed indicated that they like for the media to present content on topics concerning the environment, sexual diversity, or human rights, which represent themes that emerged in our qualitative phase (see Table 2.0).

Table 2. Attributes that attract our participants to media

Attributes that attract our participants to media	Mentions
Reliability	95%
Objectivity	93%
Question the government or demonstrate distance from it	83%
Journalistic rigor	83%
Media that publish information immediately following a certain event	92%
Media that demonstrates respect for victims of violence	90%
Responsibility of the media to contribute to building peace but that they normally do not do so	85%
Combination of news with entertainment	74%
Topics concerning the environment, sexual diversity, or human rights	73%

In an attempt to disaggregate this apparently unitary entity called “the media,” our questionnaire also made contrasts between different media sources and between specific Mexican journalists, seeking to identify which of these presented the greatest positive or negative deviations from the mean. The results indicate that the participants tend to have far more mistrust of journalists associated with the main television broadcasters, Televisa and TV Azteca, while they tend to have much more trust in journalists associated with Channel 11 (Instituto Politécnico Nacional), CNN, or online news portals. One news channel owned by Televisa that has clearly succeeded in differentiating itself from the rest of the network is Foro TV, whose journalists scored well in our survey. Upon drawing contrasts between specific media outlets, Televisa and TV Azteca presented the greatest deviations with regard to being controlled by the government or their owners, broadcasting violent news, or demonstrating a lack of seriousness and journalistic rigor. The newspapers *Reforma* and *La Jornada* presented high deviation with regard to covering violent content excessively. As indicated below, web portals, on the other hand, were perceived as having greater independence from the traditional media and generated greater acceptance and reliability among those we surveyed. Regarding radio stations, with the exception of certain journalists who are perceived as serious and independent, the majority of the results were situated around the average.

Results Related to Social Media and Internet Websites

Our findings confirmed the relative ambiguity found in our qualitative phase in terms of feelings about social media, but now with a greater tendency toward mistrust of these media; 59% of those surveyed reported feeling mistrust in news published on social media, while 41% expressed that they do trust the news published on these platforms. Once again, 62% reported having more trust in the information they acquire through their own experience and that of those they know than they do in the information that is published on social networks.

However, worthy of separate mention is that concerning online news portals (not those associated with traditional media but, rather, independent portals such as *Animal Político* or *Aristegui*

Noticias in the Mexican case). Regarding these online portals, 81% of those surveyed believed that they are not manipulated by the government, while 76% believed that their information is objective. In our contrast and deviation tests, we detected that, according to our survey respondents, web portals such as those indicated are notably more reliable than are the traditional media, much more serious, and generally perceived as “the best media.” Moreover, our participants indicated identifying with their presenters/hosts/journalists much more consistently than with those of any other type of media.

Findings from our Statistical Model/Linear Regression

As expected, a significant correlation (0.72) was detected between the perception that the government manipulates the information and the degree of distrust in the traditional media news outlets. This was additionally supported by the statistical model we developed. The negative feeling index shows that the totality of our respondents expressed at least one negative feeling after their contact with the news media, and almost one in three participants expressed having all of the negative feelings we consulted after their contact with the news media. According to the linear regression test, the perception that the government manipulates information, and the perception that traditional media outlets also manipulate the information, predict negative feelings such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness and hopelessness after contact with the news media.

Similarly, as expected, the perception that traditional media sources display too much violence (yellow or sensationalist journalism) is a highly contributing factor in generating negative feelings after contact with those media sources. In contrast, the level of trust in specific media outlets, as well as the perception that a certain media outlet does not exhibit violence in excess, and contributes to building peace have a negative impact on the provocation of the undesirable feelings we measured.

Stated differently, distrust in the media seems to be directly associated with distrust in the government, specifically the feeling that both the government and the media manipulate the information. However, these perceptions do not seem to stop in distrust, but end up directly impacting on negative feelings perceived by many participants after their contact with the traditional mass media. Likewise, the perception that the Mexican mainstream news media outlets are sensationalist, is a predictor of negative feelings after contact with them, while, conversely, this series of negative feelings diminish after contact with media outlets that are perceived as contributors to building peace in the country. That may explain the fact that 19% of our respondents felt calmer and 7% felt more peaceful after their contact with the news media. Per our model, those are media outlets they trust and consider as peacebuilders.

Worthy of further mention, and probably an interesting source of reflection, is that one of the attributes that respondents assign to the media, which also ends up contributing to the generation of negative feelings, seems to be that their “content is entertaining”. Or, put differently, it seems that somehow, despite feeling bad after contact with traditional media, participants find that the contents of these media still entertain them.

VI. Discussion of results

The results confirmed our hypotheses with some nuances. Although a majority of participants expressed trust in the news transmitted on “television,” on “radio” or in the “newspapers,” as media in the abstract (without making reference to a particular media company), when those media were assigned a specific name, such as that of any of the two major television networks, radio broadcasts or newspaper outlets consumed in the country, the level of mistrust considerably exceeds the level of trust. Furthermore, the results confirm that (a) the perception that the government manipulates the information is correlated to the perception that the information is manipulated by the media sources themselves; (b) to the extent that these two perceptions exist, the greater is the likelihood of presence of negative feelings among audiences such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness and hopelessness following contact with such traditional media; (c) similarly, not only a majority of participants consider that the traditional media in Mexico exhibit violence excessively, but to the extent that these media are perceived as more yellowish or sensationalist, the greater the probability those negative feelings will be generated after being in contact with them. The latter is consistent with the analysis of the in-depth interviews conducted in the qualitative phase prior to this investigation. Likewise, the present study confirms that a majority of participants value their own experience and observation, conversation with close people, or the experience of close people as sources of information, rather than that obtained from traditional media. Also, a majority of participants prefer to access musical, cultural entertainment or sports programs in contrast to news. Regarding the factors that attract participants to specific media outlets, it was confirmed that a majority of Mexicans seem to value media that show objectivity, seriousness, journalistic rigor, reliability, and distance from government, in addition to treating their audiences with respect, as well as the victims of violence with respect. These factors—associated with what is known as *peace journalism*—seem to contribute to this other finding from our research: the greater the perception that certain media outlet contributes to building peace, to that extent, negative feelings such as stress, frustration, apathy, fear, anger, anxiety, discomfort, repulsion, sadness and hopelessness are less present after contact with that particular media source.

The results of this study reflect the fact that the distancing we detected in limited samples in our previous studies between participants and mass media, seems to be a generalized phenomenon in Mexican society, specifically with regard to traditional media outlets including the two major television networks in the country and some other media outlets in radio and print journalism. According to the findings presented, this is reflected not always through not tuning into channels or stations, and hence, it is not a matter of ratings. In fact, as we observed in the profile of our survey respondents concerning their media consumption, it is clear that, in Mexico, traditional media continue to be very much used to obtain information. It is instead a psychological and political distancing between the citizens and certain traditional media sources that audiences appear to associate with the elites in power in the country. The participants frequently access the news through these media, but they strongly mistrust them given that they believe that they are manipulated by the government or by the interests of the media outlets themselves. Likewise, as was detected in the study about symptoms suggesting posttraumatic stress that we carried out in 2011 (Meschoulam & Calderon-Abbo, 2019, 49), contact with the news tends to produce stress among the participants a manifestation which, combined with other negative feelings, seems to intensify to the extent that there is distrust in the government and in the media because of the belief

that they manipulate the information, and to the extent that there is a perceived excessive display of violence by those media sources. Moreover, in their view, the majority of the traditional media sources disrupt peace and provoke negative feelings, which may lead them to prefer programs related to entertainment, sports or culture rather than accessing news. In short, the results indicate a distancing as a result of mistrust, perceived sensationalism, and feelings such as anger, anxiety, despair and stress, which in the perception of participants—regardless of whether this is true or not—are caused by these media.

Additionally, in our previous studies, social media appeared as spaces to strengthen conversations and find out about news through alternatives sources not connected to the circles of power. Since 2017, however, the findings indicate that this trend could be reversing due to the high presence of mistrust in social networks by participants. The reason for this mistrust is linked to a lack of control perceived with regard to the propagation of rumors and fake news on one hand, and the occupation of social media by the traditional media and powerful groups in the country on the other. The quantitative research that we present in this article not only detected signs of that mistrust, but also demonstrated that this mistrust is even more present than we initially thought. Interestingly, nine out of ten of those surveyed use social media to obtain information; however, the majority of them report mistrusting that information. Once again, then, it is not about distancing that can be reflected in the number of clicks but, rather, a psychological distancing. It would seem that these participants access news that they do not believe or do not believe entirely.

As a result, Mexican citizens appear to rely much more on their own experiences, conversations with their associates and the experiences of people they know, to socially construct their perceptions regarding what is happening in the country, especially on issues related to violence, although not only about those issues.

As we explained previously, this is enormously delicate for at least two reasons: (a) Democracies need informed citizenries that are interested in public affairs and willing to participate in them; however, it is impossible for citizens to be well-informed based only on their own experiences, daily conversations, and the experiences of people they know. A healthy and fluid relationship between society and the media is thus an indispensable condition that Mexico currently appears to lack. This characterizes, at least, the relationship between the citizenry and the media most used to consume news; and (b) the free flow of information is one of the necessary conditions for building positive peace in a society (IEP, 2018, 8). To the extent that a majority of citizens believe that the information is manipulated by the government or by the media themselves and that social networks are unreliable sources of information, there is an absence, or a perceived absence, of the free flow of information, which instead of contributing to building peace does precisely the opposite.

Nevertheless, the results of this research, especially if we combine them with those of our previous studies, also give us some clues to how these trends could be reversed. Mexican citizens highly value those media sources that demonstrate objectivity and journalistic rigor, that question the authorities, and that demonstrate adequate distance between the media outlet and the government (or powerful elites). The more a media source can effectively communicate that it possesses those attributes, the more likely it is to capture and maintain its audiences.

It is understood that there is a broad debate about what the role of the media should be in covering the violence and events that unfortunately do occur that disturb the peace (Barreto, Borja, Serrano, & López-López, 2009; Becker-Blease, Finkelhor, & Turner, 2008; Bernabé, 2011; Bongar, Brown, Beutler, Breckenridge, & Zimbardo, 2007; Choi & James, 2007; Ewart, 2012; Farnen, 1990; Galtung, Lynch, & McGoldrick, 2006; Gilboa, 2009). However, and very much apart from that debate, the results of the qualitative phases as well as those of this quantitative study seem to indicate that Mexican citizens place significant value on a media source that demonstrates respect for the victims of violence, avoids sensationalism and instead contributes to building peace in the country. What follows, then, is to ask if there can be a balance between the great imperative for the media to cover events that occur with the demand of citizens for objective coverage that places less emphasis on blood and more on building peace. In our previous publications, we made a series of recommendations on those areas. The results of this study contribute evidence to support those recommendations including *peace journalism*. A summary of these recommendations include those covered in the following section (summarized from Meschoulam, 2019).

VII. Recommendations

1. Government communication. The findings of this study should be disseminated among officials and those responsible for government communication; trainings should be carried out in this sector in order to value the shared responsibility with regard to the prevalence of mistrust in the media and with regard to the propagation of collective fear, to evaluate the possibilities for free yet coordinated efforts to counteract these trends. Officials should avoid generating information vacuums during times of crisis and communicate violent events in a way that is timely, truthful, and credible while balancing the need to inform with an attempt to avoid propagating panic, rumors or fake news. The training of those officials should include methods to inform the public about what is being done to contain the violence crisis as well as alternatives to resolve the situation. This also entails the need to train public officials on integral peacebuilding (positive peace)—vis a vis reducing violence (negative peace)—in order to demonstrate to citizens that it is understood that the root cause of the circumstances of violence plaguing Mexico is structural factors—such as inequality, corruption and impunity—that must be addressed in the short, medium and long term.
2. Improve (and communicate) the transparency and credibility of public institutions. This includes demonstrating, on the part of the government, distance between the authorities and the media, allowing the media to conduct themselves with freedom and independence and to question the authorities with complete flexibility whenever it is needed, responding adequately to citizens' inquiries and offering credible and timely explanations or, even, recognizing errors or omissions. These proposals, far from being "idealistic" or unviable, according to our studies offer real and tangible incentives for political actors, given that they would considerably increase positive appraisals of their performance. Hiding information, masking realities, or evading explanations are counterproductive communication strategies according to the evidence we present.
3. The media must strengthen their trustworthiness, demonstrating clear independence from political actors or interest groups, objectivity and absolute journalistic rigor in the management of information. This entails questioning the authorities whenever it is necessary, promoting

critical thinking, offering spaces for debate demonstrating openness to diverse positions, and strengthening investigative journalism to reveal problems of corruption or structural issues in the country. This recommendation has to do not only with an interest in public affairs, but also business: the need to acquire and preserve the loyalty of audiences that highly value the elements stated. This is even more relevant in times in which the competition offered by online spaces are valued as much more reliable by citizens, as demonstrated by the evidence we shared in this study.

4. Similarly, regarding the coverage of violence, moderation is recommended in terms of images, videos and the treatment of victims (Restrepo, 2004). The evidence from this study indicates that showing empathy for those affected, their relatives and communities, without denigrating their image or identity and without assuming culpability or responsibility for events that have not been investigated, are elements that are highly valued by citizens.
5. In line with the proposals of *peace journalism* (Galtung, Lynch, & McGoldrick, 2006), it is recommended to report on violence in a way that is complete, truthful and timely, but that does not focus exclusively on the violence itself; the reports should seek to cover the underlying structural factors, the causes of the violence, and, at the same time, promote analysis and debate regarding potential solutions or alternatives to resolve or, at least, lessen that violence and its effects. To do this, it is suggested to invite experts and strengthen investigative journalism that seeks answers regarding how cycles of violence are fed as well as possibilities for halting them and building positive peace in a society. This measure is widely backed by both the in-depth interviews we carried out in the qualitative phases and the findings of this study.
6. Seek adequate balance between hard news on violence and content considered softer or regarding other topics. Some authors propose *decentering* the news agenda (Pries-Shimishi, 2005). That is, without ceasing to cover the violence, balance news coverage adequately with relevant information regarding diverse topics ranging from politics and the economy to other important issues that exist in a country. In line with this, our research appears to contribute an additional element. Citizens appear to tend to seek out programs related to music and entertainment instead of news because of the level of stress that they feel it causes. Therefore, it is recommended that components of softer coverage be included, such as gender diversity, the environment, technological advances, film, art, music and sports, as elements within news programs. Perhaps one could argue that there are already programs or sections in newspapers that address these topics. It is true. However, our results indicate that, in the view of our participants, coverage of violence continues to be disproportionate and, in their opinion, the news programs in spaces such as radio and television should include a greater selection of these topics combined or interspersed with coverage of violence.

VIII. Recommendations for future research

We assume that several of the results detected in a nationally representative sample in Mexico could be found in other countries. This is relevant at the time of this writing in which broad sectors of populations from different parts of the world seem to exhibit some degree of distrust of traditional media in their own countries (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019). The recommendation would be to conduct in-depth interviews such as those we have carried out in recent years, and

apply quantitative instruments similar to the one we used for this research. This can be done in areas that suffer from armed conflict or circumstances of violence such as Mexico, or in countries with higher levels of political and social stability. Similarly, it is recommended to deepen, both in Mexico and in other parts of the world, in the investigation of issues such as social media, based on the results of our research. Finally, as noted above, it would be worth replicating this same investigation, after a period of at least one or two years with Andrés Manuel López Obrador in office in Mexico.

IX. Conclusions

The results of this study validate, in general terms, the findings of the qualitative research phase we carried out in 2017, now among a representative national sample in Mexico. This implies that the perceived distancing between citizens and the traditional news media, especially those that are most watched, listened to or read, is not an isolated issue but, rather, a manifestation that describes, to a large extent, the relationship that exists today between the Mexican population and the mechanisms they use to remain informed about what is happening in the country. The present investigation adds evidence that demonstrates that the source of the negative feelings that the audiences present after their contact with the media (and hence, their preference to disconnect from the news and access other types of content) is directly related to mistrust regarding the manipulation of information and perceived yellow journalism or sensationalism.

This has serious implications not only for democracy and freedom but also for the possibility of building peace from the ground up in one of the least peaceful countries in the world. As we have explained, peace is not limited to the absence of violence, and hence, factors such as the propagation of fear, with all of the psychosocial effects this entails, and the need that exists for a positive relationship between citizens and mass media are issues that should be dealt with the same level of priority as combating crime or strategies to contain and reduce the waves of violence that have characterized the country since 2006. This study appears to demonstrate that Mexico is far from adequately addressing these factors and that the majority of the population prefers to distance itself from information or, at least, the traditional routes for accessing information. Instead, they privilege other types of mechanisms for socially constructing their perceptions and ideas about violence and peace, such as individual experiences, conversations with people with whom they are close, or the experiences of their associates. When citizens do decide to access the media, they generally choose music, culture, sports or entertainment programs, or they read or listen to news that they mostly appear to mistrust. Moreover, contact with major media sources frequently generates stress, anger, anxiety, despair, fear or other negative feelings that distance those citizens even more from the information.

Due to the relevance of these findings with regard to violence and peace, it is indispensable to consider and put in place a series of parallel measures—involving both the media and other social sectors—that are aimed at reducing the impact of the propagation of fear and at promoting elements that foster closeness between Mexican citizens and the traditional media and facilitate not only the free flow of information but also the desire and willingness of the population to access that free flow of information. This study, particularly if it is read in conjunction with the qualitative research that precedes it, provides evidence that can offer some keys for those social actors.

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