Colombian political leaders on Twitter during the Covid-19 pandemic

Michael Haman1 | Milan Školník1 | Jan Čopík2

1Department of Political Science, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Kralove, Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic
2Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Praha, Czech Republic

Correspondence
Michael Haman, Department of Political Science, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Kralove, Hradec Kralove, Královehradecký, Czech Republic.
Email: michael.haman@uhk.cz

Funding information
Philosophical Faculty; University of Hradec Králové, Grant/Award Numbers: Political Institutions and Political Behavior, Specific research 2021

Abstract
This study analyzes the use of Twitter by Colombian political elites during the Covid-19 pandemic, employing qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques. We collected Twitter data on the Colombian president, the mayor of Bogota, and all the members of the Congress of Colombia. We then analyzed qualitatively the content of the most popular tweets sent by President Iván Duque, Mayor Claudia López, and Gustavo Petro, the leader of the opposition. We also analyzed the growth in the number of their followers during the pandemic. We found that the most popular tweets from Colombian opposition politicians were often related to criticism of the government. López also informed her constituency about the state of the capital. President Duque's most popular tweets were primarily informative. During the pandemic, all three politicians gained a significant number of Twitter followers.

KEYWORDS
Covid-19, political actors, political communication, social media, Twitter

INTRODUCTION

In times of crisis, it is important to keep the population informed. Political representatives give recommendations and instructions on how people should behave to protect their own lives and their loved ones and minimize the damage in general to overcome the crisis as quickly and effectively as possible. One of the communication tools of the twenty-first century accessible to the public that helps inform the population during crisis situations is the social network Twitter (Bakker et al., 2019; Eriksson & Olsson, 2016; Helsloot & Groenendaal, 2013; Interdonato et al., 2019; Kawchuk et al., 2020; O'Loughlin et al., 2017; Pond, 2016).

The importance of Twitter as an effective communication tool is currently being examined during the global Covid-19 pandemic in all countries of the world, including Colombia. In this country, the use of Twitter has already been studied in the context of the peace process (Barreto-Galeano et al., 2019; Barrios et al., 2019; Cortés & Jurado, 2018; Fabra-Mata & Mygind, 2019; Quintero Jurado & Marín Cortés, 2018). Its use during the election campaign has also been examined (López Londoño, 2018; Ordoñez Salinas et al., 2016; Prada Espinel &
Romero Rodríguez, 2018; Ruano et al., 2018), and attention has been focused on the use of Twitter in general from the point of view of users or influencers (Durán-Vaca & Ballesteros-Ricaurte, 2020; Hernández Rodríguez, 2017; Hopke et al., 2016; Hung & Calderón, 2011). Yet, the use of Twitter in Colombia has not been studied in the context of a crisis. Twitter can be a communication platform for Colombians to find necessary information from the political representatives on how to deal with the crisis.1 At the same time, the platform can be a political arena where politicians use the topic of the coronavirus to their own advantage. We examine how the selected political elites in Columbia communicated on this social network during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study is divided into two main parts. The theoretical and methodological part presents an overview of the current state of research on the topic of Twitter in relation to politicians and crises. The theoretical framework of crisis exploitation is introduced, the methodological procedure is explained, and the choice of politicians for the purposes of analysis is justified. In the analytical part, word clouds are analyzed. Furthermore, a content analysis of the 50-most-tweeted messages is performed. Finally, whether the selected politicians benefited from the crisis in the form of an increase in their followers is examined over a certain period. The programming language R is used for the analysis.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Social media and politicians

Politics has increasingly become a media issue over the last 30 years. It is therefore not surprising that this period is referred to as the third age of political communication, which is characterized by the diversification of the media environment and the intensifying role of new media in the process of interaction between political actors and the public (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). In the context of political communication, mass media are receding into the background with the rise of the Internet and social networks.

Thanks to social networks, politicians can reach citizens and voters directly, which represents a huge saving compared to mass media in terms of both time and money. Another indisputable advantage is that they can get feedback from citizens, whether in the form of a direct comment, like, or following. Such interaction with users or citizens opens a space for more direct involvement in the political process. Citizen participation in public affairs is generally vital to a democracy, so social media strengthens the democratic process by bridging the gap between politicians and citizens (Bennett & Entman, 2000; Coleman & Blumler, 2009).

Politicians can use social networks to inform and interact with citizens as well as to mobilize them. This strategy can be effective not only during election campaigns but also during crises, which politicians can use to their political advantage.

Crisis exploitation

The theory of crisis exploitation can be described as, “the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office-holders and public policies” (Boin et al., 2009, p. 83). A crisis creates a space for political actors to propose political innovations and organizational reforms, redefine issues, gain popularity, and, above all, criticize their opponents. Crises create political opportunity windows not only for established politicians but also for new holders of public office (Keeler, 1993). During crises, there is an effort to capitalize on the disruption brought about by unforeseen events and to defend and strengthen political positions and authority, attract public attention, and remove
old policies and create new ones. In times of crisis, political actors can call for changes that are otherwise difficult to implement in a period of stability, for reasons such as the nature of the political system, powers of veto, and the balance of powers (Hay, 2002; Kuipers, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW: USE OF TWITTER

There are several debates addressing the use of Twitter that can be related to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Studies have considered the use of Twitter in emergency situations. They have monitored whether social networks such as Twitter are used in emergency situations at all, and if so, what communication strategies are used to inform the public, how the public and emergency authorities communicate with each other, whether information via Twitter actually has a real influence on the mitigation of emergency situations, and much more (Alshareef & Grigoras, 2017; Hughes & Palen, 2009; Lachlan et al., 2016; Latonero & Shklovski, 2011; Laylavi et al., 2016, 2017; Martínez-Rojas et al., 2018; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2016; Parsons et al., 2018; Power et al., 2014; Purohit et al., 2013).

The use of Twitter in crisis situations and natural disasters has been explored (Finch et al., 2016; Muniz-Rodriguez et al., 2020). Research on Twitter as a communication tool has been carried out not only for crises related to natural elements but also for political events that escalate into a state of crisis.

Finally, the representation of politicians on Twitter has been examined (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Burbach, 2017; Kissas, 2020; Masroor et al., 2019; Schneiker, 2019; Tromble, 2018). It is the role of politicians to inform the public in times of crisis, and they have used social networks such as Twitter to do so. At the same time, politicians can benefit politically from a crisis (Kreuder-Sonnen, 2018).

Our study contributes to the debate on the use of Twitter for both crisis and political purposes in the case of Colombia.

METHODOLOGY

In the initial phase of this study, we collected information on the Twitter accounts of members of the Colombian Congress. Of course, not every member of the Colombian Congress has a Twitter account. We looked only at original tweets and excluded retweets. We identified 254 Twitter accounts that tweeted in the analyzed period from March 6 to June 25, 2020. Twitter application programming interface (API) offers a range of information. We gathered tweets and other Twitter data in R with rtweet package (Kearney, 2019). Given that Colombia is a presidential system, the current president Iván Duque and the former president Juan Manuel Santos were added to the list. Furthermore, given that BogotE is the political center of all important state institutions and has a population of almost 8 million, the mayor of the capital, Claudia López, was also included in the list. We were interested in the number of followers in deciding whom to analyze.

Figure 1 shows that Juan Manuel Santos, the former president from 2010 to 2016, has the largest number of followers on Twitter. As of June 26, 2020, more than 5.5 million people follow him. In second place is the current senator Álvaro Uribe, who held the office of head of state from 2002 to 2010. Almost 5 million Twitter users follow this representative of the Democratic Center Party. In third place, with almost 4 million followers, is the senator and representative of the center-left electoral coalition List of Decency (Lista de la Decencia), Gustavo Petro. The current mayor of Bogota and the representative of Alianza Verde (Green Alliance), López ranks fourth among the most-followed politicians on Twitter, with a number exceeding 2,300,000 followers. The current president Duque (@IvanDuque) from the
Democratic Center (Centro Democrático), is in fifth place, with less than 2 million followers on Twitter.

We selected President Duque, Senator Petro (@petrogustavo), and Mayor López (@ClaudiaLopez) for the analysis. The purpose is to capture the interaction on Twitter between the top government officials and the most prominent faces of the opposition during the coronavirus crisis. Former President Santos is no longer in public office, and Uribe is from the same political party as the current head of state, so the two former presidents were not included in the analysis. The choice of the three politicians not only reflects the government and the opposition but also provides insight into Covid-19 and related measures by the country's top official, the capital's top official, and a senator who, as a former Bogota mayor and presidential candidate, combines the standing of Duque and López.

We monitored the influence of these three selected politicians on Twitter. We performed word clouds revealing which words dominated tweets and what politicians emphasized in communications. We collected all tweets sent by @IvanDuque, @ClaudiaLopez, and @petrogustavo from March 6 to June 25, 2020. We eliminated stop words from tweets by using R package stopwords (Muhr et al., 2020), through snowball in this package. During the processing of tweets, we also removed numbers and transformed words to lowercase.

We focused on a sample of the 50 most popular tweets to find out what the purpose was of these posts. This process is achieved through content analysis and coding of tweets based on their communication goals (Rufai & Bunce, 2020). The tweets were (1) informative (politicians informed about the virus and related measures); (2) morale-boosting (politicians thanked people, praised their courage, or wanted them to undertake acts of patriotism); (3) politically motivated in general (when the issue of Covid-19 is addressed, but the government is not attacked or praised, for instance, putting forward proposals); (4) critical of the government (as having done something wrong during the crisis) or critical of political rivals; (5) praising the
We also monitored whether there was an increase in the number of followers and which of the analyzed three politicians gained the most followers during the coronavirus crisis. Twitter API does not provide data about the growth of followers, so we collected the data continuously from June 2019 to June 2020.

RESULTS

Figure 2 shows the words most used by President Duque during the pandemic. The term “prevenciónyacción” (prevention and action), which the head of state used most often in his tweets, completely dominates. It was a hashtag that he used very frequently. Other frequent words were “pandemia,” “covid,” and “medidas” (measures), “envivo” (live), or “salud” (health). These words were directly related to the spreading virus and measures to protect the health of the population. Other frequently used words were “país” (country), “gobierno” (government), “colombianos” (Colombians), and “nacional” (national), or “president” (president) and “Colombia” (Colombia). It is clear from this analysis that, during the ongoing pandemic, it was important for the president to mention the activities of his government, emphasizing in his tweets the country he governs and its people, that is, those affected by the coronavirus crisis. His tweets were not dominated by other words that were not related to the crisis. For example, he did not deal significantly with economic issues, the process of reintegrating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) into society, or the issue of drugs. He rarely targeted his political opponents during the crisis.

For the current mayor of Bogota, the capital of Colombia was in first place during the pandemic, as revealed by López's tweet cloud, shown in Figure 3. The word “Bogotá” was the most mentioned. The emphasis on the city stems not only from the function of mayor in general but also from the fact that at the time of the pandemic she was solely responsible for the situation in the capital. Unlike the president, she was not responsible for policy in relation to the situation across the country. This word was immediately followed by terms such as “hoy” (today) or “gracias” (thank you). López often gave information about the situation for a specific day. She also thanked all those who fought the spreading disease, such as doctors, security forces, and those who provided supplies of basic food and medicine. She often tweeted about the pandemic, as demonstrated by words such as “salud” (health), covid, “medidas” (measures), “cuarantena” (quarantine), and “vida” (life). She also often tweeted that “personas” (persons) should stay at home—“casa”—to prevent the spread of the virus. She
often criticized or adopted reports from the “gobierno nacional” (national government). Compared to President Duque, the words that López used frequently in individual tweets were more varied. While the president's most emphasized word was prevention and action in the fight against coronavirus, for the mayor of Bogota the most emphasized word was simply Bogot. The whole country was important to Duque, and the capital was important to López.

Based on Senator Petro's tweet cloud, shown in Figure 4, both “Colombia” and “Bogotá” were important for the former presidential candidate and former mayor of Bogota. These two words were the most common in his tweets, as were “health” and “virus,” which related directly to the ongoing global “pandemic.” Other common words concerning the coronavirus crisis were “vida” (life), covid, and “cuarantena” (quarantine). The opposition leader often mentioned the current president Duque or his government—“gobierno”—in tweets, either
criticizing or praising it. A very frequent topic in the tweets of the former mayor of Bogota was López's controversial intention to demolish the “Hospital San Juan.” Petro often commented on the ongoing pandemic with a specific topic and at the same time distinguished himself both from a former presidential challenger in general and his successor as mayor (see Table 1).

A content analysis of the 50 most popular tweets by the current president of Colombia, Duque, revealed that informative tweets dominated. The president informed the Colombian public about the measures being prepared or already being implemented in connection with the spreading coronavirus disease and explained the reasons for these measures. They included the closure of schools, restrictions on free residence within the state, and the interruption of international traffic. An example is a ban on the arrival of aircraft with international passengers at Colombian airports for 30 days. President Duque occasionally sought to support the Colombian people verbally to bear the brunt of the pandemic's negative effects. Above all, he tried to evoke feelings of patriotism. On Twitter, the president called on Colombians to join the hoisting of national flags as a symbol of unification in the fight against coronavirus. In some places, there was purely political content in presidential tweets about the coronavirus. Examples include the commentary on the neighboring regime in Venezuela, and Colombia's promise to continue social programs for Venezuelans. Tweets that praised the government or where the president praised himself or his cabinet ministers for their success in the fight against coronavirus were not among the 50 most popular tweets. Tweets praising, for instance, the mayor of Bogota for her actions were also not among the 50 most popular tweets. Duque did not use Twitter to criticize members of the government or opposition, thus manifesting as a leader who felt there were more important matters than criticism from the opposition.

The current senator and former challenger to the current president, Gustavo Petro, who can be considered the leader of the Colombian opposition, compared to Duque was more diverse in terms of content in the 50 most popular tweets. He used informative tweets minimally. For example, he stated that the virus had arrived in the area by plane. There is no motivational content in any of the senator's top 50-most-tweeted tweets calling on Colombians to demonstrate unity or patriotism or have strength in the fight against coronavirus. Still, Petro's tweets contained comments with political content. He did not directly attack the government, but as an opposition politician, he criticized the state of Colombian healthcare, which, according to him, has turned from public service to business, resulting in poor quality care during the coronavirus crisis. The former presidential candidate also often criticized the government. He questioned, for example, the repeal of coronavirus measures and argued that the government's decision would only bring illness and death. An opposition leader once praised President Duque for imposing a quarantine on the country. He acknowledged the seriousness of the decision and openly expressed his support. Petro's tweets were also characterized by the fact that he often dealt with things unrelated to the global pandemic on Twitter. For example, Petro's tweets confronted former President Uribe over his relationship with Pablo Escobar, mentioned the involvement of Vice President Ramirez's brother in the heroin trade, and drew attention to state brutality toward Colombian children.

The current mayor of Bogota and former senator López, like President Duque, was responsible for the safety of people who, in her case, were living in the Colombian capital. She often used the social network Twitter to inform the city's population about the implemented anticronavirus measures, such as population testing. Motivational content was also in her top 50 tweets. López thanked the people of Bogota for a well-managed anticoronavirus exercise. Her tweets also had a political charge, which was quite frequent among the 50 popular tweets. She mentioned, for example, the need to support small and medium-sized enterprises, which had been affected by the economic repercussions of the coronavirus crisis, to the detriment of large companies. López did not hold back on criticism of the government and president. Her critical tweets were more frequent in comparison to those of her opposition colleague Petro. An example is her criticism of the promised lung ventilators, which did not reach hospitals.
| Name                     | Topic                  | Tweet in Spanish                                                                 | Translation to English                                                                 | Date          |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Iván Duque Márquez       | Informative: 76%       | Quiero informarle a todos los colombianos: A partir de las 00:00 horas del 23 de marzo, queda prohibida la llegada de todos los vuelos internacionales de pasajeros a los aeropuertos del país, por un periodo de 30 días. | I want to inform all Colombians: As of 00:00 h on March 23rd, all international passenger flights are prohibited from arriving at the country's airports, for a period of 30 days. | March 19, 2020, 2:25 p.m. |
| Morale-boosting: 8%      |                        | Los colombianos nos debemos sentir orgullosos de lo que somos. Los invito a que en estos 19 días de cuarentena pongamos la bandera en nuestras casas, balcones, redes o perfiles. Estamos más unidos que nunca como país y no vamos a parar ni de crecer ni de soñar ni de construir. | We Colombians should feel proud of who we are. I invite you to put the flag on our houses, balconies, social networks, or profiles during these 19 days of quarantine. We are more united than ever as a country, and we will not stop growing or dreaming or building. | March 25, 2020, 1:07 p.m. |
| Political: 6%            |                        | Los migrantes venezolanos enfrentan la dictadura y ahora una pandemia; no podemos referirnos a ellos de manera despectiva. Pese a dificultades, seguiremos trabajando para ellos con programas sociales que tenemos y continuaremos haciéndolo de la mano con alcaldes y gobernadores. | Venezuelan migrants face the dictatorship and now a pandemic; we cannot refer to them in a derogatory manner. Despite the difficulties, we will continue to work for them with the social programs we have and will continue to do so hand in hand with mayors and governors. | April 5, 2020, 2:46 a.m. |
| Other: 10%               |                        | Todo el peso de la ley debe caer sobre quienes promuevan el tráfico de personas y la explotación sexual de mujeres o niños. Nada excusa a quienes pretenden vulnerar los derechos humanos de las comunidades indígenas. | The full weight of the law must fall on those who promote human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women or children. Nothing excuses those who seek to violate the human rights of indigenous communities. | March 25, 2020, 2:36 p.m. |
| Gustavo Petro            | Informative: 10%       | El virus llegó en avión a Bogotá, a sus barrios ricos, y por transmilenio se repartió a toda la ciudad. | The virus arrived by plane to Bogotá, to its rich neighborhoods, and by transmilenio [rapid transit bus in Bogotá] was distributed to the whole city. | May 14, 2020, 12:19 p.m. |
| Political: 24%           |                        | Ha muerto un médico en Bogotá por el virus. Es el reflejo del abandono de la salud. A los médico(a)s lo (a)s transformaron en obreros mal pagos y sin estabilidad, A los pacientes los transformaron en clientes, A la ciencia la volvieron negocio. | A doctor in Bogotá has died from the virus. It is a reflection of the abandonment of health. Doctors were transformed into poorly paid and unstable workers, patients were transformed into clients, and science was turned into business. | April 11, 2020, 4:33 p.m. |

(Continues)
| Name                      | Topic        | Tweet in Spanish                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Translation to English                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Date          |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Criticism: 16%            | Criticism: 16% | No salgan a comprar por favor. Los padres valen más que un televisor importado. No dejen ir a los niños y niñas al colegio en agosto. El gobierno está llevando a la sociedad a la enfermedad y la muerte.                                                                                                                                         | Please do not go out to shop. Parents are worth more than an imported television. Don’t let the children go to school in August. The government is leading society to illness and death.                                                                                                                                             | June 19, 2020, 2:45 p.m. |
| Praise: 2%                | Praise: 2%    | Fue difícil pero es una buena decisión. Ahora viene una época difícil para todas las familias colombianas pero con disciplina se superará la adversidad. Mi apoyo a su medida de confinamiento obligatorio, Duque.                                                                                                                                         | It was difficult but it is a good decision. Now comes a difficult time for all Colombian families but with discipline adversity will be overcome. My support for your measure of mandatory confinement, Duque.                                                                                                                   | March 21, 2021, 3:36 a.m. |
| Other: 48%                | Other: 48%    | Colombia debería parar un día ante la brutalidad del Estado en contra de la niñez en nuestro país.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Colombia should stop one day in the face of the brutality of the State against children in our country.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | June 26, 2020, 1:57 a.m. |
| Claudia López Hernández—  | Informative: 42% | 3 buenas noticias para Bogotá: (1) Ayer llegaron 100.000 pruebas @Uniandes (2) Hoy llegaron otras 100.000 pruebas @SectorSalud (3) El lunes sale compra por $36.000 millones en material de bioseguridad para todo nuestro personal médico. El lunes empezamos testeo activo preventivo! | 3 good pieces of news for Bogotá: (1) Yesterday 100,000 tests arrived @Uniandes (2) Another 100,000 tests arrived today @SectorSalud (3) On Monday we will purchase $36 billion in biosecurity material for all our medical personnel. On Monday we start active preventive testing! | April 11, 2020, 9:52 p.m. |
| Morale-boosting: 2%       | Morale-boosting: 2% | Gracias Bogotá! Hoy hicimos el mayor ejercicio de cultura ciudadana y autocuidado de nuestra historia! La ciudadanía cumplió voluntariamente #SimulacroVitalBogota! Gracias a equipos @Bogota por su gran trabajo! Suerte a Antioquia, Santander y el Valle que comienzan hoy! | Thank you Bogota! Today we did the biggest exercise in citizen culture and self-care in our history! The citizens complied voluntarily #SimulacroVitalBogota! Thanks to the @Bogota teams for their great work! Good luck to Antioquia, Santander and the Valley starting today! | March 3, 2020, 12:56 a.m. |
| Political: 18%            | Political: 18% | Con todo respeto. Las pequeñas y medianas empresas son el corazón económico de Bogotá y Colombia. Emplean al 60% de nuestra gente. Ni siquiera les han ayudado a pagar su nómina menos a salvarlas. ¿Y la prioridad que se está discutiendo es salvar a Avianca, una empresa extranjera? | With all due respect. Small and medium-sized companies are the economic heart of Bogotá and Colombia. They employ 60% of our people. They have not even helped them to pay their payroll, let alone save them. And the priority being discussed is to save Avianca, a foreign company! | April 29, 2020, 1:42 p.m. |
| Name       | Topic          | Tweet in Spanish                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Translation to English                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Date            |
|------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Criticism: 18% | El Gobierno Nacional que no ha cumplido con la entrega de un solo ventilador UCI provoca hoy mayor aglomeración en Bogotá. Sitios cerrados sin buena ventilación son los de mayor riesgo de contagio. ¿Subir las ventas y bajar las vidas? Qué insensatez! No cuidan y sí dañan! | The National Government that has not come through with the delivery of a single ICU ventilator today causes greater agglomeration in Bogota. Closed places without good ventilation are the ones with the highest risk of contagion. Up sales and down lives? What nonsense! They do not care and they are harmful! | June 19, 2020, 2:20 p.m. |
| Praise: 4%    | Esa es la decisión correcta! Agradezco al Presidente haber tenido en cuenta información epidemiológica de Bogotá que indica que debemos ir hasta primera semana de Mayo. Tiempo adicional lo usaremos en más pruebas, control epidemiológico activo y ampliación de capacidad hospitalaria. | That's the right decision! I thank the President for having taken into account epidemiological information from Bogotá that indicates we should go until the first week of May. Additional time will be used for more tests, active epidemiological control and expansion of hospital capacity. | April 6, 2020, 11:34 p.m. |
| Other: 16%    | Es absolutamente injustificable que hagan un acuerdo para mantener las condiciones salariales de los jugadores y en cambio suspendan los contratos de las jugadoras de los equipos femeninos! @SantaFe a recapacitar y cambiar esa inaceptable discriminación! #LasLeonasSeRespetan | It is absolutely unjustifiable that they make an agreement to maintain the players' salary conditions and instead suspend the contracts of the women's teams' players! @SantaFe should rethink and change this unacceptable discrimination! #LasLeonasSeRespetan | April 7, 2020, 4:22 p.m. |

Source: Authors' elaboration.
The mayor praised the president only twice. She positively acknowledged his idea to extend preventive isolation for a few more days. Her tweets during the period under study also included several topics not related to the coronavirus pandemic. An example is her criticism of the different levels of pay between men's and women's sports teams.

There were limitations in focusing on the 50-most-popular tweets. We identified all original tweets sent by Petro or López and filtered out those containing the keywords Duque, “gobierno,” or “president.” We identified 521 tweets by Petro and 117 by López and evaluated the content of these tweets as to whether they were positive or negative, discovering that these tweets confirmed the findings from the 50-most-popular tweets relating to the criticism of the government.

Figure 5 shows the number of Twitter followers gained by @IvanDuque, @ClaudiaLopez, and @petrogustavo from June 3, 2019, to June 29, 2020. On June 3, 2019, @IvanDuque started with more than 800,000 followers, @ClaudiaLopez had over 1.3 million followers, and @petrogustavo had almost 3.45 million followers.

From each Twitter account, it is possible to compare the pre-pandemic period to a period during the Covid-19 pandemic. On March 6, 2020, the first case of Covid-19 in Colombia was confirmed (Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social, 2020). Since that date, increased interest in news on Covid-19 is to be expected among the public.

Before the global pandemic, there were only minimal increases in the number of followers on the Twitter accounts of the president, senator, and mayor of Bogota. The only two exceptions were during the election of López in October 2019 (Argüelo, 2019), when there was increased interest in following her account, and in November 2019, when Colombians went on strike and all three selected politicians commented on the event on the social network (Newbery, 2019). This fact signals that user interest in the Twitter accounts of politicians grows at a time of significant events, something confirmed by the increase in the number of followers after the first case of coronavirus in Colombia. In the second half of March 2020, when the virus began to spread rapidly and anticoronavirus measures began to be implemented, all three politicians saw an increase in the number of followers, and in the case of Duque and López, there was a massive weekly increase. Particularly in 1 week, from March 16 until 23, 2020,
@IvanDuque gained more than 120,000 followers, @ClaudiaLopez gained more than 140,000 followers, and @petrogustavo gained more than 30,000 followers.

The data on the number of followers was always collected on Mondays. All Twitter follower increases were significant, but their increase differs because of the total number of followers. Petro did not gain as many followers as the president and mayor of Bogota due to the content of individual tweets. President Duque and Mayor López were responsible for the security of Colombians, or the inhabitants of Bogota. For this reason, informative tweets predominated in their case. The public was interested in information during the pandemic, so they followed the two executive politicians on Twitter. Senator Petro, as a legislator, did not have executive opportunities to deal with the crisis and provided only minimal information about Covid-19-related matters.

As of June 29, 2020, @IvanDuque had more than 1.9 million followers, @ClaudiaLopez had over 2.3 million followers, and @petrogustavo had almost 3.9 million followers. Figure 5 shows that there is increased public interest in a politician during political events such as strikes or elections, but in times of emergency there may be a very significant increase in followers if the politician is providing citizens with information that interests them in relation to the crisis.

**CONCLUSION**

This study explores the use of the social network Twitter by Colombian political elites. President Duque's Twitter accounts as a representative of the ruling elite were analyzed, as well as Bogota's Mayor López, and the senator and presidential candidate Petro as a representative of the opposition. The research was carried out using quantitative methods with the programming language R, and a qualitative content analysis of the most popular tweets was also performed.

From the word clouds, it was found that from the first case of Covid-19 in Colombia, on March 6, 2020, until the end of the study period, the topic of the coronavirus crisis dominated the tweets of all three selected politicians. The course of the pandemic and anticonvirus measures that the Colombian public should follow were often tweeted. In addition, it was noted that Duque often addressed the whole country, while López exclusively addressed Bogota, which are logical outcomes based on their positions. Both Colombia as a whole and the capital Bogotá were important in Petro's tweets, which testifies to his interest in becoming the country's president, while taking into account the inhabitants of the capital as a former mayor. A content analysis of the top 50-most-popular tweets reveals that President Duque's tweets were largely informative, which relates to the fact that, as head of the executive branch, he was responsible for timely information and the safety of Colombians. López was in a similar situation, often informing the people of Bogota about the measures taken, but as a representative of the opposition she also criticized the government. Petro's tweets were more diverse in terms of content, since he was not responsible for information for and safety of the population as a senator, so he had significantly fewer informative tweets in comparison. Instead, he often addressed the political agenda, including issues not directly related to the global pandemic. During the crisis, there was also a significant increase in the number of followers on Twitter for all three politicians and a rapid increase for the president and mayor of Bogota, which is natural, since the two had information that was important to the public.

There is room for further research in several areas. First, it is possible to expand research and analyze the discourse of other political elites, such as members of Congress. We found that 87% of all retweets of tweets sent by members of Congress during the analyzed period could be attributed to only 10% of the members of Congress with Twitter accounts. Therefore, a small majority of congress members dominate the Twitter-sphere in Colombia, but further analysis lies outside the scope of this investigation. These results are presented in the Appendix, and we
encourage further research in this direction. We looked for differences in information between government and opposition parties because, due to the nature of the presidential system, it is possible that even congress members from government parties had reservations about how the government approached the crisis. It is also possible to focus on the reactions of other political elites and representatives of civil society to the contents of the tweets of selected politicians—whether they criticized them or, on the contrary, valued their awareness. The research demonstrates that, in times of crisis, the political elite and the public can agree on several things (Merkley et al., 2020). When the coronavirus crisis is over, the government's actions can be evaluated to assess whether they have been timely and effective, and attention can be paid to whether this might open topics for many politicians such as population security, healthcare quality, and the role of the public sector. A comparison of coronavirus and postcoronavirus agenda setting on Twitter could be carried out. In any case, the coronavirus crisis has proved to be an opportunity to strengthen the communication reach of politicians on the social network Twitter, from which they can benefit in their further political activities when the crisis is over.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This study is a result of the project of specific research Political Institutions and Political Behavior supported by the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Hradec Králové in 2021.

ORCID
Michael Haman  http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5772-2045
Milan Školník  http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0672-219X

ENDNOTES
1 Latin American politicians have already used Twitter during crises (Aguillón Vale & Narváez Serra, 2019; Segado-Boj, Díaz-Campo & Lloves-Sobrado, 2015).
2 These natural disasters might be hurricanes (Raineart et al., 2018; Takahashiet al., 2015; B. Wang & Zhuang, 2017); fires (Abedin & Babar, 2018; Z. Wang et al., 2016); floods, tsunamis, and water contamination (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Bunney et al., 2018; de Bussy & Paterson 2012; Getchell & Sellnow, 2016); and earthquakes (Cho et al., 2013).
3 Examples of the second category of crisis include Twitter activity about riots in the United Kingdom in 2011 (Gascó et al., 2017), the Nairobi hostage crisis in 2013 (Sullivan, 2014), the European Union's political crisis over the Eurozone and financially indebted Greece in 2015 (Hänsska & Bauchowitz, 2019), the terrorist attacks in Berlin in 2016 (Fischer-Preßler et al., 2019), the Gulf crisis in 2017 (Jones, 2019), and the Cameroon Anglophone crisis, which is ongoing (Nganji & Cockburn, 2020).
4 Activity on politicians’ Twitter accounts and their interaction with other users is most often examined during election campaigns—what agendas they set, what discursive strategies they choose, and especially whether their efforts really have an effect on the target group of voters (Ahmed et al., 2017; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013; Hrdina & Karaščiūnė, 2014; Jungherr, 2016; Larsson & Ihlen, 2015; Pérez Dasilva et al., 2018; Plotkowiak & Stanevska-Slabeva, 2013; Rivas-de-Roca et al., 2020; Sainudin et al., 2019; Small, 2018).
5 The Colombian Congress has 280 members.
6 When we had data available, we also looked at the Twitter activity of politicians. The results are presented in the Appendix.
7 We considered the popularity of tweets as the sum of retweets and likes by Twitter users. These actions can be perceived as something different, so we decided to add them together to designate the most popular tweets.
8 All authors participated in the coding of tweets and at least two authors agreed on the category of each tweet; we classified tweets according to this agreement. Inter-rater reliability between three authors was 0.86 (Fleiss' kappa).

REFERENCES
Abedin, B., & Babar, A. (2018). Institutional vs. non-institutional use of social media during emergency response: A case of Twitter in 2014 Australian bush fire. Information Systems Frontiers, 20(4), 729–740. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-017-9789-4
Acar, A., & Muraki, Y. (2011). Twitter for crisis communication: Lessons learned from Japan's tsunami disaster. *International Journal of Web Based Communities, 7*(3), 392–402. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJWBC.2011.041206

Aguillón Vale, P. D., & Narváez Serra, J. (2019). Comportamiento del lenguaje de líderes políticos venezolanos en el uso de Twitter. *Signo y Pensamiento, 38*(74), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.syp38-74.clip

Ahmed, S., Cho, J., & Jaidka, K. (2017). Leveling the playing field: The use of Twitter by politicians during the 2014 Indian general election campaign. *Telematics and Informatics, 34*(7), 1377–1386. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2017.09.005

Alonso-Muñoz, L., & Casero-Ripollés, A. (2018). Communication of European populist leaders on Twitter: Agenda setting and the ‘more is less’ effect. *El Profesional de La Información, 27*(6), 1193–1202. https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2018.nov.03

Alishaee, H. N., & Grigoras, D. (2017). Using Twitter and the mobile cloud for delivering medical help in emergencies. *Concurreny and Computation: Practice and Experience, 29*(24), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpe.4151

Argüelo, F. (2019). Bogotá elige a su primera alcaldesa: Lesbianas, ecologistas y símbolo de la lucha contra la corrupción. *El Mundo*. https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/10/28/5dbc505621efa0b1438b460e.html

Bakker, M. H., vanBommel, M., Kerstholt, J. H., & Giebels, E. (2019). The interplay between governmental communications and fellow citizens’ reactions via twitter: Experimental results of a theoretical crisis in the Netherlands. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 27*(3), 265–271. https://doi.org/10.1111/j1468-5973.12252

Barreto-Galeano, M. I., Medina-Arboleda, I. F., Zambrano-Hernández, S., Sabucedo-Cameselle, J.-M., Blanco-Abarca, A., & Maurice Lair, É. (2019). Rhetoric, political ideology and the peace process in Colombia: A Twitter analysis. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 44*(11), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1615256

Barrios, M. M., Estarita, L. M. V., & Gil, L. M. (2019). When online commentary turns into violence: The role of Twitter in slander against journalists in Colombia. *Conflict & Communication, 18*(1), 1–16.

Bennett, W. L., & Entman, R. M. (Eds.). (2000). *Mediated politics: Communication in the future of democracy*. Cambridge University. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613852

Blumler, J. G., & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The third age of political communication: Inferences and features. *Political Communication, 16*(3), 209–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/1058460991985956

Boin, A., H Hart, P., & McConnell, A. (2009). Crisis exploitation: Political and policy impacts of framing contests. *Journal of European Public Policy, 16*(1), 81–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802453221

Bracciale, R., & Martella, A. (2017). Define the populist political communication style: The case of Italian political leaders on Twitter. *Information, Communication & Society, 20*(9), 1310–1329. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328522

Bunney, S., Ward, S., & Butler, D. (2018). Inter-organisational resilience for flood focussed emergency planning: Examining multi-agency connectedness through Twitter. *Water Practice and Technology, 13*(2), 321–327. https://doi.org/10.2166/wpt.2018.043

Burbach, J. (2017). Female politicians and the use of Twitter for identity construction. *Comunicazione Politica, 18*(2), 311–322. https://doi.org/10.5270/87227

Cho, S. E., Jung, K., & Park, H. W. (2013). Social media use during Japan's 2011 earthquake: How Twitter transforms the locus of crisis communication. *Media International Australia, 149*(1), 28–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1329787X13490105

Coleman, S., & Blumler, J. G. (2009). *The internet and democratic citizenship*. Cambridge University. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818271

Cortés, A. F. M., & Jurado, J. M. Q. (2018). Confianza en el proceso de paz en Colombia en Twitter. *Revista Mexicana de Sociologia, 80*(1), 115–137.

deBussy, N. M., & Paterson, A. (2012). Crisis leadership styles-Bligh versus Gillard: A content analysis of Twitter posts on the Queensland floods. *Journal of Public Affairs, 12*(4), 326–332. https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.1428

Durán-Vaca, M. K., & Ballesteros-Ricaurte, J. A. (2020). Sentiment analysis on Twitter to measure the perception of taxation in Colombia. In M.Serrhin, C.Silva, & S.Aljahdali (Eds.), *Innovation in Information Systems and Technologies to Support Learning Research* (pp. 184–193). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36778-7_20

Enli, G. S., & Skogerbo, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(5), 757–774. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330

Eriksson, M., & Olsson, E.-K. (2016). Facebook and Twitter in crisis communication: A comparative study of crisis communication professionals and citizens. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 24*(4), 198–208. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12116

Fabra-Mata, J., & Mygind, J. (2019). Big data in evaluation: Experiences from using Twitter analysis to evaluate Norway's contribution to the peace process in Colombia. *Evaluation, 25*(1), 6–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389018804259
Finch, K. C., Snook, K. R., Duke, C. H., Fu, K.-W., Tse, Z. T. H., Adhikari, A., & Fung, I. C.-H. (2016). Public health implications of social media use during natural disasters, environmental disasters, and other environmental concerns. *Natural Hazards, 83*(1), 729–760. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-016-2327-8

Fischer-Preßler, D., Schwemmer, C., & Fischbach, K. (2019). Collective sense-making in times of crisis: Connecting terror management theory with Twitter user reactions to the Berlin terrorist attack. *Computers in Human Behavior, 100*, 138–151. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.05.012

Gascó, M., Bayerl, P. S., Denef, S., & Akhgar, B. (2017). What do citizens communicate about during crises? Analyzing twitter use during the 2011 UK riots. *Government Information Quarterly, 34*(4), 635–645. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2017.11.005

Getchell, M. C., & Sellnow, T. L. (2016). A network analysis of official Twitter accounts during the West Virginia water crisis. *Computers in Human Behavior, 54*, 597–606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.06.044

Hänska, M., & Bauchowitz, S. (2019). Can social media facilitate a European public sphere? Transnational communication and the Europeanization of Twitter during the Eurozone crisis. *Social Media+Society, 5*(3), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119854686

Hay, C. (2002). *Political analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Helsloot, I., & Groenendaal, J. (2013). Twitter: An underutilized potential during sudden crises? *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 21*(3), 178–183. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5973.12023

Hernández Rodríguez, J. C. (2017). Interactividad y socialización periodística en Twitter. Un análisis de los medios migrantes colombianos de mayor influencia online. *Estudios Sobre El Mensaje Periodístico, 22*(2), 1065–1083. https://doi.org/10.5209/ESMP.54252

Hopke, J. E., Gabay, I., Kim, S. C., & Rojas, H. (2016). Mobile phones and political participation in Colombia: Mobile Twitter versus mobile Facebook. *Communication and the Public, 1*(2), 159–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/205704716642607

Hrdina, J., & Karas čaková, Z. (2014). Parties, pirates and politicians: The 2014 European Parliamentary elections on Czech Twitter. *Central European Journal of Political Science, 24*(4), 437–451. https://doi.org/10.2478/cejps-2014-0034

Hughes, A. L., & Palen, L. (2009). Twitter adoption and use in mass convergence and emergency events. *International Journal of Emergency Management, 6*(3/4), 248–260. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEM.2009.031564

Hung, E. S., & Calderón, C. A. (2011). Online opinion leaders in Colombia, Venezuela and Iran. Case top 20 most view users in Twitter. *Communication and Society, 24*(1), 75–100.

Interdonato, R., Guillaume, J.-L., & Doucet, A. (2019). A lightweight and multilingual framework for crisis information extraction from Twitter data. *Social Network Analysis and Mining, 9*(65), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11278-019-0608-4

Jones, M. O. (2019). Propaganda, fake news, and fake trends: The weaponization of Twitter bots in the Gulf crisis. *International Journal of Communication, 13*, 1389–1415.

Jungherr, A. (2016). Twitter use in election campaigns: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 13*(1), 72–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2015.1132401

Kawchuk, G., Hartvigsen, J., Harsted, S., Nim, C. G., & Nyirö, L. (2020). Misinformation about spinal manipulation and boosting immunity: An analysis of Twitter activity during the COVID-19 crisis. *Chiropractic & Manual Therapies, 28*(1), 34. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12998-020-00319-4

Kearney, M. (2019). tweet: Collecting and analyzing Twitter data. *Journal of Open Source Software, 4*(42), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.01829

Keeler, J. T. S. (1993). Opening the window for reform. *Comparative Political Studies, 25*(4), 433–486. https://doi.org/10.1177/001041409302500402

Kissas, A. (2020). Performative and ideological populism: The case of charismatic leaders on Twitter. *Discourse & Society, 31*(3), 268–284. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959424219889127

Kreuder-Sonnен, C. (2018). Political secrecy in Europe: Crisis management and crisis exploitation. *West European Politics, 41*(4), 958–980. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1404813

Kuipers, S. (2005). The crisis imperative: Crisis Rhetoric and welfare state reform in Belgium and the Netherlands in the early 1990's. Amsterdam University.

Lachlan, K. A., Spence, P. R., Lin, X., Najarian, K., & Del Greco, M. (2016). Social media and crisis management: CERC, search strategies, and Twitter content. *Computers in Human Behavior, 54*, 647–652. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.027

Latonero, M., & Shklovski, I. (2011). Emergency management, Twitter, and social media evangelism. *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, 3*(4), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.4018/jiscrm.2011100101

Larsson, A. O., & Ihlen, Ø. (2015). Birds of a feather flock together? Party leaders on Twitter during the 2013 Norwegian elections. *European Journal of Communication, 30*(6), 666–681. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115595525
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Michael Haman is a junior researcher at the University of Hradec Králové. He focuses on social media, political communication, elections, and electoral behavior. He has recently published in Public Choice, Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, and the Canadian Journal of Political Science. He and his colleague Milan Školník have created a unique online database of politicians and their presence and communication on Twitter—PoliticiansOnSocialMedia.com.

Milan Školník is a junior researcher at the University of Hradec Králové, specializing in corruption, public administration, and political participation. He has published in European Review, Political Studies Review, and Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties. He and his colleague have created a unique online database of politicians and their presence and communication on Twitter—PoliticiansOnSocialMedia.com.

Jan Čopík is an associate professor and teaches political science and public administration at the Department of Humanities, Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. His research interests include the issue of local government and development of municipalities in the contemporary and historical context. He has published in Local Government Studies.

How to cite this article: Haman, M., Školník, M., & Čopík, J. (2022). Colombian political leaders on Twitter during the Covid-19 pandemic. Latin American Policy, 13, 104–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/lamp.12249
APPENDIX A
The analysis of Twitter accounts of deputies and senators points to one phenomenon. Between March 6, 2020, and June 25, 2020, a total of 254 congressmembers were identified who sent an original tweet at least once. Overall, they had such an influence on Twitter that their tweets were retweeted 10,617,652 times. Yet, as much as 87% of all retweets of tweets sent by members of Congress during the analyzed period can be attributed to only 10% of the members of Congress with Twitter accounts. Most deputies and senators have only a minimal reach on Twitter, and these politicians are not often retweeted. The network then is dominated by only a few politicians.

One of the most retweeted politicians was Senator Petro, followed by his fellow senator, the writer Gustavo Bolívar, who is known on Twitter for his authorial work. Next in line with a similar number of retweets are human-rights defender Iván Cepeda and the former president Uribe. Bogota Mayor López and current President Duque are in fifth and sixth place in terms of the number of retweets.