

# HATE SPEECH AND FAKE NEWS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN COLOMBIA



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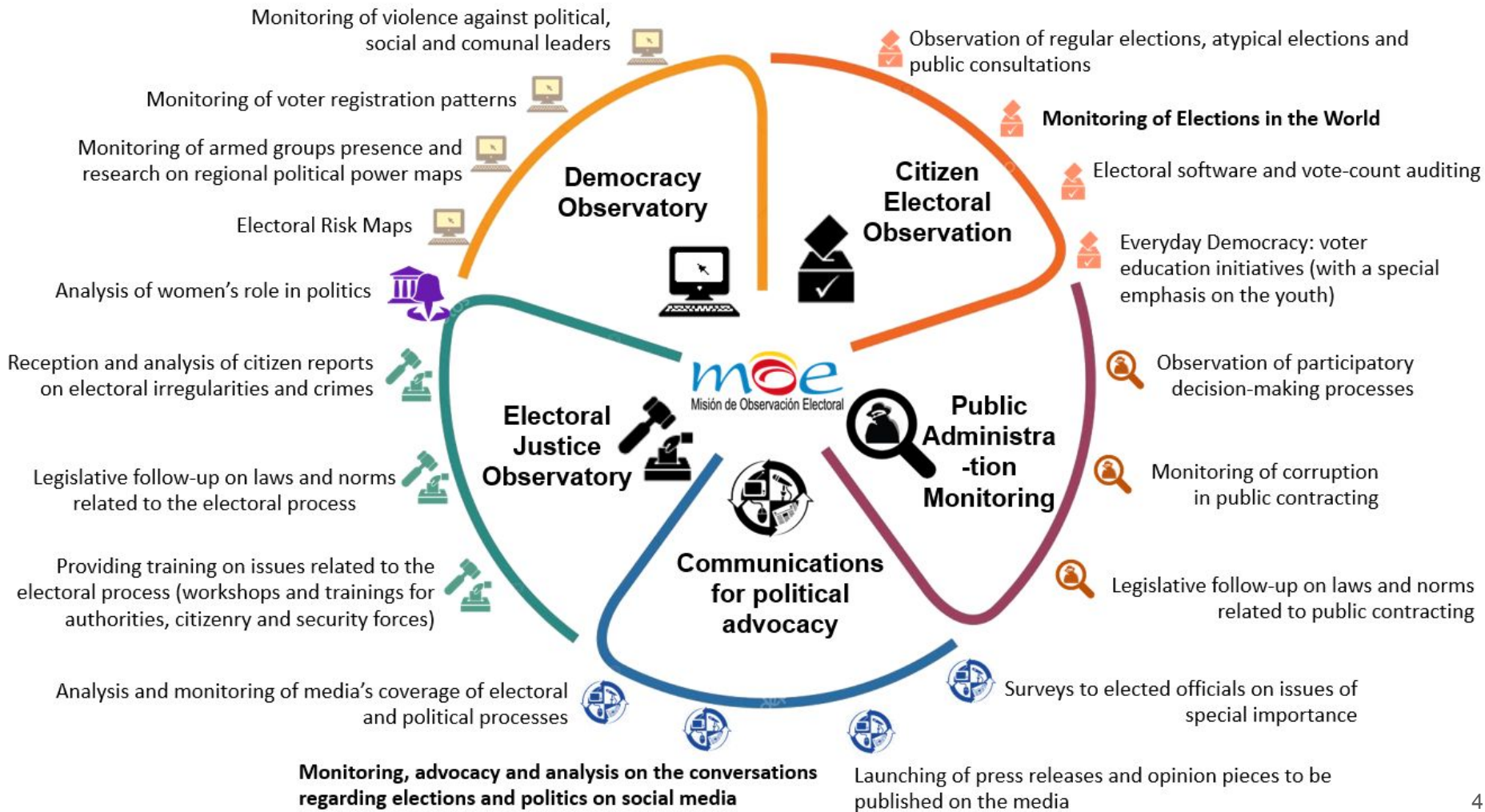
# Who are we?

**Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE - Electoral Observation Mission)** is a platform of civil society organizations created in 2006 in Colombia - independent of government, political parties and private interests - that promotes the realization of the right of every citizen to participate in the formation, exercise and control of political power.



# MOE's Working Groups

- A. Democracy Observatory
- B. Electoral Justice Observatory
- C. Communication for political advocacy
- D. Public administration monitoring
- E. Citizen election observation



# MOE's analysis of 'Hate Speech' and 'Fake News' and advocacy for political tolerance

- MOE has been carrying out an extensive monitoring of public opinion on social media since the year 2016 with a special focus on the analysis of 'Hate Speech' and political intolerance.
  - In the electoral context, 'Hate Speech' is defined as a: "speech expressing hatred of a group or groups of people with differing political and/or ideological views".
  - In the electoral context, 'Fake News' are defined as: "false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views and electoral results".
- MOE has been producing rigorous research on hate speech and fake news trends to advocate for political tolerance in collaboration with other civil society actors, political parties, authorities and the media for the past 2 years.

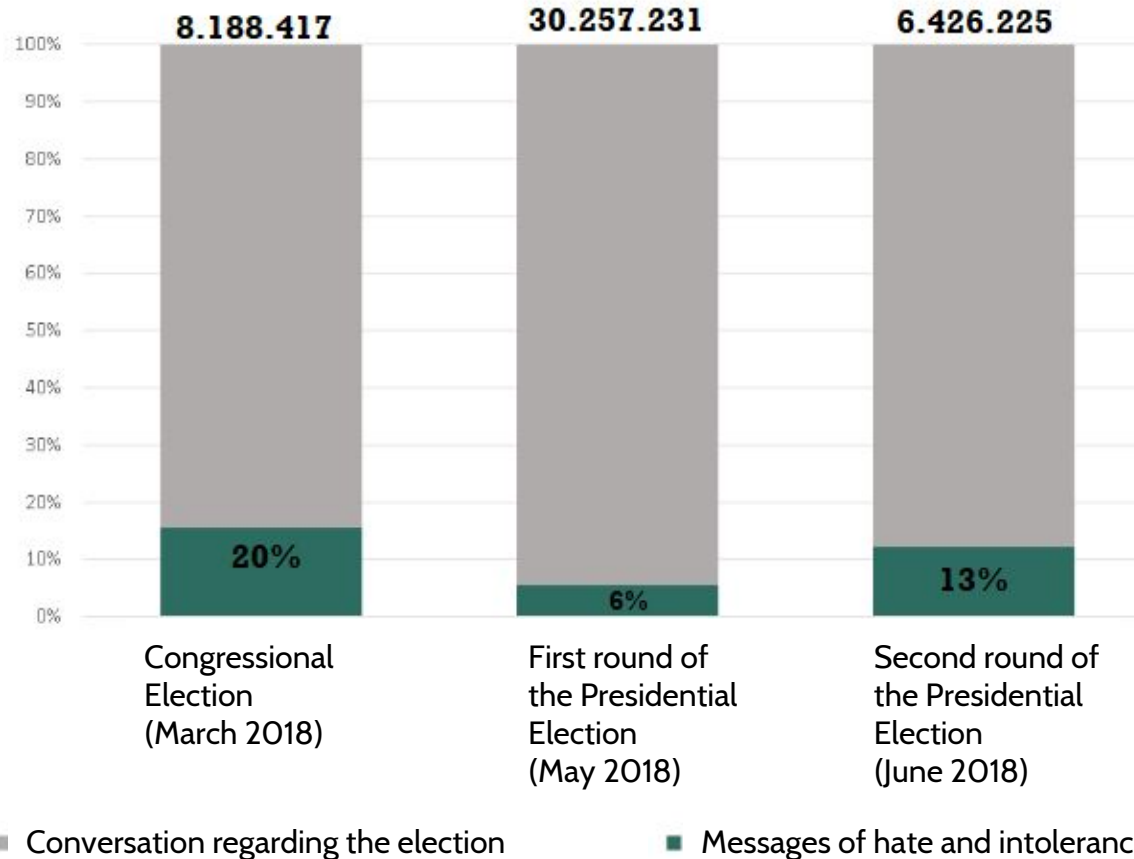
# MOE's analysis and advocacy throughout the 2018 electoral cycle in Colombia

- For the 2018 Congressional and Presidential electoral processes, MOE produced 2 comprehensive analytical reports, launched awareness campaigns, organized educational and informative events and, managed to get candidates to the Presidency to sign a 'Nonviolence Pact' regarding this topic.
- During the first semester of 2018 - which covered the Congressional and Presidential processes in Colombia - MOE analyzed almost **45 million social media mentions** concerning the elections in Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Blogs.
- The study looked both at the behaviour of users and the social media dynamics regarding:
  - (A) Hate speech and political intolerance and,
  - (B) Fake news.

# (A) ‘Hate speech’ and political intolerance on social media during the 2018 electoral cycle in Colombia

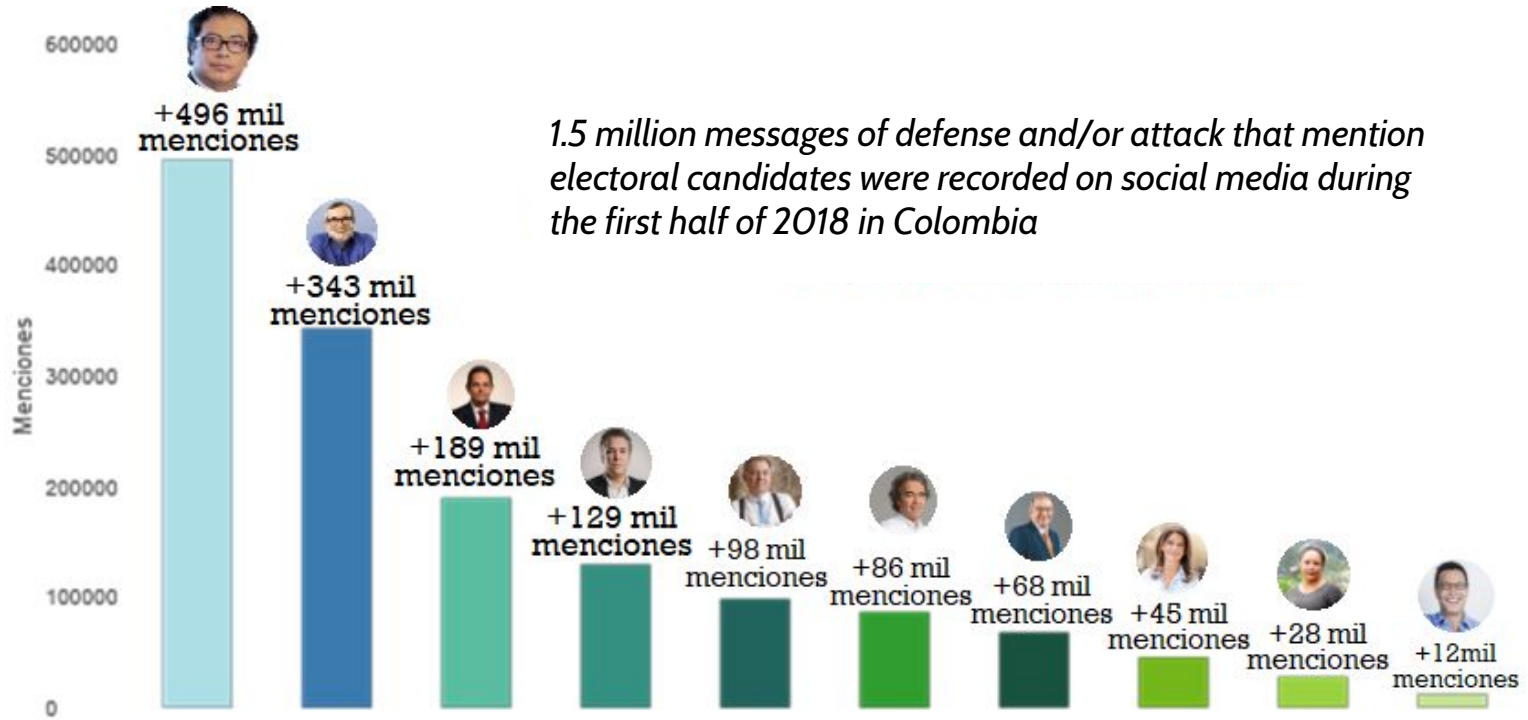
- 20% and 10% of the social media mentions regarding the elections were of hatred and intolerance by users during the Congressional and Presidential campaigns respectively.
- 2% of the presidential and congressional candidates’ posts on social media were of messages of hatred and intolerance during both the Congressional and Presidential campaigns.
- Social media posts mentioning the following topics were the ones that generated the highest number of messages of hatred and intolerance:
  - FARC
  - Corruption
  - Castrochavism
  - Paramilitarism
  - Other leftist guerrilla armed groups (M19, EPL, ELN).

# Social media conversations regarding the elections in Colombia and messages of hate and intolerance online during the first semester of 2018

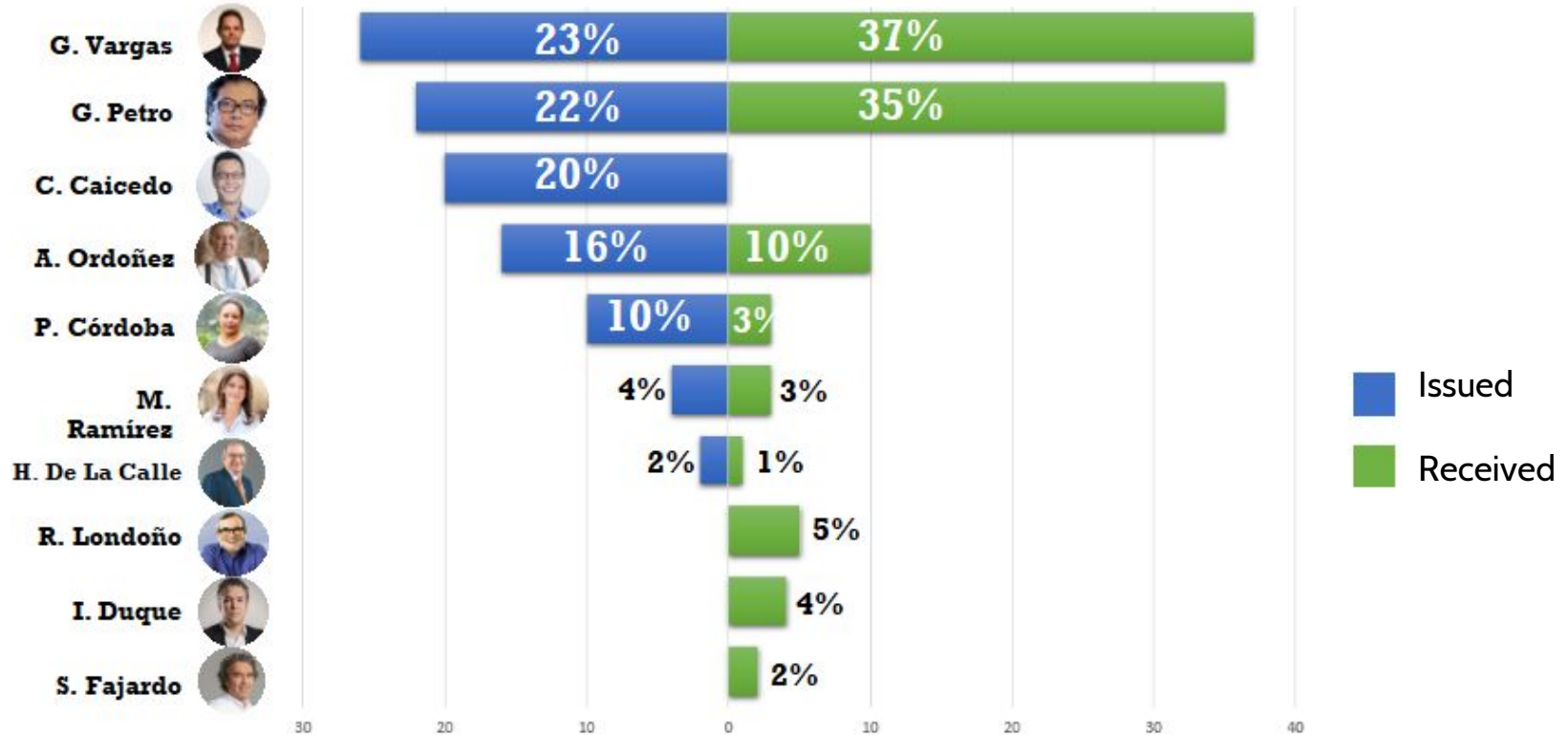




- Conversations on social media regarding candidates on the extreme ends of the political spectrum were the ones that registered the highest number of messages of hatred and intolerance.



- In broad terms, the candidates that received and issued the highest number of messages of hate and intolerance tended to be the same



## Presidential candidates signed a “Non-Violence Pact” (25<sup>th</sup> of April, 2018)



The declaration signed by the presidential candidates included the commitments to:

1. Promote a political culture based on mutual recognition and respect of the political opponent.
2. Reject any violent action undertaken in the name of any candidate.
3. Refrain from disseminating false, defamatory, hateful or violent messages and information.
4. Reject any act of intimidation, corruption and/or coercion.

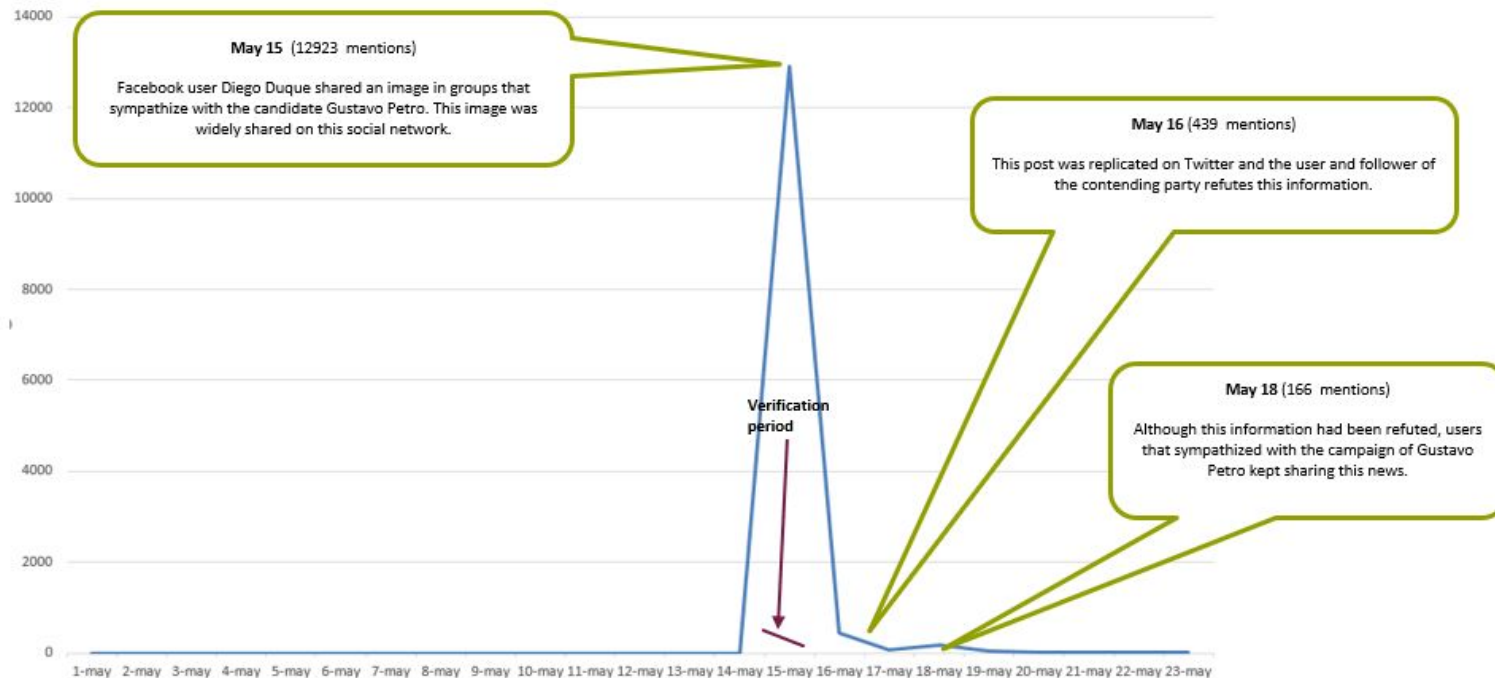
## (B) Fake news on social media during the 2018 electoral cycle in Colombia

- The life-cycle of fake news analyzed was short: it ranged between 3 to 7 days. However, their periods of propagation were very intense.
- The most important factor determining the spreading of fake news was the interference of political figures: if the news was shared or discredited by recognized political figures it directly shortened their life cycle.
- The presentation of evidence and proof that the news was fake and/or the issuing of official comunicués by candidates or members of political parties have been to be the most effective ways to stop their propagation.
- However, when the rebuttal comes from media agents and/or influencers, audiences granted the message much less credibility and rather spread fake news at a faster rate.

- Even if fake news have been rigorously refuted, they can still resurface and viralize quickly again later in time.
- The portion of social media followers that evaluated and corroborated the veracity of the information was low.
- Online communities that spread, verify and rebutte fake news are usually isolated from one another. Therefore, the majority of the people that received and shared the news do not receive a proper rebuttal that allows them to know that the information is false.
- Social media platforms - such as Twitter and Facebook - have become increasingly involved in removing fake news and/or blocking users that spread false and/or misleading messages.
- The use of information as a means for political propaganda prevailed over the use of data for informative reasons - in turn, this is conducive to a post-truth environment in the 2018 electoral cycle in Colombia.

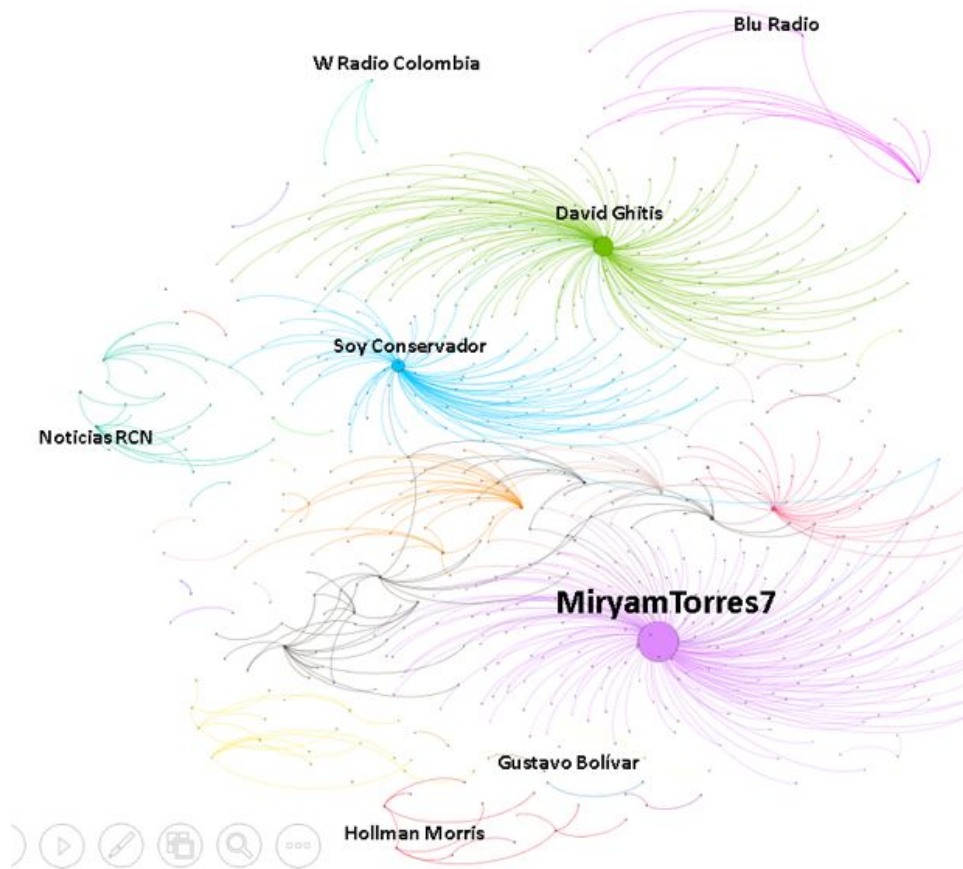
## Case Study: 'fake news' circulated denouncing that a high-ranking official of one of Colombia's electoral authorities' bodies was related (was the cousin) to presidential electoral contender Iván Duque - main rival of Gustavo Petro.

### Life-Cycle of Fake News

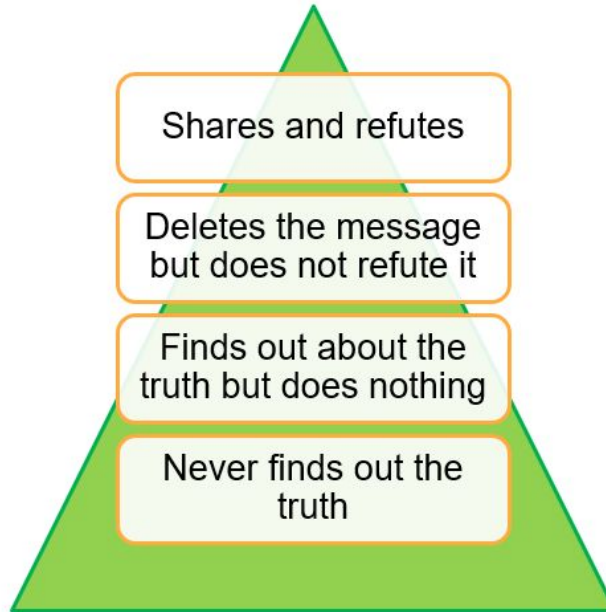


The life cycle of this fake news was of 6 days between its publication, viralization and rectification. It generated a very wide impact with more than 13,000 mentions on social media.

# Communities



- The main behavioral patterns amongst users that spread fake news on social media were the following:



*The vast majority never found out the truth or if they did they did nothing. Only the minority of users delete their posts with fake news and only an almost insignificant amount refutes the false information they had previously shared.*