Intermedia Agenda-Setting in the 2012 Elections: Relations between social media and regional web journals in two Brazilian capital cities

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Abstract

This paper discusses the intermedia agenda setting between the social media of mayoral candidates in Belo Horizonte and Vitória in Brazil and the coverage by the local news sites *Em.com.br* and *Gazeta Online* in the 2012 municipal elections. We discuss the origins and evolution of reflections and research on agenda setting and then focus on its occurrence in contemporary election campaigns. After a systematic observation of the material published by the two websites and official candidate profiles, we present the main trends of intermedia agenda-setting in the campaigns of the two capitals. The analysis highlighted significant differences: in Victoria we noticed a strong intermedia agenda-setting between social networks and news sites, while in Belo Horizonte there was an alignment with the campaign agenda of the two main candidates.

Keywords

Intermedia agenda setting. Elections. News sites. Social Networking.

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1 Introduction

The power of the communication media to set the agenda of issues that are most present and relevant for social discussion is a frequent theme of studies in the field of communication and agenda-setting theory is a privileged space for this discussion. Considering the profound changes in the media ecosystem since the first studies about agenda-setting, in this study we use the concept of "intermedia agenda-setting" to understand the journalistic coverage of electoral campaigns (McCOMBS, 2009). More specifically, our objective in this article is to discuss intermedia agenda-setting between social media of mayoral candidates in Belo Horizonte and Vitória and coverage by the local web journals. *Em.com.br* and *Gazeta Online* in the municipal elections of 2012.

We first present a discussion about agenda-setting based on a bibliographic survey of the main studies in the field up to the new perspectives, which emphasize intermedia relations in the current media scenario. We then highlight agenda-setting in the electoral campaigns with an emphasis on

how social media increase the complexity of the current political-electoral debate. Next, we present the data collection method and synthesize the main trends identified after a systematic accompaniment of articles published by the two web journals and by the official profiles of the candidates in the two state capitals.

2 Agenda-setting: a review

The initial study of the agenda-setting hypothesis was undertaken by U.S. scholars Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in the late 1960s. The pioneer empiric research was conducted during the U.S. presidential elections of November 1968 to verify the agenda-setting power of the communication media and evaluate their ability to promote issues that were the object of debates and of public interest. In their results, the authors indicated that "the proofs of this study that voters tend to share the media-composed definition about what is important strongly suggest their agenda-setting function" (McCOMBS; SHAW, 2000, p. 57).

Clóvis de Barros Filho (2001, p. 169) explains agenda-setting as "a type of social effect of the media. It is the hypothesis according to which the media, through the selection, arrangement and incidence of its news, determines the issues that the public will talk about and discuss." Meanwhile, Brum (2001) explains that "the essence of agenda-setting seeks to identify if the issues that are presented in the major media become important to the receptors, and if they are the subject of daily conversation."

From the perspective of agenda-setting, it is believed that news is selected because of characteristics specific to the media. Journalists and communication professionals act as gatekeepers of information, thus choosing which issues they will make news and which will not be highlighted, presenting an hierarchy of the news to the public (McCOMBS; SPELLMAN; WEAVER, 2000). In this process, institutionalized journalistic practices lead to a similarity in the facts and news selected. The interconnections of the issues shared among the agendas of the news media is reproduced in the journalistic dynamics through criteria of newsworthiness, which as Traquina (2000) explains, is established by a set of news values. According to Traquina, "one essential aspect of this professional culture is the sharing of values about the importance or the interest that an event or issue may have" (TRAQUINA, 2000, p. 25).

The hypothesis of agenda-setting converges in this organizational context from the selection and establishment of an hierarchy of the information by the mass media in such a way that the news is ordered and separated by the degree of impact and relevance journalists judge it to have. McCombs and Shaw (1992 apud TRAQUINA, 2000, p. 39) explain that the selection of issues that will constitute the agenda determines the power of journalism: "the selection of topics for the journalistic agenda and the selection of framings for the 'stories' about these topics define powerful roles of agenda-setting and terrible ethical responsibilities." In addition to institutional and

official sources, the large journalistic companies impose themselves as important sources of information and agents that promote the agenda of the other media. The coverage of the news agencies, for example, "is to a large degree the pressure exercised by the normative journalistic context which is due to the growing homogeneity in the contents and framings observable in the media agenda" (PEREIRA NETO, 2011, p. 253).

The prominent evidence of the media's influence on the public orientation and the significant changes in the media system mark the transformations of the studies about agenda-setting in recent decades. The dynamics of the media agenda-setting process imposed by the mass media acquires new shapes in the "complex communicative ecosystem" of mediatization in contemporary society, which is marked by the multiplication and diversification of connected audiences and other aspects (OROZCO-GÓMEZ, 2006). In particular, the appropriations of the on-line social media are marked by a complementation and co-existence with the mass media. Thus, the ability to select the information that the public will consume is shared among the media, that is, one media sets the agenda for other medias.

McCombs (2009), upon revising the agenda-setting hypothesis developed decades ago, has incorporated new perspectives produced by on-line spaces and the contribution that this scenery can make to an expansion of voices. A new concept – intermedia agenda-setting – reveals the emphasis given to the integration and complementarity of

the media today. Although McCombs (2009) does not provide details or offer a precise definition for the concept of intermedia agenda-setting, we can delimit it by exploring the term "intermediality." The concept of intermediality, as Herkman explains (2012, p. 374,), originates in the theories and artistic movements of the 1960s and refers to "to the continuity of media formats and the articulation and rearticulation of media in the social and cultural contexts in transformation." Intermediality he explains, "emphasizes the analysis of continuity and of the change in medias."

Based on authors such as Wenz (2008), who highlights compatability and permeability as characteristics of intermediality, Alzamora and Tárcia (2012, p. 26) indicate that "the intermedia perspective, in this line of thinking, should refer to forms of production and circulation of information that are established in the crossing and complementarity of varied media environments." Meanwhile, Wenz (2008, p. 258) indicates that "the intermedia produced by the new media signifies the integration between medias, the development of media hybrids and of new systems of integration between medias."

To think of intermedia agenda-setting, therefore, signifies recognizing and exploring the mutual influences exercised by the different contemporary media and by the audiences connected to them in the sense of negotiating – reinforcing, expanding or minimizing – the presence of a certain subject among the journalistic highlights and in other

social instances. This perspective dialogs, for example, with what Primo (2008, p. 8) calls "media interlinking," for whom "it is no longer possible to find a mutually exclusionary relationship between the media levels. To the contrary, one level turns to the other to set its agenda, expand its action and even inspire reports and criticisms to be presented." One of the prominent discussions in this context concerns the effect of the growing intermedia relations on agenda-setting: is the trend a fragmentation of the subjects highlighted in media environments or a strengthening of the power of agenda-setting typical of the mass logic of information transmission? According to McCombs (2009, p. 224), some observers foresee the end of agenda-setting "to the degree that audiences become fragmented and virtually everyone has a unique media agenda that is a highly specialized composite constructed from this vast wealth of news and information sources." For Pereira Neto (2011), these forecasts are based on the poor cohesion of the media agendas and on the formation of personal agendas in light of the diversity of content available to the public.

In this sense, McCombs (2009, p. 223-224) affirms that "there is no doubt that the Internet has already considerably expanded the variety of sources of news and information about public issues and about any other topic that you can imagine," but he believes that there is little evidence that the new technologies and the consequent segmentation of information sources have been capable of fragmenting audiences to the point of creating

different media agendas. The role fulfilled by the "elite news media" by triggering broad coverage of new topics and the strong influence of "key journalists" in the definition of the framings given to the news are, according to the author, examples of the current influence of the mass medias in intermedia agenda-setting. On the other hand, McCombs (2009) indicates that there is a growing importance of the connected audience, contributing to a "permeability" of the media agenda.

2.1 Agenda-setting in electoral campaigns

The initial reflections of the agenda-setting hypothesis, as mentioned, were based on studies conducted during electoral campaigns, which reinforce the pertinence of these occasions for this theoretical-methodological perspective. For McCombs (2009), "elections offer a dynamic environment to examine both the influence of the news sources on the media, and in turn, the influence of the media on the public" (McCOMBS, 2009, p. 171). Among other singularities, electoral campaigns are moments when candidates are more vulnerable to exposure to the communication media and the population and voters are potentially more involved and mobilized for a public debate.

Because it is a determining factor for electoral success, politicians plan their campaigns to capture media attention. The news coverage of the activities and issues referring to the campaign

place the candidate on "the agenda" of the communication media. Thus, the public activities of the candidates become events covered by the media, and consequently influence the agenda-setting for the public (McCOMBS, 2009, p. 161).

The contemporary communication scenery–marked by the diversification of the communication media and by the growing intermediatic relationship among them–expands and modifies the relationship between politics, media and voters and brings new routes to the electoral campaigns. Marques and Sampaio (2011) indicate two characteristics in the current model of circulation of political and electoral information: "there is a greater availability of information generated by candidates, parties and users; and consequently, greater competition for the attention of users (MARQUES; SAMPAIO, 2011, p. 211).

In this context, political agents use the Internet to guide voters, feed the media institutions and steer the journalistic coverage based on their own criteria of newsworthiness. Internet tools represent an opportunity for expanding a politician's electoral base and a powerful space for promoting and disseminating news. Using digital resources to support a campaign becomes a strategic factor, because "for political groups and candidates, there is the opportunity to form new contact networks, reach particular audiences, standardize messages and logically to adopt more effective internal

organizational strategies" (MARQUES; SILVA; MATOS, 2011, p. 348).

Considering the characteristics of the digital environment, Cervi and Vieira (2010, p. 4) analyze the decentralized model of production permitted by online social media highlighting the "democratizing capacity of these tools, which means thinking about how they allow a pluralization of debate, whether by modifying the productive routines of journalists, or by direct intervention in the electronic public sphere." In the case of the microblog tool Twitter, Marques and Sampaio (2011, p. 213) highlight how one of the greatest potentials of the tool is precisely "its repercussive effect" through resources such as hashtags and trending topics. In addition, Cervi and Mussuchin highlight (2011, p. 6), "[...] the followers of the candidates act as mediators, passing information along to other voters or interacting with traditional information sources." This involves a "cascade effect," as Labella (2012) indicates in an analysis of Spanish elections in 2011.

The realization of electoral campaigns in the current media ecosystem points to the realization a process of intermedia agenda-setting marked by intense relationships between the different actors involved in the production and dissemination of information. The potential uses of the Internet, however, suggest a relativization of the agenda-setting of a mass character. On the other hand, as Herkman (2012) indicates, the performances of the candidates in the mass media are still essential for contemporary political campaigns

and important sources of information for the majority of voters. For this author, "print newspapers and television news and debates are the most important information sources for the majority of voters. The performances of candidates in these media are essential to election results" (HERKMAN, 2012, p. 380).

3 Methodology and data collected

Considering this theoretical panorama, the main objective of the empiric research summarized below was to discuss the intermedia agenda-setting between the social media of the candidates for mayor of Belo Horizonte and Vitória and the coverage of the regional web journals *Em.com.br* and *Gazeta Online* in the municipal elections of 2012.

To do so, after we map the official channels of the candidates in the on-line social media and the special pages for elections prepared by the web journals, daily observation was made of the postings. The

data were collected between August 13 and October 7 for the Belo Horizonte municipal election and until October 28 for the city of Vitória where there was a runoff. After mapping all the publications in the official profiles of the mayoral candidates on the social media and of all the material produced by the two web journals in the three months of data collection, we sought in this article to synthesize the main trends and exemplify them by mentioning articles, tweets and posts considered exemplar of the situations identified.

3.1 Belo Horizonte (MG)

Seven candidates disputed the mayoral elections in Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais state, but only three created official accounts on Twitter and five fan pages on Facebook, as we indicate in Chart 1.

The electoral scenario in the largest city in Minas Gerais was polarized between the candidates

Chart 1: Profiles of the mayoral candidates in Belo Horizonte on Twitter and Facebook

Candidate (party)	Canal(s) on Twitter	Facebook Page
Marcio Lacerda (PSB)	@MarcioPrefeito e @Marcio40BH	Marcio Lacerda
Patrus Ananias (PT)	@Patrus_Ananias e @VotePatrus13	Patrus Ananias
Vanessa Portugal (PSTU)	@Vanessa_pstu	Vanessa Portugal
Alfredo Flister (PHS)	-	Alfredo Flister
Tadeu Martins (PPS)	-	Tadeu Martins Soares

Source: prepared by the authors.

Marcio Lacerda (PSB), who was seeking re-election, and Patrus Ananias (PT). These were also the two candidates who most used the on-line social media during the campaign and were thus the focus of the data presented here. Meanwhile, the web journal *Em.com.br* created the channel "Especial Eleições 2012," a space that presented details of the elections in Belo Horizonte through articles about the mayoral candidates.

The most common situation found in the monitoring of the official candidate profiles on the social media and of the articles published in *Em.com.br*, was the publication of common issues based on the campaign activities. The agenda of visits by the candidates to places in Belo Horizonte and the declarations they made at these locations were the main issues in the social media and on the web journal, which indicates a redundancy and, mainly a significant agenda-setting around the issues and actions proposed by the campaign committees.

A typical case of this relation of campaign news with the issues published on the social media and in the articles on the web journal is the presentation of a Pact for Youth signed by Marcio Lacerda and his vice-mayoral candidate Délio Malheiros, in which they made a commitment to invest in policies for youth. On August 21, the act was presented in the profile @marcio40bh and was the subject of an article in *Em.com.br*.

Polemics and mutual criticisms involving the two candidates were recurring subjects in the web journal articles during the entire campaign. In general, the declarations and responses issued by the candidates to the press during their campaign events became the lead of the articles on *Em.com.br*. In the candidates' social media, however, these attacks or debates were nearly always ignored, which indicated an effort to establish a "positive agenda." In some rare situations the social media was used to criticize, provoke or even make hints to the direct adversary. When commenting on a declaration by Marcio Lacerda that he was hoping that rain would interfere with the rally with the presence of former president Luis Inaácio da Silva (Lula), Patrus' official page published the statement: *"I heard that some people around here are doing a rain dance."*

With the beginning of the free time on television for the candidates, there was a strong agenda-setting by TV in relation to the issues presented by *Em.com.br* and by the candidates' social media. The web journal highlighted, on the very first day (September 23), the issues presented on the programs exhibited on the free electoral hour. The participation of influential political supporters in the free electoral hour–Lula and President Dilma Rouseff for Patrus and Senator Aécio Neves of Minas Gerais and the state's governor Antonio Anastasia for Marcio Lacerda–was also the theme of articles in *Em.com.br* and of posts on the candidates' social media pages.

We recorded some cases in which the articles on the portals discussed the social media. One example is an article on the web journal that commented on a video posted on former president Lula's Facebook page in which he asked people to vote for the candidates in his party, including Patrus Ananias. In the final stage of the campaign, the information posted in the social media took on new dimensions in the journalistic vehicles, as in the repercussion of a video in which Marcio Lacerda's vice-mayoral candidate, state deputy Délio Malheiros (PV), appeared in an interview recorded five days before the slate was formed, criticizing the mayor's administration. The issue was highlighted in the press and *Em.com.br* presented articles about the issue, including *Vídeos de Malheiros faz Patrus e Lacerda se confrontarem*, [Malheiros Video Creates Confrontation between Patrus and Laverda], published on October 1.

Another video that generated a polemic showed President Dilma Rousseff praising Marcio Lacerda and classifying the adversary to her party's candidate as "one of the best mayors in the country." Marcio Lacerda shared on his fan page a link to a Youtube video and the web journal picked up on the issue, publishing the article *Vídeos para atacar adversários são usados pelas campanhas de Lacerda e Patrus* [Videos to attack adversaries are used by Lacerda and Patrus campaigns].

Finally, in a few situations, the candidates' social media referred to articles published by other news media. *Em.com.br* in particular was only cited by the profiles of the candidates to promote video-chats by the web journal with the candidates Marcio Lacerda and Patrus Ananias.

3.2 Vitória (ES)

The capital of Espírito Santo had six mayoral candidates, five of whom had Twitter profiles and Facebook pages, as indicated in Chart 2.

In comparison with Belo Horizonte, the dispute in Vitória had more candidates with the possibility of winning: Luiz Paulo Vellozo (PSDB), Luciano Rezende (PPS) and Iriny Lopes (PT) were the leading names in the capital city's mayoral race. The election was close, polls showed alternating trends in the intention to vote and the elections were only defined in the runoff.

The most striking characteristics of the presentation of the campaign on the Internet in Vitória was the near absence of coverage on *Gazeta Online* and the intense use of social media by the main mayoral candidates, including the promotion of online events and activities. The web journal *Gazeta Online* created a special page for electoral coverage, but, contrary to *Em.com.br* in Belo Horizonte, it did not give routine coverage to the candidate's campaign activities. On a number days during the electoral period, no articles at all were published about the elections.

Chart 2: Profiles of Vitória mayoral candidates
on Twitter and Facebook

Candidate (party)	Canal(s) on Twitter	Facebook page
Luiz Paulo Vellozo (PSDB)	@LPVellozo	Luis Paulo Vellozo Lucas
Luciano Rezende (PPS)	@LucianoRezende	Luciano Rezende
Iriny Lopes (PT)	@iriny_13	Iriny Lopes
Gustavo de Biase (PSTU)	@GustavodeBiase	Gustavo de Biase 50
Edson Ribeito (PSDC)	@edsonpsi	Edson Ribeiro

Source: prepared by the authors.

On the other hand, there was intense work by the campaign staffs in Vitória to promote activities on the Internet and integrate voters to the candidates' campaign programs. One example is the web-rally by the PSDB candidate Luiz Paulo Vellozo Lucas, conducted weekly (Mondays at 9 pm) with online transmission on the candidate's official website. In his Twitter profile, the candidate periodically promoted the web-rally, inviting voters to participate and send their questions. Another case in which the candidates counted on the potential of the social media was a channel called "Pensar Vitória" [Thinking of Vitória] , which was created by Worker's Party candidate Iriny Lopes to discuss his proposals. The candidate regularly published invitations on her Twitter profile asking voters to participate.

A very common use of the social media by the mayoral candidates' staffs was the promotion of links to news published by the *Gazeta Online* and other news media. This agenda-setting is exemplified in a publication on the Facebook page of candidate Gustavo De Biase (PSOL) of an article from the A Gazeta print newspaper about a criticism made by De Biase of the candidate Luciano Rezende. The page "Gustavo De Biase 50" published an image of an article accompanied by the following phrase: "Published today in the newspaper A Gazeta: We need ethics and independence in politics! We are not beholden to anyone." The candidate Luciano Rezende, who was involved in the case, did not comment on the issue on his social media.

On other occasions, the candidates provided links to articles from the portal about campaign issues and polls. One case that illustrates the agenda-setting of the social media by the portal *Gazeta Online* was a publication by the candidate Luiz Paulo Vellozo on his fan page which referred to a web journal article published the previous day about the results of a poll by the Instituto Ibope showing the PSDB candidate in the lead.

As in Belo Horizonte, the free television time for the candidates was a focus of articles in the portal in Vitória. For example, on October 23 (during the runoff), the *Gazeta Online* website published an article about the candidates new TV programming. As a complement, the candidates often used their free television time to promote their social media, which had videos and presented the issues explored each night on TV.

It was not always television that triggered the intermedia agenda-setting process. One case with strong repercussion on the social media and in the regional and national newspapers was that of the candidate Edson Ribeiro, who was able to gain attention with a video of him snorting a Bible as if he was inhaling cocaine. Even before being presented on the free television time (during which the candidate had only 1'40''), the video was released on the Internet and gained visibility on social media. Feeding the polemic, on Sept. 13 Edson Ribeiro posted a tweet saying: "people of God don't worry, every attack is coming from people led by the cocaine sniffer." Media outlets throughout the country ran pieces about the case and on his Facebook page the candidate highlighted this national repercussion.

The considerable movement on the social networks during the mayoral campaign in Vitória resulted in disputes and conflicts about non-official profiles and wound up becoming the subject of some articles produced by *Gazeta Online* and by other news outlets. The article *Campanha entra na fase de Guerra Virtual* [Campaign enters phase of Virutal War], discussed false Internet pages that ridiculed and satarized the mayoral candidates in Vitória. The false profiles were mentioned again in articles on the portal published on August 30, describing the false Facebook profile "Uriny Lópolis" which a judge ordered to be taken offline.

4 Comparative analysis and final considerations

Based on the data synthesized above, we can identify significant differences in the intermedia agenda-setting process between the online social networks of the candidates and the coverage of the main web journals of the two cities. The situation in Belo Horizonte was noteworthy because of the close alignment between the issues presented by the official profiles and by *Em.com.br* and the campaign agenda of the two main candidates. The web journal also explored the criticisms the adversaries made of each other at these campaign events, something that was rarely found on the official candidate sites in the last days of the campaign.

There were also few references in the social media to the articles published by *Em.com.br* or other news outlets. This web journal, in turn, rarely mentioned the social media in its coverage and when it did, it was to discuss situations triggered outside the official campaign sites.

In Vitória, we believe it is possible to associate the sparse political-electoral coverage by the on-line

version of the largest newspaper in Espírito Santo with a greater intensity in the use of the official social media to promote and debate issues related to the campaign. As we described, the promotion and disclosure of on-line activities (such as web-rallies) and the reference to articles produced and activities promoted by *Gazeta Online* were some of the most common uses of Twitter and Facebook by the candidates' staffs. Contrary to what took place in Belo Horizonte, the coverage of *Gazeta Online* made repeated references to the campaign events that took place on the Internet, mainly to that which the web journal called the " virtual war."

In this sense, it appears clear that in Vitória, there was an intense process of intermedia agenda-setting between the candidates' social media and coverage on the web journal *Gazeta Online*, while in Belo Horizonte the only effective thematic approximation between the official profiles and the web journal *Em.com.br* was the common coverage of campaign events of the two main candidates. In both capitals, however, the candidates' free television time clearly had strong influence on the issues presented on the social media and the web journals. Thus, it is important to indicate that despite the growing complexity of the contemporary media ecosystem, televised broadcasts–at least in terms of coverage and electoral repercussion on the two situations studied her-continue to occupy a central space.

For future studies, we therefore suggest more systematized observation of the intermedia agenda-setting between the mass media (TV, in particular) and the coverage and discussions on the Internet. At the same time, it is essential to consider the impact of the non-official profiles on the social media on the electoral campaign. In addition, it seems important to analyze the agenda-setting dynamic in other state capitals of the same sizes, to provide new comparisons and discussions.

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Agendamento intermidiático nas eleições 2012: relações entre redes sociais online e webjornais regionais em duas capitais brasileiras

Intermedia agenda setting en elecciones municipales de Brasil en 2012: relaciones entre las redes sociales y webjornais regionales en dos capitales

Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo discutir o agendamento intermidiático entre as redes sociais dos candidatos à prefeitura de Belo Horizonte e Vitória e a cobertura dos webjornais regionais *Em.com.br* e *Gazeta Online* nas eleições municipais de 2012. Iniciamos uma discussão sobre as origens e a evolução das reflexões e pesquisas sobre agendamento e, em seguida, voltamo-nos para suas especificidades nas campanhas eleitorais contemporâneas. Após uma observação sistemática das matérias publicadas pelos dois webjornais e das postagens dos perfis oficiais dos candidatos, apresentamos as principais tendências do agendamento intermidiático nas campanhas das duas capitais. Na análise, destacamos significativas diferenças: em Vitória nota-se um forte agendamento intermidiático entre as redes sociais e os webjornais, enquanto em Belo Horizonte destaca-se um alinhamento de ambos com a agenda de campanha dos dois principais candidatos.

Palavras-chave

Agendamento. Intermídia. Eleições. Webjornais. Redes sociais online.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo discutir la intermidia agenda setting entre las redes sociales de los candidatos a lo gobierno municipal de Belo Horizonte y Vitória y la cobertura regional de sitios de noticias *Em.com.br* e *Gazeta Online* en las elecciones municipales de 2012 in Brasil. Hemos iniciado un debate acerca de los orígenes y evolución de la reflexión y la investigación sobre la agenda setting e nos dirigimos a su aplicacion en las campañas electorales contemporáneas. Después de una observación sistemática del material publicado por los dos sitios de noticias y los perfiles de los candidatos, se presentan las principales tendencias de la intermidia agenda setting en las campañas de las dos capitales brasileñas. En el análisis, se destacan diferencias significativas: en Victoria nota una fuerte intermidia agenda setting entre las redes sociales y sitios de noticias mientras que en Belo Horizonte existe una alineación con el calendario de campaña de los dos candidatos principales.

Palabras Clave

Intermedia agenda setting. Elecciones. Sitios de noticias. Redes Sociales.

Expediente

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