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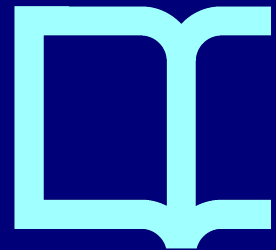
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Framing femicide in the news, a paradoxical story. A comprehensive analysis of thematic and episodic frames

Femicide is a worldwide problem. Studies of femicide discourses have found embedded discriminatory ideologies that could help to legitimize gender-based violence (GBV) at individual and social levels. This paper aims to contribute to the research on femicide and news frames. Studies of thematic and episodic frames tested their differential effects, but they did not examine the content. We propose a three-level methodology, distinguishing between thematic and episodic frames, conducting an in-depth examination of issue-specific frames, and adding the notion of substantiveness to analyse the results. We created a dataset of 2,528 news articles from Mexican mainstream media, coded through qualitative content analysis. The proposal can be applied in many cultural contexts and opens up opportunities for comparative studies of femicide. Our results reveal that thematic pieces are focused on non-intimate partner violence (IPV) femicides. Episodic pieces are more diverse but with a tendency to individualize the problem and attribute responsibility to the victims.

Keywords: Thematic and episodic frames, substantiveness, issue-specific frames, femicide, gender-based violence GBV, intimate partner violence IPV.

Introduction

Femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence (GBV) and it is a global human rights crisis. In the year 2021, 56% of murders of women and girls in the world were committed by an intimate partner or a family member (*Gender-related killings of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)*, 2022). Feminist scholars argue that misogyny and GBV are produced by cultural patterns, material practices (Lagarde y de los Rios, 2005), and ideologies disseminated through private and public discourses (Lazar, 2007). These can influence and reinforce attitudes of accepting or justifying GBV at social and individual levels (Hunnicut, 2009). There is a significant corpus of empirical studies about femicide discourses from different socio-political contexts and using different methodologies. These confirm the dominance of narratives of victim-blaming and

justification of the perpetrator's actions (some examples are Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Brodie, 2021; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020; Pröll and Magin, 2022; Slakoff, 2023; Taylor, 2009; Tiscareño-García and Miranda-Villanueva, 2020). Evidence confirms that attitudes that justify GBV are associated with perpetration among men (Stith et al., 2004), victimization among women (Abramsky et al., 2011), and negative reactions from institutions and the community towards the victims (Flood and Pease, 2009).

The news media has the power to reinforce beliefs and shape public opinion by using particular definitions and interpretations of political issues, which in communication theory are called frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007). These are consequential for citizens' interpretation and might shape their attitudes toward the issue and the individuals involved (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2018). Nonetheless, not all frames have the same effects. Their strength depends on many factors such as the individual, the topic, the content (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2018), the capacity to produce emotional arousal (Aarøe, 2011), and the socio-political context (Boukes, 2022). Studies have found considerable differences in effects between thematic and episodic frames, especially in the attribution of responsibility to social conditions or specific individuals (Aarøe, 2011; Boukes, 2022; Hart, 2011; Iyengar, 1994; Kaiser, 2020). This raises a concern about femicide reporting, which could be reinforcing misogynist ideologies by focusing on episodic pieces and attributing responsibility to the victims.

This paper presents a methodological proposal to advance the understanding of how discourses about extreme gender violence operate in the news media. The main objective is to examine the highlighted aspects and the differences in thematic and episodic news on femicide. We aim to contribute to frame theory and the field of femicide discourses. First, there is a gap in framing studies; those that tested the

strength of thematic and episodic frames did not delve into the content (Boukes, 2022). To address this, we propose a three-level analysis distinguishing between thematic and episodic frames (Iyengar, 1994), examining the content in-depth of issue-specific frames (de Vreese, 2005), and adding the notion of substantiveness (Bartholomé et al., 2018), which we associate with the quality of the coverage. When reported in the news media, femicide is either episodic (in reporting on a specific case) or thematic (in reporting on the wider phenomenon). This is different from news reporting on other economic or political topics, where coverage moves beyond episodic or thematic frames (Boukes, 2022). Our conclusions provide empirical evidence of the differential content in thematic and episodic frames, and these go beyond the attribution of responsibility to individuals in episodic and broader social conditions in thematic.

Secondly, femicide studies tend to be context-specific, and many are written in Spanish due to the topic's relevance in Latin America. Studies in English have mainly focused on IPV-femicides in western territories, with little discussion of media representations in the global south, including countries with extremely high rates, where non-IPV femicides are well recognized (Brodie, 2021). This paper contributes to strengthening the dialogue between studies published in English and Spanish, different methodologies, and the diverse cultural context that each one represents. Our approach attempts to create a typology of frames of femicide applicable in many cultural contexts. Systematizing the findings of previous studies of femicide news and using a deductive-inductive approach, we created a valid methodology that provides in-depth knowledge, maintains the objective of denouncing practices of gender discrimination, and discovers novel aspects overlooked by previous studies, such as the roles of authorities and social movements. Finally, by incorporating the findings of framing

effects literature into our design, we provide a solid ground to forecast impact at a social level.

Our empirical focus is Mexican media. This country is representative of the Latin American region (where most of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world are located) and it is the Spanish-speaking country with the highest number of femicides (Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, n.d.). Mexican authorities stated that murders of women in the country account for between 11% and 12% of all murders since 2014 (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Publica, 2019). Nonetheless, between 2014 and 2017 the local media increased femicide reporting by 400% on average (Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020), positioning femicide as an important topic in the public discourse, regardless of the official version of it not being an increasing crisis.

We created a dataset of 2,528 articles by applying qualitative content analysis to text and visuals to identify the structural frame (thematic or episodic) and the frame elements: definition of the problem, main actors, attribution of responsibility, moral evaluation, and recommended treatment (Entman, 1993). We obtained patterns that we grouped into clusters of main topics (Matthes and Kohring, 2008) and report on the frequencies of the frame elements. With this proposal, we achieved three objectives: we conducted an exhaustive examination, provide a useful model of analysing results with the possibility to compare in time and between socio-political contexts, and minimize the loss of information giving the possibility to report on the entire corpus without discarding any article.

The analysis of news frames constitutes a robust tool to uncover the construction of meaning. By reporting on the content, the structure, and the level of substantiveness

in the communicative materials, we expect to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between discourse, human interaction, and the social construction of reality.

News frames

Framing refers to the process of selecting some aspects of reality and making them more salient in a communicative context (Entman, 1993). Framing analysis involves two tasks: uncovering the construction of meaning and identifying its effects on individuals (Björnehed and Erikson, 2018). A sizeable body of literature explores the structures of news frames (Bartholomé et al., 2018; Björnehed and Erikson, 2018; Chong and Druckman, 2007; de Vreese, 2005, 2012; Entman, 2004; Matthes and Kohring, 2008; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000) and the strength and duration of the effects (Kaiser, 2020; Lecheler and de Vreese, 2018; Powell et al., 2019), producing multiple categorizations. In this paper, we did not conduct a review of the entire literature of news frames, instead, we composed an argument about the benefits of incorporating the findings of framing effects studies into the design of news frames analysis, especially in news concerning human rights violations.

Studies on framing effects can be traced to two traditions: equivalence and emphasis frames. The first ‘refers to differential modes of presentation for the exact same piece of information’ (Scheufele and Iyengar, 2012: 3-4). Here, the content in two frames is the same or equivalent, but it varies in the structure of the information. It may use different words, headlines, or focus on individual affectations rather than the social context. The second tradition understands frames in a broader sense, identifying the central idea that ‘suggests what the controversy is about’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989: 143). Experiments with emphasis frames use pieces that vary in content

(Scheufele and Iyengar, 2012), emphasizing one aspect and avoiding others. Both traditions prove that differences in structure and/or content produce differential effects.

We recognize the relevance of analysing the content and the structure in which the information is presented. To analyse the structure we use the classification of thematic and episodic frames (Iyengar, 1994). Thematic framed stories explain the issue in a general or abstract context as a backgrounder, and with general outcomes (Iyengar, 1994). In contrast, episodic framed pieces explain the issue in the form of a case or event, depicting the issue in particular instances (Iyengar, 1994); the exemplars are often ordinary citizens illustrating broader issues (Boukes, 2022). Episodic framing is a form of humanizing the topic, producing appealing stories, and allowing citizens to represent themselves in public discourses; but it can be linked to dramatization and individualization of the issue, portraying it as a private concern (Boukes, 2022). Studies show that episodic frames have notable effects on the attribution of responsibility to individuals, ignoring responsibility on a societal level (Aarøe, 2011; Boukes, 2022; Hart, 2011).

Regarding content, we use issue-specific frames that allow a profound level of specificity and detail but make it difficult to generalize and compare between issues or social contexts (de Vreese, 2005). Most issue-specific frame studies are based on the identification of the elements: problem definition and causes, responsibility attribution, moral evaluation, and recommended treatment (Entman, 1993). The frames do not need to contain all the elements, but the existing elements create patterns that can be found in a single communicative material or grouped systematically (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). Such patterns can be identified by the presence or absence of keywords, stock phrases, sentences that thematically reinforce clusters of facts or judgments (Entman,

1993), metaphors, examples (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), visual images (Powell et al., 2019), and source selection (de Vreese, 2005).

For some scholars, the frame is comprised of the problem definition (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). But, in the analysis of political news, scholars have found that sometimes news pieces do not contain an elucidated definition and stories can just be focused on the personal characteristics of the actors involved, personal attacks, and politics as a game (Hänggli, 2020). To mark this difference, Entman (2004) proposed categorizing news pieces as substantive when they are focused on the issue, and procedural when they do not mention the issue and are about political strategies. Indeed, discerning news that prioritizes the explanation of the issue over other perspectives, such as conflict, can be very valuable for the analyses. Nonetheless, we depart from Entman (2004) because we do not consider that news pieces are necessarily substantive or procedural. Instead, we follow Bartholome et al. (2018) and consider that substantiveness is a dimension that can be measured on an ordinal scale. We build on the concepts of substance proposed by Hänggli (2020) and Bartholome et al. (2018), constituting our own: substantiveness is the extent to which a communicative material explains the issue and the ideological, political, social, and legal causes and implications. Hence, the indicator to consider news pieces more or less substantive is the quantity and the quality of the aspects explained.

The femicide news

Femicides are hate-crime murders against the female gender (Segato, 2014) and are the result of persistent actions of discrimination and violence including verbal, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, mutilations, and forced situations (Radford and Russell, 1992). Therefore, femicides are the product of different forms of GBV such as intimate partner violence (IPV), intra-family violence, violence related to criminal practices that

mainly target women like trafficking, exploitation, hatred towards women with stigmatized occupations (sex workers, dancers, waitresses), and committed by organized crime groups to impart terror in the community and revenge against rival criminal groups (Monárrez Fragoso, 2009).

Empirical studies on femicide news have found sensationalist coverage and the construction of otherness, portraying the murders as a product of personal circumstances (Balica et al., 2022; Brodie, 2021; Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Hawley et al., 2018; Lloyd and Ramon, 2017; Taylor, 2009). They often emphasize the lurid details of the murder (Ananías Soto and Vergara Sánchez, 2016; Boonzaier, 2022; Buitrón, 1997), show the torture suffered by the victims in photographs (Berlanga Gayón, 2017; González, 2018), and highlight the victims' misbehaviour, suggesting a degree of responsibility for the outcome of the events. The strategies of victim-blaming are the use of negative language to describe women, highlighting unreported previous violence or not continuing with the legal process, the suggestion of infidelity, promiscuity, or being romantically involved with the perpetrator (Gillespie et al., 2013; Taylor, 2009), mentions of stigmatized occupations (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Sánchez González, 2008), lack of self-care, and putting themselves in endangering situations (Arduino, 2014; BardWigdor and Bonavitta, 2017; Fernández López, 2017; Ravelo Blancas, 2017). An effect of otherness is also created by mentioning nationality, race, ethnicity, and poverty, suggesting these are causes of the violence (Brodie, 2021; Moreno Ramírez, 2021; Slakoff and Brennan, 2019; Threadcraft, 2017) and not mentioning that these are additional sources of discrimination (Brodie, 2021).

In many stories, the perpetrators are not identified (González, 2018; Ramírez, 2021), and when their identity is reported, it is likely that their actions are explained in a way that blurs or justifies their responsibility (García et al., 2021; Gutiérrez Aldrete,

2020; Taylor, 2009). The perpetrator may be presented as a victim of circumstances, mentioning jealousy and infidelity as natural causes of rage (Nader, 2014), reasons beyond his control like alcoholism, stress, economic, or psychological problems (Gillespie et al., 2013; Ventura, 2014), or describing IPV in terms of equal blame for women and men (Taylor, 2009).

Most of the studies that identified victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification narratives used specific cases, and their methodologies lack rigour, producing analytical limitations (Pröll and Magin, 2022). Recently, quantitative studies with the frame theory approach included thematic articles in their analysis, making considerable advances in the field (Brodie, 2021; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020; Pröll and Magin, 2022). By using the findings of studies in western countries (Bullock and Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013; Surette, 2015) and comparing them with her research carried out in South African news, Nechama Brodie (2021) systematized issue-specific frames of femicide:

- (1) Police frame or ‘just the facts’.
- (2) Implies such events happen to ‘certain types of people’.
- (3) Blame victims and excuse perpetrators.
- (4) Shock of ‘how normal’ the perpetrator appeared.
- (5) Blaming a faulty justice system.
- (6) Suggesting a victim or offender had been blocked from opportunities at a structural level.
- (7) Institutional racism.
- (8) Blaming real violence on violence portrayed in the media.

The last four frames emphasize the social facet of the problem (Brodie, 2021). Nonetheless, the frames are characterized by evaluative and narrow categories. Hence, a recent study with the same approach found different frames in Colombian news:

- (1) Gender-based inequalities and discrimination against women.
- (2) Perpetrators in court.
- (3) Prehistory and course of events of femicide.
- (4) Reactions of neighbours, eyewitnesses, and villagers (Pröll and Magin, 2022).

The authors admit not finding any article typical for the fourth frame, they included it because they found paragraphs referring to it in some articles. It is possible to see a relationship between Brodie's and Pröll and Magin's frames, but the groups are still very restricted. Neither study found a way to show how two or more of these frames concur in news stories at the same time. In addition, neither of the studies differentiated IPV femicides from non-IPV femicides, nor did they include the visual element of the articles, which can be a very significant framing device (Powell et al., 2019).

The literature on thematic and episodic frames predicts differences in the content; nonetheless, previous studies about femicide news categorized the frames depending on one or two elements, without differentiating between thematic or episodic. We consider that the separation between thematic and episodic framed news will help to better understand the coexistence of discourses with different versions of the problem. Based on that idea, we created the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there differences in the way that the frame elements are depicted depending on the news pieces being thematic or episodic in their framing?

RQ2: Are there differences in the substantiveness of the information depending on the news pieces being thematic or episodic in their framing?

Methodology

The newspapers in the study were chosen for their audience scope, considering they inform on general topics, and have national coverage in print and digital versions, the latter available for consultation since 2014. The newspapers that have different versions per region were discarded. Five newspapers have these characteristics in Mexico. To ensure equal representation in ideologies we selected one left-leaning, one right-leaning, and one centre-leaning example. We prioritized the ones with the most visits to their websites, as data was collected through their digital versions: (1) *El Universal*, highest number of online visits, centre ideology and open access to its online library; (2) *Excélsior*, second-highest number of online visits, left-wing ideology and open access to its online library; and (3) *Reforma*, third-highest number of online visits, right-wing ideology and online library available by paid subscription (Alexa.com, 2015; Secretaría de Gobernación, 2015; Rodelo and Muñiz, 2016).

The articles were collected using the search engine on each outlet's website covering a period of seven semesters: from July 2014 (date of the first government council meeting to study the possibility of declaring an 'alert for gender violence' due to the high rates of femicides) to December 2017 (date on which this research registered a stabilization in the increased media attention to femicide). Two filtering processes were used: entering keywords: 1) 'femicide' (*feminicidio*), from the results all articles that had the keyword in the headline, dealt with the topic in the body of the article, or reported on specific cases were added to the database. We discarded those that had the word in the body of the article, but the topic was not related. 2) 'Dead woman' (*mujer muerta*), the intention is to include femicides even if the news outlet did not describe them as such. Articles reporting women murdered by (ex)partners, family, or acquaintances, and single or mass murders of women possibly committed by organized

crime groups were added to the database. Those referring to accidental deaths and that explicitly stated that the causes of death were not related to gender violence were discarded. The process produced a unit of analysis of N=2,528 articles from the three outlets. *El Universal* 1031, *Reforma* 969, and *Excélsior* 528. The dataset will be available open access on the Figshare repository.

The text and the first photograph were analysed, relying on content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Rodriguez and Dimitrova, 2011) and discourse analysis to find implicit meaning and evaluations (Van Dijk, 1996). By systematizing the findings of previous studies of femicide news, a list of relevant characteristics was made including victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification strategies, socio-demographics, stigmatizing characteristics, institutional violence, media violence, and gender-based inequalities. Additionally, using an inductive approach we performed an exploratory analysis of 100 random articles to identify the forms in which the frame elements can be depicted. We created the codebook combining the inductive and deductive procedures of coding (Matthes and Kohring, 2008).

Thematic and episodic frames

Previous literature confirmed that “episodic and thematic frames are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but often co-occur in the same news story (Iyengar, 1994; Rucinski, 1992) or neither of these frames may be present” (Boukes, 2022: 376). To operationalize our categorization: articles were registered as thematic when they reported the issue in an abstract form (Iyengar, 1994), for example, statistics, policies, laws, authorities’ statements and their activity reports, political debates, and social movement coverage. Articles were categorized as episodic (Iyengar, 1994) when they reported the murders of specific women, including the discovery of the bodies, authorities’ actions related to investigations and legal processes of specific crimes,

interviews with the victims' families, and social movements with claims related to specific cases. Articles that have elements of both structure frames, which we called mixed, were assigned to a category according to two criteria: 1) volume or extension is defined as the number of paragraphs dedicated to each frame (Boukes, 2022); if the same volume is dedicated to each, 2) the topic in the headline decides the dominant frame (Tankard, 2001). Mixed articles were analysed carefully to explore the possibility of creating a third category but we decided against it. The reasoning was that the elements that make an article mixed will be registered in the next steps of our coding and this methodology will highlight which content has the greater volume in each article.

Emphasis refers to the main topic of the article, which was coded independently of being thematic or episodic. We used six categories generated by testing the femicide frames proposed by Brodie (2021), Pröll and Magin (2022), our inductive findings in our corpus, and avoiding evaluative content or a pre-established relation with any issue-specific frame element.

- (1) Social problem, including laws and policies, statistics, explanations of cultural patterns, gender-based causes, and socio-political context.
- (2) Authorities' actions and statements, interviews with authorities, politics, and confrontation between authorities.
- (3) Social movements, protests, and interviews with activists.
- (4) Primary actors are the victims, victims' families, and perpetrators; this topic includes articles focused on descriptions before the murder and after the murder in the case of families.
- (5) Murder facts and discovery of the bodies.

- (6) Legal topic includes prosecution processes, debates regarding the classification of the crime as femicide, homicide or other, evidence, and conviction.

Issue-specific frame elements

We identified the four elements described by Entman (1993), adding the visual component. The inductive-deductive technique of coding revealed that each element can have two or more variables with several categories. Table 1 summarizes the procedure for coding the issue-specific frame elements.

Table 1. Coding of issue-specific frame elements

Frame element	Variables	Categories	Code	Issue-specific frame elements		
Denomination of the problem	1. Denomination of the crimes	1.1 Femicide GBV related (F)	F+IPV	Femicide IPV		
		1.2 Suicide Homicide Murder (non-F)	F+non-IPV	Femicide non-IPV		
Actors	2. Relationship victim-perpetrator	2.1 (Ex) Partner (IPV)	F+UK			
		2.2 Family 2.3 Acquaintance (non-IPV)	Non-F + any relationship	General violence		
		2.4 Unknown (UK)				
		3. Sources of information	3.1 Primary actors (victims, perpetrators, families) 3.2 Investigation authorities 3.3 Other authorities 3.4 NGOs and activists 3.5 Experts	3.6 Opinion and editorials 3.7 Other sources (bystanders, neighbours, news agencies)	Three main sources per article are noted	All categories
Attribution of responsibility	4. To the government	4.1 Corruption 4.2 Inaction	4.3 Human rights violations 4.4 Impunity	4.5 Misogyny	Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Institutional violence
	5. To a phenomenon	5.1 Use of metaphors 5.2 Wave of violence	5.3 'Appeared dead' 5.4 Violent country		Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Nominalization
Moral evaluation	6. Victims	6.1 Promiscuity 6.2 Lack of self-care 6.3 Stayed in the relationship with the perpetrator 6.4 Stigmatization socio-demographics or occupation	6.5 Negative description 6.6 Not reporting previous violence		Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Victim-blaming
		7. Perpetrators	7.1 Jealousy or victim infidelity 7.2 Causes beyond his control 7.3 Psychological problems	7.4 IPV equal blame	Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Perpetrator-justification
		8. Governmental level	Application/creation of policies and laws recommended		Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Policies and laws
Recommended treatment	9. Societal level	9.1 Cultural misogyny 9.2 Create social awareness 9.3 Social causes of discrimination	9.4 Social machismo 9.5 Social consciousness		Existent (1) No evidence (0)	Social change
		10. Element depicted	10.1 Victim alive 10.2 Victim deceased 10.3 Perpetrator 10.4 Victims' families	10.5 Persons from NGOs and institutions 10.6 Protests 10.7 Police theme 10.8 Other topics	Three main elements per article are noted	All categories

Variables

1. Denomination of the crime, the use of the words ‘femicide’, ‘homicide’, ‘suicide’, ‘murder’, and ‘GBV’ were the main criteria. Still, we considered the full content because an argument against something very often uses the same words (Van Dijk, 1996). For example, in this extract from an article in *El Universal*:

Various members of the university community have raised their voices and called for protesting against what they consider to be femicide. However, another sector ensures that the characteristics of the crime do not correspond to the indicated crime. (Our translation).

The word femicide appears seven times in the article, without a conclusion about the case. The coders agreed that the article does not define this specific murder as femicide.

All the articles have a registered ‘denomination of the crime’, this is the only variable that totals the number of articles in the unit of analysis. All other variables were registered when they were found.

2. The victim-perpetrator relationship was registered in four categories: IPV partners and ex-partners, family, acquaintances, and an unknown person or unknown relationship. The cross-referenced variables 1 and 2 gave three issue-specific denominations: IPV-femicides, non-IPV femicides, and general violence murders.

3. To identify the main actors besides victims, perpetrators, and victims’ families, we registered the sources of information (Wonneberger and Jacobs, 2017) in 17 categories. Three sources maximum were registered per article; rarely do the articles have more than three or do not mention any source, but it is possible. The results were re-coded into seven categories that theoretically share main characteristics in their interpretation of the

problem, for example, activists, NGO members, and protestors are grouped in the same category called social movement.

The extent of responsibility attributed to victims and perpetrators depends on a moral evaluation. Additionally, scholars have discovered the relevance of narratives without any attributed responsibility (González, 2018; Moreno Ramírez, 2021), nominalizing the problem and blurring the GBV issue. Based on the concept of femicide that encompasses a personal and institutional GBV (Lagarde y de los Rios, 2005; Segato, 2014) we created the following four variables.

4. Attribution of responsibility to government institutions. We registered mentions of corruption, impunity, human rights violations, inaction, and misogyny directly attributed to institutions and employees (Segato, 2014; Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, 2015).

5. Nominalization was registered for articles that did not attribute responsibility to any institution or person and instead described femicide as a phenomenon, use metaphors such as ‘wave of violence’, or mention that femicide is part of the general violence (González, 2018; Moreno Ramírez, 2021).

6. Victim-blaming was registered when mentioned: suggestions of promiscuity, negative description, the decision to stay in the relationship with the perpetrator, not reporting violence to police, or not continuing with the legal process (Taylor, 2009); stigmatized occupations such as sex work, dancers, models, and hostesses (Alcocer Perulero, 2014); suggestions of lack of self-care such as going to parties, use of alcohol and drugs, and putting herself in dangerous situations (Arduino, 2014; Fernández López, 2017; Ravelo Blancas, 2017); suggestions that nationality, race, ethnicity, and poverty are related to victims’ misbehaviour (Moreno Ramírez, 2021).

7. Perpetrator-justification was registered in articles that mention jealousy and infidelity as natural causes of rage (Nader, 2014), reasons presented as ‘beyond his control’ such as alcoholism, stress, economic or psychological problems (Gillespie et al., 2013; Ventura, 2014), or describing IPV in terms of equal blame for women and men (Taylor, 2009).

8. Policies and laws, referring to the government institutions responsible for tackling the problem were registered in articles that mention words such as ‘should’, ‘ought’, ‘must’, and ‘ask’, referring to laws and policies (Van Dijk, 1996).

9. Social change was registered in articles that mention cultural misogyny, social machismo, and other intersectional causes, in conjunction with terms such as ‘should avoid’, ‘create awareness’, or ‘social consciousness’ (Van Dijk, 1996).

10. The coding of the visual element was based on the methodology of visual framing by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) and the findings of studies on photographs of femicide in the news (Berlanga Gayón, 2017; González, 2018; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020). First, aiming to register the topic of the photograph on a denotative level, we created categories depending on the person(s) portrayed, place, or situation. The categorization was tested in a deductive-inductive exploratory analysis which revealed data to add a second connotative level that registered actions and context. For example, we created two categories for the victims: alive and deceased. In total, we created thirteen categories that were coded as dummy variables, and every picture can have more than one. For example, pictures of parents protesting and holding up photographs of the victims were registered in three categories: family, protests, and victims alive. The categories without statistical significance were aggregated into ‘other topics’.

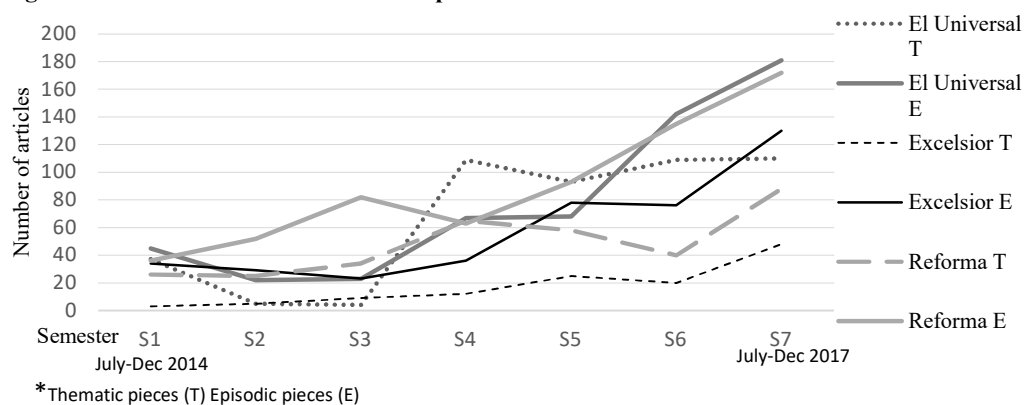
Results

The three news outlets in the study exhibit different behaviour regarding the volume of articles dedicated to femicide. *El Universal* is the only one with a balanced distribution between thematic and episodic pieces, comparing the total number of articles in the corpus. Compared over time, the three outlets increased their coverage in different proportions depending on the frame. Table 2 shows the number of articles categorized as thematic and episodic per outlet and compares the first semester with the last to reveal the increase in attention. Figure 1 shows the evolution per semester.

Table 2. Articles per outlet in the seven-semester period and evolution between the first and last semester (2014.S2 - 2017.S2), broken down by structure frame

Outlet	Thematic framed pieces				Episodic framed pieces			
	N	Initial sem.	Final sem.	Increase	N	Initial sem.	Final sem.	Increase
<i>El Universal</i>	483	37	110	197%	548	45	181	302%
<i>Excelsior</i>	122	3	48	1500%	406	34	130	282%
<i>Reforma</i>	336	26	88	238%	633	36	172	377%
Total	941	66	246	273%	1587	115	483	320%

Figure 1. Evolution of media attention per outlet and structure frame



We classified articles into thematic and episodic, and subgroups by emphasis (Table 3). Our results reveal that episodic pieces can have any of the six emphases, and thematic pieces have just three of them: social problem, authorities, and social movements. This produced nine groups that we call emphasis frames, three thematic

and six episodic. The issue-specific frame elements when found were counted and shown in percentages of each emphasis frame. The categories are reported when their occurrence is at least 5% of the total number of articles (n) in at least one of the emphasis frame groups. Proportions are divided into quartiles, the first from 75% to 100% with the darkest shade, decreasing the shade in the second and third, and the fourth quartile from 1% to 25% with no shade. We created separate tables for each outlet; nevertheless, due to the surprising similarity of the results in almost every variable, we decided to present one aggregated table, this being a finding itself. The tables per outlet are available for consultation on request.

Table 3. Frequencies % of issue-specific elements per emphasis frames groups

Structure		→ Thematic articles (N=941)			Episodic articles (N=1587)					
Frame elements	Emphasis →	Social Problem (n=512)	Authorities (n=237)	Social movement (n=192)	Social Problem (n=28)	Authorities (n=619)	Social movement (n=69)	Primary actors (n=112)	Murder facts (n=677)	Legal (n=82)
	Issue-specific elements									
Definition and causes	Femicide IPV	2.5	3.4	2.1	14.3	25.8	13	17.9	20.2	37.8
	Femicide non-IPV	89.6	84	95.3	57.1	44.6	65.2	31.2	30	35.4
	General violence	7.8	12.7	2.6	28.6	29.6	21.7	50.9	51.3	26.8
Actors	Primary actors	2.1	0.0	13.5	25	19.1	27.5	40.2	13	31.7
	Investigation authorities	7.8	21.1	2.1	17.9	57.5	20.3	46.4	69.6	23.2
	Other authorities	32.4	69.6	15.1	10.7	19.1	2.9	9.8	11.7	41.5
	NGOs and activists	38.3	13	81.2	28.6	10	43.5	7.1	3.1	8.5
	Experts in GBV	4.7	1.7	3.1	10.7	0.6	0.0	1.8	0.4	2.4
	Journalists	17.4	3.8	2.1	28.6	1.9	1.4	0.0	0.8	2.4
	Other sources	11.1	9.3	14.6	10.7	8.9	20.3	21.4	15.9	1.2
	Responsibility attribution	Institutional violence	33.2	13.9	39.6	17.9	23.9	14.5	1.8	1.9
	Nominalization	22.7	36.3	29.7	0.0	1	2.9	0.9	12.7	0.0
Moral evaluation	Victim-blaming	5.7	5.9	1	7.1	17.6	4.3	25	30.4	19.5
	Perpetrator-justification	1.6	0.9	0.0	10.7	7.3	2.9	16.1	16.3	6.1
Recommended treatment	Public policies	42.6	75.5	35.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Social change	19	2.5	11	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Visual	Victims alive	3.1	2.9	5.7	21.4	18.4	17.4	22.3	13.8	17.1
	Victims deceased	1.4	2.5	0.5	0.0	4	1.4	4.5	12.7	3.7
	Perpetrators	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.9	4.3	14.3	14.8	17.1
	Victim's families	0.6	1.3	1.6	3.6	2.6	7.2	5.4	1	8.5
	Persons NGOs/institutions	16	35	5.2	0.0	4.9	5.8	2.7	0.9	2.4
	Protests	20.9	14.3	57.8	7.1	12.3	49.3	4.5	4.8	11
	Police theme	3.1	3.4	0.0	7.1	8.6	7.2	5.4	18.6	7.3
	Other topics	17.4	13.9	15.1	14.3	18.4	18.8	15.2	10.3	13.4

As inferred from Table 3, we found significant differences in problem definitions between thematic and episodic framed articles. Thematic articles tend to define the problem as femicide which implies GBV, but between 84% and 95.3% are focused on murders perpetrated by a stranger and rarely mentioned that women can be killed by their (ex)partners (less than 4%). Episodic framed pieces are diverse, having articles referring to IPV femicides, but also a large percentage (between 21.7% and 51.3%) defining the murder as part of the general violence in the country, disentangling it from GBV. Even murders committed by (ex)partners or siblings can be defined as general violence, not femicides.

A relevant finding is that the articles rarely contain thematic and episodic frames at the same time. Episodic articles tend to not relate the event with its social facet and thematic articles seldom mentioned specific cases, differing from the findings of previous studies (Iyengar, 1994; Rucinski, 1992). Thematic articles are almost completely abstract, disconnected from the victims and their families who appear as sources only when they are part of a protest.

In several thematic pieces, we found attribution of responsibility to institutions (from 13.9% to 39.6%) and a phenomenon (from 22.7% to 36.3%). However, episodic pieces were not necessarily linked to responsibility attribution to institutions. This element is related to the emphasis frame and the sources, being common in the social problem (17.9%), authorities (23.9%), and social movement frames (14.5%), but rarely mentioned in primary actors (1.8%), murder facts (1.9%), and legal emphasis frames (6.1%). Articles in which the sources are activists are more likely to mention institutional violence, and activists are the second main source in five of the emphasis frames, just after the authorities.

The results show that victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification narratives intersect with all types of frames. However, these are more common in frames in which investigation authorities are the main source, such as the largest group, murder facts (30.4%), primary actors (25%), and the second-largest group, the episodic authorities' frame (17.6%). This consolidates the conclusions of previous studies that institutions are the main source of gender discrimination discourses (Segato, 2014; Wright, 2011).

Thematic articles highlight the need for laws and policies; unfortunately, IPV femicides are not part of the social problem that these articles described.

The analysis of visual elements shows that there are two main topics: the image of the victims alive in episodic pieces and protests in thematic pieces. This differs from the predictions of previous studies about the use of the pictures of the victims' bodies as a sensationalist element (Berlanga Gayón, 2017; González, 2018).

Conclusions and discussion

The three-level methodology proposed in the present work demonstrated an effective in-depth analysis of thematic and episodic frames. We contribute to frame studies by providing empirical evidence of how differential content in thematic and episodic frames can convey distinct explanations of causes, individuals affected, people responsible, and solutions, and therefore appear as two different issues. These results are not generalizable to all studies of thematic and episodic frames, but this paper presents one of the first examples (to our knowledge) of a comprehensive examination and can serve as a reference for future studies.

We demonstrated that on the topic of femicide, the public debate in thematic articles lacks connection with the reality of the victims. Episodic articles, instead, individualize the problem, detaching it from the societal roots of GBV. The findings

related to the denomination of the problem and the attribution of responsibility align with previous frame studies (Aarøe, 2011; Boukes, 2022; Hart, 2011), but we demonstrated correlations in all the issue-specific frame elements. The table of frequencies of results provided a strong tool to demonstrate that news articles are rarely comprised of two interrelated variables. Instead, a holistic approach can contribute to a better understanding of the issue's facets and nuances. The simplicity can help to seize opportunities for this proposed methodology to be reproduced and consulted by scholars and others, contributing to the dissemination of scientific knowledge and social awareness.

Our results reveal that the public discussion of laws and policies is only directed towards non-intimate partner violence (non-IPV) femicides and that IPV femicides are treated as private matters. In 2011, Melissa Wright found that Mexican authorities tended to blame women for putting themselves in danger by being in public spaces and not taking shelter in their homes, ignoring that in many cases the perpetrators are inside their homes. Media coverage is still reinforcing that discourse, presenting a distorted picture of the reality of femicide which 'could influence people's perceptions of who is at risk of becoming a victim of crime, and who is to be feared as the perpetrator' (Brodie, 2021: 14). Hence, we have unveiled and analysed novel aspects. The relevance of social movements and the positioning of activists as the second most used source constructs a narrative of balanced confrontation between two political actors. In general, measuring sources was a key element to understanding the behaviour of each issue-specific element.

Regarding substantiveness, we argue that it can be measured by the extent and quality of the communicative material explaining the issue's causes and implications. We took into account the way issue-specific frame elements are depicted (or are absent)

and contrasted this information with the findings of previous studies on femicide news such as sensationalism (Ananías Soto and Vergara Sánchez, 2016; Balica et al., 2022; Boonzaier, 2022), victim-blaming (Alcocer Perulero, 2014; Gillespie et al., 2013; Slakoff and Brennan, 2019; Taylor, 2009), perpetrator-justification (García et al., 2021; Gutiérrez Aldrete, 2020) and calls to improve explanations of the personal and social context of GBV, the use of experts as sources, and avoidance of discriminatory portrayals of victims (Brodie, 2021; Gutierrez Aldrete, 2022; Richards et al., 2014). We find that articles that attributed the problem to general violence are the least substantive, as they lack any explanation of gender-based violence (GBV), which is the central characteristic of femicide. The higher percentages of these articles are episodic with emphasis on primary actors (50.9% of n=112) and murder facts (51.3% of n=677). The authorities-framed articles tended to be procedural (Entman, 2004; Hänggli, 2020), particularly the episodic ones, which often just reported the discovery of the bodies also lacking substantiveness. The thematic authorities frame discussed laws and policies, but frequently nominalized the problem as a phenomenon without any reference to perpetrators (García et al., 2021) and did not mention socio-cultural aspects. Therefore, the most substantive group is the episodic social problem frame; although it is the smallest group, these exemplify how stories can connect personal cases with a broader context of GBV and explained that femicides are a social issue. This is the group with the highest percentage of GBV experts as sources (10.7 of n=28), being the only group that surpasses 5%, and the one with the most variety in sources, which implies a range of viewpoints.

We consider that our findings provide a tool to forecast attitudes and behaviours of news readers towards the issue and the actors involved. We demonstrate that victim-blaming and perpetrator-justification structures are embedded in all the frames,

especially episodic, maintaining continuity through outlet and time. This leads to stronger effects by producing empathy (Aarøe, 2011) with the perpetrator, and feelings (Powell et al., 2019) of rejection towards the victims. On the other hand, the thematic articles lacked the humanization of the problem which reduces the possibility of producing emotional affects in the audience (Scheufele and Iyengar, 2012).

It could be argued that our design for presenting results is just a different way from previous studies and that, by not separating articles with victim-blaming and those with perpetrator-justification, it could diminish the importance of denouncing these practices. We believe it is the opposite, as we demonstrate that no matter what the frame is, those structures can still be present. Nevertheless, one limitation of the study is that we did not measure the positive or neutral representation of victims and perpetrators. Another limitation is that the coding of the entire corpus was done by the first author, having a second coder for one hundred articles to measure intercoder reliability with good results in all the variables.

We aimed to build a typology of issue-specific frames of femicide. We believe it also has application in different socio-cultural contexts and even in other topics that deal with human rights violations, which could be beneficial for comparative studies. The methodology still needs to be validated in other contexts to affirm that we achieved that objective. This we see as an opportunity for future research.

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