

DE LA CALLE IS THE (ONLY) OPTION FOR THE CENTRE

Authors: Juan Luis Suárez | Retweets point the way forward.
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A key measure in the Twittersphere is the number of times a famous user – e.g., celebrity or politician – gets her tweets retweeted by her followers. Retweets show a strong allegiance between users and their leaders, and retweeting a message is usually perceived as an endorsement of the opinion contained in the original tweet. The more retweets and users retweeting your messages, the better.

DATA FACTS ►

31,442 users
1,204,717 retweets
February 2018

The same applies to politics in Twitter. The volume of retweets shows the strength and size of a candidate’s followings. Petro is again the leader among Colombia’s presidential candidates. He was retweeted almost 46,000 times in February by almost 14,000 different users. Duque got retweeted even more (45,993) than Petro but by fewer users (9,000). Fajardo, De La Calle and Vargas Lleras remain way behind in retweets and users. Uribe is still a strong force in shaping up public opinion as he received 50,726 retweets from 12,806 users; however, he is not running and, since November, most of his support has been transferred to Duque (see [Cultureplex’s DataPoints #1](#)).

RETWEETS BY CANDIDATE ►

Duque 45,993
Petro 45,878
Fajardo 13,608
De La Calle 9,939
Vargas Lleras 6,629

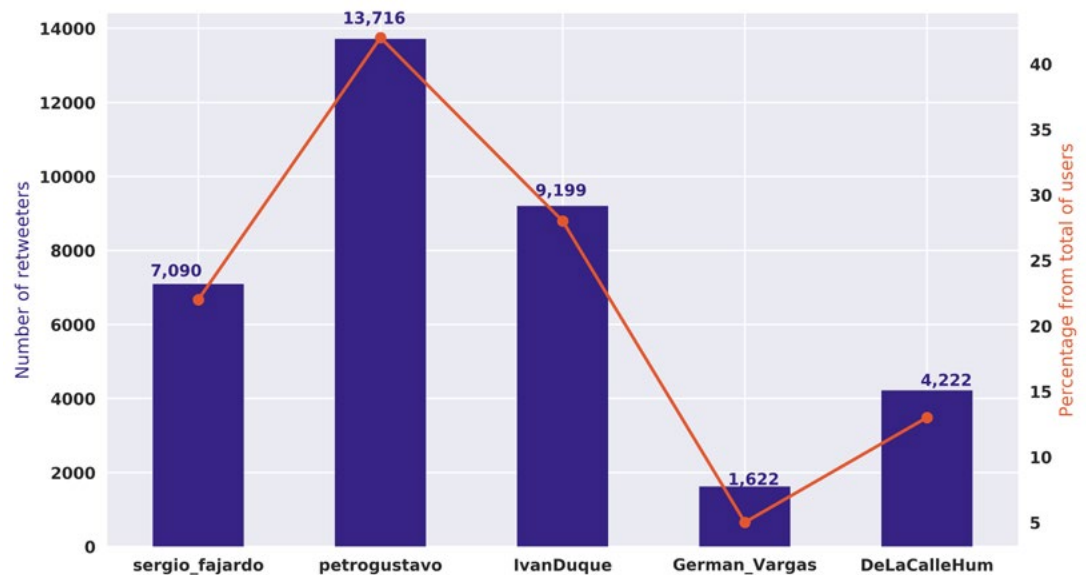


Figure 1. Number of users that retweeted each candidate and the percentage it represents of the 31,442 retweeters in February.

The number of retweets, however, is not enough to estimate the value of this metric. A user can, for example, regularly retweet messages by Shakira and Carlos Vives, and only

sometimes those by Juanes. Is this user closer to Shakira than to Carlos Vives? Does it mean she will never purchase Juanes' music? In the music market, you can always buy several albums but in politics you can only vote for one politician: where would her vote go if the user is retweeting messages by two politicians? Who will she vote for?

POLITICAL CLOSENESS

We analyzed political similarity between candidates to determine different scenarios provided by Colombia's presidential candidates' retweet activity. We measured this by calculating the number of users who retweeted two given candidates, which suggests these users share the two politicians' opinions. The intersection between two candidates' retweeters is important because it indicates the likelihood of users switching to the other candidate once the first is defeated or withdraws from the race.

POLITICAL DISTANCE ►

Political distance may indicate how support will shift as some of the candidates lagged behind or exit the race.

It is very unlikely Petro's and Duque's followers will vote for the other candidate if one of them loses in the first round. This shows in the analysis of their common network of retweeters: they only have 155 users in common, barely representing 1% of their respective followers. Even more distance exists between Petro and Vargas Lleras: they just have 58 common followers. Vargas Lleras is no more popular with Fajardo's (43) or De La Calle's followers (46); instead, it is more likely De La Calle's followers vote for Duque (129) than for Vargas Lleras. In any case, Vargas Lleras' votes will probably end up with Duque as they have 326 common retweeters.

PAIRS OF CANDIDATES	COMMON USERS	SIMILARITY INDEX
Petro / De La Calle	1120	0.0624
Fajardo / De La Calle	657	0.0581
Fajardo / Petro	815	0.0392
Duque / Vargas Lleras	326	0.0301
Duque / De La Calle	129	0.0096
Vargas Lleras / De La Calle	46	0.0079
Fajardo / Duque	113	0.0069
Petro / Duque	155	0.0068
Fajardo / Vargas Lleras	43	0.0049
Petro / Vargas Lleras	58	0.0038

Table 1. Pairs of candidates and numbers of common users between them.

SIMILARITY ►

Political similarity is calculated using the *Jaccard Coefficient*.

THE KEY LAYS AT THE CENTER

Petro and De La Calle have the largest group of common users (1,120). Their political similarity index is the highest among all pairs of candidates (.0624), including Fajardo and De La Calle (.0581), who many experts see as possible allies, and even Fajardo and Petro (.0392), who were supposed to share some of the Polo's voters. Not even Duque and Vargas Lleras (.0301) are as similar as Petro and De La Calle.

What does this mean? First, the chance of Fajardo/López attracting some of Petro's voters in the first round is very low (and the other way around is true, too). Petro has been very successful in getting most of the left's support, while Fajardo's tone has not helped retain

Polo's voters he needed to become the centre-left candidate.

Fajardo and De La Calle are very similar (.0581) and an alliance between the two groups would help consolidate a space in the middle that could challenge Petro first and Duque later. The similarity between De La Calle and Fajardo is also noted in the percentage of common retweeters over the total of their supporters: 9.1% for Fajardo and 15.6% for De La Calle.

De La Calle, however, is the most “transversal” candidate of them all, as he shares the highest number of common users with most other candidates. It is true his base is not as big as Petro's or Fajardo's, but it is the base that connects with more of these two candidates' users. In fact, De La Calle has almost double the users in common with Petro (1,120) than he has with Fajardo (657). His similarity with Petro is also the highest between any pair of candidates (.0624).

COMMON USERS ►

Actually, the intersection of the users retweeting Petro, De la Calle and Fajardo shows the potential of an alliance among the three of them, or of the remaining candidate in a second round (see Figure 2). For this potential to be activated, a leader that is attractive to most of them needs to emerge.

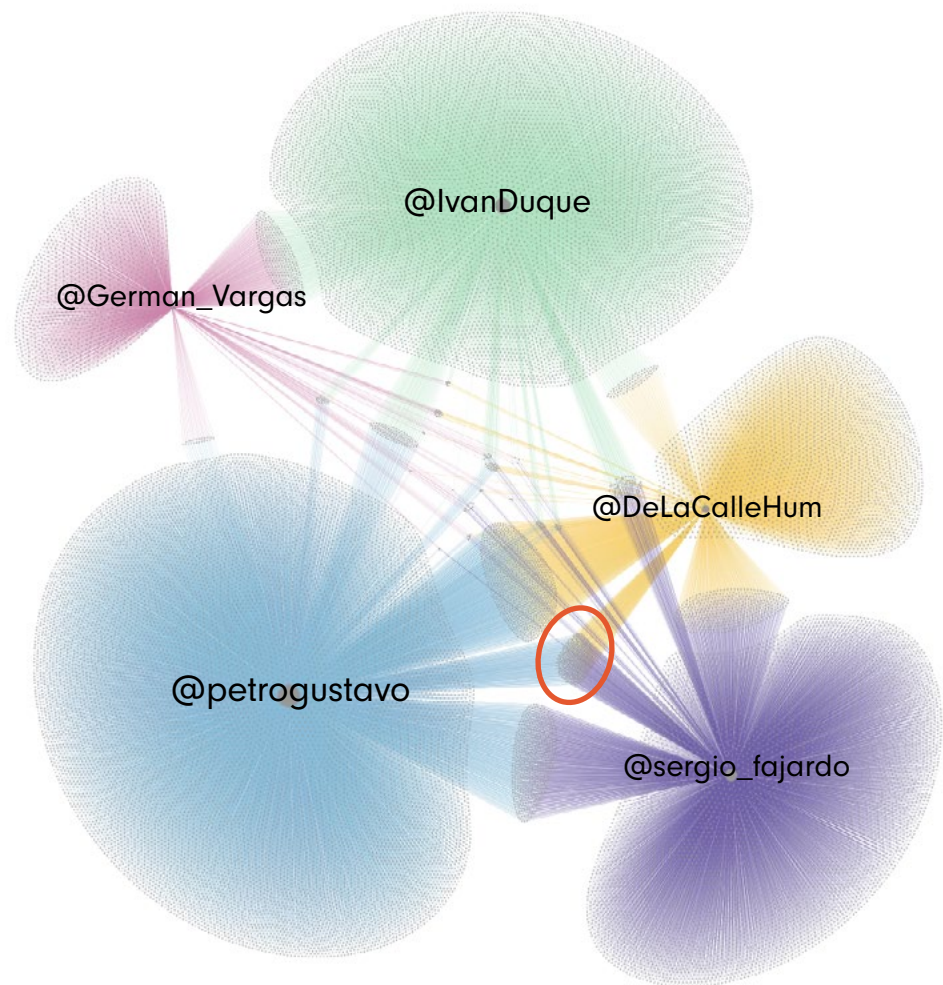


Figure 2. Network of retweets between users during February.

With a very well-established candidate on the right (Duque), the only option for all other candidates is to produce an alliance that will allow their ideas to make it to the second round. Petro feels he has earned the right to be that candidate as he has been the most

successful and the only one with similar numbers to Duque's; however, many people from the centre and moderate left don't want to vote for Petro due to his record as Bogotá's mayor and perceived extreme views on economic and social issues.

Fajardo could collect most of De La Calle's support, but he will not be able to attract enough voters from Petro because they have produced a cleavage between their groups. This has been reinforced by many of the Polo's followers moving over to Petro instead of staying with Robledo and Fajardo.

De La Calle is the candidate who could collect Fajardo's support and also steer some of the voters he shares with Petro away from the former mayor to expand his electoral base around a great centre-left coalition. He will likely also need some help from the centre-right, and the only likely scenario for that is that he reaches a deal with the Party of the U (Santos' party and the manager of large numbers of votes in some departments). Even this deal is more probable with De La Calle as leader than with Fajardo.

Will De La Calle, coming from a smaller base of voters, be able to convince Fajardo/López/Robledo to make him the leader, while securing the support of the Party of the U? If he wants to become the next President of Colombia, this is the moment to show the same negotiating abilities he showed to reach the peace agreement that ended Colombia's internal conflict. For the centre-left, negotiating around De La Calle is the only way forward.

METHODOLOGY

We downloaded tweets using the Twitter's streaming API with the following query:

"A_OrdonezM, IvanDuque, navarrowolff, CarlosAlfonsoVR, J_Clopatofsky, PalomaValenciaL, CarlosHolmesTru, JAIME_ARAUJO_R, petrogustavo, carlosecaicedo, JERobledo, piedadcordoba, charoguerra, juankpinzon, RafaNietoLoaiza, ClaraLopezObre, juanmanuelgalan, sergio_fajardo, ClaudiaLopez, LizarraldeRuben, TimoFARC, CristoBustos, LuisAlfreRamos, UbeimarDelgadoB, DeLaCalleHum, mluciamirez, velascoluisf, German_Vargas, MoralesViviane, JuanManSantos, AlvaroUribeVel"

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