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MARCH SEES AN ASTOUNDING 142% INCREASE IN ACTIVITY

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The campaign begins all over again, and Colombians are more interested than ever.

SUMMARY

DATA FACTS ▶

In March we gathered **2,981,341** retweets from **233,393** retweeters.

The presidential campaign has begun with new impetus following the March 11th elections to Congress, the Easter holidays and the lack of merger between Fajardo and De La Calle. Extraordinary interest in the candidates' debates echoes what can be detected on Twitter: the volume of campaign tweets has gone up from 1,870,709 (with 198,825 users) to 4,519,579 (334,861 users) – a growth of 142% – between February to March.

All candidates' followers have continued to grow steadily since February, with Petro way ahead of all others. Of course, this data needs to put in relation with the number of votes that the different candidates got in the March election. And there, Duque got a healthy headstart.

CANDIDATES' FOLLOWERS ▶

The growth rate has been computed according to the number of followers on February and April.

CANDIDATE	FEBRUARY 28th	MARCH 31st	APRIL 8th	GROWTH RATE %
Petro	2,910,868	2,936,051	3,046,433	4.66
Fajardo	1,071,183	1,152,316	1,178,410	10.01
Vargas Lleras	730,556	747,780	753,385	3.12
Duque	171,366	247,948	268,999	56.97
De La Calle	67,269	95,303	107,592	59.94

Table 1. Number of followers per candidate since February until April 8th, 2018.

RETWEETING IS THE KEY

In an election with so many unknowns, the March elections marked certain trends, but also left many questions unanswered. Pollers are still trying to figure out how to capture people's intentions and how to validate their polls with other tools. The volume of retweets shows the strength and size of a candidate's followings – the more retweets and users retweeting your messages, the better.

Petro leads the increase
of retweeting activity
followed by Duque. The
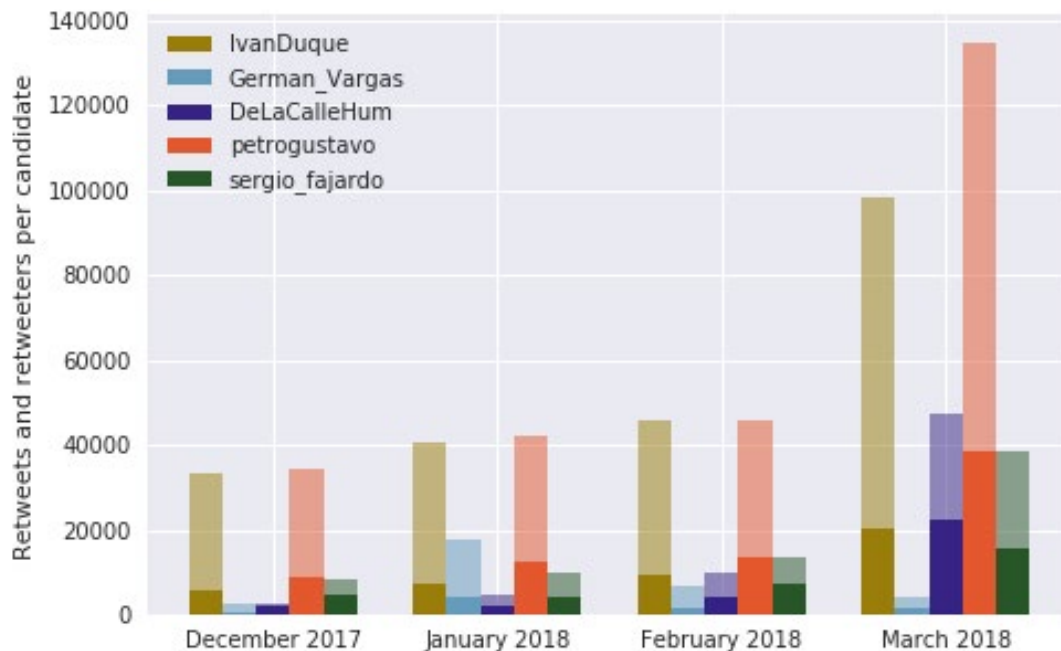other candidates cannot
keep pace.

Figure 1. Number of retweets (lightest colors) and number of retweeters (darkest colors) per candidate from December 2017 until March 2018.

In March, we see four clear trends:

• The technical tie in retweeting activity between Petro and Duque has broken in favour of the former mayor of Bogotá. Petro has managed to leave the group behind by a wide margin, and Duque is playing catch up, as though he has reached a temporary ceiling.

• De La Calle is in front of Fajardo in retweets and retweeters.

• Vargas Lleras has (almost) disappeared from this public sphere as his data is negligible.

• The overall volume of retweets has gone up by 147% with respect to February.

MARKET SHARE IN RETWEETING ACTIVITY

RETWEETERS BY
CANDIDATE ▶

These % are not
exclusive: some users are
retweeting more than
one candidate.

When we look at the percentage of retweets captured by each of the candidates over total retweets produced in March, Petro wins again: he has 17% of users who retweet, whereas De La Calle and Duque each have 9%, although the latter has a larger volume of messages (3% vs 2% for De La Calle, but far from the 5% for Petro). The conclusion is that on Twitter, Petro has a larger number of loyal followers (those who retweet him), and they are much more active (they produce more retweets).

It is important to note that this also marks a clear growth for Petro in March. He had "just" a 10% market share of retweeting users in February and is now at 17%, compared to 7% and 9% for Duque, 3% and 9% for De La Calle, and 5% and 7% for Fajardo. Vargas Lleras stays at 1% in users and barely 0.5% in retweets.

	NUMBER OF RETWEETERS	% OF MARCH RETWEETERS	NUMBER OF RETWEETS	% OF MARCH RETWEETS
petrogustavo	38,682	17	134,574	5
DeLaCalleHum	22,099	9	47,129	2
IvanDuque	20,428	9	98,250	3
sergio_fajardo	15,452	7	38,631	1
German_Vargas	1,819	1	4,143	0

Table 2. Number of retweeters and retweets per candidate, including the percentage of the total volume of retweeters and retweets in March respectively.

THE POLITICAL CLOSENESS AMONG CANDIDATES

De La Calle is the common ground between Petro and Fajardo. He has a very high similarity index to Petro (0.1178) and even higher with Fajardo (0.1277). But, this relationship between the candidates' followers does not translate to Petro and Fajardo (just 0.0444), although one would assume the Polo would have played a bridge effect. At this point, it is difficult to accept Petro will grow with Fajardo's voters, or the other way around. Likewise, the main weakness for Duque is that his similarity indexes with all other candidates are very low. He is an island – a strong one, but very isolated. This means he needs to put all his eggs into winning in the first round.
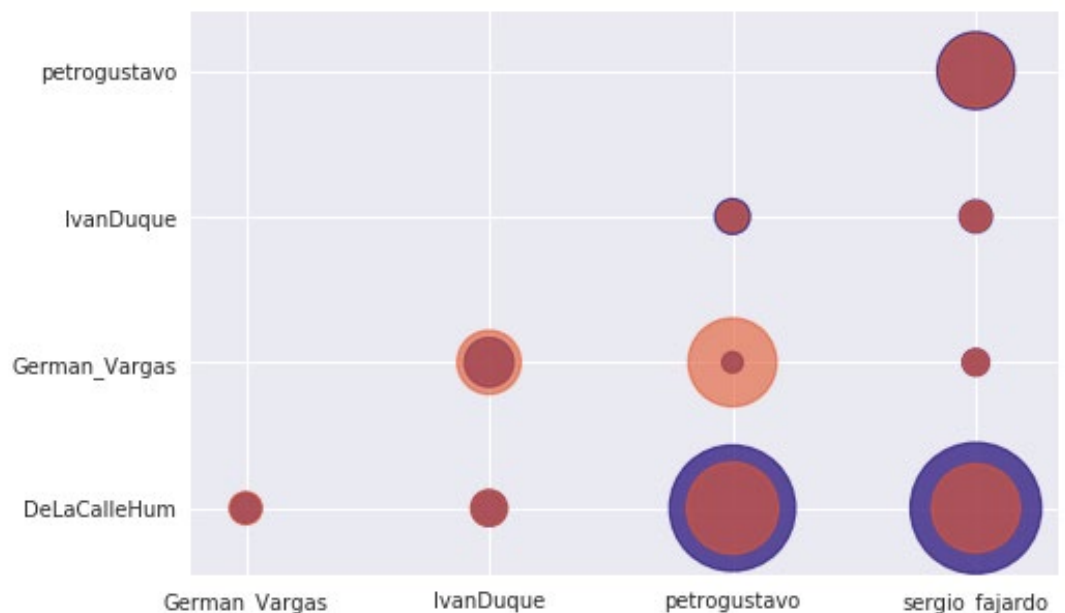
Figure 2. Political closeness between candidates in February (orange) and March (purple).

Political similarity is key to determining different scenarios for the future: it indicates how likely it is users who currently support two candidates will switch to the remaining

candidate once the other withdraws from the campaign or loses in the previous round.

WHAT WILL DE LA CALLE DO WITH HIS POLITICAL CAPITAL?

Maybe nothing, especially if the candidate and the Liberal Party split their support right after the first round.

However, we still think De La Calle is the key to this election if he plays his cards well. It is very difficult for him to win (the campaign has made too many mistakes and his base is small); however, his ability to talk to followers who also support Petro or Fajardo makes him very important if he decides to throw his support behind one of them. Of course, if he supports one of these candidates and the Liberal Party does the same with Duque, their influence will dilute.

De La Calle has a very small base of loyal followers and a great deal of potential. It is difficult to foresee how, or if, he will be able to monetize the potential. Only 381 users have constantly retweeted his messages every single month since December (Figure 4) which does not compare to the 2,946 loyal to Petro, the 2,204 to Duque or even the 865 who keep retweeting Fajardo's tweets.

However, De La Calle experiences very little erosion in retweeting activity. His account is the one with the smallest decrease in retweeting activity (we don't count Vargas Lleras as his account does not have much track one way or another), while the increase rate puts him right behind Petro and way ahead of Duque and Fajardo.
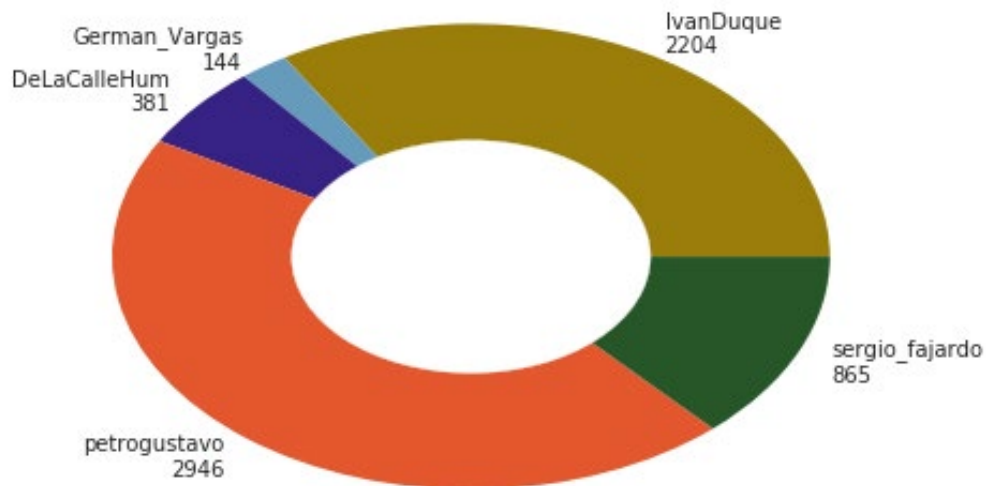

Figure 3. Loyal retweeters: users that have constantly retweeted the candidate from December to March.

There is an increasingly interesting, but very remote, scenario from this side of the spectrum: to fight Duque in the first round to pass to a second round in which De La Calle (Fajardo's campaign does not seem to take off) would face off with Petro to become the next President of Colombia. It would be a very difficult strategy to operationalize, but not impossible now that the famous coffee with Fajardo did not produce an alliance. Or maybe, it is that voters, as they appear in Twitter, are showing the candidates from the

center-left what they wish they'd have done from the very beginning.

How De La Calle and the Liberal Party use their political capital will still be key if he does not pass to the second round.
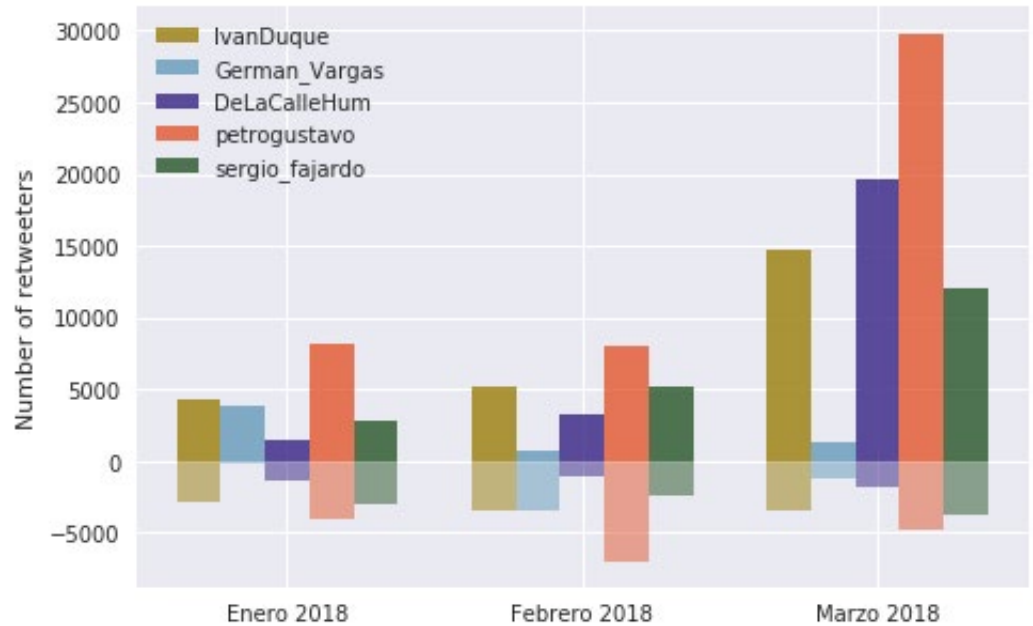
Figure 4. Monthly increase and decrease number of retweeters per candidate.