



Razón y Palabra

ISSN: 1605-4806

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Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador
Ecuador

Kraus Luvizotto, Caroline
Ciudadanía, Información y Comunicación en los Movimientos y Contramovimientos Sociales
Razón y Palabra, vol. 29, núm. 123, 2025, Mayo-Agosto 2026, pp. 69-78
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador
Quito, Ecuador

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26807/rp.v29i123.2237>

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Ciudadanía, Información y Comunicación en los Movimientos y Contramovimientos Sociales

Citizenship, Information, and Communication in Social Movements and Countermovements

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DOI: 10.26807/rp.v29i123.2237

Fecha de envío: 20/03/2025 | Fecha de aceptación: 06/08/2025 | Fecha de publicación: 30/08/2025

Resumen

Este estudio aborda el papel central de la comunicación en la construcción y contestación de los derechos de ciudadanía, resaltando su relevancia para las transformaciones sociales en el mundo contemporáneo a través de las acciones de movimientos y contramovimientos sociales. A partir de los procedimientos metodológicos prescritos en la Revisión Sistemática de la Literatura, este estudio analiza la importancia de los movimientos sociales para la participación social, el ejercicio de la ciudadanía y el mantenimiento de la democracia, y su recorrido teórico contempla la relevancia de la información y la comunicación en este contexto. Los resultados de este estudio sugieren que los movimientos sociales son actores políticos activos en la esfera pública que, aunque no dialoguen con todos los sectores de la sociedad o con el poder político, son portadores legítimos de las demandas específicas de determinados grupos sociales. La disputa entre movimientos y contramovimientos sociales, aunque muchas veces marcada por antagonismos profundos, es esencial para la vitalidad de la democracia, ya que abre espacio para la diversidad de perspectivas y para el compromiso ciudadano en cuestiones de interés colectivo. La presencia de diferentes grupos en la sociedad civil, incluidos los contramovimientos, es una prueba de la diversidad de ideas y opiniones, y es esencial que exista espacio para el diálogo y la negociación entre ellos, con el fin de construir una sociedad más justa y democrática.

Palabras clave: Ciudadanía, información, comunicación, movimientos sociales, contramovimientos.

Abstract

This study addresses the central role of communication in the construction and contestation of citizenship rights, highlighting its relevance to social transformations in the contemporary world through the actions of social movements and countermovements. Based on the methodological procedures prescribed in the Systematic Literature Review, this study examines the importance of social movements for social participation, the exercise of citizenship, and the maintenance of democracy, with its theoretical framework emphasizing the significance of information and communication in this context. The results of this study suggest that social movements are political actors active in the public sphere who, even without engaging with all sectors of society or political power, are legitimate carriers of the specific demands of social groups. The dispute between social movements and countermovements, although often marked by profound antagonisms, is essential to the vitality of democracy, as it creates space for diverse perspectives and encourages citizen engagement in matters of collective interest. The presence of different groups in civil society, including countermovements, is evidence of the diversity of ideas and opinions, and it is essential that there be space for dialogue and negotiation among

them in order to build a more just and democratic society.

Keywords: Citizenship, information, communication, social movements, countermovements.

1.- Introduction

Information and communication have become essential for the achievement and maintenance of rights and for the exercise of citizenship. Nowadays, much of their importance derives from the potential of the internet and its informational structure, characterized by the decentralization of access, interconnectivity, and simultaneity. These elements have transformed communicational action by enabling individuals to produce and disseminate their own content increasingly rapidly, interactively, and participatively. However, despite these advances, significant challenges remain in ensuring the full realization of this right worldwide. Disinformation, manipulation of information, and restrictions on access to information are persistent threats that must be addressed (Kraus Luvizotto, et al., 2024). Therefore, it is crucial that social movements continue to promote the right to information and communication as a pillar of democracy, seeking ways to strengthen government transparency, improve media literacy, and ensure equal access to information for all citizens.

Social movements play a significant role in democratic dynamics. In a healthy democracy, social movements are recognized as legitimate representatives of the demands of social groups, serving as vehicles through which the demands and concerns of civil society are expressed and negotiated. They organize and disseminate mobilization agendas and issues (Luvizotto, 2022), and in this context, citizens' participation is essential for the maintenance of the system.

The communication and information networks established by social movements are essential for underpinning the alternative public sphere and building the foundations of the movement itself. This leads to the understanding that the relationship between social movements, information, and communication is both intimate and intense. According to Gohn (2008, p. 38), social movements have the "capacity to transform social actors into socio-political subjects, collectives, builders of their histories" and possess the ability to "form alliances, integrate into networks, establish partnerships, connect with other movements that share similar principles and values, and undertake other actions expressed in the political engagement of a movement"

The intense circulation of media products, immersed in what Braga (2012) defines as the process of the mediatization of society, enables the dissemination of discourses and narratives advocated by a wide range of social actors and organizations, as well as by the state itself. In this scenario, political actors such as social movements and countermovements play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and constructing the political agenda. Through their active participation in the media and on digital platforms, they can reach a broader and more diverse audience, promoting their ideas, demands, and values.

Countermovements are characterized as organizational and mobilization processes with a conservative nature or aligned with dominant sectors/classes. These actions are carried out by individuals, groups, and/or socio-political organizations that share common opinions and, in general, advocate for the maintenance of the status quo or the stability of a particular social group. They typically promote agendas that oppose those of social movements, competing for space and visibility in the public sphere (Martin-Vicente, Kraus-Luvizotto, 2025).

Social movements and countermovements bring a variety of perspectives and voices to public discourse. They represent diverse interests and groups and, through their repertoires of action, can encourage social participation by involving citizens in activities such as protests, petitions, and political engagement, regardless of their political views or societal projects. This dynamic of opposition can strengthen democracy, as citizens feel

more connected and engaged in the political process.

Following the methodological procedures prescribed by the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), based on the protocols described by Galvão & Ricarte (2019), this study addresses the importance of social movements for social participation and democracy. The theoretical framework encompasses aspects inherent to the exercise of citizenship and social participation, emphasizing the role of information and communication in this context. It conceptualizes and establishes a relationship between social movements and countermovements, while recognizing a certain performative dimension in both movements and countermovements. This performativity is manifested in their mobilization, organization, and articulation around political objectives, which is crucial for disseminating their demands and claims to society at large and to those in political power.

Initially, the SLR themes were defined by establishing social movements, countermovements, citizenship, and social participation as the main objects of study, with a particular focus on the importance of communication and information in this context. National and international databases were consulted, and the search targeted strategically selected themes in the fields of Communication, Sociology, and Information Science. The review prioritized publications from the 2000s onward, with special emphasis on works published since 2010, while still recognizing the relevance of classic texts from earlier periods. In the end, 82 references were selected and their content systematized: relevant information from each study (such as methods and results) was extracted and recorded systematically. Of these 82 references, 18 were used to compose the text presented here.

The relevance of this study lies in understanding the triad of citizenship, information, and communication as fundamental pillars for contemporary social movements and countermovements. The relationship between these elements becomes central to current debates on democracy and social participation, given that active citizenship can only be fully realized when there is free and equitable access to information and the right to communication is guaranteed. In a context where information circulates increasingly rapidly and extensively, the ability to organize collectively and articulate narratives around social demands becomes an essential tool for both progressive movements and those seeking to preserve the status quo.

This interrelation is especially significant in light of the growing complexity of disputes in the public sphere, exacerbated by mediatization and the amplification of voices through digital platforms. However, while the rapid dissemination of information offers new opportunities, it also presents challenges: disinformation, data manipulation, and the spread of narratives that undermine democratic participation become obstacles that both movements and countermovements must confront. By addressing these aspects, this text aims to contribute to a critical reflection on contemporary forms of social organization, providing theoretical insights for understanding the relationship between citizenship and communication in contexts of conflict and social transformation.

Social movements, by using communication as a strategic tool, promote the visibility of their causes, while countermovements employ these same tools to construct opposing narratives, revealing a contested arena for public opinion that directly impacts democracy. Thus, this study seeks to highlight the central role of communication in the construction and contestation of citizenship rights, emphasizing its relevance to social transformations in the contemporary world.

The reflections presented in this study suggest that social movements are political actors operating in the public sphere who, even without engaging with all sectors of society or political power, are legitimate carriers of the specific demands of social groups and act in favor of democracy through civic practices. The presence of diverse groups in civil society — including social countermovements — is evidence of the variety and plurality of ideas and opinions. It is crucial that space for dialogue and negotiation exists among these groups to foster the development of a more just and democratic society.

2.- Social Movements, Countermovements, and Social Participation

Social movements aim at social transformation based on a societal project — a worldview historically constructed from the experiences of a particular social group. Social movements are collective actions with political and social characteristics. These collective actions can take many forms, including protests, demonstrations, digital activism, artistic representations, and occupations of public or private spaces, and they may or may not involve violence.

This study revisited the main theories regarding social movement actions. In response to perspectives that pointed to irrational expression or mass behavior, the Resource Mobilization Theory emphasizes rational decision-making and resource management to achieve proposed objectives, disregarding both the symbolic aspects of culture and the relationship with social and political structures (Alonso, 2009).

The Political Process Theory does not exclude the rational and organizational nature of movements but expands this view by incorporating their relationship with structures through concepts such as Political Opportunity Structures (Tarrow, 2011), which refer to the conditions that constrain or facilitate collective contentious action; and Repertoires of Contention (Tilly, 1995), which refer to the limited range of options from which social movements choose to act.

The New Social Movements perspective, more widely embraced in Latin America, emphasizes cultural aspects, such as collective identity, which mediates between social actors and political structures (Melucci, 1989). These theoretical strands highlight different aspects, all relevant to understanding social movements, and converge towards a comprehensive perspective that integrates structures, resources, and culture (Bringel, 2012).

The political changes that have taken place in Brazil over the past decades, marked by the emergence of left-wing governments that promoted social inclusion policies and the conservative reaction to these governments from traditional political and economic sectors, have resulted in political polarization in the region, impacting democracy and citizen participation (Martin-Vicente, Kraus-Luvizotto, 2025).

The role of social movements and countermovements in political polarization is linked to the dissemination of ideas and values, the construction of political identities, and the mobilization of society around specific demands. Their repertoire of action can be employed both to reinforce polarization and to mediate between different groups within civil society.

In Brazil, in particular, the phenomenon of political polarization has been heavily influenced by the actions of social countermovements. These groups, often connected to political and economic interests, use various communication channels to construct narratives that criminalize their opponents and seek to influence public opinion. The dissemination of false news and the creation of distorted narratives about facts are common practices among these groups, which aim to delegitimize social movements and their causes. Countermovements oppose the agendas and narratives of social movements and provide elements for analyzing and understanding their repertoire of action and their relationship with civil society, socio-political organizations, and the State — a context in which information is a crucial element (Martin-Vicente, Kraus-Luvizotto, 2025).

According to Silva and Pereira (2020, p. 32), “a common element in all definitions of countermovements is that they are constructed in opposition and conflict with social movements that challenge or threaten the interests, values, lifestyles, social positions, and other aspects of a particular segment of society.” When social movements advance in their achievements — whether through public opinion support or when the state becomes more favorable to their demands — what was once a generic concern for certain individuals or social groups transforms into a concrete and imperative threat, “creating an

opportunity for the constitution of a social countermovement" (Silva & Pereira, 2020, p. 36). This is because, according to Rezende (2016), countermovements do not oppose the social movement directly, but rather the progress resulting from its mobilization.

Certainly, the narrative opposition presented by social countermovements exerts a strong influence on the communication process, as it often seeks to delegitimize the agendas of social movements, either through distortion or minimization. The communicational dynamics established by social movements, in opposition to countermovement narratives, emerge as an important mechanism for defending their political agendas and promoting broader social change.

Luvizotto et al. (2023) argue that communicational dynamics can both constitute and reinforce asymmetrical power relations, while also serving as a means to revisit such asymmetries. Although information is inherently linked to power relations, its emancipatory potential remains significant. The authors also assert that information is essential for citizens, social groups, and organizations to fully participate in the democratic process.

The relationship between movements, social countermovements, and social participation is filled with tensions and challenges, yet it also presents opportunities for strengthening democracy. Social movements, in their efforts to transform established structures, find in mobilization and digital activism a fertile space to express their demands and promote change. However, social countermovements, often associated with conservative forces, employ similar communication strategies to preserve the status quo, thus creating a contested arena for public opinion and the dominant narrative in the public sphere.

The possibilities for social participation, in this context, are amplified by digital networks, which provide citizens with a platform for direct engagement in political and social causes. Social movements use these platforms to organize collective actions, disseminate information, and raise public awareness about their agendas, while countermovements resort to the same tools to undermine these initiatives, reinforce ideological divisions, and, often, promote disinformation. In this sense, communication and information become powerful tools both for advancing social progress and for maintaining oppressive structures.

However, it is important to recognize that these dynamics also impose limits on social participation. Increasing polarization and the fragmentation of public opinion can hinder dialogue and consensus-building, weakening the ability of social movements to achieve their goals through peaceful and negotiated means. Moreover, the control of communication platforms by corporate and political interests raises concerns about equitable access to information and the influence these entities exert in shaping social discourses (Zanetti et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, social movements continue to play a crucial role in promoting active citizenship. Through their actions, they challenge established hierarchies and foster greater awareness of issues related to social justice, equality, and human rights. Conversely, social countermovements, by attempting to reverse or neutralize these achievements, reveal the complexity of interactions between different sectors of society and highlight the importance of communication in mediating these conflicts.

3.- Information, Communication, and the Repertoire of Action of Social Movements and Countermovements

To understand contemporary social dynamics and the actions of social movements and countermovements, this study presents a reflection on the relationship between information, communication, and the repertoire of action of social movements and countermovements.

Following Volpato (2022), this study adopts the concept of the repertoire of action of social

movements to refer to the “limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and put into action through a relatively deliberate process of choice” by these movements (Tilly, 1995, p. 26). The repertoire represents a historically circumscribed range of actions. “Participants in social movements choose among more or less conventional forms of contentious interaction, taking into account other variables in their context, such as their objectives, mobilization structures, and political opportunity structures” (Volpato, 2022, p. 65).

Some elements are essential to understanding the repertoire of action of social movements and countermovements, such as power relations, political discourses, and symbolic production in the construction of the public sphere and the formation of public opinion. The public sphere is seen as a space for negotiation, dispute, and the construction of meanings, in which social movements and countermovements operate and build their actions and strategies.

In the specific case of social movements, the analysis of their repertoire of action must consider the communicational dimensions present in the practices of these social actors, including the construction of discourses, the choice of communication channels, the mobilization of communication resources, among other strategies that influence the relationship between social movements and society (Volpato et al., 2019).

Information constitutes the organizational foundation of relationships in contemporary society. The value of information is immeasurable, and it is essential to understand and master its production, dissemination, access, and preservation. Digital technologies have revolutionized social structures in unprecedented ways. In addition to technical resources, various actors have adopted and adapted technologies based on diverse interests, producing and disseminating information rapidly and extensively in modern societies.

Through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), it is possible to exchange information in digital informational environments, enabling interaction and collaboration between citizens and between them and institutions, organizations, and governments, using practices and methods that are constantly evolving. This exchange of information is not limited to digital environments; in a society undergoing a process of mediatization, the convergence of communication media influences actions both within and outside digital networks (Braga, 2012).

Recent studies indicate that the internet and digital media provide a new understanding and meaning for participation, democracy, activism, and collective identities, as their structure enables the articulation of social actors in an interconnected and correlated manner. The internet is considered one of the most democratic communication channels in terms of access, content creation, and information use, although it still presents limitations and challenges that must be addressed.

Regarding the understanding of social networks in everyday life in the 21st century, numerous studies highlight their role in contemporary research and reality (Recuero, 2012; Luvizotto & Sena, 2022), in social movements and global protests (Castells, 2013), in elections worldwide amid the crisis of liberal democracy (Mounk, 2019), in disinformation processes (Pinto et al., 2018), and in many other areas.

Cyberactivism, or digital activism, is an important tool in the struggle for social change. Studies developed by Volpato et al. (2019) indicate that social movements and countermovements simultaneously employ street actions (such as marches, acts, and protests) and digital activism with instant communication resources. These tools disseminate information about their demands and mobilization agendas, helping to legitimize their causes and exert pressure on governments and various sectors of society.

Social movements and countermovements utilize the available tools in the media sphere to mobilize their supporters, raise public awareness about relevant issues, and influence public debate. By doing so, they can challenge dominant narratives and promote alternative

political and social perspectives.

However, the intense circulation of media products also presents challenges for these political actors. In their quest for visibility (Volpato, 2022), they must compete with a wide range of voices and discourses in the public sphere, which can hinder the dissemination of their messages and causes. Polarization and disinformation on social networks can make the media environment even more complex and hostile for political actors seeking to promote social change, regardless of the type of cause or social group they represent.

Disinformation, information manipulation, and restrictions on access to information are critical and persistent issues that pose serious threats to the health of democracy and social participation in contemporary societies. These problems have profound and multifaceted implications, requiring urgent attention and action; otherwise, they risk compromising the integrity of democratic systems and the ability of people to participate effectively in political life.

Firstly, it is essential to recognize that democracy depends on the existence of a healthy informational environment. Citizens need accurate, impartial, and accessible information to make informed decisions in elections, referendums, and political debates. When disinformation prevails and information manipulation spreads, citizens are deprived of the ability to accurately discern facts and the consequences of their political choices. This undermines the essence of democracy, which is based on the assumption that people have the ability to make rational and informed decisions.

Moreover, active citizen participation is a central element of any healthy democratic system. Restrictions on access to information or the widespread presence of false information impair people's ability to engage meaningfully in political life.

Furthermore, disinformation poses a threat to national security, as hostile nations may exploit it to destabilize democratic stability in other countries. This includes the deliberate spread of false information to undermine trust in democratic institutions or incite internal conflicts. Therefore, protection against disinformation is not only a matter of social well-being but also a security concern (Zanetti et al., 2023).

To address these persistent threats to democracy and social participation, a joint effort involving governments, civil society, the media, and social media platforms is necessary. This includes promoting rigorous ethical standards in journalism, implementing measures to combat disinformation on online platforms, fostering media literacy, and protecting the fundamental right to access information.

While this study acknowledges the importance of the media, particularly the internet, as a facilitating instrument for citizen participation, it is crucial to problematize the inherent asymmetries in digital inclusion and equitable access to information. The expansion of the digital environment, while broadening opportunities for political and social engagement, also highlights profound inequalities in access, which overlap with those already existing in the offline world. These inequalities are not limited to material access to technology — such as the possession of devices or internet connectivity — but also encompass more complex issues such as connection quality, the ability to fully utilize digital tools, and the cultural and educational conditions that enable critical reading and the production of relevant content.

Digital exclusion, therefore, reflects a broader form of exclusion that directly affects citizenship. Socially marginalized groups, such as low-income populations, the elderly, individuals with low educational attainment, and residents of rural or peripheral areas, tend to face greater difficulties in accessing and effectively engaging with digital platforms. In this context, the internet, instead of serving as a democratizing space, may reproduce or even exacerbate existing social inequalities, favoring those who already possess greater economic and cultural capital.

Moreover, the issues of disinformation, manipulation, and polarization in digital networks further aggravate this scenario. While the internet offers opportunities for participation and information dissemination, it also becomes fertile ground for the spread of misleading and distorted content. These phenomena, combined with the lack of digital literacy among a significant portion of the population, hinder the formation of an informed public opinion committed to democratic values. Thus, the digital environment becomes a space of power struggle, where information flows are often shaped by economic and political interests, creating informational bubbles that limit diverse perspectives and weaken plural public debate.

The pursuit of effective citizen participation in the digital era requires more than just expanding access to technology. It demands a profound transformation in the structures that govern the production and distribution of information. This includes the development of public policies that promote digital inclusion in a broad sense — not only ensuring connectivity but also encouraging media and digital literacy, empowering citizens to navigate critically through the vast online informational universe.

The effective democratization of the digital space also requires the creation of regulatory mechanisms that ensure the transparency of algorithms that filter and prioritize content, as well as the promotion of diverse voices and narratives in the online environment.

Effective communication gives voice to marginalized groups and minorities who may lack access to traditional media channels. This enables their concerns and demands to be heard and amplified, challenging the status quo and pushing for change. According to Trindade (2020), accessible information and open communication encourage participation. Well-informed citizens are more likely to engage in social movements, protests, and democratic processes, making democracy more inclusive.

In mature democracies, social movements play a critical role as mechanisms of oversight and accountability for governments and political institutions. They can raise issues that are not adequately addressed by traditional political structures and expose undesirable practices or injustices. Social movements can also directly influence public policies by advocating for legislative and regulatory changes. They have the potential to mobilize voters and build support for specific policies or candidates. Moreover, social movements can exert pressure on governments and institutions to address significant issues, whether in environmental, social, civil rights, or economic spheres.

The promotion of an informed and inclusive public debate is a cornerstone of sound political decision-making and government accountability. In this context, the media plays a central role by acting as a counterbalance to state power, investigating administrative actions, exposing corruption cases, and fostering government transparency. Through the dissemination of information, the media enables citizens to evaluate the activities of their leaders and demand accountability when necessary.

4.- Final Considerations

The reflections presented in this study suggest that the repertoires of action employed by social movements and countermovements are strongly driven by communication channels, particularly digital technologies, which are utilized to mobilize and engage people, promote public debates, and create spaces for discussion and information sharing. These actions have the potential to foster a more pluralistic, inclusive, and responsible communication model, breaking away from traditional patterns of information production, distribution, and access. However, it is crucial to recognize the persistent challenges that remain, ranging from the proliferation of disinformation to the numerous obstacles that hinder equitable access to information and communication.

Although the digital environment enables new forms of citizen engagement, it is essential to critically address the profound inequalities in access and digital literacy that permeate

contemporary society. Digital exclusion often mirrors the same exclusions present in the offline world. Marginalized groups face additional difficulties in fully engaging in the public debates facilitated by digital media. Consequently, the promises of democratized information and political participation through the internet are hindered by structural limitations that perpetuate pre-existing inequalities.

Information and communication are key elements that empower individuals to actively participate in political and social life. Through communication and information networks, people gain access to knowledge, data, arguments, and perspectives that can shape their opinions, engagement, and actions. However, the challenge of disinformation and information manipulation weakens the emancipatory potential of these tools. Social movements, in their efforts to contest narratives in the public sphere, face significant obstacles due to the proliferation of deceptive discourses that often aim to delegitimize their causes and divide public opinion.

The interconnection between social movements, information, and communication is vital for the formation of an alternative public sphere, where the voices and concerns of marginalized communities and groups advocating for social justice can be heard and acknowledged. However, this public sphere is subject to the same power dynamics that shape information flows in broader contexts, revealing itself as a constant arena of contestation. In this dynamic, the role of social countermovements is equally significant, as they represent groups seeking to maintain the status quo, utilizing the same digital platforms to contest social movement demands and shape public opinion according to their interests.

The contemporary limits and possibilities of the relationship between movements, countermovements, and social participation reside in each group's ability to mobilize resources, construct political identities, and strategically employ communication channels to influence public opinion. Although this struggle is often marked by profound antagonisms, it remains essential to the vitality of democracy, as it opens space for a diversity of perspectives and encourages citizen engagement in matters of collective interest.

The results of this study suggest that social movements are active political actors in the public sphere who, even without engaging with all sectors of society or political power, are legitimate carriers of specific social group demands. They contribute to democracy by practicing active citizenship and constructing alternative narratives that challenge established structures. The presence of diverse groups within civil society — including countermovements — reflects the plurality of ideas and opinions, making it essential to promote spaces for dialogue and negotiation among them to build a more just and democratic society.

However, for such dialogue to be effective, overcoming access barriers and ensuring broad and unrestricted digital inclusion is crucial. Without these efforts, inequalities will continue to limit social dynamics, and the power asymmetries that shape contemporary societies will persist in restricting social movements' capacity to influence public opinion and drive meaningful social change. Thus, the future of citizen participation depends on a collective effort to promote a more inclusive, transparent, and equitable digital environment — one in which diverse voices are valued, and the quality of information is prioritized.

Funding

The reflections presented in this text are part of research conducted with funding from FAPESP – São Paulo Research Foundation (Process 2021/04774-7) and with the funding of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel – Brazil (CAPES) and the Probral Program – Cooperation Projects in Research between Brazil and Germany – CAPES/DAAD (Process 88881.371423/2019-01).

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