

2022 Andalusian electoral campaign on X (formally Twitter) and Instagram. Exploring populist discourse, thematic agendas, and negative campaign strategies employed by candidates

Campaña andaluza de 2022 en Twitter e Instagram. Discursos populistas, temáticos y campaña negativa de los candidatos

Campanha andaluza de 2022 no Twitter e Instagram. Discurso populista, temático e de ódio dos candidatos

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Abstract

Using a quantitative-qualitative content analysis methodology, this paper explores the Twitter and Instagram profiles of political candidates affiliated with PP, PSOE, Vox, Adelante Andalucía, and Por Andalucía during the electoral campaign period leading up to the regional elections held on 29 June 2022, in Andalusia. We analysed a total of 871 posts with the objective of researching the populist communication strategies employed by each candidate, the main topics on their agenda and the attacks they launched against their rivals according to the social network used. The most relevant findings highlight the suitability of both networks to transmit messages that place people at the centre of the leaders' populist discourse. *Twitter* solidifies its role as the most popular digital tool for broadcasting campaign events and issuing calls to vote. Instagram emerges as the digital platform candidates most frequently use to present their political programme proposals and has the highest number of posts containing attacks by political leaders.

Keywords: Populism; thematic agenda; negative campaign; Twitter; Instagram; Andalusia

Resumen

Mediante una metodología que aplica el análisis de contenido cuantitativo-cualitativo, este trabajo examina los perfiles de Twitter e Instagram de los candidatos del PP, PSOE, Vox, Adelante Andalucía y Por Andalucía en el periodo de campaña electoral relativo a las elecciones autonómicas del 29 de junio de 2022 en Andalucía. En concreto, se han analizado un total de 871 publicaciones con el objetivo de investigar la comunicación populista de cada candidato, los principales temas de su agenda y los ataques que han realizado a sus rivales según la red social utilizada. Los resultados más relevantes demuestran la idoneidad de ambas redes para transmitir un mensaje que posiciona al pueblo como eje central del discurso populista de los líderes. Twitter se consolida como herramienta digital por la que se transmiten los eventos de campaña y se realiza un firme llamamiento al voto, mientras que los candidatos ofrecen a los usuarios de Instagram sus propuestas de programa con mayor asiduidad. A su vez, Instagram destaca por ser la plataforma digital con mayor número de ataques articulados por los líderes.

Palabras clave: Populismo; agenda temática; campaña negativa; Twitter; Instagram; Andalucía

Resumo

Utilizando uma metodologia que aplica análise de conteúdo quantitativa-qualitativa, este artigo examina os perfis de Twitter e Instagram dos candidatos do PP, PSOE, Vox, Adelante Andalucía e Por Andalucía no período de campanha eleitoral relativo às eleições regionais de 29 de junho de 2022 na Andaluzia. Especificamente, um total de 871 publicações foram

analizadas com o objetivo de investigar a comunicação populista de cada candidato, os principais assuntos de sua agenda e os ataques que fizeram a seus rivais de acordo com a rede social utilizada. Os resultados mais relevantes demonstram a adequação de ambas redes para transmitir uma mensagem que posicione o povo como eixo central do discurso populista dos dirigentes. O Twitter está se consolidando como uma ferramenta digital por meio da qual os eventos da campanha são transmitidos e uma chamada firme para o voto é feita, enquanto os candidatos oferecem aos usuários do Instagram suas propostas de programas com mais frequência. Por sua vez, o Instagram se destaca por ser a plataforma digital com maior número de ataques articulados por lideranças.

Palavras-chave: Populismo; agenda temática; campanha negativa; Twitter; Instagram; Andaluzia

1. Introduction

Despite conceptual discrepancies, there is a consensus that defines populism to be a phenomenon characterised by the "bipartition of the political community" (Franzé & Fernández-Vazquez, 2022, p. 77) of two "homogeneous and antagonistic" factions: the "pure people" versus the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004, p.27). Populist expressiveness uses an emotionally charged, negative narrative and suggests short-term policies as solutions to complicated issues (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero Ripollés, 2021). This strategic approach seeks to propel the populist leader or party into power, embodying the ideals of the people (Alonso-Muñoz, 2018) and advocating against the establishment and groups perceived to jeopardise their security (Mouffe, 2019; Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Laclau, 2005).

Social and political polarisation during crises are conducive settings for populist discourses (Tarullo & Gamir-Ríos, 2022). Yet, comprehending the rise of populism, requires a vision of the current digital age. The advent of social networks marked a paradigmatic shift in the emergence and consolidation of populist formations within the political arena (Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Ernst *et al.*, 2017). On platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, political parties circumvent the scrutiny of journalists (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Through the establishment of online communities, populist movements engage with an electorate that "lacks a group identity" (Gerbaudo, 2023, p. 43), in a personalised and emotionally resonant manner, characterising what is often referred to as "populism 2.0" (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

Twitter stands out as the most studied social network in terms of its role in political communication, particularly in electoral contexts (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022a). This focus is attributed to the inherent nature of the platform, fostering the widespread dissemination of both textual and audiovisual messages within a polarised context. Conversely, Instagram has solidified its position as a platform used by political actors to establish a closer

connection with citizens, presenting a more personal image, while simultaneously disseminating political messages. (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022b).

Nevertheless, political actors must still accept the logic of a hybrid media ecosystem (Chadwick, 2013), where conventional media continue to play a pivotal role in the dissemination of political information. Nevertheless, the expansive range of expressive options provided by online platforms has led parties that are not inherently considered populist to adopt rhetoric focused on confronting a defined people and an antagonistic "other" (Taggart, 2004). Populism is a communicative style that adapts to various political contexts and social circumstances (Ruiz-Collantes, 2023), devoid of a distinct political colour (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

Regarded as a form of political discursivity, populism exhibits a nuanced essence, with political formations being deemed "more or less populist" based on the nature of the messages disseminated within public opinion (Ruiz-Collantes, 2023, p. 15). This conceptualisation results in the evolution of the level of populist discourse in Western democracies, influenced by diverse factors (Fernández-García & Valencia, 2022). During the electoral period, the discursive shifts of populist parties are influenced by the objective to broaden their "electoral base" (Fernández-García & Valencia, 2022); they avoid their "more sectarian and radical aspects on which they were founded", while employing a "complete populism" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) that resonates with the public: criticising elites and excluding certain groups (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2021). They sometimes also adopt an "empty" or "simple" populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). For their part, parties in power and those in opposition, but with extensive political experience, often exhibit, in most cases, an "empty populism" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) marked by an exclusive appeal to the people.

Thus, the degree of populism in the discourse of political parties evolves according to the position that each party holds within its political system. Engesser *et al.* (2017) and Ernst *et al.* (2017) assert that the design of social networks constitutes another influential factor in expressing varying degrees of populism. Polarised social climates (Waisbord, 2020) arising from the prevalence of emotionality in political communication (González-Castro, 2023), coupled with the need to manage networks to reach the public in an electoral campaign, contribute to the escalation of populist rhetoric. This dynamic requires the adjustment of political agendas based on the chosen platform and exacerbates confrontations between political adversaries.

Regarding the digital agenda, studies such as that carried out by Gamir-Ríos *et al.* (2022a) highlight the frequent presence of a mobilising intent on the microblogging social network. At a regional level, candidates seem to replicate similar discourses on this social network. Drawing from the analysis of the Madrid 2021 campaign, Díez-Gracia *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that, despite each leader building their own agenda, all of them rely mainly on the dissemination of content related to campaign activities. The existing literature on Instagram is still limited. While Turnbull-Dugarte (2019) highlights the

mobilising capabilities of political groupings in the 2015 and 2016 campaigns, Gamir-Ríos *et al.* (2022b) note that during the two general elections held in 2019, candidates focused on ideological and sectoral issues.

Regarding negative campaigns, authors such as Marín-Albaladejo (2022), Tirado-García (2023) and González-Castro (2023) attribute the growing number of messages aimed at discrediting political rivals (Herrero *et al.*, 2022) to the personalisation of campaigns and the freedom of expression facilitated by the digital ecosystem. The attacks can target the candidates' programmes (Marcos-García *et al.*, 2021), their ideologies, and even personal attributes (García-Beaudoux & D'Adamo, 2013); they may be conditioned by the candidate's ideological stance (Cerón & D'Adda, 2015; Nai & Sciarini, 2018), their position in the government (Marcos-García *et al.*, 2021; Soler *et al.*, 2022; Tirado-García, 2023), and even the historical trajectory of each political figure (Valli & Nai, 2022).

The Andalusian regional elections were held in June 2022, following the end of the pandemic, and against the backdrop of a polarised digital climate. Andalusian politics underwent a transformation following the 2018 elections. With PSOE experiencing a hegemonic loss after a four-decade mandate, a coalition government was formed between PP and Ciudadanos with the support of VOX. Recent elections have shown that "the trend established in the 2018 elections continues" (Pérez-Escolar *et al.*, 2023), with notable emphasis on the dissolution of Ciudadanos, the increase of two seats for VOX, and the attainment of an absolute majority by PP.

As regional elections in Spain provide a distinctive platform for political entities to present themselves to the national electorate, and, particularly in the case of Andalusia, the Spanish media have been deemed to have the "power to turn" the region into a harbinger of general election outcomes (González-Castro, 2023, p. 2), the primary objective of this study is to explore potential shifts in the digital discourse employed by political leaders during electoral periods. Specifically, a comparative analysis was carried out of official Instagram and Twitter accounts of the candidates who won a seat in the Parliament of Andalusia, centring on their populist traits, thematic agendas, and the negative campaign strategies they used during the campaign. To offer a more comprehensive perspective on the political discourses that transpired during the campaign, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: Does the approach and intensity of the populist message delivered differ depending on the social network used during the campaign? What communication strategy has each candidate employed based on the characteristics of populist discourse and style on both networks?

RQ2: What themes does each political leader raise on their official accounts during the period analysed?

RQ3: Which social network contains the most attacks on rivals? What specific type of attack does each political candidate make?

2. Material and Methodology

The research study comprised a content analysis (Krippendorff, 1990) with a quantitative-qualitative approach to dissect, explore (Igartua, 2006), and describe the study material with a demonstrative weight. This descriptive methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of discourse circulation within the field of communication (Sánchez-Aranda, 2005; Igartua, 2006; Krippendorff, 1990). This approach is notably prevalent in academic research pertaining to the impact of social networks in the context of electoral scenarios (Bavaria *et al.*, 2019; Diez-Garcia *et al.*, 2023; Gamir-Ríos, 2020; Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022).

The analysis employs a multimodal approach, examining textual elements, images, and videos, reflecting the growing prevalence of these components in digital political communication, as indicated by previous studies (Alonso-Muñoz, 2018; Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés 2021; Bavaria *et al.*, 2019; Ceron and D'Adda, 2016; Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022; Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022b).

The fieldwork comprised three phases. First, using Phantom Buster and Twitonomy, all posts (N= 871) from Instagram (N= 272) and Twitter (N= 599) made by the leaders were collected over a 16-day period from 3 to 19 June 2022. This timeframe included the entire electoral campaign, including the day of reflection and polling day. The chosen parameters for the number of units of analysis and the time frame align with the standard conventions observed in similar studies of this nature (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022; Lopez-Garcia *et al.*, 2015). The researched candidates, as outlined in Table 1, include: Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla, the leader of Andalusian PP and the sole president of the Parliament of Andalusia with 58 seats; Juan Espadas, the candidate for PSOE and the leader of the opposition with 30 seats; Macarena Olona, whose party (VOX) secured 14 seats, placing them third in the Parliament; and finally, Inmaculada Nieto (Por Andalucía) and Teresa Rodríguez (Adelante Andalucía), who obtained five and two seats, respectively.

Table 1. Breakdown of the study corpus according to party and candidate

	<i>PP</i>	<i>PSOE</i>	<i>VOX</i>	<i>Por Andalucía</i>	<i>Adelante Andalucía</i>
	Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla	Juan Espadas	Macarena Olona	Inmaculada Nieto	Teresa Rodríguez
<i>Own tweets</i>	146	108	61	153	131
Frequency	8.1	6.0	3.4	8.5	7.3
<i>Posts</i>	53	76	46	49	48
Frequency	2.9	4.2	2.6	2.7	2.7

Source: Prepared by the authors

During the second phase, a coding sheet was designed incorporating twelve variables inspired by four study dimensions: populist discourse, populist style, thematic agenda and negativity. The variables *selection*(v1) and *leader* (v2) were made to enable the identification of the social network through which the message was transmitted and to specify which candidate disseminated the post. In alignment with the classification proposed by Engesser *et al.* (2017) and Bucy *et al.* (2020), the initial two study domains aim to determine the presence of populist elements in posts. This analysis uses eight binary variables specifically crafted to examine both discursive and stylistic attributes embedded within the messages. Through a comprehensive analysis of posts on both social networks, the discursive component assessed whether the content presented a *defence of the people* (v3), understood to be the community, a social construct or homogeneous entity (Alonso-Muñoz, 2018); whether the posts *criticised the elites* (v4), that is, whether the leader adopted a discourse focused on discrediting influential political, media, or economic actors (Engesser *et al.*, 2017); whether the posts advocate for *popular sovereignty* (v5) with statements that granted the will to vote and democratic freedom to the people; whether the posts intended to *stigmatise the other* (v6), targeting groups perceived as threats to the people, such as immigrants or specific social groups (Engesser *et al.*, 2017), and finally, whether the posts appealed *topatriotic and cultural values* (v7).

In terms of communicative style, three variables were identified: *emotionality* (v8), *negativity* (v9) and *simplification*(v10) (Ernst *et al.*, 2017; Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018). Using an equally multimodal and dichotomous analysis, posts containing dramatic and emotional language were categorically coded as emotional discourse (Oliver & Rahn, 2016). A negative style was coded when the narrative centred on economic, social, and immigration crises, where the candidate portrayed themselves to be the true representative of a transformative change within the system (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2021). Lastly, any message deemed trivial and lacking substance for political discourse, or one attempting to propose swift and "short-term" solutions (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés, 2018) for public welfare, was classified as simple.

The second domain, addressing the content of Instagram and Twitter posts, bases its analysis on the methodology proposed by Mazzoleni (2010), supported by various research methodologies (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022; Gamir-Ríos, 2020; Bavaria *et al.*, 2019; Valera-Ordaz & López-García, 2014). Variable 11, *theme*, revolves around four distinct macrocategories, distinguishing between a) political issues, encompassing general ideological questions; b) policy issues, focusing on sectoral policy issues; c) campaign issues, addressing topics related to events occurring during the campaign; and d) personal issues, when the main theme involved intimates issues related to the candidates. The final domain included only one simple response variable, *attacking the rival* (v12). Adapting the previous methodology proposed by García-Beaudoux and D'Adamo (2013), consideration was given to a) the absence of an attack; b) the construction of a simple attack focused solely on highlighting the opponent's negative traits; or c) the dissemination of a compound negative post, aiming to critique the rival while accentuating one's own positive aspects (García-Beaudoux & D'Adamo, 2013). To mitigate potential discrepancies in the coding of results, any form of

criticism, regardless of its perceived level of injustice, dishonour, relevance, or manipulation (Walter & Vlielgenhart, 2010) was coded as an attack on the political opponent.

Table 2. Study variables and intercoder tests

Dimension	Variable	Categories (subcategories)
<i>Populist discourse</i>	Defence of the people $\alpha= 0.9$	Absent/Present
	Criticism of elites $\alpha= 1$	Absent/Present
	Advocating for sovereignty $\alpha= 1$	Absent/Present
	Stigmatisation of the other $\alpha= 1$	Absent/Present
	Patriotic appeal $\alpha= 0.942$	Absent/Present
<i>Populist style</i>	Emotional $\alpha= 0.992$	Absent/Negative/Positive
	Negativity $\alpha= 0.885$	Absent/Present
	Simplification $\alpha= 0.891$	Absent/Present
<i>Thematic agenda</i>	Theme $\alpha= 0.835$	Political issues
		Policy issues (International politics / Work and employment / Equality and social policy / Education, culture, science and sports / Health / Environment / Infrastructure, urban planning and housing / Industry and consumption / Economy and finance / Security / Justice, public freedoms and democratic quality / Identity and geographic model / COVID-19)
		Campaign issues
		Personal issues
		Others
<i>Negative campaign</i>	Attacking the rival $\alpha= 0.882$	Absent / Simple / Compound

Source: Prepared by the authors

In the last phase, before studying the corpus, the two researchers – co-authors of the study – carried out a test on the variables, populist discourse and style, themes and negative campaign. Consequently, they independently coded a random sample of 50 Instagram and 70 Twitter posts. The resulting Krippendorff Alpha for all variables exceeded 0.8, affirming the validity of the results obtained (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022).

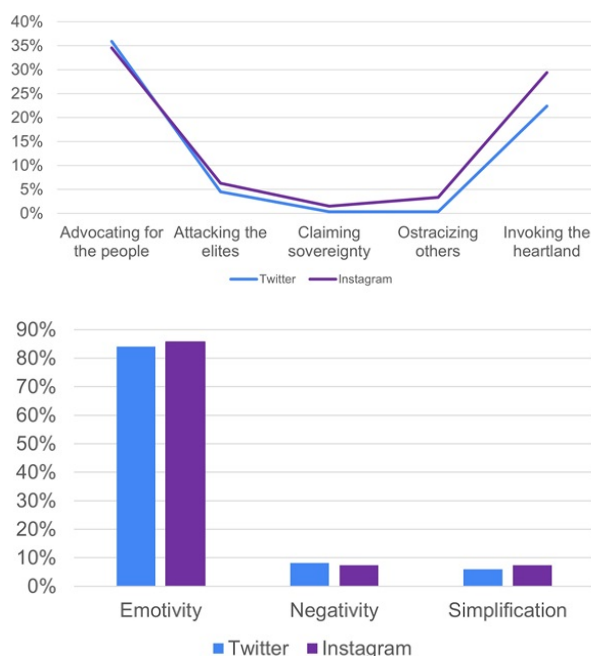
3. Results

The digital activity of the candidates presents a noticeable inequality according to the network analysed. The overall count of posts on Twitter was 599 and, in all instances, the frequency of posts per candidate on Twitter was greater than on Instagram, where 272 posts were recorded. Macarena Olona had the least activity on both platforms, while Juan Espadas posted content more frequently on Instagram. The remaining candidates published with a comparable frequency.

3.1. Populist traits present in the candidates' messages

The defence of people, appeal to patriotic and cultural values and the adoption of an emotional tone were the prominent populist features extensively posted on the Twitter and Instagram accounts of the candidates. In the context of the first dimension of the study, from the 286 posts on Twitter containing a populist discourse, 35.9% appealed to the people, 4.5% criticised elites, and 22.4% referenced national identity through patriotic or cultural values. On Instagram, the percentages did not exhibit much variation, with 34.6% of the posts characterised by defending the people, 6.3% attacking elites, and 29.4% appealing to national identity. There is a small percentage of posts on both Twitter and Instagram containing messages of popular sovereignty and the marginalisation of different groups.

Figure 1. Populist discourse and style on both social networks



Source: Prepared by the authors

Regarding populist style on Twitter, of the 513 posts exhibiting this trait, 84.1% employed emotional language; 8.2% depicted a scenario of widespread social crisis and 6% simplified political reality. Instagram stands out as the platform that had the highest total number of posts incorporating at least one stylistic feature; 85.7% of messages have an emotional tone, 7.4% are negative and 7.4% simplify political activities and proposals. In addition to the similarities they exhibit, both social networks are characterised by the predominance of a positive emotional tone (72.3% on Twitter and 76.5% on Instagram) over a negative emotional tone (11.9% on Twitter and 9.2% on Instagram).

When analysing the percentage breakdown by candidates and discourse domain, defence of the people stands out as a distinctive feature on both social networks. Except for Olona, the leader who, on Twitter (45.9%) and Instagram (63%), more frequently appealed to patriotic and cultural values than to the defence of the people, the focus of the other candidates was the people. The leader of PP employed this resource most frequently on

Twitter (46.6%), and on Instagram; he is positioned as the second candidate who most defends the people (41.5%), behind Olona.

Attacking the elites is exclusively present in the posts made by the leaders of VOX, Por Andalucía and Adelante Andalucía. In fact, the percentages are similar on both social networks for the three candidates. Thus, on Twitter, Olona criticises elites in 14.8% of her posts; Nieto in 4.6% and Rodríguez in 8.4%. On Instagram, Olona attacks the elite in 19.6% of her posts; Nieto 4.1% and Rodríguez 12.5%.

Advocating for popular sovereignty (v5) and marginalising the other (v6) were contained in Olona's posts. On Twitter, two of her posts were about popular sovereignty as an inherent part of the people, and in two others she marginalised various groups as a populist approach. On Instagram, she advocated for popular sovereignty only once out of three occasions (6.5%). She posted about the ostracism of those who are different, personified in the form of immigrants, in 17.4% of her posts.

During our analysis of the political profiles, we found the use of patriotic and cultural narratives across both digital platforms. For example, Moreno Bonilla emphasises the identity and cultural qualities of the Andalusian territory in 38 Twitter posts and 20 Instagram posts. Espadas does so in 26 Twitter posts and 16 Instagram posts, while Nieto and Rodríguez contribute with 18 and 24 posts on Twitter, respectively.

Examining the populist style of posts, Moreno Bonilla and Olona incorporate emotional appeals into 93.8% and 96.7%, respectively, of their posts on Twitter within the messages they convey. On Instagram, both politicians maintain this trend, albeit with slightly lower percentages: 90.6% for Moreno Bonilla and 95.7% for Olona. The positive dimension of emotionality exceeded the negative in both cases. The data reveal that Moreno Bonilla has 136 posts on Twitter and 48 on Instagram, while Olona has 53 on Twitter and 40 on Instagram, all of which incorporate emotional elements with a positive tone.

In this digital environment, Moreno Bonilla and Olona implement simplification as a communication approach. On 11 occasions on Twitter (7.5%) and two on Instagram (3.8%), Moreno Bonilla suggests quick solutions that simplify social reality. In turn, Olona uses this communicative style in 8.2% and 15.2% of her posts on Twitter and Instagram, respectively. Moreno Bonilla does not use negativity as a mode of populist expressiveness, whereas Olona does so on two occasions on Twitter and seven occasions on Instagram. Twitter, however, is the preferred social platform of those three opposition politicians to post negative populist frames on. Consequently, negativity is present in 7.4% of Espadas' Twitter posts, 19.6% of Nieto's, and 6.9% of Rodríguez's.

Espadas, Nieto, and Rodríguez also consistently present highly emotional content to users on both Twitter and Instagram. However, in contrast to Moreno Bonilla and Olona, their content includes a higher proportion of emotional elements with negative connotations during the analysed period. The simplification of political reality receives

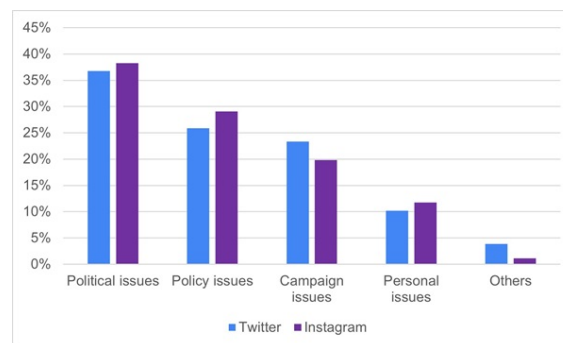
marginal representation in the case of Espadas and Nieto, both on Twitter and Instagram. In contrast, Teresa Rodríguez references simplistic or magical policies 10.7% of the time on Twitter and 10.4% on Instagram.

3.2. The leaders' thematic agenda during the campaign

In a broader context, the analysis of the candidates' digital agenda (v11) reveals a predominant focus on political-ideological issues, comprising 36.7% on Twitter and 38.2% on Instagram over the course of the campaign. These statistics suggest that there is no dominant thematic macrocategory on either social network. Sectoral topics, such as those pertaining to work and employment (3.3% on Twitter and 1.5% on Instagram), equality and social policy (3.8% on Twitter and 7.7% on Instagram), or healthcare (4% on Twitter and 2.9% on Instagram), also comprise a significant portion, each exceeding 25% of the posts. Themes like citizen security (0.3% on Twitter and 0% on Instagram) and justice and democratic quality (0.5% on Twitter and 0.7% on Instagram) are minimally represented in the collected percentages. Additionally, none of the candidates directly addressed the crisis caused by COVID-19 within the political issues category.

Figure 2 illustrates that while ideological and sectoral issues find more prominence on Instagram than on Twitter, the political practices employed during the campaign are more frequently showcased on Twitter. On Twitter, candidates share information about the events and activities they participate in during the days leading up to polling day in 23.4% of their posts, while on Instagram, the percentage falls to just below 20%. Certainly, the similarities in percentages also extend to the posts of candidates who emphasise showcasing their private lives on both networks. Hence, only 10.2% of Twitter posts and 11.8% of Instagram posts are dedicated to portraying the personal life of the respective leaders.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of topics collected by each social network



Source: Prepared by the authors

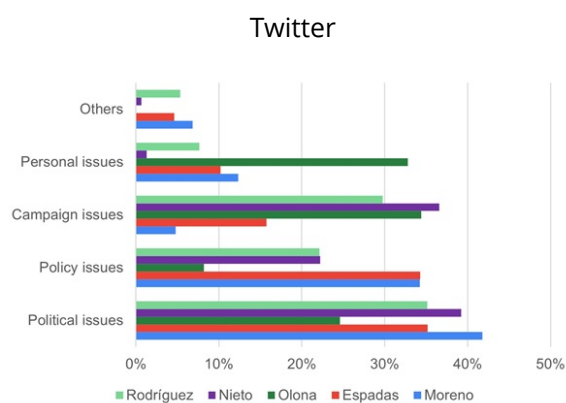
The common and widespread use of ideological and sectoral themes on Twitter and Instagram is reflected in the analysis of the percentages broken down by candidates. Moreno Bonilla is the leader who most uses Twitter as a platform for discussing ideological and sectoral topics. Conversely, he uses Instagram to disseminate personal and campaign-

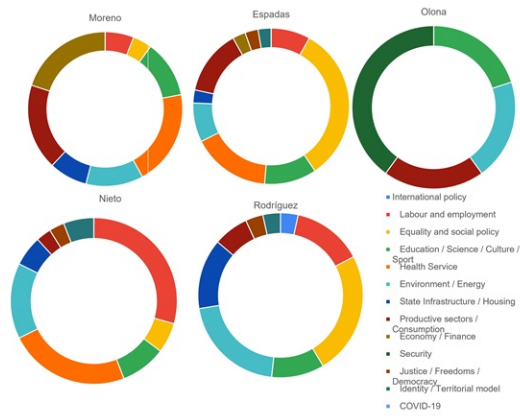
related aspects. While Moreno Bonilla posts a total of 41.8% of posts on Twitter about political issues, out of his 53 posts on Instagram, only 18 (34%) have an ideological theme. Similarly, Moreno Bonilla's Twitter account (34.2%) is characterised by posting a more diverse range of sectoral proposals than his Instagram account (32.1%).

On Instagram, Moreno Bonilla shares more personal messages about his private life with users (20.8%), compared to on Twitter (12.3%). He is the politician who posted the fewest aspects related to the future of the campaign on Twitter (4.8%), and the second least on Instagram (9.4%), trailing behind Espadas. On the other hand, Espadas gives more prominence to campaign issues (15.7%) and personal matters (10.2%) on Twitter. As shown in Figure 2, he incorporates sectoral proposals from his programme into his Instagram posts (48.7%) nearly half of the time, with a particular focus on aspects related to equality and social policy. Certainly, Espadas also disseminates partisan ideological aspects, as indicated by the percentage, which approaches 40%, in the political category.

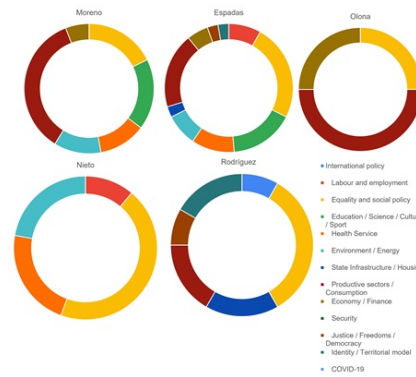
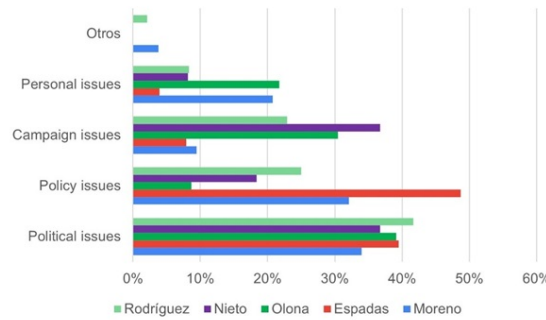
The digital agenda presented by Olona is substantially different from that of the other candidates. On Twitter, 34.4% of her posts call for citizen voting participation, receiving more weight than policy issues (8.2%) or ideological issues and general partisan confrontations (24.6%). Olona's communication strategy on Instagram does not change. The biggest difference is personal issues, which falls from 32.8% on Twitter to 21.7% on Instagram. It is particularly notable that, despite the high percentage of her posts being about campaign issues (30.4%), the majority of her posts are related to political issues (39.1%). Therefore, Olona maintains a more persuasive and personal tone on Twitter, while on Instagram, her messages have a more confrontational narrative.

Figure 3. Thematic distribution of the candidates according to the social network analysed





Instagram



Source: Prepared by the authors

Nieto posts the highest number of messages about the events occurring during the campaign both on Twitter (36.6%) and Instagram (36.7%). Her Twitter account has the fewest personal posts (1.3%), and her Instagram account is the second lowest (8.2%). While the number of messages she posts on Instagram regarding continuing sectoral proposals is still low, only nine out of 49 on Twitter, this figure notably increases to 22.2% of the total. Moreover, she used both social networks as a platform to disseminate ideological messages: 60 posts on Twitter (39.2%) and 18 on Instagram (36.7%).

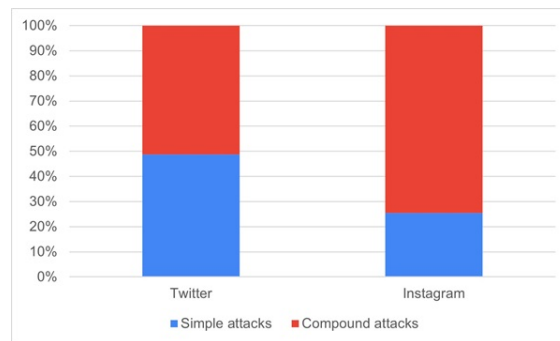
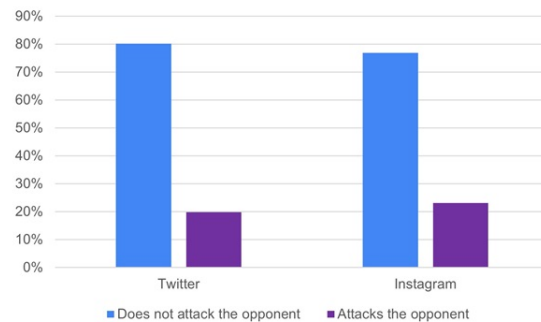
Finally, Rodríguez emphasises political and campaign issues on both accounts. Similar to Nieto, she posts very few messages containing personal information on Twitter (7.6%) and on Instagram (8.3%). Similarly, she has many posts regarding equality and social policy,

accounting for 5.3% on Twitter and 8.3% on Instagram, addressing the rights and freedoms of women's groups and marginalised communities.

3.3. Negative campaign and social networks

Turning to negativity, it has been observed that none of the candidates criticised their political rivals much on either social network. On Twitter, 19.9% of the content is negative messages against an opponent. In these instances, there are 58 simple attacks and 61 compound attacks. On Instagram, there are more attacks, despite the lower overall activity. Of the 63 negative posts (23.2%), 16 criticised an opponent without emphasising the political virtues of the candidate delivering the critique, and the other 47 attacks included the positive aspects of the candidate posting the attack.

Figure 4. Percentage distribution of Twitter and Instagram critiques



Source: Prepared by the authors

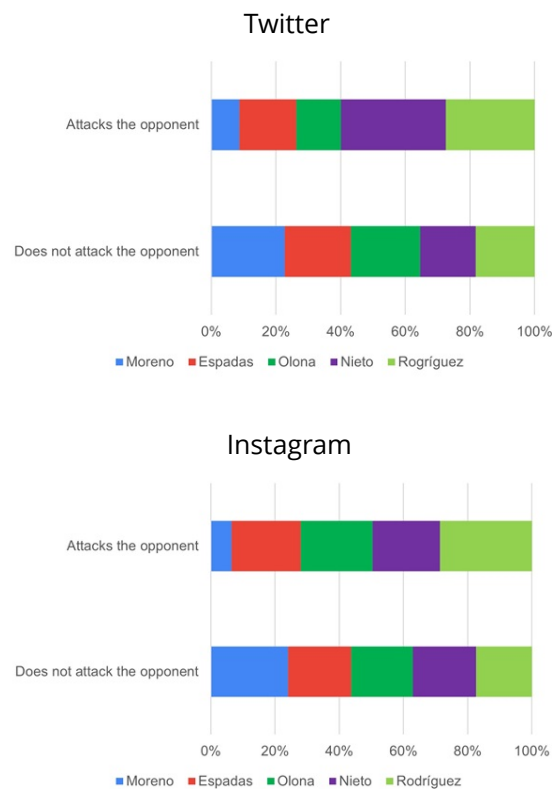
The behaviour of attacks per candidate shows variations depending on the social network the attack was posted on. As an illustration, Moreno Bonilla does not post many messages on Twitter criticising his opponents (8.2%), and is the candidate who attacks the least.

There are more attacks on Instagram by Espadas, Olona and Rodríguez. Espadas attacks his opponents on Instagram in 25% of his posts and in 16.7% of his posts on Twitter. Regarding criticism, there are nearly no discrepancies according to social network. On Twitter, simple criticisms comprised 5.6% of the posts, and compound criticisms 11.1%. On

Instagram, he only reproaches his rivals in 3.9% of his posts, while in 21.2% of them he criticises while emphasising his positive political aspects.

Conversely, Olona expresses more simple negativity in her Twitter posts (8.2%) than in her Instagram posts (4.3%), and her reproaches towards opponents take on a greater compound aspect (21.7%). In the case of Rodríguez, the data confirmed her as the candidate who posted the most criticism on Instagram (33.3%), and the second-highest on Twitter (26%), just behind Nieto (30.7%). The data on the criticism posted by Rodríguez did not reveal a pattern: on Twitter, the percentage of simple attacks (15.3%) exceeded that of compound attacks (10.7%), while on Instagram, composite attacks (22.9%) exceeded simple attacks (10.4%).

Figure 5. Distribution of attacks on Twitter and Instagram per candidate



Source: Prepared by the authors

Nieto stands out as the candidate who disseminates the most negative discourse on Twitter, with 30.7% of her posts containing attacks. On Instagram, the percentage barely varies (24.5%), but her communication strategy is not very negative, and she is the second least critical politician after Moreno Bonilla. Nieto consistently employs adversarial tactics across both social networks, frequently engaging in the rebuttal of her rivals. Her posts often feature panegyric frames, extolling the virtues of either her person or political party. Nevertheless, the most notable difference in attack types can be found on her Instagram account, where simple attacks account for 8.2% and compound attacks for 16.3%. On Twitter, both figures hover around 15%.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Twitter and Instagram both serve as central digital platforms in the Andalusian candidates' communication strategy for their campaign planning. Twitter was the preferred choice for disseminating political information to users.

When examining the degree of populism on each social network (P11), we found that both platforms were used to focus on defending the people and showcasing Andalusian cultural traits. The marginalisation of the other was used as a discursive resource more frequently on Instagram than on Twitter. The use of an emotive style occurred similarly on both platforms (Engesser *et al.*, 2017; Ernst *et al.*, 2017). Given the absence of prior literature on populist styles across digital platforms, this study positions Instagram as the primary platform for incorporating emotional, negative, and simplified aspects of populism in the context of these regional elections.

When examining individual candidates, we can identify three of the four types of populism defined by Jagers & Walgrave (2007). The leaders of the traditional parties, PP and PSOE, exhibit "empty populism" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) where defence of the Andalusian people takes centre stage in their populist discourse. On the other hand, Olona leads a "cultural battle" (Franzé & Fernández-Vázquez, 2022, p. 79) using a "complete populism" that taps into national pride, criticises the elites, and, most significantly, seeks to marginalise groups of immigrants perceived as impeding the well-being of the people. This contributes to shaping a public discourse that is already polarised by the differentiation of an "us" and a "them." Finally, despite frequently referencing the people in a substantial portion of their messages, Rodríguez and Nieto also manifest their inclination to consistently criticise the economic elites, what Jagers & Walgrave (2007) characterise as "anti-elitist populism".

As pointed out by Díez-García *et al.*, (2023) the distinctive configuration of thematic agendas by each candidate hinders the identification of behavioural patterns in the discursive frameworks they disseminate during the campaign period. Yet, when examining the aggregated data, a discernible discrepancy can be seen according to the social network being analysed (RQ2). As research carried out to date has shown (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022; Díez-García *et al.*, 2023), Twitter is the digital platform that is most used to call for citizen participation in voting and mobilisation. A relatively large percentage of posts refer to sectoral issues such as employment, social policy or health, but the majority refer to the campaign, which reinforces its use as an electoral megaphone. Furthermore, COVID-19 was not addressed in any posts throughout the campaign.

In the case of Instagram, although personal issues had a slightly higher percentage than Twitter, the most significant discrepancy was evident in sectoral issues. The reasons Andalusian political leaders consistently highlight topics associated with the category of policy issues on Instagram likely include the visual dynamism of the platform,

its unrestricted character limit, and the ability to publish videos and photographs simultaneously. Nevertheless, the aim to mobilise the electorate and encourage voting can be seen on the candidates' Instagram accounts (Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022).

In terms of a negative campaign, it is noteworthy that attacks on rivals are more frequent on Instagram than on Twitter (RQ3). Researchers who study negative campaigns identify Twitter as the digital platform where the spread of negative political content proliferates most readily (Herrero *et al.*, 2022). This argument appears plausible, as candidates have presented more aspects related to the future of the campaign, involving more emotional rhetoric (Herrero *et al.*, 2022) and, consequently, making them more prone to criticising their rivals. The difference in attacks on Instagram compared to Twitter is not too noticeable. Moreover, in no instance does the negativity exceed 25%, allowing us to confirm that social networks are a purposeful loudspeaker.

Moreno Bonilla, as president of the region, does not attack his opponents much on any social network. According to Marcos-García *et al.*, (2021), the candidates who are in the opposition attack more forcefully. It is noteworthy that Olona, a leader often regarded as a primary proponent of populist discourse, engages in the fewest attacks during the campaign. A possible explanation for this is that her support for the government in the previous legislature may have influenced the use of negativity on both networks (Nai & Sciarini, 2018).

Of course, this article has several limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, a more comprehensive understanding could be achieved by incorporating the narratives shared by leaders on Instagram Stories, enhancing the data presented in this study.

Additionally, conducting a more in-depth comparative analysis, possibly through statistical methods, could provide a nuanced perspective over the years and across various social networks. Exploring the campaign dynamics on platforms such as Telegram or TikTok could offer further insights into the evolving landscape of political communication.

Author's contribution

David Lava Santos: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Writing- original draft, and Writing- review & editing. **Miguel Ibáñez Cuquerella:** Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Formal analysis, Validation, Visualization, Writing-review & editing. All authors have read and agree to the published version of the manuscript. Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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