Summer 8-7-2024

Digital Divides and Dialogues: A Multidimensional Analysis of Populist Rhetoric, Social Media Interaction, and Polarization in Latin America

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by

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Under the Direction of Ryan E. Carlin, Ph.D.

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2024

ABSTRACT

The first part of this study investigates the engaging nature of populist rhetoric on social media, particularly from populist leaders in power. It suggests populists employ divisive and plebiscitary rhetorical elements to manipulate public opinion, advance their agendas, and potentially dismantle democratic institutions. A comparative analysis of 136,141 tweets from 24 Latin American presidents reveals that populist leaders use significantly more divisive and plebiscitary content than their non-populist counterparts, correlating with increased online engagement. The second part examines millions of replies to these presidents' tweets, employing AI techniques such as Generative Pre-trained Transformers for data augmentation and Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers for text classification. The findings indicate that populist presidents generate more divisive interactions, although non-populist leaders can also evoke such interactions during crises like elections, pandemics, and social unrest. Finally, a survey experiment involving Twitter users from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico further demonstrates that populist leaders' digital presence elevates incivility, particularly when they are in power. This research contributes to understanding how populist leaders exploit social media to enhance their political strategy and its implications for democratic erosion in emerging democracies.

INDEX WORDS: Populism, Polarization, Online Incivility, Rhetoric, Social media, Latin America

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August 2024

DEDICATION

Dedico esta disertación a Lorena y Sebastián, mis amores y motores para seguir dando el máximo de mis capacidades todos los días. También a mis padres y mi hermano que siempre me apoyan y son el más seguro de los refugios.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Ryan Carlin, for his guidance, support, and constructive feedback throughout these years. I am also grateful to Drs. Jennifer MCoy and Michael Fix for their feedback and support in different stages of my doctorate. I want to thank my amazing Latin American coders, Julieth Natalia Marroquin Pachon, Carlos Felipe Osorio Zuluaga, and Juanita Murillo Chacón in Colombia, Fabián Machuca Villalobos and Gustavo Dörner Mansilla in Chile, Camila Sánchez Mejía and Julián Leguizamón in Argentina, Abigail Rios Barrera and Octavio López Vessi in Mexico and Bianca and Alejandro in Brazil. Also thank you to Drs. Will Horne and Adrien Halliez for their feedback and advice whenever I needed.

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Populists in Power and Their Online Engagement: Evidence from Presidential Twitter in Latin America

1.1 Introduction

Questions surrounding how populists gain, keep, and lose power have fueled an explosion of research over the past two decades. Scholars tend to agree that the ways in which populists connect with citizens—through their messaging, distinctive language style, and use of coded language—give them a distinct advantage over their rivals (Gerbaudo 2018). In particular, populists have highly integrated social media into their communications toolkit. Although most public officials have a significant social media presence, populists tend to shine on these platforms. Indeed, populist messages often generate high levels of online engagement (Cassell 2021; Hameleers 2020). What makes populist rhetoric, especially when coming from populists in power, so engaging?

Answering this question is theoretically relevant to understanding the specific rhetorical resources that populists in power use to create engagement and advance their policy objectives. Furthermore, a better understanding of the rhetoric of populists in power, and how effective they are in attracting engagement can shed new theoretical light on its potential consequences, including heightened polarization and threats to democratic stability. Considering that populists in power often challenge democratic norms and institutions. Thus, practical and normative benefits of unpacking their rhetorical resources on social media include the potential to strengthen democratic resilience by developing effective counter-narratives and

digital interventions to promote democratic values.

Populists are known to leverage unique rhetoric to advance their agendas (Pappas 2019), manipulate public opinion (Love & Windsor 2018), and even dismantle democratic institutions (Cole & Schofer 2023). On social media, their strategies have received less attention. I propose that populists engage voters thoroughly by relying on specific rhetorical elements they employ. Building on the ideational approach to populism by Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser (2018) and Urbinati (2019)'s notion of direct representation in the context of populists in power, I test the effectiveness of populists in power usage of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric on Twitter[1] for creating user engagement.

Relying on a unique dataset of tweets (N=136,141) sourced directly from Latin American presidents, this study conducts a comparative analysis of tweets from both populist and non-populist presidents while in office, focusing on their respective levels of engagement. The results reveal that tweets from populist presidents exhibit a greater presence of divisive and plebiscitary content compared to those from their non-populist counterparts. Although both forms of rhetoric are present in populists in power's social media communication, other kinds of content are proportionally higher. However, the paper finds evidence suggesting that in most cases, tweets with divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric are positively correlated with higher levels of online engagement.

The paper begins by offering a theoretical discussion on the divisive and plebiscitary dimensions of populist rhetoric. It then assesses our current knowledge of how populists

[1]It is of public domain that Twitter has officially changed its name to X, for consistency I will keep calling it Twitter.

use social media and the impact of their rhetoric on online engagement. The third section details the data collection process for presidential tweets and the inclusion of variables from other sources, enhancing the robustness of the analysis. This is followed by an explanation of the relative frequency analysis used to identify divisive and plebiscitary content in populist presidents' tweets, the development of dictionaries for observing the proportion of tweets containing these elements, and the specification of a series of mixed-effects negative binomial regressions. The results section presents the main findings of the paper. The study concludes with a discussion of these findings and their theoretical and practical implications, and it offers recommendations for future research on the topic.

1.2 Populist in Power Rhetoric: Two Faces of the Same Coin

Populism, still a contested term, is frequently defined as a "thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of "the people" mudde2004. This definition is frequently associated with the communicative style employed by populists, shaping the concept of populist rhetoric. According to (Busby et al. 2019), a politician is characterized as populist if he/she adopts a rhetoric that encompasses some or all of these elements. Scholars have primed an ideational approach to populism, defining it as a set of specific ideas commonly found in populist discourse. Accordingly, Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018:3) have identified three key elements within populist rhetoric: a) a Manichean and moral cosmology; b) the

portrayal of the people as a homogeneous and virtuous community; and c) the depiction of the elite as a corrupt and self-serving entity.

In addition to the ideational approach present in populist discourse, Urbinati theorizes that populists claim to be a direct representation of the people (Urbinati 2019). Thus, populists—especially those in power—adopt rhetoric that emulates a state of a permanent electoral campaign (Mazzoleni 2008): 58), asserting that they are the only ones who genuinely represent the people; the very same people who have given them their full support; and also making calls to strengthen and expand that support. Following Urbinati's theoretical contribution, (Carlin & Love n.d.) have identified this dimension of populist rhetoric as a plebiscitary one. This dimension of populist rhetoric serves to consolidate their majority but also to exclude those who oppose their policies.

Rhetoric in the case of populists in power is more than words, it is a key element of their political strategy to move their agenda forward. Populists aim to achieve their goals through a two-fold strategy of dividing and excluding. As noted by Pappas (2019), populists in power "see advantages in pressing conflict rather than pursuing consensus" as it makes more evident and stronger the cleavage between the people and the elite. Capitalizing on these perceived disparities is crucial for them. Populists leverage every resource to amass support and solidify a real or perceived majority. This tactic allows them to readily downplay and dismiss opposition to their policies. From their viewpoint, any disagreement with their agenda is seen as an assault by the elite on the virtuous people. They contend that defending the people against such perceived threats necessitates consolidating a majority behind them,

thus self-proclaiming themselves as the genuine representative of the people (Urbinati 2013).

I argue that to understand better how populists in power move forward with their agenda, we must delve further into this two-fold strategy. On the divisive side, those who agree with them are part of the 'true people' who often have to face the threats of the corrupt elite. Populists resort to praising the good people that they claim to represent and berating the corrupt elite. This dividing dimension creates a dynamic that permeates society and divides it along a single dimension into two visible camps: 'Us' versus 'Them' with the potential for eroding democracy in what McCoy et al. (2018) have identified as pernicious polarization.

Once populists have made clear who belongs to each of these camps, they initiate a permanent campaign to garner support from 'the people'. This aspect of their strategy aims to consolidate an electoral and popular majority, as identified by Urbinati (2019), characterized by a state of permanent campaigning (Mazzoleni 2008). For populists in power, while amassing support is crucial, creating a perception of widespread popular support is essential to their strategy. Such a perception enables them to advance their policy agenda with minimal opposition and often without accountability (Pappas 2019).

Divisive and plebiscitary dimensions feed into each other. Promoting division creates two distinct camps. The populist then calls for support from the 'pure people' camp. Since populists are effective at public opinion manipulation (Love & Windsor 2018), the critical aspect of this strategy is not necessarily the actual support gained but the claim of representing the people. Armed with this alleged support, populists can dismiss opposition to their policies by denouncing the 'corrupt elite' and extolling the 'pure people.' If feasible, populists in power

might bypass institutional channels, as Webb (2013) notes, by asserting that their policies serve the people's best interests. When institutional channels are an insurmountable barrier, populists may turn to direct democracy instruments like referendums, public consultations, and popular initiatives (Olivas Osuna 2021). Alternatively, they might focus on building a majority to secure enough institutional support (e.g., loyal judges, representatives, or senators) to pass their policies. In extreme cases, they might attempt to use the alleged popular support to dismantle democratic institutions that limit their power (Pappas 2019; Cole & Schofer 2023).

Throughout the processes of bypassing institutions, filling them with loyalists, implementing direct democracy instruments, and dismantling institutions, populists employ the dual strategy outlined above, which is particularly evident in their rhetoric. Scholars have extensively analyzed the divisive component of populist rhetoric (Çinar et al. 2020; Donadio 2017; Hawkins 2009; Hawkins et al. 2019), yet the use of rhetoric by populists to claim direct representation of the people remains underexplored. This study aims to uncover the presence and prevalence of both the divisive and plebiscitary dimensions in the rhetoric of populists in power, specifically focusing on digital communication. While populists in power may not consistently employ populist rhetoric, I hypothesize that their messages will exhibit more divisive and plebiscitary characteristics compared to those of their non-populist counterparts. In contrast, non-populists in power typically strive for consensus among different societal sectors. They do not resort to berating the people or excessively praising the elite, maintaining a more moderate stance towards these groups. It is also expected that non-populists

in power will not attempt to portray themselves as embodying the direct representation of the people.

1.3 Populist on Social Media: The Shape of their Rhetoric and Online Engagement

The increased use of social media platforms by politicians has provided them with additional channels to disseminate their rhetoric. As a result, several scholars have directed their attention to the use of social media by populist executives, leaders, legislators, and parties. Social media has been shown to assist populists in power in establishing unmediated communication with the public (Boucher & Thies 2019b); (Gerbaudo 2018); (Urbinati 2019)—even when this communication perpetuates other forms of top-down relations between the populist and the people (Waisbord & Amado 2017). Some scholars have demonstrated that populist actors, such as candidates and party leaders, consistently exploit social media to disseminate their rhetoric (see (Blassnig et al. 2019); (Cassell 2021); (Engesser et al. 2017); (Gründl 2020); (Hameleers 2020); (Krämer 2017); (Waisbord & Amado 2017) in most cases showing anti-elites and people-centric discourses.

1.3.1 Populists in Power and Social Media Communication

Although social media as a political communication tool and populism in office are both growing phenomena with significant political consequences, there remains a scarcity of scholarship exploring their intersection. Much of the existing literature focuses on populists in general—especially parties and party leaders—, often overlooking the significant advantage

that a direct communication channel with citizens provides for populists in power, enabling them to disseminate their rhetoric and advance their policies. However, it is valuable to consider the contributions of previous work in examining the relationship between populism and social media communication.

Ernst et al. (2017) propose three dimensions to assess the use of populist rhetoric on social media. In their analysis of populist parties in six Western countries, they observed that people-centrism and anti-elitism were not commonly present on social media. However, these findings were nuanced by the fact that people-centrism and anti-elitism were more prevalent among extreme parties on both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. Conversely, Engesser et al. (2017), who analyzed party leaders' messages on social media, found that people-centric discourse is prevalent across various types of politicians. However, right-wing populists show more animosity against media elites, whereas left-wing attacks are directed at economic elites. Gründl (2020), studying German-speaking social media messages from parties, leaders, and parliamentarians, revealed a prominent use of people-centric and anti-elitism messages among populist parties in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Krämer (2017) suggests that right-wing populists specifically use the internet as a communication tool. The author contends that for right-wing populists internet communication is used to circumvent traditional media while erecting themselves as representatives of 'the people,' and excluding the outgroups.

These works have greatly contributed to our understanding of the use of social media by populist actors and parties. However, the majority of these studies focus on Europe, where

the rise of populism is intertwined with the reconfiguration of party systems (Vachudova 2021). In regions like the US and Latin America, where populism tends to be more personalistic, its growth aligns with the emergence of individual populist figures—Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Donald Trump in the US, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Javier Milei in Argentina are examples of the highly personalistic shape that populism adopts. This distinction is perhaps best encapsulated by a response given by Bolsonaro to a journalist's inquiry about potential political party alliances during the 2018 Brazilian presidential election: *Meu partido é o povo* (The people are my party). Furthermore, none of these studies analyze social media messages from chief executives. I posit that populists in office differ fundamentally from populist candidates or party leaders. Once elected, populists utilize the previously described twofold strategy to advance their policy agenda. Given the direct communication channels social media provides, these platforms could present an extraordinary opportunity for populists in power to amplify their strategy.

Much of the literature analyzing social media use by populists in power originates from American Politics, and is largely influenced by the 'Trump phenomenon.' Kreis (2017) analyzes about a month's worth of tweets (N=200) from Donald Trump, identifying attempts to portray homogeneous people and cast negative images of out-groups. (Ott & Dickinson 2020) demonstrates how Trump employs Twitter to spread impulsive and uncivil messages, often repetitively. These messages frequently target to discredit perceived adversaries, including journalists and media outlets, whom Trump labels as 'enemies of the American people.' Additionally, his tweets employ what these authors define as 'demeaning'—derogatory

statements (Ott & Dickinson 2020):615) intended to belittle political elites. Adopting a comparative approach, Cervi et al. (2021) analyze tweets from Donald Trump (N=1,044) and Jair Bolsonaro (N=698) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings indicate that, even amid the health crisis, these populists maintained rhetoric that glorified the people while denigrating the elite.

The study by Waisbord & Amado (2017) represents the only systematic attempt to analyze the rhetoric of populists in power on social media from a comparative perspective and beyond Western democracies. These authors offer valuable insights into the objectives of populist leaders when using social media. They highlight how populists use these platforms to perpetuate a top-down broadcasting-like type of communication with citizens. They also find that populists in power display aggressive rhetoric against political rivals and portray the media as biased against them.

1.3.2 Online engagement with populist rhetoric

Previous research has shown that digital media might have an impact on democracy by hindering political trust, fostering populism, and increasing polarization. While such effects have been observed in established democracies (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2023), we cannot ignore similar effects on emerging democracies where populist leaders are in power, such as those in Latin America. Therefore, it is relevant to learn how effective populists are at engaging with users on social media in order to assess the effects of their rhetoric more broadly. If populists, especially those in power, are effective at heightening online engagement, their divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric might gain more traction among users and extend its influence further.

I define online political engagement as any reaction to digital content that has the potential to generate broader political consequences, regardless of the effort or resources required. These activities can range from low-effort actions, such as liking or sharing a post, to high-effort activities. Examples of high-effort activities include writing an email to a representative or contributing to a blog (Groshek & Koc-Michalska 2017). The political consequences of such engagement are equally diverse. They range from feeding social media algorithms, which may lead to content going viral, to mobilizing thousands to protest against a dictator, as observed during the Arab Spring.

In a valuable scholarly piece on this topic, Cassell (2021) uses tweets to test levels of online engagement with a populist frame. In this context, the populist frame is characterized by an antagonistic division between the glorified 'people' and the evil 'elites.' Through a content analysis of both populist and non-populist party leaders and candidates, Cassell (2021) finds that social media users engage more with populist rhetoric than with technocratic and pluralistic alternatives. These findings are in line with those of Bobba (2019), who analyzed Facebook usage by the Italian right-wing populist party, *Lega Nord*. Bobba (2019) reveals that populism, especially from the party leader, is often expressed in an emotional style that is positively correlated with higher levels of 'likeability.' These observations raise significant concerns. As (Hameleers 2020) highlights, the inherent characteristics of populist rhetoric, along with the continuous interaction between populists and their supporters on social media, may exacerbate the risk of widespread polarization.

1.4 Populists in Power and Online Engagement

Following these works, I argue that populists in power use social media communication to generate online engagement. Previous scholarship showed that populists use social media to generate online engagement, even in its simplest forms like likes and retweets (Nahon 2015). This study argues that populists in power, in particular, use divisive and plebiscitarian rhetorical resources to achieve this objective. Based on the idea that populists look to increase their visibility (Cassell 2021) due to the algorithmic nature of social media (Bakshy et al. 2015); (Barberá 2015); (Groshek & Koc-Michalska 2017); (Hong & Kim 2016) and to foster the perception of widespread support, I expect that populists in power would resort more on divisive and plebiscitarian rhetoric than their non-populists counterparts. This argument is presented in the following two hypotheses:

H1: Populists in power will display more divisive rhetoric in their social media communications than their non-populist counterparts.

H2: Populists in power will display more plebiscitarian rhetoric in their social media communications than their non-populist counterparts.

Creating division and a sense of broad support align with the populists' strategy in power: to delineate a clear division between 'the pure people' and the 'evil elite' and to display an apparent direct representation of the people. Given the findings of Cassell (2021) and Bobba (2019), and considering the prominent position of populists in power, it is likely that their social media communications will attract significant online engagement. While these studies have often treated populist rhetoric as a monolithic artifact, I propose a different approach.

A nuanced understanding of its effectiveness on social media, particularly for those in power, can be achieved by viewing it as inherently dualistic. Hence, online engagement with divisive and plebiscitary messages is likely to differ from that with other types of messages, and even among the messages themselves. Divisive messages, due to their emotionally charged nature, are expected to draw more engagement than other communication forms. However, plebiscitary messages, which explicitly claim or solicit support for the populist in power, are likely to garner even higher levels of engagement than their divisive counterparts. These expectations are translated into the following hypotheses:

H3: Messages with divisive rhetoric will generate more engagement than other messages.

H4: Messages with plebiscitarian rhetoric will generate more engagement than other messages.

H5: Messages with plebiscitarian rhetoric will generate more engagement than divisive rhetoric.

Previous works have also called our attention to the fact that populists often resort to nationalistic rhetoric to elicit support (Jenne et al. 2021). As such, I would expect this kind of rhetoric to generate more online engagement. This expectation:

H6: Messages with nationalistic rhetoric will generate more engagement than other messages.

1.5 Data

To empirically test the theoretical claims above, I use data and meta-data from an original collection of tweets (n = 136,141) published by 24 Latin American presidents—6 populists and 18 non-populists—while in office between 2009 and 2022[2]. Although Twitter is not the most used social media platform in Latin America, it is the preferred outlet for politicians and those interested in discussing political matters[3] (Ausserhofer and Maireder, 2013). For instance, presidents from the largest Latin American countries, such as Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva, Gustavo Petro, Gabriel Boric, and Alberto Fernández, have more followers on Twitter than on Facebook—the most popular platform in the region. In some cases, the difference is nearly double. Furthermore, (Saldaña et al. 2017) found that Latin American journalists use Twitter more than Facebook for daily newsgathering and journalistic work.

I focus on Latin America because it presents an opportunity to examine the rhetoric of populists in power across the political spectrum. Populism in Latin America has typically been left-wing, economic, and inclusive (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013); however, figures like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil illustrate instances of right-wing and exclusionary populism in the region (Hunter & Power 2019). The region also has many examples of non-populist presidents on both sides of the political spectrum. Social media platforms are widespread in Latin America,

[2]Note that for some presidents, it took several months or even years after taking office before they started using Twitter. For presidents who were still in office, I stopped collecting tweets on December 31, 2022. In the case of Nicolás Maduro, collection stopped in December 2021 due to the lack of presidential approval data, a variable needed for the analysis

[3]Recent changes in the ownership of Twitter may alter this trend in the future. However, it is likely that politicians will use any new dominant platform for political discussion in a similar manner, particularly populists in power.

with approximately 70 percent of adults in the region having social media accounts, according to the AmericasBarometer (Lupu et al. 2019).

The collection of tweets was gathered through the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) using the R package academictwitteR (**?**) . Chief Executives were classified as non-populist or populist according to the 'Global Populism Database (GPD): Populism Dataset for Leaders 1.0' by Team Populism (Hawkins et al. 2019). The GPD evaluates the degree to which chief executives adopt discursive elements of the ideational approach to populism, as described by Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). The speeches are categorized as 'not populist,' 'somewhat populist,' 'populist,' or 'very populist,' based on their content. To ensure consistency, I only included executives whose speeches were classified as 'populist' or 'very populist' in the GPD. However, the only exception was Jair Bolsonaro, whose speeches are classified as 'somewhat populist' but who is described as a populist elsewhere (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán 2023; Smith 2020; Kestler 2022). Including Bolsonaro in the analysis offered more gains than losses. Firstly, he is the only right-wing president from a major country with a grade of at least somewhat populist in the GPD. Secondly, although beyond the scope of this study, his inclusion is an opportunity to compare and contrast the GPD classification against the content analysis of tweets presented here. Although only methodologically relevant, including Bolsonaro allows for testing the methods in Portuguese as well as in Spanish. Finally, since the analyses below are individual, including Bolsonaro does not introduce any bias. Table 1 presents a list of the executives' names, their classification, country, years in office while active on Twitter

and the number of tweets collected. The list shows good variation in terms of location and levels of activity on Twitter.

The collection of tweets includes text and metadata associated with them. For the purposes of this study, the only metadata used are the date, retweet count, and like count. For the first part of the analysis, I only added a dichotomous variable to differentiate populists and non-populists based on the data from the Global Populist Database (Hawkins et al. 2019).

To conduct the first analysis in the study, I included only original tweets or retweets with quotes from all 24 Latin American executives, encompassing both populists and non-populists. I excluded replies and retweets without quotes, as these types of tweets do not reflect a proactive effort to disseminate the executive's rhetoric.

For the second part, I focus solely on the populist cases to determine whether the adoption of populist rhetoric is associated with increased online engagement. Again, I only use original tweets and retweets with a quote posted by populist presidents. The total number of tweets for this analysis is 35,534, comprising 2,668 for Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 13,097 for Evo Morales, 4,358 for Rafael Correa, 921 for Hugo Chávez, and 14,490 for Nicolás Maduro. For this part of the analysis, I also include the dependent variables 'retweet count' and 'like count' as measures for online engagement, as this has become a standard practice in political science research (e.g. Cassell (2021)) and elsewhere (e.g. Zhan et al. (2023)). As for independent variables, the analysis includes dichotomous variables to indicate the presence of three types of content: 'divisive', 'plebiscitary', and 'nationalistic' (see Methods section for details on

Table 1.1 Populist and Non-populist Executives and their Twitter Activity

President	Type of Leader	Country	Years	No. Tweets	Handle
Michelle Bachelet	Non-populist	Chile	2016-2018	527	@mbachelet
Jair Bolsonaro	Populist	Brazil	2019-2022	9,417	@jairbolsonaro
Felipe Calderón	Non-populist	Mexico	2010-2012	2,500	@FelipeCalderon
Horacio Cartes	Non-populist	Paraguay	2013-2018	1,201	@Horacio_Cartes
Hugo Chávez	Populist	Venezuela	2010-2013	921	@chavezcandanga
Laura Chinchilla	Non-populist	Costa Rica	2010-2014	3,887	@Laura_Ch
Rafael Correa	Populist	Ecuador	2011-2017	4,358	@MashiRafael
Cristina Fernández	Non-populist	Argentina	2010-2015	8,500	@CFKArgentina
Pedro Pablo Kuczynski	Non-populist	Peru	2016-2018	795	@ppkamigo
Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Populist	Mexico	2018-2022	2,464	@lopezobrador_
Mauricio Macri	Non-populist	Argentina	2015-2019	3,126	@mauriciomacri
Nicolás Maduro	Populist	Venezuela	2013-2021	14,490	@NicolasMaduro
Evo Morales	Populist	Bolivia	2016-2019	13,097	@evoespueblo
Jimmy Morales	Non-populist	Guatemala	2015-2019	1,211	@jimmymoralesgt
Lenin Moreno	Non-populist	Ecuador	2017-2021	3,549	@Lenin
Enrique Peña Nieto	Non-populist	Mexico	2012-2018	3,880	@EPN
Otto Pérez Molina	Non-populist	Guatemala	2012-2015	3,117	ottoperezmolina
Sebastián Piñera	Non-populist	Chile	2011-2014, 2018-2020	2,663	@sebastianpinera
Dilma Rousseff	Non-populist	Brazil	2013-2016	5,974	@dilmabr
Juan Manuel Santos	Non-populist	Colombia	2011-2018	15,148	@JuanManSantos
Porfirio Lobo Sosa	Non-populist	Honduras	2011-2013	533	@PEPE_LOBO
Luis Guillermo Solís	Non-populist	Costa Rica	2014-2018	14,531	@luisguillermosr
Michel Temer	Non-populist	Brazil	2016-2018	6,319	@MichelTemer
Juan Carlos Varela	Non-populist	Panamá	2014-2019	13,933	@JC_Varela
Total				136,141	

how these variables were obtained). Additional variables in the analysis are 'Electoral Period' and 'Approval.' Major electoral events might influence levels of online engagement with chief executives. Thus, the 'Electoral Period' is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a tweet was posted within the three months before a major electoral event (e.g. national election, presidential election, legislative election, or plebiscite). Levels of approval might as well have an impact on whether citizens engage or not with executives. The 'Approval' variable represents the monthly measure of support, as reported by the Executive Approval Project (EAP, Carlin et al. (2023)), which includes data for the populists in the study up to 2022[4]. Previous research has demonstrated the potential impact of Covid-19 on support for chief executives (see Hegewald & Schraff (2022); Pignataro (2021); Schraff (2021); Tagina (2021)), which could ultimately influence online engagement. To account for these effects, I have included a dichotomous variable indicating whether a tweet was posted during the Covid-19 pandemic, applicable to those presidents who were in office during this period.

1.6 Methods

This study is divided into two main analyses. The first analysis aims to identify the presence of words theoretically associated with the two proposed dimensions of populist rhetoric—divisive and plebiscitary—in the tweets of both populist and non-populist executives and to compare the prevalence of these words across both groups. Based on the identified prevalent words, I utilize a combination of theory-driven and data-driven approaches to develop

[4]Despite attempts to collect Maduro's approval ratings from alternative sources, reliable data for that time period were not available.

dictionaries that represent 'divisive' and 'plebiscitary' content. With these dictionaries, the second analysis examines the relationship between the presence of this content in tweets and their subsequent online engagement levels.

1.6.1 Identifying divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric in Executive's tweets: Combining theory-driven and data-driven approaches

The objective of identifying words associated with the two dimensions of populist rhetoric serves two purposes. On one hand, it assesses whether words connected with populist rhetoric are indeed more prevalent in the tweets of populist executives. The second purpose is to establish a base dictionary for classifying tweets according to their content. This base dictionary will then be enriched with terms identified through manual examination of a sample of the classified tweets. In the end, the final dictionary is the result of both theory-driven and data-driven approaches.

On the data-driven side, I analyze the language used by each populist president using relative frequency analyses. I identify the top 10 most frequent words used by each of the six populist presidents in comparison with their non-populist counterparts. The tweets of each populist president are compared with those of non-populist presidents[5] in separate analyses to capture the specificity of each context. For instance, elites might be referred to with different terms (e.g. *os comunistas* in Bolsonaro, *mafia del poder* in AMLO, *los escuálidos in Maduro*, etc.); the same is true for the names of populist movements (e.g. *Revolución Bolivariana* in Venezuela, *Movimiento al Socialismo* in Bolivia, *Cuarta Trans-*

[5]These comparisons required several preprocessing steps. I removed numbers, not meaningful characters (e.g. https, a.m., AM), symbols, punctuation, stop and words in Spanish and Portuguese.

formación en México, *Revolución Ciudadana* in Ecuador). For each analysis, I employ the Quanteda R package (**?**) to create a corpus. In doing so, I remove Spanish stopwords (and Portuguese for Jair Bolsonaro), special characters, numbers, and punctuation. All words are stemmed and transformed to lowercase. Specific country names and demonyms are transformed to "country_name" and "country_demonym" to prevent them from becoming falsely prevalent. Similarly, variations of references to populist movements are categorized under "reference_to_movement" to facilitate more general and meaningful inferences. Generally, common or non-meaningful words are removed from the corpus. National heroes' names are categorized as "national_hero." Lastly, as at least three populist executives were in office during the Covid-19 crisis, compared to presidents who were not, words referencing this crisis were removed if they appeared excessively frequent (e.g. covid-19, pandemic, vaccines, coronavirus).

After completing each frequency analysis, I reviewed the results for terms theoretically linked to divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric. For divisive rhetoric, I focused on words like 'people', 'elite', and 'corruption'. For plebiscitary rhetoric, I sought terms that imply support for the leader or their movement, call for additional support, or suggest true representation of the people. For instance, mentions of the president's movement or self-references using the president's name were categorized as part of the plebiscitary dimension. Using these terms, I conducted an initial classification of tweets to identify those containing one or more of these terms.

After identifying the top 10 words through the relative frequency analysis, I employed the

Quanteda package once again to generate base dictionaries containing these terms. Then, I manually inspected a sample of tweets (10%) to find additional terms that might have been missed by the dictionary. This step helped to ensure that short expressions, which can sometimes alter the meaning of words, were not overlooked. It also aided in identifying terms whose frequency may not be high compared to non-populists or other terms but are nonetheless indicative of divisive or plebiscitary rhetoric. After this manual inspection, more terms were added to the final dictionaries (See Table A1 in the Appendix Section) based on the theory described above. To illustrate what different divisive and plebiscitary tweets in the data set look like, Table 2 shows six examples of tweets, three divisive and three plebiscitary.

In addition to the divisive and plebiscitary dictionaries, I developed a nationalistic dictionary. This dictionary was also created based on terms found during the relative frequency analysis, and the manual inspection of 10% of the tweets for each populist president. The terms included in this dictionary can be referred to in Table A1 in the Appendix Section.

After creating the divisive and plebiscitary dictionaries for each populist executive, I developed an additional dictionary for nationalistic terms. Previous studies have suggested a possible correlation between populism and nationalism (Jenne et al. 2021). The extent to which this actually occurs is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is recognized that chief executives often mention their country and its citizens' demonyms in attempts to establish common ground and gain sympathy. This usage of nationalistic terms might, in turn, translate into increased online engagement. Therefore, to account for the effects

Table 1.2 Divisive and plebiscitary Rhetoric

Tweet	Author
Divisive Tweets	
I understand why Lula tries to flee. The truth bothers, but it needs to be told! Those who are friends with crime and socialist dictators are enemies of the people!	Jair Bolsonaro
we have gold, silver, copper, oil, gas, water, electrical potential, good lands and, the main resource, a good and hard-working people	Andrés M. López Obrador
Bravo my dear comrade Diosdado! With those arguments, the weak [escuálidos] ones are pulverized! Bravo!	Hugo Chávez
Plebiscitary Tweets	
Attention.... Attention. Long live the Working Class... Long live the Ribas Mission... Long live the Bolivarian Revolution... Long live Chávez	Nicolás Maduro
From March 8 to 14, they will try to destabilize us with all media, economic, oligarchic support, but without the main thing: the support of the people.	Rafael Correa
As a Plurinational State, we greet and claim World Day for Cultural Diversity. We have an enormous cultural wealth and thanks to the struggle of the people, now our CPE recognizes the rights of the 36 original nations that make up our beloved #Bolivia	Evo Morales

of nationalistic rhetoric, the creation of a dictionary with nationalistic terms is necessary. With these three final dictionaries, I use the Quanteda package to classify tweets as having divisive, plebiscitary and/or nationalistic content.

1.6.2 The prevalence of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric on Twitter

I begin by presenting the results of relative frequency analyses conducted separately for each populist president, comparing the ten most frequently used words in their tweets to those of non-populist presidents. The results indicate a higher prevalence of words associated with divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric among populist presidents, aligning with the study's expectations. This suggests that divisive and plebiscitary content is indeed more prominent

in the social media usage of populist leaders.

Figure 1 displays the results of these relative frequency analyses for the six populist chief executives. The relative frequency in Figure 1 compares the frequency with which a term is used by a populist leader to its expected usage if no difference existed between populist and non-populist leaders. The chi-squared statistic for each term quantifies the degree of divergence in its use between the populists and the group of non-populists. Notably, references to their movements were among the most frequent for four populists, ranking in the top spot for two presidents: AMLO and Correa. The term "pueblo" (the people) featured among the top five most frequently used words for three presidents and appeared within the top ten for another. While not as prominent as references to populist movements or the people, the analysis also revealed the presence of terms like "corruption", "neoliberal", and "right-wing", commonly associated with the concept of a corrupt elite. For Jair Bolsonaro, the term "esquerda" (the left-wing) emerged as the sixth most frequently used term. Bolsonaro often characterizes the Brazilian left wing on social media as a corrupt elite or a dictatorship. The rallying cry "venceremos" (we will prevail), suggesting a future victory for the populist and the people, was the most relatively prevalent word in Hugo Chávez's tweets and also appeared within the top 10 for Rafael Correa.

To gain a clearer understanding of the extent of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric in each populist's Twitter usage, Figure 3 displays the proportions according to the message content over the period analyzed. This figure also presents the monthly levels of approval and identifies months with electoral periods, defined as the two months leading up to a

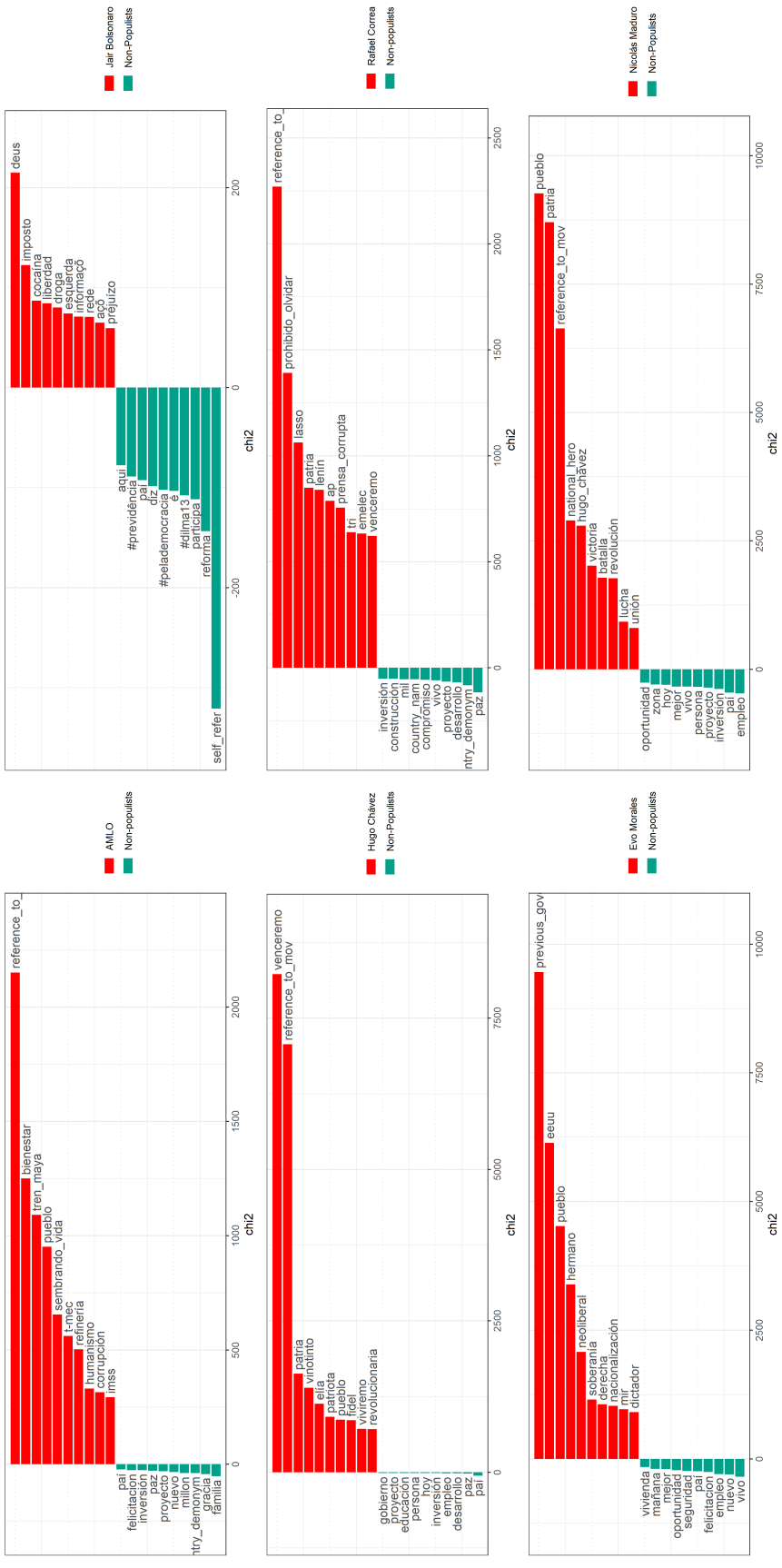


Figure 1.1 Relative Frequency of terms used by populist executives vs terms used by non-populist executives

Figure 1.2 Proportions of Tweets with one or more types of content, level of approval and electoral periods

major electoral event. Generally, the figure indicates that populists more often use their Twitter accounts for communication without divisive and plebiscitary language. However, some exhibit higher levels of such content than others. Divisive language appears in 45% of Evo Morales' tweets and in 35% of Maduro's, while Correa shows the least divisive rhetoric, at 7.7%. Plebiscitary language is found in 15% of tweets by both Nicolás Maduro and Hugo Chávez. López Obrador and Correa have the lowest levels of plebiscitary rhetoric, at 3.8% and 4%, respectively.

Electoral periods seem to amplify divisive rhetoric in some cases. This trend is evident in Bolsonaro's tweets during the months leading up to the two rounds of the 2022 Presidential election and in López Obrador's tweets prior to the 2021 Legislative election. Notably, for Nicolás Maduro and Evo Morales, divisive language became more consistent towards the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, respectively. In Bolsonaro's case, both divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric appear to have declined from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 until April 2022. Regarding presidential approval, the data does not exhibit any clear pattern.

To assess the relationship between tweets with divisive and plebiscitary content and online engagement, I rely on two mixed-effects negative binomial regression (NBR) models for each populist included in the analysis. Considering the overdispersion of count variables such as 'like count' and 'retweet count', using an NBR model was the most suitable alternative. Since the analysis also includes the variable 'Approval', which is measured monthly, I have specified a random slope for this variable by month.

The model is represented with the following equation:

$$\log(\mu_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Divisive}_i + \beta_2 \text{Plebiscitary}_i + \beta_3 \text{Nationalism}_i + \beta_4 \text{Electoral Period}_i + \beta_5 \text{COVID-19}_i + \beta_6 \text{Approval}_i + b_{\text{month}_i} \text{Approval}_i \quad (1.1)$$

Where μ_i is the expected number of likes (or retweets) for the i-th observation. The natural logarithm of μ_i is used as the link function to indicates that the number of likes (or retweets) follows a Negative Binomial distribution. The terms $\beta_1 \text{Divisive}_i$, $\beta_2 \text{plebiscitary}_i$, $\beta_3 \text{Nationalism}_i$, $\beta_4 \text{Electoral Period}_i$, $\beta_5 \text{Covid-19}_i$[6], and $\beta_6 \text{Approval}_i$ are independent variables with fixed effects on likes and retweets counts. I include a random effect for the monthly approval of the populists using the term $b_{\text{month}_i} \text{Approval}_i$. This term allows for different slopes for Approval in different months, capturing the varying influence of this predictor across time.

Since the estimates from the NBR model represent changes in the natural logarithm of the expected count of likes and retweets, respectively, exponentiating the coefficients provides a more interpretable measure of the observed effects. The coefficients in the NBR model have been transformed to present Incidence Rate Ratios (IRR) for each predictor. The next section presents the results of the analyses described above and is followed by a discussion of the findings in the paper.

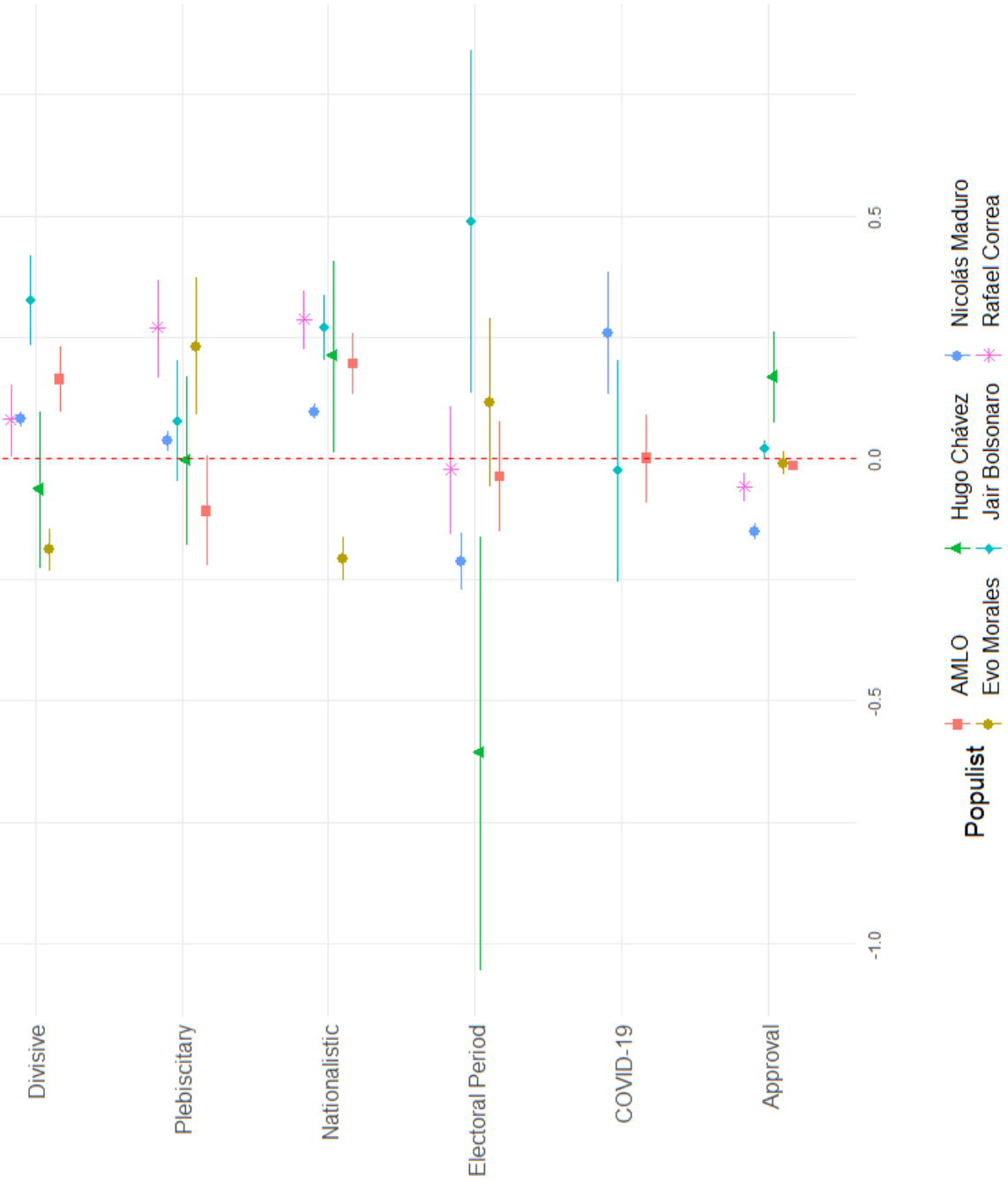
[6]This variable is only present if the populist president was in office during the Covid-19 pandemic

1.7 Results

To assess the effectiveness of populists in power using divisive and plebiscitary language on social media, I present the results of 12 mixed-effects negative binomial regressions. Figure 3 shows the results for six models where online engagement is measured by 'like count.' These results suggest that 'divisive' rhetoric has a positive and significant relationship with like count in four out of six cases: Bolsonaro, Correa, López Obrador, and Maduro. In the case of Evo Morales, this relationship is negative and also statistically significant. The only case where divisive rhetoric shows no statistically significant relationship with 'like count' is Hugo Chávez. On the other hand, 'plebiscitary rhetoric' has a positive and statistically significant relationship with 'like count' in three cases: Correa, Maduro, and Evo Morales.

In the cases of Chávez and López Obrador, the relationship is negative, whereas, in the case of Bolsonaro, it is positive, but in all these three cases, the relationship is not statistically significant. Nationalistic rhetoric displays a positive and statistically significant correlation with like count across all cases, except for Evo Morales, where a negative and statistically significant relationship is observed. Regarding the effect of the electoral period on driving online engagement, the results are mixed. In the two Venezuelan cases, electoral periods led to a negative and statistically significant relationship with 'like count.' The only case where the relationship was positive and statistically significant is that of Jair Bolsonaro. For the three cases in office during the COVID-19 pandemic, only Maduro shows a statistically significant relationship with like count, which is positive. Lastly, the 'approval' variable shows statistically significant relationships with 'like count' in five cases, being positive only

Figure 1.3 Effects of Populist Rhetoric on Online Engagement in Likes



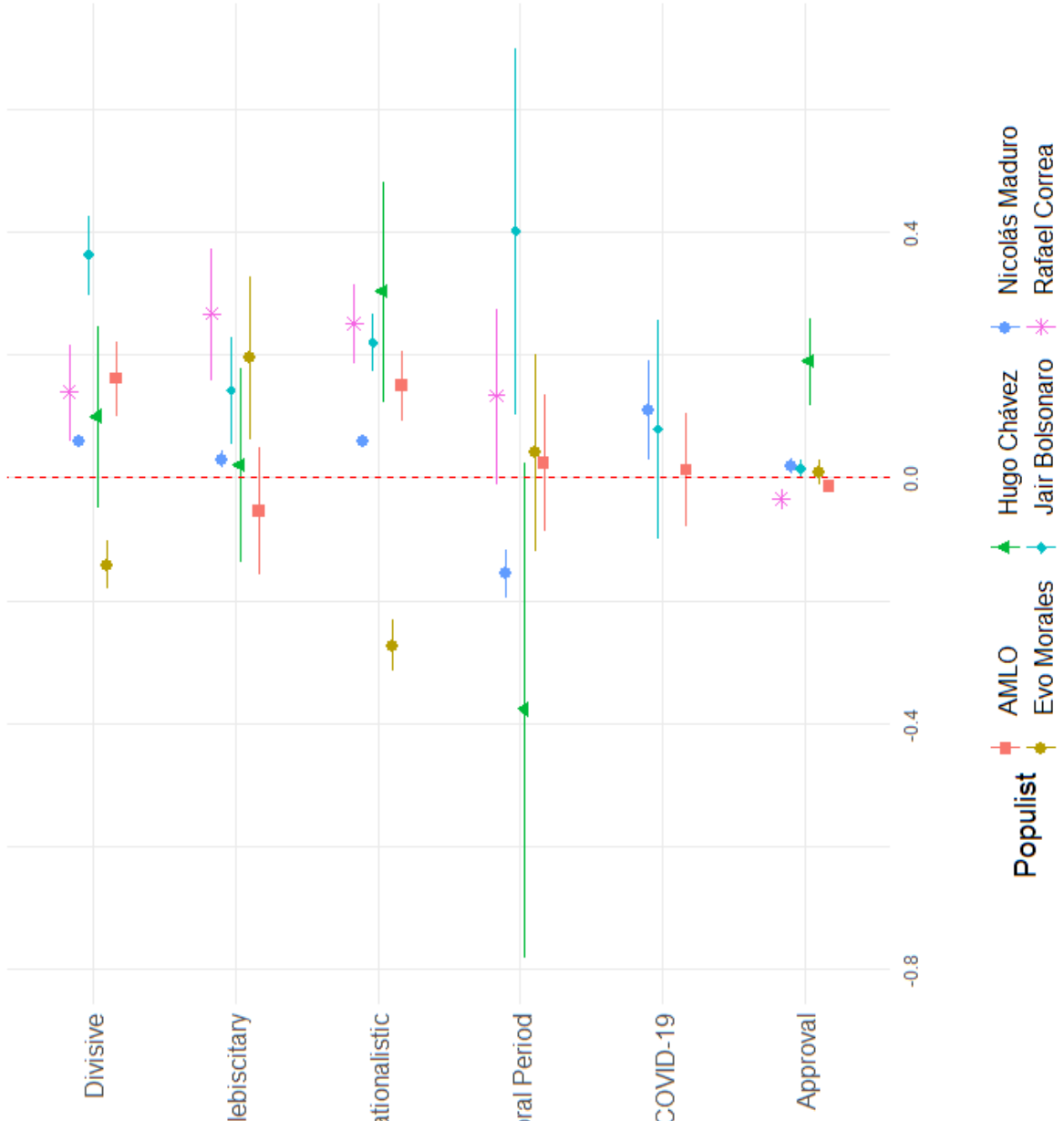


Figure 1.4 Effects of Populist Rhetoric on Online Engagement in Retweets

for Bolsonaro and Chávez and negative for Correa, López Obrador, and Maduro. In the case of Evo Morales, a negative but not statistically significant relationship is observed.

Figure 4 presents the results for models where online engagement is measured in terms of 'retweet count.' In these models, divisive rhetoric holds a statistically significant relationship in five cases; however, it is positive in Bolsonaro, Correa, López Obrador, and Maduro, and negative for Evo Morales. 'plebiscitary' rhetoric and 'retweet count' have a positive and statistically significant relationship in four cases: Bolsonaro, Correa, Maduro, and Morales. In the cases of Chávez and López Obrador, the relationship is not statistically significant, although it is positive in the former and negative in the latter. Nationalistic rhetoric results in a statistically significant relationship across all cases. However, in the case of Morales, the direction of the relationship is negative. Electoral periods show statistically significant relationships only in the cases of Bolsonaro and Maduro, being positive for the former and negative for the latter. For the three populists in office during the Covid-19 pandemic, again, only Nicolás Maduro drove statistically significantly more online engagement. Approval, on the other hand, shows mixed results, as its relationship with 'retweet count' is statistically significant and positive in the cases of Bolsonaro, Chávez, and Maduro but statistically significant and negative in the cases of Correa and López Obrador.

Since Negative Binomial Regression (NBR) uses a log-link function, the coefficients in NBR represent the change in the logarithm of the expected count of the dependent variable. To facilitate a more intuitive interpretation of the effects of the 'divisive' and 'plebiscitary' variables on 'online engagement', Table 3 presents the Incidence Rate Ratios (IRRs) for these

Table 1.3 Comparison of Incidence Rate Ratios (IRRs) for 'Divisive' and 'plebiscitary' across two sets of models

	Likes Count		Retweets Count	
	Divisive	Plebiscitary	Divisive	Plebiscitary
Bolsonaro	**1.39**	1.08	**1.44**	**1.15**
Chávez	0.94	0.997	1.11	1.02
Correa	**1.08**	**1.31**	**1.15**	**1.31**
López Obrador	**1.18**	0.90	**1.18**	0.95
Maduro	**1.09**	**1.04**	**1.06**	**1.03**
Morales	**0.83**	**1.26**	**0.87**	**1.22**

Note: Bold font represents statistically significant estimates in the mixed-effects negative binomial models.

variables of interest. These IRRs were obtained by exponentiating the NBR coefficients. For the 'divisive' rhetoric variable in the 'likes count' model, we observe that the presence of this kind of rhetoric is associated with a 39% increase in engagement for Bolsonaro, 8% for Correa, 18% for López Obrador, and 9% for Maduro. Conversely, for Morales, divisive rhetoric is associated with a 17% decrease in likes. In the 'retweet count' model, the presence of 'divisive' rhetoric correlates with a 44% increase in engagement for Bolsonaro, 15% for Correa, 18% for López Obrador, and 6% for Maduro, while for Morales, it correlates with a 13% decrease. Regarding 'plebiscitary' rhetoric, in the 'retweet count' model, its presence is associated with a 15% increase in engagement for Bolsonaro, 31% for Correa, 3% for Maduro, and 22% for Morales. Similarly, for the 'likes count' model, 'plebiscitary' rhetoric is linked to a 31% increase in engagement for Correa, 4% for Maduro, and 26% for Morales.

These results offer mixed support for the hypotheses proposed in this paper. While it is evident that populists in power tend to use more divisive and plebiscitary language compared to their non-populist counterparts, it is noteworthy that the proportion of tweets containing such messages is relatively small when compared to other types of messages. In terms of

online engagement, this study provides some evidence suggesting that these types of rhetoric can drive increased engagement. Although divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric generally appear to enhance online engagement, there are instances where specific contextual factors may mitigate this effect. The following section will further interpret these results, linking them with existing literature. It will also discuss the broader implications of these findings and propose avenues for future research.

Discussion

This study examines the use of social media by populist presidents in power in Latin America. It proposes that social media serves as a means for these presidents to advance their political strategies by disseminating divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric. The study also analyzes the extent to which these types of rhetoric translate into online engagement. Employing a combination of computational content analysis, descriptive statistics, and quantitative analysis, the paper finds evidence in line with the theoretical expectations. Divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric are more frequent in tweets from populist presidents than from their non-populist counterparts. However, this rhetoric is not the most prevalent content in the tweets analyzed. The presence of divisive rhetoric varies between 8% and 45%, and plebiscitary rhetoric between 4% to 15%, depending on the president. Online engagement also shows mixed results, with divisive rhetoric associated with increases in likes ranging from 8% to 39%, and in retweets from 6% to 39%. However, for some presidents, there is no statistically significant relationship, or it is even negative, as in the case of Evo Morales. The presence of plebiscitary

rhetoric increases online engagement in terms of likes between 4% and 31%. The relationship with retweets shows a similar increase.

The variation in the study's results is likely due to contextual factors. For instance, the lower proportions of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric in tweets by Rafael Correa or López Obrador might be related to their use of Twitter as an institutional tool. Populist presidents, given their dual political and institutional roles, are likely to balance institutional information with their political strategy. This balance might differ between presidents and over time. The lack of significant relationships or decreases in online engagement with divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric can have various explanations. In the case of Hugo Chávez, limited Twitter activity due to the platform's nascent stage in political debate might be a factor. Although a deeper analysis might be required, in the case of Evo Morales, the low penetration of Twitter in the country could explain the decreasing online engagement with divisive rhetoric. According to the Americas Barometer, only 5.8% of the population has a Twitter account, which is the second lowest penetration rate in Latin America (**?**). As a result, Twitter users in Bolivia likely belong to a social sector that opposes Evo Morales.

These results resonate with previous work on populism and social media use. The presence of people-centrism and anti-elitism found by Ernst et al. (2017) in extreme populist parties is also present in Latin American populist presidents. Generally, the divisive aspect of populist rhetoric observed in this study confirms the findings of Engesser et al. (2017), Krämer (2017), and Gründl (2020) among others. Some findings in this study align with research on populists in power and social media. For instance, Kreis (2017) and Ott &

Dickinson (2020) identified divisive rhetoric in Donald Trump's tweets. While not entirely contradicting Cervi et al. (2021), this study suggests a proportional decrease in Bolsonaro's divisive rhetoric from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic until the 2022 electoral year. Concerning online engagement, the results here suggest that the relationship with divisive rhetoric is more complex than indicated by Cassell (2021) and Bobba (2019). This complexity may be due to the unique challenges faced by populists in power in using social media communication and the varied reactions of citizens.

Despite the mixed findings, the presence of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric in the tweets of Latin American populist presidents might have concerning implications. These forms of rhetoric, especially when they increase online engagement, could lead to what (McCoy et al. 2018) identify as pernicious polarization, potentially eroding democracy.

The study has limitations that future research could address to broaden our understanding of how populists in power use social media. For instance, focusing only on Twitter, a popular platform for political debate, does not encompass the full spectrum of platforms where populists might disseminate their rhetoric. Future research could include platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or even TikTok to assess how populists use these platforms and how citizens engage with their rhetoric. Another limitation is the geographical scope of the study. Expanding the analysis to include other regions, especially emergent democracies, could provide further insights.

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on populist rhetoric, advancing our knowledge of how populists in power use rhetoric as a strategic tool to divide and claim direct

representation of the people. It represents the first systematic analysis of the rhetoric of populist chief executives in five or more political contexts. Additionally, it provides insights into the extent to which these populists use social media to disseminate various forms of rhetoric and generate online engagement among users.

CHAPTER 2

Populist Rhetoric from the Bottom-Up: Divisive and Plebiscitary Interactions on Twitter with Latin American Presidents

2.1 Introduction

A brief examination of tweets on political subjects swiftly reveals the extensive polarization that characterizes interactions on social media platforms. The scholarly literature on this topic provides some empirical support for this observation (e.g., Yarchi et al. 2020; Bakshy et al. 2015; Conover et al. 2011). Additionally, various studies indicate that populist leaders contribute to creating a polarized digital environment by emphasizing divisions between the elite and the people (Boucher & Thies 2019a; Hameleers 2020). While these studies offer valuable insights into the role of populists in digital polarization, we know less about how social media users interact with populist leaders, especially those in power, and how these interactions further exacerbate polarization.

Given the growing influence that social media have on the political environment, knowing how users interact with leaders on these platforms is relevant to understanding the polarizing potential of those interactions. Furthermore, deliberation is crucial for a healthy democracy. Deliberation holds potential to shape beliefs and opinions toward consensus and to constrain political authority by requiring justifications that are acceptable in terms of public reasoning (King 2003). When online deliberation leads to division rather than consensus, it not only makes agreement impossible but also paves the way for the adoption of policies that lack appropriate justification. In essence, high-quality deliberation on public affairs increases

the political costs of implementing policies that contradict the public's reasoned arguments. Thus, understanding the dynamics of interactions between users and leaders on social media may help us to assess the risks of democratic erosion posed by these platforms.

To gain a deeper understanding of the interactions between social media users and populist presidents, this paper aims to explore several key questions. Firstly, are populist presidents generating more polarizing responses with users than their non-populist counterparts? Are supporters or opponents engaging in more polarizing interactions with populist presidents? Do supporters (opponents) of populist presidents show more support (opposition) for their leader compared to supporters of non-populist presidents? Are these trends consistent, or do they vary over time? Answering these questions will allow us to distinguish between the polarizing effects of populist communication from the top down and those from below. This analysis will also shed light on the dynamics of engagement with populist leaders in power, examining the extent and nature of such interactions and whether they are influenced by specific political contexts or remain constant.

I propose that social media users in countries led by a populist executive (in contrast to those led by non-populist leaders) will display a permanent level of divisive responses. However, that kind of rhetoric will be more prevalent among opponents than supporters. On the other hand, since populists in power use social media to promote themselves (Waisbord & Amado 2017) and their movements in an attempt to consolidate a majority (Urbinati 2017), supporters will be more outspoken in showing their support.

To answer the research questions presented in this paper, I have collected an original

dataset, comprising nearly 2 million tweets replying to five Latin American presidents from 2019 to 2021. This dataset was analyzed using advanced Artificial Intelligence techniques. This included employing Generative Pre-Trained Transformers (GPT) for enhancing the dataset through data augmentation. along with a Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers (BERT) model for sentiment and content analysis of the tweets. The results indicate that populist presidents tend to incite more divisive and plebiscitary interactions on social media. Interestingly, a similar levels of divisive and plebiscitary discourse are present in responses to non-populist presidents. However, these interactions seem to be driven by specific events, such as protests, social outbursts, and health crises. The subsequent sections will detail the theory underpinning this study, outline the data collection process and analysis methods, present the results, and discuss the findings and their implications.

2.2 Populism and Polarization on Social Media: Top-Down Perspective

Given that a fundamental element of populism, as a thin-centered ideology, posits that "society [is] ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite" (Mudde 2004):23), a natural connection with polarization seems almost inherent. From this perspective, the essence of populism lies in exacerbating social and political divisions between these two poles (McCoy et al. 2018). Consequently, it is reasonable to anticipate that populists would utilize social media as an additional, or sometimes preferred, tool to exploit these divisions. In an analysis of tweets from Latin American presidents, Waisbord & Amado (2017) finds that populist presidents rely on an

antagonistic and confrontational discourse. Accordingly, these populist leaders use Twitter to launch attacks against their opponents. Others like Kreis (2017) have identified in Donald Trump's tweets the representation of the homogeneous people and the corrupt elite.

Populist use of social media has been characterized by two practices: unmediated communication (Boucher & Thies 2019a; Hameleers 2020; Maurer & Diehl 2020; Jost et al. 2020) and a top-down style (Kreis 2017; Waisbord & Amado 2017). Unmediated communication allows populists to address followers or attack opponents directly, articulate discursive pieces, and bypass traditional media channels. This approach enables populists, especially those in power, to rely on strategic polarization to advance their agendas (Ortega et al. 2022). The second practice, a top-down style, is a vertical mode of communication that evades any form of deliberation. As Waisbord & Amado (2017) highlights, this style of communication rejects the notion of a communicative commons, which values reasoned deliberation and allows for democratic pluralism. Instead, populist leaders use social media to broadcast their messages, normalize their rhetoric (Kreis 2017), and reinforce a news-making position and visibility (Waisbord 2018). In sum, these two practices mutually reinforce each other, heightening a more polarized digital environment surrounding populists.

On top of populist communication strategies and styles, we must consider the polarizing nature of social media platforms. Scholars have warned about these platforms' propensity to create ideological echo chambers (Hendrix 2019; Barberá 2015). While echo chambers created by algorithmic ranking seem to exist and affect exposure to some content, others have challenged their effects. Bakshy et al. (2015) suggest that individual choices, more than

echo chambers, define exposure to diverse perspectives. Similar conclusions were reached by Eady et al. (2019) when analyzing approximately 1.2 billion tweets posted by U.S. users. They found that, although online echo chambers exist, there is significant cross-ideological exposure among Twitter users. Yet others, like Yarchi et al. (2020), have identified three different aspects of polarization on social media: interactional, positional, and affective. Interactional polarization involves how users interact with like-minded individuals compared to those with opposing views. Positional polarization occurs when social media platforms predominantly expose users to confirmatory viewpoints, reducing tolerance for opposing positions. Affective polarization refers to emotional responses towards opposing political groups, often manifesting as hostility. Yarchi et al. (2020) find that different platforms exhibit varying forms of polarization, with Twitter displaying all three types. Conversely, Facebook shows more heterophily, suggesting fewer echo chamber effects.

2.3 Division and Support from the Bottom

Most studies analyzing social media users' reactions to populist rhetoric focus on two aspects: populist attitudes among users and their engagement with this type of rhetoric. Survey experiments conducted in Austria and the Netherlands by Hameleers & Schmuck (2017) reveal that social media messages blaming elites or immigrants tend to strengthen populist attitudes, particularly when the source is a favored politician. Thiele & Turnšek (2022) use a series of content analyses of Facebook comments regarding the 2015-2016 refugee crisis in Austria and Slovenia. Their results show that right-wing populist comments increased the

number of replies but reduced deliberative quality, whereas people-centric comments reduced argumentation in replies, and anti-immigrant comments led to increased incivility. Others have found a positive correlation between the number of tweets from populist parties and user engagement, indicating a 'more is more' effect (Alonso-Muñoz 2020). Studying Facebook posts from the Italian populist party, *Lega Nord* and its leader, Matteo Salvini, Bobba (2019) finds that populist communication is positively correlated with more 'likeability' of a message. Also analyzing Facebook posts, Jost et al. (2020) find that anger is likely to be elicited by populist communication that blames elites or out-groups for societal problems. The study also shows that inclusive populism increases 'Love' Reactions. In a similar vein, Cassell (2021) finds that Latin American candidates using populist rhetoric on Twitter drive higher levels of engagement measured in likes and retweets, than those using other discursive forms. Finally, Hameleers (2020) studies how populist communication in the Netherlands and the U.S. resonates with citizens. The findings of the study suggest that in the U.S., citizens' rhetoric is marked by affective polarization along partisan lines, while in the Netherlands, citizens target the cleavages between native and hard-working ordinary people versus the elite.

These studies provide a good picture of how citizens receive populist rhetoric from the top. However, none of the studies systematically analyze the prevalence of polarizing rhetoric from the bottom on social media, nor do they explore the dynamics of interactions between leaders and users. As such, several questions remained unanswered. Are there differences in the responses that populist and non-populist leaders receive from the public? What forms do

these responses take? How do these interactions evolve? Additionally, what is the impact of crises on these dynamics? Answering these questions is important to understand the polarizing potential of these interactions. Furthermore, it is helpful to assess the quality of political deliberation on these platforms derived from populist communication. Deliberation is essential for democracy (e.g., Habermas 2015) as it provides an opportunity to exchange different points of view about public issues. Thus, prevalent polarization in online deliberation might pose risks to democratic stability.

2.4 Polarizing Reactions from the Bottom-Up

I theorize that polarization on social media from the bottom is indeed a reaction to populist communication, especially to populists in power. his form of polarization is characterized by two distinct dynamics: divisive rhetoric and plebiscitary rhetoric. These elements interact and reinforce each other, resulting in a bottom-up polarization among the public.

Divisive rhetoric is characterized as communication that underscores division, discord, or conflict between different societal groups, fostering an 'us vs. them.' Populist leaders often facilitate responses with this form of rhetoric by explicitly delineating societal divisions–identifying who belongs to the in-group and who is relegated to the out-group. As previously discussed, these leaders strategically exploit societal cleavages to further their agendas (Ortega et al. 2022), using divisive rhetoric as a key tool in this strategy.

On the other hand, plebiscitary rhetoric refers to responses that call for unity either in support of or opposition to a political leader or movement. This approach resembles a direct,

Table 2.1 Examples of Responses with Divisive Rhetoric

Replying to	**Original**	**English**
`@alferdez`	*Alberto no sigas mintiendo se acabaron los ignorantes en maza en este pais siguen los ignorantes que piensan con la pansa y que son manada ya no mientas mas.*	*Alberto, stop lying, the days of widespread ignorance in this country are over. Only the ignorant who think with their stomachs and who act like a herd remain. Stop lying anymore.*
`@lopezobrador_`	*Que te los compren tus babeantes seguidores.*	Let your drooling followers buy them for you.
`@ivanduque`	*Amarrecese los pantalones y no ceda a la IZQUIERDA y al COMUNISMO, que ellos al final solo quieren tumbarlo de la Prsidencia e imponer el SOCIALISMO del Siglo XXI.*	*Tighten your pants and do not give in to the LEFT and COMMUNISM, because in the end they only want to overthrow you from the Presidency and impose 21st-century SOCIALISM.*
`@jairbolsonaro`	*O povo Brasileiro tem que ter memoria e fazer seu voto novamente para o Bolsonaro no 2022. Nos, os latinoamericanos, temos que acabar com a doenca do socialismo genocida.*	*The Brazilian people must remember and cast their vote again for Bolsonaro in 2022. We, the Latin Americans, must put an end to the disease of genocidal socialism.*
`@sebastianpinera`	*A este hombre le faltan cojones, para acabar con eso terroristas, como hace falta el General Pinochet.*	*This man lacks the guts to finish off those terrorists, how greatly General Pinochet is missed.*

public expression of opinion. It suggests a kind of informal, public referendum conducted via social media. As previously discussed, populists leverage social media to enhance their visibility and promote their movements, aiming to consolidate a majority. Consequently, responses to populist leaders frequently exhibit plebiscitary rhetoric characteristics. However, this phenomenon is not limited to supporters of populism. Opponents too often rely on similar strategies on social media, mobilizing their followers in a call for unity against populist agendas. Table 2 exhibits examples of tweets that exemplify this kind of plebiscitary rhetoric in response to various presidents.

The objectives of the study are twofold. First, it aims to assess the extent of divisive and

Table 2.2 Examples of Responses with Plebiscitary Rhetoric

Replying to	**Original**	**English**
`@alferdez`	*El pueblo soberano acompana de pie Presidente!*	*The sovereign people stand by you, President!*
`@lopezobrador_`	*Y seremos los ciudadanos los que democraticamente mandaremos a morena al carajo. De una vez y para siempre.*	*And it will be us, the citizens, who will democratically send Morena to hell. Once and for all.*
`@ivanduque`	*Bravo president Duque! Felicitaciones! Ud nos esta representando muy bien*	*Bravo President Duque! Congratulations! You are representing us very well.*
`@jairbolsonaro`	*E da-lhe Bolsonaro! Brasil rumo ao progress! Temos o melhor Presidente de todos os tempos*	*Go Bolsonaro! Brazil is on the way to progress! We have the best President of all time*
`@sebastianpinera`	*Ud es un grande! Dios quiso que estuviera al mando el 2010 y ahora. Por si o no la gente va a criticar. Confiamos en Usted!*	*You are great! God wanted you to be in charge in 2010 and now. Whether yes or no, people are going to criticize. We trust in You!*

plebiscitary responses generated by populist presidents compared to non-populist counterparts on social media platforms. This objective is translated in the following hypotheses:

H1. Populist presidents will generate more divisive reactions from social media users than their non-populist counterparts.

H2. Populist presidents will generate more plebiscitary reactions from social media users than their non-populist counterparts.

The second objective is to examine the interaction dynamics between populist presidents and their supporters versus opponents on social media. This involves comparing the level of divisive and plebiscitary interactions initiated by supporters and opponents when engaging with populist presidents. This is established by these hypotheses:

H3. Populist presidents will generate more divisive reactions from supporters than their

non-populist counterparts.

H4. Populist presidents will generate more divisive reactions from opponents than their non-populist counterparts.

H5. Populist presidents will generate more plebiscitary reactions from supporters than their non-populist counterparts.

H6. Populist presidents will generate more plebiscitary reactions from opponents than their non-populist counterparts.

2.5 Data

To test the determinants of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric emerging from the bottom on social media, I analyze Twitter data consisting of users' original replies to five Latin American presidents: Alberto Fernández (Argentina), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Sebastián Piñera (Chile), Iván Duque (Colombia), and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico). The dataset encompasses tweets published between October 2019 and December 2021, capturing a range of political circumstances, including social outbursts and the emergence of Covid-19. Additionally, these cases provide a diverse representation of the political spectrum, including a left-wing populist president (López Obrador), a right-wing populist president (Bolsonaro), two right-wing non-populist presidents (Duque and Piñera), and one left-wing non-populist president (Fernández). The classification of the presidents as populists or non-populist and as left-wing or right-wing is based on the analysis made by the 'Global Populism Database (GPD): Populism Dataset for Leaders 1.0' by Team Populism Hawkins et al. (2019).

The GPD evaluates the degree to which chief executives adopt discursive elements of the ideational approach to populism, as described by Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser (2018). Furthermore, the cases selected represent the five larger Latin American economies in the region. The data collection of the responses to these leaders was conducted using the 'AcademicTwitteR' package in R, which in the past facilitated access to the Twitter API. The total dataset comprises over 9 million tweets replying to these five presidents.

The analysis of these data followed three stages. The first stage involved assigning a sample to five pairs of local research assistants in five countries. Each pair was assigned a sample of the dataset[1] to code the responses to Latin American presidents as either having divisive or plebiscitary rhetoric, or other, and to determine their sentiment as negative, positive, or neutral[2]. For this task, the coders had access to an interactive web application[3], specifically designed for the project, enabling them to work efficiently on personal computers or mobile phones without the need for spreadsheets or direct database access. After an initial training round and a subsequent review of the first 100 coded tweets to align criteria, all pairs of coders achieved enough levels of agreement, indicating high reliability in their coding consistency.

For the second stage, I used the manually coded tweets with consensus to train and test two classifier models: one for rhetoric type and another for sentiment. Given an imbalanced

[1]Sample sizes varied among cases. For Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, the sample size was 10,000, as fewer cases of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric were expected. For the populist cases, the sample size was 5,000 cases.

[2]A more extensive explanation of the coding rules can be found in Annex 1 - Codebook.

[3]This interactive web application was designed using the R Package Shiny.

	Sentiment			Rhetoric Type		
Type of Model	Original	Synthetic Balanced	Final	Original	Synthetic Balanced	Final
Precision	0.8	0.87	0.88	0.78	0.8	0.86
Recall	0.78	0.78	0.82	0.75	0.79	0.82
F1 Score	0.78	0.82	0.84	0.76	0.81	0.84

Table 2.3 Performance Metrics for Classification Models of Tweets in Spanish

sample, where 'other' for rhetoric type and 'negative' for sentiment were significantly more common, I employed *gpt-3.5-turbo-instruct*, a Generative Pre-training Transformer (GPT) model by OpenAI, to create synthetic tweets. Specifically, for the Spanish cases, 400 synthetic tweets each for divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric were generated (100 per president). The GPT model was prompted with a synthesis of the theory, examples from manually classified tweets, and a request for synthetic tweets. This approach, previously employed in Whitfield (2021) with even less accurate models like GPT-2, aids in balancing the dataset by augmenting observations for minority classes. This process was repeated for the Portuguese language in the Brazilian case and the sentiment model in both languages.

The subsequent step involved fine-tuning the classifier by incorporating these synthetic tweets alongside the manually coded ones. I use a BERT pre-trained model, *BERTuit* (Huertas-Tato et al. 2022) for the tweets in Spanish, *BERTimbau* (Souza et al. 2020) for tweets in Portuguese and the Python package 'transformers' by Hugging Face for this purpose. Pre-trained models have demonstrated superior performance in text classification

	Sentiment			Rhetoric Type		
Type of Model	Original	Synthetic Balanced	Final	Original	Synthetic Balance	Final
Precision	0.79	0.9	0.91	0.01	0.72	0.91
Recall	0.74	0.91	0.92	0.33	0.7	0.8
F1 Score	0.75	0.9	0.92	0.021	0.71	0.84

Table 2.4 Performance Metrics for Classification Models of Tweets in Portuguese

tasks, as indicated by Malla & Alphonse (2021), compared to other machine learning methods like SVM or random forests. This preliminary model was then used to classify tweets with coder disagreements, serving as a 'third coder' to resolve conflicts in the manual classification and improve the balance of the data. Tables 3 and 4 show the performance metrics for each of these steps. I use three metrics to analyze performance: Precision, Recall, and F1 Score. High precision indicates the likelihood of a positive prediction being correct. Recall, on the other hand, measures the number of positive predictions made by the model. The F1 Score is a metric that combines both precision and recall to provide a balanced measure between the two. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, adding synthetic tweets and then retraining the model with those tweets improved the model's performance. Using the synthetically balanced model to classify tweets with disagreement among coders also led to an improvement in the model.

The final models were used to classify the remainder of the sample (N = 9,568,296). Tables 5 and 6 illustrate the distribution of tweets across the categories of interest: divisive

and plebiscitary rhetoric, along with positive and negative sentiment. Divisive responses were notably prevalent in the case of former Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, whereas plebiscitary responses were more common in the two populist cases. Positive responses accounted for almost 20% of the total in the case of Jair Bolsonaro, while negative responses were particularly high for Iván Duque, exceeding 80%.

To visually and statistically analyze the data derived from the tweet classifications, I collected additional variables. The primary independent variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether a president is classified as populist or non-populist. To address specific contextual factors, I included a dummy variable for the electoral period, defined as a tweet posted within two months before a major electoral event. The presence of protests is another dummy variable, indicating whether there was a significant mobilization, based on data from the Global Protest Tracker (for International Peace 2024) on the day the tweet was posted. 'Social outburst' is a dummy variable denoting whether the country was experiencing a social crisis, according to data from the Crisis Watch of the International Crisis Group (Group 2024). Lastly, 'COVID-19' is a binary variable designed to capture the impact of the pandemic, assigned a value of 1 or 0 depending on whether the tweet was posted within the two months following March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization declared the pandemic.

Table 2.5 Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses to Presidents

President	Country	Total Responses	Divisive Responses	% Divisive Responses	Plebiscitary Responses	% Plebiscitary Responses
Alberto Fernández	Argentina	1,398,839	159,363	11.39	30,0047	2.14
Andrés M. López O	Mexico	1,708,535	308,831	18.07	100,060	5.85
Iván Duque	Colombia	1,247,527	213,745	17.13	8,315	0.66
Jair Bolsonaro	Brazil	4,773,483	229,809	4.81	224,371	4.7
Sebastián Piñera	Chile	439,912	119,172	27.08	5,220	1.18

Note: Bold font denotes a populist president.

2.6 Methods

To analyze the previously described data, I employ a two-fold strategy. First, I present annotated time series plots that depict the counts of daily aggregated divisive and plebiscitary responses in conjunction with significant events such as electoral periods, major protests, social outbursts, and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These annotated time series plots provide not only a visual representation of the data over time but also an intuitive illustration of how specific events might influence users' rhetoric in response to the leaders.

For the statistical analysis, I use multilevel negative binomial regression (NBR) models. NBR can be characterized as part of the generalized linear models (Hilbe 2007). Using an NBR is advised when modeling count response data that is overdispersed, as is the case of the responses to presidents on social media. To capture the differences among presidents, I introduce random effects for the 'president' variable. Consequently, these models are structured hierarchically, with observations nested within the 'president' category. At the same time, other independent variables such as populist/non-populist, protests, social outbursts,

Table 2.6 Positive and Negative Responses to Presidents

President	**Country**	**Total**	**Positive Responses**	**% Positive Responses**	**Negative Responses**	**% Negative Responses**
Alberto Fernández	Argentina	213,502	32,928	15.26	1,020,274	72.93
Andrés M. López O	Mexico	1,708,535	220,520	12.90	1,257,880	73.62
Iván Duque	Colombia	1,247,527	78,902	6.32	1,016,388	81.47
Jair Bolsonaro	Brazil	4,773,483	915,255	19.17	1,900,445	39.81
Sebastián Piñera	Chile	439,912	16,589	3.77	320,344	72.82

Note: Bold font denotes a populist president.

and the COVID-19 pandemic are analyzed at the individual response level. Previous studies have suggested that the half-life of tweets from politicians is about 24 hours (Goel et al. 2023) and the dependent variable here is a daily aggregate of tweets, I incorporate a lagged version of the counts of the type of rhetoric. This also helps to account for the serial correlation observed in the dependent variable in the pre-analysis.

NBR uses a logarithmic link function, thus the coefficients represent the change in the log of the expected count of the dependent variable. As such, their interpretation is not intuitive. Consequently, I have transformed these coefficients into Incidence Rate Ratios (IRRs) to enable a more intuitive understanding of how the independent variables influence the frequency of the type of rhetoric. IRR are the exponentiated representation of the coefficient from NBR. As a result, they provide the expected factor change in the dependent variable for a one-unit increase in the independent variable.

2.7 Results

This section presents annotated time series analyses for the five Latin American presidents included in the analysis and four multilevel models using negative binomial regression. For this part of the analysis, the sample was reduced to 1,194,174 as the observations with 'neutral' sentiment and 'other' types of rhetoric were dropped. Figure 1 displays time-series data showing the weekly prevalence of divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric by sentiment along with relevant events surrounding the observations. For comparison purposes, the data is normalized.

Although in most cases divisive rhetoric is present, in non-populist cases, most fluctuations are connected with specific circumstances. For instance, the major peaks in divisive responses for Alberto Fernández occurred close to massive protests, a vaccination scandal and during an electoral period. Similarly, Duque and Piñera elicited divisive responses that coincided with periods of major social outbursts in their countries. There are peaks also present in the populist cases of Bolsonaro and López Obrador, however, the presence of this type of rhetoric seems more consistent over time. Plebiscitary rhetoric shows a more dramatic picture. While very rare in non-populist cases, it seems to be associated with specific events. For instance, Fernández received this kind of response after his inauguration and in the weeks following the declaration of COVID-19 pandemic. Similar effects are seen in all other four presidents. Other than that, only Duque elicited a high number of plebiscitary responses, but in this case a negative one as a result of a national strike. Plebiscitary responses in populist cases seem more consistent too, with peaks in specific moments such as López Obrador's COVID-19 infection and Bolsonaro's hospitalization for chronic hiccups. Interestingly, López Obrador witnessed a negative plebiscitary peak around the mid-term election.

While annotated time series provide insights into how responses with various types of rhetoric behave over time and provide information about events that might trigger these responses, deriving generalizable evidence from them is challenging. Therefore, Table 7 presents the results from four multilevel negative binomial regression (NBR) models, each corresponding to a different type of rhetoric. The unit of analysis in each model is the

grouped number of responses–divisive or plebiscitary, positive or negative–for a single day. The fixed-effects part of the table displays coefficients indicating the impact of independent variables on the daily count level. The random effects section reveals the variance and standard deviation of the random intercepts for each president.

The coefficients in Table 7 suggest that being a populist has a positive and statistically significant effect on the generation of divisive and positive rhetoric, as well as on both positive and negative plebiscitary rhetoric. However, there is no significant effect on divisive negative rhetoric. Divisive positive rhetoric appears to be influenced by social outbursts and the emergence of COVID-19. Similarly, divisive negative rhetoric is positively associated with protests, social outbursts, and the onset of COVID-19. Plebiscitary negative rhetoric is also generated by protests, social outbursts, and the COVID-19 crisis.

Interestingly, electoral periods have a negative impact on positive and negative divisive rhetoric, as well as positive plebiscitary rhetoric. Previous observations of the dependent variable show a statistically significant temporal correlation in the cases of negative divisive rhetoric and the two forms of plebiscitary rhetoric.

The Random Effects section of the results indicates the variance and standard deviation among the five presidents analyzed in each model. The variance and standard deviation are moderate for the divisive models, suggesting this kind of response is likely to be similar across all five presidents. However, the variance and standard deviation are high in the positive plebiscitary rhetoric model, likely reflecting differences between populist and non-populist presidents. While less extreme, the model for negative plebiscitary rhetoric also exhibits

Table 2.7 Multilevel Negative Binomial Regression Models of Generation of Four Types of Rhetoric

	Divisive		**Plebiscitary**	
	Positive	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Fixed Effects:				
Populist	**2.2332**	0.1722	**3.4649**	**1.9810**
	(0.5326)	(0.5318)	(0.9652)	(0.6565)
Electoral Period	**-0.5325**	**-0.0988**	**-0.1355**	**0.2835**
	(0.0683)	(0.0171)	(0.0226)	(0.0699)
Protests	0.4479	**0.0319**	**0.0374**	**1.1648**
	(0.2520)	(0.0161)	(0.0180)	(0.2834)
Social Outburst	**1.3940**	**0.3378**	**0.3344**	**1.4401**
	(0.0726)	(0.0173)	(0.0215)	(0.0814)
COVID-19	**1.1524**	**0.1945**	**0.4048**	**0.9382**
	(0.0624)	(0.0165)	(0.0201)	(0.0694)
Rhetoric Lag	0.0002	**0.0535**	**0.0839**	**0.0026**
	(0.0003)	(0.0202)	(0.0261)	(0.0007)
Intercept	**1.7405**	**5.0801**	**1.5362**	**1.2669**
	(0.3374)	(0.3361)	(0.6091)	(0.4153)
Random Effects:				
President (Variance)	0.339	0.338	1.118	0.515
President (SD)	0.582	0.581	1.057	0.717

Note: Coefficients in bold are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

high levels of variance and standard deviation.

To interpret the impact of populism and the additional independent variables on augmenting the frequency of responses with specific rhetoric, Figures 2 and 3 show Incidence Rate Ratios for each of the four types of rhetoric. Figure 2.a shows the substantial impact of being populist on generating positive divisive rhetoric. For populists, positive divisive rhetoric is expected to be 9.32 times higher than for non-populists. Responses are 1.56 times more likely to be positively divisive during protests, although this relationship is not statistically significant. Social outbursts, on the other hand, are 4 times more likely to generate positive divisive responses. Responses during the first two months after the COVID-19 pan-

demic was declared by WHO are 3.16 times more likely to be positive and divisive. Figure 2.b shows that only social outburst has a relatively substantial effect on negative divisive rhetoric. Under social outburst conditions, this type of rhetoric is likely to increase 1.4 times.

Figure 3.a shows the highest impact of being a populist in power. Ceteris paribus, being a populist is likely to generate 31.97 times more positive plebiscitary rhetoric than non-populists. Here, COVID-19 also shows a statistically significant and somewhat substantial relationship as a response during the first two months of the pandemic is likely to be 1.49 times more likely to be positive and plebiscitary. Figure 3.b shows that being a populist is 7.24 times as likely to elicit a negative and plebiscitary response. This kind of response is also 4.2 and 3.2 times more likely under social outburst and protest conditions, respectively. COVID-19 also elicits 2.5 times more negative and plebiscitary responses.

2.8 Discussion

The analysis presented here suggests that divisive rhetoric appears to be a chronic feature in the case of populists, likely due to a combination of populist communication styles and social media platform dynamics. This finding provides support to H1, as populist presidents generated more divisive reactions than their non-populist counterparts. However, in cases with constant mobilizations or social outbursts, divisive rhetoric can also be acute in non-populist contexts. Acute periods of divisive rhetoric were present during Sebastián Piñera and Iván Duque presidencies when facing social unrest in their countries. In Argentina, a series of protests and scandals have driven the divisive responses against Alberto Fernández.

Plebiscitary rhetoric seems more complex than divisive rhetoric, although evidence suggests that populist leaders are more consistently associated with responses of this kind. Supporting H2, both populist presidents—AMLO and Bolsonaro—generated a significantly higher number of plebiscitary responses compared to their non-populist counterparts. While some of these responses were positive, and thus likely expressions of unity and support, there were specific moments when these expressions were negative. Plebiscitary responses to Alberto Fernández are likely explained by a honeymoon effect. Fernández's term began on December 10, 2019, thus, he likely enjoyed exceptional support during those first months in office. Fernández, López Obrador, Duque and to some extent, Sebastián Piñera seem to have experienced a brief rally-round-the-flag effect after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Duque experienced a negative plebiscitary response after the national strike, which might be indicative of a response of users against the government policies in the form of a call for unity for rejection. Another phenomenon unveiled by the data in the study is the positive plebiscitary response to sickness. This was observed during López Obrador's first COVID-19 infection and Bolsonaro's hospitalization.

Supporting the hypotheses on generating reactions from supporters (H3 and H5), the findings of the statistical analysis suggest that populists in power are more likely to use positive divisive and plebiscitary rhetoric. Regarding opponents, the analysis supports H6, as populists are more likely to elicit negative plebiscitary reactions. The analysis did not reveal a statistical relationship between being a populist and generating negative divisive responses, thus failing to support H4. Other variables also showed the potential to generate

the kind of responses studied. Social outbursts and protests are likely to increase the levels of the four types of rhetoric analyzed. It is particularly relevant that social outbursts generate high levels of positive divisive rhetoric and negative plebiscitary rhetoric. This likely indicates that supporters of the president are emphasizing societal divisions while opponents are calling for the rejection of the president. The emergence of COVID-19 has been shown to generate divisive rhetoric predominantly from supporters. Additionally, COVID-19 shows a positive relationship with plebiscitary responses.

The implications of these findings are significant. On the one hand, they indicate that populist leaders possess a distinctive ability to influence public opinion, whether positively or negatively. Additionally, these findings highlight the potential for such leaders to foster divisiveness and plebiscitarian attitudes among social media users. Despite the inherently limited representation of social media demographics, previous research has raised concerns about the offline political effects of social media activities (e.g., Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2014; Connelly et al. 2021). Furthermore, considering that populist presidents like AMLO and Bolsonaro have 10.3 and 11.8 million followers, respectively, the potential for their polarizing impact cannot be underestimated.

The results presented here provide a nuanced understanding of how users engage with populist and non-populist leaders in Latin America on social media, specifically Twitter. The substantial volume of both divisive and plebiscitary responses observed to populist leaders aligns with prior research on the polarizing nature of populist rhetoric on social media. The unique ability of populist rhetoric to elicit strong, both supportive and antagonistic, reactions

corroborates the theoretical perspectives put forth by scholars such as Waisbord & Amado (2017) and Kreis (2017). These authors emphasize the use of social media by populists to distinctly demarcate 'the people' from 'the elite.' Additionally, the findings of this study echo the concept of strategic polarization on social media (Ortega et al. 2022), suggesting that populists are effectively taking advantage of these platforms for this purpose.

These findings enhance our understanding of how citizens interact with populist leaders on social media. Previous research has indicated that populist rhetoric is highly appealing to social media users, as evidenced by increased likes, retweets, and comments within specific communities (e.g., Alonso-Muñoz 2020; Bobba 2019; Jost et al. 2020; Cassell 2021; Hameleers 2020). Although primarily descriptive, this study goes beyond these observations by offering a more comprehensive analysis of the engagement elicited by these leaders. It identifies two distinct forms of responses—divisive and plebiscitary—and examines their prevalence. This analysis sheds light on the potential for online and offline polarization driven by these interactions, thereby opening the theoretical debate on the responses to populists from the bottom up. From a methodological standpoint, the study contributes to the growing field of computational social science and specifically to the use of Artificial Intelligence tools to enhance research on political issues. As a result of this paper, a large dataset of tweets will be made available for addressing other inquiries. Furthermore, four models, two in Spanish and two in Portuguese are already available for analyzing questions similar to those in this study or for being retrained to answer others.

Figure 2.1 Weekly Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses for Alberto Fernández

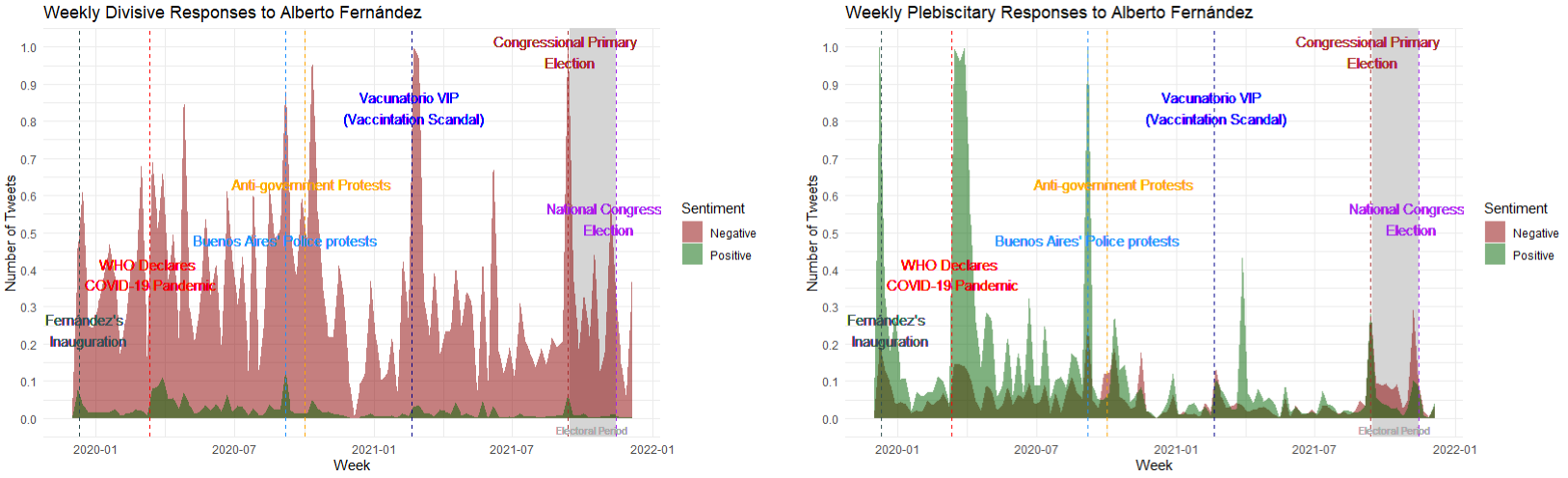


Figure 2.2 Weekly Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses for Andrés Manuel López Obrador

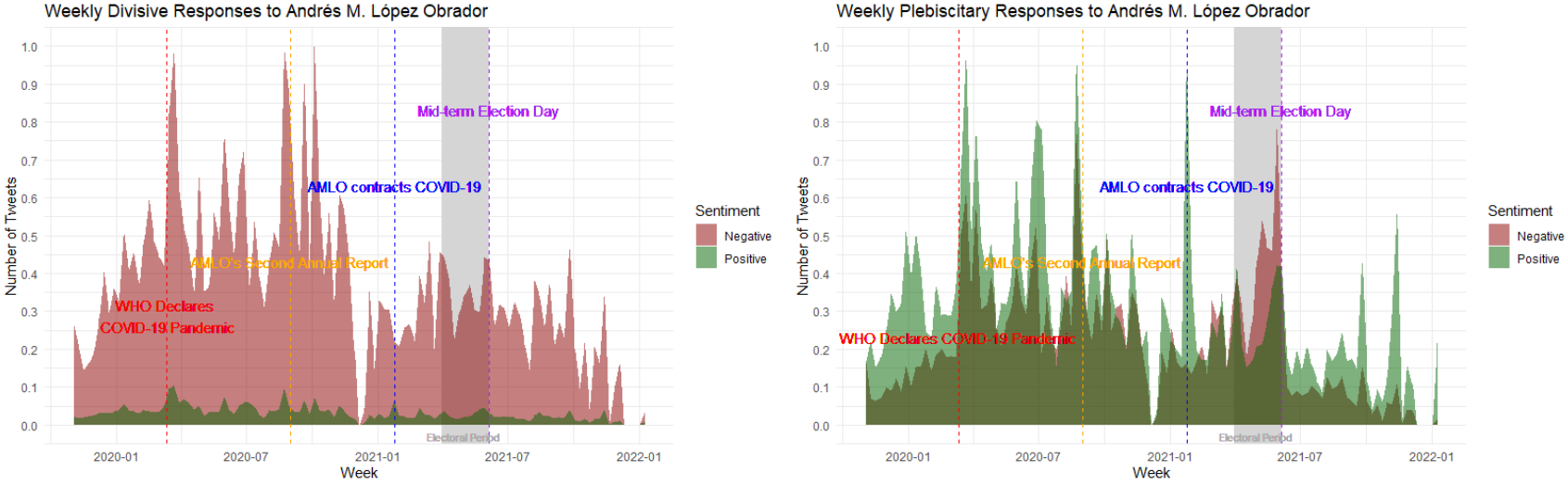


Figure 2.3 Weekly Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses for Iván Duque

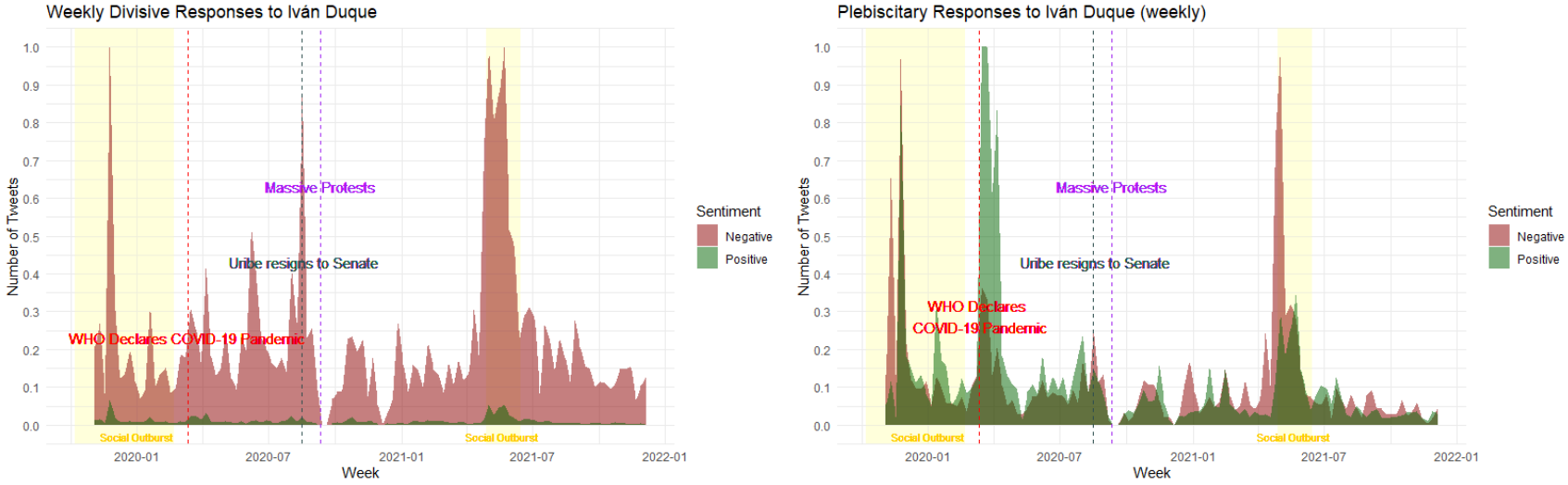


Figure 2.4 Weekly Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses for Jair Bolsonaro

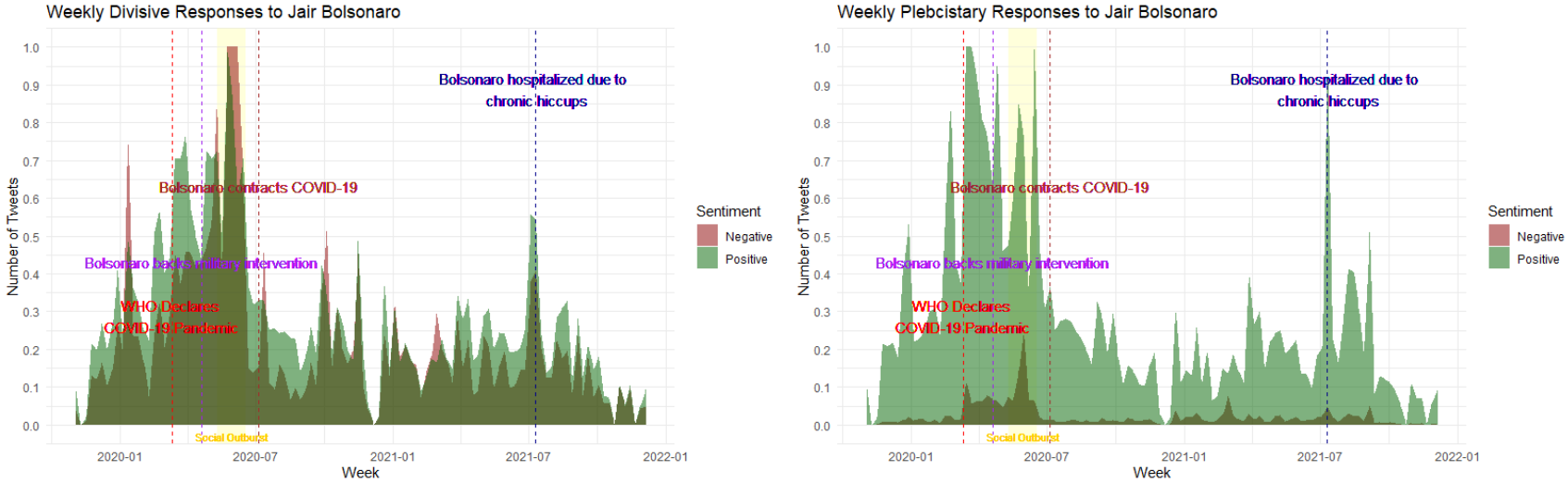
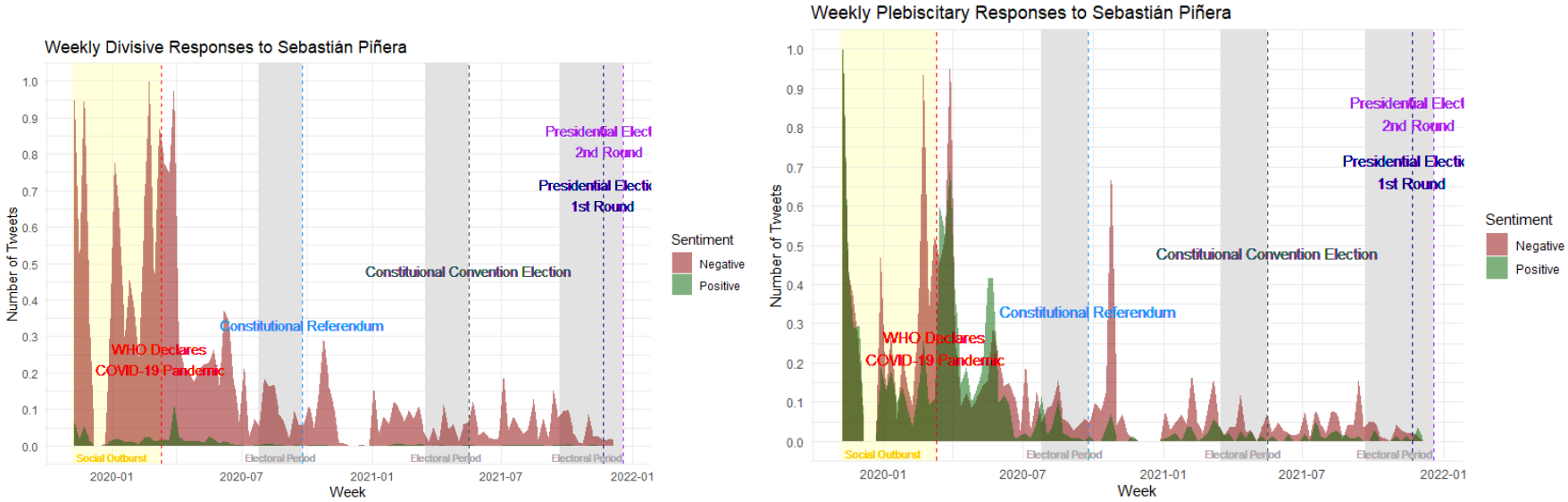


Figure 2.5 Weekly Divisive and Plebiscitary Responses for Sebastián Piñera



Note: The scale has been transformed using min-max normalization to make figures comparable.

Figure 2.6 Impact on the Frequency of Positive Divisive Rhetoric

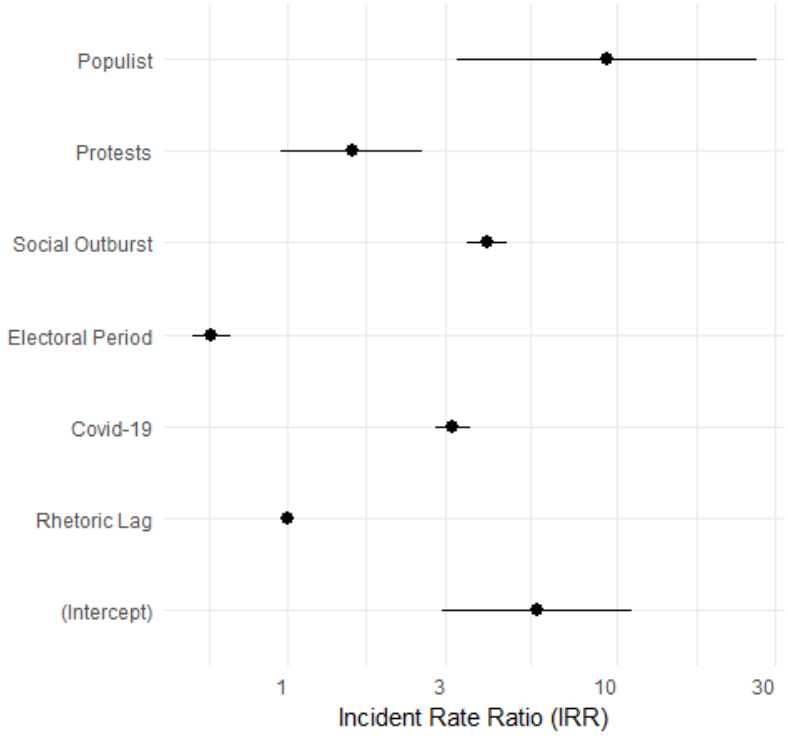


Figure 2.7 Impact on the Frequency of Negative Divisive Rhetoric

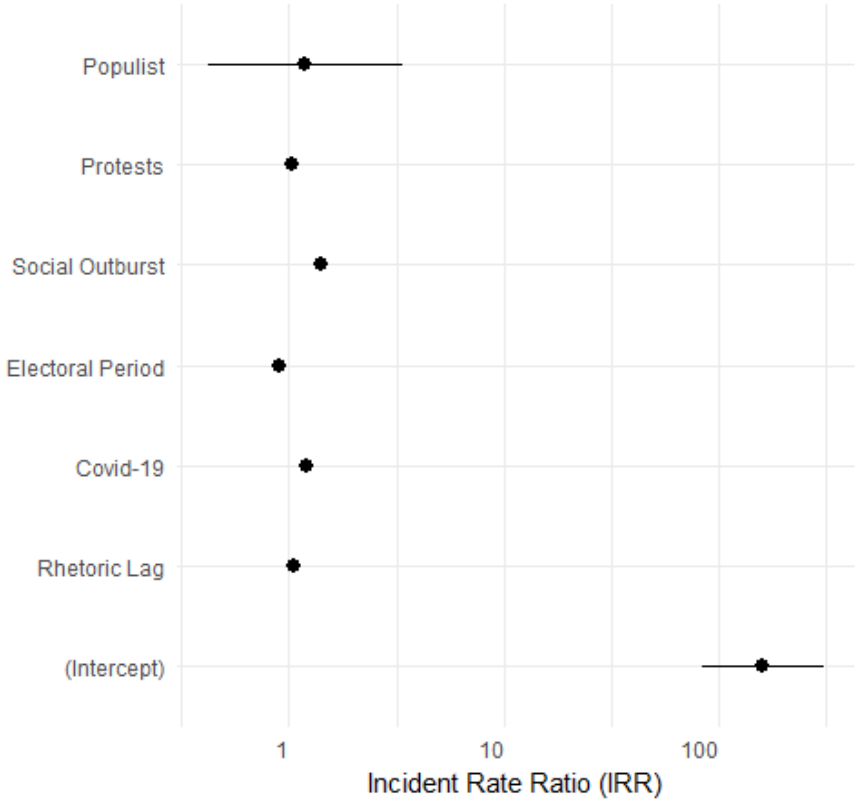


Figure 2.8 Impact on the Frequency of Positive Plebiscitary Rhetoric

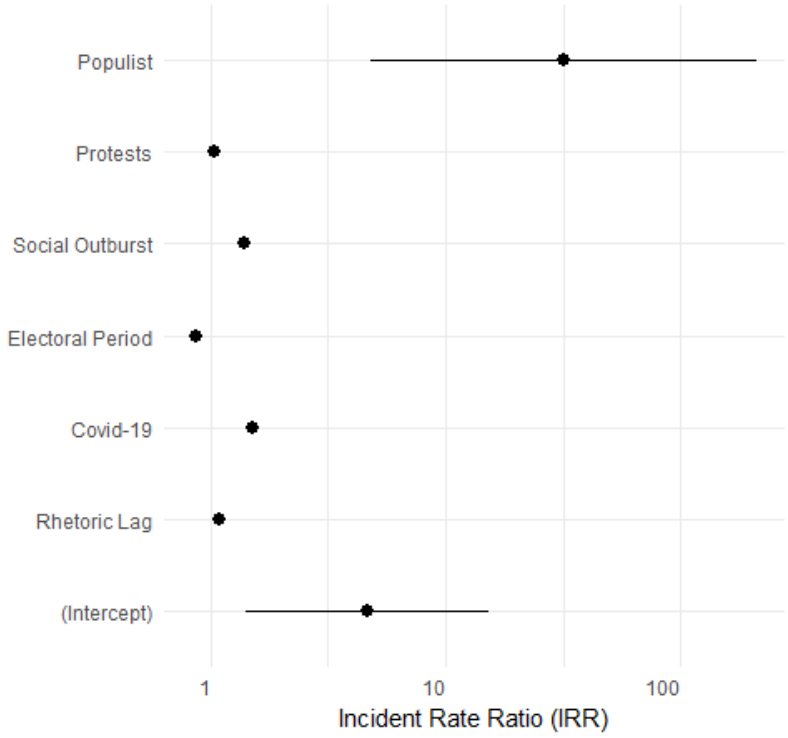
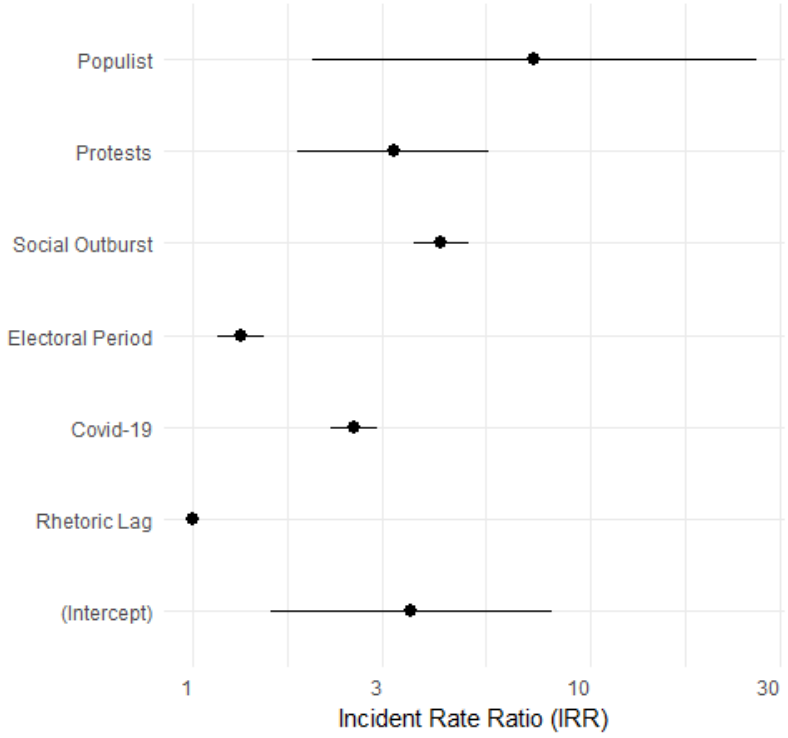


Figure 2.9 Impact on the Frequency of Negative Plebiscitary Rhetoric



CHAPTER 3

Do populists' online presence increase incivility in the public sphere? Evidence from a survey experiment in four Latin American countries

3.1 Introduction

Many democracies have experienced a combination of two phenomena: an increasingly uncivil online public sphere for political deliberation and the rise of prominent populist leaders some of which have even reached office. However, to what extent are populists responsible for contaminating the online public sphere and generating uncivil reactions? Scholars agree that populists enjoy significant popularity on social media, often eliciting higher engagement levels (Cassell (2021)) than their non-populist counterparts. Moreover, evidence indicates that populists tend to use more divisive and propagandistic rhetoric (Hameleers et al. (2018)), which often fuels the algorithms of social media platforms, thus boosting their visibility. This body of research provides a nuanced understanding of how populists leverage digital media to advance their agendas and the divisive consequences of using these platforms. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether polarization in general and online incivility in particular is a direct consequence of these leaders' affinity for such platforms

I propose that users of social media platforms tend to react more uncivilly to content containing polarizing cues when it is associated to the presence of a populist leader, even if the leader is not the author of the content. This is not to suggest that populists' rhetoric does not contribute to a polarized digital environment; rather, I argue that the mere digital presence of populists can activate uncivil attitudes when associated with certain types of

content. In the following sections, I substantiate this theory, test its implications through a survey experiment conducted in four Latin American countries–Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico–, and conclude by discussing how it contributes to our understanding of the polarizing effects of populists in the online public sphere and its implications for democratic deliberation.

3.2 Incivility in the Online Public Sphere

In many contexts, political deliberation has progressively moved from offline environments to the online public sphere, including social media platforms, blogs, and news outlets websites. As a result, we are witnessing increasing online political discussions. However, given the structure and nature of the online public sphere, the spread of uncivil discourse is prevalent (Chan et al. 2016) on these platforms. Incivility is an elusive concept as it is often context-dependent. Considering that online incivility affects the quality of democratic deliberation, I rely on Habermas' notion of incivility. For habermas2015between, incivility is characterized by disrespect for participants in political deliberations or for their arguments. I supplement Habermas' notion with coe2014online conceptualization of incivility as "features of [online] discussion that convey an unnecessary disrespectful tone towards the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics" (p. 660). Two main questions surrounding online incivility have attracted the attention of scholars. What are the sources of incivility in the online public sphere and what are its consequences? Although the latter is important for understanding the practical implications of online incivility, the former is essential for the theoretical affor-

dances proposed in this study. Therefore, I will first briefly discuss previous works on the consequences of online incivility and then proceed to address its sources.

There is an ongoing theoretical and empirical debate within the literature on the consequences of online incivility. For some scholars, incivility does not carry negative consequences per se. masullo2019we suggest that online incivility serves the purpose of drawing attention to marginalized voices, thus, its eradication may lead to the suppression of some parts of political discourse. Similarly, Patricia Rossini argues that not all forms of incivility are harmful to democracy (Rossini (2020, 2022)). For Rossini, incivility in the form of a rude and disrespectful tone is less harmful than intolerant speech that promotes discrimination and threats. The former can coexist with democratic discourses while the latter is detrimental to democratic norms. On the other side of this debate, scholars have underscored the negative consequences of online incivility, regardless of its form. In what anderson2018toxic term the 'nasty effect,' these authors suggest that exposure to uncivil online comments erodes trust in the media. This effect is mediated by political ideology being stronger among conservative readers. In an analysis of the uncivil behavior of citizens on Twitter across four European countries, theocharis2016bad observed that candidates who experience uncivil interactions may be discouraged from engaging with the public on the platform. Scholars like hameleers2022civilized have pointed to the connection between misinformation and incivility. These authors found evidence that false information often contains uncivil speech and how this combination fosters hostility and division. For instance, studying the case of the 2018 Italian general election, rega2021strategic found that uncivil posts on Facebook

generate more engagement and visibility for political leaders but also lead to more uncivil comments that lower the quality of online discussions. Similarly, krzyzanowski2017uncivility show that uncivil online discourses have normalized anti-pluralist and nativist views in the online public spheres across Europe, thus fostering right-wing populism.

Scholars like rossini2022beyond assign incivility to the reactions elicited by specific topics. According to this author, discussions about minorities, civil society, and international affairs are more likely to provoke incivility. guldemond2022fueling, on the other hand, identify deceitful opinions of leaders as the source of online incivility. Sometimes incivility emerges as part of a coordinated strategy that employs hateful bots, as illustrated in the case of online hate during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States and the Philippines (Uyheng & Carley (2020)). At the individual level, Frischlich2021Roots find specific traits that influence online uncivil behavior. These authors argue that possessing a 'dark personality' (characterized by Machiavellianism and psychopathy), along with frequent use of social media platforms and experiences with both civil and hate speech, are factors that amplify incivility. In the context of Greece, kountouri2023polarizing show evidence suggesting that incivility is an organic phenomenon with spikes correlated with specific events, such as referenda and domestic crises. From a top-down perspective, rega2021strategic point to the strategic use of incivility in these platforms by politicians, particularly during major electoral events, as a means to generate more online participation and visibility. Similarly, kluknavska2024unleashing argue that populist communication on Facebook is associated with higher levels of online incivility. Lastly, gervais2015incivility suggests the existence of a vicious cycle wherein uncivil political

talk amplifies emotional and behavioral reactions, leading users to engage in uncivil behavior themselves.

3.3 Populist digital presence and polarization

Digital media platforms are potent channels for populists. They amplify populist visibility and narratives, helping these leaders position themselves as the voice of the people against the elite (Gerbaudo (2018)). Previous research has shown that social media is a preferred channel for populist communication, even over television talk shows (Ernst et al. (2017)). Populists use these platforms to strategically increase user engagement (Cassell (2021)), often activating mechanisms that trigger emotional reactions of anger and love (Jost et al. (2020)). These strategies include confrontational rhetoric (Waisbord & Amado (2017)) that exploits emotional biases to demonize opponents and gain support (Leyens et al. (2000)). Another aspect of the digital presence of populists is the attempt to claim the representation of the homogeneous people and depict the elite as corrupted (Kreis (2017)).

To this affinity between digital media and populists, we must add the role that these platforms play as a polarizing driver. For instance, there is evidence suggesting that these platforms contributed to increased political polarization in Chile and Colombia before the 2019 social outbursts (Scherman et al. (2022)). Authors like van2021social have pointed to the creation of echo chambers and the boosting of confirmation biases on these platforms as sources of political polarization. When using these platforms, populists contribute to polarization by constructing a societal divide between “good” people and “corrupt” elites

(Hameleers (2018)). Such divisive rhetoric also translates into more online incivility and intolerance (Kluknavská et al. (2024)).

3.4 Polarized Cue Taking under the Presence of Populist Actors

There is a consensus that populists contribute to political polarization through their strategic use of digital media to advance their agendas. However, it remains unclear whether the polarization and incivility attributed to these actors are direct outcomes of their digital presence or due to pre-existing cleavages in society. I contend that populists on digital platforms spur uncivil responses among users, independent of existing polarization levels. However, for incivility to be triggered, users have to identify existing societal cleavages on messages of these platforms and attach them to a populist leader or party. The extent of these uncivil reactions is also mediated by users' ideological leanings, with right-wing (left-wing) populists potentially provoking more incivility among left-wing (right-wing) users.

Populists are considered polarizing figures as they divide society into two camps. As theorized by levendusky2010clearer, "Polarization impacts the cue-taking process because it changes the clarity of the cues elites send to voters [...] it increases the ideological distance between the parties" (p. 114). If populists are especially focused on exploiting cleavages within society (De la Torre & Bernhard (????)) then they will make cue-taking even clearer. Moreover, the populist strategy of divisiveness will not only clarify the distance between the two poles, but it will also attach to the populist representation of one of them.

While others have studied the incivility generated as a result of populists' rhetoric

(Hameleers et al. (2018); Kluknavská et al. (2024)) we know less about the omniscient toxic effects of their online presence. I theorize that the process by which users connect a divisive message to the populist is the opposite of what Petty & Cacioppo (1981) explained for cue-taking. For these authors, cues can be persuasive due to a peripheral route that instead of focusing on the content, uses credibility or attractiveness of the source. In the case of populists on social media, they function as a pervasive source of divisive cues regardless of their appeal or lack thereof.

Considering how populists facilitate the cue-taking process, I argue they leave their mark on social media, fostering uncivil reactions even to content not coming from them but that can be associated with the division in society that populists promote. Their mark works as a permanent cue for the division within society. Therefore, when presented with a divisive message, users will react uncivilly if they can connect that message with the permanent divisive cue left by populists.

Considering the theoretical claims above, I propose the following hypotheses for this study:

H1. The presence of populist actors on digital media platforms increases the likelihood of uncivil responses among users when they encounter polarizing messages.

H2. The effect of the presence of populist actors on digital media platforms on incivility will be mediated by ideological leanings, with right-wing populists eliciting stronger incivility from left-wing users and vice versa.

3.5 Data and Methods

To test the theory and hypotheses proposed in this study, I use data collected from four online survey experiments conducted in the fall of 2023. A total of 1,405 users from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico participated in the study. These participants were recruited through targeted online ads designed to invite individuals to participate in the research. While participants were not compensated, which may have skewed the sample towards individuals with a higher interest in politics, this selection bias does not pose a significant validity issue. This is because, in a real scenario, this same type of participant is likely to engage in the behaviors being tested.

The study was designed to observe the reactions of users to polarizing cues. To isolate the effect of the online presence of populist leaders, participants were randomly assigned to a treatment group or a control group. Participants in the treatment group were shown a screenshot of a local populist leader's X profile. Figure 1 shows the profiles of the four populists in the study. For Argentina, participants were presented with then-presidential candidate Javier Milei. In Brazil, participants were presented to former president Jair Bolsonaro. In Chile, the selected populist was former candidate José Antonio Kast. Finally, in Mexico participants were shown the profile of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The selection of these figures was based on references to their populist character in the political science literature. Participants in the control group were not presented with any images. Both groups were then presented with the image of a manipulated tweet with a polarizing cue. The manipulated tweet shows the photo of an average user of the country, based on

Figure 3.1 X Profiles of four Latin American Populists

the Face of Tomorrow Project, [1]. Figure 2 shows the different versions of the tweets in the four countries with a version in Spanish and Portuguese. In English, the tweet says: *We support the programs that the government has created. Those who oppose these programs are responding to the interests of the elites.* Participants had the option to like, retweet, quote, or reply to the tweet. Participants then were asked questions about their political ideology and preferences, information consumption habits, and demographics.

[1] See https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1355521/Average-female-face-The-Face-Tomorrow-Mike-Mike-project.html

Table 3.1 Responses to the Polarizing Cue

	Argentina	**Brazil**	**Chile**	**Mexico**
Likes	15	8	37	19
Replies	83	25	71	68
Retweets	15	8	37	19
Total Reactions	113	41	145	106
Total Responses	365	349	371	320

Note: Even though some participants activated the reply or retweet option, ended up not adding a text.

The dependent variable, 'uncivil discourse,' was operationalized as a dichotomous variable using participants' quotes or replies to the polarizing tweet. To determine whether a response was uncivil, I relied on a pre-trained multilingual model known as *Detoxify* (Hanu & Unitary team (2020)). This model can identify toxic messages across various languages, including Spanish and Portuguese. Detoxify assigns each message a toxicity probability, where 0 signifies the lowest and 1 is the highest probability of toxicity. I flagged messages with a toxicity probability greater than 0.1 for further review. Subsequently, I visually inspected each flagged message to confirm its incivility, transforming the probability measure into a dichotomous variable, and labeling the message as 'uncivil' when appropriate.

Although the main independent variable of interest is the treatment-—a reminder of the digital presence of a populist-—, I incorporated several additional variables to account for the diverse factors that might elicit uncivil reactions. Exposure to the out-group is recog-

nized for its potential to generate incivility. Hence, I introduced a dichotomous variable for group identity by assigning a value of 1 to participants who identified the governing party or coalition in response to the question: *Which party would you NEVER vote for?* Despite the general characterization of Twitter users as having above-average income, distinctions between mid and high-income individuals persist. Given the significant role of economic inequality in Latin America's social conflicts and division, I differentiated participants by income, creating a dichotomous variable that distinguishes between those in the highest income tier and all others. Additionally, recognizing the influence of social media on incivility, I considered variables related to the participants' information sources. While interest in politics and the frequency of news consumption were both initially also considered, they were ultimately excluded due to the homogeneity observed among respondents, who predominantly exhibited high levels of political interest and news consumption.

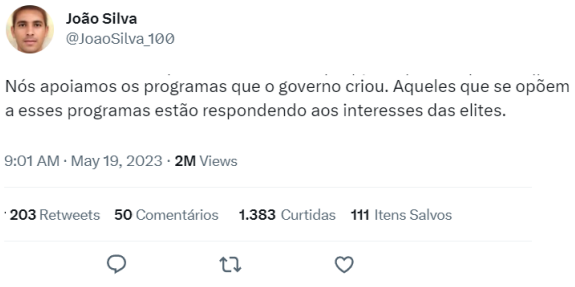
Statistical Analysis

To test the impact of exposure to the presence of a populist on incivility, the analysis employs a series of t-tests to compare the means of the control and treatment groups and determine if there is a significant difference between them. I perform four t-tests, one for each country in the study. Then, I merge the results by the ideology of the populist analyzed and perform two additional t-tests: one for the three right-wing populists and another for the left-wing populists.

The next section presents the results of the logistic regressions and provides figures for the average marginal effects of the most comprehensive models for each country.

Figure 3.2 Polarizing Cues for each Country

(a) Argentina



(b) Brazil

(c) Chile

(Mexico)

3.6 Results

Although many participants selected the option to reply or retweet (326), only 182 included a written reaction. Of the 41 participants who replied or quoted the polarizing cue in Argentina, 14 percent responded with uncivil discourse. In Brazil, of the 23 participants who provided a written response, 17 percent used uncivil language. In Chile, of the 58 replies and quotes, 12 percent used uncivil discourse. Finally, in Mexico, of the 60 participants who included a written response, 15 percent used uncivil language.

After performing a series of t-tests for each country, the results show no statistically significant relationship between being exposed to the treatment and responding with uncivil language. Figure 3 illustrates the difference between the treatment and control group means.

The t-test results display only small differences between the two groups across all four studies. In the cases of Chile and Mexico, the difference favors the treatment group, while in Argentina and Brazil, the control groups exhibit slightly more incivility.

Since the cases analyzed include one left-wing populist and three right-wing populist leaders as part of the treatment, two additional t-tests were performed to account for these differences. Figure 4 shows the results of these analyses, confirming no statistically significant differences in the means of the control and treatment groups for both the three right-wing cases and the left-wing case.

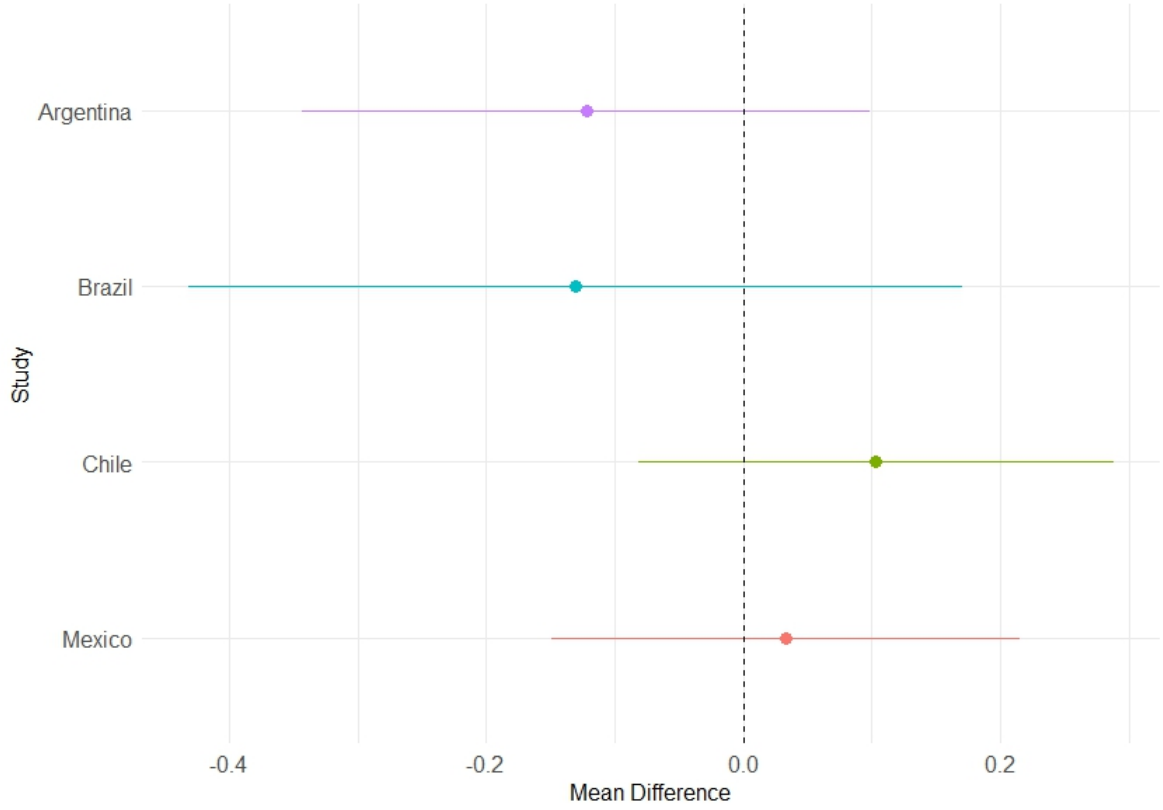
Given the small number of respondents who included a reply or a retweet, additional tests would not be appropriate to analyze the effects of additional variables.

3.7 Discussion

The evidence in this study suggests that exposure to the X profile of populist leaders does not lead to uncivil responses to polarizing cues. However, the limited sample size does not allow for strong conclusions about this finding. The study also showed no differences in the incivility generated by right-wing populists compared to left-wing populists. Again, this result may be due to the small sample size or the subtle nature of the treatment represented by presenting the populist profile.

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study. First, the attempt to emulate an X-like environment in the survey experiment, while helpful in eliciting as natural responses as possible, also hindered the number of useful responses for the analysis. Ideally, this study

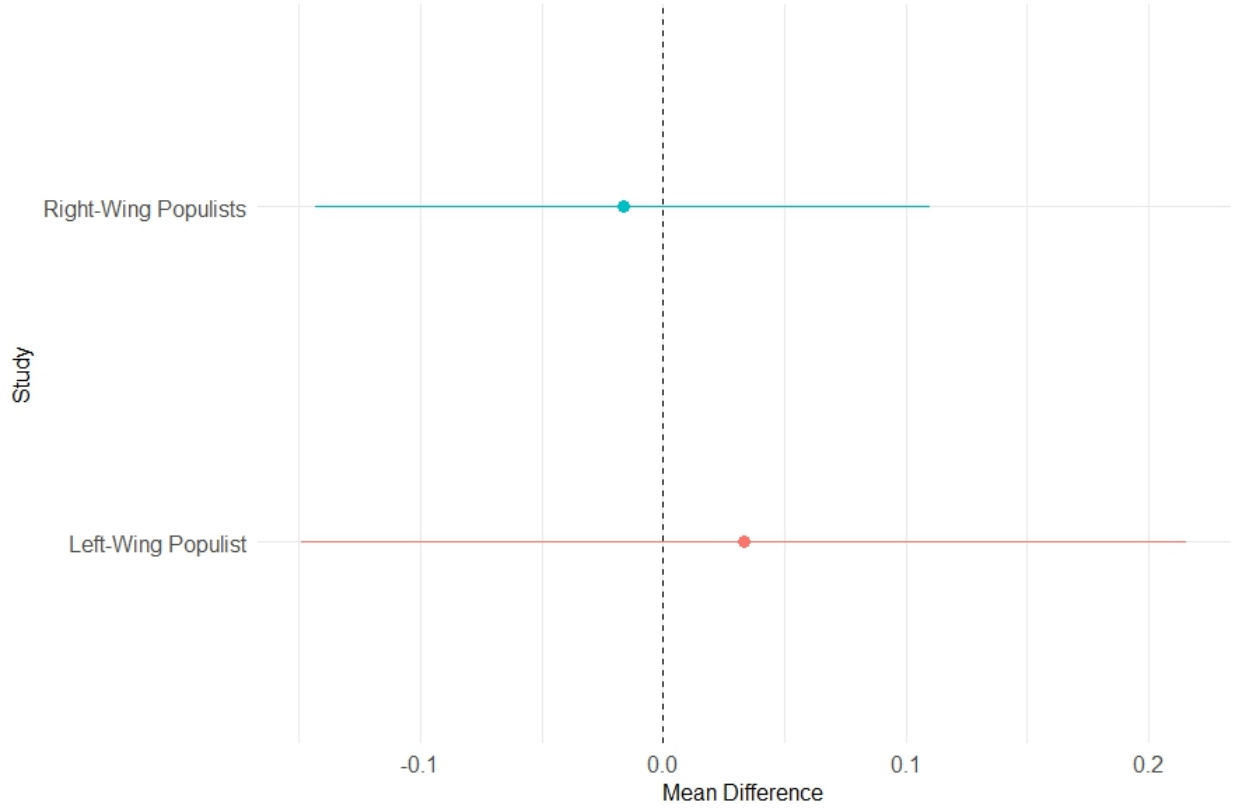
Figure 3.3 Differences in the means of the control and treatment group for the four countries in the study



should be replicated with the same design but with more resources to reach additional respondents. Alternatively, it should be replicated with a design that directly asks participants for a response to the polarizing cue. Both options have trade-offs but are worth exploring.

Regardless of its limitations, the study contributes to the theoretical debate on the sources of online incivility and the role of populists in online polarization. Further research on this area is needed as uncivil reactions incited by populist leaders are likely to intensify polarizing discourse, boosted by the algorithmic mechanics of digital platforms. This amplification of polarization and incivility has the potential to undermine the quality of democratic deliberation, highlighting the urgent need for respectful and meaningful political discussions in the

Figure 3.4 Differences in the means of the control and treatment group for right-wing cases and the left-wing case in the study



online public sphere.

Appendices

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives

Type	Terms
	Jair Bolsonaro
Divisive	*esquerda, fakenews, nosso governo, nós, Lula, traidores, bandid*, governoanterior, socialistas, popular, radica*, imprensa tradicional, velha política, bons cidadãos, cidadãos de bem, comunis*, povo, corrup*, elit**
Plebiscitary	*self reference, todos nós, apoio de todos, ajuda de todos, estar unidos, todos vocês, confiança do povo, apoio do povo, maioria do povo, interesses do povo, lado do povo, voz do povo, temos uma missão, me apoiarem, nossa luta*

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives (cont.)

Type	**Terms**
	Hugo Chávez
Divisive	*pueblo, conspiradores, escuálidos, fascist*, apátridas, golpist*, pitiyanqu*, popular, imperialist*, nosotr*, patriota*, hipócritas, puntofijistas, la extrema derecha, traidores, vendepatrias, el poder económico, oligarcas, conservadores, oligarquía, corrup*, élit*, elit*, neoliberal**
Plebiscitary	*reference to movement, self reference, aliado, nuestro movimiento, apoyo de todos, apoyo de todas, ayuda de todos, venceremos, representar al pueblo, apoyo del pueblo, confianza del pueblo, mayoría del pueblo, intereses del pueblo, lado del pueblo, voz del pueblo, gobierno del pueblo, servicio del pueblo, mandato del pueblo, voluntad del pueblo, voluntad soberana del pueblo, nuestra lucha, la lucha de muchos, la lucha del pueblo, hemos avanzado, representar a todos, ayuda de todas, sumamos, movilizarse, defenderemos*

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives (cont.)

Type	**Terms**
	Rafael Correa
Divisive	*pueblo, pelucones, prensa mercantilista, prensa corrupta, popular, imperialistas, nosotr*, patriota*, hipócritas, sin vergüenzas, la extrema derecha, traidores, vendepatrias, el poder económico, oligarcas, conservadores, oligarquía, corrup*, élit*, elit*, neoliberal**
Plebiscitary	*reference to movement, self reference, aliado, nuestro movimiento, apoyo de todos, apoyo de todas, ayuda de todos, representar al pueblo, apoyo del pueblo, confianza del pueblo, mayoría del pueblo, venceremos, intereses del pueblo, lado del pueblo, voz del pueblo, gobierno del pueblo, servicio del pueblo, mandato del pueblo, voluntad del pueblo, voluntad soberana del pueblo, nuestra lucha, la lucha de muchos, la lucha del pueblo, hemos avanzado, representar a todos, ayuda de todas, sumamos, movilizarse, defenderemos*

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives (cont.)

Type	**Terms**
	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
Divisive	*pueblo, dueños de country name, popular, nosotr*, patriota*, la extrema derecha, traidores, oligarcas, conservadores, oligarquía, corrup*, élit*, elit*, mafia del poder, fifí, fifís, prian, neoliberal**
Plebiscitary	*reference to movement, self reference, aliado, nuestro movimiento, apoyo de todos, apoyo de todas, ayuda de todos, venceremos, representar al pueblo, apoyo del pueblo, confianza del pueblo, mayoría del pueblo, intereses del pueblo, lado del pueblo, voz del pueblo, gobierno del pueblo, servicio del pueblo, mandato del pueblo, voluntad del pueblo, voluntad soberana del pueblo, nuestra lucha, la lucha de muchos, la lucha del pueblo, hemos avanzado, representar a todos, ayuda de todas, sumamos, movilizarse, defenderemos*

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives (cont.)

Type	Terms
	Nicolás Maduro
Divisive	*pueblo, conspiradores, escuálidos, fascist*, apátridas, golpist*, pitiyanqu*, popular, imperialist*, nosotr*, patriota*, hipócritas, puntofijistas, la extrema derecha, traidores, vendepatrias, el poder económico, oligarcas, conservadores, oligarquía, corrup*, élit*, elit*, terroristas económicos, neoliberal**
plebiscitary	*reference to movement, self reference, aliado, nuestro movimiento, apoyo de todos, apoyo de todas, ayuda de todos, venceremos, representar al pueblo, apoyo del pueblo, confianza del pueblo, mayoría del pueblo, intereses del pueblo, lado del pueblo, voz del pueblo, gobierno del pueblo, servicio del pueblo, mandato del pueblo, voluntad del pueblo, voluntad soberana del pueblo, nuestra lucha, la lucha de muchos, la lucha del pueblo, hemos avanzado, representar a todos, ayuda de todas, sumamos, movilizarse, defenderemos*

A Dictionaries for Populist Executives (cont.)

Type	**Terms**
	Evo Morales
Divisive	*pueblo, la derecha, colonizadores, mir, soberan*, previous governments, popular, imperialist*, fascist*, nosotr*, patriota*, la extrema derecha, traidores, el poder económico, oligarcas, conservadores, oligarquía, corrup*, élit*, elit*, neoliberal**
plebiscitary	*reference to movement, self reference, aliado, nuestro movimiento, apoyo de todos, apoyo de todas, ayuda de todos, representar al pueblo, apoyo del pueblo, confianza del pueblo, mayoría del pueblo, venceremos, intereses del pueblo, lado del pueblo, voz del pueblo, gobierno del pueblo, servicio del pueblo, mandato del pueblo, voluntad del pueblo, voluntad soberana del pueblo, nuestra lucha, la lucha de muchos, la lucha del pueblo, hemos avanzado, representar a todos, ayuda de todas, sumamos, movilizarse, defenderemos*

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