

“Long Live Freedom!”: Digital Communication of Argentina’s Emerging Libertarian Populism

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Social networks have become the ideal platform for populist leaders to directly engage with their followers, facilitating the dissemination of polarizing narratives. Populist actors have gained electoral momentum in different parts of the world by importing populist content from diverse national contexts. Argentina’s legislative elections in 2021 are a case in point. The main objective of this study is to examine the communication strategy employed by Javier Milei, an anarcho-capitalist politician, on Instagram during this electoral campaign. Through a quantitative content analysis, we identify the thematic and populist elements present in Milei’s Instagram posts. Our findings reveal a new style of ‘libertarian’ populism, which employs discursive

components previously used by populist parties from various ideologies and the strategic alignment of political communication with opportunistic themes and contextual dynamics. Milei focuses on positioning himself as the leader of the electoral campaign, with minimal emphasis on concrete policy proposals. His populist strategy revolves around attacking ideological adversaries (such as communism and feminism) and denouncing the corrupt political ‘caste’. Unlike other right-wing populist politicians, Milei’s discourse does not particularly focus on the issue of immigration.

Keywords: populism, political communication, social media, Facebook, Argentine.

Political communication was significantly modified with the incorporation of social networks as channels for disseminating the messages of leaders who found in this space the place to connect with their followers in a continuous, direct and immediate way. Although politicians from across the political spectrum use their social media accounts to disseminate their messages

(Gamir-Ríos *et al.*, 2022), the pages of populist actors tend to have a higher number of followers than the rest of the parties and obtain greater interaction from users (Fenoll and Hassler, 2019; Bene *et al.*, 2022). With messages created and designed in an impactful way (Parmelee and Roman, 2019), they seek to please their audiences —many of them far from politics (Catalina-García *et al.*, 2019)— and, at the same time, they avoid the intermediation of traditional media, with which they often have fluctuating relationships (Gerbaudo, 2018).

These digital bastions are used by populist referents to recruit citizens who are disaffected with political issues (Gerbaudo, 2018) and thus serve as places of congregation and meeting. This is especially evident when the leaders present themselves as *outsiders* (Casullo, 2019), because they do not come from the political arena, a characteristic that they promote, together with their political incorrectness, as differential advantages over their opponents (Stefanoni, 2021). All in all, the networks —due to their architecture— are a propitious channel for conveying great populist subjects such as the attack on elites and minorities, the invocation of the homeland and the defence of the people and their sovereignty (Engesser *et al.*, 2017, p. 17).

Studies on the communicational strategies of populist leaders have increased in recent years (Bast, 2021), especially in Europe (Haßler *et al.*, 2021) and the United States (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). This research aims to contribute to the study of the communication strategies of radical right-wing populist actors in the Latin American context. We investigate the messages that the libertarian politician Javier Milei published on his official Instagram account during the electoral campaign for the 2021 Argentine legislative election to find out whether he uses populist content in his posts.

In a country where the radical right-wing actors had not had institutional representation since the arrival of democracy in 1983, Mieli was the third force in the 2021 legislative election (17% of the vote), a fact that led him to occupy a place in the Congress of the Argentine Nation, thus bringing to the political formal arena ideas of a radical libertarian right. He is the main leader of the party La Libertad Avanza (The Liberty Advances, LA), a group officially launched in 2021, that participated for the first time in an electoral contest in the legislative elections of that year in Argentina. As a candidate for national deputy for the City of Buenos Aires (CABA), he faced the candidates of Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change, JxC), a centre-right alliance that governs CABA, Argentina's capital city; the representatives of Frente de Todos (Everyone's Front, FdT), an alliance of parties close to centre-left ideologies that have governed the country since 2019, and the leftist Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores - Unidad (Workers' Left Front - Unity, FIT-U).

A prolific user of social networks, Milei has open profiles on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. It is on the latter social network that he has the largest number of followers and where he has more supporters than the rest of his political opponents: in fact, he is the Argentine leader with the most followers after the country's president Alberto Fernández. Instagram is one of the most widely used social media platforms in Argentina, and it is preferred by young people for obtaining information (Newman *et al.*, 2021) and mobilizing

politically (Tarullo and Sampietro, 2022). However, with few exceptions (Demuru *et al.*, 2021), little is known about the performance of right-wing populist leaders in Latin America on Instagram. For this reason, this manuscript is a contribution to research on right-wing populism in other contexts and on this social media specifically, analysing Javier Milei's communication strategy on Instagram during the electoral campaign for the national legislative elections held in Argentina on 14 November 2021, with three objectives in mind: 1) Identifying the themes that prevailed in the communication that Milei deployed on his official Instagram account in order to determine which political aspects characterise his discourse, 2) testing the use of negative campaigning and populist content in Milei's publications to establish what are the characteristics of his communication tactics and to whom his attacks are directed and 3) reviewing the extent to which personalisation is present in Milei's Instagram posts, paying particular attention to the visual elements of the posts.

POPULISM AS A DISCURSIVE STRATEGY

The term populism is extensively used in political debates and in the media (Löffler *et al.*, 2020), which makes it difficult to reach a consensus on its definition (Casullo, 2019). Within the broad spectrum from which populism can be approached, several studies have focused primarily on the communicative dimension of populism. In their rhetoric, populist leaders speak on behalf of the people (Löffler *et al.*, 2020), while proposing polarizing scenarios: there is a 'them', who embodies the danger, against an 'us', presented as the good and moral (Casullo, 2019). Whether it is right-wing or left-wing populism, what changes is who is placed on each side of the spectrum (Mudde, 2014). In Europe, right-wing populisms have found immigration to be the main target of their communication strategies (Mudde, 2014), nuanced by attacks on the European Union (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2020), feminism (Löffler *et al.*, 2020) and the media (Engesser *et al.*, 2017). By contrast, in Latin America, populism has historically been associated with the left (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). In this case, the threat is posed by foreign capital and international funding agencies, but also by the national oligarchy (Casullo, 2019). Focusing on this research, we are interested in knowing if the new political leader Javier Milei replicates in his communication strategy the same topics that are typical of right-wing populist leaders in other contexts, or if, on the contrary, he makes use of topics that are related to the Argentinean scenario. Therefore, the first guiding question is:

- RQ1: What are the prevailing topics in the messages that Milei publishes on Instagram?

Populism is characterised by communicating and fostering antagonisms, which seek polarisation and the consequent shaping of affective communities (Gerbaudo, 2018). Populist actors blame people's problems on elites (Bast, 2021).

Presenting themselves as the voice of the people, representing something different according to cultural, social, historical and political contexts (Löffler *et al.*, 2020), right-wing populists often use patriotic symbols and refer to convening historical events (Bast, 2021). Milei had an exponential growth in public exposure, partly achieved through his attacks on the political class, in a country where this sector has lost credibility after years of unresolved structural problems plus high corruption rates (Carabajal, 2019). Despite being described by journalistic and academic sectors as a right-wing populist (Campos, 2021; Cappiello, 2021), he does not define himself as such, but as an anarcho-capitalist, defender of the minimal state. For this reason, the second question guiding this study is:

- RQ2: To what extent does Milei use populist content in his communication strategy?

Along with the rhetoric based on the exaltation of the true people and the exclusionary and anti-elite discourse, emotional language is another distinctive feature of the populist communication style (Schmuck and Hameleers, 2020). However, the valence of emotions used by populists depends on the electoral context and can be both negative and positive (Engesser *et al.*, 2017, Tarullo, 2018). Likewise, differences are observed in the communication strategy of populist actors according to their ideology, with the right tending to be more prone to negative campaigning, attacking rival political actors (Fenoll and Hassler, 2019) by using negative emotions (Fenoll, 2022a), while the populist left tends towards positive campaigning (Fenoll and Cano-Orón, 2019). Considering that previous studies have found that negative campaigns are more recurrent in electoral scenarios (García Beaudoux and D'Adamo, 2006), as in the case of this research, it is pertinent to ask the following question:

- RQ3: To what degree does Milei carry out a negative campaign in his communication strategy on Instagram and to whom, if at all, are their attacks directed?

POPULISM'S VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Visual and audio-visual messages are crucial for the construction of the political image of the leader: the power of visuals lies in the fact that they carry multiple levels of combined information (Bast, 2021; Lego Muñoz and Towner, 2017).

Instagram has gained ground as a space for the communicational deployment of political actors, thus accompanying a growing worldwide use of this platform in which the visual is obligatory for the post. This centrality of the image gives rise to content related to their private lives (Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020) of celebrity-like candidates (López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat, 2021), typical of the personalization of politics, a key point of populist leadership (Mazzoleni and Sfondini, 2009). This social media allows politicians to experiment with more

spontaneous and personal forms of communication (Quevedo-Redondo and Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

Research on visual political communication in social media reveals a greater propensity for populist actors to show the leader of their own party or populist leaders from other countries in their images, as well as to use national symbols (Farkas *et al.*, 2022). They also tend to represent themselves as simple, mundane, approachable, authentic (Demuru *et al.*, 2021), but at the same time exceptional and spectacular (Löffler *et al.*, 2020). Thus, they often design a virile populist leadership image (Löffler *et al.*, 2020) subject to a 'strongman model' (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). In this sense, Casullo explains, "in the strongman model, populist leadership is associated with an exaggerated (we could almost say parodic) performance of a stereotypical idea of macho" (2019, p. 141), which is in line with new versions of far-right populism, characterised by advocating misogynist and sexist positions (Löffler *et al.*, 2020).

Milei has a particular youthful aesthetic (Cappiello, 2021), with dishevelled hair and a leather jacket, which he accompanies with rock music in his presentations on stages and at events (Maradeo, 2021). As a specialist in economic issues, he managed to get a place on Argentine television talking about the economy, although making use of those logics that Mazzoleni and Sfardini (2009) identify as points in common between pop politics —largely acquired by populist leaders— and the media, in a balance of agreements in which one offers what the other needs: spectacularisation and emotive appeal (Cossarini and Vallespín, 2019). Taking into consideration the visual proposal by Javier Milei, we consider the following question to be necessary:

- RQ4: What are the characteristics of the visual material that Javier Milei disseminates on Instagram?

METHOD

To achieve the objectives of this research, the study follows a quantitative methodology of content analysis, where the unit of analysis is the post. The corpus is composed of all the posts ($n = 214$) published by Javier Milei on his official Instagram account during the electoral campaign, which begins on 10 October and ends on 12 November. To collect the Instagram posts, we used the CrowdTangle API, a public reporting tool owned and operated by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team, 2021).

The coding scheme used follows the codebook of the international social media political communication research network DigiWorld, which is available in an online repository¹. This coding scheme has been widely

1 See https://bit.ly/CamforS_OSF

used in political communication studies in Europe (Haßler *et al.*, 2021), and in other geographical areas, such as Canada (Boulianne *et al.*, 2022) or New Zealand (Krewel, 2022). Its use in this study allows us to standardize the variables and categories analysed with a common methodological framework and ensures cross-nationally comparable data to extend the scope of study to Latin America.

To examine the themes present in Milei's publications, the variable 'post topic' was used, with an adaptation of Börzel and Risse (2003) classification that allows us to identify whether the post addresses issues related to 1) polity (institutional and normative aspects of politics), 2) politics (processual aspects of politics) and 3) policy (issues on the political agenda). Within the policy category, different subcategories were incorporated to determine whether the content deals with economic issues (taxes, economy and finance), labour and social issues (welfare state, health, Covid-19, employment, families, housing and poverty), crime and public order (crime, political radicalism, corruption, drug trafficking and state abuses), immigration (immigration policy, crimes related to immigrants), energy and environment, civil rights (gender policy, LGTBI and minority rights) and foreign policy.

To test the presence of populist content in Milei's messages, the use of three characteristic elements of populism needs to be checked (Vreese *et al.*, 2018, p. 1) reference and appeals to the people as a unit in a political or ethnic sense (empty populism); 2) attacks on political, economic or media elites (anti-elite populism); and 3) attacks on political, ethnic or cultural minorities identified as out-groups (exclusionary populism).

The variable 'negative campaigning' allows us to establish who is the main target of the negative campaign and what is the type of attack (professional competence, personal, political management, credibility and integrity, rhetorical skills, appearance and other forms of attack). Finally, the presence of 'patriotic symbols' and 'stereotypes' (ethnic, political, male, female, LGTBI) is also analysed.

Characteristics of the visual communication were operationalised by means of the variables 'image theme' (Campaign material, Survey/Poll results, Election campaign events, Individual voter contact, Endorsement by celebrity supporters, Endorsement by ordinary supporters, Media work, Political positioning, Private background story, Negative image, Visiting sites) 'number of people visible' and 'protagonist of the image'.

Manual coding was performed by the two authors of this research and covered all elements of Instagram posts, including visual elements such as images and the first minute of videos. To ensure the reliability of the manual coding, an inter-coder test was conducted on a random sample of 50 posts (23% of the total), following the academy's recommended criteria for nominal content category research (Lacy and Riffe, 1996; Neuendorf, 2017). Inter-coder reliability was calculated using the R package *tidycomm* (Unkel, 2019). The results of the Holsti *CR* test show a common understanding of the coded categories (all Holsti $\geq .7$), giving the study good reliability values (Igartua, 2006; Neuendorf, 2017).

RESULTS

The results indicate that the campaign is mainly focused on talking about the world of politics, leaving concrete programmatic proposals in the background (Table 1). More than two thirds of the publications (69.6%) are related to processual aspects of politics, with images and content highlighting the candidate’s popularity, his or her presence in social and communication media, as well as the development of the electoral campaign, especially from a horse-race perspective. It is worth noting the total absence of references to institutional and normative aspects of politics (polity), such as changes in the political order or in the country constitution.

Table 1. Frequency of publications by type of topic

		<i>n</i>	%
Subtopics of the post	Polity	0	0%
	Politics	149	69.6%
	Policy	71	33.2%
	Economy and finance	39	18.2%
	Crime and public order	25	11.7%
	Labour and social issues	11	5.1%
	Environment	4	1.7%
	Gender policy	1	0.5%
	Non-political topic	16	7.5%
	Total	214	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Issues related to the political programme and government action are only present in one out of every three messages (33.2%). The most prominent policy is the economy (18.2%), one of the problems that most concerned Argentine citizens during the 2021 election campaign (Observatorio, 2021). Milei also focuses on crime and public order (11.7%), also at the top of the survey, addressing topics such as corruption, citizen insecurity and political radicalism. With a frequency under 10%, we find publications that deal with issues unrelated to politics and the candidate’s programme (7.5%), such as photographs of Halloween celebrations showing young people dressed up as Milei (Milei, 31-10-2021). This is followed by labour and social (5.1%) and environment (1.9%), from a denialist perspective. Gender equality only appears in one publication where LA influencer Eugenia Rolón criticises gender policies during a television debate because she claims that they treat “women as useless” (Milei, 03-11-2021).

Table 2 shows the presence of populist content and negative campaigning. We found populist elements in 17.8% of the posts. Anti-elite populism is the

most common (10.7% of posts), with attacks directed almost exclusively against the political elite, which Milei calls the “caste” (Figure 1). Criticism of the political elite follows a discrediting strategy (92% of attacks on elites), accusing politicians of being “corrupt” (Milei, 11-10-2021) and “thieves” (Milei, 12-10-2021). To a lesser extent (8% of attacks on elites), the political elite is also blamed for poverty (Milei, 12-11-2021) and for “infecting society with socialism” (Milei, 28-10-2021).

Table 2. Presence of populist content and negative campaigning

		<i>n</i>	%
Type of content	No populist or negative content	159	74.3%
	Populist content	29	13.6%
	Negative campaign	17	7.9%
	Populist and negative content	9	4.2%
	Total	214	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration.

Although the attack on the political elite is the main populist hallmark of Milei’s discourse, we also find elements related to exclusionary populism (4.7% of posts), which targets the political ‘others’, represented as a great threat to the future of the country. Kirchnerismo (Milei, 10-11-2021), socialism and communism (Milei, 24-10-2021) are presented in these attacks as political options that represent a threat to Argentina. As can be seen in Figure 1, the visual plays a very important role in this exclusionary strategy. In the lower part of the image, all the characters and movements that Milei attacks in most of his speeches are represented in black and white. The feminist movement opens the row on the left, characterised by a woman with a mask wearing the purple scarf, the symbol of the feminist movement in Argentina, and the green scarf, icon of the struggle for the Law on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy, enacted in December 2021. She is followed by the President of the Nation, Alberto Fernández, and the Vice-President, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, both with centre-left positions. To their right, JxC national deputy candidate, María Eugenia Vidal, who eventually won the race in CABA. Finally, there is the threat of communism, personified in the form of a terror puppet.

Empty populism barely appears in Milei’s messages (1.4% of posts). His discourse, therefore, is not characterised by a nationalist exaltation with appeals to the true Argentinian people as a homogeneous unit antagonistic to a common enemy. However, on a visual level, the presence of patriotic symbols is detected in 13.1% of the publications. The Argentinian flag is usually carried by his electoral running mate, Victoria Villarruel, current deputy for CABA, or is visible among the public attending its events. The national colours are also present in the infographics used during the electoral campaign (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Post with populist content and negative campaigning



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVbCpnaFh8F/>.

Negative campaign is present in 12.1% of the posts (Table 2). Most frequent negative messages are aimed to erode political opponents' credibility. To a lesser extent, Milei also uses attacks on personal competence, political management or other types of attack, such as the negative subjectification of politicians through image manipulation (Figure 1). The main target of Milei's attacks is the governing party (FdT), which receives 65.4% of the attacks (Table 3). Negative campaigning is also detected within the same ideological flank, with attacks directed against JxC (46.2% of the messages with negative campaigning), accusing them, for example, of being opportunists (5-11-2021).

Finally, the results of the study reveal the use of stereotypes in 9.8% of Milei's Instagram posts. Two thirds of the stereotypes are masculine (66.7%) and present Milei as "the lion" (Figure 2) or "the king" (Milei, 08-11-2021), who asks his followers during rallies to roar with him to "make the political caste tremble" (Milei, 10-11-2021). We also find the attribution of characteristics, beliefs or clichés that can be identified as stereotypical masculine traits or signs directed at women. Although in Spanish the word 'jefe' (boss) has the feminine form 'jefa' (female boss), Milei uses the word in its masculine version to refer to his sister: "SHE IS THE BOSS" (Milei, 14-10-2021; 07-11-2021), "Going out to vote accompanied by THE BOSS" (14-11-2021).

Likewise, a third of the stereotypes used by Milei also contain elements of an ideological and political nature (33.3%), such as the negative representation of communism in Figure 1. Among the stereotypical mentions of other political actors, we find attacks on the party FdT, for following a "collectivist model with a Castro-Chavist ending" (Milei, 14-10-2021), in reference to the political model used in Cuba by Fidel Castro and in Venezuela by Hugo Chávez. We also find stereotypical

criticism directed at the conservative party JxC, whom he accuses of being “at the service of a group of well-mannered collectivists who impost liberalism for electoral gain” (Milei, 05-11-2021). However, we also find stereotypical messages about ideologies used to positively subjectivise liberalism, as in Milei’s Instagram post where he claims “we liberals are industrious” (19-10-2021).

Table 3. Type of attack and target of the negative campaign

		Party targeted by negative campaigning							
		FdT		JxC		FIT-U		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Type of attack	Credibility	9	34.6%	9	34.6%	0	0.0%	17	65.4%
	Personal competency	4	15.4%	1	3.8%	1	3.8%	4	15.4%
	Political performance	3	11.5%	2	7.7%	1	3.8%	4	15.4%
	Other form of attack	3	11.5%	1	3.8%	0	0.0%	3	11.5%
	Professional competency	1	3.8%	1	3.8%	0	0.0%	2	7.7%
	Total	17	65.4%	12	46.2%	1	3.8%	26	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2. Image of a lion presented as “Javier Milei”



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUugXjqgqUC/>

The type of image reflects Milei’s thematic priorities (Table 4), with a higher percentage of images depicting procedural aspects of politics, such as the candidate’s work with the media (27.1%), election campaign events (17.8%), poll results or social media rankings (15.4%), as well as endorsements (by celebrities and ordinary supporters) highlighting his popularity (12.2%). It is worth noting that some messages share Milei’s appearance in news published in European newspapers, such as the French *Le Figaro* (Milei, 30-10-2021) or the British *Financial Times* (08-11-2021) and *The Economist* (11-10-2021), as well as his speech at an event organised by the radical right-wing Spanish party Vox (10-10-2021).

Table 4. Frequency of publications by image category

		<i>n</i>	%
Image theme	Media work	58	27.1%
	Election campaign events	38	17.8%
	Survey/Poll results	33	15.4%
	Political positioning	22	10.3%
	Campaign material	20	9.3%
	Negative image/video	20	9.3%
	Individual voter contact	13	6.1%
	Endorsement by celebrities	13	6.1%
	Endorsement by ordinary supporters	13	6.1%
	Television debate	9	4.2%
	Private background story	4	1.9%
	Visiting site	2	0.9%
	Total	214	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration.

As shown in Table 5, Milei is the main protagonist in three out of four images with people. Supporters and followers occupy an important place in his communication strategy, especially young people (31-10-2021) and right-wing influencers such as Emmanuel Danann (5-10-2021 and 3-11-2021), Lilia Lemoine (7-11-2021) or El Presto (14-10-2021). In decreasing order, ordinary people are also represented (22.8%) and used in some posts to epitomise the effects of citizen insecurity (Milei, 09-11-2021). Also visible are politicians from other parties (21.4%) and other politicians of LA (19.1%), such as Ramiro Marra, youtuber, also a candidate, but in his case for legislator of CABA.

Table 5. Number of people in the image according to the protagonist

		Number of people in the image							
		Single person		Several people		Crowd		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Person detail	Milei	26	19.1%	51	37.5%	25	18.4%	102	75.0%
	Supporters/ followers	4	2.9%	24	17.6%	24	17.6%	52	38.2%
	Non-political person	3	2.2%	21	15.4%	7	5.1%	31	22.8%
	Politician of other party	6	4.4%	21	15.4%	2	1.4%	29	21.4%
	LA	0	0.0%	17	12.5%	9	6.6%	26	19.1%
	Foreign top politicians	0	0.0%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%
	Other persons	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.7%
	Total	40	29.4%	66	48.5%	30	22.1%	136	100.0%

Source: Own elaboration.

Milei takes centre stage in images with a single person, although he also leads in the number of publications in which he is accompanied by several people or large crowds, visually staging mass support for the leader. The other representatives of the LA are visible in group images or crowds, revealing a lower level of personalisation than Milei. In contrast, politicians from the other parties are depicted at a distance from the crowds, thus staging their distancing from the people.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The content analysis of Javier Milei’s publications on Instagram during the electoral campaign for the 2021 Argentina legislative election reveals that the candidate of LA focuses his communication strategy on this social media on issues that are mostly distant from the concerns of Argentine citizens. The world of politics and the development of the electoral campaign, narrated as if it were a horse-race, are the central axes of his communication, with most posts lacking concrete political proposals and focused on promoting the candidate’s image as a strong and popular man in social and communication media.

Milei’s programmatic proposals are relegated to the background, with barely a third of his publications dedicated to disseminating his government programme. When he does so, it is always on the economy, and he chooses ultra-liberal protagonists, such as former minister Domingo Cavallo, to present his ideas for him. This strategy contrasts with that used by other populist leaders, who focus their campaign on explaining their political positioning (Alonso-Muñoz and

Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Fenoll, 2022a). If we focus on the themes used by Milei, the results reveal that his programme is mainly based on economic issues, as well as crime and public order, which are common topics in the discourse of conservative parties (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Petrocik, 1996). Corruption is another element present in their campaign, as can also be seen in the initial strategy used by other populist parties (Fenoll, 2022a; Valera-Ordaz *et al.*, 2017). However, immigration is absent in Milei's discourse and does not occupy the prominent place that it does in the political communication of other right-wing populist actors (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Fenoll, 2022a). The lack of proposals on institutional and normative aspects of politics is also remarkable, especially if one takes into consideration that Milei's ideological basis is anarcho-capitalism and he defends a state reduced to the minimum expression. In other far-right populist formations such as Vox in Spain, proposals for a change of state model feature prominently in their discourse (Fenoll, 2022a).

Immigration does not appear in Milei's discourse, nor is it used as an enemy of the people in his populist discourse. This circumstance could be explained by the lack of relevance of this issue in Argentina, where immigration does not even appear in surveys on citizens' concerns. Thus, it could be inferred that the use of immigration as the central axis of extreme right-wing populist discourse detected in other countries has a merely instrumental function, in a search for polarising rhetoric, which aims to channel citizen discontent on a salient issue (Bene *et al.*, 2022). However, other issues may also account for this finding. On the one hand, a large proportion of Argentina's inhabitants are descendants of immigrants (Torrado, 1992). Moreover, in a country where voting is compulsory, 16% of the electoral roll in CABA, the city in which Milei was running, is made up of foreigners. While there are no attacks on feminism or ethnic or cultural minorities (at least not directly), which are targets of the usual attacks of populist right-wing rhetoric (Löffler *et al.*, 2020), it seems that these antagonistic positions are taken and disseminated by liberal influencers, as in the case of Eugenia Rolón (Milei, 03-11-2021), or slipped in visually, as in Figure 1.

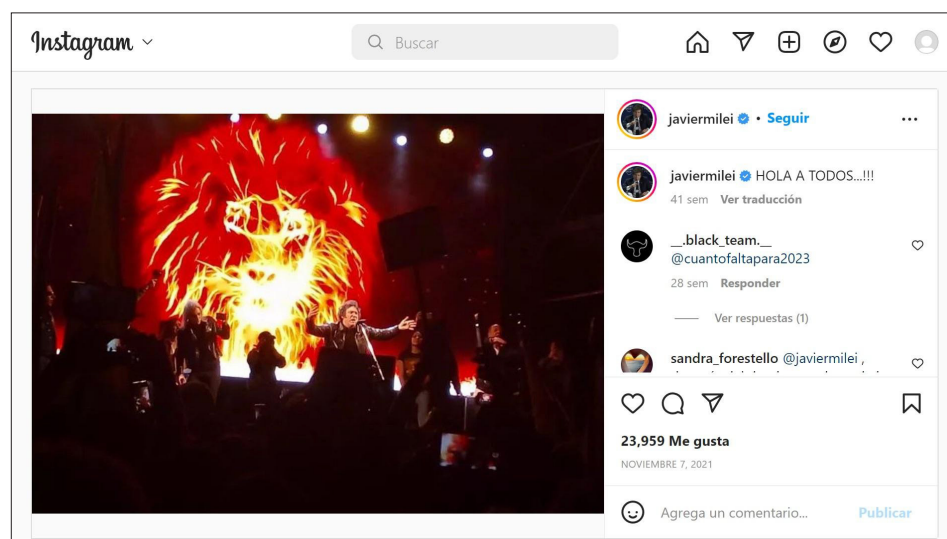
In the absence of the issues that are common to other right-wing populisms, Milei seems to have opted to direct exclusionary attacks towards the ideology of the party in power in order to capitalise on popular discontent after the pandemic, which, while not worrying in terms of the health crisis it generated, did have economic and social consequences in a society in crisis (Observatorio, 2021). Likewise, Milei's strategy of attacking the political 'caste' shares similarities with the initial strategy followed by the Spanish populist party Podemos, who, from the left, also used the word 'caste' as a battering ram with which to erode and stigmatise the political elite when it was still an emerging extra-parliamentary political force (Sampietro and Valera-Ordaz, 2015). Confronting caste, Milei presents himself as the saviour of the people: "Them or Milei", "Make the caste tremble", "The caste is afraid". To achieve this, he proclaims himself the lion, supporting this idea of virility of right-wing leadership (Löffler *et al.*, 2020). As a pop politician (Mazzoleni and Sfardini, 2009), Milei shouts and sings at his campaign events "I am the lion/ the beast roared in the middle of the avenue/ everyone ran, without understanding/ panic show in broad daylight/ please don't run away from me/ I

am the king of a lost world/ I am the king and I will tear you apart/ the whole caste is my appetite. Long live freedom, carajo” (8-11-2021).

In his electoral campaign on Instagram, Milei proposes unconventional logic of communication and encounter that are outside not only the traditional forms of political communication, but also those found in right-wing leaderships in other contexts. Therefore, one of the main findings of this study is the emergence within the ideological sphere of the radical right of a new style of ‘libertarian’ populism that omits the issue of immigration from its messages and is based on attacks on the political elite, referred to as the ‘caste’, and on the ideological adversary. This new communication strategy offers substantial differences with respect to far-right populist discourse, based mainly on attacks on the media elite (Ernst *et al.*, 2017; Fenoll, 2022b), nationalist exaltation and exclusionary attacks on minorities, especially immigrants (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Fenoll, 2022a).

Milei’s communication on Instagram is based on promoting his own character, created in the light of the television that saw him emerge and grow; migrating to the network environment the same narratives of the spectacle that helped to build and expand his image as a celebrity candidate (López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat, 2021). To do so, he uses some of the strategies of right-wing populist leaderships: the use of patriotic symbols (Bast, 2021), images of high visual impact (see Figure 3) (Quevedo-Redondo and Portalés-Oliva, 2017) and proximity to his followers, mostly young people, to show himself as one of them (Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). It is not surprising, then, that the youth vote was crucial for Milei to win his seat in Congress (Cappiello, 2021).

Figure 3. Image of Milei during a rally with a fire lion in the background



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CV-8iTk18/>.

This study offers an in-depth analysis of the strategies used by an emerging libertarian and populist actor in Argentina. In a global context, where political communication strategies circulate freely, it is important to pay attention to the electoral triumph of an anarcho-capitalist politician who defends a minimal State, in a country where the extreme right had played a residual role after the last dictatorship (Stefanoni, 2021). The findings allow us to outline the characteristics of the populist and libertarian communication style used by Milei to reach younger audiences through social networks such as Instagram, using the youth communities' own resources and disseminating an image similar to that of a rock star. All in all, this study shows that right-wing populist communication is not a singular rhetoric, but that its narratives are constructed according to the time and space in which they take place. Although the polarising resource typical of the populist communication style can circulate in dissimilar contexts, what and who is in each of the poles transcends the ideological to rely on the opportunism of the moment. Studying the logics of populism in less explored contexts, such as the case of Argentina, makes it possible to identify similarities and differences with previous research, while also allowing for the discovery of the specific characteristics of these leaderships that fit within the temporal and spatial dimensions of this specific scenario.

As for the limitations of the study, the research focuses only on the election campaign on Instagram, so the conclusions drawn about Milei's political communication may be constrained by the characteristics and affordances of this channel. Future studies should incorporate analysis of other social media to establish whether the findings detected here are part of a common digital communication strategy or whether they are unique to this platform. Likewise, further research should incorporate a wider range of accounts analysed to contrast whether the strategy used by the LA candidate is also present in other Argentinean political actors. Likewise, given that Milei's leap into politics is due to his popularity in television talk shows, the focus of the study should also be extended to these spaces to investigate the transmedia communication strategy followed to transfer the spectacularisation of his television presentations to social networks.

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