DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA
AND COMMUNICATION

MEASURING POPULISM ON TWITTER DURING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

A dictionary-based approach.

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Master's Thesis in Media and Communication

Thesis:	30 hp
Program and/or course:	Master's Programme in Political Communication/MK2502
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	St/2022
Supervisor:	[Orla Vigsö]
Examiner:	Nicklas Håkansson
Report no:	

Abstract

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Report No:	
Keywords:	Populism, Political Communication, Twitter, Content Analysis, Python, Latin America, Elections.

Arguably, populism has become increasingly topic across different spheres: the media, the academia and even the vox populi; and it has become quite common to find political movements and leaders labelled as populists. Therefore, one can say that Populism is on the rise across the globe.

Large debate takes place to define what populism is, what the criteria to label a political leader as populist should be, and whether it is healthy or not for democracies. However, must of the research on Populism seems to take place in the European and North American context, and to a lesser extent in other areas such as Latin America – area that some scholars have labelled as "the land of Populism".

Following a communication-centred understanding of Populism and a dictionary-based quantitative text analysis, this study aims to determine to what extent Latin American political candidates use populist communication during their campaigns using Twitter. In total, N=13,256 tweets from 30 different candidates across the Latin American region were analysed. The results show that most candidates engage to a certain extent with populist communication. Moreover, on top of demonstrating which candidates engaged with populist messages, the study provides insights into the type of messages employed to communicate the populist idea. Lastly, the study analyses the relationship between populist communication and mis- and disinformation as a label. The results show a correlation (R=0,060***) between populist communication and disinformation as a label to discredit or delegitimize the media or opponents.

Foreword

This work is part of my research at the University of Gothenburg, fully founded by the Swedish Institute through the scholarship for future global leaders. I will forever be grateful for the experience that studying and living in Sweden has meant to me.

To God.
To my family, for their unending encouragement and support.
To Maria Fernanda for her care, teachings, and love.
To myself, for persevering. May this work serve as a constant reminder of the significance of mental health and a marker for a new beginning. May this work also serve as the foundation from which I can influence change in Latin America, especially in my beloved Guatemala.

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1 Introduction

Populism has increasingly become a popular term in both academic and common languages. In 2004, Mudde coined the notion of a "populist zeitgeist", and notably today, we see numerous political parties and leaders worldwide labelled as populists. Nonetheless, it seems like populism is often used as a pejorative label and that hardly any politician wants to be recognized by such a name. Thus, the question that arises is: who is a populist?

Populism has been defined as the notion that society is divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups – The people against the elite (Mudde, 2004). This Manichean view of society has been defined as the minimal criterion a political actor must meet to be labelled as populist. However, albeit scholars recognize it as a good starting point, it is challenging to apply it systematically. Furthermore, according to (Pauwels, 2011), populism is not an "either-or" logic but instead argues that it could be a matter of degree. Language has become another barrier to systematically studying populist political communication across countries due to language diversity. For instance, Bonnin (2020) points out a monolingual bias in populism research; consequently, linguistic, and discursive diversity is left aside. Therefore, if we aim to understand populism truly, language must not be an alibi to study this phenomenon empirically.

Vast literature debates whether populism is healthy for democracies or not. For instance, on the one hand, the positive assessment suggests that it increases representation and gives voice to groups marginalized by mainstream politicians, leading to "people-led politics". On the other hand, the negative assessment suggests that populism might curve minority rights, perversely inverses the ideals and methods of democracy (Rosanvallon, 2008 in Enroth, 2020), and could be used to delegitimize the independent institutions such as the media and courts (de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018). However, according to the authors, the outcomes of populism might vary. In countries with strong institutions of checks and balances and a respected and autonomous press, populism is arguably less likely to turn into an existential threat to democracy. However, the opposite could happen in democracies with a polarized majority voting system, with weak institutions and press subject to instrumentation and legitimacy attacks.

According to The Economist Democracy Index 2021, most Latin American democracies are in bad shape. Most of them are allocated as flawed democracies and hybrid regimes categorized

by problems with electoral processes, pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture (See www.eiu.com for more). Scholars note Latin America as the land of populism because it has dominated the region's political landscape due to a crisis of political representation, lasting political loyalties and cleavages that predecessors left (de la Torre, 2017). Studies have found that populist movements take advantage of violating citizens' civil rights who live under material and legal deprivation conditions and often rely on politicians to access fundamental rights. Mainly, scholars argue that populist movements prospered in the 1940s and 1950s with the authoritarian regimes of Juan Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil. The two highly charismatic leaders claimed to govern in favor of the people and against the establishment's interests. (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

Although mainstream politicians also offer material rewards for the poor, populist politicians, in addition, portray the people as the essence of the nation, attempting to generate political identities (Auyero, 2001 in Conniff and Roberts, 2012). Thus, the reasons behind the populist success in Latin America are somewhat obvious. Especially considering that most of the countries have a majority voting system that is highly polarized with low credibility in democratic institutions, and the press is constantly subject to instrumentalization and attacks. Furthermore, scholars have noted that populism could not only be used as a political strategy to access power but also to maintain it. Hence, the importance of studying populism in such a context.

Researchers have also focused on populist leaders to analyse their leadership characteristics to understand the bonding between populists and societies. De la Torre (2017) argues that special attention must be given to the conversation between political actors and citizens to understand the bonding. The author notes that populist messages have empowered the humiliated population and dignified the poor and non-whites portrayed as the proletariat. Therefore, special attention must be given to the communication's role in spreading populist ideals.

Populism today is arguably not close to how it was conceptualized with historical populism. For instance, Barberi (2020) argues that whereas the "classical" populisms were considered a consequence of exceptional local problems, modern populism is a mediatized global phenomenon (Mazzoleni, 2017; de la Torre, 2019, Barberi, 2020). Moreover, the political arena is arguably changing as traditional news sources compete with social media as a source of information, therefore playing a pivotal role in politics.

The relationship between politicians and their audiences has changed as a new logic drives the production and dissemination of political information (A. Chadwick, 2013). On that logic, politicians can frame and communicate messages almost on a gateless basis to their audience, thus, potentially influencing the public agenda. For instance, social media is considered the perfect channel for the diffusion of populist messages; On the one hand, populist actors often accuse mainstream media of being controlled by mainstream political elites. On the other hand, conversely, the possibility of communicating directly with their electorate can reinforce their image as approachable (Manucci, 2017).

Thus, social media has become central to understanding populist communication, given that it is there where political actors can have a closer approach to their followers. Nevertheless, as Gründl (2020) argues, analysing political messages on social media is challenging because vast volumes of content are produced daily, and there are still challenges in analysing large amounts of data. This study thus follows a dictionary-based quantitative text analysis (see methodology section) as an attempt to measure populism.

Furthermore, although mis- and disinformation have been embedded in the media system since the early days of mass communication (Tsfati et al., 2020) and vies for public attention (Shin, et al., 2018), with the rise of social media, it is overwhelmingly present to the extent that scholars have suggested the term "misinformation society" (see Pickard, 2016), leading to the era of "alternative facts" and "post-truth".

With the rise of post-truth, populist actors can give a new value to their narratives to disrupt established social conventions (Maldonado, 2017). In that sense, the main issue is that different interpretations or versions of reality may coexist (Hameleers, 2020a), therefore, posing a threat to democracies (Hameleers & Minihold, 2020) because objective truth for shaping public opinion is becoming less influential than political beliefs or emotions (see Shin, Jian, Driscoll, & Bar, 2018). For instance, Bennet, 2018 argues that democratic nations worldwide are experiencing increased levels of false information circulating through social media, where accuracy and honesty of information are subject to fierce debate. Thereby there is increasingly scholarly attention towards mis- and disinformation, primarily focusing on spreading incorrect or dishonest information.

However, Egelholfer and Lecheler (2019) suggested that troubling communication (mis- and disinformation) is also used as a label to delegitimize or attack political opponents and sources of information. Furthermore, studies have found that populist politicians are more likely to use

hostile rhetoric than mainstream politicians. For instance, in Latin American democracies, a strain of populist political rhetoric openly hostile to the press and established knowledge has been observed (Waisbord, 2018). Nevertheless, research has been mainly focused on exploring the consequences of mis- and disinformation and the psychological mechanisms that help people maintain convenient misperceptions (Graves & Wells, 2019). However, little is known about the connection between using disinformation as a label to delegitimize and the extent to which it can be considered part of populist content.

To contribute to the debate on the conceptualization of populism, I argue that understanding the role of communication in disseminating populist ideas broadens our understanding of populism because it enables us to comprehend the discursive construction and dissemination of its central ideas. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that this study does not attempt to define populism but aims to contribute to its understanding from a discursive approach.

Having clarified that, I follow Mudde and Zaslove, 2014 and Jagers and Walgrave, 2007, to study populist discourse as a matter of degree and explore whether assigning "levels of populism" to the studied actors is possible. Following such an approach potentially allows to identify and measure the extent to which political actors use populist communication. Furthermore, considering previous research suggesting a relation between populist discourse and mis- and disinformation, this study attempts to explore whether there is a relationship between populist communication and disinformation.

Previous literature has focused mainly on single countries, so this study attempts to measure populist communication across the Latin American region. As previously stated, the region is interesting for this study because it will contribute to understanding populist communication by retrieving information from the so-called land of populism (see de la Torre, 2017). Furthermore, given that scholars argue that populism could be a potentially powerful tool to reach power and remain in it, it is essential to broaden the understanding of the dissemination of populist ideas for the sake of democracies.

The following section provides an overview of the topic concerning this research and its relevance. After that, the following chapter defines the theoretical framework. Subsequently, the methodology underlying this study is detailed. Lastly, the ending chapter provides the analysis and conclusion, followed by suggestions for future research.

1.1 Research topic:

Arguably, defining populism is rather complicated given its fuzziness. Scholars have defined it in terms of essential characteristics of populism, such as economic populism, leadership style and ideology. Nevertheless, populism has taken different shapes across time and regions, thus exposing its plasticity and fuzziness. Further, studies conducted in European countries suggest that populist actors differ in domestic policy agendas and their position in the political spectrum, therefore, suggesting a chameleonic feature. Thus, more than sharing a worldview, populist actors seem to share a particular way of communicating (Block & Negrine, 2017; Bossetta, 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016). Bossetta (2017) suggests that politicians without a populist agenda may also adopt a populist style to generate the appeal of those who have it. Hence the debate about what populism is still alive. Nevertheless, most research focuses on political and sociological perspectives and little on the role of communication in spreading populist ideas (see de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018; Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). Furthermore, given the convenient tool that social media turned out to be for politicians, it is essential to advance the understanding of populist communication by this means.

According to scholars, populism can be understood as an ideology (Mudde, 2004), style (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) or strategy. Nonetheless, they are not mutually exclusive but rather semantically interrelated, in particular, ideology and style (Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017), often leading to misinterpretations. Stanyer, Salgado and Strömbäck (2016) argue that there are two approaches to understanding populist communication. On the one hand, the focus is on those political actors classified as populists and investigating their communication strategies, tactics, and styles. On the other, identifying key characteristics of populist communication strategies, tactics and styles precede the study of political actors and the extent to which they use those characteristics. Further, whereas the first approach understands populism as an ideology, the second understands populism as a communication style.

Under the premise that populist ideas are just as central as the tools used to spread them (see de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018 Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012), this study follows a communication-centred understanding of populism. As noted by scholars, such a perspective classifies populist messages as a phenomenon on its own rather than on a particular type of politician or party family, providing insights into the discursive

construction of populism and contributing to the understanding of populism. Furthermore, as pointed out by de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, & Stanyer, 2018, conceiving populism as a discursive construction bridges literature from political sciences and communication, therefore providing insights into populism in general and populist communication in specific. Although the approach of populism as a strategy is relevant for understanding populist communication, it is not considered for this analysis as it mainly concerns the articulation and spreading of populist ideas rather than the motives and aims behind the communication.

Moffit and Tormey (2004) argue that previous empirical approaches to populism as a discourse miss fundamental elements of the populist appeal -namely, the "stylistic" elements beyond the pieces that are analyzed because they primarily focus on keywords selected by the coders. To gain a more profound knowledge of populist communication, the focus of the analysis is centred on the semantic interrelationships between content and style.

According to the authors, content refers to the public communication of central components of populism, such as people-centrism or anti-elitism. In other words, it refers to the ideology of populism (Answers to the question: *what?).* Style, on the other hand, refers to merely presentational elements; such as the adoption of different guises such as language, dress code (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), and a top-down and leader-centred communication with an antagonistic discourse against critics and fixation to press coverage (Waisbord & Amado, 2017); in other words, *the form* (answers to the question *how?*).

Studying how political messages are constructed in terms of content and style will contribute to understanding how and to what extent political actors engage in populist communication. Moreover, its operationalization contributes to the determination of the types of populism based on the typology of populism, namely *complete populism, anti-elitism populism, excluding populism and empty populism* (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007), therefore, potentially allowing to determine *degrees* of populism.

Plenty of scholarly attention has been given to Populism in the European and United States context and, to a lesser extent, in Latin America. Political history in the Latin American region is filled with populist governments to the extent that three waves of populism are identified within literature (Aguirre and Caroline Avila, 2020). The third wave is classified as a radical one that coincides with the rapid changes in media and technology. According to Aguirre and Avila (2020), Latin American populist leaders can succeed given the fragility of political institutions and media systems vulnerable to interference and commercial pressures.

Furthermore, populist governments are recognized for their terrific use of communication in various forms (Waisbord 2014b). Nonetheless, studies have mainly focused on examining political marketing, discourse content analysis and evidencing the tensions about the media and its coverage (Waisbord, 2014b) but, to a lesser extent, how populist ideas are constructed and presented by political actors.

This study, thus, has as objective to understand how the populist core ideas ("The people", "The elite", and "The Others") are discursively constructed by Latin-American politicians – despite their ideological affiliation and therefore attempt to measure the *degrees* of populism based on Jagers and Walgrave (2007) typology. Given that social media is used by politicians to bypass the media's gatekeeping and directly communicate with citizens, the analysis is performed by retrieving the subjects' tweets. Nonetheless, one issue must be addressed before analysing the content of such tweets: most studies concerning populist communication often take the English language as a starting point, ignoring the linguistic and discursive diversity embedded in the Spanish language. Latin America, a predominantly Spanish-speaker region, is considered a highly diverse language, and research on populist communication seems to overlook that fact. For instance, there seems to be a transparent equivalency between "The people" in English and "Pueblo" in Spanish. Nevertheless, "pueblo", "gente", and "personas" -all understood as " the people" in English"- have different meanings in Spanish (Bonnin, 2020). Therefore, this study addresses such consideration.

In terms of research design, this study analyzes tweets posted during election periods across Latin America. The two final candidates were considered for this analysis to generate a better understanding. This study seeks to analyse all Latin American countries; nonetheless, Nicaragua and Brazil were omitted, given that for the former, there is no official account from (now) president Ortega, whereas, for the latter, the Portuguese language poses a barrier for interpretation. Twitter becomes an interesting arena to analyse populist communication because, according to Waisbord (2017), the platform is prolifically used by political actors and governments across the region. Furthermore, given the nature of the social media platform, every tweet the political actors posted could be considered a statement to reach their followers. Thus, providing a clearer picture of their engagement with populist communication.

In addition, and terms of significance, the present study seeks to address the abovementioned research void by conducting a dictionary-based quantitative text analysis on a cross-national

dataset accounting for more than 14,000 tweets obtained from 30 political actors (more about the data in the methods section). Furthermore, albeit growing, little research has been conducted using this approach. Therefore, this study will advance the understanding of populist communication and provide insights into a computer-assisted methodology.

The following chapter will elaborate on the concepts previously introduced. Next, the aim and research questions will be introduced. After that, previous research that has been conducted on the three concepts will be presented.

1.2 Aims and research questions:

To summarise the general aim of the study, the following research questions have been formulated and are answered through the interpretation of the findings from the analyses.

> [RQ1] How does the discursive construction of the core components of populism (The people and the elite) look across Latin America?
>
> [RQ2] What are the most prominent characteristics of populist communication?

[RQ3] To what extent do politicians across Latin America engage with populist communication?

[RQ4] Does populist communication relate to using disinformation as a label?

[RQ5] To what extent do advocative or conflictive messages prevail in populist communication?

Previous research has found a relationship between populist communication and disinformation. However, it is essential to note that it is out of the scope of this study to fact-check the information communicated by the actors in question; instead, the focus turns to the relationship between labelling opponents and the media as "fake" or disinformation. That can be explained by understanding that a communication strategy in populist communication involves using conflictive messages that aim to attack and discredit opponents and the media. Therefore, this study assumed that populist communication predicts the use of disinformation as a label.

[H1] There is a relation between populist communication and the use of disinformation as a label.

2 Theoretical Background:

This section expands the concepts and framework underlying the study. The investigation departs from the conceptualization of populism in this study. Understanding populism as discursively constructed will allow the analysis of the Latin American political actors selected for this case. The concepts of post-truth and alternative realities will be coupled to analyze the discourse construction. This section is structured to mirror the two diving parts of this work: populism as a communication phenomenon and populism in the post-truth context. Nonetheless, as populism conceptualization is still contested, the section begins with the debate

on how populism is conceived among scholars to generate a better understanding of the academic relevance of the issue in question.

2.1 **Populism**:

Populism became part of the political vocabulary in the 19th century with the Russian Narodniki, the first known populist movement due to its people-centred foundation. Since then, "people's parties" began to arise in different parts of the globe. However, since populism is new, there is little agreement on conceptualising populism as it is notoriously difficult to define. Further, many argue that populism differs depending on the region and contextual conditions (Priester, 2007 in Engensser et al., 2017).

In Europe, populist movements are often related to right-wing politicians with clear anti-immigration stances. On the other hand, in Latin America, socialist politicians with nationalist, anti-imperialism and redistribution stances represent populist movements (de la Torre, 2017). Further, socio-economic and socio-cultural changes are often utilized to explain the rise of populist movements. However, even though socio-economic and socio-cultural developments are vital for the evolution and result of a political project (including populism), populist politics should not be reduced to symptomatic effects (De Cleen, Glynos, & Mondon, 2018).

De la Torre, 2017 argues that populist leaders have dominated Latin America's political context since the 1930s and the 1940s, albeit with some commonalities and differences. The author suggests that Latin American populism has three subtypes – classical, neoliberal, and radical. However, all three subtypes have a shared understanding of democracy as mass action on behalf of a leader that impersonates the democratic ideals and promises to include the excluded. Further, the author suggests that populism in Latin America has found fertile soil to propagate because of its strong rhetorical appeals to the weak citizenship rights. Vast literature notes the deficits in the quality of Latin American democracies; however, the author suggests that the populism raise goes even beyond forms of legal, political, or socio-economic exclusion. In the absence of political mediation and representation that populism finds its way by naming and politicizing people's daily experiences of marginalization and humiliation (de la Torre, 2017). It might arise in nations with weak institutions and a weak rule of law.

However, most Latin American studies are more focused on the social conditions for the emergence of populist movements and essentially analyse the populist leader as a component. Nonetheless, Bonnin (2020) points out that it is a weak approach as it attempts to explain political processes from the standpoint of a charismatic leader. According to scholars, there are three shared traits of the different experiences of populism in Latin America: a) a crisis and change as conditions for its emergence; b) a participative dimension that out weights the representative dimension (typical to liberal democracies) c) an intrinsic historical ambiguity in which "it is not clear who is speaking, the figure in the balcony or the crowd" (Bonnin 2020, translated from Mackinnon and Petrone, 1999, p. 22). In addition, de la Torre (2000) argues that to understand populism, it is essential to differentiate it as regimes in power from populism as a broader social and political movement seeking power. Thus, the author argues that to understand its appeal, the personalistic charismatic leadership, Manichean discourse, political clientelism and patronage, and the social history of populism must be studied as variables.

2.1.1 Populism: a discursive construction

There is a growing debate on whether populism should be considered an ideology. Laclau (2006) observes that categorising populism as an ideology is problematic since it has predominantly emphasized an ontic approach rather than capturing the ontological status of the idea. Therefore, a strategic dimension is foreseen by moving away from an ideological understanding of populism and conceiving it as a concept.

Instead, populism is considered a thin ideology that considers society as divided into two homogeneous groups and antagonist groups: "The pure people" and "the corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2007 pg.23), and stresses that politics should be an expression of "The people's" will. Thin ideologies are a narrow set of ideas about the world. In the case of populism, those ideas concern structures of power in society (Mudde, 2004). However, as a thin ideology, it does not exist in any form but constantly interacts with other ideologies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2011 in Moffitt and Tormey, 2014), such as socialism and nativism, to provide a complete picture of the world. Hence, populism is often related to right- or left-wing worldviews but never stands alone.

Before continuing, it is important to note the different labels used by scholars to define populism discursively, such as political style (Knight, 1998), a discourse (de la Torre, 2000; Laclau, 2005), appeal (Canovan, 1999), or thin ideology (Mudde, 2004). Nonetheless, the

commonality between the different approaches is that they all require references to “the people” as a minimal requirement of populism (Hameleers & Vliegenthart, 2020). Nevertheless, it does not imply that continuous references to “the people” is insufficient to categorize a political actor as populist, hence the categorization of populism as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde, 2017).

Laclau (2006) suggested that the alternative to ontic approaches is to identify the structure that underlies the organization of contents, therefore, conceives populism as a structuring logic of political life. In other words, Laclau goes against the trend to conceive that populism is a set of ideas about politics and society but instead shifts to how populists articulate the contents of populism. Laclau explained the rhetorical appeal of populism by demonstrating the discursive elaboration of a fundamental contradiction in social formation -namely, the people versus the establishment. He argues, thus, that populism is a discourse that articulates popular-democratic interpellations as an antagonist to the establishment and that, given the system cannot process those contradictions, a populism break is implied (de la Torre, 2000). Nonetheless, although Laclau’s work was groundbreaking for understanding the appeal of populism, it is partial because he only examines the conditions of the production of discourses and does not consider that not all discourses are accepted nor that discourses are constantly competing with others. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the production, circulation, and reception conditions of political discourses. Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the context in which the discourses are given (De Ípola, 1983 in de la Torre, 2020)

Scholars argue that populist discourse has a dualistic worldview between good and evil, assigning a moral dimension to everything and interpreting it as a cosmic struggle between evil and good (de la Torre, 2000). The populist discourse presents a Manichean opposition between “the pure people” - which is framed as the good, virtuous group of people; and the corrupt elites – framed as evil (K. A. Hawkins, 2009; Mannuci, 2017), depicted as those who deprive the “sovereign people” (Engesser et al., 2017) from their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice (Albertazzi and McDonnel 2008). In other words, the elite identity is discursively constructed as the enemy and the other group as the [good] people, posing a logic of enmity. Thus, populism as a thin ideology assumes an antagonistic role by differentiating "the people" and "the establishment", thereby battling discursively for the control of the social and political meaning.

2.2 Populist communication:

In the absence of a single and consensual definition of populism, many scholars define populism as a communication phenomenon– the discursive school- competing with the ideological school. Nonetheless, although scholars from the ideological school see the style approach as too abstract, there are significant overlaps between both schools. Thus, Mudde has updated his original definition to note that populism can also be categorized as a communication style.

Whereas populist ideology refers to a mental concept, populist communication is manifest (Wiz 2018) that can be observed in party manifestos, speeches, and the media. A distinction between content and style must be made to understand populist communication. Understanding populist communication's content means emphasizing the public communication of the core components of populism with a characteristic set of key messages and frames (de Vreese et al., 2018). Similarly, Jagers & Walgrave, 2007 refer to populism as "a communicative frame that appeals to identify with the people and pretends to speak on their behalf", and Roodujin (2014) conceives populism as a characteristic of a message rather than as an actor's characteristic. Nonetheless, this perspective does not rule out that political actors have ideologies, motives, goals, and attitudes that set a ground for communicative actions with detectable populist elements (Reinemann, et al., 2017).

2.3 The core elements of populist communication:

2.3.1 The People:

At the heart of populist political communication are references to the people, which, theoretically, can be either direct or indirect (Stanyer, et al., 2014). According to the scholars, the direct reference depends on the extent to which the political actors use words such as "the people", "we ("we the people"). "citizens", or ordinary". Nonetheless, it is to be noted that the fact that it is not clear who belongs to "the people" can be used as a strategic ambiguity that allows multiple interpretations (Eisenberg in Stanyer et al., 2014, p.6). In addition, scholars note that the explicit definition of the people often points to commonalities such as shared membership of the nation, region, race, or faith. The goal, according to the authors, is to draw

narratives that are part of an “imagined community” or aim to strengthen the imagined community they want to endorse (Anderson, 1991 in Eisenberg in Stanyer et al., 2014 p.6).
On the other hand, references to “the people” can also be indirect. In this case, politicians can also refer to “the people” indirectly, such as the act of not belonging to an outgroup, and thus define themselves as part of “the people”. As previously argued, references to *the people* are not enough to categorize a politician as populist because mainstream politicians often invoke it. However, populism exists thanks to the people; hence it is at the core of the ideology. Plenty of scholarly debate has focused on the vagueness of *the people*. While some argue that it is a rhetorical tool that does not necessarily refer to any existing group of people, others have adopted a class interpretation suggesting that populists do not refer to everyone but to a specific class segment (Mudde, 2004 pg.545). Thus, the question remains: who are *the people* in populist communication?

Espejo, 2017 argues that the people are what populists claim it is, meaning that the people can rule. The author claims that understanding what populists mean when they say *the people* is crucial for understanding populism and democracy. Further, Espejo also notes that scholars’ definition of populism relies on how they conceive the people and their role in a contemporary democratic order – and their normative views about democracy, representation, constitutional government, individual rights, political solidarity, and scope of the common good. However, Espejo’s approach seems more oriented towards making a normative distinction between behaviour and attitudes that could be more oriented toward a sociological approach to populism.

Populism’s main argument is based on the people’s will and absolute sovereignty (Albertazzi and McDonnel, 2008). Therefore, it demands unrestricted popular power, which is the differentiator from the liberal and constitutional logic of democracy. Whereas the constitutional logic of democracy suggests that power should remain an “empty place”, and the liberal logic argues that an anonymous rule of law should replace power, the populist logic stresses that the locus of power should be operated by the people (Wirth et al., 2016). Consequently, the populist argument rests on the claim that elites have deprived the people of their democratic rights and placed the restoration of people's sovereignty at the centre of the dispute (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017); and populist actors believe they are the only ones capable of restoring people's sovereignty by replacing elites.

Attempting to clarify the term, Taggart (2004) introduces *the heartland* suggesting that it is a place in the populist's imagination where a virtuous and unified population resides. In other words, it is an idealized conception of the community (p.274). According to the author, *the people* do not refer to a real group of people per se but rather a constructed image of the population. Nonetheless, it differs from utopian societies in that it is not directed to the future but is instead an attempt to construct what has been lost by the present. Furthermore, its roots are merely emotional and might not necessarily be rationalized or rationalizable. However, Taggart's notion does not overcome the vagueness implied in *the people* because it is still used differently amongst populists. Mudde, (2004) points to this problem by referring to how within one country, *the heartland* was debated*;* for the British Conservatives, the British heartland it was "middle England", while for the British National Party, it was "the native British people". Nonetheless, it provides another perspective on the discursive construction of the people, arguing that it represents the core of the community and excludes the marginal or the extreme (Taggart, 2000, pg.96). However, it is the discursive vagueness of *the people* what allows populists to unite different audiences in one label and by appealing to it, they produce what they claim to represent (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014)

In sum, "The people" has several implications for populism. 1) It emphasizes the centrality of the people's sovereignty as a pilar for democracies. 2) it implies homogeneity, in the sense that it implies unity with shared values and interests. 3) From a political communication perspective, by using "the people", populists attempt to produce what they claim to present, which means that populism seeks to "create a new identity among citizens or to certain prime aspects of their social identity in order to unite them and generate a sense of belonging to an imagined community charged with positive emotions" (Reinemann et al., 2017 pg.19). Mudde (2004) claims that although populists can be emancipatory, they do not attempt to change the people themselves but rather reconstitute their status within the political system. Hence, they claim to represent the oppressed ones -name the people and attempt to emancipate them by making them aware of their oppression (p.546).

2.3.2 The people in Spanish: La gente, pueblo o personas?

The Latin American populist discourse is found to also divide society into two ethically antagonistic groups: El pueblo ("the people) and La Oligarquía ("The elite"). Nonetheless, those terms do not refer to a social categorization but rather social relations (de la Torre, 2020).

For instance, *El pueblo* is the authentication of the good, the just, and the moral, and it is defined as all that is not *la oligarquía*. However, in mainstream academic studies, the operationalization of *the people* outside the English language has been overlooked, and therefore, a language bias is foreseen as linguistic differences are ignored. The consequence of overlooking linguistic diversity is that the understanding of populist discourses is impoverished.

In the Spanish language, "people" can be translated as "pueblo", "gente", or "personas", which all mean something completely different. O'Donell (1979) in Bonnin (2020) notes that "gente" is close to "citizenship", which in turn is a group of individuals with equal political and civic rights. "Pueblo" (Gramsci's' "Popolo") "is a carrier of demands for substantive justice which form the basis for the obligations of the state towards the less favoured segments of the population" (O'Donell 1979, p.289). Lastly, "personas" are individuals, but they are not defined in political terms and are usually not explicitly integrated into political discourse (Arnoux and Bonnin 2016 in Bonnin). In addition, according to Bonnin (2020), the employed term changes the addressee of both kinds of political discourses; La gente/*the people*, which refers to a sum of individuals, can easily derive into a singular "you" (*Vos/tú in Spanish),* therefore, establishing proximity between messenger and audience. In contrast, el pueblo/*the people* addresses a plural you/*ustedes*, "a complex entity which is different from the sum of its parts, but a collective subject" (Bonnin, 2020 p.472). However, coining the term *Nosotros*/*us* can also signal proximity and membership to a homogenous group (Sullet-nylander & Bernal, 2019).

2.3.3 The elites:

By distinguishing between ordinary citizens and the others, populists attempt to construct and claim to represent the people's interests. However, whilst *the people's* vagueness is still discussed, it is clear what populists are against *the elite*. Whilst there is no populist theory of what constitutes the elites, it follows the Manichean worldview of populism in which the elite is the counterpart to *the people,* in the sense that neither they are part of the people nor they share the people's values (Wirth et al., 2016). In other words, the establishment or the elites versus the underdogs, the citizens subject to their injustices.

Whether it is "the elite", "the establishment", or "the system", according to Moffit and Tormey, (2014), the elites are usually evoked as the source of corruption and as the cause of the suffering of the good people. They are blamed for the negative and harmful situations and

are accused of being incapable of solving those problems. Further, the elite is said to ignore the "pureness" and the people's anxieties (Bos & Brants, 2014). Whilst *the people* receive a positive definition, the *elites* are all the contrary, framed as the one that causes suffering and is immoral, unjust, and evil (de la Torre, 2020). By stressing that the elites are responsible for the people's disgrace, populists attempt "politics as usual" (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014); in other words, they frame themselves as outsiders. Similarly, Mudde (2004) noted that populists argue that political parties disrupt the bond between leaders and supporters by creating divisions among the homogeneous people and putting their interests above those of the people. Nonetheless, he argues that populists are not revolutionary but reformists that oppose the established parties and call for (or claim to be) a new kind of party.

2.3.4 Exclusion (The others):

The out-group, in addition to the elite, is regarded as the dangerous others (Roodujin, 2013) and is excluded from "the [good] people". One must draw two dimensions to understand the difference between *the others* and *the out-group*. On the vertical dimension is the elite (the others), perceived as an oppressive force, whereas on the horizontal dimension is *the out-group,* perceived as a threat "within" the people. (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). In other words, the out-group are non-elite groups different from *the people,* such as ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities (Reinemann et al., 2017). However, both *the others* and *out-groups* can be considered functional equivalent as they are contrasted to *the people* (Reinemann et al., 2017 p.21).

Scholars have classified statements as populist when they reflect the populist ideology on a communicative level (Hawkins, Riding and Mudde, 2012; Wiz, 2018), yet rather than reflecting the whole ideology, Engesser et al (2017) argue that single statements mainly refer to certain aspects that can be systemized according to the target they address (Wirz, 2018). Table 1 (WIRZ, 2018) illustrates how research has classified such aspects yet from an interesting proposal considering the belief that populist communication has a persuasive potential due to its emotionality. Wirz (2018) distinguishes two types of populist communication: advocative and conflictive. Whereas advocative communication focuses on the positive traits of the people and showcases the political actor as a genuine representative of their interests, conflictive communication plays on the conflict between the elites and the

people, showcasing the elites as enemies of the people's values Piontek (2020) referring to Wirz (2018).

Table 1. Overview of populist critical messages in the Literature

Advocative Messages		
References to a monolithic people	The idea of a common will and a uniform body of citizens is argued as a common attribute of the people	Bos et al., 2011; Cranmer, 2011; de Raadt, Hollanders, & Krouwel 2004, Reungoat, 2010
Stressing the peoples' virtues and achievements	Employing a Manichaean perspective and claiming that people are inherently good, and thus their decisions are always the right ones, as well as valuing a populist actor's commitment to the people.	Jagers and Walgrave, 2007
Demonstrating closeness to the people and demanding their sovereignty.	The populist leader presents themselves as genuine members of the people. Rather than handing more power to the elite and institutions, advocates for more power to the people.	Block and Negrine, 2017; Cranmer, 2011. Cranmer 2011. de Raadt et al., 2004; Pauwels, 2011, Reungoat, 2010.
Conflictive messages		
Excluding others from the people	Assert that some groups do not belong to the people	Cranmer, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2017
Discrediting others	Attributes negative characteristics to excluded groups.	Cranmer, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2017

Blaming the elite	The elite is responsible for the things that go wrong and for the people's problems.	Akkerman, 2011; Bos et al., 2011; Cranmer, 2011; de Raadt et al., 2004; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Reungoat, 2010; Rooduijn et al., 2014
Denying sovereignty to the elite	Addresses the elite's excessive power.	Cranmer, 2011; de Raadt et al., 2004; Pauwels, 2011; Reungoat, 2010

Note 1 Adapted from Dominique Wirz's "Persuasion Through Emotions? An Experimental Test of the Emotional-Eliciting Nature of Populist Communication" International Journal of Communication 12, (2018), 1114 - 1138.

2.4 Populist Style

Canovan (1999) argues that the populist style is democratic in that it is aimed at ordinary people. Further, the author argues that populists capitalize on distrust of politicians and pride themselves on simplicity and directness (p.4). According to scholars, the populist communication style refers to expressing populist ideas using presentational elements. Similarly, de Vreese et al., (2018) argue that the populist style is merely the features of political communication rather than the characteristics of the messenger or the content itself. For instance, whereas the antagonism between the people and the elites is at the core idea of populism, it is a stylistic decision to present that antagonism in a "simple or elaborate manner, in a rational or emotional tone, or a positive or negative light" (Engesser, Fawzi, et al., 2017 p.1285). Further, Moffitt & Tormey (2014) argue that the populist style attempts to avoid the problem of conceptualizing discourse by focusing on the political performance and action and how this expresses political ideas.

Throughout literature, various features are attributed to the populist communication style, such as drama, polarization, moralization, language disguises (vulgar and colloquial), directness,

ordinariness (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011); emotional, slogan-based, tabloid-style language (Mazzoleni, 2003), exaggerations and verbal radicalism (Betz and Immerfal, 1998) and their messages are characterized by hostility towards opponents and their identification with the "common people" (Bos and Brants, 2014) as characteristics of the populist communication style. Nonetheless, two significant dimensions englobe the beforementioned features: simple language and emotionalization.

2.4.1 Simple language

Canovan (1999) argues that populist actors often reduce the complexity of the issues they are communicating. They suggest that the solutions to the people's problems are relatively simple in contrast to traditional politicians' claims. In other words, it follows its Manichean worldview, depicting issues as black and white (Hawkins, 2009) or as a struggle between the good and evil (de la Torre, 2000) and making use of a colloquial/straightforward language to exhibit closeness to the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Furthermore, they argue that the problems have single causes and solutions are pretty simple (Engesser et al., 2017). Therefore, populist actors' strong and personalistic leadership is explained as they conceive politics as directly realising the people's will (Cremonesi, 2019).

Furthermore, according to Taggart (2000) in Moffitt and Tormey (2013), populism gets momentum from the perception of a crisis or threat; thus, populist messages use simple and direct language to simplify the terms and terrain of political debate. For instance, the authors point out Hugo Chavez's populist style in the light of a perceived crisis generated by an imperialist conspiracy perpetrated by the United States. Similarly, populists favour short-term and immediate action in terms of policy solutions, thus simplifying and instrumentalizing politics.

2.4.2 Emotionalization

Scholars argue that emotions are an essential feature of populist communication (see, among others, Bost et al., 2010, Hameleers et al., 2017). Political rhetoric can elicit strong emotions through acts of speech and images that often rely on emotions to accuse, harm, denounce, flatter, promote or benefit a group of people. For instance, previous research suggests that information with an emotional charge can potentially affect citizens' opinions. For example,

the American Association of Psychology (2016) found out through a survey that 52% per cent of Americans reported the 2016 elections as stressful, which led experts to sign a petition to declare Trump's rhetoric as a threat to the well-being of the Americans.

However, Wirt (2018) argues that the success of populist movements relies on the use of gut feeling rather than rational facts and deliberation. According to research on the emotional effects of populism, the phenomenon can be studied from two perspectives. On the one hand, studies have shown that populist messages are more persuasive when emotions are explicit (Hameleers et al., 2016 Wirt, 2018). On the other hand, research has demonstrated that populist messages can elicit emotions such as fear or anger, contributing to persuasion (Wirt, 2018).

Block and Negrine (2017) note that the style that populists use involves an "adversarial, emotional, patriotic and abrasive speech" through which they connect to *the people* and create a perception of crisis, threat, or breakdown. Further, Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017 suggest that blame attribution by populists makes use of negative qualities to the elites and the out-groups, drawing on the emotions of anger and fear, which have been commonly found in populist communication (Hameleers et al., 2016; Wirz 2018). Blame attribution emphasizes that *the others* and *the out-groups* are causing harm to *the people*, thereby implying a sense of threat (Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese, 2017). For instance, scholars argue that Donald Trump took advantage of media representations of Mexicans and Latinos in general and, through his rhetoric, presented them as a threat to the nation. The rhetoric made a distinction between "us" (the people who legally belong to the nation) versus "them". Similarly, populist politicians' rhetoric in Brexit and anti-immigrant sentiment were fueled by the view of an incompetent European elite.

Scholars suggest that three communication strategies are detected in populist communication. First, the elites are criticized for their incompetence, therefore, making use of a strategy of blame-shifting – which refers to "any speech act holding a specific actor responsible or accountable for (or incapable of resolving) an undesirable or harmful situation" (Wirt et al., 2016 p.52). Second, a conflicting strategy of discrediting the elite, which refers to portraying the elites as corrupt and evil, and negative personality traits, mistakes, or unlawful behaviour, is stressed. The third is a people-centrist (advocative) communication strategy that focuses on groups inside the population rather than the elite, excluding *others* from *the people*.

Departing from the theory of appraisal that describes how emotions are experienced by an individual's subjective interpretation of a situation (Lerner and Keltner, 2010 in Hameleers, 2017), authors argue that emotions can elicit appraisal patterns that, in turn, affect how information is processed. For instance, anger (or resentment) is the reaction to an offence against oneself (Lazarus, 2001 in Wirz, 2018). Furthermore, anger stimulates heuristic patterns for processing a situation (Kim and Cameron, 2011 in Hameleers et al., 2017). In other words, anger creates the feeling of certainty that things are under control; thereby, people are less likely to search for more information but instead stimulate heuristics, which results in the tendency to rely on preexisting attitudes (Lerner and Keltner, 2010). In populist communication, the conflictive messages portray the elites as betraying the people's principles and values. In other words, anger thus elicits the attribution of blame to the elite by framing an adverse situation as caused by others.

Fear, also found in populist conflictive messages, stimulates the systematic processing of a situation (Kim and Cameron, 2011 Hameleers, et al., 2017). According to the authors, fear is elicited as a reaction to an uncertain (existential) threat that cannot be controlled (Wirz, 2018, referring to Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). In populist conflictive messages, the people are framed as powerless and at the mercy of the elites, who are blamed for not dealing with an existential threat. In other words, fear constructs the perception of a threat that needs to be dealt with by appraising the feeling of uncertainty and uncontrollability, leading to systematic processing of information which in turn results in a tendency to accept populist blame-shifting (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017)

In contrast to conflictive, populist communication messages have also been found to be people-centrist. In other words, those messages highlight the people's virtues and populist actors advocate and defend their interests against the others (elites or out-groups). According to Wirz (2018), pride and hope are the core themes of the advocative strategy by populist actors. The author argues that whereas pride is a reaction to the enhancement of one's ego-identity and is used to construct an in-group identity or promote a populist actor, hope is elicited by appraisals of the importance, future expectation, and possibility (Chadwick, 2015). As the author argues, the actor portraying him/her self as a representation of people addresses the importance and goal congruence and the promise of democratization, addresses the expectations of the future and possibilities. Thus, Wirz (2018) argues that it is the contrast between the good and the bad, combined with the fear of the worst and the expectation of a more favourable feature, that

fosters the assumption that hope is more likely to be elicited by populist communication rather than by non-populist communication.

2.5 Populism and the media

Mazzoleni (2003) argue that populism has a complex and fractious relationship with the media. Some authors have researched the populism-media connection obtaining scarce results. The most articulated findings were after 2016, when studies found that the media failed to hold Donald Trump accountable, serving more as a lapdog than a watchdog. Like The New York Times, Politico published several articles concerning this issue, suggesting that the media empowered Trump's demagogy by giving him unlimited mediatic attention.

Block and Negrine (2017) argue that literature has been more concentrated on media effects and mediated populism, suggesting that the role of the media in the rise of populism remains unclear. In their framework, they focus on how populist politicians use the media. For instance, Hugo Chavez, his several-hour long broadcasts on television and radio, and Farage's usage of controversies generated by the media to give momentum to his anti-Europe, anti-immigration, and anti-multiculturalism messages. However, populist politicians, as part of their antagonistic role, engage in attacking media elites, which are framed as part of the establishment (Engesser, Ernst, et al., 2017). Furthermore, populist politicians are found to be obsessed with news coverage grounded in the hostile-media syndrome – which is "the belief that they are the constant target of negative news by the "elite media" and that their journalists are nothing but lackeys of reactionary owners and corporate business (Waisbord, 2013). In that sense, populist politicians feed on mediatic controversies, play an underdog role, use abrasive speech, earn media space by attacking or bullying the elites, and stage newsworthy political events (Block and Negrine, 2017).

2.5.1 Populism and social media

As Chadwick (2017) suggested, the hybrid system is arguably highly complex and fluid. The rise of online social media allows actors and groups to interact in public conversation; thereby, the way populist politicians take advantage of mediatic controversies cannot be seen as a linear effect. In line with their people-centric discourse, populist politicians became particularly

interested in social media due to the proximity to the people it offers because they require direct access to *the people's* grievances, allowing them to establish a bond (Esser et al., 2017).

According to the authors, populist politicians found it greatly useful to use social media because, on the one hand, it would allow them to distribute official statements to larger audiences by avoiding selective filtering or re-framing by journalists (Chadwick, 2017). On the other, they could turn to them to circumvent the media institutions and journalists -as they are presumed to be part of the elites and therefore attenuate or criticize populist statements (Mazzoleni, 2008). In addition, social media allow politicians to quickly disseminate their ideas by commenting, promoting, and discussing their messages with interconnected networks of citizens. Gil de Zúñiga, Koc Michalska, & Römmele, (2020) argue that emotional attachment, novel and surprising information, and message personalization are central for a message to become viral (Gil de Zúñiga, Koc Michalska, & Römmele, 2020). Populist politicians arguably exploit those features, allowing them to introduce their messages more effectively.

Twitter has become central to political actors' communication strategies to reach their followers. Ruiz-Sanchez and Alcántara-Pla (2019) argue that politicians commonly use Twitter to communicate statements, decisions, criteria, and opinions. For instance, Donald Trump commonly announced governmental decisions through tweets. Similarly, Nayib Bukele from El Salvador commonly addresses state issues via tweets, giving indications to government officials. In the campaign context, Bode & Dalrymple, (2016) argue that candidates increasingly use Twitter to reach their supporters and recruit new followers by reaching to opinion supporters and swing voters.

2.6 Populism and the contested reality

Although disinformation has been embedded in media systems since its origins, scholars argue that digitalization has contributed to its exponential proliferation. Furthermore, scholars warned about how the online communication ecosystem could pave the way for polarizing and uncivil messages and populist messages (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2020). McNair, 2018 noted that political reality can be viewed as comprising three categories -objective, subjective, and constructed. Whereas the objective reality is related to the image that the politician attempts to resemble, the subjective reality refers to the citizen's construction of that image mediated by perception, and the constructed reality refers to the interpretation of the media and how it

transfers it to the public. Thus, the latter is the starting point for constructing citizens' political opinions (Ponce and Rincon, 2019). With the rise of post-truth, scholars argue that it is impossible to consider truth as a shared assessment of reality (Waisbord, 2018). Post-truth is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs" (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Waisbord (2018) notes that "post-truth denotes a change in the structural conditions for public communication that are needed for truth-telling as agreement on the representation of reality". In other words, it refers to the absence of conditions for citizens to concur on the representation of reality through verifiable statements. It drives truth from social constructionism to relativism by assuming that any statement about the world is contested and partial. Further, it assumes that citizens cannot overcome subjectivity and that many lack social norms and values to have the possibility of truth.

Monod, 2017 in Hameleers, 2020 argues that replacing historical facts with alternative facts indicates that reality can be constructed. Scholars argue that politicians attempt to sell stories as "factual" reality and, at the same time, label objective facts as fake. Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019 argue that untruthful communication not only pertains to the dissemination of incorrect or dishonest information but argues that it is used as a label to delegitimize or attack political opponents and the media. For instance, scholars argue that politicians have attributed blame (labelling) to the media for their dishonesty and attempt to manipulate *the people*. Hameleers (2020) argue that media critique and attacks on the legitimacy of journalists are a common practice of right-wing populist politicians. For instance, the famous press brief in which Donald Trump labelled CNN as "fake news" to avoid their question. According to the hostile media phenomenon, people prefer like-minded media that support their worldview while perceiving contrary coverage as hostile.

Similarly, political actors accuse the media of being biased against their views (Hameleers, 2020). Thereby, by delegitimizing opposed information spread by opponents or mainstream press, political actors attempt to create momentum for their realities -such as the perception of threat. Consequently, scholars argue that the attacks on the media reflect and reinforce political polarization and distrust in the mainstream media and other institutions (Graves, Wells, 2019).

In addition, according to scholars, populism opposites truth due to its binary vision of politics if *the people* and *the elites* hold their versions of the truth. Thereby, for populism, facts are not neutral entities that can be identified (Waisbord, 2018). Furthermore, populism suggests that facts are subsidiaries of narratives that ought to predetermine perceptions of reality, the rivalry between *the people* and *the others and out-groups.* Hence, what concerns populism, rather than producing facts that contribute to knowledge, is to generate momentum for a narrative by prompting reaffirmation. Further, according to scholars, populists believe truth is a political project, suggesting that it only requires loyalty and commitment instead of expertise, facts, and debates. As a result of their dualistic view, populism regards establishment and established knowledge (such as universities and experts) as influenced by ideology, loyalty, and partisanship (Waisbord, 2018).

3 Previous research

First, an overview of previous research concerning this study's interest shall be presented. The first section concerns previous research on populist communication styles in Latin America and Western Democracies and the second regards previous research on populism and disinformation as a label.

3.1 Populist communication

As previously argued, Latin America has witnessed the rise of multiple populist actors. De la Torre (2017), in his chapter about the commonalities and differences between populism in Latin America, the author examines why different populist manifestos emerged – namely Classical populism, Neoliberal populism and Radical Populism. In addition, de la Torre analyzes their impact on democracies after gaining office. By analyzing the role of Rafael Correa, Hugo Chávez, Nicolas Maduro and Evo Morales, the author found that whereas Correa, Chavez and Maduro had a leadership style based on unity and command from above, Evo Morales pursued convergence and persuasion to allow autonomy to his grassroots. However, the results from Correa, Chavez and Maduro suggest that, despite promising that it would be different, popular organizations were subordinated, and atmospheres of polarization and political confrontation arose.

Waisbord and Amado (2017) conducted a study on Populist communication by digital means to analyse the usage of Twitter by Latin American Presidents. The study concerns the debate about whether populism represents a revolution in public communication. The authors argue that Twitter enables the possibility to promote interactive communication, -which is praised by populist rhetoric. However, results showed that paradoxically populist politicians aggrieve about the top-down communication format of mainstream media, but they do the same on Twitter. Furthermore, the authors found that Twitter is not used to promote dialogue between the president and the public. Instead, the authors noted that Twitter is used for harassing critical journalists, social media users and citizens. Therefore, the authors conclude that Twitter usage is symptomatic of persistent approaches to political communication intended to strengthen the voice of the presidency rather than promoting a dialogue. Nonetheless, they also note that deliberation on Twitter is risky due to the hostility of the social network.

Bos and Brants (2014) conducted a longitudinal content analysis of populist rhetoric in politics and the media in the Netherlands. The study analyzed content from newspapers, television news, talk shows and party-political broadcasts. The results showed that, in contrast to previous findings that suggest populism is on the rise and spreads to other parties, their analysis showed that when Geert Wilders entered the elections and populism in the media disappeared almost completely. However, the author notes that the mixed results could be derived that previous research investigated news concerning immigration. In contrast, their study focused on politicians in the elections and whether the media portrayed them with their immigration stances. Furthermore, their study also found mixed results regarding the spread of populism to other parties. They found that the anti-immigration rhetoric is more characteristic of right-wing parties, although, in the media representations, they found anti-establishment ideas in mainstream parties.

Hameleers, Bos and de Vreese (2017) studied the effects of emotionalized blame attribution in public communication. The purpose of the study was to determine the reason for the persuasiveness of populist messages and who is the most susceptible to those messages. They argue that populist messages are characterized by attributing blame through emotions. By experimenting with a national sample (N=721), the authors provided insights into the effects of populist emotionalized blame attribution at a European level. The results show that emotionalized blame affects both blame attribution and populist attitudes, nonetheless emotionalized blame effect was stronger amongst citizens with a weaker identity attachment.

3.1.1 Measuring populist communication

Pauwels (2011) measured the degree of populist communication among Belgian parties by drawing from external and internal party literature. By means of a quantitative text analysis, the author confirms their assumptions that Vlaams Belang and Lijst Dedecker were the most populist parties under study. Pauwels argues that quantitative text analysis treats texts as data rather than discourse that needs to be understood and interpreted. Furthermore, the author argues that the primary feature of this methodology is that it enables large-scale analysis of multiple texts employing a computer. Pauwels draws on the dictionary-based approach to allocate words to specific categories using a combination of a priori and empirical criteria.

Bossetta (2017) advanced the study of the concept of populism as a political style by analyzing the debate performances between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage in the context of the televised debates over Britain's EU membership ahead of the 2014 European Election. The study aimed to determine if, under certain conditions, mainstream politicians adopt a populist style. The author used a sequential mixed method approach divided into two phases. The first quantitative, computational text mining methods are based on automated content analysis, natural language processing and statistical clustering. The second phase consisted of a qualitative coding of rhetorical appeals. After losing the first debate against Farage, the results suggest that Clegg adopted features of the populist style, while Farage's communication style remained stable to the point of statistical significance.

Gründl (2020) conducted a dictionary-based measurement of populist communication in German. The author approaches an automated content analysis in German texts since no research with this approach has been conducted despite the proliferation of populist parties in German-speaking countries (namely, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). As a first step, Gründl developed a dictionary based on previous dictionaries and improved it by inductively analyzing populist ideology and retrieving different words from a thesaurus and a semantic network. Additionally, the author added terms out of theoretical considerations to capture advocative messages that appeal to the sovereignty of the people. After testing the dictionary's precision and recall, the author combined retrieved data from Facebook and Twitter to form a corpus and used *quanteda* to apply the dictionary. The search patterns in the dictionary were applied at a sentence level to avoid regular expressions to match a whole paragraph. The

analysis showed that radical right-wing parties were using populist messages on Twitter and even more on Facebook. The German AfD was found to spread the most frequently populist ideas in contrast to the Swiss SVP and the Austrian FPÖ.

3.1.2 Disinformation as label

Ross and Rivers (2018) analyzed how former US President Donald Trump disseminated mis- and disinformation and accusations of "fake news" via Twitter between November 9th, 2016, and August 7th, 2017. The authors argue that given the contestable aspect of objective truth, Trump was a spreader of mis- and disinformation in the same vein that he accused the media. Their results show that Trump used the accusations to the media to demonstrate allegiance and as a cover for his spreading of untruthful information that was framed as truth.

Egelhofer & Lecheler (2019) performed a literary review by which they concluded that "fake news" alludes to two dimensions of political communication. On the hand, the deliberative creation of false information with a journalistic format. On the other hand, the instrumentalization of the term delegitimizes news media. The scholars note that increased attention has been devoted to the genre aspect of fake news, hence plenty of scholarly debate on the consequences. Employing a literary review, the authors present a theoretical framework to study fake news.

In the context of contested truth, Hameleers and Minihold (2020) inductively analyzed the construction of untruthful discourses (N = 1,777). Further, with automated content analysis (N=56,666), the authors studied how reality, mis- and disinformation are constructed by politicians in Austria, Germany, and The Netherlands. Their results suggest an affinity between populism and disinformation. More specifically, the authors argue that right-wing politicians claim issue ownership in discrediting established knowledge and attempt to create a momentum for an alternative reality that resonates with populist world views.

3.2 Towards measuring populist communication

The scope underlying the present study, in addition to the review of the theoretical framework, points to existing empirical evidence of populist communication divided into two: content, that answers the question *What?* (RQ1) and style that answers the question *How?* (RQ2)

Furthermore, two different approaches to populist communication are detected across the literature. On the one hand, an actor-centred approach is based on how populist actors use populist communication strategies and tactics. On the other hand, an approach that focuses on key characteristics of communication and how political actors use them. Whereas the former is ideology-based and concludes on how populist actors communicate, the latter focuses on strategies, styles and rhetoric classified as populist and concludes about its presence in political actors' communication and the extent to which they engage in their usage. Therefore, given that the present study aims to understand how populism is communicated and to what extent political actors in the Latin American context engage in populist communication (RQ3), the second approach is followed.

4 Methodology

As a first step to exploring populist communication across Latin America, it is essential to identify how the populist ideas (The people and the elites) are constructed across the region. This is necessary to encompass the language diversity in the Spanish language. The chosen method to measure populist communication is quantitative text analysis, defined by Benoit (2009) as a variant of quantitative content analysis that analyses data in the form of words instead of requiring texts to be understood and interpreted. Furthermore, given that the interest underlying this study requires handling large amounts of data, a computerized analysis seemed most suitable. However, according to Pauwels (2011), quantitative text analysis has three general approaches.

Firstly, a dictionary-based approach in which a computer analyses bodies of text and allocate text units to an a priori or a posteriori-defined coding scheme; nonetheless, Pauwels (2011) argues that arriving at a compelling dictionary is not an easy task (p.8). Another approach is word scores which rely on a priori scores and word distributions of reference texts. The last approach is the word fish, which according to the author, relies on using words not used by others as bait. The dictionary-based approach is the most suitable for this analysis, given that the others seem less suitable to determine levels of populist communication. The approach, thus, is to develop a dictionary that *aposteriori* will allow the identification of keywords embedded in political messages, in this case, tweets.

4.1 **Building the dictionary**:

The dictionary is composed of terms that are indicators for a theoretical concept and allows to determine the frequency of keywords to determine a document's class (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013 p.2), to put it in another way, the dictionary is composed by words that refer to the core ideas of populism, i.e., the people, the elites, and the others, as well as words that indicate conflictive or advocative messages. Furthermore, dictionaries provide an efficient way to code large amounts of texts reliably. According to Grimmer and Stewart (2013), recall and precision describe the quality of a dictionary. Whereas recall allows for avoiding false negatives by accurately capturing the populist ideas, precision refers to how well the dictionary captures populist texts, thus avoiding false positives. Gründl (2020) argues that both concepts conflict because if more terms are included, the recall will increase, but precision decreases. Thus, following Gründl's method, the dictionary is developed by expanding the list of possible terms to improve recall and selecting or modifying terms to attempt high precision.

4.1.1 Data collection to build the dictionary:

As shown in Table 2, The two final candidates from Argentina (2019), Chile (2017), Paraguay (2018), Uruguay (2019), Ecuador (2021), Bolivia (2019), Venezuela (2018), Perú (2021), Panamá (2018), Costa Rica (2018), Honduras (2017), El Salvador (2019), Guatemala (2021), and Mexico (2018) were considered for this analysis.

Table 2 Candidates Overview

Country	Candidates	Year
Argentina	Mauricio Macri Alberto Fernández	2019
Bolivia	Evo Morales Carlos Mesa	2019
Chile	Alejandro Guiller Sebastián Piñera	2017
Costa Rica	Fabricio Alvarado Carlos Alvarado	2018
Ecuador	Andrés Arauz Guillermo Lazo	2021
El Salvador	Nayib Bukele	2019

	Carlos Calleja	
Guatemala	Alejandro Giammattei Sandra Torres	2021
Honduras	Salvador Nasralla Juan Orlando	2017
México	Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) Ricardo Anaya	2018
Panamá	Rómulo Rox Laurentino Cortizo	2018
Perú	Keiko Fujimori Pedro Castillo	2021
Uruguay	Luis Lacalle DanielMartinez	2019
Venezuela	Nicolás Maduro Henri Falcon	2018

The unit of analysis for this study is tweets published by both candidates during their political campaigns. Visuals and interactions were not taken into consideration. The Twitter data was accessed using the open-source python program *Twint*, which allows retrieving data without the downloading limit of Twitter's API. That is because the API only allows to download of the latest 3200 tweets from each account; therefore, it would not have been possible to collect the data from the time frame of interest. Given the high volume of available tweets, following a convenient sampling strategy, the sample was formed by tweets from all political actors from 10 days prior to the last day of the campaign because it was observed that such timeframe was the most intense in terms of how often the candidates were tweeting.

4.1.2 Analysis strategy:

Following the Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), each tweet was thoroughly analysed, considering only references to populist communication, and was assigned open codes. The first step toward developing the dictionary required analysing the sample and

creating an initial list. After that, the list was analysed by running a preliminary manual text analysis to determine precision and recall. Whereas high recall was obtained, many false positives popped up; therefore, a refinement was required. For instance, “pueblo”/town was often used by candidates to refer to a specific place as opposed to people; another example of false positives was “ricos”/rich which intead of making a reference to the elites, was referring to the richness of the country in terms of resources. For instance, “somos *ricos* en cultura”/ we are rich in culture

Therefore, following Gründl (2020) approach, terms were not confined to single words as the scholar argues that it is helpful to use multi-word expressions. For instance, “obsessed with power” instead of only one word, “obsessed” and “power”. In addition, regular expressions instead of stemming words offer more control. Therefore, to capture grammatical variations and thus achieve more precision, texts were kept in their original form to distinguish between plurals and singulars. In other words, instead of reducing words to their stem -which might imply difficulties for texts in Spanish, the variations were recorded. For instance, while “corrupto” (corrupt) might be used to accuse only one actor, “corruptos” (E.g., corrupt politicians) could be a term to refer to the elites (E.g., “Los corruptos” / the corrupts). Thus, if stemmed, the word would be reduced to its base form, and results could be affected.

Furthermore, to avoid missing insightful information, the surrounding words of each detected dictionary term were analysed (*keywords-in-context),* allowing the detection of further populist terms. Therefore, throughout the analysis, words that referenced the core ideas of populism (The People, the elites) were identified and coded if a statement referred to the people or the elites. Furthermore, following the theoretical conceptualizations of Wirz (2018), segments were also coded in detail if a statement was advocative or conflictive. Using such distinction would allow determining the emotional charge given to the populist idea and whether it was advocative or conflictive. For instance, “abusive” (Abusivos) might refer to an adjective for the elite. Therefore, it is categorized as a conflictive message as it implies that the elite is harmful to the people

To complement the initial list and therefore, improve the dictionary, I relied on existing German and English dictionaries (see Gründl, 2020, Pauwels 2011, and Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011) to develop the most encompassing dictionary possible. Thereby, the words were

translated from English to Spanish. Furthermore, Word Sketch from Sketch Engine, accessed with the academic license provided by the University of Gothenburg, assisted in identifying collocations and word combinations.

Additionally, following the theoretical conceptualization from Hameleers and Minihold (2020), references to disinformation were also taken into consideration as part of conflictive messages by allocating words used for flagging erroneous or false information as misinformation discourses. Words in a previous dictionary developed by the authors also were translated into Spanish. After refining and assessing the precision of the dictionary, it was closed with 264 terms.

4.2 Compiling the dictionary

4.2.1 People-centrism

Terms such as *"el pueblo/the people"* or *"la gente/the people"* were commonly detected across the sample referring to the people as a homogeneous group. For instance, *"el Paraguay de la gente/* Paraguay of the people" – *Mario Abdo (2018).* However, it was commonly found the combination of "el pueblo" + "nationality", for instance: *"esta es la victoria del pueblo ecuatoriano" – Andres Arauz (2021),* Which in English would be translated into "this is the victory of the Ecuadorians". In addition, other accounts in which the political actors placed themselves as part of the people were found, such as *"hermanos/bothers"* and *"nosotros"/us.* However, other forms of a collective subject were found, such as *"ustedes"*/you, as accounts that referred to the people.

Terms referring to the idealization of territory were also found as evidence of the heartland. For instance, *"patria/homeland"* was usually accompanied by other words such as "dignificar"/dignify + the country's name or "recuperar"/recover.

Accounts of the sovereignty of the people were also detected. For instance, words such as "soberano/sovereign", "digno/worthy", and "poder del pueblo/power of the people were coded as advocative. Furthermore, adjectives with an advocative connotation were commonly present across the sample. For instance, "*la voluntad del pueblo*/the will of the people", "victoria popular/popular victory", and "el pueblo manda/the people rules".

4.2.2 Anti-elite:

Multiple accounts of the elite were also found across the sample. Words such as "*grupos de poder/*powerful groups"*, "cúpula de poder / power dome"*, "*los poderosos /*the powerful"*, and "los mismos /* the same", were found as references to the elite. Adjectives qualifying the elites as oppressive to the people were also noted and coded as conflictive. For instance, "Citizens are ready to debate with the corrupt politicians represented in Duque" – Gustavo Petro, 2018. Furthermore, adjectives with a conflictive connotation suggesting that the elites have deprived the people's sovereignty were also detected. For instance, *"los humillados/the humiliated"* and *"el pueblo perjudicado /* the disadvantaged people" were also coded. In addition, other terms accounting for discrediting the established knowledge were also found, for instance: "Y ahora que dirán "los analistas"/ "And now what will "the analysts" say" /-Nayib Bukele (2019). Finally, "La prensa fifi", a term coined by the Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, was found to label the press as a hypocrite and conservative. Similar were found statements from other actors, such as "prensa corrupta/ the corrupted press", and "prensa conservadora / the conservative press".

In addition, multiple terms aiming to flag certain information as false or deceiving was found across the analysed sample. For instance, terms such as "*es falso/it is false"* and "desinformando/disinforming" were found to flag something as false or blame someone for lying. Furthermore, other accounts such as "campaña negra/ black campaign" were employed to blame a politician for holding a negative campaign against another. For instance, "*El Partido Vamos, ha articulado una campaña negra en mi contra / The Vamos Party, has articulated a black campaign against me*" – Sandra Torres, 2019.
(See appendix for complete dictionary)

4.3 Quantitative text analysis:

The central aim of this study is to identify political actors engaged in populist communication and whether it is a thin or thick populism based on the saliency of accounts to the people and the elites. The study attempts to determine the above by analysing the frequency of the keywords in the dictionary developed in the first part of the study to measure populist

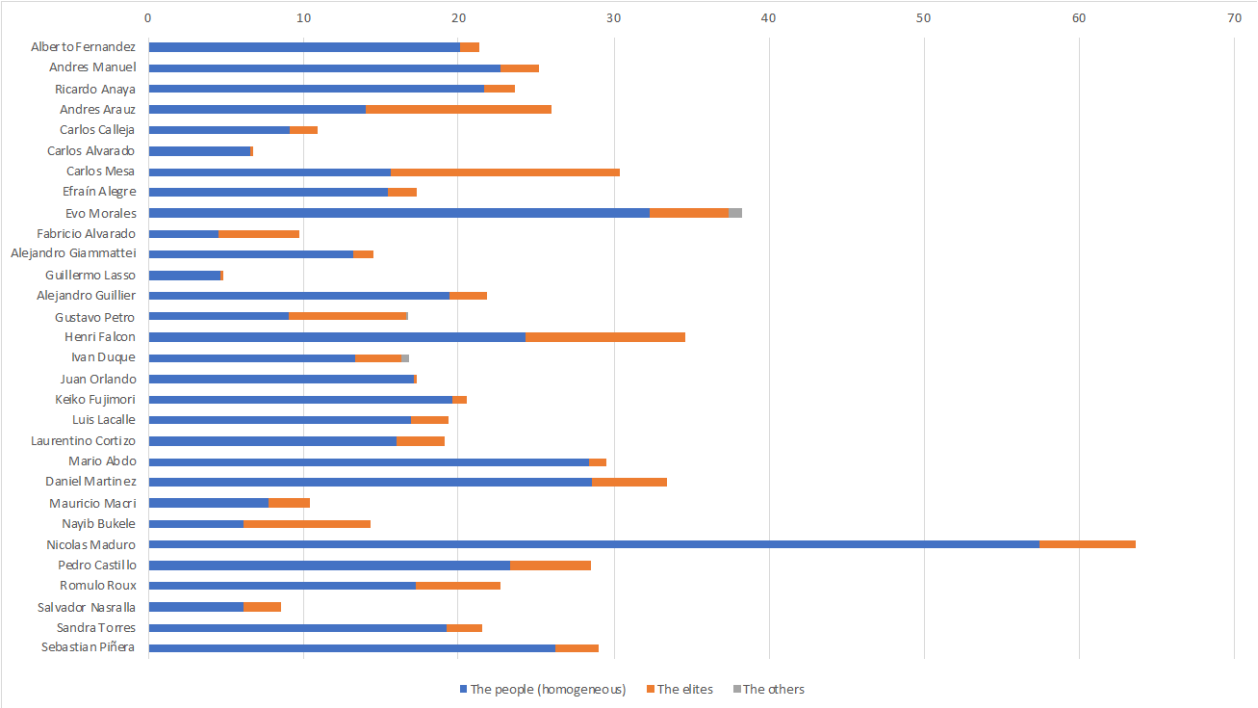
communication and determining whether the statement is conflictive or advocative and the saliency of accounts to disinformation as a label to test the hypothesis underlying this work.

4.3.1 Data collection and findings:

Since the aim of the study is to analyse electoral communication, the timeframe considered to retrieve the tweets from the political actors in questions was expanded to 10 days before the beginning of the electoral campaign and 10 days after the end of it, to capture as many tweets as possible. Therefore, after modifying the code and entering the dates of interest for each political actor, N=14,251 tweets were retrieved in total. However, after cleaning the data, in this case, discarding tweets that contained only a picture or a link, the dataset was established at *N=13,256* tweets. Then, the software MAXQDA was utilized to facilitate the dictionary application.

By revising the results of frequency (table 1, appendix 1), references to *the people* were the most found across the region (*N=2352)* in contrast to references to *the Elites* (*N=539)* and *the others* (*N=16).* In detail, Evo Morales, from Bolivia, accounts for the most references to *the people (N=387),* followed by Colombian Ivan Duque (*N= 229)* and Nicolas Maduro from Venezuela (*N= 167).* Nonetheless, some actors accounted for more than 1,000 tweets while others barely reached 200. For instance, Guillermo Lasso accounted for 1616 tweets, while Andres Arauz had 200 tweets. If word frequencies were to determine the extent to which the actors engage in populist communication, those who accounted for more tweets would have more chances of scoring higher. To avoid missing relevant information, the results were normalized based on the proportion of words in relation to the whole sample. For instance, for Alberto Fernandez, 38 terms accounted for *the people* meaning that out of 164 tweets analysed, 23.2% contained a term in relation to the beforementioned category. Therefore, Nicolas Maduro (60%) is who accounts for most of the people as a homogeneous group and is followed by Evo Morales (38%). (For more, see table in Appendix 1).

Figure 1 Proportion of populist ideas in Tweets per actor

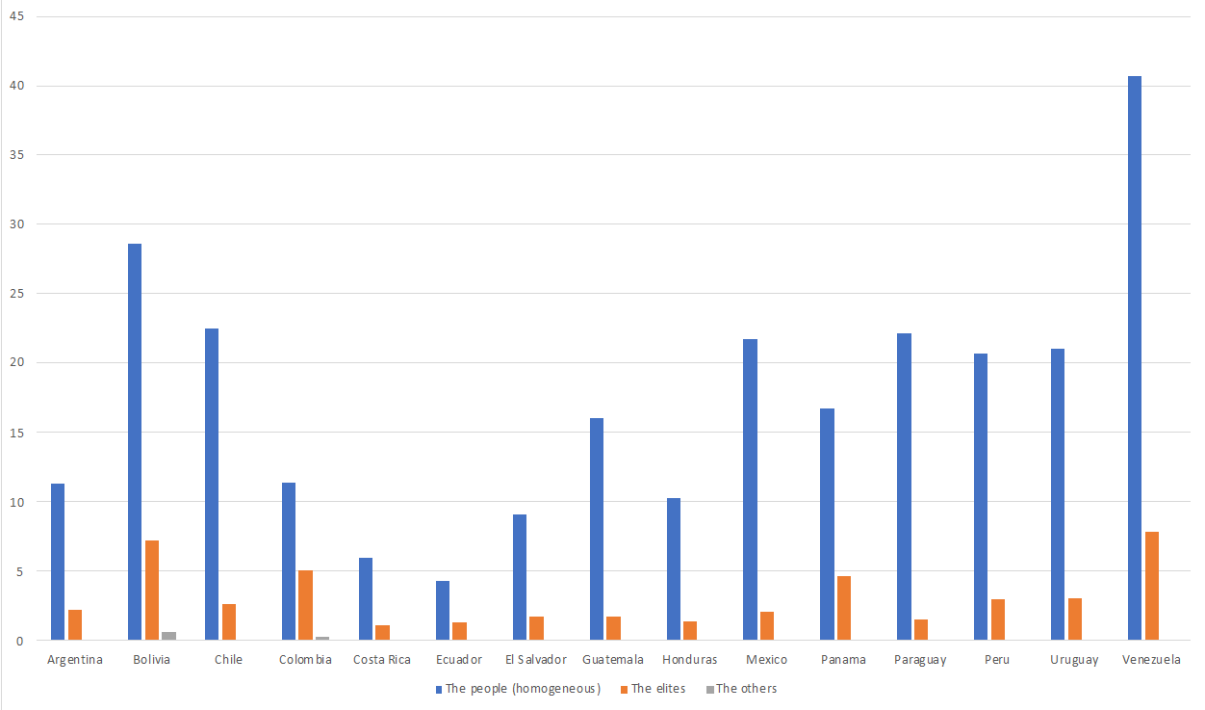


Note: N=13,356 tweets; Values expressed in percentages

Accounts to the elites were also found, albeit to a lesser extent than references to the people. However, in this case, other actors outspanned and that could be explained by taking into consideration which candidate was part member of the governing coalition (or was governing him/herself) and which one was from the opposition coalition.

For instance, in Venezuela, accounts to the elites were predominantly found on Henri's Falcon tweets (10,3%) (opposing candidate) in contrast to Nicolas Maduro (6,2%), who was governing Venezuela at the moment of this analysis. Similarly in Bolivia, Carlos Mesa (14,8%) opposing, Evo Morales; Ecuador Andres Arauz (12%) opposing Guillermo Lazo and Nayib Bukele (8,2%) in contrast to Carlos Calleja scored among the highest.

Figure 2 Distribution of populist ideas across Latin America



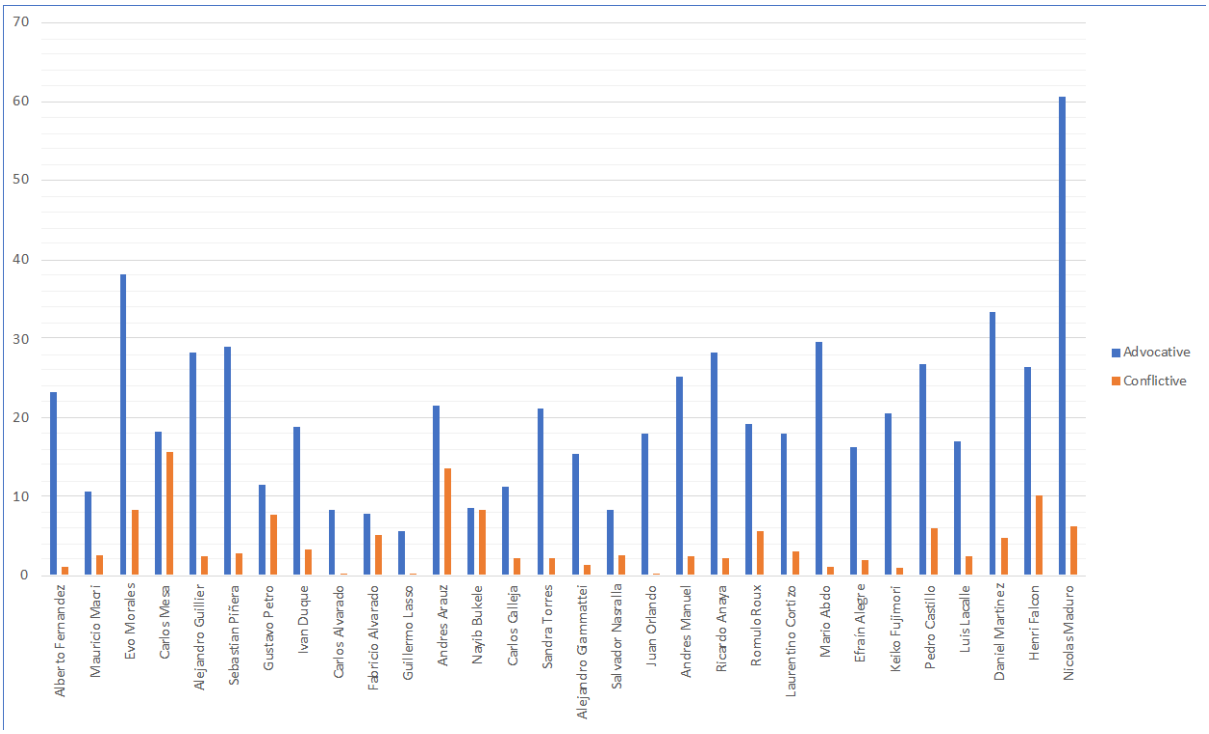
Note N= 13,682 tweets; Values presented in percentages; both candidates from each country are included.

Figure 2 provides a broader picture of how the accounts for each populist idea performed per country, and it can be observed that the Venezuelan and Bolivian candidates engaged the most in populist messages. Furthermore, scarce results accounted for *the others* were found, which could be explained due to their functional equivalence with *the elites.* A correlation (p=0,047) was found between accounts of *the elites* and *the others.*

To analyse the prevalence of advocative and conflictive messages, the variables "*anti-elite*" and "*the elites are oppressive*" were recoded into the variable "*conflictive*" (Cronbach's alpha = 0,95). The same procedure was performed for the variables "*homogeneous group"* and "*peoples' sovereignty"* recoded into the "advocative" variable (Cronbach's alpha = 0,91). Given the differences in sample sizes, the percentage of tweets containing references to the conflictive and advocative messages was considered to generate a better understanding. As figure 3 shows, advocative messages prevail across the region. Notably, Nicolas Maduro (60,7%) was found to advocate the most for the heartland, the virtuous people, and restoring the people's sovereignty. Similarly, Evo Morales (38,1%) and Daniel Martinez (33,3%) rank amongst the ones with notably more advocative messages. Nayib Bukele's case turns

interesting as he is the only one who accounts for almost the same proportion of advocative (8,6%) and conflictive (8,4%) messages. Apart from Bukele, Carlos Mesa (15,6%), Andres Arauz (13,5), Henri Falcon (10,3), and Evo Morales (8,3%) also scored notably high in contrast to the remaining actors. It is also notable that little evidence of conflictive messages was found in Guillermo Lasso's, Carlos Alvarado's, and Juan Orlando's samples.

Figure 3 Prevalence of advocative and conflictive messages



Note: N= 13,256 tweets; values expressed in percentages.

What remains is to determine if there is a relation between populist communication and the use of disinformation as a label. Figure 4 illustrates the proportion of engagement with disinformation as a label by the studied political actors. Andres Manuel highlights as he accounts for 11,8% of terms related to disinformation as a label. This analysis assumes that populist communication and disinformation as a label are correlated. Table 2 shows the correlation model and shows that the assumption was correct.

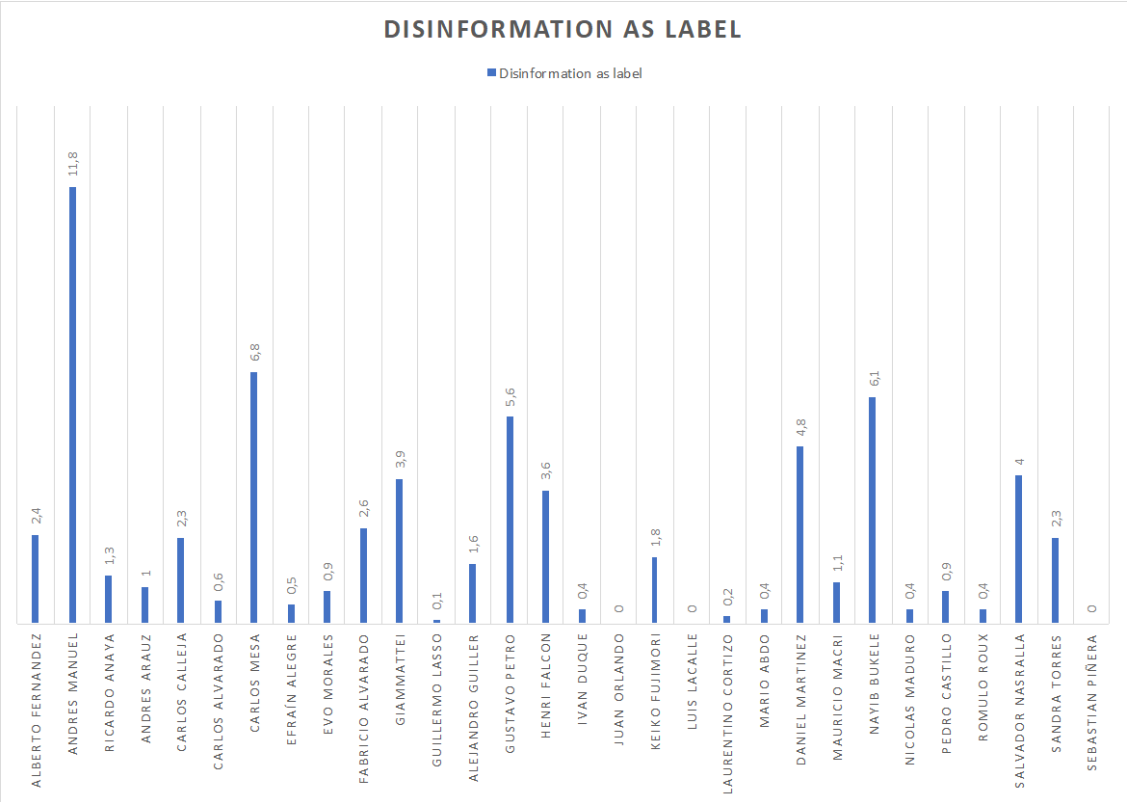
Table 3 Correlation Model

	Populist Communication
Disinformation as label	0,060***

*Note: N=13,256; *,**,*** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively*

By exploring more in detail in figure 4 related to disinformation as a label, it is interesting that Carlos Mesa, Nayib Bukele and Gustavo Petro follow Andres Manuel with records of employing terms related to labelling information or the media as disinformation. Moreover, it is also interesting that Juan Orlando, Lacalle and Piñera account for 0 references.

Figure 4 Proportion of terms related to disinformation as a label



***Note** N= 13,256 tweets; results are presented in percentage.*

5 Discussion

For this study, a dictionary measurement was conducted to determine the prevalence of populist messages among Spanish-speaking presidential candidates from Latin America. The study focused on social media communication, specifically Twitter, as, according to scholars, it has increasingly become important for political actors to reach and recruit new followers. Furthermore, the importance of analysing political communication employing social media relies on the fact that political actors find it easier to establish a conversation with the electorate, arguably changing the rules of the game. However, this study came with no ease. The first challenge was that, to my knowledge, no previous dictionary in the Spanish language was available. Thus, the terms included in the dictionary reflect the theoretical conceptualization of populism and its ideas to ensure as much validity as possible. In addition, other terms coined in other languages were included and tested for precision and recall (Gründl, 2020; Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Furthermore, following Gründl's approach, the dictionary was built to capture conflictive and advocative messages.

While developing the dictionary, it became evident that considering the language diversity is essential for advancing the understanding of populist communication. Paying close attention to word usage across the region is of great importance to ensure better results. For instance, even though all studied actors are native Spanish speakers, there were connotative differences for specific words that, if neglected to evaluate the precision of the dictionary, the results would have been far from reality.

Results showed that all political actors engage, to a certain extent, with populist communication. However, most of them account for Jagger's and Walgrave's thin- definition of populism. Moreover, the analysis shows that all the studied political actors refer to *the people* as a homogeneous group. Nevertheless, as previously argued, only accounting for the people does not necessarily make an actor a populist.

Instead, by analysing the prevalence of advocative and conflictive messages, a degree of engagement with populist communication can be given. That is because advocative messages include references to the people as homogeneous and virtuous and the people's sovereignty. Furthermore, accounts for conflictive messages refer to the thick- definition of populism proposed by Jagers and Walgrave, who argued that it accounts for anti-elitist ideas such as blaming the elites for the disgraces of the people and labelling them as corrupt and oppressive.

On top of that, as Wirz argued, conflictive and advocative messages imply emotions, which scholars have attributed as central to the presentational aspects of populist ideas.

Thereby, although most analysed actors engaged with advocative populist communication, others also engaged with conflictive. It is interesting to highlight the result found in the case of Nayib Bukele, who, based on the outcome of the analysis, the actor occasionally relied on thick populism (accounts to the people and the anti-elite ideas). In contrast, other actors, such as Nicolas Maduro and Evo Morales, heavily relied on people-centric ideas of populism to communicate with their followers. This is determined by the proportion of accounts in relation to their whole sample of tweets. Furthermore, the results coincide with the other studies categorizing Maduro and Evo Morales as populists (see Waisbord; de la Torre). However, the added value of the present study is that it provides an insight into the type of messages employed to communicate the populist idea.

This study assumed that disinformation, understood as a label, is in close relationship with populist communication and this assumption was proved right. Apart from three, all political actors accounted at least once in labelling a piece of information as false or accusing someone of lying. This finding advances the understanding of the labelling dimension of disinformation that has been overlooked. As Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) pointed out, much concern has been given to the genre dimension of fake news and too little to the use as a label. Although previous studies had suggested and found a relationship between untruthful discourses and populism (Hameleers, 2020b, 2020a; Hameleers & Minihold, 2020), this study, to my knowledge, is the first one to address it in the Latin American context.

The study, however, comes with limitations. Firstly, the dictionary is the only one in the Spanish language, and despite that high validity was in mind while it was in development and that several rounds were carried out to ensure recall and precision, the dictionary still requires a reliability test and validation. However, inspired by Gründl's (2020) dictionary development, which sat the bases for the development of the present one, the procedure was detailed as much as possible in this work.

Regarding the applicability of the dictionary, there as certain limitations worthy of pointing out. The first one is that, while it can be an excellent tool to analyse high volumes of data, such as that retrieved from social media, it is limited to textual materials; that is a considerable

limitation considering that audio-visual content prevails in social media. Thus, the chances of losing important information are high and unquantifiable. Furthermore, emoticons are also embedded in today's online communication, and dictionary-based approaches might be limited to analysing them in the proper context mainly because dictionaries ignore irony and sarcasm.

5.1 For future research:

A dictionary-based approach for a quantitative text analysis proved to be very handy for analysing large amounts of data. Therefore, future research should continue exploring and developing dictionary-based analysis. Concerning populist communication, a deeper analysis should be devoted to linguistic diversity to avoid neglecting future empirical research. Furthermore, what is communication without a recipient? That is another exciting avenue for research. Finally, what are the effects of advocative and conflictive messages? To what extent can they mobilize followers? It is essential to accelerate research concerning disinformation. Given that, as argued by scholars, populism could be a tool used to reach power and maintain it, delegitimating the truth and the media must not be taken for granted.

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7 Appendix 1

Table 4 Dictionary frequencies and percentages by actor

	The people (homogeneous)		*The elite*		*The others*		*Total Tweets*
Actor	**Word count**	**Percentage**	**Word count**	**Percentage**	**Word count**	**Percentage**	
Alberto Fernandez	33	20,1	2	1,2	0	0	164
Andres Manuel	27	22,7	3	2,5	0	0	119
Ricardo Anaya	98	21,6	9	2	0	0	453
Andres Arauz	28	14	24	12	0	0	200
Carlos Calleja	81	9,1	16	1,8	0	0	894
Carlos Alvarado	43	6,5	1	0,2	0	0	661
Carlos Mesa	37	15,6	35	14,8	0	0	237
Efraín Alegre	32	15,4	4	1,9	0	0	208
Evo Morales	328	32,3	52	5,1	9	0,9	1015
Fabricio Alvarado	7	4,5	8	5,2	0	0	154
Alejandro Giammattei	41	13,2	4	1,3	0	0	310
Guillermo Lasso	75	4,6	4	0,2	0	0	1616
Alejandro Guillier	24	19,4	3	2,4	0	0	124
Gustavo Petro	87	9	73	7,6	1	0,1	963
Henri Falcon	80	24,3	34	10,3	0	0	329
Ivan Duque	162	13,3	36	3	6	0,5	1220
Juan Orlando	84	17,1	1	0,2	0	0	492
Keiko Fujimori	22	19,6	1	0,9	0	0	112
Luis Lacalle	14	16,9	2	2,4	0	0	83
Laurentino Cortizo	72	16	14	3,1	0	0	451
Mario Abdo	74	28,4	3	1,1	0	0	261
Daniel Martinez	12	28,6	2	4,8	0	0	42
Mauricio Macri	28	7,7	10	2,7	0	0	365
Nayib Bukele	32	6,1	43	8,2	0	0	526
Nicolas Maduro	158	57,5	17	6,2	0	0	275
Pedro Castillo	27	23,3	6	5,2	0	0	116
Romulo Roux	138	17,2	44	5,5	0	0	802
Salvador Nasralla	40	6,1	16	2,4	0	0	655
Sandra Torres	58	19,2	7	2,3	0	0	302
Sebastian Piñera	28	26,2	3	2,8	0	0	107

Note: N= 13,256

7.1 Appendix 2

Table 5 Dictionary frequencies and percentages by country

	The people (homogeneous)		**The elite**		**The others**		**Total Tweets**
Country	Word count	Percentage	Word count	Percentage	Word count	Percentage	
Argentina	61	11,3	12	2,2	0	0	540
Bolivia	369	28,6	93	7,2	9	0,7	1291
Chile	52	22,5	6	2,6	0	0	231
Colombia	251	11,4	111	5,1	7	0,3	2194
Costa Rica	50	6	9	1,1	0	0	833
Ecuador	106	4,3	32	1,3	0	0	2443
El Salvador	81	9,1	16	1,8	0	0	894
Guatemala	99	16,1	11	1,8	0	0	615
Honduras	135	10,3	18	1,4	0	0	1311
Mexico	125	21,7	12	2,1	0	0	577
Panama	211	16,7	58	4,6	0	0	1266
Paraguay	106	22,2	7	1,5	0	0	477
Peru	49	20,7	7	3	0	0	237
Uruguay	27	21,1	4	3,1	0	0	128
Venezuela	262	40,7	51	7,9	0	0	644

Note: Two presidential candidates accounted for each country.

7.2 Appendix 3

Table 6 Dictionary including word length and frequency

Word	**Word length (Characters)**	**Frequency**
el pueblo	9	543
la gente	8	401
Patria	6	272
hermanos	8	183
defender	8	174
ciudadanos	10	117
recuperar	9	103
los panameños	13	97
crisis	6	95
soberanía	9	92
los ciudadanos	14	87
los colombianos	15	84
fraude	6	78

población	9	78
mentir	6	75
víctimas	8	69
los ecuatorianos	16	68
mayoría	7	63
corruptos	9	62
los bolivianos	14	48
los corruptos	13	46
los guatemaltecos	17	46
luchan	6	46
un pueblo	9	44
falso	5	42
devolverle	10	37
los venezolanos	15	36
habitantes	10	35
los chilenos	12	35
represión	9	32
los argentinos	14	31
reparación	10	31
los mismos	10	29
los medios	10	28
los mexicanos	13	26
vulnerables	11	26
despilfarro	11	25
dignidad de	11	23
saqueo	6	23
las mafias	10	22
los paraguayos	14	22
abuso de poder	14	21
guerra sucia	12	19
injerencia	10	19
destruir	8	17
la banca	8	17
medios de comunicación	22	17
clase política	14	16
honesto	7	15
soberana	8	15
los uruguayos	13	14
más de lo mismo	15	14
mismos de siempre	17	14
propaganda	10	14
para la gente	13	13
dignificar	10	12
ejemplar	8	12
soberano	8	12
engaño	6	11
imperialista	12	11
los hondureños	14	11
troles	6	11

los peruanos	12	10
politiquería	12	10
campaña negra	13	9
promedio	8	9
clientelismo	12	8
manipular	9	8
mismos de siempre	16	8
nacionalistas	13	8
oligarquía	10	8
equivocado	10	7
es falso	8	7
los ricos	9	7
saquearon	9	7
derroche	8	6
falsedad	8	6
gente trabajadora	17	6
la cúpula	9	6
las mentiras	12	6
los banqueros	13	6
recuperar nuestro	17	6
analistas	9	5
hipocresía	10	5
manipulación	12	5
son lo mismo	12	5
voluntad popular	16	5
votantes	8	5
el imperialismo	15	4
el periodista	13	4
engañaron	9	4
estafa	6	4
nepotismo	9	4
recuperar la soberanía	22	4
desinformación	14	3
difama	6	3
duplicidad	10	3
engañe	6	3
imperialistas	13	3
los privatizadores	18	3
parcialidad	11	3
recuperar nuestra	17	3
reivindicar	11	3
rumor	5	3
victoria popular	16	3
abusivos	8	2
broma	5	2
clase trabajadora	17	2
demagogia	9	2
destruyeron	11	2
electores	9	2

grupos de poder	15	2
libertad del	12	2
los poderosos	13	2
mienten	7	2
mintiendo	9	2
poder del pueblo	16	2
se beneficiaron	15	2
abusaron	8	1
asistencialismo	15	1
ausentes	8	1
bulo	4	1
burlan	6	1
burlarse	8	1
campañas negras	15	1
castigan al	11	1
conspiradora	12	1
cúpula corrupta	15	1
desconfianza	12	1
desinformando	13	1
despilfarraron	14	1
difamando	9	1
el bipartidismo	15	1
el pueblo está harto	20	1
el pueblo trabajador	20	1
empobrecen	10	1
engañando	9	1
hipócrita	9	1
humillados	10	1
inocente	8	1
llenándose	10	1
los mentirosos	14	1
los privilegiados	17	1
lucraron	8	1
malversado	10	1
ofenden	7	1
para engañar	12	1
parte del sistema	17	1
politiquero	11	1
prensa conservadora	19	1
resistir	8	1
se llenaron	11	1
sin ética	9	1
soberbios	9	1
voluntad de la mayoría	22	1
voluntad de sus pueblos	23	1
a expensas de	13	0
alta sociedad	13	0
anteponen	9	0
arrogante	9	0

blasfemia	9	0
cabildeo	8	0
casta corrupta	14	0
castigan la	11	0
caudillismo	11	0
cercanía a la gente	19	0
clase alta	10	0
codiciosos	10	0
compadrazgo	11	0
confundido	10	0
conspiración	12	0
conspiradores	13	0
conspiraron	11	0
conspirativo	12	0
contribuyentes	14	0
corruptela	10	0
criollos	8	0
derechos vulnerados	19	0
desfavorecer	12	0
desfigurar	10	0
deshonestidad	13	0
difamadores	11	0
distorcionan la	15	0
distorcionar la	15	0
disuadido	9	0
doble juego	11	0
el pueblo manda	15	0
el pueblo perjudicado	21	0
el pueblo que lucha	19	0
el pueblo sabio	15	0
el pueblo soberano	18	0
empobrecián	11	0
empobrecieron	13	0
enriquecieron	13	0
esconden información	20	0
esconder información	20	0
evadieron	9	0
exluyeron	9	0
falta de imparcialidad	22	0
favoritismo	11	0
globalistas	11	0
gringos	7	0
hacer trampa	12	0
hambre de poder	15	0
han empobrecido	15	0
han excluido	12	0
han exluído	11	0
ilícitamente	12	0
imparciales	11	0

impertinente	12	0
inconforme	10	0
indefenso	9	0
la clase dominante	18	0
la elite	8	0
la gente que lucha	18	0
la patria es pueblo	19	0
los analistas	13	0
los costarricences	18	0
los represores	14	0
los soberbios	13	0
lucrándo	8	0
marioneta	9	0
mendaz	6	0
oportunismo	11	0
parodia	7	0
pervertir	9	0
pisotearon	10	0
población trabajadora	21	0
poco escrupulosos	17	0
política dimensional	20	0
prensa corrupta	15	0
prensa mentirosa	16	0
privilegios de pocos	20	0
pueblo ejemplar	15	0
pueblo honesto	14	0
pueblo ilustre	14	0
pueblo indefenso	16	0
pueblo inocente	15	0
pueblo soberano	15	0
pueblo víctima	14	0
represivo	9	0
se repartieron	14	0
sin escrúpulos	14	0
soberanía del pueblo	20	0
tortuoso	8	0
vaciaron	8	0
verdades a medias	17	0
viejos políticos	16	0
volundad de los colombianos	27	0
volundad del pueblo	19	0
voluntad de los argentinos	26	0
voluntad de los bolivianos	26	0
voluntad de los chilenos	24	0
voluntad de los costarricences	30	0
voluntad de los ecuatorianos	28	0
voluntad de los guatemaltecos	29	0
voluntad de los hondureños	26	0
voluntad de los mexicanos	25	0

voluntad de los panameños	25	0
voluntad de los paraguayos	26	0
voluntad de los peruanos	24	0
voluntad de los salvadoreños	28	0
voluntad de los uruguayos	25	0
vulnerados	10	0

Note 2 N=264 words