

Ensayos

The Consistency of Donald Trump Twitter Rhetoric about Immigration. Setting a Path to Spurn Migrants in the U.S.

La Consistencia de la Retórica de Donald Trump en Twitter sobre la Inmigración. T
rasando un Camino para Rechazar a los Migrantes en los EE. UU.

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Abstract: The proliferation of nationalist and nativist movements all over the world have capitalized the wide impact of social media, especially in Twitter. In the case of the United States, first as candidate and then as President, Donald Trump initiated an active use of twitter to disseminate his views on migration and migrants. This paper analyzes the themes and the political implications of his tweets from Trump's electoral win to the end of the second year of his presidency. The authors' assumptions are that Trump's rhetoric untapped a collective sentiment against migration and to those who supported views to protect migrant communities. The findings show that some topics were retweeted massively fueling perceptions that most Americans were against migrants' communities and their protectors.

We conducted content analysis of the tweets sent by Mr. Trump as President during the first half of his presidency. We used Trump's Twitter personal account as @realDonaldTrump. Trump as President continued using his personal account as policy and political media instrument rather than to use the official account that traditionally all Presidents have used as @POTUS. Since Trump run in a nativist platform, we examined his tweets with strong negative sentiments against migrants and immigration in general.

Palabras clave: Trump, inmigración, Twitter, populismo, redes sociales, medios de comunicación social, movimiento nativista

Resumen: La proliferación de movimientos nacionalistas y nativistas en todo el mundo ha aprovechado el importante impacto de las redes sociales, especialmente en Twitter. En el caso de Estados Unidos, Donald Trump, primero como candidato y luego como presidente, mantuvo un uso activo de Twitter para difundir sus opiniones sobre la migración y los migrantes. Este artículo analiza los temas y las implicaciones políticas de sus tweets desde la victoria electoral de Trump hasta el final del segundo año de su presidencia. Las suposiciones de los autores son que la retórica de Trump explotó un sentimiento colectivo en contra de la migración y de aquellos que respaldaban opiniones para proteger a las comunidades de migrantes. Los hallazgos muestran que algunos temas fueron retuiteados masivamente, alimentando la percepción de que la mayoría de los estadounidenses estaban en contra de las comunidades de migrantes y de quienes

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las protegían. Realizamos un análisis de contenido de los tweets enviados por el Sr. Trump como presidente durante la primera mitad de su mandato. Utilizamos la cuenta personal de Twitter de Trump, @realDonaldTrump. Trump, como presidente, continuó utilizando su cuenta personal como instrumento de política y medios de comunicación políticos en lugar de utilizar la cuenta oficial que tradicionalmente todos los presidentes han utilizado, @POTUS. Dado que Trump se postuló en una plataforma nativista, examinamos sus tweets con fuertes sentimientos negativos hacia los migrantes y la inmigración en general.

Keywords: Trump, immigration, twitter, populism, social media, social networks, nativist movement

Introduction

The use of social media by elected governmental officials have been more active in recent years when they post information, perspectives, or commentaries in the official account of their job. However, few have used their personal accounts to present their personal views or even policy standpoints and recommendations in Twitter, they do that because of the potentials for backfires and rapid attacks. However, Donald J. Trump stated that his use of social media was not “Presidential...it is Modern Day Presidential” (Trump, 2017)¹. What the message meant is that he was willing to say anything and everything he wants that disrupt and break all historical presidential traditions. Many observers thought that his use of Twitter as candidate would change as soon as he would arrive to the White House, actually it got worse (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019; Kellner, 2016). False statements and incendiary rhetoric continue to be used by the President on almost any topics that called his attention.

One topic was particularly troublesome for many observers: his nativist approaches towards immigration (Pérez Huber, 2016; Demata, 2017). From the time he announced his candidacy on July 15, 2015, Trump made clear that immigration was at the top of his political platform. He started by tagging Hispanics and Muslims as the causes for all the economic, social, and political problems of the U.S. Early in the campaign process, it was notorious that Trump was willing to use disinformation and populists’ remarks that were insulting, demeaning, offensive,

1 Trump, Donald J. (2017) Tweet posted on July 1, 2017 on his @realDonaldTrump Twitter account.

and plainly discriminatory (Colley, 2019). His rhetoric took a tone that ignited a dormant anti-immigrant sentiment containing important biases, stereotypes, and racist attitudes (Marietta et al., 2017; Eatwell and Goodwin, 2019: 68; Rivers and Ross, 2020: 832); in other words, he was appealing to the nativists who wanted to keep the country as it was in the past.

In fact, this type of discourse coincides with what is proposed in studies that delve into the distinction between right-wing and left-wing populist parties. These studies conclude that right-wing populisms, among which we would frame Trump, tend to use exclusionary definitions of who is part of the people, based on nativist components (strongly associated with anti-immigrant discourses); while those on the left, tend to define people in more inclusive terms, using economic criteria (poor people or those experiencing economic exclusion) (Marcos, 2020).

Immigration is a problem that America has faced since its founding, whether legal or illegal. The last time the U.S. Congress passed immigration reform was in 1986, since then there is such a polarization on passing legislation that the country has been living without a comprehensive new legal framework. It is an issue that is touted as a crisis by most Americans (Pew, 2019). Researchers found that the topic received considerable attention on Twitter –when more than 20 million tweets that matched immigration-related keywords were posted from January 20 to February 20, 2017, just in the first month of the Trump presidency (Galen, et al, 2018). The country has 44 million foreign born people or 13.6% of the total population of which 10.5 million are unauthorized migrants (Pew, 2019). The unauthorized population is composed by people from different nationalities, including Latin Americans, Asians and Europeans. In 2017, Pew estimates show that Latin Americans, especially Mexicans are around 47% of the total while the rest are from other countries (2019). One problem for U.S. policy makers is the group formed by migrants who enter the country as minors which is estimated in about 1.5 million. The group was provided with a special presidential protection called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program or DACA issued by President Obama; however, only 800,000 registered under the presidential act because they were afraid of being identified, arrested, and potentially deported (Pew, 2017).

Trump stand on immigration was very clear. The country was being invaded by illegal migrants that were stealing jobs from Americans and those migrants were in the country to supply drugs, increase crime, and escalate sexual assaults (Flores and Chavez, 2019). Visible arrival of migrants from Latin American countries were targeted first, especially Mexicans, who in the eyes of Trump were indistinguishable from Central and South American migrants. Then he turned his attacks to Muslim migrants who were in the country for nefarious purposes, in other words to commit terrorist attacks against Americans. He, in fact, was seeking to exacerbate the fears of older white Americans who did not want to see different people and religions in their communities, ignoring the economic and demographic realities of the United States. Ultimately, immigration was then a point of departure for Trump's political disruption of the 2016 presidential election.

During the presidential campaign, Trump confronted Hillary Clinton by stating that she intended to be soft on borders. For him, the border was only a crossing point of illegal migration not about intensive active trade or economic interdependence with Mexico, not even about the million commuters a day who legally cross the border from either country to work and reside. The wall on the border was a campaign talking point to stop illegal immigration, and he made that clear in any speech opportunities but also in social media messages, especially in his twitter account. The messages Trump crafted during the campaign were directed not only to attack Mrs. Clinton about her softness on border and immigration issues, but to rise more anti-migrant sentiments.

Candidate and then President Trump has used his personal twitter account @realDonaldTrump to create a distorted frame of immigration by repeating continuing snippets that underlined the attacks and negative impacts of immigrants to the U.S. Twitter was seen as reflecting the democratization of media by decentralizing the spread of digital information (Rivers and Ross, 2020: 837) due to the platform ability to post direct messages, then embed messages from other sources, or redirect the reader to other websites or sources of information, or allows to share the tweet and to retweet the original message to other followers creating an immediate viral tool. Because as a social networking tool Twitter is free, the cost for political candidates is

literally insignificant, and the power to disseminate at not financial cost make it very attractive (McGregor, Mourão and Molyneux, 2017; Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García and Casero, 2016). In addition, Trump has been successful in bypassing journalists and the traditional media by claiming that Twitter is a tool to communicate directly with Americans (Ouyang and Waterman, 2020). Twitter, however, is not an editor that can change or correct erroneous information; in fact, Trump has not always been successful when he often asserts or provides false or inaccurate information.

During the time of study used for this study, Twitter did not flag disinformation or misinformation, it is until mid-2020 that the platform incorporated a new alert system aimed at warning the reader about the lack of veracity or about the absence of verified information on a particular tweet. Thus, Twitter has begun to filter, although still at a very low level, the information present on its network so that the content basically holds truthful information. Besides the messages related to the pandemic caused by COVID-19, the alerts have gained greater prominence after the 2020 US Presidential elections, due to the President Trump accusations about wide electoral fraud and the manipulation of results.²

Trump uses of Twitter is not divorced from his speeches and media interviews where he always expanded his tweets statements. The analysis of Trump's tweets shows that he writes the tweets with more "emotionally charged" words in them, such as "badly", "crazy", or "weak" regardless of who he is referring to. He is also less likely to use hashtags, photos or links in his tweets; in other words, he wants to establish his position as the only valid position in a discussion (Robinson, 2016). In the White House, it is likely that others have access to the phone to send messages from it, the subtle variation of semantics and misspells words indicate when the President himself sent a tweet.

The use of a tool that allow to disseminate any information regardless of its veracity is a megaphone for populists and Twitter has facilitated it (Lockhart, 2018). The rhetoric and the content can be outrageous and there would not be any filter between the politician who sends

² In these cases, preceded by an exclamation point, messages flag by Twitter say, "This claim about election fraud is disputed" or "Multiple sources called this election differently."

the message and the target audience. The framing and semantic writing in his tweets has been constantly repeating the same messages since his candidacy: immigration is the sole issue that explains all the failures of the U.S. As more populist his message became, Twitter is the powerful tool to attract audience and supporters, and when he fails to provide logical and cohesive policy information, he turns to his tweets to divert the attention or to attack the news media that put in evidence his errors (Colley, 2019).

This paper³ examines the main topics and frames (Lakoff, 2014) used by Donald Trump as U.S. President in his Twitter account to foster his political platform on anti-immigrant attitudes which in turn bolsters nativism. The authors collected data from the @realDonaldTrump since Mr. Trump took office of the presidency of the U.S. on January 20, 2017 until the end of his second year on January 20, 2019. The research fills a void in analyzing Trump messages in the context of immigration and the emergence of nationalism and explore its characteristics, frequencies, framing, and issues that he has been using. The importance of the research lies in two distinctive conditions, first is to understand how Twitter has been used to bypass and disregard the news media which traditionally has been the mediator between political actors and the public. And secondly, to understand better the communication strategy of Mr. Trump by using only one voice through social networking, specifically Twitter.

Literature Review

Academic research has departed from a plurality of perspectives and debates to understand the contemporary use of the concept “populism” (Ribera y Díaz; 2020). Discussion is focused on three positions: populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2004), as a form of political mobilization, and as a discursive frame (Bonikowski, 2017: 184). In terms of this study, the last perspective is the theoretical position use (Bonikowski, 2016; Aslanidis, 2016; Moffitt, 2016), because a frame is the way of presenting a message from a specific perspective in order to improve a wide impact on audiences (Benford and Snow, 2000).

³ This work is part of a broader investigation related to Trump's political discourse on Twitter about immigration and other social platforms.

Populism usually surges associated with mass political movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Uribe, 2017). In the U.S., the origins of populism are confused with the birth of the Republic and Andrew Jackson the 7th President of the U.S. (1829-1837) as his first proponent (Puértolas, 2017: 114). Currently, populism is an expanding political phenomenon, both in Europe and in America (Wodak, 2015), its causes do not go back exclusively to the financial crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed it, but “is part of a growing revolt against conventional politics and liberal values” (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2019: 13). In fact, populism is the symptom of the contingency of the relationship between a mass society and its political power and being able to adopt the most varied political aspects and figures (Villacañas, 2017: 17). Specifically, Trump and Brexit have proved to be the prelude to the greatest boom of extreme right-wing populism in Europe such as: Marie LePen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Viktor Orban in Hungary and Santiago Abascal in Spain, among others.

However, these booming political phenomena are perceived as a new form of populism, in which the ideology loses weight in favor of the charismatic personality of the leader (Uribe, 2017: 216; Cossarini and Vallespín, 2019). This is because in their relationship with voters, their styles predominate more than the contribution of political content (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2018). In this way, the strategy of spectacularizing politics tends to be accompanied by simplistic rhetoric (Ott, 2017), informal language (Ahmadian, Azarshahi and Paulhus, 2017) incendiary and provocative statements (Winberg, 2019), and sometimes aggressive and insulting using resources such as irony and satire (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2018: 1200). Resulting in a polarizing society and creating a climate of hostility and mutual mistrust (Levitsky y Ziblatt, 2018: 69).

Populists’ leaders use their personality characterized by certain egocentrism that marks, without a doubt, their communicative style. So, Trump can be seen as the most relevant example of this, by using the media as a tool to spread “his ideology” (Kreis, 2017: 608). In fact, since he announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Presidency in 2015, he has regularly used his personal Twitter account to communicate his political agenda, an action he has maintained after his arrival to the White House. He is also framing his discourse on the so-called

sharepolitica, or to communicate by generating trending topics (Carrillo, 2017: 137), and the typical approach using negative connotations (Gross and Johnson, 2016).

Given the above, we understand the reason why social networks have become a basic communication tool for Trump (Ott, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018) due to its immediacy, its ability to spread the message and reach to the general public without any filter, its potential to mark the political agenda with its own issues, its power to bypass the traditional media, its ease of presenting itself as a framework for launching attacks on its political opponents, and its perfect format for launching messages with a simple and direct arguments (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016; Gross and Johnson, 2016; Galán, 2017). As consequence of all this, using Twitter is for those political figures, the favorite medium of dissemination. It is commonly assumed that the possibility of interaction with user-citizens favors its use as a tool for political communication; in other words, as a strategy to approach citizens, even though previous studies show that Trump does not usually interact with the rest of the platform users, using a top-down style (Kreis, 2017: 616). Despite this, one of the features that define populism is the struggle for the adherence and faithfulness to the masses (Villacañas, 2017: 18) and, to achieve this, populist leaders place special emphasis on ensuring proximity to the electorate through the use of social media, especially Twitter.

Trump's messages on Twitter presents two of the characteristics linked to the leader-followers relationship, as being characteristic of populist rhetoric, and that we will analyze in the following sections of this research paper. First, he presents a strong anti-establishment and anti-political discourse (Freidenberg, 2007: 245; Wodak, 2015) as he publicly questions the functioning and fulfillment of the functions of state institutions.

And secondly, Trump's discursive framework is established in terms of we-they or friend-enemy (Laclau, 2013) because there is always the possibility of a confrontational stage, challenging even the existence of the opponents (Mouffe, 2010). In this sense, Trump uses Twitter to identify the enemy that he himself has generated and then places himself on the opposite side as a savior that will defeat that enemy (Carrillo, 2017: 136). Although this rupture is not limited only to immigration, he uses it against political opponents, in this case, the Democratic Party,

making them the enemy. When rival parties become enemies, political competition turns into war and institutions become weapons. The result is a system that is always on the edge of rupture (Levitsky y Ziblatt, 2018: 184).

In the case of immigration, according to the results of previous studies, Trump uses the idea of the threat "to the people and the country" by illegal immigrants who take jobs from Americans, who are terrorists that threaten the American way of life or take advantage of the social benefits of the American system (Kreis, 2017; Winberg, 2019; Wright and Esses, 2018). With this speech he tries to generate an anti-immigration sentiment in Americans, so people see migrants as threats to the security and peace of the United States (Peña, 2017: 209), appealing to people's emotional side (Demertzis, 2006; Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza, 2017). The consequences of this "criminalization" are the foundation of Trump's proposals for deportation of illegal immigrants, the proposal for a wall between the United States and Mexico and the negotiation or cancellation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Carrasco, 2017).

Methodology

Based on the context explained in the previous section, this research analyzes the messages published on Twitter by President Trump from his inauguration on January 20, 2017 until the end of his second year in office on January 20, 2019.

The objective is to examine the use and management of Twitter personal account of President Trump during the first half of his term, as well as the content of the messages -focused on the frames used, the main approaches used, and the evaluative connotation towards immigrants in the United States. We seek to identify, in quantitative terms, the impact of messages and trends in the activity of the social media platform in relation to the object of analysis and, in qualitative terms, their content based on a series of pre-established variables. This will be done, firstly, by analyzing the results of each year individually and, secondly, by making a comparison between the results of both periods.

Based on the propositions, we are seeking to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 What are the migration salient areas of President Trump tweets in his first and second year?

RQ2 What are the main targets of President Trump tweets in his first and second year related to migration?

RQ3 What frames were used more frequently by President Trump in his first and second year?

RQ4 How did President Trump frame migration in his tweets during the first and second year?

To answer the questions posed in this investigation, the tweets were extracted using a *scraper* tool, to select all those messages published by President Trump related to immigration policy during the first half of his term. To carry out the search, the following keywords were used: *travel ban, immigration, immigrants, migrants, DACA and illegal immigration*.

Once the tweets were obtained, the study was conducted at two levels, one quantitative and the other qualitative. For the quantitative analysis, the total number of tweets has been manually collected and counted. For the qualitative study of the content of the messages posted by President Trump, a three-coder analysis was conducted. The first of them, related to identifying the predominant frame in the discourse of each tweet, the variables used are the following:

1.- Democrats Criticism. This refers to messages with critical, derogatory, or negative content about the work of Democrats in relation to immigration policy.

2.- Defense of the travel ban. It contains the messages of support for the President's proposal to pass legislation to toughen the ways for immigrants to enter the country.

3.-Support for Trump's immigration policy. It contains the messages that, in general, refer to the different measures proposed by President Trump to control migratory movements in the country.

4.-Criticism of Congress. It refers to the messages in which the President directly questions or accuses Congress of the neglect, slowness, or laxity of the legislation on immigration and, specifically, in relation to DACA.

5.-Criticism of the judiciary. It contains messages in which the President questions the work of the judiciary in cases related to immigrants.

6.-Criticism of the previous immigration policy. It contains the messages in which Trump launches generic criticism of the immigration policy of previous Presidents and how this is the cause of the current problems of insecurity coupled with the number of illegal immigrants in the country.

7.- Criticism of the press. This refers to the tweets posted by the President that criticize the news organizations for their reporting on immigration, migrants, and their communities.

Of all these variables and after the complete reading of the message, one is selected since they are mutually exclusive variables. The second analysis examines the approach adopted in the message, which can be positive, negative, or neutral. As before, one is selected after reading the complete message as they are mutually exclusive variables.

The third qualitative analysis examines the assessment that the President makes about immigrants in his messages, implicitly or explicitly. In this case, based on previous studies according to which Trump's discourse on immigration is based on the repetition of negative stereotypes about migrants (Carrasco, 2017; Green, 2016; Wright and Esses, 2019), we determined the following statements: illegal, that generate insecurity, criminals, dangerous, exploiters of the system, rapists, drug traffickers and system abusers. Although methodologically, the variable with the greatest weight or most significant in the message will be indicated in exclusive terms, it is expected that several of them may appear superimposed in the same message, although with a secondary role.

FINDINGS

After compiling the tweets related to immigration published in the official Twitter account of President Trump, from January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2019, a total of 368 tweets were found. From this, each tweet has been treated as a unit of analysis. Of these, 38 correspond to the first year in the White House, while 330 are from the second year of his presidential term. This first finding shows a greater emphasis on the political discourse on immigration during the second

year of President Trump term. This means that 89% of the sample corresponds to his second year as President of the United States.

A clear trend towards critical content messages is observed in immigration-related tweets posted during Trump's first year in the White House, as only 34% of tweets lacked critical content. However, in the second year there was a significant drop in the weight of criticism content messages, since they only accounted for 46% of the messages posted in that period. In this sense, it cannot be inferred that there is a real setback in critical messages since a good part of the messages expressed in defense of his migration policy also have a critical perspective towards those who oppose it. In this way, it is observed how 54.19% of the messages of support for his policy have a high criticism charge against those he considers enemies of Mr. Trump immigration policy; Although this means that 45.81% of the messages classified in this variable do not have critical elements, this is mainly because a good part of these are messages in which Trump publicly supports a Republican candidate. It is important to note that such messages support candidates for a seat in Congress or for Governor, emphasizing their support for the tightening of the immigration containment measures that Trump defends. However, because each tweet is considered a unit of analysis that should only be coded in one of the pre-established variables, a categorization of support for the President's immigration policy was chosen when it had more weight than criticism in the published message.

Within the messages with critical content published in both periods, the Democrats are the main target of his criticism since they disagree with his immigration policy and do not support their legislative proposals on it. Thus, 47% of the messages in the first year and 40.6% in the second year are directly aimed at attacking the position adopted by the Democratic Party and its members, as well as blaming them for the negative effect derived from the presence of immigrants in the country. In addition, Trump also dedicated part of his messages to criticize the previous immigration policy, especially from President Obama, this being the subject of 3% of the tweets in 2017 and 2.1% in 2018.

Along with the Democrats, the U.S. Congress and the judiciary are also the subject of their critical messages, which is a direct way of attacking the division of powers enshrined in the

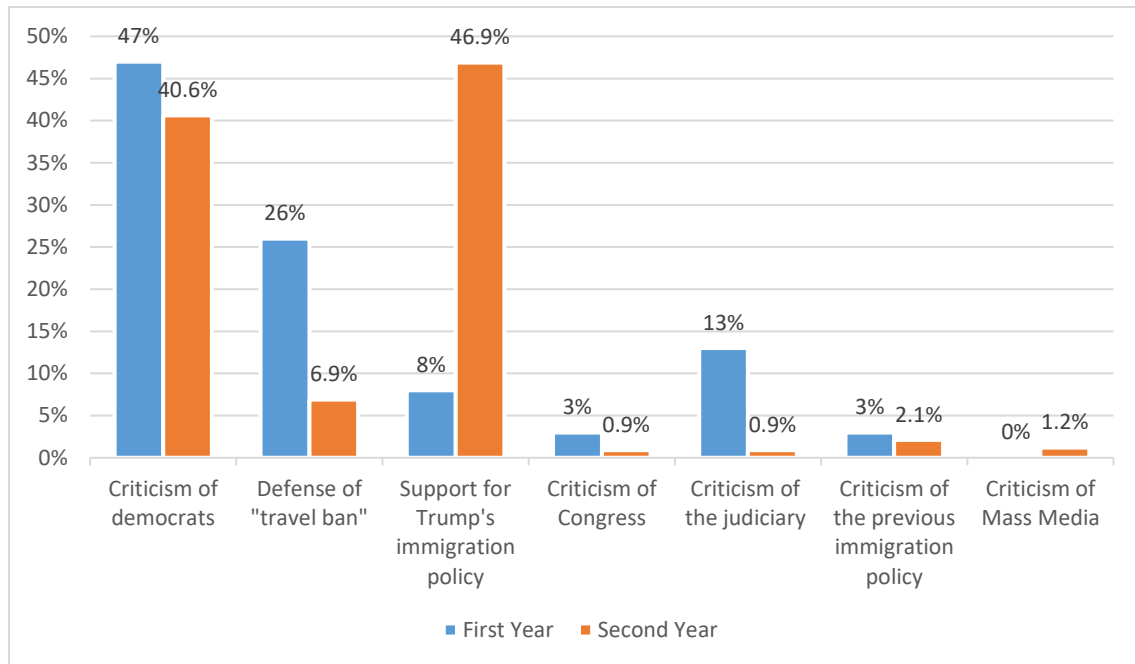
Constitution of 1787. Although in the first year analyzed these institutions receive a higher percentage of attention in his tweets than in the second year. In the case of the legislative branch, criticism occupies 3% in the first year and 0.9% in the second; while, in the case of the judiciary, this is the target of 13% of the tweets in the first year and 0.9% in the second.

The significance of critical messages in the study makes this analysis in line with previous studies that demonstrate President Trump's tendency towards a populist, aggressive and unfounded discourse as the basis of his communication strategy on social media (Kreiss, 2017; Lockhart, 2018; Ott and Dickinson, 2019; Bucy, Foley, Lukito et al, 2020; Ross and Caldwell, 2020)

Criticism aside, Trump's political discourse on immigration on Twitter focused on defending both his immigration policy in general and his legislative proposal. The tweets related to the defense of his immigration policy went from 8% during the first year in the White House to 46.9% during the second, being the most used variable in his second year in office. This may be due to the holding of the mid-term elections and the fulfillment of one of the fundamental missions of the electoral campaigns, which is none other than defending the action carried out until now, specifically the objective would be to "sell government actions as best possible" and his government program (Simón, 2019: 73), as well as his electoral promises. In fact, those messages in which the President endorsed and defended a Republican candidate in the Sunbelt States, he did emphasize how those candidates were staunch defenders of his immigration policy. This event led us to classify these posted messages as defending Trump's immigration policy.

Figure 1.

Frames most frequently used by Trump tweets related to immigration during his first and second year in office



Source: data extracted from Twitter and calculated by the authors.

The analysis of the messages published during the first two years of President regarding migratory movements on the southern border of the United States reveals a tendency to use qualifiers, either explicitly or implicitly, with a high pejorative load. As can be seen in the graph, only around 11% of the total lack a negative qualification towards immigrants. Thus, 89% of the tweets refer to them mainly as illegal, criminal, pre-dangerous and traffickers.

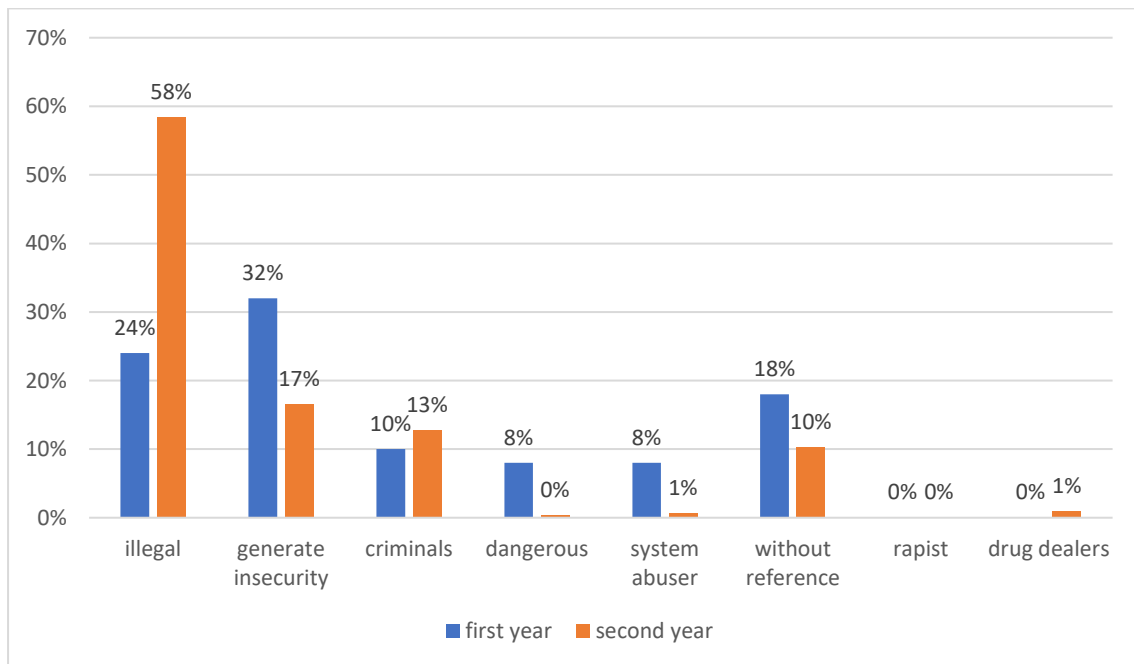
In fact, it is common to find more than one of these qualifiers simultaneously explicitly in a good number of tweets. In these cases, the choice was made to select the variable to which Trump gave more weight in his message, thus being the one that had the greatest impact on the researcher. Such a situation can be seen, for example, in the message published on December 31, 2018 in which he states *"I campaigned on Border Security, which you cannot have without a strong and powerful Wall. Our Southern Border has long been an "Open Wound," where drugs, criminals (including human traffickers) and illegals would pour into our Country. Dems should get back here an fix now!"* Or in the message published on July 30, 2018 in which he wrote *"Illegal immigration is a top National Security problem. After decades of playing games, with the whole World laughing at the stupidity of our immigration laws, and with Democrats*

thinking... that Open Borders, large scale Crime, and abolishing ICE is good for them, we must get smart and finally do what must be done for the Safety and Security of our Country!"

If attention is focused on each of the two years analyzed, it can be seen how the two most used variables are those that classify immigrants as illegal, 24% in the first year and 58% in the second year, and as generators of citizen insecurity 32% in the first year and 16% in the second. Thus, these two variables combined exceed 50% of the tweets in both years, even exceeding 70% in the second year. In both periods, the third most used variable is the one that classifies immigrants as criminals, 10% in the first year and 12% in the second one). The rest of the variables with negative content (dangerous, abusers of the system and traffickers) have a lower incidence in both years, although they are still somewhat more relevant during the first year of his mandate, resulting in 26% of the tweets in the first year and only 1.5% in the second year. It is manifest that Trump sought to associate any of these qualifiers with the immigrant group which has the ultimate goal of building an idea in the collective imagination that immigrants are a group of people that is harmful to the American society and against whom it is necessary to protect oneself, justifying this way the construction of the wall and the hardening the law enforcement of immigration.

Figure 2.

Main Themes related to immigration messages posted by President Trump during his first and second year in office

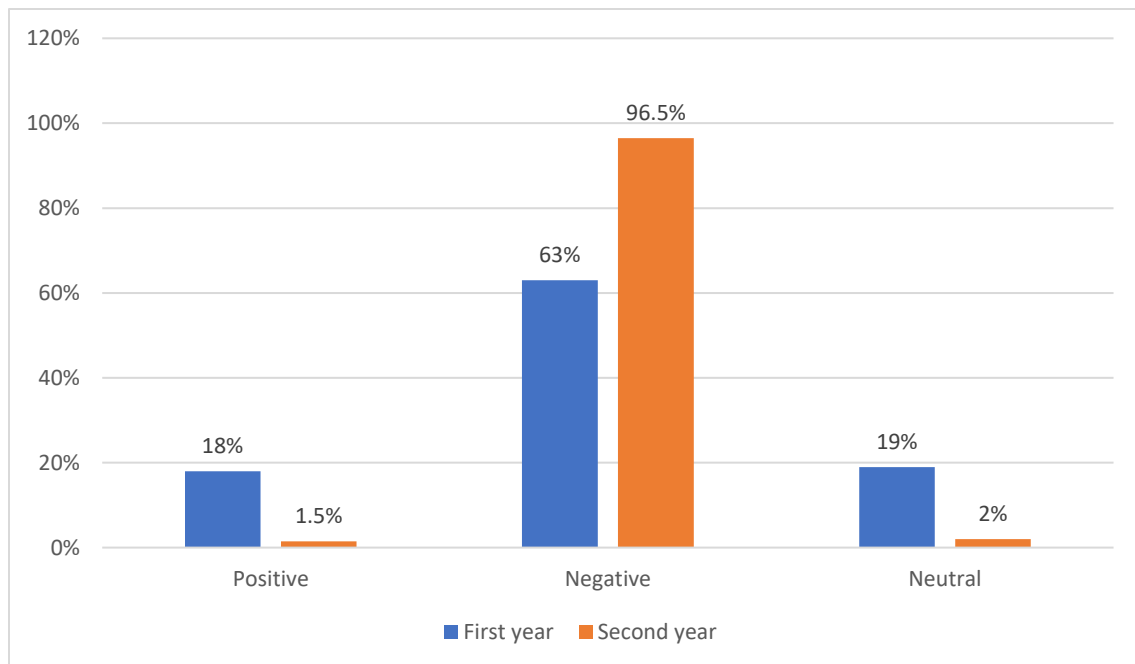


Source: data extracted from Twitter and calculated by the authors.

The analysis of Mr. Trump tweets shows a pattern in his messages that is mostly negative. That is, it publishes messages in which it uses expressions, evaluations, and qualifications that seek to point out immigrants as those responsible for the problems of crime, drug trafficking, insecurity, and problems with the system in the United States. Thus, this attitude is in crescendo, since while in the first year the number of messages with a negative focus rose to 63%, during the second this figure skyrockets to reach 96.5%. This finding coincides with the results derived from previous studies, according to which, Trump's speech is characterized by being negative, inaccurate, populist, and prone to humiliate others. This hardening of the approach intends, on the one hand, to put pressure on the rest of the branches of power to obtain support for his immigration policy and, on the other hand, to increase the social support of American citizens to his postulates, especially about his vision of the concept of citizenship.

Figure 3.

Focus (positive, negative, or neutral) of the tweets posted by President Trump during his first and second year in office.



Source: data extracted from Twitter and calculated by the authors.

The target recipients of Trump's political discourse on social media about immigration policy are US citizens. That is, 68% of the total tweets on migration policy in the period analyzed and 70% of the tweets, both in the first year and in the second year, are directed at the American public. This is mainly due to the president's objective of persuading and convincing the public both of his critical view of the political activity promoted by the Democrats, as well as the benefits of his measures to control illegal immigration and avoid the problems that he attributes to such migratory groups. Likewise, there is a clear intention of President Trump to convey his negative and stereotyped vision of all immigrants, as indicated above, linking them to frames of criminality and insecurity. In this way, by linking both elements, it is clear that Trump intends to reach the public towards the impossibility of his slogan "*Make America Great Again*" because of the negative roles of the immigrant community and of those who prevent his measures to control immigration.

Although Mr. Trump mostly directs his messages to all American citizens, a growing interest is observed in the second year to directly addressing the voters of a specific State. In this way, compared to 7% in the first year, in the second year 21% of their tweets were focused on the voters of one of those states. This is due to the fact that, during their second year, the mid-term elections were taking place and in supporting the Republican candidates from the Southern states who advocated a strong immigration policy along the same lines proposed by Trump. Thus, he usually referred to the candidates as tough on the borders and candidates who would fight against crime and insecurity caused by illegal immigration.

Also, in relation to the target audience of their tweets, there is also a tendency to question, from a critical perspective, the other branches of power. That is, the United States Congress and different levels of the Judiciary are questioned directly by the President in several tweets. Thus, on the one hand, during the first year analyzed, 5% was addressed to the Department of Justice, questioning its work in relation to immigrants, while in the second year these messages fell to 0.3% of the total. On the other hand, 11% of the messages in the first year and 5.1% of the tweets in the second, are addressed to the United States Congress, which demands more restrictive and forceful legislation for immigrants.

Finally, both Democrats and Republicans in general are also recipients of his tweets. In this sense, based on our results, the volume of tweets addressed to the opposition party and its members is much more significant. Thus, during the first year, 5% of your messages will go to them, compared to 3.3% of the total in the second year. In those messages, the President makes use of this social platform to publicly replicate the political debate on immigration that confronted him, on behalf of his party and against the Democratic Party. In this way, Trump criticizes the Democrats not only for not following his policies, but even for inaction on what he considers a problem of vital importance to the nation. As an example of such intentions, in his message posted on January 12, 2019, he notes *“We have a massive Humanitarian Crisis at our Southern Border. We will be out for a long time unless the Democrats come back from their “vacations” and get back to work. I am in the White House ready to sign!”*

Image 1.

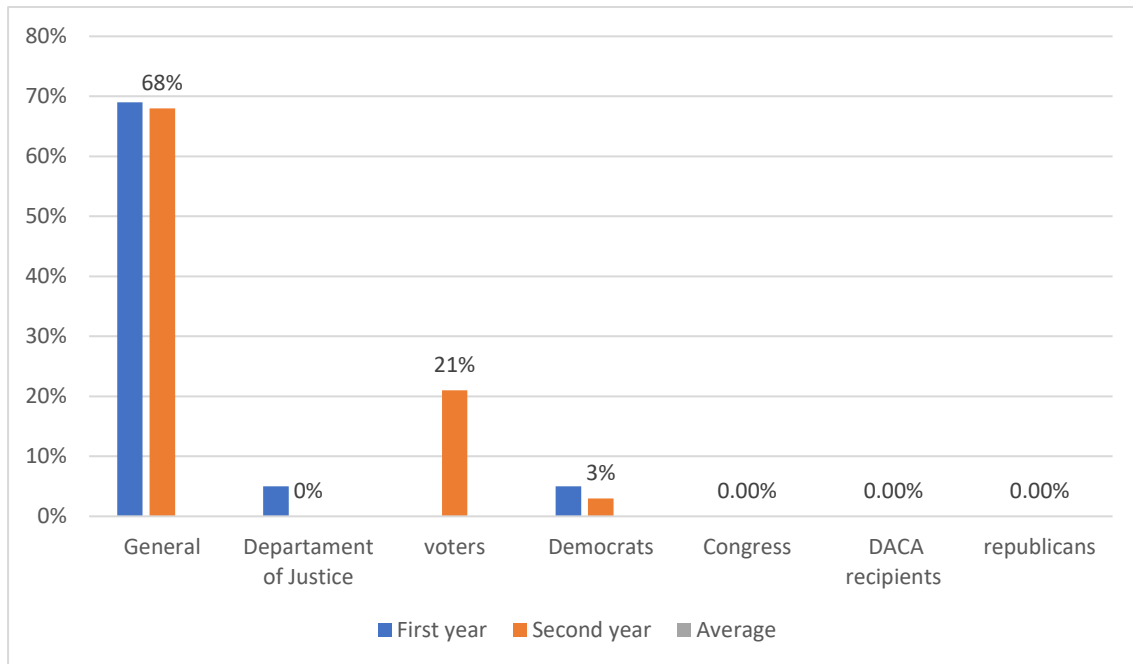
Referenced President Trump’s tweet



Source: Twitter

Figure 4.

Main political targets of President Trump related to immigration.



Source: data extracted from Twitter and calculated by the authors.

Discussion and Conclusions

After the analysis of the tweets published by President Trump on his personal account (@realDonaldTrump) between January 20, 2017 and January 20, 2019, an immigration discourse characterized by the presence of a populist tone is observed. The posts are aggressive and highly critical, which seeks to offend and stigmatize the immigrant community. This research seeks to understand the political communication of President Trump and to unwrap how his speech on Twitter is characterized by using a populist, manipulator, and humiliating tone, as well as exaggerated, superfluous, inaccurate, untruthful, and often unsubstantiated language (Kessler et.al. 2020).

Based on the similarities with previous studies, the present investigation yields its own results that contribute to the generation of knowledge about the use and abuse of social media by public figures. This is so because, based on the research questions posed and the results

obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn: first, it is clear the tendency of Mr. Trump to publish messages with critical content directed towards immigrants and those opposed to his immigration policy. Likewise, there is a tendency of increasing tweets aimed at defending his immigration policy. This pattern is evident in both years of his mandate, although in the second year the percentage of the relative weight of critical messages decreases and the weight of messages of support and defense of his immigration policy increases substantially.

In these two anchoring points of his communication, it is worth noting how, that the main objective of his criticism is the Democrats, whom he blames not only for the laxity of the existing regulations on immigration but also for the impossibility of solving the problem by implementing his policy recommendations. The problem with the appeal of slogans like *Make America Great Again* and its permeation in society is that "projecting the idea that Democrats are not really Americans constitutes a frontal attack on mutual tolerance" (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018: 152). On the other hand, it is also worth emphasizing how, especially during his second year in office, the defense of his immigration policy began to play a leading role in his language, revolving around two fundamental ideas: the defense of those candidates who support the tightening of the country's immigration policies and the defense of those specific measures that the White House advocates. In this way, he intends to convince the public, through authoritative arguments and the presentation of his measures, that it is possible to put an end to the problem and that he is the only one capable of materializing the change so that *Make America Great Again* is feasible.

Thus, this dichotomy between defense and criticism as priority axes of his discourse, may show an intention to polarize the discourse. This is so because, instead of seeking ways of understanding and consensus to reach an agreement and some agreed measures in this area, he chooses to create two confronting blocs between those who support him and those who do not, showing them increasingly distant from each other and almost irreconcilable. This is part of the trend towards affective polarization that exists in the United States, where there is less and less possibility of dialogue and agreement between Republicans and Democrats, a reality that can end up leading to deep hostility between both political supporters (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018:146)

Secondly, the results show an eminently stereotyped and pejorative image of the immigrant community. In this way through their tweets, directly or indirectly, he tends to classify migrants as illegal, traffickers, criminals, profiteers and dangerous. By repeating these immigrants' images, he pursues a political strategy based on fear and insecurity so that true Americans position themselves close to the measures advocated by his Presidency. This type of communication strategy is widely studied in the academic field on populism (Frei and Kaltwasser, 2008; Wodak, 2015; Nai, 2018). These studies propose the idea of how, through this type of discourse, it is intended to give a rather basic, simplistic, and easily understandable explanation for the voters, both about the problems and of the causes of those problems. In the same way, the message is focused on more subjective, emotional, and passionate issues, to awaken less rational feelings, such as indignation, mistrust, fear and hatred, in order to keep the friend-foe dichotomy in American society (Frei and Kaltwasser, 2008: 133). This, in turn, helps to establish the frames to be used in the political and media agendas (Lacoff, 2004).

Third, and to reach as many fellow citizens as possible through this simplistic and direct discourse, it can be seen how the primary recipient of his tweets is the general public, 70% in the first year and 69 % in the second one. His intention, therefore, is to try to convince the largest number of Americans, specifically voters, that changes must be made to tougher immigration policy. He also mentions repeatedly that by recognizing that immigrants are the cause of the problems of the system such as insecurity, crime, drug trafficking, and the deficiencies in public services, actions need to be tough. In addition, Twitter offers the possibility of reaching directly not only the user followers through retweets, likes, and comments, but also others' followers and the followers of the followers, and so on, allowing exponentially multiple ways of diffusion and communication impacts. This process of diffusion in Twitter makes a message easier to be perceived by platform users who are reached not because they are Mr. Trump followers, but because they question him. Thus, these messages achieve a greater impact on the public, serving as an exponential loudspeaker for their political discourse, bypassing the filters of the traditional news media by reaching the user without any intermediary.

Fourth, the vast majority of the messages posted by President Trump look like a negative microblogging. In fact, during the second year of his tenure, this feature became more accentuated, as the messages went from 63% to 96% with a clearly negative focus. This finding demonstrates how the negativity of the approach in Mr. Trump tweets, which is a typical element of populist political discourse, and which he distances his immigration discourse from a space to resolve social conflicts by political actors (Mendé and Smith, 1999). On the contrary, what this type of discursive approach achieves is to increase political polarization, since it prevents the rapprochement of positions, dialogue and understanding between the political class. In addition, the problem that can emerge from this political polarization is that it can be easily transferred to the social sphere (Hong and Kim, 2016; Bail, Argyle, et al, 2018). This unfortunately means that the consequences in the long term could result in a major negative impact on the coexistence and cohesion of the American society as a whole.

However, and even with the relevance of the findings derived from the conclusions of this investigation, one must also be aware of both its limits and the field of study that remains to be conducted. In this sense, on the one hand, it can be understood that the present study may be limited in relation to the selection of the sample since a series of keywords have been used for it, in such a way that they could have been left out of the analysis. In other words, similar immigration-related tweets that do not contain those words. However, this does not prevent us from highlighting the validity of the research since a rigorous method has been applied in the selection of the sample, for which the careful determination of the most relevant words is essential to achieve solid and valid results.

On the other hand, the inexistence of a framework compared to other relevant issues in Trump's political discourse and his agenda in the White House can be considered a limit. Even though this comparative analysis could show a more complete x-ray of Trump's political communication on Twitter, it is no less true that this can be covered by thematic frame studies on Mr. Trump communication. Lastly, the fixing of the time frame could be considered a limit insofar as it leaves out the second half of his term. However, two points here, one is that the first two years of a President's term in the US are the critical years to politically advance promises

made during the campaign; and second, the sample obtained during the first two years is sufficient and allows solid conclusions to be drawn that serve as a bridge for future research that contains the President's four years in the White House, which as we know now were full of political turmoil.

To conclude, this research aims to contribute to enriching the academic literature related to the use of media platforms by political actors in North America. For us, as researchers, it is important to understand how major political actors, as the President of the U.S. shapes political communication about immigration, which is considered a major national policy issue. Specifically, it is crucial to closely examine the posts in the @realDonaldTrump account and its imprint both in the American political system and in its citizens. This, both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, helps to generate a continuous analysis of the political and discursive reality, the role of social media, as well as its consequences and implications into the American societal fabric.

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