

A Functional Analysis of VOX's Climate Crisis Discourse on Twitter/X

Análisis funcional del discurso de Vox sobre la crisis climática en Twitter/X

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Abstract

The climate crisis stands as one of the foremost threats to humanity, demanding urgent measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Despite its critical nature, climate policy has become a contentious issue, intensified by ineffective communication strategies and polarized public discourse. Social media platforms have become significant arenas for opinion formation, often exacerbating misinformation and public harassment. This research employs the Functional Theory of Discourse to analyze on the Spanish far-right party Vox's discourse on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) regarding environmental policies. A total of 91 posts from Vox's official account and its leader, Santiago Abascal, were analyzed over six months, from September 2022 to February 2023. The posts were categorized based on their discursive functions: acclaims, attacks, and defenses, with further subcategorization into policy and character appeals. The analysis reveals that Vox's communication strategy balances attacks and acclaims. Attacks primarily targeted the Spanish government and international bodies like the European Union, using themes of dishonesty, incompetence and opposition to climate measures. Acclaims highlighted Vox's proposals for energy sovereignty, opposition to the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law and leadership qualities. Therefore, Vox's discourse on environmental policies is characterized by simplicity and a dual focus on attacks and acclaims. Their messaging promotes nationalistic and conservative ideals, positioning themselves against progressive and environmentalist ideologies. This strategy of polarization and confrontation, aided by multimedia elements, effectively engages their audience but poses challenges for democratic debate and the implementation of effective climate policies. Future research should explore the implications of such discursive strategies on public opinion and policy-making.

Keywords: Climate crisis, Social media, Vox, Far-right, Environmental policy.

Resumen

La crisis climática es una de las principales amenazas para la humanidad y exige medidas urgentes para reducir las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero. A pesar de su carácter crítico, la política climática se ha convertido en un tema polémico, intensificado por estrategias de comunicación ineficaces y un discurso público polarizado. Las redes sociales se han convertido en importantes escenarios para la formación de opinión, exacerbando a menudo la desinformación y el acoso público. Esta investigación emplea la Teoría Funcional del Discurso para analizar el discurso del partido español de extrema derecha Vox en la red social X (antes Twitter) en relación con las políticas medioambientales. Se analizaron un total de 91 publicaciones de la cuenta oficial de Vox y su líder, Santiago Abascal, durante seis meses, de septiembre de 2022 a febrero de 2023. Los mensajes se categorizaron según sus funciones discursivas: aclamaciones, ataques y defensas, con una subcategorización adicional en apelaciones a la política y al carácter. El análisis revela que la estrategia de comunicación de Vox equipara ataques y elogios. Los ataques se dirigieron principalmente al Gobierno español y a organismos internacionales como la Unión Europea, empleando la falta de honestidad, incompetencia y oposición a las medidas

climáticas. Los elogios destacaron las propuestas de Vox a favor de la soberanía energética, su oposición a la Ley de Cambio Climático y Transición Energética y sus dotes de liderazgo. Por lo tanto, el discurso de Vox sobre las políticas medioambientales se caracteriza por su sencillez y un doble enfoque entre ataques y aclamaciones. Sus mensajes apelan a ideales nacionalistas y conservadores, posicionándose en contra de las ideologías progresistas y ecologistas. Esta estrategia de polarización y confrontación, ayudada por elementos multimedia, engancha eficazmente a su audiencia, pero plantea retos para el debate democrático y la aplicación de políticas climáticas eficaces. Futuras investigaciones deberían explorar las implicaciones de tales estrategias entre la opinión pública y en la formulación de políticas.

Palabras clave: Crisis climática, Redes sociales, Vox, Extrema derecha, Políticas medioambientales.

Introduction

The climate crisis represents one of the principal threats to current and future generations. In its Sixth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) concludes that human influence on planetary warming is unequivocal and that, without urgent measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the consequences will become increasingly severe. Despite the significance of these findings, environmental policies have become one of the most debated scientific issues in recent history (Boykoff, 2009). One reason for this situation is the lack of effective communication strategies among media outlets (van der Linden, 2014), whose coverage has been criticized as sensationalist, decontextualized, and dominated by a Western perspective (Boykoff, 2010; Leon & Erviti, 2013; Lampis, 2013). Furthermore, there are social groups, lobbies, and political formations that continue to question or, at least, downplay the impact of the climate crisis, generating a parallel public debate that is detached from scientific evidence (Anderson et al., 2012; Howell et al., 2020).

In the past two decades, social media has become a crucial space for opinion-sharing and information-gathering on a variety of issues, taking a place once reserved for traditional media (Hermida et al., 2012), which are now seeing their influence on the collective imagination diminished (Luhmann, 2007). This audience migration to the digital realm has brought significant challenges, such as misinformation and public harassment, exemplified by the spread of hate speech (Gagliardone et al., 2015). In the context of the climate crisis, notable studies by Mede and Schroeder (2024) and Arce García and his team (2023) highlight the attacks on Greta Thunberg on social media, illustrating a confrontation of ideas with few boundaries.

Thus, political ideology has become a key factor in addressing the climate crisis (Goebbert et al., 2012), and several studies highlight the predominance of interpretive frameworks aligned with far-right parties on the web (Bennet & Livingston, 2018; Hameleers, 2020), whose presence is much more extensive than that of other political formations, likely due to the traditional media's veto of such alternative discourses (Darius & Stephany, 2022). In the Spanish context, Vox has established itself as the political party with the greatest presence and activity on social media. With a strategy based on polarization and confrontation, the party led by Santiago Abascal has experienced exponential growth across various platforms, which have become its communication channel independent of traditional media (Cea Esteruelas, 2019; Castro Martínez & Díaz

Morilla, 2021). On its profiles, Vox has expressed its staunch opposition to global proposals to combat climate change while launching a series of policies focused on the national territory.

Due to the significant increase in its social reach and presence in various municipal and regional governments—in coalition with Partido Popular—this research adopts the functional theory approach (Benoit, 2007) to examine Vox's discursive strategy on the social network X (formerly Twitter) regarding environmental policies, with particular attention to the legitimation of proposals and the objectives of attacks through its publications.

Theoretical background

This section addresses the implications of political communication on social networks, with a particular focus on far-right formations and, specifically, the political party Vox. Subsequently, the main threats posed by digital platforms to the effective implementation of environmental policies, encompassed under the term climate obstructionism, will be discussed. Finally, the Functional Theory of Discourse will be presented as a theoretical reference for the development of this research, defining its scope and the main precedents in the study of political communication.

X, the Far-Right on Social Networks and Vox

Technological advances have promoted a shift towards bidirectional communication between political leaders and civil society (Tuñón Navarro & Carral Vilar, 2019), engaging audiences, particularly younger ones, in decisions debated at the highest levels (Hendricks & Denton, 2010; Campos Domínguez, 2017; Bouza & Tuñón, 2018).

Among all social networks, X, the evolution of Twitter since its acquisition by Elon Musk, is the most relevant platform for political communication (López Meri, Marcos García & Casero Ripollés, 2017), as it facilitates direct conversation between leaders and their audiences (Ganesh & Froio, 2020), thereby allowing the public agenda to be set (Rivas de Roca & García Gordillo, 2020) in a constant process of political content generation known as cyberdemocracy (Lévy, 2004). For these reasons, the short messaging network has become a fundamental battleground for far-right parties in recent years (KhosraviNik, 2017). Using the Brexit process as a reference, KhosraviNik examines the influence of echo chambers in justifying the rise of populist parties among the working classes, driven by national rhetoric opposed to globalization and elites (Enli, 2017). This narrative extends across all geographic areas (Ernst et al., 2017; Alonso Muñoz & Casero Ripollés, 2019; Pérez Curiel, 2020), representing a threat to institutions and democracy itself through the spread of misinformation, propaganda and the promotion of polarization and division within society (Guerrero Solé, Mas Manchón & Virós i Martín, 2023).

Brown (2019) explores the contradictory and complex nature of contemporary far-right parties, which have a strong presence on social media. In their discourse, they combine nativism (with elements of racism, nationalism, and Christian conservatism) with neoliberalism (demonization of the state, defense of capital and freedom, and control of labor). In Spain, the party led by Santiago Abascal entered politics in 2013 to occupy a space that Mariano Rajoy's Partido Popular had abandoned by adopting, according to Vox, a more

centrist position. This new party thus captures the discontent of a segment of the Spanish right for whom issues such as national unity, traditional values, and economic freedom were perceived to be under threat (Tuñón Navarro & Bouzas Blanco, 2023). Although it did not achieve institutional representation until 2018, when it won 12 seats in the Andalusian parliament, the far-right party currently holds a total of 33 deputies and 3 senators in the national chambers, 6 MEPs, and representation in several regional and municipal governments. Its rise, primarily supported by vote acquisition through social networks, has driven a growing line of study (Barrio, 2020; Oleaque Moreno, 2020), particularly related to its strategies during election periods.

The 2019 national elections, in which Vox first entered the parliament, marked the starting point of its successful digital strategy, achieved through discourse simplification and the hyper-presence of its candidate (Aladro & Requeijo, 2020). Vox's digital discourse has been analyzed from multiple perspectives, considering its language (Capdevila Gómez & Moragas Fernández, 2023), image composition (López Rabadán & Doménech Fabregat, 2021), topics addressed (Suau Gomila & Sánchez Meza, 2023), use of emotional appeals (Pérez Altable, 2023), and virality techniques in its posts (Cozzo & Prignano, 2023). Consequently, the party follows in the footsteps of leaders like Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Matteo Salvini in Italy, progressively replacing its presence in traditional media, which it distrusts, with the broad showcase represented by social networks, where it can exercise absolute control over the message (Vázquez Barrio & Campos Zabala, 2020) and influence the political and public life of Spanish society (Guerrero Solé, Mas Manchón & Virós i Martín, 2023).

Disinformation, Climate Obstructionism and Environmental Policies

The democratization of Internet access has not only allowed users to interact and share content but has also led to less desirable consequences, such as the proliferation of misinformation, a problem affecting the credibility of traditional information sources (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2020).

In this regard, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms misinformation and disinformation. According to Hameleers (2020), the former refers to the unconscious dissemination of false or inaccurate data, while the latter involves an intention to manipulate the message for gain, usually political.

Misinformation has seen significant growth since 2016, a year marked by significant events such as the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's electoral victory. This reality has extended into academia (Kucharski, 2016), which addresses the phenomenon of disinformation from multiple angles. During the coronavirus pandemic, Nguyen and Catalan Matamoros (2020) observed an increase in misinformation linked to scientific fields, leading to the coining of a specific term for this case: "infodemic" (Zarocostas, 2020).

However, scientific disinformation is not only associated with health. Communication regarding the climate crisis has also been affected by this reality due to the political nature of the debate (Lewandowsky, 2020; Levy et al., 2021). In this context, those opposed to adopting solutions against global warming can no longer be categorized as deniers, as they do not deny this phenomenon (Moreno & Thornton, 2022); it is more appropriate to speak of climate obstructionism (Almiron & Moreno, 2022), focusing their efforts on nullifying climate policies. According to Moreno Olmeda, their strategy involves "creating and disseminating misinformation about climate science and climate change in general" (2022: 121). The climate obstructionism strategy aims, as per the Climate Social Science Network (2021), to influence public, political,

and media debate to discourage public support for the adoption of environmental measures, thereby maintaining the current status quo.

Several studies have corroborated the relationship between far-right parties and the spread of misinformation about the climate crisis on social networks (Hultman et al., 2019; Vowles & Hultman, 2021). These political formations oppose all kinds of climate policies, as noted in the study by Schaller and Carius (2019), making it pertinent to analyze Vox's environmental discourse. Moreno and Thornton (2022) indicate that this party relies on nationalist arguments and polarizing elements to reject any form of climate action, through the study of its alternative proposal to the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law.

Functional Theory of Discourse and Research Background

The Functional Theory of Discourse (Benoit, 2007) has become an indispensable tool for studying political communication, providing a useful framework for analyzing the messages that different formations disseminate to persuade potential voters. Based on the premise that voting is a comparative act and that the primary objective of political speeches is vote acquisition, this approach has its roots in the study published by Benoit, Pier and Blaney (1997), where the authors outline the main principles for understanding the most common persuasive mechanisms in electoral contexts to stand out against opponents: attack, acclaim, and defense. These functions will be further developed in the methodological chapter.

These functions are related to Aristotle's classical rhetoric theory, which introduced the concept of *ethos* as a means of persuasion based on the speaker's credibility. In this sense, the strategies proposed by Benoit et al. (1997) could be used to enhance the image of politicians, damage that of their opponents, and protect the credibility or *ethos* of political figures.

For Mouffe (2005), the confrontation between different political positions is necessary, but it must occur according to a set of shared norms and by accepting all perspectives as legitimate. The author advocates for an agonistic relationship between political actors, in which they are opponents, as opposed to an antagonistic relationship, where they are seen as existential enemies. This view tends to weaken democracy, as there is no dialogue between the actors, and they are not recognized as legitimate.

The Functional Theory of Discourse emerged linked to electoral debates, specifically to the American elections. The foundational work of this approach analyzes the communicative strategy of three key contests for accessing the White House: John F. Kennedy vs. Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter vs. Ronald Reagan, and Michael Dukakis vs. George Bush. Benoit delved into the latter duel with Brazeal in a subsequent study (2002). One of the most recent cases, Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 elections, was analyzed in Vargas Plasencia's doctoral thesis (2019), with a slight methodological variation.

Benoit's theory has been replicated and validated in various political and geographic contexts, although Téllez, Muñiz, and Ramírez (2010) indicated that its implementation outside North America remains limited. For example, these authors compared the televised debates of the presidential elections in Mexico, Spain, and the United States between 2006 and 2008, noting significant differences among the candidates. While political acclaims prevail in America, attack is the preferred function in Spain.

Mexico has a significant number of examples based on functional theory. Echeverría Victoria (2006, 2008) analyzes the Mexican presidential debates of 2006 and 2012, respectively, identifying the predominance of propositional strategies focused on political projects rather than disqualifications of opponents. This finding

is replicated in the works of Cruz Valencia (2018, 2019), which also examine the 2012 and 2018 elections, incorporating television spots as study material. Television ads are also analyzed by Maldonado Maldonado et al. (2016) for the 2016 regional elections. This research group found a direct relationship between viewing these broadcasts and voter participation.

Continuing with the American continent, Pérez Taype (2021) analyzes the speeches of Fernando Olivera and Alan García in the 2016 Peruvian presidential race. The author establishes a clear difference in the strategies of each, with Olivera being much more aggressive than his rival. However, the election resulted in the victory of Alan García, who opted for silence in response to the attacks received during the campaign. Identity construction is fundamental in a region marked by a tumultuous past, as noted by Olguín Valencia (2013) in his analysis of the 2011 duel between Keiko Fujimori and Ollanta Humala, linked to the figure of the 1990s Peruvian president, Alberto Fujimori, and his legacy.

In Spain, notable studies include those by Herrero, who has published with Benoit (2009) and Römer Pieretti (2013) analyses of the 2008 and 2011 debates, with Mariano Rajoy, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba as protagonists. Among their main conclusions, the authors highlight the political tension, with political reproach as the main argument, especially for the opposition candidate, who in both cases was Mariano Rajoy. In the second debate, it is noteworthy that neither candidate held the presidency at the time of the elections, limiting the other functions of the discourse.

Beyond electoral debates, this research posits that the Functional Theory of Discourse can and should adapt to the new possibilities offered by technological advances. As Marín Lladó and Pérez Tornero (2020) point out, social networks have transformed political communication, and their effectiveness depends on adapting to changes and continuous interaction between political actors and the electorate.

One of the primary uses of these platforms among political representatives is the construction and defense of their public image (Quevedo Redondo, Portalés Oliva & Berrocal Gonzalo, 2016), especially through X. In this regard, Rodríguez Gómez (2022) notes the lack of interaction between candidates and their supporters, as they use this network solely as a means of dissemination. However, the public participates in this digital contest by showing their support or rejection of politicians and their proposals through the engagement generated. Osorio Andrade, Arango Espinal, and Rodríguez Orejuela's work (2020) reveals that messages containing attacks generate more interaction than other functions, especially if the content is personal rather than political.

Therefore, the Functional Theory of Discourse is revealed as an ideal tool to achieve the objectives pursued by this research, which we outline in the following section.

Methodology

This research utilizes Benoit's (2007) Functional Theory of Discourse, outlined in the theoretical framework, due to its efficacy in describing the strategies employed by political figures during campaign periods. Assuming that with the advent of social media, we are witnessing a perpetual electoral contest, the primary objective of this study is to analyze Vox's environmental discourse on social media through the lens of discourse functions theory.

Specifically, the study aims to identify the use of discourse functions in the posts shared by the party (@vox_es) and its leader (@Santi_ABASCAL) on the social media platform X. It will analyze the most recurrent thematic categories and subcategories in the messages and, finally, upon conclusion of the paper, provide a comparative analysis between the findings and the reviewed literature to establish parallels and differences with similar research in this field.

Therefore, the specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- O1. To identify the discursive functions – acclaims, attacks, and defenses – in the X messages of Vox and its leader, Santiago Abascal, regarding environmental policies.
- O2. To examine which discursive functions are most frequently used by Vox and its leader on X in relation to environmental policies.
- O3. To explore the role of multimedia content published in X messages in amplifying the discursive functions of Vox and Santiago Abascal.
- O4. To analyze the most recurrent thematic categories and subcategories in the climate change messages of Vox and its leader, Santiago Abascal, on X.

To conduct this analysis, the original codebook has been adapted to include an identification section, which encompasses the date, the message, and the account from which it was posted, as detailed in *table 1*:

Table 1: Codebook

Date	Message		User
./././..	_____		@_____
Functions	Categories	Topics	
Acclaim	Policy	Past Deeds / General Goals / Future Plans	
	Character	Personal Qualities / Ideals / Leadership Ability	
Attack	Policy	Past Deeds / General Goals / Future Plans	
	Character	Personal Qualities / Ideals / Leadership Ability	
Defense	Policy	Past Deeds / General Goals / Future Plans	
	Character	Personal Qualities / Ideals / Leadership Ability	

Source: authors (based on Benoit, 2007)

The functions of political discourse are therefore categorized into acclaims, attacks, and defenses, based on the following criteria:

- a) Acclaims are positive statements, proposals, or declarations that highlight the strengths, advantages, or qualities of a politician or their party, thereby enhancing their image and the public's perception of them.
- b) Attacks are defined as any negative comments regarding an opponent or their party, emphasizing the weaknesses and disadvantages associated with their policies, proposals, or personal attributes.
- c) Defenses are understood as responses to attacks received, whether directed at the candidate or their party, and serve to prevent further attacks on the same issue and to mitigate or repair the damage to their image.

Regarding thematic categories and subcategories, each function is classified identically and summarized as follows:

- i. Political Issues refer to statements related to government actions, future perspectives and general objectives requiring intervention, showing preferences, opinions, and future plans.
- ii. Character Appeals refer to the traits, skills, and attributes of politicians, especially those that qualify them for their role. These can be ideals (principles and values embodied by the candidate or their party), qualities (integrity, honesty, courage), or leadership (ability, experience).

To ensure the reliability of the results, the analysis was conducted by two coders, achieving an agreement index higher than the minimum acceptable value of 0.8 (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), with a level of agreement of 0.89 according to Holsti's (1969) index.

Regarding the object of study, as outlined in the research objectives, the analysis focuses on environmental policy posts shared on the social media platform X by the Spanish far-right political party Vox (@vox_es) and its leader, Santiago Abascal (@Santi_ABASCAL), over a six-month period from September 2022 to February 2023. This time frame was chosen for convenience, while ensuring a sufficiently significant sample to achieve the set objectives, with a total of 91 posts analyzed. It covers a period of notable relevance in environmental matters, including events such as the presentation of the amendment to the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law, the COP 27 held in Egypt, and the European resolution banning the sale of combustion vehicles from 2035. To compile the sample, a deductive search was conducted using terms related to the climate crisis, the environment, and sustainability, including climate change, climate, environment, climate agenda, ecology, green/s, nature, sustainability, Agenda 2030, COP27, natural resources, energy, recycling, renewables, nuclear, greenhouse, CO2, warming, solar, and wind.

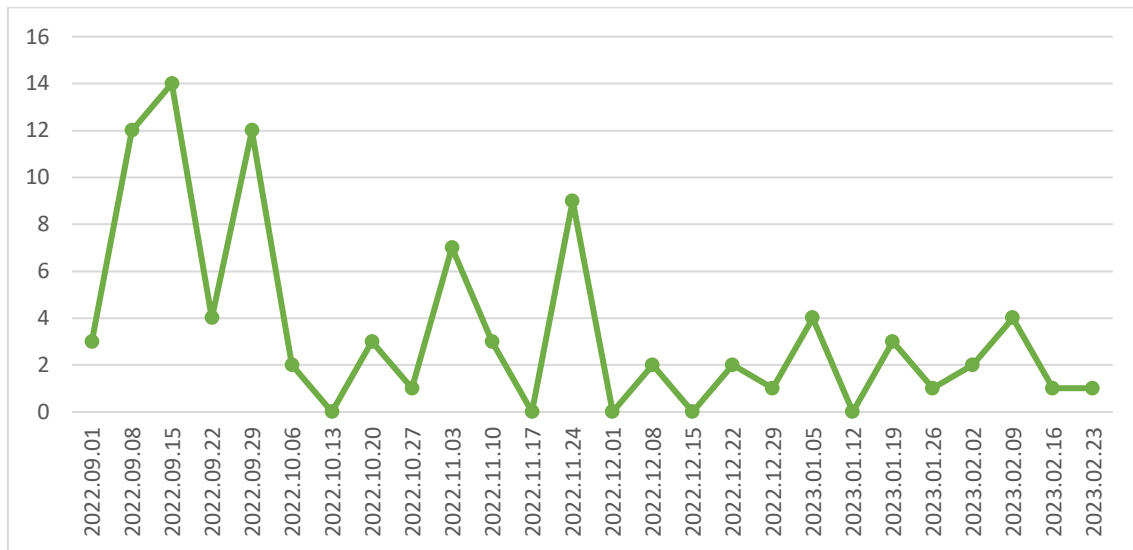
The decision to analyze posts shared on X is supported by the research reflected in the theoretical framework, which confirms that such content extends beyond the followers of a political organization due to resharing tools (Ganesh & Froio, 2020) and allows for the synthesis of political discourse into direct and fragmented messages (Rivas de Roca & García Gordillo, 2020).

Results

The following pages present the results of the analysis conducted on the 91 units of analysis that make up the sample, which include the environmental-related posts shared from the party's account (@vox_ex) and its president (@Santi_ABASCAL) on the X platform between September 1, 2022, and February 28, 2023. The contributions from both accounts are markedly different, with the party's profile accounting for 86% of the analyzed messages (n=78), while the leader contributes only 13.

The *figure* provided below illustrates the chronological distribution of these messages. It shows how several events act as significant catalysts for environmental discourse on social media, such as the Spanish government's control session held on September 14, the restrictions on electric vehicles proposed by France on September 26, and the COP27 summit in Egypt during November:

Figure 1: Chronological distribution of analyzed posts



Source: authors

The total number of functions detected amounts to 151, recognizing that a single post may contain multiple segments corresponding to different functions. As shown in *table 2*, the messages issued by these accounts are characterized by their simplicity, primarily presenting one or two discursive functions in each case:

Table 2: Number of functions contained in each post

Nº functions / post	Nº posts
1 function	41 posts (45%)
2 functions	42 posts (46%)
3 functions	6 posts (7%)
4 functions	2 posts (2%)

Source: authors

The general analysis of the discursive functions demonstrates that Vox's communication strategy regarding environmental policies shows a relative balance between attacks, which account for 53% of the cases, and acclaims, which reach 47%, as shown in *table 3*:

Table 3: Types of functions

	Policy	Character
Acclaims	37 (25%)	33 (22%)
Attacks	35 (23%)	46 (30%)
Defenses	0	0

Source: authors

The defensive function, on the other hand, is not used in any of the messages, despite the fact that during the analyzed period, the political party holds management positions at both local and regional levels. However, it opts not to address potential criticisms or attacks from other parties or opposing voices. To gain a broader perspective on these results, it is necessary to analyze each quadrant in isolation. Therefore, in the following sections, we will break down each of the categories and subcategories corresponding to the functions of discourse, with particular attention to the dominant narrative, the attack, and the resources used against its targets.

Analysis of Acclaims

Following the order established in the previous table, the first discourse function to analyze is the acclaim, which refers to positive messages that contribute to reinforcing the image of the party and its candidate by highlighting their strengths and qualities. *Table 4* summarizes the results obtained from the analysis of categories and subcategories related to this function:

Table 4: Categories and subcategories of the acclaim function

	Past Deeds	General Goals	Future Plans
Policy (n=37)	1 (1%)	18 (12%)	18 (12%)
	4 (3%)	19 (13%)	10 (7%)
Character (n=33)	Qualities	Ideals	Leadership

Source: authors

As shown by the data presented in the previous *table*, political issues play a crucial role in Vox's discursive strategy. Due to their limited experience in government, their messages focus on proposing broad objectives and future plans, aligning more with their role as an opposition party in the national political arena. Among their general objectives, the political formation aims to achieve energy sovereignty, optimize water management, protect the primary sector, and combat globalist elites. To accomplish these goals, their future plans include the approval of their energy sovereignty plan and a new national water plan, as well as the repeal of restrictions on free mobility within cities, such as the Madrid Central project.



The results obtained in the policy category resonate with the figures related to character, as the theme around which Vox's political discourse revolves at this point is ideals, highlighted by leadership qualities that contribute to their differentiation from other parties. The ideals conveyed by Vox through their publications are solidarity, understood as support for families and groups adversely affected by environmental policies; sovereignty, to exploit domestic natural resources without relying on external markets; and freedom, with a capacity for decision-making that has been seized by both national and international elites.



Within its role as an opposition party in the debate on environmental policies, the political formation incorporates messages that reinforce its leadership qualities aimed at reversing these measures. In this context, they not only position themselves as the first to foresee the consequences of climate agendas and propose tax reductions on energy bills but also as the sole proponents, alongside their union and allied media, of energy sovereignty.



Analysis of Attacks

Following the examination of acclaims, the analysis of the discursive function of attacks is presented. As noted in *Table 3*, attacks are the primary focus of the party's communication strategy. Furthermore, given their direct impact on the reputation and credibility of public institutions, as highlighted in the theoretical framework, we will also address the study of the key figures who are the targets of these disparaging messages.

Table 5: Categories and subcategories of the attack function

	Past Deeds	General Goals	Future plans
Policy (n=35)	30 (20%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)
Character (n=46)	19 (13%)	21 (14%)	6 (3%)
	Qualities	Ideals	Leadership

Source: authors

Table 5 highlights that Vox's discourse on climate policies constitutes an ideological battle, with more than a quarter of their arguments addressing the qualities and political ideals of their opponents across the analyzed sample. Among the qualities employed as a method of attack, the most prominent is the existence of dishonest interests, linked to political and economic motives. Additionally, the government is criticized for its incompetence and lack of credibility.



Regarding ideals, Vox advocates for traditional conservatism by attacking environmentalism, using pejorative terms such as fanaticism, religion, or craziness in their messages. They argue that environmental measures involve sacrificing citizens' freedoms to maintain the privileges of the elites, suggesting a form of environmentalist dictatorship. This perspective is closely tied to leadership, as the party claims that the Spanish government is incapable of governing in the best interest of Spaniards, either due to a lack of will or capability, as it must respond to the interests of international organizations.



Concerning proposals to reverse environmental deterioration, the far-right party highlights past actions as their main battleground, clearly distinguishing themselves from parties in government and reaffirming their position as an opposition force against the established power. The central issue in climate policies is the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law, enacted in May 2021, which they describe as national suicide, an energy ruin, contrary to the interests of Spaniards who are forced to depend on other countries.



In a secondary order, the central government's management of water resources figures prominently, with accusations of destroying water reserves, and the restrictions on mobility, which would equate to expelling the working classes from cities.

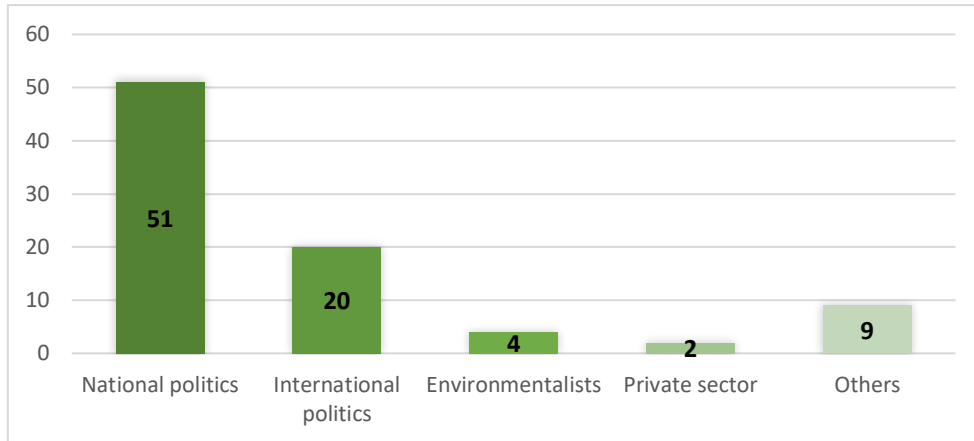


Targets of the attacks

Among the targets of these attacks, national political parties and their leaders stand out, with up to 51 mentions in the analyzed messages, significantly ahead of international representatives and institutions (n=20), environmental movements (n=4), or the private sector (n=2). Additionally, we include a

supplementary variable for all generic mentions (n=9), which do not refer to any particular institution but to the "other," representing progressive ideologies, globalists, and elites without specifying a name.

Figure 2: Targets of attacks in posts



Source: authors

Within national politics, the primary target of Vox's attacks is the government, occasionally personified by its president, Pedro Sánchez. However, mentions of congressional parties and the People's Party are also common, illustrating a purported distance from their approach to environmental policies.



Within international institutions, the messages target Brussels as the headquarters of the main European Union bodies, including the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Central Bank. In addition to these centers, which set the direction for community policies, the attacks also extend to Germany and Russia, with Germany being the leading power within the union and Russia being a major energy supplier, respectively.



Discussion and conclusions

The study of the discursive functions employed by Vox and Santiago Abascal on the social media platform X has enabled us to achieve the research objectives. Based on the results presented in the previous chapter, we now outline the main conclusions drawn and their connection with similar works in this field of study. Following the order of the results and the research objectives, the first conclusion to note is that environmental policies do not constitute the central agenda of the party. They only enter the public debate when significant events occur, such as the proposal of the amendment to the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law or the celebration of COP 27 in Egypt. The rest of their messages refer to local, national, or international decisions and measures that are either partially or completely out of context, thus contributing to the spread of misinformation about climate policies and questioning the role of institutions (Schaller & Carius, 2019; Martín Sánchez, 2020), which hinders the adoption of effective measures.

The shared messages are characterized by their simplicity, using a maximum of 2 functions in 90% of cases (O1). These are straightforward, direct messages capable of generating controversy without delving into information or contextualizing their sources. Multimedia elements (O3), such as infographics, videos, photographs, and links to sympathetic media, play a crucial role in this approach. Through this strategy, Vox reinforces its discourse, delivering a much clearer and more appealing message to the user (Carral & Tuñón, 2020), while maintaining control over the narrative construction (Vázquez & Campos, 2020).

The analysis of functions reveals a deliberate balance between acclaims and attacks (O2), clearly contrasting their errors with their own proposals and values. In this sense, populist discourse uses arguments against climate action to create the image of a common enemy (Forchtner & Lubarda, 2021), which, in this case, would be progressives, environmentalists, or elites. This balance between diagnosing the problem and presenting their solution was previously observed in similar studies on the digital strategy of populist movements, such as those by Maldonado Maldonado et al. (2016) or Vázquez Barrio and Cebrián Guinovart (2017). Vox's depiction of a common enemy intertwines with Mouffe's (2005) theory of antagonism, in which

political opponents are transformed into existential enemies and seen as illegitimate actors, or rather, as threats.

Regarding categories (O4), the findings of this study align with those of Olguín Valencia (2013), who argues that messages focus more on the character of opponents than on their political proposals, paving the way for a confrontation of personalities rather than policies, driven by a carefully crafted digital marketing strategy. This discursive dynamic could lead to serious consequences for democratic debate (Berdón Prieto et al., 2023). The political objectives outline a scenario of nationalist policies addressing a global problem, stemming from the dismantling of international agreements forged over decades. This approach coincides with López's (2019) observation of the use of climate arguments to propose measures linked to the economy or national security. The ideals defended are typical of populism, with rhetoric echoing the arguments of other political formations rooted in alternative discourse (Moreno & Thornton, 2022). The ideas of others are disparaged with derogatory, almost ridiculing terms, representing a terminological usage that would warrant a study in itself. In this context, media literacy and fact-checking agencies emerge as potential mitigators of a discursive strategy aimed at promoting climate inaction.

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