

Article

Spanish Political Communication and Hate Speech on Twitter During the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the polarized discourse of the West vs. Russia seems to have escalated to levels similar to those during the Cold War period. The aim of this article, which is centered on the case of Spain, is to discover to what extent communication from political parties contributed to such polarization by encouraging hate speech. To this end, messages sent by the political parties represented in the Spanish parliament, over the social network Twitter during the first 60 days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, were analyzed: A total of 3,186 tweets from 67 official accounts, both from these political parties and their main leaders, were coded. The results showed that despite social networks in general—and Twitter in particular—being a favorable environment for the promotion of hate speech, the communication of Spanish political parties was generally characterized by political correctness and moderation. The presence of the main indicators of hate speech analyzed (threats, criticism, ridicule, or insults) was very minor. The present article associates this finding to other variables such as the tone of the tweets (informative, opinionated), their scope (international, national), and engagement (replies, quotes, retweets), among other factors. It is concluded that Spanish political authorities had a socially-responsible behavior in the case analyzed, reinforcing the importance of public diplomacy to counteract hate speech.

Keywords

hate speech; polarization; political communication; political parties; political social responsibility; Russia; Spain; Twitter; Ukraine

Issue

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1. Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February of 2022 once again underscored the role of social networks in modern wars, as the conflict was to be fought both physically and digitally. The Ukraine war is, in fact, the first viral war, broadcasted in real-time through fragments of images disseminated in social networks. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become a battlefield in which battles and threats from both sides

of the war are being reported instantaneously. Thus, for example, when the invasion was first detected by Google Maps, the newspaper *The Washington Post* tracked the first movement of the Russian troops by using videos uploaded to TikTok by users in Ukraine, and Twitter was the medium selected by president Zelensky to disseminate a video in which he announced that he was not leaving the country. The phrase “We are here. We are in Kyiv. We are protecting Ukraine” (Applebaum, 2022) was found on his Twitter profile.

Social networks have also echoed the general public's rejection of this war, as the polarized discourse of the West vs. Russia seems to have increased to levels similar to those during the Cold War period (Bluhm, 2023; Schwartz, 2022). "Hate speech" has also been used as a tool to shape the image of the invading country: At the international level, Russia faced the fast condemnation by many world leaders, and EU and NATO allies, and many Western companies stopped operating in the country; Vladimir Putin was personified as the "bad guy" (Garner, 2022), becoming the person with the worst reputation on the internet in 2022 (Observatorio Español de Internet, 2022). According to Milosevich-Jurasti (2022), a turning point in the current West–Russia relationship was the definition of the Russian leader as "a war criminal" by Western observers. The first ones to qualify Putin in this manner were the American President Joe Biden and the High Representative of European Union Foreign Policy Josep Borrell.

As opposed to "the villain," the international community qualified Zelensky as "the hero" (González-Martín, 2022; Pereira & Reeve, 2022) and, in this sense, Spanish public opinion during the first 30 days of the war was aligned with the positions of the EU and the national government. According to a poll published in April by the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [CIS], 2022a), the Spanish people gave a score of 7.1 to acts perpetrated by Ukraine in the conflict, while Russia scored the worst, 1.5 points—on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). Spain obtained a simple pass (5.06), as only 39.7% of the population mentioned being "very" or "strongly" in agreement with the position of the Spanish government on the conflict (CIS, 2022b).

As for the role of world leaders in the conflict, the Ukrainian president obtained the best score (7.35) and the Russian leader the worst (1.35). The leader of the Spanish government, Pedro Sanchez, was found second-to-last, ahead only of the Chinese president Xi Jinping (3.44) and Putin himself (CIS, 2022b).

Considering that Spain is the most polarized country in Europe (Gidron et al., 2019) and that political ideology is the third highest cause of discrimination and hate crimes in the country (right after "racism and xenophobia" and "sexual orientation and gender identity"; see Ministerio del Interior, 2021), the present article aims to uncover up to what point communication from Spanish political parties on Twitter contributed to fomenting polarization associated to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the first few months of the war, and to analyze if it promoted hate speech.

The phenomenon of political polarization is widespread across many democratic countries due to the predominance of "post-truth communication" (Waisbord, 2018), in which reality is often distorted and emotion prevails over reason, as a way of arguing (Pérez-Escobar & Noguera-Vivo, 2022). This increase in hate was observed in the last report from the

Anti-Defamation League (2022), at both the international level and in the case of Spain, the latter within the results from the second national poll of affective polarization (Centro de Estudios Murcianos de Opinión Pública [CEMOP], 2022).

Since January 2020, the government of Spain has been based on a coalition between the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), with a center-left ideology, and Unidas Podemos (UP), with a left-to-extreme-left ideology. The government is currently led by Pedro Sanchez, leader of the PSOE and president of the country since 2018, who, after winning the elections in November 2019, came to an agreement with UP that resulted in the first central government coalition in present-day Spanish democracy. Until then, Spanish governments had either been led by the PSOE or the Popular Party (PP), the latter with a center-to-center-right ideology. The PP is, in fact, the main opposition party, followed by Ciudadanos (center-to-center-right), VOX (right-to-extreme right) far behind, and lastly, regional and nationalist parties of varied ideologies. Therefore, we can conclude that, as of today, the Spanish government is tied to a leftist ideology (with the inclusion of members of the Communist Party among its ranks for the first time), while the parliamentary opposition maintains an ideology tied to the right. Table 2 shows specific information on the ideological position of the rest of the parties with representation in the Spanish parliament.

It must be mentioned that all Spanish political parties manifested their opposition to the Ukraine war, although not fully agreeing with some of the measures taken by the government. Thus, for example, the largest volume of tweets of the selected sample corresponded to those published on March 2nd (as shown in Figure 1), the day it was first announced that Spain would send weapons to Ukraine. This decision was met with strong opposition from the leftist parties and generated controversy in the coalition government due to the opposition of the Minister of Social Rights, Ione Belarra, and the Minister of Equality, Irene Montero, both members of UP ("España envía armas," 2022). Belarra qualified the parties who agreed to send weapons as "war parties," and criticized, in a video disseminated on social networks, that the decision could lead to "an uncertain and dangerous scenario of world war" (Podemos, 2022).

The political tension felt during these early days of the conflict can be summarized in tweets such as those from VOX leaders (with their catchphrase: "Putin's allies are in the government"; see VOX, 2022), as well as from the Government Action Secretary of Podemos Pablo Echenique:

Listening to editorials and talk-show speakers from some media, there's the feeling they have not yet decided if the enemy is Putin (who assassinates Ukrainians) or Unidas Podemos (who works for the cease-fire and peace). Or even worse—that they have decided. (Echenique, 2022a)

Comments such as these show that the greater the ideological polarization—understood as the distance between the ideological positions of the parties—the greater the affective polarization—that is, the distance between the affection we feel towards those with whom we share our political ideas and positions, and feelings of rejection towards supporters of other parties who defend opposing positions (Egea & Garrido, 2022, p. 17).

To set the context of the present research study we can highlight the boycott led by the leftist political parties of President Zelensky’s intervention in the Congress of Deputies on April 5, 2022, the day in which the greatest volume of tweets was observed ($n = 117$) in that month (see Figure 1). On their social networks, two deputies from UP announced they would not attend the event due to their “antifascist conscience.” Also, the General Secretary of the Communist Party in Madrid Álvaro Aguilera called out Zelensky on Twitter as a “danger against peace” (Aguilera, 2022). These strategies of confrontation on social media are directly linked to strategic motivations to promote hate speech.

Hate speech can be defined as denigrating language towards people or collectives motivated by race, gender, religion, ideology, etc. (Nockleby, 2000; Waldron, 2012; Whillock & Slayden, 1995). Gagliardone et al. (2015) expand the concept to expressions that promote prejudices, as these can indirectly contribute to the creation of a climate of hostility and polarization that can lead to the use of language at the same level, resulting in a toxic spiral (Amores et al., 2021; Guerrero-Solé & Philippe, 2020). In this sense, the Pyramid of Hate created by the Anti-Defamation League is a useful tool for understanding how hate advances through a continuum, as already mentioned by Allport (1954). Thus, the normalization of biased or prejudiced behaviors (creation of stereotypes, micro-aggressions, insults, etc), can evolve and become the seed of more severe problems such as discrimination, violence based on prejudices, or even genocide. Using the base of the pyramid as the starting point for this study, our research used the following four categories as indicators of hate speech: threats, criticism, ridicule, and insults. Many other tools and lines of research for the detection and analysis of hate speech can be found in the literature (Amores et al., 2021; Pereira-Kohatsu et al., 2019).

Studies have described the role of social platforms as environments that promote hate speech—especially Twitter—due to their active role in the creation of public opinion (e.g., Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Colleoni et al., 2014; Himelboim et al., 2013; Parmelee & Bichard, 2012; Soedarsono et al., 2020). The work presented here provides a point of view centered on Spain, for the study of the use of Twitter in the Russian-Ukraine conflict (Chen & Ferrara, 2022; Donofrio et al., 2022; Morejón-Llamas et al., 2022; Polyzos, 2022; Shevtsov et al., 2022; Smart et al., 2022). An additional aim is to analyze the influence of Twitter on parliamentary communication, a topic that has been the object of analysis in many contemporary

studies (e.g., Campos-Domínguez et al., 2022; Dubois & Gaffney, 2014; Esteve Del Valle et al., 2021; Martínez-Rolán & Piñero-Otero, 2016).

2. Objectives and Method

The objective of the present study is to identify and categorize the communication of political parties represented in the Spanish parliament on Twitter and to discover to what extent it has promoted hate speech and polarization about one of the most important international events of 2022: the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. The selected timeline comprised the first 60 days of the invasion, from February 24 to June 24, and a total of 67 official accounts from the different political groups and their main leaders (secretary, president, or speaker) were analyzed. In line with this general aim, our specific research objectives were:

Objective 1: To identify messages on Twitter related to the Ukraine invasion published by the political parties represented in the Spanish parliament and their main leaders, and to determine their temporal distribution during the first 60 days of the war.

Objective 2: To code these Twitter messages regarding tone, subject areas, and the type of engagement created—understood as the “index of responses of the users to the comments sent through social networks” (Fontenla-Pedreira et al., 2020, p. 4), that is, the analysis of the replies, quotes, and retweets.

Objective 3: To identify hate speech indicators (threats, criticism, ridicule, insults) in these Twitter messages.

To obtain this data, the free software t-hoarder (Congosto et al., 2017) was used, as well as the set of keywords shown in Table 1. The final sample consisted of 3,186 tweets published during the period analyzed in

Table 1. List of keywords.

Keywords	
arkov	moscu
árvov	moscú
bucha	odesa
dombá	odessa
donb	otan
donet	putin
guerra	rusa
invasi	rusia
kiev	ruso
kremlin	russ
kyiv	ucran
mariupol	ukra
mariúpol	zelen

all the official languages of Spain, containing the aforementioned keywords. The texts were coded following a double-verification method to guarantee the inter-coder reliability between two raters, with an average Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.83. The IBM SPSS v27 program was used for data analysis. Table 2 shows the distribution of the 3,186 tweets from our sample for each of the 67 accounts analyzed during this period, regardless if they were original messages, replies, quotes, or retweets.

3. Results

Starting with Objective 1, we can observe a decrease in the temporal distribution of tweets about the Russian invasion of Ukraine during the period analyzed, as shown in Figure 1; nevertheless, 37.9% of the publications were concentrated in the first 10 days, and this number reached 59% when we look at the first 20 days. In any case, it is also observed that this trend fluctuated downward on a daily basis week after week, without considering if this was due to relevant or newsworthy events associated with the evolution of the conflict. An exception, however, was day 41 of the period analyzed (April 5, when Ukraine President Zelensky addressed the Spanish Congress remotely).

Arranged by political party (see Table 3), we see that the ruling party PSOE was the most active party on Twitter, responsible for 20.8% of these messages.

The PSOE was followed by Ciudadanos (15.2%), the center-to-center-right Basque Nationalist Party (or PNV, responsible for 7.4% of these messages), VOX (5.9%), and the left-to-extreme left EH Bildu (5.8%). The main opposition party, PP, was only responsible for 3.7% of these tweets, a percentage similar to that of other parties with a minority representation in the Spanish parliament. UP was not very active on Twitter on this subject, accounting for only 5% of these messages.

Objective 2 of our research was to characterize communications on Twitter about the Russian invasion of Ukraine during the first 60 days of the conflict in terms of the tone of the messages, subject area, and the type of engagement they created. In this respect, we were limited to the type of tweets and we did not consider their engagement rate. To characterize the tone of the messages, a differentiation was made between informative, opinionated, and mixed tweets: Informative messages were defined as messages in which the Twitter user—political party or political leader—presented or recounted events about the Russian invasion of Ukraine; opinionated messages were those in which the user offered his or her assessment or position about the events. Thus, it must be clarified that the mere presence of an assessment or opinion did not imply an opinionated message (tone), as long as the opinion did not correspond to that of the user, who only disseminated it for informative purposes (for example, when a political party publishes a declaration or an opinion from a third

Table 2. Twitter accounts of the parties and politicians analyzed.

Account	N	%	Account	N	%	Account	N	%
@CiudadanosCs	461	15	@NestorRego	41	1.3	@prcantabria	15	0.5
@PSOE	457	14	@Santi_ABASCAL	36	1.1	@andoniortuzar	13	0.4
@eajpnv	168	5.3	@Ortega_Smith	35	1.1	@FeijooGalicia	13	0.4
@socialistes_cat	157	4.9	@KRLS	31	1	@Pdemocratacat	13	0.4
@ehbildu	113	3.5	@cupnacional	30	0.9	@EnComu_Podem	12	0.4
@PabloEchenique	103	3.2	@gabrielrufian	30	0.9	@MarinaBS_Cs	12	0.4
@CristinaNarbona	99	3.1	@ionebelarra	29	0.9	@mariadolosa	11	0.3
@JuntsXCat	83	2.6	@TeresaRodr_	29	0.9	@InesArrimadas	10	0.3
@populares	82	2.6	@FClavijoBatlle	27	0.8	@upn_navarra	8	0.3
@Esquerra_ERC	81	2.5	@Yolanda_Diaz_	27	0.8	@ArnaldoOtegi	7	0.2
@vox_es	77	2.4	@anioramas	24	0.8	@AdelanteAND	6	0.2
@aramateix	65	2	@compromis	24	0.8	@josep_rius	6	0.2
@MertxeAizpurua	65	2	@cucagamarra	24	0.8	@Elisendalamany	5	0.2
@obloque	62	1.9	@EnComun_Gal	23	0.7	@adrianpumares	4	0.1
@coalicion	58	1.8	@enricmorera	22	0.7	@davidbonvehi	4	0.1
@AITOR_ESTEBAN	55	1.7	@salvadorilla	22	0.7	@junqueras	4	0.1
@Hectorgomez	54	1.7	@ierrejon	20	0.6	@navarra_suma	4	0.1
@AdriLastra	53	1.7	@Ferran_Bel	17	0.5	@TeruelExiste_	4	0.1
@monicaoltra	52	1.6	@FORO Asturias	16	0.5	@JoseMariaMazon	3	0.1
@Nueva_Canarias	45	1.4	@joanbaldovi	16	0.5	@SobiranistesCat	3	0.1
@ivanedlm	41	1.3	@anaponton	15	0.5	@CarmenMoriyon	2	0.1
@jessicaalbiach	41	1.3	@MasPais_Es	15	0.5	@jordisanchezp	1	0
						@RevillaMiguelA	1	0
						TOTAL	3186	100

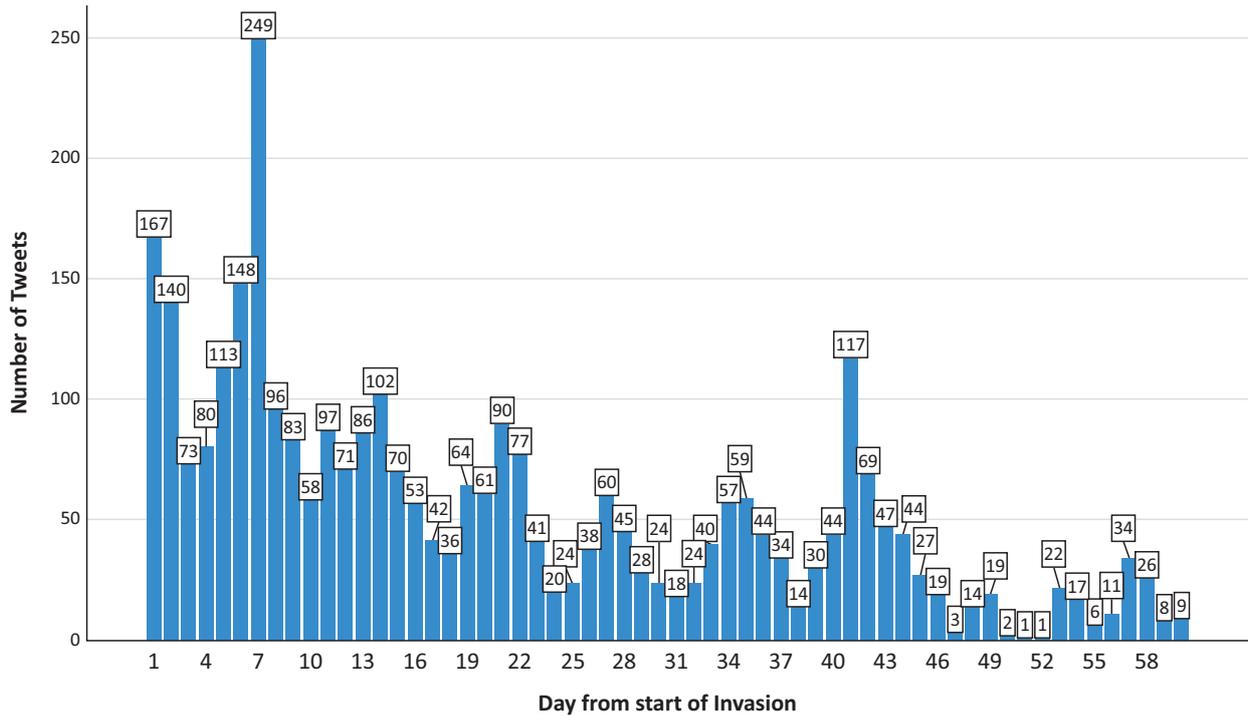


Figure 1. Temporal distribution of the publication of tweets.

Table 3. Distribution of the tweets per political party.

Denomination	Acronym	Ideological position	N	%
Partido Socialista Obrero Español	PSOE	center-left	663	20.80%
Ciudadanos	CS	center to center-right	483	15.20%
Partido Nacionalista Vasco	PNV	center-right to center-left	236	7.40%
VOX	VOX	right to extreme right	189	5.90%
EH Bildu	EHB	left to extreme left	185	5.80%
Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña	PSC	center-left	179	5.60%
Unidas Podemos	UP	left to extreme left	159	5.00%
Junts per Catalunya	JXC	center-right	121	3.80%
Partido Popular	PP	center-right to right	119	3.70%
Bloque Nacionalista Galego	BNG	left	118	3.70%
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	ERC	center-left	115	3.60%
Compromís	COMPR	left	114	3.60%
Coalición Canaria	CCAN	center to center-right	109	3.40%
Candidatura de Unidad Popular	CUP	left to extreme-left	106	3.30%
En Común Podem	ECPOD	left	53	1.70%
Nueva Canarias	NCAN	center-left to left	45	1.40%
Más País	MASP	center-left to left	35	1.10%
Adelante Andalucía	AAND	left	35	1.10%
Partido Demócrata Europeo Catalán	PDCAT	center to center-right	34	1.10%
Galicia en Común	ECGAL	left	23	0.70%
Foro Asturias	FORO	center-right to right	22	0.70%
Partido Regionalista de Cantabria	PRC	center to center-left	19	0.60%
Sobiranistes	SOBIR	left	8	0.30%
Unión del Pueblo Navarro	UPN	center-right to right	8	0.30%
Teruel Existe	TER	combined	4	0.10%
Navarra Suma	NAVSUM	center-right to right	4	0.10%
TOTAL			3186	100.00%

party between quote marks). The “mixed” category was used for messages in which the presentation/recounting of events and the assessment or positioning of the broadcaster were combined in a single message. Our conclusion was that the tone of the tweets was more opinionated (45.6%) than informative (41%), also considering that, in the remaining 13.4% of the “mixed tweets,” the aim of the user went beyond providing information (they also often provided their opinions), and that some form of opinion or assessment could already be found in plenty of informative tweets. When separat-

ing the data according to political party, the differences were substantial.

When we take into account the 10 political parties with the greatest representation in the Spanish parliament, it can be clearly observed that some of them kept their messages informative in tone, while others used a more opinionated tone (see also Table 4). For the PSOE, 51.1% of its tweets were informative (as compared to the mean of 41% for all parties). The PSOE was followed by the main opposition party, the PP (51.3%), and the PNV (68.2%). A more opinionated tone was found in the

Table 4. Tone of the tweets.

Party		Tone			Total
		Informative	Opinionated	Mixed	
UP	<i>N</i>	22	119	18	159
	% PART_NUM	13.80%	74.80%	11.30%	100.00%
	% TONE	1.70%	8.20%	4.20%	5.00%
PP	<i>N</i>	61	54	4	119
	% PART_NUM	51.30%	45.40%	3.40%	100.00%
	% TONE	4.70%	3.70%	0.90%	3.70%
VOX	<i>N</i>	50	132	7	189
	% PART_NUM	26.50%	69.80%	3.70%	100.00%
	% TONE	3.80%	9.10%	1.60%	5.90%
ERC	<i>N</i>	45	64	6	115
	% PART_NUM	39.10%	55.70%	5.20%	100.00%
	% TONE	3.40%	4.40%	1.40%	3.60%
PSOE	<i>N</i>	339	247	77	663
	% PART_NUM	51.10%	37.30%	11.60%	100.00%
	% TONE	25.90%	17.00%	18.00%	20.80%
CS	<i>N</i>	128	235	120	483
	% PART_NUM	26.50%	48.70%	24.80%	100.00%
	% TONE	9.80%	16.20%	28.10%	15.20%
EHB	<i>N</i>	82	67	36	185
	% PART_NUM	44.30%	36.20%	19.50%	100.00%
	% TONE	6.30%	4.60%	8.40%	5.80%
PNV	<i>N</i>	161	63	12	236
	% PART_NUM	68.20%	26.70%	5.10%	100.00%
	% TONE	12.30%	4.30%	2.80%	7.40%
MASP	<i>N</i>	8	23	4	35
	% PART_NUM	22.90%	65.70%	11.40%	100.00%
	% TONE	0.60%	1.60%	0.90%	1.10%
JXC	<i>N</i>	49	57	15	121
	% PART_NUM	40.50%	47.10%	12.40%	100.00%
	% TONE	3.70%	3.90%	3.50%	3.80%
Other parties	<i>N</i>	362	391	128	881
	% PART_NUM	41,09%	44,38%	14,53%	100,00%
	% TONE	27,80%	27,00%	30,20%	27,70%
Total of all parties	<i>N</i>	1307	1452	427	3186
	% PART_NUM	41,00%	45,60%	13,40%	100,00%
	% TONE	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

more ideologically-extreme parties, such as UP (74.8% as compared to a mean of 45.6% for all parties) and VOX (69.8%). Ciudadanos deserves special mention, as it used mixed tweets to the detriment of merely informative tweets (24% as compared to the mean of 13.4% for all parties). Through a simple correspondence analysis, a visual representation was obtained of the informative or opinionated tones of all the involved parties, as shown in Figure 2.

In terms of subject, the tweets were categorized as international, national, or mixed. International tweets were centered on worldwide politics or realities, referring to the war in the international arena or the consequences of the conflict beyond Spain. National tweets were focused on Spanish national politics, or the Spanish reality, and addressed the consequences of the war as they were felt in Spain (on many occasions from the economic point of view or referring to national issues that were somehow associated with the conflict). The “mixed” category was reserved for tweets that combined both national and international dimensions. The results from the top 10 Spanish political parties (see Table 5), point out that the subject area was predominantly international: 79.2% of the cases, as compared to 19.7% of the tweets referring to national matters, and a marginal 1.1% with a mixed focus. No significant differences were found in the subject area of the messages regarding tone. Also, no great differences were found in the subject area addressed by the tweets from each political party ana-

lyzed, although the parties that addressed the national reality to a greater extent were PP, VOX, PSOE, and EH Bildu, while the ones that frequently focused their messages on the international arena were Ciudadanos, Más País (center-left to left), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (center-left), and PNV.

With respect to the type of engagement created, it is possible to observe that 57.7% corresponded to retweets and 36.2% to original messages, with the remaining responses or cited tweets only reaching 6.2%. Likewise, regarding tone, we found that, in the original messages, the informative tone was more frequent than the opinionated one and, conversely, the opinionated tone was more frequent on the retweets. Lastly, the results indicated that when correlating the type of engagement and subject area of the tweets (see Table 6), retweets were less frequent for messages centered on the national reality (46.0% of the cases, as compared to 57.7% of the mean) and that, on the contrary, original messages were more predominant than the mean in the case of tweets focused on the national arena (46.8% and 36.2% respectively).

Objective 3 of the present research was to identify hate speech indicators in Twitter communications from political parties with representation in the Spanish parliament during the first 60 days of the conflict. To this end, the following four indicators were considered: threats (speech that states the desire to harm someone or something); criticism (messages that speak badly of someone

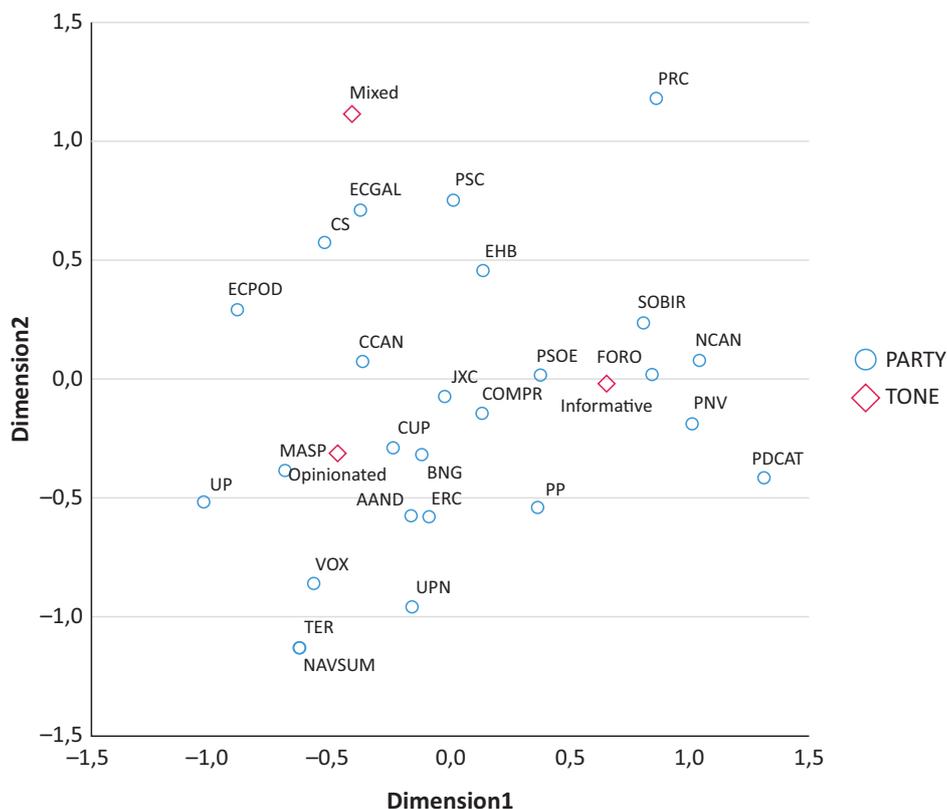


Figure 2. Simple correspondence analysis of the tones found in the messages.

Table 5. Subject area of the tweets.

Party		Area			
		National	International	Mixed	Total
UP	<i>N</i>	32	121	6	159
	% PART_NUM	20.10%	76.10%	3.80%	100.00%
	% AREA	5.10%	4.80%	16.70%	5.00%
PP	<i>N</i>	28	90	1	119
	% PART_NUM	23.50%	75.60%	0.80%	100.00%
	% AREA	4.50%	3.60%	2.80%	3.70%
VOX	<i>N</i>	44	138	7	189
	% PART_NUM	23.30%	73.00%	3.70%	100.00%
	% AREA	7.00%	5.50%	19.40%	5.90%
ERC	<i>N</i>	19	96	0	115
	% PART_NUM	16.50%	83.50%	0.00%	100.00%
	% AREA	3.00%	3.80%	0.00%	3.60%
PSOE	<i>N</i>	152	504	7	663
	% PART_NUM	22.90%	76.00%	1.10%	100.00%
	% AREA	24.20%	20.00%	19.40%	20.80%
CS	<i>N</i>	42	438	3	483
	% PART_NUM	8.70%	90.70%	0.60%	100.00%
	% AREA	6.70%	17.40%	8.30%	15.20%
EHB	<i>N</i>	39	145	1	185
	% PART_NUM	21.10%	78.40%	0.50%	100.00%
	% AREA	6.20%	5.70%	2.80%	5.80%
PNV	<i>N</i>	43	192	1	236
	% PART_NUM	18.20%	81.40%	0.40%	100.00%
	% AREA	6.80%	7.60%	2.80%	7.40%
MASP	<i>N</i>	4	31	0	35
	% PART_NUM	11.40%	88.60%	0.00%	100.00%
	% AREA	0.60%	1.20%	0.00%	1.10%
JXC	<i>N</i>	6	115	0	121
	% PART_NUM	5.00%	95.00%	0.00%	100.00%
	% AREA	1.00%	4.60%	0.00%	3.80%
Other parties	<i>N</i>	219	652	10	881
	% PART_NUM	24,86%	74,01%	1,14%	100,00%
	% AREA	34,90%	25,80%	27,80%	27,70%
Total all parties	<i>N</i>	628	2522	36	3186
	% PART_NUM	19,70%	79,20%	1,10%	100,00%
	% AREA	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

or something, inflicting damage, but without insults or ridicule); ridicule (speech ridiculing someone or something mockingly, but without using insults); and insults (messages that offend someone or something, with hurtful expressions or words). Considering the meaning granted to these four indicators in the coding process, the presence of ridicule was found in 2.5% of the tweets, insults in 1.8%, criticism in 1%, and threats in 0.2%. Thus, the presence of hate speech was small, without these indicators being found in 94.5% of the 3,186 tweets about the Russian invasion of Ukraine dissem-

inated by political parties with representation in the Spanish parliament.

When separating the data according to the tone of the messages (see Table 7), it was observed that in informative and mixed tweets, there was a smaller presence of hate speech indicators than in opinionated ones; if these indicators were not found in 94.5% of the total messages, in the case of the opinionated ones, this value was reduced to 89.5%. As for hate speech indicators per subject area, no significant differences were found; a higher percentage of these indicators were

Table 6. Engagement and subject area of the tweets.

Engagement		Area			
		National	International	Mixed	Total
Original	<i>N</i>	294	848	11	1153
	% ENG	25.50%	73.50%	1.00%	100.00%
	% AREA	46.80%	33.60%	30.60%	36.20%
Reply	<i>N</i>	29	64	8	101
	% ENG	28.70%	63.40%	7.90%	100.00%
	% AREA	4.60%	2.50%	22.20%	3.20%
Quote	<i>N</i>	16	78	1	95
	% ENG	16.80%	82.10%	1.10%	100.00%
	% AREA	2.50%	3.10%	2.80%	3.00%
Retweet	<i>N</i>	289	1532	16	1837
	% ENG	15.70%	83.40%	0.90%	100.00%
	% AREA	46.00%	60.70%	44.40%	57.70%
Total	<i>N</i>	628	2522	36	3186
	% ENG	19.70%	79.20%	1.10%	100.00%
	% AREA	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

found in messages that were mixed in nature, although we must consider the small number of this type of tweets. Likewise, we must also take into account that we cannot confirm that the use of hate speech indicators led to a greater or lesser level of engagement, specifically due to the reduced number of tweets with these indicators, which could not provide us with conclusive results (see Table 8).

The indicators of hate speech according to its use by political parties can be found in Table 9. The political parties with the smallest percentage of hate speech indicators in their tweets were the following, in descending order: PSOE (98.6% versus a mean of 94.5%), EH Bildu (97.8%), Más País (97.1%), PP (96.6%), PNV (96.6%), and Junts Per Catalunya (95.9%). On the contrary, the ones

that published a smaller number of tweets without hate indicators (always below the total mean), were the following, in ascending order: VOX (74.1%), UP (83.6%), and Ciudadanos (91.3%).

Through a simple correspondence analysis, a visual representation was obtained for each of the four hate speech indicators analyzed (threat, criticism, ridicule, and insult), and each of the political parties in the Spanish parliament, independently of the number of seats (see Figure 3). This figure confirms, in general terms, what was previously mentioned about the scarce presence of these indicators, thereby adding a more qualitative perspective. However, it must be pointed out that UP and Sobiranistes were closer to ridicule, while VOX was closer to insult and criticism.

Table 7. Hate speech indicators according to the tone of the messages.

Tone		Speech					
		Threat	Criticism	Ridicule	Insult	None	Total
Informative	<i>N</i>	0	0	1	7	1299	1307
	% TONE	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%	0.50%	99.40%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	0.00%	1.30%	12.30%	43.10%	41.00%
Opinionated	<i>N</i>	0	30	77	46	1299	1452
	% TONE	0.00%	2.10%	5.30%	3.20%	89.50%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	96.80%	96.30%	80.70%	43.10%	45.60%
Mixed	<i>N</i>	6	1	2	4	414	427
	% TONE	1.40%	0.20%	0.50%	0.90%	97.00%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	100.00%	3.20%	2.50%	7.00%	13.70%	13.40%
Total	<i>N</i>	6	31	80	57	3012	3186
	% TONE	0.20%	1.00%	2.50%	1.80%	94.50%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 8. Indicators of hate speech according to engagement.

Engagement		Speech					Total
		Threat	Criticism	Ridicule	Insult	None	
Original	<i>N</i>	3	3	25	13	1109	1153
	% ENG	0.30%	0.30%	2.20%	1.10%	96.20%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	50.00%	9.70%	31.30%	22.80%	36.80%	36.20%
Reply	<i>N</i>	0	3	7	1	90	101
	% ENG	0.00%	3.00%	6.90%	1.00%	89.10%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	9.70%	8.80%	1.80%	3.00%	3.20%
Quote	<i>N</i>	0	4	8	7	76	95
	% ENG	0.00%	4.20%	8.40%	7.40%	80.00%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	12.90%	10.00%	12.30%	2.50%	3.00%
Retweet	<i>N</i>	3	21	40	36	1737	1837
	% ENG	0.20%	1.10%	2.20%	2.00%	94.60%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	50.00%	67.70%	50.00%	63.20%	57.70%	57.70%
Total	<i>N</i>	6	31	80	57	3012	3186
	% ENG	0.20%	1.00%	2.50%	1.80%	94.50%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 9. Indicators of hate speech according to its use by political parties.

Party		Speech					Total
		Threat	Criticism	Ridicule	Insult	None	
UP	<i>N</i>	0	1	21	4	133	159
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	0.60%	13.20%	2.50%	83.60%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	3.20%	26.30%	7.00%	4.40%	5.00%
PP	<i>N</i>	0	0	2	2	115	119
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	0.00%	1.70%	1.70%	96.60%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	0.00%	2.50%	3.50%	3.80%	3.70%
VOX	<i>N</i>	0	13	24	12	140	189
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	6.90%	12.70%	6.30%	74.10%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	41.90%	30.00%	21.10%	4.60%	5.90%
ERC	<i>N</i>	0	0	3	3	109	115
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	0.00%	2.60%	2.60%	94.80%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	0.00%	3.80%	5.30%	3.60%	3.60%
PSOE	<i>N</i>	2	1	4	2	654	663
	% PART_NUM	0.30%	0.20%	0.60%	0.30%	98.60%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	33.30%	3.20%	5.00%	3.50%	21.70%	20.80%
CS	<i>N</i>	3	9	11	19	441	483
	% PART_NUM	0.60%	1.90%	2.30%	3.90%	91.30%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	50.00%	29.00%	13.80%	33.30%	14.60%	15.20%
EHB	<i>N</i>	0	4	0	0	181	185
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	2.20%	0.00%	0.00%	97.80%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	12.90%	0.00%	0.00%	6.00%	5.80%
PNV	<i>N</i>	0	1	3	4	228	236
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	0.40%	1.30%	1.70%	96.60%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	3.20%	3.80%	7.00%	7.60%	7.40%
MASP	<i>N</i>	1	0	0	0	34	35
	% PART_NUM	2.90%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	97.10%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	16.70%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.10%	1.10%

Table 9. (Cont.) Indicators of hate speech according to its use by political parties.

Party		Speech					Total
		Threat	Criticism	Ridicule	Insult	None	
JXC	N	0	1	1	3	116	121
	% PART_NUM	0.00%	0.80%	0.80%	2.50%	95.90%	100.00%
	% SPEECH	0.00%	3.20%	1.30%	5.30%	3.90%	3.80%
Other parties	N	0	1	11	8	861	881
	% PART_NUM	0,00%	0,11%	1,25%	0,91%	97,73%	100,00%
	% SPEECH	0,00%	3,40%	13,50%	14,00%	28,70%	27,70%
Total all parties	N	6	31	80	57	3012	3186
	% PART_NUM	0,20%	1,00%	2,50%	1,80%	94,50%	100,00%
	% SPEECH	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

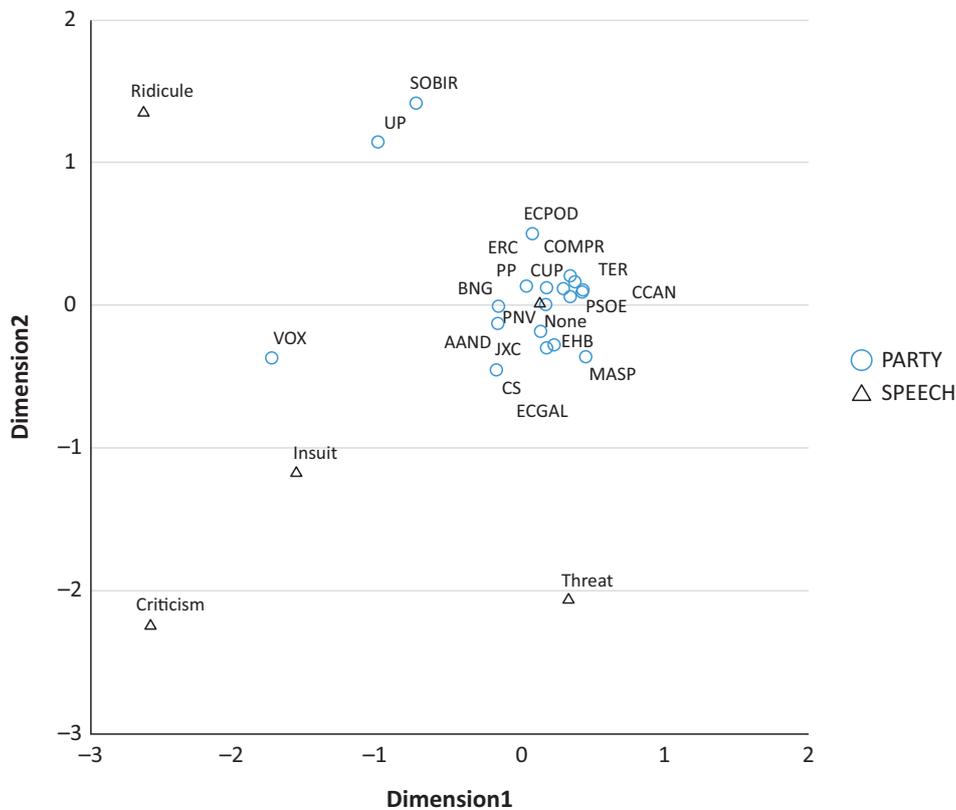


Figure 3. Simple correspondence analysis of the hate speech indicators according to the parties.

4. Conclusions

Our analysis shows that the Twitter debate on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, between Spanish political parties, had a low level of toxicity during the first 60 days of the war (Guerrero-Solé & Philippe, 2020). Therefore, it can be deduced that most Spanish political leaders/forces, including the governing party, showed a high level of social responsibility to avoid tensions.

Spanish political parties used Twitter with a greater intention to opine than inform. All of these political parties took to Twitter to express their opposition to the war in Ukraine, although at the same time defending

their different ideological positions. Thus, the main parties in the country granted more importance to sharing informative messages on Twitter, while parties with the most extreme ideologies attributed greater significance to sharing opinion pieces, which demonstrates the positive association between ideological polarization and affective polarization: Greater ideological polarization results in greater affective polarization (Orriols, 2021; Torcal & Comellas, 2022). Most of the tweets analyzed tended to offer a negative image of Russia, given its conflicting positioning against European and democratic interests. Those who openly identified their position did so in favor of Ukraine. Most of the messages analyzed

also addressed the humanitarian component of the conflict and argued for the need to end the confrontations through a peace agreement. We can conclude, then, that the opinion of politicians was mostly aligned with that of Spanish society in general (CIS, 2022a). These types of dichotomous discourses were also observed in other studies that analyzed the dissemination of political messages in armed conflicts (Moreno-Mercado et al., 2022; Orhan, 2020). We also concluded that Twitter messages published by the more extreme parties focused on matters adjacent to the war itself, which mostly dealt with national political polarization.

In general, Spanish political parties with more extreme ideologies promoted hate speech to a greater degree, although the study revealed that these types of messages did not generate a greater level of engagement as compared to those that did not promote that type of speech; citizens for whom these messages were intended also waded for moderate and socially responsible communication.

More than 80% of the tweets analyzed referred to the international arena (these messages created the greatest engagement), and only 17% alluded to the national impact of the war. Although correlations were not found between the national/international dimension of the messages and each of the political parties, some significant differences were observed, especially when referring to the national character of specific events—as a result of the ideological position of each party—which shows how different parties and their leaders bid for framing public interest matters through ideology and the use of social networks.

The results obtained also demonstrate that Spanish polarization was less related to partisanship than to ideological blocs, which translates into aversion or animosity towards the parties of the opposite bloc (Garrido et al., 2021, p. 277), as shown in tweets that tended to disseminate unverified rumors or accusations between political adversaries (see, e.g., Echenique, 2022b; VOX, 2022). Thus, the polarizing discursive mechanisms that were observed in the sample of tweets analyzed correspond to some of the seven strategies proposed by Marín-Albaladejo (2022), namely: dichotomous simplification; demonization; victimization; reporting of conspiracies; disinformation; and promotion of subjects that contribute towards increasing tension. These strategies of confrontation on the internet encourage hate speech.

Although the present article did not address all the possible indicators of hate speech, as it only reflected on four of them (threats, criticism, ridicule, and insult), the study could be broadened to encompass other types of parameters addressed in other methodologies. This would help us to more strongly corroborate the scarce presence of hate speech in the sample analyzed.

As for the extent to which communication from Spanish political parties on Twitter contributed towards promoting polarization associated with the Russian-

Ukrainian conflict in the first 60 days of the war, the results obtained were very reasonable, especially if we consider the international dimension of the event. The months following these first 60 days should also be analyzed, especially considering the impact of the war on Spain—on the national economy, as a recurring subject in the media, and in the Spanish political agenda. Future studies should be conducted to draw meaningful inferences on foreign policy matters.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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