

Affective dimension in political discourse on X: Ecuador's 2023 electoral campaign

*Dimensión afectiva en el discurso
político en X: la campaña electoral de
Ecuador 2023*

*Dimensão afetiva no discurso político
em X: a campanha eleitoral
do Equador 2023*

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In the use of social networks in electoral campaigns, the incorporation of emotions in the candidates' discourse has gained prominence in recent years. This study presents a comparative analysis of the discourses of Noboa and González during the runoff campaign of the 2023 elections in Ecuador. For this purpose, discourse analysis was applied to tweets from both candidates. The results show that both incorporate affective elements in their discourse, although with differences in tone and strategies: polarization in one case and calls for unity in the other.

KEYWORDS: Emotions, electoral campaign, discourse, social media, Ecuador.

En la utilización de las redes sociales en campaña electoral, la incorporación de las emociones en el discurso de los candidatos ha tomado protagonismo en los últimos años. En este trabajo se realizó un estudio comparativo entre los discursos de Noboa y González durante las elecciones de Ecuador de 2023. Para ello, se aplicó un análisis crítico de discurso a los tuits emitidos por ambos candidatos. Los resultados muestran que ambos incorporan elementos afectivos en sus discursos, aunque con diferencias en el tono y en las estrategias polarizantes (en un caso) y de llamada a la unidad (en otro).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Emociones, campaña electoral, discurso, redes sociales, Ecuador.

No uso das redes sociais em campanhas eleitorais, a incorporação de emoções no discurso dos candidatos vem ganhando destaque nos últimos anos. Neste trabalho, foi realizado um estudo comparativo entre os discursos de Noboa e González durante as eleições de 2023 no Equador. Para isso, aplicou-se uma análise crítica do discurso aos tuítes emitidos por ambos os candidatos. Os resultados mostram que ambos incorporam elementos afetivos em seus discursos, embora com diferenças no tom e nas estratégias polarizadoras (em um caso) e de apelo à unidade (no outro).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Emoções, campanha eleitoral, discurso, redes sociais, Equador.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital social networks have become an essential tool in the development of electoral campaigns, especially with the growing participation of a young electorate and in a context of virtuality and hybridity that predominates in all areas of the public sphere. The literature offers evidence of how social media has become, on the one hand, a source of polarization, negativity and hate speech that hinders public debate and, on the other, a space that is more emotional than rational.

This paper articulates these elements through an analysis of emotion in the political discourse of the two presidential candidates in the runoff campaign of the 2023 Ecuadorian elections. These elections had a particular feature: they took place after the application of the “muerte cruzada” (mutual dissolution) clause, applied by then-President Guillermo Lasso after the impeachment against him, which had the immediate consequence of dissolving the National Assembly and ending the then-president's term in office.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the use of emotional resources by the presidential candidates Daniel Noboa and Luisa González in the runoff campaign of the 2023 Ecuadorian election, taking into account the semantic fields used and the leadership they build during the campaign.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This section provides a theoretical overview of the main themes on which this work is based: electoral campaigns, the use of social media by candidates and the appeal to emotions in political discourse. The articulation of these elements allows us to explore new dimensions in electoral studies.

The study of electoral campaigns

In democratic contexts, electoral campaigns are the most intense period in the political process, and therefore attract the attention of politicians, the media, the public and academics. Despite the rise of the

permanent campaign (Blumenthal, 1980) in different geographical contexts, the moment of the election and the entire process surrounding it continues to be the main exponent of the discourses of political leaders and their relationships with different political, social and media actors, which is why the electoral campaign continues to be a laboratory for the analysis of political leadership and power.

In recent years, the study of electoral campaigns has been increasingly linked to social media and its use during these periods. Thus, numerous studies have been found that analyze candidates' use of social media (López-Meri et al., 2017) or voters' consumption of social media (Navia & Paz, 2017) as the main trends of study. Some of the most abundant debates in this field are those related to the implementation of personalistic strategies on social media (Gil-Ramírez et al., 2019; Slimovich, 2016), which would contribute to the humanization typical of electoral processes. Within this line of research, several authors incorporate user behavior on social media to their studies, proposing models for frame activation (Aruguete, 2021) and examining polarization processes on social media (Calvo & Aruguete, 2020).

Furthermore, there are postmodern campaigns that prioritize emotional, light-hearted narratives that appeal to new issues such as the environment or feminism, distancing themselves from the traditional way of campaigning (Crespo Martínez et al., 2020).

Regardless of the line of work, there is consensus on the idea that election campaigns raise the profile of candidates, helping to build their political leadership and position them through their discourse. One of the ways in which political actors are represented is through attributes, understood as a set of perspectives or frameworks with which to conceptualize each actor (Ghanem, 1997). Early studies about attributes focused on the framework of agenda setting studies, specifically on the transfer of the relevance of attributes and the image of actors between the media and public agendas (Takeshita & Mikami, 1995), based on the proposal that each topic or issue was accompanied by a series of attributes, thus constituting the second level of agenda setting theory (McCombs & Evatt, 1995). Since then, some studies have begun to fo-

cus on how the attributes of political candidates emphasized by the media affect citizens' impressions of the candidates (Kioussis et al., 1999).

Depending on the perspective from which the attributes are approached and their proximity to the agenda-setting proposal, some authors propose different dimensions of the attributes. For several, a distinction can be made between framing, affective and cognitive forms (Ganhem, 1997), while other proposals maintain only a distinction between substantive and affective (McCombs & Evatt, 1995), from which they establish subcategories and specific characteristics. The affective dimension refers to the emotional response that the audience may have, which involves both affective elements of the message and the way that message is narrated.

From other perspectives, the attributes of political actors can be classified into different groups: education, specific knowledge and motivation (Dunn & Hall, 1984). These proposals are related to what other authors later suggest as objectifiable characteristics (age, education, class, experience) and subjective characteristics (personal skills, characteristics of leaders) (Alcántara et al., 2016).

One of the objectives of the candidates during the electoral campaign is precisely to highlight and attempt to transfer these attributes and characteristics, insofar as this allows the electorate to get closer to the candidates and consolidate their leadership. In contexts of political disaffection (Paramio, 1994) and polarization, it is to be expected that this rapprochement will occur to a greater extent through affective attributes, as these would allow the electorate to identify with a particular candidate.

In this sense, these attributes have more relevance in contemporary campaigns in which strategies to humanize candidates are exacerbated (Maarek, 2014; Martín Salgado, 2004) as strategies to bring candidates closer to the citizens, especially in the use of social media by new parties and leaders (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). These strategies deepen the processes of personalization in politics, in which more importance is given to the leader and their individual characteristics than to the party or its programmatic proposals (Crespo Martínez et al., 2020; D'Alessandro, 2004).

The weight of emotions

In studies on campaigns, we find proposals that focus on how social media encourages a more emotional and polarizing use (Diez-Gracia et al., 2023) in political activity. Not surprisingly, in recent decades, the emotional dimension has been incorporated into social and human sciences studies in what some authors have called “the affective turn” (Clough, 2007), providing a new epistemological axis for approaching modernity and its limits (Athanasίου et al., 2008). In recent years, this dimension has also been incorporated into studies on political and electoral participation (Corduneanu, 2019; Dolan & Holbrook, 2001; Jasper, 2012; Lagares et al., 2022). Some authors suggest that the incorporation of emotions into electoral campaigns is a strategic move by candidates to achieve certain objectives (D’Adamo et al., 2021). Approaching emotions as social and cultural practices, rather than as specific psychological states (Arfuch, 2016), represents a shift in traditional analyses of electoral behavior, complementing classical theories, but also implies articulation with established lines of research, such as the personalization of politics, the humanization of electoral processes, and the soap opera transformation and trivialization of political activity (Bouza, 2006).

The weight of emotions is greater in digital spaces, where the architecture is designed to prioritize this dimension (Tarullo, 2016). In addition, the platforms’ own tools, such as emoticons, allow for a better reflection of the emotions evoked by the message (Tarullo, 2016). Similarly, the incorporation of images and videos also allows the affective dimension of messages to be explored. Some studies suggest that political actors offer a more emotional and polarizing agenda on their social media accounts during election campaigns (Diez-Gracia et al., 2023).

Once the importance of the affective dimension in the political process has been recognized, it is useful to identify the different types of emotions that can be found in this field. First, it is important to differentiate between personal emotions, which express an individual and sometimes intimate dimension, and collective emotions, which are shared by a group or community, thereby reinforcing their intensity. From the perspective of neuroscience, some authors propose a more specific categorization, suggesting the existence of subjective, private,

hidden and elusive emotions (Damasio, 2001), depending on the neural responses generated by each one of them. In political discourse, fear and hope are emotions that go together (Tarullo, 2016) and they cause voters to engage and interact on social media (Tarullo, 2018), as emotional connection with the message increases the chances of engagement and virality (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020). Some authors have explored each of these emotions and their presence in political content (Marcus et al., 2017; Weeks, 2015). The underlying hypothesis in these proposals is that messages with emotional elements reach the audience better and connect more effectively, especially with those who are more distanced from the political class.

Without delving too deeply into the differentiation between emotions, feelings and affections, this paper examines how emotions were incorporated into the political discourse of candidates on social media during the 2023 Ecuadorian election campaign, thus complementing previous studies (Chavero & Ramos, 2022).

The 2023 Ecuadorian elections

The 2023 presidential elections in Ecuador took place in a particular context, as they were held ahead of schedule. In May 2023, the National Assembly initiated impeachment proceedings against former president Guillermo Lasso, accused of being linked to the so-called “El gran padrino” (The Godfather), a case of organized crime, bribery and extortion in public companies in which people from the former president’s family circle were allegedly involved (La Posta, 2023). After several months of investigation, Lasso appeared before the National Assembly as part of the proceedings and, one day later, brought forward the elections by invoking the “muerte cruzada” (mutual dissolution) clause contained in Article 148 of the Ecuadorian Constitution, thus deepening the political crisis and opening a new electoral cycle. As a result, the first round was held in August of that year, and finally, on October 15, 2023, a runoff election was held, in which Daniel Noboa won the presidency.

The two candidates who campaigned during the runoff were Luisa González and Daniel Noboa. González was a member of the Assembly for the Citizen Revolution (*Asamblea por la Revolución Ciudadana*), the political movement of former president Rafael Correa (2007-

2017), who remains the country's leading political figure (Rivera et al., 2024). Daniel Noboa was a member of the Ecuadorian United Party (*Partido Ecuatoriano Unido*) and was the presidential candidate for the National Democratic Action party (*Acción Democrática Nacional-ADN*), a coalition created for these elections. Noboa, the son of one of the country's wealthiest businessmen (Redacción Primicias, 2023) who had run for president several times, presented himself as the *outsider* candidate, promising to break with the Correa cleavage. He was also one of the youngest candidates in history, at just 35 years of age.

For both candidates, it was their first time running in a presidential election, and neither had significant visibility in the political arena, so both had to build their image and try to position their objective and subjective characteristics (Alcántara et al., 2016) among the electorate.

The runoff campaign took place between September 24 and October 12, in a climate of polarization, political crisis and rising insecurity throughout the country, with security and the economy being the main issues on the public agenda throughout the period (Solano & Molina, 2023). Notably, candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated during the first round of the campaign, becoming the first presidential candidate to be killed since the return to democracy.

As had happened in the 2021 elections, and in line with the international trend, this campaign was characterized by the heavy use of social media as one of the main platforms for the candidates. In the case of Ecuador, 76% of the population has access to the Internet. There are 3.5 million X (formerly Twitter) accounts, with an 84.21% growth in users between September 2022 and May 2023, making this social network the fastest growing during this period (Del Alcázar Ponce, 2023).

This study proposes the following general research question: To what extent did presidential candidates Daniel Noboa and Luisa González use emotional resources in their X discourse during the 2023 Ecuadorian election campaign? This question gives rise to three specific questions:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of the digital discourse that candidates used to build their leadership during the election campaign?

RQ2: What linguistic elements did Daniel Noboa and Luisa González use on X?

RQ3: To what extent did candidates incorporate emotions into their social media discourse during the election period to generate polarizing messages?

To investigate these questions, this paper analyzes the runoff campaign of the 2023 election, which ran from September 24 to October 12. To better identify the elements raised and considering the importance of social media in the final days of the campaign, the analysis was extended to October 15, the day of the elections. By considering only the second round, it was possible to focus more closely on the candidates with a real chance of winning the presidency and avoid dispersion among the eight candidates.

METHODOLOGY

To build the corpus, the official profiles of the candidates² were used, and only tweets posted on these channels were considered, including retweets and quotes, but not comments or replies from other users. Comments and replies were excluded because this work focuses on the study of emotions within political discourse, not on their reception and decoding. It is a study focused on the affective dimensions of political messages in election campaigns, but it does not address the path that emotions take once these messages have been issued. In total, the corpus has 258 tweets, a relevant size for the type of analysis proposed.

Critical discourse analysis was applied to this corpus, understanding it as a theoretical-methodological tool to identify the discursive conditions and characteristics of the sender, but also and above all their relationship with power and the political and social context in which they are embedded (Charaudeau, 2009; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2009). The operationalization of the proposed theoretical categories through discourse analysis involves the creation of a series of analysis variables, which arise from the different theoretical and conceptual perspectives outlined in the preceding sections and are listed in Table 1. The systematization, analysis and diagramming work was carried out using the Atlas.ti software.

² @LuisaGonzalezEc and @DanielNoboaOk

TABLE 1
CATEGORIES AND VARIABLES OF ANALYSIS

Category	Variable	Description
Affective shift: emotions	Feelings expressed: fear, anger, sadness, joy-happiness, gratitude, pride, disgust, hope, anger, longing (dream), love.	Feelings and sensations that the tweet expresses.
	Actions: sings, dances, etc.	Representation of the candidate through their actions and behavior.
Humanization	Elements of their private life, role (mother, father, spouse, etc.), family, references to colloquial or routine matters.	Expression of elements of the candidate's private or intimate life, which bring them closer to the electorate by representing them as ordinary people.
Polarization	Optimistic	General nature of the message in terms of negativity.
	Negative	Attitude and type of relationship shown with other actors participating in the campaign.
Language	Relationship between actors: attack, collaboration, unity, inclusive.	Attitude and type of relationship shown with other actors participating in the campaign.
	Type of language: colloquial, formal, literary, technical. Use of data, metaphors, humor, etc.	Type of language used in messages and resources used.
	Overall tone: triumphalist, needs support, confrontational, persuasive.	Intonation of tweets regarding the election campaign.
	Network-specific tools: image, video, hashtag, emoticons, etc.	X rules and elements that are used as part of the message.

Category	Variable	Description
Leadership	Attributes: strength, initiative, leadership, firmness, approachability, confidence, experience.	Characteristics and skills with which the candidate represents themselves as a political leader.
	Relationship with other actors: individual, with other political actors, with other social actors, with journalists...	Ways in which the leader presents themselves in relation to other actors in the public sphere.
	Knowledge and visibility: identity.	Incorporation of elements to build or reinforce the candidate's political identity.
Election campaign	Appeal to the homeland, the people, technical language, reference to rights, international organizations, inclusion of data, etc.	Semantic and conceptual fields that construct a type of leadership (populist, technocratic, internationalist, etc.).
	References to change, the future, promises, target electorate (young people, women, older adults, rural areas, etc.).	Fields specifically related to the development of the electoral contest. Campaign proposals. Specific sectors of the population addressed.
	Issues: security (peace, terrorism), economy, employment, education, health, housing, environment, corruption, etc.	Main topic referred to in the message.

Category	Variable	Description
	Election debate	References to the electoral debate as the main moment of the campaign and/or as the topic or timing of the message.

Source: The authors.

RESULTS

This section analyzes the most significant results in relation to the research questions and the characteristic elements of the discourse of each candidate in the runoff campaign of the 2023 Ecuadorian elections: Luisa González and Daniel Noboa. To this end, both the presence of the proposed variables and the relationship between them and the co-occurrences found in the discourses of both candidates were considered. Of the total corpus (258), 151 tweets were published by candidate Luisa González and 107 by Daniel Noboa.

Characteristics and types of leadership of Noboa and González

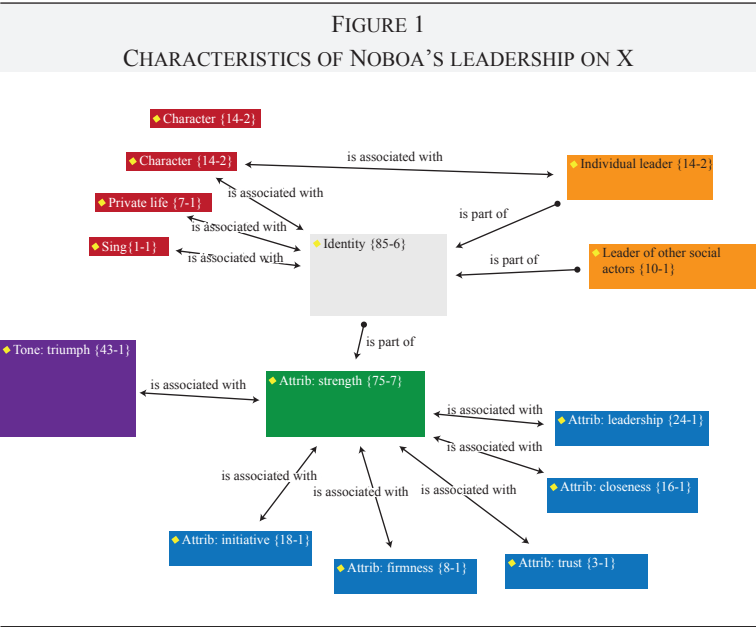
First, an analysis was carried out of the main characteristics of each candidate’s discourse in relation to how they construct their image as leaders, understanding that the attributes and emotions they appeal to are part of an electoral strategy (D’Adamo et al., 2021) and, therefore, help to characterize the type of leadership that a candidate wishes to reflect. Although this is not a study on leadership, it is important to examine the characteristics that the candidates project about themselves as leaders and how these relate to the appeal (strategic or otherwise) to certain emotions during the election campaign.

Candidate Daniel Noboa built his leadership on X through an emphasis on his own identity (85 appearances), a self-representation as a strong leader (75) and a triumphalist tone (43).

One striking feature is that Noboa makes extensive use of retweets from other leaders (especially assembly members) and his political party, which reflects the weak leadership he had at the time and the need to build his own image and political identity. The emphasis on his own

identity can be seen in the repetition of his name, that of the political movement that supports him (ADN), and his image. In this way, the candidate attempts to reinforce awareness and visibility of his figure in his first run for the presidency of the republic. In his social media discourse, the candidate’s individual image was highlighted (14) without reference to other actors, and it portrayed him as a telenovela-like character (14), including elements of his private life (7), thus implementing a personalist strategy (Slimovich, 2016).

In his self-presentation, he constructs himself as a strong actor, with leadership and initiative as his main attributes. The predominant tone of his X posts is triumphalist, in an attempt to improve his visibility and gain support for his candidacy.

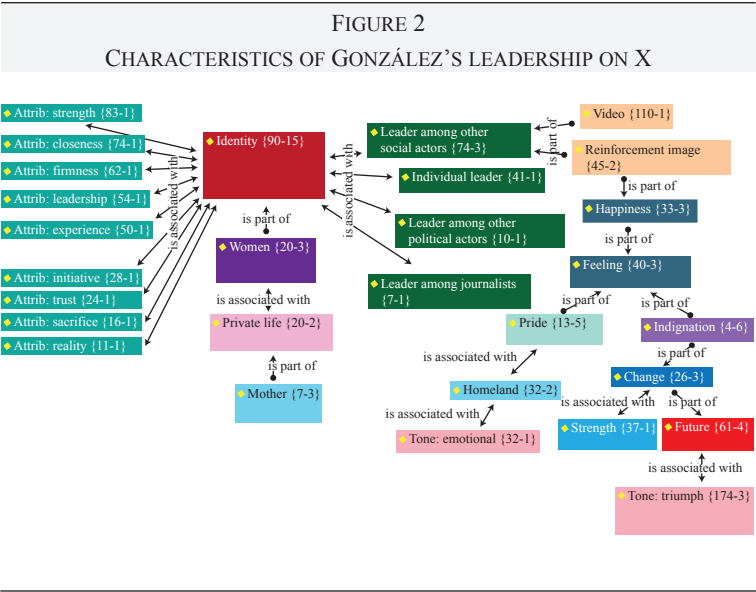


Source: The authors.

The leadership reflected on social media by candidate Luisa González is that of a strong (83 appearances), approachable (74), firm (62) and experienced (50) political leader. Of these attributes,

the importance given to closeness to the public stands out, sometimes with a high degree of humility, which is reflected in the incorporation of images or videos in which she appears with other social actors and representatives of civil society (74).

Secondly, she emphasizes her experience and preparation to govern the country, which is reinforced by images and calls to work with other political actors (10), usually from the same political movement. In this way, unlike candidate Noboa, González reinforces a more collective than individual leadership, although both implement a triumphalist tone.



Source: The authors.

A large part of the candidate's discourse incorporates elements that seek to consolidate her identity (90 appearances): logos, flags and images that highlight her figure are some of them. As part of this political identity, the appeal to women and the identification of the candidate as one of them is particularly relevant, leading her to incorporate elements of her private life into her discourse (20), especially her status as a

mother (7), which contributes to the humanization of the candidate (Martín Salgado, 2004).

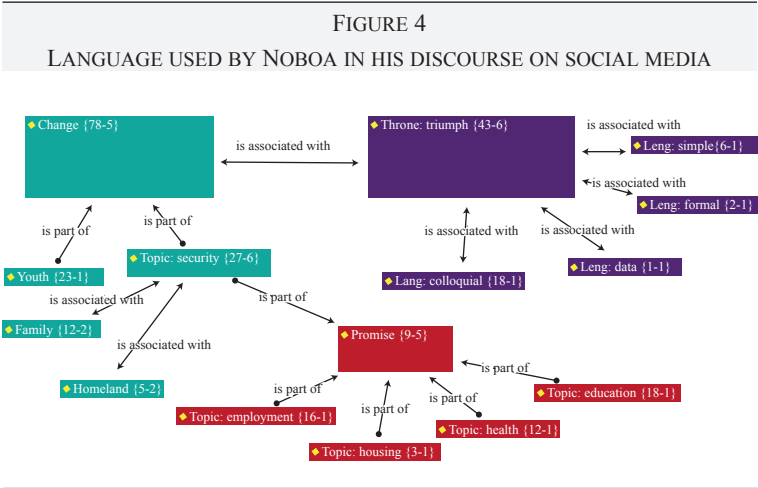


Source: Noboa (2023a) and González (2023a).

Linguistic resources used in digital electoral discourse

Candidate Noboa builds his discourse on social media around the idea of change (78 appearances), which would come from him and is fundamentally associated with issues of security and young people, who, according to his discourse, would be the ones driving this change. To achieve this, he makes electoral promises (9) without defining any of them in his digital discourse. To do so, he uses mainly colloquial (18) and simple (6) language.

Unlike Noboa’s discourse, candidate González builds her digital discourse around the idea of unity (107), which has two perspectives. On the one hand, the idea that political actors must unite to “move the country forward” and solve the serious problems Ecuador is facing, especially in terms of security and the economy. On the other hand, there is the inclusive dimension, according to which all citizens, with special emphasis on historically excluded groups and the most vulnerable population, must be part of the new future proposed by the candidate.



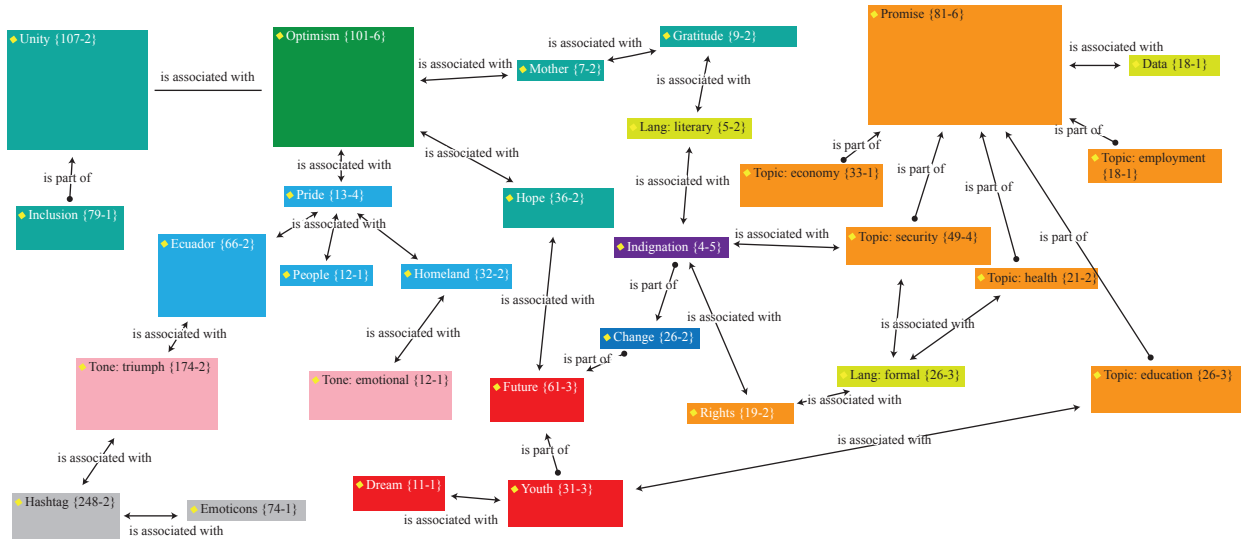
Source: Own elaboration.

This message of unity is presented in an optimistic tone, associated with pride in being Ecuadorian and hope for realizing the dream of a better future, as seen in the previous section. All of this means that the candidate’s discourse is dominated by a triumphant (174 appearances) and an emotional tone (32 appearances), in what would be a strategy to reach the most disaffected electorate (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020).

This call for unity, expressed in optimistic and emotive language (at times even literary), is accompanied by a set of campaign proposals on the issues of security (49), the economy (33), education (32), health (21) and employment (18). Unlike the previous discourse, these campaign promises are presented in formal language, including data and appeals to the restoration of individual and collective rights. The reference to rights in her language is a way of consolidating her objectifiable characteristics (Alcántara et al., 2016), in a reference to her career as a lawyer.

In both cases, the more emotional and the more formal-rational proposals, the use of social media features as part of political discourse stands out: hashtags are used in all the candidate’s tweets, and many others (74) include emoticons as part of the discourse. This reflects

FIGURE 5
LANGUAGE USED BY GONZÁLEZ IN HER SPEECH ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Source: The authors.

the incorporation of technology and its tools as part of political discourse in the digital sphere (Maíz-Arévalo, 2024).

FIGURE 6
EXAMPLES OF TWEETS BY NOBOA AND GONZÁLEZ



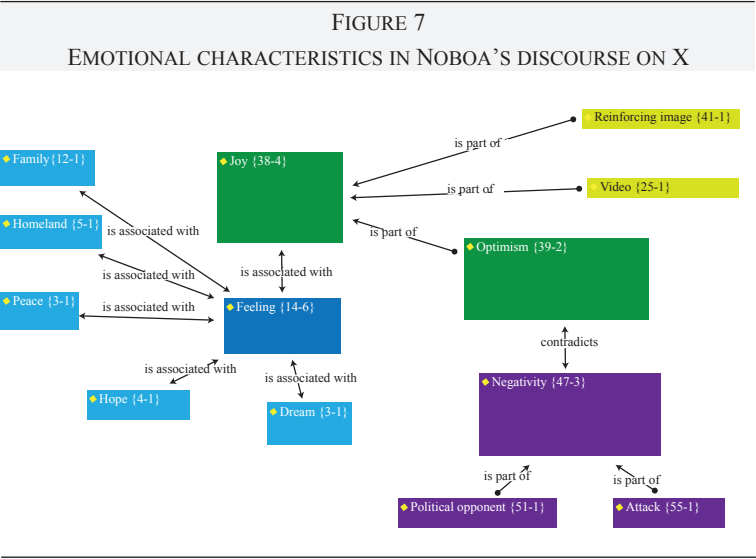
Source: Noboa (2023b) and González (2023c).

Emotion and polarization in the discourses of Noboa and González

Candidate Noboa builds his discourse on social media around two main blocks: one optimistic and the other negative. The negative elements revolve around attacks on his opponent, especially in relation to corruption. For his part, the optimistic block is characterized by the use of cheerful messages on X, often related to the expression and/or appeal to sentiment. To this end, he constructs a discourse whose main elements are family, homeland, peace, hope, and the fulfillment of a dream, thus combining emotional traits (Tarullo, 2016) with others that humanize the candidate (Martín Salgado, 2004).

In this way, an emotional-rational polarization can be observed. On one hand, the negative pole is constructed rationally by attacking the political opponent, for which the candidate uses *priming* (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) carried out by the major hegemonic media in recent years against former president Rafael Correa and his political party (Chavero & González, 2021; Palos Pons, 2024). On the other hand, the optimistic pole is articulated with the change that young people are demanding and promoting and with the incorporation of sentimental appeals.

One of the characteristics of Noboa’s discourse on X is the constant use of images and videos of the candidate, which attempts to reinforce his image and build his identity as a politician by taking advantage of the possibilities offered by social media.



Source: The authors.

In addition to the emotional appeal, Noboa’s discourse has a particular feature that is not present in González’s discourse: the use of negative fields (Mayer, 1996). In his X discourse, candidate Noboa focuses on both negative (47) and optimistic (39) elements, with a slight predominance of the former. The negative tone is constructed through attacks on his political opponent (52), especially by associating her with corruption (38). This type of direct attack strategy on the opponent has higher levels of engagement (Rodríguez-Sánchez & Echeverría, 2025). The optimistic tone is articulated with the idea of change associated with the drive of young people (23) and sentimental elements (14).

In the case of González, it was found that her discourse is articulated around two fundamental emotions. The first (and most prominent) is joy (33), which can be seen in her discourse through the optimism in her

tweets and which is articulated with love (14), hope (36) and pride (13). On the one hand, she associates both love and hope with her role as a mother and the construction of a better future for young people; on the other hand, pride is associated in her discourse with the homeland and Ecuador, with some mentions of the “people” as well, which reveals some characteristics of discursive populism (Laclau, 2005).

The second important element of the candidate’s discourse is pain and indignation, which appear mainly associated with the insecurity in the country and the consequences this has for families and especially for women. This allows her to target part of her discourse to a very specific audience and to highlight gender violence as a matter of public interest, which she does in a more emotional way. Although this is a negative emotion, the appeal to pain does not constitute political negativity in the sense indicated in the academic literature (Mayer, 1996).

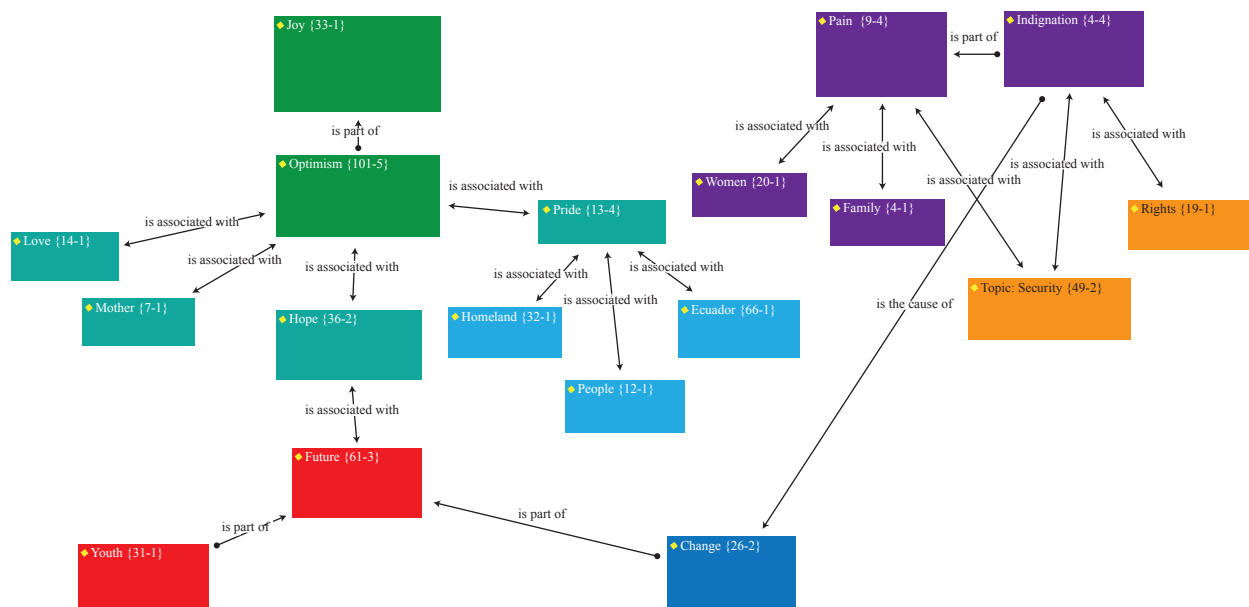
The convergence of pain due to insecurity and hope for a better future ultimately leads candidate González to propose the need for political change and present her candidacy as the best option for achieving that change. The convergence of these emotions is consistent with what other authors propose, as fear and hope are emotions that appear together (Tarullo, 2016) in an attempt to establish an emotional connection with the electorate (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020). The incorporation of emotional elements tends, beyond the tools of electoral political marketing, to create emotional bonds between voters and candidates (van Zoonen, 2004).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study compared the political discourse on social media (X) of the two candidates in the 2023 Ecuadorian presidential runoff: Luisa González and Daniel Noboa. The analysis was based on theoretical postulates that highlight an increase in the affective and emotional dimensions of political discourse and electoral processes.

In response to the research questions guiding this study, the most notable finding is that both candidates appealed to the affective dimension as part of their political discourse during the campaign, but with

FIGURE 8
EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS IN GONZÁLEZ'S SPEECH



Source: The authors.

FIGURE 9

EXAMPLES OF TWEETS BY NOBOA AND GONZÁLEZ



Source: Noboa (2023c) and González (2023b).

significant differences. On the one hand, Noboa combined emotional and rational elements as a form of polarization: while he used rational discourse to attack his political opponent in a clear negative strategy (Mayer, 1996), he appealed to emotions to present himself as the candidate of change and of a new generation, distancing himself from the traditional political class. The latter is consistent with studies indicating that simplified and emotional resources are more effective in reaching voters who are more distant and disaffected from political issues (Gutiérrez-Coba et al., 2020), as well as those indicating that candidates on social media use a more personal, polarized and emotional discourse (Diez Gracia et al., 2023).

In contrast to this polarizing strategy, candidate González appealed for unity in a more optimistic way, through pride, love and hope. After identifying with the pain and outrage caused by the political and security crisis, the candidate constructed a discourse in which she rescued pride in the homeland, love for the country and its people, drawing a parallel with the love of mothers for their children, in which she presented herself as a mother, and hope for a better future. In both cases, the emotions they incorporated are individual but were intensified when shared by the community.

Secondly, this study sought to identify the leadership characteristics of both candidates. Once again, some commonalities were found, such as a triumphant tone or the need to strengthen their own identity, in a clear electoral political marketing strategy (Maarek, 2014), but with interesting differences between the two discourses. Noboa appears to a greater extent as an individual leader (the result of the haste with which he registered his candidacy in the early elections, when he was still creating his own political party) and with attributes (McCombs & Evatt, 1995) such as strength and leadership with a clear predominance. This leadership was further reinforced with fictional character traits, such as the parallel with the Quaker cereal character (owned by the Noboa company in Ecuador), in an exercise of trivializing politics (Bouza, 2006).

In contrast, Luisa González built a more collective leadership, clearly referencing the political movement she represents, which governed for ten years. These references helped consolidate her electorate and characterize her as a leader with experience, strength, and approachability as her main attributes. Another distinctive feature of her leadership had to do with her status as a woman and, in particular, as a (single) mother, an element she incorporates as a tool for resilience (Serrano Pascual et al., 2019) and inspiration to lead the country's recovery. In the case of Luisa González, one finding is that she made abundant references to the homeland and the people, who, according to her discourse, must unite under the pride of being Ecuadorians and build a better future together. Another element that stands out in González's discourse is its inclusive nature, as she constantly repeated that all citizens must be represented in this hopeful future. These characteristics, in addition to the strong emotional component, are subtly related to populist discourse (Laclau, 2005).

Finally, we looked at the linguistic resources used by each of the candidates on social media. In this regard, we found that Noboa positioned himself in the field of change, using colloquial and simple language to present himself as a different option. In his case, we observed a process of simplification of messages, with clear personalist content and little explanation of specific proposals or issues of concern, in line with what happens in other countries in the region (Montúfar-Calle et al., 2022).

In contrast, candidate González used formal language backed by data, which she generally relates to her campaign proposals on the different issues she presented. In cases where the emotional component stands out, she used language of gratitude, sometimes literary, which reinforced the overall optimistic tone of her discourse in line with postmodern campaigns (Crespo Martínez et al., 2020).

The results of this study align with research that suggests the need to consider the affective dimension as part of electoral and political behavior (Corduneanu, 2019; D'Adamo et al., 2021; Dolan & Holbrook, 2001; Jasper, 2012; Lagares et al., 2022), especially in social media performance. On the other hand, it raises new questions in this regard, such as the need to delve deeper into the differentiation between emotions in relation to processes of social and political polarization in electoral contexts, particularly in countries where elections are decided in a runoff campaign. Furthermore, it is necessary to study the real effects of this affective dimension in greater depth: in electoral processes as an immediate effect, but also in political (dis)affection and the strength of democracy in Latin American contexts as a long-term effect.

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