



Isabel Díaz Ayuso and the Weasel Words: Nativism, Markets and Traditional Morality in the Political Discourse of the Right Wing in the Community of Madrid

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research identifies and details the structuring trends in the discourse of the President of the Community of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, from the perspective of political ideologies and discourse strategies. Neoliberalism and nativism are the starting point to study her political speeches. Neoliberalism evolves with the introduction of traditional morality in the framework of mercantilism, according to F. Hayek, by means of the main discursive strategy that this author discovers in the use of the so-called weasel words. **Methodology:** The research begins with the electoral program of the People's Party in the 2023 elections and the videos published on Díaz Ayuso's YouTube profile during that year. The 14 most-viewed videos are used to exemplify in detail the characteristics of the structuring trends in her discourse. **Results:** In order let other topics meaningless and stress the ultra-liberal discourse, the Madrid leader uses weasel words such as "Freedom", "Family", "Ideology", "Corporation" or "Spain", which reduces the political semantic memory by changing its context. **Discussion:** The use of weasel

words in her discourse generates interactions that place the receiver outside the public sphere: in religion, morality, commerce and tourism, business, individual life, suppressing traditional elements of political content such as the common good, social welfare, redistribution of wealth, public dialogue or class justice, devalued by the leader. **Conclusions:** Isabel Díaz Ayuso personifies the neoliberalist trend of the anti-political style based on the use of weasel words that replace the social agenda with topics drawn from the individual sphere, the purely economic realm, and traditional morality, thereby narrowing the political debate.

Keywords: Political Discourse Analysis; Isabel Díaz Ayuso; YouTube; Nativism; Neoliberalism; Weasel Words.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research analyzes the central themes of the discourse of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, leader of the Madrid regional PP and current president of the Community of Madrid, from the perspective of political ideologies and discourse strategies. It uses the electoral program that her party presented for the May 2023 regional elections and analyzes the videos published on the president's YouTube channel throughout that year. Excerpts from the 14 most-viewed videos have also been extracted to illustrate the characteristics of the dominant themes.

Ayuso first became president after the May 2019 elections, with a 64.3% voter turnout and 30 seats (22.23% of the voting). *Partido Socialista*, led by Ángel Gabilondo, won the most votes with 37 seats (27.31% of the voting). The PP secured the presidency through a coalition agreement with *Ciudadanos*, with the support of *Vox* (<https://bitly.cx/Hi1Ae>).

It is important to remember that, in 2019, the PP was grappling with a credibility crisis that began in 2013, following the publication of the "Bárceñas papers" by *El País* in January and the leak by *El Mundo* in July of WhatsApp messages exchanged between the then Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, and the PP's former treasurer (<https://bitly.cx/Uw47>). The 2015 court ruling by Judge Pablo Ruz revealed the party's illegal financing between 1990 and 2008 through falsified accounting practices managed by treasurer Luis Bárceñas, causing a significant loss of votes in that year's elections, although the PP still received the most votes (<https://bitly.cx/3djNB>). However, the party did not finish its second term, as in May 2018 the PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* launched a motion of censure against Mariano Rajoy, which they won with 180 votes and which made Pedro Sánchez the Prime Minister.

To this crisis of credibility of the party at the national level, there is the specific crisis of the PP in the Community of Madrid where, since the government of Esperanza Aguirre, members of the party were successively accused of corruption and falsification of documents, as in the cases of Francisco Granados, the next president Ignacio González and, finally, the president Cristina Cifuentes, accused of theft and falsification of a university degree (<https://bitly.cx/lfZK>).

Ayuso called early elections midway through the legislature, in May 2021. With a 71.74% turnout, she managed to double her seats and votes (65 seats and 44.76% of the voting) by winning back the segments of the electorate that had voted for *Ciudadanos* in the previous elections (<https://bitly.cx/hSKSX>). In fact, the *Ciudadanos* party disappeared from the Madrid Assembly, foreshadowing what would later happen in other assemblies, city councils, the Congress, and the Senate. In a context of hyper-personalization of politics (Riorda & Quesada, 2023), where the leader is clearly more powerful than the party in terms of persuading voter segments, and considering the aforementioned crisis of credibility, this victory for the Madrid PP is a victory for Díaz Ayuso.

In the following elections, those of May 2023, she achieved an absolute majority. With a lower turnout than in 2021, at 65.5% of the electorate, the leader secured 70 (47.32% of the voting) of the 135 seats in the Assembly, becoming a phoenix for the party. Metonymically, she demonstrated in Madrid that the PP could recover the credibility and votes of a significant portion of the electorate.

Ayuso's success deserves special attention because it provides an opportunity to examine the trends shaping right-wing discourse in Spain. It is possible to observe how local and regional political content disappears in favor of aspects such as commodification, moralizing, allusions to national-Catholic ideals, and emotional appeals. This

strategy is well defined by the neoliberal political theorist Friedrich Hayek (Hayek, in Santamaría, 2019), as seen in his concept of the use of so-called weasel words.

2. OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this research is to determine the structuring trends in Díaz Ayuso's discourse from the perspective of the study of political ideologies and language strategies. To achieve this overall objective, we have set a series of specific objectives, which will be detailed below:

- To identify the trends in the program of Partido Popular de Madrid in the last elections, those of May 2023.
- To delve deeper into the characteristics of these trends through an in-depth literature review in order to create a table that provides an analysis of the 62 speeches of Díaz Ayuso on YouTube during the year 2023.
- To determine what trends these 62 speeches follow, paying special attention to the ideology in which their main discursive strategies are framed.
- To illustrate some of the characteristics of these trends through various excerpts from the 14 most-viewed videos. The selection of excerpts is based on their clarity and representativeness, so that they reflect the general tendency of the study corpus.

The study of political ideologies deals with “beliefs, ideas, or even closely related attitudes characteristic of a group or community” (Macrides & Hulliung, 1998, p. 14). The dominant political ideology globally is neoliberalism (Acanda González, 2021; Springer et al., 2016). In this sense, the dominant anthropological framework and common sense of global society are those of neoliberalism, characterized by individualism, the commodification of all aspects of life, and moralization (Brown, 2021). Neoliberalism, as a political-economic philosophy and ideology, is also presented as the only possible alternative. It has been more than three decades since Margaret Thatcher coined the TINA (There Is No Alternative) doctrine. Thus, all political approaches would have been exhausted except for the neoliberal one (Queiroz, 2018).

In addition to neoliberalism—especially in the discourse of right-wing groups—there is also nativism (Brown, 2021; Saidel, 2021). Nativism conceptualizes the state as mononational and monocultural (Mudde, 2007). Its central idea presents a particular group as a threat to the culture and existence of the native community (Guia, 2016).

When addressing the analysis of the electoral program of the Madrid People's Party in the 2023 elections and the videos that Díaz Ayuso published on YouTube during that year, this neoliberal-nativist context was taken into account as explained below.

3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the stated overall objective, a qualitative research was conducted in which, through an interpretive paradigm, the social construction of reality was approached, prioritizing context, meanings, and intentions (Liamputtong, 2023). A political discourse analysis (PDA) was employed, which began to develop in the latter decades of the 20th century within the framework of the so-called linguistic turn (Dunmire, 2012). However, it is important to note that rhetorical studies, dating back to the 5th century BC (Ducrot & Todorov, 1991), already reflected on the use of techniques to persuade and convince through discourse within the framework of democracy in Classical Greece.

Politics is inseparable from language (Chilton & Schaffner, 1997), and language is a political phenomenon (Pelinka, 2007). Hence, Bakhtin (1989), almost a century ago, spoke of the stratifying forces of language, and Pitkin (2017) of how social agents obtain power through language. Along the same lines, Wodak and Meyer (2003) and Van Dijk (1997, 2016) frame political discourse analysis within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Both authors have also dedicated numerous studies to ideology and discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2005, 2008; Wodak, 1989, 2015), which is precisely the object of this study.

On the other hand, this work is also a case study since it focuses on the analysis of a specific political leader, Díaz Ayuso, to understand how the discourse of the right works in general in Madrid and in Spain.

In conducting this research, a series of sequential methodological steps were followed. First, the programme of the Partido Popular for the May 2023 Madrid regional elections was analyzed in detail to determine whether it follows any clear trends from the perspective of political ideology and discursive strategies. There were three key trends identified: neoliberal philosophy, nativism associated with the left and peripheral nationalisms, and the use of weasel words.

Among the numerous documents reviewed, particularly noteworthy are those by Wendy Brown (2021), Evaristo Valls (2022), Alberto Santamaría (2019), and José Álvarez Junco (2016), as they have been essential for developing the table of characteristics used to analyze Díaz Ayuso's discourses.

Table 1. *The Three Core Trends Shaping the Partido Popular's May 2023 Platform from the Perspectives of Political Philosophy and Language Strategies*

Neoliberalism	Nativism	Weasel words
Correction Mechanism 1: Governmentalization.	The community and its culture are in danger.	Transfer of signifiers to a new context.
Correction Mechanism 2: Traditional morality is the foundation of freedom and order. Religion is fundamental.	Peripheral nationalisms as a threat.	Conceptual void.
Business management works similarly to religion.	The left-wing as a threat.	Antimetaphors and shrinking. Semantic reduction or transformation.
Defense of the protected personal sphere.	The anti-Spain movement as a threat.	Emotions as moral drivers.
The family assumes the roles of the Welfare State.	The State is mononational and monocultural.	Tunnel vision.
Self-entrepreneurial subject.	Conservative Spanish nationalism is constitutional patriotism.	
Competition and productivity as the highest priority.	Madrid's identity is that of conservative nationalism.	
Freedom is a matter associated with individual initiative, of an entrepreneurial nature.	The core ideas are generic and abstract: homeland, country, culture.	
Values are those of the individual or family sphere, rather than the state or collective sphere.	Stories featuring mythology and symbolism connect different time periods.	
	Nihilism.	

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the ideas and concepts collected in the theoretical framework.

The third step focused on selecting the study corpus. To do this, four aspects were taken into consideration. First, political discourse today is inseparable from the use of social media. Second, social media is particularly crucial to Díaz Ayuso's success. Third, while studies already exist analyzing aspects such as Díaz Ayuso's leadership style, personal brand, personalization, and communication style on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, none of them focus on her YouTube videos. Fourth, there is a context of permanent campaigning (Rodríguez, 2012), meaning that the material and symbolic efforts of parties and leaders to gain, retain, or strengthen their hold on power continue throughout the election year.

The last elections held in the Community of Madrid were in May 2023. During that year, a total of 62 videos were published on Díaz Ayuso's official YouTube channel. These videos constitute our corpus of study. Most of them are speeches given in the Assembly and in various locations in Madrid. After analyzing them using the table above, the 14 videos with the most views were selected to illustrate, with examples, the three core trends (neoliberalism, nativism, and weasel words) and some of their key characteristics.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Nativism: Nationalism, Xenophobia and Culture

Nativism is a concept that has been defined in various ways, with some authors even advocating for its use as a term derived from nationalism. Cas Mudde (2007, p. 19), a political scientist specializing in the far right and populism, understands nativism as an ideology that blends ethnic nationalism with xenophobia and confines it to the state. The author indicates that nativism is an ideology that maintains that “states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (people and ideas) fundamentally threaten the homogeneous nation-state.” Historian Aitana Guia (2016) emphasizes the rejection by a country, region, or city of a particular group of immigrants as its fundamental characteristic. This group threatens the culture and very existence of the native community. However, according to Guia, nativism has not focused solely on immigrants, but has also included Catholics and leftists, as in the case of the United States.

The nativist narrative framework is quite simple and corresponds to the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968). The native community perceives itself as a victim (the target of attacks, grievances, and harm) of a persecutor who constantly endangers it and could even lead to its disappearance. Therefore, it is crucial that the native community place itself in the hands of, that is, transfer its responsibility to, an agent who plays the role of savior (religious institutions, associations, political parties, leaders) and thus resolves the situation. The savior guarantees the preservation or restoration of the social practices that construct the native community's own meanings, that is, its identity and culture. To fulfill this mission, the savior neutralizes or weakens the persecutor's actions, distancing or expelling them from the native community's territory (the city, the region, or the nation-state) if necessary.

Regarding nationalism, Álvarez Junco (2016, pp. 6 and 51) defines it as a “cultural artifact or system, like religion or the family,” that emphasizes “the existence of distinct cultural traits” and considers that “the governance of the territory it inhabits should correspond to the human group that bears such traits.” It shares with religion “the predisposition to sacrifice oneself, even to the point of giving one's life, for the community,” and both “are related to death, immortality, and permanence” (Álvarez Junco, 2016, p. 6). It is generally characterized by three features: “worldview, sentiment, and political doctrine or principle” (Álvarez Junco, 2016, p. 48). Along the same lines, Macridis and Hulliung (1998) situate it in late 18th and 19th-century Europe, and see the community and the individual's loyalty to it as its core: “Nations are a homeland, which evokes the obedience and affection that children are supposed to owe their parents” (Macridis & Hulliung, 1998, p. 234). This would be the characteristic aspect of nationalism, which, being an artifact or construct, can be filled with the most varied content.

A distinction is made between mild or civic nationalisms and extreme, aggressive, or exclusionary nationalisms (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2018). The feeling of belonging and identification with the nation presents a wide range of variations: “ranging from the mere acknowledgment of belonging to a certain ethnic group or cultural group to jingoism, chauvinism, or patriotism—or the far less innocuous racism or imperialism—based on the belief in the innate superiority of one's own national group and its right to dominate other peoples.” The latter posits “a providential mission or destiny for the group and an essential inequality or hierarchy into superior and inferior races or peoples” (Álvarez Junco, 2016, p. 48).

The distinction between civic and aggressive-exclusionary nationalism, however, does not appear so clear in practice. For example, British and American nationalisms, with their more civic roots, also featured “frequent claims of national supremacy” that referred to “the white man's mission” or “manifest destiny” (Macridis & Hulliung, 1998, p. 241). Here there is the colonial perspective that identifies the inhabitants of the metropolis with the civilized aspect as opposed to the savage one, that is, the colonized peoples. The doctrine of manifest destiny identifies the American colonizers as a people chosen by God, designated to conquer and populate North America.

Analyzing how the United States itself was built from its early colonies, which were essentially businesses (Orozco, 2004), and the foreign policy it has developed throughout its history, makes it possible to understand how the moral superiority of divine origin is instrumentalized to achieve purely material objectives (Requeijo, 2006). This aspect is directly related to colonialism and is clearly observed in the case of Spain, which will be detailed in a specific section.

Xenophobia is defined as hatred of foreigners, those born in other lands. It is related to racism, which Álvarez Junco (2016) understands as connected to imperialism. Our ethnic or cultural group has the “legitimate right” to dominate others because it is superior to them. Guia (2016) linked it to the rejection of a specific group of immigrants. It seems that, in many cases, this is the main threat according to nativist discourse. However, as it will be detailed later, nativism in Ayuso's case is structured around the so-called “peripheral nationalisms” and the left-wing. They both already represent, in Menéndez Pelayo's (2002) formulation of national-Catholicism, the anti-Spain movement, the enemies of the homeland (Álvarez Junco, 2016).

The last of the core elements of nativism is culture. Following Stuart Hall, it is “a process, a set of practices” that involves “the production and exchange of meanings—giving and receiving meanings—among the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in a similar way and can express themselves, their thoughts and emotions about the world, in ways that will be mutually understood” (Hall, 1997, p. 2). For Lévi-Strauss (1993), culture is an original synthetic structure that transmits communicative relationships and interactions with nature and among different peoples, so that it is naturally hybrid and shaped by the union of and identification with diversity—especially in the case of the connection with other beings in nature.

Thus, “all cultural traditions” are “hybrid”: “they are the result of countless processes of exchange, imitation, fusion, diffusion, interposition, and assimilation of cultural traits from one group to another, over millennia” (Carvalho, 2007). This thesis also understands the multicultural and multiethnic character of the modern state.

Classical authors such as Américo Castro (2021) have studied the essentially hybrid and mestizo nature of countries like Spain and continents like Europe. At the root of the formation of national entities with a strong cultural heritage, such as Egypt, the United States, Mexico, or Spain, lie phenomena of union or fusion of very diverse communities during periods of rich cultural coexistence, such as medieval Al-Ándalus and Sicily or post-Byzantine Alexandria.

Nativism, however, renders differences between groups “irreconcilable” to justify each group having its own space. Thus, Ferreira (2019), who, like Mudde (2007), confines nativism to the state, speaks of a “mononational and monocultural” conception of it (Ferreira, 2019). As Guia (2016) indicates, it reproduces colonialist assumptions, in which “European countries imagine themselves as countries with populations rooted for centuries or millennia with specific and stable cultural and religious characteristics. European narratives of belonging still affirm that there are ‘native’ peoples, ‘de soca-rel’ (in Catalonia), ‘de souche’ (in France), or ‘true’ peoples (like the true Finns) who are the ‘natural’ inhabitants of a territory” (Guia, 2016, p. 110). Culture, in this way, replaces the category of race that was central to nativisms until the middle of the twentieth century (Álvarez Junco, 2016).

From a psycho-social point of view, nativism exacerbates the human being's sense of belonging, which is one of the essential social needs, by using the closure around the community with the creation of supposed enemies.

This sense of belonging is activated through specific narratives that draw on mythologies and symbolism, connecting past, present, and future, and highlighting the individual's interaction with two merging axes. On the one hand, with their native peers, from their family to other members of the community—past, present, and future. On the other hand, with their own unique nature and landscape, defining the space that this community naturally, peacefully, and legitimately inhabits.

Rooted in primary emotions (love, pride, fear, repulsion, and anger), affective human interactions, and the connection with nature and space, its deep psychosocial basis can be easily instrumentalized for socio-political ends. Sentiment, national identity, personal memories, and family interactions become intertwined with political action and religion, obscuring purely political arguments in favor of specific emotions and feelings.

As it will be discussed later, this phenomenon of the conflation of morality, politics, and family or religious values is part of a process studied by authors such as Wendy Brown (2021), which is essentially an emptying of political discourse in favor of a series of phenomena that can be considered to be a diffuse conceptual fog. In other words, nativist discourse requires vague and highly abstract ideas to evoke sensations, emotions, or feelings in a very broad way. The more generic and abstract the overarching idea that subsumes everything—such as country, homeland,

nation, culture, or common morality—the better it serves the purposes of this system, which are, in reality, to separate, polarize, and distance.

By unifying meanings, emotions, and behaviors within its conglomerate, nativist discourse can transcend class, generational, or even political group language to construct a common ground whose operation is framed within nihilism, since it trivializes values, detaches them from their foundations, and instrumentalizes them (Brown, 2021). Nativist rhetoric seems to appeal to deep-seated values, but what it actually does is strip those values of their substance, because the way it operates fosters exclusion and opposition.

4.1.1. Nativism in Spain: National Catholicism

There are highly relevant historiographical studies, such as that of Américo Castro (2021), on the historical reality of Spain, who identified a phenomenon a century ago that is unique in the European political world: the use of religious ideas for political ends, which occurs with particular intensity in our country. According to this author, the tendency toward a political ideology based on religious caste stems from a past of centuries of religious warfare that established in Spain a caste-like or elite national Catholicism, instrumental and lacking spiritual depth, which denies the enemy the status of equals and understands the territory as a spiritual reserve. The Spanish nationalism of the right and far right in Spain becomes orthodoxy, says Castro (2021), in the face of all kinds of heresies and deviations, which are treated with violence and dehumanization. National Catholicism is a trait deeply rooted in the country's history and has gone through multiple phases of development.

As an example of this phenomenon, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (2002) presented the foundations of national-Catholicism at the end of the 19th century in his *History of Spanish Heterodox Thinkers*. Inspired by the traditionalism that opposed the French Revolution and liberalism, and by Jaime Balmes and Donoso Cortés (Fernández Riquelme, 2022), he identified Catholicism with Spain and Spain with Catholicism as if they were two sides of the same coin. Islam and Judaism had no place in the definition of Spain. The anti-Spain movement—the heterodox thinkers—comprised those Spaniards who turned their backs on Catholicism, “something equivalent to political subversion.” Thus, nationalism here is synonymous with “counter-revolution”: it opposes “workers’ subversion,” “separatism,” and “secularization” (Álvarez Junco, 2016, p. 169). The unity of the homeland is identified with the spiritual reserve of religion and achieves its uniqueness by opposing all the rich currents of thought and culture that populated the country in the past, and which are considered religious errors (Menéndez Pelayo, 2002).

A few decades later, in 1918, the *Fiesta de la Raza*¹ event, linked to the concept of *Hispanidad* (Hispanic identity), became the national holiday (Álvarez Junco, 2016). In a European context marked by racism, the purpose of October 12th was to commemorate the date on which Columbus discovered America; that is, Spain's identity as a nation is intimately tied to colonization and imperial pride. As Álvarez Junco points out, it was the intellectual Ramiro de Maeztu who “launched the idea of *Hispanidad* as a spiritual community of Spanish-speaking nations based on the Catholic principles that Spain had introduced to the New World” (Álvarez Junco 2016, p. 179).

National Catholicism embodies a characteristic of European nativism that has persisted for centuries: the rejection of Muslims. It draws on the Reconquista movement and Spain's Christian roots, which are embodied in myths and figures such as Don Pelayo and the Catholic Monarchs. Today, this opposition resurfaces in the form of the characterization of Muslims as bearers of traditions that run counter to the values inherent in the democratic system (Guia, 2016) and to vague notions of Spanish culture and customs. Contemporary national Catholicism extends this opposition to the nation itself, to peripheral nationalisms that threaten its territory, and to the secular left wing that jeopardizes its traditions and values.

Caro Baroja (2003) already showed how a pseudo-mythology of a people, race, ethnicity, or community can be constructed by alluding to hazy ancestral mythologies. The use of myths, symbols, and basic language is a resource of nativism, but these myths are inventions, manipulations, or distortions of the essential culture, which is always hybrid and a phenomenon of reconciliation between nature and humanity, or between different human

¹ Day of the Race

communities.

It is interesting to observe how, in recent decades, conservative Spanish nationalism has presented itself not as nationalism but as “constitutional patriotism,” following Habermas. In contrast to the destabilizing, disintegrating peripheral nationalisms, which are opposed to democracy, the Constitution, and the rule of law, there is Spanish patriotism, the receptacle of “the collective values that guarantee freedom” (Álvarez Junco, 2016, p. 197). The context, then, is not one of several nationalisms in conflict but rather of peripheral nationalisms that threaten the democratic system. However, this Spanish nationalism, heir to national Catholicism, is aggressive and exclusionary: it considers the Spanish nation to be the only one existing within the State and trivializes and despises cultural diversity (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2021).

Conservative nationalism has become so ingrained that it seems to be the only possible form of Spanish identity. Spain's history, marked by a dictatorship based on national Catholicism that lasted for over forty years in the 20th century, has led to nationalism being identified as synonymous with national Catholicism. However, as Álvarez Junco (2016, p. 16) reminds, there is a “secular and progressive Spanish identity” represented by figures such as Francisco Giner de los Ríos and Manuel Azaña.

One of the leading exponents of this naturalized conservative nationalism is José María Aznar, whom Díaz Ayuso considers “always a role model” (Ayuso, as cited in Esteban, 2023). The former president believes that Spanishness completely defines the identity as individuals; it is the essence: “Being Spanish permeates and incorporates everything, without fail. That is how powerful our nation is. And if the Spanish nation were to be in danger, it would be your own individual identity that would be at risk” (Aznar, 2018, p. 74).

As it will be discussed later, Madrid's identity, the sense of belonging, and the values of its citizens, as presented by Díaz Ayuso, are largely constructed from a conservative nationalism inherited from national Catholicism. Metonymically, Spain is Madrid and Madrid is Spain: “Madrid is Spain within Spain. What is Madrid if not Spain? It belongs to no one because it belongs to everyone” (*La Vanguardia*, 2020). The values of this identity are formed through a consistently oppositional discourse that borrows expressions from other ideologies or sectors to link them to the essence of the city: freedom, bravery, Judeo-Christian values, love of family, wealth, the free market, and free trade.

In her speeches, Ayuso frequently speaks of the Christian roots of Europe and Spain, although she does not attack or criminalize Muslims as Vox does. However, when it comes to constructing the concept of Spanishness, she shares myths and figures with the far-right party's discourse.

4.2. Neoliberalism: Markets, Traditional Morality and Corrective Mechanisms

For neoliberalism, markets and traditional morality represent the most natural and appropriate form of human and civilizational development, requiring the greatest possible freedom—that is, the absence of limits and regulations—to function (Brown, 2021). Studies and reflections on this phenomenon have focused on the first element, markets, and have tended to overlook the importance of the second, traditional morality, in the very conception of the individual, their logic, their interpersonal relationships, and their experience of the world.

Thus, the privatization of public goods and services is commonly identified as a practice that is characteristic of neoliberalism. So too is the concentration of capital and the reduction of taxes for businesses, foreign investment, and citizens, especially those segments that, based on wealth and income level, should be subject to higher tax rates in a redistributive system. Finally, as the market becomes the foundation of the state and government, both of them fall under the oversight of supranational institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (Brown, 2021).

Traditional morality, the other key element in neoliberal logic and the least studied, is, for Hayek, the foundation of freedom and order (Hayek, as cited in Brown, 2021). As Brown points out, influenced by the conservative philosopher and politician Edmund Burke, Hayek “marvels at the capacity of tradition to produce social harmony and integration” (Brown, 2021, p. 139). For Burke, tradition is what binds social groups together—especially religion, as

noted by researchers Macridis and Hulliung (1998) and Robin (2019).

Hence, as Brown emphasizes, Hayek also assigns a key role to religion, since it is what “codifies” and “transmits” tradition (Brown, 2021, p. 141). Religion is characterized by “the structure of blind belief,” which is based on “accepting things without analyzing or understanding, but that serves to help us adapt.” This structure of blind belief is also the basis of “business management,” where the individual, even if they consider the context “hostile,” should not aspire to change it but rather adapt their “reaction” to it (Santamaría, 2019, p. 111).

Tradition, therefore, is fundamental to social processes, so we should not question or challenge it, but rather adapt to it and put it at the service of neoliberalism (Santamaría, 2019). The concept of the protected personal sphere is fundamental here, a space shaped by “community norms or individual freedoms” that acts as a boundary or impermeable frontier against political power, social influence, or the very foundations of democracy. The preservation and defense of the protected personal sphere allows one to invoke, for example, “conscientious objection” to avoid providing “services related to contraception, abortion, or same-sex marriage.” It also allows one to use “school vouchers” to choose a school with certain values instead of a public school (Brown, 2021, p. 112).

Traditional morality is also the counterpart to the free market: a way to counterbalance the coldness inherent in the economization of all aspects of life. Brown explains that it was the godfather of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol, who emphasized the need to “promote traditional values in families, schools, and civic spaces, affirm religious influence in political life, and cultivate patriotism” (Brown, 2021, p. 131). The family, in particular, becomes the essential “counterweight” to the problems of commodification, assuming the functions that correspond to the Welfare State. It also functions as “a disciplinary container and a structure of authority” (Brown, 2021, p. 134).

The strength of neoliberalism, then, lies in the fact that it is “a new political rationality,” a “new anthropological framework,” which “creates a new subject and a new subjectivity” (Brown, pp. 45 and 68). It is not simply “an economic system or a macropolitical mode of organization” (Valls, 2022, p. 33). This new political rationality constructs individuals as “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Foucault, 2007), driven by competition, efficiency, and profit maximization. These market principles not only determine the functioning of businesses, the state, and the government, but are “principles that saturate reality, governing all spheres of existence.” Hence the use of the metaphor of “subject of competition and expansion of human capital” (Brown, 2021, p. 45). All aspects of life are understood in terms of capital. Work is life, and life is work. Work-life must not only be competent, efficient, and profit-maximizing, but it must also be creative, original, unique, and authentic (Valls, 2022). Individuals find ways to capitalize on their assets, their time, their interpersonal relationships, and themselves (Brown, 2021). There is no “cultural or biological limit that contains the demands placed upon oneself.” Therefore, neoliberalism rejects fatigue, and, if necessary, political power authorizes and normalizes the consumption of all kinds of psychotropic drugs that eliminate it (Valls, 2022, p. 36 and p. 52).

To achieve this, “the market must be the force that gives meaning and spirit to the state, from working conditions to education” (Santamaría, 2019, p. 113). This is what Foucault (2007) referred to as “governmentalization.”

Besides the state itself, the other two mechanisms that guarantee the hegemony of the neoliberal model are the use of traditional religious morality, which have already been discussed, and language. The next section will be dedicated to the latter.

4.3. Language Reappropriation and Weasel Words

The formulas for ensuring the dominance of liberalism were fundamental in the very conception and development of the neoliberal model (new liberalism). Hayek called them “correction mechanisms” but, in reality, they are “power mechanisms” (Santamaría, 2019, p. 113).

That author identified the generation of bonds based on “collaboration, solidarity, and altruism” as one of the greatest threats to the model. Furthermore, since it was classified within the category of “human instincts,” it was vital to inoculate against its flourishing and action. The tool for doing so is language: it is necessary to transform “the

language traditionally opposed to market dynamics (imagination, creativity, emotions...)” into “essential for the new labor and educational narrative” (Santamaría, 2019, p. 113).

However, as Mikhail Bakhtin states, language “is not a neutral medium that easily and freely becomes the intentional property of the speaker: it is populated and overpopulated with other people’s intentions. Its appropriation, its subordination to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complex process” (Bajtin, 1989, p. 111). Languages are the “stratifying forces” and, as a consequence of their action, “there are no neutral words and forms in language, no one’s: language is totally misappropriated, traversed by intentions, accentuated (...) Every word has the aroma of the context and the contexts in which it has intensely lived its life from a social point of view; all words and forms are populated with intentions” (Bajtin, 1989, p. 110).

Neoliberalism, therefore, faces a complex task in attempting to subordinate language to its intentions. The very nature of signs lies at the heart of this difficulty. Signs, as Peirce explains, have acquired functions that connect people to the objects they represent, and they always refer people to something other than themselves, to the object they represent (Peirce, in Castañares, 2019). This object is “already conditioned, contested, evaluated (...) immersed in the light of other people’s words that have been said about it” (Bajtin, 1989, p. 94). The object to which the sign refers has been constructed from a specific perspective, based on intentions that determine its meaning. Agents with the capacity to condition objects and sign systems consolidate hegemonies and obtain the power of representation through languages, as Pitkin (2017) studies, following the long tradition of studies on language and power.

Friedrich Hayek is quite aware of the crucial role that language plays in constructing meaning within a given context. He understands that power depends on the ability to shape language, to imbue the substance of expression with one’s intentions and interests. Thus, he employs the metaphor of weasel words, which are based on using “words that cannot be dispensed with,” avoiding or shunning “the implications of one’s own ideological premises” (Hayek, as cited in Santamaría, 2019, p. 113). He is referring, therefore, to a specific operation within semantic reappropriation. Hayek argues that neoliberalism, in order to maintain and reinforce itself as a hegemonic force, must appropriate the key signifiers or symbolic words of a given encyclopedia, semiosphere, or system of meaning in such a way that they reflect its intentions and interests.

Weasel words operate in two different ways, according to Hayek’s thesis on this linguistic strategy. Like the weasel, which absorbs the contents of other animals’ eggs and leaves the shells empty and intact, weasel words, in their operation of transferring signifiers to a new context, generate a conceptual void both in the original context and in their new context. They change and empty political semantic memory by changing their context.

To give a clear example, when Isabel Díaz Ayuso centered her entire 2021 election campaign on the word “Freedom” as her absolute slogan, she performed two semantic operations: on the one hand, she brought the concept of revolutionary freedom, traditionally associated with communism, anarchism, and socialism, back into the realm of right-wing liberalism, reviving nothing less than Stuart Mill’s liberalist ideas (2022). In fact, although her initial political emergence was limited to the word “Freedom,” she later used the opposition “Socialism or Freedom” in the 2021 elections, and then exacerbated the opposition to “Communism or Freedom”—on the occasion of Pablo Iglesias’s candidacy presentation in those elections.

With this strategy, Díaz Ayuso strips the word “freedom” of its immediate political connection to revolutionary socialist, anarchist, or communist ideas. And at the same time, by identifying the word with her political program, she leaves the empty shell of semantic content available for other purposes. Thus, Díaz Ayuso’s freedom, based on this weasel-like word, is generic freedom: freedom for being from Madrid, for consuming, for starting a business, for having a partner, for breathing. It is an empty shell, based on a conceptual fog. Ayuso’s freedom, once emptied of its historical content, reconnects with another context, essentially the economic sphere: it is the invisible hand of capitalism that energizes her political discourse. Thus, she will also use the empty shell of the word “freedom” to breathe meaning into consumption, tourism, religion, and even depoliticization.

In neoliberal logic, competition, self-exploitation, and profit maximization are core values. The individual becomes entrepreneurial and adapts to traditional morality. This is a model that opposes the social, democratic, and political spheres (Brown, 2021). Therefore, neoliberalism appropriates key signifiers from these three spheres, which have been central to the sociocultural context of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, such as freedom, equality, justice, and solidarity. Thus, it constructs freedom as the opposite of the social. It frames freedom within the natural realm, which is spontaneous, good, and virtuous, in contrast to the social, which belongs to the artificial realm and is directed, bad, and ineffective.

Through figures like Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism denies the very existence of society and its values, rendering them empty shells. In a 1987 interview, Thatcher stated, "You know there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (Thatcher, 1987). If society and the social sphere do not exist, if they are something invented and harmful, then social justice will be constructed along the same lines, becoming simply "the politics of envy" (Brown, 2021, p. 55). Díaz Ayuso has recently denied the existence of the "class struggle" and even of social classes themselves (<https://bitly.cx/vkc5>), considering them "inventions of the left wing." This strategy empties these concepts of their meaning.

Similarly, neoliberalism appropriates the signifier "Democracy" in such a way that its core no longer refers to political equality but to property. In her speech at the 1980 Tory Convention, when she had been in office for only one year, Thatcher spoke of "owner-occupier democracy" (Thatcher, 1980). This semantic connection captures the essence of democracy as a guarantor of equality and self-governance (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2018), which requires the reduction of material or symbolic inequalities so that equality ensures control over and accountability for political power (Brown, 2021, p. 49). Instead, property ownership, profit maximization, and competition take the place of political value itself, constituting expressions that empty democracy of its meaning and place it at the service of neoliberalism.

Another word that loses its value when it becomes a weasel word is Politics. The political, essentially, is always concerned with "common existence as conceived, formed, and governed." One depends entirely on the political aspects because they define "the destiny of human and non-human worlds." In turn, it is interconnected with many other powers (Brown, 2021, pp. 88-90). There are goods that cannot be obtained individually and require the "commons." This is referred to as the "provision of public goods," which in many cases involves the "redistribution of resources among different members of the community" (Colomer, 2009, p. XII). Neoliberalism sees politics as a danger to the foundations of civilization: the market and traditional morality. Political management is only of interest insofar as it can generate economic benefits, and therefore must be controlled by placing it at the service of competition and self-exploitation. The only acceptable freedom is the freedom of profit and the market.

The primary linguistic system used to empty the dangerous realm of politics of its essential content is to translate everything into economic terms: democracy is based on property, and the system's goal is to maximize profits. Society, politics, and the social sphere become empty words, while money, profit, and consumption are the truly existing realities. Property, markets, traditional morality, the individual, and the family exist and are considered decisive—weasel words introduced into the political sphere to deprive it of its true meaning.

Weasel words create reductionist semantic connections. Rather than broadening—as metaphors do—comprehensive views of what is political by expanding their perspectives, they function as antimetaphors, identifying contexts that undermine the broader view. Thus, on the one hand, the subject becomes corporatized: competition, accumulation, hierarchy, homogeneity, and loyalty are the foundations of identification, valuation, and interaction. On the other hand, markets and companies become individualized and family-oriented, and the capitalist aspect of their behavior disappears. Pride in individual and family responsibility (corporatization) is pitted against social justice and redistribution, which are viewed as manipulations and policies based on envy and begging. A surprising paradox arises: political leaders who employ Hayek's strategy (Santamaría, 2019) use the term "politics" to denigrate and belittle their own functions.

Other weasel words equate concepts to reduce their traditional political dimension, as happens with "ideology" when linked to feminism or "freedom" when universal public education or healthcare is questioned. There are reductionist semantic combinations such as "liberal democracy," which reduces the former to the latter; the "Judeo-

Christian" heritage, which suppresses the Islamic one; or "social-communism," which eliminates the nuances between the two ideologies and wipes out social democracy with a stroke of the pen. The terms "poverty" or "sadness" identify socialist or communist systems, emotionally absorbing a vast array of historical situations into just two words. "Freedom" allows one to renounce the common good, universal services, or, in contexts like education, can be used to justify ceasing investment in public education. "Political" and "doing politics" mean being corrupt, false, or manipulative, and therefore saying that someone is doing something for political reasons implies that they should be completely ignored. While the weasel words shrink the usual fields of public political action, they leave room in the discourse for it to be invaded by other sectors and social agents, such as business, the private subject, the religious institution, or tradition and morality.

From a psychosocial perspective, the logic behind the weasel words also has a very important emotional aspect. James Jasper (2013), in line with other authors such as Warner and Aladro-Vico (2009) and Watzlawick et al. (1991), has pointed out that the emotions generated by communication can energize or demobilize, generate or discourage action, because at their core, they either do or do not confer semantic meaning on contexts or interactions. According to Jasper, the management of opposing emotions in socio-political movements produces a crucial effect: emotions serve as moral batteries (the "combination of positive and negative emotions that, through their contrast, provide energy for action") in social situations (Jasper, 2013, p. 52), but they are also connected to the reduction and intensification of meaning.

The instrumentalization of weasel words is associated with semantic reduction. The use of this type of language is linked to emotional changes in individuals. The reduction or transformation of the meaning of situations can generate emotional escalations in which the sense of reality is lost due to intense feeling, generating what cognitive psychology calls "tunnel vision" (Beck, 2003). Since emotions can generate reciprocal and instantaneous solidarity, using positive and negative combinations, even with very negative emotions, the appeal to concepts that, in starkly contrasting combinations, can awaken emotions such as attachment and anger simultaneously, is highly effective when triggered by weasel words, which are capable of subtracting meaning. For example, appealing to family ties, religious sentiment, or individualism can trigger emotions such as rejection, fear of danger, or, conversely, pride and affection.

4.4. Political Discourse, Social Media and YouTube

It has been almost 20 years since social media became essential for understanding political communication. Barack Obama's 2008 US presidential campaign and his two terms as president marked a turning point in this regard. The use he made of social media between 2016 and 2020, and the current use of his successor in the White House, Donald Trump, determines how political discourse is produced, disseminated, and interpreted globally (Karpf, 2017; Pérez-Curiel & Limón-Naharro, 2019; Ross & Rivers, 2020). Although social media amplifies the characteristics of reality television, and the 21st century is the century of hyper-television, Trump lays the groundwork for a new rhetoric or discursive logic characterized by the constant impact —a trait typical of the influencer figure (Battista, Giordano & Mangone, 2026; Pérez-Curiel & Limón-Naharro, 2019; Street, 2018).

In Spain, the use of social media in political communication became prominent from 2009 onwards. It was used extensively in the regional elections in Galicia and the Basque Country in 2009, Catalonia in 2010, the 2009 European elections, and the 2011 general elections (Jivkova-Semova et al., 2017). Without it, the success of the 15-M Movement, Podemos in the 2014-2017 period, and Vox in the 2019-2026 period cannot be understood.

There is a vast body of research analyzing the discourse of Spanish leaders and political parties on social media from the perspective of ideologies and discursive strategies. Many of these studies focus on the YouTube platform (Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2017; Cerdán et al., 2022; Gil & Gómez de Travesedo, 2022; Peña & Zorogastu, 2025; Pineda Cachero et al., 2022). However, in the case of Díaz Ayuso, while there are studies that analyze aspects such as her leadership style, personal brand, personalization, and communication style on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, none focus on her YouTube content.

YouTube is an open network that allows any internet user to access its videos without needing to register. Those with a profile can share, comment on, or rate videos (Cerdán et al., 2022). It also functions as a repository from

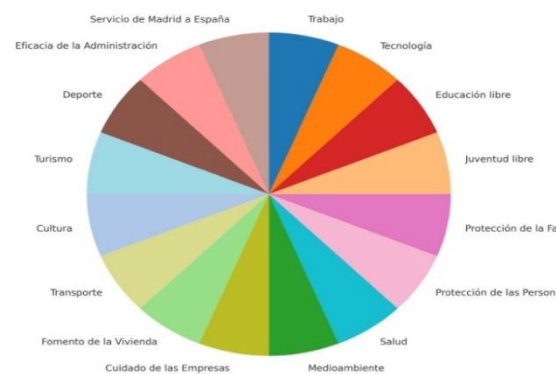
which to distribute content to other media (Rodríguez-Serrano et al., 2019). It is the second most popular social network in Spain and the fourth in terms of daily time spent on it. Furthermore, it is the network of choice, along with Instagram, for older users, according to the IAB Annual Study (IAB, 2024). The 2025 Reuters Institute's Digital News Report (University of Oxford) ranks YouTube as the third most used social network in Spain, both for accessing general information and specifically for news (Sierra et al., 2025).

Díaz Ayuso's YouTube channel has 17,100 subscribers, 421 hosted videos, and nearly 3,000,000 total views. While this is far from Pedro Sánchez's 37,400 subscribers and Santiago Abascal's 25,000, the number of views she achieves is very high compared to those of the two national leaders. A preliminary look at the president's videos reveals that, for the most part, with the exception of some outtakes, they project a concept of institutionalism and a purely political role, in contrast to the influencer persona she cultivates on other networks like Instagram (Caro-Castaño et al., 2024).

5. RESULTS

The Partido Popular groups the measures in its program for the May 2023 Madrid regional elections into 16 thematic areas. These areas and their content shift the discourse from purely collective aspects, associated with public services or institutions, to the family sphere, values—freedom—and the individual, with the economic and business aspect as a comprehensive axis that links and summarizes all the other areas: work, business, tourism, efficiency, housing and transportation development, and even culture. It thus follows the central principle of neoliberal philosophy as formulated by Hayek.

Figure 1. *Thematic Pillars of the Partido Popular in Madrid. Political Topics Are Shown in Cool Colors, and Topics Associated with Weasel Words in Neoliberal Strategies Are Shown in Warm Colors*



Source: Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the program, there is continuous metonymic links with Spain that shift the political action of the Community of Madrid, which has jurisdiction at the regional level, to the national level. Implicitly, by emphasizing "Madrid's service to Spain," the program seeks to contrast this with peripheral nationalisms and the left, which are supposedly not fulfilling this role. This is the realm of nativism.

The language used to convey the proposals continually includes weasel words such as freedom, Spain, family, company, or person.

The 62 videos published on Díaz Ayuso's official YouTube channel during 2023 follow these three trends. The majority of them are speeches she delivered in the Assembly or elsewhere in the Community of Madrid. Almost half of them (43%, or

27 speeches) focus on confrontation with Pedro Sánchez, and 27% (17 speeches) on confrontation with Más Madrid and the left wing in general. It was found that this pattern is consistent with the videos published on her channel since the beginning of 2020, that is, from a few months after she became president of the Community of Madrid. In fact, the videos with the most views throughout the 2019-2025 period, with the exception of a blooper reel, a talk with Toni Nadal and the unveiling of the nativity scene at Puerta del Sol are part of the confrontation with Sánchez.

Of the 62 videos analyzed, a selection of the 14 with the most views was made to illustrate with concrete examples the three core trends and some of their characteristics.

Table 2. *The 14 Videos With the Most Views on Díaz Ayuso's YouTube Profile During 2023*

Video Titles	Views and Duration	Date
1. Me gusta la fruta. (I like fruit.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_p9bzibH6yY&t=7s	45,593 views 7'35"	17-11-2023
2. Con Toni Nadal. Hablamos del mérito y del esfuerzo. (With Toni Nadal. We talked about merit and effort.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EY7GT6bFFo0	24,352 views 49'47"	20-01-2023
3. El proyecto de Pedro Sánchez está acabado. (Pedro Sánchez's project is over.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMPIQNbHnQ&t=90s	17,114 views 19' 49"	22-01-2023
4. Sánchez: el caradura. (Sánchez: the shameless one.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L78JbkH9yo	10,422 views 23'29"	22-04-2023
5. Declaración institucional de la Comunidad de Madrid tras el acuerdo de Pedro Sánchez y Junts. (Institutional statement of the Community of Madrid following the agreement between Pedro Sánchez and Junts.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqSLpzXG4X8&t=6s	8,028 views 7'10"	09-11-2023
6. Madrid con ganas. (Madrid full of enthusiasm.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_ujq8HV7dw	7,119 views 17'55"	01-05-2023
7. Más Madrid debería ir 15 días a comprobar en persona cómo es la vida en manos de Hamás. (Más Madrid should spend 15 days there to see firsthand what life is like under Hamas.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfveARFELTE	5,043 views 3'25"	20-10-2023
8. Discurso de Investidura en la Asamblea de Madrid. (Inaugural speech at the Assembly of Madrid.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW49S8baQXA	4,646 views 1 16' 35"	24-06-2023
9. Rendirnos no es una opción. Apertura de curso político. (Giving up is not an option. Opening of the political season.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEEh1hFKU48	4,388 views 22' 25"	01-09-2023
10. Puede marchar en paz. (You may go in peace.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRF_XCRXchi	4,320 views 3'39"	02-04-2023
11. 179 candidatos con ganas de ganar Madrid. (There are 179 candidates eager to win Madrid.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RAJje0dfik	4,314 views 17'08"	15-04-2023
12. El mejor Madrid. Discurso en la toma de posesión. (The best Madrid. Inauguration speech.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K27ZuCh2NzM	4,285 views 9'06"	23-06-2023
13. Mensaje de Fin de Año. (New Year's Message.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL-j0kxGRL0&t=13s	4,134 views 9'23"	31-12-2023

14. No quiero la independencia del País Vasco. (I do not want the independence of the Basque Country.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuO_plyuV6M	3,731 views 35'42"	26-05-2023
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Source: Elaborated by the authors.

All the selected videos except the first, “I like fruit,” revolve around the main weasel word Díaz Ayuso uses: freedom. In speech number 13, the End-of-Year Message, she states the following:

My commitment for 2024 is to continue defending our model of coexistence. A Community of Madrid where no one is above the law, where we preserve the independence of judges, and where those who think differently are respected. A region that serves Spain—the Spain that belongs to all of us—that does not forget the victims of terrorism and feels represented by the national symbols: the flag, the anthem, and the coat of arms (...) This is our best way of understanding life in freedom, without walls, in harmony. Where each of us aspires to be the best version of ourselves, we will build the greatest Madrid in its history (...) In the region that belongs to everyone, where people come to live in peace, to be whatever they want to be, to decide how to start a business, earn a living, pursue an education, or raise a family as they choose, and to embrace this wonderful daily adventure that is life in freedom. And, if we are able to spread our enthusiasm, we will also build the best Spain.

Here “Freedom” is constructed in opposition to Sánchez, the left wing and peripheral nationalisms. At the beginning of her speech, the president referred to the “serious mistake of the amnesty,” “the Basque and Catalan separatist minorities,” and “communist policies that only impoverish and stifle.” Against all of this stands “the region of all,” the Community of Madrid, which, metonymically, represents Spain, “the Spain of all.”

“Spain” is also a weasel word, used as a clutch to shift the focus of political action toward opposition to the national government's policies. The use of “Spain” allows Ayuso to oppose the government in a context where she cannot afford to lose because it is not her own. Furthermore, she blends “freedom,” “Madrid,” and “Spain” with neoliberal aspects—both economic and moral—as well as nationalist and nativist elements. Thus, she speaks of “starting a business” or “raising a family as one chooses.”

With this strategy, on the one hand, she brings the concept of revolutionary freedom, traditionally associated with communism, anarchism, or socialism, back into the realm of liberalism—in this case, its right-wing current—reviving nothing less than Stuart Mill's (2022) liberalist ideas. On the other hand, she identifies the word with her political program and leaves the egg empty of semantic content, available to be used according to her interests. Thus, Díaz Ayuso's freedom, based on this weasel-like word, is generic freedom: freedom for being from Madrid, for consuming, or for starting a business. Ayuso's freedom, once emptied of its historical content, reconnects with another context, essentially the economic sphere. Thus, she will also use the empty shell of the word “freedom” to instill meaning in consumption, tourism, religion, and even depoliticization.

This rhetorical strategy is constantly repeated. For example, in Speech 8, the inauguration speech states:

The composition of this Parliament is the result of elections that have left us with three main messages. The first is that the people of Madrid like the lifestyle they have and the policies defended by the Partido Popular in Madrid. That is why they did not vote solely on economic grounds, something that is crucial in this region: they voted for the values of freedom, joy, courage, patriotism, pluralism, generosity, and a way of understanding and living together that exists in Madrid like few other places in the world. (...) Here, the freedom to live means a more intense, more personal, and more authentic life. (...) That is also why the far left wing has weakened in this Chamber. Madrid is breakwater of the many Spains, and it was here that the reconquest of freedom and of a Spain for all began. And the trend is now unstoppable (...) Spanish people, from left to right, do not want to lose their country, to see it fade away, to accept that young people are being pushed into victimhood, to fund staged events with public money to encourage supposed new class struggles (between men and women, rural and urban areas,

public and private, the elderly and the young), which only seek to divide society so that it loses its initiative and can be controlled. At the hands of those who politicize everything, even pet ownership or intimate relationships: and that is the exact definition of totalitarianism in any of its forms: that everything is political, so that nothing is personal, spontaneous, or free (...) And the change is unstoppable because all of Spain is clear on this: Spain deserves a better government, and does not want its enemies to occupy its institutions, nor to change it through the back door.

The nationalist-nativist question is alluded to through the use of the signifier "reconquest," which, again through metonymy of the part for the whole, amplifies its identification with larger dimensions of action. Furthermore, the text openly speaks of the "enemies" of Spain: the left wing (the Government) and peripheral nationalisms. Neoliberal aspects are also included through signifiers such as "initiative." Thus, there is a semantic field of the positive (freedom-Madrid-Spain) that refers to reconquest, patriotism, truth, spontaneity, and the personal elements. On an emotional level, it evokes joy and pride. In contrast, there is the semantic field of the negative (totalitarianism-enemies of Spain) that refers to the far left wing, the (central) Government, politicization, control, division, victimhood, and fabrications. On an emotional level, it evokes fear and anger.

It is interesting to observe how, in line with what has been said about neoliberalism in the theoretical framework, the "personal" elements (the individual) is related to what is spontaneous, authentic, and true, as opposed to "politicization," control, and falsehood. In speech 2, "With Toni Nadal. We talked about merit and effort," the central theme is individual freedom of action as the focus of political interest. By the minute 42, second 59, there is a definition that excludes the realm of political governance, guided by an invocation of freedom:

Madrid is a project we've created that offers opportunities and freedom to those who have lost faith, who have lost opportunities and freedom, and who want to live in peace, live their own way, based on their convictions, their beliefs, and their own decisions. We simply stand by them, support them, and help them whenever they ask for it (...) Our project is purely liberal and personal, and you have to be willing to commit to it.

The annulment of the collective principle is clear in this discourse in which a discursive strategy is confirmed based on the association of semantic fields in which an operation of semantic shrinking is proposed: freedom is associated with what is individual, which in turn is associated with belief (religion) and, in turn, with opportunities for triumph (effort and merit).

In speech number 4, "Sánchez: the shameless one," the president again constructs her discourse around the aforementioned semantic fields (freedom-Spain-Madrid versus totalitarianism-enemies of Spain). As in Toni Nadal's speech, she alludes to effort, merit, and prosperity, but in this case, within the context of education. Investment in private or government-subsidised education is fundamentally defined as the hallmark of freedom and equality. Freedom and equality as values that stand in contrast to the counter-values of control and collectivization.

We want to continue working to protect students from sectarianism—not only through ideological content, but also by instilling in them a certain attitude toward life. They are always resentful, supposedly happy because everything is handed to them on a silver platter; they always level everyone down because they try to collectivize and control our young people; they are always complacent. We believe in a culture of hard work, merit, and sacrifice—and in ensuring that no one is left behind, but that those who thrive, work hard, and achieve success can continue to grow. Because they deserve it; they deserve it, and we owe it to them. A quality education, where content matters (...) where public, private, state-subsidized, and special schools coexist and do so according to what families freely request of us. We want a country of free citizens who are equal before the law.

In speech number 10, "You may go in peace," Díaz Ayuso responds to the then-leader of the opposition, Mónica García, by using the weasel word "ideology." Here, "ideology" is a negative value, again identified with falsehood, deceit, and indoctrination. It must be said that someone guided or influenced by ideology becomes an insult.

You are a woman driven by ideology, who thinks she can do anything: that's why you promote blacklists

of your fellow doctors; you don't care—you've never cared—about sabotaging the healthcare system at any time. In addition to losing your credibility and your social benefits, you've lost your professionalism. Let me tell you... (and at the end): you may go in peace, for I am inspired by the Vatican.

Also in relation to Más Madrid, in speech 7 she recommends that the party's deputies go to Gaza and live with Hamas for at least 15 days:

Do you know what the Manichean left does with all of this? You should be ashamed of how you twist the narrative; what's more, I stand with the world's liberal democracies. I urge you to stop being the only one in this chamber who doesn't attend Holocaust commemorations, because I'm starting to think that you aren't in support of the Palestinian cause, but rather that you are deeply anti-Semitic.

Here, Díaz Ayuso uses adjectives to create semantic fields that are emptied of meaning—"Manichean left," "liberal democracies of the world," "anti-Semitic"—in an anti-metaphorical way, because the semantic combination empties or reduces the content of words. Democracies are not only liberal, the left wing is not the only Manichean group, nor are defenders of the Palestinians anti-Semitic; in all cases, these are strategies for stripping words or concepts of their inherent value. Again, metonymy allows her to jump from the regional context not to the national one, but to the international one.

The left wing is always portrayed as false, manipulative, and indoctrinating in the face of freedom, spontaneity, and truth, but also as impoverished, wretched, and depressing, thus activating the emotional aspect already being referred to herein. In this same speech, the identification is absolute in the sentence:

Poverty and the left wing need each other and feed off each other. Just look at those who have left Latin America fleeing socialism, the Ukrainians, so many others who are fleeing.

The invasion that Putin's Russia began in February 2022 in Ukraine is identified with the actions of a left-wing government, in a broad historical characterization.

Finally, the most widely viewed speech is the one characterized by the euphemistic expression "I like fruit," which is key to insulting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whom Díaz Ayuso called a "son of a bitch" in the public gallery of the Congress of Deputies. When the Socialist group demanded an apology, the president responded by insisting on this expression, repeating it up to four times in her reply.

They probably want me to call Sánchez handsome, divine, wonderful, but the president already said yesterday in Parliament that he is going to build a wall in Spain to make two, one against the other (...) Well, if they expect me to suck up to him, and praise him for destroying Spain, well yes, of course, I like fruit.

This expression has become one of the most viral political slogans or motifs, and even in demonstrations and public events, images of fruit or banners bearing this slogan are used to express opposition and struggle against the national president. The tone of opposition goes beyond politics, speeches, and arguments, reaching the level of hate speech in an emotional barrage that combines love for Spain and nationalist sentiment with a visceral, insulting rejection of the socialist politician. Ayuso constantly uses "Spain" as a weasel word to resolve the battle on a national level, thus bypassing the regional dimensions of the debate. Once again, language that is external to politics removes it from the realm of dialogue or political debate, setting in motion, in addition to contexts far removed from its own sphere of influence, emotions and reactions that further narrow the tunnel vision of the social debate.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analyzed speeches of Isabel Díaz Ayuso follow the same trends as the electoral program that the PP presented to the May 2023 elections: nativism in its national-Catholic form that constructs the left and peripheral nationalisms as enemies of Spain, neoliberalism through the economization and moralization of the political sphere and the use

of the weasel word as a semantic reduction.

Nativism is present in their discourse because, although it does not aim to restrict the flow of immigrants or criminalize Muslims, as Vox does (Aladro-Vico & Requeijo, 2020), it does construct Catholicism (and, notably, the Judeo-Christian heritage) as the core of Spanish and European culture, emphasizing the danger posed by the left and peripheral nationalisms. The nativist logic of creating an enemy, in this case an internal one, allows them to eliminate differences within their community and propose an irrefutable concept of identity. This identity is based, as we have already explained, on the principles of conservative nationalism, heir to national Catholicism, and on a so-called "liberal democracy" that excludes social democracy, socialism, and Eurocommunism from the political arena.

The metonymic fusion of Madrid and Spain is personified in Díaz Ayuso herself through allusions to the country's destiny, its origins, and its history, present in the traditions and institutions with which the leader identifies. The enemy is personified in the president of the national government, Pedro Sánchez. This scheme corresponds to the drama triangle. The native community (in this case, Madrid-Spain) is constructed as the victim of a persecutor (the left, peripheral nationalisms, and the central government, embodied in Pedro Sánchez) that constantly endangers it. The savior (Spain-Madrid, embodied in Ayuso) guarantees the preservation or restoration of the social practices that construct the native community's own sense of self, that is, its identity and culture. This opposition, as Martín Rojo (2022) points out, projects conservative ideas and concepts as rebellious and anti-establishment.

Neoliberalism is reflected in the economization of various dimensions of politics. Fundamental values of politics in general, and of democracy in particular, such as equality, freedom, and solidarity, are reduced to matters of competitiveness, entrepreneurship, profit, and consumption. The text delves into nihilism, the detachment of values from their foundations, and their trivialization. It also frequently refers to meritocracy through expressions such as "the culture of merit, effort, and sacrifice," "thrive," or "continue to grow."

Neoliberalism also manifests itself in moralization, Hayek's second corrective mechanism. Politics is identified with an individual or group morality, through expressions such as "a more intense and personal life," "the best version of ourselves," "being who we want to be," "living in peace," "living one's own way," "a purely personal project," or "creating a family." There are times when the leader frames her discourse within a religious context through signifiers such as "a project of freedom for those who have lost their faith" or "living according to one's beliefs."

In the analyzed speeches, the characteristics of nativism and neoliberalism materialize through Hayek's third corrective mechanism: weasel words. The most frequently used are "Freedom," "Life in Freedom," "Spain," "Liberal Democracy," "Market," "Commerce," "Enterprise," "Family," "Person," and "Prosperity." These are contrasted with "Totalitarianism," "Enemies of Spain," "Politicization," "Collectivism," "Ideology," "Control," and "Class Struggle." As neoliberalism posits, the semantic field of what is positive is constructed around the person, the family, and the enterprise. These are associated with truth, spontaneity, and, in Díaz Ayuso's words, "a more intense, personal, and true life." The semantic field of what is negative comprises what is social and what is political, which are identified with the left wing, peripheral nationalisms, manipulative ideology, and sectarianism. "They politicize everything," making "everything political, so that nothing is spontaneous, personal, or free."

With the weasel words, Díaz Ayuso instrumentalizes emotions through qualifications and definitions that not only empty traditional political concepts of their conceptual meaning, but also fill them with content from other sectors and social agents: market freedom, religious sentiment, the revival of tradition, the fear of manipulation or moral degeneration, and the fight against external threats to the community.

This entire description fits perfectly with the strategies of the most radical political right-wing groups in the sociopolitical context of Spain at all levels, since, in the same way this was noted several years ago when discussing the political party Vox, political styles characterized by semantic underload—which encourage the hollowing out of ideas or platforms—are favored by the information overload of the social media-driven society, the climate of social acceleration and communications saturation, and they exploit situations of scarcity or economic and sociocultural crisis to increase the impact of their formula.

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