

From Iowa to Wisconsin: Donald Trump's Use of Truth Social in the 2024 Republican Primaries

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The authors would like to acknowledge the support and funding received from the following research projects: PID2021-126765NB-I00 and CIAICO/2024/191 (Universidad Cardenal Herrera-CEU). This paper also arises from research project Ref. PID2021-124969NB-I00, which was funded by the MCIN/AEI and the "ERDF: A way of making Europe" programme. Special thanks go to Prof. Jeff Siarto, from the Department of Media and Information at Michigan State University, who assisted with data collection.

How to cite this article / Standard reference:

Pérez-Gabaldón, M., Nicasio-Varea, B., & Chavez, M. (2027). De Iowa a Wisconsin: El uso de Truth Social por parte de Donald Trump en las primarias republicanas de 2024 [From Iowa to Wisconsin: Donald Trump's Use of Truth Social in the 2024 Republican Primaries]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 85, 1-27.
<https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2027-2713>

Date of Receipt: May 21, 2026

Date of Acceptance: July 22, 2026

Date of Publication: January 1st, 2027

Expected Date of Publication: September 14, 2026

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Following Donald Trump's account cancellation from the social media platform Twitter in 2021, he founded Truth Social as an alternative platform for the dissemination of his campaign messages without the filter of the news media. This study analyses Donald Trump's strategic use of the Truth Social network during the 2024 Republican presidential primaries, from the Iowa caucuses to the Republican National Convention in Wisconsin. The study examines the way in which this new technological platform has become a pivotal instrument for mobilization, confrontation, and narrative construction. **Methodology:** A mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 4,571 messages posted during the Republican primaries was conducted. Quantitatively, the number of posts, 'ReTruths', 'likes' and 'replies' were measured. The content classification as positive, negative or neutral is achieved through the application of a system comprising ten mutually exclusive categories. **Results:** The data demonstrate extensive utilisation of the platform to consolidate Trump's personal identity and political discourse, while at the same time disparaging his political adversaries. **Discussion:** As a result of the previous points, Truth Social functions as a communication space that amplifies the dissemination of information unverified by the news media, thus favoring the circulation of controversial content. **Conclusions:** The analysis reveals an intensive, strategic communication pattern during the Republican primaries. Messages were slightly more positive, fostering mobilisation and leadership image, while negative content reinforced victimisation and identity cohesion. The findings indicate greater user engagement with negative messages, which contributes to the formation of an echo chamber that reinforces ideological reaffirmation and limits exposure to divergent perspectives.

Keywords: political communication; social media; electoral campaigns; disinformation; polarization; U.S. Republican primaries; Donald Trump; alt-tech; populism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an essential channel for political communication, especially during election campaigns (Conway et al., 2015; Ross & Rivers, 2018). It allows political leaders to disseminate their messages directly to their audience, without barriers or intermediaries, and enables direct, multidirectional user participation, which has been touted as contributing to broadening public debate (Larsson & Moe, 2011, p. 741). In recent years, the social media landscape has seen the emergence of 'alt-tech' platforms that position themselves as alternatives to dominant sites such as Twitter/X and Facebook, emphasising freedom of expression and minimal content moderation (Shah, et al, 2024). What characterizes these platforms linked to far-right movements (Donovan et al., 2019) is the introduction of structural changes within the public sphere, with the potential to alter its democratic function (Siapera, 2023). This is because they have created their own distinct communication ecosystem—one far removed from neutrality or constructiveness (Jasser et al., 2021). They seek to steer public opinion and shape perceptions regarding institutions and the political system (Battista, 2025) through the radicalization and polarization of public debate (Dehghan & Nagappa, 2022), the amplification of far-right news (Zhang et al., 2024), the funnelling of divisive impulses (Croicu & Kreutz, 2017), and an increase in toxicity (Ali et al., 2021) and violent rhetoric (Zhang et al., 2024).

As a social media platform, Truth Social was founded in February of 2022 as an alternative to Twitter after the company suspended the account of Donald Trump following the January 6, 2021 attacks to the U.S. capitol carried out by Trump's supporters (Gerard et al., 2023). Its role as an alt-tech platform where prominent political figures are active has positioned Truth Social as a significant social media platform, particularly in terms of facilitating political discourse (Shah, 2024). The primary objective of the platform is to disseminate information created by Trump himself without any mainstream media filter, verification or scrutiny, in a manner analogous to his previous communication on his Twitter/X account.

President Trump's manner of communication has given rise to a new type of social media use that reflects a movement towards what Enli (2017, p. 55) calls 'deprofessionalisation'. The emergence of Trump as a prolific user of the social media platform Twitter/X during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign demonstrates a consistent tendency to author his own messages through his own personal impulsive and unprofessional manner (Enli, 2017, p. 55; Ott, 2017). In this way, he has expressed opinions, political statements and judgements without intermediaries, in a very personal informal style (Nai & Maier, 2017). The tactic is rhetorical, propagandistic, and populist, promoting an antagonistic or oppositional "friend-enemy" logic explained in academic literature including by authors such as Laclau (2005) or Mouffe (2010), who use an interpretive framework to understand discursive construction and the production of antagonisms in public discourse. It has also been shown that Trump has an advantage over his rivals (Das Sarma, 2016; Muswede, 2022), while also providing significant media coverage, going viral, and having a major impact (Gómez-García et al., 2019, p. 57) and popularity (Varis, 2020, p. 432).

Under this political strategy based on direct communication, users of Truth Social are a remarkable example of how a social media platform is used to share information between the users where they follow and ReTruth, the Truth Social equivalent of Twitter's Retweet (Gerard et al., 2023), themselves multiple times, creating a group sharing their same views, ideas, biases, in a tribe-type format. As a conservative social platform, Truth Social attracts citizens who have serious mistrust of the mainstream news media. This pattern produces an active place for the spread of biased, unverified, incomplete, and misleading information. Moreover, far-right echo chambers use this space alt-tech that have led to the reorganizing of groups who have shared conspiracy theories in one single space with potentially damaging effects on democracy (Barberá, 2020; Gerard et al., 2023; Sternisko et al., 2020).

Thus, following McLuhan (1964) as an introductory premise to contextualize the influence of the media and the technological environment on the configuration of the message—according to which the medium exerts a greater influence on how we think and how society changes despite the specific content it conveys. We observe that the architectural properties of Truth Social are designed precisely to generate distinctive and potentially influential political narratives (Bidewell et al., 2026) by eliminating dissent and prioritizing emotional content. Consequently, a specific rhetorical prevalence exists that directly influences the audience within this distinctive ecosystem. Truth Social functions as a distinctive sociotechnical environmental platform (Bidewell et al., 2026) that promotes the normalization and legitimation of populist discourse within the public sphere—presenting itself merely as one political narrative among many options (Pérez-Altabe, 2024, p. 31). This diminishes the intermediating capacity of conventional media, while simultaneously amplifying Trump's informational agenda (Gilardi et al., 2021), and fostering the creation of echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021; Del Vicario et al., 2016), among other effects. Indeed, existing literature already elucidates the role Truth Social played in Trump's electoral success and in the legitimation of his populism (Nilson, 2026).

The communication process on Truth Social would therefore be determined by messages that—structured through meanings—are organized in a specific manner, through the operationalization of codes within the syntagmatic chain of discourse. Once completed, the discourse must be transformed into social practices by the audience for the circuit to be complete and effective. Thus, following Hall's (1980) model, the discursive form of the message occupies a privileged position within the communicative exchange on Truth Social, and the moments of "encoding" and "decoding" by the sender and receiver are decisive. In other words, communication processes are situated within structures of understanding, while simultaneously being shaped by social and economic relationships that mold their actualization during reception. This, in turn, enables the meanings encoded within discourse to be decoded, thereby exerting an effect—whether to influence, instruct, or persuade—with consequences across the realms of perception, cognition, emotion, ideology, or behavior.

In this sense, it should be noted that the present work focuses on analyzing Trump's communication strategy, that is, how he encodes the messages he disseminates through Truth Social, but does not study the decoding process by the receivers, which should be highlighted as a limitation of the study.

As social media platforms grow in political, cultural, and social importance, their effects on users, especially on their consumption of information are critical for academics (Sharot & Sunstein 2020). There is a pattern of social media users who place themselves as active consumers in sites and sources which align closely to their political, social, and cultural beliefs. This pattern reduces the possibility of identifying information that is unverified, false, or sent with the sole purpose of deceiving. Some users believe that by using what they consider as trusted sources can avoid the step to watch, read, and hear news from the press that professionally implement fact verification and testing (Frimer et al., 2017). As explained below, in addition of political scientists, communication, psychology, social psychology and sociology scholars are trying to understand better how and why some social media platforms and websites shape certain perceptions that create echo chambers that lead to political polarization with significant risks to democracy (Bail et al., 2018; Barberá, 2020; Garrett, 2009; Kubin et al., 2021).

While most people have some direct control over the information they access, alt-tech platforms present limited alternative and diverse perspectives that provide different views. In this way, consistent access to the same social media platforms creates a process in which the narratives are collectively accepted with very limited room for divergent perspectives (Cinelli et al. 2021). As users access the same sites, follow the same people, or access information from the same news organization, there is a propensity to be trapped in an echo chamber that fosters disinformation, misinformation and malinformation (Del Vicario et al. 2016). This in turn has generated a continuing growth of conspiracy theories that are far from reality (Cinelli et al. 2022).

Truth Social also serves as an element of Trump's political agenda setting. In its effort to ignore and dismiss the news media, Truth Social has eliminated the gatekeeping power of the press (Gilardi et al., 2021). Usually there are three main political agendas, one from the traditional news media, one from the political parties, and another from politicians. The political agendas align to a greater or lesser degree depending on the topic and the political environment in which the three operate (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). When strong political parties have more control over topics and political agendas, they tend to set these agendas by influencing the news media and politicians. When the news media is trusted and influential, the press can set a political agenda that influences politicians and political parties (Boydston, 2013). But, in some cases, the popularity and exposure of a political candidate may create a condition where his/her political agenda dominates both the political parties and the press. Such is the case of Donald Trump who has effectively used social media, especially through Truth Social to set and advance his political agenda (Kubin et al., 2021; Ott, 2017).

One of the most effective political agenda setting efforts is Donald Trump's use of social media platforms. From the announcement of his candidacy for U.S. President in May of 2015, Trump began to launch his political agenda on Twitter, now X, which at the time was the most used social media platform. And while it is understood that he ignores and attacks the press systematically, he has used both Twitter/X and Truth Social as a medium to attract and drive the news media's attention (Zhang et al., 2024). One of the challenges in analyzing Truth Social is the separation between Truths and ReTruths in advancing Trump's political agenda, in other words, while his initial posts may receive relatively limited attention, they are amplified by both reposts and news media attention. This means that Trump has been able to attract both conservative and liberal news outlets to his postings (Zhang et al., 2024). It is unclear if the efficacy of Trump's ability to use social media, whether X or Truth Social, can be replicated. Also, unclear is the capacity of his Truth Social account to engage a greater audience or if it has reached its ceiling.

2. OBJECTIVES

Drawing upon the existing literature and contextual framework delineated above, this research undertaking seeks to analyze the messages disseminated by President Donald Trump on his social media profile (@realDonaldTrump) during the Republican primaries, a period which culminating in Trump's emergence as the Republican candidate for the US presidential elections held in November 2024. Truth Social's distinctive position within the social media ecosystem, in terms of its capacity to document the progression of political discourse in the period leading up to the 2024 U.S. presidential election, renders it a significant subject for academic inquiry (Shah et al., 2024).

The principal aim of this study is to examine Donald Trump's political communication strategy 2.0 on the social network Truth Social during the 2024 Republican Party presidential primaries, which were divided into two stages. The initial stage starts at the onset of the primary season, coinciding with the Iowa caucuses on January 15, and ends on March 5 with 'Super Tuesday'. In this initial phase, fourteen candidates participated—the majority of whom terminated their campaigns prior to the casting of any votes—with Trump gradually gaining the upper hand and eliminating his competitors as the race progressed. On March 5th, Super Tuesday, ballots were cast in 15 states, the most on any single day during the primaries. On Super Tuesday, Trump emerged victorious in all states except Vermont. In the aftermath of this substantial triumph, Nikki Haley, the sole remaining contender competing against Trump in the primaries, withdrew from the Republican primary contest. This development culminated in Trump attaining the status of the sole candidate, thereby ensuring his nomination in early March. The second stage of the competition took place from March 6 to July 14. Specifically, July 14 marked the culmination of the primary elections. The Republican Convention commenced on the 15th of July.

From this objective standpoint, the following research questions emerge:

- RQ1. Given that previous studies point to frequent and intense use of social media (Zhang et al., 2024), to what extent is such sustained activity observed during the period under analysis?
- RQ2. In light of prior research showing that Trump's political discourse on social media is predominantly characterised by negativity and attacks on opponents (Nai & Maier, 2017; Ross & Caldwell, 2020), as well as the tendency for heightened negativity among opposition candidates (Lau & Pomper, 2004), what is the relative prevalence of critical messages compared to announcements of proposals during the period under analysis?
- RQ2.1. Considering that, following Super Tuesday, all Republican candidates withdrew from the race, how does the volume of criticism directed towards the Republican Party vary between the initial phase of the race and the subsequent phase in which Trump remains the sole candidate in the Republican primaries?
- RQ3. Building on previous studies that highlight substantial levels of attention and interaction from followers—particularly through platform-specific mechanisms such as retweeting, favoriting, and replying (Lazarus & Thornton, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018)—to what extent do followers engage with the content, and how does interaction differ between messages containing negative versus positive content?

3. METHODOLOGY

To fulfil the objectives and answer the research questions set out above, a social research method based on content analysis, with an interpretative basis (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2015, p. 106) of political texts (Anduiza et al., 1999) is utilized. This is considered a consolidated technique for determining the positions of political parties and leaders (Alonso et al., 2012, p. 10). For the purposes of the research, the social network Truth Social was selected as it is the primary platform through which Donald Trump engages in political communication. It is worth noting that the subject of study is of interest as this is the first primary campaign in which Trump has used the Truth Social platform as a communication vector.

The primary objective of content analysis is to achieve structured representation of a substantial volume of data, in addition to manually coding this data. The authors of the present study collected data from Trump's Truth Social profile using R programming to access data from the platform, especially *rvest*. We employed *Truthbrush*, a Python-based standalone API client developed by the Stanford Internet Observatory. The tool operates as a command-line utility compatible with Mac, Linux, and other Unix-based systems, enabling direct retrieval of platform content. We installed and configured Truthbrush by following the instructions provided in the project's official README file. This ensured that the environment and dependencies were set up correctly prior to initiating the data extraction processes.

Because Truthbrush returns its query results in JSON (JavaScript Object Notation), an additional conversion step was required to facilitate subsequent data analysis. We used the *json2csv* utility to transform the raw JSON output into CSV format, which is more suitable for spreadsheet-based inspection and statistical processing. Specifically, we executed the command `truthbrush statusesrealDonaldTrump > data/realDonaldTrump_DATE.json` to retrieve all publicly available posts from the *realDonaldTrump* account. At the time of data collection, Truthbrush did not provide a parameter to limit queries by date range; accordingly, the command generated a complete archive of the account's posts. The redirection operator (`>`) was used to pipe the resulting JSON data directly into a structured file.

Prior to conversion, the JSON data underwent a brief cleaning process using regular expressions (Regex). This step replaced newline characters with newline-plus-comma sequences, preventing formatting errors during the JSON-to-CSV transformation. After cleaning, we ran the conversion command `json2csv data/realDonaldTrump_DATE.json --output data/realDonaldTrump_DATE.csv` to generate the final datasets. All data were retrieved in two batches—on 15 July 2024 at 10:51 AM and 23 July 2024 at 7:50 AM—and both batches were processed and converted on the same day. The recency of the extracted posts is confirmed by the first entry appearing in each respective dataset.

The collection timestamp corresponds both to the "created on" date recorded on our computer and to the general timestamp of the first post in the dataset. This information is explicitly available in the raw JSON files. Consistency between these values can be verified by examining the dates in the dataset, which correspond to the retrieval dates.

The corpus of messages collected was published between January 15 and July 14, 2024, and the data set comprised the textual content of the post, the time and date of publication, as well as other metadata (replies, likes and retweets or truths and retruths). The extraction process yielded a total of 5,699 records. During the data-cleaning stage, 1,128 records (19.8%) were excluded because they contained no analyzable content. Specifically, these records appeared as empty entries in the database generated by the extraction tool, with no text, images, videos, links, or other retrievable information available for analysis. As these entries did not contain any communicative content that could be coded according to the study variables (themes, tone, or other message characteristics), they were excluded from the final corpus. Consequently, the total number of

messages analysed was 4,571, of which:

- 1,352 were from the first stage of the primaries (from 15th January to 5th March); and
- 3,219 from the second stage (from 6th March to 14th July).

The methodology employed is predicated on reading as a means of information gathering, undertaken in accordance with the scientific method in a systematic, replicable, objective and validated manner. Content analysis is distinguished from other research techniques by its inherent combination of observation, data production, and the subsequent interpretation or analysis of the data produced (Andréu Abela, 2002).

The study of the messages, which constitute the entire sample, was carried out on two levels, one quantitative and the other qualitative. To conduct the quantitative analysis, the total number of messages published during the specified period was collated and enumerated. Furthermore, the total number of retweets, the total number of likes and the total number of comments were recorded to measure the degree of interaction among citizens. Given the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study, the analysis focused on frequencies, distributions, and interaction metrics, without applying inferential statistical tests to compare groups

The following coding scheme was employed for the qualitative analysis of the content of the messages posted on the profiles analysed:

Table 1: *Coding scheme for the qualitative analysis*

Positive messages	Negative messages	Neutral
A positive evaluation of their own actions and values, and the defense of their group's resources and interests [Van Dijk, 2005; Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2015]; this includes messages defending their policies, expressing gratitude, providing information on campaign events, and soliciting votes)	Messages of criticism and confrontation, involving the negative presentation of the other (Van Dijk, 2005); or containing references to otherness (employing inclusive language solely in the context of tacit or explicit divergence—"us" versus "them" [otherness]) (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2015)	messages categorized as "other" are included
1) Messages with information about the primaries (primary dates, debates, campaign events, rallies, interviews, news about the progress of the primaries, etc.)	4) Messages critical of the Democratic Party and its leader, Joe Biden	10) Others (messages that do not fall into any of the above categories)
2) Messages announcing political proposals	5) Messages critical of political leaders from his party who were competing against him in the primaries, and other Republican leaders	
3) Messages and slogans defending his policies, achievements and the work carried out by Trump during his time as President of the United States, which would lead him to victory in the elections	6) Messages critical of the media (messages critical of the work of the media and its publications)	
7) Messages asking for votes and support from the public to win the primaries	9) Critical messages of the judicial system and defence in his court cases	
8) Messages of support and gratitude for the support received, as well as data from polls and studies reflecting Trump's advantageous position in the elections, due to social support		

Source: Authors' own work

Of these, one is indicated after the message has been read in its entirety, prioritizing the predominant element of the message, so that they are mutually exclusive variables¹.

3.1. Ethical considerations

For the preparations of this study, we accepted and signed the Terms of Service of the Truth Social platform in order to access its platform accounts. Specifically, for this study, publicly available data was extracted from the Truth Social platform. The use of the information obtained is in line with the purposes permitted by the platform, in this specific case, related to expanding the area of research on electoral communication on social media in the United States. Both the processing of the data from the profile studied and the management and reproduction of the texts and storage of the dataset have been carried out in accordance with the principles established in Truth Social's Terms of Service.

Generative artificial intelligence was employed to provide basic linguistic assistance during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, ChatGPT, based on the GPT-5 Chat model (publicly accessible version in 2026), was used between January 9 and 13, 2026 to produce a draft English translation of the article, which was originally written in another language. The AI-generated translation was subsequently reviewed, corrected, and refined by the authors to ensure its accuracy, internal consistency, and appropriateness for academic publication.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of message themes

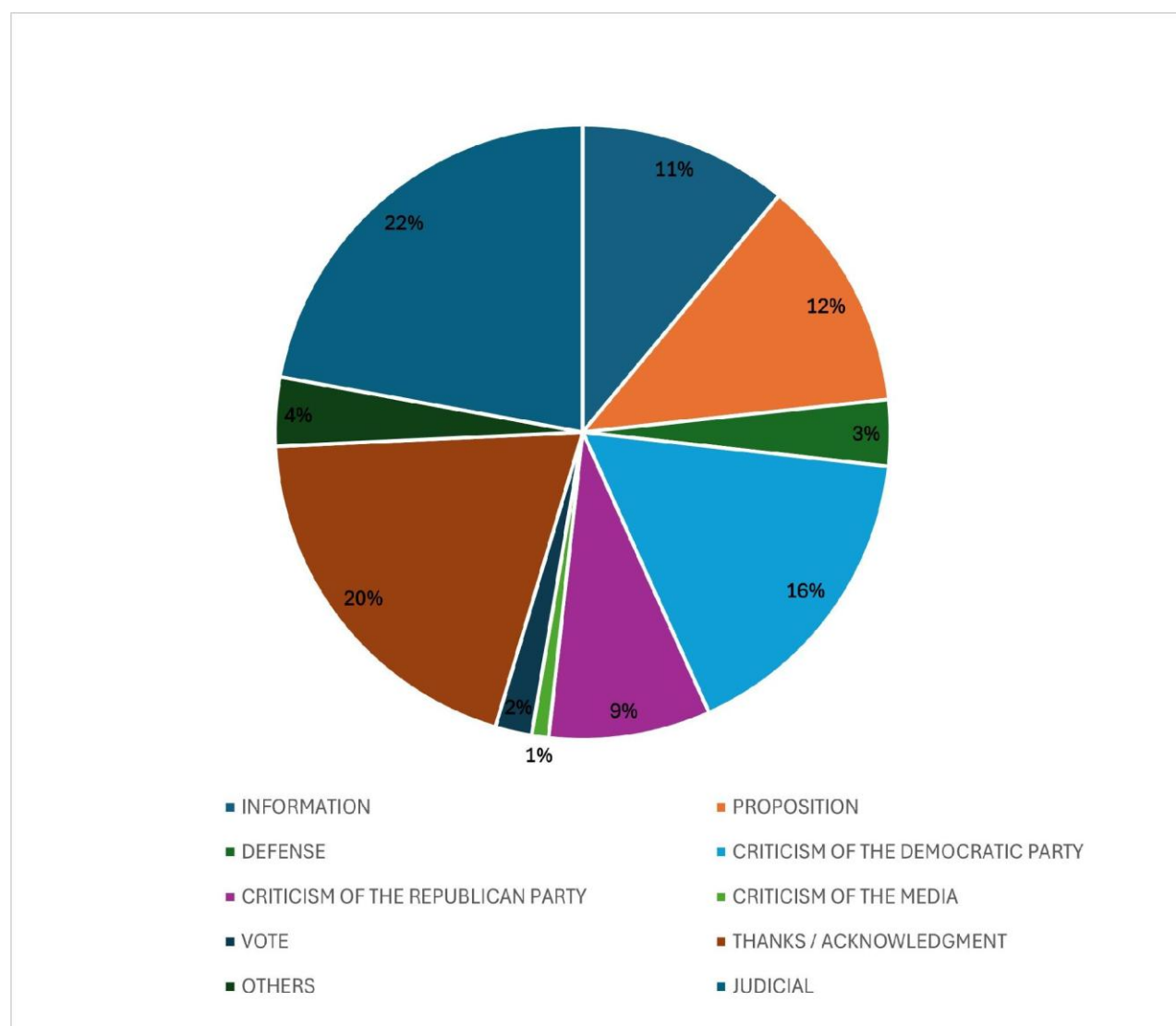
4.1.1. Analysis of the first stage: from January 15th to March 5th

The data indicate that the most prominent theme in the messages concerns Trump's self-defence in relation to the legal proceedings pending before various courts (22%). Donald Trump posits the hypothesis that the legal proceedings against him, which included both federal criminal charges and civil lawsuits in both New York and Georgia, were part of a meticulously orchestrated campaign of 'electoral interference' by former President Joe Biden, the Department of Justice, and the Democratic Party. The objective of this campaign, Trump contended in these posts, was to sabotage his candidacy.

The second and third most frequent themes are expressions of gratitude (20%) and criticism of the Democratic Party and its members (16%). In the latter category, the author of the posts attempts to demonstrate the deleterious impact of the Biden administration on the American populace. The focus is directed towards the citizens themselves as the causative agents of the prevalent issues, and the author employs disparaging terminology such as "Crooked Joe Biden" to underscore Biden's purported decline in mental and physical well-being. This is supported by the Trump's assertion that Biden is unfit to continue leading the country.

¹ Following the categorisation of all the messages analysed, a control phase was carried out on the results obtained. To this end, 10% of the total sample was selected for recoding by a researcher not involved in the present study, in accordance with the pre-established variables. Inter-coder reliability was also calculated using Scott's Pi, yielding a coefficient of 0.83. The percentage of agreement found was within the terms established by Igartua (2006) to ensure the reliability of research of this type. This supports the consistency and reliability of the coding.

Graph 1. Thematic analysis of the first phase of the messages



Source: Authors' own preparation.

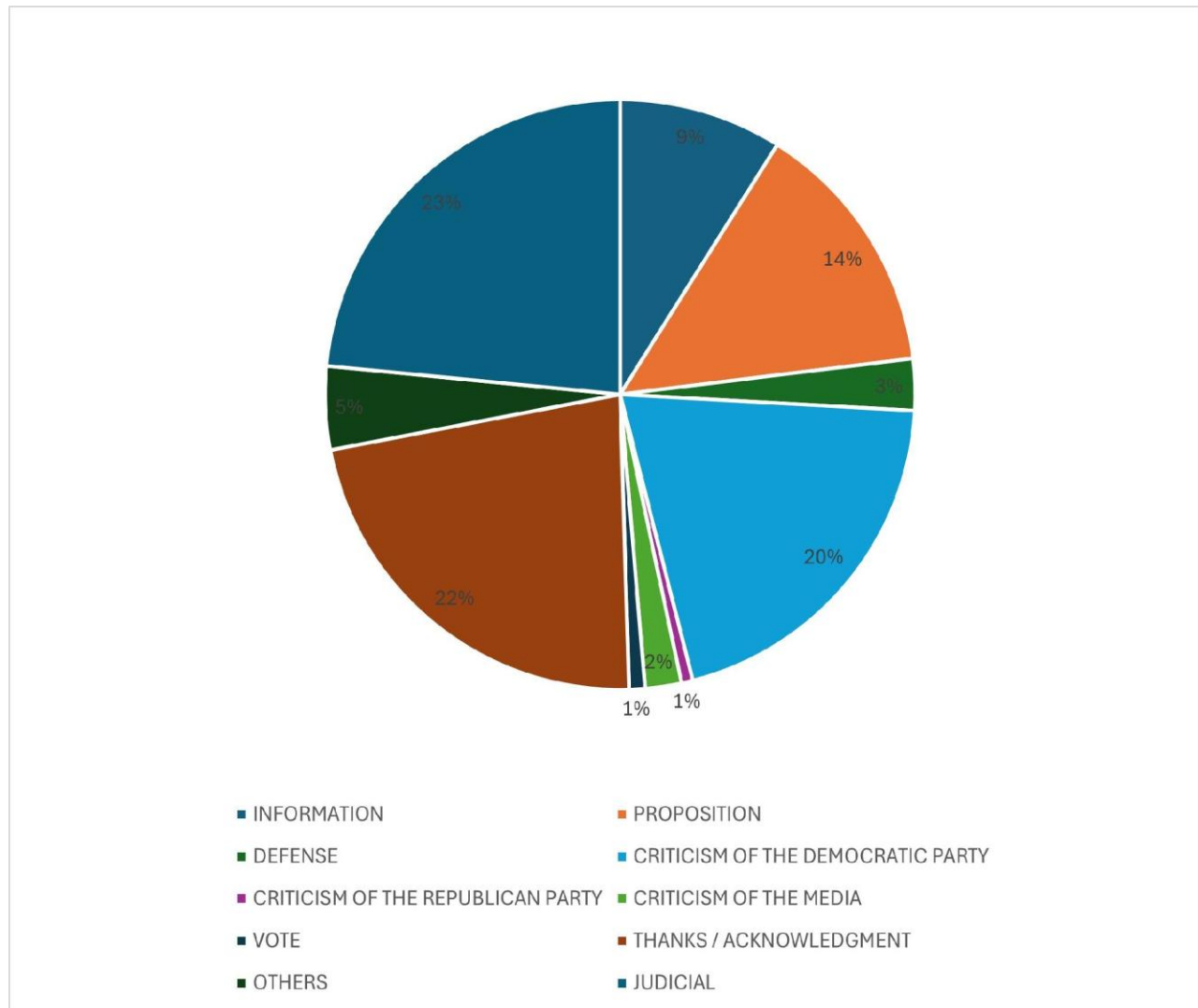
The presentation of proposals is also a significant theme; these were primarily focused on the closure of national borders and the deportation of illegal immigrants, in addition to economic protectionism and the restructuring of certain government departments that were blamed for Trump's supposed political persecution (12%). An additional significant theme is the dissemination of information about Trump's campaign activities, including location, facilitating his supporters' attendance (11%).

4.1.2. Analysis of the second stage: from March 6th to July 14th

Focusing on the themes of the messages during this period, the three most prominent topics are Trump's legal defence (23%), criticism of the Democratic Party and its members (20%), and expressions of gratitude to his supporters (22%). As in the previous stage, his legal defence relies on the same set of arguments, framing the judicial proceedings as politically motivated actions aimed at undermining his candidacy. Similarly, posts expressing criticism of the Democratic Party continue to attribute national problems to the Biden administration and to question its leadership.

By contrast, criticism of the Republican Party and its members declines sharply, falling from 9% to just 1%, reflecting the absence of intra-party competition at this stage. Other themes remain present but less prominent, including the presentation of policy proposals on immigration, economic, and security issues (14%), as well as campaign-related informational messages (9%).

Graph 2. *Thematic analysis of the second phase of the messages*



Source: Authors' own preparation

4.1.3. Analysis of the whole period of primaries

The most prevalent messages across both time periods were directed towards denouncing the legal proceedings against Trump. These were systematically presented by Trump as part of a campaign of political persecution led by the Department of Justice, the Democratic Party, and President Joe Biden. The objective of this campaign was to interfere in his candidacy. The pervasive utilisation of 'judicial' tags in messages underscores the strategic deployment of Truth Social by the president as a platform for his defence in the face of multiple legal proceedings. This utilization of the platform serves to simultaneously attack the judicial system and position himself favourably within it (Jacobson, 2024). On this issue, as demonstrated by the findings of several polls, the allegations levelled against Trump did not result in any immediate deterioration of his standing with the party base. In certain instances, these allegations even prompted Republican voters to align

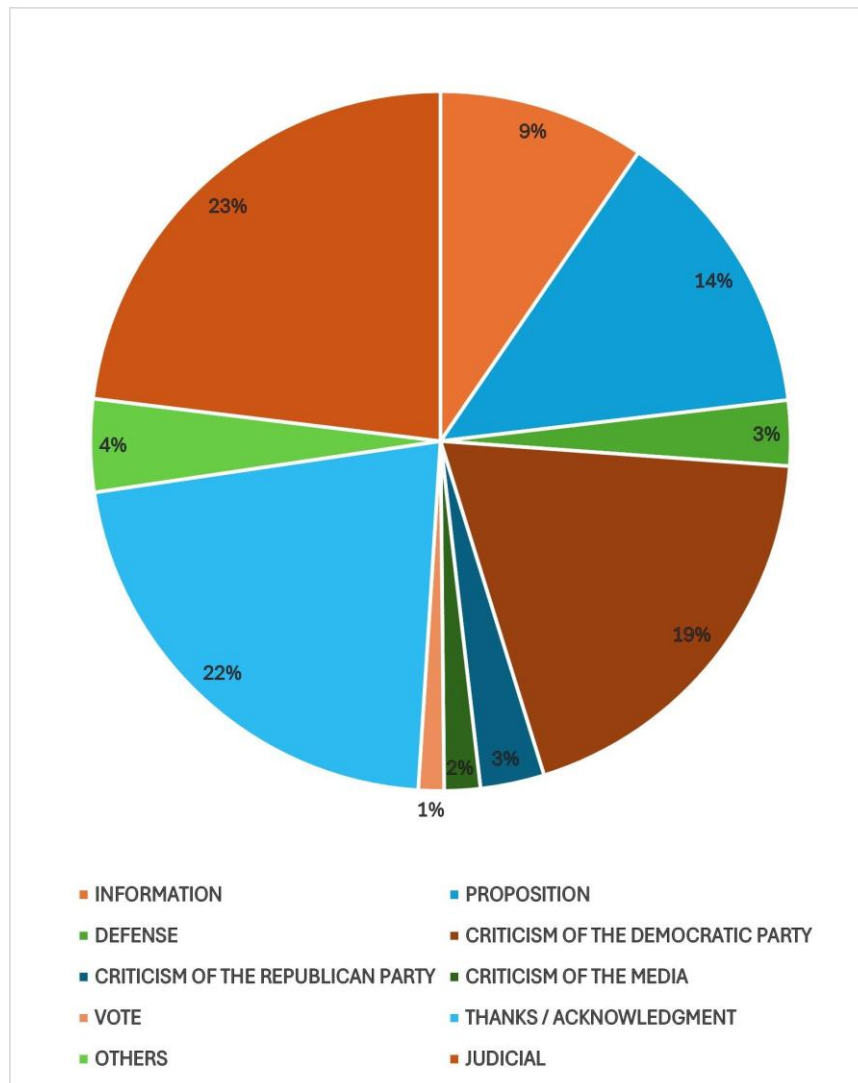
themselves with his defence (Jacobson, 2024). It is evident that Trump has strategically employed his accusations, convictions, and ongoing trials to consolidate the loyalty of his most devoted supporters. In fact, the majority of Republicans and most Trump voters are unwilling to recognise as valid almost any statement that questions Trump (Jacobson, 2024). This finding aligns with the conclusions of earlier research, which has demonstrated that partisan identification in the US has reached extreme levels. Voters demonstrate a propensity to align themselves with their respective groups, often disregarding contradictory or patently false information, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disinformation. Venizelos (2022) points out how charismatic performativity and discursive transgression play a crucial role in the political identification of Trump's supporters, regardless of the quality of the president's institutional performance. Voters demonstrate a tendency to align themselves with their respective groups—in this case, the MAGA movement—often disregarding contradictory or patently false information, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disinformation. This explains why the narrative of judicial victimization proves so effective for Trump. Furthermore, this dynamic is reinforced by the very architecture of Truth Social, which reduces moderation and disinformation controls, thereby giving free rein to the widespread dissemination of such messages.

However, Trump's messages also emphasised gratitude and recognition for supporters, underscoring their loyalty and consistent mobilization. In this sense, in these messages, Trump tends to adopt the stance of a tough leader and, importantly for his political proposals, he talks about 'prominent Republicans' (Varis, 2020, p. 436), the 'good' Republicans who defend his political proposals, his own line of discourse, and who are also critical of MAGA's enemies. This duality reveals a discursive coherence in which the narrative of political victimization is articulated with an emotional appeal to the bond with his electoral base. These results underscore a pivotal aspect of his campaign communication strategy, namely the sense of shared identity that Trump has forged with his MAGA supporters. Trump positions himself as the advocate of (primarily) white Americans who perceive themselves to be economically and culturally marginalised by globalism, immigration, feminism, secularism, and the country's expanding racial and ethnic diversity (Jacobson, 2024, Pew Research Center, 2024). Thus, the MAGA political identity—which is a collective identity—is constructed upon a "we" that can exist only by virtue of the demarcation of a "they." This "we/they" relationship has ultimately evolved into a "friend/enemy" relationship, in which the "they" are perceived as those who call "our" identity into question and threaten "our" very existence (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2010).

Trump has been accused of expressing and validating the resentments, grievances, and antipathies of people who feel ignored or disparaged by the cultural, business, and political elites of both parties, both conventional Republicans and Democrats. The author articulates the sentiments of the subjects in their own vernacular, employing a rudimentary form of derision directed towards their adversaries, a disdain for established conventions, an authoritarian bravado, and insinuations of violent retribution against their shared adversaries. These elements, as posited by Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck in 2018, serve to excite and amuse rather than dishearten the audience.

The results indicate a significant reduction in criticism directed at other Republican candidates from the first to the second period. This pattern can be attributed to the fact that, in the subsequent electoral cycle, Trump remained the sole candidate in the primaries, with no challengers. Consequently, the need to target criticism at Republican contenders who had withdrawn from the race became redundant.

Graph 3. *Thematic analysis of the whole phase of the messages*



Source: Authors' own work.

4.2. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of message tone

4.2.1. Analysis of the first stage

After analysing the messages, it can be observed that, during the initial phase, the distribution of positive and negative messages is balanced, with each accounting for 48% of the total messages, leaving a mere 4% of neutral messages. The second phase follows a similar pattern, although positive messages (49%) slightly outweigh negative ones (45%). This may be mainly because, at this stage of the primaries, he no longer had any internal competition and, given this situation, he softened his rhetoric slightly.

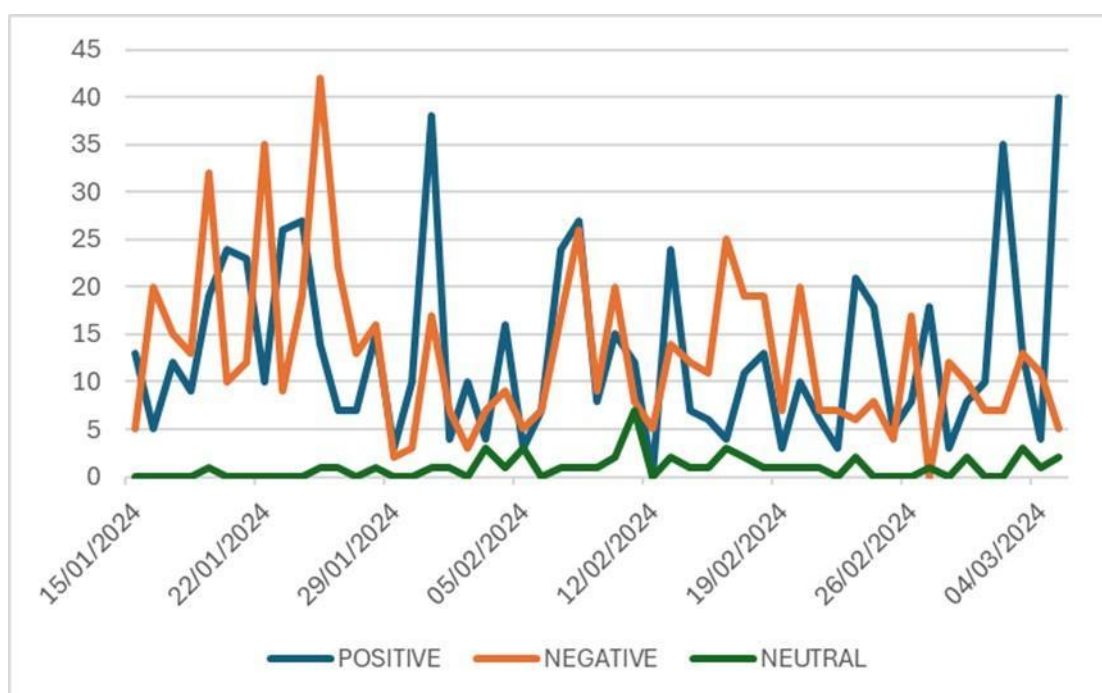
As demonstrated in Graph 4, the tone of Donald Trump's messages on Truth Social has evolved from positive to negative and back to neutral. This evolution is observed from the beginning of the primaries to Super Tuesday and is presented in a chronological manner. This stage is characterised by two factors that typify the entire primary campaign: first, the candidate's confrontation with the Democrats, and second, the candidate's legal difficulties. However, it is also characterised by a differentiating factor, namely internal competition within the party, personified by Nikki Haley and her supporters.

In the period between mid-January and early February 2024, the tone of Trump's posts was predominantly negative, with several peaks exceeding 30 messages per day, reaching its zenith towards the end of January. Conversely, the positive tone maintains a more moderate presence during this initial period. However, commencing in February, a shift in the trend becomes discernible: the rate of positive messages begins to increase, with peaks exceeding 35 messages per day, particularly evident in the first and last weeks of the month, displacing negative messages in terms of frequency. Posts with a neutral tone remained virtually negligible throughout the period under analysis.

It is also useful to consider whether the sequence of events has had an impact on the tone of the messages. In the case of negative messages, three particularly significant peaks are evident, coinciding with a series of criticisms of the judicial system, specifically the New York State Attorney General, for her prosecutions of Trump; criticisms of the Democratic Party for its handling of the country's borders, which Trump characterized as a weapon of mass destruction; and criticisms of Nikki Haley following her loss in the New Hampshire primary.

Conversely, the positive messages exhibited a peak in detection at the conclusion of January and the onset of March. In the final days of January, the primary focus of Trump's communications was on endorsing Republican candidates who advocated for his political agenda, including border security, military defense, agricultural policy, and economic policies. In essence, the proposals advanced by candidate Trump were incorporated into a larger ideological framework that he designated as "Make America Great Again" (MAGA). The surge in positive messages observed in early March is associated with his triumph on Super Tuesday, which prompted him to disseminate a substantial number of messages expressing gratitude to citizens for their endorsement in the period preceding and following the results.

Graph 4. *Tone analysis of the first phase of the messages*



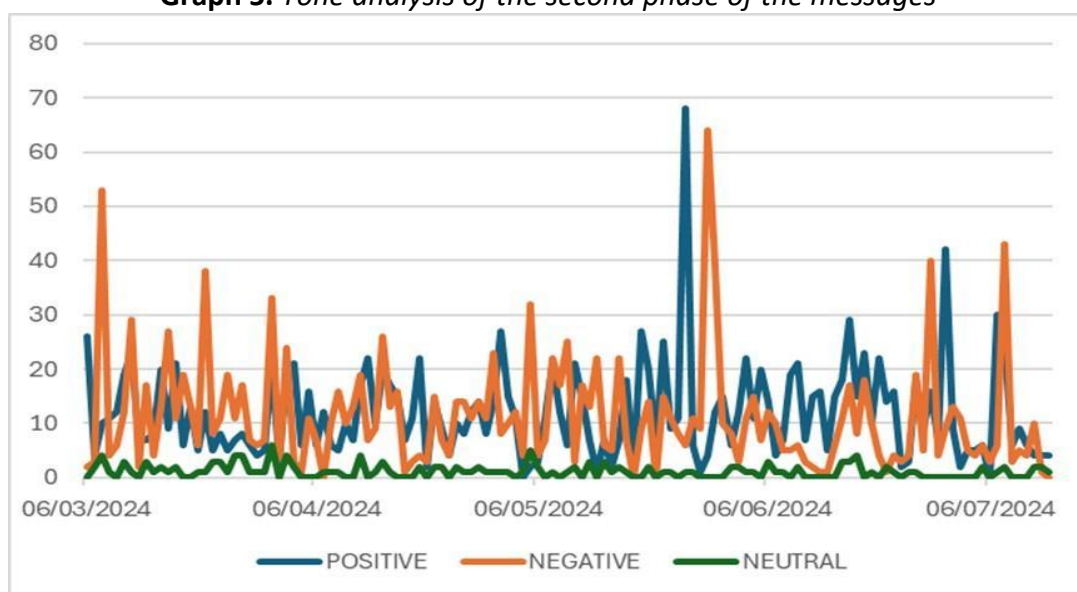
Source: Authors' own work

4.2.2. Analysis of the second stage

As demonstrated in Graph 5, the tone of Trump's messages underwent a notable evolution during the second stage of the Republican Party primaries, a period characterised by the absence of competition within his party. As in the preceding stage, Trump initiated this second stage of the primaries with a tone that was more negative, aggressive and critical. Consequently, until the end of May, instances of positive messages outweighing negative ones were almost negligible. However, from that point onward, our analysis reveals that the prevalence of positive messages surpasses that of negative messages, with a notable surge in negative messages occurring in July, coinciding with the final stretch of the data collection period. However, it is important to note that in mid-July, messages were classified as positive despite relating to a negative event, namely the attack on Trump in Pennsylvania. Consequently, messages classified as 'positive' pertain to a negative event. As in the initial stage, neutral messages are characterised by their residual nature.

It is also worth considering the potential influence of external events on the tone of Donald Trump's posts on Truth Social. In the context of negative messages, this relationship is particularly evident. The most pronounced peak occurred between 29 and 30 May 2024, coinciding with the court ruling in New York, in which Trump was found guilty in the so-called Stormy Daniels hush money case. After this ruling, there was a considerable increase in posts aimed at delegitimizing the judiciary. The then former president accused the judiciary of political motivations and a lack of impartiality. Concurrently, and frequently within the same messages, these criticisms are directed towards the Democratic Party, which Trump's posts held responsible for allegedly manipulating the judicial system for electoral purposes. This convergence of discourse between attacks on judicial institutions and political opponents helps explain the appearance of the most significant peak in negative messages during the period analyzed, clearly associated with an exogenous event with high political and media impact. Conversely, the highest peak of positive messages was recorded on May 26, 2024, coinciding with Memorial Day in the United States. This increase occurred immediately after Trump's participation in the Libertarian Party National Convention the previous day, a political event that broadened his public exposure in a non-partisan context. During Memorial Day, the content of his social media posts primarily centered on the formulation of political proposals and the articulation of values associated with patriotism and national identity. These posts adopted a predominantly positive tone, aligning with the prevailing sentiment of the day.

Graph 5. *Tone analysis of the second phase of the messages*



Source: Authors' own work

4.2.3. Analysis of the whole period of primaries

In the period between January and July 2024, during the Republican Party primaries, former President Donald Trump adopted a nuanced approach in the tone of his messages posted on Truth Social. The analysis revealed that 47% of these posts were characterised by a negative sentiment, while 49% exhibited a positive tone. This slight predominance of positive content is particularly relevant when considering the findings of previous literature, which highlights how his discourse is predominantly characterised by confrontation and disparagement (Nai & Maier, 2017). The stability of this ratio throughout the different phases of the process – from the multi-party competition to the consolidation of his leadership as the presumed candidate – suggests a sustained and deliberate communication strategy. These results are consistent with the findings of previous studies, which indicated that during the 2020 election campaign, Trump employed a more positive emotional tone in his speeches than Biden. It has been observed that Trump's social media communications exhibited a tendency to feature self-laudatory content, characterised by positive messages, while concurrently displaying a marked tendency to adopt a critical and negative stance in communications directed towards Biden (Körner et al., 2022). In this sense, a recent study (Shah et al., 2024) on the most frequently used words in posts published on Truth Social between February 2024 and October 2024 reveals the high frequency of terms centred on Trump, his candidacy, and his slogan, MAGA (Make America Great Again). Despite the prevalence of negative references to Democratic candidates, terms such as 'Donald Trump', 'MAGA', and 'Trump Vance 2024' have gained significant traction. This underscores the pronounced emphasis placed on the political figure and his campaign in the candidate's communication strategy.

4.3. Analysis of citizen interactions

In this final section, the premise that users employ social media to participate in the production and dissemination of information in political and electoral processes is adopted. This shift in communication patterns has the effect of favoring both interaction and bottom-up activity, thus disrupting the traditional top-down approach to information exchange. Therefore, of the three channels of interaction provided by Truth Social, in the two periods analyzed, there is a higher total number and average of 'favorites', followed by 'retruths', and a much smaller number of responses, as illustrated in Table 2. This finding aligns with earlier research on the utilization of this network, which has identified the 'favorite' channel as the primary mode of interaction (Pérez-Gabaldón & Nicasio-Varea, 2015; Merino et al., 2013). It is noteworthy that the 'favorite' channel is often perceived to involve a comparatively lower level of engagement compared to the other two channels.

Table 2. Total and average of retweets, favourites and replies in the two periods.

First period			
	RETRUTH	FAVORITE	REPLY
TOTAL	3.524.479	13.382.006	774.192
AVERAGE	2.606	9.897	572
Second period			
	RETRUTH	FAVORITE	REPLY
TOTAL	9.339.783	36.600.676	2.291.808
AVERAGE	2.901	11.370	711
Complete period			
	RETRUTH	FAVORITE	REPLY
TOTAL	12.864.262	49.982.682	3.066.000
AVERAGE	6.432	24.991	1.533

Source: Authors' own work

Regarding the degree of interaction by message type (positive or negative), the data indicates that, in both periods, messages classified as negative registered higher average interaction values across the three interaction indicators. In effect, there is a greater prevalence of retweets, favorites and replies to negative messages. This finding is consistent with previous literature suggesting that social media platforms may facilitate the amplification of certain types of content within ideologically homogeneous communities (echo chambers). Higher levels of interaction were observed in messages containing criticism and attacks directed at political opponents, the media, or judicial institutions. This is significant because, although Trump did not focus his entire communication strategy on spreading negative messages, the data show higher interaction levels associated with messages classified as negative. Consequently, negative messages accumulated higher levels of audience interaction than positive messages in the periods analyzed. This phenomenon may be attributed, at least in part, to the findings of certain studies indicating that while Trump's Truth Social followers during this period comprised a diverse array of groups, including those who exhibited minimal interest in politics and those who were generally opposed to him, most of the interaction and amplification was facilitated by members of a political society that held even more conservative views than the Republican Party. This society included individuals with white nationalist and other extreme ideological orientations. (Zhang et al., 2018). These results align with the findings of previous studies, which have indicated that Trump employs alt-tech platforms, such as Truth Social, where his discourse and interaction become more unrestrained (Zhang et al., 2024). It is evident that Trump has strategically leveraged his substantial political and economic influence to navigate the evolving social media landscape in order to promote his ideology.

Table 3. Audience interaction by type of message -positive and negative- in each period

First period			
	RETRUTH	FAVORITE	REPLY
POSITIVE	1.535.849	6.232.714	272.876
average	2.348	9.530	417
NEGATIVE	1.876.363	6.662.486	470.830
average	2.891	10.265	725
Second period			
	RETRUTH	FAVORITE	REPLY
POSITIVE	3.967.085	16.216.397	909.433
average	2.504	10.237	574
NEGATIVE	4.922.233	18.464.523	1.252.648
average	3.307	12.408	841

Source: Authors' own work.

Finally, when examining interactions between the pre- and post-Super Tuesday periods, the trends outlined above hold. In the initial period, the messages that garnered the highest number of interactions were, for the most part, of a negative nature. The content of these communications concentrated on criticisms of the judicial system, Joe Biden, the Democratic Party, and the demand for a repeat election. This demand was based on the assertion that the 2020 election had been fraudulent. In the second period, however, when he was the sole candidate, the messages with the most interaction were positive, although they related to a negative event, the attack on Trump in Pennsylvania. Consequently, of the eight messages, merely two can be designated as 'negative', yet four others, despite being 'positive', allude to a negative occurrence.

Table 4. *The eight most viral messages during the first period*

Date	link	Message	Replies	Retruths	Favs	Pos or Neg
2024-01-26	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111824480073262515	Absolutely ridiculous! I fully disagree with both verdicts and will be appealing this whole Biden Directed Witch Hunt focused on me and the Republican Party. Our Legal System is out of control and being used as a Political Weapon. They have taken away all First Amendment Rights. THIS IS NOT AMERICA!	12.065	14.493	54.278	Neg
2024-01-16	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111763449892183173	THANK YOU IOWA, I LOVE YOU ALL!!! DONALD J. TRUMP	4.880	11.564	55.518	Pos
2024-03-04	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112038026037364851	BIG WIN FOR AMERICA!!!	4.544	11.096	49.370	Pos
2024-02-11	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111913990846366079	I signed and was responsible for the Music Modernization Act for Taylor Swift and all other Musical Artists. Joe Biden didnt do anything for Taylor and never will. Therefore, no way she could endorse Crooked Joe Biden, the worst and most corrupt President in the History of our Country, and be disloyal to the man who made her so much money. Besides that, I like her boyfriend, Travis, even though he may be a Liberal, and probably can't stand me!	6.305	9.726	44.259	Neg
2024-02-05	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111879340091575646	Only a fool, or a Radical Left Democrat, would vote for this horrendous Border Bill, which only gives Shutdown Authority after 5000 Encounters a day, when we already have the right to CLOSE THE BORDER NOW, which must be done. This Bill is a great gift to the Democrats, and a Death Wish for The Republican Party. It takes the HORRIBLE JOB the Democrats have done on Immigration and the Border, absolves them, and puts it all squarely on the shoulders of Republicans. Donald be STUPID!!! We need a separate Border and Immigration Bill. It should not be tied to foreign aid in any way, shape, or form! The Democrats broke Immigration and the Border. They should fix it. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!!</	3.518	12.326	38.808	Neg
2024-01-26	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111824715782495188	There is no longer Justice in America. Our Judicial System is Broken and Unfair!	6.683	9.051	34.633	Neg
2024-01-15	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111760436116590576	So interesting to watch anti-Israel protesters violently demonstrating at the While House, getting close to tearing down the fences that protect the President, and NOTHING is even mentioned about it in the LameStream Media, which is merely a subsidiary of the Democrat Party. No arrests, no nothing. Free the J6 Hostages, NOW!!!	2.268	10.540	32.684	Neg
2024-02-11	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/111914034854285263	INSTANT REPLAY	3.522	13.117	35.342	Neg

Source: Authors' own work

Table 5. *The eight most viral messages during the second period*

Date	Link	Message	Replies	Retruths	Favs	Pos or Neg
2024-07-14	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112782066045321247	I want to thank The United States Secret Service, and all of Law Enforcement, for their rapid response on the shooting that just took place in Butler, Pennsylvania. Most importantly, I want to extend my condolences to the family of the person at the Rally who was killed, and also to the family of another person that was badly injured. It is incredible that such an act can take place in our Country. Nothing is known at this time about the shooter, who is now dead. I was shot with a bullet that pierced the upper part of my right ear. I knew immediately that something was wrong in that I heard a whizzing sound, shots, and immediately felt the bullet ripping through the skin. Much bleeding took place, so I realized then what was happening. GOD BLESS AMERICA!</	59.040	60.437	260.039	Pos
2024-07-14	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112784638860095397	Thank you to everyone for your thoughts and prayers yesterday, as it was God alone who prevented the unthinkable from happening. We will FEAR NOT, but instead remain resilient in our Faith and Defiant in the face of Wickedness. Our love goes out to the other victims and their families. We pray for the recovery of those who were wounded, and hold in our hearts the memory of the citizen who was so horribly killed. In this moment, it is more important than ever that we stand United, and show our True Character as Americans, remaining Strong and Determined, and not allowing Evil to Win. I truly love our Country, and love you all, and look forward to speaking to our Great Nation this week from Wisconsin	22.168	37.605	174.448	Pos
2024-07-14	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112786183121187515	Based on yesterday terrible events, I was going to delay my trip to Wisconsin, and The Republican National Convention, by two days, but have just decided that I cannot allow a shooter, or potential assassin, to force change to scheduling, or anything else. Therefore, I will be leaving for Milwaukee, as scheduled, at 3:30 P.M. TODAY. Thank you! DJT	17.640	23.285	14.2677	Pos
2024-07-14	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112786191989780006	UNITE AMERICA!	9.014	17.680	98.744	Pos
2024-05-30	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112532216091974043	THIS WAS A DISGRACE RIGGED TRIAL BY A CONFLICTED JUDGE WHO IS CORRUPT. WE WILL FIGHT FOR OUR CONSTITUTION THIS IS LONG FROM OVER! <a href="https://links.truthsocial.com/link/110542839430424765	9.333	15.024	60.704	Neg
2024-07-01	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112711754312482501	BIG WIN FOR OUR CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRACY. PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN!	4.545	14.434	65.703	Neg
2024-05-30	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112532293208502452	VICTORY ON NOVEMBER 5TH. SAVE AMERICA!!!	6036	14146	58685	Pos

2024-05-30	https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/112532453963389112	PRESS CONFERENCE TOMORROW MORNING AT 11:00 A.M. TRUMP TOWER ATRIUM. MAGA2024!	4927	13865	54030	Pos
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Source: Authors' own work

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of Donald Trump's communication strategy on Truth Social reveals a series of discursive patterns and interaction dynamics that provide a deeper understanding of how the US president has used social media as a political tool.

First, it is important to note the extensive and continuous use of the social network Truth Social by Donald Trump during the Republican primary campaign. The president published a total of 4,571 messages during the two periods analysed which answers the first research question. However, it is noteworthy that, despite his consistent activity throughout the entire period, Trump augmented the frequency of his posts during the second stage of the primaries, a time when he was no longer contending with any rivals.

Second, regarding the tone, the results reveal a slight predominance of positive messages over negative ones—ranging from the period of competition among Republican candidates to the consolidation of his leadership as the presumptive Republican nominee. This significant finding, which addresses the second research question, runs counter to studies that previously demonstrated Trump's tendency to dominate electoral campaigns by posting messages with a negative tone on social media. What this finding reveals is a sustained and deliberate communication strategy aimed at promoting and reinforcing his political image and platform during the primary campaign—specifically, mobilizing his supporters through positive messaging. Thus, it can be concluded that Trump frames his primary campaign from an encouraging, uplifting, and optimistic perspective.

In this regard, the discursive coherence that links the narrative of political victimization with an emotional appeal to his electoral base is significant. This duality serves to reinforce the sense of shared identity between Trump and his supporters, thereby consolidating a cohesive political community around common values, perceptions and grievances. In this sense, negative messages—primarily focused on denouncing the legal proceedings against him—serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they portray Trump as a victim of political persecution orchestrated by the Department of Justice, the Democratic Party, and President Joe Biden. Conversely, the emotional mobilization of MAGA supporters, who perceive these allegations as assaults on the MAGA movement, is a notable phenomenon. It is evident that Trump has strategically employed his indictments, convictions, and ongoing trials to consolidate the loyalty of his most devoted followers, since—as has been observed in previous works—they do not result in a deterioration of his standing among the MAGA base (Jacobson, 2024; Venizelos, 2022). Conversely, positive messages are predominantly oriented towards gratitude and the presentation of proposals, thereby contributing to the maintenance of an image of active and committed leadership.

Third, and in response to research question 2.1, the results show that there was a significant decrease in criticism of other Republican candidates from the first to the second period. The findings are substantiated by the circumstance that, in the subsequent electoral cycle, Trump was the sole remaining candidate in the primaries. Consequently, the necessity to direct criticism towards Republican candidates who had relinquished their bids for the presidency became redundant.

Fourth, regarding citizen interaction, Truth Social favorites predominate as the main form of interaction, which reveals low-engagement citizen participation, in which users express their support without actively engaging

in the conversation. In addition, it is clear that the messages that generate the most interaction have content classified as 'negative', providing an answer to the third question. The finding that negative messages elicit a greater volume of responses and comments suggests that such content is not only more extensively disseminated, but also prompts more profound reflection, albeit within the confines of ideological reaffirmation as opposed to pluralistic discourse.

In this context, it is worth noting that the social network Truth Social functions, in and of itself, as a space for identity reaffirmation—a place where Trump's followers find a safe environment to articulate their opinions, free from the constraints of the censorship that prevails on more heavily regulated platforms. Consequently, Trump's communication strategy is bolstered by the very structure of Truth Social, which contributes to the creation of an "echo chamber" where—as analyzed in the Theoretical Framework—narratives are collectively accepted, leaving very limited room for divergent perspectives (Cinelli et al. 2021). As a result, Trump's followers find themselves entrenched within this echo chamber (Del Vicario et al., 2016), a situation that leads to the proliferation of conspiracy theories far removed from reality (Cinelli et al., 2022).

This finding holds particular significance, as it validates the assertions made in the theoretical framework regarding the functioning of social networks as "echo chambers"—spaces in which polarizing and contentious content is frequently amplified. Therefore, it is essential to underscore the role played by the architectural properties of Truth Social within Donald Trump's communication strategy. Thus, it becomes evident that the platform does not merely convey the message; rather, it actively constitutes it, thereby contributing to both its encoding and decoding. These results are consistent with the findings of previous studies that have indicated how Trump has adapted his communication strategy to the evolving social media landscape, leveraging alternative technology platforms to disseminate his ideology without constraints. On the social media platform Truth Social, Trump's discourse becomes more uninhibited, enabling him to consolidate his political leadership and reinforce his narrative of confrontation.

In summary, the analysis conducted demonstrates that Trump's communication strategy on Truth Social is characterised by a combination of messages (predominantly positive) with emotional appeal and exploitation of the dynamics of social media. This is an endeavour to consolidate his standing as a political leader and to challenge those political actors and institutions that may cast criticisms. The congruence between the messages conveyed and the reactions engendered by his audience underscores the efficacy of political communication that is oriented towards polarization, victimization and the establishment of a collective identity. The results of this work are consistent with the processes described in the theoretical framework, according to which Trump's communication strategy serves to reinforce his electoral base and contribute to the radicalization of the public discourse.

Considering these findings, several avenues for future research are suggested. On the one hand, it would be relevant to comparatively analyze the communicative behaviour of other political leaders on alternative platforms to determine whether the phenomenon observed in Trump is replicable or specific. Conversely, further research is required to explore citizen interactions on social media, with a particular focus on the relationship between emotional content and political mobilization. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to investigate the impact of these communication strategies on the public perception of democratic institutions, with a particular focus on the judicial system and the media.

Trump's communication strategy on Truth Social illustrates how leaders may use social media to construct narratives, reinforce emotional bonds with their base, and facilitate political mobilisation; the findings are consistent with processes identified in the literature and point to communicative dynamics that could favour these outcomes.

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Funding: This research received external funding from projects PID2021-126765NB-I00 and CIAICO/2024/191.

Acknowledgements: The realisation of this paper was made possible by the sustained collaboration of the authors and the financial support of projects PID2021-126765NB-I00 and CIAICO/2024/191, and PID2021-124969NB-I00 at Universidad Cardenal Herrera-CEU. In addition, the authors would like to thank Professor Siarto (Michigan State University) for his assistance in designing and organising the data extraction tool for the Truth Social platform.

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