Department of Cultural, Media and Visual Studies

To what extent and in what ways has the populist discourse of the Chega party in Portugal been shaped by its existence in the social media space?

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Abstract

This dissertation proposes an exploration of the populist rhetoric of the far-right Portuguese party Chega in its manifestation through social media space. The focus will be placed on the interplay between populism and affordances of Facebook as a social media platform, exploring the extent to which the party's rhetoric might be shaped by its existence in the social media space. The resulting discourses generated on this platform will be explored in relation to three key defining aspects of populism: the formation of the leader, the centrality of the people and the anti-establishment rhetoric. In order to explore these in their relation to social media, focus will be placed on lack of gatekeeping, connectivity and polarisation.

The social media presence of Chega was explored through Critical Discourse Analysis, making use of Facebook posts posted on the individual account of the party leader, André Ventura, and on the official account of the Chega party during the last two months of the 2021 presidential campaign.

Keywords: Populism, Far-right, Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Media, Facebook.

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Introduction

Capitalising on a growing disillusionment with existing liberal democracies, the surge of far-right populist parties has proved to be a wide-reaching phenomenon across Western Europe. Offering responses to economic discontentment, the rejection of fast-developing globalisation and other concerns, the appearance of this form of political style has found its roots in context-specific factors that have furthered the legitimacy of far-right manifestations. Characteristically individual in its motivations but unified in its expression, populism has been associated more recently with a far-right rhetoric that opposes the institutionalised liberal left. Critical of a lack of direct accountability and inauthentic leadership, far-right populism has come to endorse a protest fuelled by frustration that seeks the re-structuring of existing democratic systems. Defined by a narrative that highlights the centrality of the people and the opposition of the establishment, populism's influence is furthered and unified through its leader, that claims to embody the resistance of the nation against its corrupt ruling institutions.

Coupled with a ubiquitous digital media landscape, one that has proved favourable to the populist propensity towards ideological division, the manifestation of populism has significantly readjusted to profit from the mass self-communication style of social media (Castells, 2013) and the absence of the gatekeeping (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020) argued to be characteristic of mass media that scrutinise the circulation of narratives opposing the dominant ruling system. Mimicking a sense of connectedness through its intimate entangling in everyday life, social media has proved valuable in legitimising populist appeals, through enabling the creation of a community that is framed as representative of the nation and its values.

Until 2019, Portugal had been considered immune to the far-right populist appeal (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020), yet the country saw a change in this reality with the rise of Chega, the first far-right political party to acquire political representation in the country after the establishment of democracy following the 1974 revolution. With a history of past authoritarian rule, inclinations towards a far-right rhetoric had been frowned upon and criticised by the mass media. Yet, with an increased mediatisation of the political landscape, the narrative of revolt found significant following and space of expression amongst those highly frustrated with the outcomes produced by existing political institutions. Through a highly critical and moralistic rhetoric embodied by its leader André Ventura, the party has shaped its ethos around the creation of a new republic that would offer more vertical ties between those in power and the people (Jaramillo, 2021).

Considering the above, this dissertation proposes an exploration of the development of the party's rhetoric through its interplay between populist appeal and social media diffusion mechanisms. Focusing specifically on anti-establishment appeal, centrality of the people and ubiquity of the leader in the movement, this expression of populism will be observed through a focus on these elements with a consideration of ideological, discursive or political aspects. Through the discourse analysis of Facebook posts posted throughout the two months prior to the Portuguese presidential election on the 24th of January 2021, this dissertation will engage with the overarching narrative developed by Chega through Facebook and reflect on the extent to which such expression has been shaped by the affordances of social media.

0.1. Organisation of Dissertation

In this initial section, an introduction offering an overview of the study and the concepts that will be used in the dissertation is offered. Chapter one will then offer an in-depth conceptualisation of populism and its three defining elements that will later be explored in relation to their interplay with social media discourses created by the political party. Chapter two will highlight the aspects of social media that prove valuable in their shaping of populist discourses, exploring the connection between social media characteristics and the previously outlined populist theories. Chapter three will offer historical context on Portugal and the rise of Chega as a right-wing political party. Chapter four will outline the use of critical discourse analysis and its employment in the analysis of social media posts to explore the development of the populist rhetoric on Facebook. Chapter five will comprise an analysis of the content explored from the posts made by the political leader and the political party, highlighting the development of specific discourses. Chapter six will offer concluding remarks on the overall expression of the populist discourse of Chega in its Facebook presence and the ways and extent to which its output is shaped by social media. Finally, chapter seven will outline shortcomings of the research conducted and suggest possible future research on the manifestation of populism through social media in Portugal.

1. Populism

The current political climate in Western Europe has been defined to an extent by a "crisis of faith in democracy" (Moffitt, 2016, p.1) that has been met by the rise of new populism. Stemming from an appeal to the growing frustrations associated with the past three decades of liberal democracies present in Western Europe, populism can be traced back to its initial manifestation through the US Populist Party in the late nineteenth century and the appearance of Latin American populism in the 1930s. Yet, when one considers the current expression of new populism evident through the French party National Front and Forza Italia in Italy, it is clear that this phenomenon has morphed to address distinct frustrations from that of its first expression in the nineteenth century (Mudde, 2017; Moffitt, 2016; Taggart, 2004).

From its initial roots in "collectivist agrarian traditions" (Urbinati, 2019, p.114) in the nineteenth century to its resistance of today's globalisation, the adaptable nature of populism highlights the impossibility of reducing it to "a single, essential core" (Moffitt, 2016, p.16) as demonstrated in the pioneering work of Canovan (1981). Due to such inability, the conceptualisation of populism has long been defined by a level of contestability that has prevented any form of definitional uniformity, as it has in each instance "mirrored the modes of democracy it challenged" (Urbinati, 2019, p.112) making its expression highly dependent on the context in which it forms. Taggart fittingly describes its nature as "chameleonic" (Taggart, 2004, p.275), expressing its capacity to adapt to the systems of power it aims to critique in the country in which it appears. Irrespective of a particular political standing, ranging from leaders from the "far left (Evo Morales) to the far right (Marine Le Pen)" (Moffitt, 2016, p.26), populism can be better understood through the mechanisms it adopts and not so much through a specific ideology. However, it is worth considering that when it comes to new populism in Western Europe, its "most visible presence has been through the

far right" (Taggart, 2004, p.270), heavily defined by a rejection of current developing globalisation and accompanying ideals of multiculturalism.

For the purpose of this dissertation, populism will be explored through the definition offered by Canovan of it being "an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values" (Canovan, 1999, p.3). Being considered a phenomenon that legitimises its efforts through "two main entities: the nation and the people" (Urbinati, 2019, p.111) when opposing the establishment, a central element of populism is the idea of voicing the needs and wants of 'the people', an entity constructed and defined in favour of the ideals carried by the populist leader. Accompanying the rhetoric of the devotion to the will of the people is the opposition of the current establishment, an entity that is framed as having failed to serve the interest of the nation and of currently standing in the way of its prosperity. By placing a focus on these central mechanisms of expression, that of anti-establishment rhetoric, appeal to the people and maverick leadership, populism will be explored as "something that is done" (Moffitt, 2016, p.24), regardless of ideology, by engaging with the elements of its expression that can be traced from its initial manifestation in the nineteenth century.

Due to the "basis of their unusualness" (Taggart, 2004, p.276) when it comes to radically challenging not only existing institutions but also deep-rooted societal conducts, populist movements are often found to grow exponentially when they first emerge. Nonetheless, their ability to sustain momentum faces challenges in their achievement of power, highlighting the way in which they often manifest themselves rather episodically in democracies. All forms of populism "converge on appeals to the people and a distrust of elites" (Taggart, 2004, p.273), providing the basis for its development through an affective narrative that moralises its practices as virtuous in contrast with those of the ruling establishment. Representing "a potential barometer of the health of representative politics" (Taggart, 2004, p.276) in its

radical critique of the flaws of institutionalised governmental practices, it is a phenomenon that capitalises on "contexts of high public discontent with politics" (Barr, 2009, p.30) through its focus on morality embodied by its leader.

1.1 Maverick Leadership

When one speaks of populism, key individuals come to mind such as Juan Perón or Donald Trump, signalling an association that proves essential when understanding populism: its "unifying narrative and a leader claiming to embody it" (Urbinati, 2019, p.113). Barr suggests that the leaders of populist movements are often defined by an outsider status or that of a maverick. For the purpose of this dissertation, the idea of the maverick leader proves essential as it describes the leader who begins his political career within an established party but goes on to form his own party or radically change the one through which he began his political journey (Barr, 2009). The success of the leader lies in his ability to convince the people of his rejection of "ossified institutional structures" (Canovan, 1999, p.6), this can only be done if the leader is an outsider when it comes to the political system of the country. Furthermore, this enables the leader to present himself as "monolithic and untainted by internal conflict" (Taggart, 2004, p. 274) which grants legitimacy to the critiques posed against the establishment. Personalism and charisma also play a key role in the construction of the populist leader, encouraging "loyalty to individuals rather than to ideologies" (Barr, 2009, p.40), which only becomes possible through the centrality of a particular individual in the movement. Charisma works in enabling mobilisation of support through encouraging trust in the leader's ability and personal conviction in order to "overcome gaps between their messages and reality" (Barr, 2009, p.32). A discourse of uniqueness is often employed in the leader's description of himself, promoting the "claim that they, *and only they*, represent the people" (Müller, 2017, p.20). It is this belief that encourages support as it appeals to the discontent and offers change through suggested "short-term and swift action" (Moffitt, 2016, p.45). Lastly, it is important to recognise that to further set themselves apart from the establishment they oppose, leaders often "pride themselves on simplicity and directness" (Canovan, 1999. p.5) which seems to critique the bureaucratic nature of institutions that have

become too complicated for the understanding of the people. Through its leader, populism seems to encourage "an ideology based on trust through faith more than trust through free and open deliberation" (Urbinati, 2019, p.122), which is why often it gains an almost religious fervour (Salgado & Zuquete, 2017) when it comes to its following. Ultimately, populism can be said to "share the same political 'shelf-life' as those leaders" (Taggart, 2004, p.276), as they become the seemingly legitimate embodiment of the will of the people.

1.2 Centrality of the people

Of utmost importance to the success of populism is the centrality of 'the people', a group argued to be an "empty signifier" (Urbinati, 2019, p.118) that acts as a reflection and legitimisation tool for the populism it supports. Observing 'the people' as a product rather than the cause of the populist movement enables the exploration of the narrative of each populist movement, considering that it is an entity that has "no real content at all" (Mudde, 2017, p.3), its construction is reliant on the self-perception of the leader's morality and purpose. Populism emphasises the role of the people as "the measure of political justice and legitimacy" (Urbinati, 2019, p.113), framing their support and opinions as the backbone of the movement. Yet, although "proclaiming the *vox populi* unmediated" (Canovan, 1999, p.14) proves to be central to the appeal of populism that claims to aim for "more direct vertical ties between leader and followers" (Barr, 2009, p.45), the fact that the people are a construction of the movement when it comes to their values and aims, would mean that they would mimic that of the movement. Therefore, when populist leaders claim that the people "being sovereign, cannot be wrong" (Urbinati, 2019, p.122), this legitimacy and infallibility becomes attributed to the movement. Through offering an alternative to the heavily unpersonalised governmental links with the people, populist leaders offer a closer connection and consequently instil a sense of belonging that "liberal, pluralist democracy with its (…) procedural mechanisms lacks" (Weyland, 2017, p.59).

The ability to create a deep sense of belonging is often reliant on the populist perception of the people as "pure and homogenous" (Mudde, 2017, p.33), which essentially simplifies the distinct groups of a country's population into a large group with the same perceptions and needs. However, this group that the populist leader claims to represent is that of the "righteous and morally pure" (Müller, 2017, p.3), who represent the desired majority, as all who do not support populism are framed as "morally illegitimate" (Urbinati, 2019, p.120).

This reductionist construction of the people assists populist leaders in terms of opportunistically characterising their support base as morally righteous and excluding opponents on the grounds of immorality. Through this, the "inclusion occurs through a parallel process of exclusion" (Urbinati, 2019, p.112), as the addressed frustrations and will of the majority are framed in line with the values upheld by the populist leader, all else that falls outside the desirable characteristics promoted by the populist rhetoric becomes discarded.

1.3 Anti-establishment rhetoric

The unusualness of populism in its manifestation within democracies lies in its critique and opposition to the existing establishment. Although populism does not "advocate the replacement of democracy" (Barr, 2009, p.32), it suggests a re-structuring of its "multilayered system of representation" (Barr, 2009, p.45). A sense of moral duty to the people characterises this desire to alter the current system of governance that has become associated with a "power elite that [is] unable to represent ordinary citizens" (Canovan, 1999, p.6). The development of more vertical ties between the leader and the people is at the core of populist rhetoric, renouncing "the loss of purity" (Taggart, 2016, p.254) brought on by the ruling elite. Reliant on a discourse of exclusion, populism works in framing the elite as a "voice of special interests" (Mudde, 2016, p.33) as opposed to the populist wish of serving according to the will of the people.

Although "any political project is premised on the division between two competing antagonistic groups" (Moffitt, 2016, p.23), populism's created division stems from an opposition to those who hold ruling power. Through a discourse of "us versus them" (Barr, 2009, p.31), populism furthers and capitalises on the existing low credibility when it comes to well-established parties. Placing itself on a moral high ground, populism creates a dichotomy between the honest and the corrupt, taking advantage of its opposing nature when it comes to the establishment. Supported by existing "long-term problems of weak democratic governance" (Taggart, 2016, p.272), populism forms a narrative that highlights the frustrations and fallibilities of the ruling establishment and is seen to "thrive on conflict and encourage polarization" (Müller, 2017, p.4).

Ultimately, as highlighted by Taggart, populism is "a call for better governance" (Taggart, 2002, p.67), its claim being that such achievement depends on bringing the ruling institutions and elites into question. Due to its unsettling nature, it is a phenomenon that "both

undermines and inspires democracy" (Mudde, 2017, p.1), encouraging accountability from

the government but possibly increasing political alienation from the people.

2. Populism and social media

When it comes to the rise of new populism, it has been as a process "intimately related to shifts in the media landscape" (Moffitt, 2016, p.70), which have facilitated wide-reaching communication and mimicked intensified levels of connection through the ubiquity of digital technologies in daily life. If one is to understand populism as a phenomenon "articulated discursively" (Manucci, 2017, p.472), the analysis of political messages shared through social media platforms enable an exploration of the ways in which "the features of social media lend themselves especially well to the promulgation of populist messages and figures" (Hendrickson & Galston, 2017).

Whereas in the past, political messages relied on transmission through mass media, which signified a certain measure of external control; nowadays existing social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, remove most forms of restriction on the individual expression of politicians. Considering the highly personalistic character of populist movements, this freedom of individual expression which has a been product of the shifting of "models of media consumption from traditional top-down processes" (Moffitt, 2016, p.91) proves essential in the creation of the leader through a self-defined narrative separate from external scrutiny.

Irrespective of a political form or agenda, the new media landscape has come to affect all forms of political communication, however, populism has proven to be particularly "suited to the contours of the digital media landscape, whereby ideological division, virality and immediacy are favoured" (Moffitt, 2016, p.92). By considering the anti-establishment rhetoric that also proves central to the success of populist movements, the social media propensity towards "conflict and negativity" (Manucci, 2017, p.467) aligns with the dichotomy between the corrupt and the virtuous emboldened by populist rhetoric.

Linked to the populist inclination towards the moralistic division of society that seems to be embraced by social media, the move of digital technologies from acting as "harbingers of globalisation" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.331) to facilitating the rise of far-right populism has proven subject to various speculations on this shift. A possible explanation might relate to the fact that at the core of both populism and social media is an appeal to "emotion rather than policies and facts" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.19) which facilitates the mobilisation of audiences due to its immediate affective impact. Arguably, social media aim "to inflect and magnify an irrational public mood" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.16) which proves fruitful to the populist appeal that focuses on "specific wounded areas in their particular society" (Manucci, 2017, p.473) to further their appeal for a re-structuring of the establishment. Coupled with the "sense of empowerment of national masses through digital media" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.339), these platforms afford populist movements the ability to mimic true sovereignty being expressed through online interaction.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the connection between populism and social media will be explored through Moffitt's idea of "the leader [being] seen as the performer, 'the people' as the audience, and crisis and media as the stage on which populism plays out upon" (Moffitt, 2016, p.5). Through this, social media's absence of gatekeeping, encouraged divisiveness and increased connectivity will prove crucial in exploring the resulting performance of populist discourses created by the political party Chega.

2.1 Absence of gatekeeping and the creation of the leader

When Moffitt mentions that one "cannot suffocate a populist in the age of blogs, YouTube and social networks" (Moffitt, 2016, p.89), attention is brought to the shift in freedom brought on by the absence of gatekeeping in these platforms. Whereas the traditional media system proved to be often characterised by a certain control from mainstream political elites (Manucci, 2017), new social networks have enabled dissent from the status quo to not be scrutinised and kept from reaching the public.

Considering the "frequent liberal-cosmopolitan stance" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.8) adopted by mainstream media, the existence of social media networks that allow for mass self-communication (Castells, 2013), enable the counteraction of such dominant narrative, allowing populism to thrive. Taking into account the maverick leadership that arguably characterises populist movements, the possibility afforded by social media to "select and pursue specific strategies without the etiquettes and regulations of more traditional communication channels" (Zulianello, Albertini & Ceccobelli, 2018, p.440) addresses the populist need to individualise the leader through a network that subjects self-presentation to limited mediation.

Considering that platforms such as Facebook rely on the communication of the personal for engagement and connection, "private information about a candidate or representative will spread more easily than information about a new parliamentary initiative" (Klinger & Svensson, 2016, p.35), a characteristic proves suitable to platforming the centrality of the leader when it comes to populism. Through this encouraged centrality, social media offers a platform suitable to "the creation of an alternate reality based on politicians' ability to control the story by enhancing the logic they see fit" (Gonawela *et al.*, 2018, p.317). The absence of gatekeeping thus signifies an ability to not only circulate a tailored narrative that is highly

personalised, but to also normalise the ideals that the populist leader embodies, through a medium that highlights personality over policy.

Furthermore, the "lack of editorial oversight and fact-checking procedures on social media platforms" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.333) has enabled the simplification of issues present in society that the establishment has failed to address. Hence providing a platform to populist actors that offer "simple solutions that are unlikely to work in reality" (Bartlett, 2014, p.106) but that function in delegitimizing the establishment and reach voters through an affective discourse of morality.

Social media platforms offer "personalized communication channels that allow [populist leaders] to exert their charisma and suggestive power" (Engesser, Fawzi & Larsson, 2017, p.1286) through personal narratives that are based on opposition to the establishment and solidarity with the people. By enabling "messages [that] do not have to follow the news values and are frequently more personal and sensationalistic in nature" (Engesser *et al*, 2017, p.1113), social media platforms further populist appeal through interactions that find validity in their provocative, challenging nature. Through its characteristic reliance on elements of "simplification, emotionalization, and negativity, [which] are perfectly in line with the Internet's attention economy" (Engesser, Fawzi & Larsson, 2017, p.1286), populist rhetoric gains power from its existence in the social media space.

2.2 Connectivity and the appeal to the people

United in their commitment to an audience, populism and social media share a need of engagement for their survival. When it comes to populism, leaders "build their credibility on their links with ordinary people" (Manucci, 2017, p.475), through social networks they gain access to 'the people' instantly. This level of connectivity enables leaders to create a sense of "closeness and intimacy" (Moffitt, 2016, p.89) that furthers an idea of accessibility to the leader.

Popular sovereignty forms the basis of the populist appeal, therefore the "more direct communication between populist leaders and their base" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.16) encourages a belief of increased accountability compared to other forms of communication that, through more structured mediation, appear more detached from the leader. Besides working as a form to communicate unfiltered opinion and critique to their followers, populist leaders also take advantage of the interactive nature of social networks to "activate and deepen ties" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.16) with the created community.

Taking into consideration the people as an empty signifier as outlined before, there is a need for the creation and addressing of a specific group that aligns with the ideology and critique encouraged by the populist leader. Social media allows for the addressing of the "people as a homogeneous community" (Kraemer, 2017, p. 1298) through the creation of groups and pages that target and filter the audience reached. Regarding the need of populism to channel the frustration of particular groups, the ability to form a platform dominated by "groups of like-minded persons with a feeling of solidarity" (Kraemer, 2017, p.1304) permits the circulation and socialisation of the created populist narrative, normalising the criticism through a high level of personalism.

Furthermore, it is important to note that social media is still defined by hierarchical structures dictated by power dynamics between platforms and political actors, however, the "rhetorics of horizontalism regarding social media platforms often hide vertical structures and inequalities" (Rensmann, 2017, p.130). Through its democratic appearance and appeal reliant on an image of "social media as 'human-contact opportunity'" (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016, p.23), the ability of populist leaders to reach their supporters and mimic a level of closeness that becomes associated with devotion to the people, proves highly beneficial for the acceptance of the populist narrative.

Through the creation of community through apparent high levels of connection between the leader and 'the people', social media platforms enable "causal interpretation[s], by which an outside agent is blamed for the obstruction to the achievement of one's goals" (Rico, Guinjoan & Anduiza, 2017, p.448). Such affordance enables the construction of the dichotomy of the virtuous and the corrupt, through the inclusion of those who are deserving of the change offered by the populist leader and the exclusion of the illegitimate.

2.3 Polarisation and the anti-establishment rhetoric

Accompanying its anti-establishment rhetoric is populism's distrust when it comes to mainstream media. Often accusing it of "being controlled by the mainstream political elites" (Manucci, 2017, p.475), the move to social media enables the furthering of the anti-establishment protest and the disassociation from mass media institutions framed in their association with political elites. In social media, populists claim to find a "neutral and independent arena" (Manucci, 2017, p.475) through which they find the freedom to shape their news and criticise not only the political elite but also the mainstream media that accompanies it.

The leaders of populist movements also find in social media a way to "interact in isolation with those who already think what [they] think" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.16), meaning that they find reduced resistance to the views and values they promote. Such control over their platform also means that the creation of a community is facilitated by the "algorithm-driven 'filter bubbles'" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.333) that encourage the ideological division upon which populism relies on.

Populism "combines the positive valorisation of the people with the denigration of their enemies (Bobba, 2018, p.13)", such a Manichean approach becomes enabled through the fact that "citizens no longer share the same picture of a common sociopolitical reality" (Bruns, 2016, p.30) when it comes to their interactions in social media. Whereas mass media "address a more heterogenous audience and hence have to adapt their reports accordingly" (Bruns, 2016, p.30), social media platforms benefit from the creation of targeted groups through "homophile filter bubbles and echo chambers" (Engesser, Fawzi & Larsson, 2017, p.1286).

Accompanying such ideological division comes not only a level of intolerance for views that differ from one's own but also "tolerance of exclusionary nationalist rhetoric and hate

speech" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.333). Considering that social media capitalises from affective communication that seems dependent on a certain level of conflict in order to appear, extremism seems to "get greater visibility and support than [it] would have in an offline media setting" (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p.339).

Ultimately, "the target-group opportunity render social media an especially convenient instrument for populist messages" (Ernst *et al.*, 2017, p.1351), by enabling the process of opposition to the establishment to become empowered through the imposed limit on "genuine debate between competing views (…) shaped by constructed group dichotomies" (Ceron, 2017, p. 198).

3. Populism in Portugal

3.1 Historical and social context

Taking into consideration the outlined explanations when it comes to the expression of populism through social media, it is important to understand the country-specific context in which it occurs. In Portugal, a country with "the inheritance of a long period of dictatorship (1933–1974)" (Salgado, 2018, p.55), the stigmatisation of far-right parties has meant that until 2019 there has been no pronounced representation of far-right ideals in the political spectrum. Following the 1974 revolution, "a limit to freedom of association of all kinds of fascist (and racist) organizations (article 46)" (Salgado, 2018, p.55) was established by the Constitution. Yet, although accompanied by further legislation that guaranteed media freedom, the development of the mainstream media was still seen to rely to a great extent on a hegemonic political narrative. Due to a lack of "investigative journalism, journalists overly rel[ied] on politicians as sources of information" (Salgado, 2018, p.57), which meant that the framing of issues was, to an extent, controlled by political pressures. Consequently, the visibility afforded to right-wing rhetoric and associated parties was, for the most part, limited. However, the incorporation of social media as a political medium brought an amplified "visibility of this kind of discourses in Portugal" (Salgado, 2018, p.57).

Following "the arrest and criminal investigation of former prime minister José Sócrates" (Salgado, 2018, p.58) and "scandals involving some secretaries of state" (Salgado, 2018, p.58) in 2014, the perception of political figures in Portugal became tarnished in its association with corruption. The mistrust experienced by citizens when it came to political elites became a defining element of Portuguese politics, something shown in pre-electoral surveys in 2019 that "showed corruption was a salient concern" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.769). The arrest of Sócrates came to affect public perception of Portugal's current prime minister António Costa who was "a member of the first of his two governments" (France-

Presse, 2021), but also Portugal's current president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who was subject to the perception of guilt by association. This existing distrust when it came to political elites proved of high importance in the rise of Chega, who effectively capitalised on the long-standing resentment felt towards failing political actors.

After having been "one of the countries that most felt the Euro Crisis" (Salgado, 2018, p.56), the accusation of Sócrates having taken "€34m from three companies while he was in power between 2005 and 2011" (France-Presse, 2021) proved devastatingly discouraging for the re-establishment of credibility for political elites. Still felt in the current political environment, Portugal continues to be defined by a "socioeconomic dimension of conflict" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.754). When it comes to "sociocultural cleavages" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.755) these remain of relative low salience, considering Portugal's relative "low immigration figures" (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020, p.1046), yet the introduction of Chega in the Portuguese political field has arguably furthered the discussion of these cleavages. In its overcoming of the rejection of right-wing ideals characteristic of Portugal's post-democratic history, the rise of Chega came to challenge hegemonic institutionalised politics, capitalising on the failures of political elites and resulting mistrust of the public.

3.2 The rise of Chega

Emerging from a history of failed attempts by far-right parties to gain political representation in Portugal, Chega rose to prominence in 2019, acquiring a seat at the Assembly of the Republic and finding itself central to what can be considered "a watershed moment in Portuguese democratic history" (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020, p.1038), as the first far-right political party to gain political representation since the establishment of democracy. Demonstrating its capacity of learning from the mistakes of previous movements like the Partido Nacional Renovador, who failed to detach their right-wing rhetoric from associations with extremism (Mendes & Dennison, 2021), Chega formed its campaign in a balance between appealing to those frustrated with lack of change by proposing policies such as "harsher sentencing for corruption cases" and "immediate deportation of all illegal immigrants" (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020, p.1046), whilst presenting itself as detached from any extremism that would echo the burden of Portugal's dictatorial past.

Led by André Ventura, whose familiarity as a "well-known football TV commentator" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.762) proved essential in adding to the party's visibility, Chega found its platform in a developing narrative based on "corruption and anti-establishment messages" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.770). Having begun his political career as a "representative of the second largest party (the centre-right Partido Social Democrata)" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.762), Ventura captured media and subsequently the country's attention through "accus[ing] Roma people of living on state benefits" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.762), placing him at the centre of public debate.

Aided by the internal crisis experienced by the political right after "one of the worst results of its history in 2019" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.762), Chega framed itself as capable of addressing the "gaps in political supply" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.770). Formed as a "splinter from a mainstream center-right party, rather than being a product of extreme right-

wing fringe movements" (Mendes & Dennison, 2021, p.754), Chega carried the credibility

associated with a leader who held an understanding of the political system in which it was

situated, but the unique radical appeal of having chosen to oppose it. As a result, Chega

received "a much greater deal of media attention than previous radical right parties" (Mendes

& Dennison, 2021, p.760), justified in the presence of a leader that became recognised

through mainstream politics and a narrative that differentiated its opposition from extremism.

4. Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDS) was adopted in addressing the 236 posts made by the leader André Ventura and the 287 posts made by the political party Chega on Facebook, during the two final months of the political campaign for the 2021 presidential election. This method of qualitative research was chosen due to its engagement with "language as a 'social practice' that is both determined by social structure and contributes to stabilising and changing that structure simultaneously" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p.7). Considering the populist engagement with concepts of opposition and construction of personalised narratives, critical discourse analysis enables the exploration of populist communication on social media and its construction of "a collective understanding that certain concepts, actions, and relationships are true and correct" (Chilton & Schäffner, 2011, p.351).

Furthermore, critical discourse analysis will allow for an addressing of legitimisation techniques, condemnation of the opposition, and discursive techniques of power associated with morality. Taking into consideration that this dissertation aims to explore the ways in which social media visibility shapes the performance of the populist discourse adopted by Chega, the interest of CDS in "demystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and transparent investigation of semiotic data" (Unger, Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2021, p.264) proves suitable in addressing this aim.

4.1 Ethical Considerations

This dissertation does not pose any direct ethical concerns, not in relation to the author or to third party individuals. All data analysed was collected from public Facebook pages, making use of posts freely accessible once posted on the platform. The use of data poses no harm to any individual, no private or sensitive information was used that would affect the safety of anyone.

5. Analysis

For the purpose of the discourse analysis conducted, the narrative of the Chega party was considered through the three defining characteristics of populism outlined formerly: maverick leadership, centrality of the people and anti-establishment rhetoric. The expression of such elements was seen to rely on discourses of uniqueness, exclusion, legitimacy and morality. For this analysis, specific posts were selected to illustrate patterns of self-representation of the leader and supporting narratives offered by the political party. Due to the large quantity of data collected, 23 selected posts were included in the analysis to illustrate the narrative patterns and enable an in-depth exploration of the discourses adopted.

5.1 Unique leader

5.1.1 Self-presentation

Through the analysis of the discourse of André Ventura on his Facebook page, the politician was found to engage in discourses of uniqueness and morality when furthering his presentation as a political leader. An engagement encompassing religious elements as well as nationalist narratives, his political campaign was presented in alignment with a higher purpose that fuelled his efforts to change the Portuguese political system. This proved effective in detaching individual motivations and presenting his political aims as being rooted in representing the collective, a specific collective that will be discussed further on. Considering the use of Facebook as the platform for the dissemination of this narrative, two elements proved influential in the development of these discourses. Firstly, the ability of the leader to have a personalised page, separate from the party, that produced a number of posts close to the number created by the official Chega party page. Furthermore, the absence of gatekeeping enabled the development of discourses of emotive and self-reflexive nature, characteristics furthered by the immediacy and perceived spontaneity associated with Facebook posts.

Illustrative of the discussed patterns is the following post where the religious elements, personalised narrative and selfless drive are highlighted:

"I often tell my friends that God has entrusted me with a painful mission, which is at the same time an enormous privilege: leading the transformation of Portugal! I knew it would be hard and that there would be pitfalls every step of the way! That many would abandon me! That many would want to eliminate me! In any case, the work must go on. I am not giving up on you. I am not giving up on Portugal!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation).[1]

[1] [1] "Costumo dizer aos meus amigos que Deus me confiou uma dolorosa missão, que é simultaneamente um enorme privilégio : liderar a transformação de Portugal! Sabia que seria

Through an almost confessional tone, Ventura takes advantage of Facebook's characteristically personalised structure that enables a post of a politician to be presented as a simple, spontaneous reflection that one would express to a close friend. The use of exclamation marks, an element also present in later posts analysed, seems to work as an expression of passion for the message conveyed, breaking the message into short emphatic sentences that mimicked the leader's emotion. The engagement with religious imagery also proves compelling in placing Ventura's political campaign in line with the intervention of a higher power, acting as a legitimisation tool for his presence and power in opposing the system.

The central entities that hearten the "painful mission" accepted by the leader are the nation and the people. Through an engagement with nationalism, Ventura manifests his commitment to the nation by recalling its past:

"In Coimbra, I knelt before the tomb of Afonso Henriques and promised to fight until my last

day for Portugal and the good Portuguese people!" (Ventura, 2021, my translation).[2]

Ventura's reminiscing of national heroes from the Portuguese past, such as Afonso Henriques, the first Portuguese king who turned Portugal into an independent nation, encourages an association between his political efforts and the efforts of national heroes. Through such continuity, the description of his political campaign as a "painful mission" and one defined by his commitment to "fight until [his] last day" proves convincing in framing his aims as commendable in their sacrificial, devoted nature.

The allusion to the unstoppable power of his political campaign also proved meaningful in its expression. Through the discussed employment of religious imagery and use of nature

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duro e que haveria armadilhas em cada troço do caminho! Que muitos me abandonariam! Que muitos me quereriam eliminar! Seja como for, o trabalho tem de continuar. Não desisto de vocês. Não desisto de Portugal!"

[2] "Em Coimbra, ajoelhei-me perante o túmulo de D. Afonso Henriques e prometi lutar até ao meu último dia por Portugal e pelos portugueses de bem!"

metaphors, such as the one presented below, Ventura construes himself and his political party as the representation of unyielding change. The association to natural elements such as a "hurricane" express an inevitability when it comes to the party's success. The leader engages with a self-presentation that encourages the perception of all-encompassing strength through his use of metaphorical expressions:

"A hurricane that will fill the Portuguese with hope in 2021." (Ventura, 2020, my translation).[3]

Moreover, such relentless drive is highlighted in pledges of remaining honest regardless of the cost, significant in normalising a perception of unquestionable accountability:

"Even under fire, I will never stop telling the truth. That will always be my motto!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation).[4]

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[3] "Um furacão que vai encher portugueses de esperança em 2021."
[4] "Mesmo debaixo de fogo, nunca deixar de dizer a verdade. Será sempre esse o meu lema!"

5.1.2 Supporting party presentation

In comparison to the leader's self-presentation, the supporting narrative developed on the political party's page seems to place a closer focus on directly describing the virtues of the leader and highlighting the struggles faced in his political journey. It is important to note that through having separate platforms, the party's narrative that highlights the leader's virtues is symbolically detached from the leader himself, enabling discourses of admiration to be presented without the leader being directly engaged in his own self-promotion.

When reflecting on the leader's performance on a political debate, the political party posts the following:

> "André Ventura for his part was, as is his style, a gentleman. Objective, forceful, assertive, genuine and pragmatic. Personality traits that are also in short supply in Portuguese society and should therefore always be noted." (Partido Chega Oficial, 2021, my translation).[5]

The leader is praised for traits that align with the charismatic leadership characteristic of populist movements, highlighting his firmness and directness. In commenting on the lack of such traits in Portuguese society, the uniqueness of the leader is alluded to and, with it, the accompanying need for his presence in the political system.

Whereas the individual page of the leader highlighted an invulnerability afforded by a higher purpose, the party page engaged with a narrative of victimhood:

> "Our campaign has been met by a constant wave of hate. See here the death threats directed at André Ventura. They will not silence us!" (Partido Chega Oficial, 2021, my translation).[6]

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[5] "André Ventura por sua vez esteve como é seu timbre, um senhor. Objectivo, contundente, assertivo, genuíno e pragmático. Traços de personalidade que igualmente escasseiam na sociedade portuguesa e que por isso devem ser sempre registadas."

[6] "A nossa campanha tem sido recebida por uma onda de ódio constante. Veja aqui as ameaças de morte dirigidas a André Ventura. Não nos calarão!"

In positioning the leader as a victim of the environment in which he conducts his campaign, the discourse of vulnerability simultaneously reinforces the perception of the leader's strength in continuing his campaign and encourages the solidarity of his supporters.

By placing struggle as a defining element of its political campaign, the party introduces an affective link where the leader and his supporters are placed on equal ground when it comes to resisting and sustaining difficulties brought on by the establishment they oppose. The leader is thus furthered as the embodiment of the sovereign, whose power relies on the support of the people as highlighted below:

"Do not hesitate to contribute to the electoral campaign of the candidate that will change the political paradigm in Portugal. Support André Ventura in this journey that has as its purpose each and every Portuguese who no longer see themselves in the current way of doing politics.

Don't let André Ventura walk alone!" (Partido Chega Oficial, 2020, my translation).[7]

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[7] "Não deixe de contribuir para a campanha eleitoral da Candidatura que vai mudar o paradigma político de Portugal. Apoie como puder André Ventura nesta caminhada que tem por fim todo e cada um dos portugueses que já não se revêm na actual forma de fazer política.
Não deixe André Ventura caminhar sozinho!"

5.2 Community of the legitimate

When considering the construction of 'the people', the discourse of legitimacy associated with this entity was developed in two ways: through a definition of inclusion and the victimisation of the included. As suggested by Jaramillo (2021), the construction of the legitimate people that Chega aim to represent was crafted under the idea of the "Good Portuguese", a label highly dependent on the "functionalisation" of citizens (Jaramillo, 2021, p.25). Considering the target-group opportunity inherent through the use of Facebook as a communication platform, the political party is afforded the possibility of addressing and victimising specific groups and foster a sense of solidarity, disseminating and normalising the reality that the establishment is a direct enemy to these groups. It is important to note that the engagement with the people and representation of them in discourse was more present on the Facebook page of Ventura than on the page of the political party, highlighting the leader as a essential entity when it comes to enabling connection with the people.

5.2.1 The Good Portuguese

Characteristic of populist movements is the appeal to the people that are presented as the legitimate majority but are, in truth, a constructed entity. Using Facebook to further this construction, the discourses adopted by the leader further a definition that presents electoral worth as being limited to a specific group. As argued by Jaramillo (2021), the "Good Portuguese" has been an entity created by Chega, where the value of the individual becomes associated with their profession, as this signifies a clear contribution to the building of the nation and therefore the right to be represented. This is highlighted through the following statement, where Ventura calls to specific professions and the association to "good people":

"With me the Government will not go back to leaving the most affected sectors behind, nor will it continue to harm teachers, nurses and police officers as it has been doing. The Government will have to be for the good people." (Partido Chega Oficial, 2020, my translation).8

The professional sectors mentioned by Ventura are framed as having been harmed by the establishment which he opposes, hinting at the current political leaders' lack of prioritisation of these "good people". In contrast to the current government, Ventura states these individuals will become the priority under his political campaign, offering to counteract the neglect of the current establishment.

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8 "Comigo o Governo não voltará a deixar os setores mais afetados para trás, nem continuará a prejudicar professores, enfermeiros e polícias como tem feito. O Governo terá de ser para as pessoas de bem."

The direct link and interest of the leader in hard-working individuals is affectively reiterated through the following post on the Chega Facebook page:

"Second day of the campaign. At Docapesca in Lagoa, André Ventura in contact with the fishermen and learning about their real problems. The hotel and restaurant industry is also in great difficulty and unemployment is rising sharply. People feel abandoned and need support that either doesn't arrive or takes a long time to arrive. On January 24th the Algarve will vote André Ventura!" (Partido Chega Oficial, 2021, my translation).[9]

Although Ventura is constructed as a leader unique in his opposition to the establishment, he is also defined in his ordinariness through his direct links with the people as underlined by the above post. Capitalising on rising frustrations brought on by "rising unemployment", the link between the people and the leader who learns "about their real problems" proves essential in placing both entities on the same side, the side that opposes the current establishment.

In addition, the good people also become defined through the exclusion of those who do not form part of the constructed legitimate entity:

"If the subsidisers, the complacent and the extreme left think that they are discouraging me, they are very wrong. They only give me more strength to fight for the good Portuguese people. Tomorrow I'll be there in Setúbal, a land of good and hard-working people." (Ventura, 2021, my translation).[10]

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[9] "Segundo dia de campanha. Na Docapesca em Lagoa, André Ventura no contacto com os pescadores e a saber dos seus reais problemas. Também a hotelaria e a restauração estão em grandes dificuldades e o desemprego aumenta de forma brutal. As pessoas sentem-se abandonadas e precisam de apoios que tardam a chegar ou não chegam. Dia 24 de Janeiro o Algarve vai votar André Ventura!"

[10] "Se os subsidiodependentes, os acomodados e a extrema - esquerda pensam que me desanimam, estão muito enganados. Só me dão mais força para lutar pelos portugueses de bem. Amanhã lá estarei em Setúbal, terra de gente boa e trabalhadora."

Placing these individuals in opposition to "the good Portuguese", Ventura furthers the dichotomy between the "subsidisers, the complacent and the extreme left" and the people he aims to represent. In line with the populist discourse of "us versus them" (Barr, 2009, p.31), the leader is seen to rely on the contrast between the moral and immoral to further valorise the people he claims to fight for. The moral are the hard-working individuals who sustain the nation, whilst the immoral are responsible for the struggles the "Good Portuguese" face.

The constructed good people are recognised by the leader as a powerful entity, much like the "hurricane" used to describe the leader, the legitimate people are presented as capable of being embodied as an "earthquake":

> "On 24 January the Portuguese will cause a huge earthquake in this decrepit political system!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation). [11]

The use of this metaphor allows for a presentation of their power as an implacable force, much like that of their leader. When dealing with a "decrepit political system", only something as powerful as an "earthquake" with its connotations of destruction, will enable the necessary change for the desired reconstruction emboldened by the leader.

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[11] "Dia 24 de Janeiro os portugueses provocarão um enorme terremoto neste sistema político decrépito!"

5.2.2 The struggle of the abandoned

Capitalising on the discontentment and frustration of the good people as is characteristic of populist movements through their focus on "wounded areas in their particular society" (Manucci, 2017, p.473), the focus on victimhood is also manifested in the discourses adopted by the leader and the political party.

Framed as victims of the system, André Ventura signals to the need for fairness to be ensured by those in power in Portuguese society, expressing the view that half of the country has been supporting the other:

"Those who receive subsidies from the Portuguese people's taxes have to contribute to society. So much to do. So much to contribute. CHEGA wants to end this society in which half of the country supports the other half!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation). 12

In a sweeping statement that works in exacerbating feelings of indignation when it comes to the suggested imbalance present in current society, the good people become further defined through their performance of a profession through the emphasis on "people's taxes". The entitlement to representation seems to be correlated to such performance, granted only to those who "contribute".

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12 "Quem recebe subsídios dos impostos dos portugueses tem de contribuir para a sociedade. Tanto para fazer. Tanto para contribuir. O CHEGA quer acabar com esta sociedade em que metade do país sustenta a outra metade!"

Furthermore, the leader significantly defines the emotions of these individuals who face the struggles brought on by the current state of the country, framing such emotions as the driving force behind his political campaign:

> "It's not radical right, it's popular. And it wasn't television, it was the tiredness and frustration of the Portuguese people with the state the country has reached." (Ventura, 2021, my translation). 13

Rejecting the label associated with radicalism through re-emphasising the popular nature of the movement that responds to the "tiredness and frustration" of the people, proves a useful mechanism in distancing the party from associations with radicalism and mimicking a sense of unity through struggle.

This popular nature is furthered by the leader's claim of proximity to the people, placing himself with the people in the opposition to the establishment:

> "Always close to the people and their difficulties... These privileged people of the regime. It's these kinds of people we have to beat in January!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation). 14

The focus is again placed on creating a division. The leader is with "the people and their difficulties", whilst the "privileged people of the regime" are distanced through their supposed exemption from struggle. A negative association is created between the current political regime and unearned privilege, a link contrasted with the difficulties faced by the "good Portuguese". The use of the pronoun "we" furthers the complicity between the leader and supporters, joined by a mutual solidarity in their effort to oppose the regime.

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[13] "Não é direita radical, é popular. E não foi a televisão, foi o cansaço e a frustração do povo português com o estado a que chegou o país."

[14] "Sempre junto do povo e das suas dificuldades... Estes privilegiados do regime. É este tipo de gente que temos de vencer em Janeiro!"

5.3 Purging of the immoral (Discourse of Exclusion)

When shaping the anti-establishment narrative, the two broad categories that characterised its expression were an emphasis on the unchanged, outdated nature of the ruling political power and the lack of suitability of the existing alternatives, highlighting Chega as the only viable substitute that would bring the maturity of the old and the change of the new. Capitalising on the fragmented socio-political reality allowed through the use of Facebook, the political leader and party developed a discourse of exclusion of the establishment through highlighting their low levels of morality linked to personal interests.

5.3.1 Old lines of power

When describing the current ruling establishment, Ventura highlights the long-standing existence of the left that has been faced with little adequate political challenge. This is shown in the following post:

"Were you expecting this candidacy to leave everything the same? That it would leave the left without confrontation, as has happened for 45 years? Get used to it, I came to leave no stone unturned in this rotten and corrupt system that governs us!" (Ventura, 2021, my translation).[15]

Introducing himself as the one who will turn every stone, Ventura opposes himself to the system and establishes the dichotomy associated with populism between the honest and the corrupt. Presenting himself as the unique challenge to a system he claims to be "rotten", the leader appeals to a negative association to be made with the current establishment, highlighting the need of the country to be rid of it, such as one would with rotten food.

Such unfavourable association is furthered by Ventura's direct mention of the nation's president, calling to his sympathy towards "thugs and criminals" shown in the following post:

"Marcelo sided with thugs and criminals, he even left sympathetic words for all kinds of less recommendable people. He was incapable of condemning an attempted aggression against a presidential opponent. Very bad!" (Ventura, 2021, my translation). [16]

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[15] "Estavam à espera que esta candidatura fosse para deixar tudo na mesma? Que fosse para deixar a esquerda sem confronto, como acontece há 45 anos?Habituem-se, eu vim para não deixar pedra sobre pedra deste sistema podre e corrupto que nos governa!"

[16] "Marcelo esteve ao lado de bandidos e de criminosos, deixou até palavras simpáticas a todo o tipo de gente menos recomendável. Foi incapaz de condenar uma tentativa de agressão a um adversário presidencial. Muito mal!"

The leader appeals to the people's indignation through challenging the character of the most powerful political figure in the country, reflecting on his lack of action in condemning an attack towards Ventura. The use of simple language for the valorisation of the president's actions, "very bad", mimics an almost childlike reproach towards his behaviour.

Ventura also capitalises and encourages the link between the current establishment and supposed corruption to justify his strong opposition and circumvent accusations of fascism when it comes to his political campaign:

"The country where not liking corrupt people and wanting to remove them from power is fascism!!!" (Ventura, 2021, my translation).[17]

Furthermore, Ventura contrasts himself and the people against the establishment, placing the blame of the crisis faced on the actions of the government:

"They brought us into the crisis. Now they don't know how to get out of it!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation). [18]

The use of the pronouns "they" and "us" perfectly expresses the dichotomised discourse adopted by populist political leaders, creating a simplistic division in society between the good and the bad.

Ultimately, the posts made both by the political leader and the political party highlight the inadequacy of the current political establishment, one characterised in relation to its privilege.

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[17] "O país em que não gostar de corruptos e querer afastá-los do poder é fascismo!!!"

[18] "Trouxeram-nos até à crise. Agora não sabem como sair dela!"

A privilege framed as being unfairly sustained by the work of the people:

>"The answer to these "democrats" who think they own everything, who think that the ordinary Portuguese have to continue paying to sustain everything and everyone in the system, we have to give it on 24 January." (Ventura, 2020, my translation). [19]

The discourse associated with the current political system becomes correlated with entitlement, framing its political performance as one driven by personal interests. This is in turn contrasted with Chega and their altruistic motivation of wanting to reshape the current establishment in line with the needs of the people.

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[19] "A resposta a estes "democratas" que se acham donos disto tudo, que pensam que os portugueses comuns têm de continuar a pagar para sustentar tudo e todos no sistema, temos de a dar no dia 24 de Janeiro."

5.3.2 Young and extremist

When it comes to addressing political opponents other than the ruling party, Ventura and the political party represent these through a discourse that diminishes their suitability by highlighting elements of immorality and lack of substance. Through aligning the opposing parties with aggressive protests and framing their political drive as limited to a desire to win, Chega implicates a lack of maturity in characterising their campaigns, in contrast with the Chega political campaign whose conduct is shaped by its loyalty to democratic values.

When it comes to criticising the opposition, Ventura presents the opponent's political drive as superficial, associating it with egotistical motives:

"A candidacy without any substance or consistency, with the sole aim of boosting the ego of the extreme left in Portugal. Help me crush her!" (Ventura, 2020, my translation). [20]

Distancing the needs of the people from the central aim of this political party and substituting it with a selfish personal goal, Ventura expresses his exasperation through the use of the verb "crush", evoking anger in his response to this political presence.

In order to further discredit the opposition, the leader also diminishes their efforts to the sole desire of being placed ahead of the Chega party:

"Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias are already speaking with one voice, they don't give a damn about the Presidential election or the country, they only want to be ahead of me. They'll have a bitter night on January 24th!" (Ventura, 2021, my translation). [21]

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[20] "Uma candidatura sem qualquer substância ou consistência, com o único objetivo de aumentar o ego da extrema - esquerda em Portugal. Ajudem-me a esmagá-la!"

[21] "A Ana Gomes e a Marisa Matias até já falam a uma só voz, estão-se nas tintas para as presidenciais e para o país, só pensam em ficar à minha frente. Vão ter uma amarga noite no dia 24 de Janeiro!"

The addressing of two different parties under the claim that they are "already speaking with one voice" functions in minimising the individuality and worth of each candidate. In line with the characteristic of populist movements to represent themselves as a unique option, this lack of separation proves productive in framing other political parties as being driven by something so similar that they could even be joined.

The main criticism emboldened by the Chega party towards its political opponents relates to their supposed intolerance towards anything that does not align with their views:

> "Today on TVI at 9pm the confrontation between the dictatorship candidacy that wants to outlaw and imprison everything and everyone it doesn't like represented by Ana Gomes and the democracy and political tolerance represented by André Ventura. Not to be missed!"
>
> (Partido Chega Oficial, 2021, my translation). [22]

Chega frames the political debate as one between a leader capable of respecting its opponents in true democratic fashion, and an opponent that expresses dictatorial traits, wishing to limit any form of opposition. This functions in hinting at a lack of maturity on the part of Ana Gomes as a political leader, manifested through her supposed inadequate desire to restrict any expression contrary to her personal convictions and preferences. Through associating dictatorial traits with its political opponent, Chega strategically distances itself from such label through the contrasted presentation of its leader as an embodiment of "democracy and political tolerance".

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[22] "Hoje na TVI pelas 21h o confronto entre a candidatura da ditadura que quer ilegalizar e prender tudo e todos aqueles de que não gosta representada por Ana Gomes e a democracia e tolerância política representada por André Ventura. A não perder!"

Furthermore, the supposed need to "imprison everything and everyone" is justified by a lack of substance characteristic of the political parties of the left:

"The lack of capacity to participate in the democratic game of the left and extreme left is evident if not blatant. When arguments run out they resort to vandalism, when they lose their way they destroy, try to outlaw or use all kinds of cheap shots to get their political opponents out of the way. They will not pass! By fear or less loyally and honestly you will not get there. Come to play in the democratic debate and try..." (Partido Chega Oficial, 2020, my translation). [23]

Reflecting of expressions of immaturity, the opposing political parties are defined through links to immoral behaviour, such as vandalism and destruction. Reiterating their inability to act in accordance with democratic expectations, Chega strengthens an image of weakness, engaging with negative imagery that associates the opposition with unscrupulous political action enabled by dishonest fear tactics.

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[23] "A falta de capacidade para participar no jogo democrático das esquerdas e extrema esquerda é evidente senão mesmo gritante. Quando os argumentos escasseiam passam ao vandalismo, quando perdem o norte destroem, tentam ilegalizar ou usar de todo o tipo de golpe baixo para tirar os seus adversários políticos do caminho. Não passarão! Pelo medo ou de forma menos leal e honesta não chegarão lá. Venham a jogo no debate democrático e tentem..."

6. Discussion

Taking into account the analysis presented in the previous section, this discussion aims to further explore the connections between the construction of populist discourses and their communication through social media in the case of the political party Chega. The discussion will be divided into three main parts: personalism, connection and dichotomisation. Additionally, the role of emotion will be discussed in shaping the three elements presented prior. In line with the populist elements of leadership, centrality of the people and anti-establishment rhetoric, the results from the analysis will be discussed through their links to the absence of gatekeeping, connectivity and encouraged polarisation. It is worth highlighting that although populist discourses are not limited to their social media presence, this discussion proposes an engagement with the ways in which "features of social media lend themselves especially well to the promulgation of populist messages and figures" (Hendrickson & Galston, 2017).

6.1. Personalism
Absence of gatekeeping and leadership

When considering the highly personal narrative adopted by Ventura, from his individual valorisation of other political actor's behaviours, to affective confessions reflecting on his personal purpose; the absence of gatekeeping characteristic of a social media platform like Facebook proves conducive to the unrestricted construction of the charismatic, connected leader. Through a discourse of uniqueness furthered by links to religion and a moral code driven by a nationalist ethos, the mass self-communication enabled by Facebook through which "the production of the message is self-generated, the retrieval of messages is self-directed" (Castells, 2013, p. xix), allowed Ventura to engage in an idealised self-representation that did not depend on external scrutiny, one that was then further supported by the political party's page.

In perceiving social media as a "form of self-representation in which each message and the themes, tone, or content therein are part of a larger persona-building exercise" (Gonawela *et al.*, 2018, p.295), the discourse presented by the leader on his individual page proved productive in establishing links to reliability and honesty, as highlighted through his relentless truthfulness even under harsh criticism.

Whilst "understanding complex policy issues can be taxing for many citizens, (…) most of them have confidence in their ability to judge character" (Castells, 2013, p.202), which points to the need of the leader in populist movements to have a personalised platform that allows for the development of such character. The construction of Ventura as a political leader through the analysed discourses was shown to accentuate his altruistic motives and selfless drive, traits that encourage the trust of citizens in supporting his political campaign.

Ultimately, Facebook "give[s] a personalistic leader a daily presence in the lives of millions of followers" (Weyland, 2017, p.58), through which the anti-establishment rhetoric and

solidarity with the people can be furthered and normalised in interactions that infiltrate the

daily lives of supporters through the ubiquitous presence of social media.

6.2.   Connection

Connectivity and the centrality of the people

The importance of the leader's alignment with the people and their struggle proved quite clear through the reiterated valorisation of hard-working citizens, and its direct association with a political drive to have their needs met by proper political representation. The political party's construction of 'the people' relied on equating citizen's worth with their profession and dichotomising them against both the establishment and those who did not correspond to the homogenous definition of worth furthered by Chega. Supported by Facebook's exploitation of "users' homophilous tendencies" (Bruns, 2016, p.49) formed through an inclination of users to engage with similar others, the discourses of inclusion and exclusion were facilitated due to a cultivated online space of solidarity between supporters and leader.

With the apparent "rhetorics of horizontalism" (Rensmann, 2017, p.130) afforded through a platform like Facebook, the leader can also engage in a bond that is "direct and bypasses any organizational intermediation" (Weyland, 2017, p.59). Such advantage permits a level of perceived accessibility to the leader that can mimic increased accountability on his part due to the lack of boundaries in communication. Additionally, it also contradicts the communication standard embraced by mass media that is seen to support the "liberal-cosmopolitan stance" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.8) Ventura's populism opposes. Expressing the leader's understanding of struggle becomes facilitated in a "media environment that favors non-elite actors" (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006, p.1286), who are framed as the responsible entities for such struggle.

Through Facebook's creation of "self-referential and segregated publics in which particular world-views are affirmed and reinforced" (Rensmann, 2017, p.130), the valorisation of the "Good Portuguese" (Jaramillo, 2021) becomes normalised and the victim status imposed on

the group of citizens protected by Chega helps further mobilise support through the comradeship in opposing the current establishment.

6.3.   Dichotomisation

Polarisation and the anti-establishment rhetoric

From the populist need to position its political campaign against the establishment, the Chega discourse was seen to rely on created dichotomies of privilege and struggle, honesty and corruption, and altruism and egotism. The anti-establishment appeal was thus reliant on the "positive valorisation of the people and denigration of the enemies" (Bobba, 2018, p.13), a discursive tactic defined by an evident simplification of reality. Considering the "destabilization of facticity through new digital media" (Rensmann, 2017, p.131), such simplification acquires exposure, relying on its affective impact that proves productive in strengthening engagement.

Taking into account that "Facebook seems to be the preferred channel for political actors to advocate for the people and blame or criticize elites" (Ernst *et al*, 2017, p.1358) the suitability of this social media platform in furthering the characteristically populist anti-establishment rhetoric is expected. A rhetoric manifested through discursive tactics of blame and shame adopted by Ventura and the political party when associating political opponents with ideas of corruption and immoral, violent behaviour.

Considering the ways in which "both populist ideology and emotions embed moral cues that influence offline and online citizens' behaviour" (Martella & Bracciale, 2022, p.70), the delegitimization of the current establishment when highlighting its long-standing, unchallenged rule proves supported by deep-seated frustration among citizens. Furthermore, "content that elicits partisan fear or indignation is particularly contagious" (Barrett, Hendrix & Sims, 2021, p.8), which would mean that descriptions that align other political parties with a dictatorship would prove quite effective when taking into account Portugal's past.

Ultimately, when one considers the ways in which "sustained exposure to a selective output can harden viewpoints" (Bartlett, 2014, p.107), the divisions incentivised by Chega become all the more consequential through their diffusion on Facebook, a platform that socialises the political views of the party through daily interactions.

6.4. Emotion

As has been reiterated throughout this dissertation, populism can be seen as a form of political expression that relies on appealing to popular support through heavy criticism of the system and the centrality of a charismatic leader. Consequently, its power becomes largely defined by a successful appeal to the emotions of the people in order to facilitate the mobilisation of their support. Considering Facebook's propensity towards encouraging "emotion rather than policies and facts" (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020, p.19), populist leaders such as Ventura find in this platform fertile ground for the dissemination of their messages which are often defined through their personal, sensationalist and divisive nature.

If one considers the overarching narrative of criticism and victimisation emboldened by the political party's Facebook discourse, the fact "that positive emotions do not have significant effects on Facebook interactions, while negative emotions cause people to express themselves" (Martella & Bracciale, 2022, p.70), seems to align with the party's adoption of a negative framework of expression. The indignation fostered by the mentioning of corruption, the anger encouraged by mentioning death threats received by the leader and the fear instilled by the supposed alignment of a political party with dictatorial ideals all prove beneficial in further alienating Chega supporters from any other political party.

Ultimately, emotion can be seen as a powerful driving force in gaining support through engagement, benefiting both populist leaders and social media platforms, such as Facebook. Through permitting an affective link to be established between the leader and his supporters, a sense of loyalty and trust is imbued, emotions that act as legitimating tools for the power of the populist political leader.

7. Conclusion

Despite the fact that the manifestation of far-right populism in Portugal through social media provides ample space for analysis, this dissertation aimed to explore the interplay between Facebook and the Chega party populist discourse within the context of its political campaign for the 2021 Portuguese presidential elections.

Such populist discourse was seen to align with the content encouraged by a social media platform such as Facebook, through its highly personalised, affective and polarising discourse. The social media space enabled the construction of populism to be defined through discourses of uniqueness, exclusion and morality. The power of such discourses was assisted through an engagement with mass self-communication that permitted the overcoming of gatekeeping practices by traditional mass media and made space for the diffusion of messages created by the leader and the political party targeted to a specific group, that of the "Good Portuguese" (Jaramillo, 2021). The dichotomisation characteristic of populism was equalled by social media's "tendency to afford filter bubbles and in-group polarisation" (Bruns, 2016, p.30) and the self-presentation developed through Ventura's Facebook page allowed for the construction of a leader that would morally and honestly represent the people.

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis allowed for an understanding of the narratives constructed by both the leader, Ventura and the political party Chega, which proved useful in framing the discussion of populism based on communication patterns that were made evident in the analysis. From the encouraged negative associations with the establishment to the emotive addressing of the people, the critical analysis of discourse enabled a direct application and exploration of both populism and social media's defining mechanisms of engagement.

When considering the shortcomings of the research carried out, an analysis of content beyond written discourse would have been valuable to explore the interplay between the different affordances of social media in supporting the populist rhetoric. Conducting a similar discourse analysis on different platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram, would have also been useful in exploring differences in the expression of the party's narrative. Furthermore, engagement with the reactions to the Facebook posts would have proved effective in offering an understanding of the people, possibly allowing for an engagement with the interactive component of social media. Finally, the current social media activity of the party and the party leader would be another productive area of research, to understand whether present discourses are distinct from the ones outlined in this dissertation.

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Appendices

Research Diaries

Meeting 1 - 18/11/2021

This meeting was centred around gaining some sort of direction when it came to the structure of my dissertation. It began with a discussion of how I was feeling and how my dissertation was fitting with my other modules and progressed onto discussing the content of my research proposal. From the time of the submission of the research proposal, a few changes have occurred in my focus for the dissertation. After reading further on my topic, I explained to my tutor that I wanted to get rid of certain sections I had initially mentioned and he encouraged such changes. There was also debate on the idea of "cancel culture" and he encourage me to question its existence using further reading, also advising me to be cautious on my engagement with the concept. One of the case studies I had proposed for my dissertation was also discussed. My tutor also suggested I consider whether cancel culture should be a concern or whether it has proven to be more of a moral panic?

I discussed using Critical Discourse Analysis as my method, my tutor agreed with my choice of method. I am hoping to have the next meeting in three weeks. Until then my tutor requested that I find four to five case studies which will then be discussed and narrowed down in the next meeting. Furthermore, he also requested that I do some further reading on cancel culture.

My main concern going into this meeting was the suitability of the question and whether it was too broad. I was reassured that I was asking all the right questions that a good dissertation student should be asking and that research will most times feel like you are broadening and discarding and that it is part of the process. All the aspects I initially

considered including were relevant and linked and that taking them out adds more to the process of refining my research.

<p style="text-align: center;">Meeting 2 - 10/12/2021</p>

This meeting was conducted via Teams as I was unable to come into campus due to the flu.

I presented my case studies and a slight restructuring of my question. After researching further on 'cancel culture' which I intended to be the focus of my dissertation, I realized there was very little covering the topic and that it was far too subjective, which would mean I would not be able to analyse media in a way that interested me. My initial question focused on the effects of media on the public debate but by the time of this meeting, I had adjusted the focus to the quality of information and its effects on maintaining the public informed. My question at the moment would perhaps be: To what extent has the current media driven culture enriched public debate?

I want to explore the ways in which the structure of debate in media affects the productivity/worthiness of the quantity of information it provides. Are these platforms so beneficial because they offer so much information or are they so detrimental because there is so much information, little control over quality of information and certain filtering that controls and forwards certain ideas. Have media audiences become more educated on issues or only been victims of the performative and manipulative nature of many of the forms of information? To explore this, I want to consider the spiral of silence theory, I also want to engage with the logic of property and the logic of the common.

I want to explore the ways in which social media have developed into platforms that profit from dividing opinion, (logic property and the logic of the common) and to maintain people

on the platform for longer. This divisiveness is supported by the algorithms that censor certain ideas and promote others.

In terms of case studies, I am considering media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jordan Peterson and the rise of toxic masculinity and the rise of far-right populism in Portugal. My tutor asked me to consider three possible directions of focus: a contrast between old and new media, the presence of filter bubbles and the way in which the personal has become public.

After this meeting I will be doing further reading on the topic, my tutor suggested a few books that I should consider so I will be engaging with that material and narrowing my focus.

Meeting 3 - 10/02/2022

In this meeting I discussed my detailed plan with my tutor and discussed the impact of having covid during the Christmas break.

I intended on doing three different case studies to illustrate the impact of social media on communication, my tutor advised me to focus on a specific case study I had on Portugal and the rise of a far-right populist party. I have decided to reshape my dissertation around this and feel like it offers me a much more focused approach.

The progress with the dissertation has been extremely slow due to the assessments I had to hand in in January. I have struggled with prioritising work on the dissertation as other assignments always gain a certain priority due to closer deadlines, but I know I need to set aside much more time for my dissertation.

I feel very inspired by the direction my dissertation has taken, up until now I hadn't been able to pinpoint a specific focus and now the planning seems much easier. I have always been

very interested on the politics side, but I think I've always been very cautious and wary of the topic as it requires a certain level of knowledge which is very specific. After narrowing down my focus I will be exploring the dissemination of populism in Portugal through the example of Chega, a far-right political party that gained political representation for the first time in 2021.

The next few weeks I will be doing more reading and research and further structuring my plan. My tutor also suggested that I request an extension for my deadline since I lost valuable time of work due to having covid over Christmas so I will fill a form requesting a two-week extension.

Nonetheless, I will still follow the timetable I have created for myself that aims to get the dissertation done in time for the normal deadline.

Meeting 4 - 03/03/2022

I went to this meeting with a very clear head as to what direction my dissertation is taking. I spent the past weeks familiarising myself with the literature on populism and the context of populism in Portugal. The connection of this phenomena with social media is particularly interesting. I sent a detailed plan to my tutor which we went through on our meeting, he said I seemed to be clear on where I was going and that he would want to see something in writing soon. One of the aspects of social media, virality, I was a bit unsure about and he urged me to continue my readings and if it did not fit to get rid of it.

I also told him how much I was enjoying the reading process and that I was very excited to put it all together. He suggested I explore the option of going on to do a Masters if I enjoy the research process and offered to have a meeting with me about it.

I also asked him a few questions on my research method and presenting it on my dissertation. I will be using Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the discourse of the political party leader on Facebook.

<div align="center">Meeting 5 - 07/04/2022</div>

I scheduled this meeting after being unable to attend the one that I had booked for the week prior. I was unable to attend as I had to travel to return home after the loss of a relative. In this meeting we discussed feedback on work I had sent to get reviewed by my tutor. The feedback was overall positive, my tutor told me that my writing was clear and interesting but that he was interested in seeing more of the populism theory in interaction with social media. We discussed my question and that it would need to be tailored more precisely to address my discussion.

I also discussed in this meeting the structure of my dissertation. I was initially having a shorter section covering past literature on populism, social media and country-specific context. However, I found that it would be more beneficial to fully develop the ideas and concepts in the initial section to offer the reader an in-depth exploration of the concepts. This meant that instead of having three chapters to individually analyse the posts in isolation, I will do it in a more connected form in my analysis and discussion. My tutor reassured me as to the size of my theory discussion, highlighting that some dissertations are more theory based than others. I admitted that engaging with the theory was what I most enjoyed in the process of writing.

I now feel confident to carry my initial discussion and content into my analysis and discussion. It will be quite interesting to use the knowledge I've gathered to reflect and

organise my discussion in line with patterns of expression that will be recognizable as a result of my extensive research.

I spoke to my tutor about ethics considerations, he assured me that I did not have to fill any form and that I could perhaps just include a section on ethics considerations. With collecting data from social media, I found it difficult to understand what was acceptable so I just kept to public Facebook pages, and he assured me that it would pose no issue.

My focus now is on analysing the data collected. My tutor encouraged me to continue sending him work and I am hoping to meet with him next week to have a final meeting before Easter break.

Meeting 6 - 14/04/2022

I went to this meeting feeling a bit overwhelmed considering that the upcoming weeks will be the final stretch in getting my dissertation done. By this point I have more than half of my dissertation typed up. I discussed with my tutor the direction of my analysis and the patterns I had noticed through gathering and reviewing the posts.

My focus for the Easter break is to type up my analysis and discussion, finalising my work. I have done most of the editing on my first half of the dissertation and am quite happy to have written it and edited at the same time. Although I feel a bit of pressure, I am also very focused on continuing to write with passion and interest and not let time affect my mood when it comes to my work. I want it to be a piece of writing that reflects my development as a writer and researcher considering where I started in first year of university.

Considering the journey that has been for me to find my focus and area of interest, I am at a place where time is of the essence, but I am so happy with my topic. Writing a dissertation is

a process that overwhelmed me very much when I first started, but I knew that the moment I found my area of interest I would at least be able to enjoy the process.

I discussed getting feedback during the Easter break with my tutor, he told me I could always email him but that he would have a busy few weeks, I plan on getting my dissertation fully edited and finalised by the end of Easter Break so that I can discuss it with him on the week back.