

Design of Analytical Categories and Indicators for Measuring  
Demagoguery as a Communication Tool in Political Contexts

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*Diseño de categorías e indicadores de análisis para la medición de la  
demagogia como herramienta comunicativa en contextos políticos*

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**Abstract:**

*This study examines, through a pilot exercise, the methodological feasibility of measuring demagoguery in political communication through the systematic development of analytical categories and empirically grounded indicators. It addresses a methodological gap in the literature, which has historically focused on normative and qualitative approaches. To this end, the study proposes a triangulation-based mixed-methods framework that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques in a case study of Donald Trump in the United States. The study is supported by three forms of triangulation: methodological, data, and theoretical, with the aim of clarifying category boundaries and ensuring the consistency of indicators. The results demonstrate that this approach strengthens the validity and reliability of the analytical process while enabling systematic longitudinal and cross-national comparisons. In conclusion, the article argues that demagoguery can be measured as a variable within a rigorously specified triangulation-based methodological framework.*

**Keywords:**

*Demagogy; Demagoguery; Methodological triangulation; Mixed Methods; Indicators; Case Study; Donald Trump.*

**Resumen:**

*Esta investigación examina, mediante un ejercicio piloto, la viabilidad metodológica de medir la demagogia como herramienta comunicativa en contextos políticos, a partir de la construcción de categorías de análisis e indicadores empíricamente operativos. Tras identificar una brecha metodológica en la literatura, históricamente centrada en enfoques normativos y cualitativos, se propone un enfoque basado en la triangulación que articula técnicas cualitativas y cuantitativas en el estudio del caso de Donald Trump en Estados Unidos. El diseño se sustenta en tres tipos de triangulación: metodológica, de datos y teórica, con el objetivo de operacionalizar tanto las categorías analíticas como los indicadores. Los resultados sugieren que este enfoque fortalece la validez y la fiabilidad del proceso analítico, al tiempo que amplía las posibilidades de realizar comparaciones longitudinales y transnacionales. En conclusión, el estudio demuestra que la demagogia puede medirse de manera rigurosa mediante un enfoque integrador basado en la triangulación metodológica.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Demagogia; Triangulación Metodológica; Donald Trump; Caso de Estudio; Indicadores; Categorías de Análisis.*

**1. Introduction to the Academic Debate on Demagoguery and Its Methodological Limitations**

In recent decades, demagoguery has acquired renewed centrality in the analysis of contemporary political communication. The rise of highly personalized leadership styles, the intensification of discursive polarization, and the consolidation of digital media ecosystems (Hauser, 2018) have fostered the circulation of political narratives grounded in the simplification of social conflicts, emotional appeals, and the systematic construction of internal and external enemies (Ortiz, 2017; Bermúdez, 2023).

Although these phenomena have been widely addressed within political theory, cultural studies, and discourse analysis, a fundamental methodological challenge persists: the absence of analytical tools capable of systematically and comparatively measuring demagoguery as a communicative strategy within a given political-governmental context.

In this regard, following a literature review focused on the measurement of demagoguery as a communicative tool and on the design of instruments capable of determining its presence, use, or application as a central axis of communication strategies employed by national governments and political leaders, it becomes evident that a significant portion of the existing literature is characterized by normative or predominantly qualitative approaches, centered on rhetorical analyses or in-depth discursive interpretations that are difficult to replicate.

During the research process, more than 20 doctoral dissertations and scientific articles from various countries across Europe and the Americas were analyzed, selected due to their thematic or methodological proximity to the present study, with the aim of identifying potential areas of theoretical and methodological convergence. This exercise

reveals considerable diversity in terms of scope and objectives among the studies reviewed.

The closest case is that of Kissock (2020), whose research on members of Congress who supported Jair Bolsonaro during his presidential term in Brazil presents partial affinities with the present study. However, its analytical perspective is externally oriented, focusing on pro-Bolsonaro legislators rather than on the political leader as the primary unit of analysis or on his direct communications, which constitute a core element of the proposal advanced in this pilot study. Nevertheless, it incorporates comparable methodological elements, including the use of mixed methods, social media metrics analysis, and theoretical approaches to emotional appeals in political discourse.

Beyond this, the review makes it possible to identify that, although these contributions are essential for understanding the symbolic and persuasive logic of demagoguery, as well as for highlighting potential methodological approaches, their limited operationalization restricts the possibility of developing longitudinal, transnational, or intersystem comparative analyses.

Consequently, it may be argued that demagoguery remains an analytically powerful yet methodologically diffuse concept (Pazé, 2016), thereby complicating its integration into comparative empirical research and broader evaluation models concerning democratic quality and political communication (Rodríguez, 2012).

This methodological gap becomes particularly problematic in a context in which demagoguery operates not only as a rhetorical style but also as a strategic communication tool, closely linked to media, technological, and social dynamics (Pazé, 2016).

In line with the above, and considering the acceleration of information consumption, the algorithmic logic of digital platforms, supported by echo chambers and the use of artificial intelligence (Schuliaquer & Vommaro, 2020), as well as the constant mediatization of politics, communicative practices aimed at maximizing visibility, confrontation, and emotional mobilization have become increasingly prominent, all of which constitute central elements of contemporary demagoguery (Slimovich, 2019; Ortiz, 2017; Aristóteles, 2014).

Following Mula-Grau and Cabezuelo-Lorenzo (2025), this process of integration into the media ecosystem represents a paradigm shift that transcends mere instrumental application, transferring its principal effects to the sphere of governmental political management and communication practices grounded in demagogic tools.

Within this scenario, and in the absence of a methodology capable of providing clear and comparable indicators, the research design process that gave rise to this pilot study revealed the difficulty of evaluating the scope, intensity, and variations of these demagogic practices across different political and governmental contexts.

Based on this research problem, the present study and the pilot application from which it emerges raise a central question: Is it possible to develop analytical categories and indicators capable of measuring demagoguery as a communicative tool in contemporary

political contexts? To address this question, a pilot study adopting a mixed-methods, or triangulation-based, approach was implemented, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies within a comparative design aimed at ensuring rigor, validity, and consistency in the findings.

This approach is grounded in the premise that demagoguery constitutes a multifactorial phenomenon in which discursive, rhetorical, media-related, and political dimensions converge (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2019), and therefore requires analytical tools capable of capturing such complexity without reducing it to a single variable.

Following this multifactorial perspective, the methodology implemented in the pilot case study presented below (Donald Trump, United States) is based on the triangulation of four qualitative and quantitative research strategies:

- Literature review and theoretical framework analysis, aimed at defining clear research questions and hypotheses, along with their corresponding analytical categories and indicators.
- In-depth interviews with experts from different geographic regions worldwide, intended to contextualize the phenomenon under analysis.
- Content analysis and social media metrics analysis of Donald Trump's communications, aimed at identifying discursive, lexical, and strategic patterns in his communication.
- Analysis of the political leader's speeches, focused on identifying message structure, content, and emotional appeals directed toward his support base.

Overall, the combination of these four elements gives rise to methodological triangulation, which enables a deeper engagement with the complexity and multidimensional nature of the phenomenon under analysis, while strengthening the robustness of findings as a strategy for reinforcing the validity of conclusions (Solórzano, 2022).

This article is structured into three main sections, in addition to the academic introduction and the formulation of the research question. First, the methodology employed (triangulation) is presented and justified, with particular emphasis on its procedural dimensions, the process of constructing analytical categories and indicators, and the logic of methodological triangulation; this section also outlines the step-by-step process followed during the implementation of the pilot study. Second, the preliminary conclusions derived from the pilot application of this methodology are presented in response to the research question. Finally, a series of methodological limitations are discussed, which may be considered in future studies of a similar nature.

## **2. Methodological Triangulation Used in a Pilot Study for the Development of Analytical Categories and Indicators in the Donald Trump Case**

The methodological triangulation employed in this pilot study for the development of analytical categories and indicators aimed at measuring the use of demagogic strategies in Donald Trump's political communication (United States) is grounded in the

recognition that the measurement of complex phenomena in the social sciences remains one of the principal methodological challenges of empirical research.

Within this context, methodological triangulation emerges as a key strategy for articulating qualitative understanding and quantitative measurement, enabling the development of empirically operational and conceptually robust categories (Stevens, 1951), such as those specified in the case study developed in this research.

This exercise is based on the premise that the longstanding debate between qualitative and quantitative approaches has profoundly shaped the development of social research. As Sáenz, Gorjón, and Gonzalo (2012) argue, the distinction between quality and quantity has historically divided approaches to qualitative and quantitative inquiry, reflecting different ways of understanding the object of study. In this pilot study, while the qualitative approach seeks to understand the nature of the phenomenon, the quantitative approach aims to assess its magnitude.

This perspective is complemented by the contributions of Cruz (2006), who argues that the study of any object of inquiry may benefit from the adoption of multiple methodologies and research designs, emphasizing the need for methodological pluralism adapted to the diverse dimensions of a phenomenon such as demagoguery in political communication. From this perspective, the objective is not to hierarchize methods, but rather to adopt a dual strategy that recognizes the specific value of each approach without sacrificing either of them.

In practical terms, this pilot case study integrates quantitative elements, such as the analysis of social media metrics and the lexical characteristics of Donald Trump's speeches, with qualitative elements through a triangulation process (van Dijk, 2019). These include discursive analysis, the examination of social media publications through techniques derived from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Stecher, 2009), and the interpretation of speeches and emotional appeals through a priori Category-Oriented Qualitative Content Analysis (COQCA) (Rueda, Armas, & Sigala-Paparella, 2023).

Figure 1 presents the operationalization of the triangulation employed in the pilot study in its broadest form, seeking to address the methodological dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches through a complementary framework (Peña, 2019). This framework integrates distinct theoretical perspectives for the selection of analytical categories (left column of the table), the use of different methodologies (center), and multiple data collection sources (right).

For the development of analytical categories aimed at measuring demagoguery and its indicators, this perspective is particularly relevant, given that demagoguery constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon involving discursive, emotional, media-related, and political elements that must be rigorously translated into the quantitative domain (Ortega, Azurmendi, & Muñoz-Saldaña, 2018). In the pilot study, as a result of theoretical triangulation, each category is composed of 20 indicators, as explained below.

The pilot case developed in this study examines the use of demagoguery as a communicative resource in the contemporary political arena through a comparative study

of the messages issued by Donald Trump during his second presidential term. Based on this logic, the triangulation process summarized below was implemented.

**Figure 1**  
Summary of Triangulation in the Pilot Study

Theoretical Triangulation (Analytical Categories)	Methodological Triangulation	Data Triangulation
Analytical Category 01 (AC-01). Nationalism and Local Politics as a Priority	Methodology 1. Situational analysis through interviews with global experts (50 participants in this case).  Methodology 2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) applied to social media and interviews.  Methodology 3. A priori Category-Oriented Qualitative Content Analysis (COQCA) applied to public speeches, social media, and interviews.	Data Package 1. Interviews and questionnaires with international experts.  Data Package 2. Social media metrics: reach, engagement (followers, likes, shares, etc.).  Data Package 3. Lexical metrics in speeches: lexical structure and density, readability index, word frequency, interrelation among words, grammatical structure, etc.
AC-02. Criticism of the Establishment as an Enemy		
AC-03. Political Positions and Intentionality		
AC-04. Use of Fear through Security, Economy, and the State of Civil Society		
AC-05. Political Discourse (Structural Alignment with the Values of the Governing Party)		
AC-06. Discrediting Institutional Actors and the Construction of Enemies		
AC-07. Strategic Use of “Fake News” and Disinformation in Relation to the Media		
AC-08. Political Agendas (in the Trump case: security, borders, immigration, economy, business, culture, values, and morality)		
AC-09. Reinforcement and Functioning of Echo Chambers		
AC-10. Emergent Category (adaptable to the researcher’s findings during the analytical phase)		

*Note.* Source: Author’s elaboration based on the research methodology designed for this study.

This pilot study was developed in five stages following the definition of the research questions, hypotheses, and other formal methodological and research components.

The first stage, grounded in the recognition of triangulation as an integrative methodological strategy (Forni & De Grande, 2019), was carried out following the review

of bibliographic sources according to the strategy proposed by Rueda, Armas, and Sigala-Paparella (2023) for a priori COQCA. It consisted of defining analytical categories, which in this pilot study totaled ten (AC-01, AC-02 ... AC-10), as shown in the left column of Figure 1. These categories, like the indicators, emerged from an in-depth theoretical analysis.

The purpose of these categories is to standardize the search for information and move from interpretative descriptions toward analytical models that allow systematic comparison between the political leader, his speeches, and the national context; in other words, they provide structure to the available information. As explained below, each analytical category is composed of 20 indicators.

Of these ten categories, nine are fixed or standardized, meaning they remain constant if the pilot is replicated in other contexts. The final category, referred to as the emergent category, remains open to new findings associated with the specific realities and characteristics of each case study. In the pilot analyzed here, this category emerged following the application of COQCA to speeches and interviews, combining governmental reforms, appeals to state efficiency, and the use of national symbols by Donald Trump. These themes had already appeared in the theoretical framework but only became consolidated as a cross-cutting dimension following the analytical process.

Subsequently, in an effort to implement comparative research techniques combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches simultaneously, despite the methodological complexity this entails (Oller & Barredo, 2015), a second stage was conducted in which information was collected through three sources: open interviews with more than 50 global experts in communication and politics; a simple random sample for selecting social media messages (in this pilot, 100% of the messages published on one social media platform during the first 100 days of government were analyzed); and speech selection through purposive non-probability sampling.

Following this, in a third stage, the data and information gathered from interviews, social media, and speeches were analyzed according to the parameters of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Category-Oriented Qualitative Content Analysis (COQCA), using technological tools such as ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, and Voyant Tools. The objective was to identify relevant information for each analytical category. Each tool fulfilled a specific function according to its scope, while collectively emphasizing the principle of complementarity inherent to methodological triangulation.

As previously noted, following the theoretical analysis, 20 measurement indicators applicable to each category were defined and used transversally across all categories, as follows:

1. (Indicator 01 or I-01) Narrative aimed at emotional manipulation (and its mobilizing effect).
2. (I-02) Construction of enemies (elites, media, etc.).
3. (I-03) Simplification of ideological differences.
4. (I-04) Simplification of messages or short slogans.
5. (I-05) Exacerbation of social divisions.

6. (I-06) “Friend/enemy” cleavage.
7. (I-07) Messianic discourse (leader-savior at the center).
8. (I-08) Absence of data in messages.
9. (I-09) Use of fear.
10. (I-10) Messianic leadership style.
11. (I-11) Construction of “the people” (us) versus institutions (the elites).
12. (I-12) Outsider leadership aimed at reconfiguring the system.
13. (I-13) Rejection of institutional mediation.
14. (I-14) Construction of external threats.
15. (I-15) Appeals to nationalism.
16. (I-16) Elimination of traditional media gatekeeping (gatekeepers/watchdogs).
17. (I-17) Use of propaganda.
18. (I-18) Leader’s absolute reasoning (final authority).
19. (I-19) Slogan-based argumentation.
20. (I-20) Values, beliefs, and prejudices centered on the leader’s worldview.

Simultaneously, in what may be defined as a fourth stage aimed at strengthening the reliability of the study, quantitative data collected through social media analytics tools (Google Analytics, Metricool, and Keyhole) were incorporated. This methodological complexity thus becomes a necessary condition for addressing demagoguery as a phenomenon characterized by categories that are both complex and comparable.

In the fifth and final stage, under an integrative perspective in which triangulation is understood not merely as an instrumental combination but as a strategy of convergence (Cruz, 2006), qualitative and quantitative findings were analyzed jointly, assigning equal proportional weight to all categories (1 point per category).

Accordingly, during the pilot study, 0.05 points were added to each category every time the presence of an indicator was identified, and 0 points in its absence. Given the existence of ten categories, the final outcome generated a value on a 0–10 scale of demagogic communication within a government.

To obtain this result, the pilot study applied a weighted average formula based on multiple indicators, similar to that employed by indices such as the Economist Intelligence Unit (2026), assigning each category a value between 0 and 1, and subsequently calculating an overall average to estimate the level of communicative demagoguery.

In the Trump-based pilot study, findings demonstrate that all ten categories (fixed and emergent) are applicable and, collectively, characterize Trump’s communication as demagogic, while also highlighting methodological limitations discussed in the final section of this article.

An example of the operationalization of a category is presented below, using AC-01 (“Nationalism and Local Politics as a Priority”).

Following the interviews and the analysis of expert contributions using the selected technological tools, the category was found to meet 18 of the 20 indicators, except for

I-13 (rejection of institutional mediation) and I-16 (elimination of traditional media gatekeeping). Therefore, the score assigned to this category was 0.9. The formula applied is as follows:

$$AC-01 = (I-01 + I-02 + I-03 \dots + I-20)$$

This procedure is directly applied to each category until all ten results are obtained, after which they are summed and averaged to calculate a final value. The formula used is:

$$\text{Communicative Demagoguery (Trump Case)} = (AC-01 + AC-02 + AC-03 \dots + AC-10)/10$$

In this sense, triangulation functions as a methodological bridge, enabling the operationalization of discursive and rhetorical strategies and transforming them into measurable analytical categories and indicators without reducing the qualitative complexity of the phenomenon.

Beyond the general evaluation of the case study, this pilot demonstrates that, from a pragmatic perspective, mixed methods such as triangulation perform complementary functions oriented toward a common objective: measurement through the development of analytical categories and indicators, as identified by Chávez and Alfaro (2022). Indeed, triangulation may be understood as a mechanism of convergence and complementarity of findings, which is particularly relevant for the study of demagoguery (Alzás & Casas, 2017).

### **3. Conclusions of the Pilot Study on Triangulation as a Methodology for Developing Analytical Categories and Indicators**

Aligned with the research question posed, the methodological application and development of the case study support the argument that measuring demagoguery as a communicative tool in contemporary political contexts is methodologically feasible, provided that, as suggested by the findings of the pilot study, it is approached through an integrative framework capable of articulating qualitative understanding and quantitative measurement. Far from constituting merely a rhetorical style or a general theory, demagoguery emerges as a multidimensional communicative phenomenon shaped by discursive, emotional, social media-related, and political elements that require analytical tools capable of capturing such complexity.

One of the principal contributions of the pilot study lies in demonstrating that methodological triangulation should not be understood as an auxiliary resource, but rather as a structuring principle of research design. The systematic combination of qualitative and quantitative methods makes it possible to transform interpretative categories, traditionally associated with discourse analysis, into operational analytical categories and indicators that can be measured, compared, and replicated. In this regard, triangulation functions as a methodological bridge that enables their development without reducing the theoretical density of the object of study.

Likewise, the study demonstrates that the adoption of a comparative design, supported by different forms of triangulation (methodological, data, and theoretical), strengthens the

validity and reliability of the findings. This approach enables the identification and comparison of demagogic patterns across multiple sources and levels of analysis, reducing the risk of normative interpretations lacking empirical grounding while expanding the possibilities for analytical generalization. Consequently, triangulation not only validates findings but also contributes to a more precise and nuanced understanding of demagogic practices in political communication.

The pilot methodological framework developed in this study establishes a foundation for the creation of replicable analytical models applicable to both longitudinal studies and transnational comparisons. This opens the possibility of advancing toward broader measurement systems, including the development of comparative rankings or indices of demagogic practices.

From an epistemological perspective, the article contributes to overcoming the historical dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the study of political communication. By demonstrating that both approaches can be integrated coherently and complementarily, the study reinforces the idea that methodological plurality does not weaken research but rather expands its explanatory capacity.

Finally, the study raises relevant implications for future research. The proposed and pilot-tested methodology may continue to be refined and adapted to different national contexts, leadership styles, and media platforms, thereby enabling the exploration of the evolution of demagoguery across diverse political settings. Likewise, it contributes to opening new avenues of inquiry aimed at examining the relationship between demagogic practices, democratic quality, and digital ecosystems, contributing to the development of more robust analytical tools for the critical study of contemporary political communication.

#### **4. Methodological Limitations**

Although the pilot study demonstrates that it is both feasible and methodologically appropriate to develop research approaches based on triangulation for the development and standardization of analytical categories and indicators aimed at measuring phenomena such as demagoguery, its implementation also reveals a number of limitations that should be taken into consideration.

First, it is necessary to question the relevance of the emergent analytical category within the proposed model. In the current design, this category accounts for a maximum of 10% of the final result, and only one emergent category was incorporated as a direct outcome of the analytical exercise. However, when replicating the methodology in other contexts, multiple emergent categories, or none at all, may arise. In such cases, it becomes necessary to establish clear methodological criteria to guide their inclusion or exclusion, ensuring the consistency of the model without compromising its analytical validity. This category fulfills an important function by incorporating contextual dimensions related to intercultural comparability in the measurement of complex phenomena.

Likewise, it is pertinent to question whether each analytical category must necessarily be composed of a fixed set of 20 indicators, as proposed in this pilot study, or whether it would be methodologically more appropriate to define differentiated sets of indicators

according to the specific nature of each category. In this case, the decision responded to the recurrent presence of indicators identified through theoretical triangulation; however, future applications may require greater flexibility in this design.

Furthermore, although the operationalization of analytical categories and indicators is supported by a solid and well-structured academic foundation, it may still be conditioned by the expertise of the researcher proposing the model. In this regard, the incorporation of specialists in statistics, measurement, and data analysis is highly recommended to strengthen the technical robustness of the framework.

Additionally, there is a need to incorporate a quantitative component capable of estimating the margin of error in the operationalization process, while also establishing clear protocols for situations in which results exceed acceptable thresholds. In this pilot study, measures aimed at strengthening reliability were adopted, such as source complementarity, triangulation of techniques, and the geographical diversity of experts. Nevertheless, the absence of an explicit calculation of error constitutes a limitation that should be addressed in future research.

Finally, during the adaptation of the methodology to different political and cultural contexts, it is essential to analyze potential difficulties arising from the heterogeneity of media and political systems. Such analysis would make it possible to contextualize findings appropriately and avoid interpretations misaligned with the specific characteristics of each case.

Moreover, from a forward-looking and lessons-learned perspective, it is important to consider the financial implications of the methodological model. One of the principal lessons suggests the need to implement progressive funding strategies, beginning with the adaptation and validation of indicators in specific cases, followed by pilot testing in a limited number of countries and, subsequently, scaling the model to regional or global levels. Such an approach would enable the gradual adjustment of dimensions, variables, and measurement scales, thereby reducing methodological risks.

Finally, regarding technological tools, the integration of large-scale and automated data-processing technologies, together with discourse analysis techniques and qualitative validation processes, is essential for the development of comparable sets of indicators. The systematic application of these tools would facilitate the progressive standardization of the model and the eventual construction of comparative rankings, thereby strengthening the empirical analysis of demagoguery across diverse political contexts.

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