



THE TWO FACES OF THE CAMPAIGN: POPULISM AS A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF ANDREJ BABIŠ IN THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE CZECH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2023

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Populism has become one of the key phenomena of contemporary political communication across European democracies. Communication strategies play a significant role in the success of populist actors, and the crucial influence of social media on this process cannot be ignored. Social networks allow politicians to connect more directly with voters and provide a space for personalized and emotionally attuned communication. This article analyses the populist political communication of Andrej Babiš (ANO 2011) during the 2023 Czech presidential election campaign, with particular attention to differences between his outdoor billboard campaign and his online communication on Twitter (X). The study aims to identify which elements of populist rhetoric were employed in these environments and how they evolved between the first and second rounds of the election. The study uses quantitative content analysis, focusing on key aspects of populist communication such as defining oneself against elites, emphasizing the people as a homogeneous group, and mobilizing through emotional appeals. The findings reveal a distinct platform asymmetry: while the outdoor campaign relied heavily on emotionally charged and fear-based appeals—especially in the second round—Twitter communication was more restrained, serving primarily as a channel for personalization and reference to external content. The study highlights the role of media platforms in shaping populist communication strategies within the Czech political context.

Key words: Czechia; president; elections; campaign; political communication; social media; populism.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The 2023 presidential elections have stirred Czech society. One candidate in particular, Andrej Babiš, has brought populist rhetoric into the public space, built primarily on a discourse of fear of war and strong negation. All this was done with the help of a very sharp and emotionally charged campaign, especially before the second round of the presidential election. As much as it may have seemed that this could be a path to success (especially to discourage the participation of supporters of his opponent Petr Pavel and supporters of the candidates who did not advance from the first round to the second round of the election), it was not enough to win the presidency in the end. On the contrary, in retrospect, this style can be considered counterproductive. After the unsuccessful candidacy, a number of leading and long-standing marketers working for Babiš's communication team either left or were let go (incl. the main figure in Babiš's marketing, Marek Prchal², spokesman Vladimír Vořechovský or Tünde Bartha, former head of the Office of the Government during Babiš's tenure of the Prime Minister in 2017-2021 and his candidate for head of the Office of the President should he win), who were directly responsible for the split of society.

Nevertheless, the topic of the use of elements of populism in the communication of politicians and candidates for political offices remains highly relevant, as shown by examples of other elections, whether in the region of the Central and Eastern Europe (incl. the case of key Czech elections to the Chamber of Deputies held in October 2025), or in established Western democracies (Western Europe, the United States). The topic of populism and its various forms and shapes therefore have had and will continue to have a significant place in the future. It remains a relevant research topic not only in political science, but also in communication studies, sociology and / or psychology. In the Czech Republic, this is doubly true given the long-term dominance of the ANO 2011 movement led by Andrej Babiš on the Czech party-political scene.

This is why the Babiš's movement has been a frequent object of research in many social science fields, practically since its foundation. Initially, analyses focused on its categorization within the concept of business-firm parties and placed it in the broader context of the changes in the party-political environment in the Czech Republic from the turn of the first and second decade of the 21st century to the present (see Hloušek and Kopeček 2017; Hloušek, Kopeček and Vodová 2020; Charvát and Just 2016; Just and Charvát 2016; Šárovec 2018). Subsequently, research has already focused on more specific aspects of the movement's internal functioning and its programmatic (see Cirhan and Kopecký 2017; Hájek 2017; Hloušek and Kopeček 2019; Kopeček 2016; Kopeček, Hloušek, Chytilík and Svačinová 2018). A separate broad category of research has been the interconnection between the ANO 2011 movement on the one hand and populism, democratic backsliding and the emergence and strengthening of illiberal tendencies on the other (see Bušíková and Guasti 2019; Čísař and Štětka 2017; Dostálová and Havlík 2024; Hanley and Vachudová 2018; Havlík and Kluknavská 2022; Husenicová 2020). More specifically, the question of political marketing and political communication of the movement, either in general or specifically in relation to particular issues or events, has long been a subject of interest, viewed, among other things, through the lens of populism as a

² Prchal was even expelled from the Art Directors Club of the Czech Republic, which brings together advertising professionals, because of his harsh election campaign.

communication strategy (see Filipec and Měšťánková 2024; Naxera 2018; Naxera 2022; Stulík and Naxera 2022).

The present study focuses on how Andrej Babiš's populist rhetoric changed between the first and second round of the 2023 presidential election, using the example of two basic ways of communicating with voters. One way is the more classical format of the offline outdoor campaign, i.e. reaching voters through billboards. The second is online campaigning using social media. In our case, this segment will be represented by a campaign on Twitter (now X).³

The analysis is based on the following research questions: What rhetorical strategies were used in the outdoor campaign and on the social media platform Twitter at different stages of the presidential campaign? How did Andrej Babiš's populist rhetoric change between the first and second round of the presidential election? Was there as dramatic a transformation in Twitter communication as in the outdoor election campaign? How did the emotionality and appeal to fear in Andrej Babiš's communication in the outdoor election campaign differ from his communication on Twitter?

In the first part, the text presents the theoretical background, defining populism primarily as a communication strategy and explaining its key elements, such as the people, the elites and the so-called "other" group. It then introduces the methodological framework of the research, the quantitative content analysis. The text describes the selection of data, the period analysed and the categories according to which the data were classified.

Then the text introduces the form, and the rhetoric of the outdoor election campaign, especially the different form and targeting before the first and the second round of the presidential election. It will then compare whether the communication strategy used on the social media network Twitter corresponded to this. At the same time, it will focus on the change in populist communication between the first and second round of the presidential election, and whether and, if so, how the nature of populist rhetoric changed.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before analysing the content of Andrej Babiš's outdoor campaign and Twitter campaign from the perspective of the use of populist political communication, it is necessary to first define the term populism itself. Its current usage is quite broad (Canovan 1999) and it can be argued that it is a somewhat contested concept with plethora of different definitions, while it is also necessary to distinguish between how it is perceived by the public, and thus the media, and how it is treated in professional discourse. Journalists and the public often associate it mostly with pejorative terms used by politicians, journalists or citizens, who most often refer to either emotionally influenced cheap propaganda based on pseudo-arguments, the presentation of simple solutions to complex problems, opportunism based on the mood of society based on public opinion, or tendencies to compromise political opponents (Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömback and de Vreese 2017, 13).

³ The text analyses events from the time when today's network X was still called Twitter (the analysis covers the period of January 2023, the renaming occurred in July 2023). Thus, throughout the text, the authors use the term Twitter and other terms derived from the social network's name valid at the time.

The search for a definition in professional discourse is equally difficult. There, too, are several concepts and approaches (Taggart 2004, 275). There is no such thing as a universally valid and acceptable definition of populism. Nevertheless, three prevailing perspectives on how to approach populism can be found. Populism can be understood either as an ideology (e.g., Canovan 2002; Mudde 2007), as a so-called *thin-ideology*⁴, which can be combined with other 'full-fledged' ideologies (Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008; Abts and Rummens 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018), or as a communication strategy (Aalberg and de Vreese 2017), resp. political style (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Moffitt 2016), which is built on the contrast of 'us' (ordinary pure people) vs. 'them' (evil and corrupt political elites, not caring about ordinary people and being detached from everyday problems of ordinary people) (Bennett et al. 2020; Schmuck and Hameleers 2020; Bobba 2018; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck and de Vreese 2017; Tomšič 2022, 11–12; Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė 2022, 100) or as a tool for mobilization (e.g. Jansen 2011).

It should be noted that the individual concepts can be mutually intertwined (Havlík and Pinková 2012, 126; Dvořáková, Buben and Němec 2012, 128). However, across these approaches, three key elements can be found that form the core of populism. These are the people (*peoplecentrism*), anti-elitism and the so-called 'others' or excluded, dangerous groups (Bennett et al. 2020; Bobba 2018; Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck and de Vreese 2017; Charvát, Charvátová and Niklesová 2022). The basic assumption is always the unlimited sovereignty of the people.

The first pillar, without which populism would be essentially unthinkable, is the idea of the people (Mudde 2004, 544) as a homogeneous and pure group. The exaltation and glorification of the people are put in contrast to the evil and corrupt elites, i.e. the second pillar of populism, and to dangerous, excluded groups, i.e. the 'others'⁵ as the third core element of populism. Therefore, the groups of the people, the elites and the 'others', or the interrelationship between these actors that shapes the identity of each of them (Bennett et al. 2020, 6), will be the object of research interest in terms of the approach as a communication strategy or political style that is presented to followers on Andrej Babiš's Twitter profile.

Populism as a communication strategy, or populist communication, builds on the basic populist definition of "good people vs. bad elites" and complements it with the characteristic in which "the actor is a spokesperson / part of the people" (Naxera 2022, 193). Empirical studies point out that populist communication, or communication of populist subjects, is characterized by several distinctive features compared to the communication of non-populist subjects. These include, for example, more frequent criticism of political opponents, as well as more frequent use of elements of negative campaigning, which fits into the general

⁴ Thin ideology means that it is unable to stand alone as a practical political ideology as it lacks the ability to present a broad and coherent program for addressing key issues (Stanley 2008, 95).

⁵ Through the lens of populist discourse, one can imagine a group of persons (those who do not belong to the people) who have no right to be part of the true (pure) people, or those persons who have no right to share the will of the people because they lack their virtues (Bennett et al. 2020, 39). This group is also perceived as homogeneous, and the stronger this perception of unity is, the more likely it is to receive a negative evaluation. It is characteristic of the 'others' in populist political communication that they threaten the values, identity and rights of the people. These include migrants, ethnic (or Roma) minorities, LGBT+ communities, welfare recipients. Thus, in the case of right-wing populist discourse, it is not only the evil elites who pose a threat to the values of the people and their rights, but also the dangerous 'others'. Thus, they are not only excluded but also discredited and blamed (Stanyer, Salgado and Strömbäck 2017).

framework of defining populism, which is primarily based on criticism of elites. In turn, this is also linked to the lesser space devoted in populist communication to the electoral programme itself (see e.g. Cassell 2023 for more details).

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this text is to compare Andrej Babiš's outdoor (billboard) campaign, which contributed significantly to the division of society in the pre-election period, and Andrej Babiš's communication on the social media network Twitter. Twitter was chosen for several reasons. Social media networks play an important role both in communicating directly with the public and in mobilizing voters and supporters. Moreover, they play significant role in the reflection of emotions in society (Nesiba 2025, 25). Social media networks, along with microblogging platforms, have thus become an integral part of political communication (Charvátová 2024, 57–58), primarily because of the possibility of closer connection and inexpensive communication with potential voters (Blassnig, Ernst, Engesser and Esser 2020; Esser, Stępińska and Hopmann 2017). Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide politicians with the space to disseminate their messages directly and carry the potential for successful self-promotion without the necessary dependence on traditional intermediaries (Bracciale and Martella 2017, 3; Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel and Esser 2019, 5–11). This is precisely why populist political actors use new media as a useful and effective tool to bypass mainstream media (Esser, Stępińska and Hopmann 2017, 378; Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2018, 3) and to consolidate connections with their supporters by creating a user-generated sense of social presence. As many international studies show (cf. van Kessel and Castlein 2016; Gil de Zúñiga, Michalska and Römmele 2020; Jacobs and Spierings 2018), Twitter is an ideal platform for populist communication, also considering that it is characterized by its speed and potential for virality (Jacobs and Spierings 2018). At the time of the research, Twitter had approximately 1.4 million users in the Czech Republic, representing 13.3% of the population (Kemp 2023), yet many studies have turned their attention to the competing platform Facebook, which is more popular globally. Considering the polarization of society, which has emerged from communication in the public space, the aim was to see if it is visible to that extent on that platform. First and foremost, we will be interested in whether Babiš's communication can be described as populist.

The research period was divided into two parts of the so-called hot phases of the election campaign. The first part represented the period of two weeks before the first round of the presidential election, i.e. from 1 January 2023 at 0:00 a.m. to 14 January 2023 at 2:00 p.m., when the first round of the presidential election officially ended and, in a sense, anything published from 2:01 p.m. onwards by the advancing candidates should therefore already be understood as communication before the second round. Although the election campaign before the first round lasted more than two weeks, the analysis focused only on the two-week period for reasons of comparability with the period before the second round, which is limited just to two weeks. The second round therefore followed immediately and consisted of two weeks before the second round, i.e. from 2:01 p.m. on 14 January 2023 to 2:00 p.m. on 28 January 2023.

First, we were interested in the frequency of use of populist elements, i.e. people centricism, anti-elitism and references to the so-called 'others' group in Andrej Babiš's communication. As a methodology we chose a quantitative content analysis. The analysis of the outdoor campaign evaluated both the visuals bearing

the slogan "Proto Babiš" ("Therefore Babiš"), accompanied by several variations of slogans, and the two billboards that were posted in the public space before the second round of the presidential election. In addition, 169 posts from the social media network Twitter that appeared in the crucial period of two weeks before the first round and two weeks before the second round on Andrej Babiš's Twitter account (@AndrejBabis) were included in the research. In the two-week period before the first round, i.e. from 1 January 2023 at 0:00 a.m. to 14 January 2023 at 2:00 p.m., there were a total of 78 posts. In the two-week period before the second round, i.e. from 14 January 2023 at 2:01 p.m. to 28 January 2023 at 2:00 p.m., there were a total of 91 posts.⁶

We then created identifying categories for the posts that related to the originality of the posts. The frame of reference was whether they were original tweets by Andrej Babiš (or tweets that were authored by the @AndrejBabis account), retweets that were originally authored by someone else, or replies to other tweets. To make our research as specific as possible, we included only original posts published on Andrej Babiš's account. Retweets may or may not necessarily express the position of the account owner in question, whereas the original tweets are unquestionable. The category under consideration (i.e. the original authorship of Andrej Babiš's tweets) included a total of 28 posts before the first round of presidential election and a total of 40 posts before the second round. The second frame of reference was whether the posts were populist, i.e. whether the posts referred to any of the three pillars of populism mentioned above. The quantitative content analysis examined the frequency and distribution of populist elements (people-centrism, anti-elitism, and references to the so-called 'other' group) in both outdoor materials and Twitter communication. The outdoor data included the main billboard series "Proto Babiš" ("Therefore Babiš") and its subsequent variants displayed before the first and the second round. The online dataset consisted of 169 posts from Andrej Babiš's official Twitter account (@AndrejBabis), published during the two analysed phases: 78 posts before the first round and 91 posts before the second round.

Those that exhibited features of populism (i.e. references to the people, elites or to the so-called 'other' group) were subsequently subjected to qualitative content analysis, namely in order to determine how the populist narrative is presented to the followers in relation to each of the pillars of populism, or how the construct of the aforementioned us vs. them dichotomy is created at the latent level of communicated content and shared connotations. The media representation of binary oppositions within the controlled discourse was also analysed with regard to the fact, that the way in which information is conveyed and the rhetorical strategies employed in its presentation, fundamentally influence the formation of attitudes, the formation of knowledge structures and the co-creation of opinion orientations, while they can also determine patterns of behaviour in specific social contexts. The research will focus on the temporary fixation of expressions related to the mentioned populist pillars. Through a combination of both methodological approaches, the study will achieve the portrayal of specific aspects of populist rhetoric, language and discursive practices in presidential election campaigns.

At the same time, we were interested in whether and how communication has changed before the first and second round of presidential elections, both in the outdoor campaign and in communication on social media. We focused on whether the narratives presented were repeated, or what transformation occurred within the different pillars of populism. We also focused on the rhetorical strategies used in the communication at each stage and whether the communication can be described as coherent and unified.

The larger number of contributions before the second round logically corresponds to the nature of a two-round election, where the first round is often considered a kind of *(pre-)selection*, while the second round represents the actual *election*. Moreover, in the first round each candidate faces a larger number of opponents from different parts of the political spectrum, which to some extent makes it more difficult to target the campaign more specifically, including its communication element. In the second round, where only two candidates advance, the targeting of the campaign is much more specific. Not only does the number of contributions correspond to the above, but there are also significant differences in the sentiment used in the communication.

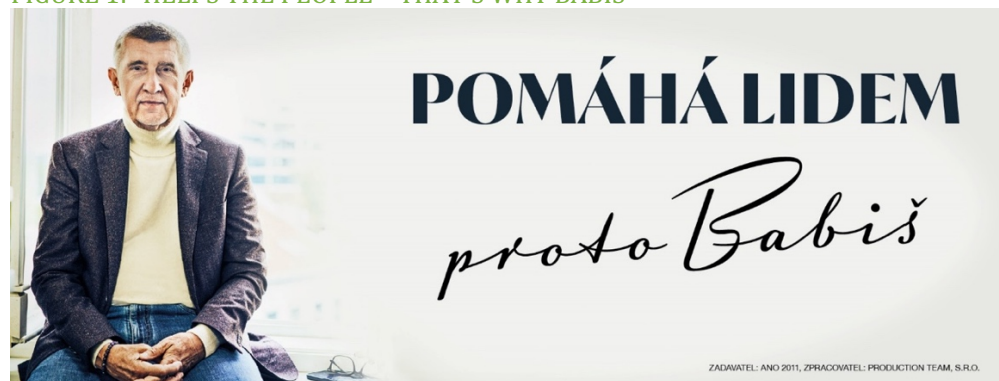
4 ANALYSIS OF ANDREJ BABIŠ'S OUTDOOR CAMPAIGN BEFORE THE FIRST AND SECOND ROUND

Before we move on to an analysis of the content of Andrej Babiš's messages on his Twitter account, let's look at the concept of Babiš's campaign on billboards before the presidential election. At the launch of the campaign, Babiš said he would run a positive campaign⁶ and before the first round, billboards and posters with the striking, short and easy-to-remember slogan "*Proto Babiš*" ("*therefore Babiš*" / "*that's why Babiš*") filled the public space from his side (see Figures 1 and 2). This slogan was the unifying and central element of the campaign and was then supplemented by other expressions in individual modifications. The main slogan, which appeared alongside the slogan "*Proto Babiš*" ("*therefore Babiš*" / "*that's why Babiš*"), was the phrase "*helps the people*". The phrase "*helps the people, that's why Babiš*" appeared, among other things, as the background poster at the press conference hall at the Andrej Babiš's campaign headquarters and appeared on the lectern as well. This phrase was also plastered on one side of the caravan that Babiš used in the contact campaign, and a banner with this phrase appeared as the cover photo on Babiš's Facebook and Twitter pages during the campaign. Other promotional materials from the "*Proto Babiš*" ("*therefore Babiš*" / "*that's why Babiš*") series included the slogans (in alphabetical order) "*action*", "*crisis manager*", "*fighting for Czechia*", "*I will help you*" and "*not afraid of the powerful*".⁷

⁶ The analysis for the second round included one post published after 2:00 p.m. on January 28, 2023, after the runoff election. It was a congratulatory message to the newly elected president, which Andrej Babiš published on the social media network Twitter at 3:30 p.m. Based on the sentiment analysis of the first round of the campaign in the virtual environment, only 37 % can be said to have a positive charge, and 58 % a negative one (Abdros 2023).

⁷ This campaign also provoked a counteraction in the form of negations or parodies. Either directly in conjunction with the original slogan "*therefore Babiš*" / "*that's why Babiš*" (e.g. "*the president in conflict of interest, that's why Babiš*" on the website of Mikuláš Peksa, then a member of the European Parliament for the Czech Pirate Party, see Peksa 2022; or "*he denounced people, that's why Babiš*", see Nezvaný host 2022) or in conjunction with the modified slogan "*that's why not Babiš*" (e.g. "*still needs presidential immunity, that's why not Babiš*" on the website of the non-profit organization Million Moments for Democracy; see Milion chvilek pro demokracii, [s.a.]).

FIGURE 1: “HELPS THE PEOPLE – THAT’S WHY BABIŠ”



Source: Andrej Babiš's Facebook page.

FIGURE 2: “ACTION – THAT’S WHY BABIŠ”



Source: Andrej Babiš's Facebook page.

If we look at the above slogans through the lens of the pillars of populism, then whether directly or indirectly identifiable are *people centrism* (“helps the people” or “I will help you”) and *anti-elitism* (“not afraid of the powerful”). With a simple and understandable slogan, Babiš has created the impression that the entire political reality is reducible to a simple dilemma and a choice between us (the ordinary people) and them (the elites or the powerful). The campaign thus created a contrast between the candidate who “fights for Czechia” and the existing establishment. This polarization reinforced the impression that the election of Babiš would bring about a fundamental change that would solve the problems of ordinary people. In combination with selected appeals, emotions were targeted, e.g. with the complementary slogan “helps the people”. Here, the emotions of the voters were directly addressed and an image of Babiš as a protector and at the same time a representative of the interests of ordinary people was created. This emotional rhetoric was thus more convincing than complex political arguments. Overall, the first stage can be clearly assessed as a typical strategy of populism – using simple and emotionally charged slogans, Babiš tried to reach out to the widest possible spectrum of voters, creating a clear dichotomy between the people and the elites (us vs. them).

While direct attacks on the opponents did not appear in the campaign materials before the first round, the situation before the second round was diametrically different from this point of view. This corresponds, among other things, to our thesis above about a more specific targeting of the campaign in a situation where only two candidates are advancing to the next stage and face each other. The second round thus greatly facilitates the use of emotional and negative elements of political communication directed against one opponent. Babiš really kicked off the campaign for the second round in a very aggressive style, immediately after the announcement of the results of the first round. Babiš's campaign before the

second round was primarily based on the theme of war, with reference to the conflict caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine. The campaign suggested to voters that his opponent, Petr Pavel (unlike Babiš), did not want to seek the peace. Babiš put himself in the position of a peacemaker and Pavel, on the contrary, in the position of one who would drag the Czech Republic into the war.

For the campaign, he used billboards bearing the slogan: *“I will not drag Czechia into war. I am a diplomat, not a soldier. President Babiš”* (see Figure 3). Under the pressure of circumstances and the wave of criticism coming not only from political opponents, Babiš later said that instead of the word “soldier”, the word “general” should have been used.⁸ The term “general” was one of identifying elements by the campaign of Babiš's opponent Petr Pavel, originally a soldier by profession, who had reached the highest general rank while in the army, and the term “general” became one of his campaign trademarks.

FIGURE 3: “I WILL NOT DRAG THE CZECHIA INTO WAR. I AM A DIPLOMAT, NOT A SOLDIER. PRESIDENT BABIŠ”



However, even the second version of the billboards did not bring calm. On the contrary. War rhetoric and the tendency to reinforce people's fear of war also appeared in the amended text: *“The General does not believe in peace. Vote for peace. Vote for Babiš”* (see Figure 4). Here Babiš used a distortion of Pavel's statement that permanent peace is an illusion, suggesting to voters that, unlike him, Pavel does not really want peace. However, the statement that *“lasting peace is an illusion,”* which his opponent Pavel uttered in the Czech Television debate on 8 January 2023 (gla and jko 2023), was taken out of context by Babiš precisely to emphasize the distinctiveness of Pavel's position, in contrast to his (Babiš's) frequently used “peacemaker” position.

⁸ To a limited extent, criticism of Andrej Babiš's campaign also came from within ANO 2011, for example from the then-mayor of Ostrava, Tomáš Macura (Kubant 2023).

FIGURE 4: “THE GENERAL DOES NOT BELIEVE IN PEACE. VOTE FOR PEACE. VOTE FOR BABIŠ.”



It can be clearly assessed that the second stage of the campaign brought fear as the main communication strategy in the outdoor space. The billboards worked with negative framing that clearly evoked potential danger and offered Babiš as a guarantor of safety. The appeal used fear of war as an effective way to mobilize voters. Reality was simplified in the communication to a binary opposition of diplomat vs. soldier, where the opposing candidate was presented as the one who would drag the Czech Republic into war. This was an indirect attack on Petr Pavel. Although his name was never mentioned directly, he was implicitly put in the role of a “soldier” who posed a danger. However, the moment the term “soldier” was replaced by “general” we can no longer speak of an indirect but a direct attack on Petr Pavel. Although he was not mentioned by name on the billboard, as we have said above, Pavel used the term “general” as his trademark in presidential campaign.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, Babiš was attempting to appeal to voters who feared the Czech Republic's involvement in the conflict, but also to older and undecided voters for whom the topic of security and stability might be more sensitive. The first billboard was widely criticized as misleading and manipulative, which paradoxically led to an increase in its reach and visibility. Although it may have been controversial, it consolidated support among supporters and voters of ANO 2011.

The choice of topics that are emotionally strong and widely resonating in society is to some extent a consequence of the adoption of the direct presidential elections, which by its very nature motivates or encourages candidates and their teams to use these elements. One of the members of Babiš's marketing team, Tünde Bartha, expressed in an interview with Deník N that their campaign does not provoke fear, but only responds to the voice of the people (Boubínová 2023). Babiš himself, however, admitted in a lengthy interview after the election that there was a mistake in this part of the campaign. According to him, from the very beginning the billboards should have had the term “general” and not “soldier” and that they should not have talked about “war” (this term was present in the first version of the billboard), but only about “peace” (this term was, however, included only in the second version of the billboard) (Pospíšilová 2023).

However, he shifted the responsibility to “our marketer” who according to Babiš “completely mishandled the campaign” (ibid.).

5 ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE CAMPAIGN BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND OF ELECTIONS

Although strong themes appeared intensively on election posters, in Babiš's public and media statements, and at press conferences, they appeared much less on Andrej Babiš's Twitter account. However, this is a somewhat misleading conclusion, as many of the messages on Twitter were very neutral by themselves, but at the same time often referred to highly heated and emotional media appearances. A classic example, which will be discussed in the following part of this text, is Andrej Babiš's first appearance at the press conference after the results of the first round of the presidential election were clear on 14 January 2023, which was reflected on Twitter only in the form of an invitation to watch Babiš's statement and a link to the video channel where the statement in question was running. As such, from the point of view of this research, the Twitter post itself must be described as non-populist, even though the medium to which it refers was streaming a speech that had all the characteristics of populism.

If the campaign, which took place outdoors, turned out to be populist, then the conclusions reached by the analysis of the Twitter communication may seem surprising. Out of a total of 28 relevant posts before the first round of the presidential elections, only two could be directly identified as using elements of populist political communication. The rest were either neutral or could not be assessed as populist.

Both two populist contributions referred to a critique of the elite while simultaneously presenting a narrative of the people as the suffering us, or the people as victims. In both conceptions, the posts portrayed people as being betrayed by the elites abusing their position. Neither post made direct reference to a group of so-called 'others'. Both posts used mobilizing rhetoric and emotive language, which can clearly be seen as key features of populist rhetoric as seen in the outdoor campaign.

In his first such Twitter post, published on 3 January 2023, Andrej Babiš used and combined two elements that were typical of his campaign. Firstly, there was the emphasis on the topic of poverty, “into which the government of [Prime Minister] Petr Fiala has plunged us”, and secondly, the linking of his main opponent, Petr Pavel, with the Fiala government:

“Our country is suffering. We are getting poorer. We stop trusting each other. The government of Petr Fiala has plunged us into this economic and social crisis. And if they manage to install one of their candidates in the Castle [referring to Prague Castle, the seat of the President – authors' note], they will no longer have any scruples. An avalanche will break loose. And it will be bad”.

Here we encounter a classic populist narrative, as populists tend to talk about the people as citizens or our country, and populist discourse thus creates a construct of the people, a kind of social identity that is supposed to unite citizens in order to feel a sense of belonging to a particular group (Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömback and de Vreese 2017, 19). The people are also identified here based on the antagonism of us vs. them, whereby elites are accused of caring only about

themselves and not about the will of the people, which they have pledged to protect (Mudde 2004). The direct accusation of elites is evident here in the personalized message concerning the Prime Minister Petr Fiala. Right-wing populism tends to gravitate towards criticism of the current government. Thus, there is a separation of the elites from the people, since through populist optics elites have no right to belong to the category of the people. Moreover, elites are accused of harming the people and are described as a threat and responsible for negative developments or situations (Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel and Esser 2019, 3).

The polarizing language, which the message skilfully uses, also carries the conspiratorial undertone *“if they manage to install one of their candidates in the Castle, they will lose all scruples”*. Here, too, we encounter a catastrophic scenario that is clearly intended to reinforce the sense of urgency and fear of a possible future situation: *“An avalanche will break out. And it will be bad.”* Strong emotions (*“we are suffering”, “we are getting poorer”, “it will be bad”*) are used for this purpose, combined with an appeal to fear and distrust towards the government and elites.

In the second Twitter post, which had a populist narrative, the main substantive topic was the economy, specifically taxes and social benefits. Alongside this, the topic of restricting freedom of speech was also present. All this was again framed by the steps that the current government was allegedly preparing in these areas.

“If it's true what I'm hearing that the government is going to want to raise taxes, cut welfare or restrict free speech after the presidential election, I would be the one to stand up to that.”

Here, it is worth mentioning in the first place the conditional construction of the message (*“if it is true”*), which allows the communicator to avoid factual responsibility for the following statement, since he does not say, in the context of the criticism of the elites, that the government is actually planning to do the things mentioned, but presents the audience with the possibility as a probable threat. Thus, once again, the communication shows a separation between the elites and the people, with the elites being accused once again of harming the people, or of preparing steps to harm the people (in this particular case, to worsen the socio-economic situation of the population by raising taxes and cutting social benefits, or even to hit one of the pillars of a democratic society by restricting freedom of speech).

We are operating in the dimension of negativity, where the stylistic tool of crisis rhetoric, exaggeration and declaration of scandal is used in the form of how Babiš tries to portray future developments (more Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel and Esser 2019, 10). This is also connected with the timing of the above-mentioned condition, where the turning point is supposed to be the election of the president, after which the government *“will no longer have any scruples”*. At the same time, the Twitter post contains a list of negative impacts on citizens. In the end, Babiš puts himself in the role of a saviour, or one who will save the people from the domination of corrupt elites, i.e. a typical rhetorical figure of populists, using combative language (*“I would be the one to stand up to that”*), which may evoke conflict and the position of the communicator in the role of a leader of resistance. Thus, the message can be assessed as having a strong negative charge, which is disguised by the implication of threats, and there is an absence of positive words.

In the first analysed period, we also find several contributions, 11 in total, in which the message itself does not contain any populist discourse per se, but there

are, for example, references to interviews, recordings of discussions, speeches or statements that already have these elements. However, since our analysis focused only on the messages published on Twitter itself, the content of these posts was not included in the overall results of the analysis. However, as an example, we can show a post published on 5 January 2023. In it, Andrej Babiš refers to a statement he made to the Society for the Défense of the Freedom of Speech. This society approached candidates before the elections with questions about freedom of speech.

“My opinion on freedom of speech? Quite clear. Without freedom of speech, there is no democracy. There is not one right opinion and not one truth. Democracy means debate, controversy, criticism and the exchange of often conflicting views. That said, and gladly, @SOS_projevu.”

The actual tone of the Twitter post has no direct or indirect hints of populist rhetoric, it does not create a dichotomy – in this particular case – between the silenced society and the elites attempting to censor or fact-check the information. However, in his own statement to the Society for the Défense of Freedom of Speech, to which Babiš refers, he already makes such allusions. In a statement published by the Society for the Défense of the Freedom of Speech on its website on 4 January 2023, Babiš wrote, among other things: *“Anyone who wants to control and direct public discourse is not a democrat, even if they invoke democracy and its principles every day. (...) Society has always been able to manage itself naturally, we don't need a “ministry of truth” to do that. I find it scandalous that the Prime Minister Fiala said that people have the right to have their information fact checked. I am of the exact opposite opinion – I believe that people have the right not to have their information corrected, especially not by the state, the Ministry of the Interior or the state-subsidized media and NGOs to which this government has allocated 150 million to “fight disinformation”. This is nothing more than an attempt to appropriate public discourse, just as it was under the previous regime.”* (Sedláčková 2023).

However, a slight majority of the posts analysed before the first round of the presidential election (15 out of 28) did not carry any populist discourse at all, nor were they on the edge. Therefore, the Twitter communication before the first round of the election, unlike outdoor billboard communication, cannot be assessed as populist.

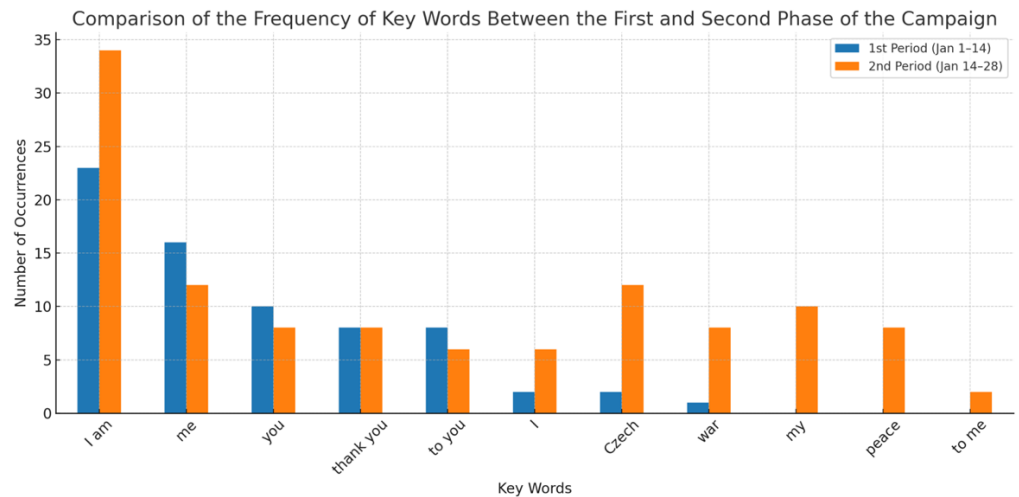
6 ANALYSIS OF THE ONLINE CAMPAIGN BEFORE THE SECOND ROUND OF ELECTIONS

Focusing on second round of presidential election, the total number of published Twitter posts included in the analysis rose to 40 (in the two-week period between the two rounds). The number and the share of Twitter posts that bear the characteristics of populist rhetoric has also increased. We identified a total of 11 such posts published by Babiš on Twitter before the second round (one appeared in duplicate, so there were originally 12 in total, but because it was a completely identical post, it is included only once in the subsequent analysis). Given the significant changes of the campaign in the outdoor space, we compared the most used keywords between the first and second round of the presidential election. The results confirmed a communication frequently using the first-person singular formulations (so-called “*ich* form”), with the pronouns “*I / me / my*” and the verb “*I am*” among the most used ones. The above clearly shows an

emphasis on personal narrative, from which we can infer a desire to put oneself at the lead of *“the people”* (characteristics of direct presidential elections). At the same time, the essentially consistent use of the pronouns *“you / your”* suggests a direct address to the electorate. However, the words *“peace”* and *“war”* are more typical for the second analysed stage, clearly confirming the rise of the conflict narrative and the issue of security in the second round of the election. National identity (*“Czech”*) appears more prominently in the second stage, which corresponds to the strategy of mobilizing national sentiment that was also evident on the billboards (see above).

The first Twitter post, characterized as populist, is from 15 January 2023, in which the ANO 2011 chairman operates with the now-frequented urban vs. rural cleavage in the context of different voting behaviour of these two territorially defined categories. In the Czech context, this is often narrowed to a dimension Prague vs. the rest of the country. Babiš, with a very general reference to unspecified posts by unspecified authors on social media, said that he was sorry that people living in villages and voting for him are being lashed out:

FIGURE 5: KEYWORDS USED IN BABIŠ’S TWITTER POSTS



Source: Andrej Babiš's Twitter account.

“I was saddened by the way those who on social media invoke the truth, love and democracy pick on the people living in villages for voting for me. They called them sheep and narrow-minded. They wrote that “Prague and love must triumph over the village and hatred””.

The message shows a contrast between the common people (who live primarily in the countryside according to this interpretation) and the elites (who live primarily in the city according to this interpretation), and it is a classic populist narrative in the form of an unnamed group that belongs to the liberal elites (a group that espouses truth, love and democracy). The message also implies that these are morally superior elites who have contempt for rural voters (*“they pick on people living in villages ... they call them sheep and narrow-minded”*). Secondly, we have another of the classic populist narratives, namely the necessity of protecting someone, here specifically protecting the people living in the countryside. The very pointing out that *“Prague and love must triumph over the village and hatred”* reinforces the dichotomy, whereby the people living in the countryside (and the communicator's voters) are automatically associated with hatred. The phrase in question functions as a direct appeal to the emotions of rural voters who may feel unfairly attacked. Implicitly, the post implies that the

elites do not accept the democratic choice made by the people. This is clearly underscored by the mobilizing element of *"I was saddened"*, where at first glance this may appear to be a conciliatory statement, but in the context of the post the whole thing comes across more as a defensive narrative that reinforces the moral framework and positions Babiš as one who is standing up for the people who are being unfairly criticized.

The above is underscored by the second Twitter post classified as populist, which repeatedly makes a disparaging statement about the victory of *"Prague and love over the village and hatred,"* thus reinforcing a sense of injustice among the voters. However, in contrast to the previous post, where the people living in the countryside were more distinctly separated from the urban elites, there is an attempt to include both groups:

"1 952 213 of you voted for me. Thank you! I appreciate every single one of your votes, whether you live in cities or villages. I read on the social media that "Prague and love must triumph over the village and hatred." Excuse me?! Now, a few words about that."

Here we encounter a direct address to voters and an expression of thanks, which clearly helps to strengthen the relationship between Babiš and his followers. At the same time, the declared number of voters reinforces this sense of legitimacy and points to the fact that Babiš represents a large share of the people. The rhetorical question (*"Excuse me?!"*) adds an emotional charge to the message and gives the impression of shocked disagreement with elitist statements. The conclusion of the post then gives the impression that the author is going to defend his voters, which is very typical of populist rhetoric, and the promise to clarify the truth is a distinctive element of populist communication style.

In two other Twitter posts that have the characteristics of populism, Babiš defines himself in relation to his opponent in the second round of the presidential election, Petr Pavel. In the first of the posts, dated 16 January 2023, he uses one of the frequent campaign narratives, namely linking Pavel to his earlier statement, made on 8 January 2023 in a candidate debate on Czech Television, that *"lasting peace is an illusion"* (gla and jko 2023). This is the only Twitter post that was in the identical spirit as the outdoor campaign. However, while the billboards never specifically named the opponent, the Twitter post did. As we have already mentioned above, Babiš used this element of the *"me vs. General Pavel"* polarization and attack on the opponent frequently in the campaign, especially in contrast to his (Babiš's) *"peacemaker"* stance. He even mentioned it in a Twitter post, where he directly frames the opponent negatively, although without any specific arguments:

"There are many reasons why not to vote for General Pavel. Unlike him, I seek peace, and I don't think lasting peace is an illusion."

As is clear from the published post, this is more of an emotional appeal than a rational argument. Peace is constructed in the post as a moral value. The statement attributes a positive value to Babiš (peacemaker), while the opponent is implicitly placed in the opposite role (warrior). We encounter here a double opposition, both a personal contrast (me vs. Pavel) and a value contrast (peace vs. war). As in the populist post mentioned above, Babiš uses a direct appeal to the voters and a simple message. The use of the personal form *"I seek"* creates the impression of a personal commitment to the people

He explicitly targeted his opponent Petr Pavel for the second time on 27 January 2023, the first day of the second round of the presidential election, tweeting, “*Mr. Pavel is once again underestimates our nation and makes it incapacitated.*” And although this is again a criticism of the opposing candidate (whom Babiš connected with the ruling coalition, i.e. with the elites), the dominant discourse in this case appears to be that of *people centrism*. There is a direct dichotomy of “us vs. Pavel”, where the people are explicitly defined in the post as “*our nation*” and portrayed as a victim of the elites, with the fact that the virtue and usefulness of the people is being defiled by Pavel.⁹ Consequently, Pavel is portrayed as one who despises and oppresses the nation, while at the same time being positioned as an elite disconnected from the common people. The communication suggests that Pavel does not recognize the people's abilities and that this is a repetitive pattern of behaviour towards the nation (“*once again*”). Babiš puts forward arguments that aim to separate Pavel, as a representative of the elites, from the people, because he is not the one who speaks on behalf of the people and for the benefit of the people. On the contrary, Babiš mobilizes the voters by putting them in the position of those who must protect their dignity from the elites. This is an indirect call to action in defence of national honour, hence a characteristic feature of populist rhetoric.

As he did before the first round of presidential election (see above), Andrej Babiš campaigned strongly against the government of Petr Fiala. Again, one of the frequent anti-establishment elements he used to argue for his election as president was the fact that the governing coalition controlled both chambers of parliament at the time, and that therefore a president from the other political camp would be a healthy balance of political forces in the country. He linked his opponent to the ruling coalition and indirectly he did the same towards the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court, the person who heads the third pillar of the Czech political and constitutional system, the judiciary:

“The five-party-coalition controls the entire country, they have the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, and the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court is rooting for them. And if they have a President in the Castle, 46 percent of the voters will not be represented.”

For the second time in the campaign ahead of the second round, he mentioned the government on Twitter in a post published on 19 January 2023 in the context of its stance on Russian aggression in Ukraine. He also recalled his plan to hold a peace summit at Prague Castle if elected president:

“I can see my billboards have caught your attention. Are you wondering how I came up with the peace summit? Simple. Come take a look. Prime Minister Fiala was the first to say we're at war, you certainly remember that.”

In this case, Babiš used personal framing (the personal tone of “*I can see*”) to create an informal and direct dialogue with followers. At the same time, he uses the emphasis on “*my billboards*” as a powerful symbol and reinforcement of the impression that this vision resonates among people and emphasizes his own leadership. In doing so, this is the second line that can be traced in the research to the reference to the campaign taking place in the outdoor space. This is, however, the final link of the communication and rhetorical strategy of

⁹ In populist discourse, the people are generally described as not being a threat / burden, not being responsible for negative developments / situations, nor committing mistakes or crimes (Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel and Esser 2019, 3).

peacemakers vs. warmongers with the outdoor campaign, and the remaining Twitter posts that could be described as populist no longer worked with this narrative. The post in question works with the construct of contrasting Babiš as a peace advocate, when peace is not only a general value but also a personal initiative of the presidential candidate, and Fiala as the one who supposedly legitimized the war. By using the phrase *“you certainly remember that”*, Babiš suggests to followers that Fiala made a problematic statement, which is intended to reinforce the impression that he is on the *“wrong side”* of the conflict. By directly contrasting this with Fiala's statement, he creates a simplified view: either peace (Babiš) or war (Fiala), and indirectly, suggestively, he also criticizes the opposing candidate, Pavel, which allows for a broad interpretation.

The role of the media in the pre-election campaign was a frequent topic of public discussion before the presidential elections (and even afterwards). Criticism and discrediting of the media, especially of certain media streams, is a frequent feature of the populist narrative.¹⁰ Through a populist lens, the media are accused of belonging to elites and not infrequently are even labelled as servants of the political *establishment* (Esser, Stepińska and Hopmann 2017; Bartlett, Birdwell and Littler 2011; Schmuck and Hameleers 2017, 2020) or as enemies of the people (Norris and Inglehart 2019).

Andrej Babiš has long been known for his harsh criticism of the media, which publish critical articles or broadcast critical reports about him (see e.g. ČTK 2020). He has also complained several times about the role of the media in the election campaign. According to him, the media allegedly favoured his opponent and therefore did not act impartially. In an interview with idnes.cz, he said that *“if Putin were running for president of the republic against Babiš, the media would prefer even Putin over me”* (Pospíšilová 2023). At the same time, however, several periodicals belonging to Babiš-owned Agrofert's portfolio advertised Babiš outside the standard advertising space (Berger 2023).

Babiš also reflected the media's alleged hostility towards him during the presidential campaign in some of his Twitter posts. In several posts he expressed his gratitude if someone in the public space took the same or a similar attitude to the role of the media (either the media in general or a specific media outlet) as Babiš had. This category includes a post from 21 January 2023 thanking the editor and commentator of the daily news server Echo 24, Lenka Zlámalová, who in a television appearance was critical of the role of the media in the election campaign:

“Thank you, Mrs. Zlámalová, someone finally said it. You're the only one with guts. And you're not hypocritical.”

Zlámalová expressed the media's disfavour as one of the factors that allegedly influenced Babiš's result in the presidential election in her post-election analysis published in the daily Echo 24 (Zlámalová 2023).

Babiš has long been critical of Czech Television (public service broadcaster), which he presented also in his campaign before the second round of the elections. He initially refused to participate in the election duel on Czech Television before the second round, a position he declared on his Twitter account on 17 January 2023: *“Just so you know, I have decided NOT to attend the election debate on Czech Television. I will look forward to seeing you in the duels on Prima, Nova, Blesk and*

¹⁰ In general, populist actors tend to deny communication to journalists of some traditional media or prefer to use live inputs.

Deník.” However, on the day of the duel, 22 January 2023, just eight minutes before the start of the live broadcast, he suddenly arrived at the National Museum building from where the duel was broadcasted by the Czech Television. Subsequently, he subjected the election duel to criticism, in particular the moderator Martin Řezníček became the target of Babiš’s attacks.

Three days later, Babiš praised on Twitter what he called “*a very informed and detailed analysis of the performance of the Czech Television moderator*” by Petr Bohuš. This former employee of Czech Television publishes regularly comments critical of Czech Television on his website *Modrý jelen / Blue Deer* (Bohuš 2023). Many critics of the public media, including Babiš, rely on his assessment of Czech Television’s performance.

“So this is a small miracle. A very informed and detailed analysis of the performance of the Czech Television moderator of the duel will be extremely surprising to those who thought it was fine. The media expert Mr. Petr Bohuš has broken it down to atoms.”

In a comment to this post, Babiš added: “*Those of you who watch Czech Television’s public affairs programs should see this analysis first*”, which is also one of the fundamental rhetorical populist strategies. When criticizing either the media or the elites, political actors rely on authorities that are in line with their anti-establishment views.

The atmosphere in the period between the first and second rounds of presidential elections was significantly exacerbated by several threatening anonymous letters that Andrej Babiš allegedly received. Naturally, this was reflected in Babiš’s public appearances, including his communication on social media. In one Twitter post published on 24 January 2023, he responded to the atmosphere at one of his rallies in Brno, which was supposed to be “*wild*” and which was disrupted by, among other things, alleged “*rude slogans*”, but which he again linked to criticism of the public media:

“Vulgar slogans and disruption of our rally. Brno was wild, so watch this short video. Oh, and let me also say something about our independent Czech Television 😊”.

Hours later that day, he tweeted that he had asked the police to grant him temporary protection considering the numerous threats against him. He listed the threats he and his family had faced in recent days:

“A live bullet in an envelope addressed to my wife, an anonymous letter threatening to kill me, and now a spent cartridge in the parking lot of the Sokol Hall in Průhonice. I called the police and asked for so-called temporary protection.”

A Twitter post that appeared on 26 January 2023, the day before the second round of elections, was highly resonant. In it, Andrej Babiš urged his supporters to vote for him and to also bet on him, because “*in Fortuna the odds (betting on Andrej Babiš’s victory – authors’ note) are 12 (meaning 12:1 – authors’ note)*,” i.e., if they bet CZK 1,000, they will win CZK 12,000, which he concluded by saying “*Babiš always helps, it will be better under Babiš*”:

"I was in Fortuna, the odds are 12. Bet CZK 1,000 and come to vote, you will win CZK 12,000 🤔 Babiš always helps, it will be better under Babiš 🤔."

It is a post that has provoked a range of reactions from the public about whether such behaviour is ethical. And this has come from both critics and internet trolls.¹¹ It is clear from the available data that the number of bets taken on candidate Babiš has indeed increased in Fortuna. However, it is speculative as to whether the challenge mentioned in the tweet had a direct influence on this. However, a spokesperson for the company said that he was really surprised by the tweet (Pospíchal 2023). The Fortuna Twitter account even responded directly to the post by saying *"Vote with your heart, bet smart!"*. The announcement on Babiš's Twitter account saying *"I was in Fortuna"* also seems interesting, as it gives the reader the impression that Babiš was at the bookmaker to place a bet. Which would be more than problematic, as the legislation states that those who participate in a betting event may not bet on it. There have also been several criminal charges filed against Andrej Babiš for various reasons, including for promoting gambling.

Even before the second round of presidential elections, there were several posts published on Andrej Babiš's Twitter account that did not carry a populist narrative per se, but referred to strongly populist statements, interviews or speeches, just like before the first round (see earlier). Among them, one of the most notable was a very heated and emotional speech by Andrej Babiš after the end of the first round of the elections, when it was already clear that he and Petr Pavel would advance to the second round. The link to the streaming platform, where this speech was broadcasted, was published on Andrej Babiš's Twitter account. However, the actual content of the relevant media statement and parts of it were not published on the Twitter account. Twitter account served just as a promotion of the media statement and link to the streaming platform that broadcasted it. In total, we identified 10 such borderline posts, which usually only referred to statements or declarations with populist elements made elsewhere.

Of the 40 Twitter posts analysed, 18 could be evaluated as clearly non-populist, i.e. less than half of them, which is a lower proportion of the total number of posts than in the case of the first round (when 15 out of 28 were identified as clearly non-populist, i.e. a close majority). Thus, anti-establishment rhetoric became the dominant populist discourse in this stage of election campaign. And this is whether we are talking about criticism of the ruling elites or denouncing the presidential opponent for belonging to these ruling elites, as well as criticism of the media, here primarily the public service media, which can also be classified as elites in the populist narrative (more below). The second discourse we encounter is the pillar of the people, which Babiš targets in his communication. The element that we have missed in the pre-election communication is the attacks on the group of so-called 'others'.

¹¹ For example, a certain Mr. Bahenský wrote in the comments: *"Mr. Babiš. I took your advice, but you lost, so you didn't help me much. Now I will have nothing to eat and no money for rent. Please return my money to my account 2401931745/0800. Show me how Babiš always helps"* (Pospíchal and Vodsedálek 2023). After being contacted by journalists, the author of the comment said: *"My comment was pure irony, which I wanted to point out the real situation around Andrej Babiš. The fact that he has totally immorally challenged voters and people blinded by faith in him to bet a lot of money on him,"* he explained. He added that his ironic comment was picked up by the media, which cited him as an example of a person who had paid the price for Babiš's challenge" (Pospíchal and Vodsedálek 2023).

7 CHANGE IN POPULIST RHETORIC BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

As the results of the analysis showed, the outdoor campaign and Twitter communications were not uniform. The first round in the outdoor campaign built its communication on the unifying and simple slogan *"Proto Babiš"* (*"therefore Babiš"* / *"that's why Babiš"*), supplemented by other slogans (*"helps the people"*, *"fighting for Czechia"*, etc.) The emotional appeal was based on a sense of injustice and the need to protect the people, which is typical of a populist strategy. The communication appealed to social cohesion and the sense of sacrifice of the common man, highlighting the unjust treatment of the people by political elites. Ahead of the second round, the rhetoric of the outdoor campaign changed considerably, shifting sharply towards conflict and security / defence issues. Billboards began to use the themes of war and fear. Babiš presented himself as a peacemaker, while his opponent was implicitly positioned as someone who could lead the Czech Republic into the war. Slogans and supposedly logical phrases such as *"I will not drag Czechia into war. I am a diplomat, not a soldier. President Babiš."* (subsequently modified to the *"general"* variant) clearly show this shift. The campaign has thus shifted from socio-economic issues to emotionally charged and fear-inducing narratives.

An analysis of tweets before the first round showed that only a small number (2 out of 28) contained direct elements of populist rhetoric. In most cases, these were neutral messages or possibly references to populist speeches published elsewhere, but the tweets themselves could not be described as populist in such cases. While the number of populist posts increased in the second round (11 out of 40), the change was not as dramatic as in the case of outdoor campaign, where language and themes were significantly rethought.

This brings us to the answer to two of the research questions, namely how did Andrej Babiš's populist rhetoric change between the first and second round of the presidential election? Has there been as dramatic a transformation in Twitter communication as in the outdoor election campaign? While the outdoor campaign underwent a substantial change from socio-economic themes to a narrative of security and war, there was a softening or shift to more neutral messages on Twitter, and populist elements were less prominent there. Turning to the next research question, how did the emotionality and appeal to fear differ in Andrej Babiš's outdoor election campaign communications on one side and his Twitter communication on the other side, the clear result here is that the emotional charge and fear-inducing narrative was much more pronounced in the outdoor campaign with literally key elements, while on Twitter the overall rhetoric was much more restrained and the direct emotional charge was only marginally present.

The outdoor campaign brought, especially before the second round, strong slogans and visuals that directly evoked emotion and fear. The communication before the second round was highly emotional, confrontational and negatively framed, with fear of war becoming a key theme. Slogans evoked urgency and danger (e.g. *"The General does not believe in peace. Vote for peace. Vote for Babiš."*), thus trying to mobilize voters through the dichotomy (peace vs. war), i.e. a strongly emotional narrative, and catastrophic scenarios, through the fear of conflict and a dangerous future.

On Twitter, the emotions and appeals to fear were only sporadic. Many of the posts were neutral or merely referred to populist speeches published elsewhere. Direct and highly emotional messages appeared in only a few cases mentioned above in the text. Overall, the communication had a more moderate tone, with emotional charge and direct appeals to fear being much more limited. While some Twitter posts did link to press conferences or videos, where the emotional and fear-inducing narrative was evident, Twitter functioned as a distribution channel that merely promoted and disseminated such content, but without itself generating similar direct emotional appeals. When there were some posts on Twitter that explicitly used emotionally charged language (especially before the second round), their number and intensity was lower than that of the outdoor campaigns. This suggests that direct appeals to fear were deliberately subdued on this platform.

8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The analysis showed that despite the heated and emotional expressions in society in the run-up to the presidential elections, these were neither incited nor reflected largely by Andrej Babiš's communication on the social media network Twitter. This is perhaps also due to the form of the platform, which, despite the dynamic changes in recent months, still retains a predominantly commentator-news form, and political communication is often conducted in that way. There are more frequent interactions between political actors, using the possibility of retweets of individual contributions by fellow party members, or more or less direct communication with journalists (Křovák and Charvát 2022, 24–25). Outdoor campaigns have been designed to immediately reach the widest possible audience with short, emotional slogans that have maximum effect in creating fear and a sense of threat. The strong emotional appeal was intended to mobilize voters and highlight the danger of electing the opposing candidate. The outdoor campaign also targeted voters with limited access to information technologies and social media, mainly older voters, who represent the core of Andrej Babiš's electorate. The above-mentioned facts therefore encouraged for the more frequent use of populist forms of communication in the outdoor (offline) space.

In contrast, Twitter, with its nature of quick messages, often functioned as a mean of referring to other, more detailed speeches where the emotional appeal was more developed, hence the strategy here was more based on information transfer and as a complement to other communication.

In an analysis of Twitter communication aimed at answering the first research question of what rhetorical strategies were used in Twitter communication at different stages of the presidential campaign, several key communication approaches emerged that evolved depending on the stage of the election. In the first stage of the campaign, messages on this social media network often used a personalized narrative, reinforcing the image of the candidate as a representative of the people. This approach also included direct mobilizing outreach, which increased voters' sense of legitimacy and belonging. As already mentioned, several posts were designed to link to externally published media speeches with strong populist elements, allowing for the dissemination of polarizing discourse without the tweets themselves containing explicit populist rhetoric. The second phase of the campaign saw a significant intensification of these strategies and confrontational discourse. The principle of dichotomy was applied in the messages, where value contrasts were used to create a confrontational framework, often complemented by conditional formulations, which allowed

threats to be implied without direct statements, and by elements of irony or humour, which served to lighten the direct confrontation.

An interesting feature of the research presented here is certainly the fact that Babiš did not resort to attacking a group of so-called 'others' in his pre-election communication on Twitter. The dichotomy of us vs. them was built on the reinforcement of a specific aspect of people's identity and different variations of populist political communication associated with anti-elitism (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Anti-elitism consisted of conflicting populist communication strategies towards established elites or mass media, with Babiš discrediting or blaming elites and separating these elites from the 'pure' people. By focusing on the people (often as a nation), he demonstrated his closeness to the people, emphasizing their virtues and describing them as a monolithic group that he would lead out as a saviour from the clutches of the rotten elites. Finally, he denied the sovereignty of the elites in a negative and conflicting manner (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig and Esser 2017: 1349). The above discourses can be seen as the result of fixations of meanings arising from political struggles.

It should be noted, however, that many of Babiš's other public appearances during the presidential campaign (speeches at rallies and meetings with voters, statements to the media, answers in media interviews or in duels with the opposing candidate before the second round, etc.) had the characteristics of populist political communication. At the same time, Andrej Babiš referred to these public appearances on Twitter. The actual post containing the link was usually only in the sense of "*read / see what I said*" and was therefore not classified as populist in terms of the analysis of the content of the tweet itself. However, linked material that already contained elements of populist communication was not included in the analysis. The authors are aware that this fact represents a limitation of the analysis presented here and certainly poses a certain challenge for how to approach such analyses in the future.

Similarly, the comparison with communication on the social media network Facebook, which was also not the subject of the analysis, is interesting, but the nature of populist rhetoric is evident at first glance, whether in the form (or character) of individual posts or in the more personalized style of communication.

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DVA OBRAZA KAMPANJE: POPULIZEM KOT KOMUNIKACIJSKA STRATEGIJA ANDREJA BABIŠA V KAMPANJI ZA ČEŠKE PŘEDSEDNIŠKE VOLITVE 2023

Populizem je postal eden ključnih pojavov sodobne politične komunikacije v evropskih demokracijah. Komunikacijske strategije igrajo pomembno vlogo pri uspehu populističnih akterjev, ključnega vpliva družbenih medijev na ta proces pa ni mogoče prezreti. Družbena omrežja politikom omogočajo neposrednejšo povezavo z volivci in zagotavljajo prostor za personalizirano in čustveno prilagojeno komunikacijo. Članek analizira populistično politično komunikacijo Andreja Babiša (ANO 2011) med češko predsedniško kampanjo leta 2023, s posebnim poudarkom na razlikah med njegovo kampanjo na zunanjih oglasnih panojih in spletno komunikacijo na Twitterju (X). Cilj študije je ugotoviti, kateri elementi populistične retorike so bili uporabljeni v teh okoljih in kako so se razvijali med prvim in drugim krogom volitev. Študija uporablja kvantitativno analizo vsebine, s poudarkom na ključnih vidikih populistične komunikacije, kot so opredeljevanje sebe v odnosu do elit, poudarjanje ljudstva kot homogene skupine in mobilizacija s čustvenimi pozivi. Ugotovitve razkrivajo izrazito asimetrijo platform: medtem ko se je zunanja kampanja močno zanašala na čustveno nabite in na strahu temelječe pozive – zlasti v drugem krogu – je bila komunikacija na

Twitterju bolj zadržana in je služila predvsem kot kanal za personalizacijo in sklicevanje na zunanje vsebine. Študija poudarja vlogo medijskih platform pri oblikovanju populističnih komunikacijskih strategij v češkem političnem kontekstu.

Ključne besede: Češka; predsednik; volitve; kampanja; politično komuniciranje;