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**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
IMPACT OF POPULISM ON YOUNG
VOTERS IN ECUADOR AND MEXICO**

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I dedicate this work to my dad and my mom. You have always been my guides and the driving force in my life. You cannot imagine how fortunate I am to have you by my side. I love you infinitely.

To my sister Camila, my best friend and lifelong companion. You have been part of every stage of my life, and I only hope it remains that way forever. I adore you.

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Comparative analysis of the impact of populism on young voters in Ecuador and Mexico

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the influence of populism on the electoral preferences of young voters in Ecuador and Mexico between 2007 and 2020. It identifies social, economic, and cultural factors that shape the inclination toward populism used by right- or left-wing politicians, comparing youth political participation in both countries and evaluating how candidates' proposals have impacted their electoral decisions. The methodology employed is PRISMA, with a systematic review of 120 articles, of which 69 were selected after a rigorous screening process. The results show that populist governments have directed their policies toward young people, with Rafael Correa and Andrés Manuel López Obrador standing out in higher education initiatives. Since 2018, the use of social media has strengthened political marketing, positioning young people as technological intermediaries and key actors in campaign dissemination. The study concludes that, although Ecuador and Mexico share cultural similarities and youth electoral patterns, populism has had different impacts on their political leaders. This analysis contributes to understanding the role of populist discourse and digital media in youth mobilization and the shaping of electoral dynamics.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Populism, Social Media, Speech, Voters, Youth.

Análisis comparativo del impacto del populismo en los jóvenes electores en Ecuador y México

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la influencia del populismo en las preferencias electorales de los jóvenes votantes en Ecuador y México entre 2007 y 2020. Se identifican factores sociales, económicos y culturales que determinan la inclinación hacia el populismo utilizado por político de derecha o izquierda, comparando la participación política juvenil en ambos países y evaluando cómo las propuestas de los candidatos han impactado sus decisiones electorales. La metodología empleada es PRISMA, con una revisión sistemática de 120 artículos, de los cuales 69 fueron seleccionados tras un riguroso proceso de filtrado. Los resultados muestran que los gobiernos populistas han dirigido sus políticas hacia los jóvenes, destacando Rafael Correa y Andrés Manuel López Obrador en educación superior. Desde 2018, el uso de redes sociales ha fortalecido el marketing político, posicionando a los jóvenes como intermediarios tecnológicos y actores clave en la difusión de campañas. Se concluye que, aunque Ecuador y México comparten similitudes culturales y patrones electorales juveniles, el populismo ha tenido impactos diferenciados en sus líderes políticos. Este análisis contribuye a comprender el papel del discurso populista y los medios digitales en la movilización juvenil y en la configuración de las dinámicas electorales.

Palabras clave: Electores, Discurso, Jóvenes, Marketing Político, Populismo, Redes Sociales.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF POPULISM ON YOUNG VOTERS IN ECUADOR AND MEXICO

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Latin America is a huge region that occupies a large part of the American continent. Its history is marked by colonization, a process that left deep traces in its social and economic structure. The indiscriminate exploitation of its natural resources mainly benefited the colonizers and local elites, while the indigenous and Afro-descendant populations remained marginalized and poor. This legacy of inequality has been maintained over time, giving rise to strong economic and social contrasts that still persist in the region.

This study focuses on two countries in this region, Ecuador and Mexico, which are part of these historical events. The leaders who have taken command of these states have had to use a resource that allows them to relate more closely to the situation of each country at the time of starting their political campaigns, this resource is populism. In the words of Di Tella (1965), populism is a political movement with strong popular support, whose participants are those who belong to non-working classes with important influence in the party. It is a style of politics, that has had a place in many sectors of Latin America, in this case, Ecuador and Mexico.

Populism, over time, has produced social bonds between populist leaders and the *people*. While there are currents such as liberalism or utilitarianism, they cannot explain the very existence of the *people*, while the populist style solves it and explains its existence. For populism, “the *people* are an abstraction, an idealization, which pretends to refer to the totality of the population, or rather to that part of the population that possesses the noblest, most authentic and pure characteristics” (Savarino, 2006, p. 83).

Populism constructs the political and no “people” are exempt from this constructive process. It must be considered that, within a society, there are sectors isolated from modernity, others with limited economic resources, with different ideologies, marginalized people, and precarious workers, among others, who coexist on a daily basis with those who have more advantageous living conditions. This mass of people is known and exalted by

populist leaders as *people* (Bartra, 2008). Society does not have political instruments to attract the masses, so they are incorporated and manipulated through different elites, but mainly through a leader; masses whose memories are influenced and manipulated by historical, economic and social background (Viguera, 1993).

Populism used by these elites or a leader plays with the culture and psychology of the masses, where it can be said that each leader tries to be part of the *clamor of the people* and pretends to understand the specific needs of each sector mentioned above; it simulates a feeling of relevance with the voters. It is a very attractive theory that analyzes the behavioral management of the social being and the human being, as well as the theory of language (Villacañas, 2015).

For Di Tella (1965), there must be organizational links, such as an elite that is positioned in the middle or upper levels of the anti-status quo stratification, which means being against the current state of things or in opposition to the way in which politics or social, economic, or cultural structures work. As a result of this elite, a mobilization is born that is attached to the idea of revolution and change; finally, an ideology is consolidated and spread among leaders and followers, thus creating a collective enthusiasm.

Viguera proposes that (1993), in the Latin American context, it was Gino Germani who initiated the formulation of populism in the academic sphere, which was developed in the 1950s and whose frame of reference is *the theory of modernization*. Germani defined populism as a phenomenon characteristic of the transition from a traditional society to a modern society in underdeveloped countries, i.e. in Europe this change took place through a slow consolidation of a *representative democracy* in which the masses became involved through reforms and participation in political parties. In Latin American countries, the transition is different since it gives rise to new forms of political activity that constitute *populism*, due to the asynchrony characteristic of any process of change in Latin America, which was aggravated after the crisis of 1930 and the Second World War.

According to Stanley (2000), populism is particular to Latin America, since some authors agree that populist leaders arrived in different Latin American countries so strong that they gained power and did not allow anyone else to govern. The author argues that these leaders' way of doing politics is the most complete expression of the irruption of the popular classes in the process of urban and industrial development.

Although the authors cited above do not completely contradict each other, they do not categorize it and open the way to an explanation of populism. Being a style that helps leaders to be closer to the masses, this style takes shape and adapts according to the ideology of each leader. Populist leaders mold their ideology to their discourse and seek to mark their difference with respect to other leaders. Mouffe as cited in Mazzolini (2019, p. 130). points out that “populism is a construction of the political frontier”. However, between the years 2011 and 2012, this border was weakening and leftist political parties sought to implement a strategy of populism politics adjusted to the left to establish again the border *radical reformism*, which tries to change things with a revolutionary announcement that does not materialize in weapons, but in law proposals and, tax changes among others, which can indeed offer alternatives to neoliberal globalization (Mazzolini, 2019).

However, for authors such as Mazzolini, populist strategy is confused with a war of movements that implies a frontal confrontation against the adversary. For him, the populist strategy is a strategy of war of position that deals with a prolonged ideological, cultural and political struggle, that is to say, populism does not seek abrupt revolution, but creates an ideological and symbolic base. In order to establish the aforementioned frontier, social divisions are redefined to adapt them to the narrative and the political context, for example: bourgeoisie/proletariat, or rather, people/oligarchy or establishment (Speech proposed by López Obrador in Mexico). In this war of position there will always be a moment of advance and retreat (2019). Therefore, leftist populism focuses on economic inequality, social justice, and redistribution of wealth, and because of these factors, populist leaders implant in people the idea that the economic and political elites are their main oppressors.

Left-oriented populism, according to Laclau, focuses on a struggle against inequalities and the mobilization of popular sectors excluded from the political system, that vulnerable sectors whose opportunities have been limited. The author points out that populism is not an ideology but rather a political logic that enables the articulation of unmet demands from subordinate groups (De La Torre, 2005).

Mudde & Rovira (2017) point out that left-wing populism is based on a moralistic view of social conflict, where the aim is to expand social rights, promote a stronger role of the state in the economy, and democratize power in favor of excluded majorities. The authors again emphasize the role of working people against the corrupt economic elite.

Populism is not intrinsically tied to either the right or the left, as it is more about a discursive strategy than a specific ideology. However, left-wing populism has greater demands than right-wing populism, as its approach cannot rely on demagogic solutions; it must propose a concrete alternative to neoliberalism (Mazzolini, 2019).

Right-wing populism similarly seeks to represent the *people* but with a capitalist focus that emphasizes national identity, security, and often measures and restrictions on immigration. These leaders, despite belonging to the elites, aim to appear as “ordinary people”, appealing to traditional values and tending to be socially conservative. As expected, they use “anti-establishment” rhetoric, which refers to a stance opposing the dominant power structures in society. Like left-wing populism, it presents a dichotomous view of society, such as people/elite. While right-wing leaders are not as intense as left-wing leaders, they aim to reach beyond an exclusive sector and strive for all sectors to begin aligning, a vision considered quite utopian for both left-wing and right-wing politicians (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013).

Mudde & Rovira (2017) says that right-wing populism combines nationalist and authoritarian elements, where the “pure people” confront a corrupt elite, arguing that politics should be an expression of the people's will. Meanwhile, Vaarakallio (2015) analyzes that right-wing populism emphasizes cultural identity, considering that this form of populism is fueled by cultural loss and identity crises in societies undergoing continuous and rapid changes; therefore, there is a rejection of globalization.

Eatwell & Goodwin (2018) argue instead that right-wing populism arises as a response to the decline in public trust in institutions and economic discontent. However, they align with other authors in asserting that this form of populism is closely tied to identity, as well as the rejection of immigrants and global integration.

In political processes, young people exhibit defiant, rebellious, and even revolutionary attitudes. Over time, young people have demonstrated an affinity for technological changes, easily absorbing the information that technology provides. For this reason, youth is considered the present and future of nations, as their fresh minds enable them to promote and be part of significant changes (Barbero, 2022).

The category of youth may vary depending on the geographic area, cultural context, and political environment of a specific country or region of the world. However, it is generally considered to include individuals between adolescence and adulthood, ranging

from 15 to 29 years old. They are known as young adults and are characterized by their cognitive maturity, the development of complex thinking, and decision-making, the latter often impacting their future positively or negatively. Young people in this age range have the ability to think abstractly and consider many alternatives on a specific matter (Steinberg, 2005). This age range is applied in Latin America due to socioeconomic and cultural factors that extend this stage (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo [PNUD], 2023).

As part of the political changes in a country, young people come to be classified alongside the rest of the adult population under the term *voters*, meaning citizens who meet the legal requirements to exercise their right to vote in elections. These requirements, in most countries, include being of legal age, holding citizenship, and, in many cases, being registered in the electoral roll. Voters in Ecuador and Mexico have the right and responsibility to participate in this process to elect new government representatives (Ellis et al., 2007). In Ecuador, voters are included in democratic processes starting from the age of 16 to 18 under the so-called “optional vote”, meaning they face no penalties or obligations for not voting. However, this small group of voters will not be considered in this analysis, as a large percentage of young people either do not vote or do so out of mere curiosity rather than genuine interest in politics.

Young people in both Mexico and Ecuador, during the period from 2007 to 2020, have become much more involved in political processes. Both countries have experienced economic crises and corruption by elected politicians. This has led to uncertainty and the need for young people to be part of the change, at least through their involvement as part of the electorate, contributing a new perspective for the future of their nation. In both countries, youth has been a key factor in adapting populism to the new technological era and political marketing. As previously mentioned, young people have greater empathy with social networks, and each new generation is more connected to technology. Initially, social media platforms were designed simply to meet new people, but gradually these platforms became involved in marketing, not only commercial marketing but also as a channel where media and politicians could share their proposals, ideals, and use populism.

Political leaders, by using these digital tools, have been able to reach young audiences and influence their political perceptions with their populist messages. It should be noted that within the youth population, there are supporters of all political tendencies. Therefore, the use of technology has allowed each young person to connect with like-minded individuals and their leader. While, due to the missteps of previously elected governments, many young

people have shifted their alignment among different political parties before settling on their ideologies, many others remain steadfast and deepen their understanding of their political inclinations. This reinforcement and consolidation of beliefs in each young person and in each process, in recent years, has been guided by information transmitted through digital media. Thus, the use of this technological resource has become increasingly indispensable in political campaigns as a means of conveying the populist leader's message to young people.

The choice of Mexico and Ecuador for this analysis stems from their histories and political landscapes. Ecuador, since its inception as a republic, has undergone various periods of government, with emphasis placed on administrations that have used populism as part of their campaign strategy to attract the masses. Additionally, studying this country is considered important, given that in recent years its governments have been unstable, and the use of populism and new marketing strategies aligned with the technological era has clearly attracted the interest of young people. On the other hand, Mexico has a political history quite similar to Ecuador in terms of populism. It becomes an interesting country for this study because its populism began in an institutionalized manner, combining nationalist policies, redistribution, and the participation of unions and peasants. Unlike other countries, Mexico has maintained continuity in its populism. Furthermore, Mexico has also employed populism in its recent electoral contests, allowing for a comparison with Ecuador regarding the use of populism, its proposals, and the acceptance of young people (Olvera, 2024).

This analysis also seeks to align with the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This goal aims to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels” (Moran, 2025).

These objectives include specific targets, and the ones considered most important for this study are:

- “Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.”
- “By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime.”
- “Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms.”
- “Create effective, transparent, and accountable institutions at all levels.”

- “Ensure inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels that addresses needs.”
- “Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in global governance institutions.”
- “Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, to create the capacity at all levels, particularly in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.”
- “Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.”

Goals extracted from the official United Nations page (2024).

SDG 16 aligns with this analysis by focusing on building strong institutions, inclusive participation, and justice. The emphasis on this SDG will allow us to determine whether populist leaders have strengthened the participation of young voters in Ecuador and Mexico. It will also enable an examination of young people's trust in democratic institutions. Their participation is crucial for political transformations and the construction of a better society.

1.2 State of the Art

Ecuador and Mexico have experienced significant changes in their political environments over the past decade. Left- and right-wing governments have shaped the history of both countries, with distinct political styles that have relied on populism as a tool and strategy. Additionally, both nations have deeply rooted cultures and ethnicities that have posed challenges for political campaigns, along with economic and social issues that have impacted these two countries.

Next, a review of the literature will be carried out and the findings obtained regarding populism among young voters in Ecuador and Mexico will be described, both on the right and left from 2007 to 2020.

Populism in this period is established and adapted to the needs of each country and to the discourse issued by each populist leader. For Laclau, populism could be conceptualized and treated as mere rhetoric; however, he proposes a different position that opposes it and where vagueness and indeterminacy do not constitute defects of a discourse, but in certain circumstances are related to social reality and are attached to people's emotions. Laclau places populism as a component of politics, affirming that in the Latin American context,

politics is a synonym of populism. In this region there is the articulation of different social demands, which are intended to be met by the populist leader, who demonstrates an ambiguous feeling of solidarity, but that the fulfillment of such demands, finally become a symbolic act for the people (De La Torre, 2005).

In Ecuador, as in the rest of Latin America, populism is adapted into its politics, and in recent government periods since 2007, the application of this political style has been quite evident. With the arrival of Rafael Correa and his so-called "Citizen Revolution," reference can be made to a new populism compared to previous governments, which evokes the historical memory of Ecuadorians regarding the liberal revolution of former president Eloy Alfaro. Correa employed a very concrete discourse that resonated with the middle and lower social classes, and like many left-wing politicians, his ideology and rhetoric opposed social inequalities. He sought to ensure that every citizen would feel recognized, heard, and developed a sense of belonging after having been neglected for many years.

Currently, Ecuador finds itself trapped in a labyrinth that, according to Rosero (2023) "está impuesto por el capitalismo, la dependencia, su historia y su presente" (p. 29). "is imposed by capitalism, dependency, its history, and its present" (p. 29). After a decade of left-wing governance, Ecuador has shifted to the right, with voters seeking a new alternative to lift the country out of crisis. However, factors such as corruption, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which exacerbated the country's crisis, and clashes between branches of government due to ideological and party disparities have made it difficult for the new right-wing leaders to manage the country and maintain control. Ecuador urgently needs profound restructuring and transformations to provide a better future for its people, but most importantly, to attract the vote and political interest of young people.

In this research work, it is not appropriate to conduct a critical analysis of former President Correa's government; however, his excellent handling of populism must be highlighted. Beyond having a highly effective discourse aimed at capturing the attention of the Ecuadorian people, he has managed to ensure that, over the years, his presence endures in the memory of his supporters and even those who are not or were not his followers.

Ecuador is on the verge of a new electoral contest, where Daniel Noboa, leader of the Democratic Action Movement (ADN), faces Luisa González, who leads the Citizen Revolution Movement (RC). Noboa seeks re-election, highlighting his efforts during his short term in areas such as security and the economy. Meanwhile, candidate González

proposes reinstating the economic justice policies implemented during the government of former President Correa, her mentor, and strengthening the role of the state.

Given the current context of populism and Ecuadorian politics, it is relevant to connect these events with the youth population. While their vote has been of considerable importance, it must also be acknowledged that there is a lack of political education. In many cases, young people lack the necessary economic resources, educational means, and access to reliable information, among other things. These resources are essential for playing significant roles in political parties or, at the very least, being part of an electorate that votes thoughtfully (Soto et al., 2022). On the other hand, following government changes, internal conflicts, and instability, many young people are not interested in participating in politics in any form, which is not ideal, considering that being involved in politics could benefit them in the future. According to the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (Senplades, 2012), young people's political engagement occurs in an informal context between the ages of 17 and 24, and they express their discontent with politics through social media messages, graffiti, street protests, and other means. In Ecuador, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), young people aged 18 to 30 make up 25% of the electoral roll, which is significant and important. However, not all of this percentage actively participates (2023), prompting the National Electoral Council (CNE) to design informational campaigns to encourage young people to become more involved in democratic processes (2021).

The lack of political interest among young people is not a phenomenon exclusive to Ecuador; it parallels Mexico, which, like many Latin American countries, experienced a popular, agrarian, and nationalist movement during its revolution. This movement overthrew the oligarchy in 1910 as a response to social inequality, wealth concentration, land dispossession from peasants, repression, and the absence of political freedom under Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship (Citizen Portal of the Government of the State of Mexico, 2025). Since this event, “the popular class” became part of a new revolution. From this milestone, the concept of populism emerged in Mexico and became a distinctive feature of political leaders (Magrini, 2019).

Between 2007 and 2020, Mexico has faced several governments changes the most recent being the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). In his political and populist style, he maintained a very particular communication strategy compared to previous presidents. López Obrador proposed a strategy/project called the “Fourth Transformation”,

which sought profound and structural change in the country's public life. This "transformation" followed three significant milestones in Mexico's history: Independence (1810–1821), the Reform (1857–1861), and the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917). His discourse used simple and direct language, rejecting corruption in Mexico and the control of elites over social classes. In his speeches, he emphasized "the people," the power mafia, neoliberalism, and social demands. It should be noted that these terms depend on Mexico's social reality. Like most populist leaders, López Obrador proposed in his new project the rescue of his people and the restoration of popular sovereignty. This can be considered a strategy to connect with sectors that feel unheard. To maintain this strategy, López Obrador consistently used the phrase "a servant for Mexico" and always sought to address the issue of inequality in the country. For many Mexicans, this discourse became a beacon of hope to resolve the economic and social problems the country faced (Flores & Amador, 2022).

Under this political approach, López Obrador had to convince the young Mexican electorate. Therefore, he focused on higher education, proposing spots for all high school graduates. While this goal captured young people's attention and promised them a place in a university, fulfilling it was quite uncertain. This proposal is considered an ambitious policy with limited resources, where the former Mexican leader used education as a means to attract young people who increasingly face limited access to higher education (Rodríguez & Maldonado, 2019).

In Mexico, young people aged 18 to 29 make up 27% of the electorate, making their participation decisive and important (Bobadilla, 2024). Despite this excellent percentage, according to Paula Ramírez, president of the Electoral Institute and Citizen Participation of the State, only 37% of the aforementioned percentage of young people went to the polls. According to a study conducted by this organization, young people do not fully trust politicians, this, like in Ecuador, Mexico is also conducting campaigns to encourage young people to get involved and participate in public decision-making (Muñoz, 2024).

As mentioned earlier, youth participation in politics is important, and a medium through which the populist discourse of various political leaders, specifically those in Ecuador and Mexico, has been disseminated is through technological means. Social media has marked a new milestone in political marketing, and both countries have been caught up in this wave of digital marketing.

According to Ramos et al., (2018), political marketing is a branch of marketing that uses platforms where politics can be operated in styles similar to commercial advertising. Its effect reduces voters' loyalty to a particular political party, causing indecision, which allows them to capture. The attention of new voters who have not yet defined their choice. Political marketing also involves significant investment by candidates during their campaigns.

Political marketing is not only present physically but also has a strong presence through digital media, as electronic devices are now part of everyone's daily life. Without them, there would be a kind of disconnection from the world. Therefore, politics does not overlook this behavior, and its presence in digital media reflects its discourse, public image, and political proposals. The pace of campaign dissemination through digital media is instantaneous, constant, and evolving, as various political parties imitate trends on social media or have the ability to create their own *trends*. Another advantage of political marketing through social media is interactivity with others, which allows any political party to position itself with a unique and innovative brand. This marketing is not limited to traditional methods; it provides a space where political marketers create a market where candidates, government officials, parties, and movements can address public opinion in a specific sector: their voters (Ramos et al., 2018). This digital political marketing strategy has proven to be a key tool in the political campaigns of Ecuador and Mexico.

In Ecuador's 2021 presidential elections, the impact of social media on voters, especially young people, was evident. Candidate Xavier Hervas effectively used digital platforms, where he stood out and achieved notable acceptance among young voters. He focused his campaign on proposals to improve health, employment, and education through Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, a strategy that earned him fourth place among 14 candidates with 15.68% of the votes (Tandazo et al., 2021).

Following this new trend in the country, in the 2023 elections, the “Citizen Revolution” movement used this digital strategy to attract young voters. Similarly, the political movement “National Democratic Action (ADN)” also applied the “infotainment” strategy, which allows them to inform their proposals and ideologies through methods that entertain the public. This helped expand the candidates' visibility (Morocho et al., 2024).

In Mexico, Manuel López Obrador used a phenomenon called “Amlitos,” which are products featuring the image of President AMLO, creating marketing with a concept titled “lovemark,” where a brand generates loyalty among its supporters, even beyond reason.

Dolls with his image were distributed and became even more well-known thanks to social media (Barragan, 2024).

The methods of conducting political campaigns and applying populism have evolved, aiming to attract voters. As previously mentioned, young people are the most engaged with technological media, often teaching those who are less familiar with social networks how to use them and stay updated on news and proposals that benefit them during political campaign seasons. Additionally, during recent presidential terms in both Mexico and Ecuador, information about projects or decrees has been transmitted firsthand through social media.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS AND CONTEXTUALIZATION OF POPULISM IN MEXICO AND ECUADOR, AND ANALYSIS OF YOUNG VOTERS IN EACH COUNTRY.

2.1 Populism and its approaches

Populism in Latin America takes various forms. It not only adapts to the rhetoric of the populist leader but also encompasses different approaches, with Di Tella providing the best summary based on Germani's legacy. In the structural-functional theory, the working masses emerge from structural tensions caused by the transformation from a traditional society to a modern one, specifically through the internal migration within a country as people move from rural areas to cities in search of better opportunities. The elites seek to dominate this new sector and emphasize focusing their attention on these minorities (Aldao & Damin, 2013).

Populism can later develop into an economic structural approach where social and economic structures play key roles in discussions about populism. “The central elements for understanding populism are those referred to in Marxist jargon as industrialization, the creation of an incipient bourgeoisie, and the transition to a class-based society” (Aldao & Damin, 2013, p.155). According to the economic conditions of each sector of society, populist leaders can manipulate and tailor their discourse to the respective needs of the people (Aldao & Damin, 2013). In Latin America, this approach focuses on reducing dependency on imports to stimulate domestic production, leading populist governments to adopt protectionist measures (Economy and investment, 2024)). También los Estados populistas implementan políticas de nacionalización de sectores estratégicos e invierten grandes sumas de dinero en infraestructura y servicios sociales para unir el desarrollo económico y lo social (González & Bustamante, 2021).

To carry out the first two approaches, it is necessary to integrate discourse theory, which focuses on how populist leaders use language to mobilize and establish a closer relationship with their supporters, the people. This discourse is characterized by a narrative that divides society into “the people” and “corrupt elites”. According to Moffitt, the populist leader constructs their image as a representative of the people through their discourse, highlighting their proximity and authenticity compared to the elites (2016). Charaudeau (2019), proposes that populist discourse is simplistic and emotional, often reflecting an

economic logic rather than a cultural one. Nevertheless, nationalist sentiment and cultural identity remain key factors in the discourse of charismatic populist leaders. This discourse demonstrates how language operates beyond emotions and recurrent argumentation.

The study of populism requires research across various disciplines, such as geography, sociology, and history, among others. This analysis focuses on two countries with politically fertile histories in populism: Ecuador and Mexico.

2.2 Populism in Ecuador

Populism and its approaches have been adapted to meet the existing needs within a community, in this case, Ecuador and Mexico. To contrast the impact of populism among young voters, it is essential to contextualize the situation in both countries.

Ecuador is a country located in northern South America, with a history similar to its neighboring countries, stemming from the disintegration of Gran Colombia and its struggle for independence. After achieving independence, Ecuador began its history as a republic in 1830 under its first leader, Juan José Flores, a Venezuelan who obtained Ecuadorian nationality through the aristocrat Mercedes Jijón Vivanco. This consolidated a new colonial culture, where familial ties were present not only in civil governance but also in ecclesiastical matters (Ponce, 2006) .

Starting from Ecuador's political beginnings, its social structure was deeply divided, with laws protecting the elite while neglecting peasants. Subsequent presidents attempted to implement institutional reforms and foster progress for the country. These governments included “Vicente Rocafuerte (1835–1839), Gabriel García Moreno (1860–1865 and 1869–1875), and Eloy Alfaro (1895–1901 and 1906–1911)” (Paz y Miño, 2006, p. 90).

Following the Juliana Revolution in 1925, the country began state modernization, advancing support for banana agro-exportation and gradually strengthening industrial development. However, agricultural production lost its economic dominance, leading to internal migration as peasants moved to cities, contributing to urban growth (Paz y Miño, 2006.). Amid these milestones in Ecuador's economic and social evolution, a political style emerged under President José María Velasco Ibarra, who governed the country for five terms (1934–35, 1944–1947, 1952–56, 1960–61, 1968–72). Velasco Ibarra centered his discourse on understanding the resentment of the masses as a strategy to attract them, highlighting the struggle between the people and the oligarchy. When Velasco Ibarra launched his candidacy, only 3% of the population voted for him. He was considered the candidate of the highland

landowners and the rural petite bourgeoisie. However, he gained supporters by meeting their demands, dramatizing his returns from exile, and portraying himself as a “redeemer” who would save the people. He traveled across the country, spreading his message and paving the way for mass politics or a populist style that remains present in Ecuador since Velasco Ibarra's government (Rivera et al., 2022).

On February 15, 1972, during a so-called “carnavalazo”, referencing carnival festivities, Army Commander Guillermo Rodríguez Lara led a coup d'état, taking the presidency of Ecuador. This event occurred without violence due to the country's political instability, as Velasco Ibarra had been declared a dictator after breaking the coalition that brought him to power (Paladines, 2016).

After Velasco Ibarra's presidency, populism did not gain significant traction among other politicians who assumed Ecuador's presidency until the campaign and government of Jaime Roldós Aguilera. Roldós came to power with the CFP (Concentration of Popular Forces) party, which initially had more influence on the coast. Its structure included the party leader, neighborhood leaders, and the masses or political followers. In power, Roldós proposed a government of change and development, with equitable distribution of the country's resources to Ecuadorians (Moreano & Donoso, 2006). He reached every sector of Ecuadorian society with a discourse focused on patriotic exaltation, fostering a nationalist sentiment among the people. Alpusig et al. reference that Roldós aimed to soften his rhetoric while evoking action from people in need of his support. He avoided excessive praise, except when addressing the armed forces, as minimizing his political figure would have been a mistake during a time when firmness was expected (2023). It is evident that the former president based his populism on discourse theory, as his rhetoric sympathized with Ecuadorians' demands, strategically using soft yet assertive language that portrayed him as a strong authority.

The Ecuadorian people's acceptance of Roldós' government was evident in every public speech. However, his term was short-lived due to his death during his presidency, a milestone that plunged the country into uncertainty. Following the premature death of Jaime Roldós, Abdalá Bucaram, a former CFP member, founded the Ecuadorian Roldosist Party in his memory and with the intention of continuing his legacy. The party's structure was similar to the CFP, but instead of neighborhood leaders, provincial chiefs strengthened its territorial presence. Bucaram won Ecuador's presidency in 1996, reaffirming the presence of populism in the country through his political campaign aimed at confronting and dismantling

the oligarchy to consolidate populism as a political style. Bucaram's campaign heavily relied on television, using simple videos with subtitles with the slogan “La 10, la de los pobres” [The 10 for the poor] or “El líder de los pobres” [The leader of the poor]. His innovative use of television sought to represent people's aspirations for success and social mobility, such as sharing a soccer match with a renowned player, hosting a program, or meeting famous figures from Ecuadorian television, radio, or press—despite his strained relationship with the media. Bucaram was known for disregarding norms or protocols during presidential events, preferring to dramatize his dreams of grandeur and personal achievements, portraying himself as humble and prioritizing the people's needs over his presence among the elite. Despite his closeness to the people and their needs, his political instability, disorganized image, and accusations of being “crazy” led to his removal in 1997 (Moreano & Donoso, 2006). Bucaram's use of digital media to spread his message paved the way for digital marketing and revolutionized campaign methods for future politicians. Again, discourse theory is referenced, where Bucaram empathized with the “poor people”, who, according to his narrative, had been forgotten and marginalized by the oligarchy.

Following Bucaram's chaotic and brief term, Ecuador entered a new phase of turbulence and political instability marked by irregularities, institutional crises, and corruption. It is important to note that the governments that took over Ecuador after Bucaram and before Correa exhibited populist traits, except for Jamil Mahuad, who did not use populism in his campaign or government. Instead, Mahuad was responsible for one of Ecuador's most devastating economic crises, the 1999 banking holiday, and announced the country's dollarization. Tired of political imbalance and governments unable to complete their terms due to inefficiencies, Ecuadorians placed their trust in a new and young politician named Rafael Correa Delgado in 2007. Correa promised a “Citizen Revolution,” aiming to restore trust in institutions, dismantle mafias, and, with his leftist ideology, address the needs of the most vulnerable while rejecting political interests, stating that “the homeland now belongs to everyone” (Soto, 2021).

Former President Correa implemented profound transformations in the country, reducing poverty and increasing public spending in key areas such as education, where schools and colleges were built, educational texts were distributed to public and private institutions (subtly transmitting indoctrination messages), and free meals were provided. In healthcare, new hospitals were established, patient care improved, and free medications were distributed. Housing projects under MIDUVI (Ministry of Urban Development and

Housing), human development bonds, community police units, road construction and improvement nationwide, and other social investments were also implemented (Soto, 2021).

This explains the enduring affection of the people for the former president, even after his term, despite controversies revealed by subsequent presidents. However, it is important to analyze his rhetoric and how he adapted populism to his ideology. Correa presented himself as a charismatic leader seeking to restore the homeland damaged by previous governments (Soto, 2021).

In his political campaign, the application of the Laclausian discourse technique is evident. This method focuses on analyzing how political identities, hegemonies, and power relations are constructed through discourse (Saur, 2013). Additionally, his speeches incorporate excerpts from the Bible, considering Ecuador's significant Catholic and Christian population. The former president frequently quoted figures like Che Guevara and Sandino, always concluding his speeches with the phrase "Hasta la Victoria Siempre." [Ever onward to victory!]. Building on this, Correa's movement continued with a "performance" that involved smiling, dancing, and singing enthusiastically with the people during every public appearance, where everyone, adults, young people, and even children participated (De la Torre, 2010), Correa views the people as:

Not a conceptual ghost, not a worn-out rhetorical word, but a palpable reality that demands loyalty, affection, dedication, and sacrifice. The people pay our salaries, the food we bring to our homes; the people are north and south, depth of life, nurturing seed (Correa, 2009, cited by De la Torre, 2010, p. 9).

His reference alludes to a multicultural nation with diverse ethnic groups that were marginalized under previous administrations, limiting their opportunities. At this point, the populist leader emphasized his complete commitment to the people's benefit rather than his own, aiming to advocate for those who had been forgotten. His work focused on ending neoliberal policies, distancing Ecuador from the United States to establish full autonomy, and granting rights to nature, among other initiatives (De la Torre, 2010).

Despite all these changes and improvements for the country, the final term of former President Correa's administration began to show a decline due to Ecuador's economic situation. In 2016, Ecuador was struck by an earthquake in Manabí, and oil revenue dropped from 17% of GDP in 2006 to 3.28% in 2015, leading Correa to declare the country's economy in recession. Additionally, by late 2016, Latin America saw a shift to the right

following the departure of leftist governments and the Venezuelan crisis, as the situation for 21st-century socialism worsened (Meléndez & Moncagatta, 2017). Ecuadorians' credibility and trust in the “Citizen Revolution” continued to weaken. Rafael Correa concluded his presidency in 2017 but promised to continue what he had started by presenting his former vice president, Lenín Moreno, as his successor. Moreno won the presidency but chose to distance himself from some of his predecessor's policies and reveal numerous irregularities from the previous administration, ultimately breaking away from Correa's movement. This marked a significant blow to Correa's project, the “Citizen Revolution”, effectively ending a socialist era in the country. These events discouraged the population from continuing to vote for leftist parties, paving the way for new governments leaning more toward the political right in search of change for the country. In contrast to Correa's movement, populism was not as pronounced in the governments that followed. While two right-wing presidential terms have concluded in Ecuador, the memory and desire among many Ecuadorians for Correa's movement to return remain evident. Although it is no longer the country's leading political force, it holds a solid second position.

In the recent elections, Daniel Noboa secured victory after a closely contested first and second round, where his main opponent was the leader of the Citizen Revolution, Luisa González. Candidate González repeatedly referenced in her speeches the continuation of former President Correa's project, proposing to maintain public spending on security, health, and education, while reintegrating marginalized groups. These proposals allowed her to gain significant acceptance in the country, especially along the coast. On the other hand, Noboa focused his campaign on avoiding the mistakes of the past, particularly regarding the corruption cases exposed during Correa's administration, and he advocates for a new Ecuador. Due to uncertainty and a pronounced indecision among Ecuadorians, returning to vote in the second round became inevitable, which in turn led to significant voter absenteeism in the first round.

During the second-round campaign, the stance of Correísmo was centered on recalling Correa's achievements and decade in power. On the other hand, Noboa focused on an anti-Correísmo discourse rather than concrete proposals. Social media once again played a key role in both candidates' campaigns, directly disseminating pro- and anti-Correísmo rhetoric, along with each candidate's proposals, to the broader public.

In the second round, absenteeism was significantly lower than in the first round. Additionally, optional votes played a crucial role, driven by concerns about the country's

future. As a result, Daniel Noboa secured the presidency with 56% of the votes, while Luisa González received 44% (CNE, 2025). With these results, the Citizen Revolution once again loses the presidency, along with credibility and public acceptance. However, it is important to note that there is no complete trust in Daniel Noboa either. Many citizens viewed him as the less harmful option for the country, as his first year in office was met with strong criticism. One of the most significant controversies was the invasion of the Mexican embassy, which tarnished Ecuador's reputation as a reliable country. On the other hand, before the presidential elections, Ecuador's country risk stood at around 1,908 points. After Noboa's victory, it dropped to 1,282, which in turn restored confidence among international investors (Cañizares & Álvarez, 2025). On the other hand, before the presidential elections, Ecuador's country risk stood at around 1,908 points. After Noboa's victory, it dropped to 1,282, which in turn restored confidence among international investors.

Due to all these factors, Noboa's victory seemed almost guaranteed, despite the strong popular support for candidate González. In the first round, ADN, Daniel Noboa's political party, managed to secure a significant majority in the National Assembly. Thanks to this, President Noboa has a clear path to implementing his policies. This new presidential term begins with a nation filled with hope and high expectations for transformation, particularly in key areas such as security, health, and employment.

2.3 Populism in Mexico

Mexico is a country located in North America that shares the Spanish language with other countries in South America, as well as some in Central America and the Caribbean. Due to its geographical and population size, Mexico surpasses and differs from Ecuador in many economic and social aspects. However, in terms of governments, they share ideologies and populist styles. Mexico is rich in culture and history. For the purposes of this research, the analysis will begin with its emancipation from Spanish rule in 1821. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico, in 1824, Mexico enacted the first Federal Constitution of the United Mexican States following the dissolution of Agustín de Iturbide's Mexican Empire (Martí, 2025).

Mexico began its history as a republic under the leadership of Miguel Ramón Adaucto Fernández y Félix, known to the Mexican people as Guadalupe Victoria. His term lasted from 1824 to 1829. He founded the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation and purchased the freedom of some slaves to progressively eradicate slavery. However, these actions were

not entirely welcomed by the Mexican elite. His successor, Vicente Guerrero (1829), who had Afro-Mexican and Indigenous ancestry, continued Guadalupe Victoria's ideology and abolished slavery in Mexico. He supported free education but left his position as leader to combat a rebellion against his government (Covarrubias, 2024).

During its first century as the Federal Republic of Mexico, several leaders contributed to the country's evolution and transformations that remain significant in the lives of Mexicans. However, these governments continued to experience sociopolitical instability, and populism was not evident in their campaigns or terms. Between 1877 and 1910, Porfirio Díaz imposed a dictatorship, bringing a brief calm despite his tyranny and oppression of those who dared to oppose him. In its second century, Mexico's political history began to reflect populism with the founding of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) in 1929. This party was composed of generals who had participated in the Mexican Revolution that overthrew Díaz in 1910 (Entrena, 2001).

Between 1934 and 1940, Lázaro Cárdenas began his presidency. The former president renamed the PNR to the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PMR). The party included peasants, workers, and all those considered middle to lower class, transforming it into a party with mass policies that channeled and controlled the people's demands (Córdova, 1974, citado por Entrena, 2001). Cárdenas nationalized oil and railroads, implemented agrarian reform, and distributed a significant amount of land to peasants. With his closeness to the people, who had long felt forgotten, he created and promoted social justice policies for workers and supported unions. This government was described as structurally populist, as it referred to the creation of political-institutional structures to institutionalize the sociopolitical production processes of populism. However, the strategy of proposing measures to address demands did not have long-term effects, ultimately working against Cárdenas (Entrena, 2001). While the PRI had more candidates, who reached the presidency of Mexico, the use of populism was not as evident as during Cárdenas' government. Structural functionalist populism became noticeable due to the modernization of Mexican society, where marginalized individuals gained access to new opportunities. Between 1940 and 1976, governments did not incorporate populism into their political strategies.

In 1976, José López Portillo assumed the presidency of Mexico. He adapted populism into his discourse, stating that his goal was to settle accounts with the previous administration under Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970–1976). Mexico had been left with rising inflation, drastically reduced investment in all economic sectors, government deficits, and significant

growth in external debt (Leal, 1990). López sought to restore trust among entrepreneurs in the government and institutions of Mexico. After implementing strong measures, such as fulfilling the letter of intent signed by the previous government with the International Monetary Fund, and overcoming the economic difficulties inherited by López, he regained the trust of national and foreign investors due to rising oil prices (Covarrubias, 2024). This is a clear example of economically focused populism, where López adapted his discourse and strategies according to the country's economic situation and the needs of each social sector. The former president directed his efforts toward national and international entrepreneurs to prioritize the country's economic stability as a means to strengthen his legitimacy and maintain popular support.

Another economically focused populist strategy by López was increasing public spending due to the oil boom during his term. The former president proposed managing abundance, but once again, projects with favorable results only had short-term projections. Additionally, in 1981, Mexico faced another crisis due to falling hydrocarbon prices. In 1982, López concluded his presidency with a significant loss of trust from the people and entrepreneurs. The peso suffered a substantial devaluation, leading to the nationalization of banks. López delivered a speech in which he stated, “I will defend the peso like a dog.” Nevertheless, his government was tarnished by the economic crisis and lack of credibility (Leal, 1990).

In 1988, Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office in Mexico. However, from the beginning of his term, he had little public support, as it was suspected that he had committed electoral fraud against his opponent, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of Lázaro Cárdenas. Despite this, Salinas continued his term, attempting to address the country's crisis caused by his predecessors. Salinas implemented a discourse characterized by optimism in the face of economic adversity and public discontent. While his government was marked by neoliberal policies, he used populist methods such as the “Solidarity” program, which focused on investing in basic infrastructure such schools, health centers, and housing, aiming to stabilize the Mexican people. However, this program was heavily criticized for its underlying political clientelism intended to strengthen the former president's image. Salinas' project aimed to achieve economic change and build new alliances with private enterprises and other countries. He took actions against feudal figures such as the leader of the oil workers' union and a former feared police chief, restoring discipline in public and private institutions. Unlike previous governments, Salinas implemented a significant measure with long-term positive

economic consequences for Mexico: The Project of Economic Integration and Liberalization with its northern neighbors, the United States and Canada. This undoubtedly restored economic stability to the country. However, despite these transformative measures, there was an uprising among indigenous communities demanding work, land, housing, and other needs they felt were unmet (Meyer, 1993). Salinas' populist approach was neither structurally functionalist nor based on discourse theory, which is why vulnerable sectors of the population did not sympathize with his government. In 1994, Salinas concluded his term with neoliberal measures that occasionally had populist undertones.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, governments were not labeled as populist. However, it is important to mention and analyze the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto, who began his presidency in 2012 after proposing transformative and modernizing measures for Mexico during his campaign. In his speeches, he emphasized the need to reform sectors such as energy, education, and telecommunications, aiming to position himself as a reformist leader detached from traditional practices (Muciño, 2016). Peña Nieto often criticized populism, considering it risky for democracy and economic stability. However, his rhetoric and projects contradicted this stance. Programs like the "National Crusade Against Hunger" reflected a welfare populism. This program aimed to reduce extreme poverty, but it revealed political and electoral motives, including resource mismanagement, which increased public distrust (Martínez & Romo, 2022). He promoted structural reforms promising economic benefits; however, in 2017, he implemented the "*gasolinazo*", a measure that removed fuel subsidies and raised prices. Despite being a fiscal adjustment, it disregarded public opinion, leading to protests and mass demonstrations (Nájar, 2018). This shows that populism can exist in governments that reject it. Peña Nieto's constant contradictions weakened public trust and credibility in his administration.

After Peña Nieto's term ended in 2018, marked by controversies due to his misguided policies, attention shifted to analyzing the politics, rhetoric, and populist strategies of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who is considered a leftist politician with a clear focus on the people.

In his third bid for the presidency, López Obrador achieved the long-awaited victory and began his term in 2018. His administration started by reversing an educational reform implemented by his predecessor, Enrique Peña Nieto, which aimed to improve education in Mexico. This reform evaluated teachers' capabilities and professionalism, with those opposing it facing dismissal or imprisonment. It also established an institution to oversee

educational evaluations. By overturning this reform, López Obrador captured the attention of young Mexicans and promoted his unprecedented proposal for accessible education for all Mexican youth, regardless of social class. He also proposed scholarship options for everyone and granted autonomy to universities. This project could be considered a poor decision, given its generosity but limited state resources. For this reason, the focus shifted to providing scholarships and benefits to public institutions (Rodríguez & Maldonado, 2019).

López Obrador's governance strategy was guided by populism and the sentiment of neglect among marginalized sectors. The former president incorporated anti-establishment rhetoric into his speeches, highlighting the value of the people who had been forgotten for years. In addition to criticizing corrupt elites, López Obrador firmly opposed the mafia and Mexico's social issues. He nationalized strategic resources like lithium and strengthened the state's role in economic matters (Sarsfield, 2023). López Obrador utilized populism in all its forms, adapting it to his leftist ideology. He also embraced the digital era, using digital platforms to ensure greater access to his rhetoric. Additionally, he employed physical methods like “Amlitos”, dolls bearing his image, which served as a reminder to the people and potentially favored re-election or the election of another candidate from his party.

The former president's political and populist strategy benefited his party and generated public trust. Currently, Mexico is under the leadership of Claudia Sheinbaum, an ally of former leftist president López Obrador. She began her presidency in 2024, stating in her speeches that López Obrador's proposed Fourth Transformation would not “backtrack” and that the policies implemented during the previous administration would continue to be developed, ensuring that the project endures through history. There is a strong relationship between the current president and the former president (Raziel, 2024).

2.4 Young voters of Ecuador and Mexico

This study analyzes the fundamental role of young people in electoral contests, highlighting their influence and, in many cases, their decisive impact on the results. This relevance stems from their significant connection to digital media, which has transformed how political proposals and speeches are disseminated. Through their constant interaction with social networks, young people not only have immediate access to political information but also generate opinions, mobilize other young people, and actively participate in debates. Additionally, they show growing concern about their future, understanding that the decisions made by a new government will directly impact their professional and personal development,

as well as the quality of life for future generations. Therefore, their interest in elections goes beyond voting; they seek to express their demands for proposals that address and fulfill their needs and aspirations. They also pay close attention to political speeches with which they identify.

It is important to note that, according to UNESCO, a young person is defined as being between the ages of 15 and 24 (Inyang, 2025). Meanwhile, the World Health Organization defines youth as individuals aged 10 to 19 (2025). The main characteristics of this group include making hasty or poorly thought-out decisions, having strong social media skills, demonstrating greater commitment to society and environmental issues, and actively participating in debates and decision-making at both national and global levels (Meneses, 2025).

When discussing decision-making in their countries, it is essential to highlight young people's participation in politics. In Ecuador and Mexico, voting is mandatory starting at age 18. Ecuador has the unique feature of offering optional voting for young people aged 16 to 18; however, this vote does not represent a significant majority. According to the CNE, adolescents exercising optional voting account for only 4.7% (Ortiz, 2025). This small segment of the electoral roll often cannot be considered a conscious or well-thought-out vote, as most adolescents aged 16 to 18 do not show commitment or responsibility in choosing a new government. Therefore, they do not represent a relevant sector for this study.

On the other hand, in Ecuador, young people aged 18 to 29, whose vote is mandatory, make up 20.22% of the electoral roll (Ortiz, 2025). This percentage is representative and vital for the country's decision-making. However, distrust generated by recent governments, security crises, and limited job opportunities have led to disengagement among young people. In 2023, Ecuador had 276 organizations eligible to participate in sectional elections, yet young people's presence was not significant. This was also evident in the high number of null votes, blank votes, and absenteeism (Segura et al., 2023).

Despite these discouraging figures for the country, politicians have sought and developed strategies to capture young people's attention, starting with the use of social media to disseminate their proposals. These proposals are increasingly tailored to young people's needs, such as education and employment. However, the level of distrust outweighs even the most attractive proposals. In Ecuador, the program “Youth Vote+: Social and Civic Activation of Young People” was implemented, focusing on education with civic

engagement. However, this program did not yield favorable results (Amna, 2012, cited by Vélez et al., 2022). Despite low interest in the last two elections, digital marketing strategies attracted more young people, and the adaptation of political discourse on social media captured the attention of this demographic.

In Mexico, the importance of young people's participation in electoral processes is also emphasized. According to data from the National Electoral Institute (INE), 25% of the electoral roll consists of young people aged 18 to 29 (2024). In the 2024 elections, according to the INE, 61.53% of 18-year-olds participated, while participation among those aged 25 to 29 was 47.4% (2024). These figures are significant for understanding young people's decision-making and for implementing proposals that attract their vote.

Mexican candidates are aware of the importance of young people's participation. For this reason, as in Ecuador, they have developed projects and proposals that include improving access to higher education and job stability to attract young people's interest in participating in electoral contests. In 2018, the Mexican government under López Obrador adopted the program “Youth Building the Future,” which provided paid training to 2.3 million young people. This reflected a leftist strategy focused on social justice, inclusion, and the strengthening of the domestic market (Cervantes et al., 2023). The implementation of this program restored a small degree of trust and economic stability among young Mexicans. Additionally, previous governments, through the Ministry of Public Education, developed the policy “I Won't Drop Out”, recognizing the public issue of young people abandoning the education system (Hernández, 2021). In this way, the government became involved in social issues, creating a bond that fostered attachment among young people, earning their sympathy and, in future electoral contests, a secure vote in gratitude for the support provided through these programs.

Thus, it is understood that current politicians recognize the importance and weight of young people's votes in both Ecuador and Mexico. To prevent disinterest among young voters, projects have been implemented that emphasize meeting this sector's needs. However, not all young people receive this type of assistance or training, leading those who do not benefit from these incentives to show greater indifference. Therefore, leaders' strategies to reach these young people include digital marketing and political marketing aligned with lovemark.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

3.1 PRISMA Methodology

For the completion of this or the completion of this study, the PRISMA methodology (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was employed as a guideline for conducting and presenting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. This methodology enhances the transparency, quality, and consistency of the research, facilitating the assessment of scientific evidence. PRISMA includes a set of guidelines, a checklist, and a flow diagram that help describe the study selection process, from the initial search to the inclusion of relevant articles (Moher et al, 2009). For this study, it was necessary to consult digital libraries such as Dialnet, Scielo, Redalyc, and Google Scholar, with the latter being the primary source from which most articles were retrieved.

The article selection process began with a search for documents whose titles referenced populism. Following this, documents discussing populism in both Ecuador and Mexico were prioritized, and finally, articles focusing on youth and young voters in both countries were included. The initial selection consisted of 120 articles, of which 45 were excluded due to weak relevance to the study's theme. For the next screening phase, the titles of the remaining 75 articles were re-reviewed, ensuring the publication years were appropriate and that access to the full texts did not pose significant challenges. In the final selection stage, the abstracts of the articles were read, allowing for a more precise content evaluation and ensuring their relevance in meeting the study's objectives. This process resulted in 69 articles, which have been essential to the development of this research.

3.2 Results

Despite their geographical and demographic differences, Mexico and Ecuador share many cultural traits, beginning with their histories, which were shaped by colonization and later by their struggles for independence. Once both nations established themselves as republics, they experienced various administrations, among which those that employed populism as a political strategy or adopted populist methods, despite not officially identifying as populist governments, were analyzed in this study.

During the administrations of Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador and Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, populism was clearly aligned with discourse theory. Both presidents delivered charismatic and impassioned speeches, emphasizing their closeness to the people and their empathy for public needs. They frequently traveled across their respective countries to hold rallies, aiming to connect with the largest possible segments of the population. However, while Velasco Ibarra promised social justice reforms, many of them could not be implemented due to uprisings and coups. In contrast, Lázaro Cárdenas successfully enacted his most significant reforms, including agrarian reform, socialist education, and support for the working class. In this way, these two prominent populist leaders and skilled orators paved the way for further study of subsequent governments.

Next, a comparison will be made for each approach mentioned in the second chapter of this research study.

Table 1
Populism with a structural economic approach

Ecuador		México	
José María Velasco Ibarra	He promised economic reforms, but political instability restricted their implementation.	Lázaro Cárdenas	He nationalized oil and railways, implemented agrarian reform, and strengthened labor unions.
Jaime Roldós	He proposed taxes, agrarian, and educational reforms, but his government was brief and failed to consolidate deep economic changes.	José López Portillo	Increased public spending during the oil boom, but his administration ended in economic crisis due to the fall in oil prices.
Abdalá Bucaram	He implemented limited social programs, and his government was unstable.	Carlos Salinas	Introduced neoliberal policies, such as the Free Trade Agreement, and social programs like "Solidaridad," though criticized for clientelism.
Rafael Correa	He raised public spending on education, health, and infrastructure to strengthen popular support.	Enrique Peña Nieto	He carried out structural reforms, such as energy reform, but the "gasolinazo" negatively impacted his approval.
		Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Strengthened social programs and nationalized strategic resources.

Note: This table presents a comparison of how presidents in Ecuador and Mexico have employed populist strategies based on economic factors. According to Chapter Two of this study, data has been included on redistribution policies, social programs, subsidies, and the impact these measures have had on lower-income groups. Additionally, it examines how these policies align with economic narratives that promise to improve living conditions and reduce inequalities.

Table 2
Populism with a structural functionalist approach

Ecuador		México	
José María Velasco Ibarra	Mobilized the masses and dramatized his connection with the people, but without institutionalization	Lázaro Cárdenas	Created political-institutional structures to modernize society and integrate working-class groups.
Jaime Roldós	Mobilized the people with a patriotic and nationalist discourse, seeking unity in times of crisis.	José López Portillo	Attempted to strengthen the government's legitimacy through political and social reforms, though without a solid structure.
Abdalá Bucaram	Centered his populism on emotional connection with the masses and the use of media.	Carlos Salinas	Sought to modernize the country's political and economic structure, but faced social discontent due to persistent inequalities.
Rafael Correa	Institutionalized populism through his "Citizen Revolution" and used indoctrination methods via books, food, and other means.	Enrique Peña Nieto	Attempted to connect with vulnerable sectors through welfare programs.
		Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Linked the State structure with the people and promoted the "Fourth Transformation".

Note: This table compares the structural and functional dimensions of populism in both countries. It focuses on the organization of power, the relationship between democratic institutions and populist leaderships, and the structural impact of political decisions on social systems. It examines how social structures transform and adapt in response to populist dynamics.

Table 3
Populism with discourse theory

Ecuador		México	
José María Velasco Ibarra	Used an emotional discourse with a narrative of a people's redeemer confronting the oligarchy.	Lázaro Cárdenas	Employed an inclusive and nationalist discourse, framed within the struggle against the elites.
Jaime Roldós	Used firm and emotional language, emphasizing democratic values and human rights.	José López Portillo	Highlighted revolutionary nationalism and the defense of the people in his discourse, appealing to Mexican identity.
Abdalá Bucaram	Delivered a provocative discourse with direct appeals to the fight against the oligarchy.	Carlos Salinas	His discourse was contradictory: he promoted social liberalism while implementing neoliberal measures.
Rafael Correa	Used religious and revolutionary elements, emphasizing the people's protagonism.	Enrique Peña Nieto	Adopted a reformist discourse, but contradictions affected his credibility.
		Andrés Manuel López	Centered his discourse on opposition to corruption and neoliberalism, with a clear distinction between the people and the elite.

Nota: Este cuadro analiza las estrategias discursivas utilizadas por los líderes populistas de ambos países. Se desglosan los mensajes clave, el uso de símbolos nacionales, la construcción de “elites” como antagonistas y la representación de pueblo como protagonista que necesita ser escuchado y atendido. En este cuadro comparativo se destaca cómo en ambos países las narrativas discursivas se adaptan al contexto cultural y político.

3.3 Discussions

3.3.1 Dissemination of populism through digital marketing

Between 2007 and 2020, technology played a fundamental role in the political campaigns of the governments of Ecuador and Mexico. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa primarily conveyed his populist and indoctrinating message through national television, advertisements promoting his social project, and the “cadenas sabatinas”. At this point,

social media did not have a significant impact, as the population was still accustomed to traditional media, including television and radio campaigns. Following the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, Ecuadorians increasingly needed internet access, allowing technology to reach every corner of the country. In the 2021 elections, candidate Hervas revolutionized campaign methods in Ecuador through the social media platform TikTok, where he shared his proposals with a young audience that played a key role in spreading his message among the adult population. Although Hervas did not win the presidency, he introduced a new low-cost campaign strategy that proved effective for political outreach. The rapid expansion of digitalization and internet access made social media the most effective tool for political campaigning. In 2024, a new presidential election was announced due to political tensions and the dissolution of the sitting government. In this new contest, social media took center stage, with candidates using localized trends to communicate their messages and proposals. They also made their campaigns public through videos showcasing their connection with the people and their populist rhetoric. Following the debate and its dissemination on social media, young voters played a crucial role in promoting Daniel Noboa's strong performance, contrasting him with other candidates and positioning him as the most prepared contender, ultimately leading to his victory in Ecuador's presidential election. For this administration, social media has become the most effective communication tool, with young people serving as the key intermediaries between technology and the adult population

Similarly, Mexico adopted the use of social media as a key tool in political campaigns. Enrique Peña Nieto stood out for his digital strategy, utilizing platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to promote his campaign, share promotional videos, and deliver personal messages. This approach allowed him to interact directly with voters and humanize his image, successfully connecting with a younger audience and solidifying his path to the presidency. As one of the first politicians to base his campaign on technology, he set a precedent that would later be followed by other candidates.

A clear example is Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who turned social media into a fundamental tool for his 2018 campaign. His anti-establishment discourse was primarily disseminated through Facebook and Twitter, allowing him to spread his leftist ideology across all sectors of society, from the most marginalized populations to the highest social strata. The virality of his content, including the popular "Amlitos," reinforced his image as a popular leader. Beyond connecting with the people, he managed to gain their trust, which was crucial to his electoral success.

Subsequently, Claudia Sheinbaum continued this trend during her presidential campaign, advocating for the continuation of the "Fourth Transformation" initiated by López Obrador. She acknowledged the importance of social media in spreading her message and proposals, highlighting the role of young people as intermediaries between digital media and the adult population. Through these platforms, Sheinbaum successfully informed the public about the continuity of her predecessor's projects and conveyed inclusive and progressive messages, strengthening her connection with various sectors of society.

3.3.2. Public spending, higher education, scholarships, and indoctrination.

During Rafael Correa's government in Ecuador, public spending experienced a significant increase, primarily in education, health, infrastructure, and social programs. State investment expanded through the construction of schools, hospitals, and roads, aiming to strengthen the role of the state in the economy and ensure access to basic services. Meanwhile, in Mexico, under López Obrador's administration, public spending focused on social programs and reinforcing the state's role in strategic sectors, such as the nationalization of lithium. Investment in infrastructure was key to maintaining popular support and ensuring the continuity of the "Fourth Transformation".

Regarding scholarships, in Ecuador, Correa promoted a more accessible education system through educational subsidies such as scholarships for students from vulnerable sectors, facilitating access to public universities. Additionally, free school materials and meals were provided in educational institutions. On the other hand, López Obrador launched the "Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro" program, offering scholarships and financial support for young people seeking job training. Public universities were also strengthened with incentives to facilitate access for marginalized sectors.

It was observed that during Correa's government, elements of indoctrination were embedded in the educational system, particularly in school textbooks, school meals, and even in medications distributed by the state, which contained messages aligned with the political project of the "Citizen Revolution." Additionally, every piece of infrastructure built by the government featured logos referencing "Ecuador Ama la Vida," a project of Correa's administration. On the other hand, López Obrador's administration employed similar strategies to spread his vision of the "Fourth Transformation," consolidating narratives in educational and digital media to strengthen the political identity of his government. He also conveyed his message through books distributed by the Secretariat of Public Education. This

type of indoctrination was rejected by the opposition, who argued that children and young people should develop their own ideology rather than having it shaped by the government in both Ecuador and Mexico.

3.3.3 Current statistics on social media usage in Ecuador and Mexico and the influence of young people on adult voting

The impact of social media on daily life is increasingly evident. In Ecuador and Mexico, technology has become deeply integrated into the daily routines of their inhabitants, becoming a key component of social interaction and access to new information.

In Ecuador, according to Corporación Mucho Mejor Ecuador (2021), there are 14 million profiles across various digital applications, representing 77.8% of the population. Meanwhile, in Mexico, according to Villalobos (2024), 91.2% of the population uses the internet to access social media. In both Ecuador and Mexico, the most widely used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Through these platforms, politicians have been able to spread their speeches, proposals, and even create “trends” to capture the attention of a younger audience. This initiative, first adopted by López Obrador in Mexico and Xavier Hervas in Ecuador, influenced the decision-making of both young and adult voters. Additionally, it proved to be a more cost-effective alternative compared to traditional physical advertising.

Young people in both countries handle technology with greater fluency and skill, allowing them to receive the information that candidates want to convey more directly. In this way, young people become transmitters of information to the adult population, influencing their ideas and even swaying their vote toward another candidate. For this reason, it is considered that the latest elections in both countries were largely shaped by young people and technology.

It is important to mention that the use of technology has also been a part of misinformation, as third parties have used digital media to promote campaigns that undermine the intentions of other candidates or spread false messages about their lives and government projects.

3.3.4 Comparative table of the governments of Rafael Correa and López Obrador regarding the use of populism and their proposals that attracted young people.

Table 4
Comparative table

	Rafael Correa (Ecuador)	Andrés Manuel López O. (México)
Use of populism	Correa used an emotional and nationalist discourse, promoting the fight against the elites and positioning himself as the leader of the people. His narrative strategically included religious and revolutionary references to emotionally connect with the population.	AMLO employed an anti-neoliberal and anti-corruption discourse, establishing a clear division between the people and the elite. His narrative focused on social justice, the inclusion of marginalized sectors, the eradication of corruption, and the "Fourth Transformation."
Proposal for young people	He implemented scholarship programs and free access to higher education, as well as encouraging youth participation in social and educational projects.	He created programs such as "Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro," offering scholarships and job training for young people, and strengthened public universities to ensure universal access.
Connection strategies	Correa promoted the "Citizen Revolution" as an inclusive project, attracting young people with promises of change and educational opportunities.	AMLO used social media and viral content to connect with young people, highlighting his commitment to inclusion and the development of job and educational opportunities.
Impacto n Young people	He managed to gain the support of young people through educational policies and a discourse that positioned them as key agents of social change.	He consolidated his youth base by offering concrete solutions to issues such as unemployment and lack of access to education, earning their trust and support.

Note: This table examines the populist strategies of Rafael Correa and Manuel López Obrador. Key aspects include the rhetoric used to attract young people and the general population, the implementation of public policies aimed at youth, such as scholarships and university admission quotas in both countries. Both populist leaders identify themselves as agents of change and even propose being part of a new revolution or transformation, reaching young people with a nationalist and rebellious message.

CONCLUSIONS

Populism is present in both Ecuador and Mexico, and politicians understand that this style of politics connects them with the people. However, in the technological era the world is experiencing, young people are taking center stage. Between 2007 and 2020, youth engagement and interest in politics increased, and this study determined that in both countries, young people's participation has been gradually rising despite widespread distrust toward politicians. In Ecuador, where voting is mandatory, young people make up 22% of the electoral roll, which is significant, though this figure could increase in future elections. Meanwhile, in Mexico, where voting is not mandatory, 25% of young people participate, a representative percentage that could also improve. Despite the population differences between Ecuador and Mexico, their electoral rolls show similar trends and percentages. Both countries have implemented programs to attract young people's interest in politics, but the results have not significantly changed participation rates

In Ecuador, Correa, through the use of populism, consolidated a decade of a government with a strong leftist stance. However, his controversies and scandals prevented him from returning to power, allowing space for other politicians who do not follow his political line. After the latest elections, his party has been steadily losing influence in the country. On the other hand, before 2018, Mexico had governments like that of Peña Nieto, which generated distrust among the population, and whose failed projects led the people toward a new leftist government under López Obrador. He managed to build trust with his "Fourth Transformation" project and used populism to connect with the neglected sectors of society. Unlike Correa, López Obrador was able to consolidate his leadership and initiate a new government through Claudia Sheinbaum, who proposes to continue his political line and the projects he left behind.

Both former presidents sought to capture young people's attention through study scholarships and greater access to higher education. They even proposed equitable education, meaning that people from low-income backgrounds would not be placed below the elite but would be equally competitive and important in securing employment. In this way, young people gradually became more involved in politics.

On the other hand, digital marketing and proposals aimed at young people through fresh and simpler advertising have captured their attention and proven to be a highly effective strategy. In future elections, this could increase their participation rate, as young people are

the most open and adept at using social media. Proposals related to public spending in the academic sector have also drawn the interest of young people. Additionally, speeches with nationalist and rebellious tones have attracted the attention of the young audience aged 18 to 29 in both countries

Digitalization is undoubtedly a part of daily life for the people of both countries, and artificial intelligence continues to develop rapidly. As a result, this analysis raises uncertainty about how positive or negative the use of AI in political campaigns could be in future elections. Additionally, how much could its use influence the decisions of upcoming young voters? Without a doubt, technology is expanding into many fields, and politics is no exception.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Based on this comparative analysis, it is suggested to develop strategies for the governments of both Ecuador and Mexico to use social media more efficiently, attracting and increasing the electoral roll of young voters.

For future research, it is recommended to consider and study the rise of artificial intelligence and how it could generate false information through third parties or trigger negative campaigning, which could influence the people's voting decisions. Alternatively, AI could positively contribute to future political campaigns and the dissemination of political speeches and proposals.

It is recommended that the new governments of Ecuador and Mexico establish regulations that promote the responsible use of technology to create a cleaner democratic environment and prevent misinformation.

While both countries' governments have programs encouraging youth participation in politics, it is suggested that additional programs be created to train young people in political marketing through social media.

Finally, it is recommended to develop a method that allows the population to recognize whether AI-generated news is true or false. This could even be clarified through the CNE in Ecuador or the INE in Mexico.

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