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Unexpected Politicians: The Viral Celebrities of Unrest

Abstract: This chapter focuses on the so-called “Celebrities of the Unrest”, a series of people who rose to fame after becoming viral during the Chilean outburst of 2019, moving on to develop political careers. Widely popularised in social media and by media outlets, these figures expressed their protest messages through performative acts, such as using costumes in demonstrations or developing complex alter egos. After becoming heroes and popular icons, they started a process of converting their symbolic capital into a political one, successfully running for the Chilean Constitutional Convention in 2021. In doing so, they left the streets and become representatives in the most important institution in the country’s recent history. This was achieved despite their having no political background or connections. This research was conducted by tracing their respective individual social and political careers to understanding the different stages in the building of their characters, as well as the transformation process from mere demonstrators to influential politicians. Secondly, we collected and analysed social media network data from Twitter and conducted a sentiment analysis of YouTube comments for a better comprehension of the phenomenon. The results of this inquiry demonstrate the existence of shared features among the five cases, as they developed a particular style of leadership, combining traits from activism, microcelebrities and more traditional political activities.

Keywords: virality, celebrity politics, Chilean social outburst, pop politics

The Social Outbreak of October 2019 was a process that deeply shook the institutions of Chilean democracy and the ways in which citizens feel represented. For six uninterrupted months, both the streets and social media platforms became a field of political dispute and experimentation for new repertoires of social protest and political struggle.

One of these new ways of doing politics was that of the Celebrities of the Unrest, ordinary citizens who acquired viral fame, the status of icons and heroes and then managed to build an unprecedented symbolic and political capital.

Given their unexpected electoral success and the probable role that viral dynamics of communications may have played in their rise, it is worth asking how it is possible that people with no previous recognition, funding or political experience were elected to the Constitutional Convention, then considered the most im-

portant institution in the country's history. Furthermore, once they became part of the institution, do these viral mechanics continue to prevail in the response of the audiences to them?

To retrace their political paths, we conducted a meticulous review of press clippings (214) and other sources of information (156), such as interviews or blog articles, public transparency platforms, online forums and social media posts. Based on this information, it was possible to identify significant episodes of virality that were important to their rise to fame, plus others that emerged in real time while the first phase of the study was being conducted. To “catch” these viral episodes, we scraped data from Facebook and YouTube users' comments using RStudio Cloud's Tuber package, as well as Twitter data which was imported using NodeXL.

For the sentiment analysis, we adjusted the time frame of the sample, tokenised the text and filtered it with lexicon dictionaries, identifying eight basic emotional categories. Twitter interaction data and sentiment information were also visualised through sociograms, bar graphs and word clouds to facilitate analysis. In total, we analysed more than 4,962 user comments on Facebook, 14,338 on YouTube and 24,955 tweets.

This chapter is structured in three distinct sections. First, we describe the political and media context in which these people obtained viral fame. Second, we outline their personal and political trajectories and describe how they became viral personalities. Also, each subsection presents a viral episode involving each character, tracing the reaction of the audiences. The last section identifies a series of common traits that distinguish these figures, as well as proposing a discussion on the positive and negative aspects of this phenomenon regarding the quality of democracy in Chile.

1 A Moving Media and Political Context

1.1 New Informative Dynamics

In the last ten years, Chile has experienced several social, political and cultural changes that have transformed collective practices, and the way information and entertainment content is produced and consumed. Although large media conglomerates continue to operate in a centralised and vertical manner, social media has brought about new ways in which people, organisations, citizen journalists and social movements relate to each other.

The use of these new media for receiving information and news has increased rapidly, especially among young Chileans. According to a 2009 study by Feedback-UDP, free-to-air television was the most consumed and trusted source of information, with 56 percent of first-mentions and 85 percent of the total answers. In its 2021 report, the same survey found that television is now the least trusted media, with a 60 percent rejection rate. In contrast, social media went from being one of the least consumed and trusted media, with an average use of 1.6 hours a day and 12 percent trust, to an average daily consumption of 3.5 hours and 29 percent trust. In lower income segments, this level of confidence rises to 37 percent (Feedback Research 2021).

In addition to their massiveness and reach, Bolter (2019) argues that social media networks have become the ideal platform for the expression of new creative vanguards, new narratives, as well as voices and topics previously relegated to the status of the underground.

In terms of potential, these technologies have shown their capacity to produce significant effects on political activity and public opinion, either within the institutional system or from outside it. Some of the most important effects include changes in turnout levels, political polarization, the spread of hate speech and fake news, as well as modifications in the behaviour of influential public sphere stakeholders (see Enikolopov, Petrova and Zhuravskaya 2020). On the contrary, studies have proposed that these new forms of communication have reduced the costs of accessing information, brought new accountability relations and a sense of closeness between different sectors of society, such as politicians and citizens (Negrine 2008, Ceron 2017).

Although there is no consensus on the balance of benefits and disadvantages, the authors Falck, Gold and Heblich (2014) and Gavazza, Nardotto and Valletti (2019) have noted how the massive increase in access to internet and social networks has shifted much of the media offer towards entertainment, at the expense of opinion-forming content and political news. This shift is attributed, in part, to the increasing overlap between politics, especially elections and the commercial dynamics of digital marketing (see Street, Inthorn and Scott 2016). By applying strategies from the advertising world (widely familiar to those operating in the cultural industries), such as the collection and monitoring large amounts of behavioural patterns and data, campaign teams have been able to maximise reach and influence over public opinion (see Rogers and Nickerson 2014). Supported by a growing arsenal of data analytics tools, effective targeting and the viral-oriented environment provided by social media, politicians and activists can deploy messages that spread very quickly (see Rogers and Nickerson 2014).

1.2 The 2011 Protests

While there had been student demonstrations since the mid-2000s, Chile's mobilised sectors barely had a presence on the internet, at a time when the service had not yet become massive in the country. It was not until the student protests of 2011 that social networks were really “discovered” by social movements as a space for political dispute (see Solá-Morales and Rivera Gallardo 2016).

With a generation of high school students, who grew up with new technologies, as the main protagonists, the Student Movement found in social media a key tool for calling for demonstrations, sharing news and counter-information. Open communities on Facebook and the accounts of Student Federations and their leaders on Twitter managed to effectively push a series of slogans, messages and ideas into the public debate. These messages, most of them specially designed to go viral, served a dual function: While students were encouraged to maintain and radicalise their actions, government and Congress were challenged to meet their demands (see Solá-Morales and Rivera Gallardo 2016).

On the part of the mass media, most of the attention was given to movement's leaders, Camila Vallejo¹, Giorgio Jackson² and Gabriel Boric³, focusing on frivolous aspects such as their physical appearance, their personal hobbies or infantilising them. Despite the nature of their exposure being close to entertainment content, these leaders were able to take advantage of this for the benefit of the movement, which achieved, according to surveys, a high level of public approval (see Flores Leiva 2012). However, this construction of public image and celebration of these leaders led to strong criticism related to the manipulation of the movement and political opportunism, especially after the assumption that these leaders would run for office in the subsequent elections, as they actually did. Although after a few months the student movement declined, it represented a high point in the use of social media for the expression of unrest, which continued growing until 2019, constantly questioning the state of the political system.

1.3 The Social Outburst

The precarious balance in which the legitimacy of Chilean democracy found itself, 30 years after an incomplete transition from dictatorship and ten years since the

¹ Former MP, current Ministry General Secretariat of Government of Chile since March 2022.

² Former MP and Minister of the Presidency, Parliamentary Affairs and Social Development (2022–2023).

³ Former MP and current President of the Republic of Chile since March 2022.

student's movement, was shattered by the so-called Chilean Social Outburst of 2019, a cycle of protests unparalleled in the country's history. Though the announcement of the \$30 pesos (equivalent to 0.03 euros) increase in Santiago transport fares is considered the immediate trigger (see Mayol 2019, Martuccelli 2019), for some the popular revolt had been incubating for a long time and for a variety of reasons. Among the causes that explain its magnitude are the persistence of high inequality as a result of neoliberal policies (see Elizalde 2020, Landerretche 2021), urban and educational segregation (see Poduje 2020), the unmet expectations of an educated but materially precarious generation (see Peña 2020), political parties funding and corporate scandals (see Matamala 2021), to mention a few.

Added to this is the influence of trends at a more global level, such as a resurgence of the “springs” of 2011 (see Sanhueza Huenupi 2021), the global crisis of representation and distrust in democracy (see Mella 2020) and the influence of the fourth wave of feminism and the *gilets jaunes* protests in France in 2018 (see Martuccelli 2019). Finally, at the domestic level there would be a strong generational gap in Chile, expressed through a deep ideological and cultural distance between the youth and the generation that regained democracy in 1990 and lived through the Concertación governments (see Angelcos, Roca and Cuadros 2020, Alé Tapia, Duarte and Miranda 2021).

The situation reached its peak on 18 October, when most Metro stations were placed under heavy police guard. Although for a few hours the situation seemed to be under control, at midday there was a new widespread spate of fare-dodging that happened at different points of the network. During the afternoon, video footage that showed *Carabineros* (police force) injuring demonstrators and passers-by went viral and worsened the mood of crowds, who set the entrances of some stations on fire, as well as buses in the city centre. *Cacerolazos* (pot banging), barricades and demonstrations became more intense, sometimes turning into looting or property damage. Therefore, a State of Emergency was announced, authorising the Chilean Armed Forces to deploy on the streets for the first time since the end of the military dictatorship (see Cavieres Figueroa 2020).

Weeks later, Human Rights NGOs issued reports denouncing the indiscriminate use of violence including arbitrary arrests, improper use of weapons, torture and sexual abuse by policemen. In total, 34 people died between October 2019 and March 2020 for various reasons, seven of them as a result of direct actions by police or military forces. It is also estimated that more than 400 people suffered eye injuries, partially or totally losing their vision because of rubber or steel bullets (see Vallejos Muñoz, Retamal and Concha 2021).

The protests epicenter was Plaza Italia in Santiago, historically considered the boundary between the city's working class and upper-middle class neighbourhoods (see Matamala 2021). Renamed by the protesters as *Plaza de la Dignidad*

(Dignity Square) the area hosted public rallies every day for several months. Its surroundings faced destruction, violent clashes for control of the roundabout central island and the appearance of “characters” dressed in costumes or other performative elements. The height of the October events was on Saturday 25th with the so-called Million March. This historic demonstration, the largest in the country’s history, drew an estimated 1.2 million people just in Santiago, as well as a million of people mobilised in the regions. A political agreement was achieved on 15 November, with the compromise of a Referendum for a New Constitution to be opened. For some, this represented a political closure of the crisis, as protests started to demobilise. A year after, this proposal was approved with more than 78 percent of the votes, so new elections were called to decide who would draft it. This period was of great importance for the consolidation of the iconic characters, who would begin to prepare their political journey.

Although the demonstrations continued until the start of the COVID-19 quarantines, the agreement on the New Constitution was reached on 15 November. At the same time, a slow demobilisation took place, with the focus shifting towards sanitary and economic issues (see Heiss 2020).

The Social Outburst immediately became a political, social and cultural phenomenon whose images spread across the world, having a notorious and immediate parallel in digital spaces. Social media served as a meeting point, a place for organisation, catharsis or just expressing anger. But unlike previous movements of discontent, the communications about the 2019 demonstrations had a notable element of virality (see De Requená-Farré 2020). This would be conditioned by the high level of internet access, widespread use of smartphones and social media among the Chilean population. The events of October, as observed by García (2020) were the most recorded, transmitted, and mediated event in the country’s history.

The demonstrations had a strong anti-party character, were opposed to any agreement or concession with the government and lacked visible leadership. In this context, a series of individuals far from traditional politics, who came from the streets but went viral on social networks, became the symbols of the movement. These people, who also received circumstantial media exposure, quickly became iconic and heroic figures, becoming an important element of the movement’s symbolic and aesthetic repertoire.

A brief profile of each of these Unrest Celebrities – Rodrigo Rojas, Giovanna Grandón, Bessy Gallardo, Alejandra Pérez and Cristóbal Andrade – is presented in the following sections.

2 A Brief Overview of the Celebrities of Unrest

2.1 Bessy Gallardo

Bessy Gallardo is a 38-year-old lawyer and former Constitutional Convention member for Santiago's 8th district. A widow, mother of three, she had worked for several as a cashier while studying law at the Universidad de las Américas, considered one of the least selective universities in Chile.

Bessy rose to fame on the morning of 18 October 2019, after participating in a street reporting on Canal 13's morning show. Although the segment aimed to convey brief opinions from passers-by, due to Gallardo's eloquence her intervention ended up being extended for more than ten minutes, in which time she also interacted with the show's hosts in the studio. Her level of sharpness and argumentation led the hosts to invite her to the studio as a "citizen panelist" the following day, which she immediately accepted⁴.

Minutes later, excerpts of her participation were published⁵ on social media by Canal 13 and other popular accounts, such as TV blogger @Televisivamente⁶, receiving millions of views, thousands of reactions and comments on Facebook and around 9,400 retweets in the first 48 hours, becoming a national trending topic on Twitter for days, and as high as number 3 on 18 October 2019.

If until then the protests seemed to be motivated solely by the fare increase, Gallardo described a much broader pool of causes that justified the protests, including demands for better healthcare, education, pensions and other aspects. From then on, the show slightly modified the pattern of its dispatches, dropping the discussion around the price of fares and began to interview other passers-by on various other topics of the national social agenda.

During the following weeks, Gallardo participated as a guest on more morning shows and interviews, where she debated on equal terms with politicians, academics and television personalities. Although the protests were mostly self-organised, non-organic and lacked formal leadership, Bessy Gallardo became a sort of spokesperson for the Social Outburst. On YouTube, videos of her first speech and other opinions she gave on morning shows also went viral, with more

4 Valenzuela, Pepa. "Bessy Gallardo: 'Cuando violentas a los Carabineros cometes un grave error porque antes de ser paco, el paco es persona, gana tan poco como tú y tiene tu misma clase social'". *The Clinic*. 20 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.theclinic.cl/2019/10/20/bessy-gallardo-dejo-mudos-panelistas-matinal-13-cuando-violentas-carabineros-cometes-grave-error-antes-de-ser-paco-es-persona-gana-tan/>.

5 Tu Día (Canal 13), Facebook, 18 October 2019, 2:41. Available at: https://fb.watch/ny_VNUqvMd/.

6 Televisivamente. Facebook, 18 October 2019, 2:43. Available at: <https://fb.watch/ny-QRzMuxJ/>.

than a million views and thousands of comments in the following days. By analysing data from 5,211 YouTube comments captured during this rise and peak of her popularity, it is possible to understand how users perceived and empathised with her social unrest narrative. For instance, the enthusiasm for her interviews was such that even heroic and combative traits were attributed to her, as well as early requests for her to run for elected office, as mayor or congresswoman (See Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Most liked comments on YouTube videos featuring Bessy Gallardo (our translation) (October 18, 2019 to October 28, 2019) ten videos selected, total views: 1,260,317 Total comments: 5,188.

Most liked comments on YouTube videos featuring Bessy Gallardo	Like count	Polarity
"The young woman was much better informed than every f— pundit and hosts there. Nobody dared to speak because they had no arguments"	2132	Positive
"The best of the segment was the girl, please take out every other pannelist and let her talk for the entire rest of the day"	1277	Positive
"How people can't understand how we are sick and tired of being robbed! The prices and everything is going up except for salaries and the quality of life is like s—. The authorities pretend to be blind and say they will improve the safety! What the f—?, this is such a s— country!"	1019	Negative
"We really need people like her in Government. Down to earth, focused on the important things and can look beyond their own pockets"	536	Positive
This girl is brilliant. Now there's nothing except protesting, because this f — guys in Government live for free and it's us who day to day go to work to survive"	437	Positive

In addition to this positive reaction and recognition of her potential as a spokeswoman, people also made comments expressing their anger at the government and the political situation, sometimes perceiving Bessy as an important agent who could help to overcome the crisis. In fact, the most common word pairs used by YouTube users were “people’s advocate”, “people’s spokeswoman”, “love her”, “she’s great”, “future congresswoman” and “Bessy (for) President”⁷. In comparison, there are far fewer negative comments aimed at her, with some accusing her of being “resentful”, “communist” or referring to her self-identification as a femi-

7 My translation; original: “abogada del pueblo”, “vocera del pueblo”, “la amo”, “seca la mina” “futura diputada” o “Bessy Presidenta”.

nist. Others, meanwhile, questioned the assumed spontaneity of the interview that went viral.

After this initial viral stage and taking advantage of her recognition and respect amongst the protest's supporters, Gallardo began to shape her next steps in activism and politics. From mid-2020 she participated in the so-called "Tren del Apruebo", organised by those who would later found the People's List, even taking on the role of spokesperson⁸. Despite speculation that she would be a candidate for the antisystem People's List, internal disputes and controversial transphobic remarks on a podcast impeded her nomination.

With little chance of being part of an independent list, she joined the Progressive Party list, but without being an official member, with the aim of running for the Constitutional Assembly. By this time, this viral fame remained as her main asset. In an interview with CNN⁹, she acknowledged her popularity as an icon of the protests as a key factor in her being proposed as candidate by the PRO.

After her election, which was attributed to her recognition as an internet phenomenon, Gallardo surprisingly shifted to the political centre, joining a caucus associated with the Christian Democrats. In August 2020, she turned again to the centre-left, returning to the Progressive Party and endorsed the fourth presidential bid of perennial candidate Enríquez-Ominami, who broke with his coalition to run on his own.

At the Convention, Gallardo was a member of the Economy and Environment commission, whose resolutions were repeatedly rejected by the Convention plenary. She later got involved in several controversies, both for her remarks on the floor and in the press, and on one occasion for her use of vulgar language during a livestream¹⁰. She also had internal disputes with other members of her caucus, whom she even called "rats", "sexists" and "misogynists". Adducing ideological differences, Gallardo resigned from her political group, joining Chile Digno, an antiglobalisation left-wing alliance¹¹. After the rejection of the proposed new Constitution, she dedicated herself to completing her degree and advising trade unions. In October 2022, she joined the Chilean Communist Party.

8 La Zona Cero. 6 September 2020. Available at: <https://lazonacero.cl/noticias/subete-al-tren-del-apruebo-es-la-nueva-campana-de-klankiltro/>.

9 CNN Chile. 12 May 2021. Bessy Gallardo: "Siempre esperé que hubiera una revuelta, por fin Chile pudo decir 'estoy harto'". Available at: https://www.cnnchile.com/elecciones2021/bessy-gallardo-siempre-esper-una-revuelta-distrito-8_20210512/.

10 Radio Agricultura. Facebook, 23 June 2022, 13:05. Available at: <https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=506772741225917>.

11 Camila Higuera. Guía práctica: Los distintos bloques políticos de la Convención a seis meses de instalado el poder constituyente. 5 January 2022. Available at: <https://interferencia.cl/articulos/guia-practica-los-distintos-bloques-politicos-de-la-convencion-seis-meses-de-instalado-el>.

2.2 Rodrigo Rojas “*Pelao*” Vade

Rodrigo Rojas Vade is a 39-year-old former politician and activist who was a member and Vice-President of Chile’s Constitutional Convention for Santiago’s 13th District. After it was revealed that he had lied about a health condition, a key element in the narrative on which he built his popularity, Rojas resigned from office and retired from public life.

Seven years before becoming famous, Rojas Vade told his family and friends that, after undergoing a series of tests, he had been diagnosed with a rare type of leukaemia, which had a high mortality rate. Rojas then underwent treatment in private clinics in Santiago and Barcelona, Spain. Although there is no record of him being treated in the public healthcare system, Rojas argued that he was offered only palliative care and was required to pay 600,000 dollars for his treatment¹². Through a blog called “Cancer, unfiltered reality”, Rojas described her experiences and shared photographs showing the decline of his body. Several times, in poetic terms, he announced to his followers the imminent conclusion of his life due to illness¹³.

After returning from Barcelona, where his body had supposedly rejected chemotherapy, Rojas Vade took the decision to quit his treatment, devoting what were supposed to be his last days to activism¹⁴. On 22 October he approached Plaza Italia with a sign referring to the high cost of his treatment, instantly attracting the attention of other protesters. The action was captured in dozens of pictures uploaded to Twitter and Instagram, immediately becoming viral.

After a few days his protest became more performative, adding patches on his body with slogans, wearing catheters and shaving off his eyebrows¹⁵. He claimed to be protesting with his body, the only thing that the system had left him. Commentators, artists and influencers echoed this story, immediately making him one of the most iconic characters and spokespersons of the movement, occasionally involving traits of a personality cult. This led to the publication of

12 Pepa Valenzuela. “Pelao Vade: ‘Este sistema de salud está hecho para que te mueras.’” *The Clinic*. 14 January 2020. Available at: <https://www.theclinic.cl/2020/01/14/pelao-vade-este-sistema-de-salud-esta-hecho-para-que-te-mueras/>.

13 Paz Radovic and Andrew Chernin. “Rojas Vade admite que no tiene cáncer: ‘Siento que me tengo que retirar de la Convención.’” *La Tercera*. 4 September 2021. Available at: https://www.litoralpress.cl/sitio/Prensa_Texto?LPKey=J6R2OHNTBSEPIHB77VD6VDZECRORZ6H67GWTWTSALKWWXEIV4VIQ.

14 Roka Valbuena. “Capítulo 12: Rodrigo Rojas Vade antes de la verdad | *El Giornalista*.” Canal 13C. YouTube, 13 January 2022. Available at: https://youtu.be/MNN6hD-MIoY?si=nbTEoDU_xPEWIFr1.

15 Diana Lozano. “Rojas Vade: la teatral puesta en escena que lo convirtió en ídolo.” *El Líbero*. 11 September 2021. Available at: <https://ellibero.cl/actualidad/rojas-vade-la-teatral-puesta-en-es-cena-que-lo-convirtio-en-idolo/>.

fan art pieces, tribute songs, museum exhibitions and videos on social media, all of them portraying him as a hero or a leader of the resistance.

A few examples of these viral images include an illustration featuring Rojas being beaten by a policeman with the caption: “[S]ome heroes are fighting on multiple fronts [referring to his alleged cancer treatment], nothing will make them fall”¹⁶; a comic issue dedicated to Rojas and other “characters” of the protests¹⁷; a “Draw My Life” style video published by the renowned weekly magazine *The Clinic*¹⁸ and an action figure of Rojas made by a fan¹⁹.

Despite having no previous political ties and having declared himself “neither left nor right”, he was one of the founders of the anti-neoliberal, anti-establishment People’s List, of which he was likely to run as a candidate for the Convention. The activist was central to the platform’s campaign, appearing as protagonist in most of its TV spots²⁰ and social media posts. These ads featured images of Rojas at the clinic and at protests, bragging about being able to participate in the protests without being expelled from Plaza Italia, like other mainstream politicians.

Days after being elected, Rojas Vade was arrested by the police as he was taking part in a violent demonstration. Although he was released a few hours later without charge, the incident caused a media stir which further reinforced his heroic status. When the Convention was installed, Rojas Vade was one of those who actively tried to stop the inaugural session from starting, in solidarity with protesters gathering outside. A founding member of the People’s List, Rojas was the group’s natural candidate for the Convention’s leadership. With 45 endorsements, Rojas was nominated as one of the Vice-Presidents, taking the oath of office barefoot, covering one of his eyes in solidarity with those injured by the police in demonstrations, while shouting protest messages.

Taking advantage of his new position and the respect he had gained within the leftist movement, Rojas Vade was a leading promoter of the move for the People’s List to have its own presidential nominee, endorsing Diego Ancalao’s bid. Although Ancalao managed to register his candidacy, on 26 August the Electoral Service announced his disqualification due to the discovery of over 23,000 fraudulent citizen endorsements, as well as the filing for a criminal investigation. After revelations that Ancalao and his team (including Rojas) had paid nearly \$3 million to a criminal

16 <https://web.facebook.com/Gambachilenoticias/photos/a.286808365162425/733862203790370>.

17 https://www.reddit.com/r/chile/comments/x5651g/comic_que_la_lista_del_pueblo_le_dedicó_al_pelao/.

18 <https://youtu.be/bDQJZ3epda8?si=Oj25uzHA5sh23Zk5>.

19 <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7EBHbIjIe3>.

20 La Lista del Pueblo – “Rodrigo ‘Pelao’ Vade Rojas – Candidato La Lista del Pueblo” [video] YouTube, 9 November 2020. Available at: https://youtu.be/ZGthBivRayw?si=_scCKVOhGawL7Lpg.

gang leader, who faked the signatures on behalf of a deceased notary, the People's List declared itself “in indefinite recess”.

On 4 September 2021, *La Tercera* published an article exposing how Rojas had lied to the public and his own family about his illness and he admitted that he had no cancer²¹. Later that night, through a video posted on his social media, he confessed to lying about his illness and announced his resignation from his seat and from the vice-presidency, which he submitted on the following day, but due to legal gaps this wasn't official until it was authorised by Congress in March 2022.

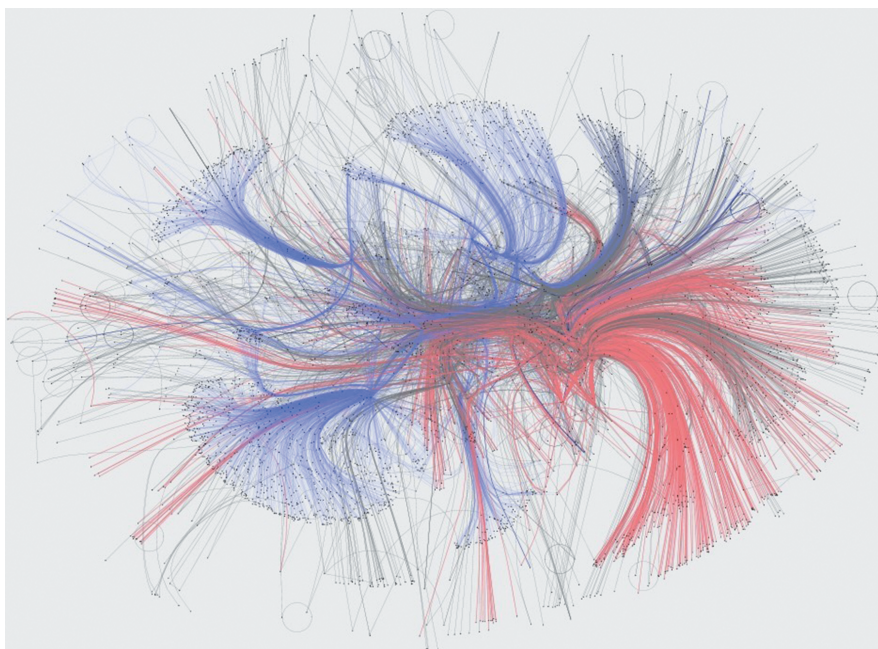


Fig. 1: Interaction map of tweets mentioning Rojas Vade fake illness scandal. In red, replies and quotes to media outlets official accounts on Twitter. In blue, clusters related to popular right-wing accounts, all of them anonymous. Data collected 4 September 2021. Visualisation in NodeXL.

Source: Created with NodeXL Pro (<http://nodexl.codeplex.com>) from the Social Media Research Foundation (<http://www.smrfoundation.org>).

²¹ Paz Radovic and Andrew Chernin. “Rojas Vade admite que no tiene cáncer: ‘Siento que me tengo que retirar de la Convención’”. *La Tercera*. 4 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-domingo/noticia/rojas-vade-admite-que-no-tiene-cancer-siento-que-me-tengo-que-retirar-de-la-convencion/6M4MJHN6KZGGLKJMMTDUBDAJY/>.

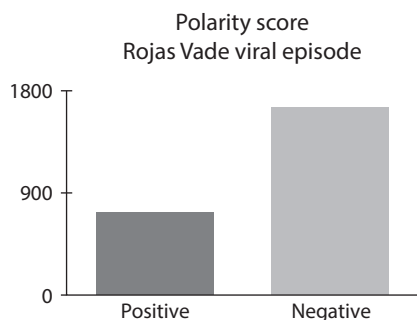


Fig. 2: Sentiments net polarity, Rojas Vade fake illness scandal (Positive/Negative). Data collected 4 September 2021. Visualisation in RStudio.

By mapping users' interactions referring to this event, mainstream media played a leading role in making it viral, once they published on their official accounts, which are among the most followed in Chile (See Fig. 1). The most important conversation generators included centre-right Canal 13 and Radio Bio Bio, which reported these revelations as a news flash of national interest, as well as *The Clinic*, a satirical leftist magazine.

From the analysis of 23,036 tweets data collected in the four hours following the news, it was noted that the polarity of these messages was trending extraordinarily towards negative emotions (Fig. 2). This reaction is consistent with the widespread outrage and indignation caused by the disclosure of his deception, along with speculation that, despite resigning, he would continue receiving compensation as a Convention member. This was in clear contrast to the positive reputation of his character until then, considered an icon of heroism and honesty, which was key to his political rise. Pieces of fan art also reflected this change in his public image, being re-published for ironic or comedic reasons. An illustration representing Rojas as an anime character, a giant or a titan fighting the police that originally received more than 1,800 likes on Instagram²², was slightly modified as an ironic meme and through "shitposting" accounts, increasing its reach and engagement, gathering more than 18,700 likes and hundreds of comments²³.

Finally, after being subpoenaed to testify by the Chilean Investigation Police, he confessed to having used fake catheters and scars to appear as if he had undergone medical treatment. At the beginning of 2023, he was sentenced to 61 days in prison and fined for the crime of fraud, since he had made fundraising efforts to pay for his supposed medical treatment. Since then, he has remained away from public life.

²² <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8u6A5XJ8FE/>.

²³ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cak7pMVplTA>.

2.3 Giovanna Grandón, *Tía Pikachu*

Grandón is a 43-year-old school bus driver, who served as a member of the Chilean Constitutional Convention representing the 12th District of Santiago. Her rise to fame came on 25 October 2019, in the context of the so-called Million March. Dressed in a mistakenly purchased inflatable costume of the popular character Pikachu, Grandón wore it to do “something different” and “to dance” at the demonstration. The image of her dancing around and after stumbling, falling to the ground received millions of views²⁴ on social media, as well as prompting the creation of various memes, parodies and fanart. Due to the comical atmosphere of the video, which contrasted with the violence on previous protest days, the video was an absolute hit, even receiving foreign media attention (see Caminos 2021).

The popularity of the video led the media to quickly seek out the person behind the costume, which was achieved four days later through stories that ran on Canal 13 and Mega. The story was reproduced in other media outlets, and she began to be interviewed on different digital platforms and even had an appearance in a music video, “Esto no prendió”, which trended at number one on YouTube. Other examples of her popularity include illustrations dedicated to her²⁵ a ceramic plate (Fig. 4), keychain figurines and other souvenirs for sale (See Fig. 3), as well as the announcement of a “southern tour”, where she appeared at demonstrations and danced in the squares of 14 cities²⁶. On the other hand, while Grandón became known for dancing at demonstrations, often getting caught up in clashes between protesters and riot police, she sought to become a symbol of working-class women and struggling families. Now known as *Tía* (Aunt) *Pikachu*, she began silent social and political activity, starting official accounts for her and her husband on social media, and participating in political and charity events in Santiago and in the regions. The idea of getting to know first-hand the sufferings of ordinary people continued to be a key theme in her campaign build-up for the Constitutional Convention (Collao López 2020).

24 Canal 13 – “Es madre y abuela. Tiene 44 años y ha llamado la atención por la forma en que ha salido a protestar: vestida de Pikachu”. [video] Facebook, 29 October 2019. Available at: <https://web.facebook.com/teletrece/videos/2552902474745171/>; Grandón, Giovanna (@bailapikachu.official) – “Por los que preguntan por mi caída! Estoy bien, solo un poco adolorida y cansada de tanto bailar en las marchas” Instagram, 28 October 2019. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4Lla8dFWID/>.

25 <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4IMd0SlwTl>.

26 <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8G0hVFIEIk>.



CroFem
Mujer, guerrera, consecuente! Obvio que debía ser tejida por CroFem ❤️
Todas deberíamos tener una Tía Pikachu en la familia 🥰🥰

*No tomo pedidos de Pikachu original, sólo de la Tía Pikachu 🥰

Fig. 3: A keychain figurine for sale featuring Tía Pikachu. Facebook Post 3 November 2020. Accessed 4 March 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/Crofem/>.



TÍA PIKACHU Y CORRE DINOSAURIO
\$13,100 \$21,900

Fig. 4: A ceramic plate for sale with Grandón's character on it, by then already a pop icon. Reproduction. Accessed 1 March 2024. https://www.enriquetarobinson.com/products/acc_co.

Taking advantage of the possibility of organising lists of independent candidates, Grandón was one of the first to join the People's List (LDP), the anti-establishment electoral platform set up in the heat of the demonstrations. With around 4,000 online sponsorships and the required 500 constituents' signatures, Grandón secured her candidacy in the 12th District, the largest in the country. Also, the *Tía Pikachu* phenomenon received the attention of experts in political communication. In addition to the volunteers in the field, her team consisted of several political scientists, a historian, an illustrator, a journalist and a lawyer, as well as the People's List leadership, some of whom had experience in election campaigning.

Another focus of her campaign was to emphasise her role as a citizen far removed from the political elites and her status as an independent, "apolitical" and anti-party candidate. This, on the other hand, led to many attacks on social media, mostly ironising her notable lack of rhetorical skills and constitutional knowledge. Despite this, she was elected as one of the most voted for candidates in her constituency (see Lankes 2021). Once elected, Grandón began "intense preparation" to best fulfil her role as a member of the Convention, receiving crash courses on constitutional theory and the Chilean institutional system, as she declared in an interview.

On the Convention's inauguration day, while protests were taking place around the old National Congress building, Grandón went out to talk to the demonstrators trying to appease them. After a brief altercation, which included verbal aggression, she told the press that it was just a small group of anarchists "who don't understand anything". This sudden distancing from those who minutes earlier had accompanied her to the taking of the oath was seen as a betrayal and a sign that, as she had become part of the establishment she would end her relationship with the street.

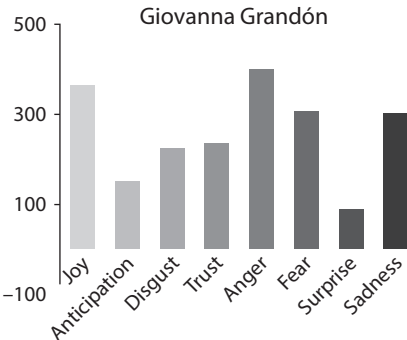


Fig. 5: Sentiment analysis of comments on YouTube videos related to the assault on Grandón. Data collected 8 October 2021 to 18 October 2021) Total views: 400,795. Total comments: 3,694.

On 8 October 2020, a few days before the second anniversary of the Social Outburst, Grandón and her fellow assembly member Eric Chinga went to the Plaza Italia (aka Dignity Square), still the protests epicenter. Although she was not dressed in her characteristic costume, a group of people recognised and confronted her. The situation quickly escalated, with people assaulting, shouting and throwing projectiles at her on the spot. Two years after becoming one of the main figures to emerge from the protests in Plaza Italia, *Tía Pikachu* was kicked out of the square.

The footage of the incident was quickly spread on social media, most notably on Twitter, on which “Tía Pikachu” stayed in the top three trending topics for 16 hours in a row, with 50,724 posts during that period. Of these, the most viral accounts were again right-wing, most of whom made fun of the situation, in some cases including gross insults and even threats. Some of these spreaders were @ciudadanolevi1, @tere_marinovic, @realvozzfire and @FORTALEZAC1, among other anonymous accounts.

The incident was also reported on the nightly newscasts of major TV channels, as well as in news segments posted on their official accounts. Some of these videos were also published on YouTube, while at that time there had already been videos uploaded of other users discussing the event, most of them in a celebratory manner (Tab. 2).

An analysis of the YouTube user comments (3,694) using NRC lexicon dictionaries shows a tendency towards feelings of joy, anger and fear in the audience’s responses (See Fig. 5). In particular, the “joy” emotion appears to be distributed across both sides of the political landscape. While far-right accounts mocked the downfall of an *Octubrist* icon, others identified with the hard core of the demonstrations²⁷ also argued that she had “sold out her soul” to the corrupt political system.

At the political level, the situation was condemned all across the board by the government, most of her Convention colleagues, as well as by all the then presidential candidates. In an interview, Grandón declared herself to be “emotionally shaken”, as the fight should not be “between those who were fighting for dignity” but said she would continue to be on the streets, where she belonged²⁸.

²⁷ Also known as Primera Línea or Frontline, a more heavily equipped version of the Black bloc groups, who contested territorial control of Plaza Italia with the police up until the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantines.

²⁸ Soledad Reyes, “Condena total: constituyentes y mundo político repudiaron las agresiones a la ‘Tía Pikachu’ en Plaza Baquedano.” ADN Radio. 8 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.adnradio.cl/nacional/2021/10/08/condena-total-constituyentes-y-mundo-politico-repudiaron-las-agresiones-a-la-tia-pikachu-en-plaza-baquedano.html>.

Tab. 2: Most liked comments on YouTube videos related to the aggression episode against Giovanna Grandón (*Tía Pikachu*) in Plaza Italia-Dignity Square (Translation) Data collected 8 October 2021 to 18 October 2021. Total views: 400,795. Total comments: 3,694.

Most liked comments on YouTube videos related to the aggression episode against Grandón	Like count	Polarity
They burnt half the country for this . . . this is embarrassing	753	Negative
Don't worry Tía Pikachu, the Carabineros you hate so much will help you out of there. Life's strange twists and turns, isn't it?	740	Negative
Just like in the French revolution, those who raised up the masses were sooner or later victims of them.	572	Negative
It makes me sad and nostalgic to think that not so long ago on friday afternoons people used to go there to listen to the Chilean Philharmonic. All these f— people killed the soul of this country.	507	Negative
Raise crows and they'll pluck out your eyes . . . a proverb 2000 years old. You f— up, Tía Pikachu, you've passed to a better life.	503	Negative

Months after this episode, she was involved in other scandals, such as wearing the *Pikachu* costume on the Convention floor, as well as it being revealed that she received state subsidies despite having a salary as an elected authority. Having become an independent candidate for the rest of her tenure, after the New Constitution project was rejected in a referendum, she withdrew from public life, resuming her work as a school bus driver and flea market trader.

2.4 Cristóbal Andrade “*Dino Azulado*”

Cristóbal Andrade is a 34-year-old activist who represented the 6th district of the Valparaíso at the Constitutional Convention. Born in Quilpué, Andrade is an auto mechanic and a pastor of the Evangelical Christian Pentecostal religion. He has defined himself as a social and community leader, “protector” of the environment and of “traditional indigenous” languages²⁹.

Although he had never been involved in social movements before, his political awareness came at the start of the Estallido Social of 2019, when hundreds of people came out to demonstrate in the streets of his city. Due to the general dis-

²⁹ Paz Radovic and Rosario Mendiá. “Zoom a los 27: las principales causas de la sorpresa Lista del Pueblo.” *La Tercera*. 22 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-domingo/noticia/zoom-a-los-27-las-principales-causas-de-la-sorpresa-lista-del-pueblo/U6B5Q5HWLFEBXLIHYHEO6VPJ2E/>

trust of the media, many activists in the area decided to open their own social media accounts to share information. One of them was “Somos el Pueblo Quilpué”, created by Andrade and some friends of his, which posted calls for demonstrations and videos denouncing police violence. In addition to this content, it uploaded videos of people dancing in costume, which quickly spread as comedic content, especially among TikTok and Instagram users of the Valparaíso area.

At the end of October, following the invitation of other protesters wearing inflatable dinosaur costumes³⁰, Andrade acquired his own, naming it *Dino Azulado* (Blue Dino). In his words, his motivation was to “cheer up” and revitalise the protests in Quilpué, which at the time were beginning to decline in terms of attendance (see García Soto 2021).

By August 2020, however, much of his attention was focused on promoting the *Apruebo* (I approve) in the first constitutional referendum, running in parallel a kind of personal pre-campaign. Days after the vote, he began to make public his intention to be an independent candidate for the Constituent Assembly. By then *Dino Azulado* left the anonymity of his character and began to appear as Cristóbal Andrade, coordinator of “Somos el Pueblo Quilpué” and “Cordón Solidario Quilpué”, both astroturfing organisations. Against all odds, considering the limited resources with which they campaigned, the People’s List became the second most voted for in District 6 with 16.5 percent of the vote, winning two seats out of eight. Three weeks after taking office, *Dino Azulado* entered the floor of the Convention in his dinosaur costume, immediately drawing the attention of the rest of his colleagues and the press. What began as a hallway joke, he said, ended with him and Giovanna Grandón (*Tia Pikachu*) taking to the podium in costume, where they danced and were photographed (see García Soto 2021).

At first, some accredited journalists tweeted some clips from their personal accounts, probably merely as something funny or anecdotal that had happened on a working day at the Convention. These videos, however, quickly spread on Twitter, leading to their own media outlets and to other users publishing it on their websites and other social media platforms, making it viral.

The fierce response from users as well as other politicians who commented on this performative eccentricity, caused mentions of Andrade’s account (@DinoazuladoO) to skyrocket by more than 2,700 percent in six hours. Criticism from the right mostly pointed to the lack of seriousness, while some on the left argued that this type of extravagance would only damage the image of the institution.

30 Characters such as corre Dinosaurio, Dino Albino, Dino Horacio and Dino Osorno became well-known in their own cities and even had their own accounts on social media.

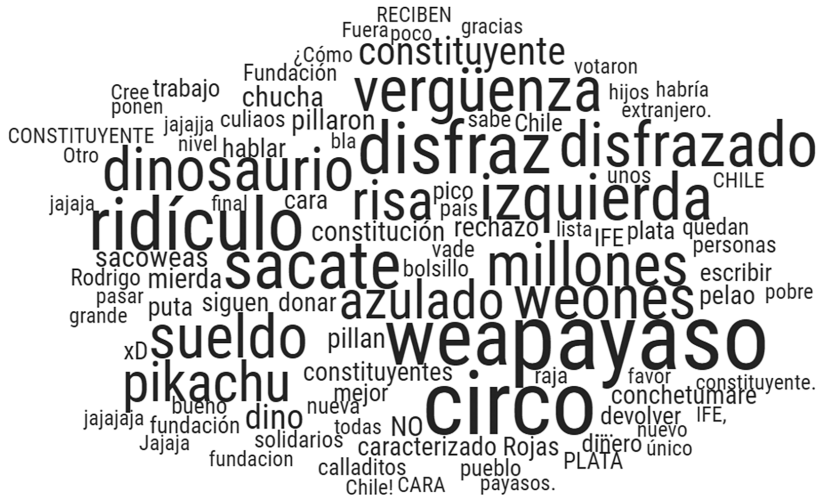


Fig. 6: Word cloud with the most frequently used words referring to the *Dino Azulado* costume incident (29 July 2021 to 6 August 2021). Total comments: 1,418.

At the same time on Facebook, users responded to these publications with thousands of comments, most of them expressing indignation or making fun of not only the costumed constituent, but the whole institution. Among the most used terms were “payaso” (clown), “circo” (circus), “sácate” (take it off), “vergüenza” (shame), “risa” (laugh), as well as other curse words and insults (See Fig. 6). The incident ended with Andrade and Grandón conceding they had made a mistake but justified it saying they did it during lunchtime and not during the sessions. For the rest of the Constitutional Process, at least, neither of them wore their costumes again.

After the dissolution of the People's List due to mentioned scandals, Andrade remained an independent and did not join any other Convention caucus. In late 2021, after the new constitution been rejected in a referendum, *Dino Azulado* declared that he was uncertain about what to do, but that he would probably try to run for Congress in the future. In June 2022, in a news report showing what former constituents were doing a year after, Andrade described how difficult it had been to find work as a mechanic again, and that he had even thought of leaving the country to start from scratch somewhere else. He also said he was still active in politics, especially after starting a news account on Instagram called *Prensa Política*.

2.5 Alejandra Pérez

Alejandra Pérez Espina is a 45-year-old social activist who was a delegate to Chile's Constitutional Convention for Santiago's 9th District. Raised in a leftist family in the working-class neighbourhood of Quinta Normal, she participated in demonstrations against the dictatorship during her childhood. This political impetus, however, did not carry on into her youth and, until the Social Outburst of October 2019, Pérez had not been involved as a community, social or trade union leader. After marrying an automotive company executive, she devoted herself mainly to domestic duties and parenting, as well as to a small business selling flowers online.

In 2017, after several rounds of cancer treatment, Alejandra underwent a total double mastectomy surgery. Although her treatment was carried out in Chile's private healthcare system, she said this situation helped her to better understand the deficiencies of public healthcare, as she heard of cases of people who died because of a lack of adequate treatment.

From 18 October 2019 onwards, she began to regularly attend demonstrations in the Plaza Italia area. Later, she started to do so without a top, displaying different messages written with marker pen on her naked chest, showing off her scars. Sometimes it was the demonstrators themselves who wrote on her body sentences referring to the demands of the movement, calling for better public healthcare, or denouncing police violence (see González Contreras 2021). Her performance received strong support both in the streets and on social media (Fig. 7), where images of her published by photojournalists were circulating especially on Instagram. Within days of the beginning of this kind of performative demonstration, Pérez became an iconic protester at Plaza Italia, just as *Tía Pikachu* and Rojas Vade had, both of whom she used to appear and be photographed with.

This status as an iconic street demonstrator not only positioned her in terms of recognition and media exposure, but also gave her a strong symbolic capital. Pérez and Rojas Vade were, for some, the perfect embodiment of the system's flaws, especially for those without adequate healthcare coverage. The respect she gained within what would become the People's List paved the way for her candidacy in District 9, even though she was not a constituent of that district.

Her campaign was heavily shaped by her personal history, her street performances, and the slogans of the more radical groups of protesters. Her provocative image was reinforced with a juvenile, rebel, or in her words "insolent" tone, complemented by cowboy boots, wide-framed sunglasses and brightly coloured hair (see González Contreras 2021). In total, Pérez claimed in an interview to have spent only around 500 EUR on her campaign, "plus a small contribution from her fans", although she officially declared expenses of nearly 11,000 EUR. In the May 2021



Fig. 7: A fanart caricature featuring Alejandra Pérez as a superhero. At demonstrations, she constantly interacted with the “Chilean Avengers”, a group of characters and cosplayers dressed as superheroes, who received a great deal of media attention. Reproduction. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9Xhretp1fP>.

polls, she gained the third largest majority in the district and was officially elected. After her victory, Pérez appeared again in Plaza Italia, the epicenter of the protests, in an event where she was presented as “People’s Constitutional Delegate” and pledged to faithfully represent the causes of the Social Outburst.

After taking office, in October 2021 she made her first speech, half-naked and showing the scars caused by her illness, as she did in Plaza Italia. This action immediately drew attention from the media and the viewing audience that followed the sessions via streaming, and quickly published news and comments on the event on social platforms.

nadora Plurinacional, a pro-indigenous, Trotskyist group³¹. After her friend and colleague Rojas Vade's fake cancer was revealed, she was the only convention member to defend the now resigned Rojas Vade, accusing the media of orchestrating a defamation campaign.

In January 2021, Pérez reported that she had again been diagnosed with metastasis and announced her intention to undergo treatment, but without abandoning her work as a Constituent Delegate. Once the work of the Convention had been completed, Pérez joined *Transformar Chile*, a breakaway anti-neoliberal movement created by Valparaíso mayor Jorge Sharp. Since late 2022 she has been a staff member of the Valparaíso City Council.

3 Possible Perspectives on the Celebrities of Unrest

3.1 Common Traits

From these personal and public trajectories, it is possible to establish that this type of activist-turned-politician presents some distinctive traits compared to more classical definitions of activists, politicians and celebrities. These viral celebrity protesters were subjected to accelerated processes of mediatisation and celebrification that turned them into popular culture icons and respected spokespersons for citizens' causes. Combining the impact of viral communication logics, a new approach to anti-systemic political narratives and the role of performance as a tool for expressing discontent, they managed to capitalize on the respect and visibility gained in the street and on social networks, turning them into votes.

They are essentially people from working-class backgrounds. Coming from marginalised areas, these five characters have a clear awareness of their social background and the limits that this has caused in their life trajectories. The hardships of everyday life are an important part of their narrative and the idea of portraying themselves as common citizens is key to connecting with their audiences.

They have neither the political experience nor the technical or ideological formation of their competitors. In all cases, the 18 October demonstration was a wake-up call for social and political causes. Compared with the rest of the candi-

³¹ Camila Higuera, "Guía práctica: Los distintos bloques políticos de la Convención a seis meses de instalado el poder constituyente" *Interferencia*. 15 January 2022. Available at: <https://interferencia.cl/articulos/guia-practica-los-distintos-bloques-politicos-de-la-convencion-seis-meses-de-instalado-el>.

dates for the Convention, these Celebrities of Unrest possess much less knowledge of constitutional matters, even ignoring basic concepts.

Unlike other political leaders, whose career path is usually linked to sustained party involvement or prominence in the academy or media, the legitimisation of these figures is obtained from their presence in spaces where unrest is expressed. Having emerged from the street, their proximity to the rest of the demonstrators, who are able to see, talk or take pictures with them, is their main mechanism of validation.

Their rhetoric incorporates populist or anti-systemic ideological concepts. These figures distinguished themselves by their anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation stances and their scepticism towards liberal democracy, with a strong anti-party component. Other causes advocated were the disbandment of the police and armed forces, the expropriation of large companies, the secession of indigenous territories, the legalisation of drugs, among others. However, when they stepped into the institutional system, this challenging and moralising rhetoric faded behind more moderate stances.

Through their personal struggles, they inspire a strong sense of empathy from their audiences and voters, appealing to their common sense. In the case of Pérez and Rojas, their narrative focuses on the need for better healthcare, based on their own experience as patients. Grandón sought to represent working women and small entrepreneurs, Gallardo did the same with students and sexual dissidents, and Andrade with communities affected by drought and polluting industries. From these hardships, a position of moral superiority and immunity from criticism was established, giving them a protective shell against criticism during their time as demonstrators and candidates, but it faded away as they got into institutional politics.

Their characters may be based partly or entirely on fake or exaggerated claims. A review of their trajectories revealed both inconsistencies in their biographies as well as a glorification of small actions or gestures. The distortion is such that from an old tweet or a photograph in a certain place, for example, they could claim to have a record of activism on certain topics.

As a result of their performative acts, they were turned into popular heroes, being the subject of a variety of homages and tributes. Their life stories and characters were depicted in murals, songs, memes, statues and so on. These celebratory actions further enhanced their fame and validation, effectively helping them become political influencers. Once inside the Convention, they continued to do some performative acts, such as using costumes or breaching protocols to attract the attention of the press and social media users. After the revelation of Rojas' fake cancer, these histrionic or theatrical expressions began to be avoided, representing, in a way, the end of symbolic *Octubrism*.

In terms of how they switched from the street to the political world, due to their popularity they could easily bypass the candidate selection process for their political platforms. This is the case of Grandón, Rojas and Pérez, who had a guaranteed place as candidates on the People's List from its formation, not being subject to selection requirements established by the list, such as the collection of a certain number of endorsements from citizens and social organisations.

Once they entered formal political institutions, it was their own shortcomings and limitations that lead to problems of various kinds, often unintentionally. Most of these moments, some of them almost trivial, were quickly covered by the press, placing them under heavy media pressure. As noted in the sentiment analysis, their theatricality seems to have had a direct correlation with the audiences' negative response on social media. These episodes had a major and damaging impact, not only on their image, but also on the rest of the Convention, for which levels of approval dropped significantly.

Apart from this, the analysis of social networks and sentiment found that celebrities of unrest become primary targets of criticism and defamation campaigns by those who opposed the Convention as a whole. Whether because of the scandals they were involved in or because of their performative character, thousands of accounts, especially of right-wing activists, delivered hate speech not only aimed at them, but also at the institution they were part of.

On this basis, it is possible to draw two visions and interpretations of the phenomenon and its possible projections, in accordance with the contrasting perspectives of cyberoptimism and cyberpessimism.

3.2 From a Cyberoptimism Perspective

The electoral success of these characters became a demonstration of how the internet, social media and their potential new communication dynamics could be beneficial for democracy and a better form of political representation. In this sense, the Celebrities of Unrest would perfectly embody the idea of popular democracy in action, in which citizens, regardless of their social, educational, political background or resources could contest the highest positions of power.

These cases would demonstrate, in line with those who argue that social networks favour democratisation, that they could be a tool for effective political transformation, not only by decentralising informative flows and influencing public discussions, but also by mobilising large masses of votes towards platforms that seek to break the status quo.

On the contrary, if instead of anti-systemic rhetoric these political platforms choose a reformist approach, the protest cycles instead of just pointing out the

problems of that power, could be channelled in such a way that their disruptive energy could be converted institutionally into a means of relieving the unrest, thus stabilising the system.

Nevertheless, the dominance of these communicational tools – managing virality, celebrity and delivering messages through performative acts – might allow both individuals and social movements to emerge as relevant actors, pushing their specific agendas. This could challenge the classical definition of social movements, which once they achieve their goals, either dissolve or reformulate themselves. Political and social platforms would not only be relegated to the role of making demands to institutions but would also be able to infiltrate and intervene directly in them.

The rise of these Celebrities of Unrest would be another indication of the beginning of a change in the directionality of politics, as common citizens had the potential to become their representatives, even if they resisted classical power relations. For them, inexperience or lack of preparation would not be an obstacle, since their main values were precisely their closeness in all respects to their constituents, including their weaknesses.

3.3 From a Cyberpessimism Perspective

From this perspective, the analysed phenomenon would be a step against efforts to improve democracy and the quality of public discussion. In the light of the outcome, providing favourable conditions for the Celebrities of Unrest, as unprepared and seemingly unmerited people, with a tendency for scandal, could result in various negative effects on the levels of representation and trust in institutions.

If this repertoire proves to be effective, it might lead the rest of the agents to engage in similar electioneering and demagogic practices, shifting the political discussion into the field of spectacle-politics. In this new scenario, the advantage would be for those who have more popularity or are willing to carry out actions that increase it, such as performative activism.

The case of the People's List is further evidence of the difficulty of such platforms to sustain themselves over time. After a successful campaign that sought to repeat the viral and performative success of its emblems, the Celebrities of Unrest, the list was a surprise gaining one million votes and 27 seats in the 2021 Constitutional Delegates Election. Presuming that its questioning attitude and street legitimacy were a guarantee of electoral success, the group attempted to broaden its impact by running candidates for the Presidency and Congress later that year. However, the political and social scenario was not the same and it failed to collect the necessary endorsements to run a single parliamentary candidate. This, com-

bined with allegations against its presidential candidate over counterfeit signatures, led to the dissolution of the group, which by then had become a *de facto* political party.

Finally, the Celebrities of Unrest can be understood as part of the widespread advance of populism on an international level in recent years. This new expression would be based on performativity, the creation of a rhetoric of identity versus otherness and the elaboration of false narratives. These elements have also been recognised as favourable conditions for the emergence of *caudillos* (political leaders), who, in the face of increasingly totalising and desperate demands, offer an illusion of solutions to society's afflictions. However, once inside the institutional framework, they are unable to fulfil these promises and their validation is exhausted, affecting the legitimacy of the entire system.

We believe that further research could be carried out taking into consideration the proposed category when analysing subsequent electoral processes in Chile or other countries. This could be especially useful where there are cycles of social mobilisation or protests, leadership renewal or when there is evidence of the persistence of this viral, performative and populist political style. Another interesting approach could be to conduct research on the true levels of spontaneity behind these figures' exposure, or to contrast their features with those of more traditional celebrities who become politicians, especially when fame, entertainment and politics seem to be, more than ever, more closely connected.

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