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Digital political communication through a gender lens: discourses, themes, and inclusive language. A case study of two gender-balanced elections in Andalusia: 2018 and 2022

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Electoral campaigns are particularly significant moments for identifying the available political options. Social media campaigns have become universal, and every candidate seeks to showcase their proposals and distinct political personality. The main goal of this article is to examine electoral political communication on social media platforms through a gender perspective. We analyze the messages posted on X (formerly Twitter) by candidates during the last two election campaigns in Andalusia. With a total sample of 2,196 posts, we applied quantitative content analysis and binary logistic regression, in addition to qualitative discourse analysis to a subset of the sample. We aim to identify how, where, when and by whom issues pertaining to women as a collective, feminism, gender, or the use of egalitarian language are introduced into two campaigns characterized by gender-balanced representation of candidates. Our findings indicate a limited use of inclusive language and infrequent foregrounding of women in discourse. Nonetheless, gender is a significant explanatory factor for a more inclusive communication style toward women, alongside an explicit emphasis on addressing policies affecting women.

KEYWORDS

electoral campaigns, political communication, gender-inclusive language, Andalusia, gender perspective, social networks, X

1 Introduction

This paper explores the use of inclusive language and gender visibility in the political-electoral messages posted on the social networking site X by candidates for the last two regional presidential elections in Andalusia (Spain).

We conducted a longitudinal review with a gender perspective to two digital political campaigns with a gender-balanced representation of candidates. This approach is grounded in our understanding that the use of inclusive language and the explicit referencing of women, gender, feminism or gender equality in campaign discourses could be a potential predictive indicator—in this declarative phase—of more substantive policies focused on reducing gender inequality and/or a willingness to address gender policies once in office. Stressing the importance of women within campaign discourse shows that women matter to these candidates. Furthermore, explicitly tackling problems that affect women as a group could point to the future political actions of that candidate once in office (substantive representation). At any rate, analysing electoral campaigns with a gender perspective allows us to predict

the stance candidates will take with regard to issues of gender or relating to women during the electoral battle.

Regarding the choice of case studies, the elections analysed were especially important, firstly because it is uncommon in the Spanish political system to have an equal representation of men and women running for president of a self-governing region (women rarely run for executive positions at any level of government). In this study, we examine two consecutive elections in the region of Andalusia, where both campaigns had gender parity. This exceptional circumstance allows us to analyse two moments in time within the same territorial context (Andalusia) where public conversation (political discourse) occurs in a non-masculinised space, in a campaign where one would expect female candidates to act as active subjects in a politically fragmented scenario. This scenario includes the early institutionalisation of block politics and a more radical polarisation of social networking sites. In this paper, we explore political communication in the campaigns run on X (formerly Twitter) and examine potential gender differences in this scenario. These differences could in theory favour the kind of public debate in which candidates explicitly appeal to women for their votes or address them as subjects of policies. This might naturalise the use of inclusive language and promote the visibility of women in the messages of all candidates regardless of gender. The second reason for choosing this context and timeframe is that the 2018 elections marked a cyclical change in Andalusia. For the first time in 40 years of democracy, a regional government was formed without the socialist PSOE party. A regional coalition was established by the centre-right PP party and the centrist-liberal Ciudadanos party. Additionally, the right-wing party VOX gained seats on a regional Parliament for the first time (Trujillo and Montabes, 2019; Ortega et al., 2022). Their entry intensified the bloc dynamics that have influenced the entire Spanish political system during a period of significant political polarisation. VOX has taken a strong stance against gender policies and feminism, opposing what they call “gender ideology” (Graff and Korolczuk, 2021; Righetti, 2021; Reinhardt et al., 2024). They appeal to sentiments and identity, constructing their digital narrative through controversial and direct content that is markedly populist, influencing the public and inciting polarised debate (populist strategy) (Engesser et al., 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Aladro Vico and Requeijo Rey, 2020; Castro Martínez and Díaz Morilla, 2021).

In this paper, we do not focus on gender discursive gaps or sexist language, but on how, where, when and who chooses to use egalitarian language. Although there are numerous examples of international studies that apply a sociopolitical perspective to the use of language in political communication (among the most recent being: Evans and Clark, 2016; Meeks, 2016; Wagner et al., 2017; Marañón et al., 2018; Estrada et al., 2023), research focusing on the specific case of Spain is scarce and tends to be parcelled up (Moreno Benítez, 2012; Lagares, 2020; Beltrán et al., 2021). The subject has a long way to go in Spain, hence the relevance of research papers such as this.

2 Political discourses: issues and uses of inclusive language

Electoral campaigns are especially relevant moments that reflect the current political offer, underscore party brands,

characterise leaders and introduce questions into the debate that define candidacies in their bid for office. Beyond the dominant affective polarisation, citizens should be given a taster of the candidates’ route map to office.

With regard to the issues examined here, gender equality policies in Spain have developed parallel to the recognition of women’s political and social rights. They have been institutionally recognised and embodied in plans, programmes and laws often promoted by the European Union. However, following the economic crisis of 2008, progress began to grind to a halt and has not yet fully recovered. In fact, such policies are now starting to be called into question by the far right of the political spectrum (Lombardo and León, 2014; Ruiloba-Núñez, 2020).

Recent election campaigns have fuelled the debate. For the purposes of this study, it is essential to know whether issues related to gender, feminism or policies aimed at women as a group are selected as important. At the same time, stereotyped expectations regarding the behaviour of political communicators, female and male candidates in this case, and the effect they have or should have on the issues addressed, also come into play. This is corroborated by the literature (e.g., Meeks, 2012; Dittmar, 2015; Evans, 2016), which distinguishes between male and female issues in relation to the areas addressed, understanding that such stereotypes encourage voters to believe that some issues are better handled and addressed by one sex or the other. In a stereotypical association, women are often given more credibility to discuss and act on “soft” issues (environment, health and/or education), so called because they are given less importance than other issues such as the economy, foreign policy and/or employment, associated with the male domain. Is there a difference in the issues tackled according to the sex of the candidate? In relation to the objectives guiding this research: will issues related to gender equality, feminism or women as a group be addressed predominantly by women candidates?

On another note, although very closely related, in the political arena, traditionally an institutionalised and masculinised environment, one might expect that the language used would be predominantly generic, with inclusive language only used in a specific and limited manner, fundamentally with ideological connotations.

The identification of sexist language as a form of discrimination against women was first flagged in the public sphere in Spain in the 1980s thanks to state femocracy (*Instituto de Mujeres*), followed by equivalent regional and local institutions, feminist organisations and, above all, the adoption of international guidelines (for example, United Nations, 2019a,b). The definitive impetus in terms of legitimising non-sexist language usage in public debate came with Organic Law 3/2007, of 22 March, for the effective equality of women and men (Rubio, 2016), in spite of ongoing debate and resistance from the Royal Academy of Language (RAE) and a section of the public. According to the RAE, the general consensus among linguists was that the unmarked (or generic) use of the masculine to designate both sexes was firmly rooted in the Spanish grammatical system, as it was in many other Romanesque and non-Romanesque languages, and also that there was no reason to censor it (Bosque, 2012—Report signed by all the academic members of the RAE). This stance was endorsed in the 2020 RAE Report on Inclusive Language and Related Issues, which also advocated the use of the inclusive or encompassing masculine (Real Academia Española, 2020).

TABLE 1 Summary of candidate participation in the two electoral campaigns.

	Candidate's name	Political party	X handle	Messages posted	%
Electoral campaign 2018	Susana Díaz	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)	@susanadiaz	78	7.2
	Juan Marín	Ciudadanos (CS)	@juanmarin_cs	81	7.5
	Juanma Moreno	Partido Popular (PP)	@juanma_moreno	234	21.7
	Teresa Rodríguez	Adelante Andalucía (AA)	@teresarodr_	534	49.5
	Francisco Serrano	VOX	@FSerranoCastro	151	14
	Messages posted in 2018 = 1,078				
Electoral campaign 2022	Juan Espadas	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)	@_JuanEspadas	149	13.3
	Juan Marín	Ciudadanos (CS)	@juanmarin_cs	112	10
	Juanma Moreno	Partido Popular (PP)	@juanma_moreno	73	6.5
	Teresa Rodríguez	Adelante Andalucía (AA)	@teresarodr_	374	33.5
	Inma Nieto	Por Andalucía (PA)	@InmaNietoC	203	18.2
	Macarena Olona	VOX	@Macarena_Olona	207	18.5
	Messages posted in 2022 = 1,118				
Total sample = 2,196					

Source: Authors' own creation.

However, positions in favour of new linguistic sensitivities regarding gender and the fundamental role of every speaker in the choice of suitable discursive formulas to overcome sexism in language are starting to gain ground (Instituto Cervantes, 2021). This awareness is reflected in different guidelines or recommendations (such as Recommendation CM/REC 2019 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Prevent and Combat Sexism, adopted on 27 March 2019 or the Guide to Inclusive Language drawn up by the Government of Spain in 2023—Gobierno de España, 2023).

Choosing one or the other linguistic strategy is one of the techniques used by the political class to achieve its objectives (Bañón et al., 2016, p. 8; Sajjad et al., 2018, p. 204; Vellón and Saura, 2023, p. 181) or attract a specific group (women or non-binary people) (Guerrero, 2023, p. 34). In the political sphere, parties with a more conservative ideology argue in favour of the generic masculine, while progressive dynamics are championing a feminist linguistic ideology (Vellón and Saura, 2023, p. 180).

3 Gender differences in digital political discourses

New media have brought about changes in communication in all areas, including profound changes in electoral political campaigns themselves and in their strategies.

Political figures use social media as a means of self-promotion, a tactic for building an audience, or a way to connect with voters (Marcos, 2018). In such a highly personalised context (Metz et al., 2020), politicians seek to engage voters' attention in a permanent campaign where they promote their personal agenda, highlight their profiles and showcase their more human side by employing

politainment (Alonso et al., 2016; Cervi et al., 2023), and in some cases, becoming political influencers (Casero-Ripollés, 2020).

Social media platforms have ushered in new ways for politicians and citizens to interact, in line with shifts in media consumption tailored to various groups, profiles or trends (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram or X) (Campos-Domínguez, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo and Portalés-Oliva, 2017; Stier et al., 2020). In this research, we focus on X, a social networking site that has gained significant relevance and is used widely by political figures around the world.

In Spain, the political class has embraced X extensively (López de Ayala-López et al., 2016) albeit as late adopters (Aragón et al., 2013, p. 185), making it an indispensable medium in the communication strategies of political actors.

While some studies claim that gender stereotypes do not affect voters (Brooks, 2013; Dolan, 2014; Hayes and Lawless, 2016), other research argues that they do (Bauer et al., 2017; Holman et al., 2019; Ditonto and Andersen, 2020). These contradictions affect how women politicians approach their communication strategies, causing confusion in their gender roles (Cameron and Shaw, 2016), combining feminine and masculine qualities in their campaign messages (Bauer and Santia, 2022) to achieve better results. These contradictions lead to linguistic acculturation (García de León, 2002; Ruiloba Núñez, 2013; Fuentes-Rodríguez and Álvarez-Benito, 2016) in the language of power, with women using masculine expressions unopposed as professional terms of success within the political discourse. Recent studies (Just and Crigler, 2014; Park, 2016; Yarchi and Samuel-Azran, 2018; Beltrán et al., 2021) show how political leaders communicate differently on social media: they talk about different issues, with women talking more about those related to gender; and in a very different tone, with women being more emotional and inclusive. We will try to apply and evaluate all the above evidence for our case study in Andalusia.

TABLE 2 Summary of the variables and their categories of analysis.

Variable number	Variable	Categories		
1	Type of tweet	1 Own tweet		
		2 Retweet		
		3 Reply		
		4 Tag		
2	Issue	2.1 Asking for votes		
		2.2 Media appearance		
		2.3 Culture		
		2.4 Health		
		2.5 Economy-business		
		2.6 Education		
		2.7 Women		
		2.8 Immigration		
		2.9 Transport		
		2.10 Employment		
		2.11 Taxes		
		2.12 Corruption		
		2.13 Young people		
		2.14 Environment		
		2.15 Other		
3	Feminine or masculine issues	1 Feminine issues		
		Health		
		Education		
		Women		
		Environment		
		2 Masculine issues		
		Economy-business		
		Transport		
		Employment		
		Taxes		
		4	Inclusive language	1 Yes
				2 No

Source: Authors' own creation based on Ruiloba-Núñez and Goenaga Ruiz de Zuazu (2022b, p. 517–518).

4 Objectives and research questions

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the use of inclusive language and the visibility of women and gender in the messages posted on the official X accounts of candidates in the last two electoral campaigns for the Presidency of the *Junta de Andalucía* regional government.

We will try to answer five research questions:

Q1- Are women encouraged in political discourses as stakeholders? Are women visible in digital election campaigns?

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the regression model.

	Mean	Standard deviation
Use inclusive (LANGUAGE)	0.15	0.36
Sex (SEX)	1.64	0.481
Age (AGE)	1.72	0.808
Ideology (IDEOLOGY)	1.69	0.905
New or old party (NEWOLD)	2.35	1.581
Feminine or masculine issues (ISSUE)	1.49	0.5

Source: Authors' own creation.

TABLE 4 Categories of independent variables used for the regression model.

	Categories
Sex	1- Man
	2- Woman
Age	1- Young (up to 45)
	2- Middle age (between 46 and 59)
	3- Mature (over 60)
Ideology	1- Left
	2- Centre
	3- Right
Feminine or masculine issues	1- Feminine issues
	2- Masculine issues
New or old party	1- New left-wing parties (PA and AA)
	2- Old left-wing parties (PSOE)
	3- Centre party (CS)
	4- Old right-wing parties (PP)
	5- New right-wing parties (VOX)

Source: Authors' own creation.

Q2- Who makes women, gender equality or feminism more visible in their discourses? Is the sex of the political candidates a determining factor or do other variables carry more weight, such as ideology?

Q3- Which linguistic strategies are used to make women visible in political discourses?

Q4- Can the type of political issue be key to using more or less inclusive linguistic resources?

Q5- To what end is inclusive language used in political communication in Andalusia?

5 Methodology

In this article, to achieve our research objectives, we analyse and codify the messages posted by all the candidates throughout the last

TABLE 5 Summary of the distribution of our qualitative subsample by candidates and issues.

Issue	Candidate					
	Susana Díaz (PSOE)	Juan Espadas (PSOE)	Teresa Rodríguez (AA)	Inma Nieto (PA)	Juanma Moreno (PP)	
Asking for votes	5	2	5	2	2	
Health	0	0	1	2	1	
Women	1	0	1	1	0	
Employment	1	1	2	1	0	
Total	7	3	9	6	3	(n) 28

Source: Authors' own creation.

two electoral campaigns in Andalusia: the first, between 16 and 30 November 2018 and the second, from 3 to 17 June 2022.

We conducted our research on a total sample of 2,196 messages (Table 1), collected using the t-hoarder tool (Congosto et al., 2017).

In 2018, a total of five candidates stood for President of the Junta de Andalucía, with two women and three men as party leaders. In 2022, a new political party emerged in the electoral race: Por Andalucía, with Inma Nieto as the party leader (making a total of three female political leaders).

Our methodological strategy is mixed. We apply quantitative content analysis to our entire sample following a descriptive strategy and applying a logistic regression model to spot any patterns in the use of inclusive language. We also apply qualitative discourse analysis to the specific subset of messages that expressly use inclusive language (143 messages). When analysing inclusive language, we exclude retweets from the whole sample, since these have not been written expressly by the candidate.

In the quantitative analysis, we explore a total of 4 variables, only taking into account the written language of the message (Table 2). For each unit of analysis, we differentiate: the type of post; the issue dealt with (based on the classification of policy or political issues by López de Ayala-López et al., 2016, p. 154) provided that they represent at least 1% of the sample (20 messages); differentiation between “feminine” or “masculine” thematic blocks (based on the theoretical division proposed by Meeks, 2012, p. 179; Evans, 2016, p. 661).

We do not include in this variable any thematic categories that are not expressly included as a stereotyped issue (see categories 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.8, 2.12, 2.13 and 2.15 in Table 2). And finally, the use of inclusive language (excluding retweets), with an operational definition based on the work of Estrada et al. (2023, p. 26–30).

The dependent variable for our binary regression model (descriptive statistics are given in Table 3) is the “use of inclusive language”, encoded in a dichotomous way: adopting the value 0 when it is not used in the post and 1 when it is. In addition, we incorporate five independent variables (Table 4) into the model, which were of a political or socio-demographic nature and specific to the electoral campaign.

For discourse analysis, we select a subsample of 20% of all the messages that use inclusive language (143 cases). We extract the subsample of 28 cases intentionally selected by subject according to the weighted use made by each candidate of inclusive language (Table 5). This number is sufficient to encompass the most relevant themes and the different ways in which each candidate crystallises

TABLE 6 Gender differences regarding the intensive use of the social networking site X between both elections.

		Electoral year		Total
		2018	2022	
Candidate sex	Man	43.2%	**29.9%–	36.4%
	Woman	56.8%	**70.1%+	63.6%
				(N) 2,196

Source: Authors' own creation.

There is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables (chi-square, $p < 0.00$). The tables illustrate the direction of this relationship using data from Haberman's corrected standardized residuals. In this case, two asterisks (**) indicate a significance level of 99% for these residuals, with a “–” sign indicating underrepresentation and a “+” sign indicating overrepresentation.

their particular approach to introducing inclusive language in their messages posted on X.

6 Results

Viewing the data as an aggregated whole, we can confirm that the set of messages analysed is similar in both campaigns. In numerical terms, the candidate Teresa Rodríguez (AA) makes the most use of her X profile in both campaigns, against Juan Marín (Ciudadanos) in 2018 and Juanma Moreno (PP) in 2022. Ideologically, we see that new left-leaning parties (PA and AA) also make more intensive use of X during both campaigns, accounting for half of all tweets. If we focus on the gender variable (Table 6), women candidates make more intensive use of X, especially in the electoral campaign of 2022.

However, if we take into account the use made of X in an aggregate way, male candidates account for a greater number of own tweets, while female candidates account for more retweets and generate more conversation (replies). Indeed, although Teresa Rodríguez displays the most intensive use of X in both campaigns, she is not so much platforming her own voice (fewer than 3 in 10 of her tweets are her own). Rather, her activity on X is mainly focused on being a spokesperson for her own regional party or other linked accounts (64.8% are retweets). This might be because leaders' accounts are overseen by their respective parties. The female candidate for VOX has a similar profile, while the female



FIGURE 1
Posts by Teresa Rodríguez. Source: first image https://x.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1063914015791951873; second image https://x.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1063844581308096512.

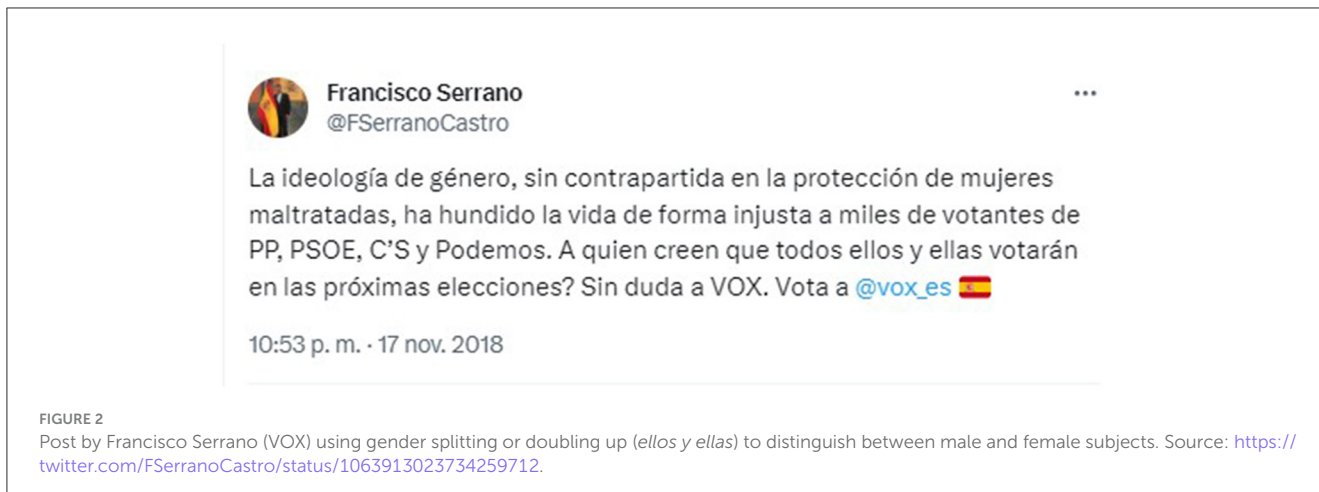


TABLE 7 Summary of the binary logistic regression model.

Variable	Coefficient	Significance
Constant	-6.509	0.003
Sex	2.020	0.006
Age	0.825	0.045
Ideology	0.086	0.908
Newold	-0.220	0.670
Issue	0.461	0.164
(N)	278	
Hosmer and Lemeshow test	7.260	0.402
Nagelkerke R2	0.189	

Source: Authors’ own creation.

representatives of the PSOE and PA parties do platform their own voice with more than 7 out of 10 of their tweets being their own.

6.1 Women as subjects of politics

From the whole of our sample, we find that only 5.9% (60 cases) of digital political discourse in the last two regional electoral campaigns in Andalusia place women at the centre. Thus, the answer to the first research question posed (“Are women encouraged in political discourses as stakeholders? Are women visible in digital election campaigns?”) would be no. Male and female candidates do not conduct political campaigns online that focus on women as a group.

However (answering our second research question: “Who makes women, gender equality or feminism more visible in their discourses? Is the sex of the political candidates a determining factor or do other variables carry more weight such as ideology?”), the data show ($p < 0.00$) that women candidates, new parties and progressive ideology, as well as younger candidates, have a greater tendency to put women at the centre of the debate.

Specifically, Teresa Rodríguez champions the promotion of equality, with more than three quarters (46 cases out of 60) of her tweets about women. We found a greater weight in the 2018 campaign, even including the creation of a feminist department as an electoral pledge, as shown in the two posts included in Figure 1. With her own voice (own tweet), she focuses her messages mainly on supporting the feminist movement and the fight against gender-based violence. Through her overseen leadership profile (retweet), she retweets many messages both from her regional party (@AdelanteAND) and other local parties (@AdelanteCadiz or @Adelante_Cor). In this case, the retweeted posts focuses on issues related especially to women’s labour rights as well as the precariousness of employment in feminised sectors such as “Las Kellys¹”.

6.2 The use of inclusive language within political discourses

The social networking site X can gauge the use of inclusive language in campaigns, a moment in which messages are more measured and candidates can decide expressly, freely and without a means of mass intermediation, whether or not to use inclusive language. A variety of different strategies can be used to crystallise inclusive language: explicitly naming the referenced groups (men and women, businessmen and businesswomen...) or using both the feminine and masculine versions of a word (gender splitting or doubling up, such as *niños y niñas*, boys and girls); using typographic strategies (a/o, @, x); using collective nouns or other generic structures (community, people, citizens); or omitting the (gendered) article in the message (representatives, voters, participants).

We analysed candidates’ own messages (1,189 tweets that would cover the sample of their own messages and replies—excluding

1 The name “Las Kellys” is the result of adapting the phrase “Las Que Limpian”, referring to women who clean hotel rooms. In Spain, they first received this name in 2019 because of their protests, when they emerged from anonymity to take part in social mobilisations.

TABLE 8 Summary of topics regarding the use of inclusive language according to candidates (% column).

Issue	Candidate					Total
	Susana Díaz (PSOE)	Juan Espadas (PSOE)	Teresa Rodríguez (AA)	Inma Nieto (PA)	Juanma Moreno (PP)	
Asking for votes	22.0%	13.6%	30.5%	23.7%	10.2%	59
Health	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	55.6%	27.7%	18
Women	14.3%	14.3%	21.4%	42.9%	0.0%	14
Employment	14.3%	28.6%	42.9%	14.3%	0.0%	14
(n) 105						

Source: Authors' own creation.

TABLE 9 Summary table of the subsample showing issues and associated links.

	Candidate	Issue	Link on X
1	@_JuanEspadas	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/_JuanEspadas/status/1537910474385199106
2	@_JuanEspadas	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/_JuanEspadas/status/1537901354714210310
3	@_JuanEspadas	Employment	https://twitter.com/_JuanEspadas/status/1534530673507291136
4	@JuanMa_Moreno	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/JuanMa_Moreno/status/1067437499172024320
5	@JuanMa_Moreno	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/JuanMa_Moreno/status/1066285342574223360
6	@JuanMa_Moreno	Health	https://twitter.com/JuanMa_Moreno/status/1065922372669227009
7	@TeresaRodr_	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1537363588754853888
8	@TeresaRodr_	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1536672533851869184
9	@TeresaRodr_	Employment	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1536017468363268098
10	@TeresaRodr_	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1534942344587448320
11	@TeresaRodr_	Women	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1534484113717182464
12	@TeresaRodr_	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1068103462687305729
13	@TeresaRodr_	Employment	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1067168739668492288
14	@TeresaRodr_	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1065696420034838528
15	@TeresaRodr_	Health	https://twitter.com/TeresaRodr_/status/1064856219528175616
16	@InmaNietoC	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1537832321868611584
17	@InmaNietoC	Health	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1537568103781089285
18	@InmaNietoC	Women	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1533923411071840257
19	@InmaNietoC	Employment	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1536417338702151681
20	@InmaNietoC	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1535979443537289216
21	@InmaNietoC	Health	https://twitter.com/InmaNietoC/status/1533184598070464512
22	@susanadiaz	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1067849141915652097
23	@susanadiaz	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1067522908585635840
24	@susanadiaz	Women	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1066652364239720448
25	@susanadiaz	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1066365964869124098
26	@susanadiaz	Employment	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1065349144066301953
27	@susanadiaz	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1064986016879206403
28	@susanadiaz	Asking for votes	https://twitter.com/susanadiaz/status/1063847941033680904

Source: Authors' own creation.

retweets—), focusing on the topics covered and the objectives pursued by using such language.

As in other communicative spaces of society and politics, inclusive language is a minority choice among speakers. Even when

the communication is tinged with strategic connotations (asking for votes), this resource is residual. Our data show that it is used in fewer than two out of every ten messages (15.3%) and its use increases the further to the left of the political spectrum the speaker



FIGURE 3 Applied use of the generic feminine by Teresa Rodríguez. Source: case 10 in Table 9.

is. In fact, among right-wing parties this linguistic resource is practically non-existent. We would highlight here the isolated case of VOX (Figure 2) where Francisco Serrano uses gender splitting or doubling up in a strategic way to expose the counter narrative on gender violence.

In addition, women candidates mostly use inclusive language (81%) compared to men who barely use it at all (3%). Susana Díaz and Inma Nieto champion this communication strategy well-above the average.

Through our binary logistic regression model, we address which variables of the candidates' profile are affecting the use of inclusive language in digital political discourses to a greater or lesser degree. As shown in Table 7, our model has a good fit (Hosmer-Lemeshow test), was estimated for a total of 278

cases and as a whole is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 35$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.001$). The fit of the model (Nagelkerke's R2) is limited, accounting for 18.9% of the use of inclusive language in digital electoral campaigns. However, if we examine the coefficients, we see that the sex and age of the candidates have significant effects ($p < 0.05$), where being a woman and/or younger increases the probability of using inclusive language in campaigns. It appears that the type of political party, its ideology or the theme of the post show no statistically significant relationship with the use of inclusive language. In response to question 4 posed in this research ("Can the type of political issue be key to using more or less inclusive linguistic resources?"), dealing with one of the so-called "feminine" issues does not seem to be related to the use of inclusive language.



FIGURE 4
Combined use of the issue of Women and Inclusive Linguistic Strategies by Inma Nieto. Source: case 18 in Table 9.

Although the thematic stereotyping of tweets is not a determining variable for the use of inclusive language, individually some issues favour a more intense use of inclusive language than the average. In addition, without taking into account the sex of the candidates or issues that do not reach 10% of the sample, there is a stronger presence of inclusive language ($p < 0.00$) among the following topics: asking for votes (38.6%), health (11.8%), women (9.2%), and employment (9.2%) (Table 8).

So (answering Q5 on the effective uses of inclusive communication), in line with the political moment of an electoral campaign, it is worth highlighting the strategic use made of candidates' political communications. This materialises in the form of messages directed towards "asking for votes", in a clear instrumentalisation of the use of language. As we can see from the data, at least three out of every 10 messages from each of the women candidates use this linguistic strategy: Teresa Rodríguez, Inma Nieto and Susana Díaz account for more than three quarters of the strategic messages written with inclusive language. Again, gender is an explanatory variable of usage regardless of the type of use.

As for modes of usage, by carrying out a more qualitative analysis of the subsample of selected messages indicated in the methodology and exploring the ways in which inclusive language is manifested (Q3 "Which linguistic strategies are used to make women visible in political discourses?"), we can see that: gender splitting or doubling up "*compañeros y compañeras*" (case 7 in

Table 9), "*apoderado o apoderada*" (case 12 in Table 9) or "*andaluces y andaluzas*" (case 14 in the Table 9) and even making use of the generic feminine gender such as "*grandes invitadas*" (Figure 3) are the preferred methods of expressing ideological-instrumental language demonstrated by Teresa Rodríguez. The same is true of Inma Nieto, who focuses on women when asking for votes, with expressions such as: "*Nos querían resignadas el 19J. Nos tienen desbordando actos e ilusionadas con un proyecto que cada vez es más amplio...*" (case 20 in Table 9); or the tweet "*Por Andalucía. Por nuestra gente. Juntas y a por todas.*" (Case 16 in Table 9) where the generic feminine ("*todas*") is mixed with generic structures ("*gente*"). However, Susana Díaz only uses gender doubling, by means of typographic resources, specifically @: "*l@s progresistas*" (case 27 in Table 9), "*l@s socialistas*" or "*salimos reforzad@s*" (case 23 in Table 9).

Andalusia has high levels of unemployment—one of the highest in Spain (regional unemployment rates can be found in the updated public database on the website of the National Statistics Institute)—and its healthcare system was badly hit after the pandemic (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2023). In this electoral context, healthcare and employment are the most talked about issues in the campaign among those that use inclusive language. Hence, even ideologically very opposed candidates such as the PA and PP use inclusivity in their language to make healthcare workers visible as a collective, without gender stereotypes (bearing in mind that this is a predominantly feminised collective, as well as healthcare



FIGURE 5 Combined use of the issue of Women and Inclusive Linguistic Strategies by Teresa Rodríguez. Source: case 11 in Table 9.

itself, an activity related with care, which we classify at a feminine issue in our operationalisation based on the theory). In both cases, they make use of collective nouns such as staff or professionals: “personal sanitario” or “profesionales de la sanidad pública” (see cases 6, 17, and 21 in Table 9). The subject of employment is usually a confrontational issue used particularly by parties in opposition. This can be seen in specific messages, for example, from the female candidate for AA and the male candidate for PSOE in 2022 (Juan Espadas) using gender doubling up such as “trabajadores y trabajadoras” (cases 3 and 13 in Table 9) or “vecinos y vecinas”, or conjugating general structures, such as “gente del metal” (case 9 in Table 9).

Together with the issue of employment, posts about women written using inclusive language are the fourth subject of our qualitative analysis. The female candidate for PA (Figure 4) accounts for four out of every 10 posts about women written using inclusive language; followed by the female candidate for AA (Figure 5). What particularly stands out here is the combined use of inclusive linguistic strategies that promote the visibility of women with an added bonus that combines content and form. They foreground a conscious decision to talk about women, gender or feminism, naming them with the additional purpose of urging the feminine or feminist conscience of women who “are listening”, at whom the message is directed.

7 Conclusions

The research presented here expands on existing studies on political communication with a gender perspective. It introduces not only reflection on the inclusion of issues related to women, equality or feminism, but also focuses on who is doing this, how and where, in addition to making visible how inclusive language is used by candidates of both sexes in their campaigns.

Among the most salient findings is that female candidates make more intensive use of X, talking more than twice as much as their male counterparts (as seen in other studies regarding regional elections in Spain, such as [Ruiloba-Núñez and Goenaga Ruiz de Zuazu, 2022a,b](#); [Pérez-Castaños and Ruiloba-Núñez, 2023](#)). In fact, Teresa Rodríguez clearly leads the field when it comes to using this social networking site, albeit with a supervised profile. Furthermore, ideologically speaking, “new” left-leaning parties (PA and AA), both led by women, also make more intensive use of X, accounting for half of all tweets.

Despite the fact that women candidates do say they have a voice on this social networking site, especially those from progressive parties, our results show that women are not especially encouraged in political discourses as stakeholders, nor are their problems made especially visible. However, it is women candidates, new and progressive ideological parties, as well as younger candidates who show a greater tendency to put women at the centre of the debate. Specifically, it is again Teresa Rodríguez who champions the promotion of equality, especially in the 2018 campaign.

As in other communicative spaces of society and politics, inclusive language is a minority choice among speakers of both sexes. Even in strategic moments, this resource is residual, bearing out the conclusions reached in other recent research ([Estrada et al., 2023](#); [Vellón and Saura, 2023](#)). The issues of employment (with gender doubling up or splitting), healthcare (using collective nouns) and women (where the combined use of inclusive linguistic strategies is particularly prominent) also display the strongest use of this resource in Andalusia's electoral campaigns. In addition, and although we are aware that our binary logistic regression model would improve its fit with a larger sample of inclusive language use, our findings allow us to better gauge the relationships between variables than we would be able to with simple bivariate relationships. We have been able to demonstrate how the sex and age of candidates have statistically significant effects, where being female and/or younger increases the probability of using inclusive language in campaigns. Susana Díaz and Inma Nieto champion this communication strategy well above the average. Once again, gender appears to be a potential factor influencing usage, irrespective of the type of use.

While the gender variable has been shown to explain our goals, we would expect more spaces with feminised political leadership to help broaden the concern and visibility of gender equality.

However, further comparative analyses between digital electoral campaigns with and without a balanced presence of women and men will be necessary to continue deepening our understanding of the effects of candidates' gender on political communication.

Future comparative studies should look at other complementary macro variables (such as the equality indexes

of the countries or regions analysed, the electoral system, the organisation of the parties, the dominant political culture, etc.) that might contribute to constructing more consistent explanations. In addition, studies are needed that connect the statements made (visibility and concern for the women's collective, feminism or gender equality and the use of inclusive language) with the effective implementation of public gender policies by candidates once in office.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

JR-N: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MG: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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