



**#TOMADELIMA  
ON TIKTOK**

**RECONTEXTUALIZING  
THE PROTEST AMID  
PERU'S POLARIZED  
SOCIO-POLITICAL  
CRISIS**

**MASTER'S THESIS BY  
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## **#TomaDeLima on TikTok**

Recontextualizing the protest amid Peru's polarized  
socio-political crisis

Master's Thesis

MA New Media & Digital Culture

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## Abstract

The emergence of social media platforms has fundamentally changed the creation and dissemination of political discourse. The rapid adoption of TikTok has had a particularly notable impact in Peru, where an increasing number of users are turning to this platform to access news and share political content, often echoing the socio-political crisis prevalent in the country. This thesis examines how affective polarization is reflected in TikTok videos within the hashtag #TomaDeLima, focusing on a corpus of videos capturing opinions and scenes from the protests in the Peruvian capital. Using multimodal discourse analysis and David Machin's recontextualization strategies, this study examines how TikTok users make sense of the demonstrations through the use of strategies such as addition, substitution, evaluation, and deletion.

The findings highlight the significant influence of TikTok's unique features in shaping the way discourses are constructed and shared. Multimodal elements, often intertwined with playful performances and satirical tones, contribute to an atmosphere in which affective polarization is both reflected and reinforced. The study also reveals underlying ideological patterns, including an "Us" versus "Them" narrative and a strong Andean identity among those supporting the protests. Through these methods, TikTok users create discourses that can be potentially manipulative and shape public opinion. This thesis highlights the importance of understanding the role of social media in political discourse, especially in contexts where research on such phenomena is limited, as in the case of Peru and other countries in the Global South.

**Keywords:** Affective Polarization, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Recontextualization, TikTok, Political discourse, Protest, Peru.

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## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1 <i>The “Toma de Lima”</i> .....	11
2.2 <i>Politics on TikTok: From news commentary to playful political activism</i> .	12
2.3 <i>Affective polarization on social media: An “Us” vs. “Them” story</i> .....	15
2.4 <i>Discourse and Ideology</i> .....	17
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>4. Analysis</b> .....	<b>24</b>
4.1 RQ1: Recontextualizing the protest.....	25
4.1.1 <i>Addition</i> .....	25
4.1.2 <i>Substitution</i> .....	28
4.1.3 <i>Evaluation</i> .....	32
4.1.4 <i>Deletion</i> .....	34
4.2 RQ2. Affective polarization reflected through TikTok's multimodal affordances.....	38
4.2.1 <i>Strategically blending video, sound and text</i> .....	38
4.2.2 <i>Playful politics</i> .....	40
4.2.3 <i>Narration and commentary of the protests</i> .....	42
4.3 RQ3. Prevalent ideologies among #TomaDeLima TikTok's .....	44
4.3.1 <i>Right-wing vs. left-wing ideologies</i> .....	44
4.3.2 <i>Andean identity</i> .....	46
<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>48</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>52</b>

# 1. Introduction

“Los seres que se habían dado a la tarea de existir allí, entendían, desde hacía siglos, que la felicidad nace de la justicia y que la justicia nace del bien de todos.” [“The beings who had taken on the task of existing there had understood for centuries that happiness is born from justice, and that justice is born from the common good.”]

- Ciro Alegría

Peru has 202 years of independence from the Spanish Empire, and since the beginning of its republican and independent path, it has faced countless challenges to preserve its democracy and sovereignty. The task of building a nation in a post-colonial country, characterized by great ethnic, cultural and geographical diversity, remains a real challenge two centuries later. In a country whose history has been marked by dictatorships, terrorism and constant corruption, coupled with a society with high levels of racism and classism, socio-political stability still seems a long way off.

Over the past seven years, Peru has experienced a revolving door of leadership, with six presidents taking office amid intense ideological clashes. The political landscape, which revolves around two main ideologies - the right-wing, which seeks the preservation of the status quo, and the left-wing, which calls for social and political change - has been marked by confrontation. This ongoing tension has threatened the fragile democracy that emerged after the resignation of dictator Alberto Fujimori in 2000. The period of instability and confrontation

climaxed during the tumultuous 2021 presidential elections<sup>1</sup>, which pitted Pedro Castillo, a leftist leader of Andean descent, against Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the aforementioned authoritarian ruler.

The lead-up to the elections saw escalating polarization, with supporters of both candidates framing the contest as a battle for democracy, magnified by the influence of social media platforms serving as virtual battlegrounds.<sup>2</sup> In an unexpected turn of events, Pedro Castillo, who was considered an outsider in the race, won the election by a minimal margin.

After the results were announced, political erosion continued as opposition groups challenged the results, leading to continued uncertainty and mistrust in the electoral process. Once in power, President Castillo's administration faced relentless opposition from a predominantly right-wing Congress, hampering governance and exacerbating tensions. This led Castillo to launch an unexpected *coup d'état* that ended with his subsequent removal from office for violating the country's constitution. Following this event, mass mobilizations took place in different regions of the country to demand new elections and the resignation of the new president, Dina Boluarte, who had taken office as Pedro Castillo's vice president but, once in power, quickly colluded with the opposition that dominated Congress. Clashes with law enforcement resulted in 49 deaths. Evidence of police abuse posted by protesters on networks such as Twitter or TikTok was found; at

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<sup>1</sup> "Un Perú dividido decide su elección presidencial más polarizada," *France 24*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/es/américa-latina/20210606-peru-presidenciales-candidatos-opuestos-polarizacion-voto>.

<sup>2</sup> "La campaña en redes sociales activa y agita la polarización," *La República*, May 28, 2021, <https://larepublica.pe/elecciones/2021/05/28/elecciones-2021-la-campana-en-redes-sociales-activa-y-agita-la-polarizacion-pltc>.

the same time, isolated incidents of violence against the police gained prominence on social media, and alleged links to terrorism took off.

In response to the indiscriminate repression that took place mostly outside the capital and resulted in the deaths of almost 50 Peruvians, including 2 minors<sup>3</sup>, thousands of people mobilized in large groups from different regions, especially from the south, where most of the indigenous population is concentrated, to the capital, Lima, in a protest called "Toma de Lima" ["The Takeover of Lima"]. However, polarizing discourses that labeled supporters of the former president and those on the left as terrorists and violent, and on the other spectrum, those on the right as advocates of a bloody dictatorship, permeated a large part of the population, making these protests a reflection of the polarization of the country, where dialogue and listening to the demands and needs of different sectors of the population were not taken into account and the search for common ground seemed impossible. To date, there has been no trial to resolve the case of the victims of police repression.

Peru seems to be stuck in a never-ending political crisis and confrontation. The population remains polarized, the political discourses of right versus left are not only seen in Congress or government institutions, but are also reflected in the discourses of the population on social networks, with a particularly interesting case, TikTok.

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<sup>3</sup> Gloria Purizaca, "No son solo una cifra: las vidas detrás de los 49 civiles asesinados en las protestas contra Dina Boluarte," *La Republica*, March 22, 2023, <https://data.larepublica.pe/paronacional-muertos-por-protestas-en-peru-cuantos-y-quienes-son-un-recuento-de-los-civiles-que-fallecieron-dina-boluarte/>.



Despite its reputation as a platform for entertainment, TikTok has emerged as a significant source of political news and commentary in Peru. The Reuters Institute's News Report 2023<sup>4</sup> pointed to TikTok and WhatsApp as the apps that generated the most growth in news consumption among Peruvians last year. Peru, along with Thailand, has the highest adoption of TikTok (39%) for news consumption, with topics related to politics being the most discussed (60%) by Peruvians on the platform. This indicates that what is sometimes called a "dancing app" is now considered one of the main sources for Peruvians to learn about and discuss politics.

TikTok, formerly known as Musical.ly, is a social network created by the Chinese company ByteDance. The platform gained massive popularity in 2020 and has been growing ever since. The main mission of the platform is to provide entertainment by presenting short videos that present how users create skits, dances, or lip-sync videos to popular music. Users can interact with the content by "liking," "sharing," and "commenting," and it is through these interactions that the platform recommends more and more videos as you scroll<sup>5</sup>. This recommendation system and the creative possibilities that can be reflected in users' content are perhaps the most distinctive features of the social network.

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<sup>4</sup> Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *Digital News Report 2023* (University of Oxford 2023), DOI: 10.60625/risj-p6es-hb13.

<sup>5</sup> "How TikTok recommends content | TikTok Help Center", TikTok Help Center, accessed December 15, 2023, <https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/exploring-videos/how-tiktok-recommends-content>.

It's not surprising that TikTok, as an engaging and entertaining platform, has gained widespread popularity for consuming political content. However, I argue that this trend can pose potential challenges. Users have the power to reflect, reinterpret, and even manipulate content. They can spread ideologically driven discourses, reshape narratives, and propagate polarizing perspectives. It's crucial to examine the multimodal discourses that take place on a platform that is so important as a source of political information for the population.

This research aims to explore how political discourse unfolds on TikTok, with a specific focus on the content shared under the hashtag #TomaDeLima, which gained prominence during the 2023 protests in the Peruvian capital. Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the study will examine how different semiotic elements - such as moving images, pictures, and sounds - contribute to the construction of meaning. Drawing on David Machin's strategies of recontextualization<sup>6</sup>, we seek to understand how discourse, particularly in a polarized country like Peru, is shaped within the distinctive environment of TikTok and the underlying values and intentions of its users. Through the findings of this research, we aim to comprehensively address the main research question and its sub-questions.

**Main research question:**

How does the recontextualization of the #TomaDeLima protest videos on TikTok reflect affective polarization?

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<sup>6</sup> David Machin, "What is multimodal critical discourse studies?," *Critical Discourse Studies* 10, no. 4 (2013/11/01 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813770>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813770>.

**Sub-questions:**

- What strategies of recontextualization are present in the TikTok posts under the hashtag #TomaDeLima?
- How is affective polarization represented through TikTok's multimodal elements such as text, images, sounds, and other affordances?
- What ideologies are prevalent in the TikTok videos under the hashtag #TomaDeLima?

The proposed research holds significant relevance for both academic scholarship and societal understanding. By applying Machin's discourse recontextualization method to a social media platform such as TikTok, which has not been extensively studied in this context, the study aims to fill a gap in the current research literature. This method provides a detailed and efficient approach to unraveling how discourse is transformed within the dynamic affordances and characteristics of TikTok. Particularly in cases of highly polarized and ideologically charged discourse, such as the protests in Peru, understanding this process of recontextualization is crucial.

Furthermore, the study addresses the urgent need for more research on the relationship between Latin American countries, such as Peru, and new media platforms. Given the prevalence of political polarization in Peru and throughout the region, especially in digital spaces, there is an urgent need to examine how these dynamics unfold on social networks. The results of the study have the potential to shed light on the ways in which social media can reshape political discourse and

democratic processes, as well as illuminate the complex interplay between digital communication, political participation, and social change.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 The “Toma de Lima”

The protests called “Toma de Lima” [“The Takeover of Lima”] gained strength as a response to the indiscriminate violence and the feeling of not being listened to by a sector of the population. The term “take over” was used as a way of figuratively appropriating a space that they felt was alien to them, Lima, the capital of the country, where socio political decisions are made that affect the entire population, especially marginalized and historically ignored sectors of it, such as the rural and indigenous populations. As Verónica Ferrari<sup>7</sup> posits, Castillo's election was more than a mere political choice; his government was representative of people who, like Castillo, had suffered the same racist abuses in their lives. People from rural, peasant, indigenous regions, marginalized and precarious since birth, who felt that no other government had ever represented them. When his attempted coup failed and his vice president, Dina Boluarte, took power, millions of Peruvians felt it was a betrayal of their vote, of the popular decision, of Castillo himself, and of them.

Thousands of people came to the capital from all over the country to make their voices heard, but stigmatization and discrimination, closely related to what

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<sup>7</sup> Verónica Ferrari, "Tomas de Lima: las marchas contra el racismo y el clasismo en Perú," *Agencia Presentes*, September 12, 2023, <https://agenciapresentes.org/2023/09/12/tomas-de-lima-las-marchas-contr-el-racismo-y-el-clasismo-en-peru/>.

Ferrari mentioned, as well as disorganization and a heterogeneous set of demands<sup>8</sup>, ranging from Boluarte's resignation, the dissolution of Congress and the calling of immediate elections, to more extreme requests such as a new constitution and the release of ex-president Castillo, made the protest unwelcome by the majority of the capital's inhabitants and de-legitimized by a significant portion of the nation's population.

In this research, I will seek to examine how this protest was (re)contextualized in Tiktok, using the hashtag #TomaDeLima, I will delve into how this protest is understood, narrated, commented upon, and generally portrayed by different parts of the country's political spectrum, left and right. The left aligned itself with the defense of its vote and the recognition of marginalized voices, and the right was characterized by a discourse of rejection, associating its opponents with terrorist groups or portraying them as violent and lazy.

## ***2.2 Politics on TikTok: From news commentary to playful political activism***

The use of social media as a space for consuming, discussing, and creating political content is not new. Several studies have analyzed various election campaigns, political activism movements, political crises, and protests on different social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.<sup>9</sup> As Medina Serrano et

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<sup>8</sup> Guillermo D. Olmo, "La toma de Lima": quién estaba detrás y cuáles eran los objetivos de las protestas contra el gobierno en la capital peruana," *BBC News Mundo*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-64330302>.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua Tucker et al., "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (01/01 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3144139>.

al.<sup>10</sup> argues, users employ their social media accounts not only to learn about political news but also to actively participate in political discourse, and since its launch, TikTok has been no exception. A number of authors have examined how political discussion and expression is represented on this platform from different perspectives and using different methodologies.

One seminal study was conducted by the aforementioned Medina Serrano et al. Their study sought to understand who uses TikTok for political purposes in the United States and how the platform's design shapes the flow of political information. In their findings, they discovered that users do not simply disseminate information, but become active presenters of political information through the platform's unique audiovisual tools, making political participation much more interactive than on other video networks such as YouTube or Instagram. Regarding the dynamic and entertaining aspect of this platform, studies such as Sánchez-Querubín et al.<sup>11</sup> have analyzed how TikTok has become a tool for playful civic participation, ambivalent criticism, and spaces for commenting on events. The authors emphasized the way in which playful political performance was embodied, with users expressing their ideologies or political preferences through dancing or singing. Continuing to focus on the use of the platform's creative possibilities, Cervi et al.<sup>12</sup> examined how

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<sup>10</sup> Juan Carlos Medina Serrano, Orestis Papakyriakopoulos, and Simon Hegelich, "Dancing to the Partisan Beat: A First Analysis of Political Communication on TikTok" (Proceedings of the 12th ACM Conference on Web Science, Southampton, United Kingdom, Association for Computing Machinery, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Natalia Sánchez-Querubín et al., "Political TikTok: Playful performance, ambivalent critique and event-commentary," in *The Propagation of Misinformation in Social Media*, ed. Richard Rogers, A Cross-platform Analysis (Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Laura Cervi, Santiago Tejedor, and Fernando García Blesa, "TikTok and Political Communication: The Latest Frontier of Politainment? A Case Study," Peru; politainment; political campaign; political communication; TikTok, 2023 11, no. 2 (2023-05-16 2023), <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i2.6390>, <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/6390/3161>.

candidates for the Peruvian presidency in the 2021 election used TikTok's affordances to present their proposals and engage with their followers.

Focusing more specifically on case studies related to protests or activism, Literat et al.<sup>13</sup> used content analysis to examine how users critiqued or extended the mainstream media's news discourse on protests such as Black Lives Matter or the Capitol riots through TikTok's affordances. Another example is Ammar et al.'s<sup>14</sup> content analysis of the conflicts and protests in Lebanon in 2019 and 2020 on the Chinese platform. One of the main findings was the use of parody and satire through the affordances of the platform to narrate the conflicts in a creative way. Finally, it is relevant to mention Vijai and Gekker's<sup>15</sup> study, which analyzes the case of #Sabarimala in India through the dual lens of playful engagement and platform affordances. As in the previous case, the focus is on the playful use of the platform for expression and political resistance. The authors make an interesting mention of how polarization can be fostered by the platform through the algorithm and the appropriation of hashtags.

Having explored the use of the tiktok platform to share political news and speeches, it is appropriate to introduce the main theory of this research, affective polarization.

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<sup>13</sup> Ioana Literat, Lillian Boxman-Shabtai, and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, "Protesting the Protest Paradigm: TikTok as a Space for Media Criticism," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 28, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221117481>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/19401612221117481>.

<sup>14</sup> Ammar Lujain et al., "Analysis of the representation of the 2019 Lebanese protests and the 2020 Beirut explosion on TikTok." *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2020): 53-72.

<sup>15</sup> Darsana Vijay and Alex Gekker, "Playing Politics: How Sabarimala Played Out on TikTok," *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764221989769>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764221989769>.

### **2.3 Affective polarization on social media: An “Us” vs. “Them” story**

The study of polarization in social networks is not a new phenomenon. Several authors have studied its presence in different countries and contexts.<sup>16</sup> In order to delve deeper into the main theory of this research, it is appropriate to define what polarization is. McCoy, Rahman, and Somer<sup>17</sup> define polarization as a process by which the normal diversity of differences in a society becomes increasingly aligned along a single dimension, cross-cutting differences become reinforced, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of “Us” versus “Them”. This last notion of “us” versus “them” leads us to define a concept that will be particularly important in this research, affective polarization.

Affective polarization can be characterized as the reinforcement of tribal tendencies toward loyalty to one's in-group and antagonism toward out-group members. This reinforcement promotes zero-sum perceptions, increases social distance, and decreases the willingness to cooperate and compromise with political opponents. McCoy et al.<sup>18</sup> emphasizes the importance of recognizing the affective component inherent in group identities and affiliations. This component plays a critical role in fostering and perpetuating polarization by influencing attitudes,

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<sup>16</sup> Moran Yarchi, Christian Baden, and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, "Political Polarization on the Digital Sphere: A Cross-platform, Over-time Analysis of Interactional, Positional, and Affective Polarization on Social Media," *Political Communication* 38, no. 1-2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1785067>.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer McCoy, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer, "Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics, and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759576>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764218759576>.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer McCoy, Tahmina Rahman, and Murat Somer, "Polarization and the Global Crisis of Democracy: Common Patterns, Dynamics and Pernicious Consequences for Democratic Polities," 23.



behaviors, and discursive practices. Authors such as, Iyengar and Gaurav<sup>19</sup> and Orhan<sup>20</sup> even argue that increased affective polarization poses significant challenges to the democratic process and has become a primary factor in supporting undemocratic positions.

As we have reviewed, political content on social media has been extensively studied by authors, and the case of political polarization is no exception. Barberá, in his article "Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization,"<sup>21</sup> posits how numerous studies mention that platforms such as Facebook or Twitter do not necessarily polarize people, but rather expose them to more sources of information as they encounter content shared by what he calls "weak ties," which would be colleagues, family members, and acquaintances who typically post diverse information, both ideological and personal. However, this article does not consider platforms with powerful recommendation algorithms, such as TikTok, where, as mentioned, the interaction is essentially not with friends, but with content from different creators that may be of interest to the user. The author also mentions that research on polarization in new media tends to focus on the United States or Western countries. However, studies such as Calvo and Aruguete's<sup>22</sup> study on

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<sup>19</sup> Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "AFFECT, NOT IDEOLOGY: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE ON POLARIZATION," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41684577>.

<sup>20</sup> Yunus Emre Orhan, "The relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding: comparative evidence," *Democratization* 29, no. 4 (2022/05/19 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2008912>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2008912>.

<sup>21</sup> Pablo Barberá, "Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization," in *Social Media and Democracy*, ed. Nathaniel Persily and Joshua A. Tucker, SSRC Anxieties of Democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Ernesto Calvo and Natalia Aruguete, Fake news, trolls y otros encantos: Cómo funcionan (para bien y para mal) las redes sociales (Siglo XXI, 2020), <https://sigloxxieditores.com.ar/libro/fake-news-trolls-y-otros-encantos/>

Twitter polarization in the 2017 Argentinian elections, Ponte Torrel's<sup>23</sup> research on affective polarization in the 2021 elections in Peru, and Cuevas-Calderón et al.<sup>24</sup> study on Peruvian far-right hate speech on TikTok through content analysis are good examples of how research has been done. Further research on how affective polarization is reflected on TikTok is relevant and will therefore be a focus of this study.

## **2.4 Discourse and Ideology**

“Discursive practices - through which texts are produced (created) and consumed (received and interpreted) - are viewed as an important form of social practice which contributes to the constitution of the social world including social identities and social relations”<sup>25</sup>

As authors Jørgenson and Phillips argue, it is through the practice of discourse that social and cultural reproduction and change occur. Discourse can be used in many ways, but Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on examining how discourse is used to construct and maintain power structures, social practices, and ideologies. It is the latter term, in its socio-cognitive approach, that I will focus on in this research. Teun Van Dijk<sup>26</sup> defines ideologies primarily as *socially shared belief systems* that can be expressed, used, or implemented by individuals as members of a group in discourse and other social practices. The

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<sup>23</sup> Juan Manuel Ponte Torrel, "La campaña peruana en Twitter. Análisis de la polarización afectiva durante la segunda vuelta de las elecciones generales 2021," *Cuadernos.info* (2022), [http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0719-367X2022000300008&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0719-367X2022000300008&nrm=iso).

<sup>24</sup> Elder Cuevas-Calderón, Eduardo Yalán Dongo, and Lilian Kanashiro, "Conservadores en TikTok: polarización social en el Perú," *Revista Prisma Social*, no. 39 (10/29 2022), <https://revistaprismasocial.es/article/view/4865>.

<sup>25</sup> Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, "Critical Discourse Analysis," In *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2002), 74. <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/discourse-analysis-as-theory-and-method>.

<sup>26</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, "Ideology and Discourse," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (Oxford University Press, 2013).

author notes that ideologies often encapsulate beliefs that generate disagreement, leading to the exchange of persuasive arguments and defenses between members of different ideological groups, often generating the self-image of the ideological in-group as positive while that of the out-group is negative, creating the typical polarized structure of ideologies as representations organized as the aforementioned “Us” vs. “Them”.

As Gyawali<sup>27</sup> points, ideology is not only associated with the representation of social reality. It reflects social identity and the construction of thought. Therefore, ideology conveys the presence of thoughts, mental models, coordinated by social and cultural influences, context models. This last term is important for our research because not only is the context of the protests distinctive, but also the way in which it is recontextualized in a social network with such particular affordances and characteristics as TikTok.

### **3. Methodology**

As mentioned in the previous section, discourse is a social practice through which the social world, including social identities and social relations, is constructed. In this research, we will focus on discourse beyond text and therefore apply what is known as Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA).

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<sup>27</sup> Gyawali Yadu Prasad, "Ideological Interaction Theory in Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Heritage*, ed. Turcanu-Carutiu Daniela (Rijeka: IntechOpen, 2020).

As Sabina Tan and Marissa K. L. E<sup>28</sup> argue, MDA examines the different forms of multiple meanings that emerge from the many different discourses, modes, and media that interact with each other. For Ledin and Machin<sup>29</sup>, the different forms of communication allow not only a deeper analysis, but also, as in linguistics, a more systematic level of description. In this mode of analyzing discourse, the audiovisual properties of discourse take on value and constitute meaning.

In terms of the construction of meaning, in this research we will pay particular attention to how this meaning is recontextualized, in this case in TikTok. As Fetzer<sup>30</sup> posits, the connection between language and reality is shaped by the process of (re)contextualization. Van Leeuwen and Wodak<sup>31</sup> note that social practices are represented through various forms of communication such as reporting, explaining, analyzing, and interpreting. This representation always involves transformation, placing things in new contexts that change them. The specifics of this transformation depend on the interests, goals, and values of the new context. Recontextualization transforms the meaning of words from one context to fit the demands of another, leading to their reevaluation. With multimodality, examining the meaning-making potentials of writing, hyperlinking,

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<sup>28</sup> Sabine Tan and Marissa K. L. E, eds., *Discourses, Modes, Media and Meaning in an Era of Pandemic: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Approach*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003168195>.

<sup>29</sup> Per Ledin and David Machin, "Multi-modal critical discourse analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, edited by J. Flowerdew and J. Richardson (Routledge, 2018), 60–76.

<sup>30</sup> Anita Fetzer, "Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Yan Huang (Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Theodoor van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak, "Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse-Historical Analysis," *Discourse Studies - DISCOURSE STUD* 1 (02/01 1999), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001005>.

and visual modes can elucidate how different semiotic resources are used to serve different communicative functions, collaboratively creating coherent narratives with manipulative potentials, as Altahmazi<sup>32</sup> notes.

To conduct my research, I will use the MDA lenses and the recontextualization strategies framework proposed by Machin<sup>33</sup>, based on van Leeuwen's<sup>34</sup> model of representation of social actions, which we previously mentioned conceptualizes discourse as a recontextualization of social practices. In his methodology, Machin examines what semiotic resources are used in the recontextualization of things such as participants, goals, behaviors, values, etc. through the consideration of 4 strategies: Deletion, Addition, Substitution and Evaluation (Figure 1).

In this study, I examine the strategies of discourse recontextualization, the most used elements and affordances, and the prevalent ideologies found through a multimodal lens in posts on TikTok under the hashtag #TomaDeLima, a hashtag used to amplify discourses related to the 2023 protests in the Peruvian capital following the impeachment of former President Pedro Castillo and the violent clashes that followed. The first 50 most popular videos under the hashtag will be considered, and through the use of purposeful sampling, a method explained by Michael Quinn Patton<sup>35</sup> as the selection of information-rich cases from which their

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<sup>32</sup> Thulfiqar H. M. Altahmazi, "Creating realities across languages and modalities: Multimodal recontextualization in the translation of online news reports," *Discourse, Context & Media* 35 (2020/06/01/ 2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100390>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211695820300234>.

<sup>33</sup> Machin, "What is multimodal critical discourse studies?," 352-353.

<sup>34</sup> Theo Van Leeuwen, "Discourse as the Recontextualization of Social Practice," in *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> M.Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2002). <https://books.google.nl/books?id=FjBw2oi8E14C>.

study can illuminate the questions sought to be studied, I will select and subsequently examine the strategies of discourse recontextualization I find in the videos uploaded by the users. This with the aim of observing and discovering the ideologies hidden in the use of different types of semiotic resources and how the affective polarization lived in the country is represented.

Strategy	Explanation
Deletion	Deletion involves the omission or removal of certain aspects of a social practice from a representation. This may include excluding participants, actions, settings, or other elements that are deemed less relevant or intentionally overlooked.
Addition	Addition refers to the inclusion of elements in a representation that were not originally present in the social practice being depicted. These additions serve to enhance or alter the meaning of the representation.
Substitution	Substitution involves replacing or simplifying the details and complexities of social activities with generalizations or abstractions. This can include representing social actors by types or using symbolic representations to depict complex concepts.
Evaluation	Evaluation occurs in the process of recontextualization because representations inherently reflect the goals, values, and priorities of the participants. Events and people are portrayed according to the perspective and agenda of those who create the representation.

**Figure 1.** Strategies of recontextualization of discourse according to Machin, based on van Leeuwen. Own depiction, 2023.

In order to proceed with the analysis of the collected material, it is important to consider previous works that have focused on the analysis of the recontextualization of discourse, in order to have a reference for the use of this method. A pioneering and important work was carried out by van Leeuwen and

Wodak<sup>36</sup>, where they analyzed the historical discourse to legitimize immigration control in Austria. The research focuses on analyzing how the discourse of immigration control has been constructed over time, with the aim of understanding how immigration control policies have been justified. Through the review of historical documents and political discourses, the authors identified patterns and changes in the way the issue of immigration and its control has been addressed over the years, and how these transformations or recontextualization strategies of the discourse are used to legitimize the measures that have been taken.

In “Discourse as the Recontextualization of Social Practice”, van Leeuwen<sup>37</sup> illustrate the transformations that occur in social practices through recontextualization strategies, the relationship between social practice and discourse, and the influence of social practice on textual representation. The analysis is based on a corpus of texts representing the same social practice and how these texts recontextualize the original practice. The author discusses elements of the social practice and explores transformations that occur during the recontextualization process, such as substitutions, deletions, reorganizations, additions, repetitions, and reactions. This text aims to highlight the importance of understanding how the recontextualization of discourse in social practice influences textual representation and understanding of social reality.

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<sup>36</sup> Van Leeuwen and Wodak, “Legitimizing Immigration Control: A Discourse-Historical Analysis”.

<sup>37</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Discourse as the recontextualization of social practice,” 3-22.

In terms of studies applying this strategy to the analysis of multimodal discourses, we find the study by Maria Lorenzetti<sup>38</sup>, which examines the role of social networks in the promotion of populist discourse and analyzes the construction of political identity through multimodal representations. The author proposes that the recontextualization of discourse is an effective strategy for normalizing and promoting the political agenda of right-wing populist leaders. This strategy involves taking elements of the discourse and presenting them in a way that hides the negative aspects of the figures and normalizes their political agenda.

On the other hand, the specific use of the recontextualization strategies proposed by David Machin can be examined in two papers. Authors such as Althamazi<sup>39</sup>, examine online news translation practices, focusing on news coverage of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Arabic and English. The study identifies four multimodal recontextualization strategies that result in different levels of meaning transformation and analyzes how these strategies serve specific communicative functions, such as epistemic fit, cultural adaptability, and normalization of ideological stances. The article highlights how multimodal recontextualization, through the manipulation of visual and linguistic elements, promotes a particular interpretation of reality, which in turn influences readers' perceptions. In addition, Eriksson's<sup>40</sup> article explores the representation of the working class in the Swedish

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<sup>38</sup> Maria Ivana Lorenzetti, "Right-Wing Populism and the Representation of Immigrants on Social Media A Critical Multimodal Analysis," 15 (06/12 2020), <https://doi.org/10.13136/2281-4582/2020.i15.666>.

<sup>39</sup> Althamazi, "Creating realities across languages and modalities: Multimodal recontextualization in the translation of online news reports".

<sup>40</sup> Göran Eriksson, "RIDICULE AS A STRATEGY FOR THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE WORKING CLASS," *Critical Discourse Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015/01/02 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2014.962067>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2014.962067>.



program *Ullared*, arguing that it is part of a broader political project to delegitimize and devalue the working class in the country, which is linked to changes in the country's social and economic policies. The article highlights the importance of critical analysis of multimodal discourse to understand how ideologies are communicated and reproduced through entertainment media, and stresses the need to continue this work in the current social context.

## 4. Analysis

In this analysis section, I explore how affective polarization is expressed through the recontextualization of social practices in the #TomaDeLima videos on TikTok. To do this, I've structured the analysis by addressing the sub-questions derived from the main research question. This approach allowed a focused examination of how different recontextualizing strategies are used to convey ideological positions, manipulate perceptions, and reflect group identities in the context of the protests in the Peruvian capital

The analysis highlights different strategies such as addition, substitution, evaluation and deletion, each providing a unique lens through which users shape the narrative of the protests. Through specific examples, I examine the content, context and implications of these strategies, exploring how they contribute to affective polarization and reveal ideologies and social dynamics.

## 4.1 RQ1: Recontextualizing the protest

The corpus analysis showed that users used different multimodal recontextualization strategies, with addition being the most common. These strategies were used for different purposes and in different patterns.

### 4.1.1 Addition

Among the top 50 videos analyzed under the hashtag #TomaDeLima, most of them used the strategy of addition, mainly adding music and text to the video to create meaning about what happened during the protests in the Peruvian capital. I selected 3 videos (Figure 2) that clearly represent this strategy to analyze them in depth.

a) “Terruquitos, ahí vamos” [*Terruquitos here we come*”]

In one video, a battalion of police officers can be seen on their way to intervene in the confrontations that were taking place between the police and the demonstrators who were on their way to the capital on the highways. Although these images are real, the author of the video added an audio track from the Peruvian film *La boca del lobo*<sup>41</sup> [The Wolf’s Mouth]. This film focuses on a group of soldiers from the Peruvian Anti-Terrorist Army who take control of a small town in the Andes that is controlled by the terrorist militia “Sendero Luminoso”; the film seeks to demonstrate that the era of terrorism in Peru was an internal armed conflict, where both military and subversives committed crimes against innocent people under the slogan “the end justifies the means”. The video uses audio from the movie in which the soldiers prepare to confront the subversive group. Part of the song mentions,

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<sup>41</sup> *La boca del lobo*, directed by Francisco Lombardi (1988; Lima, PE: Inca Films).

“We've come to sweep them away, we've come to fuck them, terrorists don't hide”. This addition alludes to the belief that the Toma de Lima protesters are terrorists or subversives who have come to the capital not to make their demands heard, but only to create chaos. The author of the video also adds the text “Making the *terruquitos* run away,” expressing a position in favor of the government and the armed forces, despite the previous clashes that resulted in nearly 50 civilian deaths.

b) Andes citizens marching to Lima

In the analyzed corpus, I was able to find several videos showing the march of the demonstrators towards Lima. In these videos, music is also added to the visual images to represent their position in the situation. In the first video we can see a large number of citizens from the Andean region of Puno, where most of the people died in the confrontations with the police, walking on the road to the capital of Peru. The author added to the video the song “Justicia para vivir”<sup>42</sup> [“Justice for Living”] by Chila Jatun, a group from the Bolivian Andes, which refers to the abuses and injustices of the government. The user who created the video chose a part of the song that could reflect feelings about the political and social situation: “Being ambitious, being greedy will be your prison, poor wretch. All the money of our people you spend in another country. I want to scream, justice for living”. In addition, the video is accompanied by a text over the image that reads, “Everyone to Lima to close the Congress. The brave *Puneños* are already on their way to Lima”. The author uses the term *puneño*, which refers to the inhabitants of the Puno region, and

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<sup>42</sup> Chila Jatun, “Justicia para Vivir” by Gonzalo Hermosa Camacho JR, recorded 2016, track 8 on *Justicia para Vivir*, Redes Del Tunari.

expresses the idea of closing the Congress, possibly with the intention of reflecting their identity and their ideological and social beliefs.

c) Mocking protestors in Lima

In this case we see an example of what Vijai and Gekker<sup>43</sup> and Sánchez-Querubín et al.<sup>44</sup> call playful politics, forms of engagement in politics that are exemplified by memes, satire, etc. The addition of the sound of laughter as a musical background and a sticker of a laughing child is used as satire to mock the group of people marching in the capital. As can be seen, the group is not very large, which was one of the main reasons that many of the citizens who were against these demonstrations used to de-legitimize the protests. The overall turnout was lower than expected, which was a source of ridicule and the opposition's characterization of it as a failure. The use of multimodal tools to generate memes or comedy content is very common on TikTok, it is a way to hide ideologies or positions through playful content, I will elaborate on this topic in the chapter where I explore the second research question.

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<sup>43</sup> Vijai and Gekker, "Playing Politics: How Sabarimala Played Out on TikTok," 714.

<sup>44</sup> Sánchez-Querubín et al., "Political TikTok," 190.



**Figure 2.** Addition strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

#### 4.1.2 Substitution

In terms of substitution strategies, I found mainly the use of symbols as substitutes for messages to refer to the "other" by analogy. Furthermore, I observed other forms of substitution, such as dance performances and the use of videos and hashtags to express ideologies and identities.

##### a) The "K" rat and Genocide barbie

What is particularly interesting about the analysis of multimodal objects is the ability to generate meaning through tools beyond text or narrative. In the case of our corpus, I was able to find two examples that demonstrate the use of popular or symbolic objects to depict meaning. In the first case, we observe two men with a rat hanging with the symbol "K" (figure 3); this representation refers to the elimination of Keiko Fujimori, the ex-presidential candidate favored by right-wing groups. The figure of the rat is usually used to represent her, her political party and her father,

former president Alberto Fujimori, because of the allegations of corruption and crimes against humanity of which they are accused. Without the need for texts, through the use of this object it is clear what message the men in the video are trying to convey: the end of Keiko Fujimori and her political party. In another video, we can see a similar case of substitution: the demonstrators represented the current president of the country, Dina Boluarte, who, as we have mentioned, is allied with the right wing, in a Barbie doll box titled "Genocide Barbie". The use of this popular symbol, which became especially relevant last year with the release of the *Barbie*<sup>45</sup> movie, was likely intended to draw public attention and at the same time condemn the president's decisions, which, as mentioned above, resulted in the deaths of almost 50 Peruvians due to the indiscriminate use of force by the national police.

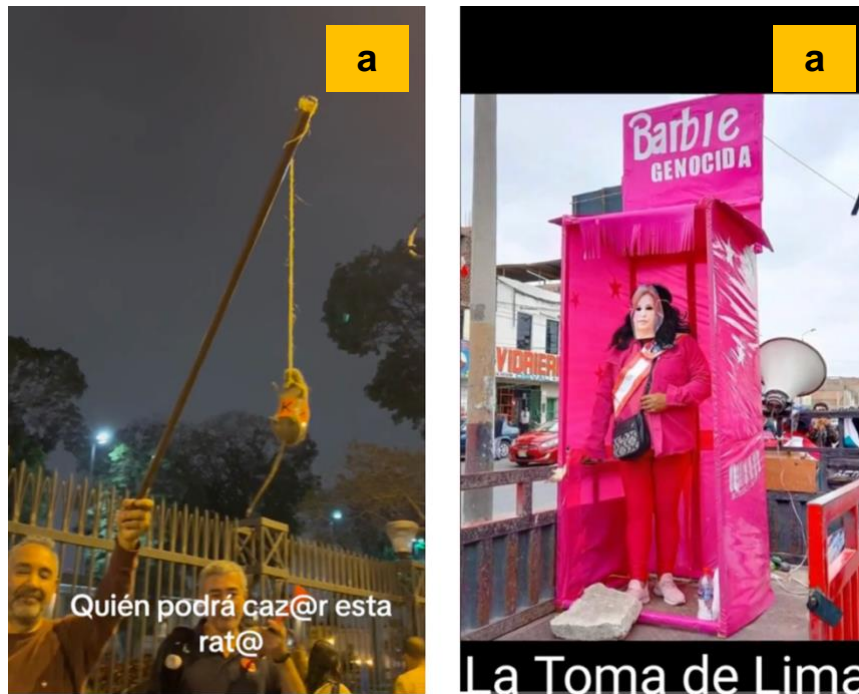
b) Art as a tool of combat

One user uploaded an artistic dance performance that took place at the demonstration. It shows a group of female dancers who seem to symbolize the pain and struggle for justice for those killed in the past marches. One group of dancers can be seen lying on the ground, and later another group of dancers helps them to get up. The author of the video uses the original music of the presentation, which is only the sound of drums, and adds in the description of the video: "Art as a tool of combat". This dance, along with the description of the video, seeks to reflect the sense of pain, brotherhood and struggle of the protesters who, among other things, seek justice for the deaths in past demonstrations. In my view, this video shows how

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<sup>45</sup> *Barbie*, directed by Greta Gerwig (2023: Los Angeles, CA, Warner Bros. Pictures).

dance and music can represent and reflect in a way that is as deep and intense as a text.



**Figure 3.** Substitution strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

c) “Toma del aguadito” and Donkey protest

Using what we referred to as playful politics, users opposed to the marches reappropriated the hashtag #TomaDeLima, mockingly substituting the name and calling it #TomaDelAguadito. The population that went to the capital was mostly vulnerable people from the Andes who had no place to stay in Lima. In response, some organizations offered communal pots and shelters to those who arrived, videos were circulated of demonstrators eating soup after the marches. This substitution of calling the march #TomaDeAguadito hides a symbolism that can be considered discriminatory, since it refers to the food that was served in these communal pots, a famous peruvian soup called "Aguadito", thus minimizing their struggle by affirming

in a satirical way that the people come to the capital just to eat for free, thus delegitimizing their struggle.

Another form of substitution that goes hand in hand with one of the aforementioned ways of expressing ideological messages on the platform is the use of videos as memes. One user employed the audio of another video on the platform, a common affordance on the platform, where a man can be heard motivating protesters at the march. The new video appropriated this audio but substituted the original visuals with footage of donkeys walking down a road. (Figure 4). The video is also accompanied by text that reads "Toma de Lima?" and laughing emojis. The use of this video of donkeys refers to the people going to the capital to protest, symbolically representing them as donkeys, an animal commonly known or used to represent ignorant people.



**Figure 4.** Substitution strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.



### **4.1.3 Evaluation**

Regarding evaluation strategy, it observes the re-evaluation of the events of the demonstrations through the TikTok videos posted by the users, who add their values, beliefs and reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with these demonstrations to give meaning to the events from their point of view. In this strategy, we can observe the ideological positions of the users in a more tangible way.

#### a) 5 reasons to join the fight

Through the use of what Literat et al.<sup>46</sup> calls direct-address commentary videos, we observe how a user (figure 5) who is in favor of the protests directly narrates what he considers to be important reasons for joining the demonstrations. The author talks about actions planned or carried out by the Congress (some of which are explained in a perhaps subjective and potentially manipulative way) that, in his opinion, endanger the health, integrity and democracy of the population and the country in general. The user starts the video with the words: "I give you 5 reasons to join the march on July 19 and take back the country from this mafia that has captured it". With this narration, the author reflects the polarization in the country, speaking of the congress as a mafia, as the enemy that must be defeated. The author also uses text to reinforce his message, writing the phrase "important" in red, which is commonly used for high-risk warnings, and accompanied by the Peruvian flag. In addition, in the texts of the lower zone, he mentions the supposed sources from which he was informed about the bad performance of the legislators, possibly as a way to legitimize his discourse.

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<sup>46</sup> Literat et al., "Protesting the Protest Paradigm: TikTok as a Space for Media Criticism," 372.

## b) Good Peruvians vs. Bad Peruvians

In the video published by Alejandro Caveró (figure 5), a right-wing congressman who has been the target of various criticisms for his controversial views and opinions<sup>47</sup>, gives his position on the protests. The congressman also uses the direct-address commentary video technique and chooses to position in the background of the video some *Retablos*<sup>48</sup> and *Toritos de Pucará*<sup>49</sup>, artistic works that have great symbolism in the Andean culture related to the representation of their customs and cultures. This symbolic act can be related to the congressman's narration that his family also comes from the Andes of the country and that the term “Tomar” [Takeover] is not correct, since Lima has been “Tomada” [Taken] for many generations by the massive migrations to the capital from the Peruvian highlands.<sup>50</sup>

Although he begins the video with a conciliatory tone, the congressman quickly expresses his ideological position, commenting: “A radical sector of the left wants to use violence not for their legitimate demands, but to break the democratic and constitutional order of the country”. The author reflects what was mentioned earlier as the feeling of antagonism or rejection of the members of the out group, in this case leftist parties and supporters. The congressman mentions several times the word “Peruanos de bien” [“Good Peruvians”] referring to people who think like

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<sup>47</sup> “Detector de mentiras: Alejandro Caveró: 'Yo no veo ninguna película peruana que haya ganado absolutamente nada,’” *RPP Noticias*, October 2, 2023, <https://rpp.pe/politica/congreso/detector-de-mentiras-alejandro-cavero-yo-no-veo-ninguna-pelicula-peruana-que-haya-ganado-absolutamente-nada-noticia-1508407>.

<sup>48</sup> “Retablo Ayacuchano: Una de las expresiones artísticas más importantes del Perú,” *Peru Travel*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.peru.travel/es/masperu/retablo-ayacuchano-una-de-las-expresiones-artisticas-mas-importantes-del-peru>.

<sup>49</sup> “Toritos de Pucará: Los guardianes de los hogares andinos,” *Y Tú Qué Planes*, March 13, 2024, <https://www.ytuqueplanes.com/blog-viajero/puno/toritos-de-pucara-los-guardianes-de-los-hogares-andinos>.

<sup>50</sup> Altamirano, Teófilo, “From Internal to International Migration in the Peruvian Andes,” *ICIMOD*, accessed April 15, 2024, <https://lib.icimod.org/record/26974>

him, or in other words, his in-group, affirming that only through consensus and unity among them will they be able to rebuild the country. Through his speech, he rejects the presence of people with opposite ideas to participate in a project that can get the country out of the crisis, seems that through his eyes they are “Bad Peruvians”. At the end of his video, the author makes a final symbolic ideological reference, mentioning that communism, commonly associated with leftist parties, only brings hatred and division to the country.



**Figure 5.** Evaluation strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

#### 4.1.4 Deletion

Deletion strategies were mainly used by users of different positions to show the positive aspects of the in-group to which they belonged, and at other times to show only the negative side of the out-group, omitting certain details that could

generate a potentially manipulative discourse about what happened at the demonstrations.

a) Protest was a success vs. Protest was a failure

Users employed specific footage of the protest, omitting or deleting others, to prove their point and ideological stance (figure 6). One user in favor of the march shows an aerial video of a large number of demonstrators gathered in the center of Lima, but the video only shows footage of one avenue and focuses on the spaces where more people are gathered. The video, accompanied by an added sound called “Victory,” also shows a text that reads “La toma de Lima fue un éxito” [“The takeover of Lima was a success”], reinforcing the discourse that the demonstrations were a triumph.

On the other hand, a user opposed to the demonstrations shows a photo split in two, comparing right-wing and left-wing protests. The image on the right shows a photo of a march against the government of the former president that took place in November 2022<sup>51</sup>, with a large number of participants dressed in red and white and accompanied by a Peruvian flag. On the left, we see an image of the same street during the “Toma de Lima” protests. This comparison is quite manipulative, as the photo on the left was taken at a time when the protesters were still on their way to the meeting point, making it look empty and like a failure. This video denotes the ideological position of the user by using the aforementioned “us”

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<sup>51</sup> “Miles marchan en las calles de Lima contra el presidente peruano,” *France 24*, November 06, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20221106-miles-marchan-en-las-calles-de-lima-contra-el-presidente-peruano>.

vs. “them” rhetoric to compare the supposed success of the group it belongs to and the failure of the outgroup.



**Figure 6.** Deletion strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

b) The “good ones”

One of the characteristics observed in the analyzed videos is the emphasis on showing the positive side of each group (figure 7). This goes hand in hand with the discourse of “my group is the good one”, “we are the good ones, they are the bad ones” that is observed in affectively polarized discourses as mentioned in the theoretical framework. In a video of a user we observe the aforementioned common pots that were made to feed the citizens who came from different regions, the video is accompanied by the song “Flor de retama” [“Retama Flower”], a musical piece originally from the Andean region of Ayacucho that symbolizes a

hymn of protest against abuses and repression<sup>52</sup>, accompanied also by the text “Solo el pueblo salvará al pueblo” [“Only the people will save the people”], a popular phrase in Latin America that is used as a symbol of struggle<sup>53</sup>. The video focuses on showing the sense of community and brotherhood experienced in the demonstrations.



**Figure 7.** Deletion strategies under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

On the other hand, we see a video from another user who shares a clip of a policeman protecting a child who may have gotten lost in the middle of the protest. As mentioned in the background, the actions of the National Police are quite

<sup>52</sup> “La verdadera historia de ‘Flor de Retama’, canción interpretada por Martina Portocarrero,” *Infobae*, April 23, 2022. <https://www.infobae.com/america/peru/2022/04/23/la-verdadera-historia-de-flor-de-retama-cancion-interpretada-por-martina-portocarrero/>.

<sup>53</sup> Antonio Antón, “¡Sólo el pueblo salva al pueblo!” *Nueva Tribuna*, October 19, 2022. <https://www.nuevatribuna.es/articulo/sociedad/solo-pueblo-salva-neoliberalismo-lucha-clases-latinoamerica/20221019134102204043.html>

controversial, and the abuses committed in the clashes during previous demonstrations have created divisions in opinion and assessment of the institution. This video tries to show a positive side of the police, probably with the intention of showing that members of this controversial institution can also be empathetic and do fulfill their job of protecting citizens. In both of these videos, the users show only one side of the story, omitting or eliminating content that could damage the image of each group. Both users leave out specific footage, acts of violence on the part of the demonstrators and acts of repression on the part of the police.

## **4.2 RQ2. Affective polarization reflected through TikTok's multimodal affordances**

In the analyzed videos, we observed the use of different multimodal TikTok affordances to generate meaning about what happened in the protests and the significance of the events. In this chapter, I will analyze the main tools used by the creators to express affectively polarized discursive goals.

### **4.2.1 *Strategically blending video, sound and text***

Similar to Literat et al.'s<sup>54</sup> findings on the US Capitol riots, the more vernacular affordances of the platform, such as the use of video, music, and text, were strategically blended to create meaning in the "La Toma de Lima" videos. In particular, it was noted that this combination was mostly used to reinforce the users' position and reflect their identity. As observed in Figure 2 of the previous chapter,

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<sup>54</sup> Literat et al., "Protesting the Protest Paradigm: TikTok as a Space for Media Criticism," 371.

music and text were added to produce meaning. Other examples are shown in Figure 8, where this combination is also used to reinforce their position. The figure on the left shows a video of a user who participated in the protest, he accompanies the documentation with a text that says in the upper section ["Hoy se toma lima"] ["Today we take Lima"] and in the lower section he adds "19 de julio un día como hoy se derrocó la dictadura militar de Bermudez" ["July 19 a day like today the military dictatorship of Bermudez was overthrown"], this last text alludes to the end of the right-wing military government of former president Francisco Morales Bermudez. In addition to the text, the user added a viral audio in Spanish with lyrics that translate to: "We do not surrender today, we do not surrender tomorrow, we never surrender," possibly with the intention of reinforcing support for the cause.

Another example of the use of this mix to support the demonstrations is seen in the video on the right, where a recording of the protest is observed in fast speed, which seems to attempt to emphasize the number of participants and the different fronts that were present, this image is also accompanied by a text with the name of the protest and the use of the song "Solo le pido a Dios" ["I ask God"]<sup>55</sup>, a popular piece in the region that was used to express the feeling of fighting against a past dictatorship in Argentina. The author of the TikTok used a fragment of the song that appeals to the emotions and resonates as a protest anthem for those who have died in past demonstrations, whose photos are displayed by a group of protesters in one part of the video: "Solo le pido a Dios que el dolor no me sea indiferente, que la reseca muerte no me encuentre vacía y sola sin haber hecho lo suficiente" ["I only

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<sup>55</sup> León Gieco, "Sólo Le Pido a Dios," recorded January 1978, track 1 on *4 LP*, INAMU Discos, Buenos Aires.



ask God that the pain not be indifferent to me, that the parched death not find me empty and alone without having done enough"].



**Figure 8.** Strategic blending of video, music and text under the #TomaDeLima videos in TikTok.

#### 4.2.2 Playful politics

In a finding similar to that of Sánchez-Querubín<sup>56</sup> et al. and Vijay and Gekker<sup>57</sup>, the use of the platform's affordances to convey political content in a playful way in the form of satire or comedy was employed by some users. In Figure 9, we observe the use of popular culture characters to convey a particular message in a comedic way. In one of the analyzed videos, a user shares an interview of a protester who gives his reasons for marching; after each of his arguments, the creator of the

<sup>56</sup> Sánchez-Querubín et al., "Political TikTok," 190 -195.

<sup>57</sup> Vijai and Gekker, "Playing Politics: How Sabarimala Played Out on TikTok," 714.

TikTok adds snippets of videos of characters from the series "El Chavo del 8", a classic Mexican comedy show; these are used with the intention of mocking the protesters' reasons, using small fragments where the characters mention with laughter: "Are you drunk or what?" and "What an idiot, you have a 0".



**Figure 9.** Using video clips from comedy shows to mock protesters.

On the other hand, in the right side of figure 10 I identified a video by a user on the other side of the ideological spectrum, using a filter of the "Joker" from the Batman comics, accompanied by sounds of evil laughter. The user adds a text to the video that reads: "Yo regresando de la Toma de Lima" ["Me coming back from the takeover of Lima"]; in recent years, the Joker character has been increasingly used in demonstrations in Latin America as a symbol of indignation and disgust against

indiscriminate power and oppression.<sup>58</sup> Going further into the use of funny sketches or playful performances, in the right side of figure 10 we observe a video made by a user who satirized the wealthy elite of the capital, showing their supposed indifference and ignorance regarding the demands of the demonstrators. This is done in a comical way, using common stereotypes such as beliefs, speech and habits of this social class.



**Figure 10.** Using filters and satire performances to make meaning of the protest.

#### ***4.2.3 Narration and commentary of the protests***

As mentioned throughout this research, the characteristics of this platform have made it a widely used space for political narration and commentary. In the videos analyzed in the previous chapter, this is observed on several occasions with

<sup>58</sup> Javier Blázquez, “La sonrisa del caos: por qué el Joker se ha convertido en icono de las protestas en todo el mundo,” *El Mundo*, 19 November, 2019, <https://www.elmundo.es/papel/historias/2019/11/19/5dd2cc4dfdddf46a48b4606.html>

the use of direct address commentary videos, where users are observed giving their opinion on the demonstrations or narrating what happened from their point of view. Two examples of this feature can be seen in Figure 11. In one of the videos, a user is observed narrating what he considers to be the failure of the demonstrations, including criticizing the reasons and motivations of the protesters. The user extends his disclaimer by 2 minutes and 30 seconds since, unlike other short video apps that allow only 60 seconds, TikTok allows videos created on the platform to be up to 3 minutes long, allowing for more in-depth and argued political commentary.



**Figure 11.** Commentary and narration in the #TomaDeLima videos.

Another feature found in several videos is the use of the green screen feature in the app, which places the narrator in the foreground of the video and graphic material such as videos or photos in the background. The second example in Figure

11 shows an illustration of the use of this green screen affordance, where a user who uses the platform for political commentary explains what he sees as a failure in the impact of the protests, accompanying his presence in the narration with photographic material and text in the video.

### **4.3 RQ3. Prevalent ideologies among #TomaDeLima TikTok's**

#### ***4.3.1 Right-wing vs. left-wing ideologies***

As discussed in the theoretical framework, ideological identities are based on the values and positions shared by a group of people, which are called socially shared belief systems. These often lead to viewing people with similar positions as positive and those with opposing identities as negative. In the case of the #TomaDeLima videos analyzed, many videos contain a strong ideological element without specifically referencing any particular political party or character. Instead, they emphasize the expression of values and positions held by supporters of both ideological spectrums, left and right.

As pointed in the introduction, the discourse of the Peruvian right wing generally focuses on maintaining the status quo, which includes the continuation of development through capitalism and the preservation of the existing constitution and powers established by former dictator Alberto Fujimori. In various videos, right-wing users reflect these beliefs by delegitimizing the protesters' demands as absurd and anti-democratic. They often omit the protesters' calls for justice, instead emphasizing the importance of not harming the country's economic growth amid the social crisis.

(Figure 12)

On the opposite side of the spectrum, we see users who identify with the left engaging in a variety of demands and discourses. Some call for new elections, others for a new, more participatory and fairer constitution, and some ask for the return of former President Pedro Castillo. Although the demands and discourses vary, there's a common thread: a sense of weariness and a call for change and social justice, along with a desire for a system in which they feel more represented and heard. In a text-only video (Figure 12), accompanied by stickers and music, one user urges people to join the demonstrations: “Llegó el día de la liberación de nuestro pueblo. Sin sacrificio, sin lucha, no hay victoria. Adelante todos hasta sacar a la diktadura y cerrar el congreso” [“The day of the liberation of our people has come. Without sacrifice, without fight, there is no victory. Let's all continue until we get rid of the dictatorship and close the Congress”]. With this message, he not only expresses some of the demands of the demonstrators, but also makes a linguistic reference to the accusations that the Congress of the Republic supports Keiko Fujimori, the right-wing leader and opponent of Pedro Castillo, writing dictadura [dictatorship] with a K, the initial that is commonly used to refer to the former candidate. On the other hand, the use of words such as “our people” is observed, referring to their in-group and Andean identity, which I will discuss below.



**Figure 12.** Right-wing and left-wing ideologies portrayed in #TomaDeLima videos.

#### **4.3.2 Andean identity**

Throughout the research, it's clear that one of the most tangible and powerful ideological elements in the videos analyzed is Andean identity. The demonstrations drew large numbers of citizens from the southern Andean regions to the capital, eager to have their demands heard and to seek justice for the deaths caused by indiscriminate police violence during the protests of the previous months in the southern regions. In the videos (Figure 13), users use songs that reflect their identities and struggles, ranging from Huaynos<sup>59</sup>, popular music from the Peruvian

<sup>59</sup> "Más allá del huayno: conoce esta danza andina que expresa alegría y espíritu de nuestros ancestros," *Perú Info*, May 04, 2022, <https://peru.info/es-pe/talento/noticias/6/24/mas-alla-del-huayno--conoce-esta-danza-andina-que-expresa-alegria-y-espíritu-de-nuestros-ancestros>.

Andes, to well-known protest songs from the broader South American region, characterized by the sharing of the Andes mountain range.

The text used in the videos also reflects a strong sense of community and family. In their discourse, participants often use words like “Hermanos” [“Brothers”], “Hermanas” [“Sisters”], and “Hijos” [“Children”] to refer to those mobilizing from the mountains, emphasizing their shared weariness and desire for change. This choice of language may be aimed at strengthening the sense of belonging by using terms associated with the family, reinforcing the idea that they share the same roots, customs, and way of experiencing life. Another term often used to describe themselves is “El pueblo” [“The People”], which refers to the working-class people from the interior of the country who are fighting against oppression and the existing system. Furthermore, in various TikTok’s there are images and video of the marches where indigenous symbols are present, such as the use of Quechua<sup>60</sup>, the native language of the Andes, and the Whipala<sup>61</sup>, the flag that represents the Andean and indigenous peoples of the South American region. The use of these elements is a way of reflecting their identity.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the name of the protests, "Toma de Lima," has a specific connotation. The demonstrators, mostly from the southern regions, use the word “Tomar” [“Takeover”] symbolically, representing the reappropriation of

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<sup>60</sup> “Quechua,” *Base de Datos de Pueblos Indígenas (BDPI)*, accessed April 18, 2024, <https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/lenguas/quechua>.

<sup>61</sup> Pelayo Escandón, “¿Qué representa la bandera Whipala?,” *El País*, October 12, 2016, [https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/10/12/madrid/1476265918\\_284325.html](https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/10/12/madrid/1476265918_284325.html).



a space that is alien to them. This name reflects the disconnection and disunity between the capital and the inhabitants of the Andean regions.



Figure 13. Andean identity expressed in #TomaDeLima videos.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, through a comprehensive examination of videos posted on the Tiktok platform under the hashtag #TomaDeLima, which refers to the protests that took place in Peru in 2023, I demonstrate how social practices and discourses are recontextualized through the use of multimodal elements in an affectively polarized context, such as the socio-political crisis in Peru.

Using the lens of multimodal discourse analysis, and applying the recontextualization strategies proposed by David Machin<sup>62</sup>, it was possible to

<sup>62</sup> Machin, "What is multimodal critical discourse studies?," 352-353.

examine how users make sense of the protests. In the analyzed videos we found the use of each of the four strategies: Addition, Substitution, Evaluation, and Deletion. These strategies were used for different purposes and in different patterns, shedding light on how discourse is formed within the distinctive TikTok environment. The most common strategy used by users was addition, as in all videos, music, text, or images are added to show what happened in the protests or to take a position on them. As for substitution, I found mainly the use of symbols such as graphic elements, hashtags, or even references to characters from popular culture as substitutes for texts to refer to the "other" in a satirical way or to reflect ideologies. Evaluation was the strategy where ideological positions and opinions were more tangible, as users re-evaluated the events and reasons that motivated the demonstrations from their beliefs and points of view. Deletion was used to omit details of the social practice, to narrate partial parts of what happened, and to attempt to reinforce support for an in-group; it was possible to observe more clearly the potential manipulative goals of these multimodal productions.

In analyzing these discourse transformations, we found that the use of certain affordances was more prevalent. Users strategically combined the most common platform tools such as video, sound, and text to create meaning and reveal their position. As could be seen especially in cases of substitution strategies, the use of satire and playful performances through multimodal affordances was one of the most common ways to denote the confrontation generated by affective polarization. On the other hand, the use of the platform as a means to narrate and expose ideas was found in different videos, where users take advantage of certain characteristics of the platforms, such as the possibility of extending the video for more than 60

seconds. Through the analysis of all these videos, two dominant ideological elements could be observed: the “Us” vs. “Them” rhetoric, reflected in a battle of “right” vs. “left”, and a strong allusion to Andean identity by the protesters and users supporting the demonstrations.

These findings provide valuable insights into how discourse is transformed under the dynamic affordances and characteristics of TikTok. The presence of these recontextualization strategies highlights the influence of multimodal elements in promoting certain interpretations of reality, which in turn can influence users' perceptions. Although the use of different resources and tools is consistent with the findings and characteristics observed in the literature reviewed, the results of the research show the particular ways in which ideologies and identities are expressed in a protest charged with feelings of social justice and weariness in a highly affectively polarized country like Peru, where a stable democracy does not seem to be guaranteed.

Some limitations of this research can be considered the use of hand-selected material and the employment of a limited number of videos in the analysis. The use of digital methods tools to collect data may be an option to have a larger corpus and be able to conduct an even more representative research. As for the use of MDA, although this methodology has allowed to reveal underlying ideologies and meanings, perhaps the use of content analysis methodology could also be useful to answer the research question and sub-questions posed.

The main purpose of this research was to understand how polarization is reflected in TikTok through the transformation and recontextualization of social practices, in this case the "Toma de Lima". I consider interesting that future research

will not only focus on understanding discourses, but also consider the importance of the TikTok algorithm when consuming content on the platform and how it may or may not reinforce polarization in the country. The application of an algorithmic audit would be ideal to deepen this research. On the other hand, a cross-platform study would also be valuable to understand how polarizing discourses are expressed in different media with specific affordances and how they can be connected. Finally, I believe that any type of research related to the study of the political and socio-cultural contexts of Peru and the Latin American region in general, and their impact and relationship with new media, is essential, since there is a wide gap between research conducted in Western countries compared to the Global South.

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