

University of Hradec Králové, Philosophical Faculty, Department of Political Science

Supervisor's references for bachelor's thesis "Guaidó's and Maduro's Twitter engagement and discourse in Venezuela (2017-2022): a case study in the politics of the internet"

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Maria Ximena Suarez Salgado's thesis explores the political discourse of Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó in the period when they simultaneously claimed the political leadership of Venezuela through the analysis of their Twitter publications. In the project's first part, she outlines the political evolution of Venezuela over the last 30 years and then explains the relevance of Twitter as a public space for observing political discourse in the country. Then she describes her methodological approach and performs an analysis of the peaks of activity in the two presidents' accounts to test a series of hypotheses concerning their respective approach to political discourse. The project is commendable in its elaboration of an approach that retrieves raw material and then makes the data manageable for scholarly analysis.

In my opinion, the work is appropriately rooted in the political history of her country of origin and constitutes a timely attempt to evaluate a recent phase in its political development. Overall, I believe her work to be at its strongest when it allows topics and trends that illustrate the unfolding of political discourse to emerge from the material. While the hypothesis generation could have been better justified – the hypotheses are plausible, but not explicitly rooted in theory – she successfully retrieves material that resonates with the hypotheses' themes across the peaks of activity. Her initial research design, which included the two parallel national assemblies for a total of four Twitter accounts, was very ambitious and she had to scale it down in order to complete the draft before the deadline.

Another strong point lies in the comparative nature of the project, which mirrors the real-life situation of duplicated institutional structures in Venezuela. Going through the material, one really gets a sense of the distance between Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó in terms of message, style, and content. This could perhaps have been made even more explicit by creating a comparative table where the core differences are presented synoptically for the reader's benefit. Yet, as the two final "word clouds" illustrate, the key elements at the core of their discourse are the same, but not the way that they are implemented, through the creation of two different, incompatible visions of Venezuela past, present, and future.

Having followed the student throughout the whole process, from the initial idea to the final draft, I would also like to highlight an important aspect that does not come across in the final

document. Not only she personally retrieved the material by using appropriate tools, but went through a lengthy process of creating a readable, searchable dataset. This dataset itself constitutes an achievement, as it can be further used by the candidate herself or by other researchers at the university to perform more in-depth analysis. In fact, her proposal to present this research as part of a panel on Latin American politics at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in September 2023 has been accepted. Encouraged by this external validation, she intends to make a shorter version of this dissertation into an article-length academic publication over the summer, which is an inherently good outcome for a bachelor-level dissertation.

To sum it up, I find that this work surpasses the usual standards set by the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Arts of the Czech Republic for bachelor theses. I would therefore like to recommend the thesis for defence and suggest a grade of B.

Date: May 15, 2023

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ABERGOLing', written in a cursive style.