



## BETWEEN SYMBOLS AND POWER The Construction of Political Narratives Through Visual Culture in Social Networks

EMERSON DAVID DEVIA ACEVEDO <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> La Salle University, Colombia

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### KEYWORDS

*Political Narratives  
Social Networking  
Political Symbology  
Public Opinion  
Social Mobilisation  
Political Communication*

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of visual culture on social media in the construction and dissemination of political narratives. Through an analysis of instances where symbols, including images, memes and videos, are utilized in digital media and their interaction with political discourse, this study aims to elucidate the impact of these visual representations on public sentiment and the intricate dynamics of political authority. The study focuses on pivotal events of the past year, investigating how social media have served as pivotal platforms for political communication and social mobilization.*

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## 1. Introduction

The study of power in politics represents a pivotal area of inquiry within the field of communication studies. To fully comprehend this complex phenomenon, it is essential to adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon insights from political science, sociology, psychology, and semiotics. Symbols assume a significant function in the context of political communication, as they facilitate the conveyance of concepts, ideas and emotions, while simultaneously generating representations. Symbols are not merely images; they are units of meaning that establish a relationship between utterance and thought, reflecting the political position of the actor.

It is for these reasons that symbols represent a key area of focus within the field of communication studies, particularly in the context of political communication. Power is manifested through various mechanisms, establishing resonant, associated and subconscious relationships between actors. To problematise political narratives, it is necessary to consider theories and methodologies from disciplines such as political science, sociology, psychology and semiotics.

Archetypes are universal patterns that manifest themselves in personality traits and are embedded in the individual and collective unconscious of people. They exert a significant influence on human behaviour and motivation, and have been a pervasive feature throughout history, manifesting in a multitude of forms, including myths, religions, social structures and, of course, in politics.

The conjunction of these factors facilitates comprehension of political conduct. Such symbiosis represents a strategic maneuver for those in positions of leadership, serving to legitimize authority, mobilize the electorate, maintain social control, and construct political identities. In the context of politics, symbols and archetypes play a pivotal role in the construction of political narratives, given their significant influence on public perception. Consequently, the use of symbols and archetypes in political affairs is not merely an aesthetic choice; rather, they are a strategic tool that is intentionally employed to manage and shape public opinion and agendas. This is achieved through the transmission of ideologies and the reinforcement of political agency, thereby creating a sense of legitimisation of the electorate.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Overview of Symbolism

It can be argued that regardless of one's geographical location, one is surrounded by symbol systems. To illustrate, upon momentarily suspending one's reading of this text and directing one's attention outward, it becomes evident that one can discern a multitude of symbols in one's immediate surroundings. These may be observed on one's attire, within a book, in the street, through a window, or even in the act of simply gazing upwards. One of the most prized attributes of the human condition is the capacity for inquiry, which gives rise to a web of beliefs that we call a system. This system is replete with a vast lexicon of meanings and symbols that bestow upon us a plethora of meanings and representations pertaining to an idea (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003).

The joint study of symbols and signs (semiotics) encompasses the analysis of relationships and meanings, as well as an examination of their utilisation and interpretation in the construction of an ideological understanding of the world. As Keane (2018) asserts, an examination of semiotic ideology reveals the reflexivity of the capacity to utilise human signs, thereby establishing a link between ethical and political value and influencing social existence. By means of interpretation, a concept is grasped, and qualities are ascribed to it. In shaping an exchange of ideas, we imbue it with force and aspirational charges, thereby contributing to its legitimisation. This can be observed in human history, where symbols are used for meaning and signifiers, either in a positive or negative relationship with the system.

In the field of psychology, Jung (2002) put forth the notion that symbols are regarded as manifestations of the collective unconscious, encompassing universal meanings that transcend individual experiences. These expressions, codes, and gestures often transcend the limitations of spoken language, representing a form of communication that is both universal and transcendent.

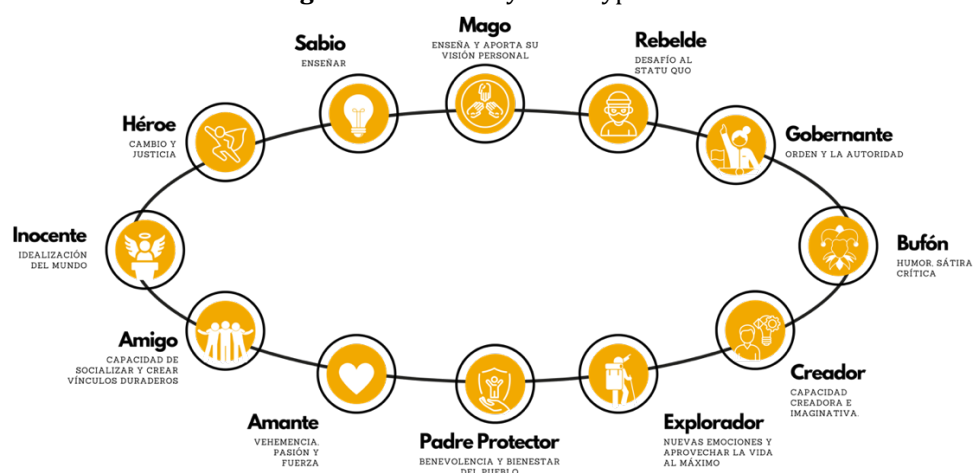
Symbol systems are an interrelated web of gestures, images, numbers, alphabets, colours and shapes, which must be considered as a unified whole, as the individual components would otherwise be meaningless. In the context of politics, this phenomenon is exploited by communication and design

professionals in the creation of concepts. To illustrate, the zenithally azimuthal equidistant projection, centred on the North Pole, features a wreath of olive branches and is coloured in Pantone 2925 blue, which alludes to the flag of the United Nations system. These symbols are complex and evocative, functioning as a conduit between intricate political concepts and the public's intuitive comprehension, facilitating a profound and accessible understanding.

## 2.2. Personality Archetypes

This section will focus on the archetypes proposed by Jung (2002). These archetypes represent universal themes and characters that emerge in almost all cultures and historical moments, especially those of a political nature. In the context of politics, these archetypes are frequently observed in the manner by which political leaders and movement pledges present themselves to the public (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Personality Archetypes



Source: Own elaboration, 2024; based on (Jung, 2002; Unir, 2024).

These conceptual representations draw on psychoanalytical meaning, deriving inspiration from the collective unconscious. Indeed, the use of symbols and metaphors in politics is as old as the very concept of politics itself, as they convey complex messages in a concise and effective manner. Political figures have assumed the responsibility of elucidating the significance of archetypes, personifying ideals, values, and apprehensions that resonate with the electorate, utilizing their psychological and historical import.

The examination of these archetypes enables an understanding of the fundamental principles of political authority and the mobilization of social sentiments (Laponce, 1975). The utilisation of these visual signals enables political figures and movements to employ a mode of communication that transcends the written or spoken word, thereby appealing to the electorate on an instinctive and emotional level.

## 3. Methodology

The objective of this study is to examine the interconnections between visual culture and political narratives. This research employs a mixed methods approach to generate knowledge (Creswell, 2014; Kozinets, 2019; Vara-Horna, 2012). The methodology is based on an enquiry between variables or constructs, with an exploratory, descriptive and explanatory approach. This methodology encompasses the collection, processing, critique and analysis of mixed information. Regarding the data collection techniques, bibliographic documentary review techniques and the extraction of content and entries in digital media were employed (see Table 1). A total of 23,074 records were extracted using data science techniques contained in the social listening platform Meltwater. In order to analyse the case in question, exemplifications and emotional reactions to symbols, including images, memes and videos of the information available between 2022 and 2023 are provided. A sample of the initial 20,000 records was defined.

**Table 1.** Aggregate Search Information Last Year.

Criterion	Description
Key Concept/ Word	Symbols in Politica (All Language)
Operation	Politics and Symbol and culture
Valuation	Exact Concordance
Source type (17)	Digital Media Entries (social networks, blogs, others) No duplicate articles
Countries	All global
Bases Available at	10.6084/m9.figshare.25368607

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Note 2: The Spanish operation covers all languages, but its main objective is to collect data in Spanish, but also includes other Romance languages.

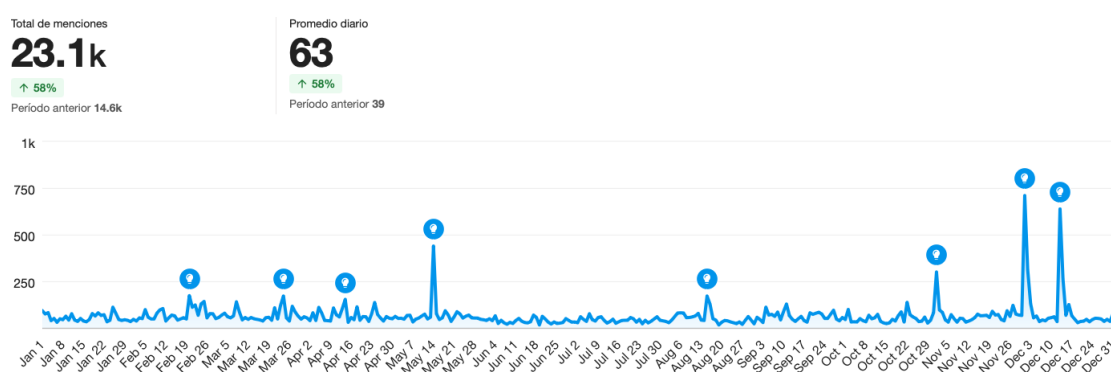
**Limitations:** The present study is not without limitations. It is important to note that the sample size of this study, comprising 20,000 records collected over the course of a year, may not be sufficiently large to yield statistically significant findings. It is therefore possible that the sample may not be sufficiently representative to cover all possible variations of the categorical intersection.

## 4. Results

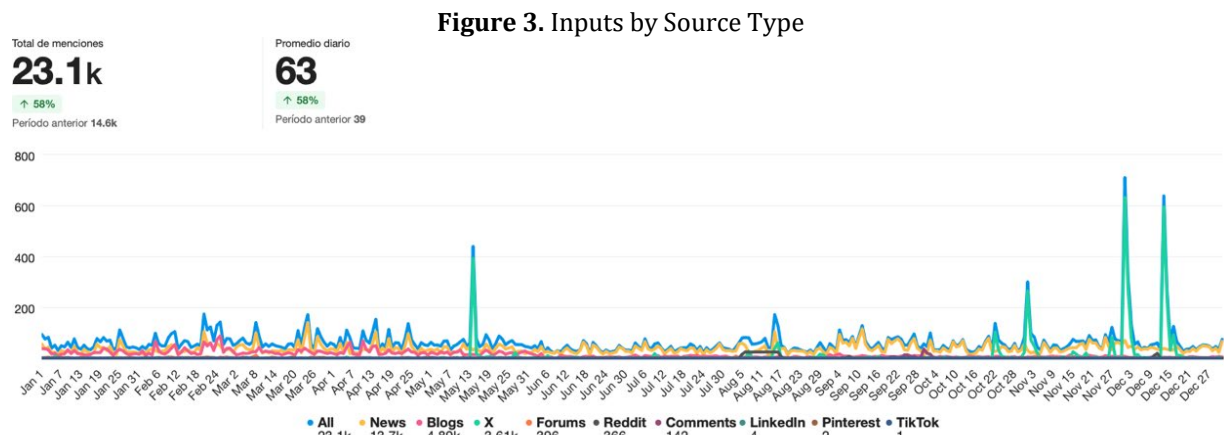
The results of the research are presented in the following analysis of the categorical intersection. The utilisation of symbols in the political domain has been demonstrated to be an efficacious and pervasive instrument of communication. Its capacity to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries facilitates the conveyance of intricate messages in an intuitive and direct manner.

By encapsulating complex political narratives in recognisable symbols, politicians can effectively communicate their messages and values, thus simplifying the process through which voters form their political opinions (Zahoor, 2021). By means of exemplification and case analysis, it becomes evident how political movements and parties around the globe deploy a variety of symbols to encapsulate and project their ideals, values, and objectives. Figure 2 illustrates the total number of mentions over time, demonstrating a notable increase of 58% in comparison to the preceding period. The data reveals three notable peaks in the mentions, indicating the occurrence of pivotal events or statements that garnered significant attention from the public and the media. These observations are detailed in Table 2. These peaks correspond to periods of heightened political and social activity, coinciding with events of significance in the public sphere.

**Figure 2.** Inputs per Time Series



Source: Meltwater, 2023.



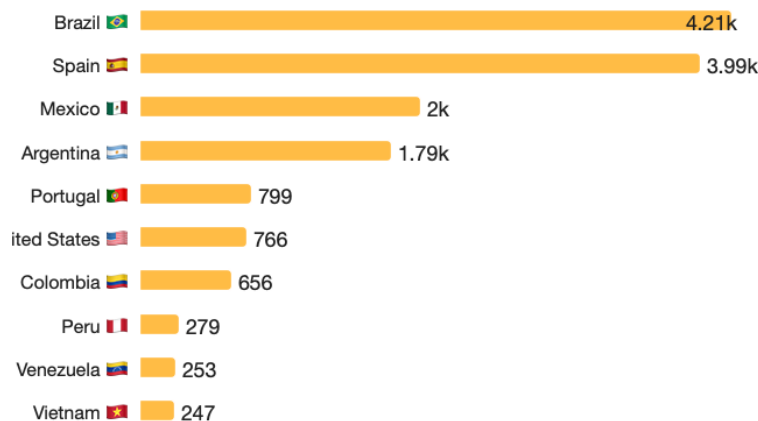
Source: Meltwater, 2023.

Figure 3 employs a classification system that identifies the source of origin of the mentions, which include news, blogs, forums, comments, and other sources. The prevalence of certain media outlets suggests that users attach greater importance and demonstrate a preference for consuming public opinion through these channels.

In the context of power, the platforms that generate the most mentions tend to exert a considerable influence on the configuration of narratives and political communication. Figure 4 illustrates the number of mentions or posts originating in different countries, with Brazil, Spain and Mexico being the most prominent.

This suggests that the level of influence or interest in factors such as the political, economic or cultural relevance of issues related to geographic distribution may be indicated by this data.

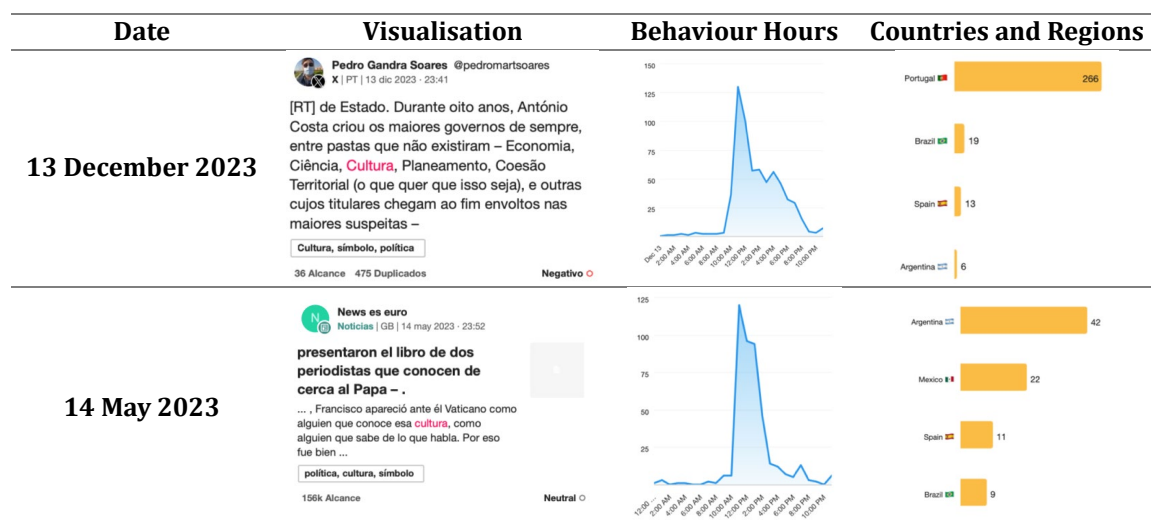
**Figure 4. Disaggregated Entries by Participation by Origin**



Source: Meltwater, 2023. Includes news sources, blogs and social media.

**Table 2. Conversation Milestones**

Date	Visualisation	Behaviour Hours	Countries and Regions
1 December 2023	<p>Newscastrat   The Number One Newscast in L</p> <p>Costa Rica celebra 75 años sin ejército, una hazaña que la convirtió en referente de paz</p> <p>... el ejército. El antiguo Cuartel Bellavista, hoy Museo Nacional, es símbolo de ese giro histórico, que se conmemora cada 1 de diciembre. ...</p> <p>cultura, Política, símbolo, política</p> <p>514 Alcance 14 Duplicados</p>	<p>Neutral</p>	<p>Spain 147</p> <p>Colombia 45</p> <p>Mexico 31</p> <p>Brazil 22</p>



Source: Own elaboration, 2024. Based on data extraction from Meltwater, 2023.

Figure 5 presents a word cloud that illustrates the prevalence of terms with both positive and negative connotations. The distinction between terms with positive and negative connotations also provides insight into the patterns of approval or rejection of specific political archetypes and symbols. This reflects a dialectic between criticism and recognition that may be present in the region's political narrative.

The larger words, such as "great contributions" and "symbol of colonialism", indicate the primary themes in the discourse concerning cultural or political legacy and contributions in the context of historical critique or revaluation. This reflects the polarisation and emotional charge of the terminology employed. Furthermore, they indicate the existence of a polarisation of opinions and the presence of archetypes such as "the hero" and "the rebel", which are in antithesis to the oppressor.

Figure 5. Tonality and Word Cloud



Source: Meltwater, 2023. Includes news sources, blogs and social media.

Emojis serve as contemporary archetypes, as evidenced by the symbiotic relationship between the sign system and the expression of feelings and reactions, as illustrated in Figure 7. The illustration depicts a variety of emojis, encompassing a range of subjects from national flags to expressions associated with victory, love, and disappointment. The emojis in question appear to indicate approval or disapproval of political events and narratives, as well as the leaders involved and the events themselves. The correlation between specific emojis and national flags reflects the collective perception of and attitudes towards those countries. To illustrate, the juxtaposition of a heart emoji with a flag may signify affection or endorsement, whereas the combination of an SOS emoji with a flag could be interpreted as an indication of an emergency situation.

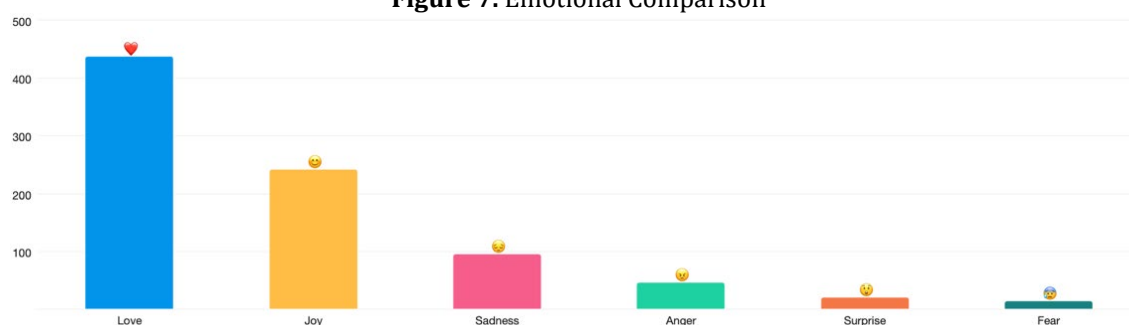
**Figure 6.** Use of Emojis and Symbols



Source: Own elaboration, 2024. Based on data extraction from Meltwater, 2023.

Note: Includes information from X only. For the other networks it is not possible to obtain the data.

**Figure 7.** Emotional Comparison



Source: Own elaboration, 2024. Based on data extraction from Meltwater, 2023.

Note: Includes information from X only. For the other networks it is not possible to obtain data.

The analysis of figures 2 to 7 and table 2, when considered together, demonstrate how specific archetypes and symbols are distributed across different channels of communication, thereby generating intersecting political narratives. Symbols reflect the diversity of ideological currents in global politics, underscoring the significance of symbols as vehicles for collective identity and instruments of mobilization. The capacity of these systems to motivate, unify, and mobilize people around a shared objective underscores their pivotal function in political communication and the formation of collective narratives.








## 4.1. Symbols in Politics




### 4.1.1 Identification of Common Political Symbols

It has been previously observed that symbols are capable of communicating complex ideologies, feelings and identities in a concise manner, particularly within the context of political discourse. In light of the aforementioned observations, it can be seen that the most prevalent symbols are the flags of states and political parties. These symbols represent national identity and unity. Conversely, the combination of colours and their associated conceptual meanings are used to convey political descriptions. Conversely, the utilisation of animals, and in particular the reinterpretation of their imagery into iconography, serves to abbreviate complex concepts, facilitating rapid recognition and emotional engagement. The following examples will serve to illustrate this point.

**Table 3.** Common Examples of Symbol Use in Politics

Symbol	Meaning	Context	Image	Where It Is Used
<b>Paloma</b>	Peace	Used to advocate for peace and an end to conflict.		In peace movements worldwide, political campaigns promoting non-violence.
<b>Fist</b>	Solidarity, resistance	Symbol of struggle against oppression and unity.		Labour movements, protests and political revolutions.
<b>Rosa</b>	Social democracy, socialism	It represents the values of social democracy and socialism.		Used by socialist and social democratic parties all over the world, e.g. the Socialist International.
<b>Eagle</b>	Power, freedom	National emblem representing strength and independence.		National symbols of the United States, Mexico and other countries.
<b>Hammer and Sickle</b>	Unity of workers and peasants	It symbolises communism and Marxist ideologies.		Communist parties all over the world.
<b>Red Star</b>	Socialism, communism	It stands for socialist or communist ideals.		Socialist and communist movements worldwide.
<b>Heart</b>	Love, compassion	Used to convey empathy, compassion and care.		Political campaigns focused on social welfare, health care and humanitarian causes.
<b>Sol</b>	Renewal, vitality	It represents new beginnings and the energy of life.		Political parties that advocate change or renewal, e.g. the Akbayan party in the Philippines.
<b>Leon</b>	Courage, leadership	Emblematic of strong leadership and courage.		Used by political parties and movements to signify leadership and strength, e.g. in the UK.



Symbol	Meaning	Context	Image	Where It Is Used
<b>Light/ Torch</b>	Enlightenment, freedom	It represents ideals of enlightenment, freedom and guidance.		Political movements advocating freedom, education and enlightenment values.
<b>Blue (colour)</b>	Conservatism, stability	Associated with conservative values and stability.		Used by conservative political parties around the world.
<b>Red (colour)</b>	Revolution, socialism	It symbolises revolutionary change and socialist ideals.		Used by left and socialist parties around the world to represent their commitment to change.













Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

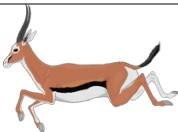



Note: Image credits to Freepik and Shutterstock

Notwithstanding the definitions and postulates presented above, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge that the interpretation of political symbols is subject to variation according to the specific cultural configurations and historical periods under consideration. To illustrate, the colour red may signify socialism and revolution in one context, yet simultaneously represent prosperity, sunshine and good fortune in another cultural setting. The use of animals and other representational elements evokes a range of associations that are shaped by national narratives. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of these concepts, an in-depth examination of the significance of political symbols is presented in the following table (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Examples of Symbols by Country

Country	National Symbol	Image	Meaning/Interpretation
<b>United States of America</b>	Bald Eagle		It represents truth, strength, courage, wisdom, power and freedom. It has been used for over 240 years and is also a symbol of the endangered species act.
<b>Russia</b>	Bear (Historical)		It is a totemic symbol of high mythological value, with outstanding qualities such as strength and cunning.
	Double-headed eagle (Official)		Their heads look into the infinite past and future, which means that the present is a line of contact eternities.
<b>China</b>	Dragon		Supreme spiritual power. Both earthly and heavenly power. Symbolises knowledge and strength, benevolence.

Country	National Symbol	Image	Meaning/Interpretation
United Kingdom	Leon		Symbolises strength and courage
	Flag (Union Jack)		Combination of the crosses of England, Scotland and Ireland. Patron Saints of each territory.
France	Gallo Gallo		National distinction evoking the inhabitant of Gaul and strength in the French Revolution. It is assumed as a common representation of the French, associated with the church (bell towers).
	Unofficial National Emblem		Lion's head and an eagle's head. Includes a monogram of the French Republic ("RF"). Oak and olive branches.
Germany	Black Eagle o Federal Eagle		Inspired by Germanic symbols, it represents everything from the Middle Ages to the republics. It represents good fortune and well-being
Japan	Rising Sun		Kyokujitsu-ki . It means where the sun rises and is commonly associated with Japanese nationalism, militarism and imperialism.
	Rising Sun (Variation)		
India	Bengal Tiger		Imposing and majestic. Sacred animal associated with the deities of Hinduism.
	Lotus Flower		Ashtamangala of Buddhism. It represents creation, cosmic renewal, purity and self-improvement. It is commonly associated with the human capacity for self-improvement and virtuousness.
Brazil	Southern Cross (symbol inside flag)		It represented for a long time a National Order, in honour of a constellation. Today it represents a gesture of gratitude from the Brazilian people.
Mexico	Golden Eagle		It is considered a celestial symbol, representing the incarnation of the sun and fire. It is also associated with strength and warrior character.
Argentina	Sun May		It represents a war sun and the Inca god Inti. It is associated with revolution and evokes the birth of a new nation.

Country	National Symbol	Image	Meaning/Interpretation
South Africa	Springbok (Antelope)		Also known as the Leaping Gazelle. It is the national animal.
Canada	Maple Leaf		It refers to the typical flora of the country. In common people it represents pride, courage and loyalty.
Colombia	Andean Condor		It symbolises freedom. In some Andean cultures it represents spirituality and power.
Spain	Bull		It is associated with Spanish nationalism and represents tenacity and courage.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Note: Image credits to Klipartz , iStock and Shutterstock

## 4.2 Personality Archetypes in Politics

### 4.2.1 Description of the Main Personality Archetypes Relevant to Politics

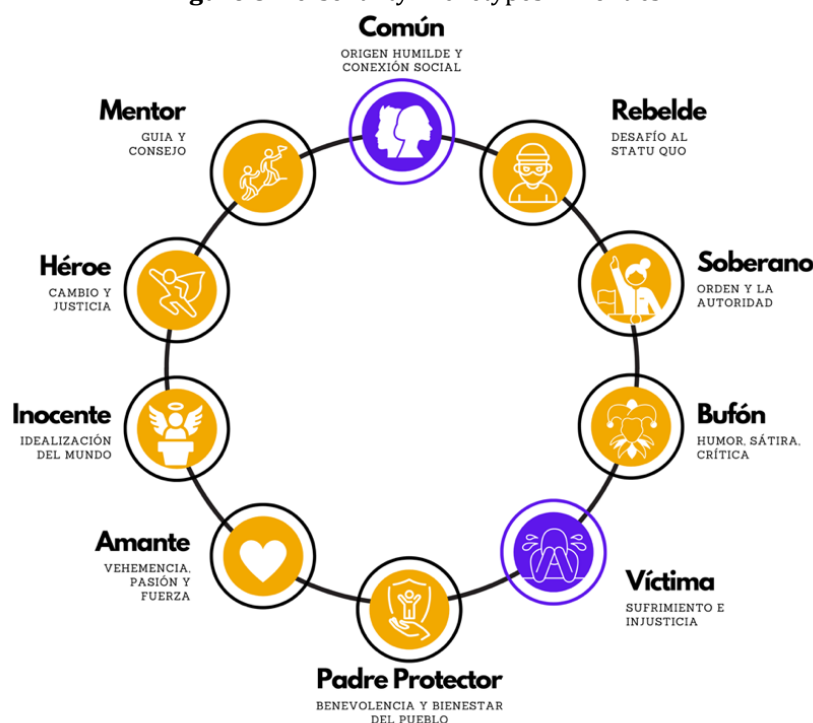
The symbolic representation of an individual is almost always embodied in personality archetypes, which provide a powerful framework for connecting with their constituents. Those engaged in the political sphere are acutely aware of the archetypes they embody and thus adept at adapting their communication strategies and political narratives in order to resonate with the expectations and values of the electorate. The construction of these narratives and the use of archetypes in the key of history have been employed during election periods and are particularly evident in historical events. Such figures frequently utilise archetypal imagery, wherein a singular occurrence serves as a benchmark for others, thereby establishing a symbolic comprehension that resonates with the general public (Kuzminski, 1986).

This is the manner in which archetypes have historically been deployed to evoke emotional responses and create images in the electorate and in the formation of public sentiment. The strategic deployment of symbols and signs in electoral processes can be traced back to historical cases in which images and the construction of narratives have been fundamental in the transmission and amplification of messages. Indeed, they have even been used to sustain ideologies. To illustrate, the deployment of post-revolutionary roles by figures such as Fidel Castro exemplifies the decoding of narratives surrounding political leaders through semiotic methods (Payne, 2017). A similar phenomenon can be observed with regard to the reframing of political figures associated with the processes of "discovery of America", for example: Madoc, Christopher Columbus, and others.

It is important to recognise that politics is crossed by diverse interests and actors. This implies that archetypes are also used by actors who are not typically considered political leaders. In 2018, the deployment of representations in political communication was exemplified by the Assange vs Zuckerberg case, which served to illustrate the potent construction of social leadership (Blanco-Gracia, 2018). This example demonstrates how the utilisation of archetypes transcends social domains, influencing the formation of discourses pertaining to adherence, affiliation and rejection. Indeed, these archetypes are frequently embodied and exploited by political leaders, with eight of them being the most prevalent. However, two more have been innovated and emerged, as illustrated in Figure 8, and mergers have been configured.

The use of archetypes is pervasive, having been employed in nearly every electoral process globally. One of the most recent fusions is the archetype of the "everyman," a common person representing the middle classes and advocating security and fairness as symbols of stability.

**Figure 8.** Personality Archetypes in Politics



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

In alignment with the aforementioned points, the embodiment of archetypes by political figures is not typically exclusive. One or more of these archetypes are embodied concurrently, either consciously through the strategic deployment of their public image, the construction of their brand, and their political affiliation, or unconsciously through their actions, narratives, and rhetoric. Furthermore, the utilisation of patriotic symbols in marketing campaigns serves to reinforce the tenets of national identity and to forge links between the interests of the electorate and the political party in question.

The use of symbolism in politics is a multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing a vast array of objects, images, and concepts. These may include the Stars and Stripes, a prominent national symbol, or the use of historical documents such as a country's constitution as a backdrop during political speeches and rallies. Nevertheless, the use of symbolism in politics extends beyond mere campaign tactics, becoming emblematic of a multifaceted historical tradition and the underlying historical fabric. Similarly, in the present era, symbolic struggles such as those of the LGBT sector have demonstrated the efficacy of symbols as a means of protest and as an indicator of social change (Nunez, 2015). This is exemplified by the utilisation of the rainbow flag as a symbol of diversity.

The strategy not only presents the policy, but also focuses on evoking shared cultural narratives and values, thereby legitimising the message by influencing the public perception of the leader and the message. In the contemporary era, the influence of these archetypes and symbols has been amplified. The sheer volume of data and the ease of access to information for voters are readily apparent, and the necessity for simplification and immediate comprehension is self-evident. The following examples illustrate this point.

**Table 5.** Exemplification of Archetype Type and Relationship to Political Leader

Type of Archetype	Political Leader
<b>Hero</b>	Winston Churchill; Nelson Mandela; Margaret Thatcher; Vladimir Putin; John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton; Emmanuel Macron; Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro; Rodrigo Duterte; Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador; and many others.
<b>Sovereign</b>	Queen Elizabeth II; Lee Kuan Yew; Louis XIV of France; Napoleon Bonapart; Xi Jinping; Narendra Modi; Perón
<b>Rebel</b>	Che Guevara; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez; Gustavo Petro; Hugo Chávez; Javier Milei
<b>Wise</b>	Noam Chomsky; Angela Merkel; Juan Manuel Santos; Mahatma Gandhi
<b>Common</b>	Jimmy Carter; Lula da Silva; Xavier Bettel; Ana Brnabić; Javier Milei
<b>Innocent</b>	Barack Obama, Bernie Sanders; Abraham Lincoln; Jacinda Ardern;
<b>Jester</b>	Mark Twain, Winston Churchill; Beppe Grillo.
<b>Lover</b>	Martin Luther King and MLK Jr; Nelson Mandela; Greta Thunberg
<b>Victim</b>	Nelson Mandela; Aung San Suu Kyi; Malala Yousafzai; France Márquez
<b>Protector</b>	John Paul II; Teresa of Calcutta, Princess Diana or Michelle Obama; Nayib Bukele; Eva Perón

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

It is important to note that archetypes are not fixed categories; rather, they tend to adapt and are often combined. These archetypes can therefore be seen as a recurring manifestation of figures from the individual and collective psyche, as evidenced in stories, myths, narratives and political discourses that are based on psychological needs and aspirational burdens.

### 4.3 Visual Culture in Social Networks

The examination of visual culture entails an investigation into the function of visual media and artefacts in the formation of culture and society. Consequently, the analysis of the media and its various forms of mediation is a crucial aspect of this field of study. This entails an analysis of images, technologies, signs, meanings, symbols and visual practices in terms of both context and power. The objective of this form of problematisation is to gain insight into the ways in which visual representations influence our perceptions, identities and understanding of the world around us. Mitchell (2009) examines the relationship between visibility, media and language. Mirzoeff (2016) extends this analysis to encompass the analysis of symbols and power in terms of authority. Hall (2004) provides an analysis of the encoding and decoding of messages.

The role of visual culture in connection with digital social networks is fundamental to the dissemination, amplification, interpretation and impact of symbols and personality archetypes in politics. It is erroneous to view social media platforms as mere conduits for the conveyance of political messages. Rather, they are the crucibles in which meanings, signifiers and identities are negotiated and formed. It can therefore be stated that visual culture in the context of social networks and political archetypes is concerned with the amplification of the reach and frequency of the message, as well as the interpretation and reinterpretation of emotional engagement. It is evident that visual culture and digital social networks are pivotal in comprehending the contemporary dynamics of political landscapes. It is therefore unsurprising that political leaders frequently utilise these media platforms to foster closer connections with their constituents. Those in positions of leadership who utilise this power and the development of concepts to amplify and increase visibility and commitment to their causes (Raynauld & Lalancette, 2021). The utilisation of symbols, encompassing images, memes and videos, has become a ubiquitous feature of the discursive and visual presentation of political leaders.

The combination of specific symbols and archetypes can serve to enhance the messages conveyed. To illustrate, the olive branch and the arrows of the United States of America's seal are juxtaposed, symbolising the country's preparedness for both peace and defence. This serves as an exemplar of how symbols can encapsulate complex national ideologies and principles. From the above, it is evident that political symbols are not merely decorative graphic elements; rather, they encapsulate meanings and

signifiers that influence public perception and engagement. By evoking concepts, collective emotions and cultural narratives, symbols amass influence and sway the electorate.



In periods of uncertainty and chaos, the Hero, Sovereign and Sage archetypes are particularly appealing and accepted, offering a political narrative of overcoming adversity or restoring order. In periods of upheaval, crisis and turbulence, the appeal is for the Rebel, Common Man, Victim and Protector archetypes, which align with the desires and tides of systemic change.

#### 4.3.1 The Impact of These Archetypes on Public Perception and Political Narratives.



From a systemic perspective, the use of archetypes and symbols provides a framework for constructing a narrative that enables voters to rapidly ascertain the character and intentions of the leader. When a political figure is associated with an archetype, such as the "hero" or the "common man", the qualities associated with that archetype are imbued into any symbol that the figure adopts or is associated with.

To illustrate, a politician perceived as embodying the 'protector' archetype may utilise the symbol of a shield, which voters will readily interpret as a pledge to defence and security. This enables the construction of narratives that are not only memorable but also emotionally powerful, ensuring that they remain in the public consciousness long after the campaign (Jones, 2017). To provide further insight, we will examine a few case studies in closer detail.



**Table 6.** Zoom to Full Cases

Leader	Background	Archetype	Archetypal Analysis	Symbols used	Effects
<b>Franklin Roosevelt</b>	During the Great Depression, the United States faced unprecedented economic turmoil. Roosevelt entered this scenario with a promise of hope, recovery and change through his New Deal policies.	Hero	Taking bold steps to rescue his country from economic despair. His fireside chats and public speeches were full of optimistic visions and a strong sense of leadership, which resonated with the American people's need for a saviour in those difficult times.		Roosevelt's alignment with the Hero archetype helped build broad support for his policies and leadership, contributing to his election to an unprecedented four terms. This archetype facilitated significant changes in US social and economic policy.
<b>Margaret Thatcher</b>	The UK's first female prime minister, she came to power at a time when the UK was facing economic decline and social unrest.	Sovereign	Thatcher adopted the archetype, emphasising strong government, law and order, and the principles of a free market economy. His firm stance on these issues, coupled with his authoritarian leadership style, reinforced his image as a powerful and stabilising force.		The "Iron Lady" character helped Thatcher implement radical reforms and assert the UK's position. His leadership style and policies left a lasting impact on British politics and society.





Leader	Background	Archetype	Archetypal Analysis	Symbols used	Effects
<b>Barack Obama</b>	Barack Obama's presidency was marked by challenges such as economic recession and international conflict. His campaign, however, was fuelled by themes of hope, change and inclusiveness.	Wise	Obama often represented the archetype of the Sage, appealing to reason, wisdom and the better angels of our nature. His eloquent speeches and his emphasis on diplomacy, education and health reform underscored his commitment to knowledge and enlightenment as pathways to progress.		This archetypal positioning helped Obama cultivate an image as a thoughtful leader, able to guide the nation through complex challenges with insight and integrity. His approach inspired a generation and facilitated key policy achievements, such as healthcare reform and the Paris climate agreement.
<b>Eva Perón</b>	Affectionately known as "Evita", she remains one of the most emblematic figures in Argentine history. She played a crucial role in defending labour rights and women's suffrage.	Mother Protector	She embodied the archetype of "La Madre", providing care, compassion and protection to the "descamisados", a term used to describe poor and working class Argentines. Her foundation, the Fundación Eva Perón, provided health, educational and social services, reinforcing her maternal image.		This archetype secured him a place in the heart of Argentina's political culture. His legacy continues to influence Argentine politics, demonstrating the enduring power of archetypal images in shaping political narratives and public perception.



Leader	Background	Archetype	Archetypal Analysis	Symbols used	Effects
<b>Hugo Chávez</b>	<p>President of Venezuela from 1999 until his death in 2013.</p> <p>He was a politician and military man, as well as a polarising figure known for his charismatic leadership and populist policies.</p>	The Rebel	<p>He positioned himself as a revolutionary leader fighting against inequality, imperialism and the power group. His use of vivid rhetoric, combined with policies aimed at redistributing wealth and power, resonated with many Venezuelans who felt marginalised by the political and economic systems in the 1990s.</p>		<p>By embodying the archetype, he cultivated a fervent support base, mainly transforming Venezuelan politics and society.</p> <p>His Bolivarian Revolution brought about the shift towards socialism, and his legacy continues to shape Venezuelan politics.</p>
<b>Álvaro Uribe</b>	<p>President of Colombia between 2002 and 2010, a period marked by an intense internal armed conflict with illegal guerrilla groups.</p> <p>He was the first president to be re-elected in Colombia's history.</p>	Protector	<p>He exemplified the archetype of "The Protector", prioritising security and the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. His firm stance on law and order, encapsulated in the policy of "Democratic Security", was aimed at safeguarding Colombian citizens and restoring national stability. I am fighting drug trafficking head-on.</p>		<p>The incarnation of the archetype created significant public support for him, allowing him to implement tough security measures and negotiate from a position of strength.</p> <p>His leadership style and policies led to a remarkable decline in official violence and kidnappings, cementing his legacy as a leader who restored a sense of security in Colombia.</p>

Leader	Background	Archetype	Archetypal Analysis	Symbols used	Effects
<b>Andrés Manuel López Obrador</b>	Known as AMLO, he became president of Mexico in 2018, promising to tackle corruption, reduce inequality and transform the country's political and economic systems.	Hero - Populist	<p>He represents the archetypal "Hero and The Populist", positioning himself as a champion of the people against the elite and traditional political structures.</p> <p>Its rhetoric and policies emphasise social justice, economic redistribution and national sovereignty, appealing to widespread desires for change and equity.</p>		It has significantly influenced Mexican politics, resonating with many citizens disillusioned by years of corruption and inequality. His presidency marks a shift towards more nationalist and socially focused policies.
<b>Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva</b>	Known as Lula, he was president of Brazil from 2003 to 2010 and was recently re-elected in 2022. Coming from a working class background, Lula's rise to the presidency was marked by his focus on social welfare and labour rights.	Common	<p>He embodies the archetype of the "everyman", connecting with the public through his humble origins and empathetic leadership style.</p> <p>His policies, including the Bolsa Familia programme, aimed to reduce poverty and inequality, demonstrating his commitment to the welfare of all Brazilians, especially the most vulnerable.</p>		<p>Lula's appeal had a significant impact on Brazilian politics, fostering a sense of inclusion and hope among the population.</p> <p>His ability to relate to the average Brazilian and implement policies that responded to their needs led to substantial social improvements and made him one of the most popular leaders in Brazil's history.</p>

Leader	Background	Archetype	Archetypal Analysis	Symbols used	Effects
<b>Historic Pact Alliance between Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez</b>	<p>It is a political coalition in Colombia, led by Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez. Petro, who started his political career as a former member of the M-19 guerrilla movement, through his term as mayor of Bogotá and his subsequent presidency, has been a member of the M-19 guerrilla movement. Márquez began her career as an activist, leader and domestic worker. The coalition's rise, but especially Petro's rise to the presidency in 2021 marked a historic moment for Colombia, as the country's first recent left-wing president.</p>	<p>Outlaw Revolution y Protector Common</p>	<p>Petro embodies the archetype of the "Revolutionary", a figure who seeks a profound transformation of society and challenges the status quo. His background as a former guerrilla fighter, his outspoken criticism of traditional political and economic systems Márquez represents democratic access to power and represents the interests of various population groups #LosNadies, referring to those forgotten by the state. Their joint use of narrative and symbolism, including their emphasis on peace, social equity and environmental sustainability,</p>		<p>The alignment of Petro and Márquez with the Revolutionary and Protectora archetypes has had a significant impact on Colombian politics, signalling a shift towards more progressive, benevolent policies. His election reflects a broader regional trend of political change and underlines the powerful role of archetypal imagery in resonating with voters' desires for transformation. The presidency also highlights the challenges associated with embodying archetypes, such as navigating opposition from entrenched interests, paternalism and managing the high expectations of supporters.</p>
<b>Javier Milei</b>	<p>President-elect of Argentina</p>	<p>Rebel Populist</p>	<p>It is characterised by challenging the status quo, breaking with convention and fighting against systems or beliefs perceived as oppressive or corrupt.</p>		<p>It suggests a significant change in Argentina's political landscape. Its ability to mobilise an active and committed base of supporters not only challenges the established parties and a radical change in the political landscape.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.








Note 2: Note 2: Image credits to Shutterstock, Alamy, Secretariat of Culture of Argentina, Tiempo 21, Magazine Semana, Klipardz, Federal Government of Brazil, Brands of The Worlds and Javiermilei.com.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned observations, the utilization of universal symbols has been demonstrated to evoke a range of responses, including those of an emotional nature (see Table 7). These counterarguments indicate that the concept of archetypes may be overly simplistic and manipulative in nature. Furthermore, the utilizations of archetypes to reinforce stereotypes and prejudices is also vulnerable to reinterpretation. These expressions, which are frequently elaborated in meme format, seek to counter the amplification of the message and facilitate a rapid understanding based on cultural and social context.

**Table 7. Examples of Emotional Responses**

Archetype	Meme
Hero and Sovereign	 
Mother Protector	 
The Rebel	   



Archetype	Meme
Common	  
Reinterpretations / Triggers of Political Violence	   

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Note: Image acknowledgements to Pinterest, Facebook, X, Instagram, MuseuDeMemes

Political communication is aware of the capacity of symbolism to establish a profound rapport with the electorate, frequently employing historical archetypes to evoke a sense of continuity and shared values. To illustrate, the heroic figure of the "Founders" is a pervasive motif in American politics, functioning as a symbol of national identity and pride. This archetype is consistent with Weber's concept of the ideal American, which political figures aspire to embody in their public personas to evoke a sense of confidence and stability (McNamara, 2019).

Conversely, the utilization of colour systems in political campaigns, as evidenced by the sea of crimson flags at a rally, has a profound impact on the collective psyche of supporters. The colour red, frequently linked with passion and revolution, evokes emotions and serves to reinforce the party's identity with an impactful symbol that is both referential and resonant (Nunez, 2015). It is precisely through the utilization of symbolic associations that narratives and narratives are effectively constructed, transcending the electorate and drawing upon shared psychological and sociological foundations. This phenomenon can be observed in the recognition of political parties as brands, a concept known as political branding.

The concept of 'appropriability' is employed to differentiate political campaigns and create a distinctive brand identity. This concept refers to the unique association of a particular symbol or

archetype with a political entity (Sood, 2018). By employing this symbolic and narrative strategy, political campaigns are able to effectively communicate their vision and proposals, thereby making a lasting impact on the collective psyche of voters (Villegas, 2023; Zahoor, 2021; Żerkowska-Balas et al., 2022). This analysis highlights the significant influence of archetypes in shaping the political landscape and in defining the public's perception and admiration of leaders.

## **5. Conclusion**

The analysis of personality symbols and archetypes in politics has revealed that the political landscape is characterised by a complex interweaving of factors operating within a situated context. The analysis of political leaders and cases revealed that the narratives constructed from archetypes serve as potent instruments of political communication, enabling political figures to psychologically engage with the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the electorate. These narratives facilitate the mobilisation of support, the legitimisation of political agendas, and the influence of public opinion.

From the Hero to the Revolutionary, each of the archetypes is characterized by a distinct set of attributes and a unique narrative that collectively shape the political ethos. The value of the analysis lies in its capacity to identify narrative resonance and symbolic affiliation, as well as the processes of legitimation. This system functions as a mechanism for electoral mobilization and is indicative of a political identity. Images and representations serve as prefigurative and identitarian elements of ideology, thereby giving rise to collective social imaginaries. This strategic deployment of signs and symbols represents a broader shift in political communication modalities, as evidenced by the findings of numerous studies (Jenzen et al., 2020; McGarry et al., 2019; Surdiasis & Eriyanto, 2018). Indeed, the use of performative communication is becoming increasingly prevalent.

In the context of digital social media, expressions are conveyed through a range of visual forms, including images, symbols, memes and videos. These have become central elements in the shaping of political discourse, with the proliferation of such forms of political narrative enjoying greater acceptance and reach. This visual political communication, however, is not merely illustrative; rather, it entails the strategic utilization of visual elements to convey intricate ideas and emotions that resonate with the viewer (Farkas & Bene, 2020). The deliberate design of these illustrations as call-to-action prompts facilitates engagement between the audience, the medium and the content, thereby influencing the formation of public opinion.

### ***5.1. What Insights can be Gained from an Examination of the Historical use of Symbols and Archetypes?***

The concept of archetypes is of great significance in the field of political psychology, as they represent universal patterns that serve as a repository of shared experience and wisdom. In regard to influencing perceptions of the political arena, the strategic utilisation of symbols and archetypes represents a narrative instrument that shapes how voters view and connect with a political leader. To illustrate, the archetype of the charismatic leader is characterised by the capacity to inspire and unify people around a shared vision. This can be especially efficacious in periods of social turbulence or when voters are seeking a figure who offers hope and direction. Consequently, their emotional responses evoke more memorable messages (Sotirova-Kohli et al., 2013; Villegas, 2023). Indeed, they serve as a means of communication and as a conduit for deep subconscious meanings, which resonate with the electorate and can trigger collective actions.

### ***5.2. What is the Psychological Impact of Political Symbolism on the Electorate?***

The use of symbols in relation to archetypes serves to reinforce truths about human nature, thereby facilitating the creation of characters that align with the unconscious expectations and ideals of the electorate. This influence is not merely superficial; symbols can trigger feedback effects that reinforce cultural narratives and affect the very nature of social discourse, interpretive layers and public response to political images (Laponce, 1975; Poon, 2018). In any case, the approach must be ethical, as the cultural and historical roots of archetypes demand a sensitive and respectful approach to their use.

The intersection between visual culture and political narratives provides a valuable avenue for examining the ways in which symbols are employed to construct persuasive messages and mobilise the electorate. The potency of these symbols is derived from their ability to evoke pre-existing emotions and ideas within the collective consciousness. Furthermore, the utilisation of digital platforms provides an opportunity for the amplification of political messages. Such visual elements as party logos, emblematic images, and viral memes can swiftly capture the attention of users and initiate discussions. In conclusion, the analysis of visual narratives represents a crucial aspect of political discourse, as they constitute a fundamental means through which power is represented and challenged. Consequently, the utilization of visual artefacts in politics constitutes a swift and persuasive action.

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