

Neo-fascist trends in education: neo-liberal hybridisation and a new authoritarian order¹

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Abstract

In this article the way in which current neo-fascism is penetrating education is analysed. For this purpose, a case study sample of three prominent figures was chosen linked to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), an organisation that has woven global networks and managed to have an important political presence worldwide: Steve Bannon (USA), Javier Milei (Argentina) and Santiago Abascal (Spain). The research methodology used was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), examining the texts and documents produced by these figures regarding the debates on education. The results show a basic similarity, albeit centred on different specific focuses: a) the warning of a leftist threat in education, sometimes characterised as an effect of ‘cultural Marxism’; b) a generalised rejection of educational proposals that seek to address cultural differences within schools and particularly with regard to sex education policies and the critical analysis of ethnic and cultural relations; c) a commitment to the ‘freedom’ of choice of individuals and families with regard to education, which consists of a project of educational privatisation. The conclusions of this research reflect the solid constitution of an international network of educational neo-fascism with a

common agenda, with different implementation depending on the geographical and political context.

Key Words: *Educational neo-fascism, educational policies, neoliberalism, anti-fascist pedagogy, Bannon*

Introduction

In December 2023, the economist Javier Milei was elected president in Argentina, with a government project centered on economic austerity and a rhetoric hostile to social justice and the recognition of cultural and sexual diversity. His platform, supported by different leaders of the international far right, such as Donald Trump in the United States and Santiago Abascal -leader of the far-right party Vox since 2014 and MP since 2019- in Spain, has managed to generate great expectations. Both the international capital- as shown in his recent appearance in Davos- and sectors of the global far right view his arrival as an opportunity to roll back ‘socialism’ and promote an order founded on the logic of capital, ‘economically liberal and socially conservative’ (Novaes, 2023).

Among Milei’s first pro-market initiatives at the head of the government, the now president has promoted an education proposal that favours the private sector and competition between schools. At the same time his proposal is openly hostile to education for equality and cultural and sexual diversity, the autonomy of teachers' work, and education as a basic and free right guaranteed by the State to all its citizens. His position is symptomatic of the different tendencies that nourish his platform: a landscape with libertarian banners, as well as posters with the legend ‘Let's make Argentina great again’, a clear allusion to Donald Trump's electoral platform.

One particularly important organisation is the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), an event created in the 1970s by US conservatives which, with the passage of time and an evident process of internationalisation, has gradually become a meeting point for the new right, the old right, the alt-right and neo-fascism on a global level. Milei himself appeared as a speaker at its 2022 international edition.

In 2024, as president of that country, Milei has once again been present at the Conference, now sharing the main stage with Donald Trump and Liz Truss, former British Prime Minister. This meeting was marked by the interest of Trumpism to ‘better communicate its message to the Latino community’ (Galaup, 2024) with a view to the next elections in the United States. For the global far right, Milei is a kind of market prophet with the ability to consolidate bridges between supporters of free capital and conservative order in the hemisphere, as well as a key player in the battle of ideas against collectivism.

In addition to being a product of Argentina's domestic politics conditioned by a long period of economic instability, Milei's arrival to the presidency in that country can be read as another symptom of the global expansion and growth of far-right political platforms. In these we find the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, or Giorgia Meloni in Italy (Martini, 2024).

Such platforms, articulated in an open or veiled matrix based on a denial of social justice, also have increasingly visible implications in the field of education, both at the level of public pedagogy (Sandlin, et al., 2011) which seek to re-educate the global citizenry in conservative values such as the critique against social justice deployed by Milei in Davos (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Neofascism in the 21st Century

In recent years, we have witnessed a resurgence of the far right around the world. We agree with Guamán et al. (2019), Hill (2021), Pavón-Cuéllar (2020), Ramos (2021) and Cox and Skidmore-Hess (2022) that the term ‘neo-fascism’ is more appropriate to describe the forces currently occupying the far-right space. Their programme does not so much refer to the classic fascism of the 1930s, but rather to the aim of accelerating and deepening the neoliberal model, with an increasingly ‘deconstructed’ State, according to Steve Bannon. Except for the military and police spheres to accelerate the ‘freedom’ of capital's power to continue activating expanded accumulation.

The neo-fascism of the 21st century with a discourse based on class, ethnic, and gender hatred, appeals to fear and resentment to wage the ‘cultural battle’ for ideological hegemony. It seeks to set the media and political agenda through strategies of constant provocation. It dominates propaganda, populist messages, and fake news on social networks. They re-appropriate the instruments of action used by social movements seizing public spaces. Also, they redefine the language of the defence of the commons (freedom, democracy, social justice...) in an individualist and libertarian key to attack everything that implies solidarity, collective rights, and the struggle for the common good. Their way out of the crisis and their political programme as a whole show a clear commitment to neoliberalism (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2018; Hill, 2021; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2020), which distinguishes them from the flirtation with social aspects that the fascisms of the 20th century initially had.

Paradoxically, this neo-fascism has been nourished by popular discontent originating in the social effects of the capitalism managed by social democracy, even if it is disguised under different euphemisms - ‘with a human face’ or ‘third way’-. The increase in inequality, pauperisation, individualisation of the

working class, has generated a breeding ground that has fueled their messages of rejection of migration and distrust of institutions. Their response to the effects of neoliberalism and capitalism has been more neoliberalism and capitalism (Guamán, et al., 2019).

Educational neo-fascism

It is this hybridisation of neoliberalism and authoritarian order that consolidates current neo-fascist tendencies in education (Hill, 2021). Strategically, neo-fascism has operated at the transnational level, through a complex set of networks and alliances with other formations, also concerned with the advance of "progressivism" and "cultural Marxism" (Staal, 2018), such as "libertarians", neo-conservatives, ultra-right radicals and "free market flat-Earthers" (Dvoskin, 2019). All this alongside 'traditional' concern with and enmity towards socialism and movements and organisations of the working class. Their narrative is shaping the education policy agenda and becoming central to the political debate on education in many countries (Aranda, 2023).

This neoliberal education policy agenda is constituted through a double movement: on the one hand, it seeks to expand spaces for the representation of the interests of capital in educational administrations, schools and communities, promoting different mechanisms of exogenous and endogenous educational privatisation (Ball and Youdell, 2007) such as school voucher policies proposed by the new Argentinean president, or the support for the development of charter schools in the United States, in the case of Bannon or his disciple Trump. On the other hand, they seek to incorporate neo-traditional logics into the sector's regulations, curricular content, and school practices: machismo and androcentrism, particularly characteristic of the Spanish case with Santiago Abascal and his VOX party, as well as racism and homophobia.

Neo-fascism finds in the education system a strategic enclave of dispute in which to carry out its cultural, ethical and political war (Laje, 2022). Its aim is to prevent the infiltration of ideological principles they see as dangerous to Western civilisation and its traditional values by means of a return to the ‘classical values’ of the West. Simultaneously, it pursues the promotion of the neo-liberal model applied to educational management, recovering the agenda of the private sector in education, in the face of what they consider to be the State's attempt to indoctrinate the minds of children and adolescents. In addition, their intention is to expand the spaces for the reproduction of capital, given that they see schools not only as a business and an investment but also as a factory of human capital at the service of businesses (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2022).

The CPAC as a meeting space of the neo-fascist international

The Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) is a regular meeting organised by the American Conservative Union (ACU) since 1974. It brings together leaders of the conservative world, hundreds of organisations, thousands of activists, and millions of media viewers (Schlapp, 2019; CPAC, 2022), although it has also been a space for the participation of politicians associated with the US libertarian tradition. Parker (2015) sees CPAC as an instrument of the US conservative movement that has historically played a key role in articulating the confluence of politicians, public intellectuals, strategists, and conservative activists to build relationships and blend diverse agendas. CPAC had, for example, a relevant strategic role in reinforcing the figure of Ronald Reagan, placing him as a keynote speaker in several of its meetings (Parker, 2015). However, the conference is not just a ‘mise-en-scene’ of the right-wing political agenda but has become a transnational space for mobilising activists as conservative party middlemen (Cole, 2022).

The Conference has become an almost obligatory forum for the different expressions of the global extreme right. This can be seen by looking at the main speakers of two of its last meetings, in Mexico (2022) and the United States (2024) included in the list of speakers and countries in Annex I.

An example of this is the list of guests at its 2022 edition in Mexico City, with the participation of important figures in political life around the world:

Christopher Landau, former US ambassador to Mexico; José Antonio Kast, former presidential candidate in Chile; Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro; Santiago Abascal, leader of Vox, the Spanish far-right political party; Ted Cruz, Republican Senator for Texas, in the United States; Steve Bannon, well-known political strategist of the US far-right; and Javier Milei, current president of Argentina. The relevance of the conference lies not only in the high-level political profile of those attending as speakers, but also, and mostly, in the fact that more than half of those attending CPAC are university students.

The CPAC conference consists of days in which speakers and special guests address different topics related to the advance and strategy of the global ultra-conservative movement, such as the fight against *communism* and the cancellation or threats of progressivism, as well as strategic elements useful for the cultural battle. However, such a space is more than a spectacle where conservative leaderships develop monologues with media pretensions. Cole (2022, p. 3) proposes that in such spaces three processes take place in relation to the mobilisation of activists, many of them students in higher education: “providing information on policy positions, teaching tools for activism through target training and socialization, and finally engaging in cultural meaning-making around conservative ideology and identity”.

This allows the formation and permanent expansion of political networks that extend beyond the institutional scope of conservative party formations, in which the rejection of equality and a clear *patriarchal populism* are reproduced (Sanders and Dudley, 2023). Thus, the Conference constitutes a logistical environment that has allowed the global extension of conservative nodes of discursive production, activist logistics and a permanent knowledge of the political terrain at the global level.

In 2021, the North Carolina Conference panel on education questioned public education as left-leaning and politicising, seeking to destroy the nuclear family and Christian values, as well as making students ashamed of their country by building knowledge and awareness of the history of slavery and the black community in the United States through ‘The 1619 Project’ (C-SPAN, 2021).

Hence, the aim of this research has been to analyse how the organisation of current neo-fascism at the international level, present in groups such as CPAC and some of its key players, is penetrating education policies at the global level to redefine the meaning of education and the purposes of education. The objective is to study and unravel some of the main characteristics and mechanisms of infiltration in the educational system, in educational practice in classrooms, educational communities and the definition of educational policies. We chose three prominent figures -Steve Bannon in the USA, Javier Milei in Argentina, and Santiago Abascal in Spain- linked to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) as case studies of this trend.

Materials and Method

The methodology used in this research was the case study, using Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2008) as a research instrument, one of the epistemological perspectives and methodological tools that is currently

contributing considerably to critical social research (Medina-Vicent, 2022; Varela-Rodríguez and Vicente-Mariño, 2022). This approach was selected for its usefulness in uncovering the ideological discourse underlying the political and educational project of the three cases selected as a representative sample of the Neo-Fascist International in the field of education.

Sample

The selection of Steve Bannon, Javier Milei and Santiago Abascal as the cases studied comes from the prominence that the characters analysed have achieved in the international CPAC meetings, particularly in the one held in 2022 in Mexico City. Furthermore, they are several of the most active actors in the production and dissemination of educational proposals associated with the organisation. Not only have they generated concrete educational proposals to consolidate a new authoritarian order in education, but they have also carried out specific political alliances and strategies to put their ideas into practice. These characters share the trait of having developed a series of ideas regarding education and, moreover, of using them to create a public pedagogy (Sandlin, et al., 2011) that seeks to convince the public and members of other conservative movements. Their proposals and narratives have been promoted by their followers in the political agenda of their respective countries and at the international level, as well as in everyday debates in educational communities, so that their speeches at CPAC (Schlapp, 2019; CPAC, 2022) have managed to go beyond the formal meeting structures of these extreme right-wing forces at this conference.

These three cases have been selected based on the following criteria:

- **Programmatic:** They proclaim an ideology in education centred on the rejection of public (state-controlled), gender equality and progressive educational content (human rights, diversity, social justice, critical

education, etc.), claiming the recovery of values linked to traditional conservatism, the introduction of values linked to a militaristic culture and warlike confrontation, the recovery of a culture of exaltation and pride in a heroic past, as well as a radical privatisation of education and curricular control and supervision of school content.

- **Political relevance:** The three cases represent regionally relevant political enclaves: Steve Bannon, former advisor to Donald Trump; Javier Milei, political leader of La Libertad Avanza, an ultraconservative and neoliberal political coalition in Argentina; Santiago Abascal, leader of the far-right Vox Party in Spain and a reference in the neofascist sphere at the global level.
- **Sex:** These spokesmen and ideologues are men who defend an openly patriarchal culture and are models of what has been called the ‘alpha male’, who are often surrounded by women who agree with their thinking and discourse, and who also openly declare themselves to be against what they call the ‘gender ideology’ of feminism.
- **Geographical location:** All three drive strategic enclaves of the international neo-fascist movement in different relevant regions in the West: Latin America, the United States and Western Europe. Although there are other actors involved in media education, the ideas of those mentioned have been exported from their geographical areas to other parts of the world and have become substantial references.
- **Networks:** All three cases are linked to strategic institutions at the international level, dedicated to promoting market and conservative policies as think tanks: Fundación Disenso, led by Abascal in Spain, has built alliances in Latin America with other organisations, such as Fundación México Unido; Milei is closely linked to Atlas Network, a well-known network of pro-market organisations created in the 1970s and which currently has more than 500 think tanks worldwide, promoting

education privatisation agendas and confronting progressive governments; and Bannon who has been linked to ultra-conservative think tanks such as the Dignitatis Humanae Institute in Europe and the Heritage Foundation in the United States.

- Resistance: All have generated resistance and constructed their political and educational discourse against the progressive sphere.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied to reports, documents, speeches, interventions, and participation in relevant debates on education or that at some point addressed educational issues driven by such leadership, following the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (2013).

CDA is framed within the approach of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS):

A set of interdisciplinary principles and theories, in which different approaches are integrated for the exploration and critical interpretation of the micro and macro-discursive level, whose core of reflection is always a social, cultural, or political problem relevant to the community in which such discourse is produced, distributed, and understood (Pardo, 2013, p. 45).

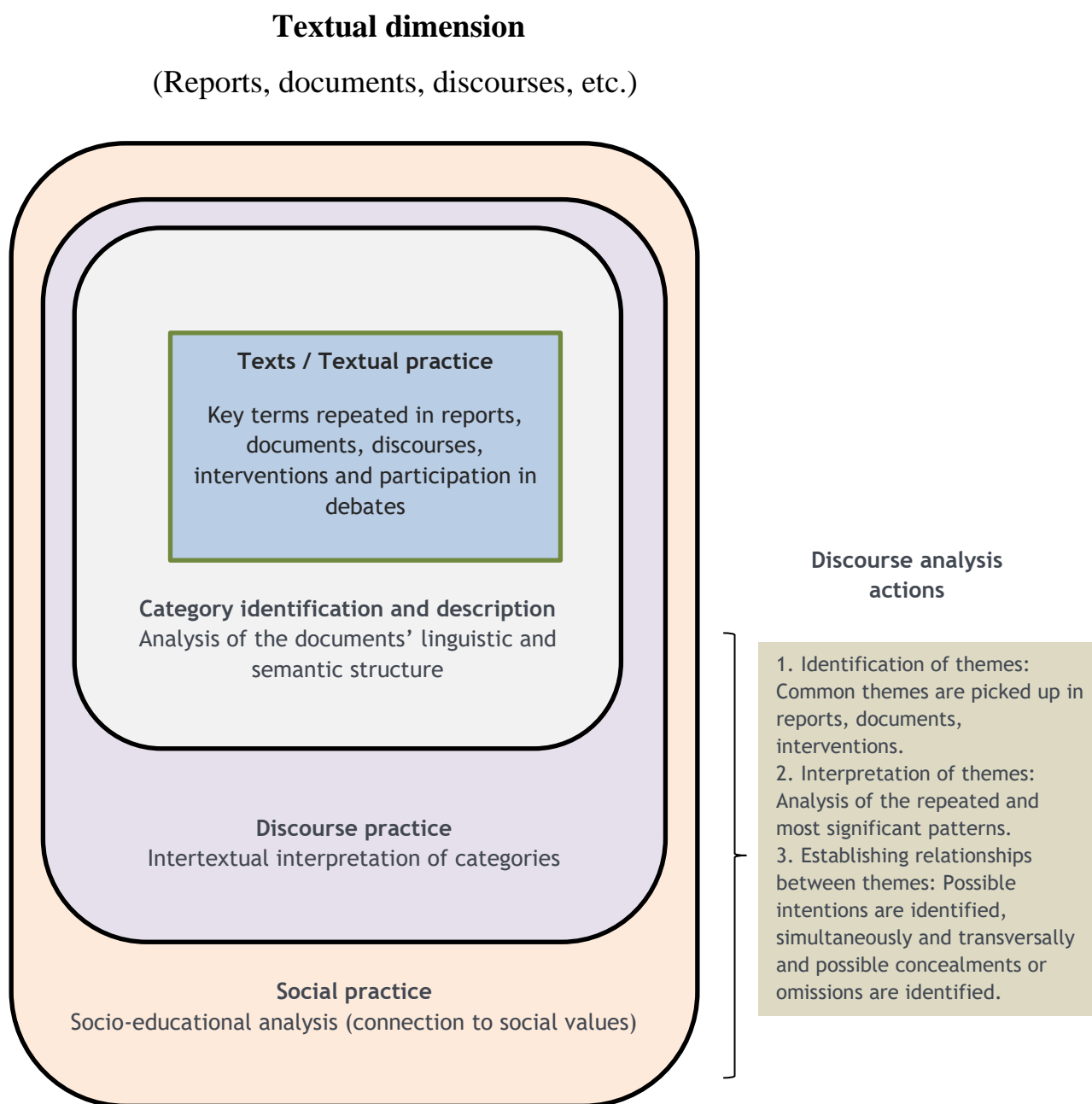
CDS are heirs to the proposals of Fairclough and Wodak (2000), Van Dijk (2015), Fairclough (2013), Wodak (2011). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a tool for critical educational research, insofar as it allows us to describe, explain and analyse the relationships between language, power, educational practices and discourses, and their nexus with educational policies and the capitalist system (Martinez and Flax, 2020). In that sense, CDA is an explanatory field of the underlying ideologies, assumptions and hidden

meanings of discourses and the rhetorical and discursive devices used to persuade in the field of educational policies (Pendri, et al., 2024).

The reports, documents, speeches, interventions, and participation in debates were initially subjected to repeated reading and viewing to gain an overview and establish common themes and categories. Coding of themes and categories was done manually. The questions guiding the readings followed those posed in Carlsson's (2021) research: What problems and challenges related to the object of research to which these discourses are believed to respond, can be identified in the documents and discourses? What assumptions or presuppositions underlie the representations of these problems related to the political ideology about education that underpins them? What is hidden, invisible or unproblematised in these problem representations? How and in what way are these proposals constructed in the discourses as the solution to these problems and challenges?

Around these questions we have developed the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (1995) and subsequently developed in numerous CDA studies and research. The following graph, Figure 1, summarises the process.

Figure 1. *Tridimensional model based on Fairclough (1995)*



Analysis

The phases of the applied analysis process were as follows (Contreras Islas, 2020):

- (1) Reading and analysis of the texts and speeches on education expressed by these three leaders in their reports or those of their parties, in the documents, and in the speeches, interventions and participation in debates of the three leaders.

(2) Contextualisation: (a) Analysing who, how and for what purpose the documents were produced and (b) how they were disseminated, as well as (c) to whom they were addressed. Contextualising the meaning and intention of the documents.

(3) Categorisation: (a) Extracting key concepts and words, (b) determining the contextual thematic axes and networks in which they are imbricated and (c) establishing the fundamental categories that appear in accordance with these concepts and thematic networks.

(4) Deepening: (a) Formulate inferences about the ideology and approach of the texts; (b) Discover silences from the internal logic of each text and (c) surface contradictions that may not be so evident.

In specific terms, to develop these phases we have applied the three-dimensional CDA model to the analysis of the texts and interventions of these three cases, considering three levels:

- The first one called discourse as 'text' (or textual practice) corresponds to the linguistic analysis of the discourse as a unit or written 'piece of language', accounting for how the linguistic construction, vocabulary, overall structure, and cohesion, among others, of the interventions and documents produce effects of meaning, i.e. impacts on the identities, actions, and social representations of the educational model and the educational policies intended. To this end, we analysed the texts by extracting key words related to the ideology that is shown and against the ideology that is manifested, as well as that which is ignored or concealed. Depending on the volume of occurrence and the focus of the terms, we can observe how the issue of education is raised in the texts and

interventions analysed. In this way, we extracted the key words around which the discourses were elaborated, as well as the thematic axes and networks that gave them meaning and connected some discourses and interventions with others. This allowed us to establish common or similar themes and categories across the three cases, around the question: What key conceptualisation, characteristics, issues, and challenges related to education can be identified in the texts, documents, and interventions?

- A second level of analysis, 'discursive practice', involving processes of dialectical and critical interpretation of the texts analysed, focused attention on the ways in which texts and discourses can be interpreted from an intertextual approach (unravelling the multiple discourses that are present within those utterances and which are inferred and concealed) and critically analysing the meaning of the texts. The question is: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representations of education and education policy, the analyses, and the proposals on how to approach them?
- And a third level understood as 'social practice', which alludes to the situational and institutional character of discursive narratives, given that they are embedded in a set of situations, institutions and macro contexts that condition these interventions and documents and that contribute with them to performatively produce a certain social order, reinforcing or questioning it. This third level of analysis considers the political and ideological effects that are shaped by these interventions and educational proposals and that form part of the strategies of cultural hegemony, questioning how the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and ideological contexts in each geographical and political context operate in the

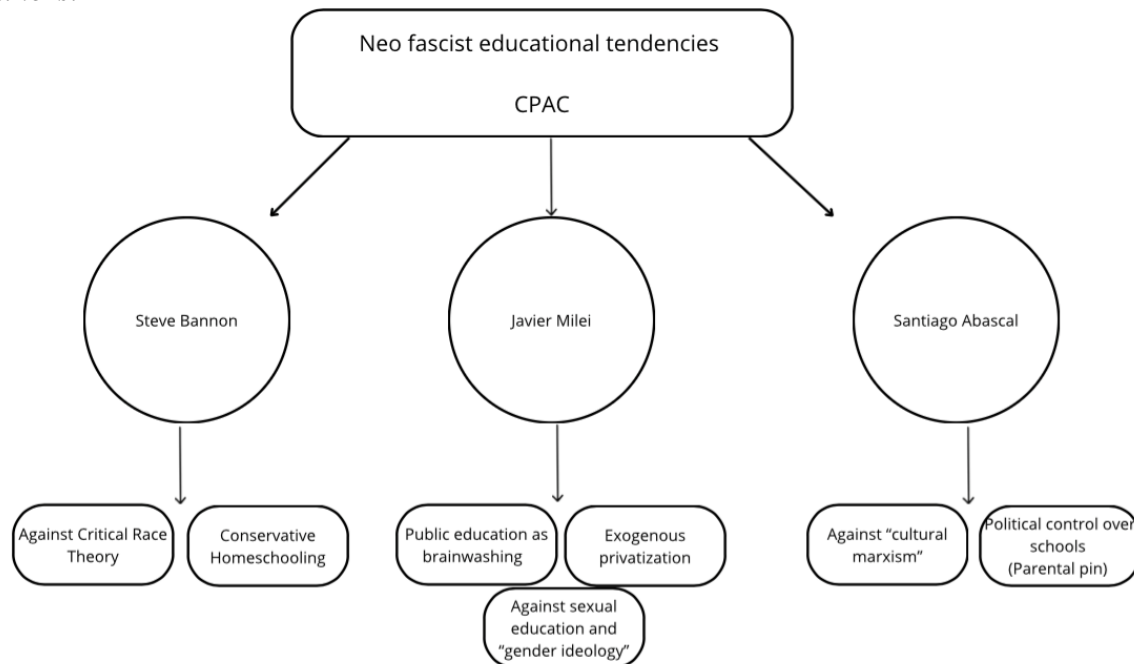
reproduction of those discourses around the following questions: In which sociopolitical context is the discourse or report analysed situated? What remains hidden, invisible, or unproblematized in these texts and interventions?

These three levels are related. It is not possible to understand one level without considering the others. This was the three-dimensional model used as the analytical framework of the corpus, to problematize the discourses produced and presented in the different reports, documents, speeches, interventions, and participation in debates of the three cases analyzed.

Results

Neo-fascism in education is not an organically defined movement. However, it is possible to trace a set of common ideological tendencies that are transversal to the different expressions of the ultra-right worldwide.¹ At the CPAC Conferences (Schlapp, 2019; CPAC, 2022), spaces have been organized for educational debate, where key leaders have managed to find a common platform for the dissemination of their thinking. However, their proposals for educational change have generally been developed outside these forums. The following figure 2 explains the three main leaderships studied and their key proposals in education.

Figure 2. *The Neo-fascist International and its influence on education. Elaborated by the authors.*



In the analysis carried out we have identified a series of categories regarding common approaches when the actors discuss or intervene in the debate on education. These are:

(1) Resignification of the term and conception about educational indoctrination: there is a demand to return to educate in ‘traditional values and principles’ in the face of the leftist threat in education, sometimes characterized as indoctrination in ‘cultural Marxism’.

(2) Generalized rejection of educational proposals to address cultural differences, diversity, and inclusion within schools. The refusal is particularly clear with respect to affective and sexual education policies and critical and decolonial analysis of ethnic relations.

(3) Neoliberal educational policies: a commitment to the ‘freedom’ of choice of individuals and families with respect to the selection of educational centers and

funding on demand (vouchers or school checks), which represents a project of educational privatization. Moreover, this call for freedom is also linked to a market perspective regarding the contents developed in classrooms (educational entrepreneurship), which leads to an anti-government rhetoric, particularly in the context of progressive or center-left governments.

All the above points converge in a project aimed at greater control of public education by conservative and ultra-liberal actors, while it is constantly criticized (especially teachers) for its practices, contents, and results in terms of ‘lowering standards’, poor ‘competitiveness’ and excellence.

Although in their public interventions each character has placed particular emphasis on certain educational narratives, as shown in the graph above, it is possible to identify that their proposals, critiques, and rhetoric around education are juxtaposed and feed off each other. Thus, educational issues, strategies and proposals expressed by far-right political forces in the United States are also taken up in Spain and Argentina. Similarly, the form of the political debate in Europe or Latin America permeates the content of the educational discussion in the United States. This collective action can be interpreted as a project of global and organized educational intervention at the level of the educational system, as well as expressions of public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2011) that make up what could be called an ‘educational neo-fascist international’.

Bannon: cultural warriors, conservative homeschooling, and anti-critical race theory

Foster (2017) develops an interesting characterisation of the ideology of Bannon: (a) the need to overcome the ‘crisis of capitalism’ brought about by ‘globalism’ and ‘crony capitalism’; (b) the restoration of the ‘Judeo-Christian West’; (c) the promotion of extreme ethno-nationalism; (d) explicit

identification with the ‘global populist movement’; (e) the insistence on a global war against ‘Islam and an expansionist China’; and (f) the notion that the US alt-right represents a Great Turning in US history.

In Bannon’s texts and proposals, he has developed an ambitious educational plan to train right-wing ‘cultural warriors’ to fight the left, the Chinese Communist Party, radical Jihad, and cultural Marxism. In doing so, he planned to defend Western civilisation from the above-mentioned threats. The project would take place in a medieval Italian monastery now converted into an academy of ‘gladiators’ and cultural leaders of the far right, called the Academy for the Judeo-Christian West, which would ‘produce the future Mike Pompeos, Nikki Haleys’ (Business Insider, 2021).

Analysing Bannon's discourse, we see how it coincides with the recovery of a militaristic language in education and the conviction that education is a key piece in the cultural battle. These terms are also used by different contemporary intellectuals of the right both in Latin America and in other parts of the world. In his intellectual production, Agustín Laje has stated that Bannon tries to collaborate in the daily battles that the ‘cultural guerrillas’ of what he calls the new right wage against progressivism (Laje, 2022). A perspective also shared by Javier Milei, who presented Laje's book in May 2022.

A second category that marks the ideological discourse of Bannon, Donald Trump's former advisor, is homeschooling. His proposal is to turn the ‘mothers’ who defend homeschooling into his ‘shock troops’ (Brown, 2019, 2021a) against the policies of mandatory use of masks in the school space (during the pandemic). Also, against the ‘forced’ incorporation of the so-called critical race theory in schools, turning ‘mothers’ into an advance party of the ‘firestorm’ he intends to unleash in the field of public education.

Homeschooling has also been used historically by the US ultra-conservative movement to confront certain state educational policies, as well as certain content in school textbooks that they find uncomfortable. Contents addressing progressive themes on sex or ethnic issues or studying the lives of historical heroes of the civil rights struggle in the classroom are typical examples. Indeed, Brown (2021b) sees such a movement as tending to undermine political institutions and threatening democratic accountability through the exercise of ‘conservative liberty’. This educational policy aims to gradually nullify the development of debate and open discussions that consider the diversity of structural issues in the United States; a trend that seeks to limit anti-racist expressions and solidarity both inside and outside the classroom which is related to critical race theory.

Hence, the former advisor to the Trump administration proposes and calls on conservative and ultra-right-wing actors to occupy and ‘take over school boards’ (Pollock et. al., 2022), where the educational policies of each district are decided, to push back in the educational sphere discussions on the conditions of ethnic oppression. In this way, it seeks a strategy of effective power to exert influence over the curriculum and the contents developed in schools, and with it, over the different topics that are discussed in the classrooms. In Spain, Abascal has applied this in a similar way proposing the ‘parental pin’: families educate their children, the school only instructs them -understanding instruction as the transmission of ‘traditional and religious values’.

In Spain, the homeschooling option has become a way to defend children from the ‘indoctrinating will of politicians’. Vox's parliamentary group has also sought to regulate homeschooling to offer parents an educational option to state education. Their documents state the following: “We want to guarantee an educational system that offers parents the possibility of choosing the best

education for their children far from indoctrination. We defend the regulation of this model as one more alongside public, private, and state-subsidised education” (Grupo Parlamentario Vox, 2020).

The Argentine ultra-right also shares this position, especially regarding the policy of comprehensive sexual and emotional education as a “mechanism to deform people's heads”. For Milei sex education responds to the interests of left-wing and gender ideology. In this sense it constitutes a practice of indoctrination linked to the promotion of ‘socialism’ (Todo Noticias, 2022) which should be eradicated; an action that he contemplates in his electoral platform.

As we can also see in this educational category or topic they coincide in educational policies and unite intervention strategies in the educational field, thus forming this ‘neo-fascist educational international’ which weaves a global network that is progressively spreading throughout the world in a coordinated and systematic way.

Milei: public education as ‘leftist brainwashing’ and privatisation of education

In addition to a total adherence to market solutions to all social problems and a clear proximity to the economic anarcho-capitalismⁱⁱ that Milei is advocating (Dvoskin, 2019), the Argentinean president has shown himself to be in favour of policies of repression against acts of collective mobilisation to demand rights. This has been openly criticised by teachers' unions, certain education associations dedicated to popular education, and many critical educational communities.

In the field of education Milei's documents and statements systematically defend his opinion on public education as is a place for brainwashing (Clarín,

2022; Milei, 2022) into the “religious ideas of the State” (Chaves, 2022). According to his statements this threatens people's freedom and generates negative economic effects.

Moreover, according to Milei the -public- schools are used to persecute those who think differently and to promote socialism in what he understands is a “pure” recovery of Antonio Gramsci's thought (Todo Noticias, 2022). In this sense, Milei considers that “public education has become a centre of Marxist indoctrination” (La Nación, 2020) and states the following:

Young people tend to be rebels against the status quo, and since today the politically correct thing to do is to recite socialist rubbish most young people are liberals. At the same time, it is easier for them to get out of the cobwebs of socialist thinking because they have been exposed to the brainwashing of public education for less time, regardless of whether it is state or privately administered (La Nación, 2022).

In the presidential debate, Milei put forward a ‘revolutionary proposal’: implementing the idea of human capital in education. He also stressed that it was necessary to ‘stop giving them fish; teach them to fish instead’ and, if possible ‘to have a fishing company’ (La Nación, 2023). In Spain this has also been transferred to education with the ‘entrepreneurial competence’, a narrative that is not only promoted by the far right but is also taken up by the right and by social democracy; and even by part of the trade union, political and social left (Gajardo, et al., 2024).

In the Bases for Political Action and National Electoral Platform 2023, Milei's electoral platform La Libertad Avanza contemplates a series of substantial changes in education in that country among which the following stand out: a) a system of vouchers or educational cheques (also promoted by Abascal and

Bannon); b) decentralising education, giving the budget to families instead of giving it to the Ministry, financing demand and the free choice of centre -like Abascal in Spain-; c) generating competition between educational institutions from the curricular point of view at all levels of education by means of incorporating more hours of subjects such as mathematics, language, science and educational technology (La Libertad Avanza, 2023). What is worrying in this analysis is that many of these proposals and the narrative framework that underpins them (although not so explicitly) have also been taken up by social democratic and progressive governments in their legislation and educational reforms, creating a common neoliberal educational narrative that now runs practically across the entire political spectrum. This effect of a ‘shift to the right’ across the political spectrum (Antón-Mellón and Seijo Boado, 2023) frames the current educational debate and discussion agenda within a neoliberal paradigm. These discussions are increasingly distant from the approaches or debates of critical pedagogy and social transformation, or emancipation proposed by the great contemporary pedagogical currents, which have practically disappeared from any discussion or debate in the educational reforms of the West (Oliveira, et al., 2024).

Once installed as president, Javier Milei has pushed through a series of changes in both the organisational structure and national norms related to education. He created a Ministry of Human Capital in which he included the Secretariat of Education, headed by an academic with a vision favourable to applying market policies in the education system. At the same time, it recuperates authoritarian and radically neoliberal policies in education such as laws for the dissemination of standardised test results by school (boosting competition), the generation of periodic tests on teachers (making teachers responsible for educational failure and generating a model of mistrust and questioning of public education professionals), and the consideration of initial, primary and secondary education

as ‘essential services’ which prevents the right to strike in order to demand rights or improvements in education.

Given that the Argentinean economist considers education as a means of generating human capital, schools must reformulate their ways of functioning. By doing so schools respond to the dynamics of current capitalism as has been demanded for years by business employers around the world: adapting training to the changing demands of business. The formula for achieving this is essentially exogenous privatisation (Ball and Youdell, 2007) by subsidising the demand for education rather than the supply, which is a revival of the classic approaches of the fathers of neoliberalism Friedman and Friedman (1990).

The proposal for the voucher system (La Nación, 2022) is presented as a ‘shock solution to the teachers' unions' negotiations with governments or the supposed ‘low quality’ of education. The problem will no longer be one of underfunding of public education but of the inability of schools themselves to be attractive enough to win new ‘customers’ (families and students) who demand their educational services and, therefore, allocate and invest their school cheques in those schools. In this way, the educational communities are made responsible for their problems, with the educational administration disregarding funding, support, resources or providing the centres with the means to do so. Basically, this proposal in education coincides with a much broader global agenda of dismantling the public sector, privatisation and the advance of the neoliberal model; also understood as the extension of the capitalist market's operating space in an ever-increasing number of areas of social life including common goods and social rights.

Milei's reform proposal has also been promoted by far-right and pro-market groups in countries such as the United States, where: (a) education is a multi-

billion dollar market, and the private sector is eager to take over this new market niche; (b) conservatives are dedicated to the free market and believe that private is inherently superior to public; (c) reducing public education furthers the Republican Party's goal of slashing the public sector; (d) privatisation undermines teachers' unions; and (e) the rhetoric of privatisation can be used for political purposes (Miner, 2002).

Abascal and the quest for control of schools and teachers' work through the 'parental PIN'

Abascal's leadership at the head of Vox, a far-right party in Spain, has also shown sympathy for his country's fascist past; either by citing Francoist intellectuals in public interventions (Vozpópuli, 2019) or by including characters associated with Francoism in his political platform. In addition to this, the party led by him is the one that has developed one of the most consistent proposals to deepen the control of families over the school curriculum: the so-called 'parental PIN'.

This pin is a parental 'veto' that seeks to control school content and the values in which pupils are educated. It obliges school management staff to inform families about the complementary activities organised during school hours, establishing the requirement that parents give their consent to this training by means of an 'express authorisation' (El País, 2020). In this way, families can veto content such as sexual and emotional education, education on equality and diversity, human rights, care of the planet, etc. Thanks to the international networks where the Vox party operates, this mechanism of educational control has managed to be transferred to other countries such as Mexico where different voices of the ultra-right and the so-called popular right have sought to enable channels for the control of schools and conservative content (Jarquín, 2021).

Vidal-Quadras -founder of Vox in Spain- claims like Bannon and Milei that the term ‘indoctrination’ is a mild word to describe what is taking place in the Catalan public education system. He describes it as ‘authentic and totalitarian social engineering, a continuous brainwashing of children and adolescents to transform them into nationalist fanatics hostile to everything Spanish’ (Fidalgo, 2019). A similar opinion is held by the Vox MP Arraz who considers that the educational curriculum in Spain is ‘impregnated’ with ideology which promotes ‘gender ideology, radical feminism, and the stigmatisation of historical figures’ (La Vanguardia, 2022). These are common postulates amongst far-right politicians, such as Senator Ted Cruz who accused teachers of ‘indoctrinating’ white babies with Marxist teaching (Laats, 2022).

The Spanish foundation Disenso -Vox’s think tank- is chaired by Abascal claims to fight against ‘cultural Marxism’. Other patrons of this foundation are known names of the far-right such as Herman Tertsch and Rocío Monasterio who offer a programme to train ‘young leaders’ and ‘combat’ the ‘advance of communism’. They insist on the need to ‘reconquer’ the Iberosphere, one of the fetish concepts of the far-right which includes Spain, the United States and Latin America; just like Bannon's ‘cultural warriors’ and Milei's ‘cultural guerrillas’.

Its aim is to wage the ‘battle of ideas’, to fight the ‘pro-green hegemony’ and the ‘Marxism that has shed its skin supplanting with the gender struggle and the race struggle what was once the class struggle’, to recover the ‘hegemony and the cultural imaginary’ (Munárriz, 2021). All these are expressions from the presentation letter of the Higher Institute of Sociology, Economics and Politics (ISSEP) which is the Spanish branch of that of Marion Maréchal in France, niece of the ultra-right-wing Le Pen. The owner of the ultra-right-wing media channel Intereconomia, the businessman and former president of the

construction company Sacyr Vallerhemoso as well as others linked to the ultra-right-wing Vox party, participated as lecturers.

Abascal wants to recover ‘patriotic’ values of a heroic past in the educational content of schools by promoting summer camps to train ‘child soldiers’ from the age of seven, where army veterans and monitors who have been candidates for the far-right group Vox give them military training and teach them to shoot with simulated weapons. They impose military instruction on them as a form of leisure and learning, training them in patriotic values such as ‘honour’, ‘love of our country and our flag’, ‘spirit of sacrifice’ and discipline, instead of learning peace education (González, 2020).

The same party has succeeded in promoting a programme of activities on hunting in Andalusian schools, in addition to the ‘promotion of bullfighting schools’, leaving environmental education in public schools in the hands of hunters (Manchado, 2021). The latter points to a recurrent agenda in the recovery of the ‘patriotic values’ of Spanish neo-fascism: using the educational system to recover and promote hunting and bullfighting in education. This is linked to the mythical representation of a traditional past where ‘real men’ were ‘trained’ through practices linked to violence towards animals or other human beings.

Discussion and conclusions

According to the analysis carried out it can be seen how an ‘educational neo-fascist international’ has been articulated, which embodies in the field of education the global network woven by what can similarly be called a ‘neo-fascist international’. In addition to the three cases studied other similar characters can be found with equivalent tendencies, ideology and practices and articulated in the form of a structured network.

Be it the former president Jair Bolsonaro with his bill to regulate home education in Brazil, his revision of history textbooks so that children learn that the 1964 coup d'état was constitutional and the military dictatorship of the 1960s in Brazil had been 'a democratic regime of force', or his 'Escola sem Partido' project against indoctrination in school that encouraged students to film teachers accusing them of 'indoctrination' (Carnut, 2021; Thiago, 2024); be it Giorgia Meloni in Italy, who has renamed the Ministry 'Education and Merit', promoted a nationalist and protectionist baccalaureate dependent on business to recover the 'Italy brand' by placing 'Italy's traditional values in their rightful place' based on the Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian heritage, with exhibitions on Italian tradition and the creation on 15 April of the "National Made in Italy Day" and reduction of humanist education; be it Viktor Orban in Hungary with his law restricting teachers' rights, abolishing their civil servant status, increasing working hours and enforcing forced mobility, his strategy to control public university campuses through privatisation to foundations close to Orban's party, as well as cutting investment in public education (Arato and Cohen, 2024; Bacila Sahd, 2024; Martini, 2024; Saraiva and Seffner, 2024; Thiago, 2024).

As we can conclude, a global constellation of synergies has been structured, linked, and organised in a planned and systematic way in the neo-fascist organisations, parties, leaders, and foundations that have a similar plan centred on fundamental and common axes, which in the educational sphere can be labelled as an 'educational neo-fascist international' (Arabi, 2020; Díez-Gutiérrez, 2022).

It is true that, depending on the leadership that drives it -something crucial in this type of formation-, the geopolitical context in which it develops, and the situation of power achieved, the educational proposals of this neo-fascist educational international are implemented or developed with greater intensity or

breadth. But all of them seem to be in tune with each other and to come from common sources that are embodied in an established and shared ideology.

Faced with this ‘neo-fascist educational international’, it is necessary to articulate proposals and strategies in classrooms, in schools, in educational and social communities, but also in educational policies to confront a model that is being installed and normalised in society and in the educational sphere. This model is being whitewashed by the media, presenting it as just another possibility or opinion, forgetting the genocides and barbarity that the rise of fascism in Europe and America last century entailed. Therefore, it is urgent to get involved as a society, as an educational community, and as individuals and conscious citizens, in a clear and unambiguous way to combat neo-fascism, given that one cannot be a democrat without being anti-fascist (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2022).

Faced with this international situation we must promote the experience and strategies being developed by educational communities, teachers, pedagogical renewal movements, the green tides; those which come from the great educators who throughout our history have proposed authentic revolutions in education - Freire, Sensat, Freinet, Dewey, Montessori, and many others- that promote critical, committed, solidarity-based pedagogies for the common good. Schools cannot remain oblivious to the social, political, and global context that surrounds them.

Education is of course a question of values and a political and democratic question. There is no such thing as neutral education and education policies as they are always carried out from certain parameters and with certain objectives: whether it is the economic logic of competitiveness of the OECD or the logic of the common good and liberation of Paulo Freire. Education is a moral and

political practice about the construction of our desired model of society. Every curriculum and the pedagogy that underpins it is a version of our own dreams for ourselves and our communities. That is why it is crucial to rethink the purpose of education and the kind of education we are offering to the future generations.

The education community cannot remain oblivious to barbarism. Neither to the planetary barbarism of climate change, nor to the economic barbarism of social exploitation, structural injustice, and international plunder, but neither to the social and ideological barbarism of neo-fascism. The real ammunition of this model is not only rubber bullets or tear gas; it is our silence and complicit indifference.

In short, we need an anti-fascist Pedagogy (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2022; Lanuza, 2022) that encourages us to rethink the current social order in terms of democratic socialist alternatives to school and capitalist society. The education we want must be coherent with the model of society we intend to build; that is, one that is more just, equitable, supportive, ecological, feminist, inclusive and happy.

Finally, it is necessary to point out certain limitations in this research. Though the three case studies are considered as representative of a ‘neofascist international in education’, the nuances, contexts and priorities in the education policies made by other representatives of this current do not always converge in a simultaneously and agreed upon manner. Therefore, it would be necessary to continue expanding this research to other references, other countries, and contexts (also in other continents), as well as analyzing the influence of the epistemological and philosophical framework of this ‘neofascist thought’ on the educational policies of liberal, social democratic or progressive governments. It

is basic to explore what conceptual frameworks of this approach are being assumed and normalized in the field of educational policy worldwide (Oliveira, et al., 2024).

Endnotes

¹ In Europe, the far right governs in Italy, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. It has been involved in government in Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Other countries where the far right governs as minority coalition partners are Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, the only EU member that also has a neo-Nazi presence in its parliament. In Spain, Germany, Portugal, and France it is already a central force. The Hungarian prime minister set the tone for Europe's shift to the far right: in April 2022 he won his fourth consecutive term in office, despite the fact that the opposition had stood united in the elections. Giorgia Meloni, with her far-right, fascist-rooted 'Fratelli d'Italia' party, came almost out of nowhere and her victory in the parliamentary elections of September 2022 made her Italy's prime minister. Jimmie Åkesson, the leader of the populist far-right 'Sweden Democrats', became the country's second-largest political force last year. In Finland, the far-right Party of Finns has already won seven ministries. Marian Kotleba, head of the neo-fascist L'SNS party, which is among the most radical neo-Nazis in Slovakia and is called 'Führer' by his followers, won eight per cent of the 2020 parliamentary elections. In June 2023 in Greece, the far-right Elliniki Lysi (Greek Solution), the ultra-nationalist and ultra-religious Niki (Victory) and Spartans, the successor to the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party banned in 2020, together won almost 13% of the votes for Parliament. In March 2024 Chega, the far-right formation in Portugal, came third, quadrupling its results and going from 12 to 50 MPs, achieving a strong penetration among the young electorate. But it is not only in Europe that neo-fascist tendencies are advancing and converging on a global scale: Javier Milei was the most voted candidate for president in the August 2023 elections in Argentina (30%). The Republican Party of Chile, led by José Antonio Kast, a far-right party, swept the elections for the Constitutional Council. The ultra-right-wing Jair Bolsonaro lost the last Brazilian presidential elections by the slimmest of margins, even though he had just come from the denialist management of a pandemic that killed 700,000 of his compatriots. The American Tea Party and Donald Trump are exponents of the rise of the neo-fascist and populist extreme right. To which we can add the phenomena of Rodrigo Duterte, president of the Philippines, in power since 2016, or the president of El Salvador Nayib Bukele. In Israel, the head of the radical right-wing Likud party, Netanyahu, 73 years old and with three open corruption investigations against him, hands over portfolios and strategic positions to ultra-right-wing parties (Jewish Power, Religious Zionism and Noam), fundamentalist and radical, with leaders who publicly pride themselves on being supremacist and homophobic (Dieckhoff, 2023).

² Anarcho-capitalism, also known as free market anarchism or libertarian anarchism, derives from libertarianism -the political philosophy of the free market- which holds that the protection of individual liberty through private property and the free market allows for an organised society without the state. Its current intellectual references are the Mises Institute and the Cato Institute, which advocate the convergence of anarchism -non-state- and libertarianism -free market- (Love-Brown, 2020).

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Annex I

México (2022):

Speaker	Country
Eduardo Verástegui	Mexico
Matt Schlapp	USA
Lech Walesa	Poland
Sara Carter	USA
Alfonso Aguilar	USA
María Herrera	Spain – USA
Thierry Mariani	France
Christopher Landau	USA
Rosi Orozco	Mexico
Tim Ballard	USA
José Antonio Kast	Chile
Alejandro Giammattei	Guatemala
Alice Galván	Mexico
Rodrigo Ballester	Spain
Mario Duarte	Guatemala
Fernán Altuve	Peru
Juan Ángel Soto	Spain
Miklos Lukacs	Peru
Angel Souberville	Mexico
Guillermo Torres Quiroz	Mexico
Paco Páez	Mexico
Rodrigo Iván Cortés	Mexico
Emilio Yitzhak	Mexico
Frida Espinoza	Mexico

Carlos Ramírez	Mexico
Mamela Fiallo	Ecuador
Armando Regil	Mexico
Lupe Batallan	Argentina
Pablo Kleinman	USA
Jack Posobiec	USA
Karina Yapor	México
Mercy Schlapp	USA
Orlando Gutiérrez	Cuba
Jiangli Yang	China
Joseph Humire	USA
Daniel Quiroz	Costa rica
Martin Paz	Venezuela
Steve Bannon	USA
Eduardo Bolsonaro	Brazil
Polonia Castellanos	Spain
Gregor Puppinck	France
Jason Jones	USA
Abby Johnson	USA
Valerie Huber	USA
Aarón Lara	Mexico
Christian Badillo	Mexico-USA
Guillermo Gutiérrez	Mexico
Pablo Muñoz	Argentina
Arturo Moreno	Mexico
Abraham Enríquez	USA
Jesús Márquez	USA
César Grajales	USA

Carlos Díaz	USA
Ted Cruz	USA
Shiva Ayyadurai	India
Fredo Arias	Mexico
Juan Ivan Peña	Mexico
Carlos Leal	Mexico
Elsa Méndez	Mexico
Eva Landau	Bolivia
Chiara Barchiesi	Chile
Ramfis Domínguez	Dominican Republic
María Cabal	Colombia
Enrique Riera	Paraguay
Ricardo Godoy	El Salvador
Mercy Schlapp	USA
Mark Green	USA
Rafael López	Peru
Mayra Flores	USA
Jay Aeba	Japan
Miklos Szantho	Hungary
Hermann Tertsch	Spain
Orlando Salazar	USA
Jean-Lin Lacapelle	France
Gergely Gulyás	Hungary
Santiago Abascal	Spain
Javier Milei	Argentina

Source: <https://cpacmx.com/cpac-2022-expositores/>

USA (2024)

Donald Trump	USA
Matt Schlapp	USA
Mercedes Schlapp	USA
Elise Stefanik	USA
Vivek Ramaswamy	USA
Ben Carson	USA
Jim Jordan	USA
Nigel Farage	UK
Liz Truss	UK
JD Vance	USA
Javier Milei	Argentina
Nayib Bukele	El Salvador
John Solomon	USA
Jan Jekielek	USA
Tulsi Gabbard	USA
Trent Staggs	USA
Anrew Bailey	USA
Cory Mills	USA
Pam Bondi	USA
Kent Volkmer	USA
Sandy Rios	USA
Mike Lindell	USA
Ed Henry	USA
Geri Perna	USA
Monica Crowley	USA
Abe Hamadeh	USA
Tommy Tuberville	USA

Richard Grenell	USA
Mark Robinson	USA
Matt Gaetz	USA
Steve Bannon	USA
Bishop Joseph Strickland	USA
Matthew Whitaker	USA
Robert Malone	USA
Jack Posobiec	USA
Mark Levin	USA
Bill Walton	USA
Megyn Kelly	USA
Byron Donalds	USA
Kristi Noem	USA
Michael Knowles	USA
Brooke Miller	USA
Sara Carter	USA
Tim Ballard	USA
Ben Ferguson	USA
Sebastian Gorka	USA-UK-Hungary
David Friedman	USA
Kari Lake	USA
Tom Homan	USA
Kat Cammack	USA
KT McFarland	USA
Brandon Straka	USA
Kevin Hasset	USA
Rick Santorum	USA
Eduardo Verástegui	Mexico

Ken Paxton	USA
Gordon Chang	USA
Kurt Schlichter	USA
Todd Starnes	USA
Mark Green	USA
Santiago Abascal	Spain
Lara Trump	USA
Dan Bishop	USA
Katie Pavlich	USA
Scott Perry	USA
Dave McCormick	USA
Penny Nance	USA
Stephen Moore	USA
Savannah Chrisley	USA
Hogan Gidley	USA
Josh Hammer	USA
Julie Kelly	USA
Dave Yost	USA
Brandi Swindell	USA
Terry Schilling	USA
Larry O'Connor	USA
Julio Rosas	USA
Tom Fitton	USA
Andrew Wheeler	Australia
Andrew Cooper	Australia
Deal Hudson	USA
David Milstein	USA
Jay Aeba	Japan

Elizabeth Ameling	USA
Caleb Hanna	USA
Bilal Essayli	USA
Abraham Enríquez	USA
Miklos Szantho	Hungary
Tim Stewart	USA
Brett Tolman	USA
Charles McCall	USA
Peter Lucido	USA
Nick Freitas	USA
Tanya Gould	USA
Meg Brock	USA
Roger Robinson	USA
Matt Boyle	USA
Kimberly Fletcher	USA
Julie Strauss	USA
Kash Patel	USA

Source: <https://digital.cpac.org/speakers-dc2024>

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(Octaedro, 2020), Educación para el bien común (Octaedro, 2020), La revuelta educativa neocon (Trea, 2019) or Neoliberalismo educativo (Octaedro, 2018).

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Declaration of interest

None of the authors have any conflicts of interest regarding this research work.

