



RegularizaciónYa: Temporalities and Claims in the Migrant Regularization Campaign in Spain

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Abstract

This article examines how migrant-led activism in Spain uses collective narratives to legitimize migration regularization and enact citizenship. European states regulate human migration through legal status, producing administrative irregularity that restricts access to work, welfare, and protection, and that structures everyday life through prolonged bureaucratic waiting, suspended plans, precarious work, and exposure to preventable harm. Against this backdrop, the campaign “Regularización Ya” launched a Popular Legislative Initiative seeking residence permits for people living in administrative irregularity in Spain. We analyzed original tweets from the campaign’s official account posted during the signature-collection period (December 2021–December 2022), using reflexive thematic analysis interpreted through a collective-narrative lens. We show that the campaign weaves collective narratives that link longstanding and ongoing exclusion to present mobilization and future horizons of shared belonging. It frames irregularization as a temporal injustice (lives put “on hold” through bureaucratic waiting and institutional neglect) and mobilizes this framing to build alliances with civil-society actors and citizens. By circulating these narratives in the digital public sphere, organizers amplify migrant voice and perform citizenship through public claim-making. Overall, the study shows how time becomes a political resource in migrant-led struggles and how regularization is framed as overdue social justice rather than an exceptional concession.

Keywords Regularization · Migrants · Time · Social rights · Online discourse · Citizenship

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“A future is built only in the dynamic movement of a present [...] For those who do not resign themselves [...] the ‘afterwards’ risks posing the same problem as what came before: that of the forces capable of linking the fight against exploitation and domination to the invention of another future”. Jacques Rancière (2024, p. 51)

Introduction

Research on regularization¹ has largely examined how states design, justify, and administer schemes that grant legal status to selected groups of migrants (Ambrosini, 2023; Chauvin et al., 2013; Jonitz & Leerkes, 2022; Triandafyllidou, 2015). This body of scholarship has shown that regularization is not simply a technical or humanitarian response to undocumented migration, but a central mechanism of migration governance. Through regularization policies, states differentiate between deserving and undeserving subjects, regulate access to rights and protection, and manage labor, mobility, and social membership. In this sense, regularization has been analyzed primarily as a state-centered process, shaped by legal-administrative frameworks, economic imperatives, and securitization logics (Figgou, 2016; González-Enríquez, 2009; Mazzilli, 2022).

While this literature is essential for understanding how legality and illegality are produced and managed, it leaves less explored another dimension of regularization: the ways in which regularization itself becomes an object of political struggle, articulated by migrants from below. This perspective is important because legality and illegality are not only categories imposed and administered by the state, but also objects of interpretation, contestation, and collective claim-making. Examining regularization from below makes visible how migrants publicly reframe irregularity not as an individualized administrative condition, but as a structurally produced injustice that can be politicized and transformed. Recent research has begun to complicate state-centered accounts by highlighting the role of intermediaries such as lawyers, associations, and trade-union actors in shaping migrants’ access to regularization (Bonizzoni et al., 2025). Yet, this work remains primarily concerned with access to existing legal channels rather than with collective efforts to redefine the meaning and politics of regularization itself.

This article addresses that question through the case of #RegularizaciónYa, a migrant-led, nationwide campaign in Spain that advanced the regularization of all migrants in administrative irregularity through a Popular Legislative Initiative. The campaign depended not only on migrant organizing but also on alliances with civil-society actors and formal citizens (with a Spanish ID) whose signatures were necessary to support the legislative process. We approach this campaign not simply as a

¹ “Regularization’ refers to any process or procedure through which someone can obtain a residence status from a relevant government authority authorizing – ‘regularizing’ – their stay in the country they residence in” (PICUM, 2024).

request for legal inclusion, but as a political intervention that publicly re-signifies irregularity as a structural injustice and frames regularization as a collective and durable demand rather than as an exceptional concession by the state.

More specifically, the article asks: How do migrant-led organizers rework temporal narratives (waiting, interrupted life courses) to justify regularization and to broaden public support for legislative change? We focus specifically on grassroots efforts advocating for regularization policies. Although migration scholarship has richly documented how states govern migrants through temporary permits, delays, and precarious legal arrangements, less attention has been paid to how migrant movements themselves mobilize these temporal experiences as part of their political discourse. This vantage point reveals that regularization must be analyzed not just through state responses but also through the lenses of performative citizenship (Isin, 2017) that resists state-imposed temporalities and mobilizes public support for legislative initiatives aimed at regularizing migrants. In other words, the campaign does not merely talk about citizenship; through claim-making it enacts it. More specifically, we argue that the campaign performs citizenship by contesting the temporal organization of exclusion. By naming waiting, suspended futures, and deferred rights as politically produced injustices, and by asserting migrants as active claimants of rights in the present, the campaign enacts belonging not as a status granted from above, but as a public and collective political practice.

Through its public discourse, the campaign frames irregularity as a condition of suspended life in which futures are postponed, care responsibilities intensified, and social participation rendered precarious and contingent. In doing so, it turns time into a political resource. It links past harms, present suffering, and future-oriented demands in order to make irregularization publicly legible as a collective injustice rather than as an individual administrative deficit. Regularization thus appears not as an exceptional remedy granted by the state, but as a structural response to a regime that governs migrants through prolonged uncertainty and permanent deferral.

This perspective brings into dialogue two bodies of scholarship. On the one hand, research on migrant activism, rights-claiming, and acts of citizenship has shown that non-citizens are not merely excluded subjects; through protest, coalition-building, and public claim-making they enact citizenship in performative and relational ways (Andreouli et al., 2025; Ataç et al., 2016; Isin, 2017; Nordling et al., 2017). On the other hand, scholarship on migration temporalities has shown how bordering regimes organize migrants' lives through waiting, liminality, interruption, and constrained future-making (Axelsson et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2023; Robertson, 2014; Tan, 2020). Migrant-led struggles for regularization are not only struggles over legal status and recognition; they are also struggles over time, over who is forced to wait, whose life is held in suspension, and whose future is treated as indefinitely postponed.

The article makes two connected contributions. First, it shifts attention from regularization as a state-managed policy mechanism to regularization as a field of migrant-led political contestation. Second, it shows that temporality is central to this contestation, reframing administrative irregularity as a structural condition and to justify regularization as a matter of justice rather than exception. Addressing this gap matters because analyses centered only on law, policy, or state discretion cannot

fully explain how migrants themselves theorize irregularity, build publics around it, and transform lived precarity into collective political claims.

Empirically, we analyze the campaign's communication through reflexive thematic analysis, while also attending to how tweets function as narrative acts that organize events across past, present, and future, allocate responsibility, and project possible horizons of justice. Reflexive thematic analysis understands qualitative analysis as an interpretive process of meaning-making in which themes are actively developed through the researcher's situated and reflective engagement with the data, rather than simply discovered within them (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020). This allows us to examine how temporal experience is made communicable and politically meaningful in activist discourse, and how the campaign reworks dominant narratives of legality, deservingness, and belonging.

Literature Review

From State-Centered Regularization to Migrant-Led Claim-Making

A substantial body of scholarship, particularly in the US context, has examined undocumented migrants' agency, legal precarity, and everyday negotiations of illegality from below (e.g., Abrego, 2016; Menjívar, 2023; Parreñas et al., 2021). To address the dimension of migrant action, it is necessary to turn to scholarship on migrant activism and acts of citizenship. Contemporary European mobility is increasingly shaped by precarious labor migration, mixed migration trajectories (asylum, labor, and family motives that overlap), and status fluidity produced by temporary permits, irregularization, and repeated regularization/de-regularization. While scholarship has long examined citizenship as a legal status tied to rights, membership, and the nation-state, another important strand of work has emphasized citizenship as a performative, relational, and contested practice enacted through public claims and struggles over recognition and belonging (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Isin, 2017; Andreouli et al., 2025; Nordling et al., 2017). Migrant right claims have been addressed as everyday acts and urban practices (e.g., Zisakou et al., 2024), a processual and everyday practice rooted in the principle of the "right to have rights" (Arendt, 1973/1951; Isin, 2017; Andreouli et al., 2025). Relevant literature (Dadusc et al., 2019; Ataç et al., 2016; Stierl, 2018) shows non-EU migrants in Europe increasingly engage in activism to advocate for rights and highlight issues affecting their communities. This includes anti-deportation campaigns, protests by undocumented workers, no-border camps, and autonomous urban spaces. Movements foster coalitions across social groups, challenging borderlands and citizenship boundaries. Many studies analyze solidarity groups and their criminalization for border resistance (Mezzadra, 2020; Tazzioli, 2019). More recent research explores migrant-led campaigns and grassroots organizing (Perolini, 2022; Tazzioli & Walters, 2019), showing psychosocial benefits for marginalized groups like migrant women (Aceros et al., 2021; Lardier et al., 2020).

Migrants, in this strand of research, are portrayed as being actively organizing projects against European border politics, such as the practice of squatting buildings,

challenging the boundaries of conventional citizenship (Mezzadra, 2020; Raimondi, 2019), and dismantling host-guest relations and hierarchies. Gonick (2020) has focused on migrants' housing movements, articulating experiences of inequality and discrimination on the one hand, and alternative modes of habitation, cooperation, and social justice on the other. These actions challenge exclusionary and conventional citizenship and advance radical inclusion through community practices built on care and mutual support (Casas-Cortés, 2019).

Nicholls and Vermeulen (2012) view the city as a strategic arena for struggle where exclusions are enacted and where migrants gain “rights through the city.” Cities concentrate diverse resources and relational opportunities that enable marginalized immigrants to connect with key supporters, establishing themselves as active political voices in public debate, despite being marginalized within the wider society (Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016). Analysis of migrant movements for regularizing “illegal status,” particularly in France, reveals the contradictory relational dynamics of cooperation and conflict (Nicholls, 2013). The very legal openings that allow certain undocumented immigrants (e.g., those with French citizen children) to assert claims often create unequal opportunities within the broader migrant rights network, leading to cleavages and fragmentation among migrant groups and between migrants and support organizations (NGOs, unions) (Nicholls, 2013). According to authors, mobilizations by precarious actors, such as asylum seekers protesting detention or deportation, are inherently fragile, since alliances are ambivalent and unstable reflecting asymmetrical power dynamics (Ataç & Steinhilper, 2020; Steinhilper, 2021).

At the same time, rights-claiming alone does not fully capture what is at stake in these struggles. The campaign does not simply seek legal status; it also contests the lived time of irregularization. To understand how that contestation works, the literature on acts of citizenship must be brought into dialogue with scholarship on migration temporalities.

Temporalities of Resistance

The concept of temporality has been used to capture different dimensions of time in social life and their implications for identity and power (Kenyon, 2000). Following Fent and Kojola (2020), we approach temporality as “a site of political struggle” (p. 822), rather than as a purely neutral sequence or measure of clock time. More specifically, we are interested in how lived time (Hoy, 2009, in Robertson, 2014) of irregularized migrants—marked by waiting, uncertainty, interruption, and the anticipation of harm—is organized and made communicable through narrative.

Existing literature has primarily examined temporality through the lens of migration policies that impose external time regimes, such as visa restrictions, waiting periods, and temporally limited rights and through conditions of precarity primarily in the labor market (Axelsson et al., 2017; Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Coman et al., 2019; Nyers, 2013; Tan, 2020; Wang, 2020). According to the literature, migrants' precarious work conditions are regulated by temporal processes which mobilize special time arrangements as “waiting zones” (Axelsson et al., 2017).

These time arrangements are characterized by hyperflexibility without full access to labor market or are seen as a transition for a better future and permanent status. Precarious conditions of “being temporary” (Tan, 2020; Wang, 2020) put immigrants in a liminal condition (Castillo, 2016) often generated across their (in) mobility process, circular forms of migration (Wang, 2020), and transnational labor markets practices (Coman et al., 2019). As Sanò and colleagues (2024) mention, temporal control is connected to capitalist modes of production, where indefinite waiting produces vulnerable, illegalized workers.

Recent scholarship has foregrounded the temporal dimensions of migration control and migrant resistance. Castellano (2024) describes “temporal dispossession” as depriving migrants of future planning. Yet migrants actively resist, using waiting as a tactic to regain agency and legal stability. Similarly, Benedikt (2024) shows how informal settlements resist deadlines, permits, and waiting through everyday disobedience like resisting deportation or re-entering after removal. These tactics reclaim stolen time (Khosravi, 2018) and transform imposed stasis into agency. These studies reveal how migrants creatively resist temporal control by appropriating and reshaping time.

Also, studies shed light on different temporalities emerged by processes of settlement, belonging and citizenship (Forde et al., 2024; Robertson, 2014), future plans, and temporal aspects of integration processes (Ryan, 2018; Zisakou et al., 2025). Forde and colleagues (2024) employ and further develop the concept of “imagined temporalities” to highlight how UK resettlement policies cast resettlement as a rigid, linear event aimed at assimilation within a 12-month period, which is fundamentally at odds with the non-linear, lifelong, and complex cultural learning processes experienced by refugees and observed by support workers.

Authors studying migration time scales describe migration as a contingent process shaped by acceleration, disruption, and intersections of biographical, political, and global timelines. Migration is inherently multi-temporal because it is lived and governed at the intersection of at least three timelines. First, biographical time concerns how mobility and legal status reorganize life courses (education, work, family formation) through interruptions, acceleration, and prolonged suspension. Second, political-administrative time refers to the temporalities produced by bordering regimes: waiting, deferrals, deadlines, and the slow violence of bureaucratic delay that disciplines migrants’ possibilities. Third, these experiences are embedded in broader historical and global time, shaped by unequal geopolitical relations and labor markets, that structure who is rendered mobile, who is rendered deportable, and whose futures are made precarious (Cwerner, 2001; Robertson, 2014; Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024; Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018).

Building on this body of work, our study examines how migrant-led activism politicizes the very temporal regime through which irregularization is governed. We show that the campaign reworks state-imposed waiting, delay, suspension, and stolen time into grounds for public accusation, collective identification, and rights-claiming. In this sense, time becomes a political resource precisely because it is first lived as a technology of control.

Bringing the literature on acts of citizenship into conversation with the literature on migration temporalities sharpens the paper’s central argument. If citizenship is

enacted through claims, performances, and public interventions, then one important way it is enacted in migrant-led regularization campaigns is through the politicization of time itself. In this sense, temporality is one of the main means through which the campaign performs citizenship: by refusing prolonged waiting, asserting presence in the here and now, and projecting migrants as legitimate participants in the collective future, the movement enacts belonging beyond formal legal status.

Drawing on scholarship on narrative and social movements, we treat the campaign's tweets as narrative fragments that organize events across time and position migrants within a broader political storyline. Narratives are a way of organizing events across time, linking past, present, and future into a "plot" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) that allocates responsibility, agency, and suffering (Somers, 1994). From this perspective, the campaign's tweets can be seen as narrative acts that retrospectively configure a past of institutional violence, name and politicize present struggles, and project future horizons of justice; as Christiansen (2011) mentions, narratives can help to sustain social movements through hardships. Work on narrative and social movements has shown how activists' discourse not only recounts harm but also re-scripts marginalized groups as rights-bearing political subjects. This narrative lens complements our focus on politics of time by highlighting how temporalities are emploted to challenge the racialized hierarchies of life and death that structure some migrants' access to rights. As Lilja (2018) mentions citing Foucault's work, resistance is formulated as a temporal narrative wanting to escape from the oppressive present.

By centering official campaign narratives, this study examines how migrants' voice is enacted through discourse and it contributes to the literature by showing how time can be reclaimed as a political resource, a means of resistance, and a tool for reimagining citizenship and justice beyond state-centric framings (Robertson, 2014). Towards this objective, a movement of migrants to introduce a Popular Legislative Initiative for the regularization of all migrants in administrative irregularity in Spain is of particular interest.

Background to the Study: #RegularizaciónYa

Since 2001, large-scale regularization programs have become common in southern European countries (Chauvin et al., 2013). In Spain, there have been over six major regularization processes, the last one in 2005 (Gil Araujo & González-Fernández, 2014). Rather than establishing a systematic framework for regularization, the Spanish state has relied on "special amnesties" as ad hoc tools of migration policy (Maas, 2006). These sporadic decisions reflect the interplay between the capitalist state's productive needs and the political pressure exerted by migrant activists to gain social rights. While the Schengen Treaty facilitated intra-EU mobility, non-EU and economically disadvantaged migrants continue to face irregular administrative conditions.

This longer history is important because #RegularizaciónYa did not emerge in response to a new problem, but in response to the persistence of an old one. Earlier moments of mobilization already showed how regularization in Spain has been

shaped not only by state priorities but also by migrant protest. A pivotal regularization effort took place in 2001, following a fatal car accident that killed 12 Ecuadorian agricultural workers without legal papers in Lorca, Murcia. Their deaths sparked spontaneous mobilizations in cities such as Murcia, Valencia, Madrid, Barcelona, Almería, Lepe, Málaga, Ceuta, and Melilla. With support from social organizations, migrants occupied churches and public spaces demanding unconditional regularization (Barbero, 2012; Varela, 2008). These actions prompted the government to offer regularization through “arraigo”² (González-Enríquez, 2009; Laubenthal, 2005, 2007). The last regularizations, in 2004 and 2005, mostly targeted migrants already in the labor market (Finotelli, 2011; González-Enríquez, 2009).

Against this background, the emergence of #RegularizaciónYa in 2020 can be understood as the product of both structural continuity and conjunctural rupture. The structural continuity lies in the enduring presence of a large population of migrants living in administrative irregularity in Spain and therefore excluded from stable residence, full labor protections, and secure access to social rights. Today, Spanish migration law fails to provide security for nearly half a million migrants living in administrative irregularity (Albarrán Méndez, 2025). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many migrants working in insecure, informal jobs lost their income and were left unprotected (Palomino et al., 2023). Despite the government’s pledge that “no one will be left behind” (echoing broader political rhetoric of inclusion; e.g., Obama’s “we leave no one behind”), none of its relief measures included migrants in administrative irregularity (Regularización Ya, n.d.). In response, over 800 social organizations launched a Popular Legislative Initiative (Iniciativa Legislativa Popular-ILP³) calling for exceptional regularization (Regularización Ya, n.d.). They demanded full and unconditional recognition of all undocumented migrants (labor migrants without papers, people with expired permits, and people in or after asylum procedures whose status remains unresolved). The campaign included coalition-building and alliances between migrant-led organizers and diverse civil-society actors (migrant groups, activist collectives, NGOs/rights organizations, and unions). Collaboration ranged from formal coordination (co-organized outreach) to informal support (amplification and volunteering). Migrant-led organizers drove framing, while partners and supporters extended outreach, resources, and visibility.

This mobilization was driven not only by the crisis but by public recognition of migrants’ essential roles in care work, food production, and basic services. On April 9, 2024, the Spanish Parliament accepted the ILP and began working on a draft bill for regularization. All parties except Vox⁴ party supported the legislative process (Carreño, 2024).

² a Spanish legal pathway that grants residence based on demonstrated “rootedness” (e.g., length of stay and social/labor ties).

³ The popular legislative initiative (in Spanish, ILP) is a mechanism allowing citizens to propose legislative changes or introduce new laws. Introduced under Article 87.3 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, it enables citizens to actively participate in the legislative process. To submit an ILP, a minimum of 500,000 valid signatures from Spanish citizens (showing their Spanish ID cards) is required. The proposal is then submitted to the Congress of Deputies, where it undergoes review and debate.

⁴ Vox is a Spanish far-right party founded in 2013.

In light of ongoing social struggles for the reconfiguration of citizenship, this research explores how “Regularización Ya,” which reached parliamentary debate and gained institutional support, navigates administrative irregularity to claim rights and belonging. In this way by expanding the above literature on migration, we document how the movement used social media, particularly Twitter, to articulate political demands of migrants in administrative irregularity. The campaign, which ended in December 2022, collected over 700,000 signatures. On 27 January 2026, the Spanish government announced the urgent processing of a royal decree aimed at regularizing foreign nationals already living in Spain, explicitly presenting the measure as reviving the spirit of the Popular Legislative Initiative. The proposed process would grant an initial one-year residence permit with work authorization to eligible applicants and opened an institutional pathway that echoes core demands long advanced by the movement.

Method

Data Collection

For the purposes of a broader project on regularisation, we manually collected 1589 tweets containing the term “RegularizacionYa” from December 2021 to December 2022 focusing exclusively on accounts of major political collectives supporting the campaign. Those groups included first the official account of the campaign (“RegularizaciónYa Cuenta Oficial @Regularizacion”) as well as accounts of other groups which are active in this field and are mostly migrants’ unions or collectives that act in the field of migration and political and labor rights: *Sindicato Mantero BCN @sindicatomanter* (The Street Vendors’ Union of Barcelona is a grassroots union of street vendors created in 2015 to defend themselves from police persecution and racism), *Tras La Manta @TrasLaManta* (Network of support against the criminalization and racist, classist violence towards street vendors in Barcelona), *Tanquem els CIE! @TanquemElsCIE* (collective that works for the closure of Immigration Detention Centers), and *Caminando Fronteras @walkingborders* (support initiative for human rights). In this article, we focus on the official campaign account as the institutional voice of this coalition ($n = 622$ original tweets). We treat this account as the institutional speaker of the coalition, where migrant activists collectively articulate the campaign’s narrative. Tweets were organized and coded manually using standard office files (a spreadsheet for the corpus and a separate document for analytic memos) stored in a secure folder.

This focus allows us to analyze how the campaign itself chooses to frame regularization, rights, and temporality. We did not include tweets from personal accounts as our aim was to explore the official campaign’s public discourse. Focusing on organizational accounts allowed us to (a) treat these profiles as key “speakers” in the field of regularization debates, (b) reduce ethical concerns about quoting identifiable individuals, and (c) keep the corpus analytically manageable while concentrating on messages that the movement itself foregrounded as part of its official communication. We selected this specific time frame because it coincided with the Popular

Legislative Initiative's signature collection process, which concluded in December 2022. The tweets were original posts emphasizing the importance of migrant regularization.

Analytical Procedure

We employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020), which views meaning-making as context-bound, situated, and shaped by the researcher's active role. Our study is situated within a critical, constructionist orientation to discourse, informed by discourse-based theories of citizenship. We did not quantify the frequency of codes/themes across the corpus; our focus is on interpretive meaning-making and the narrative work performed by tweets rather than on distributional patterns. We conceptualize the campaign's tweets as discursive enactments of citizenship, in Asen's (2004) sense of citizenship as a mode of public engagement (see also Kock & Villadsen, 2017). Beyond identifying thematic patterns, we also attended to how tweets worked together as narrative fragments within the campaign's broader public discourse. This narrative sensitivity informed how we interpreted the temporal organization of the themes, rather than constituting a separate method of analysis. Our analytic strategy was abductive, involving iterative movements between inductive, data-driven coding and more deductive, theory-informed interpretation. Our coding was initially inductive and close to the language of the tweets, while the development and naming of themes were informed by our theoretical interest in temporality and citizenship. This approach encourages reflective engagement with theory, data, and interpretation.

The tweets were stored and analyzed in dedicated files. Through iterative readings, we generated initial, predominantly semantic codes that remained close to the tweets' wording (e.g., "planned massacres at the borders," "duration of the campaign," "refusal to leave," "building a diverse society," "structural poverty in agricultural camps"). These codes were then grouped into more abstract subthemes, which in turn informed the three overarching themes, in relation to our central research question: What narratives does the movement mobilize in its campaign discourse to advocate for the regularization of migrants in administrative irregularity? For example, codes such as "planned massacres at borders," "delay in rescue operations," and "structural poverty in agricultural camps" clustered into subthemes like "border deaths as normalized state violence" and "structural precarity as slow death," which together formed the theme "Temporalities of state control." This operated as an interpretative label applied after identifying this cluster of codes and subthemes, rather than as an *a priori* theme. Beyond identifying thematic patterns, we treated the tweets as narrative fragments that, taken together, contribute to a broader collective narrative of the campaign. Our analysis focused on how these fragments link past, present, and future, and on how they position different actors (migrants, the Spanish state, EU institutions, "citizens with DNI," allies) within this temporal plot. This narrative lens also informed the way we organized and presented the themes: first we attend to how the campaign retrospectively narrates a past of institutionalized violence; second, how it constructs a present of struggle and alliances;

and third, how it projects future horizons of equality and justice. The overarching themes revealed by the analysis tied to distinct temporal dimensions and sequence of a “narrative plot”: from a history of state violence and past injustices, through present struggles, towards a more just future. The themes that emerged were entitled as following: (a) “Temporalities of state control” ($n=207$); (b) “Temporalities of alliances and fight against rights’ violation” ($n=259$); and (c) “Future (temporal) horizons and demands of social equality and justice” ($n=156$). Tweets were analyzed in Spanish and back-translated for this article. Original punctuation and capitalization were retained where possible. Representative tweets were selected to illustrate each theme.

The analysis examines how Regularización Ya publicly represents and narrates irregularization in order to mobilize support for regularization. Our data therefore capture discursive claims and political framing, not migrants’ lived experience as such.

Findings

The analysis is structured around the aforementioned themes. The first theme concentrates on border governing and migrant deaths and represents the state as a mechanism of violence. Death, structural violence, and poverty represent a prolonged injustice rooted in the past. The second theme emphasizes the urgency of the present (manifested in the campaign’s central demand “now”) which galvanizes alliances and collective efforts for immediate rights-claiming. A collective “we” of migrants and allies confronts injustices within a bounded time frame (the nine-month campaign) and mobilizes alliances with formal citizens as a key resource. The third theme projects a political vision of an equitable future driven by present mobilization, advocating for dismantling exclusions rooted in formal citizenship distinctions and fostering the building of inclusivity and commonness.

Temporalities of State Control

The tweets in this theme have highlighted different ways within which time can play a crucial role in arguments and discourses which condemn politics against migrants’ lives: either through stressing temporal frameworks and temporal length of necropolitical apparatus (Mbembe, 2003) or through more complex temporalities of violence such as time freezing (delaying of rescuing) and temporariness (harsh conditions of temporal work) (Table 1). Mbembé (2003) introduced the concept of necropolitics to analyze the exercise of power over death. Unlike biopolitics’ focus on sustaining life, necropolitics centers on the subjugation of life to death, exposing the violent underpinnings of state power in its management of disposable populations.

This first theme points to the continuity of border governing and normalization of migrants’ death. In particular it contains temporal constructions related to labor precarity and the colonization of migrants’ time through state neglect and delay in rescue mechanisms. The temporal dimension highlights the

Table 1 Theme 1

Tweet 1	<i>We do not forget the planned massacres of recent years. #Genocide #BorderMassacre, 29/12/2022</i>
Tweet 2	<i>11,286 people have died on the Spanish borders in the last five years. Thousands of families have been destroyed by immigration control policies. #BorderMassacre 11,286 victims of the Western Euro-African Border #RightToLife2018-2022, 19/12/2022</i>
Tweet 3	<i>These are not isolated cases or accidents, it is structural poverty planned by governments of all stripes for decades. Another fire in #Lepe the victims were seasonal workers, mostly migrants, who support the European economy with their work, 28/12/2022^a</i>
Tweet 4	<i>#NotDeathsButMurders Political interests and the delay in activating rescue services are a flagrant example of violation of rights, the absolute dehumanization. The route of death supported with European funds, 06/11/2022</i>

^aLepe is a town in the southern Spanish province of Huelva

enduring dynamics of exclusion, emphasizing that deaths, marginalization, and exploitation are neither isolated incidents nor accidents; they constitute the norm rather than exception. The activists construct the temporalities of control by focusing on the necropolitical state apparatuses within the time frame of the last years, constructing the consequences of bordering through temporal proximity (tweet 1). The tweet opens with a categorical negation (“we do not forget”) that functions as both a memorial claim and a promise of continued mobilization. The expression “planned massacres” attributes clear intentionality to state actors and rejects any framing of these deaths as accidental. Hashtags such as #Genocide and #BorderMassacre condense this accusation into highly charged labels, re-signifying border management as deliberate mass violence. In doing so, the tweets use emphatic naming and hashtagging to translate dispersed events over “recent years” into a single, morally saturated narrative of state aggression.

The emphasis on recent times, on the one hand, highlights and reaffirms the necessity of intervention and stopping the murders that are taking place. On the other hand, campaigners underline practices of exclusion and slow death which, as the literature states, occupy the temporalities of the endemic (Berlant, 2007) (tweet 2). Putting those deaths in the context of the last or recent years, the campaign adds time proximity and discursively formulates the possibility of immediate action to stop recent acts of violence at the borders. Situating the users/readers in a presence of negligence and lack of state measures to prevent migrants’ deaths, the tweets remind of ongoing atrocities happening *right now* and *during* the last years. According to the campaign narrative, the prolonged temporality of death demarcates the politics of deterrence needed to be revoked. Destruction and life loss of migrants—as recounted in the second tweet—in the Spanish borders in the last years are being considered attributes of border politics. The number of deaths is mentioned strategically as a proof of the necropolitical state apparatus implicitly answering at the same time to institutional discourses related to border security and safety. Tweets in this theme underscore the antithesis of life versus death amidst the fight of normalizing the (political, symbolic and actual) death of migrants.

As tweets in this theme highlight, the targeted migrants are categorized as subjects produced by the structural poverty (tweet 3). The discourse occasionally shifts from the temporal emergency and death of the recent years and expands the previously highlighted as mere protection of life to exploring the political aspects of institutional aggression against migrants.

The transition from contingency, associated with “accidents,” to structure, constituted by the use of words such as “planned” and “for decades,” is accentuated by the adjective *another* in the phrase “another fire,” which functions as a marker of repetition and routinization. Through categorical affirmation, evaluative adjectives, and a long temporal horizon (“for decades”), the tweet reframes localized events in Lepe as symptoms of a long-standing, state-produced regime of exploitation. This initial statement of the continuous murders of migrants is territorialized in specific localities where precarious seasonal workers tend to find temporary job posts. Reference to seasonal workers underlines, as other authors showed, the relationship between precarious work labor and temporal technologies, which lead to the attachment of migrants to complex positions within heteronomous temporal frames and hyperflexible working conditions (Wang, 2020), showing how necropolitics is deeply entangled with biopolitics in migrant labor (De Genova & Roy, 2020).

The campaign also stipulates the-common in the migration literature as usurpation of time (Andersson, 2014) (tweet 4). Temporality has become a multifaceted tool and vehicle in the “fight against migration” (Andersson, 2014). In the campaign’s discourse, migrants in administrative irregularity are represented as subjected to extended periods of “waiting” for their rights, facing an active usurpation/colonization of their time by state authorities through serial expulsions, extended periods of being in legal limbo (waiting for legal answers to their claims), retentions, or immediate pushbacks. In the campaign’s discourse, the state not only takes time away from migrants by prolonging bureaucratic procedures but also deprives them of vital time for life through delayed rescues and negligence. Experiences that have been described in terms of waiting, suspension, and “stolen time” are turned into collective claims about “years of life” taken by irregularity and into accusations that the state “steals” or “wastes” migrants’ time. In this way, the campaign’s narrative makes the phenomenology and materiality of irregular migrant time tangible and shareable as a political problem, rather than a private ordeal. As literature states, border control, securitization, and externalization bring to the fore not only (re)spatialization of state’s monopoly of violence but also underline the temporal dimensions of migrant experience created by internal and external borders (Mora & Montenegro, 2009). As authors mention, concrete walls, real-time intelligence, administrative systems of control, police raids and brutality, bureaucracy, discrimination, and racism (Anderson et al., 2009) are not only part of a border regime of the Global North but also an apparatus of—expansion and reduction of—time control: speedy intervention to prevent unauthorized movement before a migrant has crossed the border and prolonged temporal in-between waiting zones for those who are already “inside.” As Schindel (2022) stresses, border assemblages are involved in the deployment of spatialized slow violence which is politically produced; these assemblages constitute a form of sovereign violence which operates not only through an unconditional power of death but also through the abandonment and exposure of

migrants to the production of a zone of mere biological survival (Schindel, 2022) as a space of “limitless limits” (De Genova & Roy, 2020). The ways in which migrants’ time is appropriated reveal a complex economics of converting a migrant into an illegal and illegitimate body not deserved to be rescued. This control is pivotal not only for scrutinizing instances of state brutality and efforts of imposition of certain temporalities through alienation and otherization, but also for delving into the acts of resistance exhibited by migrants. In this first narrative when past events are explained, the state is depicted as perpetrator and migrants as victims of violence. This backstage of harm accounts for why the campaign is necessary.

The next theme is related to temporalities (expressed by the imperative action through the campaign’s name “Regularization Now”) which subvert politics of death and propose alliances and collective action against state violence (given that only formal Spanish citizens were permitted to sign the ILP).

Temporalities of Alliances and Fight Against Rights’ Violation

The limited period of the campaign (9 months) is designated as a time for both alliances and challenges (Table 2). The limited time of the campaign is averaged out by the constant and persistent resistance and alliances (tweet 1). This limited time frame is recast as a counter-temporal space in which “our communities and organizations” can act, in contrast to the open-ended waiting imposed on people in administrative irregularity. Through future-oriented modality (“it will be”), collective pronouns (“our communities”), and the metaphor of “working side by side,” the tweet constructs alliances as the key resource for changing the long-term experience of waiting and exclusion. Alliances and cooperation among diverse groups, expressed as “common strategy,” are framed as the antidote to possible challenges, formulating a common ground of fight and resistance. The ID card, which is considered a part of the state security apparatus, is transformed in this case to a part of the apparatus of articulation of political fights against state violence. The campaigners seem here to both use and resist state practices as they recognize on the one hand how state administration can have serious consequences for a livable life and on the other the importance of using state apparatuses to achieve specific goals. In the first tweet, time (expressed as temporal length) is used as a resource to underline the need of various collectives to be allied in order to fight for migrants’ rights.

The commitment to continue fighting for the campaign (and the subsequent rights of migrants) and against migration law has a temporal meaning (tweet 2). This tweet combines assertive language and visual emphasis to construct the campaign’s permanence. The short sentences (“Here we are. Here we continue. We didn’t leave. WE WILL NOT LEAVE.”) use repetition, deictic “here,” and capitalization to highlight continuity and refusal to withdraw. Finally, the hashtag *#gasolineforthemigrationlaw* suggests that the campaign’s persistence is a fuel that keeps pressure on the existing law. Together, these rhetorical devices construct an ongoing present in which the campaign is unremittingly present and future-oriented, despite the precarity of migrants’ legal status. This is ultimately expressed and underscored by the imperative action through the campaign’s name “Regularization

Table 2 Theme 2

Tweet 1	<i>It will be 9 months of challenges and the support of our communities and organizations is key in this participatory citizen process. The progress of the ILPRegularizacion will depend on a common strategy to work side by side with allied people who have a Spanish ID. #RegularizationNow, 20/12/2021</i>
Tweet 2	<i>#REGULARIZATIONNOW is an UNQUESTIONABLE reality, which will always put the #Rights of migrants on the political agenda. Here we are. Here we continue. We didn't leave. WE WILL NOT LEAVE. #gasolineforthemigrationlaw 18/12/2022</i>
Tweet 3	<i>Why do we persist in the urgent need for regularization through the participatory process #ILPRegularizacion? Because administrative irregularity enables abuses of power and is HUMAN TRAFFICKING. If we talk about human trafficking, let's talk about the Foreigner's Law, 05/11/2022</i>
Tweet 4	<i>Now more than ever, we need the support of organizations, collectives, political parties, and individual allies to guarantee the rights of migrant people in the future. We have demonstrated how essential we are and that we are an active part of the social fabric of this country, 20/12/2021</i>
Tweet 5	<i>The racist and criminal immigration law promotes and encourages the exploitation and abuse of migrant people. Domestic workers, day laborers, seamstresses, waitresses, the list is endless. SIGN NOW! #ILPRegularization and defend rights for everyone., 24/05/2022</i>

Now.” The insistence on “now” (“ya”) does not simply express urgency. It refuses the deferred temporality through which regularization is treated as an exceptional concession to be granted later and asserts migrants as already present, already contributing, and already entitled to rights. Attempts to determine the future through constructions of a permanent *present* and a permanent *presence* of a “we” symbolize the ways in which people unite their powers to fight collectively. This “we” constitutes the roles and agents of this narrative, along with the allies “people who can sign and who have a Spanish ID. This collective “we” exceeds realities demarked by law that exercise control over migrants’ bodies and existence in the space and time. These forms of collective articulation of the resisting subject enable a more everyday and local view of resistances, allowing political action in defense of rights to be understood not only as something directed toward the State but also as arising from cooperative relations within organizations and collectives (Álvarez & Montenegro, 2020).

The campaign subverts the prevailing discourse surrounding “illegal migrants,” who often are targeted as criminals or law offenders. Instead, it redirects attention to state practices, particularly to the condition of administrative irregularity, that disrupts someone’s “regular” stay and constitutes a primary obstacle preventing migrants from establishing a new life. The campaign not only delegitimizes administrative irregularity, characterizing it as an “abuse of power,” but also strategically frames state treatment of migrants as a form of “human trafficking” (tweet 3). This intentional comparison underscores the increasing vulnerability of individuals to various forms of abuse that constitute the mobilization urgent. The rhetorical question (“Why do we persist”) anticipates and counters possible scepticism about the campaign’s insistence on regularization. The answer is delivered in categorical form. The tweet combines a rhetorical question–answer pair, definitional equivalence (“is

human trafficking”), capitalization for emphasis, and a conditional imperative (“let’s talk about”) to politicize legal status. Irregularity appears as a state-made condition that enables temporal and material abuse, rather than as an individual legal failure. The campaign illustrates the ramifications of administrative irregularity leading to trafficking, a label visually intensified in the tweets through capital letters, evident in instances such as illegal labor in Spanish agriculture, numerous cases of mistreatment by owners, including passport confiscation, forced labor, physical abuse, and intolerable living conditions in temporary tents, which are also mentioned in the literature (see, Rodríguez-López, 2020). In this narrative’s roles and agents, state and migration law are positioned as antagonists.

The criminal and racist character of the migration law is also underscored. It becomes obvious how the time limits of the campaign demand the use of a specific language and linguistic devices. On the other hand, language represents time in particular ways (as limited) that push forward the campaign. It is noteworthy that when the time of the campaign was close to an end, and the campaigners were close to fulfill their cause, their calls for unity and support were even more imperative (tweet 4). The subject in need of support here is not the abstract representation of the migrant without documents but instead it is the (precarious) employed migrant (tweet 5). In this way, the demand for rights is connected to migrants’ contribution to the community throughout their professional attributions in the production and reproduction of the society. Narratively, this is the middle of the story: protagonists and allies confronting antagonistic structures in a limited time window. The essential character of migrants’ presence in the community is used as a key reason for major political support from different political and social organizations, recognizing the multiplicity within the categories that circulate through alliances (Álvarez & Montenegro, 2020). The organizers summon for participation to everyone who have the capacity to support the campaign through the rhetorical use of a universal “you” as the recipient of the message “SIGN NOW!”. As the campaign progressed, and especially in the final months as the signature-collection process approached its close, messages intensified the imperative register (“sign now,” “now more than ever”), using the approaching deadline to heighten urgency and consolidate alliances.

In summary, this theme illustrates how time is employed to convey various meanings: the limited duration of the campaign highlights the urgent need for coordination and collaboration among different actors; it places the campaign in a continuous present of struggle and persistence, as unmet demands will further erode the social and political position of migrants. Moreover, it emphasizes the immediate necessity of participation to safeguard rights for all *now* and ensure a more just political future. This call related to future horizons is more profoundly analyzed and sustained in the last theme.

Future (Temporal) Horizons and Demands for Social Equality and Justice

In this theme, through prefigurative political statements, future temporalities are mobilized in order to depict a fairer future and anticipate features of an alternative

Table 3 Theme 3

Tweet 1	<i>Tell your neighbors and friends that we are building together a diverse society with rights for everyone. Above all, remember that we are demanding the rights that already belong to us. IT'S NOT A CHARITY, IT'S SOCIAL JUSTICE! #RegularizacionYa</i> , 21/10/2022
Tweet 2	<i>("In the coming days, we will continue to report on our roadmap. We are ALREADY taking action in various corners of the Spanish state to usher in a paradigm shift in migration policies that puts our lives and our Rights at the center. #ILPRegularization", 20/12/2021</i>
Tweet 3	<i>("We're not just here to demand a dignified life, but to change the rules of the game. We want to participate in designing new policies; we are part of this society, we're not going anywhere, and we will continue fighting for our rights with our own voice. #RegularizationNow", 28/07/2022</i>

and better world in the present (Leach, 2013) meant to replace existing political structures (Juris, 2008) (Table 3). Paraphrasing Berlant (2016), future time is used as a critique to intensify campaigners' attachment to the world felt but yet unestablished.

The campaign strategically employs imperative tenses like "tell" and "remember" to articulate an open yet crucial call, urging people to propagate the ongoing actions of the campaign which are tied to actively forging a collectively shared future (tweet 1). The campaign strategically involves the reader by placing them in an active role within the campaign. Through these linguistic choices, the campaign implies that each one constitutes an integral part to the campaign's objective, and it underscores the imperative need to raise awareness about the ongoing efforts. The discursive use of "we" and "together" emphasizes a collaborative endeavor to share and shape an inclusive future for everyone. Once again, this use of "we" marks the agents and roles of this narrative. Here the protagonists are re-figured as future-makers, not just victims. The strategy of inclusion and the production of "togetherness" play an important role in a present within which only certain identities are accepted. For instance, using a continuous verb tense ("we are building") or the adverb "ALREADY" in capital letters, it is emphasized that this ongoing effort made by people, who have no rights guaranteed by the state, is in constant dialogue with the present, serving as a bridge to a future in which rights *will be* recognized (tweet 2). This act on the present has direct effects towards the diversion from a future of oppression to a more just and fair future of recognition of mutuality and interdependency (hooks, 2000). In that future, rights will not be limited to or preserved for certain groups, but will be expanded to everyone (especially those who have been historically excluded). These temporal claims do not only demand faster access to rights; they also publicly stage migrants as already part of the social and political collectivity. In this sense, urgency, persistence, and future-making function as performative claims to belonging. The interdependency among diverse alliances of various actors shapes the collective efforts against precarity. Conversely, it is within precarity that certain ethical obligations come to the forefront. For instance, the campaign's discourse positions alliances not only as essential for the project's success but also as a call to unite forces in the future, suggesting new citizenship proposals.

The campaign systematically uses the pronoun “we” oriented to the migrants who are excluded from rights, claiming structural changes (tweet 3). Voices that are relegated to the margins now claim their right to cease the authoritarian efforts to hold them on silence. The construction (and the reconstruction) of a present of social justice can open ways for a freer future, which is the radical proposal of the movement. This all-encompassing vision of a diverse society serves as a strategic approach by the movement to mobilize formal citizens to sign the ILP while highlighting that this transformative process *is already* happening. As Berlant (2016) noted, the “commons” is constructed as an action that acknowledges a broken world and the survival ethics of a transformational infrastructure in the future.

The support for migrants and vulnerable lives becomes a collective effort to change what is considered until now commonsensical, emphasizing strategies that actively engage with the community and, consequently, influence national affairs, despite the state serving as the campaign’s boundary. While the state imposes limits, the campaign boldly articulates claims that surpass these confines. This global obligation involves seeking political and economic structures that minimize precarity and establish equality. The struggle against precarity is both a form of resistance and a transformative force. Empowered by the ability to envision and shape the future, the campaign asserts that the present is intricately linked to a vision of social justice. The future, in turn, is directly influenced by the present, making it a vital space for being able to imagine and construct bridges toward this open and more inclusive future.

In sum, this theme’s narrative of future temporalities was realized through linguistic devices (e.g., specific use of verb tenses and adverbs) and narrative constructions of a future of social justice that mobilize practices of resistance already worked out in the present.

Conclusions

This article examined the narratives employed by the movement “RegularizaciónYa” [“RegularizationNow”] in its campaign advocating for the regularization of 500,000 migrants living in administrative irregularity in order to illustrate political goals and aims. Rather than treating regularization as a purely state-administered legal mechanism, the article approached it as a field of migrant-led political contestation. More specifically, it indicated that the campaign does not only demand legal status; it politicizes the temporal organization of irregularity itself. Migrant activists through the official page of the movement use temporal narratives placed in past, present, and future times, underlining not only current/past state violence and repression of rights but also the political horizon of the campaign through prefigurative statements, actions and demands to achieve political and social rights for migrants. This collective narrative employed past injustices, present struggles, and future visions, and redistributes agency by positioning migrants not as passive victims but as protagonists of social and political transformation.

This article contributes by demonstrating how the campaign reconfigures narratives of irregularized migrants’ lived experience of waiting, uncertainty, and “stolen

years” into a collective narrative that exposes state-produced violence, mobilizes a contested present of struggle and solidarity, and imagines future horizons of justice. Conceptually, it specifies three temporal operations through which the campaign’s communication unsettles dominant narratives about irregular migrants: historicizing border and labor violence as long-term, state-produced violence rather than isolated “crises”; politicizing administrative time by naming irregularity and waiting as forms of temporal dispossession; and prefiguring futures in which migrants are recognized as present and future makers of the polity. Read together, these temporal operations do more than describe hardship; they transform irregularity from an individualized administrative status into a publicly articulated injustice that demands structural redress.

Seen in this light, the campaign’s discourse performs an important political shift. Migrants are not represented primarily as passive victims of exclusion, but as political actors who narrate the past, contest the present, and claim the future. The article therefore also contributes to debates on acts of citizenship (Andreouli et al., 2025; Ataç et al., 2016; Isin, 2017; Nordling et al., 2017) by showing that citizenship is enacted and performed here not only through explicit rights claims, coalition-building, and legislative intervention, but also through the politicization of time itself. By refusing prolonged waiting and insisting on the urgency of the “now,” the campaign challenges the temporal logic through which exclusion is normalized.

The tweets have highlighted different ways within which time can play a crucial role in arguments and discourses which condemn politics against migrants’ lives: either through stressing temporal frameworks and temporal length of necropolitical apparatus or through more complex temporalities of violence such as time freezing (delaying of rescuing) and temporariness (harsh conditions of temporal work). This is in line with other studies which underscore violations in migrants’ rights through complex temporalities (Castellano, 2024; Robertson, 2014; Tan, 2020).

Time constructions emerged in a context of constant right claiming, alliances, and acts of subversion of repression of rights. Temporal restrictions mobilized notions of emergency and temporalities of alliances as a main tool to fight against established power dynamics and violation of rights. References to temporal emergency are also depicted in the integration of the word “now” in the campaign’s name which employs the imperative of regularization of migrants as a political solution and protective measure of the right to a political life. Temporal emergency and the creation of alliances serve as tools to counteract state repression, demanding recognition of migrants as political agents (Álvarez & Montenegro, 2020).

Time was also reclaimed as a political resource for envisioning justice. Prefigurative statements articulate future-oriented demands, constructing alternative temporalities and imagining new social futures (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2021). As Cooper (2020) noted, this prefiguration “sometimes settles within the world of play and sometimes exceeds it” (Cooper, 2020, p. 894). The analysis presented in this article provided different ways within which migrants’ narratives embody times that can *disruptor condemn* the normative temporal frameworks of modern state systems, establishing a temporality of *taking rather than waiting* (Squire & Bagelman, 2012). Regularization campaigns are a claim to re-appropriate time and reactivate personal, social, and economic futures that have been disrupted or “colonized” by temporal bordering

(see Castellano, 2024; Benedikt, 2024). The campaign “RegularizaciónYa” embodies this complexity by situating regularization as an immediate necessity tied to economic and social survival, while also framing it as a step toward systemic change.

Claims for regularization are not only tied to the repression of rights in the present or temporal constraints (Andersson, 2014; Robertson, 2014) but also involve proactive efforts to bridge the present with a future contingency, one that envisions social justice with guaranteed political and social rights for migrants. Campaigners’ narratives not only challenge state-imposed legality and discourses of victimization of migrants but also open up new avenues for understanding the dynamics of resistance and citizenship not only by trying to interfere formal policies but also by mobilizing concepts of both urgency and long-term struggle. The article foregrounds how the campaign publicly constructs the temporality of irregularization, rearticulating it both as a political issue and as a resource for claims-making. The campaign represents this call for future politics, by demarcating new political horizons and imagining the future as a tool to both foment hope, alliances, and social justice and refuse/criticize/denounce abuses.

A key limitation of this study is the absence of an analysis of engagement metrics or circulation patterns. Because the data collection was designed with a qualitative, discourse-analytic focus on meaning-making, we did not archive retweet or like counts or follower numbers, nor did we trace the trajectories of specific tweets across networks. This constrains our ability to say which narrative strategies became more visible or influential in the platform’s ecology. Future mixed-method research could combine qualitative analysis with systematic collection of engagement and network data to examine how particular temporal and political framings circulate, which actors amplify them, and how these dynamics shape the public life of regularization campaigns.

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Data Availability The data corpus in Spanish may be available upon request.

Declarations

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