Media, Populism and Corruption

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ICNOVA INSTITUTO DE COMUNICAÇÃO DA NOVA

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Title:
Media, Populism and Corruption

Abstract: This book follows the **International Seminar "Media, Populism and Corruption"** held at ICNOVA, Lisbon, Portugal, in November 2022, integrated into the activities of the 21st Century Populism Observatory. The eleven chapters are preceded by a preface and a presentation, which aim to contextualize the pertinence and relevance of the themes under discussion — Media, Populism and Corruption —, as well to justify them within the scope of ICNOVA's research projects. The chapters, both theoretical and empirical, focus populist phenomena located in Brazil, Spain, United States of America, and Portugal. Four aspects stand out that guided the organization of the eBook. Firstly, the **theoretical-conceptual discussion** on the relationship between Media and Populism, undertaken by the authors, with a largely common bibliography, but where the perspectives and geographies of the analysed phenomena create different interpretations. Then, it is noted that many of the empirical studies have as object of analysis the **centrality of populist political actors**, who have optimized, or optimize their relationship with the Media, efficiently using social networks and mainstream media, to capture and captivate voters in sealed bubbles. A third aspect, which permeates, clearly, the chapters, is the **complicity between corporations/owners/operators and professionals of the Media**, mainstream and social networks, **with the expansion of Populism**, promoting the discrediting of democratic institutions and of its agents, as well as the institutional conflict, the political spectacle, and the information without contradictions. One last aspect are the articles that discuss the **relationship between Populism and gender identity issues**, with relevance to the agendas and attempts of parties, located on the right-wing populism, to revert freedoms, guarantees and achievements associated with these social movements.

Keywords: populism, media, social networks, populism and gender

Título:
Media, Populismo e Corrupção

Resumo: Este livro surge na sequência do **Seminário Internacional "Media, Populismo e Corrupção"** realizado no ICNOVA**,** em Lisboa, Portugal, em novembro de 2022, integrado nas atividades do **Observatório do Populismo do século XXI**. Os onze capítulos são precedidos de um prefácio, e de uma apresentação, que têm como objetivo não só contextualizar a pertinência e atualidade das temáticas em discussão — Media, Populismo e Corrupção —, bem como justificá-las no âmbito dos projetos de investigação do ICNOVA. Os capítulos, teóricos e empíricos, focam-se em fenómenos situados no Brasil, Espanha, Estados Unidos e Portugal. Destacam-se quatro aspetos que orientaram a organização do eBook. Primeiramente, salienta-se a **discussão teórica e conceitual** sobre a relação entre Media e Populismo, empreendida pelos autores, onde a bibliografia utilizada coincide em grande parte mas, onde as perspetivas e geografias dos fenómenos analisados criam diferentes interpretações. Em seguida, nota-se que muitos dos estudos empíricos têm como objeto de análise a **centralidade dos atores políticos populistas**, que optimizaram, ou optimizam sua relação com os Media utilizando, de forma eficiente, as redes sociais e os media *mainstream*, para captar e cativar eleitores em bolhas impermeabilizadas. Um terceiro aspeto, que perpassa, de forma mais ou menos nítida, os capítulos, é a **cumplicidade entre as empreasas/operadores/proprietários e os profissionais dos Media,** *mainstream* e redes sociais, com **a expansão do Populismo**, promovendo a desacreditação das instituições democráticas e dos seus agentes, bem como o conflito institucional, o espetáculo político e a informação sem contraditórios. Um último aspeto, a salientar, são os artigos que discutem a **relação entre Populismo e as questões de Identidade de género**, com relevância para as agendas e tentativas dos partidos de extrema-direita populista, de reverter liberdades, garantias e conquistas associadas a estes movimentos sociais.

Palavras-chave: populismo, media, redes sociais, populismo e género

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Foreword

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Numerous recent academic publications on populism have highlighted its close relationship with the media. From its inception, populism has been defined as an antagonism between a corrupt elite and the pure and incorruptible people represented by a charismatic leader. Although to date no clear and unambiguous definition of populism—as either a doctrine or a movement—has become accepted, some characteristics are generally recognized: it is context specific; it cuts across ideological, geographical, and historical boundaries; and it takes myriad, oftentimes contradictory, forms. Taggart (2000) goes so far as to describe populism as a chameleon, due to the wide gamut of its approaches such as ideology, discursive style and strategy, and its myriad contexts, whether in a range of regimes, geographies, or ideological positionings (Taggart, 2000).[1] However, despite its marked diversity, all forms of populism share a style of mediated communication.

In recent decades, the media, particularly social media, have become central players in representing politics, showcasing its dependence on communication and media. It is impossible to study populism without focusing on the media's role as a catalyst for populist claims, making them, whether, consciously or unconsciously, allies of populist leaders (Mazzoleni, 2003).[2] From serving as mere vehicles for transmitting populism, the media have transformed, in many cases, into actual agents of populism.

The digital technology explosion, in conjunction with a plethora of forms of disseminating information, disinformation and counter-information, has facilitated and enhanced the spread of populist ideas and proposals, as exemplified in the rise of populist parties across Europe, the US, and Latin America. Meanwhile, the proliferation of platforms, networks, and social and digital media, in conjunction with the financial crisis and the flight of advertising

1 Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Open University Press

2 Mazzoleni, G. (2003). The Media and the Growth of Neo-Populism in Contemporary Democracies. In G. Mazzoleni, J. Stewart and B. Horsfield (Eds.), *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis* (pp. 1-20). Praeger.

investment to said media have been catastrophic for heritage media outlets, leading in many cases to tabloidization and the growth of populism and the resulting loss of the quality and credibility of information.

In the political field, personalized leaders with populist discourses benefiting from the force of the media (Mazzoleni, 2008) have successfully undermined democratic parties to impose and legitimize themselves.[3] Populist rhetoric has contaminated traditional democratic parties, particularly in election periods, in some cases without suffering any consequences other than radicalization and the impoverishment of public debate. On the other hand, the current context marked by inflation and an energy crisis aggravated by the war in Ukraine is dramatically increasing the cost of living, therein weakening governments and accentuating the feeling of crisis favorable to the growth of populist parties. This stands in marked opposition to what happened during the Covid 19 pandemic which, in Europe and the US, strengthened leaders and governments regardless of their ideology—populist or non-populist, left or right (Cas Mude, 2020).[4]

Starting from different perspectives and methodologies, the articles in this collection reflect on the different faces of populism in its relationship to traditional and new media in different geographical and political contexts, making an important theoretical and empirical contribution to a deepened understanding of the phenomenon.

3 Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the Media. In D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-First Century Populism The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (pp. 49-64). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

4 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-populism-trump-politics-response

Notes to the Seminar "Media, Populism and Corruption"

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Dear Committee members
Dear speakers and participants, wherever you are

As coordinator of NOVA Institute of Communication and on behalf of NOVA University, I welcome this scientific event organized by the Observatory on Populism in the 21st Century.

Created three years ago and involving Brazilian and Portuguese researchers, the Observatory is already registered in the Brazilian CNPQ National Resarch Group.

At ICNOVA, the Observatory on Populism in the 21st Century is part of the Media and Journalism (M&J) research group. As you may see on the ICNOVA website, M&J has been focused on the history of journalism, the relationships between journalism, politics and democracy, the media practices of social groups and the critical skills for these practices, which call for digital, informational, and communicational literacies.

According to the website, the Observatory on Populism in the 21st Century asserts itself "in defense of democracy and citizenship" and intends to mobilize citizens in general and researchers in particular, by promoting conferences, seminars and other research and citizen awareness activities". Its lines, which are reflected in this event, emphasize political-institutional issues such as the emergence of populist governments in recent years. These later and I quote again, "call into question the rules of liberal democracy, especially with regard to individual freedoms, freedom of expression and the press".

This initiative seems to have anticipated the proper moment to take place — one day after the US mid-term elections, just over a week after the second round of the Brazilian presidential elections, and a month after the victory of an extreme right-wing coalition in Italy. All these recent acts were marked by the affirmation of populism in political discourse, the

circulation of fake information through social networks, emotional news coverage and so many other phenomena that will be discussed here.

As mentioned on the Populism and Media research, the mediatization of politics calls for contributions from Communication and Politics studies. Thus, the "objective is not only to contribute to the strengthening of democratic and citizenship practices, but also to reflect on populist communication and participation strategies act in new contexts and media environments."

I therefore congratulate the organization for the presence of Professor Gianpietro Mazzoleni, one of the most important scholars in the field of Political Communication, as the main speaker.

Other lines of the Observatory focus attention on the connection between populist ideologies and setbacks in the order of civil rights, be they gender equality and sexual rights, or justicialist forms of justice, for example. These domains consider the mediation carried out in social networks, journalism, or fiction.

The ICNOVA strategic plan combines attention to the deep mediatization of social domains (the media, companies and organizations, cultural production and the arts, technological materialities) with an action perspective in which research also seeks to have a social impact, to contribute to the goals of sustainable development.

An initiative like this seminar undoubtedly has objectives such as Peace, Justice and effective institutions, Gender Equality or Reduction of inequalities.

I would say that Quality Education is also present, and this aim is also part of our duties as researchers, in our ability to transform academic results into resources that can be appropriated by non-academics. More than ever, political, information and media literacy are urgent.

In full certainty of the public interest of this event, I challenge all participants, on this side and on the other side of the ocean, to consider how they can spread the contributions of this meeting outside the walls of academia, translating them for non-academic audiences, co-constructing resources and interventions with citizen groups.

I therefore wish for the success of the scientific debates and for its impact on the "citizen awareness" registered in the Populism 21st century Observatory. The ICNOVA website, and the research and intervention we do in this and other groups will also be interested and available spaces for this visibility. Thanks and good work!

Introduction

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The eleven chapters that make up this eBook were organized considering the broader themes and coherence between them. All the chapters are preceded by a Foreword and a note on the presentation of the eBook and the Seminar that originated it. In the Foreword, Estrela Serrano, discuss the pertinence of the articles in this collection reflecting on the different faces of populism and its relationship to traditional and new media in different geographical and political contexts. She emphasizes the important theoretical and empirical contribution to a deepened understanding of the populist phenomenon. In the Introductory Note, current ICNOVA coordinator, institutionally frames the Seminar and the eBook "Media, Populism and Corruption".

In the first chapter, Gianpietro Mazzoleni presents the big picture of populism and extreme right-wing parties, listing theories, analyses, and concepts, as well as trends in Western research. Chapters two and three are focused on the comparative approach to populist phenomena and right-wing extremism in Europe, United Sates and Brazil. In chapter two, entitled "The use of Social media by the Extreme Right in Election campaigns: a comparison of Portugal and Spain", Sara Pina compares the visibility strategies of radical right leaders and parties in Portugal (Chega) and Spain (Vox). In chapter three, Richard Romancini compares the trajectory and communication processes of former President Trump with those used by former President Bolsonaro in Brazil. The next two articles, chapters four and five, address gender issues and populism. Julia Roth's article outlines the ways in which gender and opposition to "gender ideology" has become one of the main arenas of populist and right-wing extremist discourse and polarization.

The fifth chapter, by Carla Martins and Ana Cabrera, aims to understand the relevance and significance of this position within the broader framework of the connection between gender and populism and to understand the extent to which this orientation contributes to establishing the political-ideological project of Portuguese political party Chega.

The following chapters are dedicated to the study of the manifestations of populism, in Portugal and Brazil, from different perspectives. In the chapter "Media, Corruption and Far-Wing Populism: notes on journalistic coverage of political scandals in Brazil", by Liziane Soares Guazina, Juliana Gagliardi and Bruno Araújo, discuss the relationship between media, corruption and populism as it relates to the Brazilian political experience. In the seven chapter "News circulation between Social Networks and television in Portugal: a case study of populism in the 2022 parliamentary elections" the aim is to examine the circulation of information between mass media, social media, and television newscasts during the campaign for the parliamentary election in Portugal in January 2022.

In the eighth Chapter, the authors, Adriana Oliveira e Gisela Castro, reflect on the mediatization process as a current stage of capitalism, and investigate certain characteristics, patterns, and trends of mediatization as seen in the main techno-communication strategies used in the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections, and their effects in Brazilian democracy. In the following text, chapter nine, "Extreme right-wing populism and the environment: notes on the Brazilian experience with Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022", the authors aim to obtain a better insight into how Bolsonaro incorporated central elements of populism in several of his government's actions on the environment, in Brazil, between 2019 and 2022, the period that Jair Messias Bolsonaro served as president of the country.

In the tenth Chapter, Bianca Alighieri Luz Monteiro, through the analysis of the television debates on Portuguese televisions, during the 2019 and 2022 legislative election campaigns, intended to understand the media role, included the Facebook, in the upward of Chega's popularity. The last chapter "Logic, Bolsonaro and a post-structural analysis" deepens how Bolsonaro's narrative focuses on principles of difference that aim to establish "good and evil". It also analyses how the former president uses these values to establish political and social hegemony.

Research on populist political communication. Have we said the last word?

Investigação sobre comunicação política populista. Já dissemos a última palavra?

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Abstract: What is the bottom line of two decades of research on the interplay between the media and populism? Do we have sufficient theoretical tools to understand the current developments of populism, especially vis-à-vis the platformization of much communication in the political arenas? The paper provides an overview of some the major findings and theoretical steps achieved by international scholarship in the distinctive field of "populist political communication".

Keywords: populism, media, platformization of political communication

Resumo: A que resultado se chegou após duas décadas de investigação sobre a interação entre media e populismo? Dispomos de ferramentas teóricas suficientes para compreender os atuais desenvolvimentos do populismo, especialmente no que diz respeito à plataformização da maior parte da comunicação nas arenas políticas? O capítulo apresenta um panorama geral de alguns dos principais desenvolvimentos teóricos alcançados por académicos de âmbito internacional, no campo específico da "comunicação política populista".

Palavras-chave: populismo, media, plataformização da comunicação política

Looking at the populist national landscapes since the turn of the century, we observe that populism has known changing fortunes, and that it has married, if not everywhere successfully, with nationalism and sovereign-ism, and with far-right.

For sure the national instances that we have observed in the years show that a movement or a party are bound for success or for a long life when their leaders have charismatic and media-savvy personalities. Those qualities comprehend organizational skills, political clout, but above all exceptional communication instincts that allow them to exploit and dominate seamlessly the public agenda. In the insurgent phase such leaders must show to be able to lure the attention of and coverage by established media by using contentious themes, belligerent tones and violent language.

That said, populism is a distinctive phenomenon of our times, even if there were cases identified as such in late 19th century and early 20th. It has surely attracted a huge interest of academic research, as explained further in this chapter. An interest, to be true, a bit 'slow-burn' at the turn of the 21st century, when populist movements had started to pop up in various national contexts, perhaps at first seen as folkroric versions of protest movements. The peak of research efforts by political and communication sciences was to be recorded in the last ten years.

This is not the place to review the long disputed definitions of populism. However, a starting question of this overview is that perhaps it is a "buzzword" that has been used in many instances to designate diverse political phenomena (Hunger and Paxton 2022), and a "sexy" concept (Rodujin 2019) that explains its popularity among academics.

The political events that around the globe fueled research and debate are mostly cited from Anglo-American-centrism, that is what prepared Brexit and Trump's election and presidency. To be true, populism has been a sensational, disruptive phenomenon long before

elsewhere: The Lega Nord in Italy, the Front National in France, the FPÖ in Austria, the BJP in India and One Nation in Australia, and others, especially in Latin America, the most momentous ones being Chavez in Venezuela and Bolsonaro in Brasil. However, the "critical mass" of the world coverage of populism was reached with the rise of Trumpism. "The Cambridge Dictionary declared populism 2017's Word of the Year, as media outlets drastically intensified their reporting, and occurrences of "populism" and "populist" in the New York Times nearly quadrupled from 2015 to 2017." (Hunger & Paxton 2022, p. 618). Data from Scopus show that around that year academic research started to skyrocket, to reach its peak in number of publications, in 2021.

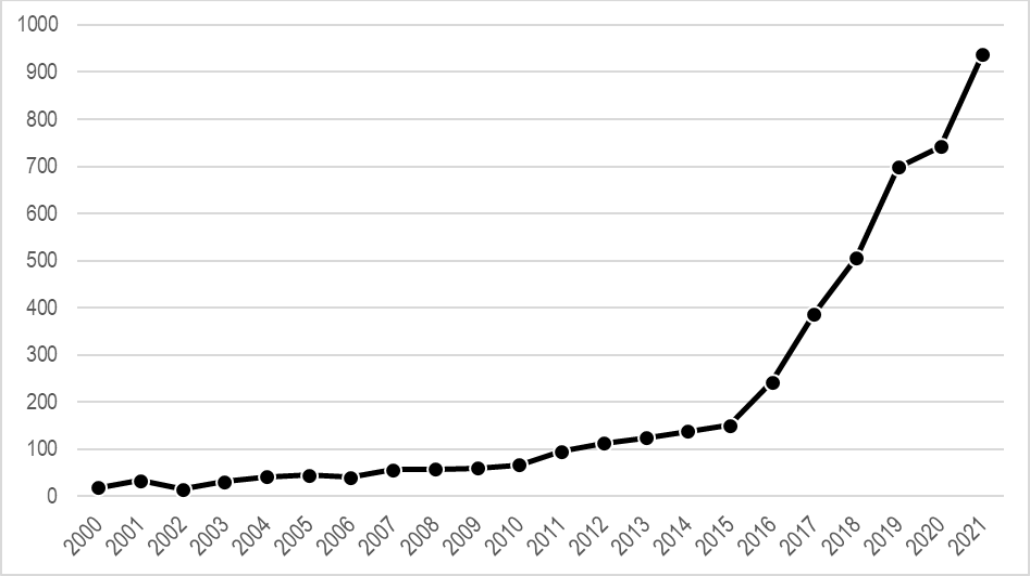

Figure 1
Absolute number of new publications per year containing the term "populis*" in the title based on the Scopus database (social sciences).
Source: https://populismobserver.com/2022/06/27/who-is-a-populist/#more-5592

Now, in the year 2022 we have seen the defeat of Le Pen and Zemmour in the Presidential bid in France, the bad performance of Salvini's Lega and of Berlusconi's party in Italy, the downfall of Bolsonaro in Brasil and the wearing out of Trump's fascination in the U.S. Midterm elections. This is not to say that populism is over, especially if we consider that it has permeated much mainstream politics, becoming an "endemic" phenomenon in established democracies (Mazzoleni & Bracciale 2018).

Is the current weakening of the populist rule paralleled also by a lowered academic attention?

In other words, is still true that populism is knowing the same academic hype of the past decade or there are no further uncharted territories left to be investigated? Have we said the last word on populism?

Research on populism as a communication phenomenon

It is undoubted that populism has been studied far and wide, and all sorts of disciplinary approaches have been used. Table 1 shows that between 2004 and 2018 the large majority of articles were from political science (N=884), while the communication scholarship is well distanced, occupying the third place (N=226). **Figure 2** shows that both approaches evidenced a striking surge in 2016. **Figure 3** shows that research and the ensuing publications were disproportionately Euro-centric, six more times as many than North America, Latin America and the rest of the world.

Table 1
Total number of articles on populism by disciplines from 2004 to 2018 (excluding disciplines with less than 20 publications) (Hunger & Paxton 2021, 622)

Discipline	Articles	Discipline	Articles
Political Science	884	Religion	52
Sociology	239	Psychology	49
Communication	226	Public	47
Area Studies	225	Literature	45
History	200	Educational	45
Economics	173	Education	43
International Relations	171	Linguistics	43
Social Sciences	166	Language and Linguistics	42
Interdisciplinary	152	Public Administration	39
Multidisciplinary	146	Social Issues	39
Humanities	123	Environmental Studies	31
Law	98	Industrial Relations and Labor	27
Cultural Studies	79	Film	26
Ethnic Studies	77	Radio	26
Philosophy	76	Television	26
Criminology & Penology	73	Asian Studies	24
Planning & Development	73	Business	24
Anthropology	68	Art	20
Geography	58	other	389

Note: One article can be part of several categories and hence we report 4344 different instances of disciplines, while we only have 2794 articles in our data

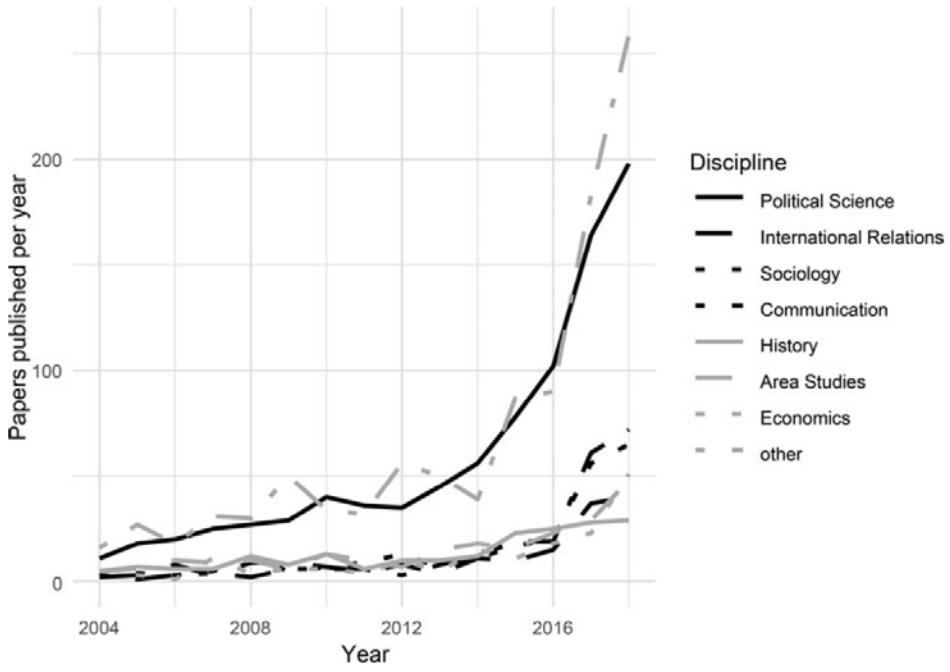

Figure 2
Yearly number of published journal articles on populism across disciplines [ibidem] Source: Hunger, S., & Paxton, F. (2022), What's in a buzzword? A systematic review of the state of populism research in political science. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *10*(3), 617–633

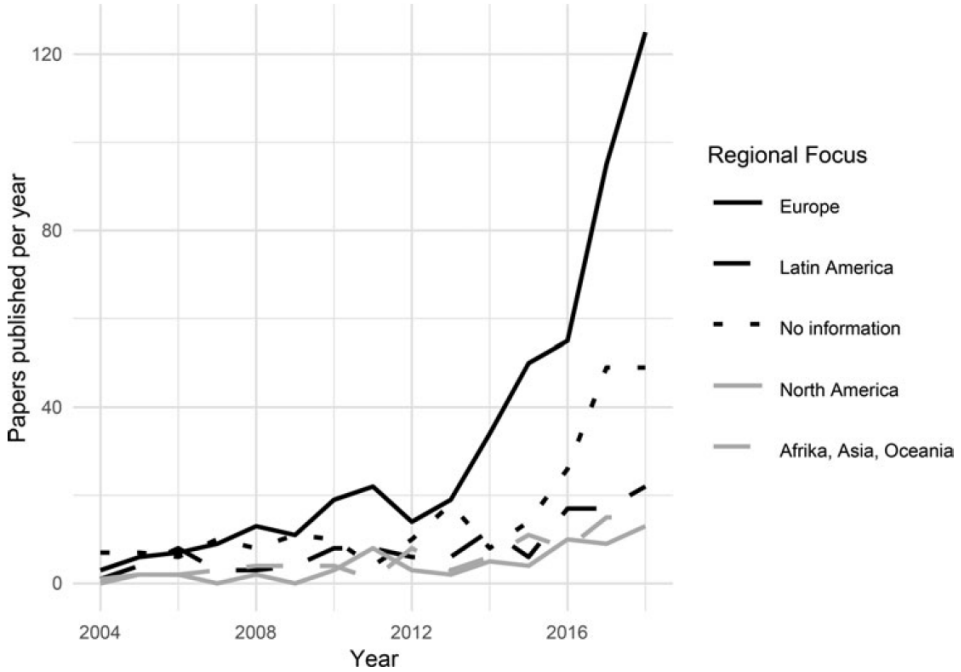

Figure 3
Yearly number of published journal articles on populism by regional focus [ibidem]Source: Hunger, S., & Paxton, F. (2022), What's in a buzzword? A systematic review of the state of populism research in political science. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *10*(3), 617–633

Examining the figures of the cited meta-study, what strikes most is that the whole scholarship on populism appears quite fragmented. The authors explain that "scholars of populism are "sitting at separate tables" due to three divides. These are rooted in (a) the different host ideologies under analysis, (b) different geographical foci, and (c) methodological differences." (Hunger & Paxton, 2022, p.629). This is clearly true, but at least a further divide should be added, the theoretical perspective. As communication scholars we can claim that looking at populism from a media-communication perspective, it appears under a very distinct light, largely disregarded by political science, yet so crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon as such — which whatever the dozens of definitions — cannot be really separated from the communication dimension and practice, and in the different national contexts.

Yet, Rooduijn (2019) holds a more accommodating opinion on the divisions in the field, pointing to the uniting rather than to the divisive aspects. In an account of "The state of the field" that focuses on the scholarly works of the second decade of the 2000s, he observes that scholars from all academic paths "agree with each other much more strongly than before on how the term should be defined." (p. 363) Rooduijn also acknowledges that "important contributions have been made by communication scientists [...] to the literature because they combine supply- and demand-side variables and assess how individual citizens respond to populist messages" (pp. 364-365), quoting some (not many, to be true) studies appeared before 2019.

Among them stands out the book with the contributions of a group of leading political communication scholars, under the COST Program, that have investigated several aspects of the interplay between media and communication variables and the rise and diffusion of populism: *Populist Political Communication in Europe* (2017), edited by T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Stroembaeck and C. de Vreese. This study can be considered as the one that filled a long period of scanty and sparse research from the pioneering, comparative work by G. Mazzoleni, J. Stewart & B. Horsfield, *The Media and Neo-Populism* (2003), with contributions by authors such as J. G. Blumler, F. Plasser, S. Waisbord. *Populist Political Communication in Europe* takes the credit of having systematized the scholarly reflection on populism in a political communication frame, and is actually a benchmark for anyone that investigates the field. Between 2017 and 2022 research has expanded, covering some specialized sub-fields. There have been published special issues of refereed journals and dozens of article on various journals across communication sub-disciplines, like the issue of 2018 (n. 4) of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, dedicated to "Populist Communication," that summarizes the theory and evidence of the Aalberg *et al*. book, with additional analyses of researchers of the same COST group. The same year *Palgrave Communications* published a special issue on "Mediated Populism", edited by M. Higgins. More recently, in 2021, the Portuguese academic biannual journal *Mediapolis* (n. 12), published a special issue on "Media, Populismo e Espaço Público: desafios contemporâneos" with a special focus on Bolsonaro's populism. In 2022 another Portuguese journal *Media & Jornalismo* (n. 1), edited by L.S. Guazina, I.F. Cunha and G.

Mazzoleni, launched a call for papers for a special issue on "Media e Populismo", published fifteen articles, after receiving more than 50 contributions from several researchers from around the globe. These examples show that the interest for populism as political communication phenomenon is still large in the International community of communication scholars, that look beyond the disproportionate Euro-centric focus of current scholarly literature.

A number of edited books and monographs have seen the light since the publication of *Populist Communication in Europe*. In the same series, in 2018, a collective book, edited by M. Pajnik and B. Sauer, *Populism and the Web. Communicative Practices of Parties and Movements in Europe* looked at populism in the digital public sphere, an area of investigation that is wide open to scholarly research. In 2020, an edited book by G. Dietze and J. Roth (*Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*) took an unprecedented look into the problems populist leaders and voters have with gender and sexuality issues. Fourteen chapters examine in depth the several aspects of the clash of views and sensitivities between right-wing populism and liberal democracy. In 2021, in the wave of the pandemic that according to some pundits challenged the "popularity" of populism, G. Bobba and N. Hubé edited a book that examined populism in relation to anti-Covid government policies — ad communication strategies — in eight European countries (*Populism and the Politicization of the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe*). In 2022 a monograph by E. Block (*Discursive Disruption, Populist Communication and Democracy. The cases of Hugo Chavez and Donald J. Trump*), looked into the disruptive power of populist speech, rhetorical styles and channels of communication of two quite different — but also very similar — "historical" leaders of international populism.

Beside the numerous scholarly publications a vast number of academic fora, conferences, seminars, research groups throughout the globe have looked at populist communication with a comparative approach.

Is populism really to be considered a communication phenomenon?

In spite of the great amount of research and theory produced by communication scholarship, looking at the extant literature on populism *as a whole*, populism is still primarily analyzed by social scientists with approaches and categories that tend to disregard the added-value of those offered by communication research. As communication scholars we might share the conviction that populism should be regarded also as a communication phenomenon, but the question is if we really ever managed to provide strong arguments to convince also other social and political scientists.

My guess is that a decisive answer is provided by the focal article "Populism as an Expression of Political Communication" written by de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, in the quoted special issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 4/2018). It is

worth citing what is the core of the communication perspective, which is an unquestionable enrichment of the study of populism:

> Conceiving populism as an ideology that is articulated discursively by political actors and media actors bridges existing literature from political science and communication science. From a distinct political communication point of view, the focus now shifts from what constitutes the ideology of populism *to how it is communicated*. From this communication-centered perspective, the emphasis is on populist messages as independent "phenomenon as such" and no longer on a particular party family or type of politician. With populism "as content," we refer to the public communication of core components of populist ideology (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism) with a characteristic set of key messages or frames. With populism "as style," we refer to the fact that these messages expressing populist ideology are often associated with the use of a characteristic set of presentational style elements. In this perspective, populism is understood as features of political communication rather than characteristics of the actor sending the message. Hence, the focus is on the unique contribution of communication processes to "construct" populist ideas, and at the communicative styles that systematically co-occur with it. Our understanding of, and approach to, populism, thus, centers around *communication*. We believe this offers a grounding definition of populism that is nuanced, concise about its constituent elements, and resonates theoretically with a more or less explicit popular use of the term. (pp. 425-426 *The International Journal of Press/Politics 23*(4) — 2018) — Emphasis added)

The suggested types of populism (complete, excluding, anti-elitist, empty) (ibidem, 426) that stem from a political communication approach have become a sort of theoretical yardstick for any in-depth and comprehensive definition of the phenomenon.

This introduces to further theoretical contributions to define populism from a communication perspective.

Clarifying the media-populism interplay

While several attempts have been made over time to define what populism is, what its nature, what relations it has with extreme-right movements, and so on, there has been little need to strive for definitions of populism as seen in the communication environment. A great work, however, has been done by scholars to carve out what can be considered constitutive features of the interplay between the media ecosystems and populism, a work that shows the wealth of populist political communication research.

The concept of "*media populism*" is perhaps the first to draw scholarly attention. The notion stems from the reflections by Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) on the historical

developments of political communication. Among the trends they observe in Age 3 (i.e. 1980s and 1990s), particularly significant are the "strong currents of populism [that] have been suffusing the worlds of both politics and the media." (p. 220). In all this, "media organizations are driven to seek ways of making politics more palatable and acceptable to audience members." (ibidem) This is the seminal thinking that will be developed by subsequent research on "popularization of politics" and of "pop politics" in connection with the impact of infotainment and politainment in the news and in political discourse (Street 2001, Van Zoonen 2005, Mazzoleni & Sfardini 2009).

Political leaders adapt to the "logics" (Altheide & Snow, 1979) of the media organizations in the news production — and coverage of politics — and so seek to "speak in a more popular idiom and to court popular support more assiduously (Blumler & Kavanagh, p. 220). In the two authors' view populism of the media somewhat overlaps with politicians' efforts to be "popular", to be accepted (and hopefully voted) by ordinary citizens. This reasoning is underlying the concept of "media populism" referring to the imperative of the media industry to go after the popular tastes, often measured by ratings. So, on the one hand media strive for (commercial) popularity and on the other politician strive for political popularity. Now, the risk is high to confuse "popular" with "populist" when politicians compete for attention, and clearly this cannot be applied to all instances of the political battle. It surely relates to leaders and figures that pursue a "populist" agenda in the strict sense and concurrently adopt media-owned "populist formats" (Blumler & Kavanagh, p. 220), or ride the (political) populist journalism of friendly media. Mazzoleni argued (2003, 2008, 2014) that the market-oriented populist/popular media language and contents can provide a favorable and fertile environment to the diffusion of political populism. Media-savvy populist preachers that exploit the "populist potential" of much media sensational/emotional coverage of typical hot populist issues (such as crime, illegal immigration, gender identity, political scandals, abortion, and the like) tune in with people's sentiments that can be responsive to a populist rhetoric. The conduciveness of media populism to political populism is witnessed by the deliberate ideological siding of certain media outlets, as in the case of certain tabloids or TV channels that support openly the agenda of populist leaders, as it was clearly the case of a number of British tabloids that supported Brexit and of Fox News a true loudspeaker of President Trump.

The original conceptualization was assessed and further developed by the mentioned group of COST scholars. They suggest to name the first kind of media populism "populism *through* the media", and the latter as "populism *by* the media", and point out to the differences between the two:

> Populism through the media differs from populism by the media in three ways. First, it assumes that congruence between media logic and political populism is stylistic but not ideological. Second, media logic creates a favorable structure that is susceptible to populist messages and their seamless

> integration into editorial considerations and news content— without any conscious intention of the journalists themselves. The reason for this easy blending— which brings us to the third point—is that populism is of high news value. Charismatic leaders, harsh rhetoric, and stirring issues hit all the right keys of newsworthiness. (Esser, Stępińska, & Hopmann 2017, pp. 367-369)

To speak of media nowadays, in a "hybrid" communication environment (Chadwick 2013), demands a clarification of which media are involved in the interplay with populism, and whether the focus of research is on the mainstream or online media or on both. For sure there has been a surge in the focus by political communication research on the social media lately, that has marginally interested our subfield of populist communication. According to Blassnig (2021) many questions remain still unanswered, such as "what constitutes the supposed affinity between digital media and populism, to what extent actors use populist communication online, and what contextual factors or opportunity structures promote the use of populist online communication" but also a comprehensive digital platforms+traditional media approach that sees them parts of a "larger information system", and, finally what are the actual "effects of populist communication on citizens' behavior or specifically in an online context" that overcomes the gap between research on the supply side (the most abundant) and the demand side. (p. 378)

The wealth of studies on the "supply side" can be easily explained by the less demanding empirical research resources needed to study what leaders do with their social media accounts, what and they post, and the like, versus measuring the impact of their (populist) communications on followers, on public opinion, and the effects on politicians of the engagement of the users. Aside from this undoubted scarcity of evidence on the effects, the supply side studies have given significant contributions to identify the specific nature of digital populist communication. Four recent exploratory studies are worth quoting for offering insightful knowledge of the multi-faceted, chaotic world of populists' communication performances on social media platforms.

What kind of populist ideology circulates on populist politicians' social media? A 2016 study on the use of Twitter and Facebook in four European countries reveal that it is all but a tight-knit, coherent set of populist messages (Engesser et al., 2016). On the contrary, the key definitional elements of populism, like emphasis on sovereignty of the people, attacking the elites, ostracizing other, and invoking the heartland, appear highly fragmented in the politician's posts. The researchers explain the reasons why: 1) the wish to reduce the complexity and make the message widely accessible to and usable by social media users; 2) the tendency to "keep the populist ideology ambiguous and malleable in order to benefit from the inclusiveness of a 'personal action frame'; 3) a fragmented set of ideological messages can "travel below the radar of political opponents and critical observers from one like-minded person to another." (pp. 13-14).

The findings support to a significant extent the assumption of much populist political communication scholarship that social media are cherished by politicians (including populists) because they secure the "disintermediation", the circumventing of news media's gatekeeping and of other filters.

Coupling the evidence of the use of Facebook by (Italian) populist leaders with the data on the intensity and nature of the users' engagement, Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2018) provide two interesting results: 1) populism is "endemic" to political communication, that is populist and non-populist leaders' communications via Facebook share some kind of populist rhetoric in the issues being discussed and in the tones used; 2) drawing on extant theory on the definitional elements of populist ideology (the same ones used by Engesser et al., appeal to the people, attacking the elites, ostracizing the others) they build the following 'Populism Index' that shows the different extents to which populist ideology is espoused by leaders:

> — *zero-level of populism*, when the posts do not contain any populist definitional elements
> — *soft populism*: the posts contain only one populist element
> — *moderate populism*: the posts contain a combination of two populist elements
> — *bold populism*: the posts contain all three populist definitional elements (pp. 6-8)

The scale is built on the actual leaders' degree of ideology manifested in their FB posts, but it is a tool that can be implemented in measuring the graduation of ideological communications in either the legacy media content as well as in the social media messages.

An outstanding example of how productive is research on populist communication, in exploring also uncommon features, is found in a study by Mendonça and Caetano of the parody and performance of populist leaders on social media (2021). Analyzing the visual self-representation of Brazilian president Jay Bolsonaro on his Instagram profile, and his theatrical rejection of pompous power of institutions and hierarchies, the two authors bring to surface the clever underlying strategy: "In its ambivalence, parody effectively produces a feeling of participation and empowerment in subjects who bear witness to the hyperbolic staging of the scene, as they are themselves part of the enacted transgression of the joke." (p. 228) Their conclusion brings further evidence to the mainstream findings on definitional elements of populism: "Besides the verbal statements that establish allegedly people-centric and anti-elitist goals, populist leaders need to trigger emotions and find resonance with the context from which they emerge." (ibidem)

The emotional dimensions of populism and especially of its communication is a fundamental area for understanding in full the phenomenon, that still waits a far-reaching, systematic, interdisciplinary attention by scientists. In the meantime, distinct aspects are being explored by research. Klinger, Koc-Michalska and Russmann (2022) have recently published a study on negativity and dramatization that transpire from Facebook populist

posts in the two last EP Election Campaigns. Populist parties engaged in a swelling communication made of emotionally-laden messages, of fierce personal attacks, in a word in a negative campaigning that contributed "to more affective publics and more dissonant public spheres" (p. 15). Clearly, at least on Facebook, conclude the authors, "campaigns are getting uglier" (p. 16), yet they seem to work in terms of triggering popular engagement. "But likes, shares, and comments do not directly translate into votes" (ibidem), is the scholarly reminder for hopeful populist campaigners.

Further questions for research

The above examples of investigation of populism as communication phenomenon are just a few of a growing scholarly literature available at the end of 2022. The answer to the question if the 'ultimate say' has been uttered by research is simply "no". Several other areas of research still wait for a more substantive effort by international research. One of the areas that is lately drawing focused research is that of the presumed affinities between disinformation on legacy and social media and populism (see, for ex. Hameleers & Minihold (2020) and Humprecht, Esser, van Aelst, Staender & Morosoli (2021). More research efforts would also be welcome in the exploration of the processes of construction of opinion and cultural populist climates. Do we know enough on the hypothesized role of entertainment media, both mainstream and digital social media (such as TikTok) as tools of "mass distraction"? Another area is that of the potential influence of the industrial (and non-industrial) policies of the so called "Big Tech", on what we can conceive as a "platformization" of populist communication, with the related issues of algorithms and the editorial power of platforms. Finally, vis-à-vis the stunning technological developments, a totally unexplored front is opening for populist political communication: to what extent Artificial Intelligence is going to affect the media dynamics that we have researched so far in the "real world"?

Always fresh evidence needs to be gathered and explained as the worlds of politics and of communication undergo rapid and dramatic changes. Populism may be temporarily in crisis but it is all but disappearing from the political landscapes around the globe. We have already seen how swiftly it can adapt to social and cultural change. Today's communication research has shown to possess the appropriate theoretical tools to monitor and analyze any metamorphosis of populism and of populist political communication.

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The use of social media by the extreme right in Election campaigns: a comparison of Portugal and Spain

A utilização das redes sociais pela extrema-direita nas campanhas eleitorais: Uma comparação entre Portugal e Espanha

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Abstract: Because of their status as newcomer parties and their less acceptance by the traditional mass media than established traditional parties, populist radical right parties have made an especially intense and innovative use of social media. This article analyses the use of social media by Portuguese (*Chega*) and Spanish(*Vox*) populist radical right (PRR) parties and their leaders during the election campaigns that preceded their spectacular growth in the national parliaments, respectively in 2022 and 2019. Empirically, we will present a comparative study of the content and strategies developed online by the Portuguese and Spanish newcomer populist radical rightaccording to three dimensions of variation, so as to specify similarities and differences of the new Iberian populist right phenomena: 1) degree of populism, as measured by attacks on political class; 2) anti-liberalism, measured by attacks on fundamental rights; 3) position in relation to economy and welfare state (liberal vs interventionist).

Keywords: populist radical right parties, Spain, Portugal, election campaigns

Resumo: Devido ao seu estatuto de partidos recém-chegados e à sua menor aceitação pelos meios de comunicação tradicionais do que os partidos tradicionais estabelecidos, os partidos populistas de direita radical têm feito um uso especialmente intenso e inovador das redes sociais. Este artigo analisa a utilização das redes sociais pelos partidos populistas de direita radical (PRR) portugueses (Chega) e espanhóis (Vox) e pelos seus líderes durante as campanhas eleitorais que precederam o seu espectacular crescimento nos parlamentos nacionais, respectivamente em 2022 e 2019. Empiricamente, apresentaremos um estudo comparativo dos conteúdos e estratégias desenvolvidos online pela nova direita radical populista portuguesa e espanhola segundo três dimensões de variação, de modo a especificar semelhanças e diferenças dos fenómenos da nova direita populista ibérica: 1) grau de populismo, medido pelos ataques à classe política; 2) anti-liberalismo, medido pelos ataques aos direitos fundamentais; 3) posição em relação à economia e ao Estado social (liberal vs intervencionista).

Palavras-chave: partidos populistas de direita radical, Espanha, Portugal, campanhas online

Introduction

Recently, Europe saw the end of the Iberian singularity of not having political representation of populist radical right parties. As Heyne and Manucci put it, «for the first time since the end of the authoritarian regimes of Francisco Franco and António Salazar, populist radical right (PRR) parties obtained representation in the political systems of the two Iberian countries»(2021: 1). In Spain, VOX obtained, in April 2019, 10.26% of the votes in the general elections and elected 24 deputies to Congress for the first time. In Portugal, with representation in Parliament since 2019, CHEGA elected 12 deputies in the January 2022 legislative elections, becoming the third most voted force, with 7.18% of the votes.

This investigation is dedicated to analyzing the online communication of the two recent PRR parties and their leaders in the Iberian peninsula — Vox and Chega, respectively founded in 2013 and 2014 — which started with modest public appearances and a receiving public indifference, but becoming in less than ten years well-known and significant political actors, achieving relevant presence in national parliaments. This is most puzzling, because both Spain and Portugal were recent right-wing post-authoritarian democracies that, when compared to the rest of Western Europe, did not have populist radical right parties for a long time.

We will thus analyze the messages and posts of Vox and its leader Santiago Abascal, and Chega and its leader André Ventura, during the fifteen days that preceded each election, a total of 674 messages distributed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages. These social networks are also the favorites of Portuguese and Spanish citizens. In Spain, in 2019, 93% of the 46 million people had access to the internet, of which 73% used Facebook; Twitter 29%; and Instagram 38%. In Portugal, in 2022, 76% used Facebook; Twitter 15%; and Instagram 53%, in 78% of the approximately 10 million Portuguese.

During the last two decades, the rise to power of PRR is based on a resurgence of nationalist, xenophobic, misogynous political discourses, which take advantage of the global increase in economic inequalities in most European democracies to sustain a mobilization strategy based on resentment. These parties also represent a new threat to democratic regimes. By gaining political representation through the system's own rules, they can surreptitiously contribute to the retreat of democracy itself, through a «form of political change» in which «voters have empowered autocrats» (Haggard and Kaufman 2021, 78). Even more, these themes are magnified by the notable growth of online media for the purposes of political communication since the beginning of the 21st century. The so-called postmodern phase or phase 3 of political campaigns (Norris, 2000 and Schmitt-Beck & Farrell 2002), characterized by the growing adherence to the use of the internet and social networks by politicians to contact voters — in electoral campaigns and between elections, since the activity is permanent — it circumvents journalistic criteria and editorial choices based on rigor, accuracy, and balance. Politicians are now able to inform (or misinform) citizens directly on a large scale but without the usual mediating role and surveillance of traditional media. In this sense, we seek to develop a descriptive quantitative analysis of the main themes of the Spanish and Portuguese parties. We focus on three dimensions of differentiation:

1. Populism: attacks on political class
2. Anti-liberalism: attacks on fundamental rights
3. Position in relation to economy and welfare state: liberal vs interventionist

Data and methodological overview

The next table shows the distribution of the 674 messages released over the fifteen days prior to the election on April 28, 2019, in Spain, and the trip to the polls on January 30, 2022, in Portugal, according to type of social network and by type of proponent, considering both parties and their leaders.

Table 1
Number of messages by social network and by parties and their leaders over the 15 days prior to the respective elections in Spain and Portugal

	VOX	ABASCAL	CHEGA	VENTURA
FACEBOOK	44	63	58	94
INSTAGRAM	28	35	57	89
TWITTER	85	61	4	52
TOTAL	157	159	120	238

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Subsequently, messages were classified and grouped according to the following predominant themes.

Table 2
Messages sent on the main social networks of the two radical right political forces in Spain and Portugal by most frequent themes

	VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
	FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW
Nationalist appeals	57%	75%	50%	84%	80%	67%	52%	67%	75%	56%	67%	27%
Catholicism defense	0	0	0	3%	3%	3%	2%	0	0	1%	0	4%
Attack on immigrants	5%	7%	6%	5%	0	10%	2%	0	0	1%	1%	0
Attacks on political class	14%	4%	16%	6%	9%	7%	17%	14%	0	10%	3%	21%
Attack on journalists	7%	4%	18%	0	3%	2%	2%	2%	0	1%	1%	4%
Other attacks	5%	7%	0	0	0	0	2%	0	0	2%	1%	4%
Lower taxation	2%	0	1%	0	0	0	7%	4%	25%	9%	7%	8%
Higher salaries, welfare support	0	1%	4%	0	0	0	9%	2%	0	2%	1%	9%
Corruption claims	0	4%	0	0	0	0	3%	2%	0	10%	9%	12%
Law and order claims	2%	0	1%	0	0	3%	5%	2%	0	4%	0	8%
Catalan autonomy	10%	4%	4%	2%	6%	8%	---	---	---	---	---	---
Support to war veterans	---	---	---	---	---	---	0	9%	4%	4%	9%	4%

(Percentages were rounded to whole numbers)
Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Populism: nationalist appeals

More than half of the messages on the main three social networks of the two parties and their two leaders in Spain and Portugal are appeals to nationalism. The use of national symbols such as the colors of the flag or the reproduction of the image of the national flag itself tends also to be exaggerated. For example, both Santiago Abascal and Vox always have

a drawing of the flag right after their identification — the flag is their "emoji" every time they "post" (see image 1). With André Ventura and Chega, this initiative did not take place, although there were several messages with images of the Portuguese flag.

Image 1
The Spanish flag always with Santiago Abascal and Vox identifications

The "hashtags" chosen are also in defense of nationality such as #EspañaViva or #PorPortugalPelosPortugueses. Messages of appeal to pride and appreciation of origins are frequently repeated, for example, in the Spanish case, with the repeated use of the phrase "se pone en pie" (stands up) preceding the name of any Spanish locality, when visited during the campaign and, in the case of Chega, statements like "it is necessary to restore dignity to the Portuguese people". These data thus confirm previous studies that argue that nationalism is essential to populism, referring to an «idealized conception of the community» (Taggart, 2004, p. 274) or idyllic past. Ramos and Baptista, also in a study of the use of twitter by these candidates before elections, concluded that «the strong value of national culture and identity characterizing Vox and Chega feeds into political discourse and action. In this sense, [...] right-wing populist parties disrupt the more inclusive arrangements that make democracy possible» (Ramos and Baptista 2022, p. 144).

In these extreme speeches there is also a way to draw attention through social networks. Since in the traditional media these parties have initial difficulty in penetrating, the messages created to be more shared must be exaggerated, based on a "plot" of "us" against "them", supported by a dichotomous scheme, which will eventually be amplified in the traditional media, especially television.

Data from the nationalist messages of the Spanish and Portuguese PRR have some preponderance on the Instagram network, which favors images. Through photographs and videos, the superiority of the homeland and the praise of its nationals in other countries are highlighted (Mudde, 2019).

Table 3
Distribution of nationalist messages broadcasted on the main social networks of the two radical right political forces in Spain and Portugal (%)

VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW	FB	INS	TW
57%	75%	50%	84%	80%	67%	52%	67%	75%	56%	67%	27%

(Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers)
Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

In both countries, there are more messages in which nationalism stands out in the leaders' media than in those of their parties, especially in the case of Santiago Abascal. However, the emphasis on nationalist discourse is greater in Spain, both in the social networks of Vox and Santiago Abascal, than in Portugal.

In Portugal, in addition to the recorded nationalist messages, an important theme is the defense and support of Portuguese veterans of the colonial war. These vary between 4% and 9% of the total. As André Ventura states,

Image 2
Post on André Ventura facebook page, 23rd January 2022

«Today is one of the most exciting days of my political life. we are at a big luncheon for ex-combatants from Overseas and they offered me the uniform. Pride! CHEGA will be on your side!»

In addition to nationalism, we can also see that in Spain, messages that specifically attack the autonomy of Catalonia were given great prominence throughout the campaign studied. Thus, in addition to the messages of nationalist appeals, which exceed half of the total messages, we must add for Spain between 2% and 10% of messages of opposition to the independence movement in Catalonia and of criticism of the reaction to this by the Spanish authorities.

Table 4
Messages from the VOX party and Santiago Abascal against independence movements, in particular Catalan autonomy (%)

VOX			**ABASCAL**		
FB 10%	INS 4%	TW 4%	FB 2%	INS 6%	TW 8%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Below we show some examples:

> «SAN SEBASTIÁN. 13 de abril de 2019. La #EspañaViva se pone en pie en tierra vasca. En defensa de la unidad de España y de la libertad, la buena gente de Guipúzcoa celebra un gran acto. Sin miedo, a pesar de las amenazas y violencia de los proetarras del exterior #PorEspaña#VOX»
> («SAINT SEBASTIAN. April 13, 2019. #EspañaViva stands up on Basque soil. In defense of the unity of Spain and freedom, the good people of Guipúzcoa celebrate a great act. Without fear, despite the threats and violence from foreign pro-Eta members #PorEspaña #VOX»)
> «En realidade es la La#EspañaViva lo que há triunfado en tierra vascas. A partir del 28-A nada será igual. Hemos iniciado para España la reconquistade su unidad y de la libertad de los españoles. Y no pararemos. #PorEspaña».
> («Actually it is #EspañaViva that has triumphed in Basque land. From 28-A nothing will be the same. We have begun for Spain the reconquest of her unity and of the freedom of the Spaniards. Andwillnot stop. #For Spain»)

Regarding the theme of law and order, the diffusion of discourses of insecurity and fear of crimes against people is also frequent in these parties. The percentage of messages of this nature can reach 12%. But differences between these two populist radical right parties are not so notorious when defending law enforcement agents and strong measures on crime. Even so, these claims are more visible in the Portuguese social media, because of Chega' support base are eventually segments of the police forces.

Finally, we measure the relevance of the defense of Catholicism, a theme that emerges in the positions taken throughout recent legislative discussions regarding topics such as the voluntary termination of pregnancy, euthanasia, or homosexual marriage and adoption by same-sex couples.

Table 5
Praise for Catholicism (%)

	FB	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	0	0	0
ABASCAL	3%	3%	3%
CHEGA	2%	0	0
VENTURA	1%	0	4%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

As we can see in Table 5, the percentages of messages defending Catholicism in Spain and Portugal are residual. On 12 social media pages, half made no reference to Catholicism. The remaining pages that referred to this did so residually. Both parties assumed themselves as Catholics but that is not a differentiation from the other right-wing parties or politicians in these countries. That can be the reason for religion being a non-issue, reinforced by the growing secularization of the population.

It should be noted that Abascal, who has 3% of messages of this type, and who was the one who most often praised Catholicism, did so in a very specific context, which was the fire that burned down Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and reconstruction needed. But it is Ventura himself that shows more propensity to reiterate religious values, much more than his own party, where these were not topics, and Vox or Abascal. It seems that the defense of religious values is just a leader strategy, not a party strategy, especially in Portugal.

Populism: attacks on political class

A permanently conflictual attitude is seen as inherent to the nature of populism (Demata et al. 2020: 9). At the same time, citizens who are most dissatisfied with their democracy are more likely to vote for far-right parties (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002: 353). Thus, disapproval and criticism of the existing political class and elite becomes a common feature in the discourse of the populist radical right parties, reinforcing its antagonistic position to the political-party system and seeking to increase its public impact.

The data below shows that there is a considerable percentage of messages in which the attack on the political class prevails.

Table 6
Messages critical of other parties and politicians in power in Spain disseminated by VOX and Abascal and in Portugal coming from Chega and Ventura (%)

	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	14%	3,5%	16%
ABASCAL	6%	8,5%	6,5%
CHEGA	17%	14%	0
VENTURA	9,5%	3%	21%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

As it is clear from the previous table, these messages predominate on the pages of the parties, less so in the pages of their leaders. Santiago Abascal and André Ventura naturally try not to be as offensive in their own media as they are in their parties' media, where responsibility for messages is more deferred, as well as possible criminal responsibility.

One of the most common accusations by the Portuguese populist right is the corruption of the political elites in power. In Portugal the perception of corruption is high and that is a theme used by Chega and Ventura to attack politicians and "the system". Surprisingly it is almost not mentioned in Spanish campaign.

Table 7
Measurement of the percentage of messages with accusations of corruption

	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
VOX	0	3,5%	0
ABASCAL	0	0	0
CHEGA	3%	2%	0
VENTURA	9,5%	9%	11,5%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Anti-liberalism: attacks on fundamental rights

In continuity with the criticisms of politicians in power, attacks on fundamental rights are quite frequent. In this section we look at attacks on freedom of expression and the press and on minorities, such as migrant communities.

Table 8
Messages criticizing and attacking journalists and freedom of information (%)

VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI
7%	4%	18%	0	3%	2%	2%	2%	0	1%	1%	4%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Regarding the attack on freedom of the press, specifically journalists, these are more present in Vox's strategy than in Chega's. Attacks on migrants, instead, are more notorious in Spain than in Portugal, as expected, as the Mediterranean refugee crisis hits Spain much harder than Portugal.

Table 9
Negative discrimination messages on migrant communities in Spain and Portugal (%)

VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI
5%	7%	6%	5%	0	10%	2%	0	0	1%	1%	0

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

In this line of analysis, we also measure attacks on other groups, such as those defending the rights of women and other minorities. In this regard, Chega and its leader Ventura have mainly attacked Roma people, whereas in Spain attacks are mainly against feminists, what Vox calls the «feminist lobby that doesn't represent Spanish women». Still, Abascal's own pages did not spread this type of messages. As already noted, Vox's social media are usually more aggressive and have more "hate speech" than its leader's Abascal.

Table 10
Negative discrimination messages about other minority groups (%)

VOX			ABASCAL			CHEGA			VENTURA		
FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI	FB	INST	TWI
5%	7%	0	0	0	0	2%	0	0	2%	1%	4%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Position in relation to the economy and the welfare state: liberal vs interventionist

The vast literature on electoral behavior has considered economic factors as fundamental in understanding the popularity of rulers and voters' voting decisions. Economy related messages in electoral campaigns are also more often used whenever they serve to attack the incumbent and blame him for bad results (Vavreck, 2009). In the period considered — 2019 for Spain and 2022 for Portugal — the objective economic conditions, such as the unemployment rate and inflation, were favorable and, even subjectively, the citizens of the Iberian Peninsula were experiencing a phase of greater optimism and recovery, after the difficult years of economic and financial crisis of 2010-2014.

Thus, one would not expect much communication with the focus on the economy or public finance. Overall, positions on the economy were not an important theme in the social messaging campaign of Vox and Abascal. Spanish main parties are already quite liberal economically. In the pages of Santiago Abascal, we do not find a single message on the subject. But there are interesting variations between the two parties. Economic topics are much more relevant in Chega's and Ventura's pages. Moreover, they also show a more liberal profile regarding the economy, by strongly advocating lower taxation. This can be related to the fact that the previous Portuguese Government — a parliamentary pact between socialists, communists, and the radical left (Left Bloc, Bloco de Esquerda) supporting a minority socialist government, reversed many austerity policies implemented by the right during the austerity period (2011-2014). At the same, this position of advocating lower taxes may be incongruent with the fact that Ventura also defends higher welfare measures.

Table 11
Positions on the Economy and the Welfare State (%)

	THEMES	FB	INSTA	TWITTER
VOX	LOWER TAXATION	2%	0	1%
	MORE WELFARE	0	1%	3,5%
ABASCAL	LOWER TAXATION	0	0	0
	MORE WELFARE	0	0	0
CHEGA	LOWER TAXATION	7%	3,5%	25%
	MORE WELFARE	0	2%	0
VENTURA	LOWER TAXATION	8,5%	7%	8%
	MORE WELFARE	2%	1%	9%

Source: Capture of all the messages posted on these interveners social media public pages

Conclusion

The start of the twenty-first century was marked by the transformations brought about by the spread of social media and their concomitant influences in the political sphere. New parties and candidates of a right-wing xenophobic bent, previously inexistent in the public sphere, also asserted themselves and grew through the access to this cheap and simple-to-manage means of communication. In line with the theories of equalization advocated by several authors who predicted that the use of the internet would facilitate the ascension to power of candidates with less control of the status quo and with less resources to ascend socially and politically, the populist radical right also experienced a growing strength.

Like elsewhere, although belatedly, the ultra-nationalist discourse has gained a foothold and a strong presence, through highly active spokespersons and organizationally robust PRR. They have spread the nation's symbols in an exaggerated way, as if it was under attack. In more than half of the communication of the three largest online media of the two parties and their leaders, the preponderant messages are in defense of patriotism, traditionalist, populist, and nativist (Mudde, 2019). Within this nationalist discourse, in the case of Spain there is still room against Catalonia's independentists (10% of the content); and in Portugal, despite the low levels of crime, nationalism is combined with issues such as law and order and the defense of the police and military forces, in particular veterans of the colonial war. The populist nature of the Spanish and Portuguese PRR is clearly revealed in the high percentages against established political elites (17%). Furthermore, in Portugal, there is also a focus on the issue of corruption.

Most importantly, the strategies of these parties involve attacking constitutional principles enshrined for around 50 years in the Spanish and Portuguese democracies, such as freedom of the press (18% on Vox's twitter) and equal treatment of citizens, with special emphasis on attacking immigrants. By breaking with the current democratic norms, the presence of these parties in the political systems of their respective countries thus represents an impoverishment of their political regimes.

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Trump and Bolsonaro: influence, contagion or populist Zeitgeist?

Trump e Bolsonaro: influência, contágio ou Zeitgeist populista?

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Abstract: This article reviews comparative studies on the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, and the former president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, with an emphasis on communication and language. This classification makes it possible to discuss whether both can be categorized as far-right populists. From the perception of obvious similarities between them, the text explores hypotheses that could explain this and concludes with suggestions for studies that deepen the theme of the influence of one politician, possibly Trump, on another (Bolsonaro).

Keywords: Trump, Bolsonaro, populism, influence

Resumo: Este artigo revisa estudos comparativos sobre o ex-presidente dos Estados Unidos, Donald Trump, e o ex-presidente do Brasil, Jair Bolsonaro, com ênfase na comunicação e na linguagem. Essa classificação permite discutir se ambos podem ser categorizados como populistas de extrema-direita. A partir da percepção de semelhanças evidentes entre eles, o texto explora hipóteses que poderiam explicar esse fato e conclui com sugestões de estudos que aprofundem o tema da influência de um político, possivelmente Trump, sobre outro (Bolsonaro).

Palavras-chave: Trump, Bolsonaro, populismo, influência

The 2016 presidential campaign of businessman and television show Donald Trump was initially met with ridicule and was not taken seriously by many. Jair Bolsonaro's 2017 announcement that he was running for president was met with suspicion because, as a member of the Federal Congress, he was mostly known as a flamboyant politician. However, both were victorious in elections held in their respective countries, being "catapulted to power virtually overnight, against all expectation" (Anderson, 2019, para. 71). The triumph of Trump shocked election pollsters, political analysts, and journalists (Kennedy et al., 2018). The case of the Brazilian was somewhat unique because he began to dominate the polls at a specific time during the campaign, and because Trump's triumph made the emergence of politicians like Bolsonaro less extraordinary.

Since his election campaign in Brazil, he has been referred to as the "Trump of the Tropics" (Webb & Palmeira, 2018). The similarities between the two politicians are so obvious that it is possible to state that "there are clearly similarities between the phenomena of 'Trumpism' and 'Bolsonarism' that do not seem to be mere coincidence. Trump's and Bolsonaro's marketers have invested heavily in creating the image of a 'new' politician" (Novoselova, 2020, p. 356). The electoral thirst for novelty led to a *disruptive election* in Brazil (Moura & Corbellini, 2019), a criterion that is unquestionably applicable to Trump. In a meaningful way, their political careers highlight the importance of the media in politics and in the careers of those who are able to utilize it skillfully.

In conducting a comprehensive review of comparative research work, we will attempt to go beyond mere recognition of the similarities between the two politicians. Thus, we will be in a position to certify and qualify the populist credentials of the two candidates, including whether they can be understood as far-right populist. Theoretical explanations for the

similarities between Trump and Bolsonaro will also be discussed in the context of the aforementioned political trend. However, we are also concerned about Trump's potential influence on Bolsonaro. The question concerns the similarities, for which the influence is the explanatory hypothesis. However, the issue is more complicated than it initially seems, as it requires an analysis of what the concept of influence implies. From this, we conclude with some suggestions and reflections on how to carry out further research on the subject.

Review of the literature on Trump and Bolsonaro

We searched scientific databases for scientific research on both politicians of interest in comparative analyses. The selection prioritized studies that emphasize aspects of communication or language. Thus, sixteen studies were gathered and classified into four major dimensions: 1) *ideology* (four works), 2) *discourse/language* (four), 3) *campaigns* (three studies) and 4) the emerging theme of the *coronavirus pandemic* (five). While there is some overlap between scopes, separation favors exposure, as demonstrated below.

There are works by Morelock and Narita (2021), Baptista et al. (2022), Almeida et al. (2020), and Felinto and Grusin (2021) in the ideological scope. In the first, the writers seek to update the reflections of the authors of the Frankfurt School for the study of emerging authoritarianism with a populist bias. Starting from a classic and synthetic description of populism as an antagonism between the people and the elite, they identify three fundamental populist narratives: people/elite, people/outsiders and non-people. The authors then highlight how this plays out in the circumstances of Trump and Bolsonaro, along with general and growing similarities associated with contemporary authoritarian populism, such as the propensity for decisionism. There are also, to a lesser extent, contextual differences between the two — the question of the immigrant as *other*, for example, is more pronounced in the case of the first.

Baptist et al. (2022) analyzed Trump and Bolsonaro's tweets throughout the electoral campaign to detect populist characteristics in their speeches. The objective was to verify if his speech was depoliticizing and mobilized conservative ideals. This was determined by the study, with several messages falling into the analytical categories employed, with Bolsonaro's depoliticization being more visible. The Brazilian employed this tactic, especially in response to concerns expressed by progressive groups.

The investigation by Almeida et al. (2020) uses Gerbaudo's (2015) idea of *populism 2.0* to situate Trump and Bolsonaro's behavior on the Twitter platform in the context of what they call *twittocracy*. In this case, social networks are the main means of contact between representatives and, often, the government ministers themselves. The research of tweets produced by both candidates during their first 100 days in power reveals that both candidates frequently employ populist characteristics, such as antagonism (internal and external) and

anti-systemic appeal. Trump's Twitter was more populist and expressed more opinions and points of view than the Brazilian president, who used digital communication on Twitter to disseminate measures and ideas in the economic and foreign policy spheres.

Felinto and Grusin (2021) create the concept of *gore mediation* to explain parallels between the two politicians, attempting to combine traits of *gore capitalism* and *premediation*. The former is concerned with the violent way the capitalist system is built, amassing bodies and corpses for profit, while the latter is a specific medial logic of anticipation that aims to project certain futures via media formats. The idea of gore mediation refers to the way Trump and Bolsonaro use various media as a weapon against their opponents, thus multiplying "premediations" of authoritarian violence, such as attacks on opponents and media professionals. The inversion of the vectors of influence and interaction between these actors is a significant observation of the study to which the notion of gore mediation contributes to the investigation. Typically, Trump's impact on Bolsonaro is considered. However, the authors note that perhaps the larger penetration of gore capitalism, which is more typical of the Third World, into American reality is what makes the reconciliation between these leaders more plausible. Hence, the former US president's social media charges against immigrants, racial minorities, environmentalists, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Congress. Notably, the increase of dread and wrath that gore mediation fosters is characteristic of certain populisms.

The similarity between Trump and Bolsonaro that studies on the ideological issue indicate also appears, in general, in research on the discourse and language of both politicians. This is the case of works by Morais and Ferreira (2021), Macagno (2022), Baronas and Ponsoni (2018) and Novoselova (2020). The first researchers employ metaphor theories to discuss the populism of these politicians based on a collection of their comments. The paper is supplemented by an analysis of these politicians' caricatures. Despite their similarities, again contextual distinctions between Brazil and the United States cause disparities in discourses. Thus, in Bolsonarist language, the other tends to be internal, that is, marginalized social groups or workers' struggle movements, seen as *enemies*. Bolsonaro places Brazil above countries he deems less developed, but below those he deems more so. This conclusion is interpreted by Morais and Ferreira (2021) as a declassification of the internal *other*, now in racial and cultural terms. "Jair Bolsonaro expresses in his speech the idea of a country that has a poor image of itself" (p. 99).

Macagno (2022) analyzes and contrasts the rhetoric of four politicians: Bolsonaro, Trump, the Italian Matteo Salvini and the current president of the United States, Joe Biden, who acts as a counterbalance for not being a populist leader. The author examines a corpus of argumentative tweets from these politicians up to six months after their respective inaugurations to discover the likely use of implicit techniques and deceptive tactics. According to quantitative and qualitative studies, populists use more fallacies, aggression and emotionally charged language. The main conclusion is that populist leaders such as Trump and Bolsonaro do not use the internet

platform for the institutional purpose of engaging with citizens and providing ideas that can be understood, analyzed and discussed. They build their conclusions, on the other hand, on beliefs already held by individuals who accept their political views.

Discourse Analysis is used by Baronas and Ponsoni (2018) to illustrate the distinctions between Bolsonaro and Trump. From the study of textual excerpts from their interviews and posts on Facebook, they identify relevant differences. In Bolsonaro, the subject of the enunciation builds with his addressees a relationship of intimacy, of enunciative sharing, which projects the image of a *man of the people*. In contrast, the subject of Trump's enunciation positions himself as a *spokesman* for his ostensible addressees, that is, an intermediary agent of the speeches of those he represents. The approach does not exclude any of these leaders from the scope of populist discourse, but reveals that their ideas about the people and the connection between the population and the leader are different. While the authors do not attempt to interpret this finding, it may be possible to do so based on Anderson's (2019) remark regarding the divergent personal trajectories of the two leaders. Bolsonaro's public personality is more ambiguous, "crude and violent certainly, but with a boyish, playful side, capable of a popular, on occasion even self-deprecating, good humour, far from the glowering bearing of Trump" (para. 56).

Novoselova's (2020) paper examines how nationalism and populism are articulated in the communication methods of their election campaigns, as well as the idiosyncrasies of communicating political themes via social media. The author performs a comprehensive literature review of empirical studies to build generalizations based on the interrelationships between study results on Trump and Bolsonaro's nationalist and populist slogans throughout their respective election campaigns. Then, numerous elements are highlighted that characterize populism and nationalism in each one of them. This leads to the conclusion that they promoted "a framework of exclusion through messages on social media in order to establish themselves as the unique representation of the constructed in-group and the advocate against out-groups" (p. 362).

Ituassu et al. (2019), Iasulaitis and Vieira (2022) and Moura and Corbellini (2019) published studies with an emphasis on electoral campaigns. The objective of the first paper is to reflect on the effects of digital political communication on democracy, using the presidential campaigns of Trump and Bolsonaro as case studies. The work demonstrates that both Trump and Bolsonaro, during their campaigns, carried out operations of fragmentation of the public they were addressing, as well as having similarities in the automation of the campaign — with the use of robots, for example — and the dissemination of disinformation, in the case of Trump primarily from Facebook and, in the case of Bolsonaro, via WhatsApp. Ituassu et al. (2019) imply Trump's impact on Bolsonaro in the electoral context, given the lateness of the Brazilian election and the fact that one of the US campaign strategists, Steve Bannon, met with the president's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro. They discussed the Brazilian campaign at that time (Cruz & Valente, 2018).

This is also one of the findings of Iasulaitis and Vieira's (2022) analysis of campaigns in the United States and Brazil based on the candidates' tweets. Using a quantitative and qualitative methodology and the technique of content analysis, this study sought to infer the campaign methods employed by the two politicians. The results indicated that they favored negative campaign techniques, both in the form of attack and counterattack, with a position on the *extreme right* of the ideological spectrum. Although populism is not the focus of the article, the results for the various characteristics evaluated reveal how right-wing populism distinguishes these contenders. Regarding Trump's potential influences on Bolsonaro, the authors note:

> Trump's strategies in the immediately preceding election *served as a showcase and demonstration effect* [emphasis added] for Bolsonaro's campaign, both from the standpoint of the agenda adopted and the style and strategies of Twitter use for the candidate, filled with techniques of political humor, sarcasm, irony, mockery, negative adjectivation, and nicknames of opponents to conduct negative campaigning. (p. 41)

Moura and Corbellini's (2019) book on Bolsonaro's political triumph contains a chapter on the communication-related similarities between him and Trump. By highlighting the context of the campaigns, the authors demonstrate that both candidates constructed images capable of representing the *outraged*, voters who did not feel represented by traditional politicians and who were not always taken seriously by their own supporters, even though their controversial statements were viewed as a characteristic of their *authenticity*. Simultaneously, the same views assisted in attracting the attention of mainstream media, which provided them with free publicity. Trump excelled at utilizing Twitter and Facebook, whereas Bolsonaro was adept at a vast array of platforms and apps, including WhatsApp. According to the authors, as a candidate, Bolsonaro has aligned his communication with the language of social networks, in which the folkloric, playful, and juvenile predominate: the *meme form*.

The studies by Béland et al. (2021), Carvalho et al. (2021), Costa and Bernardi (2021), Freitas and Negreiros (2021) and Kakisina (2022) compare Trump and Bolsonaro using the reaction to the coronavirus as a criterion for his presidential term. It is remarkable that all these evaluations reach the same conclusion: when faced with the epidemic, the two presidents emphasized, in their actual and communication measures, the economic threat of Covid-19 more than the public health issue. As a result, they failed to take advantage of both countries' excellent infrastructure and healthcare management expertise. As demonstrated by the analysis by Béland et al. (2021) of the political discourse conveyed by various channels by them about the pandemic (at the beginning of the health crisis), Trump and Bolsonaro adopted "political strategies that focused on what they perceived to be their personal advantage rather than promoting good governance, [which] undermined institu-

tional capacity and turned the potential strengths of federalism into weaknesses" (p. 433).

In the context of pandemics, Carvalho et al. (2021) and Freitas and Negreiros (1996) examine the issue of misinformation (2021). In the first case, based on the analysis of the official statements of the respective governments and the posts by Trump and Bolsonaro on Facebook at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, the authors conclude that both presidents made constant use of strategies of disinformation and deception regarding the contents and forms of their statements. Likewise, Freitas and Negreiros (2021) analyze the speeches of these presidents at the beginning of the pandemic, attributing the category of misinformation to the racism that these presidents would have perpetrated during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Costa and Bernardi (2021) investigate the tweets of both presidents from the first case of the disease in each country until the milestone of one hundred thousand deaths in each, whereas Kakisina et al. (2022) analyze a statement made by each president in 2020 regarding the pandemic. The first piece, which makes a theoretical approach to populism, describes populist language, which manifests itself in attacks on opponents, support for ineffective therapies and attempts to transfer responsibility to other individuals or institutions. The conclusion of the other study is that both politicians employed numerous manipulative techniques, including ideological polarization, denigrating others, imbuing the argument with emotional qualities, emphasizing the authority, moral superiority and reliability of the speaker. Although they do not intend to address the populism of these presidents, the examination of polarization reveals a consistent populist rhetorical technique of building the Us/Them dichotomy, in this case as a manipulation strategy through social polarization. However, as stated by Costa and Bernardi (2021), it would be improper to speak of a *populist response to the coronavirus epidemic*, given that, as Mudde (2020) notes, populist governments around the world have offered varying responses to the pandemic.

Despite their diverse theoretical and methodological bases, the comparative works on Trump and Bolsonaro presented here highlight the similarities in content and form, as well as the role of digital media in their communication strategies. The collective evidence offered by this body of research reveals that there is a consensus in describing both as right-wing populists. In addition, we can observe, based on the review elements presented and other information about these policies, to what extent Wodak's concept of *far-right populism* (2015/2020) can characterize them.

Trump and Bolsonaro as far-right populists

In the new edition of his seminal work on right-wing populism, Wodak (2015/2020) notes that the dynamic nature of modern populism has necessitated revisions in her study. Thus, while the central notion has remained that right-wing populism crafts and profits from

a *politics of fear*, populists of this sort have contributed to the pervasiveness of extremism in Europe and beyond. In view of this, the author now speaks of a "shameless normalization of far-right populism" (according to the subtitle of the new edition).

The work maintains the crucial premise of the complex and unpredictable dialectical interdependence between discourse, society, media, communication, and policy implementation. The author grasps the phenomenon through the study of the discursive manifestations of radical right populism on a micro-political level, i.e., through the analysis of interviews, posts, caricatures, and other ideologically perceptible materials. However, despite the emphasis on the discursive dimension of populism, she argues that propaganda "always *combines and integrates form and content*, targets specific audiences and adapts to specific contexts" (Wodak, 2015/2020, chapter 1, para. 23). Therefore, it is necessary to deconstruct, understand, and explain the elements of the ideology that are conveyed and that, along with the style adopted, are linked to the electoral success of far-right populists.

In this context, Wodak (2015/2020, chapter 1) develops and summarizes a set of nine characteristics of far-right populist parties, which, despite being derived from the analysis of European parties, can be generalized, as we assess, to movements and politicians of this trend in various contexts and in general. This author's descriptive and analytic work can serve as a guide for the analysis of Trump and Bolsonaro in terms of the extremist nature of their positioning and political communication. Therefore, we will use these characteristics to determine whether or not they qualify as far-right populists. Then, let's examine how the analyzed politicians position themselves in relation to these characteristics:

1. *Fair-right populists claim to represent "the people" as a homogenized ideal based on nativist ideologies, dogma accompanied by a revisionist view of history.* Trump and Bolsonaro use the rhetoric of us (people) against them (other politicians, the free press, and the electoral system itself) repeatedly. Likewise, both politicians will attempt to rewrite historical facts to support their claim that the system has wronged them. Bolsonaro retains an appreciation for the civil-military dictatorship and attempts to rewrite the history of the totalitarian state that was then established in Brazil in positive terms. The Make America Great Again — MAGA slogan evokes a mythical, idealized past that Trump claims he desired to revive (interestingly, several authors noted that he avoided saying clearly what time he was referring to).
2. *Creation of political imaginaries in addition to their own party structures and recruitment patterns.* The fact that "Trumpism" and "Bolsonarism" are now used to define political currents, particularly in their respective countries, exemplifies the formation of a potent political imaginary. It is even capable of convincing its followers to promote anti-democratic actions in favor of its leaders.

3. *Elaboration of new social cleavages, related to fears of globalization (hence, nationalism and chauvinism), and the inability of traditional politicians to address social problems.* In their communication strategies, Trump and Bolsonaro use social divisions such as nationalism, xenophobia, racism, and misogyny to highlight the position of the *other*. In statements to the press and digital correspondence, the two politicians reiterate their antagonism. The *other* can be external, as in the case of Trump with immigrants and Bolsonaro with environmentalists, or internal, as in the case of feminists in the United States and labor movements in Brazil.
4. *Use of strategic performances in the mass media and extensive use of social media, whereby traditional media can be bypassed*. Both navigate the hybrid media environment (Chadwick, 2013) dexterously, developing practices in which they seek to reinforce messages previously (or concurrently) transmitted to an in-person or traditional media audience, correct, criticize, or ironize the mainstream press or other users of social media itself, and publicize agenda points, mobilizing their bases, from sometimes unreliable press sources.
5. *Far-right populists employ frontstage performance techniques reminiscent of celebrity culture, oscillating between self-presentations as a Robin Hood-like figure and self-presentations as "rich, famous, and/or attractive" (i.e. a "idol" to aspire to)*. Trump likes to present himself as a *brand*, and Bolsonaro is commonly referred to as a *legend* ("*mito*" in Portuguese) by his supporters.
6. *There is focus on charismatic leaders as a result of the commercialization and personalization of politics and politicians.* The strong and charismatic leadership style of both is clear. This, however, causes divisions within mainstream parties, as evidenced by the emergence of the *Never Trump* wing within the Republican Party and the fact that Bolsonaro has been a president with no party affiliation for most of his term.
7. *Typically correlates with anti-intellectualism and, consequently, "arrogance of ignorance", as defined by Wodak (2015/2020). Oftentimes, appeals to common sense and traditional (conservative) values are coupled with aggressive exclusionary rhetoric.* The performance of both during the pandemic is possibly the best illustration of this quality. But there are others, such as Bolsonaro's continued defamation of artists, intellectuals and expertise, and Trump's display of affinity with the Tea Party and his elevation of popular common sense in the United States.
8. *They support pseudo-emancipatory gender policies that emphasize family values, making women appear primarily as mothers.* Trump's anti-abortion stances and policies, as well as the fact that, under Bolsonaro in Brazil, the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights was renamed the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, with consequent changes to public policy, illustrate this point.

9. *There is an ongoing normalization of far-right content and styles in opposition and government, in contrast to the recent past*. In fact, while Trump and Bolsonaro failed to fully implement their agendas as presidents, there was no political moderation when they were in office, as both leaders maintained extremist rhetoric.

In any case, Trump and Bolsonaro share association and common ground regarding these nine points. According to these criteria, they are therefore members of the far-right populist family. They are not identical, however, and some studies point to important differences. They differ in personality and political trajectories — the first never held public office or mandate, while the second was a professional politician for decades — and, probably most importantly, in terms of the social structure in each country that promoted his political rise. Elements of micro, meso and macro dimensions can help in understanding their parallels and contrasts.

A comparative study of Trump and Bolsonaro can help answer or deepen the topic raised: Does Trump affect Bolsonaro? Interestingly, the review included research (Felinto & Grusin, 2021) that indicates thinking differently. Although less likely due to Trump's precedence over Bolsonaro and the geopolitical weight of the United States and Brazil, it should not be ruled out and may enrich empirical studies that seek to confirm the influence hypothesis (suggested by similarity). But, before that, it is necessary to investigate whether there are alternative hypotheses that explain the similarity and the concept of influence itself, so that indicators can be derived from empirical observation. It is important to emphasize that, from here, we enter a more propositional and speculative terrain, open to criticism that can help to improve the methodological proposal for future research.

Populist Zeitgeist, contagion, and influence

Mudde (2004) argued in a groundbreaking article that populist discourse had become mainstream in politics in western democracies at least since the early 1990s. Consequently, it can refer to a "populist Zeitgeist". "While populism is still used primarily by outside or challenger parties, mainstream politicians, both in government and opposition, have also used it — often in an attempt to combat populist challengers" (p. 551). Over time, the emergence of populism strengthened and evolved into a global wave, including Trump and Bolsonaro.

Based on the idea of the populist Zeitgeist, authors such as Rooduijn et al. (2014) used the term *contagion* to refer to the communicative or programmatic adjustments that parties make in their speech or policy implementation in response to changes in the political environment. This concept argues that political change can be externally oriented and related to a structure of relationships. It is a proposed explanation for the similarities and afinities

between political parties and, by extension, politicians. Replicating rewarded voter behaviors from other organizations is associated with the transformation of an actor or group.

The contagion is supported by the scientific literature on political parties, which posits that they absorb the positions, issues, and communicative content of their competitors when it is convenient. There are however few empirical studies on the topic. One exception is Schwörer's (2021) research, which attempts to operationalize the word by analyzing electoral manifestos and websites of center-left and center-right parties in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Austria, as well as political statements from these bodies. Thus, the author tries to determine if there are *contagion effects*, i.e., if these parties begin to use populist slogans more frequently when rival parties of this orientation attain electoral success and public opinion is increasingly anti-elitist, nativist, and left-wing.

The concepts of populist Zeitgeist and contagion are intertwined, with the former stemming from the latter. However, it is possible to argue that they are not identical for the purposes of considering the similarities between parties and politicians. This is because the concept of contagion is linked to the understanding of changes related to competition between parties in a given space and time: the electoral success of party A with populist strategies has an effect on party B. In contrast, the populist Zeitgeist also emphasizes contextual elements and social realities that lead to the emergence or direction of populist parties, although not necessarily in the same geographic context. The effects associated with this general context and, therefore, with public opinion, can be combined with those of contagion between the parties. This is the exact conclusion reached by Schwörer's (2021) study.

Zulianello et al. (2018) also employ the concept of populist Zeitgeist in their work. In it, the authors analyze Facebook posts of populist and non-populist political leaders from twenty-six countries from different geopolitical areas (fourteen from Western Europe, eleven from Latin America, and the United States) to test the aforementioned hypothesis, concluding that it does not apply to the communication strategies of the analyzed political leaders. It was observed that the leaders of parties with a populist ideological core rely to a considerable degree on populist communication strategies in comparison with the leaders of mainstream parties. Another rather unexpected finding of the article was that in Latin American countries "the diffusion of elements of populist communication on Facebook is very limited and considerably lower there than in the Western leaders under analysis" (p. 453). Bolsonaro's meteoric rise in the country explains why he is not among the Brazilian politicians selected in this poll.

As stated, the concept of contagion refers to a change of perspective between parties and politicians within the same context. Can this be considered a form of influence? And can this last concept shed light and be expanded into empirical indicators to analyze the Trump-Bolsonaro relationship? Based on these issues, we will now discuss the concept of influence.

The term *influence* has multiple meanings and gains conceptual value through discussion in disciplinary fields that seek to give it a more restricted and scientific meaning. This

concept is discussed in at least three disciplinary traditions: one from social sciences, another from communication studies, and one from literature. In the first instance, in a classic reflection, Parsons (1963) tried to define influence in a way that distinguished it from power, while acknowledging their interdependence. According to Dahl's (1957) analysis, a part of the social science literature treats these concepts as interchangeable. In this context, power is defined as the ability to perform actions and make decisions, while influence is defined as the ability to convince others to act (Lucas & Baxter, 2012).

Parsons (1963) provides the following definition of influence: "a way of having an effect on the attitudes and opinions of others through intentional (though not necessarily rational) action — the effect may or may not be to change the opinion or to prevent a possible change" (p. 38). Furthermore, he suggested that the way one produces the result of influence on another person is by a *communicative operation*. This intervention activity generates consequences, and there may be contingent positive or negative sanctions for the target of influence, as well as possible advantages or disadvantages for the target of influence in relation to the change. Parsons (1963) understands that influence is a means of *persuasion*, thus, unlike the case of power, in which the idea of coercion is relevant.

Since influence is a symbolic method of persuasion, for it to be effective, the target of influence must have confidence in the person trying to influence. Among the various justifications underlying trust is reputation, which includes assessments of the influencer's competence, reliability, and quality of judgment. It is therefore expected that the greater an individual's political power, the greater his ability to influence others. Among the various forms of influence, political influence is associated with the concept of leadership.

Parsons (1963) argues that political influence operates "in the context of the goal-functioning of collectivities, as generalized persuasion without power — i.e., independent of the use of power or direct threat .... Though political influence is analytically independent of power, we conceive the two to be closely interconnected" (pp. 53-54). Influence is exercised through persuasion, information, and advice, whereas power generally appeals to force, coercion, and sanctions, according to other, more recent social science authors who distinguish between power and influence in a manner similar to that of Talcott Parsons (cf. Willer et al., 1997). This definition of influence closely resembles that of contagion.

Similar to the sociological perspective presented, the field of communication also developed theories about influence early on, mainly due to studies on political communication by founding authors of communication research in the United States, which resulted in classic books such as *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) and *Personal Influence* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Within this framework, concepts such as *two-step flow of communication* and *opinion leader* were coined to emphasize the importance of interpersonal communication in reinforcing or inhibiting acceptance of mass media messages. Research on the so-called diffusion of innovations (e.g., Roger, 1962) drew implications from earlier findings, noting that,

depending on the goals of a given broadcaster, it would be more effective to try to address messages to influential individuals within their immediate circle.

This type of research relativized the direct influence of the media by highlighting the importance of opinion leaders as mediators. In updates and revisions of the *media filter* hypothesis, it is argued that the political influence of mass media may be greater today because people in different countries engage in less interpersonal political discussions (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). However, even in the context of the hybrid media environment of the present day, the relevance of media influence, in terms of certain more relevant mediators, continues to reverberate and persists as a significant factor "as a conceptual operator in the digital media environment, particularly in questions about political positions and consumption" (Martino, 2018, p. 7). Hence the term *digital influencers* refers to individuals who *influence* or *create trends* via social networks. In addition to the notion of influence as a modulation in the reception of the mass media message, it is also viewed as the result of a potentially dialogical form of communication on the Internet in the contemporary context.

In contrast, communication research that focuses on the digital world has, in dialogue with computer science, developed a different concept of influence as a characteristic of users and messages in digital social media. In this manner,

> The most immediate gauge of influence on Twitter is the number of followers. Other measures of influence focus not only on the number of followers but also on the attention received by a Twitter user based on the different modalities according to which the audience may engage with a tweet, such as retweeting, replying, and mentioning. For example, Cha et al. (2010) compared three measures of influence: in-degree (number [of] followers), retweets (number of retweets containing the user's name), and mentions (the degree of engagement with others). (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016, p. 344)

As Karlsen and Enjolras (2016) note, this influence has been increasingly desired by politicians, particularly candidates, due to the individualization of campaigns, that is, the growth of individuals' personal role, while decreasing that of parties, in the overall political process. In this context, "new digital media have also been identified as a channel with the potential to increase the focus on the personal side of politics; ... are also another channel for party leaders to highlight themselves, as well as organize and centralize the party" (p. 339). Thus, a concern develops in measuring and evaluating the influence of the mentioned terms — which can be operationalized, as in the study of the cited authors, by observing the number of tweets that contain the mention indicator of a candidate on this platform.

Finally, in the tradition of literary studies, the concept of influence is central to the field of comparative literature. "Whether to affirm it, deny it, transform it or replace it with new concepts" (Nitrini, 2000, p. 126). Comparativists use the term in two ways: first, in a broader sense, to refer to the sum of all contact relationships — readings, reviews, personal contacts,

etc. On the other hand, influence is defined as the autonomous (artistic) outcome of a particular contact. In addition to its originality, which refers to the concept of something that has its own brand, a given work may contain evidence of its author's contact with another or others — influence (Nitrini, 2000).

In this perspective, influence can also be compared to the concept of imitation; however, influence implies a change in the personality of the recipient, whereas imitation is more localized. There is a continuum between the following ideas: "The greater the number of elements borrowed from the work of another author, the closer the paraphrase approaches imitation" (Nitrini, 2000, p. 130). Aspects such as the theme of the work, literary genre, stylistic resources, ideas and emotions are elements of influence, which indicate antecedent aspects. Influence and originality are also related concepts, the latter being ensured by decisions taken by an influenced author, that is, who knows another source author. Originality, on the other hand, is opposed to plagiarism.

The criticism of the traditional concept of influence, in literary studies, for its excessive psychologization, led to a movement towards the concept of *intertextuality* and the proposition of the notion that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text" (Kristeva, 1969, as cited in Nitrini, 2000, p. 161). Several literary theorists have developed this central concept, including Genette (1982/2020), who theorizes about transtextuality, which he defines as "everything that puts it [the text] in relation, overt or covert, to other texts" (p. 13) and develops a typology of categories surrounding it. Regarding intertextuality specifically, the author notes that it takes three forms: 1) Quoting, either explicitly or without reference; 2) Plagiarism, which is the unacknowledged borrowing of one author by another; and 3) Allusion, which occurs when the full comprehension of a statement requires the perception of a relationship between it and another.

Concluding remarks

Countless similarities between Trump and Bolsonaro have already been identified in the literature, as demonstrated throughout this text. Based on Wodak's discussion (2015/2020), we were able to categorize them as far-right populists through a systematization and synthesis of knowledge. We attempted to determine what explains this similarity and discussed the ideas of populist Zeitgeist, contagion, and influence. This demonstrates that is important to differentiate between contagion and influence, as the former is associated with specific geographical contexts and competitive situations. Trump's potential influence on Bolsonaro, if it exists, takes place in a different manner: across international borders and between allied politicians. Influence, like personal persuasion, can take forms and traits that are difficult to identify. The

adoption of a certain attitude or position by a politician can be caused by a variety of factors. Texts and statements are perhaps the most obvious manifestations of influence among politicians. In this sense, the perspective of literary studies on the subject seems suggestive.

It would thus be possible to verify the anteriority (originality) of the positions of one politician in relation to another, in a given corpus (tweets or posts on Facebook, for example), and whether this is linked to imitations, quotes or allusions, as well as the number of direct mentions that are made from one to another. The messages and themes could then be linked to *elements of populist communication* identified by the communication-centered literature (Reinemann et al. 2017), ultimately merged with content and categories from the discussion of far-right populism. The analysis of possible stylistic influences will also be possible and challenging; this may involve the study of rhetorical strategies or other text analysis methodologies that highlight changes over time in forms of expression attributable to the contact and influence of one politician with another. This is, of course, a proposal whose value must be determined by the ability of empirical analyses that employ it to produce well-grounded clarifications regarding the issue it addresses: the influence between populist politicians in different countries.

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Right-Wing Populism and Gender in Digitized Culture Wars

Populismo de direita e género nas guerras culturais digitalizadas

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Abstract: This article delineates the ways in which gender and the opposition to "gender ideology" has become one of the key arenas of right-wing populist and extremist discourse and polarization. Starting from a number of right-wing patterns of en-gendering, it traces particularly the correspondence between right-wing populist logics and media logics and asks how media logics and gender patterns play a crucial role in the related re-framing of polarized positionings. In the current "re-framed culture wars" (Brown), digital media in particular play an increasingly central role in the mobilization of affective attachments and the consolidation of new forms of community and communication. By proposing a first outline of possible correspondences, the article seeks to provide a lens through which the ways in which the current "conjuncture" (Hall) is marked by a re-ordering of political communication and democratic mechanisms can be traced in its complexity.

Keywords: populism and gender, media and gender, political polarization, democracy and populism

Resumo: Este artigo aborda as formas como o género e a oposição à "ideologia de género" se tornaram uma das principais arenas do discurso e da polarização populista de extrema direita. Partindo de uma série de padrões de en-gendramento da direita, o artigo traça em particular a correspondência entre as lógicas populistas de direita e as lógicas dos media e questiona de que forma as lógicas dos media e os padrões de género desempenham um papel crucial no reenquadramento de posições polarizadas. Nas atuais "guerras culturais reenquadradas" (Brown), os media digitais, em particular, desempenham um papel cada vez mais central na mobilização de ligações afectivas e na consolidação de novas formas de comunidade e comunicação. Ao propor um primeiro esboço de possíveis correspondências, o artigo procura fornecer uma lente através da qual as formas como a actual "conjuntura" (Hall) é marcada por uma reordenação da comunicação política e de como os mecanismos democráticos podem ser rastreados na sua complexidade.

Palavras-chave: populismo e género, media e género, polarização política, democracia e populismo

1. Opposition to "Gender Ideology", Neoliberal Conjunctures, Re-Framed Culture Wars

As part of the first big event of his election campaign to run again as presidential candidate for the Republican Party in 2024, Donald Trump gave a speech in South Carolina in late January 2023. Trump announced that as president, he would protect children from "perverts" and steer the country away from "woke" gender and sexuality politics: "We're going to stop the left-wing radical racists and perverts who are trying to indoctrinate our youth, and we're going to get their Marxist hands off of our children" Trump emphasized, and he continued: "We're going to defeat the cult of gender ideology and reaffirm that god created two genders called men and women", further promising to "cut federal funding for any school pushing far-left sexual or political content on our children." (McClure 2023)

Donald Trump's obvious "obsession with gender" (Dietze/Roth 2020, 7) is but one example of the observation that gender has moved center stage in right-wing extremist and populist discourse, and that it is indeed fundamental for this discourse to function. While during his presidency, Donald Trump himself did not yet outrightly oppose gender as a major enemy, he also did not contradict Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who during his first visit to the US president in 2017 claimed that he and Trump would be united in their opposition

to "gender ideology", a term originally coined by the Vatican to oppose emancipatory gender and sexual politics (Case 2019) (see Roth 2021). Nor did he distance himself from Evangelicals who organized anti-gender congresses under the guise of the "protection of the family" (Roth 2029; 2020). Religious and civil organizations to an increasing extent use topics related to gender also to mobilize transnationally. As Maryann Case observes, the "opposition to gender ideology has united conservative Catholics with persons of other faiths around the world with whom they agree on little other than the need to fight 'gender ideology.'" (Case 2019, 659) Right-wing parties and actors all over Europe and also globally follow a similar line of argumentation, for which "gender" serves as "symbolic glue" (Grzebalska, Kováts, Petö 2018). They are increasingly supported by women, ranging from tea party candidate Sarah Palin in the US to Beatrix von Storch of the AfD or author Birgit Kelle in Germany, to Italian president Georgia Meloni and Rita Maria Cid Matias from Portugal's Chega party (Gutsche 2018; Dietze 2020). Thus, populists — for a long time defined as 'men's parties' — often consciously include and use the voices of female voters and supporters, which indicates how crucial gender has become for negotiating a broad range of topics. As the study "The Triumph of the Women" demonstrates, they include women who represent right-wing positions such as the norm of the traditional heteronormative family (Gutsche 2018).

This dichotomization through gender points to the current moment which, in many places in Europe and worldwide, is marked by polarizations and new struggles over cultural hegemony. Wendy Brown aptly designates these polarizations as "re-framed culture wars" against the background of an all-encompassing neoliberal rationale. Following Stuart Hall's notion we can speak of the current moment as a conjuncture — understood as the condensation (or entanglement) of contradictions and non-negotiable conflict situations. As the mentioned examples indicate populist actors manage to polarize their societies through gender-related topics, but also that they gain approval for re-energizing debates about immigration control, demography, abortion, or well-fare in the public sphere. In different arenas, gender and sexuality function as a common feature that can be observed in all current versions of right-wing populism (Dietze and Roth 2020, 7). In this setting, mass media and especially digital media provide new frames for the normalization of but also the contestation of anti-pluralist and anti-emancipatory claims.

2. Right-Wing Populist Patterns of En-Gendering

Research on populism has only hesitantly started to put the gender question and related sexual-political strategies center stage in a systematic manner, and begun to acknowledge the epistemic value of gender as a meta allegory for very different dynamics (Hark/Villa 2015; Dietze/Roth 2020). In order to grasp the manifold dimensions and actors involved and the

phenomenon in its complexity, we have suggested the concept of the "right-wing populist complex" to relate right-wing populism not only to parties, movements, or organizations, but also to media discourses, narratives, and forms of action and to include right-wing extremism, religious fundamentalism and to focus also on the intersections of gender with other categories of social stratification (Dietze & Roth 2020b, 8 ff.). Following a populist logic, society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' (or, in the U. S., the 'heartland') and 'the corrupt elite', against which populist actors claim to express and embody a presumed 'general will' (volonté generale) of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Moreover, right-wing populism is considered a logic, a discourse, and a "thin-centered ideology", that is, populism is necessarily attached to other ideologies, and it can take many shapes and relate to diverse additional concepts, forming context-specific interpretive frames to promote the respective political projects (Canovan, 1982 and 2002; Mudde, 2004).[1]

Gender provides ample metaphoric material since gender is a category that usually evokes emotional responses, as Birgit Sauer demonstrated in her pioneering 2017 article. As she argues, gender tackles everyday experiences that everyone can relate to because everyone is gendered in a certain way and thus gender plays a crucial role in the "jointing of a national-populist project of ethnic or national homogeneity and exclusionary citizenship in the biopolitical arrangements" (Sauer 2017, 14, translation JR) of the new right. Following a right-wing populist logic, such gendered arrangements are related to a long tradition of nativist right-wing discourse centering on the (right/White) female body as a guarantor for the maintenance of the nation.

Discourses on gender thus become part of the Manichean worldview inherent to the right-wing populist logic. This binary logic requires the creation of antagonisms in order to function. Gender serves as an arena and as a sort of meta-language for the recent polarizations that originated in the developments resulting from the anti-hegemonic projects following the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the current climate of neoliberal competition for resources, these polarizations are being revived. The right-wing populist and conservative opposition to these developments is increasingly expressed through opposition to gender ideology, the demonization of social constructivist gender studies approaches and women's and LGBTQI equality rights activism in favor of abortion rights and sexual diversity. A growing number of women supporting right-wing populism express their rejection of what they consider feminism's or gender ideology's destruction of traditional gender roles and attack against family values, as well as the pressure to work full-time and educate children about sexual diversity. While "genderism" thus functions as one of the "inner enemies" of the right-wing populist logic [together with "the (corrupt) elite" of which feminists form

1 See e.g. Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013 for the inclusionary notion of populism more common in Latin American contexts.

part], women's (and gays') rights and sexual freedom are often used as an argument against the "intruding" enemy of immigrants and refugees who are constructed as a sexual threat, a pattern Gabriele Dietze (2015) has termed "ethnosexism". Moreover, for an increasingly strong transnational network of right-wing radicals, gender serves as a language to attack neoliberalism (and global capitalism) by depicting "gender ideology" as a means of colonization. In relation to the right-wing populist logic, different patterns of gendering serve different functions (see Roth 2020; 2021).[2]

3. Gender as "Affective Bridge" in (Mass) Media

Besides "gender ideology" and "political correctness", an important marker of commonality for Jair Bolsonaro during his visit to Donald Trump in March 2019 was their shared opposition to and fight against "fake news" (Roth 2021). Understood as a "political logic" (Laclau 2005, p. 117) and a "communicative scheme" (Stegemann 2017, p. 22) or "communicative pattern" (Costa 2018), right-wing populism gains from its entanglements with the workings of mass media. Current right-wing populists offer new, or revived, exclusionary narratives.[3] Performing as the 'voice of the people,' many populist actors purport to be saying "what everyone was thinking". The media is usually condemned as the enemy, even as populist actors depend on media and take advantage of the shared logic of populism and media regarding attention economies and emotional appeal (see Wodak 2015; Diehl 2017; Sauer 2020; Strick 2020). Not surprisingly, the success of current populist actors is discussed in relation to mass media, and increasingly in relation to the ever-more important role of social media. For right-wing politicians like Trump, Bolsonaro or Modi in India, the role of mass media has been crucial. As the right-wing crusade against "fake news" illustrates, shunning the 'politically correct' forms a central part of a populist strategy of condemning "the elite" of media, politicians and intellectual left-wingers. In turn, mass media also follow the logic that "sex sells" and often use sexual politics and gender topics in order to gain attention through scandal and appeal to affective reactions.

As Paula Diehl (2017) has shown, mass media serve to catapult right-wing extremist positions into the public sphere. Since populists usually find a broad resonance and attention in mass media, Diehl points to a number of parallel criteria shared by populism and mass

2 See Roth 2020 and 2021: *Pattern I:* Gender as "Affective Bridge" in Mass Media (Gendering of scandals + Others); *Pattern II:* Appropriating Women's Politics for Femonationalist Arrangements; *Pattern III:* (White) Re-Masculinization: "Genderism" as Existential Threat; *Pattern IV:* Reverse Anti-Colonialism: "Gender Ideology" as"Ideological Colonization", Radical Religious and Femoglobal Alliances; *Pattern IV*: "Ethnosexism" and "Exclusive Intersectionality" (Gendering of Social Inequalities and Gendering of Fear).

3 On right-wing populism and media, see my elaborations in Roth 2021, on which part of the arguments presented here are based.

media.[4] By creating scandals, breaking taboos, and appealing to emotions, populists meet the attention criteria of mass media. Following Diehl, through the "systemic affinity" of populism and mass media, populists get more media attention than other political actors. Hence, populists often use the attention rules of mass media as part of a strategy to gain attention and, eventually, votes. These media also serve the populist actors' strategy of contradicting "mainstream" media and declaring their version of events to be "wrong" or "fake". At the same time, they constantly cause distraction, controversies, dramatization, and scandal, which ties in with mass media's and social media's attention logic.

The examples of the open sexism of Trump and Bolsonaro show how these populist actors tend to make statements for their shock value and consciously and repeatedly cause scandals. Gender topics are particularly useful for that matter, due to their "sex sells" logic, since "sex and blood" always help to fulfill the attention criteria of media. The danger lies in the fact that the media, through their constant repetition, contribute to the normalization of such positions and eventually to a shift towards non-democratic and anti-democratic standards. Also, in line with Sauer's elaborations on the emotional appeal of gender issues, gender-related topics guarantee a certain affective engagement by all recipients, since they appeal to the everyday and to everyone. Gender moreover builds on a long-established naturalized hierarchical binary. Gender applies to numerous logics of right-wing populism and serves various populist communicative patterns. Right-wing populism works against gender-sensitive "politically correct" language and contributes to the normalization of sexist and racist language. Gender also plays a crucial role in the construction of feminism and gender ideology as "inner enemies" in the binary populist logic. By forming alliances with certain women and using seemingly feminist arguments while reviving hegemonic masculinity, populist actors' create "dynamic paradoxes" (see Farris 2008; Dietze 2019). The new populists seem to have learned that they need to present a more modernized image and depend on the support of women — and, partly, representatives of LGBTQI and other marginalized communities (see Wielowiejski 2020).

4 As criteria of mass media, Diehl lists "personalisation, "degree of proximity", "appeal to the extraordinary", "emotional appeal", "drama", "conflict structure" and "immediacy", which correspond with the following elements of populism: "centrality of the charismatic leader", "simplicity of argument", "production of scandal, disregard of taboo", "emotional appeal", "narrative of the betrayed people", "Manichean thinking", "rejection of mediation". (Diehl 2017)

4. Orchestrating Contradictions Affectively in Digitized Culture Wars

Electoral campaigns by populist and extremist candidates such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro have shown that mass media increasingly play a major role in their strategies to directly spread their messages to their followers. These followers are, however, no longer (only) the "masses" of TV times, but increasingly also carefully targeted Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp users. Via social media, populists aim at direct communication between the leader or party and their followers, since communication from a populist view needs to be unmediated. Social media facilitate this logic and therefore play an increasingly important role in election campaigns and the political communication of populists. This could be observed in Bolsonaro's successful WhatsApp and YouTube 2017 electoral campaign and Trumps constant interventions via Twitter, which were frequently quoted by media of all sorts. Through their direct communication with their voters through Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook, both Trump and Bolsonaro worked against the influence of mainstream media. The so-called "manosphere" on the internet furthermore provides extremists a virtual fan base based on masculinist to neo-fascist narratives and alliances.

Bolsonaro was one of Brazil's "most influential politicians online," with more than 49.2 million followers on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram combined (Uchoa 2018: 10, 5 million).[5] In Bolsonaro's 2017 media-led election campaign, Sérgio Costa observed the radical change of "political communication and thereby the foundations of democracy", which Bolsonaro plays to perfection (Costa 2018, translation JR). Other critics even speak of the construction of parallel worlds or realities, created through (social and other) media bubbles, and which lead to completely different patterns of perception (see e.g. Seeßlen 2017). One such pattern is the betrayal of the "general will" of "the people" through what is perceived as the "privileging" of minorities through affirmative action, gender and LGBTQI rights, and political correctness.

Costa observes structural parallels between Bolsonaro's campaign, the Brexit campaign in the UK, the campaigns by Donald Trump in the US and the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party in Germany with regard to several elements of this new communication pattern. These new forms of election campaigns are no longer about political arguments, but about the electorate's entire existence combined with male identity politics (Sauer 2020).

In a parallel reality, the voters' entire way of life — as Christians, as nuclear families, as heterosexuals, as members of a nation — is being presented as severely threatened. The people — above all the male voters who become the center of such narratives — are stylized as heroes

5 "Brazil's Bolsonaro leads in social media with 49 million followers", *Latin America News,* 26 Sept., 2022, https://www.riotimesonline.com/brazil-news/brazil/brazils-bolsonaro-leads-in-networks-with-49-million-followers/, accessed 7 Nov., 2022.

whose vote and everyday offensive stance can banish the threat (Costa 2018, translation JR).

In order to create such a parallel reality, mainstream media that could put this parallel reality into question are usually disavowed — as the notorious "fake news" phenomenon indicates. Being in the defensive position, Costa argues, media often respond with positive coverage of their critics. However, following the populist logic, the alleged threat only becomes plausible when enemies are constructed that are threatening not a political position, but the entire existence of the community. In the current climate, they make up for perceived threats caused by socioeconomic insecurity. Thus, the plurality of family models, free and legal abortion are constructed as a fundamental threat to the (reproduction/maintenance) of the nation. "These enemies are no abstract phenomena like globalization or global capitalism, but concrete opponents that can be recognized and fought on an everyday basis: 'illegal migrants' in the US or Britain, refugees and Muslims in Germany, and in Brazil: Gays or the sinful left." (Costa 2018, translation JR).

Since they are seen as incapable of protecting the people from these threats, the political establishment or elite and democratic institutions are also constructed as enemies. In addition, feminists, LGBTQI activists, and gender studies scholars are condemned as threats to the family and the nation, the latter of which has recently been attacked by conservatives and right-wing populists.

This tendency of right-wing deployment can be observed in the USA, Germany or Britain. That has gained momentum in Brazil, particularly with regard to the importance of social media like WhatsApp as communicative tools and what Costa terms the "central role of religion and sexuality in the political discourse." (ibid.). During Bolsonaro's election campaign, WhatsApp played a pivotal role: Brazil had approx. 147 million (registered) voters and 120 million WhatsApp users (2022: 155 million voters and 147.37 million WhatsApp users), the latter of which do not all have regular access to the internet.[6] This is due to the fact that several mobile phone providers enable their clients access to WhatsApp without extra costs while navigating the Internet is complicated and expensive. WhatsApp thus advanced to become the most important electoral battlefield besides television, and Bolsonaro and his team knew how to use it for their cause and to their advantage. Over 80% of Bolsonaro's supporters received their information via WhatsApp (Datafolha institute, cf. in Costa 2018), which unlike

6 According to the Brazilian government, as of September 2019, 90% of Brazilian households — or 65.6 million houses, against 84% in 2019 — have access to the internet. In rural areas, internet access increased to 74.7 % of households, from 57.8% in 2019. (https://www.gov.br/en/government-of-brazil/latest-news/the-number-of-households-with-internet-access-in-brazil-has-increased, accessed 11 March, 2023). A survey from November to December 2021 shows that Facebook was the most used social media platform for political information among all respondents older than 30 years, Instagram was the second-most preferred network for this type of activity and the top choice for respondents aged between 16 and 29 years old. WhatsApp followed Facebook among respondents older than 50 years and older, since 29 percent of respondents chose the messenger app as their main channel for political information. (https://www.statista.com/statistics/1326999/social-media-users-age-political-information/, accessed 11 March 2023).

other platforms such as YouTube or Facebook cannot be monitored by electoral authorities. After he became the victim of a knife attack on September 16, 2019, social media further helped Bolsonaro to stylize himself as a hero or savior and at the same time as a normal citizen: images of him from a hospital bed circulated broadly on YouTube and WhatsApp, and he also gave television interviews. He thus projected a personalized and private image that addressed people's feelings.

In the case of Donald Trump, the media also played a pivotal role in the success of his election campaign and in further mobilizing his followers. The role of Fox News as a private TV station supporting Trump and the role of Breitbart News and Steve Bannon — who was one of the most important advisers for Trump in his election campaign and under his presidency, until he was fired in 2017 — are well-known. Bannon is also said to have advised Bolsonaro for his campaign as well as the German right-wing populist AfD party (Assheuer 2018). As a media professional who hosted a reality show ("The Apprentice") for 12 years, Trump knows how to navigate and deal with the logic of mass media and use them for his own purposes. Trump has a long experience of promoting himself as a success story, which is also evident in his books, which became best-sellers under telling titles such as *The Art of the Deal* (1987), *Think Big* (2007), *Never Give Up* (2008), or *Great Again: How to Fix Our Crippled America* (2015). Through his strategic use of Twitter, Trump further made use of the possibilities of new social media to seemingly communicate personally with and directly influence his followers as well as public discourse more generally. As president, Trump usually sent his first Tweets early in the morning, before the first news of the day, and thereby set the tone for particular topics. His consistent demonization of "traditional" and "serious" media, whom he accused of producing "fake news", further fed this logic and contributed to a deeply divided discourse of media and its role in democracy.

Since he could not control the media like other populist leaders (e.g. Silvio Berlusconi or, more recently, Narendra Modi), Trump thus created his own reality and his own discourse in opposition to all media that see him critically. Following the populist logic, Trump seems to be successful among his followers at undermining the authority of mainstream media as part of the "corrupt elite" that is "betraying the people" (Mitchell et al. 2017). He made use of this logic by calling the media "the enemy of the people", questioning the reliability of the referee entirely. In a 2018 CBS News poll, 91% of Trump's "strong supporters" said they trust him to provide them with accurate information. Only 11% said the same thing about the "mainstream media" (see Zurcher 2018). The increasing role of affective ties further points to a changing notion of (what counts as) "truth" as opposed to "facts", particularly in a climate in which undesirable information is easily dismissed. The content flows between social media and mainstream media supporting right-wing populist discourse is a further important aspect. One interesting example is the daily morning program "Fox and Friends" which acted as a mouthpiece for Trump's tweets.

A central dimension of the right-wing populist quest for discursive hegemony is a struggle over memory politics and the media play a crucial role in the attempt of doing away with a shameful history (such as enslavement in the US, Brazil or Britain or the Holocaust in Germany) by normalizing it through repetition and fuel nostalgia for an allegedly "great" time before and a retro-utopian (Baumann 2017) desire "selling the past as future" (see Reuter 2020). And since affect is one of the major currencies through which mass and particularly social media gain attention (showing emotions, dramatization, breaking taboos, causing scandals), gender plays a pivotal role as an arena within media discourses, and further as an "affective bridge" (Dietze 2019) serving the creation of affective community and "feeling political together."

Media — and social media in particular — play a central role today for all populists, which is also due to the similar logic in the attention economy. Media have historically been crucial for the success of populist actors, as the example of the central role of radio for Peronismo in Argentina demonstrates. As the instances of Trump's and Bolsonaro's openly sexist and misogynist remarks show, this "self-truth" seems to imply sticking to particular versions of hegemonic masculinity. Among their supporters, these versions seem to strengthen rather than threaten their popularity, notably also among women, who increasingly make careers in parties and organisations of the extreme right (such as e.g. Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Le Pen in France, Rita Maria Cid Matias from Portugal's Chega party or Alice Weidel in Germany). Actors of the extreme right make use of digital media logic to evoke a variety of forms of nostalgia for homogeneity and closure. They fuel desires to reinstall sovereignty and White supremacy, to redraw boundaries and to build walls. The Manichean and polarizing populist logics behind these desires shows affinities with the logics of mass media and particularly those of the logics of digital and social media. The latter facilitate the accelerated dissemination and of circulation of information and the creation of media bubbles and echo chambers. As part of the polarizing logic of digital media — which also rely on binaries, short, pointed messages and affective appeal — particularly racialized and gendered patterns are evoked through such media practices and strategies. Such practices function in order to mobilize antagonistic attachments. These attachments are reinforced by personalized messages, the inclusion of photographs and videos or memes, and the binary logic of likes, etc. Thus, in tune with the second function Sara Ahmed (2004) identifies for affective attachment, they add to the creation of fear, hate, and division. As a consequence, principles such as equality, pluralization and diversity are being contested from various angles: Conceptualisations of memory and truths as competitive are positioned against memory and truth as plural and multidirectional (Rothberg 2009).

The following tables offer a first preliminary attempt at a systematization of some of the affinities between digital media logics and patterns of gendering on which future research might elaborate. A main observation or aspect that can be observed is, on the one hand, the strong individualization and an authoritarian or negative notion of freedom and rights, and, on the other hand, and simultaneously, the crucial role of building affective communities:

Table 1

Digital Media Logics	Gendering
Individualized consumer profiles	Weaponized masculinity, familial warfare
Simplicity and brevity	Naturalized binary order, Segregationist data
Gain attention, »clicks«/likes, data	»Sex sells«, Sexual scandal, taboos
Affective attachment	Moral panic
Moral panic, loss of order	Gendering of Others, Gendering of scandal
Binary oppositions (like/dislike, 0/1, friend/enemy), Polarization as goal	Binary/heteronormativity vs. plurality/ambiguity
Immediacy, echo chambers	Affective bridge

(Roth 2022, cf. Diehl 2017, Roth 2020, Chun 2021)

Table 2

Criteria of Mass Media	Elements of Populism	Digital Media	Digital Media Logics	Gendering
Personalization	Centrality of the charismatic leader	—	Individualized consumer profiles	Weaponized masculinity, familial warfare
Degree of complexity	Simplicity of argument	✓	Simplicity and brevity	Naturalized binary order, Segregationist data
Appeal to the extraordinary	Production of scandal, disregard for taboo	✓	Gain attention, »clicks« /likes, data	»Sex sells«, Sexual scandal, taboos
Emotional appeal	Emotional appeal	✓	Affective attachment	Moral panic
Drama	Narrative of the betrayal of the people	—/✓	Moral panic, loss of order	Gendering of Others, Gendering of scandal
Conflict structure	Manichean thinking	✓	Binary oppositions (like /dislike, 0/1, friend /enemy), Polarization as goal	Binary/ heteronormativity vs. plurality/ambiguity
Immediacy	Rejection of mediation	✓	Immediacy, echo chambers	Affective bridge

(Roth 2022, cf. Diehl 2017, Roth 2020, Chun 2021)

5. Mediatic Re-Framings of Polarized Positionings and Political Communication

In sum: In right-wing populist discourse gender is used as an epistemological scene for the ordering and hierarchization of paradoxes and contradictions. Right-wing populist communicative patterns are part of a general struggle over cultural hegemony and social welfare/redistribution, in the context of globalized neoliberal capitalism in crisis. In right-wing debates, gender became an "empty signifier" and could thus be used in the struggle over cultural and political hegemony, in which right-wing populist actors oppose the liberal cultural tendencies and the perceived "social democratic" constellation for redistribution and integration (Sauer 2017, 15). New "masculinist" actors, such as bloggers of the Alt-Right et al., depict themselves as the victims of rigid feminists and gender studies ideologists who allegedly violently push through political correctness and threaten White male identity and the maintenance and "purity" of the nation at large. Through the demonization of gender studies and feminist approaches, these actors seek to naturalize differences and hierarchies. As a metaphor for naturalized hierarchies, gender is useful for and caters to the populist logic of polarization. Through the affective dimension usually attached to gender issues, gender also serves as an arena for causing scandals that attract attention and distract from different issues, thus "channeling" other political and social discourses. Thus, gender questions provide a useful field for the mobilization of affects through which a "politics of fear" can be orchestrated and distract attention from abstract menaces such as neoliberal capitalism (Wodak 2015; Sauer 2017).

Proceeding from the observation that populism and mass media share a variety of similar logics and systemic affinities, mass media — and, increasingly, social media — play a crucial role for current right-wing populist actors. These include the creation of echo chambers or "bubbles", breaking taboos, and causing scandals and affective responses. Since (particularly commercial) media depend on large audiences, populist actors help them gain viewers through their continuous disregard for taboo, the production of scandal, their affective appeal, and the simplicity of their arguments. On the other hand, mass media and social media help populist actors to catapult their simple and affectively loaded arguments into the public sphere and, in the case of social media, to their carefully selected target groups and potential supporters. As the examples mentioned here have demonstrated, gender is being used as suitable "meta language" in order to talk about demography, ethnicity, occidental entitlement, transfer payments, and anti-immigration. Gender — expressed in paradoxical patterns ranging from sexist and misogynist "locker room talk" to "anti-genderism" (Hark/Villa 2015) and "sexual exceptionalism" (Dietze 2015), the "gendering of Others", — is increasingly interpolated by numerous right-wing populist actors in order to affectively bridge these contradictions. The current "conjuncture" is thus marked by a re-ordering of political communication and democratic mechanisms. Media logics and gender patterns play a crucial role in the related re-framing of polarized positionings. The outcome of these developments seems to be open and uncertain.

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Populism and gender: Radical right-wing brings anti-feminism to Parliament

Populismo e género: A direita radical leva o anti-feminismo ao Parlamento

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Abstract: In the parliamentary election held on 30 January 2022 in Portugal, Chega, a populist and anti-establishment party of the radical-right wing won 7.18% of the votes and 12 seats in Parliament, becoming the third major political force of the 15th Legislature. Its 12 Members of Parliament (MPs) include only one woman, Rita Matias, who is also the youngest MP in the Chamber. During the election campaign, Rita Matias presented herself as an anti-feminist, a statement that gained public and media attention after her election into public office. In this chapter, our purpose is to understand the relevance and significance of this position within the broader framework of the connection between gender and populism and to understand the extent to which this orientation contributes to establishing the political-ideological project of Chega. To try to establish this relationship between gender and right-wing populism, we propose to explore two aspects that we assume are interconnected: gender performance structuring the populist style and ideology. Our investigation has a twofold focus: Rita Matias Parliamentary interventions, between March 29th and September 30th; and journalistic texts, concerning her declarations, published between February 1st and September 30th, 2022. As a conclusion, we point out that the declaration of anti-feminism made during the campaign brought, both to the media and to Parliament, a new angle that had not yet been explored and embodies the populist style and radical right-wing ideology of Chega for gender's issues.

Keywords: populism, feminism, gender, parliament, Chega, media

Resumo: Nas eleições legislativas portuguesas de 2022, em Portugal, o Chega, um partido da direita radical populista e antissistema, conquistou 7,18% dos votos e 12 mandatos, tornando-se a terceira maior força parlamentar da 15.ª Legislatura. Uma única mulher, Rita Matias, faz parte do grupo parlamentar e é a mais jovem deputada do hemiciclo. Durante a campanha eleitoral, Rita Matias afirmou-se como antifeminista, declaração que lhe granjeou atenção pública e mediática após a eleição. Neste capítulo o propósito é compreender a relevância e o significado deste posicionamento no quadro mais amplo da ligação entre género e populismo e perceber em que medida esta orientação contribui para fixar o projeto político-ideológico do Chega. Para procurar estabelecer esta relação entre género e populismo de direita, propomo-nos explorar duas vertentes que pressupomos interligadas: a performance de género estruturando o estilo populista e a ideologia. A investigação tem um duplo foco: as intervenções parlamentares de Rita Matias entre 29 de março a 30 de setembro; as peças jornalísticas, publicadas entre 1 de fevereiro a 30 e setembro de 2022, centradas na figura da deputada. Como conclusão assinalamos que a declaração de antifeminismo feita durante a campanha trouxe, tanto para os media, como para o Parlamento, um novo ângulo que ainda não tinha sido explorado e dá corpo ao estilo populista e ideologia de direita radical do Chega para as questões de género.

Palavras-chave: populismo, feminismo, género, Chega, parlamento, media

Introduction

In the parliamentary election held on 30 January 2022 in Portugal, Chega [TN: meaning "Enough"], a populist and anti-establishment party of the radical right, won 7.18% of the votes and 12 seats in Parliament, becoming the third major political force of the 15th Legislature, which began on 29 March of that year. Its 12 Members of Parliament (MPs) include only one woman, Rita Matias, who is also the youngest MP in the Chamber. During the election campaign, Rita Matias presented herself as an anti-feminist, a statement that gained public and media attention after her election into public office.

In a debate with Joana Amaral Dias[1] broadcasted on CNN Portugal on 1 February 2022, she was confronted by the news anchor with the question "What does it mean to be a woman and an anti-feminist?". She clarified her point of view:

> Feminism puts us in this position where men and women are in opposition to each other, and it holds us hostage of a narrative in which any complementarity that might exist between men and women is undervalued. There is a need for more women in the public space who defend women in a different way, from a more conservative perspective. (...) The greatest antagonism lies in it being a Marxist movement, a movement that divides society into «us» and «them». It is a movement that often puts women and men in opposition to each other.[2]

This statement was harshly commented on and problematized by her interlocutor, and it was reproduced in various media outlets and social media platforms.

In this chapter, we seek to understand the relevance and meaning of these statements within the broader context of the connection between gender and populism and the extent to which this stance contributes to the definition of the political and ideological project of Chega.

It is hypothesized that, in the case of Chega, a genderized populism has emerged in connection with a right-wing ideology that is expressed, precisely, in anti-gender and anti-feminist views. The controversial and disruptive statement of Rita Matias elicited opposition and journalistic scrutiny, which catapulted the young MP to the media stage.

Until recently, the connection between gender and populism in this political party was dominated by the aggressive and sexist male performance of its leader, André Ventura, expressing a model of hegemonic masculinity whose preferred target were emancipated and empowered left-wing female politicians (Martins, Cabrera and Cunha, 2021; 2022).

We anticipate that the statement of anti-feminism of Rita Matias is strategic in nature, while also raising, at the political level, issues related to women and gender equality. The following questions will serve as guidelines for this research:

— Is Rita Matias seeking to polemicize with feminism as a communication strategy to ensure she obtains visibility in the media due to the value of conflict?
— Is the category of gender suitable for the pursuit of the political and ideological goals of Chega, helping to consolidate the party's conservative background?
— To what extent is the strategic nature of an anti-feminist stance problematic when, at the same time, one claims to support women's causes?
— Has there been an appropriation of women's causes, by bringing them into the

1 Joana Amaral Dias was intervening as a resident commentator on political and social issues at CNN Portugal.
2 Rita Matias on CNN Portugal with Joana Amaral Dias https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=333653425289342&_rdr

framework of anti-feminism and drawing a distinction between the defence of women and feminism?

Methodologically, we propose an exploratory study centred on the interventions of Rita Matias in these two different arenas, the Parliament and the media.

— On the one hand, we see parliamentary debates as permitting more complete and comprehensive argumentation, which makes it possible to observe populism as it manifests in the various dimensions identified in the literature (ideology, logic / discourse, communication style and mobilization strategy).
— On the other hand, we see the media as an essential dimension, assuming that contemporary populism is framed by an increasing mediatization of politics and an intensification of the performative nature of this sphere (Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Moffitt 2014; Moffitt 2016).

We identify the discursive elements in which Rita Matias develops her concept of anti-feminism, expresses her view of the social order with family at its core, describes the family model she advocates and proposes measures to fight a "demographic winter" and boost the birth rate.

Attention is paid to whether these discourses conform to the three key features of populism as a style: i) an appeal to the "people" versus the "elite"; ii), including "bad manners"; iii) constantly evoking the crisis and collapse of an era (Moffitt and Tormey 2013; Moffitt 2016).

Populism and gender

Feeding on citizens' discontent, populism has been spreading all across Europe and presenting several common features that contribute to its popularity (Mazzoleni, 2008, 2015). What populism shares with democracy is the people. The people are the object of desire, dispute and controversy. That is because, in a democracy, the people are the citizens who have rights and duties and are equal in the eyes of the law. Populists have a different view of the people, whom they equate with the nation and the sharing of the same territory, the same traditions and the same history (Pasquino, 2005) and see as a homogenous mass.

Populists do not represent the people — they see themselves as the people. They present charismatic political leaderships and media skills, which earn them high visibility in that realm. As argued by Mazzoleni (2008, p. 50), "personal charisma and media savvy have thus played a significant part in the origins and subsequent construction of populist movements". As Helder Prior supposes (2022), the media have been essential for the omnipresence of populism in contemporary democracies. Populist politicians present themselves as speaking for the people, embodying their frustration, anger and outrage. This means they must be remarkable news makers, as argued by Rita Figueiras (2020).

However, the media sometimes interpret and offer a critical tone to the statements and attitudes of populists. This has happened particularly in election coverage or regarding the pandemic (Martins, Cabrera and Cunha, 2021, 2022). André Ventura and his party Chega escaped unscathed from this criticism because, as noted by Mazzoleni (2008) and Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999), the media are associated with elite structures and thus discredited by populists in anti-media and anti-journalist narratives, especially on social media, which are their communication platforms of choice.

The interplay between gender and populism, however, is complex and not always obvious, and it remains an understudied area in the research related to populism. For Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015, p. 17), conceptually, "populism has no specific relationship to gender; in fact, gender differences, like all other differences within 'the people', are considered secondary, if not irrelevant, to populist politics". The fundamental difference is established between the "people" and the "elite".

However, Dorit Geva (2020), in her research on Marine Le Pen, the leader of the Rassemblement Nationale (France), argues that contemporary populism is deeply gendered and that it is crucial to distinguish between populism and radical-right ideologies within the populist radical right. She contends that "the gendered symbolism and performances structuring contemporary populism help tie together nativist radical-right ideologies to populism" (Geva, 2020, p.2). According to Dietze and Roth, certain peculiarities of the populist right-wing discourse "stage gender as a central arena for polarizations" (2020, p. 10). They also assert that "the emergent field of research on right-wing populism and gender has a strong affinity with the already established research on masculinity related to the subject" (Dietze and Roth, 2020, p.13).

As argued by Geva (2020, pp. 7-8), "heightened hegemonic masculinity is essential to the performance of populism as a contrast to 'effeminate' political elites".

It cannot be ignored that "populist actors do not operate in a cultural or ideological vacuum. So perhaps it is the national culture and broader ideology used by populists that determine their gender position", contend Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015, p.17).

At a time when, as emphasized, populism is spreading all across Europe, it is possible to observe an identitarian background that cuts across all populist parties and is reflected in their principles and political strategies. Anti-feminism and anti-gender are brandished as a significant part of their fight against liberalism and democracy. The aim is to establish an ultraconservative agenda under the guise of defence of a majority oppressed by a corrupt elite (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022).

Dietze and Roth (2020, p. 7) point out that "a common feature can be observed in all current versions of right-wing populism: an 'obsession with gender' and sexuality in different arenas. Populist actors conjure up the heteronormative nuclear family as the model of social organization, attack reproductive rights, question sex education, criticize a so-called 'gender

ideology,' reject same-sex marriage and seek to re-install biologically understood binary gender differences".

The conservative background of the Chega party

Chega was founded in Portugal in April 2019. It is ideologically defined as a populist radical-right party, nationalist and anti-establishment. It is a member of the European alliance Identity and Democracy, a group of nationalist radical-right political parties represented in the European Parliament[3].

In the parliamentary election of 30 January 2022, it obtained very favourable results. In the previous parliamentary election, in October 2019, the year of its foundation, it had won 1.29% of the votes and elected one MP[4], its own leader. In 2022, although the Socialist Party (PS) achieved an absolute majority, followed by the social democrats (PSD), Chega went from being represented by only one MP to having a parliamentary group with 12 MPs and a representation of 7.18%.

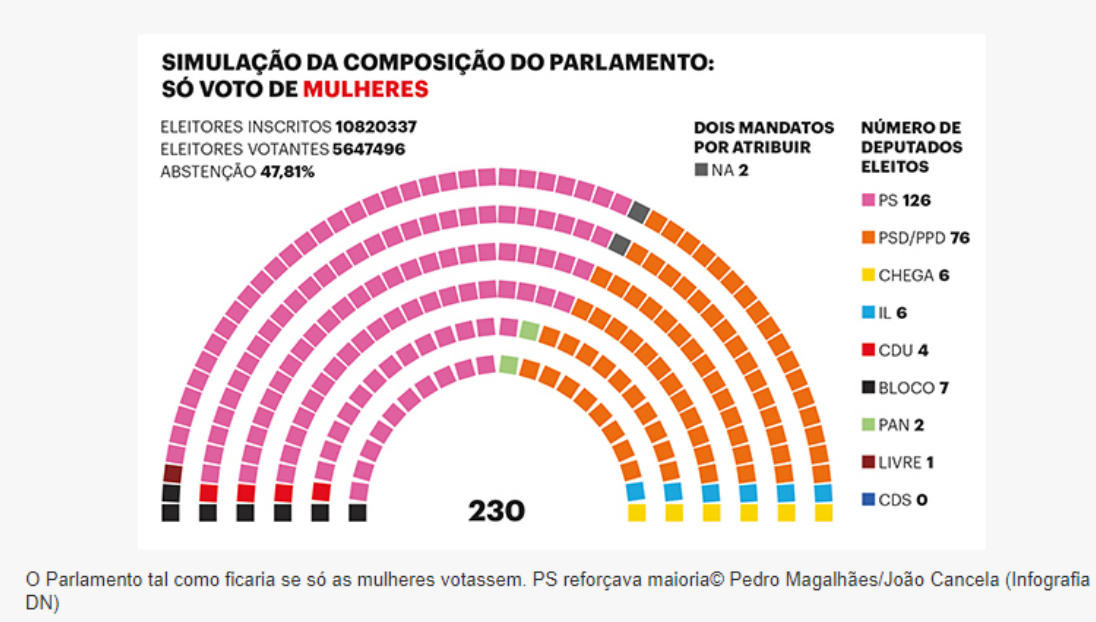
Chega's results, and those of a new political force called the Liberal Initiative (IL), were both part of a reconfiguration of the Portuguese political party framework, as they contributed to bringing to an end the parliamentary representation of the People's Party (CDS-PP), a right-wing party with a Catholic affiliation that was traditionally part of the governance arch through an alliance with PSD. By becoming the third and fourth political forces in terms of parliamentary representation, those parties pushed the Left Bloc and the Communist Party, respectively, to fifth and sixth place in the Assembly of the Republic, with a very reduced parliamentary presence, of four (4.4%) and six MPs (4.3%), respectively.

From the point of view of the electoral behaviour in the 2022 parliamentary election, the available data point, for the first time, to a gender gap — 'a female vote more left-leaning than the male vote', in the interpretation of Pedro Magalhães and João Cancela (João Pedro Henriques, DN, 20-2-2022). Chega was the most masculine of all the parties, with almost two in three voters being men (*Ibidem*).

3 This group includes Lega (Italy), Rassemblement National (France), Alternative für Deutschland, Dansk Folkeparti (Germany), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austria), Vlaams Belang (Flanders), Svoboda a prímá demokracie (Czech Republic), Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (Estonia), Perussuomalaiset (Finland) and Partij voor de Vrijheid (Netherlands).

4 It participated in the 2019 European elections as part of the Basta! coalition [TN: also meaning "Enough"].

Figure 1
Simulation of the composition of the Parliament — Only with the votes from women Socialist Party would strengthen its absolute majority



Source: João Pedro Henriques, Raio X eleitoral. Quem fez a maioria absoluta do PS?, *Diário de Notícias*, 20-2-2022

These analyses align with the patterns already identified in the research. According to the analysis of Geva (2020), voters' sex is considered important in predicting support for radical-right wing parties, which are more likely to garner support among males.

Chega is characterized by a conservative ideological background that is expressed in the values it supports. Looking at its political programme[5], one of the principles affirmed in it is "the inviolability of human life in all its stages and dimensions, with all the legal consequences resulting therefrom".

The family is placed "at the core of its view of society"; it is "the basic structure of Society"; the "meaning of social life depends, first and foremost, on the Family". One of the limits for the State is the "Limit deriving from the recognition of the core role of the family as the primary instance of Power", where "the essential part of the autonomy in the relations between Society and the State should be concentrated, meaning that only what cannot be decided nor executed within the family shall fall within the scope of the successively broader higher levels".

5 See https://partidochega.pt/index.php/programa_politico/ Accessed on 1 November 2022.

"Family and Births" is one of the chapters of the programme, containing a proposal for the creation of a "Ministry of Family", with the aim of "restoring the family, as well as its role in the education of children, to the central position that belongs to it".

The concept of family that is defended is the "natural" one, "based on an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, a psychosociological and socioeconomic reality that predates the State and is historically stable and humanly irreplaceable. In it, life and a host of affective, emotional and behavioural balances, as well as knowledge, tradition and heritage, that support the dignity and prosperity of individuals and of the peoples are transmitted".

The birth policies are based on nativism, in the sense that they are exclusive to "cases where both parents are Portuguese nationals born in Portugal and officially residing in Portugal".

This orientation of their programme denotes permeability to the formal positions of the Catholic Church concerning "gender ideology". In the Vatican's 2019 document "Male and Female He Created Them"[6], about ideology of gender in education, the central nature of the biological difference between men and women is highlighted. In it, it is argued:

> The disorientation regarding anthropology which is a widespread feature of our cultural landscape has undoubtedly helped to destabilise the family as an institution, bringing with it a tendency to cancel out the differences between men and women (...). The context in which the mission of education is carried out is characterized by challenges emerging from varying forms of an ideology that is given the general name 'gender theory', which denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family.

In a study about the Portuguese case, Alberta Giorgi (2020) notes that, even though the majority of the population is Catholic, very progressive legislation about gender equality has been adopted. In Portugal, there is a strict separation between matters of the State and matters of the Church (Cabrera, 2021). Matters pertaining to sexuality, procreation and women's rights have become horizontal and mainstream. However, Giorgi wonders how gender equality has transformed into "gender ideology" in Portugal. The main point of contention relates to the provision of sex education in schools and, specifically, to the subject of Citizenship Education, which is seen as a way of indoctrinating young people. The parallel drawn between the positions of the Vatican and those of the Episcopal Conference of Portugal is quite pertinent. On November 2013, the Episcopal Conference of Portugal (CEP) published a pastoral letter on the subject, stating that gender ideology, a term that the hierarchy of the

6 See https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_po.pdf

Catholic Church adopted that year, aims to cause an "anthropological revolution", relegating sexual identity as a "natural and biological condition" to a secondary place. Alberta Giorgi (2020) traces the course of the events that were most debated in the Portuguese Parliament and shows how, at the same time, the Church, which until then had refrained from any direct intervention on the matter, made a move through the CEP and raised support among various conservative Catholic groups, especially after the election of cardinal Manuel Clemente as Cardinal-Patriarch of Lisbon. These civil society groups, stemming from different Catholic trends, were the ones that led the process, contesting the measures related to gender equality.

This debate served as a great source of inspiration for populist right-wing political parties, which took these ideals as their own, defending them in polarized speeches around feminism and gender.

Chega and its militants reject the concept of gender and all it contains in terms of diversity, characterizing it as an ideology, emptying it of all the scientific *repertoir* in which it is grounded, disregarding international institutions such as the United Nations, the Word Health Organization and the European Union, contesting human rights and opposing the fundamental freedoms of choice and bodily autonomy. Florence Rochefort (2020, p.10) notes that this attitude cannot be dissociated from the Catholic fundamentalist identitarian reactions that oppose sexual freedoms and fuel forms of populism looking to restore what is considered a legitimate hegemony. Adversaries of the concept of gender "interpret it as 'totalitarian theory' that promotes the erosion of fundamental values like those of the family and the natural social order".

Within the scope of the Portuguese law of 2019 that lays down "the right to self-determination of gender identity and gender expression and the right to the protection of each person's sexual characteristics", the parliamentary groups of PS and BE, in September and October 2022, respectively, submitted draft legislation to regulate the implementation of this legal act in school settings. On Chega's *website* the following invitation is permanently available:

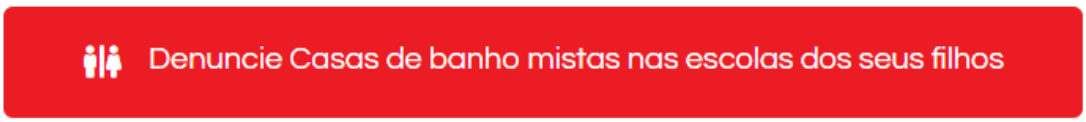


Figure 2
Message posted on Chega's website: "Report mixed bathrooms in your children's schools"

Some of Chega's legislative initiatives during the legislature that began in 2022 focus on matters of education and teaching. As an example:

— Draft law 101/XV/1: New legal rules on teaching and on the organization of the subject and curricular area of Citizenship and Development (CD) in basic and secondary schools (1-6-2022)
— Draft Resolution 72/XV/1: Recommends to the Government that the name Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação*) be changed to Ministry of Schooling (*Ministério do Ensino*) (1-6-2022)
— Draft Resolution 96/XV/1: For the immediate suspension of the use of Caderno PRESSE 3º ciclo [TN: teacher's handbook] in all public and private schools (9-6-2022)

Empirical study

As mentioned above, the 12 MPs elected by Chega include only one woman, Rita Matias. During the election campaign, the youngest MP in the Chamber presented herself as an anti-feminist, labelling feminism as a "Marxist movement" that puts men and women in opposition to each other.

Our aim is to understand the relevance and meaning of these statements within the broader context of the connection between gender and populism and the extent to which this stance contributes to the definition of Chega's political and ideological project. In order to establish this connection between gender and right-wing populism, we propose to explore two aspects that we assume to be intertwined:

a) The gender performance that structures the populist style;
b) The ideology

To implement this approach, we conduct, still at an exploratory level, an empirical analysis centred on Rita Matias, MP, and based on two axes:

1. Selection of extracts from parliamentary speeches delivered since the start of the current legislature (15th), on 29 March 2022, until 30 September of the same year, on the subject of women, women's rights, education, gender ideology and family. An attempt is made to take note, within the political discussion of specific themes and daft legislation, of the elements that characterize the political programme of Chega regarding these matters.
2. Analysis of news items focused on the person, ideas and parliamentary speeches of Rita Matias (1 February to 30 September 2022). In analysing these items, the

thematic focus is on matters related to the concept of feminism, women's rights, gender ideology and family.

Analysis of parliamentary speeches (29 March to 30 September 2022)

The analysis of the parliamentary speeches given by Rita Matias focused on the plenary sittings of the Parliament; the selection of speeches was carried out by consulting the issues of the Official Journal of the Assembly of the Republic (*Diários da Assembleia da República* [TN: hereinafter, "DAR"]).

Considering the research question, six main themes were identified in these speeches: Violence against women (13-4-2022); Proposal for a menstrual leave (24-5-2022); "Demographic winter" (25-5-2022); Prostitution (1-6-2022); Gender ideology (8-4-2022; 7-7-2022); Female political leadership (24-9-2022).

Sexual violence against women

In the sitting of 13 April 2022, Chega takes part in the debate about the harassment of women, raised by a case reported at the School of Law of the University of Lisbon and stemming from an initiative of the party Nature (PAN). Chega notes that it is the first time there is a discussion on "women" in the current legislature.

> Allow me to strengthen the confidence of the Portuguese people and say that if they could count on André Ventura before, now they will be able to count on 11 more MPs, who will not treat women as mere objects, unlike other political forces seated here (...) that claim to advocate for women but look at them only when it is convenient and through their limiting and sometimes perverse ideological lenses (DAR no. 5, 14-4-2022, p. 43).

Proposal for a menstrual leave

In the debate of 24 May 2022, Chega rejects PAN's proposal to create a 3-day menstrual leave.

> "As the Honourable Member [Inês Sousa Real, of PAN] well knows, women are already discriminated against for getting pregnant and becoming mothers, and now we are adding another factor of discrimination due to the fact that they menstruate (...). Therefore, all I want to say is that Chega is available to support any type of measure that is not indiscriminate and does not result in wage

> loss. Can I tell you something, Honourable Member [Inês Sousa Real]? We do not need your foolish feminism that harms women to be the party that presented, under this State Budget, the highest number of proposals about women. Shame!" (DAR no. 15, of 25 May, pp. 13-14).

"Demographic winter"

In the session of 27 April 2022, on the occasion of the 25th of April celebrations, she declares:

> The "demographic winter", "which is spreading like a pandemic and compromising, at an alarming rate, the pillars of our society, which are the family, the Homeland, Europe. (...) The decline of births in Portuguese maternity hospitals is the real structural challenge to the sustainability of our Country, to the preservation of our people, to the preservation of our culture and of our national identity".
>
> "(...) People try to muddle up concepts such as total, natural and migratory demographic change".

She proposes different types of assistance to families, for example, for young people buying a house and exemptions from Social Security contributions for companies that hire women with children up to the age of 3 (only the mothers are mentioned). "It is urgent to adopt policies that favour life and family" (DAR no. 16, of 26 May, p. 59).

Prostitution

In the session of 1 June 2022, she speaks about a petition to legalize prostitution in Portugal and/or decriminalize pandering, provided it does not involve coercion:

> "I cannot but stress the incoherence of some of the people in this Chamber, who claim to fight against the objectification of women but turn a blind eye to a system in which women are categorized and valued either more or less based on their age, their race, their appearance and their physical characteristics. Let it be very clear that what we are pointing our finger at is this incoherent political class and, above all, a class that, over the last decades, was only able to hand out misery" (DAR no. 19, 2-6-2022, pp. 60-61).

Gender ideology

In her very first parliamentary speech, on 8 April 2022, about the situation of young people, Rita Matias, MP, states the following: "Young Portuguese people do not need money to be wasted on schools subjects of an ideological nature" (DAR, no. 4, 9-4-2022, p. 55). And months later, when referring to the case of the Mesquita Guimarães family, in which the parents did not allow their two children to attend Citizenship and Development classes:

> "Freedom of education does not exist in Portugal, at least not for everyone. Indeed, while we accept that some ethnicities and communities watch their young people abandon school in the name of tradition, the fact is that the Public Prosecution Service is following in line with the Ministry of Education, a line of bullying and persecution to a family whose only request is for their children not to be exposed to indoctrination in Portuguese schools" (DAR no. 31 7-7-2022, pp. 55-56).

Female political leadership

Regarding the results of the parliamentary election in Italy on 25 September 2022, which brought a victory to the Fratelli d'Italia party, led by Giorgia Meloni, the MP criticizes PAN for not having a word to say about the election of

> female leaders — which is ironic, coming from someone who calls herself a feminist —, claiming that these results, which, I stress again, stem from the will of the people, have brought gloomy times for democracy. (...) Hypocrisy also exists when the Honourable Member calls herself a «feminist» but is incapable of celebrating the historic achievement of Italy having, for the first time, a woman in the office of Prime Minister. (DAR no. 43, 29-9-2022 — p. 65; p. 69).

Summary of the analysis of the parliamentary speeches

A thematic analysis of the parliamentary speeches of Rita Matias reveals a discourse that is built on opposition, on an aggressive and contentious style, framed by ideas of structural crisis and disruption. Chega brings solutions to restore order and stability.

The substantive and symbolic elements of the genderized performance that were identified could almost be outlined, like in our exercise in the table below, as a representation of a "civilizational clash".

Figure 3
Polarized gendered performance

"We" (Anti-feminists)	"They" (Feminists)
Confidence	Contribute to the objectification of women, turn women into mere objects
Protection of victims of sexual crimes	Other political forces claim to be advocates for women, but use them as means to an end Limiting and perverse ideological lenses
Legislative initiatives against domestic violence	Proposals for legislation (such as the 3-day menstrual leave) worsen discrimination and inequality against women
Party that presents the most proposals concerning women	Foolish and hypocritical feminism
Policies favourable to life and family	Incoherent political class, hands out misery
Births — key to preserving the people, culture and national identity Core: "natural" family, native, rejection of the immigration-based demographic change	Elites who are permissive with certain "ethnicities and communities" in the name of tradition, but impede freedom of education for native families
Companies should receive benefits for hiring mothers with children up to 3 years of age	Anti-democratic left (does not accept election results that it does not like)

Analysis of the news coverage (1 February to 30 September 2022)

For the analysis of the journalistic representations of Rita Matias and her ideas, only interviews and news reports were considered; opinion pieces were excluded. In total, in the period between 1 February, the day after the parliamentary election, and 28 September 2022, 12 news items (9 news reports and 3 interviews) were found for the purposes of this analysis.

Figure 4
News coverage of Rita Matias (1 February to 30 September 2022)

Journalistic medium	News report	Interview	Themes	Journalist's tone
Diário de Notícias	3	1	Parliamentary debate: menstrual leave	Neutral
Expresso	1		Brief profile of the new MPs	Neutral
Notícia ao Minuto	2	1	The anti-feminism of Rita Matias	Neutral
Observador		1	Criticism of the PSD government; anti-abortion stance; pro-life under any circumstance	Cynical and provocative
Público	2		1. The central theme is higher education; the Minister concludes with criticism of the radicalism of students' parents regarding the classes on citizenship and development, the radicalism of Rita Matias 2. Parliamentary debate: amendments to the sentencing range for crimes against animals. Rita Matias criticizes the radicalism of PAN's proposal, claiming they have more concern for animals than for older persons	Neutral
Visão	1		Describes the interview that Rita Matias gave to Observador and to Diário de Notícias and the difference of opinion between her and Inês Sousa Real	Neutral
Total	9	3		

Three main thematic areas were identified in the news coverage: Anti-feminism; Voluntary termination of pregnancy; Conservative Catholic background.

Anti-feminism

The question "What is your anti-feminism?" is asked by *Diário de Notícias* in an interview:

> It is recognizing that feminism is a movement that has brought women certain social achievements — and I have no desire to go back on those achievements — while also recognizing that society was moving in that direction and therefore those achievements do not belong exclusively to these movements. The greatest antagonism lies in it being a Marxist movement, a movement that divides society into «us» and «them». It is a movement that often puts women and men in opposition to each other. First of all, because it compares them, and we must recognize that a man and a woman have different natures.
> **Since you don't feel anti-feminist, if I were to call you a feminist what would I have to add?**
> You would have to add without having any sense of inferiority in relation to men and without wishing for an equal role, but rather for an equitable role. There are rights that men have that I don't want to have. And there are still steps that need to be taken for women to enjoy greater recognition in society. Saying that we don't identify with the movement does not make us anti-women, like people often say to me. I could not wish for others what I don't wish for myself; a woman's place is wherever she wants it to be.
>
> *Diário de Notícias*, Rita Matias: "There are rights that men have that I don't want to have", 11-7-2022

Voluntary termination of pregnancy

In an interview, the newspaper *Observador* confronts Rita Matias with extreme cases related to the voluntary termination of pregnancy:

> **"What if a 10-year-old child becomes pregnant as a result of a rape, should she have an abortion?**
> I am deeply sorry and find it is absolutely regrettable and reprehensible that a child must face such a situation, and that makes me think of the work that we must still do to promote human dignity. What I do really want to emphasize is that often people try to push Chega into this image of a backwards party that is against women, but through our work in the Assembly of the Republic we have presented alternatives".

Observador, Should a 10-year-old child who was the victim of a rape carry on with the pregnancy? "I am pro-life and feel sorry if a child is not allowed to be born", 8-7-2022

Conservative Catholic background

In the aforementioned interview she gave to *Diário de Notícias*, the MP acknowledges this conservative Catholic background:

> I grew up in a Christian family that continues to profess faith in God and to live a life based, as much as possible, on the values that were passed on to me. A right-wing conservative, yes, without foolish nostalgia (*saudosismo*), a word often used here, without any longing for the past nor any attachment to old regimes, but indeed with respect for traditions and a willingness to acknowledge that society has known other ways of organizing itself, where respect was also present, where women also had a role to play.

Diário de Notícias, Rita Matias: "There are rights that men have that I don't want", 11-7-2022


MENU 19

Diário de Notícias

INÍCIO / POLÍTICA

Rita Matias: "Há direitos que os homens têm que eu não quero"

É a única deputada do Chega. Tem 23 anos, é conservadora de direita, católica praticante, crítica dos movimentos feministas de "índole marxista" e admiradora do VOX.

Figure 5
Interview of Rita Matias to *Diário de Notícias*: "There are rights that men have that I don't want to have"
Source: *Diário de Notícias*, 11-7-2022

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the parliamentary speeches and of the news coverage in which Rita Matias appears as the protagonist, it is possible to outline this candidate's profile. Her statement of anti-feminism still during the campaign prompted a debate about this issue in the media and in Parliament and the development of an angle that the Chega party had not yet explored. More specifically, the analysis makes it possible to identify, on the one hand, a political performance that embodies a substantive representation as a woman and, on the other, the strategic appropriation of female, feminist and gender identity issues within the framework of an anti-feminist stance.

Populism is present in the discourse of Rita Matias, in which there is a "we" (the people) versus the "elite". The elite that she attacks or clashes with is also seen from a gender

perspective — the elite represents a "hypocritical, foolish" feminism. It is in polarized positions regarding gender that anti-feminism is associated with gender ideology, the defence of the heteronormative family and nativism.

Therefore, the anti-feminism of Rita Matias was strategic in that it raised the subject and then took small steps back that consolidated her arguments: the need for other voices that defend women from a conservative perspective; making an abusive generalization of the reality of feminism, it pushed feminists into the realm of Marxist theories and practices, to which it is clearly opposed.

There is a very obvious strategy aimed at breaking the indissociable link between feminist movements and women's causes, by politically appropriating certain claims pertaining to the female universe, which are recontextualized within the framework of anti-feminism. Rita Matias seeks to represent a certain modernity, but one that is conservative. It does not antagonize the achievements of equality (social and cultural context), "a woman's place is where she wants it to be", but it restricts that progress to a view of the family that is conservative and based on traditional gender roles. The binary view of gender reasserts the biological difference between men and women as a foundation, revealing the influence of the formal positions of the Catholic Church in Chega's ideological background.

In Parliament, Rita Matias speaks on behalf of women who are vulnerable, for instance, in situations in which they are victims of domestic abuse, guaranteeing that Chega will not treat them as mere objects, unlike other political forces that are limited by their ideological views cleverly associated with feminism. As an example, Rita Matias opposed the proposal of PAN's MP, Inês Sousa Real, to create a menstrual leave. With truculent language, she emphasizes the worsening of the wage gap and of other instances of discrimination and affirms that Chega is available to adopt any measures that will undo situations of inequality. It is on subject of the low birth rate in Portugal and in the European countries that she introduces the subjects of Education and Schooling. This MP, much like her party, contends that Education should be separated from Schooling. While the latter should be the State's responsibility, the former should lie exclusively with the family, viewed as a core social institution. This is the ground for the fierce opposition to the subject of Citizenship Education taught in basic and secondary education, which is perceived as a process of indoctrination based on what she categorizes as "gender ideology". Thus, she expresses solidarity regarding the court case involving the Mesquita Guimarães family, using gender as "symbolic glue" (Kováts/Põim 2015). The "demographic winter" also serves as a pretext for suggesting links to the "great replacement" theories and supporting the nativist ideals reflected in the party's programme.

Thus, presenting herself as a woman (and a young person) and as a representative of this group, Rita Matias embodies the connection between a clearly defined gender perspective, the populist style and the radical-right ideology of Chega. The emergence of a genderized populism under these specific circumstances is instrumental in supporting the foundational

aspects of Chega's political programme, which has obtained visibility in the media due to the values of conflict and controversy. This argumentative logic is repeated whenever she speaks in the Chamber.

Dietze and Roth (2020, p. 13) argue that almost all formations of the populist right claim to stand for a "new" and "other" modernity. Traditional values are rearranged into a new narrative — and Bauman's concept of "retrotopia" (2017) is applicable, expressing the visions of the future anchored in an idealized past. Simon Schleusener (2020, p. 185) explores the notion of "retrotopian desire", prominently articulated in the arena of gender, where it resonates with antifeminist impulses, the idealization of old-school masculinity, and calls for a return to traditional gender norms.

We also bear in mind what Dietze and Roth anticipated, that an important dimension of the research on right-wing populism is the observation that populism is not only concerned with gender as an issue itself but also with gender "as a meta-language for negotiating different conditions of inequality and power in the context of current struggles over hegemony, and over resources forged by neoliberalism" (2020, p. 8).

The main driver of the visibility of Rita Matias in the media was her statement of anti-feminism still during the election campaign, and the fact that she was elected shone a spotlight on this statement. Nevertheless, the news coverage is sporadic and essentially focused on her anti-feminism, more than on the parliamentary debates. She is not a central figure in the party, unlike the leader himself, who usually concentrates all the protagonism in the media. Most of the news items that focus on Rita Matias come from other sources, such as a news agency, replicating what is on the agenda, except for the interviews. In the items included in the corpus of news reports, the journalists' tone is generally neutral; this trend is broken only in interviews, where there is a direct interaction with the protagonist. In fact, only one interview, in which the goal was to know more about the person and her ideas, exhibits a more confrontational style.

It is possible that the news coverage around Rita Matias is inconsistent and, on a more substantive level, with little scrutiny of anti-feminist statements, of pro-life stances and views opposed to gender diversity that are made absolute, and that thus potentially attack well-established fundamental values related to human dignity and human rights, liberties and guarantees.

In our opinion, it would be relevant to extend the empirical analysis to hybrid media environments and even unmediated communication contexts, in online platforms such as social media, where radical-right wing parties communicate directly with their supporters and obtain strong engagement.

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Parliamentary speeches

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DAR no. 19, 2-6-2022, 1.ª Série, pp. 60-61 (XV Legislature)
DAR, no. 4, 9-4-2022, 1.ª Série, p. 55 (XV Legislature)
DAR no. 31 7-7-2022, 1.ª Série, p. 55-56 (XV Legislature)
DAR no. 43, 29-9-2022, 1.ª Série, p. 65; p. 69 (XV Legislature)

Media, Corruption and far right-wing populism: notes on journalistic coverage of political scandals in Brazil[1]

Media, Corrupção e Populismo de extrema direita: notas sobre a cobertura jornalística dos escândalos políticos no Brasil

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Abstract: The chapter discusses the relationship between media, corruption and populism as it relates to the Brazilian political experience. First, we present a brief historical review on the issue of corruption in the Brazilian public agenda. Second, we discuss (through a bibliography review) recent news reports on corruption, identifying the elements and strategies that helped sway public opinion toward the populist moral agenda of the Brazilian extreme right. In the third section, we look at some of the strategies and mechanisms behind anti-corruption discourse, and how it was key towards Bolsonaro building his populism on the concept of discursive opportunities. Lastly, we outline a research proposal that considers important categories of populist communication that can be used in future analyses of news reports on allegations and corruption scandals.[1]

Keywords: media, corruption, populism, right, political scandal

Resumo: O capítulo discute a relação entre media, corrupção e populismo no que se refere à experiência política brasileira. Em primeiro lugar, apresentamos uma breve revisão histórica sobre a questão da corrupção na agenda pública brasileira. Em segundo lugar, discutimos (através de uma revisão bibliográfica) notícias recentes sobre corrupção, identificando os elementos e estratégias que ajudaram a influenciar a opinião pública para a agenda moral populista da extrema-direita brasileira. Na terceira secção, analisamos algumas das estratégias e mecanismos subjacentes ao discurso anti-corrupção e como este foi fundamental para que Bolsonaro construísse o seu populismo com base no conceito de oportunidades discursivas. Por fim, apresentamos uma proposta de pesquisa que considera categorias importantes da comunicação populista que podem ser utilizadas em futuras análises de notícias sobre denúncias e escândalos de corrupção.

Palavras-chave: media, corrupção, populismo, direita, escândalo político

1. Introduction

The issue of corruption appears from time to time in the Brazilian public agenda and, depending on how political actors use it to debate opponents, can become a successful weapon to win political-discursive battles. The objective of this this chapter is to hold an exploratory discussion on the media, corruption, and recent right-wing populism in Brazil.

Our main argument is that news coverage of corruption allegations and scandals is, for the most part, an important aspect for swaying public opinion toward the populist moral agenda of the Brazilian extreme right, as pointed out by Mazzoleni (2014) when describing the emergence phases of populisms. Swaying opinions provided a discursive opportunity that Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters took advantage of, using social and political actors to frame mechanisms in populist communication and create narratives to convince and mobilize supporters (Dias, Von Bulow and Gobbi, 2021). This chapter should be understood as an exercise of theoretical approach of key findings in Brazilian bibliography on news coverage of corruption allegations in light of recent bibliography on far right-wing populism. This approach

1 A first version of this chapter was published (in Portuguese) in the Annals of 31 Annual Encounter of the National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication — Compos (2022).

helps to understand the processes behind the politicization of corruption as a public issue (Bobba and Hubé, 2021) and its instrumentalization (Mancini, Marchetti and Mincigrucci, 2017; Mancini and Gerbi, 2018; Rispoli and Vanucci, 2022) in contemporary Brazil.

This text is divided into three parts: the first part presents a brief historical review on corruption in the Brazilian public agenda. In the second part, we discuss some aspects of recent news coverage of corruption allegations, identifying elements that help sway public opinion toward the populist moral agenda of the Brazilian extreme right. The third section highlights some of the strategies and mechanisms behind anti-corruption discourse and how it is an essential element for building Bolsonaro's populism. Lastly, we reflect on the approximation between Brazilian studies on corruption allegations and scandals in the media and some key categories for understanding contemporary right-wing populism.

2. Corruption in the Public Agenda[2]

Recent history in Brazil shows an ongoing debate on corruption throughout practically all of the country's republican governments. Getúlio Vargas was accused of corruption which led to an unprecedented crisis in government and to his death, at the same time that Jânio Quadros held a broom in a symbolic attempt to sweep away the corruption. One of the justifications for the military coup in 1964 was the fight against corruption and subversion (synthesized in the idea of the "communist danger"). Years later, the Civil-Military dictatorship came to an end under accusations that it was practicing what it claimed to be fighting: corruption (including torture, censorship, and other forms of disrespect for human rights).

Fernando Collor de Mello used the fight against corruption and the "hunting of the maharajas" as his main topics of interest in the 1989 presidential elections, ultimately defeating Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Two years later, the topic was once again in the headlines of newspapers and magazines as the Collor government was linked to cases of corruption, which eventually led to his *impeachment* in 1992.

The issue of corruption was also present in news coverage of political crises, especially between 2005 and 2006 with the "Mensalão Scandal" involving Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration. There was also the so-called "Petrolão Scandal" (during Dilma Rousseff's administration) which was one of the pretexts for the *impeachment* process that removed Rousseff from office in 2016, and the Car Wash Operation investigations, which ended with former president Lula imprisoned and thus preventing him from running for the 2018 presidential elections. The fight against corruption was also an issue used by far-right candidate

2 Part of this section was previously developed by Guazina (2011).

Jair Bolsonaro in his presidential campaign in 2018 to mobilize supporters and gain votes across the country, as we will look at later.

The anti-corruption discourse that Bolsonaro employed on digital social networks in 2018 had been advancing even before Rousseff's *impeachment*. This kind of discourse was a driving force behind the mobilization and organization of heterogeneous movements in the streets of large cities, spreading feelings of social dissatisfaction (Tatagiba, Trindade and Teixeira, 2015). As Dias, von Bulow and Gobbi (2021) show in their analysis of the growth of right-wing digital activism in Brazil, non-institutionalized and (at that time) unfamiliar right-wing groups such as Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL) and Vem pra Rua (VPR) got a name for themselves after protesting and using collective framing mechanisms to create narratives in favor of overthrowing the Rousseff government and supporting the new Michel Temer government. At that time, anti-corruption discourses expressing anti-PT and anti-left feelings also expressed *anti-establishment* and anti-political sentiments, which played a key role in digital mobilization and bringing conservative, reactionary and extremist groups from the margins to the center of the public scene.

An important aspect of the discourse from these groups is the moral judgment used in public manifestations about government corruption. In addition to the common attributes associated with corruption (bribery, kickbacks, theft or favoritism), Filgueiras (2008) states that there is also a moral aspect at play since corruption only occurs when a norm is violated or disobeyed. As such, corruption is measured in terms of the norm that was disobeyed. Even still, one needs to have defined norms and values about what can or cannot be done in a particular situation — whether public or private, in the state, or in everyday life.

The author further proposes that corruption is inherent in the field of politics because the consensual values and norms that institutions are built on can only be legitimized if corruption exists (p. 21). The author goes on to say that conceptions about values and norms are put to the test in moments of political crisis. In terms of political and social changes, institutions and society are at odds with one another. It is here that values or norms are assessed, balancing out normative values and interests.

However, for Filgueiras (2008), this perspective is not consensual. The most common approach to the problem in contemporary theory is to understand corruption as an economic-liberal aspect. Through this lens, corruption is the result of a "natural" and structural inefficiency of the state and its bureaucracy, which can only be corrected by tough punishments, reducing its size, and reducing the state's role in society. Politics, in this sense, is inherently linked to wrongdoing and corruption is its most common practice. On the other hand, the market would be the best institutional space for the construction of public goods, as it is supposedly governed by efficiency.

This type of approach is shared by many journalists looking for allegations of corruption, especially within the state apparatus in Latin America countries, where a mix of professional values, distrust of politics, and a focus on official sources still influence political news production (Waisbord, 2000)[3].

Filgueiras (2008) warns of the risk that comes with understanding politics and the state as being inherently full of wrongdoing and corruption. Taking the legitimacy away from the political field as a space where societies debate and arrive at consensus would be akin to removing from the state its power to represent society. The depoliticization of politics can lead to more and more crises and result in less time and reflection for implementing effective control mechanisms, thus contributing to the emergence of politicians who claim themselves to be "saviors of the homeland".

On the other hand, the author also notes that just the visibility of corruption, coming from ineffective investigations or hasty denunciations by the media, can also lead to crises in the legitimacy of democracy itself. According to Filgueiras (2008), this generally occurs when large scandals are made public, such as media political scandals, where the individual (or individuals) who reported on the scandal usually represent a political party that was not involved in said scandal or had ceased to participate in it. To a large extent, it is about measuring strength and recovering power by using media visibility. Revealing a hidden story often serves to rearrange political strengths and overlooks what happened. Filgueiras (2008; 2009) and other authors point out that denouncements of corruption can be used as a tool for internal debates in the political field, while also generating an expectation that a punishment will be given. This can lead to an overall feeling of distrust on democratic institutions and impunity.

When analyzing the media's role in reporting on corruption, Mesquita, Moisés and Rico (2014) identify opposing dynamics in terms of the effect that news coverage has on the development of reported cases and on the decision-making bodies belonging to institutions. These authors believe that although Brazilian studies on the relationship between journalism and corruption show that news coverage on the subject, in general, promotes frameworks or encourages anti-political views of politics, denunciations made by the media can also motivate institutions to be more active and lead to increased social *accountability* (p. 199).

There are effects of denouncing allegations of corruption and scandals, which depend on a complex set of factors. For Cunha (2015), the perception of corruption depends on the information conveyed by the media. She believes that the way the media covers political

3 For the purpose of this reflection, we start from the belief that the politicization of corruption, that is, when the theme is used as a weapon in political disputes by political agents, can also be used by the media itself as an interested agent. In everyday practice, the investigation of allegations of corruption in journalism is soaked in ambiguities and alignments. On one hand, this work is an expression of the journalistic mission and ethos (Waisbord, 2000), on the other, it carries within itself the marks of disputes between multiple actors, whether from the political field or from journalism.

corruption is linked to the routines of journalistic coverage and its structural conditions that define the scheduling processes and the dynamics of selection and management of the public positions of political actors. Mesquita, Moisés and Rico (2014), after analyzing media coverage and institutional responses to the denouncements published during Collor de Mello's government and the "Mensalão scandal", pointed out that the dynamics of news reports about corruption in democratic Brazil is cyclical and determined by the great national scandals. Mesquita, Moisés and Rico (2014) also allude to the close relationship between how much (or how little) attention the topic gets by the media, and then how much attention it is given by institutions and the public.

This is where allegations of corruption become the focus of news coverage and political events, showing the vulnerability of actors and institutions and the emergence of new figures on the political scene. This topic can then be strategically explored by political actors and the media to build agendas and sway opinions to certain agendas, especially agendas that attack the *establishment* or have a moral nature to them, thus favoring populist politicians.

3. News coverage of scandals and the mediatization of corruption

The vast extent of news coverage on scandals involving the Workers' Party made corruption, in the words of Vaz and Velasco (2017), a "classifying idea" in Brazilian politics which helped destabilize the democratic regime and allow Jair Bolsonaro to be elected in 2018. To expand on our argument, we went back and looked at the literature on news coverage of the main corruption scandals in Brazil over the last decades. The authors point out a number of elements that make up a sociocultural framework that shapes various political discourses and affects the journalistic values of reporting on corruption, shaping political discursive opportunities (we shall look at this later) that favor right-wing populism, especially Bolsonarism.

In his classic work on how political scandals arise in the public sphere, sociologist John Thompson (2002) argues that the visibility of the media is a determining factor for a scandal in mediatized societies. This is due to the fact that, unless it is made public, a scandal will go unseen. And this is why it is important for us to study works on the visibility that the media gives to corruption. As a result, public disapproval of a scandal is not the result of a natural development of the scandal, it is often stimulated by the way in which media visibility operates in relation to the case and the agents involved in it.

Based on this understanding, the Brazilian media, when disclosing cases of corruption, ends up creating moralistic public anger and leads to feelings of denial and the criminalization of politics, especially in relation to certain actors and party groups, such as the Workers' Party. This makes room for popular rhetoric to settle in and encourage the division of society into antagonistic poles ("good citizens" and "enemies of the homeland"), not to mention a

discourse advocating for anti-politics, anti-system, and religious morality which shaped the far-right discourse in 2018 (Guazina, 2021; Araújo and Prior, 2021)[4].

In this sense, it is important to recall the extensive news coverage of Operation Lava Jato (Car Wash) by Brazilian *mainstream* media, an investigation that started in 2014 in the Federal Court of Paraná and went on to become the largest anti-corruption operation in recent Brazilian history. The investigation ended up reshaping the political scene with the *impeachment* of former president Dilma Rousseff and the arrest of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Both events directly impacted the outcome of the 2018 election campaign and its subsequent developments, such as former judge Sergio Moro being named Minister of Justice in the Jair Bolsonaro government and the exoneration of former president Lula by the Federal Supreme Court.

Looking critically at the literature on media coverage of corruption in contemporary Brazil, especially for the two main scandals in the last twenty years (Mensalão and Petrolão scandals), we can see that the issue of corruption is reduced to simplified approaches of a certain media logic on politics. Politicians and actors in the justice system were elevated to the category of "dramatis personae" (Thompson, 2002) in scandal coverage. These actors were subjected to a narrative that often labeled them as "heroes" and "villains" in news coverage that trivializes justice and criminalizes political activity.

In this sense, Araujo (2018) points to the magazines Veja and Época and how they "made heroes" out of the Supreme Court ministers who voted to convict the accused in Criminal Action 470 (more commonly known as the "Mensalão scandal"). These magazines paid particular attention to the Brazilian Supreme Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal — STF) judge rapporteur for this action, Joaquim Barbosa, who was framed by Veja as "the poor boy who changed Brazil". Similarly, Queiroz (2018), who spent ten years studying magazine coverage from Brazilian mainstream media, argues that these media tried to label the public image of Barbosa and Sérgio Moro as "judge-heroes". He claims that the reason the press represented these agents of the justice system in this way may be related to "the high appreciation for figures coming from non-democratic institutions, supported by hierarchy and rigid normative control, and in opposition to elected political actors", a perspective that describes Brazilian democracy as being "at a sensitive time and conducive to populist uprisings" (Queiroz, 2018, p. 242).

In terms of how the accused were represented in scandals such as these, several studies have shown that news coverage presumed their guilt before the court of public opinion

4 We highlight that it is not necessarily the strengthening of control institutions that paves the way for authoritarian threat and democratic erosion, but rather the dysfunctional way in which this strengthening can occur (See Avritzer and Marona, 2017). Some examples (and consequences) of this can be seen in the judicial bodies, its politicization (Salgado, 2018), the clash with the perspective of legal neutrality (Engelmann, 2016), the violation of the constitutional principle of innocent before proven guilty (Meyer, 2018), or in the case of media, the occasions in which journalistic organizations act as agents of political destabilization (Van Dijk, 2017).

had ruled on the matter, as is evident in news headlines that labeled the Mensalão trial as "the event of the century" or mentioned "Brazil's expectations" in the face of "the trial of the biggest corruption scandal in the country" (Araujo, 2018). When analyzing Folha de S. Paulo's coverage of the same event, Biroli and Mantovani (2014) argue that, under the pretext of plural coverage, the São Paulo newspaper formed a kind of moral narrative about the case by "normalizing the facts", always siding with the prosecution. In turn, any news coverage that did not immediately condemn the accused was described as merely "reacting to the facts", the stories were considered "biased" and acting out of "self-interest". These other versions of the story were not seen as possible other versions of events.

The frameworks identified in the media coverage of corruption are similar to some elements mapped by the literature that show a certain modus operandi of Brazilian political journalism, such as news coverage based on moralization and depoliticization with a strong partisan bias (Rubim, 2000; Biroli and Mantovani, 2014). On the other hand, a number of other authors show that news coverage tends to explore conflict as a structuring category of news reports (Motta and Guazina, 2010), investing in personification and permanent pressure on the institutions of democracy and scandal as discourse orientation strategies (Feres Junior and Sassara, 2016). These elements tend to somewhat strengthen the media's adversarial stance on politics, claiming journalistic credibility through its alignment with certain values of political culture, such as strong distrust in politics and the institutions of democracy (Guazina, 2011), grounds that have been extensively explored by populist rhetoric (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017).

We cannot properly understand news coverage of scandals such as "Mensalão" and "Petrolão" without considering the varying degrees of criticism and opposition the mainstream press has expressed for the Workers Party since the first presidential elections under the 1988 Constitution. In addition to the constant anti-Workers Party sentiment expressed by mainstream media during the elections, Gagliardi and Feres Júnior (2019) address the media's behavior in non-election periods using a daily analysis tool of journalistic coverage based on the valence methodology, also used by Azevedo (2018). These authors also point out that, since 2014, the Workers' Party has, for the most part, received negative media coverage in comparison to the coverage given to the PSDB party.

Sá and Silva (2020, p. S93) point to the Car Wash scandal where Brazilian state officials such as prosecutors and judges (acting as relevant political actors in the political scenario) ended up producing a conservative "political grammar" in the name of fighting corruption, something these groups see as a threat to the nation. In their "grammar", the investigative efforts into complaints made against the Workers' Party administration gained more visibility, and was expressed through anti-establishment, anti-politics and anti-left sentiments. Sá and Silva (2020; 2022) also describe how the plethora of daily news coverage ended up turning the Car Wash scandal into a "TV series".

Lagunes, Odila and Svejnar (2021) point out that the Car Wash scandal has become a controversial issue in public debate. On one hand, there are those who believe the Car Wash investigation was a successful operation in the fight against corruption, on the other hand, criticism of political instrumentalization (by prosecutors, judges and the media itself) assumed greater importance and political persecution, particularly directed at the Workers' Party, began to appear in public and academic debate.

The elements arranged in this part of the text are part of the destabilization process of Brazilian democracy, which the mainstream press has contributed to. This goes against a consensus found in international literature, and identified by Albuquerque (2021), that says strengthening the control institutions would neutralize the authoritarian threat posed by populism. Providing an "elitist" understanding of democracy, Albuquerque reflects on the crises in contemporary Brazil, especially the Car Wash scandal, and argues that the Brazilian experience seems to challenge that theoretical relationship. This is because over the last decade, Brazil has seen institutions that should be promoting control (the press, judicial departments, parliament, and the Public Prosecutor's Office) acting instead as mechanisms that destabilize the government[vi], thus creating "political and discursive opportunities" that the Bolsonarist extreme right was able to use in the 2018 elections.

4. Discursive Opportunities: Jair Bolsonaro's use of corruption

In this chapter, we argue that Brazilian public discourse, historically linked to the issue of corruption, and the recent emergence of Jair Bolsonaro can be looked at from the theoretical perspective of discursive opportunities, which itself was built on the basis of another pre-existing perspective — political opportunities.

Since the 1970s, researchers who have dedicated their lives to studying the emergence of protests have discussed the idea of a structure of political opportunities. For Eisinger (1973), this structure is more about the fertile ground that has brought forth an environment of protests. These conditions help to assess the extent to which groups are able to gain access to power and influence the political system. In his study on protests, McAdam analyzed the black movement between the 1930s and 1970s, and proposed that it came about through a convergence of internal and external factors. He said, "the emergence of widespread protest activity [was] the result of a combination of expanding political opportunities" (McAdam, 1982, p. 2). According to Eisinger and McAdam, the increase in protests comes about through changes to the structures of political opportunities, which occur from specific events or broader social processes and weaken assumptions that underlie the political status quo.

Then there is Kitschelt (1986) whose comparative study on social mobilization proposed that the structures of a nation's political opportunities were a set of variables which

helped to explain the various strategies and impacts of antinuclear movements in European countries and the United States. For him, structures of political opportunities "are composed of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents of social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others" (Kitschelt, 1986: 58).

Subsequently, Koopmans and Olzak (2004) combine the concept of political opportunity structures (McAdam, 1982; Kitschelt, 1986) with theories of media influence in order to discuss ways in which public discourse can provide mobilization opportunities. They propose the notion of discursive opportunities in the public sphere and its role in amplifying certain responses (this can be seen in their case study on right-wing violence in Germany), defining "discursive opportunities as the aspects of public discourse that determine the chances of a message being spread in the public sphere" (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004, p. 202). The three elements of discursive opportunities that their study focuses on are: distinct public visibility, resonance and legitimacy. Their view is that since most people get their information about politics from the media, media attention is a relevant issue as it acts as a mediator between the structures of political opportunities and the action of movements.

It is important to note that the media is not a homogeneous source. In addition to traditional media, which is made up of heterogeneous outlets (although similarities can be found in their political discourse), new media has been the subject of recent studies on its impact on politics and democracy. Lipinski and Stepinska (2018) used the concepts of opportunity structure and discursive opportunities as a theoretical basis to talk about the recent emergence of two right-wing politicians in Poland (Paweł Kukiz and Janusz Korwin-Mikke) in the era of social media. They analyzed the political, economic, and social contexts, the visibility given by traditional media, and the widespread use of social media. They also compared the content of messages to political expectations and preferences, and the radical agenda of the far-right Law and Justice Party (PiS), which helped to spread and legitimize populist demands.

The perspective of discursive opportunities is useful when thinking about the Brazilian case. On the one hand, there are differences, such as the fact that extreme right parties in Brazil have not achieved great relevance. On the other hand, there are similarities, such as the role of traditional media, the widespread use of social media, and the correspondence of the content of the messages expressing society's expectations and political preferences. We believe that Bolsonaro knew how to take advantage of the discursive opportunities that presented themselves in order to benefit his election. These opportunities had several determining elements such as (a) the space occupied by anti-corruption discourse, which at this moment is fueled by anti-Workers' Party sentiments, (b) the management of social media, (c) the alliance with neo-Pentecostal churches in order to establish a religious profile, evident in Bolsonaro's campaign motto ("Brazil above all, God above everyone") and in the biblical epigraph that accompanied his government's proposal plan ("And ye shall know the truth,

and the truth shall make you free", John 8:32). In this chapter, we are interested in addressing the first element.

One aspect that suggests how Bolsonaro took advantage of the structure of discursive opportunities is the way he talked about corruption while serving as a federal deputy in the Chamber of Deputies in Brasilia. Elected as a councilor in Rio de Janeiro in 1988 and as a federal deputy in 1990, Bolsonaro served in the legislative house up until 2018, but he was not known for delivering anti-corruption speeches. According to the Chamber of Deputies website, Bolsonaro spoke publicly about corruption only 46 times between January 1991 and December 2018[5].

On the other hand, the anti-Workers' Party sentiment in the mainstream press, which spread political discourse across social networks before the current right-wing networks began to dominate the discourse, contributed to the rise of the new Brazilian right represented by Jair Bolsonaro (Feres Júnior and Gagliardi, 2019). The mainstream press' bias toward the Workers' Party goes back further than Lula's term in office. Several studies on news coverage of the elections have already shown bias in the 1989 debate (Porto, 2012; Albuquerque, 2013), the more frequent and favorable framing of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1994 (Albuquerque, 1994; 2013) and the special treatment given to Plano Real (Kucinski, 1998), the lack of news coverage in the 1998 elections, which again favored candidate Cardoso (Miguel 1999) and freed him from answering for the country's problems (Azevedo, 2000). News coverage of the 2002 elections however was an exception (Miguel, 2003; Aldé, 2003), not only because of the balanced coverage given to the main candidates, but also because of a consensus that was created around Lula (Biroli and Miguel, 2013). Nevertheless, the peace was not to last.

As of 2005, the "Mensalão scandal" was covered in-depth and often contained a moral dimension of politics in its discourse (Biroli and Mantovani, 2014). Anti-Workers' Party sentiments from traditional media have increased since then, covering a number of scandals, including Operation Car Wash, as mentioned previously in this chapter. Although mainstream media's coverage of Bolsonaro during his campaign was also predominantly negative, even negative coverage spreads populist messages (Lipinski and Stepinska, 2018), and the Workers' Party was the preferred target, especially in editorials which talked about Bolsonaro's progress.

The international media referred to the former candidate as an extreme right-wing populist during the 2018 campaign, labeling him a danger to democracy. The mainstream press in Brazil avoided using the terms 'populism' and 'extreme right' during the election year and portrayed Bolsonaro and the Workers' Party governments as equally committed to

5 Approaching DEM, Bolsonaro even invites convicts to government. Brazil 247, October 26, 2018. Available at: https://www.brasil247.com/pt/247/brasil/373155/Em-aproxima%C3%A7%C3%A3o-ao-DEM-Bolsonaro-convida-at%C3%A9-condenado-para-governo.htm

democracy. The Workers' Party was viewed as a proponent for corruption, which made the option to vote for Bolsonaro more acceptable, despite the fact that it would have been easy to poke holes in his anti-corruption discourse as, even as a candidate, his representatives included politicians who were being investigated for and/or convicted of receiving kickbacks.[6] These kinds of attributes describe more of an anti-Workers' Party candidate than an anti-system one. Bolsonaro's speech on corruption created a strong ideological opposition toward the left and the progressive agendas that had been developed in previous years.

In the 2018 election, Bolsonaro benefited from the mainstream media's narrative on allegations of corruption (which ended up criminalizing politics) and built his discourse on an 'us vs. them' mentality; the "us" referred to the "good citizens" and the "them" was particularly focused toward the Workers' Party and its supporters.

His discourse against corruption and the anti-Workers' Party sentiment expressed as a result characterized the intense political polarization in Brazil. During the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro's plan behind his anti-corruption discourse was to argue for political morality which could only be achieved through a technical government, one that would be free from any ideology. This obviously did not occur as Bolsonaro appointed large numbers of military personnel and other supporters to positions which they had no prior experience with or even understanding of.[7]

Once elected, Bolsonaro continued to use his anti-corruption message in his public statements. During his inauguration speech as President of the Republic in 2019, he stated that he had assembled a technical team for the government "without the traditional political bias that made the state inefficient and corrupt" (Diario do Congresso Nacional, p. 9). In a nationalist tone he talked about "Building a fairer and more developed nation requires breaking from practices that have proven harmful to all of us, that have tainted the political class and delayed progress. Irresponsibility has led us to the greatest ethical, moral and economic crisis in our history" (idem, p. 9).

In the same year, at his opening speech at the United Nations General Assembly, he argued that his government was putting a stop to corruption in general in Brazil.[8] Two years later, at the same Assembly, Bolsonaro stated that Brazil had gone "two years and eight months without any concrete case of corruption".[9] Although he continually tried to show how his government

6 A prime example was General Eduardo Pazuello at the Ministry of Health in the context of the covid-19 pandemic.

7 https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2019-09/presidente-jair-bolsonaro-discursa-na-assembleia-geral-da-onu

8 https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/noticias/2021/09/discurso-do-presidente-da-republica-jair-bolsonaro-na-abertura-da-76deg-assembleia-geral-da-onu

9 Survey of discourses that mentioned the words "corruption", "anticorruption" and "corrupt" given between 01/01/1991 and 12/31/2018 available at Discursos e Notas Taquigráficas (camara.leg.br) and at Discursos e Notas Taquigráficas (camara.leg.br). Last access on: 03/18/2023.

was breaking from the old policies, his government attempted on many occasions to dismantle the mechanisms that combat corruption, such as his recurrent attempt to interfere in inspection and control bodies such as the Federal Police, the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (Abin), and the Financial Activity Control Council (Coaf). In 2022, Transparency International delivered its report to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which drew attention to severe setbacks in the fight against corruption in Brazil[10]

5. Media, Corruption and Far Right-wing Populism: approaches to a research agenda

In this chapter, we discuss aspects of journalistic coverage on corruption allegations and scandals, and the role the Brazilian media plays in giving visibility to this issue. We argue that the way in which the *mainstream* media made corruption visible may have led to the discursive opportunities that made a candidate like Bolsonaro viable in the 2018 elections, and that got him elected as President of the Republic behind his fight against corruption campaign motto.

In this sense, by emphasizing *anti-establishment* and anti-political views, and by using strategies to depoliticize politics and practice personalism, dramatization, moral judgment and oppositional conflict at any cost, we believe that the journalistic coverage of corruption allegations and scandals may have inadvertently swayed opinions toward the populist moral agenda of the Brazilian extreme right.

This climate of opinion proved to be a discursive opportunity for anti-corruption speeches, something Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters strategically exploited. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Bolsonaro's government strategy was to mobilize the anti-corruption discourse from the perspective of moralizing politics and defending the constitution of a supposedly technical government made up of military personnel. What's more, the fight-against-corruption narratives Bolsonaro used to convince and mobilize his supporters on digital social networks involved anti-Workers' Party and anti-left wing rhetoric.

As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) remind us, major corruption scandals are fertile ground for cultivating populist sentiments. The moral aspect employed in these scandals by political actors like Bolsonaro is often covered in the media and fuels radical viewpoints against the opposition.

Political leaders also politicize issues on the public agenda by identifying problems and attributing the responsibility to their political opponents in the hopes of gaining an advantage

10 Índice de Percepção da Corrupção | Transparência Internacional (transparenciainternacional.org.br) Last access on: 03/18/2023

among the public (Bobba and Hubbé, 2021). Due to its easily identifiable moral content, corruption can be effortlessly exploited by populist politicians by attacking the elites in power and creating a climate of hostility towards those institutions that allow populists to present themselves as legitimate defenders of the people. (Rispoli and Vanucci, 2022).

In Brazil, the media agenda's goal of giving visibility to corruption and the popular backing of anti-corruption discourses, especially as of 2015 with the *impeachment* of Dilma Rousseff, can be seen as spaces in which values and populist communication strategies can be articulated using components of the populist index (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018): increasing hostility (us versus them), *anti-establishment* sentiment (in this case, anti-Workers' Party and anti-left wing) and simplification (or reductionism).

In this sense, the news coverage that presents these elements can be seen as populist. Mazzoleni (2014) points out that the populism of the media (media populism), even unintentionally, can end up favoring political populisms by providing discursive repertoires containing anti-political and *anti-establishment* sentiments, and by simplifying social problems or favoring coverage of certain political profiles.

On the other hand, social movements can also make use of these same elements when articulating frames and repertoires in political disputes. Dias, von Bulow and Gobbi (2021) talk about how five of the main right-wing activist groups used populist framing mechanisms on Facebook during the impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff to buckle down on the us versus them logic and circulate reductionist content about the political crisis. Their study shows how relevant the issue of corruption was in building what they call the "chaos narrative", and how these actors, who led the *pro-impeachment* campaign across social media and on the streets, had similar definitions of what the country's main problem (corruption), main culprits (the Workers' Party) and main solution (impeachment) were.

We draw attention to the fact that the elements found in the study — anti-corruption discourse linked to strong anti-Workers' Party sentiments — helped fuel *anti-establishment* feelings. These same elements were also identified in analyses of editorials and news coverage of the *impeachment* published by traditional media, something we draw a spotlight on in this text.

Finally, an interesting note is the number of Brazilian analyses conducted on the role of the media, especially journalistic coverage of corruption allegations and scandals, that identify elements of the populist index listed here without referring to this bibliography or without specifically discussing the findings from a reading linked to the key of contemporary right-wing populism. In this case, it should be taking in account the context of different roots of populism tradition and approach in Latin America and the historical constitution of the Brazilian political communication field (Sarmento, Massuchin and Mendonça, 2021; Albuquerque, Recuero and Alves dos Santos Junior, 2023). However, the characteristics of the recent far right-wing populist communication could be useful in this type of analysis toward a more accurate understanding of the mechanisms of political communication strategies in disruptive times of radical conflicts.

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News circulation between Social Networks and television in Portugal: a case study of populism in the 2022 parliamentary elections

News circulation between Social Networks and television in Portugal: a case study of populism in the 2022 parliamentary elections

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to examine the circulation of information between mass media, social media and television newscasts during the campaign for the parliamentary election in Portugal in January 2022. It begins with a presentation of the context in which the election took place and the political parties and agents involved. A review is made of the literature on the media and election campaigns and the changes, in political acts, brought about by the development of information and communication technologies. The concepts of circularity, hybridism and media populism (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018) are operationalized, based on the assumption that certain information, after going viral on social media, then circulates (Chadwick, 2013) on the mainstream media, repackaged by mediators and addressed to broad target audiences (Baptista, Fernandes & Fernandes, 2021). Based on an analysis of television news, an attempt is made to take note of the elements of communication associated with media populism (Mazzoleni, 2008), which become more prominent in news stories that reference social media. Content analysis was the chosen methodology, and the *corpus* is comprised of the news broadcast during the period of the election campaign, from 16 to 28 January 2022, in the free-to-air channels RTP1, SIC, TVI/CNN and CMTV.

Keywords: 2022 parliamentary election, television coverage of the 2022 parliamentary election, social media and parliamentary elections, media populism, Portugal

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a circulação de informação entre os meios de comunicação social, as redes sociais e os noticiários televisivos durante a campanha para as eleições legislativas em Portugal, em Janeiro de 2022. Começa-se por apresentar o contexto em que decorreu o ato eleitoral e os partidos e agentes políticos envolvidos. É feita uma revisão da literatura sobre os media e as campanhas eleitorais e as mudanças, nos atos políticos, provocadas pelo desenvolvimento das tecnologias de informação e comunicação. Operacionalizam-se os conceitos de circularidade, hibridismo e populismo mediático (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018), partindo do pressuposto de que determinada informação, depois de se tornar viral nas redes sociais, passa a circular (Chadwick, 2013) nos media *mainstream*, reempacotada por mediadores e dirigida a públicos-alvo alargados (Baptista, Fernandes & Fernandes, 2021). A partir de uma análise de notícias televisivas, procura-se dar conta dos elementos de comunicação associados ao populismo mediático (Mazzoleni, 2008), que se tornam mais proeminentes nas notícias que fazem referência às redes sociais. A metodologia escolhida foi a análise de conteúdo e o corpus é constituído pelas notícias emitidas durante o período da campanha eleitoral, de 16 a 28 de Janeiro de 2022, nos canais generalistas *RTP1, SIC, TVI/CNN* e *CMTV.*

Palavras-chave: eleições legislativas de 2022, cobertura televisiva das eleições legislativas de 2022, redes sociais e eleições legislativas, populismo mediático, Portugal

1. Introduction

On 30 January 2022, with the Covid-19 pandemic still ongoing but with lockdown restrictions already being lifted, a parliamentary election was held. As the election campaign was unfolding, more than 85% of the Portuguese population had already been vaccinated and there were several calls from civil society and political parties for the process of getting back to normal. It is worth recalling that the previous elections, local (26 September 2021) and presidential (24 January 2021), had taken place in an environment of strong restrictions on movement and contact; these measures impacted not only the news coverage but also the political campaigns, the electoral procedures and the way in which politics were communicated. This scenario forced media and political actors to put together innovative and original strategies for campaign coverage and interaction with voters. Overall, these strategies proved

to be efficient and consisted, respectively, of promoting debates and optimizing the use of the internet and social media (Baccini, Brodeur & Weymouth, 2021).

Simultaneously, from 2020 to 2022, the lockdown years in Western democracies, there was a strengthening of the role of the State and the adoption of presidential decrees and ministerial orders, often without a basis in the national constitutions. These measures entailed restrictions to civil and individual rights as well as to economic and labour activities. The mass media, particularly radio and television channels and mobile network operators, were not immune to these circumstances; there was a change in journalistic routines, practices and procedures that affected the behaviour of journalists; the operation of newsrooms; live transmissions; news reporting; interviews and studio organization (e.g., Lopes, F. et al., 2021; Cabrera et al., 2020; Cunha et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2021; Cádima & Ferreira, 2021, 2022).

In addition, during this period, democracy and freedom of expression indicators declined in most democratic societies, including Portugal, as shown by the reports of Freedom House (2021; 2022) and The Economist /Democracy Index (2021; 2022).

In the parliamentary election, which was held at the end of January 2022, campaigns and journalists "lifted their lockdown restrictions", as illustrated, for example, by the 7,600 kms travelled by the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista); the 4,000 kms travelled by the Left Block (Bloco de Esquerda); the 3,600 kms travelled by the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata) and the concentration of campaign actions in the streets; in markets and fairs; and in the most heavily populated cities and districts (Lourenço & Figueiredo, 2022).

Table 1
Frames from television broadcasts: parliamentary election campaign in a period of lifting of lockdown restrictions (January 2022)

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Rui Rio and Luís Montenegro, street campaigning in Espinho, TVI 22-1-2022

PS, street campaigning in Lisbon downtown, SIC, 28-1-2022

Left Bloc, street campaigning in Porto, SIC, 28-1-2022

CDU, street campaigning in Lisbon downtown, RTP1, 27 -1-2022

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

At the same time, and following a growth in the number of users, there was an increase in internet and social media use during the pandemic. The result was an election campaign, on social media, that included not only small parties, as had been the case in previous elections (Lopes, 2022), but also the parties at the centre of the political spectrum and their candidates, as shown in the studies published by MedLab (Cardoso, 2022; 2022a).

It is assumed that, in Portugal, television continues to be the great mass medium,[1] even though more than 85% of Portuguese people have internet access and around 65% have one or more social media accounts[2]. Against this backdrop, political communication is still quite focused on the information that is broadcast on television, not just through campaign coverage but also in debates, interviews and even entertainment shows.[3] At the same time, parties, candidates and voters are intensely active on social media, notably since the 2019 parliamentary election (Lopes, 2022), in which the so-called small parties, such as the Liberal Initiative (Iniciativa Liberal) and Chega (meaning "Enough"), stood out. In the 2022 parliamentary election, this trend became more pronounced for all parties, including those at the centre of the political spectrum, such as the Socialist Party. Not being the object of this study, it is important to mention that in these elections, the daily publication of polls contributed to the campaign conflict and tension. The results obtained in the empirical study also reflect this condition.

In addition, there was an increased circulation of political information between social media and television, a phenomenon attested by the posts made by political actors and groups of citizens in the various social media platforms[4] and, in the opposite direction, by the images and comments evoked by news anchors and journalists in television newscasts. This circulation in a loop, which is the research focus of this article, takes place in a context of hybridization of political journalism, understood as an activity that mobilizes and incorporates a mainstream and a digital media framework (Baptista, Ferreira & Ferreira, 2021).

The campaign for the 2022 parliamentary election involved nine political parties represented in Parliament; they were, in alphabetical order based on the name of their leader: André Ventura, from Chega (meaning "Enough"); António Costa, from the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista — PS); Catarina Martins, from the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda — BE); Francisco Rodrigues dos Santos, from the Social Democratic Centre (Centro Democrático Social — CDS); Inês Sousa Real, from People-Animals-Nature (Pessoas-Animais-Natureza — PAN); João Cotrim de Figueiredo, from the Liberal Initiative (Iniciativa Liberal — IL);

1 See: https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Covid_III_FINAL.pdf; https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Estado-dos-Media_FINAL_12out.pdf

2 See: As 10 redes sociais mais usadas em Portugal em 2022 — 4gnews; https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/DNRPT_2022_FINAL_14Jun.pdf

3 See: https://www.marktest.com/wap/a/n/id~2858.aspx; https://www.erc.pt/pt/a-erc/noticias/erc-analisa-cobertura-televisiva-das-eleicoes-legislativas-2022/

4 See: Legislativas2022_24Jan (iscte-iul.pt)

Jerónimo de Sousa, João Ferreira and João Oliveira, from the Unitary Democratic Coalition (Coligação Democrática Unitária — CDU/PCP); Rui Rio, from the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata — PSD) and Rui Tavares, from Livre (meaning "Free"). During the campaign, there were two events that changed political party campaigns. First, the daily release of poll results, which displayed voting trends that were later shown to have little reliability, sparking a discussion about the constraints and strategies they impose on campaigns and candidates. [5] Second, and looking now at the research topic of this article, there was, for the first time in an election campaign in Portugal, a phenomenon of circulation of messages between social media and television newscasts, which clearly illustrated how the elements of media populism contaminate politics (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018).

The *corpora* analysed includes the news stories related to the campaign that were broadcast in the free-to-air channels RTP1, SIC, TVI/CNN and CMTV, a pay-per-view television, between 16 and 28 January 2022, paying special attention to the televised news stories that had social media, notably Twitter, as a reference. Throughout this article, an answer will be sought for the following questions: 1) what is the volume of political information that circulates between social media and the prime-time television newscasts of free-to-air channels; 2) which candidates and parties are most associated with this process; 3) what characteristics recognized as media populism can be found in news stories (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018).

2. From the television news coverage of election campaigns to the circularity of political information

There is a vast international bibliography on the role of television channels in covering election campaigns that looks at these acts of democracy from different angles. The goal of campaigns is to make certain political actors and themes stand out and emphasize the differences between programmes and proposals and, at the same time, to influence the setting of the agenda, attracting the attention of the media and voters. For these purposes, the media, and especially television channels, due to the audiences they mobilize and the power of image, are a great vehicle for an election campaign. The election campaigns of the 20th century corresponded to an era of mass communication, of mass media, in which the press, the radio and television communicated directly with the public, in a vertical form of communication originating in a transmitter, an all-powerful medium. Within this context, television, as the

5 See: *Público*, Tuesday 1 February 2022, Dossier Legislativas 2022 (https://www.publico.pt/2022/01/31/politica/noticia/costa-maioria-absoluta-sondagens-provavelmente-nao-empresas-1993772)

main communication device, tends to set the rules, principles and agendas that give parties and candidates visibility before the voters. Furthermore, political agents tend to optimize strategies and agendas to generate attention and acceptance among the mass media, to gain voters and supporters.

A landmark in election campaign studies is the work of journalist T. H. White (1961) on the Kennedy versus Nixon election, in which the television strategy employed by the first candidate contributed to him being elected President of the United States. In the 1980s and 1990s, the interplay between these different political protagonists was the subject of numerous studies on election campaigns. Among them were, for example, the works of Patterson (1980) and Graber (1997) on the mass media and elections in the United States; and the staging of election campaigns through the creation of a political show, advertising and tabloidization (e.g., Edelman, 1988; Gurevitch & Kavoori, 1992; Jamieson, 1996; Esser, 1999). The expansion of the American election campaign model, based on the so-called Americanization of politics (Elebash, 1984), also became a central theme for the studies on political campaigns in European countries (e.g., Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch & Waever, 1991; Hallin, 1992; Schönbach, 2001; Wilke & Reinemann, 2001; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Pippa Norris (2000) identifies, in the United States, three phases in election campaigns, defined by communication technologies. A first phase, from the mid-19th century to the 1950s, when radio and television were at the heart of the campaigns; a second phase, in which television dominated, and which goes all the way to the 1990s, depending on the technological advances of each country; and a third phase, when the internet and social media gradually moved to the centre of attention of the political marketing in election campaigns.

In the United States, a pioneer of online political communication, the 2004 presidential campaign, which opposed George Bush to John Kerry, is considered to have been the first instance of a mass use of their functionalities, such as blogs, to raise funds, mobilize supporters and convey information (Williams & Tedesco, 2004). This evolution, which was felt in all other American presidential elections, gradually incorporated other devices and platforms, such as YouTube, email, Twitter and WhatsApp, achieving greater visibility in the Donald Trump campaign, in 2016.

Despite the hopes that many academics and citizens placed on the potential of the Internet and social media to strengthen democracy and the participation of citizens in electoral acts (e.g., Norris, 2003), from a point of view of horizontal communication (Dahlgren, 2005) reality seems to point to other evidence. First, parties still prefer a top-down communication with citizens. Second, horizontal communication seems to occur primarily among peers. A third aspect emphasizes the fact that citizens interact through comments and react by expressing emotions, while political controversies occur in parallel, outside the scope of the parties, in other platforms and with other tools. Finally, political campaigns are often subject to manipulation, through fake news and misinformation.

In Portugal, due to the political and media constraints associated with the fall of the dictatorship and the implementation of democracy (1974) as well as the modernization of the media and education systems, in the 90s, the studies on election campaigns, from the media's perspective, became consolidated at the beginning of the millennium, as a field related to political science studies. Thus, those empirical studies began in the first decade of the millennium, with works that sought to capture the patterns of news coverage in the press and television, in various election campaigns, either local, parliamentary or presidential (e.g., Serrano, 2005 and 2006). Given the constraints mentioned above, studies on the role of the internet and social media in election campaigns date from the same period and, further to the expectations they raised around the democratization of the electoral processes (e.g., Canavilhas, 2009), they point to a growing sophistication, mainly from minority parties and their leaders, in the use of social media (Lopes, 2022).

This change in the media ecosystem, produced by the expansion of the internet and digital technology, made multiple communicational resources available to political actors. At the same time, it created new forms of political communication, in which the hybrid nature of the formats, the contamination of languages — oral, visual, auditory and aesthetical — and technology intersect (Chadwick, 2013).

Political campaigns are temporary in nature, which means that the context and the strategic environment in which they take place shape the nature and the instruments of communication of the candidacies, especially in the official stage of the campaign. Hence, political and media actors have adjusted, over the past few acts of democracy carried out in Portugal, to pandemic and post-pandemic constraints.

From the point of view of the mainstream media, for example, the campaigns carried out in 2020–2022 included multiple debates between candidates and parties, especially on television, with unusual audience levels (Cision, 2021; Rádio Renascença, 2022). On the side of the political actors, at the peak of the pandemic the election campaigns abandoned street actions. Rallies and street campaigning were replaced with meetings with small groups of citizens and online contacts, making full use of the internet and social media. In this context of lockdown, only the far-right party kept and promoted rally dinners and campaign activities, which involved a large number of supporters and were truly a challenge to the authority of the State and the sanitary measures put in place. By contrast, looking, for example, at the presidential election campaign, where there was increased momentum on social media,[6] candidate Ana Gomes created a cycle of online conferences on YouTube, while BE's candidate Marisa Matias closed her campaign with an online rally. The campaign of the Liberal Initiative (IL), on the other hand, was based on multiple media devices, from a cross media

6 See: presidenciais 2021 — redes sociais performance — FOXP2

perspective. In that same election, candidate Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the incumbent president, was the only one without a social media presence (Sousa, 2021).

Table 2
Frames from television broadcasts: presidential election campaign during lockdown

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, *podcast* with Daniel Oliveira, SIC, 11-1-2021

Marisa Matias (Cinema S. Jorge, Lisboa), RTP1, 18-1-2021

Ana Gomes in an online session, RTP1, 18-1-2021

Tiago Mayan Gonçalves , Campo Pequeno, SIC, 11-1-2021

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

3. Circularity of information and media populism in political communication

The circularity of political information between television and social media during election campaigns was noted in the United States in 1992, in the presidential campaign that elected Bill Clinton as president of the United States. However, it was at the end of the second millennium, with the first election of President Barack Obama (2008), that the circulation of information between media became more prominent and led to greater synergies in political communication.

In 2016, Rita Marchetti and Diego Ceccobelli (2016) described, in an article published in the journal *Journalism Practice*, the interconnection between television and Twitter in the election campaigns in Italy, pointing out the continued dominance of television as the medium preferred by Italian voters to obtain information. Referring to the work of Hallin and Mancini (2004) and the media system models proposed by those authors, Marchetti and Ceccobelli stated that Twitter, and the other social media platforms, did not challenge the primacy of television. At the same time, they agreed with Chadwick (2013) by arguing that this

does not preclude the existence of a hybrid model of political communication, which feeds on information from, and feeds information back to, social media and television, based on reconfiguration and collage; it lives within a *loop*; it goes viral on social media; it expands through television news, then comes back to social media, and so forth.

Baptista, Ferreira and Ferreira (2021), in a study on hybridism between the digital communication of political parties and digital journalism in Portugal, analyse the relationship between the activity of six political parties with seats in Parliament[7], and their respective leaders, on Instagram and the news coverage made of that activity in the four main television newscasts of free-to-air channels.[8] The authors found growing momentum in the communication flows between social media, televised news coverage, political parties and citizens. They also emphasized that it is possible to "see distinct uses and narrative strategies in social media and television channels" and to notice a dialogue between the content posted by politicians and political parties on Instagram and the television newscasts. This dialogue tends to support the communication strategies of political parties and, when something goes viral online, to echo it on television newscasts, returning to Instagram afterwards.

Going beyond a mere observation of the circularity of information between media, the Italian researcher and professor Gianpietro Mazzoleni has, from the end of the last century, produced work in collaboration with other researchers with the goal of mapping the characteristics of the media and their impact on Italian society, especially on political communication. These studies point to the existence, starting at the end of the 80s — when market deregulation began in Europe —, of a media populism that cuts across entertainment, political information and communication. According to this author, media populism emerged in and centres on television, a device that competes for the attention of the viewers, who are increasingly demanding when it comes to stimuli, and for audiences, who are increasingly disperse. The commercial approach of television, which is dependent on attracting advertising and obtaining profit to survive, promotes a type of programming, whether in entertainment or in political news, that tends to favour sensationalist formats and elements, with the goal of attracting audiences and increasing profit. Therefore, exciting, eccentric and spectacular stories are promoted, and charismatic, exuberant characters, capable of facing different stages and audiences, are highlighted.

The development of the media system and the growing discontent with political parties on the part of citizens, who look to populist leaders as an alternative to the establishment, led to the emergence, in the 1980s and 1990s, of a convergence of interests: the media seeks

7 Parties with seats in Parliament in the 14th legislature (2019–2022): Socialist Party (PS); Social Democratic Party (PSD); Left Bloc (BE); Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português — PCP); Social Democratic Centre (CDS); and Chega.

8 Jornal da Noite (SIC); Telejornal (RTP1); Jornal das 8 (TVI); and CM Jornal (CMTV).

audiences; populist leaders seek supporters; and both act in search of popularity and visibility. While the aim of the former is to increase audiences, as a result of commercial considerations and the expansive context of neocapitalism, the goal of the latter is to attract followers, in a political scene marked by the collapse of traditional parties and a growing dissatisfaction with democracy. Populist leaders have made use of media considerations, while the media have used languages, discourses and formats and the leaders themselves to boost their audience. The road towards convergence, mimicry and close links between the *mainstream* media and populist leaders started in television and in formats like the reality show and the talk shows, establishing a colloquial style of communication based on simplicity; emotions; common sense arguments; everyday language; the use of citizens/viewers as actors and extras, spreading a simplified, individualistic and egocentric view in society. In the news, this commercial approach had the consequence of building a momentum that prioritized sensationalist information criteria, alongside charismatic political actors, always endowed with considerable communication skills. The characteristics of this media system produced, in Western democracies, an environment favourable to the emergence of populisms and to the expansion of a populist style of political communication, which spread and became amplified on social media.

There is also a propensity, even among parties and actors from unquestionably democratic groups, to employ populist communication styles, given the level of mediatization of political institutions and the consumption habits of the voters. Thus, the use of impassioned speeches became common, based on a style that resorts to exacerbated emotion; a colloquial language register; slang; and the deconstruction of institutions, laws and hierarchies as well as established scientific knowledge (Ostiguy, 2009). These characteristics tend to contaminate journalists and news anchors who work in the field of politics. The expansion of this style of political communication is boosted both by a digital ecosystem based on social media and mobile networks and by the mediatization carried out by that entire system to disseminate continuous messages of political, economic and social crisis (Casara, 2019).

With the expansion of social media, at the start of the millennium, the circular nature of this style and these characteristics of populist political communication became stronger. It should be noted that the unmediated nature of social media, where each user is at once producer and disseminator, affects not just the hybridism and circulation but the style of political messages. It is also worth noting that the circulation of content is associated with the conditions and operation of big technological companies (BigTec), which own and manage social media platforms; they keep in place protocols and policies for algorithm control and private data processing, without regulation from democratic instances. For this reason, the architecture and nature of social media platforms, which are based on a design that optimizes for and encourages certain types of consumption, promotes an algorithmic populism (Maly, 2022) supported by the compulsive use of social media.

In this complex process of circulation of political content, an interplay is established between two media frameworks — the one derived from the mainstream media and the one inherent to social media —, with a view to making the most out of the potential of technology and of the target audiences to be reached. On the one side, the framework of the mainstream media remains, supported by all-powerful mass media, with the capacity to select and format content, and mediators such as journalists, commentators, content editors and others. Furthermore, this framework has geographic bases for the production, distribution and consumption by audiences, i.e., it is aimed at a territory, audience segment and specific cultures, where language could be an important factor of aggregation. On the other side, the framework of social media spreads across multiple dimensions as regards the production and distribution of content and of users and consumptions. From this perspective, while the production is individualized, personalized and unmediated, the distribution and consumption take the form of message sharing between users, particularly among groups of peers and individuals that, *a priori*, accept specific types of content. At the heart of this second dimension are the networks of sociability that develop the feeling of belonging to groups of peers, creating bubbles marked by emotional factors, loyalty to the group and collective solidarity shared by followers, fans, contributors and posters of content.

At present, the media framework put in place by social media seems to have definitively contaminated the circulation of political information among the various media, often exacerbating the most extreme elements of that communication. Therefore, there is a prevalence of extreme and polarized bubbles, which are the result of cases of virality, promoted by the algorithmic architecture materialized in the intensity of the liking, linking, posting, reacting, commenting and sharing.

It is important to stress that the establishment of a direct relationship between transmitters and receivers through digital technology has made it possible to strengthen unmediated political communication while also intensifying disputes and conflicts to attract the attention of the mainstream media. From the first perspective, social media contributed to the democratization and political participation of citizens and to give visibility to politicians, especially those for whom, for a host of reasons, it is more difficult to attract the attention of the mainstream media during election campaigns. With an eye on the mainstream media, particularly on television channels, political actors try to make their messages go viral on social media in order to reach national newscasts and subsequently return, with increased visibility, to social media. At the same time, on social media, citizens organize themselves, spontaneously and not always consciously, into groups of supporters and groups of detractors and contribute to making the disseminated content go viral.

In the empirical study presented herewith, the analysis falls on the second phase of this process: when a candidate's political message, after becoming viral on social media, is reconfigured as a news story on television newscasts in the context of the coverage of a

parliamentary election campaign. To allow for a better understanding, general data about the television coverage of the campaign are presented below, followed by the identification, recording and characterization of the news stories that reference social media.

4. Empirical study: general data about the parliamentary election campaign[9]

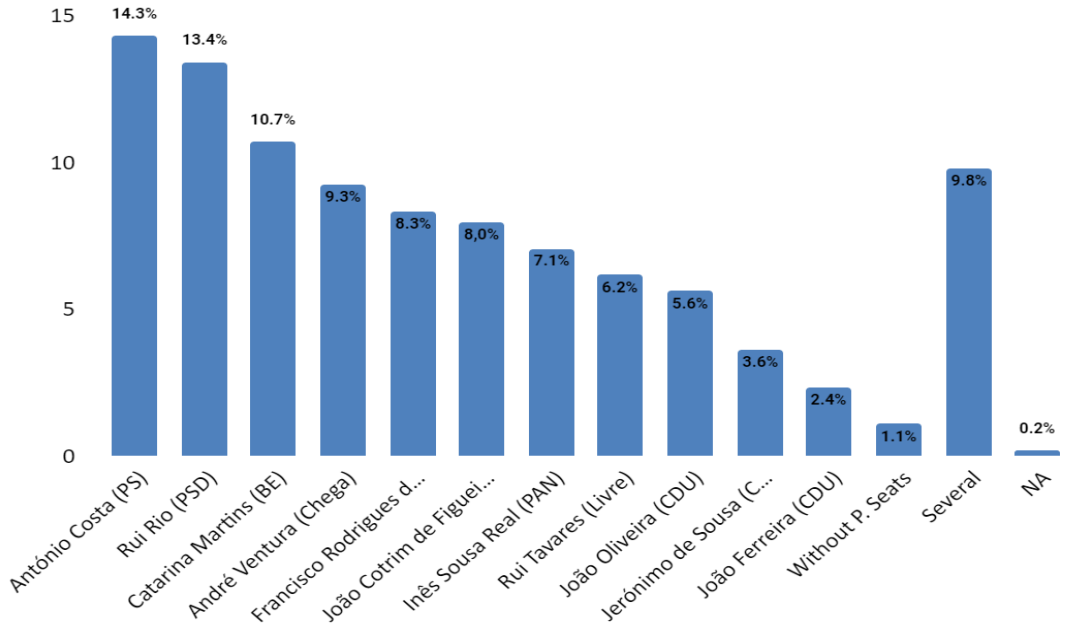
The aim of this empirical study is to examine how the circulation of political information occurs, in an election campaign, between the free-to-air channels in Portugal and social media. An additional aim is to observe in the mainstream media certain characteristics identified with media populism (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). To that effect, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis was applied to television content, based on categories drawn from the literature review made above and supported by the filling out of an Excel database. First, general data about the protagonists, themes, news anchors and journalists are presented. This is followed by a survey of news stories that reference social media and the statements of politicians that accompany them.

During the parliamentary election campaign, between 16 and 28 January 2022, 551 news stories were registered, with the following distribution: RTP1 (Telejornal) 100; SIC (Jornal da Noite) 172; TVI/CNN (Jornal das 8) 160; CMTV (Jornal das 20h) 119. These data reflect a protocol that binds television channels to cover the election campaign in a way that ensures parity among the parties with seats in Parliament, although RTP1 has fewer news stories, as it did not highlight the parties with a smaller representation in Parliament,[10] gathering them in the same news stories, which are often more than three minutes long.

9 Data collection was carried out by Ana Cabrera, Researcher at IHC-UNL; Carla Martins, Researcher at ICNOVA-UNL and Isabel Ferin Cunha, Researcher at ICNOVA-UNL. Data processing was carried out by Carla Martins, ICNOVA-UNL.

10 That was the case for CDS and its leader, Francisco Rodrigues dos Santos; People-Animals-Nature (PAN) coordinated by Inês Sousa Real; Chega, with André Ventura; the Liberal Initiative (IL), with João Cotrim de Figueiredo; and Livre, with Rui Tavares.

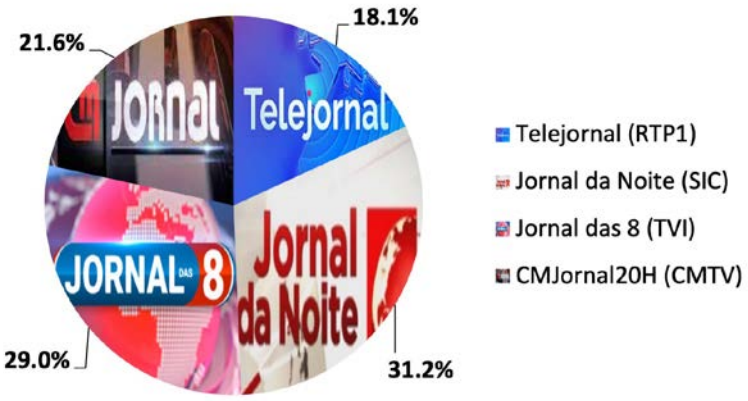
Graph 1
Percentage of news stories, by channel and prime-time news programme



Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

Personalization was one of the variables that most stood out in the analysis of the news stories from television newscasts. This conclusion, shown in Graph 2, follows not only the pattern of the campaigns carried out by parties and party leaders in a mediatized political context but also that of a television coverage of election campaigns focused on party leaders.

Graph 2
Distribution of news stories by candidacy



Source: N=551 news broadcast on television between 16 and 28 January 2022 in Telejornal (RTP1), Jornal da Noite (SIC), Jornal das 8 (TVI) and CMJornal20H (CMTV).

As was to be expected, the candidate that garnered the most media attention was António Costa, the incumbent Prime Minister and Secretary General of the Socialist Party, with 79 news stories, corresponding to 14.3%, followed by Rui Rio, the leader of PSD and of the opposition, with 74 news stories (13.4%). They are followed, in terms of the number of registered news stories, by Catarina Martins, leader of BE, with 59 news stories (10.7%); André Ventura, leader of Chega, with 51 news stories (9.3%); Francisco Rodrigues dos Santos, leader of CDS, with 46 news stories (8.3%); João Cotrim de Figueiredo, leader of IL, with 44 news stories (8%); Inês Sousa Real, leader of PAN, with 39 news stories (7.1%); and Rui Tavares, leader of Livre, with 34 (6.2%). As a result of the stepping down, due to illness, of the Secretary General of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), Jerónimo de Sousa, from the campaign of the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU), and his replacement by João Oliveira and João Ferreira, the three of them were the protagonists, respectively, of 20 news stories (3.6%), 31 news stories (5.6%) and 13 news stories (2.4%). In addition, there are two different situations: the protagonists of parties without seats in Parliament are identified in 6 news stories (1.1%), while several leaders of parties with seats in Parliament, together, were featured in 9.8% of the news stories.

As shown in the table below, the five themes most often addressed by the candidates were: "campaign strategies", "attacks on opponents", "governance solutions", "support of candidates" and "polls". These themes confirm the usual strategies used by candidates in election campaigns and the news media's preference for content that promotes conflict, antagonism and pseudo-events to the detriment of substance. As was already mentioned, the importance accorded to "polls" was a novelty of this campaign.

Table 3
Themes most often addressed by the candidates in news stories

Themes	%	Number of references
Campaign Strategies	15.2	206
Attacks on Opponents	13.1	178
Governance Solutions	9.6	130
Support of Candidates	6.0	82
Polls	5.7	77

Source: N=551 news broadcast on television between 16 and 28 January 2022 in Telejornal (RTP1), Jornal da Noite (SIC), Jornal das 8 (TVI) and CMJornal20H (CMTV).

By examining the intersection of themes and political actors, in alphabetical order based on the candidates, it can be concluded that the five themes preferred by the leader of Chega were: "Attacks on opponents", "campaign strategies", "right-wing alliance" and "minorities". António Costa, of PS, focused on the themes "campaign strategy", "attacks on opponents", "governance solutions", "support of the candidate" and "health". Catarina Martins, of BE, favoured the themes "attacks on opponents", "governance solutions", "campaign strategies", "left-wing alliances" and "health". Francisco Rodrigues dos Santos, of CDS, addressed "right-wings alliance", "campaign strategies", "attacks on opponents", "expressions of support of the candidate" and issues related to the "party". Inês Sousa Real, of PAN, focused on "animal rights", "campaign strategies", "environment and climate change", "governance solutions" and "agriculture". João Cotrim Figueiredo, of IL, focused on "attacks on opponents", "governance solutions", "campaign strategies", "economy" and "taxation". João Ferreira, João Oliveira and Jerónimo de Sousa, representatives of CDU, focused on "campaign strategies", "attacks on opponents", "governance solutions", issues related to the "party" and "left-wing alliances". Rui Rio, of PSD, chose as a priority the themes of "attacks on opponents", "campaign strategies", "support of the candidate", "governance solutions" and "right-wing alliances". Lastly, the candidate Rui Tavares talked about "left-wing alliances", "governance solutions", "environment and climate change" issues, "campaign strategies" and "democracy".

In summary, all the leaders insisted on attacks on opponents, favouring conflict and antagonism; secondly, they focused on campaign strategies, which include references to governance solutions and proposals for a right-wing alliance, in the case of right-of-centre parties, or a left-wing alliance, in the case of left-of-centre parties; lastly, there are the substantive references to the themes of each campaign, except in the case of PSD, which was the party that granted the least priority to themes during the election campaign. Thus, the substance of Chega's campaign lies in Minorities; for PS, it lies in Health; for PAN, it lies in Animal Rights, the Climate and Agriculture; for IL, it is lies in the Economy and Taxation; for CDU and CDS, it lies in issues related to the party; and for Livre, it lies in Democracy and the Climate. These data show that, during the campaign, the parties with fewer seats in Parliament sought to highlight the fundamental elements of their programmes.

The presentation style of television news and the way in which journalists report live are another important variable in this analysis. Most news anchors, 35% of whom are women and 63.2% of whom are men, as well as journalists adopted an interpretative style when presenting or reporting the news about the election campaigns. An interpretive style is one in which the news anchors or reporters, when presenting or reporting the news, contextualize, explain and analyse political facts and events as well as the statements of candidates and parties. There is also a considerable percentage of news stories with an opinion-based style, amounting to 75 (13.6%) in total, with TVI being the channel in which they have the

greatest expression, at 31.3%, and CMTV being the one with the smallest number of news stories with this profile (1.7%). The opinion-based style can be reflected in comments about the candidate, the party or the campaign action, in the tone of the text — positive, negative, ironic or other —, in the vocabulary used and in how the information is structured. This style also includes a growing level of informality in addressing political actors as well as direct questioning with the aim of inducing a specific answer to confirm or exacerbate a controversy between candidates.

5. Social media in the television coverage of the election campaign

Table 4 provides an outline of the references made to social media in the television newscasts of free-to-air channels and CMTV, a pay-per-view Television, while also identifying the circumstances in which the social media platforms were referenced. Although the number of news stories is low, only 11 (1.99%) out of a total of 551, they amount to a combined running time of 29 minutes and 6 seconds, showing great visibility, as they last more than two minutes each, except for one news story, broadcast by TVI.

The table below shows that SIC, with the news anchors Rodrigues Guedes de Carvalho and Clara de Sousa, is the channel that includes social media content in its newscasts most often and for longer periods, followed by José Rodrigues dos Santos, in RTP1. CMTV was the channel that used this strategy the least when covering the parliamentary election.

Table 4
References to social media in news stories related to the campaigns

Date	Channel	News anchor	News stories	Running time	Theme	Action/*stories* told
16/01/2022	RTP1	José Rodrigues dos Santos	2	0:03:08 0:03:20	Early voting	R. Rio posts a tweet and A. Costa responds
24/01/2022	RTP1	José Rodrigues dos Santos	1	0:02:31	Pets take part in the campaign	A. Costa says that after the election R. Rio will have time for his cat
16/01/2022	SIC	Rodrigo Guedes de Carvalho	1	0:02:32	Early voting	Rio posts a tweet
17/01/2022	SIC	Clara de Sousa	1	0:03:52	Early voting	R. Rio responds to A. Costa's response
20/01/2022	SIC	Clara de Sousa	1	0:01:45	Pets take part in the campaign	R. Rio, R. Tavares, I. Sousa Real, Cotrim Figueiredo and A. Ventura show their pets on Twitter
25/01/2022	SIC	Rodrigo Guedes de Carvalho	1	0:02:40	Wages/Social Security	A. Costa posts a video on social media in which R. Rio speaks against the increase in wages
16/01/2022	TVI	José Alberto de Carvalho	1	0:02:34	Early voting	R. Rio post a tweet in which he accuses A. Costa of not speaking truth
17/01/2022	TVI	Pedro Mourinho	1	0:02:22	Early voting	R. Rio accuses PS of twisting the truth
20/01/2022	TVI	Sara Pina	1	0:01:45	Pets take part in the campaign	Candidates campaign through the "speech" of their pets
24/01/2022	CMTV	José Carlos Castro	1	0:02:35	Pets take part in the campaign	R. Rio, assuming he wins the election, says his cat may move to Lisbon
Total of news stories			11			
Total running time				0:29:06		

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

The themes addressed in the news stories that reference social media, notably tweets posted by the candidates, present controversial issues or express expectations, reactions, emotions and goals of the political actors and their parties. The controversial issues include a change in the rules on early voting, which is criticized by the president and candidate of PSD, Rui Rio, who made a controversial tweet stating that António Costa, the incumbent Prime Minister, and candidate of PS, had voted early in Porto so that he "doesn't have to vote for himself" (16/01/2022, RTP1). This was followed by reactions from António Costa and retweets from Rui Rio, which were mentioned by the news anchors and journalists in news reports and lives. Some segments from YouTube were retrieved and posted on social media as a way to contradict statements from candidates, as was the case of a news story in which António Costa contradicted Rui Rio regarding his statements about the wage policy.

The use of social media becomes more consistent in news segments when the election campaigns of the candidates use "pets" to send messages of encouragement, attract attention and get voters to rally around the leader. This marketing strategy, which had never been used in Portugal before, optimized the media ecosystem focused on social media to create virality and to feed, in a loop, the television channels, returning to social media afterwards. This strategy makes it possible to use colloquial and fairly informal language, as the candidate/transmitter of the political message feels free to take on the identity of his pet and release, in a written message, using an oral speech register, his or her expectations, emotions and rivalry towards opponents. To accompany the display of these messages in news stories, there are news anchors who read texts from social media, in a joking tone, comparing the post and the responses.

For example, in a news story included in the newscast (Telejornal) of RTP1, on 24/01/2022, Rui Rio, the president of PSD, states the following:

> One of the most important elements of this campaign has been Zé Albino, and I think that there are many candidates, Mr António Costa in particular, who should follow the example of Zé Albino, because he manages to be a central figure in the campaign and knows when to hold his peace, which Mr António Costa sometimes does not.

As they adopt this behaviour in the campaign, it is not surprising that the candidates[11] express themselves by identifying their direct opponents and the treats that stem from possible right- and left-wing alliances. It should be noted that not all of the candidates employed these methods, but they nevertheless exploited them to their own advantage, by commenting on the posts, which was the case for António Costa, Catarina Martins and Inês de Sousa Real, as shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

11 The candidates, listed here in alphabetical order, introduced the following pets: André Ventura introduced his rabbit Acácia; Cotrim de Figueiredo introduced his dog Bala; Rui Rio introduced his cat Zé Albino; Rui Tavares introduced his cat Camões.

Table 5
The campaign of the "pets" and party alliances

SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022

TVI/Jornal das 8, 20/01/2022

TVI, Jornal das 8, 20/01/2022.

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

These images are an illustration of that dispute in which politicians engage via their pets. When Rui Rio said "Zé Albino, the cat, is heartbroken with PAN moving closer to PS" (SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022), Inês Sousa Real replied with "There's no need to be jealous. Zé Albino, the cat, actually votes for PAN" (TVI/Jornal das 8, 20/01/2022). Rui Tavares, the leader of Livre, notes that Camões, the cat, "has been hissing at the approach of PSD/PPD to the Far Right" (TVI, Jornal das 8, 20/01/2022).

Table 6
The campaign of the "pets" and the expectations of good results in the elections

SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022

SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

The expectations of good results in the elections are also the subject of social media posts through the voices of pets. Thus, the dog of João Cotrim Figueiredo, Bala, has been "very excited about the growth of the Liberal Initiative and the chance to truly reform the country over the next 4 years" (SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022), while the rabbit of André Ventura, Acácia, states that: "Neither Zé Albino, the Cat, nor Bala, the liberal dog. Acácia is fighting for first place in these elections! And she won't trail behind" (SIC/Jornal da Noite, 20/01/2022).

Table 7
The campaign of the "pets" and the duel between PS and PSD

RTP, Telejornal, 24/01/2022

CMTV, CMJornal, 24/01/2022

Source: TeleNews — MediaMonitor

António Costa, who did not use pets on social media as a form of political marketing, states in a news story: "I am open to negotiating with everyone. I have confidence in a victory for PS in the upcoming elections. Zé Albino will feel less lonely, and Mr Rui Rio will be able to spend more time at home, to play with Zé Albino, which will be very good for Zé Albino" (RTP1, Telejornal, 24/01/2022). Rui Rio responded as follows: "It's more likely for Zé Albino to move to Lisbon" (CMTV, CMJornal, 24/01/2022).

6. Conclusion in the form of an assessment of the television coverage of the 2022 parliamentary election

As previously mentioned, the aim of this article is to answer the following questions: 1) what is the volume of political information that circulates between social media and the prime-time television newscasts of free-to-air channels; 2) which candidates and parties are most associated with this process; 3) what characteristics recognized as media populism can be found in news stories (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). The last question may be raised regarding the populist style adopted both by news anchors and journalists and by the actors and protagonists of the news stories analysed.

In answering the first question, it should be pointed out that there were not many news stories that referenced social media — eleven of a total of five hundred and fifty-one — in the period of the election campaign under analysis. However, these news stories are long, with over two minutes, except for one that lasts one minute and forty-five seconds. The social media platform with greater visibility in the news stories is Twitter, although others, such as YouTube, are also referenced. All the candidates from parties in Parliament are mentioned, despite the fact that not all of them use social media in the same way. Rui Rio, president of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), is the candidate most quoted in the newscasts, based on his use of Twitter and other social media platforms. The candidate António Costa, incumbent Prime Minister and candidate of the Socialist Party (PS), and the candidate of People-Animals-Nature (PAN), Inês de Sousa Real, use tweets or posts from other candidates in order to retweet them. In news stories, news anchors and journalists mention situations and controversies that unfold in various social media platforms, especially when they involve parties with a greater expression in Parliament at the time. The Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU) is the political entity with the lowest participation in news that reference social media.

In reply to the third question, the most obvious aspects of media populism (Mazolenni & Bacciale, 2018) is found in the presentation of political information as infotainment, with the use of humour, sarcasm and irony. If these elements were already a part of the posts of candidates, they gain greater relevance as they are recycled and repackaged by news anchors and journalists into new news narratives. And this procedure is what seems original and to

be retained in this empirical work. Especially since it emphasizes and normalizes through humour and irony, political fait divers and personal rivalries. Elements that are evident when a large part of the news covers electoral campaigns based on polls and daily comments, by pundits, on their results.

In addition to the characteristics of media populism mentioned above, there is now a simplification of political themes and, simultaneously, an incitement to conflict and vulgarization of the acts of democracy, that echo across television channels based on the images and texts of news anchors and journalists. In television slots, disintermediation, a characteristic of social media, is recycled through a mediation carried out by new anchors and journalists, which enhances the viral and non-reliable components of information. It is the showtime of political actors and election campaigns.

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Media and Democracy in Brazil: advances and setbacks since the 2022 presidential elections

Media e Democracia no Brasil: Avanços e retrocessos desde as eleições presidenciais de 2022

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Abstract: As we understand that the mediatization process represents the current stage of capitalism, we investigate certain characteristics, patterns, and trends of mediatization as seen in the main techno-communication strategies used in the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections, and their effects in Brazilian democracy. Grounded on different authors and multidisciplinary perspectives about the contemporary context in which technological advances and the financialization of the market are intertwined, we discuss the fallacy of horizontality proposed by digital social networks, which make invisible the asymmetry of access, production, and distribution of content according to algorithmic determinations. Our analysis focuses on the constitution of an alternative parallel circuit of production and distribution of fake news and disinformation by the populist conservative right wing. Their aim is to de legitimize traditional mediators of the political sphere, to modify behavior and to foster attacks to institutions. We argue that the global ecosystem of platforms produces a specific type of social formation in which emergent forms of reintermediation emerge. This renders advances and setbacks to Brazilian democracy.

Keywords: communication, politics, democracy, mediatization, 2022 brazilian presidential elections

Resumo: Entendendo que o processo de midiatização representa o estágio atual do capitalismo, investigamos certas características, padrões e tendências da midiatização em ação nas principais estratégias tecno-comunicacionais usadas nas eleições presidenciais brasileiras em 2022 e seus desdobramentos na democracia do país. Com base em diferentes autores e perspectivas multidisciplinares acerca do contexto contemporâneo em que estão enredados os avanços tecnológicos e a financeirização do mercado, discutimos a falácia da horizontalidade proposta pelas redes sociais digitais, que invisibilizam a assimetria dos acessos, da produção e distribuição de conteúdos conforme determinações algorítmicas. Nossa análise focaliza a constituuição de um cirtuito paralelo de produção e distribuição de fake news e desinformação por parte da direita conservadora populista, com o propósito de deslegitimizar os mediadores tradicionais da esfera política, modificar comportamentos e fomentar ataques às instituições. Argumentamos que o ecossitema global de plataformas produz um tipo específico de formação social em que proliferam formas emergentes de reintermediação que ensejam avanços e retrocessos na democracia brasileira.

Palavras-chave: comunicação, política, democracia, midiatização, eleições presidenciais brasileiras 2022

Introduction

The 2018 and 2022 Brazilian presidential elections were particularly difficult with the appropriation of communication and information technologies by the extreme right to disseminate media-communication strategies that have subverted the game in politics and fostered unprecedented polarization. They have built a parallel circuit of angry, subservient, and uncritical content followers. Online social networks, platforms, and algorithms are part of the new process of (de)institutionalization and growing commodification of populist political action that has escalated to unimaginable violence.

This is the case of the anti-democratic acts that resulted in the invasion and destruction of iconic government buildings in Brasília on January 8, 2023. Such violence in Brazilian political history has been compared (Maia, 2023) to the 2021 invasion of the US Capitol. This makes us rethink the conditions of the production of media discourse aimed at the political field in Brazil. The importance of the communicative dimension in current times is emphasized by reflecting on the mechanisms that foster the production of intriguing modes of sociability anchored in the digital environment governed by algorithmic logics.

This chapter lays emphasis on the fields of communication studies and political sociology in search of contributions to help us reflect on how the mediatization process interferes/impacts advances and setbacks in Brazilian democracy. We understand the mediatization process as one in which communication ceases to be an ancillary activity and becomes the center of economic and political activity. This process represents the current stage of capitalism. In this sense, datafication, platformization, and the like are major topics in the debate on the social and political use of disinformation. It is also important to challenge the fallacy of horizontality proposed by digital social networks that make the asymmetry of both access and online production and distribution of content invisible. Furthermore, the new techno-mediated public sphere (Miskolci, 2021) displays a disquieting affinity between the structure of socialization platforms (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and the populist extreme right. This is evident in the systematic attacks perpetrated on institutional mediators in a parallel ecosystem of disinformation (Recuero; Soares, 2021) of their own making.

In this scenario, communication emerges as a fundamental element of democracy. This is a crucial aspect to bear in mind as we consider the production, distribution, and consumption strategies of news triggered in a populist election campaign. Since social media platforms have proven to be strategic ambience for political discourse, we argue that these digital channels emulate the public sphere, in the Habermasian sense, defined as the locus of debate and rational argumentation (França et al., 2018). They also point to other forms of mediation, socialization, and the consolidation of worldviews. Thus, in analyzing the appropriation of these technologies in support of one of the candidates in the media context of the 2022 Brazilian elections, we aim to identify certain characteristics, patterns, and trends regarding the mediatization process and some of the commercial and political-electoral strategies that subvert the game and directly impact democracy in Brazil today.

To present this discussion, we begin by considering the socio-political framework of mediatization that leads to a datafied environment in which social relations are mediated by digital platforms. Due to this process of datafication, media and sociotechnical apparatuses exert unprecedented influence a new type of public sphere reflected and refracted in online social networks. Our conjunctural analysis is anchored in a carefully selected bibliography which comprises mainly Brazilian authors. The text closes with a discussion on the importance of communication and the impact that the current mediatization process has had in the advances and setbacks of Brazilian democracy in recent times.

Among the characteristics of the current process mediatization with a strong digital accent and their consequences for democracy, we highlight: (i) the complexity and the rise of information pollution in our digitally connected world, typified as mis-information, dis-information e mal-information (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017); (ii) the use of fake news as part of the official strategy in Brazilian election campaigns shows that in contemporary politics, the main emphasis lies not in the rationality and impersonality of public debate, but in the

realm of affect (Cesarino, 2019), and (iii) the disinformation ecosystem that involves the creation, production and distribution of deliberately falsified messages.

The main point of interest seems not to be factual truth, but the biased interpretation of facts from points of view, beliefs, and ideologies. The cybernetic technology that structures the internet produces certain types of sociability that give rise to a techno-mediated public sphere (Miskolci, 2021). In this territory, populism gains new contours in perspective with digitalization and algorithmization (Cesarino, 2020). There is no doubt that it is necessary to hold accountable those who deliberately use these networks to spread lies, but it is also essential to consider the involuntary character of the endorsement given to fake news by many people who eventually share them (Oliveira, 2023).

The result of our discussion points to a holistic understanding of platforms as a globally connected ecosystem. The techno-mediatic-financial logics of this system produces a specific type of social formation that Sodré (2021) has named an "uncivil society". Facing this scenario, it is necessary to resume the concept of communication, not only to characterize it as the center of contemporary productive life but also, and mainly, as the subject matter of social bonding. In this latter sense, communication can be linked with forging democratic institutions and representation through popular vote.

Changes in the political sphere in contemporary Brazil

The first years of the Bolsonaro administration were plagued by environmental, educational, scientific, and diplomatic dismantling and by utter neglect regarding public health amid a major worldwide health crisis (Castro; Oliveira, 2022). The shocking revelations (Santana, 2020) of *Car Leak*[1] in 2019 exposed ethical and professional deviations, mainly in relation to Sergio Moro, the judge who conducted the investigations and condemned Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Bolsonaro's main opponent and favorite candidate ahead of the 2018 presidential race. After rigging the elections by sending Lula to prison, Moro became the Minister of Justice in Brazil. It was also widely rumored he would take a seat in the Federal Supreme Court in its nearest upcoming vacancy, which did not happen after all[2].

Reports on the monopolization of the media as well as studies on the current situation and political challenges of Brazil highlight the profound transformation in the ways society

1 In June 2019, The Intercept Brasil group began a series of reports entitled *Car Leak* ("Vaza Jato") referring to the set of investigations to identify money laundering and bribe payment schemes known as Operation *Car Wash* ("Lava Jato").

2 In the 2022 elections, Moro was elected as a Senator with the support of the conservative wing. Now he is being sued in court.

communicates and, consequently, coexists. The pertinence of our discussion lies in its communicational perspective. This entails an immersion in the contemporary mediatized environment to examine certain ways of doing politics that subvert the game in an unprecedented way. As we mentioned above, a parallel ecosystem of disinformation (Recuero; Soares, 2022) has been created, with disturbing consequences.

How did we get here? What are the inflection points that allow us to critically examine some of the advances and setbacks in the current Brazilian democracy? To discuss these issues, we now turn to the concept of *mediatic bios*, proposed by Muniz Sodré (2002, 2014). This concept points to a certain form of sociability that combines sociotechnical networks and market logics. This current qualification of social existence makes sense, as it identifies citizenship governed by the conditions of contemporary capitalism, based on the logics of consumption and the dynamics of digital network communication.

The broad process of mediatization configures the passage from the first to the current stage of digitalization. The first is known as digital culture. It began in the second half of the 20th century. The current phase is datafication (Lemos, 2021). This is the process of translating life into traceable, quantifiable, analyzable, performative digital data. "Datafication enables the conversion of any and all actions into traceable digital data, producing diagnoses and inferences in the most diverse domains" (Lemos, 2021, p. 194). Data performance analysis is done by algorithmic intelligence systems, which makes algorithmic management a consequence of datafication. The datafication of social life generates classifications such as "platform society" (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019).

Next, we need to identify the place of digital social networks in the mediatization process and their impact on the construction of the public sphere. Bucci (2021) argues that public sphere can be seen as a communicational construction, in which market relations precede and modulate communicational forms. This is what he has to say about digital networks and their potential to gather legions of users:

> (...) they gather crowds, (...) simply because of a capital strategy: this is an operation aimed at mobilizing subjects by means of their passions and drives to extract personal data and perspectives from them next. These two factors concentrate economic value. Social platforms, therefore, constitute a type of phenomenon of economic (super-industrial) nature. In the background, come their effect of cultural and political nature[3] (Bucci, 2021, p. 45).

3 Original text in Portuguese: "(...) se [as redes sociais] (...) aglutinam multidões, não o fazem porque têm uma vocação virtuosa de oferecer painéis racionais para a resolução de problemas de ordem pública, mas simplesmente por uma estratégia do capital: trata-se de uma operação voltada a mobilizar sujeitos por meio de paixões e pulsões para, em seguida, extrair deles olhar e dados pessoais, dois fatores que concentram valor econômico. As plataformas sociais, portanto, constituem um fenômeno de natureza econômica (superindustrial) e, num segundo plano, um efeito de natureza cultural e política".

Thus, the media compose the public sphere, as through them one can participate in the political life of society. When discussing the so-called "digital democracy," Marcos Nobre (2022) argues that the current configuration of democracy occurs as an effect of the strategies of communication experts. This movement distances itself from the standard conception of journalism (consecrated on print, radio and television after World War II), committed to the objectivity of facts and the rigid separation between information and opinion. Due to the media's relative neutrality in the face of partisan cleavages, individuals were able to form their political opinions from common sources of information, other than only those that coincided with their party-political preferences. When we observe the process of information circulation in digital social networks, in which algorithms are presented as gatekeepers[4], we see how it contrasts with the situation described above.

Considering the current scenario, we can infer that the process of standardization and oligopolization of traditional and mainstream media, which structures political life, configures the same bases that support the oligopolies of digital media. However, the latter concerns an "opinion aggregator" oligopoly (Nobre, 2022). If we prefer, we can think of oligopoly as a stimulator of the formation of bubbles that are artificially created by means of algorithms, and not as an oligopoly of information or the formation of public opinion. Wardle & Derakhshan (2017, p.50) highlight that the "the fundamental problem is that 'filter bubbles' worsen polarization by allowing us to live in our own online echo chambers and leaving us only with opinions that validate, rather than challenge, our own ideas".

The architecture of platforms and networks breaks with the "monopoly of speech" (Sodré, 2010) and establishes the logic of attention. Therefore, it would be naive to think that digital media oligopolies would be able to participate in something like a new neutrality pact with respect to the divisions among parties. That is because the emphasis is not on content or speech, but on commercial strategies that monetize online interactions. Indeed, we are facing a profound change in the mediation systems that organize — and reorganize on new bases — the production of knowledge in contemporary societies (Cesarino, 2021).

It is more the circulation of information and less the content of the message that becomes the turning point in the techno-mediatized public sphere, and also in a digital datafied democracy. Thus, the crisis of traditional media coincides with the political crisis in the sense of the consolidation of social media, whose operating logics may impact electoral outcomes. But this does not lead us to overestimate the importance of digital transformations to the detriment of the role of the so-called traditional and mainstream media. In fact, this is a non-exclusive and complex relationship. Above all, this is about recognizing how much the digital

4 Gatekeeper is the journalistic concept used to define the one who edits, that is, the one who decides what will be reported according to news value, editorial line, and other criteria.

revolution and the mediatization process have structural consequences for a certain way of perceiving and doing politics.

We must not lose sight of the fact that rumors, conspiracy theories and fabricated information are nothing new. Wardle & Derakhshan (2017) remind us that politicians have always made unrealistic promises during election campaigns, corporations have always pushed people away from thinking about issues differently, and the media has long disseminated sensational stories for their ability to shock and engage audiences. New challenges are presented today in terms of the complexity and scale of informational pollution in the digitally connected world. The most perverse of these challenges encompasses the deliberate and massive use of disinformation as a political strategy. Bolsonarism, represented by the alt right in this country, and digital media have transformed what is understood by politics in Brazil (Cesarino, 2019).

A new element that complicates the debate is the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with mass access. Although the content of the message and its large-scale distribution through social networks remain important, the focus now falls on the agent's intentionality and its power to manipulate facts. This means editing reality. While manipulated messages, as we've already seen, are "nothing new", the speed of technological innovations and the potential for their misuse are worrisome. It gets harder and harder to discern between authentic and fake content. This is why it is so difficult to correct disinformation. Regardless of whether it is true or false, it matters how much a given piece of information is compatible with previous beliefs (Oliveira, 2023) as well as its ability to spread within the capillarity of sociotechnical networks.

To further complexify this scenario, we focus in this discussion on the operation of the so-called social media for the delegitimization of traditional mediating institutions, such as the press and the political class, and the constitution of a multifaceted ecosystem of disinformation (Recuero; Soares, 2022) at the service of political-electoral strategies.

A parallel circuit in the techno-mediatic public sphere

When dealing with mediatization in this discussion, we refer to a process and its production logics in a diffuse social environment (Braga, 2018). As Figueiras (2020) points out, we cannot forget that hierarchical communication and network communication are models of social organization that coexist in contemporary society, albeit with different intensities. Public visibility anchored in mediatized logic structures the re(re)presentation of political reality. As we said above, our discussion turns to the appropriation of info communication networks by certain party-political groups with a radical and populist accent in order to discredit traditional media circuits and create parallel networks of disinformation.

The experience that we inhabit alternative, parallel worlds[5] can be apprehended through the platformization of the web, in which the digital ecosystem becomes increasingly homogeneous. Algorithmic mediation, which feeds "from our online conduct, extracts value and knowledge from it, and offers us a personalized landscape that projects what we supposedly want to see, consume, hear, read, know, and so on"[6] (Bruno, 2020, p. 245). The negative consequences of this type of mediation and architecture that modifies our experience of the world contribute to the denial of social institutions and political representation, as well as the escalation of violence, in the sense of eliminating everything that represents incompatibility.

Instead of building consensus, the appropriation of automated forms of communication guided by algorithms for electoral and political purposes has created polarizations and conflicts, discouraging the divergence of opinion. In this scenario, lines of political forces inseparable from their techno-communicational character have generated not only the widely commented phenomena of "opinion bubbles" and in more serious cases the dissemination of fake news[7], but something more radical and worrying as a central element of action politics: "the privatization of politics and insertion in a moral grammar"[8] (Machado; Miskolci, 2019, p. 950). Such a privatized dimension of politics generates collective action that does not recognize and delegitimize institutions, with the potential to destabilize democratic contexts.

Segmented groups of users of communication platforms are induced into a highly individualized context, in which experiences are personalized. This reinforces their convictions and widens their ideological and behavioral divergences. In this way, collective actions (bubbles) based on individual values and under a privatized perspective of politics tend to place institutions (media, family, school, and politics) under suspicion, leading people to eventually turn against them. Thus, the online political dispute can slide into behavioral surveillance, favoring the production and circulation of false news, disinformation and hate speech.

The 2022 electoral period was marked by an avalanche of false information that proved to be much more sophisticated and daring than the ones that contaminated the 2018 elections. In the second round, Brazil recorded an average of 311,500 false messages per day[9]. But it wasn't just the volume that was lost control. In practice, we experience the entry of new formats of disinformation content, ranging from those that are totally false to those constructed from opinions

5 A model example of this type of alternative, parallel mode of reality can be seen in the content of the Brasil Paralelo channel. This is a conservative online content company that has gained notoriety with its proximity to the Brazilian extreme right and blatant titles of historical revisionism (Salgado; Ferreira Jorge, 2021). Website: https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br

6 Original text in Portuguese: "de nossas condutas online, extraem valor e conhecimento delas e nos oferecem uma paisagem personalizada que projeta o que supostamente desejamos ver, consumir, ouvir, ler, conhecer etc."

7 Eugenio Bucci (2019, p. 37) talks about these as faked — and not fake — news as he argues, quite rightly, that "news is not *fake*—and *fake news* is not *news*". (our translation)

8 Original text in Portuguese: "a privatização da política e a inserção em uma gramática moral".

9 According to study by NetLab, School of Communication, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Website: https://www.netlab.eco.ufrj.br

disguised as facts and that sustain and reinforce beliefs, ideologies, and conspiracy theories. In this context, campaigns against the press are a veritable disinformation machine that operates like a "business". This business is financed in part by politicians, many of them without much expression, and by a chain that involves the operation of extremist websites and automated fake profiles (bots). This configuration takes advantage of the characteristics of recommendation algorithms — which prioritize high audience and engagement — to manipulate social networks and give "false relevance" to topics of interest to its sponsors. The disinformation network is complemented by the capillarity of messaging applications. This sophisticated disinformation ecosystem at the service of political-electoral strategies is in line with the conceptual framework developed by Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), how typify disinformation in three categories: (i) mis-information: false information that is shared without the aim of causing harm; (ii) dis-information: false information shared with a view to causing harm; and (iii) mal-information: true information from the private sphere that is shared in the public sphere to cause harm.

This scenario involves, above all, recognizing the potency of the platforming phenomenon (Van Dijck, 2018), defined as the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes, and governmental structures of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life — and the culture of apps as its most visible expression –, so that we understand that between democracy and algorithmic systems we no longer speak of manipulation of discourse. The correct word for this is modulation.

Algorithmic structures have become fundamental in the processes of public opinion formation and in the dispute for the preferences of the electorate. They organize and define what is seen and what followers should see from each content published on online social networks. However, these algorithmic structures are just one of the elements that make up this complex disinformation ecosystem that has been formed and appropriated by the populist extreme right in recent decades. It is urgent that we understand: (i) the different types of content that are created and shared on platforms; (ii) the ideologies and motivations imbedded in these contents; and, mainly, (iii) the strategies used for their mass dissemination (Wardle, 2019).

As Silveira (2019) explains, algorithmic operators not only organize the results of a given search according to the analysis of the profile of the person who carried it out. They also define the order of the results according to the interests of those who purchased the so-called sponsored links. We observed this movement with the elections of Trump in the United States and Bolsonaro, in Brazil. Both campaigns were riddled with accusations of manipulation and fake news. Public discourse is now highly skewed in being subjected to algorithms that operate for the profitability of online platforms. In this sense, platforms acquire great public relevance dispite their private ownership.

This intertwined system of visibility and invisibility of content by algorithmic management can even change our freedom of choice, since it restricts the options presented to us on digital networks. In this scenario, "the contents are shared in an agile, massive, and

intimate way between groups of people with whom some degree of trust is maintained, at the same time that we are deprived of any common vision"[10] (Bruno, 2020, p. 245). Therefore, it is important to highlight that "modulation technologies are not prisons, nor do they determine conduct. They lead by offering options and not by rendering these options absent"[11] (Silveira, 2019, p. 68). The result of this operation aims to modify behavior, as users to encounter certain messages more frequently than others. The problem is that such circumstances facilitate the creation of parallel communication circuits fed by fake news that are produced on an industrial scale. This is part of the subverted game played by the populist radical right and interferes with democracy in a disturbing way. The formation of these parallel circuits serves neoliberal and neonationalist agendas. Although they have different characteristics and motivations, both aim to discredit institutions and actors of democracy (Cunha, 2017).

The dimension of these reflections draws attention when we observe the impact of digital platforms in social and political life. In Brazil, the prevalence of exclusive access to the internet by cell phones has been happening since 2015. This has reached 64% of users and corresponds to an even higher fraction in rural areas (83%), the country's Northeast (75%), those aged 60 or over (80%), and those belonging to the DE classes (89%). Among class C users, access to the internet exclusively via mobile phone increased from 61% in 2019 to 67% in 2021, reaching a contingent of 51 million people[12].

Among the most popular sites for mobile internet access, the WhatsApp platform stands out for its specific features. The app also works as a privileged environment for the spread of disinformation and fake news. It functions as a hybrid network that "blends the design and architecture of private communication with uses aimed at the diffusion and exchange of information among broader groups"[13] (Bruno, 2020, p. 244). This messaging application is installed by default on 99% of smartphones in use in Brazil[14]. It is often mentioned as one of the main sources of information since 95% of Brazilian WhatsApp users open the application every day, or almost every day. Many are limited to the information that circulates within the application, given the easy conditions of access and handling of the tool in the country. In addition, the informational architecture of this application is limited to contacts

10 Original text in Portuguese: "os conteúdos são compartilhados de forma ágil, massiva e íntima entre grupos de pessoas com quem se mantém algum grau de confiança, ao mesmo tempo que somos privados de qualquer visão em comum".

11 Original text in Portuguese: "as tecnologias de modulação não são prisões, nem determinam condutas. Elas conduzem pela oferta de opções e não por sua ausência".

12 ICT Households 2021 (TIC Domicílios 2021), study prepared by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil — CGI.br).

13 Original text in Portuguese: "mistura design e arquitetura de comunicação privada com usos voltados para difusão e troca de informações entre grupos mais amplos".

14 Panorama Mobile Time/Opinion Box (2021). Available at: https://www.mobiletime.com.br/web-stories/a-popularidade-do-whatsapp-no-brasil-segundo-a-pesquisa-panorama-mobile-time-opinion-box/. Retrieved on: 17.Jan.2023.

and groups marked by personal and affective ties (professionals, family members, circles of friends, etc.). This type of architecture favors limited and restricted interaction within each group or among peers. As Bruno (2020, p. 245) points out, it leads to "immense capillarity as well as enormous opacity."[15] It is worrying that an interpersonal communication application can simultaneously host groups of up to five thousand people, which facilitates the automated mass distribution of fraudulent and anti-democratic content.

A multiplatform monitoring of disinformation carried out during the 2022 elections[16] indicated that issues related to the themes: electoral integrity, Christian values, discrediting of the press, socio-environmental issues, gender and family had a 57% growth in publications on WhatsApp, Telegram and Twitter after the first round of votes. Among the main findings, allegations of fraud regarding the integrity of the electoral process and moralistic appeals referring to conservative Christian values emerged as the main agendas of the second round.

The dispute for the Presidency in 2022 was presented as a matter of "identity and values", in which Bolsonaro would represent "God against the polls". These religious narratives intertwined with politics were extensively analyzed by the Brazilian press[17]. Evidence of the work of evangelical "pastors" was evident in the call for a "holy war" against the new government, which culminated in the anti-democratic attacks on January 8th, 2023.

As we come closer to the end of this reflective journey, it is worth taking another look at the literature on the platform economy and its governance to address the importance of communication and its impacts on democracy in Brazil. In the next topic, as a way of apprehending the info communication ecosystem composed of interdependent hierarchical structures, we focus on identifying some of the main political actors responsible for the widespread dissemination of disinformation in Brazil. We will also focus on the role of justice in combating fake news.

Communication and Democracy

Platformization can be understood as a similar process to industrialization or electrification as it refers to the multifaceted transformation of globalized societies (Poell et al., 2019). The conception of the Internet as a neutral type of technology that connects the whole world is considered insufficient, mistaken, and naive. A unique set of competing and coordinated platforms — Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft — govern the core of the

15 Original text in Porguese: "permite simultaneamente uma imensa capilaridade e uma enorme opacidade".
16 Data from NetLab (UFRJ). https://www.netlab.eco.ufrj.br
17 BBC News Brasil. Profecias em guerra santa por Bolsonaro (*Prophecies in Holy War for Bolsonaro*). YouTube. Brasil Partido Podcast. 23.Feb.2023.Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oLuCBWxN_k&list=PLCX5XjxKTpTkOAhMku4UjVxsobb-aHKf2&index=1 Retrieved on: 01.Apr.2023.

world's digital information systems. They exert unprecedented economic, social, and (geo) political control. This is what Van Dijck (2022) claims when analyzing the platform structure and its actors through the metaphorical lens of a tree.

Let us imagine a tree with three interconnected layers: the roots of digital infrastructure reach the trunk of intermediate platforms that branch out into industrial and social sectors. From these, branches, and leaves sprout. Messaging apps like WhatsApp are found in the middle tier, represented by the trunk of the tree. Along with other identification platforms such as social networks, payment systems, email services, search engines, advertising services, retail networks, and app stores, they constitute the power core of platforms by mediating infrastructures, users, and sectors.

Individually, they may not be able to handle all internet activities, but together, they function as portals, channeling data flows. In this datafied environment, algorithms work through the logics of public segmentation. They aggregate profiles that are understood as similar (Cesarino, 2022) to one another. In these terms, the content of the behavior matters less than its formal standards, since the architecture of digital platforms and their algorithms favor connections based on homophily or similarity. This creates segregation and polarization where there could be many other forms of coexistence and connection (Bruno, 2020, p. 248).

In Brazil, as we have seen, the result of this type of mediation that segments users into personalized worlds that are only partially connected has contributed to the consolidation of denialist, anti-democratic, and hate-filled bias. It is in this sense that Bruno (2020) points to two distinct effects related to this type of mediation and architecture. One is called the "confiscation of the common". The other one, the "kidnapping of the future." The first deals with user exposure to homogeneous content and perspectives on digital platforms. This favors the creation of affinity clusters and segregation The second effect involves the predictive models of knowledge and behavior control that predominate on these platforms. These are placed at the service of producing ever-broader engagement.

As we ponder on the setbacks and advances in democracy we place communication on another level, closer to mediatization and its governance. This is because the "collapse of context" (Cesarino, 2022) between fact and fiction, between public and private, promoted by this mode of appropriation of the algorithmic system of platforms makes us infer that social media have a policy, "and that this policy is biased against liberal democracy"[18] (Cesarino, 2022, p. 108).

The first step is to understand platforms as part of a globally connected ecosystem. Their logics based on cybernetic systems that disorganize and reorganize datafied and mediatized reality on new bases. They summon and keep users in permanent mode of attention and digital interaction. This kind of individualized experience makes people feel like little

18 Original text in Portuguese: "e que essa política tem um viés contrário ao da democracia liberal"

sovereigns in their own "digital feuds" (Cesarino, 2020). Thus, they get used to searching any topic on their own, just a click away. This results in discrediting institutions and specialists. After all, in a type of environment where everything can be true or fake, people look for simpler and more immediate ways to reduce uncertainties and solve problems. This makes populist leaders increasingly in demand.

These new forms of leadership are forged in a type of digital ecology that adjusts grammatical patterns according to the segmentation of the public, converted into clusters of similar psychometric profiles. The congruence of this "digital body" (Cesarino, 2019) lies less in the person herself than in the way his or her image is algorithmically personalized for each audience, covering an enormous spectrum of discourse possibilities.

Our second step in this discussion is to resume communication, not only to characterize it as the center of contemporary productive life but also, and mainly, as a social bond (Sodré, 2014). In this sense, we can place the right to public information on the same level as civil rights such as freedom of thought, freedom of movement, property, and political rights as to vote and be voted for, the right to association, and organization (Paiva; Sodré, 2019). But how can we envisage a "common" space of conditions and access in the techno-mediatized public sphere, where financial capital and the neoliberal model of society promote an instrumental and individualist view of politics?

As in the mass communication model, this vision continues to be shaped by media production, only now in another dimension. The emphasis on the circulation of messages overlaps with the production of content. This process interferes with democracy to the extent that market sovereignty subsumes political sovereignty.

In this scenario, there is no doubt that the fusion of digital research with legal diligence helped to confront the Bolsonarist digital militia. Mapping and monitoring the digital interaction network of extreme right-wing elements in our country investigated how a transnational network, under central coordination, operated in the occupation of digital space to build a circuit of parallel reality. In this world apart, the premises are false, and disinformation multiplies in different layers and platforms. It is not just about inventing a lie and disseminating this lie to a politically available audience. This is disinformation based on subjective interpretations, manipulated to appear objective.

Three interaction profiles were identified and classified in studies reported by Pires (2022). They help us identify agents, including political actors responsible for the disinformation process in Brazil: (i) the so-called "content promoters": profiles that frame news and headlines — current and past — in a pro-Bolsonaro narrative line; (ii) the "content producers", who create new stories to guide the debate within an "ecosystem of disinformation", and (iii) the third type, perhaps the most important one, are the "spin doctors". These are profiles with high credibility in that given ecosystem, capable of triggering public debate with great speed, and easily twisting any event with a Bolsonarist outlook.

In this way, the studies were able to gradually demonstrate the existence and mode of functioning of the disinformation ecosystem in the Bolsonarist wing, the so-called "hate office". This office acted in a coordinated and deliberate manner, with the aim of producing and spreading disinformation to influence the outcome of the 2022 election in Brazil and beyond.

To reflect on the conception of communication as the social production of meaning, which is constructed in socio-historical relationships, presupposes placing it in perspective in this discussion with the "techno-mediatized public sphere" (Miskolci, 2021) and the "uncivil society" (Sodré, 2021), which brings together media, illiberalism and finance. This idea of uncivilism describes the effects of the breakdown or deconstruction of civil society as a result of financial capitalism and electronic communication technology on sociability, the ideas of political liberalism and democratic processes. Faced with the systemic crisis of State apparatuses and the destabilization of traditional forms of representation, how can we think of an institutional path that is open to civil societies?

The devastating consequences of the rupture of the relationship between rulers and the ruled (Castells, 2018) are caused by different factors. The main one is distrust in institutions, which delegitimizes political representation and leaves us orphans of a shelter that protects us in the name of the "common" interest. The most striking expression of this rupture are the speeches and demonstrations that personified the 2018 presidential elections and left indelible traces in the 2022 elections in Brazil.

As we have argued so far, the current communicational ecosystem constitutes a territory of social interactions with commercial and political inclinations that are largely opaque and non-spontaneous. Guerrilla strategies intertwined with the molds of militarism within social media that are organized in networks expose a rigid kind of pyramidal hierarchy of "emerging" power (Cesarino; Nardelli, 2021). In this scenario, individual agents respond to info-communication stimuli, and they are coordinated to move like a swarm (Han, 2018). The appalling attacks in the Brazilian capital, Brasília, in January 2023 offer striking proof of this type of pernicious ongoing mobilization.

As it turns out, Bolsonaro did not win the elections, but the fact is that Bolsonarism is still active, fueled by the extreme right. As (re)states Steve Bannon, strategist of the global ultra-right in a long interview published in one of the most widely circulated Brazilian newspapers[19], "the future of the populist right in the world is connected".

19 Folha de S. Paulo, 28/03/2023. Available at: https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2023/03/steve-bannon-ve-bolsonaro-fortalecido-com-acusacoes-na-justica-e-aposta-em-eduardo.shtml. Retrieved on: 01.Apr.2023.

Conclusion

Established in September 2019 with the aim of investigating, within 180 days, the massive spread of fake news that marked the 2018 presidential elections and the orchestrated use of false profiles to attack public agents and institutions, the Mixed Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry about Fake News was closed in 2022, with inconclusive results.

The report[20] issued by this commission highlights two mechanisms that make fake news content (or disinformation) go viral. Considered as natural, the first one is the sharing of content with which the user has some identification. This practice is extremely relevant, since there is a great chance that sharing will occur and the given content will reverberate in affinity "bubbles". Two other artificial mechanisms can be described as: (i) the use of fake profiles, especially with artificial intelligence resources, known as robots or bots; and (ii) the promotion of sponsored content, especially by using data from user profiles.

By observing the characteristics, patterns, and trends of the recent mediatization process, we are faced with an ecosystem of disinformation involving editing, distribution, and monetization as political-electoral strategies in the Brazilian scenario. We can also infer the importance of the role played by cybernetic technology in the individualization of information through algorithmic segmentation of audience profiles. Platform internet, today increasingly governed by artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR), favors the disruption of the perception of reality and its simultaneous restructuring. Such is the dialectical and accelerated movement of attention capitalism.

The anti-democratic movements of January 8th, 2023 in Brazil have prompted the current government to adopt strategies to combat disinformation and hate speech on social networks. They have also led to the creation of measures such as the proposition of public policies on the subject within the scope of human rights (Góes et al., 2023). As the current President of Brazil firmly pointed out in a letter sent to Unesco[21], this is a matter of global concern, and it requires global solutions that complement national regulations. That is because even a multilaterally coordinated regulation would not bring easy answers to the complex challenge of guaranteeing freedom of expression and, at the same time, the right to reliable information in society.

Discussions on content moderation by platforms and their legal responsibility for the dissemination of fake news are advancing, mainly in Europe. In Brazil, among these initiatives, we highlight the Program to Combat Disinformation (PCD) by the Federal Supreme

20 Final Report available at: https://legis.senado.leg.br/comissoes/mnas?codcol=2292&tp=4 Retrieved on: 01.Apr.2023.

21 "Internet for Trust" was the first UN global event was held in February, 2023 to address the integrity of information and freedom of expression in social media platforms. https://www.unesco.org/en/internet-conference. Retrieved on: 24.Feb.2023.

Court[22], with the objective of combating practices that affect people's trust in the institution, distort the meaning of the court's decisions and place democratic stability at risk.

Another topic that has become central in this debate deals with the discussion of Article 19 of the Internet Bill of Rights[23] in Brazil. This article deals with freedom of expression and censorship. It is used by Big Techs as an argument against moderating harmful and illegal content. In the last Brazilian elections alone, the platforms profited more than BRL 300 million with boosts paid by candidates, largely with public resources from the Electoral Fund. It is therefore a lucrative business model.

However, it is worth remembering that it is not the Internet Bill of Rights, nor Art. 19 that prevent the platforms from acting ethically, legally, and democratically. It is necessary to highlight the responsibility of digital platforms since, as has we have argued above, algorithmic rationality feeds on hate speech and disinformation, favoring extremism, and opinion bubbles.

To understand the information crisis in Brazil during the 2022 elections and the subsequent violent attack against democracy on January 8, 2033, it is necessary to deconstruct the disinformation ecosystem of networked propaganda, to problematize the concentration of commercial media and to understand how AI systems obscure the decisions taken by the mediation of the platforms.

It has never been so important and necessary to discuss the centrality of communication in favor of its ethical-political understanding as a connection to the "common". This mode of understanding implies that every kind of technology presupposes a political principle that encompasses it. In this sense, the militarized strategies embedded in the systemic organization that we discuss here from the point of view of Brazil reinforce certain mobilization models for anti-democratic action. They demand well-knitted strategies of media-information literacy as well as fierce citizen resistance. Even though we are intertwined in the techno-mediated public sphere, clear understanding and responsible handling of this environment are the only ways to potentiate its use in the constitution of new, more democratic, and auspicious forms of intelligibility and social cohesion.

22 https://portal.stf.jus.br/desinformacao/#planoPCD

23 Created by Law no. 12,965, on 23 April, 2014. Available at: <https://www.in.gov.br/materia/-/asset_publisher/KujrwoTZC2Mb/content/id/30054611/do1-2014-04-24-lei-n-12-965-de-23-de-abril-de-2014-30054600>. Retrieved on: 04.Apr.2023.

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Extreme right-wing populism and the environment: notes on the Brazilian experience with Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022)

Populismo de extrema direita e meio ambiente: notas sobre a experiência brasileira com Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022)

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Abstract: This chapter uses a bibliographical review and a historical approach to characterize extreme right--wing populism and its relation to the environment in Brazil between 2019 and 2022, the period that Jair Messias Bolsonaro served as president of the country. We adopted Mudde and Kaltwasser's approach on populism (2017) to obtain a better insight into how Bolsonaro incorporated central elements of populism in several of his government's actions on the environment. This article is a contribution to a growing number of studies on the connections between the environment and populism outside the United States and Europe, which have the largest number of studies on the subject.

Keywords: extreme right-wing populism, anti-environmentalism, Jair Bolsonaro

Resumo: Este capítulo utiliza uma revisão bibliográfica e uma abordagem histórica para caracterizar o populismo de extrema-direita e sua relação com o meio ambiente no Brasil entre 2019 e 2022, período em que Jair Messias Bolsonaro atuou como presidente do país. Adotamos a abordagem de Mudde e Kaltwasser sobre populismo (2017) para obter uma melhor compreensão de como Bolsonaro incorporou elementos centrais do populismo em várias das ações de seu governo sobre o meio ambiente. Este artigo é uma contribuição para um número crescente de estudos sobre as conexões entre o meio ambiente e o populismo fora dos Estados Unidos e da Europa, que têm o maior número de estudos sobre o assunto.

Palavras-chave: populismo de extrema direita, anti-ambientalismo, Jair Bolsonaro

Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the relationship between extreme right-wing populism and the environment and begins by detailing the Brazilian context under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro. In a previous article, we identified the denialist, nationalist, racist and authoritarian viewpoints Bolsonaro adopted during his time as president, related in Brazilian and international newspapers (Araújo & Campos, 2020). For this article, our objective is to verify how Jair Bolsonaro managed to include key elements of populism in statements and actions made on the environment. We also describe Jair Bolsonaro's history and compares him to the concept of populism proposed by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017). Lastly, we link Bolsonaro's agenda for the environment to three dimensions of populism — the people, the elites, and the general will.

Jair Bolsonaro became president of Brazil in 2018 as an extreme right-wing politician affiliated with the Social Liberal Party. During his campaign, he presented himself as an agent operating on the outside of the political system, despite the fact he had served as federal deputy for almost three decades. He used anti-political and anti-Workers' Party sentiments in his campaign to further weaken their already severely damaged reputations due to their involvement in the political corruption scandal known as Operation Car Wash (in Portuguese, *Operação Lava Jato*), which received enormous media coverage throughout the country. Based on a successful strategy of mobilizing followers through social networks, Bolsonaro used disinformation as a political weapon to attack and damage the public image of his opponents, something he was easily able to accomplish due to a lack of regulations for social media

platforms in the country. Employing a polarizing discourse which labels opponents as enemies to be destroyed, Bolsonaro followed the script that extreme right-wing ideologists from other countries around the world make use of. In addition to pushing agendas that set the conservative sectors against progressive parties (on issues like tradition and human rights) and deliberately spreading false information, Bolsonarism used the environment as an issue with which to attack opponents and distort reality for political purposes, ultimately aligning with the interests of groups and agents that practice illegal deforestation in Brazilian biomes.

As a global player, Brazil became a pariah in the fight against deforestation and climate change, refusing to cooperate with the international community and its environmental initiatives. Bolsonaro and his government's intent to dismantle environmental protection policies, which were gradually being redeveloped since the end of the military dictatorship (1964-1985), was clear once he presented his government's plan to the Electoral Court. The word 'environment' was only used once in this plan, when Bolsonaro and his government proposed a merger between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Although not written in the government program, there were numerous setbacks to the environmental agenda with enormous repercussions. A report presented by the presidential transition team for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government (Workers Party), which defeated Bolsonaro in the 2022 elections, highlights the damage done to the biomes, to public institutions, to communities and to traditional peoples, affecting the reputation of the national productivity sector. As a result, this sector suffered from barriers to Brazilian products in international trade, from limited access to credit, and from a loss of credibility before the rest of the world. A free trade agreement between Mercosur and the European Union (which had been under negotiation for years) was never put into effect due to the Brazilian government's lax enforcement of environmental policies, despite the fact that said agreement had already been signed in 2019.

Environment protection is defined as a right for all and a duty for the Public Power to uphold in the Brazilian Constitution of 1988. Article 255 of that same constitution states that "everyone has the right to an ecologically balanced environment, an asset for common use by the people, essential to a healthy quality of life, it is the government and the community's duty to defend and preserve it for present and future generations". During the Bolsonaro administration, this constitutional principle was widely disrespected as the government attempted, on several fronts, to weaken protection mechanisms and do away with the country's environmental agenda. Drastic cuts were made to the Ministry of Environment budget, employees from internationally recognized organizations were laid off, such as the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) and the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio). Additionally, the government dismantled the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon, which had a direct impact on the massive increase in deforestation throughout the Amazon region. A

Brazilian Supreme Court judge declared the actions and negligence of Bolsonaro's government in the environmental area as unconstitutional[1].

Indeed, the Amazon suffered its largest increase in deforestation since 1988 while Bolsonaro was serving as president of Brazil. Data from 2018, the same year he took office, showed the annual deforestation rate of the Amazon to be 7,536 km². In August 2019, seven months after Bolsonaro took office, that rate increased by 34.4%. Due to a decrease in inspection and authorization for mineral and wood exploration in the country, part of which operates illegally, 11,568 km² of the Amazon were deforested in 2022 alone, according to data released by the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe). The Brazilian Cerrado, one of the country's main biomes, has also suffered the effects of anti-environmental policies. Between August 2020 and July 2021, Inpe measured 8,531 km² of deforestation in the biome, the highest figure since 2015.

The effects Bolsonaro's government has made on the environment are similar to actions implemented during the country's military dictatorship period. As highlighted by Motta and Hauber (2022), the dictatorship was a reference point for Bolsonaro support groups in terms of their actions and the public policies they adopted, especially regarding the environment. According to Salheb et al. (2009), the genesis of Brazilian environmental policy took place in the Vargas Era (1930-1945), mostly highlighted by the rationalization of the use and exploitation of the country's natural resources. When the military assumes power, it adheres to the philosophy of growth at any cost. In this context, environmental protection is seen as a barrier to economic development. "Under the regime, there was a 'lenient' attitude toward pollution control, especially industrial pollution, which was of particular interest to the military for developing policies that 'welcomed' polluting industries" (Salheb, et al., 2009). The Bolsonaro government's actions and negligence encouraged and led to further deforestation and illegal mining, even in indigenous lands. One of the tragic effects of illegal mining is evident in the crisis faced by the Yanomami indigenous people, revealed in January 2023. With their land being invaded by illegal miners, the indigenous people suffered from diseases and malnutrition due to the pollution of rivers and actions of miners.

The extreme right-wing populism of Jair Bolsonaro

Elected a federal deputy in 1991, Jair Messias Bolsonaro was sworn in as president of the Republic of Brazil in 2019 in the wake of a campaign based on disinformation and hate speech, which he used to spread an ultraconservative, authoritarian and neoliberal agenda,

1 https://portal.stf.jus.br/noticias/verNoticiaDetalhe.asp?idConteudo=484966&ori=1

noted mainly for promises of reducing the state machine, toughening laws on violence, and fighting against what he called "ideological indoctrination" in schools. In addition, he spread anti-corruption discourse and anti-Workers' Party sentiment across Brazilian society, resorting to anti-political discourse despite his almost 30 years in the Chamber of Deputies. Discredited and disrespected by the mainstream press (Mendes & Silva, 2022) — which ended up normalizing him — Bolsonaro saw his popularity grow after the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff from the Workers' Party in 2016.

His years spent as a federal deputy were marked by controversial issues, including episodes of misogyny, racism, and the defense of torture tactics and murder committed by the military dictatorship, during which time he served in the Brazilian Army as a parachutist. In addition to these polemic issues, Bolsonaro's time as a politician was unimpressive; between 1991 and 2018, he only managed to approve two Bills of Law and one amendment to the Constitution. In 2018, he joined the Social Liberal Party (PSL) and launched his presidential campaign with retired general Hamilton Mourão (PRTB) as his deputy in the "Brazil above everything, God above everyone" coalition.

His government was heavily militarized, incorporating the largest number of military personnel since redemocratization, including in the environment. A survey carried out by the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper in 2021 (through the Access to Information Law) showed that Bolsonaro multiplied the number of military personnel in charge of state companies by 10. Up until that year, 92 leadership positions in public or mixed capital companies were run by members of the Armed Forces. Record numbers of military personnel were placed in charge of federal agencies with socio-environmental functions. By the second year of his mandate, the federal agency with the most military personnel in leadership positions was the National Indian Foundation (Funai), followed by Ibama and ICMBio. These are in addition to the Special Secretariat for Indigenous Health (Sesai), the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Incra), the National Health Foundation (Funasa), and the Fund to Combat Poverty (FCP). This militarization, a commitment to an ultra-conservative agenda on human rights and public safety and, more recently, his denial of the Covid-19 pandemic, not to mention spreading conspiracy theories about the virus itself, make Jair Bolsonaro an extreme right-wing populist figure, different from the Latin American tradition that often-associated populism with charismatic left-wing leaders, such as Juán Domingo Perón and Getúlio Vargas. But what is populism and to what extent does it help us understand the political persona of Jair Bolsonaro?

Used by several countries around the world to describe politicians who are on the left or the right side of the political spectrum, the term 'populist' has generated more and more interest among scholars from various fields of knowledge. There are many publications and literature on populism, and its wide use in public debate often carries inaccuracies that make understanding this concept a bit difficult. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), who understand populism

as a low-density ideology, argue that the characteristics of populism depend greatly on the social and political context in question. The authors highlight three central and common elements of populism around the world, whether belonging to the right or the left: an emphasis on "people", "elites" and "general will". Regardless of what side of the ideological spectrum they may adhere to, populist leaders tend to make use of an 'us versus them' discourse where 'us' represents the pure and homogeneous people and 'them' represents the corrupt elites. They also maintain that politics should be an expression of the people's general will.

These aforementioned authors believe populism to be a tenuous ideology, one that can be associated with other ideologies — even if they contradict each other — by adopting a simplistic discourse about the world in order to gain social following. Due to this simplistic nature surrounding populist rhetoric, leaders do not have to offer complex answers to society's problems, limiting themselves to no more than what their vision of how the world *should* be. Mudde and Kaltwasser's perspective, referred to as the ideational approach, offers scholars a very broad concept of populism, one that encompasses many different figures and realities.

The first element these authors point to as being central to populism is that the people are viewed as meaningless. This is because populist figures frame the concept according to their demands, looking to forge a unique identity, one separate from other groups, in order to more easily gain support for whatever their cause may be. The concept of 'people' can have three very basic meanings attached to it: the people as a nation, the people as sovereign, the people as common people or even as an ethnic group. Populist leaders can adopt any one of these different meanings to identify with their supporters. They often present themselves as opposed to the elites, who frequently view the people as ignorant, dishonest, dangerous, and incapable of dealing with issues related to politics. Populist leaders often adopt cultural elements of "inferiority" in order that they appear to be just one of the people. This is why they employ simple, often emotional and sensationalist, language. Given its importance in populist rhetoric, the people is a term that extends across different theoretical approaches to populism.

The second element of populism of interest is the concept of elites, which can be economic, political or cultural. The elites represent a group that annoys or irritates the pure people in the dichotomy established by populists. They are the preferred targets of populists, who identify them as despoilers or that they pose a threat to public development. They usually appear as obstacles to the populist leader's plans. For Bolsonaro, the people are synonymous with "good citizens" and "patriots" who are represented by the colors of the national flag, which contrasts with the color red used in leftist party logos. Bolsonaro uses the term elites — who represent another enemy to fight against — in his rhetoric, claiming they are "enemies of the homeland" belonging to left-wing parties. He also uses this term to refer to institutions of liberal democracy that exercise control or oversee the government, such as media communications, parliament, or organs of the justice system. It's no wonder that Bolsonaro supporters stormed key government buildings on January 8, 2022 in Brasilia. What's

more, during his time in power Bolsonaro and his supporters continually attacked the media outlets, journalists, scientists, and university institutions that took issue with his negationist discourse toward Covid-19 pandemic and his government's attempts to destroy the credibility of the vaccines.

According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), the third central concept of populism is general will which, according to populist logic, represents the will of the people as a whole; it must be sovereign and free of any barriers. The political game populists play is interpreting and expressing what the general will of the people is, presenting themselves as legitimate representatives of the people. In this scenario, the populist leader becomes a figure who strongly identifies with the people, challenging the *establishment* in order that the will of the people can be enforced, which is regarded as absolute. One could say that populism tends to feed off anti-political discourse. This idea is incompatible with the mediations of liberal democracy since, in this government, political conflicts are processed within an institutionality composed of other powers that go beyond that which the populist leader controls, such as courts, parliaments and the press. This is why authoritarian populists, due to the limits established by the principle of checks and balances in liberal democracies, tend to try and weaken institutions, always doing so in the name of the "will of the people". In Brazil, this undemocratic idea can be seen in the expression "the people rule", chanted by supporters in the streets and spread across social networks anytime the Federal Supreme Court prevents authoritarian proposals from Jair Bolsonaro.

"Simplifying the rules": Bolsonarismo and the environment

At a meeting in April 2020 at the Planalto Palace, former environmental minister for the Bolsonaro government, Ricardo Salles[2], shared his goals with fellow ministers and the president himself: take advantage of the fact that the press was busy covering the Covid-19 pandemic and establish new rules that would effectively weaken the country's environmental legislation without anyone noticing. In the minister's words, it was time to "simplify the rules" — a metaphor describing the Bolsonaro government's anti-environment agenda. Viewpoints about nature and the environment in general definitely took even more political precedence in Brazil after Bolsonaro's rise to power. Our hypothesis is that, like other issues, the far right used the

2 Ricardo de Aquino Salles is a Brazilian lawyer, administrator and politician affiliated to the Liberal Party. He was Brazil's Environment Minister from 2019 to 2021 in the Bolsonaro government. Salles had no technical knowledge about the environmental agenda prior to becoming environment minister and was appointed to the position by figures in the rural sector who had supported Bolsonaro during his presidential campaign. Salles became a mouthpiece for those figures' interests, seeking to delegitimize and weaken the control of the organizations in the Amazon that protect illegal deforestation, such as the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) (Araújo, Campos, 2022).

environment as a key issue with which to articulate its populism with negative consequences like violence and destruction to the other and political polarization. We reviewed the literature to highlight the most prominent aspects of populist views on the environment, emphasizing the three components of populism — the people, the elites and general will.

The people — or the "good citizens"

As for the people, populists tend to defend the interests of the majority, or the "good citizens", which excludes certain members of society that are not part of the group, such as political opponents or ethnic minorities. As we have already seen, in populism the people are the majority whose voice must take precedence over the others. According to Motta and Hauber (2022), this has a direct impact on environmental policies, especially regarding the climate. "The construction of the people as a majority and explicitly unified voice marginalizes and silences indigenous peoples, leftist social movements and environmental NGOs" (p.03). Populists and authoritarians like Bolsonaro use a communication style that appeals to the people's emotions, defending the "people" and often the country by selecting which "enemies" need to be fought in the name of the greater good. It is a rhetorical appeal that exploits fear, prejudice, and repressed anger against groups that do not belong to the imagined community of the populist.

Throughout his political career Jair Bolsonaro has echoed the sentiment that "the minority should bend to the majority". This phrase (something he reiterated during his tenure as a congressman, during his presidential election campaign and during his term in office) contrasts with the Federal Constitution of 1988 which prohibits discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, color, age, and any other forms, guaranteeing the right to be different without violating citizenship rights. Some populists (including Bolsonaro) make statements that allude to what Ostigiguy and Casullo (2017) describe as "harmful minorities", another central concept of populism describing the us versus them relationship in populist rhetoric that encourages polarization and, in many cases, political violence. In relation to the environment, the Bolsonaro government labeled traditional peoples as being harmful minorities, claiming they prevent the country from advancing economically.

During his campaign, the former president was even quoted as saying "not one inch of land would be set apart for indigenous peoples and that conservation units (protected natural areas) and indigenous lands should be open to agriculture and to mining"[3]. Faced with

3 Brazil's new president and 'ruralists' threaten Amazonia's environment, traditional peoples and the global climate. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-election-landrights-deforestat/indigenous-land-culture-at-stake-in-brazil-election-experts-idUSKCN1N0241>. Access on Aug. 21, 2022.

frequent attacks and threats by the Bolsonaro management, the indigenous peoples of Brazil (APIB) denounced the Brazilian president to the International Criminal Court in The Hague back in August 2021. Bolsonaro was charged with genocide and ecocide — a newer concept of crime against the environment and humanity as a whole. In their denouncement, the indigenous people drew attention to the former government's harmful actions to the environment, which included increased deforestation and illegal activities in areas designated and recognized as indigenous lands. According to Lawreniuk (2018), violence and racism against indigenous peoples tends to be a common trait of populist environmental governance as they do not want indigenous peoples to maintain control over their own territories and ecology.

Osterhage, Wolford and Breas (2022) talk about how authoritarian populist governments try to control environmental resources to ensure their political and economic power while also controlling the population. "This results in forms of extracting resources, framed as necessary in order to defend local, regional or national sovereignty" (p.1). As such, the implementation of extraction policies, which invade biomes and are harmful to life, is almost always concealed behind appeals to the common good. These authors further argue that a significant aspect of populist environmental governance is tied to the undemocratic management of resources. The speech given by Bolsonaro's environment minister calling for lax environmental protection standards in the country is symbolic of this type of resource management.

The Brazilian experience provides important insights into how authoritarian populism operates in the environmental agenda. For instance, nationalism is seen as a way of defending the production and export of *commodities* such as soy, even though it may have a negative effect on the terrain and the environment as a whole. A study carried out by Lopes, Lima and Reis (2020) demonstrates how the rapid expansion of soy cultivation throughout the Brazilian Cerrado boosted economic indicators but camouflaged the severe social inequalities and threats to the biome's biodiversity, all in the name of development. It is no coincidence that larger landowners strengthened relations with the Planalto Palace and became a fundamental part of Jair Bolsonaro's political base (Ferrante & Fearnside, 2019). Even still, Brazilian ruralists continually refer to themselves as the "people" who feed the world and promote national growth. Of note is that, in addition to identifying with the moral values proclaimed by Bolsonaro, the sector tried to meet the demands that range from facilitating access to resources to promoting more lax environmental protection rules.

The elites — or the "others"

As highlighted in Ferrante and Fearnside (2019), few regions of the world have views on nature as politically charged as Brazil, especially after Jair Bolsonaro's rise to power. Since 2019, there has been a growing disinvestment in institutions and initiatives of environmental

protection and an increased denial of scientific data, which sometimes even encourages violence against indigenous peoples. The last few years have shown that the Brazilian government's public opposition to official data has resulted in severe environmental destruction in the country. The framework in Bolsonaro's environmental agenda includes the second component in the dichotomous relationship with the people, that is, the others or the elites that must be fought.

The elites in this case, unaware of what the true desires of the people are, according to Bolsonarist rhetoric, are mainly represented by environmentalists, scientists, opposing party politicians and the press. These elites tend to be intellectuals who are often accused in populist conspiracy theories of scheming to discredit the government. Thus, populism not only relies on anti-politic and anti-institutional sentiments, its accusations extend to intellectuals and knowledge-producing institutions in the environment sector.

Bolsonaro followed in the footsteps of other populist leaders who use loud communication styles to demonize scientists, promote skepticism about scientific data, and frame environmentalism as an "anti-poor" dimension. In November 2021, a group of 21 scientists declined to receive the National Order of Scientific Merit after the former president had previously withdrawn the honor from two scientists who were critical of the Bolsonaro government, Adele Schwartz Benzaken and Marcus Vinicius Guimarães de Lacerda. In a public letter, the group drew attention to the government's harassment of opposition parties and leaders and the successive budget cuts it made to the field. In his last year in office, Bolsonaro issued a provision (Provisional Measure 1136) that limited the transfer of funds from the National Fund for Scientific Development (FNDC) to science and research entities around the country. That fund is the main source of financial support for the environmental research sector in Brazil. Another individual who paid the price for speaking out against the government's denial of data on deforestation in the Amazon was scientist Ricardo Galvão, former Director-General of the National Institute for Space Research. He was removed from his position by Bolsonaro after releasing scientific data that showed a significant increase in deforestation in the Amazon. The president accused Galvão of giving false data about Amazon deforestation, claiming he was in the service of some NGO with an agenda to discredit the country internationally.

Like Donald Trump, Bolsonaro also fought against climate change in Brazil. A strategic issue in the international community, climate change was practically removed from the agenda by the Brazilian government, particularly from a budgetary point of view. By the end of 2021, Brazil had slashed about 93% of funding for climate change research. As Lockwood (2018) explains, one of the reasons populist leaders give for their disregard of the climate agenda is the fact that the issue is seen as "an expression of hostility to liberal and cosmopolitan elites, rather than a commitment to the issue of climate change itself" (p.18). In other words, from a populist perspective, climate policy is a debate that is in contradiction with the national interests of economic growth. It is an issue imposed by the elites who, in addition to politicians and journalists,

include climatologists and national and international environmentalists (Motta & Hauber, 2022). The inherent cosmopolitanism of the issue tends to alienate the common individual, who is almost always more invested in issues that directly affect his or her daily life. This is why populism is viewed as a significant obstacle against international efforts to slow the advance of climate change, particularly in developing countries like Brazil.

In fact, during his term in office, Bolsonaro spoke about national sovereignty when attacking leaders of other countries who publicly criticized his inaction to combat the spread of wildfires in the Amazon. One of these world leaders was the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, who had called on G7 leaders in 2019 to take urgent action to combat the devastation of the Amazon, calling it an international crisis. Bolsonaro responded by claiming there was an international effort to use the "internal issues of Brazil for personal political gains". Bolsonaro further tweeted that Macron was using sensationalism to call attention to the Amazon, claiming he evoked a "misplaced colonialist mindset in the 21st century". For Motta and Hauber (2022), this is how Bolsonaro positions himself as "a leader who defends the interests of the people against threats from other countries, scientists and environmentalists" (p. 2). There are other surveys that show how populists from different parts of the world symbolically frame the climate agenda as being a threat to the sovereignty of their countries. One such study comes from Gemenis et al (2012), who point out how 13 extreme right-wing parties in Europe use nationalism, mainly based on ethnicity, to reject climate policies. Making use of populist rhetoric, these parties demonstrate remarkable cohesion on the subject.

The general will — or of the people

The third concept of Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2017) characterization of populism — the general will — involves a strong correlation with the Brazilian economy. It is no coincidence that the former president defended mining on indigenous lands despite the irreversible impacts it can have on indigenous peoples and their lands. At the time, Bolsonaro argued that mining would bring economic benefits to indigenous peoples and the populations of the Legal Amazon in the form of jobs and income — which is what the indigenous people want. The same logic was used to justify the advance of agribusiness, the sector that saw the most growth in the country during the Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking to this point, Motta and Hauber (2022, p. 17) argue that Bolsonaro's populism "[...] plays with the economic crisis and the need for development (to the detriment of environmental protection), invoking values such as national sovereignty and prioritizing the will of the people over the discourse of an environmentally conscious elite".

The environment is not only a battleground affected by populist policies, it also becomes a political object in populist discourse (Osterhage et. al, 2022). Public policies on the

environment are closely related to issues of class, race and ethnicity and as such are important tools for which to spread populist rhetoric.

Conclusions

This chapter identified the use of key elements of populism — "people", "elites" and "general will" — in actions and declarations made by the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro on the environment. We believe that Bolsonaro's rise to power turned the environment into a heavily politicized issue in Brazil. This reduced the environmental issue to simplistic interpretations used to dismantle environmental protection mechanisms which had been in place since the end of the military dictatorship by loosening regulations and disinvesting in protection and control agencies. These actions led to drastic repercussions such as an unprecedented increase in the level of deforestation of Brazilian biomes, in addition to the persecution of ethnic minorities, such as indigenous peoples, affected by the increased presence of illegal miners on their lands.

The Bolsonaro government's environmental agenda consisted of denialist and nationalist attitudes. Like Donald Trump, Bolsonaro denied the existence of global warming, saying that the pressure various nations of the world placed on climate change was simply a "commercial game" to jeopardize the country's sovereignty. Despite official data provided by climate scientists, Bolsonaro downplayed the wildfires in Brazilian biomes, triggering international warnings about the irreversible damage that has been caused to the environment in Brazil. Motta and Hauber (2022) believe this was how Bolsonaro was able to present himself as "the leader who defends the interests of the people against threats from other countries, scientists and environmentalists" (p.2).

Creating internal and external enemies who supposedly threaten economic development, particularly in agribusiness where Bolsonaro received a lot of support in the 2018 and 2022 elections, is also an important element in his populist discourse on the environment. The former president accused indigenous peoples, environmental activists, public figures, and national and international NGOs of spreading false news about the historic environmental devastation in Brazil in recent years. He has shown a disrespect for formal processes, institutions and the scientific community. In addition to denialism, the former president attacked knowledge by using misinformation and the spread of threats and violence.

In short, despite the resistance he faced to populist environmental governance during his administration, Bolsonaro managed to increase resource extraction, create enemies, and marginalize indigenous peoples and quilombolas in their own lands, not to mention advocating illegal mining which negatively affects the biodiversity of biomes and the lives of people in Brazil, especially the most vulnerable.

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New Media and Populism: The meteoric rise of right-wing populism in Portugal

Novos Media e Populismo — A ascensão meteórica do populismo de direita em Portugal

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Abstract: Although not a recent phenomenon, populism has penetrated the governing hemicycles across Europe. According to Mudde (2019), Europe is experiencing the fourth wave of right-wing populism. Portugal was considered a European oasis until 2019—the year of the founding of the CHEGA party. Through the analysis of the television debates on national televisions in the course of the 2019 and 2022 legislative election campaigns, held by the party and the use of the social network Facebook, it is intended to understand to what extent the media have played a primary role in the upward concertation of CHEGA's popularity by constantly spreading its claims and accusations against the established system.

Keywords: CHEGA, right-wing populism, Portugal, media, electoral campaign

Resumo: Apesar de não ser um fenómeno recente, o populismo tem penetrado nos hemiciclos governativos em toda a Europa. De acordo com Mudde (2019), a Europa está a viver a quarta vaga de populismo de direita. Portugal foi considerado um oásis europeu até 2019 — ano da fundação do partido CHEGA. Através da análise dos debates televisivos nas televisões nacionais no decurso das campanhas para as eleições legislativas de 2019 e 2022, realizados pelo partido e da utilização da rede social Facebook, pretende-se perceber em que medida os media desempenharam um papel primordial na concertação ascendente da popularidade do CHEGA, ao difundirem constantemente as suas reivindicações e acusações contra o sistema estabelecido.

Palavras-chave: CHEGA, populismo de direita, Portugal, media, campanha eleitoral

Introduction

Europe has been experiencing the fourth wave of right-wing populism since the 1980s of the 20th century (Mudde, 2019). In modern times, we can observe the penetration of populism into the governing semicircles in Europe (Machete, 2018).

Until 2019, Portugal was considered by several authors as immune to the European phenomenon of the rise of populists with right-wing ideology (Carreira da Silva & Salgado, 2018; Quintas da Silva, 2018).

The existence of a radical right-wing party in the national political spectrum has not been omitted because, since 1985, the Portuguese political landscape had the Party of National Renewal (PNR), now called ERGUE-TE! (Ergue-te, 2000; Pinto, 2017).

According to Carreira da Silva & Salgado (2018), the absence of populist political parties in Portugal is related to the low interest of civil society in politics.

The Portuguese electorate shows dissatisfaction and disconnection from the political class through a high vote abstention.

From 2009 to 2022, it fluctuated between 45% and 60%. However, in 2022, abstention decreased compared to previous elections. For example, in the 2015 legislative election, the abstention rate was 44,14%; in the 2019 legislative election, 51,43%; in the 2019 European election, 69,27%; and in the 2021 presidential election, 60,76%. In 2022, the figure was 48,58% (MAI, 2009, 2011, 2015, 2019b, 2019a, 2021, 2022).

In April 2019, the CHEGA party was founded by André Ventura, a dissident from the Democratic Socialist Party (PSD).

CHEGA self-claim to be a nationalist party and mouthpiece of the people, described by its leader as a *Well-to-Do* Portuguese people defender in the resisting of the injustices from the existing corrupt system (CHEGA, 2019b; Marchi, 2020).

Populist leaders tend to fight for the *people* against the *elites*. They self- entitled as heroes or messengers of the *vox populi* (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Despite the etymological definition of *people*, Priberam Portuguese Online Dictionary is "the set of inhabitants of a nation or locality." In common social sense, in Portuguese, the word *people* is associated with a deprived, almost destitute class without a social personality.

For this reason, it is understood that the substitution of the word *people* through the idiomatic expression *Weel-to-Do Portuguese.*[1] by the leader of CHEGA, aims to create proximity and empathy with the target audience defined by the party.

Several academic studies have looked at the rise of this party, which has been labeled racist by the media (Ferreira Dias, 2020; Marchi, 2020; Serrano, 2020), although its leader positions himself against these accusations (Marchi, 2020).

During the campaign for the 2019 parliamentary elections, according to the Portuguese Regulatory Authority (ERC[2]), the newly formed CHEGA party counted between three and nine appearances on the main national television stations.[3]

He was nine times on state television Rádio e Televisão de Portugal (RTP) and eight times on Sociedade Independente de Comunicação (SIC), and only three times on RTP2 and TVI (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2020). However, in the 2021 presidential elections, André Ventura was the second candidate with the most average appearances on television channels, from 21 to 52, while Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (candidate and incumbent President of the Republic) counted between 52 and 23 TV appearances. (Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social, 2021).

The television station with the most significant presence of the two candidates mentioned above was TVI, with 51 appearances by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and 45 by André Ventura. However, the leader of CHEGA on SIC had six more appearances than candidate Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social, 2021).

In 2022, during the legislative elections campaign, the number of television appearances increased enormously. For example, the Social Party (PS) candidate, António Costa (prime

1 Common sense understands that the *Well-to-Do Portuguese* work honestly, clothed in ethical and moral values and principles of life in society.
2 The author will use the Portuguese abbreviation ERC, instead of PRA.
3 RTP, RTP2, SIC, TVI, and CMTV.

minister in functions), had 777 total appearances on national television.[4] Moreover, CHEGA had 347, the third party with the highest number of presences, after the Democratic Socialist Party (PSD) with 613 (Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social, 2022).

It is clear from the election results that CHEGA had a significantly higher number of television appearances. In addition, in 2019, the party gained one political representative in the parliament chamber, and in 2022, it increased to 12 elected members of Parliament (MAI, 2019b, 2022).

The possible causes of this increase can be many, but it is essential to highlight a fundamental fact, namely the concerted use of new media, especially social networks, during the election campaign (Freire, 2017; Santiago, 2021).

In 2022, CHEGA had an official *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Telegram*, *Youtube*, and *Tik Tok* page, totaling 314 853 followers.[5]

During the Legislative elections campaign (from January 2nd and 28th of 2022), CHEGA posted 185 publications on *Facebook* (Joaquim, 2022a). However, during the European Elections period in 2019 (March 26th and May 27th of 2019), the party posted 171 times on the same social network (Silva, 2019).

The main question of this chapter relies on the following:

— Are the difference in election results from 2019 to 2022 correlated with the change in communication strategy?

Furthermore, the answered hypothesis are:

H1 — The use of a new media strategy consolidated the messages delivered by André Ventura in traditional media.
H2 — The increased coverage of traditional media brought greater prominence to the leader of CHEGA.
H3 — Civil society is more permeable to the themes defended by the Populist Party.

This article is divided into four main sections:

— The characterization of populism, which aims to understand the political movement through a literature review;

4 *Ibidem*.
5 Collected data on November 12th, 2022. *Telegram* was not included in this data.

— The second section intends to systematize the political campaign from traditional to digital;
— Section three is an overview of the political party from the 2019 to 2022 elections.
— The last section aims to understand the media and new media relationship with the right-wing populism party through André Ventura's presence in traditional media and social networks.

Characterization of Populism

Populism is controversial in the academic world and has a wide range in its characterization. For some authors, populism is a harmless and meaningless discourse (Laclau, 2007). For others, it is a *thin* ideology without consistent policies that correspond to the socioeconomic realities of nations (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). However, Barr (2018) and Weyland (2017) refer to populism as a political strategy.

Without finding a concrete definition in the literature, some commonalities are based on the binary of the pure *people* fighting corrupt *elites* (Barr, 2018; Laclau, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Weyland, 2017) as well as populism calling itself the voice of the people (*vox populi*) (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

According to Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) and Weyland (2017), the lack of conceptual unanimity in academia is due to the opportunism of populist leaders who align their discourses and the causes they advocate with events in civil society.

Populism has been described in academic literature since the 19th century. Initially, agrarian movements based on leftist ideology defended the people's interests over those of the *elites* (Anselmi, 2017). However, since the 1950s of the 20th century, populist movements have been associated with a right-wing ideology, specifically in Europe (Hawkins et al., 2017; Mudde, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the causal phenomena of this ideological shift are related to *people's* perceived distancing from the political agendas of their elected representatives.

For Moffitt (2016), populism is based on a performative political style that relies on leaders who identify as heroes fighting against the established political system by offending their traditional opponents through disruptive language and actions that the author calls *bad manners*.

This performative political style maybe be called a constructive *persona* built in the offline environment. It is created to gain more followers through their *popular behavior*, which becomes more consolidated in the online environment.

Some authors label them as emitters of hate speech (Williams, 2021) and intentionally spread disinformation (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020).

Anselmi (2017) refers to 21st-century populism as *media* populism, although there are different ways populism can present itself. According to Severiano Teixeira (2018), populism cannot distance itself from democracy because although it opposes the established system, it is not averse. After all, "they accept electoral democracy, popular sovereignty, and majority rule" (2018, p. 80). Nevertheless, they undermine the legitimacy of the opposition by disseminating exaggerated and false messages, especially on social media.

Political discourse has always been associated with hyperpolarization of the issues discussed; according to some authors, populist leaders are opportunists regarding social events because they tend to bring, for public debate, subjects and themes that are usually neglected on traditional party agendas (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Weyland, 2017).

Laclau (2007) alludes that populism discourse is meaningless. Nevertheless, Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) e Weyland (2017) reiterate these words by stating that despite pointing out flaws in the instituted system, they do not present concrete solutions.

In modern times, social networks are increasingly used to disseminate facts that lack effective veracity, i.e., civil society faces a *post-truth* era (Salgado, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, populism is not a phenomenon that exists only in our contemporary times. Although it has never disappeared from the political landscape, it tends to gain strength when events occur that civil society interprets as affecting their privacy, such as those described above. However, the emergence of social media has breathed new life into populist leaders as they have recognized it as a means to communicate directly with voters at a lower cost (Tambini, 2017).

Freire (2017) reinforces this premise when he says that neglecting the role of the Internet in political strategy could lead to the failure of political parties.

From Traditional to Digital

In the 20th century, television revolutionized how parties reached the electorate in a one-to-many communication system. On the other hand, the Internet has narrowed communication and made it one-to-one (Moffitt, 2016), promoting empathy and identification of recipients with messages published by senders.

Among the advantages of the Internet is the direct feedback of messages and qualitative studies conducted with focus group methodology (Council of Europe study DGI(2017) 11, 2018; Freire, 2017), as they bring greater analytical objectivity, which is not the case with written comments on social networks.

Policymakers can directly track their messages' acceptability by engaging their comments without an intermediary. However, as stated, it is critical to gather more consistent information for the appropriateness of the strategy (Freire, 2017).

To conclude the list of adjacent benefits of using the Internet, especially social media, it remains mentioned that the costs associated with election campaigns have drastically decreased due to the interconnectivity between sender and receiver (Tambini, 2017).

The cost-benefit binomial of digital political marketing campaigns is much more attractive than campaigns conducted through traditional media. In other words, the strategy can be quickly adapted to current events and phenomena through publications at a lower cost.

The associated disadvantages should also be pointed out, as these are the biggest drivers of populism for science. For example, the weak point in using the so-called new media is the spread of misinformation by Internet users (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020).

According to Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), the subcategories commonly called fake news are characterized by an information disorder in which news may or may not have a basis in truth. However, they aim to arouse people's negative feelings, such as injustice, insecurity, and fear.

Lazer et al. (2018) describe fake news as news that is prepared with a text structure that resembles real news but evokes malice in recipients or confirms negative feelings such as anxiety, fear, and frustration.

Wardle & Derakhshan (2017) distinguish four types of fake news: those that are partially accurate but used in a decontextualized manner (*misinformation*), those that are false (*disinformation*), and fake news that the sender believes to be accurate due to insufficient research (*malinformation*).

According to the *OberCom* report — *Fake News in an Election Year Portugal in line with the EU* (Cardoso et al., 2019) — disinformation tactics in an election context consist of organized coordination between individuals to deceive social media users about their identity and purpose, such as using memes or satirical images to denigrate a target, using authentic images placed in a fictional montage of the actual event, or by reusing old stories. Another commonly used tactic is the distortion of facts through text, fabricated news, or images.

These forms of online discourse are not a unique feature of populist parties. However, due to voter discontent with their traditional party representatives and the opportunism of social events used by populists to promote their messages, civil society tends to identify with messages produced in simple, pragmatic, and eloquent ways (Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016; Nai, 2021; Weyland, 2017).

Although there is a gap in the literature on populists' use of misinformation as a political strategy, it is crucial to salvaging Steve Bannon's interview in the documentary American Dharma (Morris, 2018), in which he suggests the use of fake news in a concerted effort against Donald Trump's opponent in the 2016 election, candidate Hillary Clinton.

The use of fake news in the virtual environment raises the possibility that it can spread quickly and be supposedly overridden by laws.

States, especially European Union member states, have taken various measures and actions to combat the spread of disinformation, but without success (Maurer, 2013), as the line between freedom of expression and what is understood as the intentional spread of disinformation is very thin (Cardoso et al., 2019).

Therefore, legislation tends to focus directly on issues understood as hate speech and commonly associated with far-right movements and radical right parties (Williams, 2021).

According to Williams (2021), it is challenging to measure hate. It can only be measured by the ingredients that feed it, i.e., the issues addressed and the tone of the messages.

Populist speeches aim for emotional interpretation that evokes negative feelings toward elites or others in their interlocutors.

Flew & Iosifidis (2020) point out that the growth of populist parties is directly related to the democratization of ICT because its globalization gives society more significant access to information and the exchange of information among its users, which promotes acculturation and social segregation processes.

Maldonado (2017) refers to social media as a privileged stage for interaction between voters and politicians. However, the primary purpose of social media took a back seat, i.e., social media primarily served to create a virtual connection between users who were connected based on shared values, principles, or life experiences (Joaquim, 2022a).

In the context of social media, eco-*chambers* are metaphorical virtual places where beliefs, prejudices, and ideologies are disseminated, reinforced, and affirmed in a defined space.

The goal was partially undermined. Internet users sought confirmation of their opinions and unspoken truths rather than ideological confrontation (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020), giving rise to eco-*chambers* (Joaquim, 2022a).

The eco-*chambers* created by social networking algorithms eventually became a political weapon because of the ease with which content can be created on the Internet and the difficulty of effectively regulating viral space. As a result, it is possible to spread anti-immigrant, racist, and anti-system messages that lead to virtual communities of individuals who see their ideas validated by others (Recuero, 2001, 2005).

Political strategists assume that the Internet, and social media, have breathed new life into electoral campaigns (Freire, 2017; Moffitt, 2016) and that a concerted communications strategy makes it possible to manipulate the masses without neglecting traditional media or face-to-face contact at rallies (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014).

Portugal: The meteoric rise of CHEGA

Far-right movements, or populism, have not been left out of the national political scene. On the one hand, there have been several extremist movements and groups since 1974, as well

as the existence of the PNR, as mentioned earlier (Pinto, 2017; Setenta e Quatro, 2022). On the other hand, left-wing populist parties were cemented in the political sphere, gaining permanent political representation since the fall of the old regime, such as the *Bloco de Esquerda*[6] (BE) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)[7](Boros et al., 2016, 2018; Moraes, 2016).

The BE presented as an anti-system party aimed at disrupting the established political system. For decades it gained political representation in the governing chamber (Moraes, 2016), coming to power, in 2015, through a coalition with the Socialist Party (PS) with the name *Geringonça* (Lopes, 2019).

However, populist parties with right-wing ideology had not found their place with the electorate. Therefore, in 2019, after a brief stint in the municipality of Loures with some controversial statements about the Roma community living in the municipality, André Ventura disassociated himself from the PSD due to political differences and created, in April of that year, the CHEGA party (Marchi, 2020).

That year he ran as head of the list for the European Elections with the BASTA coalition since the CHEGA party still lacked approval to become legal (Marchi, 2020) and won 1,49% of the voters. However, the results needed to be more comprehensive to ensure representation in the European Parliament, despite being 1% above the results of the PNR (MAI, 2019a).

News coverage of that election campaign was considerably less than in other national elections. However, André Ventura had a few TV and radio appearances, as well as an interview in the *Público* newspaper, similar to the primary candidate leaders by the traditional national parties (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social, 2020).

Participation in television programs was an area for the leader of CHEGA since he counts in his *Curriculum Vitae* the function of sports commentator in CMTV, which guaranteed him informal training of presence on television. When CHEGA was established, its leader was familiar with public opinion.

During his political career, André Ventura has expressed several controversial opinions, giving him prominence in the traditional media.

In the 2019 legislative elections, CHEGA won a seat in the parliamentary chamber with 1.29% of the vote. However, in 2022, the political party ensured twelve National Assembly deputies, with 7.18% of the electorate (MAI, 2019b, 2022).

6 Founded in 1999.
7 Created in 1921.

Media and new media relationship with the right-wing populism party

It took almost three decades for a right-wing populist party to exist in Portugal, facing the explosion of these parties in Europe (Mudde, 2019); however, in four years of existence, a political party conquered the third position in the preferences of the Portuguese (MAI, 2022).

The advent of ICT and its democratization have turned the Internet into a *commodity* product (Joaquim, 2022b).

Moffitt (2016) identifies television as a revolutionary means of communication for the parties. However, Maldonado (2017) presents the new media as pursuers of the populist rise since it translates into a direct communicational tool between the sender and receiver, without intermediation, and enhances the popularity of populist leaders due to the ease and speed of reaction of events and phenomena.

The mediatisation of CHEGA leaders is a lever for the party's success, not only due to his controversial statements in the media and social networks or during his speeches in Parliament, as well as in the scandals in which he is involved (Palma, 2020).

During the electoral campaign, CHEGA, as previously mentioned, was present in all the leading national news channels privileging the analysis, in a pejorative way, of the performance of the other candidates and the theme of the polls and the electoral process (Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social, 2020, 2022).

Although in the elections in May during the 2019 European Elections, with the BASTA coalition, André Ventura has not managed to win over enough voters to secure a seat as a Member of Parliament, the same did not happen in October during the Legislative Elections, as with 11,9%, he not only secured the seventh place in the preferences of voters but also gained parliamentary representation, with a Member of Parliament (MAI, 2019b).

According to Weyland (2017), the leaders of populist parties tend to hide behind the numbers presented in the polls to attack their opponents by demonstrating their alleged popularity with the masses.

Throughout his political career, André Ventura has pointed out, several times, the flaws, both of the established system and of his opponents accusing them of being corrupt. The party's ideological demand against corruption is exposed in its *Manifesto* and Electoral Programs from 2019 to 2022 (CHEGA, 2019b, 2019a, 2022).

The literature presents populist leaders as strong men in the fight against the injustices carried out by the elites against the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In the words of André Ventura, CHEGA defends the good Portuguese against the vicissitudes of the established power. However, the themes favored by the European populist parties, previously presented, are not, in their entirety, the same ones defended by the national party since there is an adaptation to the Portuguese reality. In other words, the party's main themes are the fight against

corruption, the Roma.[8] (more specifically, the use of social subsidies), and the attack on their opponents (Joaquim, 2022a).

These are not new themes, nor are they recent, but what makes them privileged is the tone of their interventions because, through an exacerbated emotional tone, the resolution of problems becomes urgent in public opinion, as mentioned before. However, according to Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017), populist leaders are adept at bringing issues that traditional parties usually omit to the public square but rarely present concrete operational solutions. Nevertheless, civil society tends to feel empathy for their speeches.

The same authors allude that populist leaders, not being generalized, are often charismatic. Moreover, according to Weber (2003), they possess supernatural gifts and characteristics.

One will tend to understand that this is not real. However, through studied rhetoric and oratory based on a lexicon that voters can understand, charisma is implied as an inherent quality of the populist leader.

These characteristics, together with a concerted new media digital marketing strategy based on a pragmatic type of communication, brought, according to Santiago (2021), an increase in popularity with the electorate verified through the elections.

The CHEGA party's path can be described as meteoric, as in the four years of its existence, it has reached third place in the electorate's favor (MAI, 2022).

According to Marchi (2020), by 2019, there was a void in the political landscape because people felt they needed to be heard. However, Santiago (2021) notes that new media is the primary tool for spreading populist messages in the Iberian Peninsula.[9]

According to Anselmi (2017), Flew & Iosifidis (2020), and Maldonado (2017), social media is the primary precursor of this new wave of right-wing populism experienced in Europe. In Portugal, it has become a mainstream instrument of political communication, as it not only conveys political messages but is used to humanize politicians and bring them closer to civil society.

Furthermore, with social networks, these types of parties would have had the success they have.

CHEGA operationalizes this statement through its communication strategy, as it is present on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Telegram*, *Youtube*, and *Tik Tok*, with a total of 314 853 followers[10].

The social network with the most significant number of followers is *Facebook*, with 149 000 followers, and with fewer followers is *Tik Tok*, with 7 505 followers.

8 The Roma subject was first mentioned, by André Ventura, when he was a candidate for the municipality of Loures.
9 It refers to VOX in Spain and CHEGA in Portugal.
10 Social networks were queried on November 12th, 2022, except for *Telegram*.

However, leader André Ventura has 64 335 followers on *Twitter*, and the official party account has 28 450, broadly representing the party's personalization based on its leader.

It should be noted that the two main national parties, the PS, and the PSD[11], have 58 725 and 65 259 followers on *Twitter*, respectively[12].

Although the party's official *Facebook* page has the most followers, the most controversial posts are posted on *Twitter*, perhaps due to the social networking goal and the immediacy of *Twitter*.

Using this vast panoply of social networks shows the increasing importance of political parties being "close" to their voters and supporters. However, engagement in social networks does not mean greater political participation. It only means greater involvement with voters and gives events and phenomena immediacy because the great weapon of social networks is real-time feedback.

Recall the presentation of pets made by leaders of political parties on social networks, for example, when focusing on the pet rabbit Acácia of André Ventura.

In September 2022, his death was the subject of all the national press.

During the electoral campaign of the 2022 Legislative Assembly, the television framework of the leading news channels, inserted in their program, schedules face-to-face debates "between all the leaders of all the parties with parliamentary representation" (Cardoso et al., 2022, p. 4).

In the main results, CHEGA had 28 minutes on average of post-debate commentary, ranking very close to the major parties in the national political spectrum (PS and PSD), and the "debates between right-wing political leaders had, on average, higher audience and also higher average commentary time than debates on the left or between the left and the right." Nevertheless, the PS vs. CHEGA debate had over 1.4 million viewers (2022, p. 4). Despite the success in audiences of the debates, Observatório da Comunicação warns that

> (...) the screen TV coexists today with more screens, either mobile or computer, on which voters follow the election campaign and on which they also watch TV. Therefore, in the future, in the next elections, we also need to think about innovations in television coverage of elections, using the management and creation of networks between screens to increase viewership and maximize their attention to television content, including election debates (2022, p. 11).

11 Mainstream parties.
12 November 12th, 2022.

There are no relational studies between the holding of the debates on free-to-air news channels and the decrease in the abstention rate in the mentioned elections, but the polls of the debates let us guess that this may have been a premise.

Although it was not the debate most watched by spectators, the confrontation between CHEGA and CDS[13] will undoubtedly go down in national political history, where the campaign was almost forgotten to make way for an exchange of insults between the candidates.

On the CHEGA party's official *Facebook* page, André Ventura's opponent was minimized several times through pejorative speech and diminutives (Joaquim, 2022a). The central theme on *Facebook* during the campaign was even the exposure of weak and negative points of all party opponents, with 11 publications of the 191 publications made during January 2022 (Joaquim, 2022a).

All of CHEGA's publications on *Facebook* were analyzed to understand if there was any hate speech or disinformation dissemination. The selection of the social network *Facebook* for the analysis, as mentioned above, was because it is the social network with the most significant number of followers of the party's official page.

Regarding the first, it was noted that there was an aggressive communication strategy that, according to Williams (2021), "can be considered anti-locution, i.e., hate speech, ranging from jokes to outright insults against the former group" (2021, p. 35). In other words, *the group* refers to all who are not CHEGA supporters (Joaquim, 2022a). Regarding disinformation, the CHEGA party was found to use disinformation by presenting decontextualized facts, such as exposing ethnic Gypsies/Romans in light of their enjoyment of social subsidies. André Ventura presents this problem by extrapolating data, as only a negligible percentage, about 3%, of Social Integration Income (RSI) recipients are of Roma ethnicity (Mendes et al., 2014), and by misleadingly presenting survey data during televised debates (Joaquim, 2022b).

Despite being shrouded in successive controversies, the CHEGA party has shown a rise in popularity, with public opinion demonstrated through the election results from 2019 to 2022, based on creating a disruptive political character entirely dissimilar from traditional politicians.

Political marketing strategies have adapted to media realities. According to Sette & Almeida (2010), political leaders are equated with traditional marketing products and services. Therefore, the communication strategy is based on the marketing mix, either the 4Ps or the 7 C's. In other words: Looking at the politician as a product, one can develop a communication strategy that targets the desired audience.

According to Kotler & Armstrong (2016), all new media strategies should be based on the four axes of the marketing mix: product, distribution, communication, and price. Thus,

13 The debate took place on January 12th, 2022.

Sette & Almeida (2010) allude to the fact that the politician is the product. The distribution or point of sale for products and services is where individuals communicate, like the Internet, rallies, and media.

Price represents the value of the issue, reflected in popularity polls and election results, and communication is aligned with the previous axes.

The 7C's (Kotler et al., 2017) represent the communicational matrix to keep in mind for the success of the messages delivered, i.e., communication should be credible to build trust, cordial to promote relationships, clear for better understanding, correct to reinforce trust, consistent for the interlocutor to perceive stability, concrete and concise to consolidate trust in the shortest time possible.

Although it is private the existence of a marketing and communication structure within the CHEGA party (Santiago, 2021), it is possible to identify the parallelism of traditional and digital marketing with political marketing.

The product is André Ventura, who communicates on several digital platforms and is a constant presence either as news in the media or with presence in television programs (distribution), consolidating his growing popularity with public opinion verified through polls (Marktest, 2022) and electoral results(MAI, 2019b, 2021, 2022).

Through the aggregation of results from several polling companies copied by Marktest (2022), it is possible to quantify the popularity of CHEGA with public opinion, this time its trajectory has presented increasing percentage averages, being located in October 2022, at 10,1%, very close to the peak of 10,2% in April 2022. On the contrary, the Cambridge University study concluded that populist parties in Europe suffered a popularity setback due to COVID-19 (Foa et al., 2022).

In January 2022, a Legislative election month, their average popularity was 5,7%, with an increasing trend until September 2022. That month, the party's popularity decreased to 5,2% (Marktest, 2022).

Reflecting on these values and comparing them with the electoral results of the 2022 Legislative elections, it is possible to conclude that the popularity of the populist party of the national radical right is perceptually lower than its electoral results since, in January of 2022, had average popularity of 5,7% and has an electoral result of 7,15% (MAI, 2022; Marktest, 2022).

This superficial analysis has its weaknesses since the sample is different. However, comparatively using this data aims to understand CHEGA's rise in civil society.

From another perspective, CHEGA had 385 573 votes (MAI, 2022; Marktest, 2022), and its total aggregate universe of social media followers is 314 853, as mentioned above.

The analysis sample must be more informative, as internet users may follow all pages on the different digital platforms.

The qualitative methodology presented in this article was based on a literature review supported by quantitative data, but the study of this topic is ongoing.

While there are several articles and studies on this topic, more must be found about the motivations behind the party's popularity in public opinion than CHEGA's communication strategy.

Conclusion

The use of new media, specifically social networks, is not exclusive to populist parties; however, the communicational strategy used goes from the emotional perceptions of civil society (Freire, 2017; Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Weyland, 2017).

In Portugal, the causes studied for the emergence of a right-wing populist party were related to the local situation, i.e., despite the existence of several phenomena at a global level that drove the discontent of civil society towards the representative political class, such as the Financial Crisis of 2008 or the Mediterranean Crisis of 2014-2015 (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), it is through the communication disruption of the leader of CHEGA that civil society identifies and sees itself (Marchi, 2020).

André Ventura brought to the debate in the square public themes omitted by traditional parties, such as the benefit of social subsidies for the Roman ethnic group or the exposure of flaws of both his opponents and the established system (Joaquim, 2022a), extrapolating the feelings of injustice perceived by the *Well-to-Do Portuguese* (H3). However, hiding behind the demand for nationalism (CHEGA, 2019a), the media often accused him of being a racist, a position he vehemently denies (Marchi, 2020). Nevertheless, his statements are often controversial, so he is often mentioned in the media.

Although he is constantly present on social networks, traditional media foster his popularity with public opinion (H2). Moreover, civil society has demonstrated through its electoral preference that the party has space in the national political panorama (H3).

In the party's *Manifesto*, verifying the commitment to give a voice to the Portuguese people is possible. The party sees itself in that promise, as seen in the growth of popularity with public opinion (Marktest, 2022).

Refraining from disregarding the party's communication strategy, we conclude that the media have played a vital role in increasing CHEGA's popularity by constantly disseminating its demands and accusations against the established system (H1).

Also, increased media coverage from 2019 to 2022 (Entidade Reguladora da Comunicação Social, 2020, 2022) added value to CHEGA messages. After all, civil society felt more empathic to André Ventura's speeches because the people saw their anxieties, perceptions, and concerns represented.

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Logics, Bolsonaro and a post-foundational analysis

Lógicas, Bolsonaro e uma análise pós-fundacional

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Abstract: This paper applies the Logics of Critical Explanation approach (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) to Jair Bolsonaro's 2022 re-election candidacy launch speech. The Logics has been applied to various empirical contexts but has hardly been used to analyse the Brazilian case. Through a twofold purpose, this paper contributes (first) to the empirical applicability and specification of the Logics, and (second) to our understanding of populism by employing a post-foundational perspective to the discourse of the former president of Brazil. This critical study analyses how Bolsonaro's narrative focuses on principles of difference that sharply specify the good and the bad, where the latter need to be defeated to establish a social hegemony. Adding to the field of discourse studies, the paper argues that the Logics approach can benefit from supplementation from other theories such as Rhetorical Political Analysis and the concept of moral panic, to offer a more detailed analysis of political discourse.

Keywords: discourse theory, logics of critical explanation, populism, antagonism, Bolsonaro

Resumo: Este artigo aplica a abordagem *Logics of Critical Explanation* (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) ao discurso de lançamento da candidatura à reeleição de Jair Bolsonaro em 2022. A Lógica tem sido aplicada a vários contextos empíricos, mas quase não foi utilizada para analisar o caso brasileiro. Com um duplo objetivo, este artigo contribui (primeiro) para a aplicabilidade empírica e especificação da Lógica, e (segundo) para a nossa compreensão do populismo, empregando uma perspetiva pós-estruturalista ao discurso do ex-presidente do Brasil. Este estudo crítico analisa como a narrativa de Bolsonaro se concentra em princípios de diferença que especificam nitidamente o bem e o mal, onde o último precisa ser derrotado para estabelecer uma hegemonia social. Para contribuir para o campo dos estudos do discurso, o artigo argumenta que a abordagem lógica pode se beneficiar da suplementação de outras teorias, como a Análise Política Retórica e o conceito de pânico moral, para oferecer uma análise mais detalhada do discurso político.

Palavras-chave: teoria do discurso, lógicas de explicação crítica, populismo, antagonismo, Bolsonaro

Introduction

In the context of the political polarization that Brazil is currently experiencing, power struggles and social demands are reshaped and negotiated within the political discourse. Reconfigured meanings arise not only from old and heated interpersonal discussions but also from the displacements to which these meanings are interpellated in digital platforms. What we have witnessed is the "emotionalization of contemporary politics" (Yates 2021, p. 162). In this context, the political discourse reverberates beyond the pulpit, circulating around the subject as if it was trapped in a discursive ambush which escape is impossible. This new situation confronts us, as social subject, with its complexity; and challenges scholars interested in investigating social practices and regimes.

The Logics of Critical approach developed by Glynos & Howarth (2007) emerges as a suitable tool to explain and criticize this complexity. It provides a practical analytical framework to explore historical and social changes. The key feature of Logics is its methods of problematization, articulating a set of "empirical phenomena" to create a complex problem. Following the Post-foundational Discourse Theory's (PDT) problem-driven approach, the Logics "intended to capture the purposes, rules and ontological presuppositions that render a practice or regime possible, intelligible, and vulnerable" (Glynos, Howarth, Norval & Speed

2009: 11). Following this aspiration, and to illustrate its application, I will examine the case of the former Brazilian President's, Jair Messias Bolsonaro and how his political project become hegemonic. I will do that analysing his speech during the launch of his re-election electoral campaign to show how he mobilizes the logics of difference to establish a combative regime, articulated a neoliberal economy, and defended a conservative moral. My aim is to present how key logics within Bolsonaro's pre-campaign speech operates to narrow down any public debate that opposes his idea of nation.

Today there is considerable interest in Bolsonaro's discourse and discourses *about* Bolsonaro. His performance as President of Brazil has no precedented in the history of Brazil, which awakens the desire of academia to study his persona and his speech. Add to this the increase in the number of studies on populism around the world. When we put these two elements together we see a trend to study Bolsonaro as a fair-right populist especially when the studies analyse his leadership discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic (Fonseca, Nattrass, Lazaro & Bastos, 2021; Duarte, 2020).

It is also not uncommon to find comparative analyzes between Bolsonaro and former US President Donald Trump and how their discursive strategies and political positions are similar (Cervi, Garcia & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Iamamoto, Kubík & Summa, 2021; Agius, Rosamond & Kinnvall, 2020). Others analyze Bolsonaro through the lens of authoritarian populism (Akgemci, 2022; Neto & Cipriani, 2021). Despite being quite relevant, these analyses explain Bolsonaro's speech based on a pre-conceptualization that reinforces the categorization of him as an extreme right-wing populist. Such studies limit the concepts from emerging from the empirical material. They are also a good contribution to increase the analyse of populism beyond Europe and a rich empirical source of insights about Bolsonaro's persona (see also Júnior & Gagliardi, 2020). However by appealing to the determinism about the meaning of populism, these studies open space to a more discursive investigation about Bolsonaro's strategies.

In that sense, it is necessary to establish a dialogue between political discourse with an approach that deals with the latter in an articulatory manner. My clain is that this can be done by the use of the Logics. The approach has been applied to other contexts, but it has hardly been used in the Brazilian context. Thus, inspired by other empirical analyzes of Bolsonaro's speech and about Bolsonaro (Fausto Neto, 2020; Zicman de Barros & Lagos, 2022; Ronderos & Glynos, 2022), this article seeks to contribute empirically to the discussion about how the former Brazilian president's speech is constructed from articulatory practices. The main point here is not to label Bolsonaro's discourse but to allow the discursive strategies adopted by him to emerge from the empirical material.

My paper proceeds in five stages. First, I will introduce the general conceptualisation of the Logics Approach' by describing its three logics: social, political and fantasmatic. Second, I will present the methods; justifying why this specific speech should be analysed. The paper proceeds then to contextualisation, followed by the fourth part, where I apply the Logics to

my case study. In the final part, I present the conclusion and articulate the analysis result with the current Brazilian socio-economic situation. I conclude by indicating the limitations I encountered during the process of analysing political discourse through the lens of the Logics.

The Logics Approach: a brief overview

The Logics of Critical Explanation's approach (Glynos & Howarth, 2007) is considered an answer to the methodological shortcoming of Post-foundational Discourse Theory (Remling 2017, p. 2). It proposes a conceptual framework to understand how the discourse is naturalized within social formations. The Logics approach provides a "rigorous framework" (Remling, 2017, p.2) focuses more on the mechanism underlying the agency of all the elements of the discourse rather than trying to understanding what type of discourse is circulating in the social practices. Inspired by the interpretative strand of PDT (Glynos, Howarth, Flitcroft, Love, Roussos and Vasquez, 2021:64), Logics "seeks to interrogate and critique social realities construed as a nexus of social, political, and fantasmatic logic" (Glynos, Klimecki and Willmott, 2012, p. 298).

The Logics perspective is based on two key fundamental assumptions. First, it understands discourse as a disposition of meanings, which extrapolates linguistic and extra-linguistic elements (Laclau, 1993, p.435). It is the detachment from the bonds of structuralism that allows the discourse to present "the impossibility of a closed totality" (Laclau, 1993, p.435). Discourse understood as incomplete — but important for the subject identification — is fundamental to comprehending the relationship between psychoanalysis and PDT; since there is a confluence between the discursive incompleteness and 'the lack', the need.

The second key fundamental assumption is contingency, understood not merely as uncertainty but as the possibility of the surprise. The status of 'radical contingency is the moment when the subject becomes aware that things do not need to be the same as they are and that there are other ways to see the social. 'Radical contingency' is a way to express the "incompleteness of the symbolic universe" (Glynos, 2021, p. 99), which also reflects the subject identification process. Being the latter, the result of a lack rather than fullness (Eklundh, 2019, p.100). The "constitutive incompleteness" unconsciously embodied the subject through fantasy, enjoyment, and desire (Glynos, 2021). This conceptualization will help us address all the social and political logics, especially the fantasmatic logic.

With these two main assumptions in place, the Logics of Critical Explanation present the idea that 'there is a constitutive incompleteness in the symbolic world'. The social reality thus is incapable of fulfilling the subject identity since it is "eccentric to itself because it is always threatened by a radical exteriority which dislocates it" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 67-68). The permeability feature of social reality allows the dislocation to manifest, which means it enables "the articulation of new social constructions that attempt to suture the lack created

by dislocation" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p.68). In that perspective, the social reality has a "dual role"; it produces "the need" by "threatening identities" and puts itself as the source for the rise of a "new identification" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 68; see also Laclau, 1990). In Lacanian terms, from where Laclau fetched inspiration, this "dual role" is also related to the real as fantasy. That means "the real is not reality" (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 68), but it is the object of dislocation; it is "what shows that this reality is lacking" (Stavrakakis 1999, p. 68). It is from that view of a dynamic society, that Laclau and Mouffe (2001 [1985]) developed PDT. Against the essentialism of Marxist theory, PDT "stress the radical contingency and structural undecidability of discursive structures" (Glynos, Howarth, Norval & Speed, 2009, p. 8). To summarize, PDT lends to the Logics approach the assumption of "structures as ontologically incomplete entities", reinforcing the "radical contingency of social objectivity" (Glynos et al., 2012).

From a methodological perspective and a post-positivist view of social science explanation, the Logics Approach claims that "positivism's deductive form of explanation and validation is bound to the idea that a hypothesis is detachable from the context of its discovery" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 35). In contrast, the Logics propose the construction of a problem using the "logic of retroductive explanation" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 35) which works in a "to-and-from movement between the phenomena investigated and the various explanations that are proffered" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 34) to create a complex problem.

It means retroductive reasoning is not restricted to the context of discovery. It englobes the whole process from problematization to persuasion & intervention, including the retroductive explanation and theory construction (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 33). In doing that, the Logics approach is capable of developing more complex problematizations at the same level that allow the explanation to be "constructed and presented for critical scrutiny" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 33). By proposing a flexible, retroductive cycle of the social science, post-foundational (in contrast to the hard positivism) allows for research that is more open to the analyst's interpretation as well as to the critical analyses from other scholars.

The three logics

Understanding social practices and regimes as established systems, presupposes the operationalization of the Logics (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 145), "which produce effects of totality capable of constructing the limits, and thus of constituting the formation" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001 [1985], p. 145-146). From that perspective, the Logics Critical Explanation puts together social, political and fantasmatic logics not only to problematise the object under investigation but also to allow the researcher to link self-interpretation and empirical material capable of clarifying the social context more tangibly. Explanation becomes more detailed, and criticism is sustained by strong argumentation. As Glynos & Howarth argue:

> The function of logics in social scientific analysis is not only to make social processes more intelligible, but in the process of describing and explaining it should also furnish the possibility of a critical engagement with the pratices and processes under investigation. (2007, p 153)

The three different logics propose by Glynos & Howarth always work together, but each of them reveals specific aspects of the discourse under investigation. The Social logics are on the level of the incontestable. It captures the features of stability in social practice and regimes. They "characterize the patterning of established practices by dominant organizing principles" (Glynos et al., 2012, p. 298). In short, "they constitute the socially accepted 'rules of the game'" (Remling, 2017, p. 4). Political practices are replete with a whole range of rules which are presented through several processes, but in the context of populism, the othering is a key strategy to establish the order.

Political logics are organized to reveal "the way discursive elements enter in relations of equivalence or relations of difference" through various processes of collective mobilization and intervention" (Glynos et al., 2012, p. 299). It will provide us with a conceptual framework to expand our analysis "beyond social logics" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 145). By helping us to understand the idea of contestation, Political logics can provide a grammar to unveil how Bolsonaro's discourse strives against the socialist political project. Whereas the Social logics are in the sphere of "characterizing practices" (Glynos et al., 2021, p. 65), Political logics are more in the domain of explanation and criticism of how practices and regimes are established in the social formation.

Fantasmatic logic captures "the way in which the subject deals with the radical contingency of social relations as a subject of enjoyment" (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 152). As stated by Stavrakakis (1999, p. 75-76), "political reality, the world of politics, is constructed on the symbolic level and supported by fantasmatic frames providing its imaginary coherence by promising it an anchor in the real". In other words, the fantasy brings to the Logics the possibility of refining the understanding of the emotional content of the affective response.

Methods

Following Foucault's practice of problematization, Glynos & Howarth suggest that an object of study needs to be constructed (2007, p. 167). It means, problematization needs practice (Bacchi, 2012) and in the case of this text the practices come from long-time observation of Bolsonaro's discourse. Not only about what the news media has published about him, but also from a digital ethnography process where I followed Bolsonaro Twitter account (@jairbolsonaro) every day and watched his weekly live show on YouTube from September 2021 to August 2022. From that observation I could identity essential discursive

elements that are repeatedly articulated within Bolsonaro's discourse to maintained and naturalized political and social antagonisms.

By accompanying Bolsonaro's campaign launch speech I noted the repetition of previously identified elements, such as the comparison of the PT's Brazil with the current situation in Venezuela, the attack on the institutions, among others. From this exercise, I concluded that such speech is not an isolated event but the condensation of a narrative that begins and repeats itself throughout the Bolsonaro government.

Said that, the data for this article come from Bolsonaro's speech during the launch of his re-election electoral campaign on the 24th of July 2022. The video was watched on the SBT News YouTube channel. After watching the video two times, I used the YouTube transcription tool to collect the text. The video was watched one more time to compare the transcription with the original audio. I coded the speech manually based on my previous analysis of Bolsonaro's discourse; some categories were expected to emerge, such as the ones that articulate socialism with hate. Once the coding was completed, I ensured that the analysis addressed all essential processes and meanings in the narratives and that the data was analysed clearly and cohesively. This author did all the translations from Portuguese to English.

Background and context

Bolsonaro is often described as "The legend. The myth" by his supporters, most of them from the evangelical community. The devotion and adoration to him begins to fade when Lula, Bolsonaro's primarily enemy, regained his political rights in 2021 and announced he would run for President in 2022. From that moment, the anti-socialism discourse that was part of Bolsonaro's electoral campaign in 2018 became even stronger and essential to his rhetorical performance. Although the left-wing ideology enters the political scene to weaken Bolsonaro's narrative — already corroded by the Covid-19 pandemic, he still kept the second place in the electoral polls for Presidency[1].

Lula is the materialization of Bolsonaro's narrative that demonizes socialism and left-wing ideologies. This is actualized affective elements that trigger anxiety and hate within the Brazilian public. However, to capture the details of the construction of Bolsonaro's account, this demands more extensive empirical material over a longer period. In my research, I have followed Bolsonaro and Lula's discourse on Twitter and YouTube since September 2021. Based on this previous observation, I can argue that the selected speech

1 https://exame.com/brasil/pesquisa-para-presidente-distancia-entre-lula-e-bolsonaro-cai-de-11-para-8-pontos-no-primeiro-turno/ Accessed in 27/08/2022

condenses the main argumentative elements that Bolsonaro has uttered in the past year.

The celebration that launched Bolsonaro's re-election campaign to the Presidency of the Republic took place in a small football stadium in the city of Rio de Janeiro (his constituency) on the 24th of July 2022. The event was marked by many non-discursive elements, such as people wearing Brazilian flag colours or the moment when Bolsonaro kissed the First Lady; however, for this paper, I focus solely on Bolsonaro's speech to illustrate the use of the Logics. News media YouTube channels and Bolsonaro's son's account on Facebook (Flavio Bolsonaro) broadcasted the event live, making it available worldwide.

Apply the Logics in relation to speech

Social Logics — characterizing

In Bolsonaro's speech, it is possible to identify the construction of an antagonistic regime. Although antagonism is fundamental to the political domain (Mouffe, 2013), when it takes the form of radicalism, it loses the feature of generating debates; instead, it establishes a moral frontier between the good and the bad (Mouffe, 2020). When Bolsonaro depicts the socialist regime as the one which provokes pain and suffering; and also as the one who wants to demolish the traditional family, he formalizes an unquestionable polarized regime. Who would want such a regime? Especially when your audience is largely made up of evangelical (Garrett Jr 2022), where evil has to be defeated at all costs. This can be seen in the following quotes from Bolsonaro's speech:

(A) "Every day I bow my knees and pray The Lord's Prayer, and ask God to never allow the Brazilian people to experience the pain of communism."
(B) "Corruption was the fuel to the past governments."
(C) "The informal ones [workers] were forced [by the left-wing city mayors and state governments] to stay at home to die of hunger (...). They made you experience a bit of what is a dictatorship."
(D) "This is the same guy [Lula] who wants to legalize abortion (...) who wants to legalize the drugs in Brazil (...) who wants to the deconstruction of heteronormativity and who created what is called the gender ideology."
(E) "We know that the other side has malice, lies and makes false promises".
(F) "There is a saying: 'If you did not stay on the left-wing until your twenties, you have no heart; but if you stay on the left wing after your twenties, you have no brain."

The first quote (A) is part of the initial statement. By starting his discourse by associating socialism with pain, Bolsonaro established the 'rules of the game' at the very beginning of the ceremony; he anticipates how will be tone of his speech. The tone of his discourse can be measured through affective signifiers. Moral pain emerges as a signifier when socialism is accused of demolishing the traditional family (quote D); physical pain when socialism enforces lockdown during the pandemic, and people had to stay at home with no food (quote C); and emotional pain, when socialism is frame as "liars" (quote E).

The examples above illustrate two Social logics: a logic of combat, when the enemy needs to be taken out of the game; and a logic of intolerance when there is no room for negotiation. Moreover, from those quotes, it is possible to identify the "four hypotheses concerning the unifying principle of a discursive formation" according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001 [1985], see also Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p.139), which construct social logics. First, the 'reference to the same object': socialism. Second, a 'common style in the production of statements': socialism only produces pain and corruption. Third, 'constancy of the concepts': socialism is understood as an incompetent and demoniac unit. And fourth, 'reference to a common theme': the combat to socialism is repeated. The articulation of these hypotheses reveals Bolsonaro's attempt to naturalize the idea of a unique and exclusive unit of social and political organization (Hawkins, 2015).

Political logics — institution and contestation

From a Lacanian perspective, we can argue that Bolsonaro's discourse can play "the real" over the symbolic order. That means that when he presents socialism as a corrupt and threatening entity, as shown in the quotes above, he persuades the subject to question the world around him. This is the moment of dislocation. What I argue here is that there is a collection of signifiers, brought to the surface by political discourse, that triggers questions by the subject, such as: How did we get here? How can we avoid the continuity of this situation? The frame of corruption is fundamental at this point of the analysis, and it has a powerful meaning in the political context once it suggests the use of public funds to benefit the political individual. In sum, we can say that a political project, in this case, regimes of combat and intolerance can "provide a grammar for expressing emotion and channel affect into action" (Sunnercrantz, 2021, p. 6).

When socialist ideologies are depicted as a source of systemic corruption (as seen in the quotes above) in opposition to a competent and qualified government (quote G), Bolsonaro's discourse constructs chain of equivalence in which the common point is the aversion to the other. The effect of this is not only to create an antagonistic frontier between left-wing and right-wing but to position socialism as the worst that happened to Brazil.

(G) "We have a care for public things. There is no "way" in our government. We have been corruption-free for three and a half years."

As described by Laclau, the construction of the social through the logic of equivalence "involves the drawing of an antagonistic frontier" (2018 [2005], p. 77). In that sense, it is relevant to consider the linguistic factor in the construction of identity, that means, to mould the "us", especially when we analyse political discourse. One emblematic moment in Bolsonaro's speech happened when he remembers when he was the victim of a knife attack during the 2018 election campaign. His utterance in the third person of plural puts the people in the same vulnerable situation as he was.

(H) "We survived an attack but God saved me and [God] elected us, President."

The linguistic game "me" and "we" as in the example above, is essential in the political discourse. While the "me" reinforces the authority of those who speak — and in the narrative created by Bolsonaro, it is fundamental in order to establish the figure of the hero — the "we" works as a glue in the construction of the identity.

By employing neoliberal economics that allows the market to set the rules, I argue that Bolsonaro creates a smokescreen that hides fundamental issues in a country in crisis: hunger and unemployment. Bolsonaro's public policies focused on favouring the market, and did not meet such social demands, which are now a reality in Brazil. Add to that his questionable performance during Covid-19 (Fonseca, Nattrass, Lazaro and Bastos 2021). Without strong arguments, he blamed others and frame corruption to create a point of equivalence and establish the "us" and "them" (quote I).

According to Mouffe (2015), the construction of a new hegemony requires "the creation of a chain of equivalence between the various democratic struggles, old and new, in order to constitute a 'collective will, a 'we'". For that, continues Mouffe, it is necessary to designate a "them", an opponent whose defeat favours the rise of this new hegemony. However, the defeat of socialism, in the case of our example, does not only involve framing it as corrupt or as a threat to traditional family; but as a campaign to recruitment of those who are on the side of the "them". In a catechist tone, Bolsonaro give agency to young people who perhaps do not identify with the religious chain of equivalence; through the establishment of fear, as exemplified by the following examples (quotes J and K):

(I) "We faced a pandemic and a war [Ukraine], a drought like never seen in the last 90 years and the whole world suffering the consequences of the policy, which I was against, stay at home what an economy we fix later [during the Covid 19 pandemic]"

(J) "I want to speak with the young leftist (...) your candidate preaches the social control of the media. (...) Do you want to lose your freedom on social media?"
(K) (...) see, young [leftist], your young colleagues run away [from Venezuela] as they walking to Brazil (...), the same age as you are but weight fifteen kilos less than you."

Without a government that effectively mobilizes the political subject in the perspective of a chain of equivalence, the logic of difference plays a crucial role in furnishing the combat and intolerance regime. Like Disraeli's political Project in the nineteenth century (Stavrakakis 1999: 77), Bolsonaro applies the idea of "one nation", as shown in the quotes (L) and (M).

(L) "I do not separate whites and blacks; homos or heteros; Northeasterners or Southerners; men or women; This is a government of all 215 million Brazilians, and we all want the same thing."
(M) "The difference between you and me now is that I am on the stage; there is no other difference between us."

He also uses a non-discursive element, the Brazilian flag, to establish national unity.

(N) "In my travels throughout Brazil, a fantastic thing, more and more I see the colours green and yellow in the streets (...) we do not burn our flag, we do not trample this flag. This flag unites us. This flag shows that we have a government, we have a people, we have a nation on our side. It is the greatest symbol of our homeland."

I have shown that both the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference play a crucial role in Bolsonaro's rhetoric by applying a series of pluralising articulations to establish a new hegemonic order. The logic of equivalence and the logic of difference do not exclude each other; actually, one presupposes the existence of the other (Laclau, 2018 [2005]). In the example of Bolsonaro, this paradoxical correlation between the two logics can be exemplified when he stresses the "us", showing how competent those by his side are and forging a "them" who are corrupt.

(O) "We formed our team of Ministers. Some of them are present here. Who would expect a Ministry that was only remembered for corruption to have at its head a young army captain formed by AMAN and INE, who is Tarcísio Freitas?"

From that moment during the speech, Bolsonaro starts to list the achievements of his team of ministers. By doing that, he "expands the syntagmatic pole of language" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 130). I understand this movement as a tentative to distance himself in ideological and ethical terms from his opponent, "the corrupt socialism". By differentiating from the 'other', he connects to those who share the same ideological and ethical dimension that he does. By applying the logic of difference, I conclude that the frame of 'corruption' is, one more time, essential in Bolsonaro's discourse to weaken and disrupt the elements that link the people to socialism.

Fantasmatic logic — desire and *jouissance*

The critical fantasy studies create a space to articulate the "insights of psychoanalysis and discourse analysis" (Glynos, Burity and Oliveira, 2019, p. 148). It does by applying a psychoanalyst's understanding of fantasy aligning with *desire* (Glynos, Burity and Oliveira, 2019). In psychoanalytic terms, *desire* positions itself beyond *demand*; the latter being the satisfaction of the need, while the *desire* is what is lacking in the process of subject identification. However, the goal of fantasy is not to satisfy *desire* but to constitute it as such (Stavrakakis, 1999). In other words, it is up to fantasy to maintain *desire* as a constantly incomplete instance. A "complete" *desire* would mean a state of lethargy, and indifference, which is incompatible with political logic. It is in the attempt to maintain incomplete *desire* that fantasy reveals itself in political discourse; something that is made from the presentation of "empty signifiers", such as "Freedom", as shown below:

(P) "All of you here swore to give their lives for their freedom."

In the context of social and political practices, fantasy engages in camouflaging the radical contingency of social relations (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 147). It operates "(...) through a fantasmatic narrative or logic that promises a fullness-to-come once a name or implied obstacle is overcome — the beatific dimension of fantasy — or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable, which might be termed the horrific dimension of fantasy" (Glynos & Howarth 2007, p. 147). Both aspects, 'beatific' and 'horrific', can be identified in Bolsonaro's speech. First, he defines an enemy: socialism, as we see in quotes (A), (C) and (E). The socialism ideology represents a dislocation in the model of nation he has proposed. The beatific dimension appears in Bolsonaro's speech when he states:

(Q) "When we started our government, the country was dealing with serious ethical, moral and economic problems."

He suggests the socialist ideology is a threat and risks spreading through different sectors of society; dismantling the traditional family, inciting drug use, threatening heteronormative identity and so on, as seen in quotes (D) and (Q); also in the economy when he mentions that Petrobras incurred debt during the Workers Party government, for instance.

The horrific dimension is implicit in the possibility of Brazil experiencing the same social and economic problems as Venezuela, Chile and Colombia if Lula wins the presidential elections. This can be exemplified in the following quote.

(R) "We have to bring young leftists to our side (...) your candidate [Lula] supported others in South America (...) Look at Venezuela (...) Look where our Argentina is going (...) 50% of the population is close to the poverty line."

The fantasmatic logics furnished us with the tool to identify the strategies of Bolsonaro's narrative to frame socialism as the "thief of enjoyment" (Stavrakakis, 1999) and how he projects a nation with a neoliberal economy and conservatories moral as the new "real". In this process, he articulates a series of 'empty signifiers', for example quotes (L) and (O), but also when he says: (Q) "We are really changing Brazil, and no one is leaving behind".

Conclusion

This paper explored the complexity of political discourse through an analysis that drew on the Logics of Critical Explanation to examine the dynamics of the former Brazilian President's discourse. The purpose of this paper was to test how the Logics of Critical Explanation work in the analysis of the Brazilian political context. Such analyze revealed that Bolsonaro's discourse has a paradoxical narrative with two key features. First, it is a narrative with a lack of demands, which means it does not provide objective solutions to fix people's problems, such as household indebtedness and food insecurity. This, I argue, generates rigid social logics. Second, it became a strong narrative only when it tried to establish difference, and it took antagonism to the extreme. What we see is a discourse with high-force clashes rather than a healthy political debate.

Corruption and denial of freedom are the most important nodal points used by Bolsonaro to create a chain of equivalence. He articulates these two empty signifiers through emotion, such as fear (to become a Venezuela, to lose freedom, to lose the values of the traditional family) and hate (of the corrupt leaders, the thief of enjoyment). However, empty signifiers are context dependent and open to self-interpretation. Thus, to analyze Bolsonaro's speech, we need to recognize the current socioeconomic context in Brazil. In that sense, one would ask: 'What type of freedom does Bolsonaro refer to?' or 'How can people fight corruption if

they are denied the right to three meals per day?'. In the current Brazilian context, the nodal points used by Bolsonaro to create and sustain the identity of his ideological project just disappear into thin air. Due to the current socioeconomic situation, the *demand* for basic resources takes the lead in the subject's life, weakening the process of identification with Bolsonaro's political project.

Here, it is important to understand nodal points from a Lacanian perspective. That means the "existence of *points de capiton* never produces an eternally stable meaning, only relative and temporary" (Stavrakakis 1999, p. 71). Thus, although the nodal point tries to "embody the real" by constructing the imaginary illusion of totality, its signification takes place in a social formation under the law of radical contingency. That means that the process of identification with the nodal points proposed by any ideological project presupposes affective investment. If we compare Bolsonaro's speech in the period of the electoral campaign in 2018 when Brazil was still experiencing the aftermath of Dilma Roussef's impeachment and the biggest anti-corruption program seen in Brazil (namely CarWash (*Lava Jato*)), the articulation of corruption and freedom as nodal points had a different response on the social and political contexts.

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, I argue that Bolsonaro's discursive formation focuses on principles of difference which sharply specify the good and the bad, the "us" and the "them". The latter needs to be defeated in order to establish a "social homogeneity" (Laclau 2018 [2005]). Bolsonaro puts himself as the one sent by God to avoid the return of socialism, to eliminate the "them", as seen in quotes (A) and (H). His pre-campaign discourse did not invest in nodal points that satisfy the current social demands in Brazil, consequently creating an institutionalized program which allowed the emergence of populist strategies led by those subjects that had their social demands marginalized. He opened a space for a "transition to a popular subjectivity" (Laclau 2018 [2005]). This could be seen by Lula's victory in the 2022 election.

Applying Logics of Critical Explanation without entering the field of populism provided a more detailed analyzes of Bolsonaro's discursive formation. It was possible to identify the strategies on which Bolsonaro's discourse is based and which affective aspects emerge from his discourse. However, Logics is an approach that can benefit from other theories. The hate speech instigated by Bolsonaro as part of his strategy to define "us" vs "them" could, for example, be further explored using the concept of "moral panic" (Yilmaz, 2016). It would be possible to examine how Bolsonaro tried to change the ontological vision of Brazilian society by dividing the country between the good and the bad and making this division the core of the political frontiers. Furthermore, the construction of the leader, Bolsonaro's persona, can be explored through a rhetorical perspective (Finlayson, 2007; Gottweis, 2007). This approach could provide a more detailed analysis of the figure that enunciates the discourse, that means, of the figure that orchestrates the functioning of the Logics. Thus, combined with other concepts, Logics can offer a very detailed framework to analyze political discourse.

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