



Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in
Comparative International Relations

Final Thesis

**Bolsonaro
between populism and fascism:
an analysis of the information
manipulation during
the 2018 electoral campaign**

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Academic Year

2019 / 2020

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Abstract

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare le dinamiche e gli eventi che hanno portato all'elezione di Jair Bolsonaro in Brasile nel 2018, e il ruolo in essa svolto dalla manipolazione di informazioni avvenuta durante la campagna elettorale. A tal fine, viene presa in considerazione la situazione nazionale brasiliana precedente le elezioni del 2018 per capire come essa abbia contribuito al risultato di tale consultazione. Inoltre, questo lavoro esamina il nuovo populismo di destra e le sue tendenze vicine all'estrema destra, al fine di evidenziare come le dinamiche presenti nelle elezioni brasiliane rientrino in un contesto più ampio, legato all'emergere di tale fenomeno. In questo contesto, l'elaborato vuole evidenziare come Bolsonaro, pur rientrando nella categoria dei populistici di destra, presenti numerose caratteristiche che lo avvicinano al fascismo, così come risulta da numerosi suoi interventi in cui viene giustificato un pensiero di natura fascista.

Per capire il contesto e lo sviluppo di queste dinamiche, è importante esaminare sia il fenomeno del populismo di destra contemporaneo, sia la storia del Brasile a partire dalla fine del regime militare fino al momento delle elezioni del 2018.

Il populismo di destra è un fenomeno in ascesa a livello mondiale, e presenta caratteristiche più estreme rispetto alla sua forma classica. Mentre il populismo è generalmente caratterizzato da una divisione tra élite e popolo, il populismo di destra fornisce una distinzione della società anche a livello orizzontale, in cui spesso le minoranze vengono escluse e discriminate. In una situazione globale caratterizzata dal multiculturalismo e da crisi di natura economica e politica, questo populismo si avvicina sempre più all'estrema destra e al fascismo poiché alimenta l'odio contro le minoranze e, con le sue idee xenofobe e razziste, indirettamente legittima la violenza politica. Per diffondere queste idee, i populistici di destra spesso utilizzano i *social media* e le piattaforme online, e il rapporto tra i media e questi attori cambia a seconda del tipo di mezzo utilizzato. Mentre la stampa e i mezzi di comunicazione tradizionali sono generalmente visti come uno strumento delle élite, i media di intrattenimento, quali ad esempio le trasmissioni televisive, favoriscono il "populismo mediatico" dal momento che lo stile di comunicazione dei populistici è particolarmente adatto a questo tipo di mezzo. Tuttavia, il ruolo più importante nella diffusione dei messaggi dei populistici è svolto dai *social media*, poiché essi consentono di creare un contatto diretto con i propri seguaci

evitando la mediazione della stampa. Questo utilizzo dei mezzi di comunicazione online facilita la diffusione di una visione polarizzata della società, in cui le minoranze sono ritenute responsabili dei problemi della nazione e della crisi dei suoi valori. In questo modo, i populistici di destra alimentano l'antagonismo presente nella società e presentano una visione della realtà distorta. L'uso di piattaforme online e l'inasprimento dell'antagonismo sociale contribuiscono alla manipolazione di informazioni e allo sviluppo di *fake news*, fenomeno sempre più diffuso, il cui utilizzo permette maggiormente di influenzare l'opinione pubblica. Tale manipolazione può riguardare anche fatti storici, rivisti con il fine di presentare il passato secondo un'interpretazione mitica ed idealizzata. Nel populismo di destra, questo revisionismo storico spesso riguarda il passato fascista, e la creazione di una visione alternativa dei fatti storici viene utilizzata per legittimare la propria ideologia, sempre più ispirata ad elementi dell'estrema destra.

Per quanto riguarda il contesto elettorale del 2018, viene presa in considerazione l'influenza esercitata dagli avvenimenti storici e politici che hanno caratterizzato la storia contemporanea del Brasile della *Nova República*. Questo termine indica il periodo storico a partire dal 1985, quando il paese è passato da un regime dittatoriale ad un governo civile. Tuttavia, il processo di transizione democratica è stato avviato e guidato dai militari e, di conseguenza, il paese non si è mai veramente confrontato con il suo passato dittatoriale. Esempio di ciò è la *Lei da Anistia*, con cui è stata concessa l'amnistia sia agli oppositori politici che agli agenti dello Stato responsabili per crimini contro l'umanità. Con la fine del regime, i governi civili si sono dovuti confrontare con la situazione economica ereditata dai militari, caratterizzata da alti livelli di inflazione e debito pubblico. Per cercare di sanare questa situazione di difficoltà, i governi degli anni '90 hanno adottato politiche neoliberali basate sulla privatizzazione, la liberalizzazione del mercato e l'abolizione delle barriere doganali. Nonostante il raggiungimento di una crescita economica, queste politiche non hanno portato ad una riduzione della povertà, bensì all'aumento della dipendenza dai capitali stranieri e della disoccupazione. Con la presenza del PT (Partito dei Lavoratori) al potere, gli anni 2000 sono stati caratterizzati da nuovi modelli economici e sociali. Sotto la presidenza di Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva, tali modelli hanno permesso al Brasile di raggiungere una notevole crescita economica, fino a diventare un paese emergente. Il governo di Lula ha, inoltre, migliorato le

condizioni di vita di gran parte della popolazione, portando ad una riduzione della povertà. I programmi sociali sono poi stati continuati da Dilma Rousseff, eletta nel 2010. Dopo un periodo iniziale di alta popolarità, a partire dal 2013 sono iniziate proteste da parte della popolazione principalmente contro l'aumento dei prezzi dei trasporti pubblici. La popolarità di Dilma è scesa ulteriormente dopo lo scandalo per corruzione emerso nel 2014, in cui erano coinvolti la compagnia petrolifera nazionale Petrobrás ed imprese di costruzione private, oltre ad alcuni membri del governo. Nonostante il gran numero di imprenditori e politici coinvolti, le investigazioni condotte dall'operazione *Lava Jato* si sono concentrate quasi esclusivamente sui membri del PT. Dopo la rielezione di Dilma nel 2014, gli anni 2015 e 2016 hanno visto numerose manifestazioni di massa chiederne l'*impeachment*, con il sostegno dell'opposizione e dei media, processo poi approvato sulla base di accuse di reati fiscali e amministrativi. Nonostante la mancanza di prove, nel 2016 la Presidente è stata rimossa dall'incarico, mentre il suo vicepresidente Michel Temer, che ne aveva sostenuto l'*impeachment*, ha assunto la presidenza.

Per le elezioni del 2018, Bolsonaro ha basato la propria campagna sull'aumento dello scontento nei confronti del PT, descrivendo tale partito come il centro della corruzione e come una minaccia ai valori tradizionali. Così facendo, e presentandosi come la soluzione ai problemi del Brasile, Bolsonaro ha raccolto un grande sostegno tra la popolazione, sostegno che gli ha permesso di vincere le elezioni nonostante i suoi tratti autoritari. Tuttavia, l'analisi dei governi civili susseguitisi al regime militare mostra che episodi di corruzione sono stati un elemento ricorrente nella storia contemporanea brasiliana. Di conseguenza, l'identificazione del PT come centro e causa della corruzione ha rappresentato una visione distorta dei fatti. La stessa manipolazione volta a screditare il PT riguarda anche la questione dell'*impeachment* di Dilma Rousseff nel 2016, approvato nonostante la mancanza di prove e sulla base delle cosiddette *pedaladas fiscais*, le quali non costituivano un motivo che potesse giustificare un processo di *impeachment*. Questo accanimento nei confronti del PT può essere spiegato anche considerando l'opposizione storica che sia l'élite imprenditoriale sia i media hanno avuto nei confronti della sinistra, intesa come una minaccia alla stabilità del Paese anche prima del golpe del 1964.

Nella campagna elettorale di Bolsonaro si ravvisano anche elementi tipici del populismo di destra per quanto riguarda la manipolazione dell'informazione e polarizzazione della società. Questa manipolazione della realtà ha, da un lato favorito la

sua candidatura, dall'altro ha alimentato l'*anti-petismo*, screditando le istituzioni tradizionali e l'opposizione politica. Questo discredito è stato ottenuto anche attraverso la massiccia diffusione di *fake news* avvenuta durante il periodo elettorale. Questo fenomeno ha facilitato l'elezione di Bolsonaro, poiché la maggior parte delle notizie ha o direttamente agevolato la sua candidatura oppure ha diffamato l'opposizione politica e l'*establishment*. Ciò è stato ottenuto sfruttando le paure della popolazione e promuovendo un senso di minaccia, che ha portato all'identificazione di Bolsonaro come salvatore del Paese. La circolazione di *fake news* è stata anche favorita dall'utilizzo dei *social media* sia come principale mezzo per la campagna di Bolsonaro, sia come strumento per ottenere informazioni politiche. I *social media*, in particolare WhatsApp, si sono rivelati estremamente efficaci nella manipolazione delle informazioni e dei fatti poiché essi consentono di diffondere contenuti falsi senza alcuna mediazione. Inoltre, l'uso di *fake news* che screditavano l'opposizione politica ha contribuito ad esacerbare l'antagonismo sociale e ha polarizzato ulteriormente la divisione, basata su valori morali e tradizionali, tra il PT e Bolsonaro. Nella visione di Bolsonaro, questo antagonismo si riferiva anche al passato dittatoriale del Brasile, la cui opposizione tra i militari e la sinistra veniva rispecchiata nella polarizzazione politica emersa durante le elezioni del 2018. Bolsonaro ha spesso fornito una reinterpretazione della storia, secondo la quale i militari avevano sconfitto una minaccia comunista, rappresentata dalla sinistra, e, attraverso questa visione positiva della dittatura, egli ha difeso e glorificato un passato caratterizzato, in realtà, da violenza e repressione. Questa reinterpretazione di fatti sia presenti che storici ha aiutato Bolsonaro a giustificare le proprie convinzioni conservatrici ed estremiste e la propria difesa della dittatura, portandolo ad essere eletto presidente del Brasile.

La distorsione dei fatti utilizzata da Bolsonaro durante la campagna elettorale, e di cui ha beneficiato, ha contribuito a una situazione tipica di un mondo "post-verità", in cui essa viene manipolata e le opinioni personali pesano più dei fatti. Questa distorsione ha, inoltre, alimentato ulteriormente la polarizzazione all'interno della società, creando un'opposizione basata su una divisione tra il "bene", incarnato da Bolsonaro, e il "male", rappresentato dal PT, identificato come il centro della corruzione, sia economica che ideologica. Questi atteggiamenti sono tipici del populismo e infatti, sulla base della sua ideologia e ai suoi discorsi legati alla destra radicale, Bolsonaro può essere identificato come un populista di destra. Tuttavia, egli presenta anche elementi più estremi che lo

avvicinano al fascismo. Oltre a manipolare la verità, presentandosi come la fonte di essa, e oltre a lodare la dittatura militare come un passato mitico, Bolsonaro ha ripreso caratteristiche del fascismo anche per quanto riguarda l'opposizione politica e le minoranze. Queste sono state identificate come il "nemico" del "vero popolo", il quale è posto come difensore dei valori tradizionali legati a genere, famiglia e religione. Inoltre, in modo simile ai leader fascisti, Bolsonaro ha ripetutamente difeso e incoraggiato l'uso della violenza, soprattutto nei confronti di quelli che egli considera il "nemico". Infatti, non solo ha apertamente discriminato l'opposizione politica e le minoranze, ma, in alcune occasioni, ne ha addirittura sollecitato l'eliminazione fisica. Tuttavia, a differenza di quanto avviene nel fascismo, questi discorsi non sono stati direttamente accompagnati da azioni violente o repressive. Nonostante ciò, questi hanno portato alla legittimazione del pensiero fascista tra i suoi sostenitori, che si sentono giustificati nel compiere azioni violente. Tali dinamiche dimostrano che Bolsonaro, pur non essendo un vero leader fascista, presenta molti elementi di affinità con questo fenomeno.

Introduction

“I am in favour of a dictatorship ... We will never resolve serious national problems with this irresponsible democracy.”¹ (Bolsonaro, 1993)

On the 28th of October, Jair Bolsonaro became the new President of Brazil, with 55,1% of votes on the second round. Although not totally unexpected after the first poll, this result would have been considered impossible until a few years earlier and was still surprising for many people both inside and outside the country.

Before this victory, Bolsonaro was already known worldwide for his questionable and shocking declarations on a number of different topics, placing him among the most far-right leaders in the contemporary scene. Throughout his thirty years of political career, he claimed that he would prefer to have his son dying in an accident rather than being gay², and that his sons were too well-raised to date a black girl³. Furthermore, he addressed a congresswoman saying he wouldn't rape her because she didn't “deserve it”⁴ and stated to be in favour of torture⁵. His remarks have always been characterised by the defence of the use of violence, which can be seen in his pro-gun statements and in his belief that police forces should be free to kill criminals⁶.

Former paratrooper and admirer of Pinochet, Bolsonaro has always openly supported the military dictatorship that ruled the country for twenty years, claiming

¹ Bolsonaro at the Chamber of Deputies, in 1993, available at: James Brooke, “Conversations/Jair Bolsonaro; a Soldier turned politician wants to give Brazil back to Army rule”, *The New York Times*, (23/07/93), <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/25/weekinreview/conversations-jair-bolsonaro-soldier-turned-politician-wants-give-brazil-back.html> [accessed on 17/05/21]

² Bolsonaro during an interview with the Magazine *Playboy*, in 2011, available at: “As frases controversas de Bolsonaro”, YouTube video, posted by “El País”, (06/10/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KczwxvO3-iE&t=5s> [accessed on 09/05/21]

³ Bolsonaro during an interview in the show *O Povo Quer Saber* (TV Bandeirantes), on the 28th of March 2011, available at: “O Povo Quer Saber – Jair Bolsonaro”, YouTube video, posted by “CQC Bolg”, (29/02/2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyaqwdYOzQk> [accessed on 09/05/21]

⁴ Bolsonaro to the deputy Maria do Rosário at the Chamber of Deputies, in 2003 (repeated in 2014), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KczwxvO3-iE&t=5s> [accessed on 09/05/21]

⁵ Bolsonaro on the show *Câmera Aberta* (TV Bandeirantes), in 1999, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KczwxvO3-iE&t=5s> [accessed on 09/05/21]

⁶ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Jornal Nacional* (TV Globo), in August 2018, available at: “Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) é entrevistado no Jornal Nacional”, *Globoplay*, (29/08/18), <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/6980200/> [accessed on 24/04/2021]

he is “in favour of dictatorship” and that its mistake was torturing instead of killing people⁷.

With his declarations and attacks, Bolsonaro has often presented anti-progressive ideas and promoted a distorted vision of reality and facts, about both historical facts and the present. On this regard, one of the main topics of his electoral campaign was fuelling the resentment against the left-wing party *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party), which had been growing during Dilma Rousseff’s presidency. In 2013, Brazil experienced mass demonstrations, mainly against the increase in public transport prices, yet also marking the beginning of protests against the government. With the worsening of the economic situation in 2014, these attacks towards the government intensified, culminating in the 2015 demonstrations where conservative and right-wing groups fuelled the resentment against the PT and asked for the President’s impeachment. This indignation was also the consequence of the *Lava Jato* operation, set in 2014 and aimed at investigating the Petrobrás corruption scandal as well as other schemes involving businessmen and politicians. Controversially, the investigations focused mainly on members of the PT, contributing to the anti-petist sentiment. As a result of these events, the previously ruling party was depicted as the centre of corruption and scandal, and as the cause of Brazil’s problems. This led to a massive use of fake news aimed at undermining PT’s image, with allegations on the risk of a communist regime. Furthermore, they claimed the promiscuous nature of the party for wanting to corrupt the values of society, and, in comparison, Bolsonaro was presented as an example of moral integrity. Although his victory was due to a combination of different elements, such as the ongoing political crisis and Lula’s imprisonment, it can be argued that the circulation of fake news had a strong impact in shaping public opinion and creating the image of Bolsonaro as the *mito*, the myth, the strong man able to save the country from corruption and ruin.

Based on these elements, Bolsonaro’s victory may seem even more bewildering. Nevertheless, the result of the 2018 elections illustrates a global reality where these dynamics are increasingly frequent. As a matter of fact, the use of provocations,

⁷ Bolsonaro on the show *Pânico* (Rádio Jovem Pan), in July 2016, available at: “Jair Bolsonaro – Pânico – 08/07/16”, YouTube video, posted by “Pânico Jovem Pan”, (08/07/2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orIv9ojQL3o> [accessed on 09/05/21]

verbal violence and information manipulation are characteristic tools employed by the leaders of the new right-wing populism.

This thesis's purpose is to analyse how information was manipulated during the 2018 electoral campaign in Brazil, leading to a further societal polarisation, and to examine how this manipulation was fostered by the national situation and the use of digital media. Furthermore, it focuses on understanding that these dynamics belong to a wider framework characterised by the emergence of right-wing populism. Finally, this work aims at highlighting that, among such populists, Bolsonaro presents elements placing him closer to fascism rather than populism.

Nowadays, we are witnessing the rise of a new right-wing populism, which presents more extreme tendencies when compared to the classic one. Examples of political leaders belonging to this category are given by Trump in the United States, Matteo Salvini in Italy and Marine Le Pen in France. Populism is generally characterised by anti-elitism and, therefore, by a division between the elite and the people, both intended as a homogenous group⁸. In right-wing populism, however, there is a further distinction: being associated to nativism⁹, the division between native people and immigrants is particularly stressed. Taking advantage of the global situation of economic and political crisis, these leaders amplify the antagonism us-them typical of populism, creating a more exclusionary definition of “the other”¹⁰ and strengthening the polarisation of society. In their rhetorically violent speeches and online comments, right-wing populists often share xenophobic and racist ideas, fuelling hate against minorities and indirectly legitimating political violence. Furthermore, by spreading hate speech, these leaders encourage the creation of a connection with the extreme right and fascism, from which, on the contrary, classic populism sought distance¹¹.

In order to convey such messages, right-wing populists often use social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. As a matter of fact, while the traditional media is presented as a tool of the elites, Internet and digital media play an important role in

⁸ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35

¹⁰ Daniele Caramani and Luca Manucci, “National Past and Populism: The Re-Elaboration of Fascism and Its Impact on Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe,” *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019), 1160.

¹¹ Federico Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* (University of California Press, 2020), 97

the spreading of these ideas since they allow them to avoid the mediation of the press and create a free and direct connection with the people¹².

The combination of these elements, digital media and the boost of antagonism, contributes to the development and circulation of fake news and manipulated information. In order to validate their declarations, news is selected and reported in a fragmented and twisted way, as a way to foster the resentment against the minorities. An example can be given by the fact that when a crime is committed, specifically in Europe and in the US, right-wing leaders have a tendency to specify the nationality of the person responsible, emphasising the threat. When, instead, the same crime is committed by a native inhabitant, the news is often not even mentioned. By doing so, only specific and negative elements are highlighted, which leads to a distorted vision of reality.

Although this kind of manipulation is more common with news, it sometimes occurs also with historical facts, with a tendency to revisionism, in particular regarding fascism. As History professor Federico Finchelstein writes, “Why do populist leaders want to forgive, distort, or displace the actual history of Nazism and fascism? Because, as these leaders draw from the well of fascist ideology, rhetoric, and tactics, they have to neuter the history of fascism to normalize their politics.”¹³

The above-portrayed dynamics can easily be related to the Brazilian case and Bolsonaro’s victory, since the electoral situation in 2018 presented elements favourable to the establishment of a right-wing populist leader. Since 2013 the country had been experiencing a political and economic crisis, which led to the worsening of life conditions for many people due to unemployment, growing poverty and public insecurity.¹⁴ The situation continued to deteriorate with the ruling party involved in a corruption scandal, and in 2016 it culminated in the impeachment against the then President Dilma Rousseff. However, the motivations for starting this process were based on accusations of crimes of fiscal and administrative responsibility, of which there was no evidence. The orchestration of the impeachment was actually the result of a combination of political,

¹² Büchel Florin, Engesser Sven, Ernst Nicole, Esser Frank, “Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology,” *Information Communication and Society* 20, no. 8 (2016), 1113.

¹³ Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies.*, 98

¹⁴ Patricia Rangel and Eneida Vinhaes Dultra, “Elections in Times of Neo-Coupism and Populism: A Short Essay on Brazil’s Right-Wing Presidential Candidates’ Plans for Governance and Their Proposals for Gender and Afro-Brazilians,” *Irish Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2019), 77

financial and media interests, which later benefitted from Dilma's removal from presidency, as in the case of her vice-president, Michel Temer who took her place. For these reasons, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment can be considered as a kind of golpe, which "generated a fertile ground for the diffusion and consolidation of conservatives forces within the political system."¹⁵ Therefore, when Bolsonaro presented himself as an outsider to this situation and as the solution by claiming he would end corruption, he received great support among the population despite his authoritarian traits.

Throughout his electoral campaign, typical elements of right-wing populism were employed, including the division between the people and the elite. In this case the elite, depicted as the enemy, was represented by the Left and the PT, while the concept of "the people" was shaped following religious and traditional values¹⁶. This led to a strong polarisation of society, morally divided between those who "defend the traditional family and values" and those who oppose it¹⁷, namely both the elite and the minorities. This distinction is often linked to nationalism, which is highly present in Bolsonaro's populism. As a matter of fact, in his speeches the nation is a central element, which has to be protected by those who are trying to ruin its essence. The combination of nationalism and traditional and religious values is exemplified by the campaign slogan "Brazil above everything, God above all". In the name of protecting such principles, those minorities considered as a threat became object of discrimination, which led to an "escalation of political violence. Progressive activists and politicians have suffered physical attacks, sometimes with deadly consequences. [...] Marielle Franco, a feminist, black, and lesbian councilwoman from PSOL was assassinated at the beginning of 2018 for her leftist advocacy."¹⁸

This atmosphere of resentment against the minorities and PT has also been fostered by the spread of fake news, aimed at amplifying the fears of degrading moral standards. "These fake threats to society have nothing to do with crime or corruption but

¹⁵ Ibid., 73

¹⁶ Eduardo Tamaki and Mario Fuks, "Populism in Brazil's 2018 General Elections: An Analysis of Bolsonaro's Campaign Speeches," *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política* 109, no. 3 (2019), 113

¹⁷ Ibid., 115

¹⁸ Rangel and Vinhaes Dutra, "Elections in Times of Neo-Coupism and Populism: A Short Essay on Brazil's Right-Wing Presidential Candidates' Plans for Governance and Their Proposals for Gender and Afro-Brazilians.", 74

are powerful emotional drivers —as are the memes circulating on Brazilian WhatsApp groups associating the PT involving child abuse, female nudity, and the like.”¹⁹

The increase in misinformation was highly favoured by the massive use of social networks employed throughout the 2018 electoral campaign: instead of using traditional means like TV advertising, Bolsonaro preferred to convey his messages through virtual platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp groups. In addition to that, newspapers and traditional media also contributed to misinformation by giving a specific framing to the ongoing situation and by choosing which demonstration to give coverage to.

As regards the tendency of right-wing populism to re-elaborate history, and in particular fascism, in the Brazilian case this mainly applies to the national history. In this context, Bolsonaro has often proposed a positive vision of the military dictatorship, defending it as a glorious period and claiming that “Brazilian people did not know what a dictatorship is, suggesting that the military junta that ran the country from 1964 to 1985 could not be classified this way.”²⁰

In order to develop this reasoning, this work relies on both primary and secondary sources. As far as primary sources are concerned, juridical sources are employed, including the 1988 Brazilian Constitution and some of its amendments relevant to the country’s contemporary historical course. In addition, two specific laws have been considered for their importance in understanding how Brazil has dealt with its dictatorial past, which also influenced the 2018 electoral context. The former is the *Lei da Anistia* (Law n.6638), issued in 1979 and still in order today, which granted amnesty to both the regime’s political opponents and the Agents of State responsible for crimes against humanity. The latter is Law n.12.528 of 2011, instituting the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* meant to investigate on these crimes. Nonetheless, the majority of the analysed primary sources regards Bolsonaro’s discourses, specifically interviews and declarations made throughout his political career, mainly focusing on those belonging to his electoral period. These sources include public interventions as well as statements posted on social media, such as Bolsonaro’s official Twitter account. Primary sources are present in the

¹⁹ Fabrício H. Chagas-Bastos, “Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn,” *Revista de Estudos Sociais* 2019, no. 69 (2019), 95.

²⁰ Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, 99

second chapter for the contemporary history of Brazil, and especially in the third chapter where Bolsonaro's electoral campaign will be analysed.

As regards secondary sources, they constitute the main supply of information for this work and they are used throughout the entire dissertation. These secondary sources consist of books, academic and journal articles as well as newspapers articles and online databases on the chapters' topics. Some books, in particular, have been crucial for the development of this work's reasoning. As for the historical part analysed in the second chapter, Boris Fausto and Sergio Fausto's book *A Concise History of Brazil*, whose second edition was published in 2014, and the tenth edition of the book *História Geral do Brasil*, originally edited by Maria Yedda Leite Linhares, have been used to understand the various aspects of Brazil's contemporary history. The elaboration of the theoretical part relies on the works of different authors who discussed the theories of populism, such as Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, Paul Taggart's *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science* and Loris Zanatta's *Il Populismo*. In addition, this thesis has based its analysis primarily on contemporary right-wing populism on Mudde's book *The Far Right Today*, published in 2019 and where the main characteristics of the phenomenon and its related issues are described. Yet, among all the sources employed, Federico Finchelstein's works have been fundamental in writing this dissertation. In particular, the Italian edition of his book *From Fascism to Populism in History* together with *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* constitute the main source of information used to understand the relation between populism and fascism and to study the elements shared by the two phenomena, especially relevant when analysing Bolsonaro's case.

As far as the structure is concerned, this thesis has been divided into three main chapters, which allow to analyse the above-mentioned topics and to understand how they are interconnected.

The first chapter covers the emergence of the contemporary right-wing populism and its tendency to manipulate information. It takes into consideration three main aspects of this phenomenon, the first one being its shift towards more extreme trends and even fascism. It, then, examines the role of new digital media, such as social networks and the Internet, and how its use contributes to an increase of antagonism within society. Finally,

it analyses how these elements foster misinformation, seen through the spread of fake news and historical revisionism.

The second chapter provides an overview of the contemporary history of Brazil, from the end of the military dictatorship until the 2018 elections, to understand how the fertile ground for Bolsonaro's victory developed. Furthermore, it looks at how the country had to deal with the dictatorship's heritage, considering both the *Lei da Anistia* and the Commission established in 2011 to determine the truth about the period. The chapter also highlights how, with its coverage over the years, the national media contributed to forge the country's political process until the 2018 elections.

The third chapter analyses the manipulation of information occurred during the electoral campaign resulting in Bolsonaro's victory. It focuses on the spread of fake news, considering their impact on the formation of public opinion, and how this phenomenon was favoured by the use of social media. Finally, it aims at examining how the use of misinformation together with the defence and glorification of the military dictatorship place Bolsonaro among the more extreme right-wing populists.

CHAPTER I:
CONTEMPORARY RIGHT-WING POPULISM
AND THE MANIPULATION OF INFORMATION

Today, right-wing populism is on the rise worldwide and it presents more extreme characteristics in comparison to the classical one. While populism is generally characterised by a division between the elite and the people, both intended as a homogenous group, right-wing populism proposes also a horizontal distinction between in-groups and out-groups. In a global situation of economic and political crisis, right-wing populists amplify the typical populist antagonism of “us versus them”, creating a more exclusionary definition of “the other”, based on nativism and ethnicity, also strengthening the polarisation of society. Contemporary right-wing populism is increasingly connected to the extreme right and to fascism, as it often spreads xenophobic and racist ideas, fuelling hatred against minorities and indirectly legitimating political violence.

In order to convey such messages, right-wing populists often use social media and online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The relationship between the media and these actors changes accordingly to the kind of media. While news media are generally seen as a tool of the elites, tabloid and entertainment media favour the so-called “media populism” which presents populist ideas and style. Internet and social media also play an important role since they create a direct contact between users, allowing right-wing populists to present their ideas avoiding the mediation of the press. This particular use of the media gives them the possibility to spread a polarised vision of society, where out-groups are held responsible for the crisis of the nation. By blaming to “the other” right-wing populists foster the already existing antagonism and provide a framed worldview.

The use of online platforms and the escalation of antagonism contributes to the development and circulation of fake news and manipulated information. In today’s world, facts are considered less important than personal beliefs in forging public opinion, leading to what is called “post-truth world”, where the truth is distorted and lies are presented as facts to legitimise populist frames of society. This manipulated vision of reality is fostered by the spread of fake news, a phenomenon increasingly common lately, used to

manoeuvre public opinion and politics. The term “fake news” can refer both to the act of deliberately disseminating false information as news and to the label used by politicians to delegitimise news media. By employing this tool, right-wing populists have contributed to the acceptance of a polarised and distorted vision of reality. This manipulation can also occur with historical facts, which are framed to present the past in an idealised way. Within contemporary right-wing populism, the tendency to historical revisionism regards especially the fascist past and it is used for ideological reasons. This leads to the creation of alternative history, or “Alt-History”, an alternative timeline that intentionally rejects facts and decontextualises historical evidence to legitimise far-right beliefs.²¹

1.1 Between Populism and Fascism: the new Right-Wing Populism

In the last years, we have been witnessing a rise in right-wing populism, exemplified by events such as the election of Trump as President of the United States, the presence of right-wing parties in many governments across Europe, and Bolsonaro’s victory in Brazil. These events show that the phenomenon is not limited to a single region but is occurring worldwide with similar dynamics. Its emergence today is linked to economic and cultural reasons, namely the 2008 Financial Crisis and the process of globalisation and multiculturalism, which have fostered the development of a new wave of populism, with mainly right-wing characteristics. As a matter of fact, by fuelling nationalist and radical ideas, these populist leaders present themselves as a solution to a situation where people have lost their sense of identity and feel that their problems are ignored by the governments²².

Although it may seem a product of contemporary reality, populism is not recent, and it has presented itself in different ways throughout history. Populism is, indeed, a vague

²¹ Louie Dean Valencia-García, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*, *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*, 2020, 7-9

²² Federico Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi. Storia, politica e demagogia nel mondo attuale*. Traduzione: David Scaffei (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2019), 8; Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), PDF e-book, 106.; Loris Zanatta, *Il Populismo* (Roma: Carrocci Editore, 2018), ePub e-book, chap. 2; Cas Mudde, "The populist radical right. A pathological normalcy.", in *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader*, ed. Cas Mudde, (New York: Routledge, 2017), PDF e-book, 565

and complex phenomenon since it can apply to every political figure;²³ therefore it is difficult to provide a unique definition of it, as testified by the different approaches to it. By following the increasingly successful ideational approach, Mudde and Kaltwasser define populism as

a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.²⁴

This definition presents three core concepts of populism which can relate to different political projects: the people, the elite and the general will. In addition, populism also follows an anti-pluralistic tendency according to which society is divided into homogenous groups and diversity is seen as a weakness.²⁵

“The people” is an extremely abstract and flexible construction which populism presents as a single and monolithic unit and generally as a combination of three meanings²⁶. The first is “the people as sovereign” which implies that the people are the primary source of political power, while the second is the “common people”, a notion extremely variable since it depends on specific values as well as sociocultural and socioeconomic status. The last is the idea of “the people as the nation”, which includes all those who are native to a specific country, intended as a community in civic or ethnic terms.²⁷ Due to its flexibility, the definition of “the people” varies accordingly with the national situation, yet its homogeneity is always stressed. Those who are not included in this group are considered as dangerous to its unity and depicted as an enemy. This idea of an enemy helps to determine the identity of “the people” since there is a “tendency among populists to define themselves through portraying themselves in opposition to

²³ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), PDF e-book, 1; Paul Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science*. (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000) PDF e-book, 10; Nadia Urbinati, “The Populist Phenomenon,” *Raisons Politiques* 3, no. 51 (2013), 137; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, 21-24.

²⁴ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction.*, 5-6

²⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser.,7; Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), ePub e-book, 38; Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543-44.; Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 151-152.

²⁶ Müller, *What Is Populism.*, 42; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Chapt. 1

²⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction.*, 10-11

social groups they characterize as unpleasant.”²⁸ The consequence is the creation of an antagonism between in- and out-groups, which will be further analysed in the second section.

As regards the elite, this is generally defined in contrast to the people and on the basis of power, which populists consider to be illegitimate since the real voice belongs to the people. The elite is what populists have to fight against and, according to the specific situation, their opposition can be to a political, economic, cultural or the media elite. From a moral point of view, the elite is accused of corrupting the values of society and ignoring the interests of the people, as well as working against the interests of the country and the “general will”.²⁹

The third core concept of populism is the general will which, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser, is

based on the notion of “common sense.” This means that it is framed in a particular way, which is useful for both aggregating different demands and identifying a common enemy. By appealing to the general will of the people, populism enacts a specific logic of articulation, which enables the formation of a popular subject with a strong identity (“the people”), which is able to challenge the status quo (“the elite”).³⁰

Furthermore, this concept plays an important role in populism since, implying the homogeneity of people, it justifies authoritarian tendencies and attacks on whoever threatens their unity.³¹

The above-mentioned concepts are ambiguous in their meaning, which allows them to be changed and applied to extremely different contexts, producing a heterogeneous phenomenon such as modern populism. This emerged in Latin America after 1945 as a form of post-fascism and then developed in the other continents, following different phases: *classical populism*, with Perón and Vargas; *neoliberal populism*, with Fujimori, Collor de Mello and Berlusconi; *neoclassical populism of the left*, with Evo Morales, Chávez and Maduro; *neoclassical populism of the right and extreme right*, which is

²⁸ Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science.*, 94

²⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, 12-13; Müller, *What Is Populism.*, 38-39, 44; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 151

³⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction.*, 18

³¹ Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, chapt.1; Mudde and Kaltwasser., 19; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 65; Urbinati, “The Populist Phenomenon.”, 147

present today.³² Though presenting divergent dynamics, these experiences share some common elements, such as the opposition to the elites, the idea of homogenous categories among society, the central figure of the leader as a personification of the people and an extreme form of political religion.³³

Although populism is a worldwide phenomenon, Latin America can be defined as “the populist paradise” because of its long-lasting populist tradition.³⁴ The presence of populism is due to different reasons, among which the high levels of socio-economic inequality and the gap between real and imagined democracy. In addition to this, the history of the continent has created a fertile ground for populist experiences. Latin America was characterised by an oligarchic society, where the power was in the hands of a small minority, which led to social rifts and to the popular demand to enlarge the political arena. Therefore, populism emerged in three different waves as a response to the feeling of a lack of representation and as a consequence to economic and social transformations.³⁵

Due to its vague nature, populism can be declined differently, according to the regional reality: while in the US and in Europe populism is generally exclusionary, in Latin America it is said to be mainly inclusionary. This is due to the fact that

Latin America populism predominantly has a socio-economic dimension (including the poor), while Europe populism has a primarily sociocultural dimension (excluding the ‘aliens’). This can be partially explained by the different socioeconomic situation in the two regions. [...] Europe has reached a level of development where post-material politics are at least rivalling socioeconomic politics for importance, while Latin America is still a long way from this ‘silent revolution’ because of the continuing high levels of socioeconomic disparity and poverty.³⁶

However, this distinction is not permanent, as the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil shows.

This variety of situations can be explained by the fact that populism is a thin ideology, meaning that, differently from “full” or “thick” ideologies like fascism and socialism, it

³² Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 127

³³ *Ibid.*, 128-129

³⁴ Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 7

³⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction.*, 27-32; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*. Ch. 7; Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science.*, 59-61; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 156

³⁶ Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 167

presents a restricted morphology with only a few key concepts such as people-centrism and anti-elitism.³⁷ Therefore,

almost all populist actors combine populism with one or more other ideologies, so-called host ideologies. Broadly speaking, most left-wing populists combine populism with some form of socialism, while right-wing populists combine populism with some type of nationalism.³⁸

By analysing it, we can see how the core elements of populism are declined with thick ideology components such as nativism, xenophobia and anti-immigration. Right-wing populism provides an exclusionary vision of society: it stresses a cultural and ethnic difference between the native people and “aliens” (e.g. immigrants, citizens of foreign descent, and minorities) and it claims that the elite supports their interests instead of those of “the real people”.³⁹ By comparison, right-wing populists present themselves as the “voice of the people”, but “it is always an ethnicised people, excluding ‘alien’ people and values.”⁴⁰ These dynamics are increasingly present worldwide, as a consequence of the rise of such phenomenon, which is facing a process of radicalisation.

Despite the traumas of World War II, the post-war Western world has still been experiencing periods of far-right politics. Since the 21th century we have been witnessing a fourth wave of such phenomenon, which, differently from the previous ones, is characterised by the mainstreaming of the far right and by its heterogeneity.⁴¹

The reasons for its emergence can be found in three main moments of crisis:

the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (and beyond), the Great Recession of 2008, and the “refugee crisis” of 2015. All the western democracies were affected, albeit in different ways, shaking the national and international political status quo, and giving rise to an unprecedented wave of Islamophobic and populist protest.⁴²

³⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*. 6; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*., 13; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 150

³⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*., 21

³⁹ Müller, *What Is Populism*., 41, 44; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 158, 161

⁴⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 166.

⁴¹ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), ePub ebook, 46

⁴² *Ibid.*, 45

In addition to these events, an important role has been played by the growing process of globalisation, a phenomenon which creates uncertainty for its ability to drastically change the economic, social and cultural environment.⁴³ This insecurity, together with high levels of unemployment, has led to a feeling of dissatisfaction among the population, which fears that the presence of “the other” will compromise its identity and values.⁴⁴ It can be said that the presence of multiculturalism has provoked a crisis of identity in the Western world, which has favoured the emergence of nationalism and more radical positions, which are also linked to a sense of crisis in the political representation. As a matter of fact, social and economic instability induce people to feel ignored by their government and to believe that the political system is unresponsive, which leads to the emergence of right-wing populists. “When analysing the rise of populism, it is worth indicating that subtle and long-term changes of contemporary societies can facilitate not only the diffusion, but also the activation of populist attitudes.”⁴⁵ For example, in the European context, the majority of those who vote for populist radical right parties “consists of the ‘native’ working class, which no longer feels represented by social democratic parties that have embraced economic globalisation, European integration, and multiculturalism.”⁴⁶

Although populists present themselves as the solution for these crises, they actually aim at exacerbating the problem of insufficient representation of governments and economic inequity, both focusing on intolerance and weakening democratic institutions.⁴⁷ In addition to this, populist actors are often actively engaged in framing a situation as a crisis, labelling it as an existential threat, because it would then serve to legitimate populist governance.⁴⁸ An example can be given by the European situation, where populist radical right parties “try to redefine increases in refugees as an ‘immigration

⁴³ Angelo Ventrone, “I populismi e la fragilità della democrazia” in *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, XI

⁴⁴ Alice Kattago, “The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Contemporary Europe,” *Universidade Fernando Pessoa* (2019), 17-19; Tamir Bar-On, “The Radical Right and Nationalism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). PDF E-book, 44, 48-49; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 135; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch.7

⁴⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, 103

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 101

⁴⁷ Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science.*, 109-111; Urbinati, “The Populist Phenomenon.”, 148; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 118; Hans-Georg Betz, “The Radical Right and Populism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 1481

⁴⁸ Müller, *What Is Populism*, 59; Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.”, 547; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 110-112

crisis’, which they contend is caused by the incompetent and corrupt mainstream parties”.⁴⁹ The combination of these dynamics has led to the rise of contemporary right-wing populism which, as stated before, presents some fundamental transformations, such as their presence in countries previously resisting the phenomenon and an increasing support by the people, which places them among the biggest parties in the country.⁵⁰

Despite being linked to the specific national reality, far-right groups and parties share some similar aspects, including their opposition to “do-goodism” and “political correctness”.⁵¹ Furthermore, the key ideological elements of populist radical right are nativism and authoritarianism. Nativism is

a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. It is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native (or “alien”) elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state.⁵²

As regards authoritarianism, it doesn’t refer to the lack of democratic systems but to

the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements on authority are to be punished severely. Authoritarians see almost all “problems,” [...] as essentially law-and-order issues which can only be countered by a tough punitive approach and prevented by reintroducing “moral” or “traditional” education in schools.⁵³

It can be argued that populism is a form of authoritarian democracy since it stresses social and political polarisation, reducing the space for the expression of political minorities.⁵⁴

These key elements are combined with some recurring political issues that are fundamental in all far-right organisations, in spite of their national variations.

The first is the issue of immigration, which is presented as a threat to both the nation and its people by radical right populists, who claim that mass immigration is actually fostered by progressive politicians “who either hate their own nation or try to compensate

⁴⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, 106

⁵⁰ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 49; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 113

⁵¹ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.”, 554; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 62-63

⁵² Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 59;

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61

⁵⁴ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 131; Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 162

for their lost electorate”.⁵⁵ This issue is also linked to that of integration: according to such populists, being a citizen of a country does not imply being native, as happens with many people, mainly Muslims, still being labelled as “aliens” or “immigrants”, in spite of being born in a country.⁵⁶ Particularly in Western Europe and in the US where immigration has been on the rise, the key element is the identification of the people with the nation and, therefore, the figure of the immigrant is seen as a danger to their unity and lifestyle.⁵⁷

The second political issue is that of foreign policy which consists of suspicion and hostility regarding supranational institutions which are accused of promoting a one-world cosmopolitan government at the expenses of national concerns and problematics.⁵⁸ An example can be given by the case of the European Union which is considered to be a threat to national sovereignty by radical right populists, who are often against integration and, therefore, promote the so-called *Euroscepticism*. This can be divided into Hard Euroscepticism, indicating an outright rejection of the entire European project (i.e. Brexit) and Soft Euroscepticism, contrary to certain policy areas of the EU.⁵⁹ This phenomenon has been increasing after the 2015 Refugee Crisis with the EU refugee redistribution plan, which has been exploited by right-wing populists. By claiming that national issues are being ignored, they identify the European Union as a supreme elite, distant from “the people” and aiming only at its political interests.⁶⁰

As for the third issue, corruption, this is often mixed with nativism and authoritarianism and is, instead, a problem linked to people of the in-group, namely the elite. Generally, the accusation of corruption, intended as stealing from people, is moved against either an economic elite or politicians.⁶¹ As a matter of fact, corruption scandals present “the elite” as behaving in a dishonest manner, therefore making people resentful

⁵⁵ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 64

⁵⁶ Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch.4

⁵⁷ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. 135; Betz, "The Radical Right and Populism" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*., 143-44

⁵⁸ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 73-74; Müller, *What Is Populism*., 164

⁵⁹ Kattago, “The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Contemporary Europe”, 12; Sofia Vasilopoulou “The Radical Right and Euroscepticism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*., 190

⁶⁰ Vasilopoulou “The Radical Right and Euroscepticism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*., 191; in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*., 190; Sofia Vasilopoulou, "European integration and the radical right: three patterns of opposition", in *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader*.

⁶¹ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 71

about the political situation and fostering the presence of populism.⁶² However, corruption can also be moral with a “[...] political elite, broadly described as ‘the left’, who are accused of corrupting the nation with “postmodernist” and “cultural Marxist” ideas [...]”.⁶³ According to this reasoning, elites as well as journalists and academics are accused of corrupting the minds of the people, particularly the youth and women, with “anti-national” ideas.

The last issue concerns security which, in this context, “refers both to individuals and to collectives, most notably the nation or race, and has a cultural, economic, and physical component.”⁶⁴ Within radical right populism, security is connected to the main features of the phenomenon, that is authoritarianism and nativism. Whenever something is perceived as a “threat to the natural order”, it creates insecurity, which is fundamental for the populist discourse since it has to be dealt with through authoritarian policies.⁶⁵ Furthermore, nativism plays an important role in presenting the source of such “threat” and insecurity as being linked to “the alien”. We have an example of this when we consider the issue of crime, presented by far-right populists as something almost exclusively committed by “non-natives.” Following this reasoning, crimes are increasing as a consequence of immigration, which is not controlled by the established politicians who are considered weak and corrupt, therefore linking insecurity to both minorities and the elite. According to these populists, the solution to this alleged growth of crimes is adopting stricter rules and increase law enforcement, as well as teaching discipline, respect, and “traditional values” in schools.⁶⁶ This perception can be declined in different ways, according to the country analysed: while in Europe it generally regards immigrants, in Latin America it is more connected to non-white people, who are identified as the source of insecurity.

These ideological features are shared by parties and groups in the far-right movement, which can be divided into two major subgroups: the radical right, which includes right-

⁶² Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, 100-101; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 118

⁶³ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 71

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 66

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 163; Betz, “The Radical Right and Populism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 150-151

wing populism, and the extreme right. Among extreme right ideologies, the most important one is fascism, a form of totalitarianism where every aspect of life and society is controlled by the state, which is considered as “an ethical, organic, and spiritual entity which requires full loyalty and submission.”⁶⁷ Another example of extreme right ideology is Nazism, where race is, instead, the main entity, as its antisemitism and racism testify. In spite of the dreadful events of World War II and of the rejection of the concept of races and race’s superiority, racism “is still prominent within the extreme right (e.g. neo-Nazis and white supremacists) and even radical right politicians will at times slip into a racial or racist discourse.”⁶⁸

As previously stated, one of the characteristics of the contemporary far-right is that it has become more mainstream. This is mainly due to the radicalisation of regular parties, which have moved towards the populist radical right when it comes to immigration and integration, or law and order.⁶⁹ However, right-wing populism is also following a process of radicalisation which presents tendencies towards the extreme right, and in particular fascism.

It is important to analyse the connection between populism and fascism, which is both historical and ideological. From an historical point of view, modern populism is a response to overcome fascism, alternative to socialism or liberalism, which presents itself as an authoritarian form of democracy, as in the case of Perón’s regime in Argentina. According to Federico Finchelstein, populism is a form of post-fascism since it has reshaped fascist heritage in order to combine democratic procedures, such as the idea of the people’s sovereignty, with authoritarian and antidemocratic impulses.⁷⁰

As for the ideological link between these phenomena, more elements are to be taken into consideration. Firstly, both populism and fascism are different forms of nationalism, even though nowadays, especially in Europe and in North America, populists are closer to the fascist one.⁷¹ Furthermore, fascism presents some key concepts that are shared with populism.

⁶⁷ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 53

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 55

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 264

⁷⁰ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 17

⁷¹ Müller, *What Is Populism.*, 161.; Jens Rydgren, "Introduction", *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, 29.; Roger Griffin, "Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the 'post-fascist' era" in *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader.*, 47

The first one regards “the people”, considered by fascism not only as *demos*, but also as *ethnos*, meaning that people are conceived as an ethnical national community. While in classic populism the definition of “the people” followed the notion of *demos*, with a clear opposition between “the people” and “the anti-people”, contemporary right-wing populism returns to the fascist idea of people, sharing this element with neo-fascism, and, therefore, defining the people ethnically and the anti-people in racist or antireligious terms.⁷² Today,

the ultimate goal of the populist radical right is an ethnocracy, that is, a democracy in which citizenship is based on ethnicity. It wants to (re)create this monocultural state by closing the borders to immigrants and giving “aliens” a choice between assimilation or repatriation.⁷³

Another element playing a central role in fascism is the figure of the leader, presented “[...] as a warrior who would lead the people into holy contests against internal and external enemies.”⁷⁴ Not only is the fascist leader seen as the voice of the people, but it is also characterised by messianic traits, being a living myth and an incarnation of the truth.⁷⁵ Within fascism, the leader detains the ultimate power and is the embodiment of the state as well as the nation. Moreover, leader, people and nation are combined in a single entity which is another central element of fascism, which is rooted in populism.⁷⁶ Thus, these characteristics are adopted by populism, whose leaders present themselves as the true voice of the people, being connected to them as outsiders and separated from the elite.⁷⁷ The populist leader is a strong, charismatic figure, able to move the masses, who is directly connected to the people and a surrogate for the citizens in making all decisions, following a religious form of leadership similar to the fascist conception of the messianic leader.⁷⁸

⁷² Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 19,20; Rydgren, *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 23-24, 29

⁷³ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 57

⁷⁴ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 47

⁷⁵ Federico Finchelstein, “Truth, Mythology and the Fascist Unconscious,” *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (June 2016), 225

⁷⁶ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 47

⁷⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction.* p.62, 68; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 64-65, 121; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 1; Betz, “The Radical Right and Populism” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 153

⁷⁸ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 131; Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science.*, 101; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 58

One of the constitutive elements of fascism is violence. According to Federico Finchelstein,

Fascism was an ideology of violence. It took violence so seriously that it [...] made violence a political imperative. Violence defined fascist practice. In other words, there is no fascism without political violence. There is no real fascism without a total, existential enemy of the people and its consequent political persecution.⁷⁹

Within fascism, violence and aggression are legitimised as the best expressions of power, being linked to the totalitarian state, and can refer to both internal and external repression. Besides, “Fascist totalitarianism [...] does not spread fear, violence, and death with the sole objective of silencing real and imagined dissent. In fascism, violence ceases to be exclusively a means to achieve political goals and becomes a political end in itself.”⁸⁰ The rejection of political violence is precisely what distinguished populism from fascism, where political violence secures consensus by turning out-groups into enemies of the state, thus persecuting and eliminating them. Populism, instead, conceives a homogenous vision of the people by using rhetoric and promoting intolerance, even though within the democratic game, to which also minorities participate through open elections.⁸¹

It can be argued that there is indeed a difference between populism and fascism, which consists in their relationship with democracy. Today, when referring to “democracy”, we usually mean “liberal democracy”, a political regime which respects popular sovereignty, majority rule and institutions specialised in protecting fundamental rights. Whereas fascism’s primary aim is destroying democracy in the name of a totalitarian state, populism does not object to the legitimacy of democratic institutions, but to legitimacy of those who represent them.⁸² Besides, populism is connected to the democratic process of electoral legitimisation and, therefore “[...] is not against democracy; rather it is at odds with *liberal* democracy. It is a set of ideas that defends extreme majoritarianism and supports a form of illiberal democracy. Populism strongly champions popular sovereignty and majority rule but opposes minority rights and pluralism.”⁸³ Populism is a form of

⁷⁹ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi.*, 101

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 72

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 119

⁸² Ventrone, “I populismi e la fragilità della democrazia” in *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, IX

⁸³ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism. A Very Short Introduction*, 95

authoritarian democracy, which increases the political participation of real or imagined majorities while excluding and limiting the rights of minorities⁸⁴.

However, when considering the contemporary right-wing populism, we can see that it is rediscovering and returning to the fascist notion of violence, which is a new element if compared to classic populism. As a matter of fact, current populists and fascists share their will to foster xenophobia, without excluding political violence.⁸⁵ Lately, far-right violence has become increasingly planned, regular, and lethal and, according to the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo,

there were 578 far-right violent incidents in Western Europe in the period 1990–2015, including 190 deadly incidents causing 303 deaths. During roughly the same period in the US (1990–2013), far-right activists killed 368 individuals in a total of 155 ideologically motivated homicides.⁸⁶

The episodes of violence are mainly perpetrated by small groups or single individuals with a minor association to far-right movements and parties. Nonetheless, right-wing leaders are responsible for fostering an atmosphere of violence which can lead to actual incidents and episodes of discrimination. The recent Italian situation is a good example of this. In spite of no direct link between the government and violence, Salvini, leader of the far-right party *Lega*, has created a fertile ground for episodes of violence against immigrants, by spreading his xenophobic populism and, therefore, indirectly legitimising neofascists to commit these attacks.⁸⁷ A demonstration of this return to fascist violence is given by the episode occurred in 2018, when Luca Traini, a fascist sympathiser, committed a terroristic attack shooting at a group of African immigrants.

Having considered all the above-mentioned elements and their differences, it can be said that contemporary right-wing populism is moving from the radical right and is presenting more similarities with the extreme right. By analysing the phenomenon, we can see that this new populism shares some features with neofascism, since both identify

⁸⁴ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 31; Müller, *What Is Populism.*, 89-90; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 2

⁸⁵ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 9-10

⁸⁶ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 130

⁸⁷ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 11

the people as national community in ethnic terms.⁸⁸ As Federico Finchelstein states in his book *From Fascism to Populism in History*,

populism as a movement becomes neofascism when it transitions from a homogenizing conception of the people to one that posits its ethnic identification with the national community, while simultaneously switching from a more or less generic rhetoric of an unidentified enemy (the elites, traitors, outsiders, etc.) to the articulation of an identifiable racial or religious foe who is met with political violence.⁸⁹

Examples of this combination of far-right populism and fascism are Trump in the United States, and Bolsonaro in Brazil, who are both closer to the extreme right rather than radical right. Indeed, instead of being condemned, acts of violence are praised, as shown by Bolsonaro's glorification of the past military dictatorship and by Trump's defence of alt-right protestors in Charlottesville. Both presidents have employed a strong rhetoric of nationalism and political violence in their speeches, where minorities are openly discriminated, and specific targets are identified (i.e. either Afro-Brazilians or Mexican immigrants). This kind of declaration has legitimated fascist thinking in their supporters, who feel justified in acting in a violent and undemocratic way, as testified by recent racist episodes in both countries and by the attack against the United States Capitol.

1.2 Populist Manipulation

Right-wing populists often manipulate information and news to provide a polarised vision of society based on populist frames. It can be argued that there is a connection between the diffusion of this vision and the media. While in the populist discourse the media is usually identified as a tool of the elite and, therefore, an enemy, it is true that it creates a fertile breeding ground for the spread of populist messages. By mainly giving coverage to issues such as crime and immigration, the media contribute to the creation of political discontent, which favours right-wing populism. Furthermore, the populist communicative style, characterised by emotions and dramatization, is particularly

⁸⁸ Rydgren, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 29; Betz, "The Radical Right and Populism" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 179-180, 183; Betz and Johnson, "Against the current-stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical right" in *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader*, 118

⁸⁹ Finchelstein, *Dai Fascismi ai Populismi*, 56

effective within tabloid media, whose commercial character requires sensationalist messages. This favours the so-called “media populism”, which shares specific aspects with populism, such as a biased vision of society and a mediatisation of political communication.

Today, Internet and social media also play a central role in the spread of the populist messages, since they enable these actors to bypass the mediation of the press and, therefore, have a direct contact with the audience. Consequently, people are more likely to be exposed to these messages and have their opinion influenced by these frames.

Right-wing populism employs online platforms and social media to convey a worldview based on exclusionist ideas. Within this phenomenon, the societal antagonism “us versus them” is defined also on a horizontal level, where minorities are considered as a threat to the nation and responsible for its problems. Social media allow these actors to spread distorted information and discriminatory messages, attributing blame to “the other” and presenting negative stereotypes about it. In doing so, right-wing populists disseminate a polarised and framed vision of society, which leads to an escalation of antagonism.

1.2.1 The role of the media: from news media to digital media

The rise of the populist phenomenon, and in particular of the right-wing one, is somehow supported by the media and its coverage, whose choice of topics, as well as populists’ statements, have contributed to the spread of a framed vision of reality and society. Although the level of support varies according to the kind of media taken into consideration, there is arguably a link between the media and populism, which increases when moving from news media to digital media.

In the case of news media, e.g. print and electronic journalism, they generally present a strong relationship with the elite, being the mouthpieces of the ruling class.⁹⁰ Traditional news journalists have a tendency to rely on expert sources, often connected to the establishment, rather than listening to the opinions of ordinary people. Besides, quality

⁹⁰ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media,” in *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, ed. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008), 51

newspapers are normally based on professional gatekeepers and a balanced coverage of news, which guarantees them more objectivity.⁹¹ Thus, traditional news media mostly have a conflicting relationship with populism for their link with the elite and their will to maintain the *status quo*. On the one hand, with their coverage, “these media tend overtly to combat or downplay protest/populist threats, contributing to their containment”⁹² and presenting a negative vision of the phenomenon. On the other hand, news media are criticised by right-wing populists for their proximity with the elite and accused of reporting a biased version of facts in order to favour the established politicians and, therefore, betraying the people.⁹³ Nonetheless, even though most media consider the far right as a threat to democracy, it is also true that they have contributed to the rise of right-wing populism. It is exactly their coverage to these populists and their actions or declarations that grants the far right a higher degree of exposure. If we also consider that the primary goal of news media is to make revenues, right-wing populism is newsworthy, and, for this reason, its importance is often inflated.

Consequently, “high-quality” media, both conservative and liberal, are normalising the populist radical right with columns and interviews. In addition to this trend, news media can be considered responsible for the rise of right-wing populism as their target is mainly focused on issues like crime, corruption, immigration, and terrorism, rather than on political issues as well as education, housing and welfare.⁹⁴ By doing so, they contribute to the diffusion of political discontent and anti-political positions, which creates a fertile breeding ground for the spread of right-wing populism and its message.⁹⁵ Therefore, it can be said that news media are an enemy but also a friend of the far-right.⁹⁶

The case is different when we consider tabloid media, namely print and television outlets, also defined as entertainment media. These particular media mainly follow market imperatives and present a commercial character, which prioritise ratings and competition for advertising resources. Such characteristics require a “journalism which

⁹¹ Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes,” *Mass Communication and Society* 20, no. 4 (2017), 485.

⁹² Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media”, 51

⁹³ Anne Schulz, Werner Wirth, and Philipp Müller, “We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens’ False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions,” *Communication Research* 47, no. 2 (2020), 209.

⁹⁴ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 177-79; Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media”, 50

⁹⁵ Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media”, 51

⁹⁶ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 177

craves for the sensationalistic coverage of events, exhibits a strong preference for personalised story-telling and searches for news that stirs the emotions or provides for a kind of political voyeurism”.⁹⁷ This kind of coverage is more receptive of the populist message and creates a more favourable context for its spread. As a matter of fact, it is possible to identify a parallelism between tabloid media and populism since they are both focused on the viewpoint of ordinary citizens which are not taken into consideration by the news media⁹⁸. Furthermore, they are connected from an ideological point of view as “both share a similar ‘thin’ ideology grounded in the centrality of the common people and the circumvention of elites”.⁹⁹ The convergence of these core values has consequences also on the audience, since choosing entertainment media often leads to political cynicism, which is likely to make people more susceptible to populism.

This situation can be described with the concept of “media populism” which refers to

highly commercialised media production and/or news coverage that yield to general popular tastes [...]. It comprises both the content of commercial treatment of collective imagery (and of public affairs) and of the sweeping ‘popularisation’ of media practices and content.¹⁰⁰

Within media populism, two main phenomena should be taken into consideration. The former is the process of mediatisation of the political leadership and action, while the latter is that of dramatization, according to which political leaders must be “good actors” and understand the techniques of drama. These processes are further linked with the shift of political communication towards entertainment, emotional treatment of social reality, and sensationalism demanded by the audience.¹⁰¹ As a matter of fact, the populist communicative style fits perfectly the trend required by media populism, since it is characterised by heightened emotionality, dramatization and colloquial language to address the people and to be increasingly newsworthy.¹⁰² Moreover, another element

⁹⁷ Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media”, 52

⁹⁸ Hamelers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes”, 485

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media.” 54

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 53

¹⁰² Mats Ekström, Marianna Patrona, and Joanna Thornborrow, “Right-Wing Populism and the Dynamics of Style: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective on Mediated Political Performances,” *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 83 (2018), 3

typical of populist style is that of “bad manners”, a notion that applies to the “apparent disregard for ‘appropriate’ ways of acting in the political realm, and the deliberate flouting of such expectations and practices.”¹⁰³ This can be achieved through the use of a specific kind of language, generally with swearing and exaggerated claims in order to lower the level of political discourse. Another increasingly common way, among right-wing populists, is political incorrectness, which allows them to make harsh statements, usually against minorities, legitimised by the idea that they are “what everyone thinks”. By doing so, these leaders picture themselves as opposed to the elite and as representatives of the people.¹⁰⁴ In order to secure media attention and support, populist leaders also adopt some communication strategies, such as staging events and organising rallies where they can stand among the people to convey their message and gain public visibility. Among these strategies, there are tactical attacks on the media which enable populist leaders to show themselves as the real voice of people and manipulate information to their advantage.¹⁰⁵

Tabloid and entertainment media can, thus, be said to employ a populist style because they often outline issues following the opposition typical of populism between the people and “the other”, which can be defined vertically, as the elite, and horizontally, as societal out-groups. By following this distinction, media populism can be distinguished into three categories.

The first one is *empty media populism* which emphasises the centrality of people’s will and whose coverage focuses on feelings and experiences of common citizens. An example is given by entertainment television shows and tabloid newspapers which position the viewer at the centre of the program or news event. The second type of media populism is *anti-elites media populism*, characterised by the opposition of the innocent people to untrustworthy elites. “For anti-elites media populism, the top-down analyses of elite experts, such as scientists, policy- makers, or politicians, are consequentially perceived as less meaningful and less reliable than the down-to-earth experiences of ordinary

¹⁰³ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, 60

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 61

¹⁰⁵ Mazzoleni, “Populism and the Media.”, 57

citizens”.¹⁰⁶ As for the third type, it consists in *monocultural media populism*, which is, instead, based on a horizontal division of society.

This subtype of media populism contends that immigrants, ethnic minorities, refugees, and all other societal out-groups that do not belong to the populist heartland should not be given a voice in media coverage. Rather, journalists using this form of media populism provide a central stage for the common “national” citizen.¹⁰⁷

Consequently, this category of media populism conveys an exclusionary message based on a manipulated framework, which favours the rise of right-wing populism.

Nowadays, the situation has further developed with the emergence of digital media and its growing importance. In a digitalised world, the Internet plays a central role both in contemporary politics and as a distributor of news, since it can be used in a many ways, “from email blasts providing information or convening a gathering to the expression of political opinions via blogs, YouTube, and online interactive websites to networking with social media to fundraising”.¹⁰⁸ However, the ease with which news and information are now available and open to everyone through the Internet fosters the spread of populist feelings, contributing to the rise of right-wing populism as well as to the manipulation of information. Indeed, populists have gained an immense advantage with the development of digital media because this allows them to bypass the gatekeepers typical of traditional media. By avoiding news procedures, they can promote specific messages which would not gain visibility in news media, often because they are considered unacceptable or against media regulation.¹⁰⁹

In this regard, it is crucial to take into consideration the role of social media and how their use has fostered this phenomenon. “Social media as a channel fits the populist message by being non-hierarchical and providing populist actors with the opportunity to circumvent traditional news channels”¹¹⁰ as well as allowing an increasing circulation of

¹⁰⁶ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes”, 487

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 488

¹⁰⁸ Cynthia Burack and R. Claire Snyder-Hall, “Introduction: Right-Wing Populism and the Media,” *New Political Science* 34, no. 4 (2012), 450

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Schroeder, “Digital Media and the Rise of Right Wing Politics,” in *Social Theory after the Internet: Media, Technology, and Globalization* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 60-61

¹¹⁰ Nicole Ernst et al., “Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries,” *Information Communication and Society* 20, no. 9 (2017), 1347; Schroeder, “Digital Media and the Rise of Right Wing Politics”

the message. Besides, considering the effect of these media on voter's perceptions, social networks provide right-wing populist leaders with a platform to appear effective and legitimate to the people.¹¹¹ Through social media, these leaders can communicate with their "primary audience" (i.e. their followers), but they can also indirectly reach a "secondary audience" with the re-circulation of their message.¹¹²

There are many reasons that justify the major role played by social media in the spread of populism. The first reason is that "social media serve as direct linkage to the people and allow the populists to circumvent the journalistic gatekeepers. In this way, social media provide the populists with the freedom to uncontestedly articulate their ideology and spread their messages."¹¹³ The second one is the opportunity for a closer connection to the people at a human level, which allows the creation of a stronger bond thanks to the lower barriers of interaction and the perception of populist actors as more approachable.¹¹⁴ Third, social media foster the process of personalisation, typical of populism, by creating a clearer image of the private life of these leaders, who also convey their feelings on a personal level, thus contributing also to the process of emotionalization. Finally, social media follow like-minded peer networks, which favour the connection to groups with similar ideologies and societal visions. This issue is connected to the concept of "echo-chambers", according to which "people are exposed either largely or exclusively to pro-attitudinal communication [...] [and] can be selective in connecting to similar others and finding information consistent with own beliefs [...]."¹¹⁵

In spite of its egalitarian and informal appearance, social media can also be used by right-wing populists to address some issues in a plebiscitarian manner as well as manipulate information in order to convey an exclusionary message. In this context, exclusionism refers to a horizontal opposition of ordinary and native people to minorities,

¹¹¹ Linda Bos, Wouter van der Brug, and Claes de Vreese, "How the Media Shape Perceptions of Right-Wing Populist Leaders," *Political Communication* 28, no. 2 (2011), 182; Ernst et al., "Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries.", 1347-49

¹¹² Bos, van der Brug, and de Vreese, "How the Media Shape Perceptions of Right-Wing Populist Leaders.", 1349

¹¹³ Büchel Florin Engesser Sven, Ernst Nicole, Esser Frank, "Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragedmented Ideology," *Information Communication and Society* 20, no. 8 (2016), 1110

¹¹⁴ Ernst et al., "Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries", 1350

¹¹⁵ Shelley Boulianne, Koc-Michalska Karolina, and Bimber Bruce, "Right-Wing Populism, Social Media and Echo Chambers in Western Democracies," *New Media and Society* 22, no. 4 (2020), 684
cf.: Ernst et al., "Extreme Parties and Populism: An Analysis of Facebook and Twitter across Six Countries", 1350

“such as immigrants, people with different religions, traditions or cultural values, or people who unfairly profit from the welfare state.”¹¹⁶ With online messages and posts on social media, right-wing populists often make references to episodes of violence or crimes committed by members of the out-groups as evidence of the threat they represent to the native community. By framing news in this specific way, right-wing populists gain more credibility in their message, which reaches the viewers without any form of mediation and makes them feel their fears are not being ignored. Therefore, social media both provide an “interactive and collective organisation of information on misconduct of elite and outgroup members” and allow the “construction of threats by accumulation of anecdotal evidence”¹¹⁷.

Online platforms and social media play a major role also in the development of marginal subcultures, which are groups sharing values, identity and practises inside the larger national culture.¹¹⁸ The best example is given by the so-called “Alt-Right” which is mainly an online phenomenon belonging to the extreme right and described as “a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilisation.”¹¹⁹ It is an anonymous phenomenon, mainly present in the US but with an international impact, and whose activities are generally unorganised, consisting in misogynist and racist posts or memes.¹²⁰

All these elements considered, we can see how the media contribute to the polarisation of society and public opinion by using populist frames to cover specific issues, leading to a manipulated framework. Media’s coverage influences the people’s opinions and, often unintentionally, favours right-wing populist leaders. In the case of digital media and social networks, the populist manipulation of news and occurring episodes is even further fostered due to the nature of this media. According to Mudde,

¹¹⁶ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes”, 483-4

¹¹⁷ Benjamin Krämer, “Populist Online Practices: The Function of the Internet in Right-Wing Populism,” *Information Communication and Society*, 2017, 1305

¹¹⁸ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 102

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104; Tamir Ban-On, “Richard B. Spencer and the Alt-Right” in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right. Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), PDF e-book, 224-25

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 105

The Internet allows isolated individuals to engage with each other and feel part of a bigger movement, often without having to face pushback for their far-right ideas, because they can operate anonymously and within homogenous social media bubbles. Moreover, these bubbles also function as echo chambers, which amplify the reach and intensity of the message, attracting some new followers and radicalizing old ones.¹²¹

Therefore, these online platforms allow right-wing populists to manipulate information and spread their worldview, without either restrictions or social control, which is further shared in groups of like-minded people where people adopt right-wing practices and identity.¹²² By searching and finding information in line with one's own beliefs in such groups, these people feel supported in their polarised vision of reality, which is actually framed by far-right populists.

1.2.2 The escalation of antagonism

Populism has always been based on the antagonism “us versus them”, which is translated into the central division between “the people” and “the others”. This opposition presents a Manichean vision of society, according to which these groups are therefore divided following black and white terms, and also a moral conception, with one being good and the other one bad.¹²³ Consequently, populism presents “an antagonistic view on societal issues by emphasizing the divide between two homogenous groups: the in-group of the ordinary people and the out-group of culprit others.”¹²⁴

Within populism, the societal division can be defined through two attitudes. The first one is anti-establishment, where the “other” is constructed on a vertical dimension as the corrupt elite. Right-wing populism adds a second element of antagonism based on a horizontal dimension, which follows an exclusionist attitude. Accordingly, the out-group also consists of minorities such as immigrants, refugees, or those with different cultural

¹²¹ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 182

¹²² Krämer, “Populist Online Practices: The Function of the Internet in Right-Wing Populism.”, 1302

¹²³ Schulz, Wirth, and Müller, “We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens’ False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions”, 205; Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.”, 544; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 151; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 1

¹²⁴ Michael Hameleers and Desirée Schmuck, “It’s Us against Them: A Comparative Experiment on the Effects of Populist Messages Communicated via Social Media,” *Information Communication and Society* 20, no. 9 (2017), 1427

and religious values.¹²⁵ In this case, and especially in Europe, the definition of the out-group is not only based on ethnic and national terms, but also on the concept of welfare chauvinism, which implies that immigrants are also an economic threat since the welfare state is being destroyed to incorporate them.¹²⁶

The antagonism between the in- and out-group is based on the attribution of blame and responsibility, i.e. the identification of who is causing the problems the “innocent people” and the heartland are facing. This blame attribution is a central element to populist communication, “which moves beyond highlighting causal interpretations for societal issues”, focusing instead on a moral divide.¹²⁷

This trend is further fostered by the media when they present political issues through the populist frames of society. “Specifically, when actors are framed as responsible for causing certain societal problems, they are more likely to be evaluated in negative terms.”¹²⁸ With the increasing use of social media and online platforms, it is easier for populist actors to stress this framed division between the blameless, hard-working people and the culprit others. Concurrently, people are more frequently exposed to this populist perspective and manipulation of reality, so they are more likely to be affected by it and to accept it as truthful.¹²⁹ When both journalists and right-wing populist actors frame out-group members, such as immigrants and refugees, “citizens who prefer such media content may accept this view perceiving that horizontally constructed others indeed pose a severe threat to the purity of the heartland.”¹³⁰

The notion of “threat” is central to the framed vision of society proposed by right-wing populists, where societal out-groups are enemies and represent both a cultural and

¹²⁵ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes.”, 483-4; Müller, *What Is Populism.*, 44

¹²⁶ Burack and Snyder-Hall, “Introduction: Right-Wing Populism and the Media.”, 34-35; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 160

¹²⁷ Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, “Shoot the Messenger? The Media’s Role in Framing Populist Attributions of Blame,” *Journalism* 20, no. 9 (2019) 1146–7; Betz, “The Radical Right and Populism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right.*, 143-44.; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 4

¹²⁸ Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes de Vreese, “Framing Blame: Toward a Better Understanding of the Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Party Preferences,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 28, no. 3 (2018), 382

¹²⁹ Hameleers and Schmuck, “It’s Us against Them: A Comparative Experiment on the Effects of Populist Messages Communicated via Social Media.”, 1482

¹³⁰ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes.”, 1498; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation.*, 135

economic threat to the pure people of the heartland.¹³¹ In addition to ethnic minorities, the far-right identifies as a threat also those who do not meet the gendered vision of society with a “traditional” notion femininity and masculinity. Traditionally, this vision was based on *benevolent sexism*, which presents women as morally pure and physically weak¹³². However, today “hostile sexism has become more overt within the far right, particularly online. Hostile sexism objectifies and degrades women, who are often viewed as trying to control men through feminist ideology or sexual seduction.”¹³³ Accordingly, radical right populists depict feminism as a threat to the nation mainly for two reasons: on the one hand, it is presented as “alien” to the national culture, which risks to grow weak; on the other hand, it is said to erode the traditional family and the survival of the nation.¹³⁴ Consequently, there a division between the “real” woman, who embodies the notion of the pure and submissive to traditional values, and the feminist woman, who is, instead, depicted as a threat to such values. Following a similar reasoning, homosexuality is also considered to be a threat to the traditional values of the nation. An example is the recent approval of the amendment to the Hungarian Constitution, which alters the definition of families, excluding transgender and homosexual people from adoptions.

In the European context, immigration is considered to be the main threat to the nation, since it is depicted as imperilling the identity and traditional values of the native people. This representation is particularly recurring due to the ongoing economic crisis and the increasing presence of immigrants and refugees. People who have a stronger link to the nation feel threatened by these out-groups, as they perceive their cultural identity is put at risk as a consequence of an increasingly multicultural society.¹³⁵ Therefore,

citizens with an exclusive perception of social identity may thus feel attracted to right-wing populist parties as they promise to revive the national identity while blaming the government, the EU and immigrants for causing the cultural, social and economic threats of the heartland at crisis.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens with Populist Attitudes.”, 1427

¹³² Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 238

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 241

¹³⁵ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 144

¹³⁶ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “Framing Blame: Toward a Better Understanding of the Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Party Preferences.”, 395

Right-wing populists present themselves as defenders of true values of the nation such as traditional family and gender roles, as well as identity and citizenship limited to native people, and they contribute to a framed depiction of these out-groups as enemies. Recently, both in Europe and in the United States, for far-right actors the main enemy, threatening both national identity and security, has been identified in “the Muslim”: “[...] Islamophobia, and specifically a fear of ‘Islamisation’, dominates far-right propaganda, in which domestic and foreign developments are combined with conspiracy theories based on dubious statistics or simplistic narratives.”¹³⁷ It is important to highlight that “it is only within the context of Islamophobia that far-right groups defend gender equality and women’s rights, juxtaposing an egalitarian ‘West’ against a misogynist ‘Islam’.”¹³⁸

The current use of online platforms, together with their possibility to provide an unmediated contact between users, allows right-wing populists to manipulate information and convey this framed worldview relying on emotional communication. By doing so, there is a shift in their messages from reason to emotions, which makes the communication more persuasive and is more likely to evoke a reaction in the viewer.¹³⁹ In this process of blame attribution, people’s insecurities are stressed by using negative emotions such as anger and fear. In particular, “fear is used to highlight uncertainty about the threatening future of the heartland [...]”¹⁴⁰ Consequently, certain political issues are exaggerated or proposed in a framed way by right-wing populists, fostering fearmongering and, therefore, a sense of crisis among people. This perception is interlinked with populism: while these actors gain legitimisation from a situation of crisis, they also contribute to its creation through dramatization and by framing “the people” versus those responsible for the crisis itself.¹⁴¹

At a moment when people feel insecure and threatened, there is the tendency to seek for a scapegoat in order to both explain the origin of the problems affecting society and have the certainty that, once it is defeated, a solution can be found. Right-wing populists

¹³⁷ Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, 65

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 275

¹³⁹ Dominique S. Wirz et al., “The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants,” *International Journal of Press/Politics* 23, no. 4 (2018), 499

¹⁴⁰ Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, “‘They Did It’: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication,” *Communication Research* 44, no. 6 (2017), 876

¹⁴¹ Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, 106, 115; Zanatta, *Il Populismo*, Ch. 2-Ch. 8; Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “‘They Did It’: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication.”, 872

present the out-groups, more generally immigrants, as scapegoats responsible for the situation of crisis the nation is facing, since it is easier for the people “to make sense of political issues by finding external causes for internally experienced problems”.¹⁴² For instance, when the political elites or refugees and immigrants “are held responsible [...] the ordinary citizens are depicted as being deprived by others and assumed to be treated unfairly by those who *are* actually responsible”¹⁴³

By framing blame in such a way, these actors foster the polarisation of society and contribute to the exacerbation of antagonism, as they spread distorted information and discriminatory messages, mainly on social media. Populist messages of blame attribution generally present a positive vision of the in-group and negative stereotypes regarding the out-group. A clear example is given by posts on Facebook or Twitter where radical-right populists constantly portray immigrants as criminals or as assisted at the expenses of the native people. By exclusively covering news of crimes committed by immigrants, the public has developed negative and exclusionist attitudes toward these actors.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, when spread on social media, these negatives depictions are more accessible and, thus, the receivers are more exposed to negative stereotypes. “As a consequence of the exposure to messages that shift blame from the innocent people to culprit out-groups, citizens may interpret societal issues in ‘us’ against ‘them’ oppositions *themselves* as well.”¹⁴⁵

In conclusion, it can be said that right-wing populists benefit from the use of social media and online platforms since it allows them to simplify

cases and circumstances, cherry-picking facts, and framing topics as well as information according to the stereotypical opposition between us- versus-them. If facts run counter to that core narrative, they may be left out or reasoned away as not valid, with evasive explanations.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “Shoot the Messenger? The Media’s Role in Framing Populist Attributions of Blame.”, 1147

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, “Framing Blame: Toward a Better Understanding of the Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Party Preferences.”, 383; Hameleers and Schmuck, “It’s Us against Them: A Comparative Experiment on the Effects of Populist Messages Communicated via Social Media.”, 1428

¹⁴⁵ Hameleers and Schmuck, “It’s Us against Them: A Comparative Experiment on the Effects of Populist Messages Communicated via Social Media.”, 1427

¹⁴⁶ Vincent F. Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard, “Fact Resistance, Populism, and Conspiracy Theories,” *Reality Lost*, (2019), 89

Therefore, they are able to spread a more polarised vision of society where out-groups are blamed for the situation of crisis and the problems of the nation. Such simplified and manipulated worldview is more likely to be accepted by those people who show sympathy and support to far-right actors, as it provides explanations to complex issues. By using right-wing populist communication, which combines emotionally arousing style and stereotypical contents¹⁴⁷, these actors manage to frame reality through the attribution of blame and to manipulate information in order to fuel resentments against the out-groups. These dynamics foster the diffusion of discriminatory messages, which leads to an escalation of antagonism within society.

1.3 News and History: two targets for manipulation

Having analysed the growing use of social media as a means of information by both right-wing populists and the people, we can understand how this network has contributed to the manipulation and framing of information. Thus, today the distortion of facts is increasingly present in our everyday life, as a consequence of the role of social networks and populist frames.

We are said to be living in a post-truth world where lies are presented as truth and vice versa. More precisely, in post-truth politics “factual evidence is seen as less important than personal opinion, with public actors increasingly denying factual information.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore, in a post-truth society public opinion is largely influenced by appeals to emotions and personal beliefs rather than facts.¹⁴⁹ This central role played by emotions connects once again this phenomenon to the dynamics of right-wing populism and social media.

The distortion of the truth typical of this so-called post-truth world enable to create another parallelism between populism and fascism, since the latter was characterised by the manipulation and invention of facts in order to promote an alternative reality.

¹⁴⁷ Wirz et al., “The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants.”, 500

¹⁴⁸ Jana Laura Egelhofer and Sophie Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda,” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 43, no. 2 (2019), 108.

¹⁴⁹ Patrik Fridlund, “Post-Truth Politics, Performatives and the Force,” *Jus Cogens*, no. 2 (2020), 216

According to Federico Finchelstein, contemporary right-wing populists and fascists share many aspects as far as the notion of truth and promulgation of lies are concerned. Among them there are the racist lie of the hierarchy of races and the idea that the media is untrustworthy since the leader is the real source of truth¹⁵⁰. Furthermore, fascists used “[...] prejudices and lies to read between the lines of what seemed difficult to understand and reduced the complexity of the world by adhering to what they believed was a higher truth.”¹⁵¹ Similarly, in right-wing populism, both present issues and historical facts are distorted and manipulated by promoting fake news and historical revisionism.

1.3.1 The phenomenon of Fake News

The diffusion of “fake news” is not a new phenomenon but it has flourished with unprecedented ease due to the increasing use of social media by politicians and people. As previously stated, not only do social media enable to bypass the traditional tools of control over the truthfulness of news, they also favour the creation of echo-chambers where people are exposed to shared perspectives and are, thus, insulated from the truth.¹⁵²

In order to have a more complete understanding, fake news can be analysed as a two-dimensional phenomenon: “there is the (1) *fake news genre*, describing the deliberate creation of pseudo-journalistic disinformation, and there is the (2) *fake news label*, describing the political instrumentalization of the term to delegitimise news media.”¹⁵³

As for the first dimension, fake news can be defined as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers.”¹⁵⁴ According to this definition, there are three elements in fake news that distinguish this phenomenon from other forms of distorting facts such as rumours and conspiracy theories¹⁵⁵. First, to be

¹⁵⁰ Federico Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* (University of California Press, 2020), PDF e-book.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35

¹⁵² Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no. 2 (2017), 211 ; Matteo Monti, “The New Populism and Fake News on the Internet: How Populism Along with Internet New Media Is Transforming the Fourth Estate.,” *Stals Research Paper*, 4. XXXVI (2018), 8.

¹⁵³ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.,” 97

¹⁵⁴ Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.,” 213

¹⁵⁵ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.,” 99-100; Taggart, *Populism. Concepts in the Social Science.*, 105

identified as fake news, the information has to be presented in a journalistic form, as if it were the result of research following professional codes. Second, it includes false information such as misleading or invented facts and a distorted context. Third, its creation derives from an intentional aim at deceiving the reader, which can be considered as its main characteristic¹⁵⁶. In this specific regard, there are two kinds of fake news depending on the reason for deceiving, either financial or ideological and political. The former is fake news created to gain advertising revenues from its virality, while the latter aims at advancing the candidates one favours, usually by discrediting the opponent.¹⁵⁷ This phenomenon is, therefore, more related to the concept of disinformation rather than that of misinformation. While misinformation regards the dissemination of incorrect and misleading information unintentionally, disinformation implies distorting and spreading information intentionally.¹⁵⁸

Social media and online platforms play a pivotal role in fostering disinformation and fake news, which can be used for propagandistic purposes. In this case, we can talk about “computational propaganda”, meaning the manipulation and shaping of public opinion and, therefore, political processes by using computer technologies.¹⁵⁹ Such fake news resembles real news in their structure, yet they present shorter and less informative content as well as more personal and straightforward language.¹⁶⁰ Their creation can follow three main stages, which

begin with the opening of a fake website that is similar to mainstream media websites in terms of visuals and design. In the second phase, political bots and trawl accounts share the manipulative and fake content produced on the website in question, which enables them to reach a wider audience. In the final stage, the content produced for manipulation is brought to the agenda of online social networks and mainstream media, which allows it to become discussed and further expands the scope of manipulation by attracting the attention of large masses.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.”, 99-100

¹⁵⁷ Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.”, 217

¹⁵⁸ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.”, 101

¹⁵⁹ Turgay Yerlikaya, “Social Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era: The Manipulation of Politics in the Election Process.”, *Insight Turkey*, 22 n.2 (2020), 184

¹⁶⁰ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.”, 104

¹⁶¹ Yerlikaya, “Social Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era: The Manipulation of Politics in the Election Process.”, 184

As for the second dimension of this phenomenon, *fake news label* indicates that the term is used as a weapon by political actors, more frequently right-wing populists, in order to discredit those news media contradicting their positions and statements. Claiming that these institutions deliberately share disinformation to deceive the audience, *fake news label* becomes a political instrument through which these actors aim at “undermining public trust in institutional news media as central parts of democratic political systems [...]”¹⁶² and, therefore, at controlling their influence on the public. Furthermore, this label contributes to delegitimise *media criticism*, which is supposed to be a tool to check the quality of the media and assess whether it is executing its role in a democratic way. However, media criticism implies an explicit argumentation for the reason of the critique, which is not present when populist actors blame the media of lying and spreading fake news, actually hampering an open debate. “Therefore, criticism that is expressed in an emotional and uncivil language does not strive for constructively evaluating media quality in terms of its democratic value. Instead, it can be seen as an attempt to delegitimise the opponent.”¹⁶³ In doing so, the label of “fake news” can influence the people’s perception of both journalism and their opinions on truthfulness and credibility.

The use of fake news can be crucial for the manipulation of public opinion and politics. It has been proved that right-wing populists have benefited from such tool, especially during election periods. Aside from the well-known case of Bolsonaro’s election in Brazil, which will be analysed in detail in the third chapter, there are many examples of the use of fake news to favour these actors while they were running for elections. One of the most discussed cases is that of the 2016 U.S. elections, when there was a peak in the spread of fake news and false information on social media, which were proved to be predominantly pro-Trump or anti-Clinton.¹⁶⁴ This was further confirmed by the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which confirmed that the political consulting firm used user’s Facebook accounts to manipulate and influence the result of the elections. Among the various manipulation strategies adopted, particularly effective was that of character suicide, which consisted in sharing “humiliating information about Hillary Clinton on social networks and to make other [Republican] candidates [...] look bad in comparison

¹⁶² Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.”, 105

¹⁶³ Ibid., 107

¹⁶⁴ Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.”, 223

to Trump, in order to ensure that he was the most prominent candidate”¹⁶⁵. Other fake news favouring Trump regarded Hillary Clinton being part of the Pizzagate scandal and selling weapons to ISIS, as well as the news of the Pope supporting Trump.

A similar scenario can be found also in Europe during the Brexit referendum in the UK, or the 2017 elections in both France and Germany, where social media were used as a means for manipulating public opinion. As for the French elections, fake news favoured far-right candidates such as Marine Le Pen, since “distorting the results of surveys, the character assassination of candidates and the use of deliberate falsehoods to promote far-right anti-immigration positions were used”.¹⁶⁶ An example is the diffusion on Facebook of the news that the state had created a card that would give 40 euros per day to refugees, whereas the National Front would give priority to native people. An analogous situation occurred in Germany during the 2017 federal elections, when the right-wing “Alternative for Germany” party used social media to spread its racist ideas. This manipulation, through fake news and social bots, enabled a party with far-right ideas to enter the Bundestag.¹⁶⁷

The diffusion of fake news through social networks and websites promotes a distorted vision of reality, where topics are framed and stereotypes and lies replace facts. Right-wing populists contribute to the dissemination of disinformation through misleading news used to provoke empathy and emotions in the public. In doing so, they foster misperceptions on political topics which have relevant consequence since they influence people’s attitudes and their ability to evaluate news in a critical way.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, an alternative truth is presented and increasingly accepted by the people. This leads to a further political polarisation, which “can be connected to what has been termed an ‘increasing relativism of facts’ or ‘post-truth politics’”.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Yerlikaya, “Social Media and Fake News in the Post-Truth Era: The Manipulation of Politics in the Election Process.”, 186

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 187

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 190

¹⁶⁸ Egelhofer and Lecheler, “Fake News as a Two-Dimensional Phenomenon: A Framework and Research Agenda.”, 109

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 108

1.3.2 Historical Revisionism and Alt-History

In a post-truth world, the manipulation of truth also regards historical facts. History is considered to be based on facts and events, yet it is common for far-right actors to reject them in favour of conspiracy theories and denial of history. In this context, there is an increasing distrust of scholarly evidence and of its credibility, from history to science, which can foster invented theories to explain facts.¹⁷⁰

Traditionally, history is conceived as something cyclical that repeats itself, but this understanding has been questioned by progressive narratives, according to which the past is past, and we should concentrate on the future. This modern thinking is dismissed by right-wing populists who believe that the present age is characterised by decline and decadence, while the past is depicted in an idealised way and needs to be re-established¹⁷¹. This cyclical vision of history is mainly visible in Trump's slogan *Make America Great Again*. For the most extreme wings such as white supremacists and neo-Nazis, the restoration of the past can be achieved through the theory of acceleration, which implies a racial war to achieve a white ethnostate, as testified by the El Paso and Christchurch shootings in 2019.¹⁷²

In presenting an idealised vision of the past, history is often revised. While it is true that revisionism is necessary when new discoveries and evidence emerge, there is the risk this phenomenon could be employed for ideological purposes. Historical revisionism, together with the modification and denial of historic claims, leads to alternate timelines of the past, created to justify an interpretation of the present.¹⁷³ This replacement of historical facts constitutes an abuse of history, which aims at presenting a distorted understanding of the past. A recent example is the claim made by the far right that Hitler was a socialist, consequently merging socialism and Nazism.¹⁷⁴ These timelines generate

¹⁷⁰ Louie Dean Valencia-García, "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, ed. Valencia-García (New York: Routledge, 2020). epub e-book 14.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4-6

¹⁷² Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies.*, 3-4

¹⁷³ Valencia-García, "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories.*, 9

¹⁷⁴ Valencia-García, "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 9, 12; Charlotte Mears, "The Far Right and Women's History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 290

alternative histories, which intentionally reject and distort facts, relying on unprovable, imagined or impossible pasts.¹⁷⁵

The term *Alt-History* is related to the already mentioned “alt-right” movement, and to the notion of ‘alternative facts’ used by Trump’s counsellor, Kellyanne Conway. Both these elements present a biased interpretation of facts and misconstruction of the past to build up a politically advantageous narrative.¹⁷⁶ There are numerous ways through which alt-histories are conceived:

(1) historical denial, which can include abject rejection of archives and historical evidence; (2) belief in cyclical, or teleological, history which assumes where we are going or where we have been; (3) declination narratives which assume a theory of degeneracy in place of understanding of change; (4) mythologisation that is created when facts are replaced with chimeras; (5) nostalgia for an imagined past that often supposes both a declination and attempts to selectively exclude or underline historical facts and narratives; (6) ahistoricism based purely on untruth; and (7) through often fragmented and biased ways history is remembered and portrayed in popular public memory (films, textbooks, television shows, etc.)¹⁷⁷

By decontextualising historical elements and denying research, alt-histories are employed to transform specific events and narrations, leading to a manipulation of history that aims at legitimising one’s ideology or political position.

Within right-wing populism, the re-elaboration of the past is related to the specific history of the country, but it generally regards a past authoritarian period, and this process of re-elaboration is connected to the collective memory of that period. The concept of collective memory, developed by the philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, refers to a collection of values, memories, experiences and information which is shared by a social group, such as communities or nations. Collective memory differs from history since it mirrors the viewpoint of a specific social group in a biased and emotional way. Therefore, it is not something fixed, yet collective memories follow different phases during which

¹⁷⁵ Valencia-García, "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 14; Griffin, "Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the 'post-fascist' era" in *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader.*, 46

¹⁷⁶ "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 7; Valencia Garcia, "The Rise and Fall of the Far Right in the Digital Age", in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 858

¹⁷⁷ "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History" in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 9

their re-elaboration process evolves.¹⁷⁸ At first re-elaboration is not possible, so there is a *silencing phase*, when critical topics are avoided. Afterwards, the country faces a *self-critical phase*, followed by a *crystallisation phase*, when the events of the past period start to be revised. Finally, re-elaboration is more successful during a *fading phase*, since relating memories become obsolete and less relevant.¹⁷⁹

The process of re-elaborating history enables the creation of another connection between right-wing populism and fascism. Both ideologies present a tendency to restore an idealised and imagined past by distorting historical events. Fascists thought that the past, presented as a great moment for the country, had to be rewritten to meet the ideological directives of their present. Similarly, right-wing populists “replace historical truth with fake ideas about a glorious past that their leaders promise to revive.”¹⁸⁰ A further connection is given by the fact that, the period re-elaborated by right-wing populists is often fascism. While previous populist leaders were reluctant to follow the fascist feature of completely distorting the historical record, contemporary right-wing populists are “[...] getting closer to the fascist dream of the destruction of history and its replacement with the myth of the infallible leader. [...] They are reverse engineering their own history, especially with respect to the history of fascism itself.”¹⁸¹ For instance, the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has distorted the history of the Holocaust to satisfy his own political interests, “[...] by suggesting that an interwar pro-Nazi Palestinian leader was a key actor in the extermination of European Jews.”¹⁸²

For these actors, rewriting history becomes fundamental since it enables them to provide an explanation to, and a legitimization of far-right beliefs. As a matter of fact, with alt-histories restoring fascism, the populists’ racist, nationalist, sexist and ethnocentric thinking is justified, even though it does not apply to the modern world.¹⁸³

To conclude, historical revisionism and alt-history contribute to the creation of the post-truth world, since they generally provide a mythical vision of the past, based on the

¹⁷⁸ Daniele Caramani and Luca Manucci, “National Past and Populism: The Re-Elaboration of Fascism and Its Impact on Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe,” *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019), 1162

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, 105

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 95

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 98;

¹⁸³ “Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History” in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt-Histories*, 7

manipulation of facts. This distorted vision of history is presented by contemporary right-wing populists as the truth to legitimate their beliefs, “[...] suggesting that the fascism of the past was not that bad—or not even fascism at all.”¹⁸⁴ The same dynamics can be found in Brazil, where Bolsonaro praises the military dictatorship by providing false and biased information about the national past, which will be better analysed in the third chapter.

¹⁸⁴ Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, 98

CHAPTER II:

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF BRAZIL:

understanding the 2018 electoral context

In October 2018 presidential elections took place, resulting in Jair Bolsonaro's victory. The context where the electoral campaign occurred was characterised by a strong opposition towards the leftist Workers' Party (PT). This sentiment, present since the creation of the party, was further fostered after the process of impeachment which had led to the removal of Dilma Rousseff's (PT) from presidency in 2016.

Among the various issues in Bolsonaro's electoral campaign, the central elements were represented by anti-corruption discourses and by *anti-petismo*, a feeling of resentment against the PT. In spite of the many social policies implemented, the reduction of poverty and the increase in economic growth, in this context the PT was mainly associated with episodes of corruption and considered its principal cause. On the other hand, in Bolsonaro's speeches there was a recurring praise to the military dictatorship and to the Armed Forces, often justifying the crimes and violations of human rights occurred in that period.¹⁸⁵

In order to understand how these claims emerged, it is fundamental to analyse the events that took place from the end of the military regime in 1985 to Bolsonaro's election in 2018. Throughout this period Brazil has moved from a dictatorship to civilian rule. However, differently from other Latin American countries, the process of democratic transition was started and led by the military. The main example is the *Lei da Anistia*, which granted amnesty to the regime's opposers, but also to those agents of the State responsible for crimes against humanity.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, the country has never really confronted itself with its past, which explains why today Bolsonaro is allowed to praise the military dictatorship and its doings.

Furthermore, analysing the civilian governments that followed the military regime, it can be seen that the main accusation made to the PT during the 2018 electoral context –

¹⁸⁵ Fabrício H. Chagas-Bastos, "Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn," *Revista de Estudos Sociais* 2019, no. 69 (July 2019): 92–96, <https://doi.org/10.7440/res69.2019.08>.

¹⁸⁶ Lilia Moritz Schwarcz and Heloisa Murgel Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia* (Companhia das Letras, 2015), 686–89, <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.4439>.

i.e. corruption – is actually a recurring element in Brazilian contemporary history. The same can be said for the issue of impeachment processes, often associated uniquely to Dilma Rousseff’s one in 2016 as evidence of the negative government of the PT. In fact, impeachment requests have been presented to Congress during every administration, and in 1992 the process was approved leading to Collor’s removal from presidency. However, when related to the PT, these elements have had more weight in framing the public opinion, in spite of the unprecedented economic and social achievements. This can be explained also considering the historical opposition that both the business elite and the media have had towards the Left, depicted as a threat to the stability of the country even before the 1964 *golpe*.¹⁸⁷ In particular, this can be seen in “[...] Rede Globo’s disposition to manipulate information if necessary and thus to shape important political processes”¹⁸⁸, culminating in the narrative created to hinder Dilma’s and Lula’s credibility during the impeachment process and the *Lava Jato* investigation.

Therefore, examining how these developments occurred throughout the *Nova República*¹⁸⁹ can help to better understand why Bolsonaro’s *anti-petista* and anti-corruption claims have been so effective in the 2018 electoral campaign.

2.1 The 1980s and the process of democratisation

At the beginning of the 1980s, Brazil was under a military dictatorship, ongoing since 1964 when the Armed Forces had staged a coup d’état. The *golpe* that had overthrown the President João Goulart was the result of many dynamics, among which the criticism of the situation of political and economic crisis the country was facing and the promotion of nationalisation and reforms in order to achieve more social justice.

These measures were opposed to at both national and international level. Domestically, the opposition was represented by the military, the business elites and the upper middle classes, who felt threatened by Goulart’s agenda. Consequently, they organised mass

¹⁸⁷ Rodrigo Vianna, “G DE GOLPE,” in *Enciclopédia Do Golpe, Vol. 2, O Papel Da Mídia*, ed. Mirian Gonçalves, vol. 2 (CLACSO, 2018), 86–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvn96fw2.13>.

¹⁸⁸ Luis Felipe Miguel, “The Globo Television Network and the Election of 1998,” *Latin American Perspectives* 27, no. 6 (2000): 70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2634273>

¹⁸⁹ *Nova República* (New Republic) is the term used to refer to the period of the Brazilian contemporary history since 1985 with the restoration of civilian rule.

demonstrations declaring that communists were about to control the Brazilian state and wanted to destroy the traditional and free business values.¹⁹⁰ This sort of claim, still effective today, was extremely powerful in a bipolar world. Indeed, at international level, Goulart's projects were opposed by the United States, which were interested in fighting communism and maintaining their influence on the country. Thus, both the Brazilian conservative society and the United States supported the military coup d'état of 1964.

The Brazilian military dictatorship diverged from the other Latin American authoritarian regimes, and identifying these different characteristics is important to understand the forthcoming process of democratisation, started in the 1970s. First, elections were manipulated but not suspended: according to the *Ato Institucional nº1* (AI-1), the President was indirectly elected by the absolute majority of the members of the Congress, which remained open, except when it refused to observe the regime's orders. Another difference from countries such as Argentina and Chile, is that the Brazilian authoritarian regime was not personalist, but was instead ruled by alternative military leaders elected within the Armed Forces. Finally, although all political parties became extinct with the AI-2, this act established a two-party system, with the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional*, or ARENA (National Alliance for Renewal) as the government party and the *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, or MDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement) as the opposition party. These measures distinguish the military regime in Brazil and constitute a "democratic façade", which "[...] refers to the practice of maintaining democratic institutions, procedures and terms while manipulating or redefining them to conceal authoritarian rule."¹⁹¹

The military regime underwent periods of both repression and opening. Despite the democratic appearance of the system, the Armed Forces implemented mechanisms of repression against the opposition and those who were considered as subversives. In 1968 the AI-5 was announced, which is considered to be the mechanism of a revolution within a revolution since it officialised state terrorism and led to the so-called Years of Lead (*Anos de Chumbo*). "AI-5 re-established presidential power to cancel mandates and to

¹⁹⁰ Amon Barros and Sergio Wanderley, "Brazilian Businessmen Movements: Right-Wing Populism and the (Dis)Connection between Policy and Politics" *Organization* 27, no. 3 (2020), 398, doi:10.1177/1350508419883378

¹⁹¹ Nina Schneider, "Impunity in Post-Authoritarian Brazil: The Supreme Court's Recent Verdict on the Amnesty Law," *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe*, 2011, 40

suspend political rights, as well as to dismiss or to retire public servants.”¹⁹² It also suspended the *habeas corpus* for political crimes, consequently authorising the imprisonment of the regime’s opponents and legalising torture to guarantee “security”.

In the 1980s, Brazil was experiencing a process of democratic opening, of which it is important to highlight three aspects.¹⁹³ First, the process of “political distention”, also called “political transition” was started by the military. Second, the nature, evolution and goals of this process were also determined by the Armed Forces. Finally, it resulted from the need to solve internal problems within the regime, and not from a real democratic transformation.

This process can also be divided into three phases.¹⁹⁴ The first phase coincides with Geisel’s administration, started in 1974 and associated with a political opening. This process was defined as “slow, gradual, and secure” and the formula was related to different reasons. On the one hand, there was an internal division within the Armed Forces between the “moderates” and the “hard-liners”¹⁹⁵. The former, to whom Geisel belonged, was authoritarian but wanted to soften repression and believed that the Armed Forces should retire from political life in order to preserve the institution. The latter, instead, supported both repression and the continuation of the military rule, and was, consequently, opposed to the process of opening. Thus, the transition needed to be long to avoid reactions from this group, which was still in control of the information community (CENIMAR, DOI-CODI) and engaged in repression and torture. On the other hand, Geisel wanted to have control over the process of democratic opening which was supposed to be gradual to avoid a democratic rupture¹⁹⁶. In addition to this, public mobilisation and social movements such as the Brazilian amnesty movement, as well as criticism from the civil society and the business sector, also led to the concession of liberalising reforms and measures.

¹⁹² Boris Fausto and Sergio Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), e-Book, 608

¹⁹³ Adriano Nervo Codato, “Uma História Política Da Transição Brasileira: Da Ditadura Militar à Democracia,” *Revista de Sociologia e Política* 25 (2005): 83.

¹⁹⁴ Maria Kinzo, “A Democratização Brasileira,” *São Paulo Em Perspectiva* 15, no. 4 (2001), 5-8.

¹⁹⁵ Schneider, “Impunity in Post-Authoritarian Brazil: The Supreme Court’s Recent Verdict on the Amnesty Law”, 42

¹⁹⁶ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 485-88

The process continued with Figueiredo's administration, from 1979 to 1985, which covers both first and second phase. With the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, corresponding to the third phase, the democratic transition developed even further. These two moments are better analysed in the following sections.

It is important to highlight that, for the above-mentioned reasons, the process of democratic transition was extremely long, and the actual dissolution of the military system only occurred in 1990 with Collor's government, who dismantled the repressive apparatus.¹⁹⁷

2.1.1 Figueiredo and the *Lei da Anistia* (Amnesty Law)

The process of democratisation took further steps during the presidency of João Batista Figueiredo, when institutional transformations occurred. Among these measures, there was the partisan reform of 1979 according to which the bipartisan system was dismantled, and the two existing parties were dissolved. The government party, ARENA, became the *Partido Democrático Social*, or PDS (Social Democratic Party), while the MDB became the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*. In addition to the PMDB, other parties emerged¹⁹⁸: the *Partido Democrático Trabalhista*, PDT (Democratic Labour Party), closer to the European social-democracy, and whose leader was Leonel Brizola; the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro*, PTB, previously abolished in 1964; the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT (Worker's Party) led by Luís Inácio, Lula, da Silva, and supported by rural and urban union members as well as progressive Catholics and socialists. Beside these left-wing and liberal parties, also the *Partido Popular*, or PP (Popular Party), captained by Tancredo Neves, was founded but it was soon incorporated in the PMDB.

With the decision to extinguish the existing parties, the ruling military aimed at weakening the monopoly of the MDB in the opposition, which was increasingly popular. This move was, indeed, effective since personal differences between the new parties appeared, which meant the opposition was no longer united even though it achieved impressive gains in the 1982 gubernatorial elections.

¹⁹⁷ Samantha Viz Quadrat, "Os Militares, a Comunidade de Informações e a Abertura", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 10th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Elvísier, 2016), 570

¹⁹⁸ Alesandra Carvalho, "As Características da Transição no Brasil", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 10th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Elvísier, 2016), 562

The new parties, emerged from the dissolution of the MDB, played an important role in campaigning for direct presidential elections. During Figueiredo's administration, several demonstrations took place and united a large part of the population. Between 1983 and 1984, parties, class organisations and the Church set up the campaign *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now), which was marked by popular rallying, organised by political figures such as Tancredo Neves, Ulysses Guimarães (PMDB), Lula (PT) and Brizola (PDT). From 1984, "the movement in support for direct elections transcended party organisations and became, for all intents and purposes, a nationwide movement."¹⁹⁹ In 1984, the Chamber of Deputies voted on the proposal of the Constitutional Amendment Dante de Oliveira, which would re-establish direct presidential elections. However, in spite of the popular support, the approval did not reach the qualified majority (two-thirds) required for constitutional amendments, and the proposal was, therefore, rejected by Congress.²⁰⁰

In this context, it is worth considering *Rede Globo's* attempt to influence the ongoing political process, visible in two events. First, in the 1982 gubernatorial campaign, *Globo* tried to hinder Brizola's candidacy as governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. "By broadcasting false statistics that predicted a win by the rightist Moreira Franco, the network was paving the way for the fraudulent tallying of votes."²⁰¹ The second episode regards the demonstration for direct elections occurred on 25 January in São Paulo which was described by the television newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, as a commemorative event for the anniversary of the city with no political meaning. These claims by *Globo* show its tendency to manipulate the coverage of events and undermine the Left.

When analysing this period, it is important to consider the economic situation, which contributed to the increasing criticism towards the military regime. As a matter of fact, during Figueiredo's presidency, "political liberalisation went forward at the same time that the economic situation worsened."²⁰² In these years, inflation reached 200% and "stagflation", a combination of economic stagnation and inflation, was commonplace. Besides, Brazil was facing a situation of external debt, which had started with the oil

¹⁹⁹ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 648

²⁰⁰ Eduardo Bueno, *Brasil, Uma História: Cinco Séculos de Um País Em Construção* (Rio de Janeiro: LeYa, 2012), 1080-81.

²⁰¹ Miguel, "The Globo Television Network and the Election of 1998", 70-71:

²⁰² Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 639

shock of 1973 and worsened in 1979. Consequently, Brazil found itself highly indebted and, by the end of 1980, its external debt was already too high to be repaid, forcing the country to turn to the IMF for loans with strict conditions. In 1983, Brazil managed to obtain some loans and, from 1984, started to recover economically thanks to a trade surplus, being able to pay its interests on the external debt without recurring to new money²⁰³. In spite of this, the economic situation was still negative since inflation and the foreign debt kept growing.

In the democratisation process, it is crucial to focus on the Amnesty Law, approved by Congress in 1979 after big mobilisations by the amnesty movement.

The amnesty movement, emerged in the 1970s, had been gaining strength from 1975 onwards, in a context of worsening of the economic situation and increasing opposition to the regime and its repression. Its main demand was the recognition of the human rights violations that had been occurring under the regime. From 1975, the press extended their coverage of human rights violations, which contributed to an increasing support to the amnesty movement, which started to mobilise many portions of society. Among the many groups constituting this movement, a key role was played by two agents: the *Movimento Feminino pela Anistia*, MFA (Feminine Amnesty) Movement founded in 1975 by Teresinha Zerbini, and the many *Comitês Brasileiros pela Anistia* CBA (Brazilian Amnesty Committees) created in 1978.²⁰⁴ The growing importance and pressure of the amnesty movement contributed to the establishment of the Amnesty Law in 1979.

On 28 August 1979 the Congress ratified the Amnesty Law (*Lei da Anistia*, Law n.6638), which is still in force today. It can be considered as a form of compromise after the negotiations between the government, the military hard-liners and the MDB.²⁰⁵ According to Article 1,

Amnesty is granted to all those who, in the period between 2 September 1961 and 15 August 1979, have committed political crimes or related, electoral crimes, to those who had their political rights suspended, and to the Direct and Indirect Administration servants, and those of foundations linked to public power, to the servants of the

²⁰³ Fabiano Abranches Silva Dalto, “Brazilian Financial Crisis in the 1980s: Historical Precedent of an Economy Governed by Financial Interests,” *Revista de Economia Contemporanea* 23, no. 3 (2019): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1590/198055272332>.

²⁰⁴ Lilia Moritz Schwarcz and Heloisa Murgel Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia* (Companhia das Letras, 2015), 687, <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.4439>.

²⁰⁵ Schneider, “Impunity in Post-Authoritarian Brazil: The Supreme Court’s Recent Verdict on the Amnesty Law.”, 43

Legislative and Judiciary power, to Military and to the union leaders and representatives, punished based on Institutional and Complementary Acts.²⁰⁶

De facto, this law put on the same level both those who have been tortured and those who have committed torture. Furthermore, while exiled people were allowed to return to Brazil, amnesty was not granted to “prisoners sentenced for crimes of terrorism, assault, abduction and personal attack.²⁰⁷” It was, instead, fully granted to those agents accused of torture, murders and disappearances. With the approval of this law, many demands of the amnesty movement were ignored, as it failed to clarify the numerous crimes occurred during the dictatorship, such as human rights violations and the cases of the *desaparecidos*. In addition to this, the law hindered the punishment and prosecution of those responsible for such crimes, as the idea of “justice” consisted in giving monetary compensation to the direct victims.²⁰⁸

By doing so, the government contributed to a *transição pactuada*, an agreed transition whose effects have influenced the Brazilian society. Brazil is the only country in Latin America to have forgiven or forgotten the crimes committed by the military regime. Therefore, there is an oblivion regarding the dictatorship period since the experience has never been completely faced. Consequently, its violence returns in different forms also in today’s society, where violence and human rights violations are still present, and where the police kills and tortures more than during the military regime.²⁰⁹

A clear example of the Amnesty Law consequences can be the 2008 trial against Colonel Brilhante Ustra, leader of the DOI-CODI and responsible for torture and human rights violations. Despite being a convicted torturer, “the court was barred from meting out judicial punishment because the 1979 Amnesty Law protected Ustra from a criminal judgement. Hence, in October 2008, the court condemned Ustra 'morally and politically' by pronouncing him guilty of torture.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Brazil, Law. 6.683, Art. 1, 28 August 1979., https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l6683.htm [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²⁰⁷ Ibid. §2

²⁰⁸ Thiago Vieira Pires and Solon Eduardo Annes Viola, “Memórias Da Ditadura e o Atual Cenário de Ascenso Conservador No Brasil. Uma Análise Sobre Continuidades e Rupturas,” in *Imagínarios Sociales y Memorias*, ed. Mariana González Guyer, Paulo Henrique Martins, and Clara Betty Weisz Kohn (CLACSO, 2019), 30

²⁰⁹ Khel, Maria Rita, “Tortura e sintoma social” in: Teles, Edson, *O que resta da ditadura*. (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2010), 124

²¹⁰ Schneider, “Impunity in Post-Authoritarian Brazil: The Supreme Court’s Recent Verdict on the Amnesty Law.”, 48

After this result, in October 2008 the *Ordem dos Advogados*, OAB (Brazilian Lawyers' Organisation) appealed to the *Supremo Tribunal Federal*, STF (Brazilian Supreme Court) to exclude torture from the Amnesty Law. The OAB contested the legitimacy of Article 1, claiming that political crimes include crimes against national security and political order; torture, together with disappearance, rape and bodily injury, are, instead, to be considered as "common" crimes against humanity committed by agents of the State, and should, therefore, be excluded from amnesty.²¹¹ However, in 2010 the STF refused to revoke the Amnesty, which is still in force.

2.1.2 Transition from military dictatorship: Neves and Sarney's presidency

In 1985, the military regime came *de facto* to an end, when the first free elections since the 1964 coup d'état occurred.

After the rejection of the constitutional amendment to re-establish direct elections, it was settled that the presidential succession would be decided within the Electoral College, between the candidates proposed by the PDS and the PMDB. The PDS's candidate was Paulo Maluf, a politician linked to the authoritarian regime and nationally rejected.²¹² Maluf's candidacy caused an important split within the PDS, which resulted in the creation of the *Frente Liberal* (Liberal Front), composed of PDS dissidents and led by Aureliano Chaves. The candidate chosen by the PMDB was Tancredo Neves, who was highly praised and popular for his moderating abilities. In sight of the elections and to avoid Maluf's victory, the FL and the PMDB signed an agreement (*Acordo de Minas*) and formed the *Aliança Democrática* (Democratic Alliance), according to which Neves would run as president and José Sarney as vice-president. The agreement provided the support of Chaves's party to Neves's candidacy, in exchange for its participation in the future government and the avoidance of inquiries on military responsibility in the financial crisis and crimes against humanity.²¹³ As for the decision to have Sarney as vice-

²¹¹ Complaint of Breach of Fundamental Precept nº153, (ADPF153-DF), <https://www.conjur.com.br/dl/voto-ministro-lewandowski-lei-an.pdf> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²¹² Quadrat, "Os Militares, a Comunidade de Informações e a Abertura", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 569

²¹³ André Magalhães, "Aliança Democrática", *Verbetes Temático*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/alianca-democratica> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

president, it left members of the PMDB dubious since he was a controversial figure in the democratisation process, considering his previous belonging to the ARENA and the PDS. Nonetheless, the alliance was successful, and, on 15 January 1985, Neves defeated Maluf by 480 votes against 180. Thus, Neves was elected president of Brazil, starting the period known as *Nova República*.²¹⁴

However, Neves died before taking office and, consequently, Sarney took over the presidency. During his administration, the main priorities to address were the process of re-democratisation together with the situation of economic crisis and external debt. The economic problem was Sarney's lack of legitimacy both among the population and within the PMDB. Therefore, politically, the country was facing a situation of domestic instability with the transition from a military dictatorship to civilian rule, and with Sarney inheriting a highly divided cabinet. Economically, the country had to negotiate with its international creditors to repay the loans previously received, trying to avoid an agreement linked to the IMF restrictive measures. Considering the political pressure and in dealing with the economic difficulties, Sarney took decisions that would enable him to avoid facing new elections.²¹⁵

Having taken office in April, in May 1985 Sarney approved measures aimed at continuing the process of democratisation, which included providing for direct presidential elections, granting illiterates the right to vote and legalising all political parties and coalitions. Then, in November, elections for mayor and councillor took place in 201 cities, which gave the PMDB major victories, but also showed gains of the opposition (i.e., PT and PDT).²¹⁶ In this context of democratic opening, the government decided that in November 1986 there would be both state elections and elections for the national constitutional assembly, in charge of writing the new constitution, which would replace that of 1969.

While the process of democratisation continued, the country had to face the situation of economic crisis caused by the foreign debt and the growing inflation, which reached

²¹⁴ Schwarcz and Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia*., 698

²¹⁵ Howard P. Lehman and Jennifer L. McCoy, "The Dynamics of the Two-Level Bargaining Game: The 1988 Brazilian Debt Negotiations," *World Politics* 44, no. 4 (1992): 612, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2010489>.

²¹⁶ Sônia Dias, Renato Lemos and Alan Carneiro, "José Sarney". *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/jose-ribamar-ferreira-de-araujo-costa> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

235,5% in 1985.²¹⁷ Under the decision of the Finance Minister, Dilson Funaro, on 28 February 1986, the government announced the Cruzado Plan, a monetary plan, formulated in secret, aiming at controlling inflation in the country, yet avoiding recession. Consequently, inflation plummeted to 57,4%, but this was only temporary and not the result of a real economic stabilisation.²¹⁸ The results of the November elections strengthened the position of the government with a wide victory of the PMDB in both state and legislative elections.²¹⁹ Thanks to this increased popularity, on 21 November the government launched the Cruzado II Plan, an austerity plan leading to an immediate increase in the prices and indirect taxes, and, consequently, to an explosion of inflation.

In February 1987, two main events occurred. On the political level, the National Constitutional Assembly was settled and started to meet in order to write the Constitution; on the economic level, Brazil declared a moratorium on the interest payments on its loan obligations to commercial banks. Only in July 1988, the government finally managed to reach an agreement with the international creditors.²²⁰

As regards the democratic opening, on 5 October 1988 the constitution went into effect, and it is still in force today. It was drafted by the National Constituent Assembly, composed of the members of the Congress elected in 1986, who were given constituent powers. The Constitution is composed of nine titles, dealing with different topics such as fundamental principles, state and government organisation, social order, economic aspects and regulation of the state defence. These titles are further divided into chapters and articles.²²¹

The document had an important symbolic value, since it represented “the mark that eliminated the final formal vestiges of the authoritarian regime”²²². This aspect can be seen in the democratic nature of the Constitution, called by the assembly president, Ulysses Guimarães, “*Constituição Cidadã*” (Citizen’s Constitution). As a matter of fact, in drafting its contents, the assembly accepted popular amendments and requests,

²¹⁷ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 514

²¹⁸ Lehman and McCoy, “The Dynamics of the Two-Level Bargaining Game: The 1988 Brazilian Debt Negotiations”, 624

²¹⁹ Bueno, *Brasil, Uma História: Cinco Séculos de Um País Em Construção*, 1099

²²⁰ Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, “A BRAZILIAN APPROACH TO EXTERNAL DEBT NEGOTIATION,” *LASA Forum* 19, no. 4 (1989), 14

²²¹ Brazil, “Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988”, Brasília, Planalto do Governo. http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicaocompilado.htm [accessed on 15/02/21].

²²² Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 519

presented by organisations within the civil society.²²³ It includes a wide number of civil and social rights among which freedom of speech and reunion, guarantee of privacy and interdiction of imprisonment without judicial decision. In addition to this, other measures were added: direct presidential, statal and mayoral elections with two rounds and a five-years term were established; the presidential system was chosen as government form; the right to vote was extended to illiterates and to those over 16 years of age; the activity of the Armed Forces was reduced. Furthermore, the new Constitution marked the independence of the Three Powers: in particular, the Congress and the STF regained their autonomy and independence from the Executive power, and they widened their prerogatives.²²⁴

The text is extremely heterogenous, dealing with a wide variety of topics, from civil rights to economic and labour regulations, and is planned to protect Brazilian citizens from state and private abuses. However, this great number of topics is subject to criticism since they could be discussed in the ordinary legislation, therefore making the constitution extremely lengthy and full of casuistry.²²⁵ The Constitution was also criticised because of its economic regulation aiming at “reinforcing and extending state monopolies and discrimination against foreign capital. It was also fiscally inconsistent, calling for expenditures without corresponding sources of revenue.”²²⁶

In spite of its democratic characteristics, the text of the constitution represented a temporary victory for the recognition of popular principles. As a matter of fact, it included a review mechanism, according to which, in 1993, the Congress would have to revise the contents of the constitution. In the same year, Brazilian citizens would be subjected to a plebiscite to decide whether they preferred monarchy or a republic, and, in this case, a presidential or parliamentary government.²²⁷

The enactment of the constitution represented the end of the authoritarian rule, nonetheless the end of Sarney’s government was characterised by a spirit of discontent,

²²³Luís R. Barroso, “A Constituição de 1988”, *Verbetes Temático*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/constituicao-de-1988> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²²⁴ Brazil, “Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988”.

²²⁵ Barroso, “A Constituição de 1988”, *Verbetes temático*, CPDOC/FGV online

²²⁶ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 547

²²⁷ Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva, “Brasil, em Direção ao Século XXI”, in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 590

due to the failure of the economic plans. Furthermore, throughout his presidency, Sarney had further shifted towards the PFL (previously *Frente Liberal*) and presented more conservative tendencies. This can be seen in the attempt to prolong the period of transition with Sarney's demand to extend the presidential term from four to five years as well as maintaining the presidential regime. In order to obtain his goal, Sarney bestowed political favours to senators and congressmen in exchange for their vote to his proposal. This is the moment when the *Centrão* was established, formed by a group of parties with more conservative guidance aimed at obtaining privileges by ensuring their proximity to the president. In March 1988, the constituent assembly approved Sarney's proposals, leading to a crisis within the PMDB.²²⁸

In addition to this, during Sarney's government, many financial scandals and accusations of corruption emerged, culminating in November 1988, when the *Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito*, CPI (Parliamentary Inquiry Committee) held Sarney responsible for ruining the country's resources and for the ongoing situation. The CPI required a process of impeachment against the President and his framing for crimes of responsibility, but the request was successively dismissed.²²⁹

This situation played a pivotal role in the election of Fernando Collor de Mello, who presented himself as “[...] a saviour, the fearless opponent of corruption and the ‘maharajahs’ – highly paid and over privileged civil servants.”²³⁰

2.2 The 1990s and neoliberalism

The 1990s in Brazil were marked by the consolidation of the democratic process and by the implementation of neoliberal policies.

The decade was characterised by direct presidential elections and the application of the principles and the mechanisms present in the new Constitution. The first direct elections in 1989 resulted in the victory of Fernando Collor de Mello, a candidate without the support of the major political parties but endorsed by the media. In spite of the initial enthusiasm, throughout his term corruption accusations emerged. With demonstrations

²²⁸ Schwarcz and Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia.*, 702

²²⁹ Dias, Lemos and Carneiro, “Verbete Biográfico: José Sarney”, *CPDOC/FGV online*

²³⁰ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 553

asking for the President's resignation, the Congress voted for the approval of an impeachment process, which led to Collor's removal from the presidency. Collor was succeeded by his vice-president, Itamar Franco, who sought to enlarge his support base, creating a heterogeneous coalition of parties. Among them, the PSDB emerged as a leading party and one of its members, Fernando Henrique Cardoso²³¹, became highly popular after the successful introduction of economic measures aimed at controlling inflation. As a result, Cardoso was elected president in 1994 and, after the approval of a constitutional amendment providing for re-elections, in 1998 he became the first president to be elected twice.

On the economic side, the 1990s were defined by the implementation of neoliberal projects, aiming at improving the economic condition of the country. In order to overcome stagnation and the economic crisis, each of the three Presidents adopted economic plans consisting in privatisations, liberalisation of the market and the removal of trade barriers. The goal was to bring an opening of the market and a macroeconomic re-equilibrium. However, despite a growth in the GDP and a greater economic stability, the implementation of neoliberal policies created negative effects. On the one hand, the privatisation process led to an increase in the dependence from foreign capital and in the unemployment rate; on the other hand, it produced problems in the social area since services, previously public, were now less accessible to the lower sectors of society. Thus, the 1990s saw an economic growth, yet this was not followed by the reduction in poverty and inequality within society.²³²

2.2.1 Collor and Franco administrations

1989's elections were the first direct presidential elections since 1960. They took place in a context where the population had high expectations after the enactment of the new Constitution and demanded a change from the ongoing situation. Therefore, during the electoral campaign, the preferences on candidates focused on two figures who presented themselves as outsiders to the established political system. The former was Lula, socialist,

²³¹ Fernando Henrique Cardoso, politician and Finance Minister during Itamar Franco's presidency, was elected 34th President of Brazil in 1994 and re-elected in 1998. He is one of the founders of the PSDB party.

²³² Renato Baumann, "O Brasil nos anos 90: uma economia em transição" in *BRASIL. Uma Década Em Transição* ed. Renato Baumann, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Campus, 1999).

metal worker and trade union leader as well as leader of the PT; the latter was Fernando Collor de Mello, representative of the Brazilian oligarchy families and connected to the media. Collor belonged to the *Partido de Reconstrução Nacional*, PRN (National Reconstruction Party), formed in 1989 as an electoral vehicle, and did not have the support of the major political parties. However, he did have the support of the media elites, in particular that of the *Rede Globo*, the largest television network in Brazil owned by Roberto Marinho who considered Collor as the only candidate who could prevent the Left from reaching power.²³³ This aspect is particularly relevant, considering that the use of the television media was highly effective in influencing the popular opinion in their electoral choice.

During his electoral campaign, supported by the media, Collor presented himself as a saviour of the situation of moral and economic crisis the country was facing, promising a “‘New Brazil’ of economic modernity, greater social justice, and clean, efficient government.”²³⁴ He made several attacks on President Sarney, identified as responsible for all the national problems, especially focusing on condemning corruption. Moreover, Collor tried to stigmatise his opponent, Lula, by accusing the PT of being ready to take power through armed action, if necessary, and by creating and exposing situations to compromise Lula’s integrity and credibility.²³⁵ This was achieved with the help of the media, specifically of *Rede Globo*. For example, “‘On the eve of the runoff election, *Jornal Nacional* broadcast an edited version of the final debate between the candidates, juxtaposing Lula's worst moments with Collor's best.”²³⁶

In the first round none of the candidates reached the absolute majority, leading to a ballot between Collor and Lula, who had the highest number of votes. However, in the second round, Collor won with 42,75% of the votes and, in taking office on 15 March 1990, he declared his administration would focus on eliminating inflation, modernising the country and moralising the public administration.²³⁷

²³³ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 553-554

²³⁴ Kurt Weyland, “The Rise and Fall of President Collor and Its Impact on Brazilian Democracy,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 35, no. 1 (1993), 8.

²³⁵ Ben Ross Schneider, “Brazil under Collor: Anatomy of a Crisis,” *World Policy Journal* 8, no. 2 (1991), 324

²³⁶ Miguel, “The Globo Television Network and the Election of 1998,” 71.

²³⁷ Renato Lemos, “Fernando Collor”, *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/collor-fernando> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

From an economic point of view, Collor's government was characterised by the implementation of neoliberal measures, which were in line with the recommendations of the Washington Consensus, a set of economic policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank in order to establish adjustment programs in the developing countries. In particular, these policies were contained in the Collor Plan, a monetary stabilisation plan announced on the same day as the President took office. Its main objective was reducing both inflation and public deficit, creating the conditions necessary for Brazil's status as "First World country". The Collor Plan provided radical financial measures, which included the reintroduction of the cruzeiro as national currency at a floating exchange rate, the freezing of prices and salaries, the increase in taxes and the extinction of many state companies. In addition to this, it introduced classic neoliberal measures, such as the liberalisation of foreign trade, the privatisation of state companies and the deregulation of the market, therefore reducing the State presence in the economy.²³⁸ It was in this context of market liberalisation and lowering of trade barriers that the *Mercosul*, (Southern Common Market) was created. Established in 1991 with the Treaty of Asunción, it consisted of a trade bloc between Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, on the model of the European integration market, which would allow a free trade zone.²³⁹

In spite of their initial benefits, these neoliberal measures created a series of problems. First, the process of privatisation led to the transfer of capital monopoly from public to private sectors, which resulted in modernisation but also in higher costs for the services. Then, a stronger currency combined with the removal of trade barriers caused an increase in imports, driving many domestic producers, previously depending on state subsidies, out of business for not being able to compete with the foreign market. Consequently, there was a growth in unemployment and in inequality within society.²⁴⁰ This process was further fostered by the Collor Plan II, announced in January 1991, which aimed at fighting increasing inflation through more neoliberal measures, though unsuccessfully.²⁴¹

Throughout his government, Collor maintained the same political autonomy and isolation that had characterised his electoral campaign. In order to have his legislative

²³⁸ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil.*, 555

²³⁹ Assuncion Treaty for the Creation of a Common Market, 1991, <https://www.mercosur.int/pt-br/documento/tratado-de-assuncao-para-a-constituicao-de-um-mercado-comum/> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²⁴⁰ Teixeira, "Brasil, em Direção ao Século XXI", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 606-608

²⁴¹ Schneider, "Brazil under Collor: Anatomy of a Crisis.", 335-5

projects approved in Congress, despite the lack of an alliance with other forces, Collor “[...] proceeded to try to weaken, or undermine, other organised power centres already in existence. [...] In the process, he employed classic tactics of divide-and-conquer, such as offering opposition parties [...] an opportunity to participate in the government.”²⁴² Another method was the distribution of patronage.

Collor’s political isolation played an important role in creating opportunities for corruption. On the one hand, the independence from socio-political institutions enabled him to enrich himself without controls thanks to his power position; on the other hand, because of the interruption of an interventionist economy, the business sector, previously seeking favours from the state, was willing to pay bribes to obtain contracts and services.²⁴³

In mid-1992, allegations of corruption emerged, after the President’s brother, Pedro Collor, released an interview to the magazine *Veja*, exposing a corruption scheme in the government. In the interview he claimed that Paulo César Farias, the treasurer of the presidential campaign, was running a network of bribes, of which the President was the ultimate beneficiary.²⁴⁴ Under the pressure of the opposition parties, especially the PT, the Congress established a Parliamentary Inquiry Committee to verify these allegations, which proved to be founded. As a consequence of this evidence, the population organised mass demonstrations, protesting against corruption and demanding the President’s impeachment.²⁴⁵ In September 1992, the Chamber of Deputies voted and approved the admissibility of the impeachment demand, causing the President’s temporary removal. Before the Senate vote, Collor presented his resignation. Nonetheless, on 29-30 December, the Senate approved his removal from power and the suspension of his political rights for eight years.

With Collor’s impeachment, the presidency was transferred to the vice-president Itamar Franco, who had acted as interim President from October to December 1992. As vice-president, Franco disagreed with the privatisation program and proposed the

²⁴² Weyland, “The Rise and Fall of President Collor and Its Impact on Brazilian Democracy.” 10

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3-4, 13-16

²⁴⁴ Lemos, “Fernando Collor”, *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

²⁴⁵ Danilo Enrico Martuscelli, “O PT e o Impeachment de Collor,” *Opinião Pública* 16, n. 2 (2010), 557–9.

introduction of a wage policy to protect the disadvantaged classes, which was contrasted by Collor.²⁴⁶

Politically, Itamar Franco tried to enlarge the support to the government, in contrast to Collor's political isolation. Thus, Franco's government was characterised by a heterogeneous coalition, with the participation of several parties, which guaranteed him a wide parliamentary majority. The opposition was composed by the PT, PDT and PFL.²⁴⁷ The presence of different parties often created a division within government on how to deal with problems such as poverty and inequality. Among these parties a dominant role was played by the *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*, the PSDB (Party of the Brazilian Social Democracy), founded in 1988 from a rupture in the PMDB, by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Mario Covas, José Serra and Franco Montoro.

the PSDB emerged as a centre-left party (its main leaders, from the state of São Paulo, had gained prominence in the fight against the dictatorship and a development model that promoted income concentration) representing innovation in the "progressive" camp. Without the PT's roots in the union and social movements, the PSDB appeared as a middle-class party, with ample acceptance among more modern elements of the business world.²⁴⁸

The coalition with the PMDB and the PSDB showed the conflict between these two parties, driving the PSDB towards the PFL and, therefore, towards the right. Nonetheless, during Franco's administration, the PSDB emerged as a leading party at a national level.

In 1993, the constitutional referendum determining the country's form of government took place, as established by the 1988 Constitution. The majority of voters confirmed the republican regime with a presidential system, and it established that the presidential term would be reduced from five to four years.²⁴⁹

The main event occurred during Itamar Franco's presidency regarded the economic sphere. In December 1993, the Real Plan was announced as a response to growing inflation, and it was conducted by the new Finance Minister, Fernando Henrique Cardoso

²⁴⁶ Renato Lemos and Alan Carneiro, "Itamar Franco", *Verbetes biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/itamar-augusto-cautiero-franco> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²⁴⁷ Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva "Política e Crescimento Econômico na Nova República", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 672

²⁴⁸ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil.*, 556

²⁴⁹ Antonio Moreira Maués, "30 Anos de Constituição, 30 Anos de Reforma Constitucional," *Revista Direito GV* 16, no. 1 (2020), 7-8.

(also FHC).²⁵⁰ Differently from previous economic plans to fight inflation, the Real Plan did not introduce shock tactics, but it provided for a gradual transition. In doing so, it was possible to combat inflation while restoring public trust in the government, since the program “[...] would be known to the public in advance and would function more on a voluntary basis rather than compulsory participation.”²⁵¹ The Real Plan was supposed to reduce inflation, avoiding freezes on prices and salaries and following three stages.²⁵² In the first one, with the establishment of the *Fundo Social de Emergência* (Emergency Social Fund, FSE), expenses and revenues would be decoupled, allowing the government to balance the negative impact on the public account coming from decreasing inflation. The second stage was pivotal in establishing the success of the Real Plan since, in February 1994, it included the introduction of the *Unidade de Referência de Valor*, the URV (Value Reference Unit). The URV was an instrument for a gradual monetary reform: while payments were still made in cruzeiros, prices and salaries were denominated in URVs, whose value was fixed on that of the dollar and, therefore, changed according to the exchange rate. The third stage started in July 1994, when the new currency, the *real*, was launched. Its value amounted to 1 URV, corresponding to 2.750 cruzeiros, which was the exchange rate at the time.

Thus, the government was able to create a response to the inflation problem without freezing prices and salaries, which was positively received by the public opinion. Consequently, Cardoso obtained great popularity, which encouraged him to run for the presidential elections in 1994.²⁵³

2.2.2 Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration

Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s electoral campaign was mainly focused on the economic sphere, promoting the continuation of the neoliberal transformation. On this regard, in running for president, Cardoso announced an alliance with the PFL, which was

²⁵⁰ Dionísio Dias Carneiro, “Plano Real”, *Verbete temático*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-tematico/plano-real> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

²⁵¹ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil.*, 559

²⁵² Rubens Penha Cysne, “Aspectos macro e microeconômicos das reformas”, in *BRASIL. Uma Década Em Transição*, 76-77

²⁵³ Gian Luca Gardini, “The States of Latin America: between rhetoric and pragmatism” in *Latin America in the 21st century: Nations, Regionalism, Globalization*”, (London: Zed Books, 2012), 24

necessary to implement structural reforms, since the PFL favoured neoliberal measures. However, this alliance was criticised also by members of the PSDB due to the PFL link with the military dictatorship. Nonetheless, FHC presented Marco Maciel (PFL senator) as his vice-president, pushing the PSDB further towards a right-wing position.²⁵⁴

With the success of the Real Plan, Cardoso became the favourite candidate among public opinion, which identified him with the end of inflation. On 3 October 1994, he won the elections on the first round with 54,3% of the votes, defeating his opponent Lula.

When he took office, FHC announced the end of the “Vargas Era”, which implied the overcoming of the developing model started by Getúlio Vargas, based on state intervention and on the import substitution industrialisation model, thus moving towards an open and competitive economy.²⁵⁵ In order to achieve this goal, the *real* was appreciated, which contributed to reducing inflation and favoured imports, and there was a further integration with international markets, promoting the entry of foreign capitals and the establishment of an open economy²⁵⁶. In 1995, the government approved constitutional amendments that

put an end to state monopolies and opened a number of infrastructure areas to private capital in the form of concessions (telecommunications, oil and gas, electrical energy, ports, etc.), as well as eliminating the differences in treatment the constitution gave to locally and foreign owned Brazilian companies.²⁵⁷

However, some opposition emerged concerning the amendment on the liberalisation of state monopoly in the oil and gas sector, and in particular in the case of Petrobrás, where oil workers went on strike and occupied the refineries. To have the amendment approved in Congress, Cardoso committed himself not to privatise Petrobrás. Another controversy regarded the privatisation of the *Companhia da Vale do Rio Doce*, a state mining company leading national economic and scientific development.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Timothy J. Power, “Blairism Brazilian Style? Cardoso and the “Third Way” in Brazil,” *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 4 (2001-2002), 623.

²⁵⁵ Teixeira, “Brasil, em Direção ao Século XXI”, in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 629

²⁵⁶ Maria de Lourdes R. Mollo and Alfredo Saad-Filho, “Neoliberal Economic Policies in Brazil (1994-2005): Cardoso, Lula and the Need for a Democratic Alternative,” *New Political Economy* 11, no. 1 (2006), 104-106.

²⁵⁷ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 571

²⁵⁸ Ricardo Bielschowsky et al., “Formação de capital no ambiente das reformas econômicas brasileiras dos anos 1990: uma abordagem social” in *BRASIL. Uma Década Em Transição*, 156-62

In order to have the proposed constitutional amendments approved, it was necessary to have two thirds of the votes in Congress. Thus, Cardoso needed to widen his base electoral coalition, formed by the PSDB, the PFL and the PTB. In 1995, this coalition included the PMDB and two smaller conservative parties, the *Partido Progressista Brasileiro*, the PPB (Brazilian Progressive Party) and the *Partido Liberal*, PL (Liberal Party), obtaining about 75% of the seats in Congress.²⁵⁹ Among the constitutional amendments proposed, the one presented by the deputy José Mendonça Filho (PFL) created conflict within the Congress. The amendment provided for the re-election of mayors, governors and also of the president of the Republic, and it was supported by FHC, who would benefit from it. In spite of the opposition's contrary vote and the allegations of vote-buying, in 1997 the amendment was approved by both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.²⁶⁰

With the approval of this amendment, in 1998 Cardoso ran for president again, supported by the same coalition created in 1995. His main opponents were Lula and Ciro Gomes of the PPS, *Partido Popular Socialista* (Popular Socialist Party). As in the previous elections, through the *Jornal Nacional*, the *Rede Globo* influenced the result of the electoral race by presenting a framed vision of reality in order to favour the PSDB candidate. This was achieved by almost completely avoiding the mention of the country's problems, such as the subject of unemployment, and by manipulating the information on the ongoing Asian and Russian economic crises. At the same time, the *Jornal Nacional* chose to drastically reduce the electoral coverage and debates, which would present alternative candidates and divergent discourses to FHC's.²⁶¹

Cardoso won the elections on the first round with 53% of the votes, becoming the first president to be re-elected.²⁶² However, during his second term, FHC faced more difficulties than in his first four years, both in the political and economic sphere.

As for the first area, on the one hand, the President had to deal with a fierce opposition, formed by left-wing parties and led by the PT, which relied on legal instruments and on

²⁵⁹ Power, "Blairism Brazilian Style? Cardoso and the " Third Way " in Brazil.", 624.

²⁶⁰ Bueno, *Brasil, Uma História: Cinco Séculos de Um País Em Construção.*, 1140-2

²⁶¹ Miguel, "The Globo Television Network and the Election of 1998.", 72-75, 79-82

²⁶² Renato Lemos and Alan Carneiro, "Fernando Henrique Cardoso", *Verbetes biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/cardoso-fernando-henrique> [accessed on 29/02/2021]

support by social movements and trade unions to challenge the government.²⁶³ On the other hand, internal conflicts within the support base coalition emerged, mainly between the PFL and the PMDB for the presidency of the Senate. Disagreements regarded also the election for the Chamber of Deputies' presidency, where Cardoso chose to support a PFL deputy instead of Aécio Neves (PSDB). As a result of these frictions, in 2001 the PFL left the government coalition, then followed by the PTB.²⁶⁴

Cardoso's second term was characterised by a more problematic situation also from an economic point of view. After the 1995 Mexican crisis, Brazil had to face other international crises that had expanded through interlinked global financial markets, i.e. the 1997 Asian Tigers crisis and the 1998 Russian financial crisis. These crises particularly affected the developing countries, which were seen as vulnerable by the investors.²⁶⁵ In order to face this situation, in 1999, the government implemented the so-called "macroeconomic tripod" (*tripé macroeconômico*), a set of measures aimed at keeping a high interest rate and an overvalued currency.²⁶⁶ These measures included a floating exchange rate, an inflation target policy and a primary surplus target to balance the ratio between the public debt and the GDP. However, the adoption of a flexible exchange rate led to a devaluation of the *real* and inflation resurged. As a result of its shift towards an open economy and its dependence from foreign capital, Brazil was more vulnerable to external shocks and, due to its increasing foreign debt, the economy of the country was more fragile. The combination of these elements generated a severe crisis in Brazil and, even when the economy started to recover as a consequence of the economic policy, the *real* devaluation had a negative impact on both employment and incomes.²⁶⁷

Throughout his two terms as President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso also managed to implement some reforms in social policy. In the education area, the government extended instruction among the poorer classes with policies including the *Bolsa Escola*, an allowance program providing support to families with a monthly income under R\$90 and

²⁶³ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 570

²⁶⁴ Lemos and Carneiro, "Fernando Henrique Cardoso", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

²⁶⁵ Dante Mendes Aldrighi and André Daud Cardoso, "Crises Cambiais e Financeiras: Uma Comparação Entre América Latina e Leste Asiático," *Economia e Sociedade* 18, no. 1 (2009): 72-73.

²⁶⁶ André Nassif, "As Armadilhas Do Tripé Da Política Macroeconômica Brasileira," *Revista de Economia Política* 35, no. 3 (2015): 428

²⁶⁷ Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, "The Macroeconomic Tripod and the Workers' Party Administration," in *The Brazilian Economy Today*, ed. A.W. Pereira and L. Mattei (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 123-4

with children aged between 7 and 14. Moreover, in order to fight extreme poverty, the *Comunidade Solidária* (Solidary Community) program was created, aimed at combating child mortality and malnutrition and at improving workers nutrition.²⁶⁸

In spite of the government attempt to introduce reforms in the taxing system and in the labour legislation, these proposals were unviable. The pension reform proposed in 1995, aimed at introducing minimum retirement ages to reduce expenditures and the deficit in the public sector also created conflicts in the Congress. The reform was approved in 1998, yet with some changes and measures similar to the ones in force, inadequate to control the deficit.²⁶⁹ Another reform that caused great polarisation concerned the agricultural reform and land redistribution. “By the mid-1990s, the MTS [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, (Landless Workers Movement)] was the most extensive and best-organized rural movement in Brazilian history”²⁷⁰ and its growing strength played a role in intensifying the importance of the land reform. At the same time, the process was accelerated after the military police massive repression of landless protestors in Corumbiara and in Eldorado dos Carajás. These massacres had a great impact on both national and international public opinion, leading to an increasing government commitment on the land reform issue.²⁷¹

This episode of repression introduces a relevant issue of Cardoso’s administration: the problem of violence and insecurity, regarding especially the metropolis. In the 1990s, many metropolitan areas, in particular Rio de Janeiro, saw an explosion in criminality and violence, generally connected to the increase in organised crime dealing with drug and arms trafficking. This problem was mainly present in areas inhabited by low-income communities (e.g. *favelas*) where the organised crime, and also corrupt police, had control over the territory.²⁷² This situation was

the result of a long and complex accumulation of problems: the disordered and intense migration from rural areas between 1950 and 1980, causing the cities to swell without a corresponding increase in the necessary urban infrastructure; the “deindustrialisation” of the urban areas after the liberalisation of the economy, with a service sector incapable of

²⁶⁸ Teixeira, "Política e Crescimento Econômico na Nova República", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 688-9

²⁶⁹ Sônia M. Draibe, “As políticas sociais nos anos 1990” in *BRASIL. Uma Década Em Transição*, 136-8

²⁷⁰ Gabriel Ondetti, “An Ambivalent Legacy; Cardoso and Land Reform,” *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 5 (2007), 22

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22-23

²⁷² Teixeira, "Política e Crescimento Econômico na Nova República", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 676

taking up the slack caused by the migration of manufacturing industries to other regions; and an increase in the consumption of drugs.²⁷³

These areas experienced a vertiginous increase in violence due to conflicts between criminal groups and to police incursions. At the same time, police forces were untrained to deal with this situation, often responding with violent and repressive actions, and, in some cases, they were themselves involved in trafficking.²⁷⁴ As a result, “violence associated with crime became the major cause of death among young men aged 15 to 24, affecting mainly poor residents of the larger urban conurbations [...]”²⁷⁵ To face this situation, in 2000, the government created the National Security Plan and National Security Fund in order to finance police training and equipment as well as to establish cooperation among public security institutions. Nonetheless, the problem was not entirely solved, and the situation of violence and criminality continued to develop.²⁷⁶

When analysing Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s two-terms administration, both positive and negative elements emerge. On the one hand, positive changes were made in different areas. Economically, the closed economy model was abandoned and substituted with a more modern one, economy was stabilised as well as the problem of growing inflation, and public finances were re-organised. In the political area, there was a strengthening of democracy, as testified by the state admission of crimes committed during the military regime and by the establishment of the Ministry of Defence, which implied that the armed forces would be subordinated to civilian rule. Furthermore, many social policies were introduced, implementing the social rights indicated in the 1988 Constitution.²⁷⁷ On the other hand, the end of Cardoso’s second term was marked by a decrease in popularity, due to many factors. Firstly, as a result of a lack of investment and planning in the energy sector and in its distribution, in 2001 there was a national crisis related to energy rationing, known as “*crise do apagão*” (blackout crisis).²⁷⁸ Moreover, Cardoso received accusations of corruption, regarding the re-election amendment and the

²⁷³ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 612

²⁷⁴ Michael Jerome Wolff, “Building Criminal Authority: A Comparative Analysis of Drug Gangs in Rio de Janeiro and Recife,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 57, no. 2 (2015): 31-33.

²⁷⁵ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 611

²⁷⁶ Luiz Eduardo Soares, “The National Public Security Policy: Background, Dilemmas and Perspectives,” *Estudos Avançados* 21, no. 61 (2007), 83-85

²⁷⁷ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 621-24;

²⁷⁸ Tatiana Berringer, *A Burguesia Brasileira e a Política Externa Nos Governos Lula (2003-2010)*, (Curitiba: Appris, 2015), 144

process of privatisation. Though not accepted by the Congress, 17 requests of impeachment against the President were presented, mainly during his second term.²⁷⁹ Finally, despite the economic reforms introduced, Brazil had experienced an actually little economic growth, insufficient to reduce poverty and social inequality, and solve the problem of unemployment, which had increased from 4% in 1994 to 7% in 2002. The growth in unemployment was accompanied by an increase in public debt of more than 50% of the GDP.²⁸⁰

This was the situation in Brazil at the beginning of the 21th century and when Lula won the presidential elections in 2002.

2.3 The 2000s: the rise and decline of the PT

The first two decades of the 2000s were characterised by the presence of the PT in government, which underwent a process of rise and decline.

In the broader context of the so-called “Pink Tide”, Lula’s election in 2002 marked a turn towards the Left as well as towards new economic and social models. While maintaining some orthodox economic policies from the previous administrations, Lula introduced a hybrid combination of neoliberalism and developmentalism, which consisted in macroeconomic policies and a stronger intervention of the State in the economy. This model allowed Brazil to benefit from an increase in economic development, a growth in the GDP and a rise in the employment rate. Thanks to this model, Brazil was able to emerge from the 2008 financial crisis almost unscathed and became part of the emerging countries.²⁸¹ During Lula’s administration, the State also played an important role in implementing social policies to improve the living conditions of the population. These policies consisted in the increase of minimum salary, allowances and funds for education and, more importantly, in the creation of the *Bolsa Família*, an income transfer program which led to a great reduction of extreme poverty. Therefore,

²⁷⁹ Lemos and Carneiro, “Fernando Henrique Cardoso”, *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV;

²⁸⁰ Mollo and Saad-Filho, “Neoliberal Economic Policies in Brazil (1994-2005): Cardoso, Lula and the Need for a Democratic Alternative.”, 109-11

²⁸¹ Jan Rocha, “LULA AND BRAZIL: Abundant Energy,” *The World Today* 65, no. 11 (2009): 18.

despite the *Mensalão* corruption scandal, Lula's popularity increased reaching unprecedented levels, contributing to the phenomenon of "Lulism"²⁸².

In 2010, Dilma Rousseff was elected as Lula's successor and she continued the social programs started in the previous administration. In the economic area, changes were introduced adopting a more developmentalist approach. However, as a consequence of the 2008 global crisis, the economic situation started to worsen, following a decrease in the GDP and the end of the commodities boom. After experiencing a period with a high popularity rate, in 2013 mass demonstrations occurred in order to protest against the increased prices of transports, the corruption episodes in the government and the poor quality of public services. Dilma's popularity declined even further after the 2014 corruption scandal involving Petrobrás as well as private construction companies and some members of the government. This led to the setting of the *Lava Jato* operation, which investigated and arrested many businessmen and politicians, though focusing its investigations mainly on the PT.²⁸³

After Dilma's re-election in 2014, with the support of the opposition and the media, many mass demonstrations took place, in 2015 and 2016, asking for her impeachment. At the end of 2015, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, approved the impeachment request based on accusations of fiscal and administrative crimes.²⁸⁴ Despite the lack of evidence, in 2016 the Congress voted in favour of the impeachment and the President was removed from office, whereas her vice-president Michel Temer, who had supported Dilma's ousting, assumed the presidency. Temer's presidency was marked by conservative reforms, by increased unemployment and a slow economic resumption. His popularity rate plummeted after the release of a conversation revealing that Temer had offered bribes to Cunha, arrested for corruption, in order to guarantee his silence.²⁸⁵

²⁸² André Singer, "Raízes Sociais e Ideológicas Do Lulismo," *Novos Estudos* 85 (2009): 82–102.

²⁸³ Philipp Lichtenbeck, "La tentazione autoritaria del Brasile", in *Internazionale* 25, n.1276 (5 Oct. 2018), 50-51

²⁸⁴ Darlan Montenegro and Regina Hippolito, "Dilma Rousseff", *Verbetes biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbetes-biografico/dilma-vana-rousseff> [accessed on 20/02/2021]

²⁸⁵ Silvio César Oliveira Benevides et al., "Impeachment Sem Crime É Golpe:," in *Democracia Na América Latina: Democratização, Tensões e Aprendizados*, ed. Maria Victória ESPÍNEIRA GONZÁLEZ and Danilo UZÊDA DA CRUZ (CLACSO, 2019), 178-9.

In 2018 two main candidates were running for the presidential elections: Lula and Bolsonaro. However, Lula was arrested for corruption in the context of the *Lava Jato* investigation, despite a lack of evidence, and was prevented from running as a candidate. Lula was, thus, substituted by Fernando Haddad.²⁸⁶ The other candidate, Bolsonaro, was a former Army captain known for his anti-progressive declarations and ideas. Bolsonaro based his electoral campaign on fuelling the resentment against the PT, depicting the party as the centre of corruption and as a threat to traditional values. By doing so and by presenting himself as the solution to Brazil's problems, he gathered great support among the population, which allowed him to win the elections, in spite of his authoritarian traits.

2.3.1 Lula administration

At the beginning of the 2000s, the growing level of unemployment and the low economic growth, together with the political shift towards the conservative elites led to the low popularity of the Cardoso government and the disappointment about the neoliberal policies among the public opinion. This created a favourable context for the rise of Lula as presidential candidate.²⁸⁷

In 2002, Lula ran for president for the fourth time; yet, his electoral campaign showed some differences from the previous ones. Lula, and the PT, abandoned socialism and more radical positions, such as the defence of suspending the foreign debt payment, and presented more moderate stances, moving towards the Centre-Left. This was also seen by the widening of the PT's political alliances: in 2002, not only were traditional left-wing parties part of the electoral coalition, but also the Centre-Right, specifically the PL, supported Lula, obtaining the nominee for vice-presidency.²⁸⁸ Nonetheless, the middle class and the financial markets were worried that a PT government would compromise the economic stability. As a matter of fact,

in December 2001 the PT [had] approved a document preaching a rupture with the "neoliberal model" as a condition for the resumption of development. This rupture would

²⁸⁶ Diego Altieri et al., "As Eleições Presidenciais de 2018 No Brasil: Uma Análise Sob a Ótica Da Teoria Ator-Rede," *EnANPAD 2020*, 2020, 8

²⁸⁷ Leslie Bethell, "The Failure of the Left in Brazil," in *Brazil: Essays on History and Politics* (London: University of London Press: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2018), 214.

²⁸⁸ Alexandre Fortes and John French, "A 'Era Lula', as Eleições Presidenciais de 2010 e Os Desafios Do Pós-Neoliberalismo," *Tempo Social* 24, no. 1 (2012): 203.

imply “rejection of the agreement with the IMF”, an audit of the external debt, “substitution of the fiscal policy of growing surpluses”, and the suspension of the privatisations and investigation of those already undertaken. The same document proposed a transition to a new model in which the “internal mass market” would be the major drive of growth.²⁸⁹

To reassure the business class and the investors, in June 2002 Lula released his *Carta ao povo brasileiro* (Letter to Brazilian people), where, while claiming the importance of implementing social policies to fight poverty and inequality, he committed to maintaining the market economic and the orthodox economic policies, as well as keeping the country’s international obligations.²⁹⁰ With the guarantee of economic stability, Lula secured the support of new voters in the sectors of the middle class. In October 2002, he won the elections on the second round with 61,2% of the valid votes, beating the PSDB candidate José Serra and becoming the first metal worker to become president of the Republic.²⁹¹

During his first term (2003-2006), Lula kept his electoral promises, both economically and socially.

In the economic area, there was a continuity with the macroeconomic policies implemented during the previous administration. Despite the initial concerns, Lula guaranteed economic stability pursuing an orthodox economic policy, characterised by the maintenance of the “macroeconomic tripod”, with a floating exchange rate, inflation targeting and primary surpluses targets.²⁹² The stability was achieved through restrictive fiscal and monetary adjustments aimed at reducing inflation, by increasing interest rates. These adjustment measures led to a decline in inflation, with a consequent decrease in the interest rates, and to the resurgence of economic growth, determining the government’s validity in the financial markets. Growth was also due to trade balance surplus: after the depreciation of the *real*, Brazilian exports grew and increased their value, leading to a boost in capital inflow.²⁹³ Increasing exports and low inflation and interest rates led to

²⁸⁹ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 626

²⁹⁰ Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, *Carta ao povo brasileiro*, (22/06/2002), available at: <https://fpabramo.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/cartaaopovobrasileiro.pdf> [accessed on 17/05/21]

²⁹¹ Marcelo Badaró and Luciana Pinheiro, “Lula”, *Verbetes biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/luis-inacio-da-silva> [accessed on 29/02/2021].

²⁹² Armando Boito and Alfredo Saad-Filho, “State, State Institutions, and Political Power in Brazil,” *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 2 (2016): 194.

²⁹³ Mollo and Saad-Filho, “Neoliberal Economic Policies in Brazil (1994-2005): Cardoso, Lula and the Need for a Democratic Alternative.”, 115

internal consumption, which “[...] was driven by the expansion of formal employment, by the policy of increasing the minimum salary above inflation [...], by expanded access to credit, and by the reinforcement of direct income transfer programs benefiting poorer families.”²⁹⁴ This set of elements contributed to a reduction of poverty in a country with great inequalities within society. The phenomenon of upward social mobility concerned 30 million people, and both those living at the bottom of the social pyramid, who were taken out of extreme poverty, and families with an income between R\$1200 and 4800, who constituted a new middle class, also called “lower middle class” or “C class”.²⁹⁵

During Lula’s administration, the government adopted many social programs and policies to improve income distribution and the population’s conditions, with the creation of new formal jobs and the increase in the minimum salary.²⁹⁶ One of the government’s goals was the eradication of hunger, and it, therefore, launched the *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) program to guarantee food distribution to the poorer sectors of society. However, this program was unsuccessful and, in 2004, it was substituted with the *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance) program. The *Bolsa Família* was the most important social policy of Lula’s administration and it was the result of the combination of previous income transfer programs. It expanded the number of beneficiaries as well as the value of the benefit, granting an allowance to 12 million families living in poverty, also extreme, with an income lower than R\$137.²⁹⁷ This program played a crucial part in the reduction of poverty in Brazil, especially in the northeast region, and, by 2010, 45-50 million people, a quarter of the population, were benefitting from it.²⁹⁸

Another important area where social policies were implemented was education. The government launched plans to monitor the development index of both basic and secondary education, and it created funds to support students from poorer families through scholarships and allowances. As for higher education, the ProUni (*Programa Universidade para Todos*, University for All Program) offered approximately 60,000 allowances and it guaranteed quota to black and indigenous students. At the same time, a

²⁹⁴ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 637-8

²⁹⁵ Bresser Pereira, “The Macroeconomic Tripod and the Workers’ Party Administration.”, 128-9

²⁹⁶ Alfredo Saad-Filho, “Brazil: Development Strategies and Social Change from Import-Substitution to the ‘Events of June,’” *Studies in Political Economy* 94, no. September 2014 (2014): 20-21.

²⁹⁷ Anthony Hall, “From Fome Zero to Bolsa Família: Social Policies and Poverty Alleviation under Lula,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 696–8.

²⁹⁸ Bethell, “The Failure of the Left in Brazil.”, 218-9.

program to reorganise the university public sector (ReUni) was implemented, aiming at increasing the number of enrolments.²⁹⁹

Among the government's priorities there was also the adoption of constitutional reforms. However, the electoral coalition had to face the same problem as previous administrations, that is it did not represent a sufficient majority in Congress to approve the reforms. Therefore, "to overcome this disadvantage, Lula incorporated into his cabinet representatives of parties that had not supported his election. [...] In addition to incorporating the smaller parties and the PMDB, Lula also found places for the various currents of the PT in his cabinet."³⁰⁰ As a consequence, there was a heterogeneity within the government that, while threatening its coherence, allowed a greater margin of action. However, the reform agenda created ruptures within the PT, with internal groups claiming the party had become too centralised, making too many compromises. This split led to the creation of the PSOL, the *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* (Socialism and Liberty Party) in 2004.

At the same time,

Throughout 2004 there were rumours that the PT was not only offering positions in government and state agencies and making most of the 20,000 or so patronage appointments on political grounds (this was normal practice) but using, or rather misusing, public funds in a widespread and organised scheme to buy votes in Congress.³⁰¹

In 2005, the PTB deputy Roberto Jefferson reported that the government, without Lula's knowledge, had used those funds to monthly bribe deputies in order to have its projects approved, giving origin to the *Mensalão* scandal. This led to the creation of a parliamentary inquiry commission (CPI) to investigate the declarations. The accusations involved many members of the PT and of the government, among which the chief of the staff, José Dirceu, who was forced to resign and was substituted by Dilma Rousseff, the Minister of Mines and Energy. Despite the requests for Lula's resignation, the President denied his participation and his knowledge of such scheme. Aiming to avoid a social crisis, the opposition decided not to force Lula to resign.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Badaró and Pinheiro, "Lula", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV.

³⁰⁰ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 633

³⁰¹ Bethell, "The Failure of the Left in Brazil", 215

³⁰² Bueno, *Brasil, Uma História: Cinco Séculos de Um País Em Construção.*, 1159-61

As a consequence of the *Mensalão* scandal, Lula's popularity declined, mainly among the higher income and better educated groups in society. Nonetheless, during the 2006 electoral campaign, it was evident that Lula had recovered his popularity. In spite of the corruption scandals, in 2006 Lula defeated the PSDB candidate, Geraldo Alkmin, and was re-elected as President in the second round with 60,1% of the votes (58.3 million votes).³⁰³ It can be said that his victory was strictly linked to the social policies adopted during the first term. As a matter of fact, while in 2002 Lula was mainly voted by the PT social base (i.e. industrial proletariat and urban middle class), in 2006 there was a shift among his voters: Lula secured the majority of votes among the poorest and less educated segments of society, in the North and Northeast regions, which were the main beneficiaries of the social programs, such as the *Bolsa Família*, the increase of the minimum salary and the expanded access to credit.³⁰⁴ The 2006 electoral victory showed the emergence of the phenomenon of "Lulism". The term, coined by the political scientist André Singer, refers to the electoral realignment based on an ideological compromise between the maintenance of stability and the reduction of inequality, widening the support base around the figure of Lula. Indeed, the "Lulism" goes beyond political parties, since there is a difference between the PT electorate and Lula's electorate, since the latter includes left-wing voters as well as the conservative and right-wing segments of the poorer social groups.³⁰⁵

Lula's second term maintained the main characteristics of the first four years, with the introduction of social programs and the pursuit of economic growth. As soon as he took office in 2007, Lula launched the PAC (*Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento*, Growth Acceleration Program), a program aiming at expanding the economic growth through public investments, mainly in infrastructure. The program was coordinated by Dilma Rousseff, who was labelled by the president as "the mother of the PAC".³⁰⁶ Another program introduced during the second term was the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (My Home, My Life), a program in the housing area which offered subsidised funds to

³⁰³ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil.*, 682-3

³⁰⁴ Lúcio Rennó and André Cabello, "As Bases Do Lulismo: A Volta Do Personalismo, Realinhamento Ideológico Ou Não Alinhamento?," *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 25, no. 74 (2010): 41-44.

³⁰⁵ André Singer, "Raízes Sociais e Ideológicas Do Lulismo," *Novos Estudos* 85 (2009).

³⁰⁶ Teixeira, "Assistência Social e Combate à Pobreza", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 714, 717

lower income families to have access to houses, and which, consequently, created employment in the construction sector.³⁰⁷

From an economic point of view, Lula's second term was characterised by a shift towards a more developmental approach. The government adopted a hybrid combination of elements from neoliberalism and developmentalism: even though the previous macroeconomic policies were maintained, there was a stronger role of the state in the economic regulation. These hybrid policies included the creation and restoration of state companies, the alliance between state-owned and private companies to compete in the global market, the reduction of taxes to stimulate production and the support of internal production. The new hybrid model was based on internal mass market and the statal control of investments, following the original policies of the PT.³⁰⁸ Thanks to the previous successful economic policies, the available resources and the international situation, Brazil was experiencing a decrease in inflation and unemployment and a growth in the GDP. This led to a situation where the international reserves would exceed the foreign debt, allowing Brazil to pay its previous debts to the IMF and to be classified as "investment grade" and as an external net creditor.³⁰⁹

The accelerated growth tendency was interrupted by the 2008 global financial crisis with a reduction of both employment levels and GDP. Nonetheless, despite some initial negative impacts, Brazil managed to emerge from the crisis almost unscathed, thanks the new development model adopted, and, in the second trimester of 2009, the economy regained its growth trend with 2,3%, which was superior to the average percentage of the OECD countries.³¹⁰ This was due to the economic policies previously implemented, which included the increase in salaries and investments, and to measures temporarily adopted aimed at avoiding recession and at injecting liquidity in the financial system. This would be achieved by reducing interest rates and increasing public spending, which contributed to high internal consumption. Consequently, the government was able to maintain the pillars of the economic policy, i.e. the expansion of public investments, the

³⁰⁷ Leslie Bethell, "Populism in Brazil," in *Brazil: Essays on History and Politics* (University of London Press: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2018), 193.

³⁰⁸ Boito and Saad-Filho, "State, State Institutions, and Political Power in Brazil.", 194

³⁰⁹ Badaró and Pinheiro, "Lula", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

³¹⁰ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil.*, 637, 658-60

redistribution of income and the access to credit.³¹¹ The positive management of the crisis contributed to developing the image of Brazil as an emerging country.

At the same time, the foreign policy adopted strengthened the international positive perception of Lula's government. The choices in this area went through a change:

During Lula's first term in office, foreign policy was seen as a compensation for economic policy. [...] On the one hand, the government focused on tranquilising the "markets", on the other, it made a point of meeting the ideological demands of the left in general, and the PT in particular. In Lula's second term, [...] there was a convergence between economic policy and foreign policy around the idea of the "developmentalist" state and a nation that was "powerful" on the international scene.³¹²

Indeed, Brazil became an important player in multilateral forums, especially in the 2008 commercial G-20 forum. As a member of the BRICS, an organization of emerging economies (i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), Brazil strengthened its international relations with other developing countries, to create an alternative to the dependence on the US and Europe for exports, and in 2010 China became its main trading partner.³¹³ The Lula government sought alliances with developing nations in the southern hemisphere, in the so-called South-South cooperation.³¹⁴ At the same time, there was a further integration and cooperation with other South American countries. This was achieved with the expansion and strengthening of the Mercosur, the creation of the USAN (Union of South American Nations, an organisation based on political and economic integration), and the establishment of the Council of South American Defence.³¹⁵

In 2010, at the end of the Lula administration, Brazil was experiencing a favourable situation both internationally and nationally, due to the economic and social policies adopted.³¹⁶ Employment had risen and benefits were granted to low- and middle-income groups. As a result, consumption increased, leading to an accelerated growth with a trend

³¹¹ Laura Carvalho, *Valsa Brasileira, Do Boom Ao Caos Econômico*, 1st ed. (São Paulo: Todavia, 2018), 47-53

³¹² Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 672

³¹³ Miriam Gomes Saraiva, "Brazilian Foreign Policy: Causal Beliefs in Formulation and Pragmatism in Practice" in *Latin American Foreign Policies. Between Ideology and Pragmatism*, Gian Luca Gardini and Peter Lambert, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 60-62.

³¹⁴ Rafael Araujo, "O Brasil e a Política Externa na Nova República", in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 729-35

³¹⁵ Gian Luca Gardini, "Unity and Diversity in Latin American Visions of Regional Integration" in *Latin American Foreign Policies. Between Ideology and Pragmatism*, 236-46.

³¹⁶ Gardini, "The States of Latin America: between rhetoric and pragmatism", in *Latin America in the 21st century: Nations, Regionalism, Globalization*".

of 4% throughout the eight years.³¹⁷ Although society was still highly unequal, the distributional policies implemented, such as the *Bolsa Família*, the increase in the minimum wage and the easier access to credit, fostered a general improvement of life conditions and a significant reduction in poverty, which decreased from 35% to 20% between 2003 and 2010.³¹⁸ However, the growth in public spending, to implement social policies, had to be covered with increasing tax loads, which were the highest among the middle-income nations. Nonetheless, internal consumption continued and, in 2010, the GDP grew more than 7%, which led Brazil to occupy the 7th position among the world economies, with prospects of a further growth, also thanks to the discovery of the off-shore ‘pré-sal’ oil reserves.³¹⁹ Therefore, by the end of his presidency, Lula’s popularity had reached unprecedented levels, with an approval higher than 80%, according to the *DataFolha*³²⁰ and the IBOPE (*Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística*, Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics).³²¹

2.3.2 Dilma Rousseff administration

Since the beginning of his second term, Lula had started to appoint his chief of the staff Dilma Rousseff as his successor, with the intention to transfer his political prestige to Dilma by giving her visibility and linking her name to many programs, especially to the PAC. At the 2010 PT Convention, her candidacy as president became official, which increased the percentage of support among the population. On this occasion, it was established that the PMDB member Michel Temer, president of the Chamber of Deputies, would be given the position of vice-president. This decision, together with the creation of a broad electoral coalition, was made to strengthen Dilma’s candidacy, which promoted the continuation of Lula’s policies.³²² Her main opponents were José Serra (PSDB) and

³¹⁷ Fausto and Fausto, *A Concise History of Brazil*, 645-6, 691-3.

³¹⁸ Bethell, “The Failure of the Left in Brazil”, 217-8.

³¹⁹ Teixeira, “Política e Crescimento Econômico na Nova República”, in *História Geral Do Brasil*, 698-9.

³²⁰ “Pela terceira semana seguida, aprovação de Lula quebra recorde histórico”, *Datafolha*, <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2010/10/1211079-pela-terceira-semana-seguida-aprovacao-do-governo-lula-quebra-recorde-historico.shtml> [accessed 19/02/2021].

³²¹ Robson Bonin, “Popularidade de Lula bate record e chega a 87%, diz Ibope”, G1, (16/12/10), <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2010/12/popularidade-de-lula-bate-recorde-e-chega-87-diz-ibope.html> [accessed on 19/02/2021].

³²² Cláudio Gonçalves Couto, “O Governo Lula e as Perspectivas de Dilma Rousseff,” *Iberoamericana* (2001-) 11, no. 41 (2011): 163, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41677311>.

Marina Silva of the *Partido Verde*, who had been a minister in Lula's first government. Dilma won the election at the second round with 56% of the valid votes, defeating the PSDB candidate and becoming the first woman in Brazil's history to become president of the Republic.³²³

From a social point of view, Dilma's first term was characterised by the continuity of the policies and the programs implemented during Lula's administration, among which the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* program. Moreover, the minimum salary was further increased, and the government extended the investments for the income redistribution programs. In addition to this, in May 2011, the president launched the program *Brasil sem Miséria* (Brazil without Extreme Poverty), an expansion of the *Bolsa Família*, with the goal of increasing public services in order to lift 16,2 million people out of extreme poverty³²⁴. Moreover,

the Rousseff administration extended employment rights to domestic workers, including the house cleaners, nannies, cooks, drivers, gardeners, and personal security guards that are widely employed in upper-middle-class households. This policy has raised costs to their employers and, potentially more significant, threatened the authoritarian and paternalistic relationships in their households. The Rousseff administration also created, in 2013, a health program bringing thousands of foreign (mainly Cuban) doctors to Brazilian municipalities without any health facilities.³²⁵

It is important to mention that, with Dilma, an ex-militant tortured by the military regime, in 2012 the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth Commission) was installed.³²⁶ The CNV was meant to investigate and verify the human rights violations committed by public agents or in the interests of the State and occurred between 1946 and 1988. These violations included arbitrary arrests, tortures, deaths, forced disappearances and concealment of corpses.³²⁷ The Commission was composed of seven members, in charge of gathering declarations of victims and witnesses and organising public hearings.

³²³ Darlan Montenegro and Regina Hippolito, "Dilma Rousseff", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/dilma-vana-rousseff> [accessed on 20/02/2021]

³²⁴ Fortes and French, "A 'Era Lula', as Eleições Presidenciais de 2010 e Os Desafios Do Pós-Neoliberalismo.", 218

³²⁵ Boito and Saad-Filho, "State, State Institutions, and Political Power in Brazil.", 196

³²⁶ Brazil, Law n. 12.528, 18 November 2011, https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2011/lei/112528.htm [accessed on 20/02/2021];

³²⁷ Vieira Pires and Annes Viola, "Memórias Da Ditadura e o Atual Cenário de Ascensão Conservador No Brasil. Uma Análise Sobre Continuidades e Rupturas.", 30-31, 40

In its final report, submitted in December 2014, the CNV identified 377 agents of the government as responsible for the above-mentioned violation, and it established the death or disappearance of 434 people at the hands of the military regime.³²⁸

In the economic area, some changes were introduced, abandoning the previous orthodox policies and following a more developmentalist and heterodox approach. As a consequence of the international situation, after the 2008 financial crisis, and the adoption of countercyclical measures consisting in more public spending, Brazil was facing an economic slowdown. The country was dependent on the demand for commodities but, with the reduction of this demand, the Brazilian exports declined, leading to a massive drop in the balance of payments surplus. Moreover, the economic growth decreased from 7,5% in 2010 to 2,7% in 2011, establishing the end of the commodities boom started during Lula administration.³²⁹ In order to face this situation and avoid recession, in 2011 the government introduced new measures known as “*nova matriz macroeconômica*”. This new orientation consisted in adopting a contractionary fiscal policy by cutting public spending and investments, together with a more expansionary monetary policy, with lower interest rates. The measures also included flexible inflation targets and an appreciation of the exchange rate, with a consequent depreciation of the *real*. The goal was to favour the national industry by making Brazilian commodities cheaper and more competitive, therefore encouraging exports and attracting private investments.³³⁰ In spite of a small recovery in 2013, these policies did not have the expected result and in 2014 the economy only grew by 0.4%.³³¹

In the period between 2011 and mid-2013, Dilma’s approval soared to 65%, according to *Datafolha*.³³² This high degree of popularity allowed her to move away from Lula’s orientations, leading her to a rupture with two pillars of the “lulist” equilibrium: the

³²⁸ *Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, <http://cnv.memoriasreveladas.gov.br/institucional-acesso-informacao/a-cnvn.html> [accessed 20/02/2021];

³²⁹ Carvalho, *Valsa Brasileira, Do Boom Ao Caos Econômico.*, 62-66

³³⁰ Pedro Cezar Dutra Fonseca, Marcelo Arend, and Glaison Augusto Guerrero, “Política Econômica, Instituições e Classes Sociais: Os Governos Do Partido Dos Trabalhadores No Brasil,” *Economia e Sociedade* 29, no. 3 (2020): 779–809, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-3533.2020v29n3art05>

³³¹ André Nassif, “As Armadilhas Do Tripé Da Política Macroeconômica Brasileira,” *Revista de Economia Política* 35, no. 3 (2015): 426–43, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-31572015v35n03a03>.

³³² “Aprovação a Governo Dilma atinge 65%”, *Datafolha*, (24/03/2013), <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2013/03/1252102-aprovacao-a-governo-dilma-atinge-65.shtml> [accessed on 30/03/21]

relationship with the financial capital and the PMDB, the main ally party.³³³ On the one hand, the implementation of heterodox economic policies and the devaluation of the *real* had a negative impact on those financial and industrial companies depending on foreign capital. Concurrently, the increased state intervention challenged the hegemony of the financial capital and interfered in the autonomy of the Central Bank.³³⁴ On the other hand, in creating her cabinet, Dilma took away ministries previously under the PMDB, which lost space in the Chamber of Deputies. Besides, the PMDB, being a clientelist party, had its interests hindered by Dilma's attempt at limiting the clientelist system present in the Brazilian state, by her fight against corruption, and by the loss of positions in state-owned companies, especially with the removal of three Petrobrás directors, later found guilty.³³⁵

It is important to highlight these ruptures of the “lulist” compromise in order to better understand the following events and Dilma's isolation.

June 2013 can be considered as the divide within the Rousseff presidency. In that year, massive mass demonstrations occurred throughout the country's main cities. Starting with the specific goal of protesting against the increased price in public transport tickets, the demonstrations covered different issues. People protested for the poor quality of public services, such as health, security and education, and criticised the heavy expenses for the following FIFA World Cup, due in 2014, and also condemned the episodes of corruption.³³⁶ With the *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Fare Movement), the 2013 demonstrations gathered the traditional middle class and the new working class, as well as left-wing groups, demanding more quality services, and right-wing groups, more concerned with highlighting the corruption in the government.³³⁷ After the protests, Dilma's approval rate dropped below 50%, together with the popularity of many governors and mayors. As a reaction, the president announced the creation of five pacts

³³³ Tiago Soares Nogara, “O Impeachment de Dilma e a Crise Do Lulismo,” *Política & Sociedade* 18, no. 41 (2019): 398, <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7984.2019v18n41p396>.

³³⁴ Fonseca, Arend, and Guerrero, “Política Econômica, Instituições e Classes Sociais: Os Governos Do Partido Dos Trabalhadores No Brasil.”, 801

³³⁵ Singer, *O Lulismo Em Crise. Um Quebra-Cabeça Do Período Dilma (2011-2016)*

³³⁶ Luciana Tatagiba and Andreia Galvão, “Os Protestos No Brasil Em Tempos de Crise (2011-2016),” *Opinião Pública* 25, no. 1 (April 2019): 85-90, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-0191201925163>.

³³⁷ Saad-Filho, “Brazil: Development Strategies and Social Change from Import-Substitution to the ‘Events of June.’”, 22-3.

regarding health, transports and education, to satisfy the Left, and also fiscal responsibility to please the Right.³³⁸

Dilma's popularity declined even further in 2014, reaching 30%, due to the Petrobrás scandal and the following *Lava Jato* (Car Wash) investigation. In March 2014, a major corruption scandal emerged, revealing a scheme of money laundering which involved Petrobrás, private construction companies and members of political parties, belonging to both the government base and the opposition.³³⁹ These companies

had bribed a small number of politically appointed directors of Petrobras in order to secure a virtual monopoly of oil-related contracts. [...] Bribes allegedly allowed those companies to capture and allocate hundreds of contracts to cartel members; in turn, the corrupt directors of Petrobras channeled part of those funds to the political parties supporting their appointment.³⁴⁰

To investigate this scheme, in 2014 the *Operação Lava Jato* was set. Continuing the fight against corruption started by Dilma, the operation, conducted by the Federal Police and headed by the investigative judge Sérgio Moro, led to the arrest of prominent businessmen and politicians. However, it soon became evident that the investigations led by Moro focused on members of the PT and ally parties, contributing to a feeling of resentment against the government and the PT, identified as corrupt by the population.³⁴¹ As a matter of fact,

High-ranking Federal Police and public prosecutors made clear political use of this investigation. They ignored clues suggesting the involvement of the PSDB in similar cases, selectively leaked classified or misleading information to competing media organizations, and consistently sought to compromise the PT, especially in the run-up to the 2014 presidential elections. They also illegally arrested company executives in order to compel them to enter plea bargains; those refusing the offer to cooperate with the investigation were kept in prison indefinitely.³⁴²

³³⁸ Montenegro and Hippolito, "Dilma Rousseff", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

³³⁹ Gisela Pereyra Doval and Esteban Actis, "The Political and Economic Instability of Dilma Rousseff's Second Government in Brazil: Between Impeachment and the Pragmatic Turn," *India Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2016): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928416637926>.

³⁴⁰ Boito and Saad-Filho, "State, State Institutions, and Political Power in Brazil.", 202-203

³⁴¹ Alfredo Saad-Filho and Armando Boito, "Brazil: The Failure of the PT and the Rise of the 'New Right,'" *Socialist Register* 52 (2016): 222.

³⁴² Boito and Saad-Filho, "State, State Institutions, and Political Power in Brazil.", 202-203

Nonetheless, running again with Temer as vice-president, in October 2014 Dilma was re-elected with 51,6% of the votes, defeating the PSDB candidate Aécio Neves at the second round, by a margin of only 3,4 million votes. Despite her victory, Dilma had to confront a tense atmosphere, characterised by the worsening of the economic indicators and the evolution of the Petrobrás corruption scandal. In addition, the PSDB contested the result of the elections and asked for a recount of votes, claiming they had been rigged. When the result did not change, Aécio Neves started to defend a request for impeachment.³⁴³ Faced with this situation, Dilma responded granting more concessions and introducing a drastic change in the economic management to control the country's recession. The government adopted more orthodox and unpopular measures, reintroducing the macroeconomic tripod. However, the economy continued to contract, and inflation, public debt and unemployment kept increasing.³⁴⁴ In the attempt to satisfy both the opposition and the financial and industrial groups, Dilma broke her electoral campaign promises introducing austerity measures, therefore losing the support of the popular base and the working class.³⁴⁵

In this context, throughout 2015 and 2016, thousands of people demonstrated and protested against the government and the PT. The biggest demonstrations occurred on 15 March 2015 in São Paulo, where, according to *Datafolha*, 210 thousand people, dressed in the national colours, manifested their resentment against the PT and the government.³⁴⁶ Differently from the 2013 protests, these demonstrations, encouraged by the political opposition and the FIESP (*Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo*, Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo), reunited members of the traditional elite and middle class, with more a conservative and “antilulist” nature.³⁴⁷ These protests were promoted by right-wing groups that used social networks and online platforms to foster people's sentiments against corruption, turning the demonstrations into insurrections against Dilma, Lula and the PT. The main movements involved in the organisation of these protests were *Movimento Brasil Livre - MBL* (Free Brazil Movement), *Vem pra Rua - VPR* (Come to the Streets) and *Revoltados Online* (Outraged Online). Another

³⁴³ Tatagiba and Galvão, “Os Protestos No Brasil Em Tempos de Crise (2011-2016).”, 87

³⁴⁴ Carvalho, *Valsa Brasileira, Do Boom Ao Caos Econômico.*, 112-16

³⁴⁵ Miguel, “A PRODUÇÃO DO GOLPE NO BRASIL.”, 105-7

³⁴⁶ Bajonas Teixeira De Brito Junior, “FASCISMO,” in *Enciclopédia Do Golpe, Vol. 2, O Papel Da Mídia*, ed. Mírian Gonçalves (CLACSO, 2018), 73–75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96fw2.11>.

³⁴⁷ Singer, *O Lulismo Em Crise. Um Quebra-Cabeça Do Período Dilma (2011-2016)*.

difference from the demonstrations of 2013 was the clear authoritarian character of these right-wing groups demanding the end of government and Dilma's impeachment.³⁴⁸ It is crucial to highlight the role played by the media, especially by *Globo*, in transmitting a detailed coverage of these events, in emphasising, often exaggerating, the number of participants and in giving a negative coverage of the government. In particular, the media contributed to the destabilisation of the President and to her and Lula's identification as corrupt, bypassing the authoritarian character of the demonstrations, describing the participants as "pacific families" and avoiding comments on the references asking for military intervention.³⁴⁹

According to André Singer, the *Lava Jato* investigation and the media created a narrative that mobilised and radicalised the middle class into the belief that Lula, Dilma and the PT were a criminal organisation that needed to be eradicated from political life.³⁵⁰ This was the situation when the request for impeachment against Dilma was presented to the Congress.

2.3.3 Impeachment and Temer administration

On 2 December 2015, the president of the Chamber of Deputies accepted the impeachment petition against Dilma Rousseff, presented in October by a group of jurists (Miguel Reale Jr., Janaína Paschoal and Hélio Bicudo). The petition accused the President Dilma of crimes of administrative and fiscal irresponsibility, and allegations were made of her involvement in the Petrobrás corruption scandal. According to these jurists, Dilma had violated the Art. 85 of the Constitution and the *Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal* (Fiscal Responsibility Law) by committing fiscal manoeuvres and delays in repayments from the National Treasury to the *Banco do Brasil*, in order to alleviate the public account and to present better economic indicators, as if revenues exceeded expenditures.³⁵¹ Besides this manipulation, known as "fiscal pedalling" (*pedaladas fiscais*), the President was also accused of issuing budget decrees without the authorisation of the National Congress. In

³⁴⁸ Saad-Filho and Boito, "Brazil: The Failure of the PT and the Rise of the 'New Right.'", 224-6.

³⁴⁹ Rodrigo Vianna, "G DE GOLPE," in *Enciclopédia Do Golpe, Vol. 2, O Papel Da Mídia*, ed. Mirian Gonçalves, vol. 2 (CLACSO, 2018), 86-9, [h3https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvn96fw2.13](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvn96fw2.13).

³⁵⁰ Singer, *O Lulismo Em Crise. Um Quebra-Cabeça Do Período Dilma (2011-2016)*., 101-2

³⁵¹ Benevides et al., "Impeachment Sem Crime É Golpe:", 169-70

spite of the lack of evidence showing her direct involvement in such crimes, the Chamber approved the impeachment petition.³⁵²

At the time, the president of the Chamber was Eduardo Cunha, an extremely conservative member of the PMDB who was being investigated by the *Lava Jato* for corruption. The relationship between him and Dilma was already tense: Cunha had won the presidency in February 2015 against the candidate supported by the government, and, in July, had publicly broken with Dilma, starting to use the Chamber to sabotage the fiscal adjustment. Successively, at the beginning of December, the PT had withdrawn its support to Cunha, leading to the eligibility of a process of corruption against him. On this occasion, Cunha accepted the impeachment request against Dilma.³⁵³

Before the voting for the impeachment process in the Chamber of Deputies, some important events had occurred in March 2016. First of all, with the development of the *Lava Jato* investigation, there were suspicions of Lula's participation in the corruption scheme since, according to the *Ministério Público Federal* – MPF (Public Prosecutor's Office) and *Polícia Federal* – PF (Federal Police), the ex-President had received a triplex as bribe.³⁵⁴ On this occasion, the judge Sérgio Moro authorised Lula's *condução coercitiva*, a way of bringing subjects of a process in front of the judicial authorities against their wishes or when they refuse to testify. Despite not having refused to testify and despite denying the accusations, the images of Lula being forcefully taken to give his statement contributed to promote his representation as guilty.³⁵⁵ On 16 March, Dilma appointed Lula as her Chief of the Staff; on the same day Moro, who had wiretapped Lula's phone, revealed a conversation between Dilma and the ex-President, where she promised she would give him a paper to use in case of necessity. The conversation was interpreted by the opposition as a way to grant Lula's access to a privileged forum and, thus, avoid prison. Consequently, the STF suspended Lula's nomination as Chief of Staff and authorised an inquiry to investigate both Lula and Dilma for attempting to obstruct

³⁵² Alexandra Rattinger, "The Impeachment Process of Brazil: A Comparative Look at Impeachment in Brazil and the United States," *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review* 49, no. 1 (2018): 153, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26788345>.

³⁵³ Singer, *O Lulismo Em Crise. Um Quebra-Cabeça Do Período Dilma (2011-2016)*.

³⁵⁴ Paulo Moreira Leite, "AGÊNCIA LAVA JATO," in *Enciclopédia Do Golpe, Vol. 2, O Papel Da Mídia*, ed. Mírian Gonçalves (CLACSO, 2018), 21, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96fw2.5%0AJSTOR>.

³⁵⁵ De Brito Junior, "FASCISMO.," 76

justice.³⁵⁶ It is crucial to highlight that the wiretap and its disclosure were illegal since the conversation involved the President of the Republic and it was recorded after Moro had established the suspension of interceptions. Moreover, the media, in particular *Globo*, gave special and detailed coverage to these events, repeatedly transmitting both the scenes of Lula taken by the police and the wiretapped conversation, therefore contributing to create favourable conditions for the impeachment.³⁵⁷ Besides the *Lava Jato* and the media, also the PMDB, main ally party in the government, played an important role in the impeachment: in the same month, the PMDB withdrew its support to the government, revealing Temer's intention to remove Dilma from the presidency through the impeachment process.³⁵⁸

A special committee to verify the eligibility of the process was installed. In accusing the President of fiscal and administrative crimes, the board highlighted two caveats: the first one indicated that Dilma had not been warned by the Federal Budget Secretariat (SOF) of the Ministry of Planning about the incompatibility between the budget decrees issued with the established fiscal target; the second one was that these decrees, while incompatible with the fiscal target in force at the time, referred to the target set in the National Congress Bill 5/2015, converted into law in December 2015. As for the fiscal pedalling, it emerged that it was impossible to find an action directly identifying the President as an agent that caused the damage. Therefore, Dilma's defence stated that it was possible to attribute neither the intentionality nor the willingness to commit any illegal act.³⁵⁹

However, the report of the committee considered the process valid and, on 17 April 2016, the Chamber of Deputies approved the process of impeachment, with 367 votes in favour and 137 against. In May, the Senate also authorised the opening of the process, resulting in Dilma's suspension from office and Temer becoming interim President.³⁶⁰ After this decision the media released a tape with a conversation between Romero Jucá, (Temer's Minister of Planning, Budget and Management) and Sérgio Machado (ex-president of the Transpetro), recorded two months before the voting in the Chamber of

³⁵⁶ Badaró and Pinheiro, "Lula", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

³⁵⁷ Vianna, "G DE GOLPE.", 95-8.

³⁵⁸ Singer, *O Lulismo Em Crise. Um Quebra-Cabeça Do Período Dilma (2011-2016)*

³⁵⁹ Benevides et al., "Impeachment Sem Crime É Golpe:", 173-4

³⁶⁰ Montenegro and Hippolito, "Dilma Rousseff", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV

Deputies. In this conversation it emerged that Dilma's removal from office would be the only way to hinder the *Lava Jato* investigations against them.³⁶¹ Nevertheless, the impeachment process was not suspended and, after the President had made her defence speech where she denied all accusations, on 31 August the Senate approved the impeachment by 61 votes against 20. Dilma Rousseff was removed from office and Temer assumed the presidency of the Republic.³⁶²

Analysing the succession of events, it can be said that, even without a military coup, Dilma's impeachment was a *golpe*. This is apparent when considering the lack of clear evidence of the President's involvement in the crimes, the partiality of the *Lava Jato* operation, the mediatic manipulation in covering the events and the interests of the political elite in avoiding the investigations. In this regard, it is interesting to observe that the main political figures in favour of the impeachment process (i.e., Cunha, Temer, Aécio Neves) were themselves either investigated or arrested for corruption.

In assuming the presidency, Temer marked a clear division from the previous administrations on both social and economic areas. Temer's administration was characterised by a return to neoliberalism with a reduction of the role of the State in the regulation of the economy.³⁶³ In this regard, with the intention to retake growth, the government announced the resumption of the privatisation process, handing over state-owned companies, such as Eletrobras or airports previously controlled by the State, to foreign companies. Moreover, Petrobrás assets and oil reserves were sold and the regulation of the *pré-sal* exploration was modified, withdrawing Petrobrás right to be the only operator and allowing foreign companies to participate.³⁶⁴ In so doing, Temer opened the economy to foreign capital attracting private investments. Yet, despite an initial decline in inflation and a positive reaction of the economy, the recession continued.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Benevides et al., "Impeachment Sem Crime É Golpe:", 177

³⁶² Rattinger, "The Impeachment Process of Brazil: A Comparative Look at Impeachment in Brazil and the United States.", 154-5

³⁶³ Mariana Barbosa De Souza and Tuize Silva Rovere Hoff, "Governo Temer e a Volta Do Neoliberalismo No Brasil: Possíveis Consequências Para a Habitação Popular.," *Urbe. Revista Brasileira de Gestão Urbana* 11 (2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-3369.011.e20180023>.

³⁶⁴ Armando Boito Jr., "O Brasil de Bolsonaro," in *Reforma e Crise Política No Brasil - Os Conflitos de Classe Nos Governos Do PT* (Unesp, Unicamp, 2018), 2-3.

³⁶⁵ Lichterbeck, "La tentazione autoritaria del Brasile", 44-51.

In order to resume economic growth and to fight unemployment, the government also adopted some controversial reforms. In December 2016, the Congress approved a Constitutional Amendment aimed at limiting public spending for 20 years, therefore reducing the role of the State and hindering social sectors such as health and education.³⁶⁶ Social policies implemented by the previous PT governments were also affected with the reduction of funds for programs including *Bolsa Família* and those programs offering scholarships and incentives to education. In addition, with the reduction of those allowed to benefit from these programs, extreme poverty grew by 11%, according to the *IBGE* (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).³⁶⁷ Furthermore, Temer proposed a pension reform that would increase the minimum period of contribution from 15 to 25 years, demanding 49 years of social contribution in order to have access to the full benefit.³⁶⁸ Another highly criticised reform concerned the Labour Legislation, since, in 2017, the Congress approved a labour reform substantially damaging the worker's rights. It provided for a possible increase in the working hours, which would no longer include activities such as resting, eating, interactions with colleagues or the time spent to reach the workplace. Besides, in the case of remuneration for production, the payment of the minimum salary would not be mandatory, while on issues including the flexibilization of the working day or modifications of salary and posts, negotiations between employer and employee would prevail over the law. The government also approved a reform that allowed companies to hire outsourced employees to execute all the activities, therefore favouring the outsourcing of all the labour market and compromising workers' rights.³⁶⁹ These reforms, aiming at attracting investment and favouring the creation of employment, were positively received by the business sector. On the contrary, the trade unions and social movements protested, and on 28 April 2017 a general strike was organised.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ De Souza and Hoff, "Governo Temer e a Volta Do Neoliberalismo No Brasil: Possíveis Consequências Para a Habitação Popular.", 9

³⁶⁷ Júlia Dolce, "Pobreza extrema aumenta 11% no ultimo ano; economistas culpam trabalho informal", *Brasil de Fato*, (12/04/18), <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2018/04/12/pobreza-extrema-aumenta-11-no-ultimo-ano-economistas-culpam-trabalho-informal> [accessed on 31/03/21]

³⁶⁸ Thiago Oliveira Agostinho, "A Discriminação Ao Trabalhador Idoso e a Reforma Da Previdência," in *O Golpe de 2016 e a Reforma Da Previdência. Narrativas de Resistência*, ed. Gustavo Teixeira Ramos et al. (CLACSO, 2017), 437, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvtxw288.73>.

³⁶⁹ Edson Carneiro Índio, "O Golpe E a Reforma Trabalhista," in *O Golpe de 2016 e a Reforma Trabalhista. Narrativas de Resistência* (CLACSO, 2017), 75-6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvtxw31b.18>.

³⁷⁰ Eurídice Roberti and Marcelo Costa, "Michel Temer", *Verbete biográfico*, CPDOC/FGV, <http://www.fgv.br/cpdoc/acervo/dicionarios/verbete-biografico/michel-miguel-elias-temer-lulia> [accessed 25/02/2021];

In 2017, the government's popularity was low due to the slow economic resumption, to the reforms adopted and to the high unemployment rate. In addition, Temer's government was marked by a series of corruption scandals after many of its members were accused with plea bargaining in the *Lava Jato* investigation and, therefore, were led to resign.³⁷¹ In May 2017, Temer himself was at the centre of a corruption accusation, after *O Globo* leaked the tape of a conversation between the President and the businessman Joesley Batista, president of JBS, Brazil's biggest meat-packing company, who was investigated in the *Lava Jato*. Recorded by Batista as a way of plea bargaining, the conversation revealed that Temer had authorised the payment of bribes to Eduardo Cunha, arrested by the task force of the *Lava Jato* after Dilma's impeachment. The bribes were aimed at guaranteeing his silence and avoiding his denouncement.³⁷² The tape also exposed that one of Temer's assessors, Rodrigo Rocha Loures, could solve an undefined problem for the firm; the same man was filmed receiving R\$500,000. Joesley Batista also recorded a conversation with Aécio Neves where the senator and his sister negotiated bribes to pay for his defence in the investigations. The PSDB member was accused of corruption crimes, but escaped prison through a privileged forum.³⁷³

As a consequence of the release of these conversations, highly covered by the media, the São Paulo Exchange Market experienced a drop of 10% and the government was highly criticised, with mass demonstrations asking for Temer's resignation.³⁷⁴ The STF decided to set an inquiry to investigate the President, and, after the investigations, the Prosecutor-General of the Republic, Rodrigo Janot, filed a formal charge against Temer for passive corruption. Temer became the first Brazilian president to be charged for common crimes during his term. The opening of a process needed to be approved by two-thirds of the Chamber of Deputies, where approximately 300 members were being investigated for crimes. In a clear change in the relation to the impeachment voting, the

³⁷¹ Benevides et al., "Impeachment Sem Crime É Golpe:", 177-8.

³⁷² Dom Phillips, "Brazil President endorsed businessman's bribes in secret tape, newspaper says", *The New York Times online*, (17/05/2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/17/world/americas/brazil-michel-temer-joesley-batista-corruption.html> [accessed on 25/02/2021].

³⁷³ Jonathan Watts, "Brazil: explosive recording implicate President Michel Temer in bribery", *The Guardian online*, (18/05/2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/18/brazil-explosive-recordings-implicate-president-michel-temer-in-bribery> [accessed on 25/02/2021].

³⁷⁴ Karina Trevizan, "Bovespa fecha na maior queda em quase 9 anos após denúncias da JBS", *GI*, (18/05/2017), <https://g1.globo.com/economia/mercados/noticia/bovespa-fecha-em-forte-queda-de-olho-em-denuncias-sobre-temer.ghtml> [accessed on 31/03/21].

Chamber dismissed the complaint against Temer and the investigations did not proceed.³⁷⁵

Throughout Temer's presidency, the popularity rate remained low: according to *Datafolha*, in 2017, after the corruption accusations, the government's approval rate plummeted to 7%³⁷⁶ and, by the end of Temer's term in 2018, it had reached 3%, while the rejection rate rocketed to 70%, surpassing the levels of Dilma's presidency.³⁷⁷

2.3.4 2018 Elections and Bolsonaro's victory

In October 2018 presidential elections were due, and the situation Brazil was facing presented a series of problems, from an economic slowdown and unemployment to corruption scandals, to growing social inequality and extreme poverty, and to the lack of public security. This context and the public concern with these issues influenced the result of the elections. At the end of January 2018, two main candidates emerged from the surveys on voting intention: Lula, with 36%, and Jair Bolsonaro, with 18%.³⁷⁸

When Lula announced he would run again in the following elections, the ex-President was leading the polls. However, in 2017 had Moro accused Lula of being part of the corruption scheme investigated by the *Lava Jato*:

The Brazilian Federal Prosecution Office (MPF) brought charges against da Silva for corruption and money laundering for his participation in three contracts signed with construction giant OAS which were hurtful to Petrobras. So, according to the MPF, da Silva would be the head of the conspiracy that allegedly would have had hurt [*sic*] Petrobras, a government-controlled company, through the aforementioned contracts. His share in this would be the triplex apartment in Guarujá and a renovation carried out by OAS, thus allegedly constituting the crime of corruption. The money laundering aspect of it would be da Silva not transferring the property to himself.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Lichterbeck, "La tentazione autoritaria del Brasile", 50.

³⁷⁶ "Somente 7% aprovam governo Temer", *Datafolha*, (26/06/2017), <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2017/06/1896143-somente-7-aprovam-governo-temer.shtml> [accessed on 31/03/21]

³⁷⁷ "Reprovação a Temer é Recorde", *Datafolha*, (11/06/2018) <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaopublica/2018/06/1971539-reprovacao-a-temer-e-recorde.shtml> [accessed on 26/02/2021]

³⁷⁸ "Lula lidera intenção de voto; sem petista, Bolsonaro assume liderança", *Datafolha*, (31/01/2018) <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2018/01/1954686-lula-lidera-intencao-de-voto-sem-petista-bolsonaro-assume-lideranca.shtml> [accessed on 01/03/2021]

³⁷⁹ Ricardo Lodi Ribeiro, "Lula's Conviction: Brazil's Most Striking Case of Lawfare," in *Comments on a Notorious Trial. The Trial of Lula*, ed. Carol Proner et al. (CLACSO, 2018), 183, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96gjp.41>.

These accusations were presented with a PowerPoint identifying Lula as the centre of a corruption conspiracy scheme and were based on the allegations of the triplex property, which Lula denied, and on the declarations of a former OAS president, who had previously denied Lula's involvement and received immunity after changing his plea. Moreover, there was no actual document proving that Lula was the owner of the triplex, yet this lack of evidence was used as proof of his guilt.³⁸⁰ On 12 July 2017, Moro sentenced Lula to nine years and a half of prison for crimes of passive corruption and money laundering, and, on 24 January 2018, the ex-President was condemned on second instance, increasing his sentence to twelve years. It is important to highlight that, not only was Lula convicted without evidence, but he was also not granted an impartial judge since Moro, who sentenced him, was also the prosecutor.³⁸¹ On 5 April, the STF rejected his *habeas corpus* petition and Moro ordered his detention. Two days later Lula turned himself to the police to serve his sentence.

Despite the prison sentence, Lula continued to lead the polls with 31% of the voting intention and, in August 2018, the PT officialised his candidacy.³⁸² At the end of the month, Lula headed the race with 39% of the preferences.³⁸³ However, on 31 August, the *Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*, TSE (Superior Electoral Court) decided that Lula was ineligible, therefore denying his candidacy. With short time to prepare, the PT presented as substitute Fernando Haddad, academic and former mayor of São Paulo, who was running as Lula's vice-president. Despite Haddad's ascent in the polls, Lula's percentage could not be reached.³⁸⁴ The 2017 sentence and the TSE decision to impede Lula's candidacy can be considered as part of the same *golpe* started with Dilma's impeachment to prevent the PT from governing.

³⁸⁰ Eder Bomfim Rodrigues, "The Sentence against Former President Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva: Another Tragic Chapter of the 2016 Coup," in *Comments on a Notorious Trial. The Trial of Lula*, ed. Caroli Proner et al. (CLACSO, 2018), 39-40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96gjp.10%0AJSTOR>.

³⁸¹ Pedro P. Peruzzo and Tiago R. Botelho, "The Process' Unconstitutionality Condemning Lula and Brazil to Imprisonment," in *Comments on a Notorious Trial. The Trial of Lula*, ed. Carol Proner et al. (CLACSO, 2018), 169-70, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvn96gjp.38>.

³⁸² "Preso, Lula mantém liderança pela presidência", *Datafolha*, (16/04/2018) <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2018/04/1965039-presos-lula-mantem-lideranca-em-disputa-pela-presidencia.shtml> [accessed on 01/03/2021]

³⁸³ "39% votariam em Lula; sem petista Bolsonaro lidera disputa presidencial", *Datafolha*, (22/08/2018) <https://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2018/08/1979559-39-votariam-em-lula-sem-petista-bolsonaro-lidera-disputa-presidencial.shtml> [accessed on 01/03/2021]

³⁸⁴ Lichterbeck, "La tentazione autoritaria del Brasile", 51

On the other hand, with Lula's conviction, the other candidate gaining strength was Jair Messias Bolsonaro. Paratrooper during the military regime and dismissed from the Army, Bolsonaro was a federal deputy who, in almost thirty years in Congress, "[...] presented 150 bills, with thirty-two favouring the military, only one in favour of educational matters, and other two about healthcare-related issues. Only one of these bills was eventually passed: PL 2.514/1996, for reducing taxes on industrial goods."³⁸⁵ Before his presidential candidacy, Bolsonaro was already a controversial figure due to his outrageous and anti-progressive declarations. In addition to these remarks, Bolsonaro has always openly defended the military regime, justifying political assassinations and the use of torture. More specifically, he stated that its mistake was torturing instead of killing, and, on the voting for Dilma's impeachment, Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to Colonel Brilhante Ustra who had tortured her.³⁸⁶

Despite these aggressive declarations and violent rhetoric, Bolsonaro gained support among the population. With his drastic measures, he presented himself as the solution to Brazil's problems which, according to the surveys, concerned security and corruption. As regards the first issue, Bolsonaro's pro-gun statements, his defence of the use of violence and belief that police forces should be free to kill criminals, were considered a straightforward answer to the problem of security in a country where the number of deaths for violence has drastically increased in the last decade (63,880 homicides in 2017)³⁸⁷. As for corruption, Bolsonaro was depicted as the only honest candidate and an outsider from the corrupt system of the previous administrations, specifically the PT. As a matter of fact, his electoral campaign was based on the *anti-petismo* and the identification of the Left and the PT as a threat to moral and traditional values which, instead, Bolsonaro promised to defend.³⁸⁸ Presenting himself as an anti-establishment candidate who would break with the previous administrations, Bolsonaro gathered the support of those who identified a link between politics and corruption: "Bolsonaro was the embodiment of those who viewed the 13 year-long PT government as a travesty of abject corruption and

³⁸⁵ Fabrício H. Chagas-Bastos, "Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn" *Revista de Estudos Sociais* 2019, no. 69 (July 2019): 95, <https://doi.org/10.7440/res69.2019.08>.

³⁸⁶ Boito Jr., "O Brasil de Bolsonaro", 3-4.

³⁸⁷ Lichterbeck, "La tentazione autoritaria del Brasile", 44

³⁸⁸ Esther Solano, "Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* 42 (2018): 14-15.

kleptocracy.”³⁸⁹ The undermining of the PT’s image was fostered by a massive use of fake news throughout the electoral campaign, leading to the instalment of an inquiry to verify this phenomenon.³⁹⁰ This aspect will be further analysed in the following chapter.

Bolsonaro’s candidacy support was stalled around 20%. However, at the beginning of the electoral campaign, on 6 September, he was stabbed during a rally, which resulted in an increase in the voting intentions, with Bolsonaro leading the polls with more than 30%. As a consequence of this attack, Bolsonaro was operated and he used this pretext to continue his campaign through social media, therefore avoiding all the electoral debates.³⁹¹

The 2018 October elections revealed a great polarisation among the Brazilian population, which emerged from the results. In the first round, Bolsonaro obtained 46% of the votes, while Haddad garnered 29%. In the second round, which took place on 28 October, Bolsonaro won the elections, with 55,1% of the valid votes, starting a government based on conservatism and on the return of the military within the political sphere.³⁹² After only thirty years from the end of the dictatorship, the country is again ruled by someone who defends the limitation of democratic rights and presents characteristics belonging to the extreme-right.

Although this result may seem shocking, the analysis of the events previous to this victory can have clarified how the stigmatisation of the PT was so effective in framing the public opinion, and how anti-corruption and anti-establishment claims have contributed to the idea of Bolsonaro as an outsider and as a myth. The opposition towards the PT, rooted in both the business elite and the media, developed even further with the *Lava Jato* operation, leading to a perception of the party as the centre of corruption. This negative image reached its peak with the 2016 impeachment, creating among the public opinion the idea that the PT government was the embodiment of the country’s problems. As a result, people believed that it was necessary to avoid another victory of the Left, to point of preferring a candidate with authoritarian and extremist traits.

³⁸⁹ Chagas-Bastos, “Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn,” 94

³⁹⁰ Pedro Paulo Weizenmann, “Tropical Trump?,” *Harvard International Review* 40, no. 1 (2019): 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26617386>.

³⁹¹ Boito Jr., “O Brasil de Bolsonaro”, 4

³⁹² Tom Phillips and Dom Phillips, “Jair Bolsonaro declared Brazil’s next president”, *The Guardian*, (29/10/2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/28/jair-bolsonaro-wins-brazil-presidential-election> [accessed on 31/03/21]

CHAPTER III:

INFORMATION MANIPULATION IN THE 2018 ELECTIONS

The manipulation of information to forge public opinion by providing a distorted vision of reality reached an unprecedented level in Brazil in the October 2018 presidential elections, particularly in Jair Bolsonaro's electoral campaign. His campaign relied on two main topics, the *anti-petismo* and the anti-establishment sentiment, both constituting a cohesive factor among the heterogeneous groups that supported and voted him. Bolsonaro presented himself as a solution to both issues, a vision shared by his supporters. On the one hand, despite his thirty years as deputy, he was represented as an outsider, as someone different from other politicians and from the "old" establishment, which was identified as the source of corruption and of the country's problems. On the other hand, Bolsonaro was specifically opposed to the PT, which was negatively depicted as the centre of scandal and corruption. As a matter of fact, this depiction was fostered by declarations and statements aimed at fuelling *anti-petismo* and the popular resentment against the party, therefore providing a framed vision of reality. This discrediting was also achieved through the massive spread of fake news occurred during the 2018 elections, which characterised the presidential race.³⁹³ This phenomenon favoured Bolsonaro's election since the majority of stories either directly benefitting him or defaming his political opposition and the establishment. This was achieved by targeting the population's fears and fostering a sense of threat, which resulted in Bolsonaro's identification as a saviour.

The circulation of fake news was promoted by the use of social media both as the main means for Bolsonaro's campaign and as a tool to obtain political information. Social media, especially WhatsApp, proved to be an extremely successful way to manipulate information and frame facts since they allow to spread fake content without any mediation. Fake news discrediting the political opposition contributed to exacerbate the societal antagonism and further polarised the division between the PT and Bolsonaro, based on moral and traditional values.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Pedro Paulo Weizenmann, "Tropical Trump?," *Harvard International Review* 40, no. 1 (2019): 12–14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26617386>.

³⁹⁴ Leticia Cesarino, "Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018," 2018, 1–21,

In Bolsonaro's vision, this antagonism also referred to the country's dictatorial past, where the opposition between the military and the alleged communist threat mirrored the political polarisation emerged during the 2018 elections. When talking about the military dictatorship, Bolsonaro offered a distorted and alternative vision of historical events, which allowed him to justify his conservative and extremist tendencies. He provided a re-interpretation of history, according to which the military had defeated a communist threat which would have ruined the country, while this had been successfully run by the regime. Through this positive vision of the dictatorship, he defended and glorified a past, actually characterised by violence and repression.³⁹⁵

Bolsonaro's distortion of facts further fuelled a polarisation and a Manichean antagonism within society, where "people" and "anti-people" were defined on moral terms and were based on an exclusionary vision. Throughout his campaign, Bolsonaro constantly created an opposition based on a division between the "good", embodied by him, and the "evil", represented by the PT, identified as the centre of corruption, both economic and ideological.³⁹⁶

This attitude is typical of populism and, for his radical-right ideology and discourses, Bolsonaro can be identified as a right-wing populist. Nonetheless, for his manipulation of truth, his defence of the dictatorship and re-writing of history, as well as for his glorification of political violence and discrimination of minorities, "Bolsonaro clearly stands on the border between fascist dictatorship and the democratic form of populism."³⁹⁷

3.1 Fake News in Bolsonaro's electoral campaign

The 2018 presidential elections in Brazil have been considered by the Organisation of American States (OAS) as the first case of massive use of fake news to manipulate votes

https://www.academia.edu/38061666/Populismo_digital_roteiro_inicial_para_um_conceito_a_partir_de_um_estudo_de_caso_da_campanha_eleitoral_de_2018_manuscrito_

³⁹⁵ Giovane Matheus Camargo, Pedro Rodolfo Bode de Moraes, and Pablo Ornelas Rosa, "A (Des) Construção Da Memória Sobre a Ditadura Pós-1964 Pelo Governo de Jair Bolsonaro," *Cantareira* 33 (2020).

³⁹⁶ Eduardo Ryo Tamaki and Mario Fuks, "POPULISM IN BRAZIL'S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BOLSONARO'S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES," *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política* 109 (April 2020): 1–31, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-103127/109>.

³⁹⁷ Federico Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies* (University of California Press, 2020), 102.

and the electoral result.³⁹⁸ Indeed, during the electoral period, an extraordinary amount of fake content, including videos, pictures and statements taken out of context, circulated on social media. It has been proved that the majority of fake news, directly or indirectly, favoured Bolsonaro's election, with the spread of stories which both promoted the PSL candidate and undermined his opponents.³⁹⁹ Due to this broad circulation, the most recurring fake news can be divided into four categories: allegations of electoral fraud, misinformation about the knife attack suffered by Bolsonaro, accusations of corruption of the traditional institutions and the press. The fourth category was composed of fake news against the PT and the Left and it was the most consistent and highly effective in manipulating and forging the public opinion.⁴⁰⁰ On the one hand, this content fostered *anti-petismo* and anti-establishment sentiments by presenting a negative vision of both the Workers' Party and traditional institutions. On the other hand, the circulating fake news exacerbated the already-existing fears related to the issues of corruption and insecurity. Concurrently, this widespread misinformation fuelled the concern about traditional values of gender, family and religion, being threatened by the progressive ideology of the Left. The creation of this sense of menace contributed to the identification of Bolsonaro as an outsider and as a protector of moral values.

The circulation of fake news was so effective also thanks to the almost-exclusive use of social media. Differently from other candidates', Bolsonaro's electoral campaign was conducted almost exclusively via social media and this decision proved to be utterly advantageous. These networks, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp, allowed to avoid the mediation typical of traditional press and provided a direct link between Bolsonaro and his supporters. Besides, the use of social media led to the creation of "echo-chambers", where people could share content with a similar ideology. In particular, the role of WhatsApp as the main social network was crucial in the 2018 electoral campaign, since it provided a capillary circulation of misinformation and fake

³⁹⁸ Daniel Mello, "Spread of fake news in Brazil is unprecedented, says OAS", *Agência Brasil*, (25/10/18), <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/politica/noticia/2018-10/spread-fake-news-brazil-unprecedented-says-oas> [accessed on 02/05/2021]

³⁹⁹ Tatiana Maria Silva Galvão Dourado, "Fake News Na Eleição Presidencial de 2018 No Brasil," *PhD Dissertation* (Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-33061995000200011>.

⁴⁰⁰ Daniel Avelar, "WhatsApp fake news during Brazil election 'favoured Bolsonaro'", *The Guardian*, (30/10/19) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/30/whatsapp-fake-news-brazil-election-favoured-jair-bolsonaro-analysis-suggests> [accessed on 20/03/21]

news, also due to the presence of different layers and groups where this kind of content was received. This employment of WhatsApp was also extremely controversial since it emerged that some businessmen supporting WhatsApp were paying for the circulation of mass messages, which constitutes an illegal act.⁴⁰¹

The phenomenon of circulation of fake news was so striking that a *Comissão Parlamentar Misto Inquérito*, an Inquiry Committee, was set up in 2019. Its goal was to investigate the creation of false accounts on social media and cyber-attacks which might have influenced the electoral process and public debate.⁴⁰²

3.1.1 Fake news and their impact on the formation of public opinion

The 2018 electoral campaign was characterised by an impressive amount of misinformation, consisting mainly in fake news disseminated through social media, such as Twitter, Facebook and especially WhatsApp. While it is true that this has been a tool employed by both sides, it has emerged that the majority of the fake news circulating did favour Bolsonaro's election. As it transpires from a research which has considered 346 titles of fake news circulating during the electoral period, 72,54% of them was favourable to the right and extreme right, therefore directly or indirectly promoting Bolsonaro, while those benefitting the PT (Lula or Haddad) represented 11,56%. On the contrary, when analysing the titles that potentially undermined the candidates, 48,26% of the fake news hampered Lula and Haddad, and 15,31% Bolsonaro. Moreover, according to this research, the majority of the fake news examined (50,86%) could be considered as "pro-Bolsonaro" and 18% classified as "anti-Haddad/Lula".⁴⁰³ This result is confirmed by a WhatsApp data analysis conducted by *The Guardian*:

In a sample of 11,957 viral messages shared across 296 group chats on the instant-messaging platform in the campaign period, approximately 42% of rightwing items

⁴⁰¹ Patrícia Campos Mello, "Empresários bancam campanha contra o PT pelo WhatsApp", *Folha de São Paulo*, (18/10/18), <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/empresarios-bancam-campanha-contra-o-pt-pelo-whatsapp.shtml> [accessed on 09/04/21]

⁴⁰² "CPMI das Fake News é instalada no Congresso", *SenadoNoticias*, (04/09/2019), <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2019/09/04/cpmi-das-fake-news-e-instalada-no-congresso> [accessed on 02/05/21]

⁴⁰³ Tatiana Maria Silva Galvão Dourado, "Fake News Na Eleição Presidencial de 2018 No Brasil," *PhD Dissertation* (Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2020), 163-172.

contained information found to be false by factcheckers. Less than 3% of the leftwing messages analysed in the study contained externally verified falsehoods.⁴⁰⁴

Thus, it can be said that Bolsonaro was the candidate who benefitted the most from the spreading of fake news and misinformation. In particular, the most recurrent stories can be divided into four main categories, which can sometimes be intersected.

The first one concerns the issue of electoral fraud, with allegations and conspiracy theories on the manipulation of the electronic ballots. Among the popular fake news in this category, there was the claim that, in one polling station, Haddad had received more votes than the number of electors, or the news that the police had found a polling van with electronic ballots already filled with votes for the PT candidate.⁴⁰⁵ On this topic, the most shared fake news was a video showing a rigged electronic ballot that automatically voted for Haddad when pressing the number “1”.⁴⁰⁶ This video was also spread by one of Bolsonaro’s sons, Flávio, contributing to its virality. Fake news on electoral fraud was highly popular also because the topic was part of Bolsonaro’s discourse, who had often discredited the reliability of electronic ballots with posts on his social media account. An example is a video posted on Bolsonaro’s Twitter account where he presents “the truth” about the possibility of fraud.⁴⁰⁷ As a consequence, being confirmed by Bolsonaro himself and by his sons, this piece of news was assumed to be the truth and were, thus, spread by his followers.

A second category of fake news regards misinformation about the knife attack suffered by Bolsonaro at the beginning of September 2018. This event played a central role in the elections since it further polarised the race, and it resulted in Bolsonaro’s withdrawal from public debates, leading his electoral campaign exclusively via social media. The main

⁴⁰⁴ Daniel Avelar, “WhatsApp fake news during Brazil election ‘favoured Bolsonaro’, *The Guardian*.

⁴⁰⁵ Sarah Mota Resende, “Boletim de urna em que votação de Haddad é maior do que o total de eleitores é falso”, *Folha de São Paulo*, (08/10/18) <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/boletim-de-urna-em-que-votacao-de-haddad-e-maior-do-que-o-total-de-eleitores-e-falso.shtml> [accessed on 18/03/21]

⁴⁰⁶ Adriane Schultz et al., “É #FAKE video em que eleitor seleciona Tecla a “1” e aparece automaticamente o candidato Fernando Haddad na urna”, *GI*, (07/10/2018), https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2018/10/07/e-fake-video-em-que-eleitor-seleciona-a-tecla-1-e-aparece-automaticamente-o-candidato-fernando-haddad-na-urna.ghtml?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=fatooufake&utm_content=post [accessed on 13/03/21]

⁴⁰⁷ Jair Messias Bolsonaro, “Mais verdades sobre a possibilidade de fraudes nas urnas eletrônicas.” (05/09/18) Twitter: @jairbolsonaro, <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1037416845660311552> [accessed on 13/03/21]

fake news on this topic identified a link between the aggressor and the PT, claiming that the man was a member of the Workers Party and that he was wearing a T-shirt supporting Lula's freedom⁴⁰⁸. In addition, fake news circulated alleging the existence of a scheme to murder Bolsonaro, and this was used to compare the stabbing attack with the murder of the PSOL councilwoman Marielle Franco occurred in March 2018.⁴⁰⁹

Another category covers the fake news on the corruption of the political system, the news media and the press. This sort of allegations was employed by both Bolsonaro and his electors, recurring to the political weapon of the *fake news label* to discredit the press and undermine its credibility among the public. On the contrary, the PSL candidate was depicted as the only source of truth. Examples can be found in Bolsonaro's Twitter account, where he posted tweets delegitimising the news media (i.e. *Folha de São Paulo*, *Veja*) labelling their stories as "fake news", without providing explanations on the accusations of lying.⁴¹⁰ However, these attacks only occurred when the published story damaged Bolsonaro's image. At the same time, fake news also accused the press and public institutions, such as the TSE, of manipulating the election surveys, contributing to the conspiracy theories regarding the existence of a scheme to prevent Bolsonaro from winning.⁴¹¹ Among them, stories claimed that the TSE would cancel the vote of those wearing a Bolsonaro T-shirt on the day of the voting⁴¹², and that the TSE had given codes for the electronic ballots to Venezuela⁴¹³. Fake news also stated that the *Datafolha* survey indicating Lula in the lead had not been registered by the TSE and was, therefore, false.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ Dourado, "Fake News Na Eleição Presidencial de 2018 No Brasil.", 191

⁴⁰⁹ Leticia Cesarino, "HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE," *Trabalhos Em Linguística Aplicada* 59, no. 1 (April 2020): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1590/01031813686191620200410>.

⁴¹⁰ Janaisa Martins Viscardi, "FAKE NEWS, VERDADE E MENTIRA SOB A ÓTICA DE JAIR BOLSONARO NO TWITTER," *Trabalhos Em Linguística Aplicada* 59, no. 2 (August 2020): 1142-4, <https://doi.org/10.1590/01031813715891620200520>.

⁴¹¹ Leticia Cesarino, "Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018," 2018, 6.

⁴¹² "Eleitores poderão usar camisetas de candidatos no dia da eleição", *Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*, (05/10/18), <https://www.tse.jus.br/imprensa/noticias-tse/2018/Outubro/tse-recomenda-aos-tres-que-eleitores-possam-usar-camiseta-de-candidatos-no-dia-da-eleicao> [accessed on 19/03/21]

⁴¹³ "Códigos de urnas eletrônicas não foram entregues a venezuelanos", *Comprova*, https://projeto comprova.com.br/post/re_2B5W8XNdwo pb [accessed on 19/03/21]

⁴¹⁴ "ATENÇÃO! PESQUISA NÃO ESTÁ REGISTRADA NO TSE, DATAFOLHA E REDE GLOBO ESTÃO MENTINDO", YouTube video, 5:48, posted by "Filma o que vê News", 23/08/18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooPuK9aOXVo> [accessed on 19/03/21]

These claims were dismissed by the TSE, which provided clarifications on its online website.

The last category was also extremely crucial in manipulating the public opinion since it included fake news against left-wing politicians, aimed at undermining the PT and its candidates. Fake news against the PT and the Left covered different topics, often presenting conspiracy theories. According to these allegations, the PT was trying to manipulate the results of the elections with the help of the TSE and Venezuela, as previously mentioned. The connection to Venezuela was also used to accuse the PT of planning to install a communist regime, with allegations of Haddad praising Maduro and defending the confiscation of property.⁴¹⁵ As evidence of the connection of the PT with communism, a photo was shared, showing Fidel Castro and a young woman, who was falsely identified as Dilma Rousseff and labelled as his “socialist student”.⁴¹⁶ However, the majority of fake news involving the PT concerned the corruption of morality and traditional values, such as those linked to religion and family, with the defence of gender identity and homosexuality. These stories held the Left, and in particular the PT, responsible for wanting to destroy the principles of tradition and costumes with immoral, promiscuous and vicious proposals. On this regard, fake news claimed that Haddad had written a book encouraging incest and that he had stated that 5-year-old children would become property of the State and could have their gender decided.⁴¹⁷

The most shared piece of fake news involving Haddad concerned the “gay kit”, a despising label of what was part of the project “School without Homophobia”, created when the PT candidate was Minister of Education and suspended in 2011. This kit consisted in notebooks and videos aimed at training educators and professors to fight discrimination and homophobia in schools.⁴¹⁸ Despite the kit not being planned for

⁴¹⁵ Michelle Modesto and Dandara Magalhães, “O BRASIL VAI VIRAR VENEZUELA : O Discurso Do Medo Nos Memes Eleitorais via WhatsApp,” *ComPolítica*, 2019, 16-18.

⁴¹⁶ Cristina Tardáguila, Fabrício Benevenuto and Pablo Ortellado, “Fake News is poisoning Brazilian politics. WhatsApp can stop it.”, *The New York Times*, (17/10/18), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/17/opinion/brazil-election-fake-news-whatsapp.html> [accessed on 18/03/21]

⁴¹⁷ Adriane Schultz and Clara Velasco, “É #FAKE que Haddad disse que criança vira propriedade do Estado aos 5 anos e pode ter seu gênero escolhido”, *GI*, (02/10/18), <https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2018/10/02/e-fake-que-haddad-disse-que-crianca-vira-propriedade-do-estado-aos-5-anos-e-pode-ter-seu-genero-escolhido.ghtml> [accessed on 18/03/21]

⁴¹⁸ “É #FAKE que Haddad criou ‘kit gay’ para crianças de seis anos”, *GI*, (16/10/18), <https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2018/10/16/e-fake-que-haddad-criou-kit-gay-para-criancas-de-seis-anos.ghtml> [accessed on 18/03/21]

children, viral fake news claimed that it was circulating in public schools and was distributed to kids. “The ‘gay kit’ was based on a severe distortion of PT- sponsored campaigns in schools to normalize gayness to decrease bullying.”⁴¹⁹ Throughout the electoral campaign, these allegations were advocated by Bolsonaro himself, who declared in videos and interviews that the PT was distributing the book *Sexual Apparatus & Co* to children as part of the project, encouraging an early stimulation of sexuality.⁴²⁰ Although the TSE established the removal of these false contents and allegations, Bolsonaro continued to defend the existence of the “gay kit”.⁴²¹ The fact that this allegation was spread by Bolsonaro himself contributed to convince the public of their truthfulness, as shown by a post-election survey according to which 36% of the voters believed Haddad had created the “gay kit” and 15% of them thought he had encouraged incest in his book.⁴²²

An analysis of the content of the fake news favouring Bolsonaro is important to understand its impact on the formation of public opinion.

First, spreading this kind of misinformation shaped a negative depiction of both the establishment (i.e. TSE, news press) and the political opposition, namely the Left and in particular the PT. This phenomenon created a polarisation within society, and it contributed to a simplified vision of reality, easier to understand and accept. At the same time, this polarisation led to a situation of societal antagonism based on the Manichean opposition between “good versus evil” and “pure versus corrupt”. Thus, the circulation of memes, videos and fake news comparing Bolsonaro and the PT, with the latter presented as immoral and corrupt, favoured the identification of the public opinion with the PSL candidate.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ Stuart Davis and Joe Straubhaar, “Producing Antipetismo: Media Activism and the Rise of the Radical, Nationalist Right in Contemporary Brazil,” *International Communication Gazette* 82, no. 1 (2020), 96.

⁴²⁰ Patrícia Figueiredo, “Bolsonaro mente ao dizer que Haddad criou ‘kit gay’”, *EL PAÍS Brasil*, (13/10/18), https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/10/12/politica/1539356381_052616.html [accessed on 18/03/21]

⁴²¹ Fábio Jardelino, Davi Barboza Cavalcanti, and Bianca Persici Toniolo, “A Proliferação Das Fake News Nas Eleições Brasileiras de 2018,” *Comunicação Pública* 15, no. 28 (June 26, 2020): 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cp.7438>.

⁴²² Flávia Marreiro, “Joice Hasselmann, WhatsApp e a eleição onde o crime compensa”, *EL PAÍS Brasil*, (31/10/18), https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/10/28/opinion/1540732323_256151.html?id_externo_rsoc=TW_CC [accessed on 18/03/21]

⁴²³ Cesarino, “HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE.”

Another reason why misinformation and fake news had such an impact on the formation of public opinion is that they targeted the already-existing fears of the population. In the 2018 context, characterised by the *Lava Jato* investigation and the problem of urban violence, the main concerns among the electorate regarded security and corruption.⁴²⁴ These fears were further fostered by the dissemination of fake news holding the PT responsible for such problems. This trend amplified the feeling of insecurity and the need for a solution, identified in the figure of Bolsonaro.⁴²⁵ The same mechanism occurred with the concern that traditional values connected to family and religion were at risk, as a consequence of the progressive and liberal ideas of the Left. Besides the “gay kit” fake news, an example is the circulation of contents according to which Manuela D’Ávila, running as Haddad’s vice-president, would have declared that Christianity would disappear.⁴²⁶

This sort of claims was particularly effective among the conservative groups, who believed that morality was in danger. In particular, these claims guaranteed a large support among the evangelical churches, which have been increasingly relevant in the national context. The great presence of God Assemblies and of the Universal Church of God’s Kingdom (IURD) in Brazil shows the penetration of evangelical churches as a social and political actor, as testified by the growth of the Evangelical Bench in Congress.⁴²⁷

In terms of the impact on the election of Bolsonaro itself, there was support from a variety of evangelical media, including individual and groups of churches using their WhatsApp networks to deliver anti-PT and pro-Bolsonaro messages, as well as issue messages about abortion, gays rights, etc. that favoured supporting Bolsonaro over the PT candidate. However, the most visible impact was Bishop Edir Macedo’s (owner of Tv Record and leader of the largest evangelical church, UCKD) decision to endorse Bolsonaro.⁴²⁸

Concurrently, allegations that, in case of victory, the PT would disrupt the *status quo* and

⁴²⁴ Jean-Mathieu Albertini, “L’estrema destra brasiliana di Jair Bolsonaro scala i sondaggi”, *Internazionale online*, (24/08/18), <https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/jean-mathieu-albertini/2018/08/24/estrema-destra-brasile-jair-bolsonaro> [accessed on 19/03/21]

⁴²⁵ Cesarino, “Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018.”, 10-11

⁴²⁶ Rayanderson Guerra, “É #FAKE post com Manuela D’Ávila dizendo que é mais popular de Jesus e que o cristianismo vai desaparecer”, *GI*, (05/10/18), <https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2018/10/05/e-fake-post-com-manuela-davila-dizendo-que-e-mais-popular-que-jesus-e-que-o-cristianismo-vai-desaparecer.ghtml> [accessed on 19/03/21]

⁴²⁷ Esther Solano, “Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita,” *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* 42 (2018), 4.

⁴²⁸ Davis and Straubhaar, “Producing Antipetismo: Media Activism and the Rise of the Radical, Nationalist Right in Contemporary Brazil.”, 94

“turn Brazil into Venezuela” secured the support of the conservative and business elites, who feared the realisation of the “communist threat” and felt the urgency to avoid it.⁴²⁹ This particular conspiracy theory, ongoing since the 1964 *golpe*, was further legitimised by Bolsonaro himself who often labelled those who criticise him (i.e. opposition, media, institutions) as “communists” and as against the national interests.⁴³⁰

Thus, the spreading of fake news contributed to the creation of a sense of threat, from which Bolsonaro benefitted. On the one hand, the misinformation presented an insurmountable division and antagonism between the parties involved, based on the binary opposition between order-disorder, security-threat and tradition-immorality.⁴³¹ This construction reflected the binarism typical of populism, based on the antinomy between the nation and the “anti-nation”, leading to the creation of a perception of danger among the population, as better analysed in the last section of this chapter. Thus, fake news fuelled the social polarisation and the stigmatisation of both the PT and the establishment, which were depicted as unable to meet the problems of the population or were considered to be their cause themselves. On the other hand, the feeling of threat was due to the fake news’ exploitation of fears: in a context of general insecurity, Bolsonaro was presented as the solution to these problems for being anti-establishment and an outsider, “creating space for the acceptance of authoritarian feelings latent in society.”⁴³²

3.1.2 The role of the media

When analysing the impact of fake news in manipulating the public opinion, it is important to take into consideration the role of the media. This enables a better understanding of why fake news and misinformation have been so effective and widespread throughout Bolsonaro’s electoral campaign. It emerges that the use of social media by both the PSL candidate and his supporters was pivotal in the 2018 elections.

⁴²⁹ Modesto and Magalhães, “O BRASIL VAI VIRAR VENEZUELA : O Discurso Do Medo Nos Memes Eleitorais via WhatsApp.”

⁴³⁰ Camilo Vanucchi, “Que ameaça comunista é esta de que o governo tanto fala?”, *UOL*, (28/05/20), <https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/camilo-vannuchi/2020/05/28/que-ameaca-comunista-e-esta-de-que-o-governo-tanto-fala.htm> [accessed on 19/03/21]

⁴³¹ Letícia Cesarino, “Como Vencer Uma Eleição Sem Sair de Casa: A Ascensão Do Populismo Digital No Brasil,” *Internet&Sociedade* 1, no. 1 (2020): 109-111.

⁴³² Fabrício H. Chagas-Bastos, “Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 2019, no. 69 (July 2019): 95, <https://doi.org/10.7440/res69.2019.08>.

Before examining the role of social media, it is worth highlighting the part played by the news media both before and during the elections. On the one hand, since the 2013 demonstrations, television, newspapers and magazines (i.e. *TV Globo*, *O Globo*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Veja*) had contributed to discrediting the PT and fuelling *anti-petismo*, thus creating a fertile ground for the rise in Bolsonaro's popularity and shaping his image as an anti-establishment candidate.⁴³³ On the other hand, during the election period, national newspapers provided a comparison between Bolsonaro and Haddad which, basically, put them on the same level. While international newspapers, such as *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*, highlighted the threat to democracy represented by Bolsonaro, national press implied that both candidates constituted a danger. On their coverage of the election, newspapers such as *O Globo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*, claimed that it was difficult to choose between two extremes which could threaten democracy and its institutions.⁴³⁴ As a result, the news media contributed to the normalisation of Bolsonaro's candidacy.

As regards Bolsonaro's electoral campaign, it was conducted almost exclusively on social media. Having only eight seconds available of official electoral propaganda on television, the PSL candidate decided to use social networks for his campaign, adopting platforms as Facebook to expose his agenda and limiting his interviews with the traditional media.⁴³⁵ After suffering a knife attack during a rally in September, this decision was taken even further, with Bolsonaro's decision to avoid all public debates, therefore circumventing questions on complex topics and any confrontation with other candidates.⁴³⁶

The use of social media as the main mean to run his campaign presented many advantages. First, it allowed to create a more direct contact between Bolsonaro and his supporters, avoiding external regulation and barriers. By using their official accounts on Facebook or Twitter to share declarations and opinions, Bolsonaro and his sons were able

⁴³³ Davis and Straubhaar, "Producing Antipetismo: Media Activism and the Rise of the Radical, Nationalist Right in Contemporary Brazil.", 88

⁴³⁴ Bruno Araújo and Hélder Prior, "Framing Political Populism: The Role of Media in Framing the Election of Jair Bolsonaro," *Journalism Practice* 15, no. 2, (2020): 8-14, DOI:10.1080/17512786.2019.1709881.

⁴³⁵ Diego Altieri et al., "As Eleições Presidenciais de 2018 No Brasil: Uma Análise Sob a Ótica Da Teoria Ator-Rede," *EnANPAD 2020*, 2020., 8.

⁴³⁶ Naiara G. Gortázar and Fernanda Becker, "Bolsonaro, um candidato que cresceu no Facebook e não quer sair de lá", *EL PAÍS Brasil*, (26/10/18),

https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/10/24/politica/1540388654_185690.html [accessed on 08/04/21]

to reach a large number of users who did not trust traditional media or felt excluded by the political system.⁴³⁷ In this way, the concept of a direct link between the leader and his followers was strengthened, since social media made the candidate appear more approachable and present. Many among Bolsonaro's supporters believed that it was possible to reach him by sharing posts and tweets online until they got his attention. Bolsonaro himself managed to fuel this idea, often declaring to have taken a certain decision after considering requests received on social media.⁴³⁸ Moreover, the use of social media led to the formation of echo-chambers where Bolsonaro's supporters could interact and share their views, "[...] creating information bubbles which tend to overshadow and block out counter-narratives as these have already been dismissed."⁴³⁹

With anti-establishment and anti-corruption posts or videos which became viral on social networks, Bolsonaro was able to mirror the discontent of the electorate by targeting their emotions and sense of crisis. At the same time, without media regulation, he adopted an aggressive and direct language, refusing political correctness.⁴⁴⁰ This led a great number of people to identify with the PSL candidate, who, in their opinion, was "just like them and spoke their language", contributing to his definition as an outsider.⁴⁴¹ The lack of gatekeepers on social media also allowed Bolsonaro to directly attack the established system and the political opposition, fostering societal antagonism and polarisation. Therefore, avoiding the intervention of traditional media, not only did this use of social networks provide a framed vision of reality, but it also fuelled the circulation of fake news and misinformation which favoured Bolsonaro's candidacy.

Privileging the use of digital media to conduct the electoral campaign turned out to be an effective strategy since it allowed Bolsonaro to gain more legitimisation and reach a greater audience. As a matter of fact, a *Datafolha* survey, done before the first round, revealed that an increasing number of people used social networks as a source of news or information about politics. The survey showed that Bolsonaro's electors were the most

⁴³⁷ Cesarino, "Como Vencer Uma Eleição Sem Sair de Casa: A Ascensão Do Populismo Digital No Brasil.", 99

⁴³⁸ Leticia Cesarino, "On Digital Populism in Brazil," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 2019, 2, <https://polarjournal.org/2019/04/15/on-jair-bolsonaros-digital-populism/>.

⁴³⁹ Paul D. Scott, "Under Siege: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism or Has the Demos Become Crazy?," *Galáxia (São Paulo)*, no. 42 (2019): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25532019344235>.

⁴⁴⁰ Viscardi, "FAKE NEWS, VERDADE E MENTIRA SOB A ÓTICA DE JAIR BOLSONARO NO TWITTER.", 1153

⁴⁴¹ Solano, "Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita.", 20-23

active on social media: the percentage of those reading politics news was 57% on Facebook and 61% on WhatsApp, while 31% of them shared news on either politics or the elections on Facebook and 40% on WhatsApp.⁴⁴² At the same time, this way people were more exposed to fake news since “on social media, catchphrases, images, logos, slogans circulate fast, with no reference to an original source”.⁴⁴³

In the case of the 2018 elections, it is fundamental to analyse the role played by WhatsApp as the main social network employed in Bolsonaro’s campaign.

WhatsApp is a private messaging application that allows the creation of limited groups of up to 256 people. The company reported that it has a base of 120 million users in Brazil, reaching 56% of the population; and 98% of people who own a smart phone access the application daily according to Statista data. A research by Agência Aos Fatos on the informational habits of Brazilians on the Internet support that social media or instant messaging applications are the main channel for accessing news, reaching 33.8% against only 10% of direct visits to news channel websites.⁴⁴⁴

However, its use was extremely controversial due to the massive circulation of fake news and misinformation and to the discovery that Bolsonaro’s supporters illegally paid for the spread of these messages.⁴⁴⁵ On this regard, during the election period, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* revealed that “entrepreneurs who supported Bolsonaro paid for marketing agencies to bombard WhatsApp users with disinformation and misinformation about the Workers party and Fernando Haddad.”⁴⁴⁶ This practice was illegal since it constituted non-declared electoral funding, which added to more than R\$12,000,000. Furthermore, these agencies illegally obtained phone numbers from phone or debt

⁴⁴² “Datafolha: quantos eleitores de cada candidato usam redes sociais, leem e compartilham notícias sobre política”, *G1*, (03/10/18), <https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2018/eleicao-em-numeros/noticia/2018/10/03/datafolha-quantos-eleitores-de-cada-candidato-usam-redes-sociais-leem-e-compartilham-noticias-sobre-politica.ghtml> [accessed on 09/04/21]

⁴⁴³ Cesarino, “HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE.”, 420

⁴⁴⁴ Victor Piaia and Marcelo Alves, “Opening the Black Box: Exploratory Analysis of the Bolsonaroista Network on WhatsApp,” *Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências Da Comunicação* 43, no. 3 (September 2020): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-5844202037>

⁴⁴⁵ Erica Anita Baptista et al., “A Circulação Da (Des)Informação Política No WhatsApp e No Facebook,” *Lumina* 13, no. 3 (December 30, 2019): 31, <https://doi.org/10.34019/1981-4070.2019.v13.28667>.

⁴⁴⁶ Gustavo Ferreira Santos, “Social Media, Disinformation, and Regulation of the Electoral Process: A Study Based on 2018 Brazilian Election Experience,” *Revista de Investigações Constitucionais* 7, no. 2 (2020): 437, <https://doi.org/10.5380/RINC.V7I2.71057>.

collecting companies, and used these numbers to create WhatsApp groups where to send anti-PT messages.⁴⁴⁷

There are a number of other reasons why WhatsApp was such a crucial player in manipulating and framing news and, therefore, in the outcome of the elections. First, “an interconnected infrastructure of groups [was] composed with internal and external message flows that generate the viralisation processes on WhatsApp.”⁴⁴⁸ This infrastructure can be divided into different layers which constitute the so-called “*bolsonarista* network” on WhatsApp.⁴⁴⁹ The first layer was the official one, where the content was released directly by Bolsonaro himself as well as by his sons, members of his party, public figures and private supporters. The second stratum represented a middle zone between official and spontaneous campaign since it was constituted by vertically organised groups, accessible through public links, and where the content could be shared exclusively by the managers. The third layer included numerous groups of 256 accounts, also publicly available through links, but allowing a horizontal exchange of contents between all of their members. Personal networks composed the fourth layer, where content came from family, friends and acquaintances. The last layer, the media ecosystem, incorporated all the others and it referred to the set of links, videos, images coming from other platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, as well as blogs and websites.⁴⁵⁰

This quantity of interlinked layers contributed to the creation of an environment where fake news could circulate and reach a larger number of people, including those who did not participate directly in pro-Bolsonaro groups. The permeability of false messages was also due to a specific characteristic of WhatsApp groups, namely that such messages are encrypted and can be forwarded with no possibility of tracing their source.⁴⁵¹ On this

⁴⁴⁷ Patrícia Campos Mello, “Empresários bancam campanha contra o PT pelo WhatsApp”, *Folha de São Paulo*, (18/10/18), <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2018/10/empresarios-bancam-campanha-contra-o-pt-pelo-whatsapp.shtml> [accessed on 09/04/21]

⁴⁴⁸ Piaia and Alves, “Opening the Black Box: Exploratory Analysis of the Bolsonarista Network on WhatsApp”, 140.

⁴⁴⁹ Cesarino, “Como Vencer Uma Eleição Sem Sair de Casa: A Ascensão Do Populismo Digital No Brasil.” 96-97.

⁴⁵⁰ Cesarino, “Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018.”, 5-7.

⁴⁵¹ Gustavo Ferreira Santos, “Social Media, Disinformation, and Regulation of the Electoral Process: A Study Based on 2018 Brazilian Election Experience,” *Revista de Investigações Constitucionais* 7, no. 2 (2020): 441, <https://doi.org/10.5380/RINC.V7I2.71057>.

regard, it is important to point out that, while the PT wanted to reduce the number of contacts a message could be forwarded to, Bolsonaro asked to raise this limit, which at the time of the elections was 20 people.⁴⁵² This shows his awareness of how effective the platform was to spread twisted and false content which supported his campaign.

Similarly to other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, WhatsApp groups also worked as “echo-chambers”, “placing individuals in a bubble where they only consume information that reflects their social and political values.”⁴⁵³ Since their members did not trust mainstream media, these groups were seen as safe spaces where to check news and political content. However, the information available within these groups was mediated by gatekeepers, such as bots, algorithms and digital influencers, allowing fake news and misinformation to circulate more freely.⁴⁵⁴ This created an opposite situation to traditional media, where the gatekeepers generally guarantee the absence of distorted and fake facts. Therefore, these groups aimed at avoiding the interference of contrary and oppositional opinions which questioned the veridicality of the content circulating. On the contrary, pro-Bolsonaro groups were “policed by rigid rules (‘no leftist / communists allowed’), expulsion of undercover spies or traitors by group admins, and general suspicion of whoever criticizes the president or shows an alternative vision of what it means to be right-wing or conservative.”⁴⁵⁵ Criticism about this trend, coming from the press or the political opposition, only contributed to reinforce the conspiracy theories of an external threat endangering Bolsonaro’s victory, thus strengthening the presence and the participation of his followers online. Bolsonaro’s supporters constituted a so-called “digital body”, since they felt it was their duty to campaign directly for their candidate, especially after he had suffered the attack, becoming a sort of substitute of his physical body.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵² Davis and Straubhaar, “Producing Antipetismo: Media Activism and the Rise of the Radical, Nationalist Right in Contemporary Brazil.”, 95.

⁴⁵³ Scott, “Under Siege: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism or Has the Demos Become Crazy?”, 16.

⁴⁵⁴ Cesarino, “Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018.”, 7.

⁴⁵⁵ Cesarino, “HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE.”, 414.

⁴⁵⁶ Letícia Cesarino, “Identidade e Representação No Bolsonarismo: Corpo Digital Do Rei, Bivalência Conservadorismo-Neoliberalismo e Pessoa Fractal,” *Revista de Antropologia* 62, no. 3 (December 19, 2019): 532-3, <https://doi.org/10.11606/2179-0892.ra.2019.165232>.

In addition, WhatsApp was considered more reliable than other social networks as regards the circulation of fake news, since the content (i.e. images, links, videos, statements out of context) came from friends, families or acquaintances, therefore affecting the perception of its credibility.⁴⁵⁷ Nonetheless, it emerged that the number of fake content being spread on WhatsApp disproved this belief. For example, the fact-checking organisation *Aos Fatos* “crowdsourced from over 6,000 WhatsApp users more than 700 false or misleading posts being shared on the app.”⁴⁵⁸ At the same time, the fact-checking platform *Agência Lupa* selected the 50 most shared political images from a sample of more than 100,000 circulating on WhatsApp groups. From this review, it appeared “that 56 percent of the most-shared images were misleading. Only 8 percent of the 50 most widely shared images were considered fully truthful.”⁴⁵⁹ These examples demonstrate the important role played by WhatsApp in the manipulation of information and circulation of fake news during the 2018 electoral period.

3.2 Glorification and Defence of the Military Dictatorship

Bolsonaro’s speeches and declarations, both publicly and online, have often been characterised by a framed vision of facts and events. In the 2018 electoral period, this manipulation of reality regarded not only the circulation of fake news on elections and political opposition, but also information about historical facts. In this case, the alternative narrative aimed at redeeming specific episodes, such as the Portuguese role in the system of slavery during the colonial period and, in particular, the actions of the Brazilian military dictatorship.⁴⁶⁰

Bolsonaro has always had strong connection with the military, proven by his serving as Captain in the Brazilian Army from 1973 to 1988 and his choosing to run in the 2018 elections with General Hamilton Mourão as vice-president. Bolsonaro has often criticised the “civilian interference” within the Armed Forces, which, after the proclamation of the

⁴⁵⁷ Anita Baptista et al., “A Circulação Da (Des)Informação Política No WhatsApp e No Facebook.”, 42.

⁴⁵⁸ Tai Nalon, “Did WhatsApp help Bolsonaro win the Brazilian presidency?”, *The Washington Post*, (01/11/18), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldpost/wp/2018/11/01/whatsapp-2/> [accessed on 10/04/21]

⁴⁵⁹ Tardáguila et al., “Fake News is poisoning Brazilian politics. WhatsApp can stop it.”

⁴⁶⁰ Cesarino, “HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE.”, 408.

1988 Constitution and the creation of the Defence Ministry, had retired into the military headquarters, abandoning the political life. In the 2018 elections, after thirty years, the military have returned to participate in the civil and political sphere, with the presence of ex-members of the Armed Forces running for governmental positions.⁴⁶¹

Controversially, Bolsonaro has also always defended and praised the actions of the military dictatorship. Even before running for presidency, he had attracted attention for his outrageous declarations regarding that period. Among the most questionable remarks are those where he openly defended the use of torture, claiming to be in favour of such practice.⁴⁶² Bolsonaro also applauded Colonel Brilhante Ustra, leader of the main centre of torture and repression in the 1970s (i.e. DOI-CODI) and responsible for the death or disappearance of 45 people, labelling him as a “national hero”⁴⁶³ and dedicating his vote for Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment to him.⁴⁶⁴ Similar claims were made also during the electoral campaign, when Bolsonaro stated that what had occurred in 1964 was not a *golpe* but a revolution, which, thus, needed to be celebrated.⁴⁶⁵ In some occasions, Bolsonaro also affirmed he would eliminate the political opposition and send the PT supporters to Ponta da Praia, a place where political prisoners were tortured and killed by the military during the dictatorship.⁴⁶⁶

In these declarations, Bolsonaro presented a distorted interpretation of facts and of the historical framework in an attempt to provide a positive view of the military regime. This historical revisionism, also present in the 2018 electoral campaign, has been a constant element throughout his political career and was based on the nostalgic belief that

⁴⁶¹ Afonso Benites, “A prolongada e incomôda sombra dos militares nas eleições brasileiras”, *EL PAÍS Brasil*, (05/10/18), https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/10/05/politica/1538696487_036568.html [accessed on 13/04/21]

⁴⁶² Bolsonaro on the show *Câmera Aberta* (TV Bandeirantes), in 1999; available on: “Bolsonaro: eu sou favorável à tortura, você sabe disso”, YouTube video, 1:03, posted by “tiago mathias”, (06/06/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGu2tzkfEo8> [accessed on 17/04/21]

⁴⁶³ “Bolsonaro diz no conselho de ética que coronel Ustra é ‘herói brasileiro””, *GI*, (08/11/2016) <http://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2016/11/bolsonaro-diz-no-conselho-de-etica-que-coronel-ustra-e-heroi-brasileiro.html> [accessed on 17/04/21]

⁴⁶⁴ Bolsonaro during the voting for Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process at the Chamber of Deputies (17/04/2016), available at: “Bolsonaro cita Ustra no voto pelo impeachment de Dilma Rousseff”, YouTube video, 1:30, posted by “PODER360”, (17/04/2021) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvN7nYxbH-o> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁶⁵ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Roda Viva* on 30/07/18, available at: “Roda Viva | Jair Bolsonaro | 30/07/2018”, YouTube video, 1:21:50, posted by “Roda Viva”, (31/07/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDL59dkeTi0&t=464s> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁶⁶ Carlos Gustavo Nóbrega De Jesus and Edgar Avila Gandra, “O Negacionismo Renovado e o Ofício Do Historiador,” *Estudos Ibero-Americanos* 46, no. 3 (2020): 7, DOI: 10.15448/1980-864X.2020.3.38411.

“everything was better during the regime”. Shared by supporters of the military governments, this assumption was actually built upon false and contradictory claims, for instance that public education had worked better or that life had been safer due to a lack of urban violence.⁴⁶⁷ However, these allegations proved to be wrong.

As regards public education, its expansion during the regime was not accompanied by an increase in investments. In fact, while in Goulart’s government it had been established that 12% of the GDP needed to be invested into education, this percentage dropped during the military governments, shifting from 7,6% in 1970 to 5% in 1978. In addition, the quality of public education worsened also due to the lack of basic teaching material and the low salary given to teachers. Another cause can be identified in the hiring of teachers without sufficient training, especially in the poorest areas such as the Northeast, where 36% of them had only attended elementary school.⁴⁶⁸

As for the security of life, urban violence constituted an important issue in the 2018 electoral campaign for the soaring number of annual homicides. This increase in violence was constantly compared to the lower rate of homicides during the military regime. Even though the rate itself was then surely lower than today’s, yet it had increased when compared to the previous period. Indeed, in 1980, the national census registered an annual rate of 11 homicides per 100.000 inhabitants, while in the capitals and metropolitan regions the number of homicides was more than 20. For instance, in São Paulo this rate went from 5,7 in 1960 to 36,9 in 1985⁴⁶⁹, which is shocking number if considered that the UN definition for “epidemic of violence” refers to a rate of homicides above 10. The problem of increasing crimes and violence had also been highlighted by the media during the regime, as shown by *Veja* at the beginning of 1973, when the magazine registered a wave of crimes due to the violence of the new criminals, the corruption of part of the police and the incompetence of the State in dealing with the situation. Similarly, in 1981 the same magazine indicated the growing number of murders and drug trafficking and

⁴⁶⁷ João Filho, “‘Na ditadura tudo era melhor’. Entenda a maior fake news da história do Brasil.”, *The Intercept Brasil*, (23/09/2018), <https://theintercept.com/2018/09/22/na-ditadura-tudo-era-melhor-entenda-a-maior-fake-news-da-historia-do-brasil/> [accessed on 14/03/21]

⁴⁶⁸ Luis Barrucho, “50 anos do AI-5: Os números por trás do ‘milagre econômico’ da ditadura no Brasil”, *BBC News Brasil*, (13/12/2018), <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45960213> [accessed on 14/03/21]

⁴⁶⁹ <https://acervo.estadao.com.br/pagina/#!/20121014-43461-nac-42-cid-c8-not> [accessed on 14/03/21]

consumption in Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁷⁰ Thus, it clearly appears that the defence of the regime based on the good level of public education and urban security constituted a manipulated vision of historical facts.

Among the common claims used by the supporters of the military regime, there has always been the assumption that corruption did not exist during the dictatorship. However, it has been proved that many cases of corruption occurred during that period, such as exchanges of favours, distribution of positions, embezzlements, illicit enrichment and payment of bribes.⁴⁷¹ Nonetheless, even though denouncing such schemes committed by the military was difficult because of censorship, cases of corruption and financial scandals emerged also even during the regime. Among these, there was the Lutfalla Case, which involved the loan of public money to avoid the bankruptcy of the Lutfalla company, belonging to Paulo Maluf's family. Another example was that of Antônio Carlos Magalhães, Bahia's governor at the time, who, in 1972, was accused of favouring the company where he was a shareholder, reducing its debt by 50%. In addition, federal ministers and generals benefitted from services and privileges, financed with public money.⁴⁷²

Another recurring topic mentioned to praise the military governments regarded the economy and, in particular, the so-called *milagre econômico* (economic miracle), occurred between 1969 and 1973, when the GDP grew exponentially. During the electoral campaign, the *milagre econômico* was also presented by Bolsonaro as evidence of the efficient intervention of the military in the economy.⁴⁷³ Undoubtedly, in the period between 1968 and 1973, during Médici administration, the Brazilian GDP had a growth rate of 11%, which had been of 4,2% in the previous years of military regime. Another positive characteristic of the *milagre* was that the economic growth was accompanied by a decrease in the inflation trend and a surplus in the balance of payments as well as an

⁴⁷⁰ Rubens Goyatá Campante, "Não havia ordem e segurança na ditadura", *Brasil de Fato*, (25/09/2018), <https://www.brasildefatomag.com.br/2018/09/25/artigo-or-nao-havia-ordem-e-seguranca-na-ditadura> [accessed on 14/03/21]

⁴⁷¹ Felipe Bächtold, "Regime agigantou as empreiteiras e foi rico em escândalos financeiros", *Folha de São Paulo*, (27/06/2020), <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/06/regime-agigantou-as-empreiteiras-e-foi-rico-em-escandalos-financeiros.shtml> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁷² Ariel Chexes Batista, "UMA IMERSÃO NO PASSADO-PRESENTE: O REVISIONISMO BOLSONARISTA SOBRE A DITADURA (2011-2019)" (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, 2020), 90-91.

⁴⁷³ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Roda Viva* on 30/07/18, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDL59dkeTi0&t=464s> [accessed on 20/04/21]

important increase in exports.⁴⁷⁴ The improvement in the economic situation was the result of a combination of different factors, such as the economic and monetary policies implemented as well as the incentives to exports and entry of foreign capital. This allowed the military to invest in infrastructures (i.e. nuclear plants, roads) and to develop the industrial park. In particular, the economic growth occurred thanks to the favourable global situation, characterised by the expansion of international trade, low interest rates and the availability of liquid funds. This fostered the entry of foreign capital, which came from the concession of loans by international institutions and from the presence of multinationals in the market.⁴⁷⁵

However, the economic growth derived from the *milagre econômico* was accompanied by an increase in inequality, since the gains benefitted the entrepreneurs at the expense of the workers' salaries which were restricted, leading to a further concentration of income.⁴⁷⁶ At the same time, the Brazilian economy was increasingly dependent on foreign capital, which backfired in 1973 with the international economic crisis, due to the OPEC quadruplication of oil prices. With the 1973 oil shock, the economic model based on international loans showed its perils and the economic growth plummeted from 14% in 1973 to 5,2 in 1975. Nonetheless, the military did not abandon the model, leading to increase in the external debt, which continued even after the second oil shock in 1979. When the country engaged in an adjustment process, it was already too late and the external debt was too high to be repaid, resulting in a debt crisis which characterised the decade.⁴⁷⁷ When the military left power in 1984, the country was experiencing a situation of external indebtedness, with a debt equivalent to 54% of the GDP (compared to 15,7% in 1964) and a soaring inflation rate, which reached 223% in 1985. It can, thus, be said, that the military management of economy constituted a “cursed legacy” and is definitely not successful, as Bolsonaro and supporters of the regime claimed.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ Fernando A. Veloso, André Villela, and Fabio Giambiagi, “Determinantes Do ‘Milagre’ Econômico Brasileiro (1968-1973): Uma Análise Empírica,” *Revista Brasileira de Economia* 62, no. 2 (2008): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-71402008000200006>.

⁴⁷⁵ Beatriz Sanz and Heloísa Mendonça, “O lado obscuro do ‘milagre econômico’ da ditadura: o boom da desigualdade”, (28/11/2017), *EL PAÍS Brasil*, https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/09/29/economia/1506721812_344807.html [accessed on 15/03/21]

⁴⁷⁶ Barrucho, “50 anos do AI-5: Os números por trás do ‘milagre econômico’ da ditadura no Brasil”.

⁴⁷⁷ Howard P. Lehman and Jennifer L. McCoy, “The Dynamics of the Two-Level Bargaining Game: The 1988 Brazilian Debt Negotiations,” *World Politics* 44, no. 4 (1992), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2010489>.

⁴⁷⁸ Sanz and Mendonça, “O lado obscuro do ‘milagre econômico’ da ditadura: o boom da desigualdade”.

The *milagre econômico*, with its economic growth and achievements, explains why Médici was considered a popular president with a high degree of consent among the population, in spite of his being responsible for the period of greatest repression and political violence in Brazilian history.⁴⁷⁹ This is also important to understand the creation of a positive narrative and memory around the regime. While concealing its practices of violence with political propaganda and censorship, the military seduced the population with discourses about economic progress and social stability, seeking consensus in the public opinion through democratic appearances. As a matter of fact, differently from other countries, the Brazilian military regime tried to maintain a democratic façade and performed strategies of negotiation and compromise in order to gain legitimisation. Consequently, the Brazilian society did not develop a traumatic memory of the military rule, which allowed the creation of alternative narrations of that period.⁴⁸⁰

This re-interpretation of the dictatorship and its actions by nostalgic supporters, including Bolsonaro, was hindered by the creation of the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* in 2011. In its investigations, the CNV revealed the truth about the crimes against humanity operated by the regime, therefore undermining those positive visions and publicly exposing the actions of the relatives of the military at the top of the hierarchy at the time.⁴⁸¹ As a consequence, the military tried to provide an alternative memory which could contradict the findings of the CNV and justify their actions, and this apologetic vision was based on anti-communism. According to this version, the 1964 *golpe* was considered as a counter-revolution against the attempt of the Left to install a socialist regime, associating Goulart's reforms to communism. Also, the military regime did not constitute a dictatorship, yet it was a necessary implementation to fight the communist threat which would have ruined the country.⁴⁸²

Following this reasoning, Bolsonaro was one of the main opponents to the creation of the CNV and often criticised its final report, presented in 2014. When still a Deputy, Bolsonaro affirmed that the Commission would be unilateral in its work since it would

⁴⁷⁹ Lília Moritz Schwarcz and Heloisa Murgel Starling, *Brasil: Uma Biografia* (Companhia das Letras, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.4439>.

⁴⁸⁰ Giovane Matheus Camargo, Pedro Rodolfo Bode de Moraes, and Pablo Ornelas Rosa, "A (Des) Construção Da Memória Sobre a Ditadura Pós-1964 Pelo Governo de Jair Bolsonaro," *Cantareira* 33 (2020): 81-82.

⁴⁸¹ Boito Jr., "O Brasil de Bolsonaro", 12.

⁴⁸² Nóbrega De Jesus and Gandra, "O Negacionismo Renovado e o Ofício Do Historiador.", 7.

not investigate the crimes committed by the Left during the regime, especially in relation to the Araguaia Guerrilla. In his opinion, the CNV was an attempt at re-writing history to manipulate the truth, which saw the leftists as terrorists and criminals, while the military were heroes and victims of the Commission's investigations.⁴⁸³ An example of this kind of reasoning is Bolsonaro's declaration about the AI-5, which marked the beginning of the *Anos de Chumbo*, the most repressive period of the Brazilian history. More specifically, in Bolsonaro's words:

I praise the military personnel who, in 1968, enforced the AI-5 to contain the terror in our Country, act also supported by the media, by the Federal Supreme Court [...] But I praise the AI-5 because, for the second time, it put a brake on the leftists taking up arms, kidnapping, torturing, killing and practicing terrorism in our Country.⁴⁸⁴

Therefore, in his declarations about the regime, Bolsonaro conveyed a discourse of historical revisionism and presented an alternative version of both history and truth based on anti-communism, where facts and events were manipulated to justify his glorification of the military dictatorship.

In the 2018 electoral context, this re-interpretation of the dictatorship was also connected to the anti-petist sentiment, which had grown among the public opinion, in particular after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Bolsonaro's revisionism identified this alternative positive vision and the anti-communism as pillars of the *anti-petismo*, by stressing specific elements which had fostered the resentment against the Workers' Party. An example is given by Bolsonaro's interview on the programme *Roda Viva* on 30 July 2018, where the PSL candidate repeatedly praised the military regime, affirming that there was no coup in 1964. In particular, during the interview Bolsonaro made reference to the assumption according to which during that period corruption did not exist since no military illicitly enriched.⁴⁸⁵ Besides being a false claim, in mentioning it the candidate created a comparison with the Workers' Party, which instead was identified as source of

⁴⁸³ Pablo Almada, "Jair Bolsonaro e a Comissao Nacional Da Verdade," in *44th Annual Meeting of the ANPOCS*, 2021, 12.

⁴⁸⁴ Bolsonaro during the plenary session at the Chamber of Deputies, on the 11th of December 2008, available at:

<https://www.camara.leg.br/internet/SitaqWeb/TextoHTML.asp?etapa=5&nuSessao=316.2.53.O&nuQuarto=21&nuOrador=2&nuInsercao=0&dtHorarioQuarto=09:42&sgFaseSessao=BC&Data=11/12/2008&txApelido=JAIR%20BOLSONARO,%20PP-RJ> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁸⁵ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Roda Viva* on 30/07/18, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDL59dkeTi0&t=464s> [accessed on 20/04/21]

corruption in the country. Thus, Bolsonaro's revisionism also contributed to antagonising the PT governments.

The re-reading of the dictatorship as a pillar of the *anti-petismo* became more relevant especially after Dilma's impeachment in 2016. On that occasion, Bolsonaro voted in favour of the process basing his speech on anti-communism and on the praising of the Armed Forces, and he associated the alleged threat present in 1964 to the threat which the PT represented, implying that both would implant communism in the country.⁴⁸⁶ This creation of a new anti-communist sentiment was also shared by part of the Brazilian society, who was frustrated by the ongoing national situation and identified the 13 years of PT government as the cause of the country's problems. In this context, discourses claiming the need for a military intervention, which previously would have been dismissed, started to gain popularity among the public opinion. At the same time, the idea that the PT constituted a communist threat, also making references to Dilma's past as a militant during the regime, became more accepted, leading to an increase in number of those who believed that a military intervention could solve the situation, as had happened in 1964.⁴⁸⁷ According to this view, life during the regime was safer and more organised, and the "good citizen" was protected by the State. Thus, the military would be more prepared to rule the country and their return could resolve the country's problems, such as corruption and threats to traditional values, which instead allegedly had characterised the leftist governments.⁴⁸⁸ In this perspective, the military's ideals of morality and security were embodied by Bolsonaro, who defended conservative ideas and was favourable to gun possession, therefore being the only candidate who could guarantee order to the country.⁴⁸⁹

It is important to highlight that this situation, where a positive interpretation of dictatorship can be accepted by the public opinion, is a consequence of the *Lei da Anistia*. In privileging a conciliatory and pacifying approach, it was never possible for the

⁴⁸⁶ Bolsonaro during the voting for Dilma Rouseff's impeachment process at the Chamber of Deputies (17/04/2016), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvN7nYxbH-o> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁸⁷ "Protestos em ao menos 17 estados pedem de impeachment a intervenção militar", *Folha de São Paulo*, (15/03/2015), <https://m.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2015/03/1603185-protestos-em-17-estados-pedem-de-impeachment-a-intervencao-militar.shtml> [accessed on 20/04/21]

⁴⁸⁸ Solano, "Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita.", 24.

⁴⁸⁹ Luiz Signates, "Nostalgia e Demonização: o senso comum do apoio ao intervencionismo militar no Brasil", *Novos Olhares* 8, no. 1 (July 4, 2019): 27, <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-7714.no.2019.153583>.

Brazilian society to have a real confrontation with the dictatorial past, which also allowed the military to provide a revisionist version of facts. This also explains why the military, and Bolsonaro in particular, have always defended the existence of this law and feared it would be abrogated with the CNV.⁴⁹⁰

During the electoral period, many candidates and political opponents of different parties highlighted the connection between Bolsonaro and the dictatorship, criticising the PSL candidate nostalgic vision of the period. Nonetheless, Bolsonaro's authoritarian narrative and glorification of the military was actually effective, as testified by the increase in the number of his followers on social media. As a matter of fact, these virtual communication networks worked as channels to convey Bolsonaro's position about the military regime and played a role in spreading the revisionist interpretation about the period.⁴⁹¹ Furthermore, the internet facilitated the dissemination of "[...] 'unsubstantiated allegations' which eventually become 'self-evident facts' upon being widely circulated online"⁴⁹², thus fostering the spread and acceptance of conspiracy theories about a new communist threat. The circulation of these alarmist contents revealed the presence of a new kind of anti-communism. According to large sectors of society, the PT represented the establishment of socialism in Brazil and military intervention, embodied in the figure of Bolsonaro, was seen as the solution to national salvation against communism.⁴⁹³

As mentioned above, false claims about the dictatorship period included various issues, from the presence of a communist threat to justify the Armed Forces intervention to the boasting of both the economic miracle and the lack of corruption and urban violence. These allegations constitute a manipulation of facts aimed at providing an apologetic and glorifying re-interpretation of the military regime. However, in spite of their questionable nature, these discourses have been more effective when presented as a

⁴⁹⁰ Ariel Chexes Batista, "UMA IMERSÃO NO PASSADO-PRESENTE: O REVISIONISMO BOLSONARISTA SOBRE A DITADURA (2011-2019)" (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, 2020), 59-62.

⁴⁹¹ Danillo da Conceição Pereira Silva, "EMBATES SEMIÓTICO-DISCURSIVOS EM REDES DIGITAIS BOLSONARISTAS: POPULISMO, NEGACIONISMO E DITADURA," *Trabalhos Em Linguística Aplicada* 59, no. 2 (August 2020): 1172, <https://doi.org/10.1590/010318137409916202006241>.

⁴⁹² Cesarino, "HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE.", 408.

⁴⁹³ Chexes Batista, "UMA IMERSÃO NO PASSADO-PRESENTE: O REVISIONISMO BOLSONARISTA SOBRE A DITADURA (2011-2019)".

way to oppose the PT governments and to foster the *anti-petismo*. Somehow, a parallelism can be drawn between the past and the 2018 electoral situation, based on the same kind of polarisation within society. Indeed, the opposition between the military dictatorship and communism can be associated to the one between Bolsonaro and the PT, with anti-communism and *anti-petismo* seen as equivalent. Thus, in both cases, there has been an attempt at framing facts to provide a manipulated version of reality and truth, fostering the circulation of misinformation and historical revisionism.

3.3 Bolsonaro between Populism and Fascism

What we have so far analysed of Bolsonaro's declarations, both publicly and online, has reinforced the idea that we are living in a "post-truth age", where facts are easily replaced by personal beliefs. Throughout the 2018 electoral campaign, his discourses presented a clear opposition to the establishment and traditional institutions, as well as an identification of the PT as a threat responsible for ruining the nation and destroying its values. Differently, Bolsonaro presented himself as the solution to a situation where people had lost their trust in politics and their feeling of security. In talking about both the present and the past, Bolsonaro often proposed a simplified and framed vision of reality, based on the polarisation of society, which allowed him to give straightforward answers to the complex problems the country was facing. In particular, Bolsonaro forged public opinion by conveying a distorted version of truth and lies to legitimise his conservative and extremist ideas. After the examination of the characteristics of his figure and electoral discourses, it can be said that Bolsonaro belongs to the category of the new right-wing populists, who present various far-right elements and whose popularity among the public opinion is on the rise.

As analysed in the first chapter, populism is an extremely heterogeneous phenomenon and its core concepts are highly flexible, which explains the presence of different kinds of populism. In particular, Bolsonaro differs from other cases in Latin America, which generally and historically present an inclusionary dimension

of populism.⁴⁹⁴ On the contrary, Bolsonaro provides an exclusionary vision of society, which is divided both vertically, between “the people” and the elite, and horizontally, between in- and out-groups. Specifically, his concept of “the people”, identified as “good citizens”, is less based on ethnic terms and more on moral, traditional and religious values, while “the anti-people” are all those who aim at threatening these values with progressive ideas.⁴⁹⁵ On this regard, during the electoral period, in a demonstration in São Paulo, Bolsonaro claimed that “Brazil is ours, ‘good citizens’, workers, conservatives, Christians, who preserve family values and don’t want gender ideology in classrooms, those who want Brazil doing business with the entire world, without an ideological bias.”⁴⁹⁶ However, on some occasions Bolsonaro also stated that Brazil was united, without any racial, class, gender or geographic division, presenting “Brazilian people” as a homogenous group, whose integrity was threatened by the Left and its ideology.⁴⁹⁷

In spite of this alleged societal unity and “imaginary community”, Bolsonaro’s conception of “the people” is actually based on an exclusionary vision, since he often criticised minorities’ rights:

He claims that those groups are unduly privileged by the State. Moreover, he advocates against racial quotas in public universities, speaks against the law that criminalizes homophobia, and denies the necessity of State intervention to reduce salary disparity between men and women.⁴⁹⁸

In creating his electoral basis, Bolsonaro targeted those people who felt excluded by social and equality policies (i.e. *Bolsa Família*) and who believed that the State was

⁴⁹⁴ Mudde and Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.”, 167

⁴⁹⁵ Eduardo Ryo Tamaki and Mario Fuks, “POPULISM IN BRAZIL’S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BOLSONARO’S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES,” *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política* 109 (April 2020): 11-12, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-103127/109>.

⁴⁹⁶ Bolsonaro during a demonstration in Avenida Paulista on the 30 September 2018, available at: “Jair Bolsonaro grava vídeo que é exibido na av. Paulista, 30/SET/2018”, YouTube video, 3:58, posted by “EDUARDO BOLSONARO”, (30/09/18), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUJszRXzNA0> [accessed on 22/04/2021]

⁴⁹⁷ Marta Nogueira and Alexandra Alper, “Bolsonaro ataca PT e PSDB ao ser aclamado candidato; poderia vender parte da Petrobras”, *Reuters*, (22/07/2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/politica-bolsonaro-aclamado-idBRKBN1KC0VE-OBRBS> [accessed on 22/04/2021]

⁴⁹⁸ Juliana Chueri, “People against the Elite? Jair Bolsonaro’s Presidential Campaign,” *42º Encontro Anual ANPOCS. GT17: Mídias, Política e Eleições*, 2018, 19 <http://anpocs.com/index.php/encontros/papers/42-encontro-anual-da-anpocs/gt-31/gt17-22>.

actually privileging minorities at their expenses, depicting themselves as the ones actually oppressed.⁴⁹⁹ As a matter of fact, many among Bolsonaro's supporters felt abandoned and betrayed by the State, and this resentment was exploited by Bolsonaro, who was presented as the only candidate who could change the situation and act in the interests of the "good citizens".⁵⁰⁰

The general disenchantment with politics, resulting from the corruption scandals and economic crisis the country was facing, also fostered Bolsonaro's candidacy. In particular, his electoral declarations were focused more on an anti-establishment narrative, based on the attack of political elites and traditional democratic institutions, rather than on people-centrism. According to an analysis on Bolsonaro's tweets posted between 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018, 28% of the valid tweets referred to criticism to the political elites, constituting the bulk of his declarations on Twitter.⁵⁰¹ Bolsonaro's criticism was mainly addressed to the opposition, namely the Left and the PT, which were identified as his enemies. "He frames the PT government as corrupt, inefficient, and responsible for executing a plan to spread its ideology while in power. In addition, Bolsonaro holds PT accountable for the undermining of the traditional family and its values."⁵⁰² Thus, not only was the Workers' Party accused of being corrupt itself, but it was also guilty of performing an ideological corruption, by contaminating children in schools. On this regard, Bolsonaro supported the project "School without Party", a program to prevent the indoctrination in classrooms by leftist teachers, on the basis of the so-called "cultural Marxism", allegedly aimed at destroying moral values.⁵⁰³ However, Bolsonaro's attacks were not addressed exclusively to the Left, but to the political elite in general, accused of being self-interested. During an interview, Bolsonaro claimed that the PT and the PSDB were actually similar in their ideology, both being responsible for the country's difficulties, and that it was he who represented the

⁴⁹⁹ Cesarino, "Como Vencer Uma Eleição Sem Sair de Casa: A Ascensão Do Populismo Digital No Brasil.", 109.

⁵⁰⁰ Solano, "Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita."

⁵⁰¹ Chueri, "People against the Elite? Jair Bolsonaro's Presidential Campaign.", 14.

⁵⁰² Tamaki and Fuks, "POPULISM IN BRAZIL'S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BOLSONARO'S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES.", 12.

⁵⁰³ Solano, "Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita.", 25.

only real opposition to the traditional political polarisation.⁵⁰⁴ Therefore, in a context of general dissatisfaction, this narrative had a strong penetration among the public opinion and Bolsonaro arose as an outsider to the traditional political system, as the protagonist of rupture and change, and as the “myth” who could save the country.⁵⁰⁵

In accordance with the characteristics of populism, Bolsonaro’s discourses also contained a Manichean vision of society, with a clear division between “the good” and “the evil”. This distinction was based on moral terms between those who want to preserve and defend traditional values and those who oppose and threaten them. In Bolsonaro’s declarations, this moral division was often expressed by referring to antithetical sides and paths, one leading to prosperity and morality, while the other to corruption and communism. This opposition between two incompatible blocs further fostered the already-existing polarisation within society.⁵⁰⁶ In addition, similarly to other right-wing populists, Bolsonaro fuelled the societal antagonism towards minorities groups, such as homosexuals, indigenous people, coloured people, feminists, as well as towards the elite, identified with the PT. This antagonism was also based on blame attribution: while minorities groups were accused of being unjustly privileged by the State, the PT was held responsible for the national problems and for threatening the Brazilian democracy with its leftist ideology⁵⁰⁷. More specifically,

In this scenario, the PSL candidate strategically vocalizes hate speech against the Workers’ Party (PT) and uses them as a scapegoat for Brazilian political and economic crises in order to mobilize disenchanted voters. In a broader sense, the candidate is opposed to what he calls left-wing ideologies. This includes traditional issues of the left-wing parties and State intervention and distributive policies, but also libertarian issues such as LGBT rights, abortion, and minority rights, agendas often associated with left-wing parties.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Rádio Guaíba* on 23 October 2018, available at: “Entrevista Rádio Guaíba – RS (23/10/2018) - temas da semana” posted by “Jair Bolsonaro”, (23/10/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLuNmAkrkRY> [accessed on 22/04/2021]

⁵⁰⁵ Cesarino, “Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018.”, 11.

⁵⁰⁶ Tamaki and Fuks, “POPULISM IN BRAZIL’S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BOLSONARO’S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES.”, 12-13.

⁵⁰⁷ Cesarino, “Identidade e Representação No Bolsonarismo: Corpo Digital Do Rei, Bivalência Conservadorismo-Neoliberalismo e Pessoa Fractal.”, 545-6.

⁵⁰⁸ Chueri, “People against the Elite? Jair Bolsonaro’s Presidential Campaign.”, 17.

This attribution of blame to the PT, together with the moral antagonism, contributed to the creation of a sense of threat, which benefitted and legitimised Bolsonaro's candidacy and discourses, presenting him as the "myth" who could defend the costumes and values of traditional family, religion and morality. As previously analysed, the media played a fundamental role in the creation of this sense of threat and antagonism. On the one hand, with their coverage, traditional media and the press contributed to creating a perception of guilt around the PT and to normalising Bolsonaro's extremism during his electoral campaign.⁵⁰⁹ On the other hand, the use of social media allowed the PSL candidate to bypass the media gatekeepers and spread his framed and polarised vision of reality, according to which the PT constituted a source of corruption and a threat to the good of the country. Besides, in privileging social media, Bolsonaro was able to reach a greater number of followers also thanks to the creation of echo-chambers and WhatsApp groups, where an impressive number of fake news and conspiracy theories were circulating.⁵¹⁰ This phenomenon favoured the manipulation of information during the 2018 electoral period, providing a further polarisation of society, based on moral and ideological terms.

Bolsonaro's right-wing populism also presents some differences when compared to cases in Western Europe or in the United States, where, for example, the issue of immigration is considered a key element in the creation of antagonism. Differently from other parts of the world where immigration is a crucial matter, in Brazil the creation of a sense of threat and the need for a scapegoat s related more to the Left than to immigrants.⁵¹¹ Nonetheless, on some occasions, Bolsonaro criticised Venezuelan asylum seekers, increasingly present in Brazil, claiming that immigration laws should be tightened and Brazilians' interests should be met before others'.⁵¹² At the same time, Bolsonaro proposed a division between "superior and qualified"

⁵⁰⁹ Davis and Straubhaar, "Producing Antipetismo: Media Activism and the Rise of the Radical, Nationalist Right in Contemporary Brazil.", 88.

⁵¹⁰ Cesarino, "HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AFFORDS POPULIST POLITICS: REMARKS ON LIMINALITY BASED ON THE BRAZILIAN CASE."

⁵¹¹ Micheal Löwy, "Neofascismo: um fenômeno planetário – o caso Bolsonaro", *A Terra é Redonda*, (24/10/2019), <https://aterraeredonda.com.br/neofascismo-um-fenomeno-planetario-o-caso-bolsonaro/> [accessed on 23/04/2021]

⁵¹² Chueri, "People against the Elite? Jair Bolsonaro's Presidential Campaign.", 19.

immigrants (i.e. Americans and Europeans) and “inferior and poor” ones, who could negatively affect the country, fostering the aversion only towards a specific kind of immigrants.⁵¹³ This category was composed by Senegalese, Iranian, Bolivian, Syrian and Haitian immigrants, defined by Bolsonaro as “the scum of Earth” and as “another problem to the country”.⁵¹⁴

Still, differently from right-wing populism in Western Europe or in the US, xenophobia and nativism were not central elements in Bolsonaro’s discourses, where the scapegoat for the country’s problems was identified in the PT. In Brazil, this right-wing populism was more focused on urban violence, the progress of the feminist and LGBTQ+ rights, *anti-petismo* and corruption, which were topics capable of providing him with popular support.⁵¹⁵ When talking about these issues, authoritarianism emerged as a key element in Bolsonaro’s declarations, which proposed punitive solutions to fight crime and “cultural Marxism”. As a matter of fact, during the electoral campaign, Bolsonaro often appealed to law and order to deal with these issues and, through his authoritarianism, he offered simplified answers to the sense of fear and threat present among society.

This punitive approach was particularly relevant as regards the issue of crime and security, which still constitutes a problematic situation in Brazil.⁵¹⁶ According to Bolsonaro, the issue of urban violence needed to be dealt with through authoritarian policies, such as the reduction of the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the increase of prison sentences in the Penal Code, the lowering in the restrictions for possession of firearms and more power and freedom to Police Forces.⁵¹⁷ During an interview with *TV Globo*, Bolsonaro stated that “a criminal is not a human being” and that “if a police officer kills ten, fifteen, or twenty criminals with ten or thirty

⁵¹³ Edson Dalmonte and Priscilla Dibai, “A Direita Radical ‘Bolsonarista’: Da Aporofobia à Defesa Da Memória de Regimes de Exceção,” *IdeAs*, no. 14 (October 1, 2019): 7-8, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.6895>.

⁵¹⁴ Bolsonaro during an interview to the *Jornal Opção* in September 2015, available at: <https://www.jornalopcao.com.br/ultimas-noticias/bolsonaro-ve-imigrantes-como-ameaca-e-chama-refugiados-de-a-escoria-do-mundo-46043/> [accessed on 24/04/21]

⁵¹⁵ Dalmonte and Dibai, “A Direita Radical ‘Bolsonarista’: Da Aporofobia à Defesa Da Memória de Regimes de Exceção.”, 15.

⁵¹⁶ Chagas-Bastos, “Political Realignment in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the Right Turn.”, 95.

⁵¹⁷ Amanda Rossi and Leandro Machado, “Eleições 2018: As propostas de Bolsonaro e Haddad para a segurança”, *BBC News Brasil*, (17/10/2018), <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-45884900> [accessed on 24/04/2021]

bullets each, he needs to get a medal and not be prosecuted.”⁵¹⁸ This stricter and authoritarian approach, exemplified by the belief that “a good criminal is a dead criminal”, exploited the general sense of threat, leading to an increasing support to the PSL candidate among those who were against the victimisation of criminals and believed that the State did not protect “good citizens”.⁵¹⁹

Another defining element of Bolsonaro’s electoral campaign was nationalism, since the nation often emerged as its core element. This was exemplified by the use of national symbols (i.e. flag, hymn, colours, football T-Shirt) to identify the candidate and his supporters.⁵²⁰ In his discourses, the “real” Brazilian people were defined in a conservative way as those who defended the traditional family, and this group needed to be protected. Bolsonaro himself was presented as “the saviour of Brazil, the protector of the nation and the state against the enemy that has been in power for ten years.”⁵²¹ In particular, nationalism was embedded in Bolsonaro’s campaign slogan “Brazil above everything, God above all”. However, this patriotic slogan, actually inspired by the Nazi one “*Deutschland über alles*”, suggested that Bolsonaro’s nationalism presented a fascist matrix. Indeed, it was based on a division between those considered as the real nation and those who needed to be fought and excluded for allegedly threatening its integrity. The latter were identified as the Left and minorities (i.e. social movements, indigenous and black people, the LGBT community), accused of wanting to divide and contaminate the nation.⁵²²

This rhetoric of *bolsonarismo* can be said to be in line with contemporary right-wing populism since both phenomena are characterised by a further tendency towards the extreme right. In particular, as Finchelstein affirms, it is crucial to highlight that among the populist leaders Bolsonaro is the one closest to fascism in history.⁵²³ This important

⁵¹⁸ Bolsonaro during an interview with *Jornal Nacional*, on 28 August 2018, available at: “Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) é entrevistado no Jornal Nacional”, *Globoplay*, (29/08/18), <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/6980200/> [accessed on 24/04/2021]

⁵¹⁹ Solano, “Crise Da Democracia e Extremismos de Direita.”, 12-14.

⁵²⁰ Cesarino, “Populismo Digital: Roteiro Inicial Para Um Conceito, a Partir de Um Estudo de Caso Da Campanha Eleitoral de 2018.”, 17-19.

⁵²¹ Tamaki and Fuks, “POPULISM IN BRAZIL’S 2018 GENERAL ELECTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BOLSONARO’S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES.”, 16.

⁵²² Armando Boito Jr., “O nacionalismo de Bolsonaro”, *A Terra é Redonda*, (11/09/2020), <https://aterraeredonda.com.br/o-nacionalismo-de-bolsonaro/> [accessed on 24/04/2021]

⁵²³ Rosana Pinheiro-Machado, “Entrevista: ‘Bolsonaro é o populista que mais se aproximou do fascismo no história’, diz Federico Finchelstein”, *The Intercept Brasil*, (07/07/2020),

aspect was highly visible during the 2018 electoral period since “[...] Bolsonaro blurred the lines between populism and fascism during his campaign”, by resuming some of the defining elements of the extreme right ideology.⁵²⁴

Bolsonaro’s closeness to fascism occurs in some recurring issues in his electoral discourses. Instead of presenting an undefined enemy as with populism, his declarations openly discriminated specific targets, with beliefs other than him, such as political, racial and religious minorities.⁵²⁵ According to the philosopher Jason Stanley, during an interview with *Folha de São Paulo*,

He calls them criminals. It's always like that. In Germany, Jews were lazy and criminals. In the US, racists say that blacks are lazy and criminals. Bolsonaro says that Brazilian blacks are lazy. Power and strength go together within a group, like white people. They are dominant, so they are the winners. All the rest is worthless. This is fascism.⁵²⁶

Another constant element in Bolsonaro’s electoral speeches and declarations was the rhetoric and cult of violence, together with its legitimisation. This glorification of violence, defined as a source of regeneration to the country, is something that belongs to the fascist culture.⁵²⁷ In 2017, Brazil had seen an increase of 21,4% in the number of people killed by the police,⁵²⁸ while, during the 2018 electoral period, persecutions and aggressions by Bolsonaro’s supporters against politicians, activists and leftist intellectuals occurred.⁵²⁹ Instead of condemning this use of violence, Bolsonaro made it a core concept of his ideology, as testified by the gesture of pointing a gun used as a symbol of his campaign. In particular, this encouragement of violence was often addressed to the

<https://theintercept.com/2020/07/07/bolsonaro-populista-fascismo-entrevista-federico-finchelstein/>
[accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵²⁴ Federico Finchelstein during an interview with *CBC Radio*, on 02 November 2018, available at: “How right-wing populism is returning to its fascist roots”, *CBC*, (02/11/2018), <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/sunday/the-sunday-edition-november-4-2018-1.4888960/how-right-wing-populism-is-returning-to-its-fascist-roots-1.4888963> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵²⁵ Weizenmann, “Tropical Trump?”, 13.

⁵²⁶ Danielle Brant, “Bolsonaro uses same fascist tactics as Trump, says Yale Professor”, *Folha de São Paulo*, (04/10/2018), <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/internacional/en/world/2018/10/bolsonaro-uses-same-fascist-tactics-as-trump-says-yale-professor.shtml> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵²⁷ Pinheiro-Machado, “Entrevista: ‘Bolsonaro é o populista que mais se aproximou do fascismo no história’, diz Federico Finchelstein”, <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/07/bolsonaro-populista-fascismo-entrevista-federico-finchelstein/>

⁵²⁸ Daniel Salgado, “Atlas da violência 2018: Brasil tem taxa de homicídios 30 vezes maior do que Europa”, *O Globo*, (05/06/2018), <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/atlas-da-violencia-2018-brasil-tem-taxa-de-homicidio-30-vezes-maior-do-que-europa-22747176> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵²⁹ Boito Jr., “O Brasil de Bolsonaro.”, 8-9.

political opposition, promoting the elimination, also physical, of the “enemy”. This enemy, identified in the Left, was often threatened of being jailed, exiled or even killed.⁵³⁰ As a matter of fact, on more than one occasion Bolsonaro declared that the PT and its supports, often labelled as criminals, needed to be punished or destroyed. Some days before the election’s second round, during a demonstration in his support, Bolsonaro stated that he would operate a “wide clean-up” and that the “red”, referring to PT’s colours, would have to leave the country or go to prison if they did not accept his “new rules”.⁵³¹ On another occasion, Bolsonaro, holding the camera tripod as a machine gun, talked about shooting PT supporters and sending them to Venezuela.⁵³² These sort of declarations exemplified the resumption of the fascist glorification of political violence and elimination of the opposition.

An additional element showing the closeness between fascism and *bolsonarismo* regards the notion of truth and lies. In fascism as well as in Bolsonaro’s discourses, truth was manipulated, and an alternative reality was produced as a source of ideological legitimisation. This legitimisation partly came from a distortion of the past and the replacement of history with myth, which, in Bolsonaro’s case, coincided with his glorification of the military dictatorship.⁵³³ According to Stanley,

History in a liberal democracy must be faithful to the norm of truth, yielding an accurate vision of the past, rather than a history provided for political reasons. Fascist politics, by contrast, characteristically contains within it a demand to mythologize the past, creating a version of national heritage that is a weapon for political gain.⁵³⁴

The same occurred with Bolsonaro’s alternative version of history, used as propaganda, where he claimed that the military regime had successfully managed to defeat the threat,

⁵³⁰ Finchelstein during an interview with *CBC Radio*, on 02 November 2018, available at: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/sunday/the-sunday-edition-november-4-2018-1.4888960/how-right-wing-populism-is-returning-to-its-fascist-roots-1.4888963>

⁵³¹ Bolsonaro during a demonstration in Avenida São Paulo, on 21 October 2018, available at: “Jair Bolsonaro fala por telephone com os manifestantes da Av. Paulista”, YouTube video, 10:50, posted by “Poder 360” (22/10/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vxX3nQccTU> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵³² Bolsonaro during a rally in Rio Branco (Acre), on 01 September 2018, available at: “No Acre, Bolsonaro fala em ‘fuzilar a petralhada’ e enviá-los à Venezuela- 1º.set.2018”, YouTube video, 0:37, posted by “Poder360”, (03/09/2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0eMLhCcbyQ> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵³³ Federico Finchelstein, “Why far-right populists are at war with history”, *The Washington Post*, (23/04/2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/04/23/why-far-right-populists-are-war-with-history/> [accessed on 30/04/2021]

⁵³⁴ Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*, 1st ed., (New York: Random House, 2018). e-Pub book, 53

allegedly still present at the time, represented by the Left (and communism) and by “cultural Marxism”, both aiming at destroying the nation’s traditional values.⁵³⁵ Furthermore, in fascism, leaders were represented as living myths and as the incarnation of truth.⁵³⁶ Likewise, Bolsonaro presented himself as the embodiment of truth, while his supporters

literally call him “myth” and consider him a hero of epic proportions, a Christian warrior of patriotism and family values who needs to be trusted without question. After winning the election in 2018, Bolsonaro told Brazilians, “We need to get used to living with the truth. There is no other way. Thanks to God, this truth was understood by the Brazilian people.” He fully identified with this transcendental truth because he was going to fulfil “God’s mission.”⁵³⁷

Consequently, Bolsonaro took on the particular characteristic of the fascist leader of presenting messianic and charismatic features. As happened with fascism, Bolsonaro’s campaign further opened the space for religion into politics since, with his discourses of “salvation”, politics became a question of faith rather than reason.⁵³⁸ Like in fascism, also in *bolsonarismo* a political religion emerged, where the leader incarnated an eternal and revealed truth, while those who opposed this vision were identified as the enemies, as well as the embodiment of falsehood. However, this also contributed to the existing polarisation of society since it created an antagonism between those who believed in the leader as source of truth and those who were considered as traitors.⁵³⁹

In conclusion, the analysis of the core elements of Bolsonaro’s ideology and discourses in his 2018 electoral campaign, suggests that features of both right-wing populism and fascism were present. Furthermore, in Finchelstein’s definition, Bolsonaro can be considered a “wannabe fascist”⁵⁴⁰, because he would have liked to be a fascist and often behaved and even lied like one, yet, differently from fascism, his violent rhetoric was not

⁵³⁵ Camargo, Bode de Moraes, and Rosa, “A (Des) Construção Da Memória Sobre a Ditadura Pós-1964 Pelo Governo de Jair Bolsonaro.”, 85.

⁵³⁶ Federico Finchelstein, “Truth, Mythology and the Fascist Unconscious,” *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (June 2016): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12229>.

⁵³⁷ Finchelstein, *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*, 102.

⁵³⁸ Pinheiro-Machado, “Entrevista: ‘Bolsonaro é o populista que mais se aproximou do fascismo no história’, diz Federico Finchelstein”, <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/07/bolsonaro-populista-fascismo-entrevista-federico-finchelstein/>

⁵³⁹ Federico Finchelstein, “O Líder Fascista Como Encarnação Da Verdade,” *Serrote*, 2020, 43.

⁵⁴⁰ Pinheiro-Machado, “Entrevista: ‘Bolsonaro é o populista que mais se aproximou do fascismo no história’, diz Federico Finchelstein”, <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/07/bolsonaro-populista-fascismo-entrevista-federico-finchelstein/>

accompanied by violent practice. Nonetheless, by openly defending the use of violence, discrimination and elimination of the opposition, Bolsonaro has legitimised a fascist thinking among his supporters, who felt justified in practicing violent acts and physical attacks on progressive activists and politicians, sometimes with lethal consequences.⁵⁴¹ Bolsonaro's distortion of reality has resulted in a drastic polarisation of society and in an exacerbation of antagonism based on moral terms. For his glorification of violence, defence of the military regime and manipulation of truth, it can be argued that, among the contemporary radical right leaders, Bolsonaro has been the one whose characteristics resemble fascism the most.

⁵⁴¹ Patricia Rangel and Eneida Vinhaes Dultra, "Elections in Times of Neo-Coupism and Populism: A Short Essay on Brazil's Right-Wing Presidential Candidates' Plans for Governance and Their Proposals for Gender and Afro-Brazilians," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2019): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0791603519827224>.

Conclusions

The election of Jair Bolsonaro as President of Brazil in October 2018 marked a new turn towards the extreme right in the country's history. With a controversial electoral campaign, mainly conducted on social media and characterised by the defence of both violence and the military dictatorship, as well as by a strong societal polarisation and antagonism, the result of the elections put an end to the principles established after 1985, with the *Nova República*. It also makes us wonder how it was possible for a country with such a recent dictatorial past to elect a candidate previously belonging to the military and so clearly in favour of military intervention and even torture.

In an attempt to understand such a result, this thesis has meant to examine the information manipulation and the polarisation occurred during Bolsonaro's electoral campaign, by considering the influence of both the national situation and social media. It has also tried to show how the main elements of the 2018 campaign were part of a wider framework, specifically as regards the emergence of right-wing populism. Finally, the aim of this work has been to demonstrate that, for his defining characteristics, Bolsonaro, among the right-wing populist, is the one who seems to be the closest to fascism.

Bolsonaro's electoral campaign presented elements typical of right-wing populism in its manipulation of information and polarisation of society. This phenomenon proposes an exclusionary vision of society, where "the other" is pinpointed as a threat to the "real" people's identity and values. Bolsonaro adapted this typical populist antagonism of "us versus them" to his personal beliefs. This helped him provide a distorted and framed vision of reality where political antagonists, namely the Workers' Party (PT), and minorities were represented as a threat to the traditional values of family, gender and religion. Right-wing populists take advantage from a situation of insecurity, presenting themselves as a solution to the threat to the "real" people's identity and values. Similarly, Bolsonaro depicted himself as the only one who could save the country from moral and ideological corruption, allegedly represented by the PT and its leader, Lula. The sensation of insecurity, from which Bolsonaro benefitted, was achieved by fostering both the people's dissatisfaction with the establishment and the resentment against the "the other", in this case the anti-petist resentment. Indeed, the crusade against the PT was a key element in Bolsonaro's campaign. His *anti-petismo*, based on morality and anti-

corruption discourses, proved to be extremely effective among the population, since this negative image of the Workers' Party as the centre of corruption was particularly rooted in the public opinion, especially after the *Lava Jato* operation. However, the analysis of Brazil's contemporary history has shown that the accusations of corruption made to the PT could also be attributed to the majority of Brazilian governments, and therefore it has become clear that these allegations, identifying the Workers' Party as the cause of corruption, were actually a distortion of facts.

Despite being based on a manipulation of reality, the discrediting of the PT constituted a central element in Bolsonaro's campaign and, to validate his *anti-petismo*, a massive amount of fake news was spread. Disseminating false information as truth, picking facts and reporting them in a framed and distorted way is a trend typically employed by right-wing populists, which also Bolsonaro adopted. This work has examined the nature of this fake content and it has emerged that people's fears and their sense of threat were fostered by alleging that traditional and moral values would be at risk with a victory of the PT. From the analysis of the use of social media and online platforms in Bolsonaro's campaign, it has turned out that especially WhatsApp was essential in the circulation of this kind of allegations, since it increased their credibility. Moreover, it allowed Bolsonaro's supporters to spread fake news without any kind of mediation, favouring the distortion of reality. Through the populist techniques of blame attribution, negative stereotypes and through the creation of a scapegoat responsible for the nation's problems, Bolsonaro fostered the resentment against "the other", namely the PT, exacerbating the already-existing antagonism within society. This manipulated framework profited from the Manichean division of "good versus bad", which in Bolsonaro's case regarded the defence of moral and traditional values, at risk of being corrupted by the PT's progressive ideas and "cultural Marxism".

A similar narrative appeared in Bolsonaro's revisionism of the military dictatorship. Right-wing populists often provide an alternative and mythical version of history in order to legitimise their ideology, which increasingly draws from the extreme right. From the analysis of Bolsonaro's electoral campaign, it has emerged that the same historical revisionism was present in his alternative vision of the past. In Brazil's case, this was made easier by the fact that the process of democratic transition from dictatorship to civilian rule had been conducted by the military themselves. We have seen how this

prevented the country from having a confrontation with its past, as testified by the *Lei da Anistia*, granting amnesty both to political opposers to the military regime and to those State agents who had committed crimes against humanity. As a result, it was possible for Bolsonaro to defend and glorify the military and their actions during the regime, and still receive popular support for these claims. In Bolsonaro's re-interpretation, the 1964 military coup was a necessary counterrevolution to prevent the Left from installing a communist dictatorship in the country. The reference to the communist threat has made it possible to create a parallelism between the version spread by the military, before and during their regime, and the one promoted by Bolsonaro against the PT, both being based on a distortion of truth and on a negative depiction of the Left. It is this manipulation of information and re-interpretation of present and historical facts which helped Bolsonaro to justify his conservative and extremist beliefs, as well as his defence of the dictatorship, and still be elected as President of Brazil.

The result of this thesis' reasoning reinforces the awareness that we are living in a post-truth world, characterised by the tendency to distort and deny facts and to present personal beliefs as truth, twisting the basis of what one should trust. In post-truth society, people are drawn by emotions rather than facts in the formation of their opinions, and they are, consequently, more easily influenced by populist frameworks. Thus, the amplification of fears to create a sense of general threat proves to be an effective way to influence opinions, especially when people feel insecure and need to find simple solutions. It has been explained how right-wing populism's manipulation of information and distortion of reality foster this feeling and how these actions actually benefit populist actors, since they are perceived as the real source of truth. Bolsonaro's election makes the Brazilian case part of this phenomenon. In the 2018 electoral context, personal opinions weighed more than facts, and conspiracy theories were employed to fuel the development of a sensation of fear, insecurity and threat. Misinformation and lies were presented as truth, and historical events were re-interpreted to provide a mythical and glorious version of the past. This situation favoured the acceptance of a biased vision of reality, according to which the nation needed a saviour, identified in Bolsonaro as a messianic leader and as the main source of truth, a narrative which was extremely effective in boosting his election.

Finally, this thesis, stimulated by Federico Finchelstein's works, has meant to demonstrate that Bolsonaro, though belonging to the phenomenon of right-wing populism, yet presents more extreme characteristics which place him closer to fascism. In addition to his manipulation of truth and his praising of a regime responsible for human rights violations and hundreds of deaths, Bolsonaro has openly discriminated political opposition and minorities, and has repeatedly defended and encouraged the use of violence. On some occasions, he has even promoted the physical elimination of those he considers to be "the enemy". Claims of this nature, where political violence and discriminations are openly encouraged, have resulted in the legitimisation, among his conservative supporters, of fascist thinking and of violent actions.

The analysis conducted in this thesis has focused on Bolsonaro's electoral campaign and on the factors and events which favoured his victory. Nonetheless, considering the ongoing situation in Brazil, we can say that elements of affinity with fascism are present also in Bolsonaro's presidency. Since his election, social justice and respect of human rights have worsened, while there has been an increase in episodes of violence, racism and discrimination against minorities and indigenous people. In his public declarations, Bolsonaro has simply ignored these problems. On the contrary, on different occasions he attacked the press and journalists, with a consequent reduction in freedom of speech and of press. There have been also cases where the Federal Police persecuted and investigated people who had criticised the President. In addition, during the pandemic emergency of Covid-19 started in 2020, Bolsonaro has continued to defend negationist ideas and to spread misinformation about the virus, resulting in a situation of national crisis and in the death of hundreds of thousands of people. However, an impeachment process has not been approved and is not likely to be, especially after the election of the new President of the Chamber of Deputies, who is supported by Jair Bolsonaro.

Allegations of fiscal pedalling had led to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and had paved the way to Bolsonaro's election in 2018. New presidential elections are now due in 2022. It will be interesting to see if, by then, Bolsonaro's fascist characteristics, his denial of science and bad management of the ongoing pandemic will have had the same weight as those allegations, resulting in another impeachment process, or if this extremist right-wing populist will still be governing, deliberately ignoring his responsibilities and hindering both Brazil and its population, as he has been doing so far.

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