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People against the elite? Jair Bolsonaro's presidential campaign

Juliana Chueri

Universty of Geneva

Abstract

This article aims to identify and characterize the populist rhetoric of Jair Bolsonaro, candidate for the Brazilian presidency in the October 2018 election. Applying the methodology proposed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011), I analyze the candidate's personal tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018. The conclusion is that populism is an important element of Bolsonaro's rhetoric. First, he attacks political elites, accuses them of corruption, and blames them for the economic and political crises. Second, he appeals to the Brazilian people and claims to be the only candidate who will govern in their interest. Nevertheless, the construction of 'us', 'the people' is drawn in an exclusionary manner: he denies the existence of class, race, and gender conflicts; opposes minority rights; and does not present initiatives for social inclusion. Therefore, Bolsonaro detaches from Latin American inclusionary populism and shows similarities to Western European exclusionary populism. This fact is also illustrated by the radical aspect of his rhetoric: law and order are highly salient in his discourse, the second most frequent topic of his tweets. Finally, Bolsonaro embraces the free market economy, but as with other populist politicians, distributive issues have very limited space in his discourse.

Keywords: Jair Bolsonaro, Twitter, populism, radical right-wing populism, Brazil

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 1980, many Western European democracies have witnessed the emergence of populist right-wing parties. Those parties put an end to the stability of Western European party systems and increased polarization and party competition (Kriesi et al., 2006). In addition, they have been relatively successful in recent years, enlarging their electoral pool, winning seats in national parliaments, and participating in governments. Not surprisingly, scholars have addressed this new issue, explaining the social and economic transformation that allowed the electoral success of those parties and characterizing this party family. This phenomenon, is not circumscribed to Western Europe, as East Europe, North America, Russia, and Latin America have also produced populist leaders. Nevertheless, the literature is relatively segmented geographically, and there are very few cross region comparative studies (Rooduijn, 2011; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013).

In the Latin American context, the literature on populism centres on powerful and paternalistic political leaders such as Perón (Argentina), Vargas (Brazil), Chávez (Venezuela), Morales (Bolivia), and Correa (Ecuador). As a result, populism is defined as 'a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of

mostly unorganized followers. This direct, quasi-personal relationship bypasses established intermediary organizations or deinstitutionalizes and subordinates them to the leader's personal will' (Weyland, 2001: 14).

Despite this, it is accurate to characterize one pattern of populist leadership that appeared in the continent that fails to communicate with a broader academic research on contemporary populism in the rest of the world. One alternative to bypassing regional and contextual bias is to follow Sartori's (1970) advice and resort to minimal definitions of populism. Cas Mudde defines it as 'a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be the expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (2004: 543; 2007).

As a 'a thin-centered ideology', populism is a set of ideas with limited scope. As a result, it generally appears combined with other ideologies in parties and politicians' rhetoric. Therefore, populist is *a priori* neither left- nor right- wing, and it varies depending on the political context in which it emerges (Heinisch, 2003). As a result, a very distinct group of leaders and parties are classified under the populist umbrella. Importantly, those parties often have a chameleon character, as they adjust their ideology according to political opportunities (Taggart, 2000).

Using this minimal definition, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) compared contemporary populist leaders in Latin America and Western Europe and concluded that while in Europe populism is 'exclusionary', Latin American populist leaders present an 'inclusionary' ideology. That is to say, Latin American populist leaders support the social inclusion not only of the poor, but also of the culturally excluded, as well as the increase of voiceless people's political participation. Additionally, the social construction 'us vs. them', the very foundation of populist discourse, is usually painted in broader strokes, and 'them' is normally an external threat. Conversely, most populist parties that have been emerging in Western Europe since the 1980s are radical *and* right-wing – i.e. they are nativist (a combination of nationalism and xenophobia) and authoritarian. Therefore, the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the welfare state and politics is inherent to these parties' ideologies – making them exclusionary.

With this background discussion, I turn to the case of Jair Bolsonaro, candidate for the Brazilian presidency in the 2018 election. He is the first candidate in the polls,¹ and his success is anchored in his opposition to traditional political elites, specially Lula and the Workers' Party. This candidate is a former military officer, known for his authoritarian approach, conservative position, and anti-minority agenda. Therefore, there is an indication that Bolsonaro is detached from the pattern of populist leaders in Latin America, and shows similarities with Western European populism; also, he is the first radical populist politician to gain notable support in Brazil.

Despite the attention this candidate has attracted from the media, there is, to my knowledge, no in-depth evaluation of the populist content of his discourse and other features of this ideology. Therefore, this paper addresses this gap in the literature by performing a content analysis of the candidate's tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018. This time frame coincides with the pre-campaign period and the political campaign for the 2018 election. The primary goal of this study is to analyse his discourse to determine whether he can be considered a populist. Additionally, the analysis of Bolsonaro's rhetoric will also allow a more comprehensive classification of his discourse, adding other features to it, such as radicalism and his position on the distributive dimension.

This endeavour is relevant for at least three reasons. First, the current Brazilian institutional instability, which he contributed to building, has allowed Jair Bolsonaro to gain the political spotlight (Langevin, 2017); thus, the populist aspect of his rhetoric gains importance. It has proved to be very effective in terms of voter attraction, and it might lead to a further deterioration of democratic institutions. Second, it is important to evaluate to what extent Jair Bolsonaro can be considered an analogue to radical populist leaders such as Marie Le Pen, Donald Trump, and Geert Wilders. This will lead to a better understanding of the origins and current state of this political phenomenon in Brazil, open a channel of communication between Brazilians and foreign scholars, and create possibilities for future comparative research. Finally, the better understanding of the characteristics of this political phenomenon might help to minimize its detrimental influence.

¹ Lula is the first candidate in the polls. Nevertheless, he is in prison and was barred from running in the election.

This piece proceeds as following: after this introduction, I will present a definition of populism. Second, I will discuss the ‘inclusionary’ populism as the Latin American model and ‘exclusionary’ populism as the Western European model. Third, I will discuss the social bases for the third wave of populism and explore possible reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon in Brazil. Fourth, I will present the methodology of the study, followed by quantitative and qualitative analyses. Finally, I will present the conclusions of the study.

2. Defining populism

Populism matters, and is an important concept for understanding the contemporary political landscape.

-Moffitti (2016: 11)

The term populism has been employed in political studies in loose and inconsistent ways to denote politicians that appeal to peoples’ interests, to characterize catch-all parties, and label charismatic or demagogic politicians. Also, it is often employed in political debate with a pejorative meaning with the aim of denigrating the opponent with no clear meaning (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). This misuse and misspecification of the term leads many scholars to avoid the term in favour of other nomenclature. Nevertheless, the emerging of parties in the right-upper side of the political spectrum² in advanced democracies inspired a remarkable effort in the literature to carefully define populism, as it appeared as a common element of those parties’ ideology.

Cas Mudde proposes a minimal definition that is largely used in contemporary studies on populism. To return to the previously quoted definition, Mudde defines populism as a ‘thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* (general will) of the people’ (2004: 543; 2007:23). Because populism is a thin-centred ideology it is always combined with others such as nationalism, socialism, and liberalism. Therefore, as defined by Laclau (1977), the central feature of the populism is a discourse that pits ‘the people’ against the elite, or institutions.

² Right-wing in regard of distributive issues, and traditional, authoritarian, and Nationalist (TAN) in value dimension.

Similarly, KhosraviNik (2010) defines right-wing populism as a rhetoric that explicitly or implicitly dichotomizes the social into an ‘Us identity’ constructed along national, regional, religious, and ethnic lines versus ‘Them’ in various (and sometimes contradictory) ways. As explained by Heinisch (2003), the portrayal of the common people in opposition to malevolent elites does not refer to a specific social class. Instead, the classification is vague so as to attract different slices of the population. In order to be responsive to ‘the people’, or this constructed ‘us’, populist politicians usually support illiberal policies, direct forms of political deliberation, and the bypass of democratic institutions that promote checks and balances.

Also, by considering population as a homogeneous group and denying intermediations between peoples’ will and policies, populism is the opposition of elitism and multiculturalism. Therefore, populist parties are essentially anti-liberal, as they believe that the majority should rule without limits, denying the existence of minority rights, and defending a positive discrimination in favour of the ‘silent majority’ (Copsey, 2007). On the other hand, there is no contradiction between this ideology and democracy, as it supports popular sovereignty and majority rule³ (Mudde, 2007). In accordance, Takkis Pappas (2012) considers contemporary populism as synonymous with democratic illiberalism. Therefore, populist parties are democratic parties in their acceptance of electoral participation and constitutional legality, but illiberal in the sense that they acknowledge a single cut in society, the pursuit of adversarial politics and their opposition to minority rights (Pappas, 2016).

Despite the fact that populism is one of the many features of the ‘new’ parties of the right, this element represents the novelty of this political phenomenon, and accounts for the electoral success of those parties (Heinisch, 2003). Not surprisingly, this aspect has attracted significant attention from scholars. Besides, it stands out for its potentially detrimental impact on democracy. First, the disregard of political elites by populist leaders might foster distrust in democracy, de-legitimation of political opponents, and non-acceptance of democratic outcomes (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015). Also, the exaltation of the alleged superiority of the common man over political elites and specialists

³ It prescribes a more direct forms of democracy, rather than the representative one.

can lead to the adoption of suboptimal policies through direct forms of deliberation (Mudde, 2013). Finally, and even more dangerously, once in power, those populist politicians may dismantle democratic institutions (Pappas, 2014). Contemporary examples of this movement can be seen in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, and Russia.

3. Inclusionary versus exclusionary populism

The study of populism is normally geographically segmented, and few interregional comparative studies have been conducted. A valuable exception is Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2013) study that compared contemporary populist leaders in Latin America and Western Europe. The authors concluded that while in Europe populism is 'exclusionary', Latin American populist leaders present an 'inclusionary' ideology. These inclusionary and exclusionary aspects are defined in material, political, and symbolic terms. The monetary dimension refers to which group is excluded or included in the distribution of state's resources. In that sense, Latin American populist leaders support the social inclusion not only of the poor, but also of the culturally excluded. It should be noted that material inclusion is not an aspect inherent to the populist, which is why the literature sometimes confuses clientelism with populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser's, 2013). Conversely, Western European populist leaders focus on groups they think should be excluded from welfare state, for example immigrants.

The political dimension alludes to which group is allowed to fully participate in democracy. Similar to the material dimension, exclusionary populism restricts political participation of some groups, whereas inclusionary populism aims to include the voiceless in political participation and deliberation. Finally, symbolic representation is an abstract dimension that denotes the boundaries between 'the people' and 'the elite' based on cultural and moral senses. Latin American populist leaders dress like ordinary people in order to extol the great majority of the population. Additionally, the social construction 'us vs. them', the very foundation of the populist discourse, is usually painted in broader strokes, and 'them' is normally an external threat. Conversely, In Western European countries, populist parties construct 'the people' by excluding immigrants and ethnic minorities; their opposition to the use of the Islamic veil in public spaces is an example of this symbolic exclusion.

Related to that exclusionary feature, most contemporary populists in Western Europe are radical *and* right-wing – i.e. they are nativist (a combination of nationalism with

xenophobia) and authoritarian. These radical parties argue that crimes should be punished severely and defend stricter law and order policies. They often associate foreigners with the increase of criminality and call for stricter punishment and extradition. Also, such parties are essentially xenophobic, as they believe that there is a homogeneous native group in opposition to an alien minority that represents a cultural or economic threat to the nation.

Though this geographic dichotomy has been useful to differentiate Latin American and Western European populism, the first impressions of Bolsonaro's discourse suggest a departure from the pattern of populist leaders in Latin America, and an approximation to the exclusionary, radical populism of European advanced democracies. Therefore, the next section will explore the social bases for the emergence of this new type of populist leader in Brazil. Then, I will analyse Bolsonaro's tweets in order to identify and specify the populist nature of his discourse.

4. The social bases for the emergence of right-wing populism

The emergence of new parties on the right of the political spectrum is one of the most important political occurrences in contemporary, advanced democracies. Such parties have been relatively successful in recent years. They have been able to enlarge their electoral pool, win seats in national parliaments and participate in governments. As might be expected, many scholars have studied this theme, attempting to identify the reasons for this shift in political party systems. The literature (Betz, 1993; Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995) explains that this transformation in the political system was propelled by significant changes faced by Western European countries over the past 40 years. First, studies mention the 1970s' economic crisis, which led to long-term unemployment and a welfare crisis. Second, there was an increase in globalization, which led to a decrease of national governments' authority within their own borders and an increase in competition beyond the borders. Finally, the 'migration crisis' occurred, which is understood as a significant increase in multicultural migration (Schierup et al., 2006).

This process created winners and losers, and the 'losers of globalization' are a core element in the explanation of the emergence and growth of the new right (Betz, 1994). This group, composed mainly of low-skilled workers and small business owners, could not adapt to the world transformation and perceived modernization as a threat. They felt they had suffered due to the economic and political order and judged that the State benefited those who did not deserve help, welfare abusers and cheaters, rather than the real hard

workers (de Koster et al., 2013). From the cultural point of view, they believed that national values should be celebrated, and they supported a more authoritarian attitude from the State. In such a pessimistic understanding of reality, immigrants easily become scapegoats; they are considered cultural, social, and economic threats.

Therefore, from a sociological perspective of party competition, this discontented group created the opportunity for the emergence of populist parties on the right side of the political spectrum, which were willing to address this new reality and respond to this group's wishes. Those parties celebrate national identity and the superiority of the common man. Also, they stress societal issues such as violence, drug dealing, and unemployment and attack the mainstream parties' inability to confront these challenges and endorse an authoritarian solution to problems. Finally, they have been successful in exploiting anti-immigrant sentiments for electoral gain. They reinforce the notion that immigrants are an economic and cultural danger for the nation, using populist arguments that are often based on false assumptions in order to create fear and anxiety in the population regarding this issue (Williams, 2006).

The Brazilian context shows some similarities. First, an unprecedented economic crisis led to a GDP decrease of 3.5% in 2015 and, again in 2016, and the consequent loss of 2.6 million formal jobs between those years; this caused disenchantment with the political elites, especially with the Workers' Party that governed the country from 2003 to 2016. Second, as in Western Europe, corruption scandals increased the distrust in politicians. Nevertheless, this aspect gained unprecedented importance in Brazil. The 'Car Wash Operation', an ongoing money laundering and bribery investigation by the Federal Police, has reached 13 political parties, and 55 members of congress are now under investigation (O Estado de São Paulo, 14 May 2018). An aggravating factor was the controversial impeachment of the president, Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. This process was based on an alleged crime of responsibility due to the issuance of decrees that resulted on the opening of additional credits without the authorization of the lower chamber and contracting loans on public institutions (Solano, 2018; Viera & de Araújo Fernandes, 2018); the resulting scandals have weakened the yet young Brazilian democracy. Alongside this, there is a patent politicization of the judiciary system, illustrated by its role as protagonist in the impeachment process (Viera & de Araújo Fernandes, 2018). In this context, discontented voters are abandoning traditional political parties, as in the European

political system, embracing nostalgia about the dictatorship period, and flirting with authoritarian solutions for economic and political crises.

This scenario of instability and economic insecurity has benefited the presidential candidacy of Jair Bolsonaro, though he is far from being an outsider. The candidate is currently in his seventh mandate in the Chamber of the Deputies by the Rio de Janeiro State, a position he has occupied since 1991. The congressman was elected by the Progress Party (PP), one of the most investigated parties in the Car Wash Operation (O Estado de São Paulo, 14 May 2018), but he left this party to align his presidential candidacy with the Social Liberal Party (SLP), an inexpressive party. This politician has wisely exploited the feeling of anxiety in Brazilian society. He attacks political elites for being self-interested and accuses Brazilian political institutions of inefficiency. Interestingly, despite his general critiques of the political elite, he specially attacks *lulo-petismo*⁴, which, in Bolsonaro's rhetoric, represents the left end of the political spectrum, voters and politicians. This group is often used as a scape-goat for all the problems of the country, and it is analogous to the attacks against immigrants by radical right-wing parties in advanced democracies.

Also, Bolsonaro claims to be incorruptible, despite the involvement of his former party in a corrupt scheme and states he will put in practice a new form of government. Also, the candidate exploits the sense of insecurity of a vulnerable population to attract votes. He defends a tough approach on crime, gun liberalization, and lowering of the age of criminal responsibility.

Preliminary polls show that Bolsonaro's popularity is higher among wealthier voters. 30% of the voters that earn more than 10 times the minimum wage, around 2,335 dollars, favour this candidate. Nevertheless, numerically this cohort does not explain Bolsonaros's accession, as this group represents less than 5% of the Brazilian population. In opposition, only 11% of the voters that earn up to 1,908 reais, around 467 dollars, plan to vote for the candidate. This last group remains loyal to the Workers' Party and represent a resistance to Bolsonaro's electoral ascension (Castanho, 13 May 2018; Silva, 18 April 2018). Therefore, recent socio-economic trends in the country must be considered to explain this vote. In the early 2000s, Brazil experienced a period of inclusive growth. The poverty level fell from 24.7% in 2001 to 8.9% in 2013. Also, extreme poverty also declined

⁴ Slang that merges the name of former Brazilian President Lula and the supporters of his political party, Workers Party, which has PT as an acronym in Portuguese.

sharply during the same period, from 9.9% to 4%. As a result, between 2003 and 2011, nearly nine million households (more than 30 million people) rose above the poverty line, roughly equivalent to a fourth of the minimum wage (Kerstenetzky, Uchôa, & Silva, 2015). Also, the middle class benefited from the economic expansion and the 68% increase in the minimum wage.

This economic expansion and the increase of the minimum wage led to the formation of a new middle class. This group, called 'the strugglers' accounts for more than half of the Brazilian population and distinguishes itself from the full-fledged middle class in terms of its social and economic security, consumption patterns, and lifestyle (Kerstenetzky, Uchôa, & Silva, 2015). Their relatively insecure position has been aggravated by economic crises and the low level of public goods and services directed to this stratum. They feel abandoned by the State and believe that social policies benefit 'lazy people' and criminals instead of 'hard workers'. This is important to Bolsonaro's electoral cohort, he speaks directly to this group's resentment. He exploits the idea that the country is out of order, suffering from a crisis of values in society and politics.

Nevertheless, the literature still lacks a comprehensive sociological analysis of Bolsonaro's voters, though Solano's research (2018) gives valuable insights about this movement. Solano interviewed Bolsonaro's supporters and concluded that, similar to radical voters in advanced democracies, his supporters also felt abandoned by the State. They believe that the State is betraying the hard-working man and protecting criminals and welfare parasites, while giving privileges to minority groups. In their opinion, public policies such as racial quotas at public universities and the Bolsa Família benefits, a conditional cash transfer scheme, favour laziness and patronage. Bolsonaros' supporters share the ethics of a self-made man, despite the fact that many of the interviewees have benefited from public services in the past.

The cultural dimension also plays an important role; Solano shows that the youth of São Paulo's public schools, who lived in the period of the ascension of Brazilian economy and felt the prosperity in terms of consumption power, now feel they have lost part of their status. They support Bolsonaro because of his 'irreverence' and his discourse against political elites. An equally important driver for this support is the fact that they feel the Worker's Party is for an inferior class with which they do not want to be associated – a class that depends on government social assistance to survive. Bolsonaro represents another ethics, that of the self-made man, who can make it on his own.

5. Methodology of the study

In order to determine if Jair Bolsonaro can be considered a populist and characterize the specificities of his populist rhetoric, this study has as a unit of analysis the candidate's tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018. The authors read the tweets in full. The content of photos and videos were also taken into consideration. The period considered for the analyses encompasses the pre-campaign period and the campaign for the presidency of Brazil that takes place on 7 October 2018.

Research on the parties' rhetoric, policy preferences, and election campaigns generally focus on party manifestos. However, the literature points out that this is not the most suitable source for finding a populist message (Pauwels, 2011). First, party manifestos contain policy proposals, and it is less likely that those documents directly address political elites or 'the people' (van Kessel & Castelein, 2016; Pauwels, 2011). Second, populist parties' manifestos are usually short and non-informative. Therefore, this analysis of the presence of populism in Bolsonaro's discourse will rely on the candidate's tweets. The literature has pointed to the fact that populist parties have extensively used twitter to challenge political elites (van Kassel & Castelin, 2016), and it is has become an important channel for populist parties' political mobilization (Enli and Skogerbø, 2013). Finally, research reports that populist parties are among the most active users of social media in political campaigns (Gibson & Ward, 2012).

This paper relies on the classical methodology of content analysis of populism developed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011). The authors suggest two basic questions for the qualitative analysis of populist content in parties' manifestos. The first one aims to capture the people-centrism aspects of the authors' discourse. This is operationalized with the following question:

(1) Do the authors refer to the people?

The instruction is to search for every possible reference to the people. It does not matter whether this reference concerned, for instance, 'citizens', 'our country', 'society', or 'we' (as in 'we the people'). Additionally, the broader context of the text that also refers to people without those words were also considered. The second question focuses on the anti-elitism aspect. The question that guided the analysis is the following:

(2) Do the authors criticize elites?

Importantly, the critique or attack has to concern the political elitist in general. Critique of a specific party or a particular politician is not general enough. Rooduijn and Pauwels

(2011) once again emphasize the importance of understanding the context of those attacks. The Brazilian context of corruption scandals, and extreme political polarization was taken into consideration during the analysis.

Table 1. Categories analysed in Bolsonaro's tweets and the dimension they belong to

Category	Description	Dimension
Corruption	Stances on the need to eliminate political corruption and associated abuses of political and/or bureaucratic power.	Values dimension
Law and order and militarism	Mentions law enforcement, investment in manpower, modernization of armed forces to fight against domestic crime and external threats.	Values dimension
Minority groups	Negative references to underprivileged minorities such as homosexuals, indigenous people, coloured people, women.	Values dimension
Nationalism	Support for established national ideas, general appeals to pride of citizenship, appeals to patriotism.	Values dimension
Traditional values	Positive mentions about traditional and/or religious moral values, such as abortion, family composition and values, and religious institutions.	Values dimension
Free market economy and economic orthodoxy	Favourable mentions of the free market and free market capitalism as an economic model, and need for reduction of budget deficits, and retrenchment in crisis.	Distributive dimension
Keynesian economy management and market regulation	Positive mentions about State intervention in the economy, increases of taxes, increase of public demand, market regulation, and protectionism.	Distributive dimension
Negative: leftist ideology	Negative references to leftist ideologies, such as communism and socialism and political leaders that endorse those ideologies.	Distributive dimension
Negative: welfare state	Defence of limiting state expenditures on social services or social security.	Distributive dimension
Positive: welfare state	Mentions of investments and reforms to expand access to quality social services.	Distributive dimension

This framework allows me to determine the relevance (frequency) of the populist appeals in Bolsonaro's discourse, and also how the candidate constructs the opposition between 'the people' and 'elite' in his rhetoric. Additionally, I will explore additional features of the candidate's populist discourse. In order to do so, I identify and code the categories listed in Table 1. Those categories represent issues in the traditional left-right

dimension, but also issues that are in the ‘values dimension’. This last political dimension summarizes a series of noneconomic and cultural issues that have gained significant attention in the last three decades, including life style, cultural diversity, nationalism, and minorities’ rights. This new axis of party competition was named differently in the literature: libertarian/authoritarian (Kitschelt, 1994), post-materialist (Inglehart, 1990), GALTAN - the opposition of Green, alternative, and libertarian (GAL) to traditional, authoritarian and Nationalist (TAN).

This framework will allow me to identify and analyse Bolsonaro’s populist discourse, but also to characterize his populism and determine whether the candidate’s discourse is predominantly inclusionary or exclusionary. The analysis will proceed in two steps. The first step is a descriptive analysis to determine the frequency with which Bolsonaro uses populist rhetoric and the various issues that are combined with it. All tweets are classified according to the aforementioned categories. If the subject is not covered by any of those, it receives the label ‘other’. It is important to highlight that one tweet can be coded in more than one issue. Second, a more in-depth analysis is conducted. This last step aims to characterize the populist discourse, understand the construction of ‘us vs. them’, and the other ideologies attached to the populism.

6. Analysis

6.1 Descriptive analysis

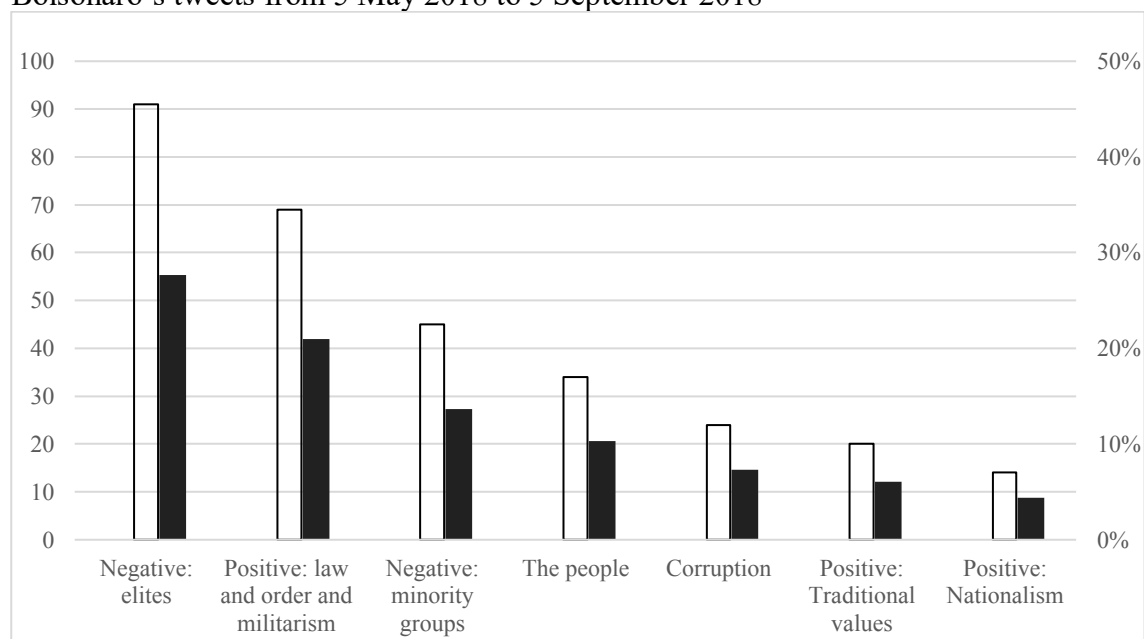
In the period under consideration, the candidate tweeted 593 times; 28 of those tweets consisted of interviews or videos of more than five minutes. This material was not considered in the descriptive analysis, but the content of the videos will be analysed in the qualitative analysis. Also, 236 tweets were classified as ‘other’. This is the larger category and includes announcements of poll results, number of followers on social media, the candidate’s political agenda, retweets and videos of supporters, greetings and thanks. Nevertheless, the theme ‘media’, a subject that appeared in his tweets 80 times, and given its importance in Bolsonaro’s discourse, will be analysed separately. Excluding the category ‘others’, and the 28 interviews, this first descriptive analysis covers 329 valid tweets.

Criticism of political elites is the most relevant item of Bolsonaro’s discourse on Twitter, appearing 91 times, i.e., in 28% of the valid tweets. This illustrates the fact that Bolsonaro’s success is anchored in his opposition to traditional political elites, especially

Lula and the Workers' Party. References to 'the people' are considerably less frequent, appearing in 34 tweets, or in approximately 10% of the valid tweets. Nevertheless, negative references to minority groups is the third most frequent subject, mentioned in 45 tweets, or 14% of the valid tweets; this prevalence might suggest that the construction of the people, 'us', is drawn not only by evoking the 'us', but also through the exclusion of certain groups.

The second most important aspect of the candidate's rhetoric is his positive stance on law and order and military issues, which appears in 69 tweets, or 21% of the valid tweets. Critiques of corruption and positive mentions of traditional values and nationalism appear in 7%, 6%, and 4% of Bolsonaro's tweets, respectively. An interesting statistic is that the aspects covered in Table 1 represents 56% of the valid tweets of the candidate.

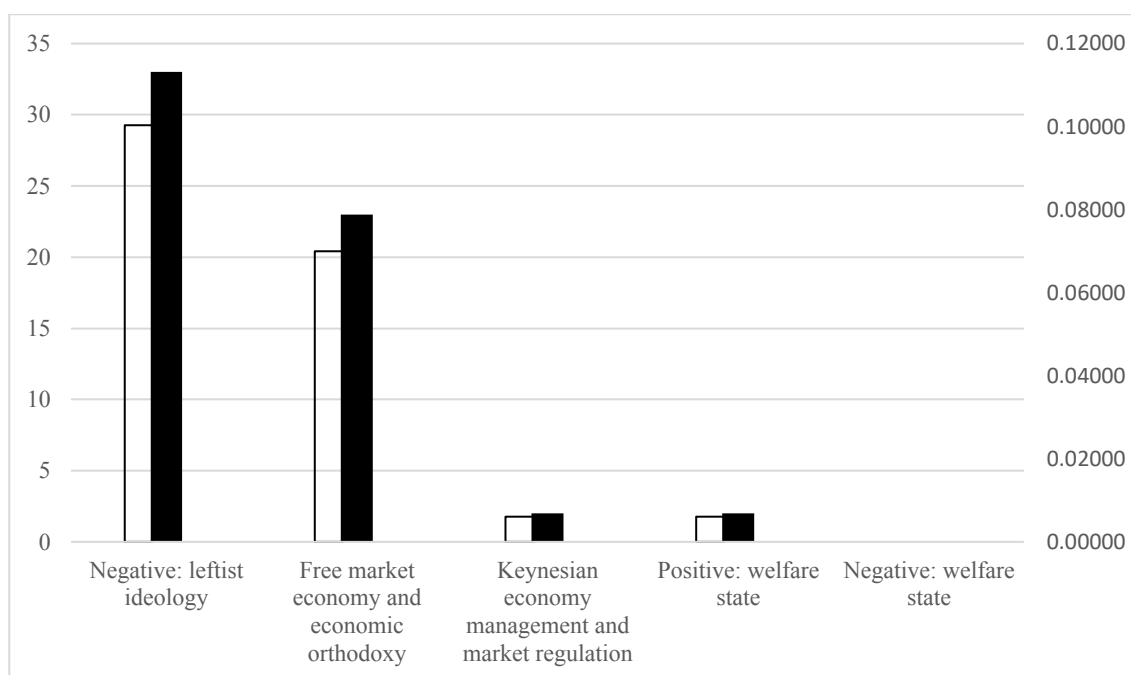
Graph. 1. Frequency and relative frequency of themes in the values dimension in Bolsonaro's tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018



Graph 2 shows the frequency and the relative frequency of Bolsonaro's tweets related to distributive issues. The first result is that they are significantly less common than tweets on issues related to the values dimension. This prioritization is explained by the fact that the candidate attracts votes mostly due to his positioning on values issues. Therefore, to talk about distributive issues might not be good strategy. First, it might increase the saliences of issues that the candidate is not considered the most competent to deal with,

which benefit political opponents. Second, it might be better for vote maximization to avoid taking a position on issues that are secondary in one's political agenda. Therefore, by avoiding or blurring his position, i.e. adopting a dubious or contradictory position, on, for example, welfare state reforms, the candidate is able to attract votes from different social strata (Rovny, 2013).

Graph. 2. Frequency and relative frequency of distributive themes in Bolsonaro's tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018



The most frequent subject on the distributive dimension is the critique of leftist ideologies, which appeared in 10% of the valid tweets. As discussed beforehand, the relatively high frequency of this issue might be related to critiques of Brazilian political elites. This supposition is supported by fact that 30% of the tweets that have negative stances on leftist ideologies, also contain a critique of political elites. The second most frequently tweeted topic on a distributive dimension are the positive stances on free market and economic orthodoxy, which appeared in 7% of valid tweets.

It is remarkable that Bolsonaro rarely pronounces on the welfare state. The candidate mentioned education policy on Twitter 19 times and spoke about welfare state programmes four times. Moreover, it was only possible to attribute valence to his comments twice: two positive comments on the welfare state. This fact indicates the

intention of the candidate to blur his position regarding distributive issues. Additionally, tweets on welfare state policies are often combined with aspects of the value dimension. For example, Bolsonaro's tweets on education generally address his concerns about ideological indoctrination in schools and the problem of sex education.

6.2 Qualitative Analysis

This section will address Bolsonaro's tweets qualitatively. First, I will discuss how attacks on political elites are established, and how the candidate builds the 'us, the people', in opposition to the corrupt elites. Then, I will analyse the other elements of Bolsonaro's rhetoric. It is important to highlight that the Brazilian political context is key to interpreting Bolsonaro's attacks on segments of the political elite. Political events, such as the tight victory of president Dilma Rousseff in 2014 elections, her controversial impeachment in 2015, and the Lula's trial and imprisonment, have severely polarized Brazilian voters. 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.

Besides his pronounced opposition to the parties' on the left, Bolsonaro claims that the political elite in general is self-interested and corrupt and all parties use the same vicious practices in government. Bolsonaro claims party divisions are fake, and the polarization between centre-left and centre-right parties in Brazil, characterized by the traditional political dispute between PT and the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), obscures the fact that mainstream parties are similar.

He uses parties' declarations of possible alliances in the 2018 election runoff to illustrate this similarity. For example, on August 20, Bolsonaro commented on the news that Fernando Henrique Cardoso, former Brazilian president and member of PSDB, affirmed that he would support PT against Jair Bolsonaro. On this occasion, the candidate tweeted: 'PSDB never was opposition to PT, they always have been birds of a feather.' Also, on July 10 he tweeted: 'Brazil does not support 4 more years of PT, PSDB and allies. This is why they are always against us'. This tweet is followed by a video that shows political leaders of both parties parsing Fidel Castro.

Also, he links political elites to corruption scandals and presents himself as the only true new alternative for Brazilian politics:

I see the moment as a mission. We are all in the same boat and we will only get out of the mud if we paddle against the tide of corruption and inefficiency caused by the current way of doing politics in Brazil that will be maintained by my opponents. The challenge is difficult, but we are prepared! (August 17)

Interestingly, his attack on political elites often is combined with critiques of the media. The candidate insists that media outlets are in favour of and controlled by the political mainstream. He accuses those media outlets of persecuting him and spreading fake news to demoralize him. As a result, about 23% of his valid tweets are devoted either to attacking the media or to clarifying an accusation against him. Regarding, this alleged persecution the candidate tweeted on 27 of July:

Because I represent a risk to the left in its intention to control the media, I am one of the favorite targets of lies and malicious distortions conveyed by the media, which acts largely in the service of the left. It is the press side by side with those who most threaten their freedom. Ironic!

The people centrism is also evident in Bolsonaro's tweets. The candidate's slogan: *My party is the Brazilian people*, exalts the people to the detriment of the elites, and evidences his intention to bypass political institutions and govern closely to the people. Not surprisingly, his slogan is similar to Marie Le Pen's: *In the name of the people*. The alleged superiority of 'the people' is present in Bolsonaro's tweet of May 20: 'Our candidacy is irrelevant near the national crisis. I only think about the future of the country. The people have to show that the boss is them and not the politicians. From this movement a new Brazil can arise'.

Importantly, he claims that he will govern for the Brazilians, the 'respected citizens', under the pretence of a unified population, denying the existence of class, race, and gender conflicts. He affirms that the left creates 'social division in the society in order to weaken it and conquer it'. Therefore, Bolsonaro claims there is a united Brazil with 'no divisions between black people and with people, people from the Northeast and the South, and heterosexuals and homosexual'. This construction of 'the people' is clearly illiberal

and exclusionary, as this pretence of a unified population comes at the expense 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.

Not rarely, traditional issues are merged with minority issues. As addressed previously, references to education policy are linked to minorities' issues and opposition to left-wing ideology. Bolsonaro argues that the current educational system is contaminated with left-wing ideology that aims to indoctrinate children. Therefore, the candidate supports a policy called 'School without Party', a polemic initiative that sought to control and persecute teachers expressing ideas considered as 'leftist' or 'Marxist', the so-called 'ideological indoctrination' in classrooms. Also, the candidate advocates against sex education in school that approaches the theme of homosexuality, as it would, in his discourse prematurely sexualizing children and lead them to homosexuality.

This exclusionary aspect of Bolsonaro's construction of 'us', the people is also evidenced by his approach to the worst off in society. Poverty and social exclusion are often criminalized in his discourse, for example, the candidate associates homeless people with drug abusers. Additionally, he magnifies the issue of fraud in the main Brazilian social programme, Bolsa Família, and affirms that it was used by the left-wing government as a vote seeking strategy:

It is necessary to reverse the logic around the program, used by the left as a vote corraling. If you are in the Bolsa Família who does not have income (sic.), unemployment is much higher in Brazil. Efficiency should be measured by people who will no longer need the benefit. (September 04).

Finally, the candidate spoke against asylum seekers. Despite the fact that immigration is not a major issue in Brazil, the country is receiving an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers from Venezuela. The candidate took the opportunity of this fact to criticize Venezuela's political regime. Also, he affirmed that the Brazilian law on immigration is permissive and should be tightened and, despite recognizing the need of those people, he affirmed that Brazilian interests should be met before helping foreigners.

Besides populist, Jair Bolsonaro's discourse is also radical. His authoritarian character is patent, as demonstrated by the frequency of his appeals to law and order and

militarism. For example, the candidate claims that human rights discourse is the left's banner to protect criminals and put the population in danger. Therefore, he proposes a tough approach on crime and a valorisation of military and police personnel:

The Brazilian this time has the option to choose a President who picks firmly against the crime that terrifies the population; who is against *saidinha*⁵ in prisons; in favor of the free market; Against ideology of gender and ideological indoctrination in schools; against the (statute of) disarmament⁶ (August 16).

He has as main policy proposals the reduction of the legal age of criminal responsibility and the liberalization of firearms licenses: 'Criminals armed to the teeth shooting at innocent men, women and children is only solved with "bullet". Those who do not consider this fact ignore the reality we are living and this is a sign that everything will remain the same. We understand this and seek for change!' (August 30).

Additionally, Bolsonaro's discourse is nationalist. It includes constant references to national symbols such as Hine and the Brazilian flags. Also, he calls attention to external threats to the country's hegemony, for example, to the unprotected Brazilian borders in the Amazon forest, or to the fact that Chinese are buying a great amount of land in the country. The aforementioned case of the influx of Venezuelan asylum seekers to Brazil, and the necessity to meet Brazilians' interests first illustrates that this nationalism also contains aspects of nativism.

In regard to distributive issues, Bolsonaro defends free market policies. This was clearly signalled during the political campaign with the invitation of Paulo Guedes, an economist from the University of Chicago, with a career in the private sector, to be his future Minister of Finance. The candidate defends less intervention from the State in the economy and an orthodox economic policy: 'Bolsonaro's economist has the right recipe to fix Brazil. Restrain state spending and reduce state presence in the economy. Not the only way, the only way. The rest is a mixture of cowardice and populism' (July 2).

His laissez-faire position regarding economic management is evidenced in his tweet concerning country's unemployment on July 30: 'If the government does not disrupt

⁵ Colloquial term for the right of the convict, in semi-open conditions, to leave the prison without police escort up to five times per year.

⁶ Firearms-Control Legislation and Policy in Brazil

the entrepreneur and does not disrupt the worker with this heavy and absurd legislation, I am sure that society itself will solve the problem of unemployment’.

Nevertheless, he often avoids to take concrete policy position on distributive issues. For example, he acknowledges the importance of the Bolsa Família, but also claims the importance of the ‘invert the logic of the program, as showed above. Besides, he claims that the lack of resources for health care are, in fact, the result of the corruption. Therefore, it is not clear if the candidate is in favour of a retrenchment of welfare state, or if he is committed with the current level of social investment. As discussed, this blurring strategy aims to avoid losing the support of the of the social stratum that relies on those services and expects improvements.

7. Conclusion

This paper addressed the populist content of Jair Bolsonaro’s politics by analysing his tweets from 5 May 2018 to 5 September 2018, a period that preceded the presidential election of October 2018. This work adopted a minimal definition of populism proposed by Mudde (2004), and its analysis is based on and Rooduijn and Pauwels’ (2011) methodology to identify the people-centrism and the critiques of the elites. The first conclusion is that populism is an important element of the candidate’s rhetoric. The attack on political elites is the most important element of Bolsonaro’s discourse, present in 28% of the valid tweets. This result supports the claim that his success is anchored in his opposition Lula and the Workers’ Party. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis showed that his attacks reach the entire political elite, not only the Workers’ Party and other left-wing parties. For example, he accuses politicians of being corrupt, self-interested, and inefficient.

In this line, he presents himself as the only candidate that can change bad governance practices and govern for Brazilians’ interests. Therefore, his tweets often (10% of the valid tweets) appeal to ‘the people’, a pretence of a unified population, denying the existence of class, race, and gender conflicts, which Bolsonaro considers ‘fake divisions’. Surprisingly, more frequent than the appeal to the people are Bolsonaro’s negative references to minorities, 14% of the valid tweets. For example, he claims that minority 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 the salary disparity between men and women.

Therefore, the analysis showed clearly that the construction of ‘us’ is drawn in an exclusionary manner. This aspect is also confirmed by the lack of proposals to include the underprivileged. In fact, poverty and social exclusion are often criminalized in his discourse – for example, he associates homeless people with drug addicts, and magnifies the issue of fraud among of Bolsa Família recipients.

Therefore, the second conclusion is that Bolsonaro’s rhetoric detaches from the pattern of populist leaders in Latin America, which was considered in the literature to be mostly inclusionary and approaches to exclusionary Western European Populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013). Besides this explicit opposition to minority rights, the candidate’s authoritarian declarations also support this conclusion. The relative high frequency of tweets related to law and order issues in his tweets, 21% of the valid tweets, illustrates Bolsonaro’s authoritarian appeal. For example, the candidate claims that human rights discourse is a leftist banner to protect criminals, disregarding the population’s safety. Also, he proposes the reduction of the age of criminal responsibility and the liberalization of gun control.

Bolsonaro’s posts on Tweeter confirms his right-wing position, as signalled by the choice of the economist Paulo Guedes as his future Minister of Finance. Nevertheless, descriptive analysis showed that distributive issues have a secondary role in the candidate’s discourse, as they are mention by the candidate about five times less frequently than issues located in the value dimension. Also, his alignment with free market economy are rather abstract- critics of left-wing ideologies, and defence of less State in the economy. Nevertheless, he avoids to take clear position regarding concrete distributive issues in his tweets. This blurring strategy is clear on welfare state issues.

The candidate avoids making a clear defence either for welfare state expansion or retrenchment. He usually links the problem of social services to issues on values dimensions, defending that the main problem of education is the ideological indoctrination by the left, or that the ‘sensation’ health care system’s lack of investments are, in fact, a result of corruption or elites’ lack of expertise in management.

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