Populism in Times of Crisis:
The Brazilian Case of Bolsonaro

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A new wave of Populism has been on the ascent around the world. In Brazil, the situation is not different, and the populist rhetoric strongly seized the most recent presidential election in 2018. The aim of this paper is to explore the reasons for President Jair Bolsonaro's (considered a populist politician) victory. The potential motivations for this triumph are discussed in this paper, with the finding that a multidimensional crisis gripped the country in the years prior to the election, leading people to sympathise with those who were in opposition to the dominant party, which culminated in a heavily divisive presidential campaign. The nation was engulfed by an economic depression that coincided with a political crisis, which had legal, social, and even cultural repercussions, with polarisation and corruption playing key roles. The paper also explores the multifaceted phenomenon of populism, and why Bolsonaro is considered to be a populist; the latter mainly related to his appealing speeches, in which he tried to show himself as a politician of the people who governs for them, in opposition to the villainous establishment.

Keywords: *Populism, Bolsonaro, Brazil, crisis, elections*

Introduction

A new wave of Populism has been on the ascent in Europe and the West for several years, being, for example, the main reason for Brexit (the United Kingdom leaving the European Union) and for Donald Trump's presidential election in the United States of America.[2] In Latin America, specifically in Brazil, the situation is not different.

The South American political scene was previously dominated by governments from the left-wing, which began to weaken in the 2010s, primarily due to corruption, but also because of ruptures within the social, economic and cultural status quo as a result of

inclusivity and diversity policies that generated regressive reactions and social distinction, especially among the middle classes.[3]

The success of populist rhetoric in the world can be worrying when we consider that the movement may pose a threat to national and international institutions, to the rule of law and to other fundamental free-market democratic institutions, such as press freedom and the independence of the judiciary system.[4] Several studies seem to agree on the decline of liberal democracy and the repressive toughening of democratically chosen political regimes, bringing concerns regarding the consequences of the phenomenon for democratic governance.

By doing an analysis related to the rise of populism in the world context, Kurlantzick stressed that social protection policies tended to empower the poorest, generating pressure and revolt from the middle classes.[5] Inglehart and Norris, based on a cultural approach, indicates that there is a dichotomy between populism and cosmopolitan liberal values; the latter referring to the ideas of open borders and a single global community.[6]

Another possible explanation for the recent electoral fortunes of populism would be related to the perspective of economic inequality, which emphasises that the increase in economic insecurity has boosted mass support for populist leaders.[7] Cas Mudde highlights that other factors can also have a notable effect on the receptivity of populism, for example, the new broad role of the media in political discourse. As well, the emancipation of citizens who have become more educated and informed, feeling that they are better able to evaluate the actions of politicians, and which should then be part of the most important decisions, is another factor to consider. [8]

In Brazil, in October 2018, the sum of these factors resulted in the victory of the far-right populist candidate Jair Bolsonaro to the presidential seat of the republic of the largest country in Latin America. Bolsonaro was elected the 38th president of Brazil by obtaining 55.13% of the valid votes in the Brazilian general election, defeating Fernando Haddad. His was a highly polarised presidential campaign, in which the share of voters who voted for each candidate was very similar to the share that expressed a strong aversion for the opposing candidate.

In parallel with the downturn in the economy in 2013, Brazil faced a societal, cultural and even juridical crisis at once. The unprecedented levels of crime on the streets, the economic instability, and the tremendous corruption scheme uncovered by the Lava Jato investigations, which led to the corruption conviction of the former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party or PT). This caused

[3] Matheus de Almeida and Fernando Henrique da Silva Horita, 'Análise Crítica da Operação Lava Jato: Ativismo Judicial, Midiatização e Jurisdição De Exceção', *Revista Jurídica Luso Brasileira* 3, no 6 (2017), 1631–1658.

[4] Evgenia Passari, 'The Great Recession and the Rise of Populism', *Intereconomics: Review of European Economic Policy* 55, no 1 (2020), 17–21.

[5] Joshua Kurlantzick, *Democracy in Retreat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[6] Ronald F Inglehart and Pippa Norris, 'Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash', *HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP16-026,* August 2016.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39, no 4 (2004), 541–562.

Brazilians to blame the established PT party for the general crisis that the country was facing.[9]

In this paper, I intend to explain in more detail what were the main causes that led the populist candidate Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of the ninth largest economy in the world. On the whole, the conservatism wave, economic insecurity, mass support of evangelical religious movements, and *antipetism* (antipathy towards the PT Party), were the main factors that, added to the wide strategic use of social media, resulted in the election of the current president.

Populism conceptualisation

Although populism is a central topic in modern world and politics, there is still no consensus about its definition. It is a popular viewpoint that 'people' is typically included in the definition of populism, although there are not many other consensuses in the academic debate. The struggle to establish a definition is in part because the term, according to Gidron and Bonikowski, has previously been used to represent the most diverse and confrontational components and contexts.[10] Nonetheless, populism is certainly a complex phenomenon, characterised by being highly contestable, and since it is difficult to describe, it is equally difficult to quantify.[11]

It is assumed that populism is prevalent across different historic periods (late 19th century till now) and countries and regions (from North and Latin America to Eastern Europe). The ideological divisions are also diverse, while in the mid-1920s in Latin America populism was primarily linked with the left-wing and associated with openness and inclusivity, in Europe, the right-wing form of populism arose in the 1980s and has only grown stronger since.[12] For this reason, it is important to understand its three main conceptual approaches: populism as a discursive style, as a political strategy and as an ideology.[13]

The first approach considers populism a discursive style, a strategically used "rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo [the people] and the oligarchy".[14] Hawkins understands populism as a Manichaean discourse that gives a dichotomous moral component to political disputes.[15] Panizza states it is "an anti-status quo discourse".[16] In a like manner, Laclau defends that populist rhetoric does not

9   Wendy Hunter and Timothy J Power, 'Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash', *Journal of Democracy* 30, no 1 (2019), 68–82.
10 Noam Gidron and Bart Bonikowski, 'Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda', *Weatherhead Working Paper Series*, no 13-0004 (2013), 38.
11 Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, 'Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style', *Political Studies* 62, no 2 (2014), 381–397.
12 Gidron and Bonikowski, 'Varieties of Populism'.
13 Ibid. 5; Moffitt and Tormey, 'Rethinking Populism'.
14 Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: The Ecuadorian Experience* (Ohio University Press, 2000).
15 Kirk A Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
16 Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005).

reflect the real ideas of those who employ it, but rather is a deliberate method of political expression – utilised by both the right and left – that frames a moral battle between 'us' (oppressed) and 'them' (oppressors).[17]

The second approach, used mainly by scholars focused on Latin America, sets populism as a form of political strategy, which can take the form of policies and different types of mass mobilisation.[18] The techniques and means of obtaining and exercising power, based on the support of a large number of followers, are the subject of this populist strategy.[19]

According to Mudde, the two first interpretations of populism are quite damaging to the term. The first suggests that it is a discourse which is simple, charismatic and emotional directed at the masses. The second portrays populism as irrational policies that aim, of a short-sighted way, to please the people, without bearing in mind many other variables, in order to win the support of voters.[20]

Cas Mudde elucidates its own definition, closer to the academic community consensus, that places populism as an ideology that has elitism and pluralism as its antithesis and opposes the powerful elite with the people. The distinction between the antagonistic groups, "the corrupt elite" and "the pure people", is indispensable, as compromise with the other's ideas must be impossible. The ideology of populism also argues that "politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people".[21]

Each of the three approaches to populism described above have their own set of distinctions, but they also have places of convergence and intersection. The ideational and discursive approaches are particularly similar, prompting some researchers to interpret them as a single mode of explanation.[22] This study supports this converging definition, in line with Hawkins and Kaltwasser's understanding of populism as a moral discourse that not only exalts people's sovereign authority but also sees politics as a fundamental battle between "the people" and "the elite".[23]

According to the authors, three ideas combined make a populist politician: "a) a Manichean and moral cosmology; b) the proclamation of 'the people' as a homogenous and virtuous community; and c) the depiction of 'the elite' as a corrupt and self-serving entity",[24] and Bolsonaro meets all these requirements. In his speeches, he portrays a Manichaean conflict between a corrupt, immoral establishment and a virtuous, hardworking people. The traditional Brazilian family represents the "people", who are good, honest, ethical and adhere to all conservative moral ideals, but are struggling at the hands of the corrupt and dishonest "elite", represented by the established politicians, especially those affiliated with the PT party. Jair Bolsonaro has strong leadership characteristics (with authoritarian inclinations) and is highly appealing to his electorate, for whom he claims he would rule, implementing policies aligned with their interests,

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[17] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

[18] Panizza, *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy.*

[19] Kurt Weyland, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics', *Comparative Politics* 34, no 1 (2001), 1–22.

[20] Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist'.

[21] Ibid. 543.

[22] Gidron and Bonikowski, 'Varieties of Populism'.

[23] Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 'Introduction: The ideational approach', 3.

[24] Ibid. 3.

thus favouring the will of "the good people", and this will be explored in greater detail in subsequent sessions.

A multidimensional crisis

The crisis that affected Brazil assumed wide dimensions, configuring a reality of insecurity in the economy, caused by a lengthened recession. This occurred in parallel with a political crisis that brought legal, social and even cultural implications, with polarisation and corruption playing relevant roles and causing a multidimensional crisis that may be viewed as a major contextual factor in Bolsonaro's election.

The economic field

Latin America in general had an excellent economic performance during the years from 2003 and 2012, thanks to the international commodity boom. The period became known as the Golden Era, a time of economic growth and reduction of poverty and inequality in the region. The commodities boom, predominantly due to the sharp increase in demand from emerging markets, especially from China, combined with low-interest rates in developed countries, brought prosperity to the region, with clear observed changes such as social inclusion, macroeconomic stability and growth.[25]

Brazil achieved its highest growth rates between 2004 and 2010, along with significant reductions in social and regional inequalities. At the same time, that kept inflation rates under control. The country made sustained increases in wages, and in the level of formal employment, as well as improvements in public and external accounts.[26] The Brazilian president at the time, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was founding member of the Workers' Party, and served for two terms from 2003 through 2010. He made inclusionary efforts to reduce the number of poor and very poor people in the country, being considered the father of the poor by some, and acquiring high popularity among the lower social classes.

There is no dispute that there was a truly inclusive commitment through the policies adopted. The financial vigour gave governments throughout all the Latin American region unusual levels of resources and the usage of the resources was translated into a serious engagement to equality. But the improvement in social inclusion and wages has not corresponded with compelling investments for the future. By 2010, as pointed out by Maghin and Renon,[27] a gradual, inevitable and pronounced decline began to take place, and the normal pattern of falling commodity prices relative to manufactured products was recovered. This reflected crisis expectations for most economies dependent on commodity exports, due to a possible vulnerability to rising macroeconomic challenges. The authors

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[25] Hélène Maghin and Eva Renon, 'Latin America's Golden Era', in *The Political Economy of Latin America: Reflections on Neoliberalism and Development after the Commodity Boom,* ed. by Peter Kingstone (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[26] Laura Carvalho, *Valsa brasileira: Do boom ao caos econômico* (São Paulo: Todavia SA, 2018).

[27] Maghin and Renon, 'Latin America's Golden Era', 138.

claim that by the end of 2012, it was revealed that decisions made during the boom were not sustainable: 'The gains of golden era had been temporary, and at worst illusory.'[28]

The economic situation started to worsen in 2014, after the re-election of Dilma Rousseff, the handpicked successor of President Lula, who had previously served as his Chief of Staff. The aggravation of economic indicators foresaw an astonishing recession in Brazil, which came in the form of widespread unemployment and misery, with the GDP growth reaching a negative 3.55% in 2015 (Figure 1).
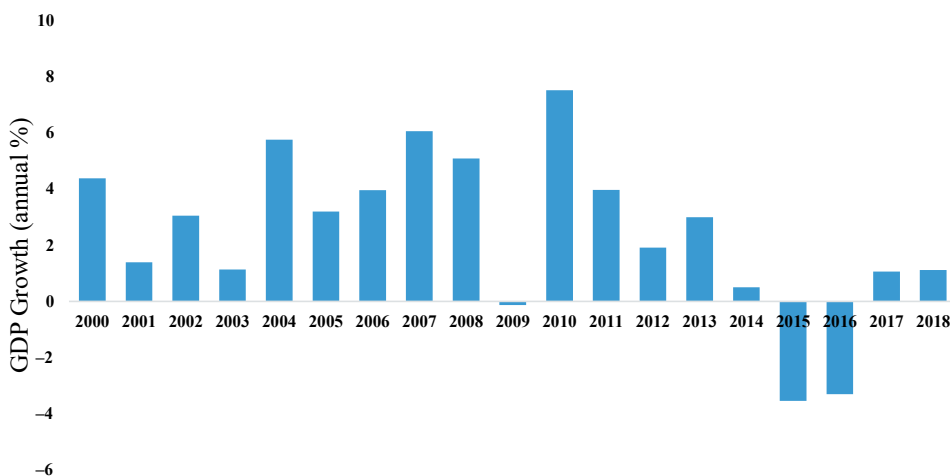

Figure 1: Brazilian GDP Annual Percentage Growth, 2000–2018

Source: Compiled by the author based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators, 'GDP growth (annual %) – Brazil' [Data file]. September, 2020.

It is worth highlighting the widely accepted theory that the increase in economic inequality, linked, for example, to the growth in automation and globalisation, generates economic insecurity which, in turn, can lead to growing support for populism.[29] This theory can indicate one of the reasons why Bolsonaro's popularity was enhanced by the economic crisis.

Mass mobilisation, the impeachment and social media

A wide wave of mobilisation had arisen in Brazil. In June 2013, the cities were taken over by popular movements that took place both on the streets, and in digital social networks. Initially, the demonstrations arose to contest the increases in public transport

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28   Ibid.
29   Inglehart and Norris, 'Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism'.

fares in São Paulo.[30] Growing into a national protest movement (especially after strong police repression), it began to communicate demands of all types, focused especially on corruption, the weak health and education systems, and on the high expenses related to the World Cup that would happen in the following year, among others.[31]

Almeida points out the important role of social media on Rouseff's impeachment. Protesters constantly used digital networks as a platform for expression, information and political discussion, which was instrumental in summoning people to the streets.[32] In addition, it was instrumental in favouring the formation of an alternative stream of opinion to established editorial lines and the mainstream press.

These social media continued to play a relevant role during and after Bolsonaro's campaign. The digital platform WhatsApp, for example, became one of the main communication and campaign tools among Bolsonarists (*Bolsonaristas* – people who voted for and vehemently support the president), with a huge flow of links, especially from YouTube, as a preferred source of political information shared between them.[33] The information distributed via WhatsApp favours a more instantaneous and circumscribed interactivity. Pre-established preferences for partisan information (as the support networks for candidates tend to relate to users and content that share the same ideological inclination) helps to create the low quality of the information shared in these groups. Thus, info-mediation through social media platforms exposes people to information bubbles, and possible overproduction of content, which present precarious modes of regulation and absence of ethical standards for issuers, making it difficult to check the accuracy and authenticity of the content. Thus, the internet proved to be a decisive factor in mobilising voters, being crucial in the 2018 elections.[34]

The intense mass demonstrations went through some major cycles of protest until it triggered the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, causing the then Vice-President Michel Temer, to assume the presidency without mass or political support, especially after some corruption scandals linked to him came to light.[35]

According to Hunter and Power, those protests also brought into view two emerging tendencies: '1) a deepening sentiment of rejection and hostility toward the PT (known colloquially as antipetismo); and 2) the presence of a small but visible far-right fringe openly expressing nostalgia for the "order" and "clean government" of the military dictatorship.'[36]

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[30] Folha de São Paulo, 'Maioria da população é a favor dos protestos, mostra Datafolha', *Folha.Uol,* 14 June 2013.

[31] Marie Fhoutine, '13 de junho, o dia que não terminou', *Carta Capital,* 16 September 2013.

[32] Ronaldo de Almeida, 'Bolsonaro presidente: conservadorismo, evangelismo e a crise brasileira', *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 38, no 1 (2019), 185–213.

[33] Camila Mont'Alverne, Isabele Mitozo and Henrique Barbosa, 'WhatsApp e eleições: quais as características das informações disseminadas', *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil,* 07 May 2019.

[34] Ricardo Ribeiro Ferreira, 'Desinformação em Processos Eleitorais: Um Estudo de Caso da Eleição Brasileira de 2018', *Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal,* 22 October 2019.

[35] Luciana Marques, 'Michel Temer fica, mas sem apoio político nem popular', *Radio France Internationale,* 18 May 2017.

[36] Hunter and Power, 'Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash'.

The atmosphere of high political polarisation took over the country and the revelations of *Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash), the largest corruption and money laundering investigation in the history of Brazil, intensified the political crisis. The intentions of this anti-corruption operation were to investigate and to judge the highest Brazilian social level, as presidents, ministers of state, governors and other politicians, as well as owners of large financial resources groups were examined.[37] In spite of the fact that the investigation arrested politicians from different parties, many of the most important names were associated with the PT. On 12 July 2017, the ex-president, Lula, was convicted of money laundering and passive corruption by Judge Sérgio Moro (who became Minister of Justice and Public Security after the election of president Bolsonaro), thus being excluded from a possible presidential race.

The outcome of the Lava Jato investigations and arrests worked as an advantage for Bolsonaro, who would enter a presidential race with both established parties weakened, as the population was showing signs of resentment towards the traditional political class, considered corrupt or lenient on corruption.

Public insecurity and the hard-line politician

It is noteworthy that the disturbingly high levels of violent crime and public insecurity in Brazil also influenced the 2018 elections. A special report by Angelo Young presented Latin America as one of the most dangerous regions in the world in 2018, with 17 Brazilian cities among the 50 most dangerous and, among these, 3 cities in the top 10.[38]

The Brazilian population was terrified by the huge crime wave that was ravaging the region, unveiling dissatisfaction with the established government, apparently failing to keep the people safe, which gave Bolsonaro another opportunity for political support. The candidate, considered a hard-line politician, ran a campaign with the extreme (right-wing) aggressiveness which has always characterised his political activity, demonstrating support for reducing arms use regulation, and advocating for stricter police, which should have "more freedom to act" as "violence is fought with violence".[39]

Bolsonaro, who used to be a military officer and graduated from the Military Academy of Agulhas Negras of the Brazilian Army, demonstrated, several times, a certain nostalgia for the Brazilian military dictatorship, which he called "democratic intervention". This helped him gain support among some voters, calling for improvements in security and an end to corruption.[40]

According to Inglehart when there is physical insecurity, groups seek strong and authoritarian leaders to protect them, which may contribute to the increasing feeling of

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[37] Almeida and Horita, 'Análise Crítica da Operação Lava Jato'.

[38] Angelo Young, 'Most Dangerous Cities in the World', *24/7 Wall St.,* 23 July 2019.

[39] Thiago de Araújo, 'Bolsonaro defende que a PM mate mais no Brasil', *Exame Brazil,* 05 October 2015.

[40] Jornal da Record, 'Bolsonaro chama ditadura militar brasileira de "intervenção democrática",' 31 March 2015.

xenophobia, authoritarian policies and strict adherence to traditional cultural norms, and that is exactly what the Brazilians did.[41]

Conservatism and religion

Another decisive factor in the 2018 elections concerns the sense of morality and customs. According to Inglehart and Norris's cultural backlash thesis, rising support for populism comes from those who, for the most part, retain "traditional values", "including the older generation and less educated groups" that have not followed progressive cultural changes, which, in turn, advocate for environmental protection, human rights and gender equality. This perspective explains populism's support as "a social psychological phenomenon", reflecting a nostalgic reaction among part of the electorate that tries to defend itself and fight the cosmopolitan changes of liberal values.[42]

In the view of the sociologist Angela Alonso "the changes that we have had in the country since the Constituent Assembly of 1988 have taken the institutions in a more progressive direction, and this is not a consensus".[43] Brazil, mostly after re-democratisation, went through several changes that can be considered progressive. On the other hand, a reaction intensified to contain this secularisation and liberal behaviours and values arose. In this context, the right-wing religious sectors stood out, especially Protestantism and Catholicism, bringing once again religion from the private and individual to the public sphere.[44]

Since the masses' demonstrations in 2013, there was a clear political bifurcation between individuals among two ideological spectra: right and left, described as conservative and progressive, respectively. It is notable that the conservative wave in Brazil has advanced since then, and its support in 2018 was massively for Bolsonaro.[45]

Bolsonaro's election

The course of the multidimensional crisis, with the downturn in the economy, the changes in the perception and tolerance of corruption, the exceptional levels of crime and the *antipetism* reaction, added to the wide strategic use of social media, implied the election of the president Jair Bolsonaro, currently without party.

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[41]   Ronald F Inglehart, 'Modernization, Existential Security and Cultural Change: Reshaping Human Motivations and Society', in *Advances in Culture and Psychology,* ed. by Michele J Gelfand, Chi-yue Chiu and Ying-yi Hong (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[42]   Ibid. 13.

[43]   Gil Alessi, 'Angela Alonso: O Brasil é um país muito conservador, que não muda fácil, nem rápido e nem sem reação', *El País,* 06 February 2019.

[44]   Almeida, 'Bolsonaro presidente'.

[45]   Francisco Thiago Cavalcante Garcez, Laura Hêmilly Campos Martins, Ítalo Moura Guilherme and Kevin Samuel Alves Batista, 'O Avançar da Agenda Conservadora e o Fascismo Latente no Brasil', *Revista UNIABEU* 12, no 30 (2019), 161–174.

According to Angela Alonso, there are three trends within Bolsonaro's electorate. First of all, there are the aforementioned *Bolsonarists,* with an adherence by heart and by moral nature, sharing all the values that the president represents. For this group, supported by a moralising religious, nationalist and militarist discourse, and by the idea of traditional family, Bolsonaro is the homeland saviour and symbolises everything they want to correct in the society. This is a relatively small part of the people who voted for him. Secondly, the other group that helped to elect him followed the line of radical *antipetism,* in which the most important thing was to vote for a candidate who was the antithesis of the PT. Finally, there was a third group that Alonso considered a bit naive or frivolous, for thinking that Bolsonaro, despite the speeches made during the campaign, would be less inflexible and staunch, and more lenient when being the Chief Executive. "These people must be very surprised, and regretful."[46]

Another fact that is worth being highlighted is that on 6 September 2018, as he was carried by his supporters in an election visit to Minas Gerais, Jair Bolsonaro was attacked and was stabbed in the abdomen. At that point, the candidate was already leading the polls, but he faced high rejection and was heavily attacked by opponents. The then candidate had to undergo emergency surgery and all this repercussion changed the course of the electoral campaign. Bolsonaro became less attacked by his opponents, for marketing reasons they did not want to appear attacking a competitor who was fighting for his life. Many voters became more empathetic towards the candidate, leading to an increase in intention to vote due to possible commotion in undecided voters. In addition, for alleged medical necessity, Bolsonaro became absent in all political debates, which could, in turn, be a possible compromise to his campaign due to his strong speech.[47]

Affiliated with the Social Liberal Party (Partido Social Liberal – PSL) Bolsonaro took first place in the first round of the 2018 presidential elections, with candidate Fernando Haddad, from the Workers' Party (PT) in second. On 28 October of the same year, in the second round, Jair Messias Bolsonaro was elected the 38th president of the Federative Republic of Brazil, with 55.13% of the valid votes.

Bolsonaro, a populist politician

The events that led to Brazil's multidimensional crisis prior to the 2018 elections could be seen as a major contextual factor in Bolsonaro's election. In a heavy Manichean campaign, he stood out among the candidates by praising the virtuous Brazilian people (the traditional family) and exalting their popular will, toward which policies should be aimed, while casting the established party as corrupt and wicked. This in itself is a great indicator of the populist traits in Bolsonaro, if we consider Hawkins and Kaltwasser's populism definition, as previously mentioned.[48]

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[46]   Alessi, 'Angela Alonso'.
[47]   Marcio Dolzan, 'Facada mudou rumos da campanha de Jair Bolsonaro', *Estadão,* 28 October 2018.
[48]   Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 'Introduction: The ideational approach', 3.

Additionally, in order to better understand the magnitude of Jair Bolsonaro as a populist politician, Tamaki and Fucks, led by the *Team Populism* project, made an analysis, using *holistic grading* of his speeches at the time of the campaign, which presented a mixture of populist with patriotic and nationalist traits, as later indicated. The speeches scale goes from 0 to 2, being 0 classified as "not populist", 0.5 as "somewhat populist", 1.0 as "populist", 1.5 as "very populist" and leaves 2.0 open for what can be called "perfectly populist".[49]

The analysis results show that Bolsonaro's speeches contain a growing level of populism as elections approach. He begins his campaign with an average populist score of 0.5 and ends it with an average of 0.9, an increase of almost 100%. The current president uses some artifices to make his speeches catchier and more appealing. The praise of popular sovereignty can be seen when he uses words such as "people" and "popular will", trying to show himself as a politician of the people who govern for them. The confrontation between him (and the good people) against the evil enemy, portrayed by his opposition (specially the left-wing and the Workers' Party, framed as "corrupt" and "inefficient", "accountable for the undermining of the traditional family and its values"), was another frame of his speeches, a Manichaean move commonly used by populist politics.[50]

The authors also point out that the presence of Patriotism and Nationalism traits in Bolsonaro's speeches was identified as the main reason why he did not score more in the populist analyses, like Hugo Chavez or even Donald Trump. "The core element of Bolsonaro's speeches is not the people, but the state and the nation", one of the reasons that the word "Brazil" is the most mentioned in his speeches, for instance, his campaign slogan was "Brazil above everything, God above all".[51]

The main distinction is that "patriotism, unlike populism, emphasizes the state", which according to Hawkins and Kaltwasser has a more independent existence than the individuals living in it, being above everything else.[52] The authors' great insight here was to understand that maybe this is due to the fact that, in the perspective of Bolsonaro, using words such as "People" is something that characterises his left-wing opposition, the Workers' Party, his main enemies. He may have decided then, as a strategy, to replace it as much as possible for "Brazil" and "nation", but the meaning would be the same, fact that would characterise it as even more populist than revealed.[53]

Conclusion

This paper has set out to analyse the multidimensional crisis that took over Brazil and implied in the election of the president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, a populist politician who

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49 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,* no 109 (2020), 103–127.
50 Tamaki and Fucks, 'Populism in Brazil's 2018 General Elections', 12.
51 Ibid. 16.
52 Kirk A Hawkins and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The Ideational Approach to Populism', *Latin American Research Review* 52, no 4 (2017), 513–528.
53 Tamaki and Fucks, 'Populism in Brazil's 2018 General Elections', 14.

used a moral discourse in his campaign to portray a fundamental battle between the evil establishment and the good people, claiming that policies should be tailored to the latter's general will.

First, the economic depression, after many years of economic growth, which conducted negative GDP growth and raised levels of unemployment, resulting in a crisis that has persisted until today. Second, hand in hand with the economic, a huge political crisis absorbed Brazil, resulting in the Impeachment of the President Dilma Roussef, affiliated to the PT party. Add to that, the many corruption scandals led the former President Lula, from the same party, to be convicted of money laundering and passive corruption, bringing up an aversion feeling towards the established left-wing party PT, known as antipetism, being primordial in the political polarisation process and later in the election of the current president.

Third, the reluctance to the progressive cultural changes intensified in the region opening up to a conservative wave, retaining traditional values and a moralising religious discourse on behalf of the family entity, which heavily supported Bolsonaro. Finally, in addition to all this, there was a high crime rate and the intensive role of social media as a means of information, that contributed to shape a generalised crisis scenario, in which the population was seeking for a saviour and found in Bolsonaro a strong figure who could maybe solve all their problems.

It is in this troubling scenario, by using heavy polarised and populist rhetoric, that Bolsonaro was elected, despite his strong hate speech against women, blacks, homosexuals and minorities. His discourse *in defence of Honour, Morals and Good Customs of the traditional Brazilian Family* (one of his mottos) attracted a huge mass of supporters mainly disappointed and exhausted with the path Brazil have been taking.

It is concluded that this new trend of extreme right-wing populism in Brazil with Bolsonaro, poses a great challenge to the conservation of the current models of contemporary democratic and liberal societies.

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