GUSTAVO VENTURELLI

Das Promessas Populistas às Ameaças Democráticas: Trajetória Política do Brasil

Final Version

PhD Dissertation presented as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Political Science.

Field of Study: Democracy, Political Institutions and Society.

Advisor: Dr. Paolo Ricci

São Paulo - SP

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GUSTAVO VENTURELLI

From Populist Promises to Democratic Threats: Brazil's Political Trajectory

Versão Corrigida

Tese apresentada à Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas (FFLCH) da Universidade de São Paulo (USP), como parte das exigências para a obtenção do título de Doutor em Ciência Política.

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From Populist Promises to Democratic Threats: Brazil's Political Trajectory

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There is a lot to say. What a journey so far. Life can be tough sometimes. Indeed, life is tough, as the main character of *Drained*[1] continuously repeats to himself. How did I get here? Well, I could not make this differently and begin appreciating my parents. And I do so not only for financial and psychological support throughout these years - and when I say that, I mean since I was an undergrad in Florianópolis eleven years ago - but for instilling in me the passion for politics. As long as I can remember, they have been involved with politics on several levels, from associativism, cooperativism, and institutional politics, fulfilling roles in the Brusque city hall by working for different administrations. They approved and supported all my choices; I could make those possible due to them. If one day I can give them back half of what they have given to me, I would be happy (and probably bankrupt).

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From a 130 thousand population city to a 22 million one. Hold on, let me catch my breath. My PhD's first year was turbulent. I stepped away for a while and then resumed my studies. That was made possible thanks to the understanding of the department, for which I thank naming Paolo Ricci, my advisor, and Glauco Peres, the chair at the time. I was lucky enough to have great friends in São Paulo who helped me cross this shady pathway. I will not name them, but I'll give a special thanks to the *soft punks*. You guys know who you are. You guys made my life so fun in the big city.

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[1] *O Cheiro do Ralo*, in Portuguese, is a comic by Lourenço Mutarelli, and it has its book-to-film adaptation by Heitor Dhalia.

ministrative assistant. Vasne helped me to navigate the academic bureaucracy smoothly. Countless emails exchanged and bureaucratic matters solved. In Kafka's classic *The Trial*, Joseph K. cannot understand the reasons behind his trial due to the labyrinthic intricacies of bureaucracy. Yes, sometimes academic bureaucracies are *kafkaesque*. Vasne is the missing element in Kafka's trial. The one who could make things clear as crystal.

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I applied for PrInt in early 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was challenging to go abroad. Hopefully, Professor Plotke emailed me with positive feedback, not only accepting to supervise my visit but continuously demonstrating his willingness to help by changing the visit period a few times. Since I had to change my stay dates and classes went online, David invited me to attend his course on populism and nationalism as an auditor, which I promptly accepted. In this course, I met Lucas Perello. Lucas became a friend and coauthor and introduced me to Alejandra Panzarelli. Their support was immeasurable, and I am infinitely grateful that our paths have crossed.

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I know you don't read, but I would like to thank you, Picky (my cat). You joined

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Hopefully, I remembered everyone. Memory can sometimes be deceiving. To the reader, sorry for these very personal pages. I can get emotional sometimes. And, of course, thank you for your time and interest in reading my work. I hope you enjoy it!

Abstract

This dissertation falls within two fields of study. First, it represents an effort in populism studies to bring evidence from Brazil. Second, delving into the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy, it uses Brazil's Bolsonaro as a case to assess if the election of a populist leader would have caused the Brazilian democratic backsliding. Chapter 1 analyzes how populism has been defined in Brazil and abroad throughout the last seven decades. It updates the debate by presenting the main contemporary approaches to populism before advocating for a minimal operationalizable concept. Chapters 2 and 3 apply this minimal definition empirically. The former analyzes official political speeches by three allegedly populist presidents through content analysis: Fernando Collor de Mello, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, and Jair Bolsonaro. It confirms previous results that show Bolsonaro as the most populist one, followed by Collor and Lula. Yet, it shows that these leaders made populist appeals more often than previous research thought. Furthermore, it goes deeper into these presidents' populism, discussing specific issues they use to make populist appeals and identifying who the people and the elite are in their rhetoric. Chapter 3 applies the same concept and techniques to election manifestos of presidential Brazilian elections between 2010 and 2022. It shows that contrary to what was believed, populism in Brazil is not only about leadership. Primarily, populism is present in the radical left. However, the 2018 elections had right-wing and even mainstream parties making populist appeals. This chapter also thoroughly examines these parties' populism and concludes that despite a few undemocratic claims existing among the radical left, they do not threaten democracy because they come from insignificant parties with no representation *de facto*. Finally, Chapter 4 applies the synthetic control method to check whether Bolsonaro is the cause of the Brazilian democratic decline. Bolsonaro is a symptom and continuer of something that began before he took office: Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. The chapter argues that if misused, impeachment can harm democracy. The dissertation caught the attention of topics overlooked by Brazilian political science, bringing evidence that populism exists in Brazilian democracy and should not be neglected by experts.

Keywords: Populism; Democratic Backsliding; Brazil; Jair Bolsonaro; Political communication.

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PCB	Brazilian Communist Party
MDB	Brazilian Democratic Movement
PTB	Brazilian Labor Party
PRTB	Brazilian Labor Renewal Party
PSDB	Brazilian Social Democracy Party
PSB	Brazilian Socialist Party
DC	Christian Democracy
PSC	Christian Social Party
PDT	Democratic Labor Party
PPL	Free Fatherland Party
PV	Green Party
PL	Liberal Party
NOVO	New Party
PATRI	Patriot
UP	Popular Union
PSL	Social Liberal Party
PSOL	Socialism and Freedom Party
REDE	Sustainability Network
PSTU	Unified Workers Socialist Party
UNIAO	Union Party
PODE	We Can
PCO	Workers Cause Party
PT	Workers' Party

Contents

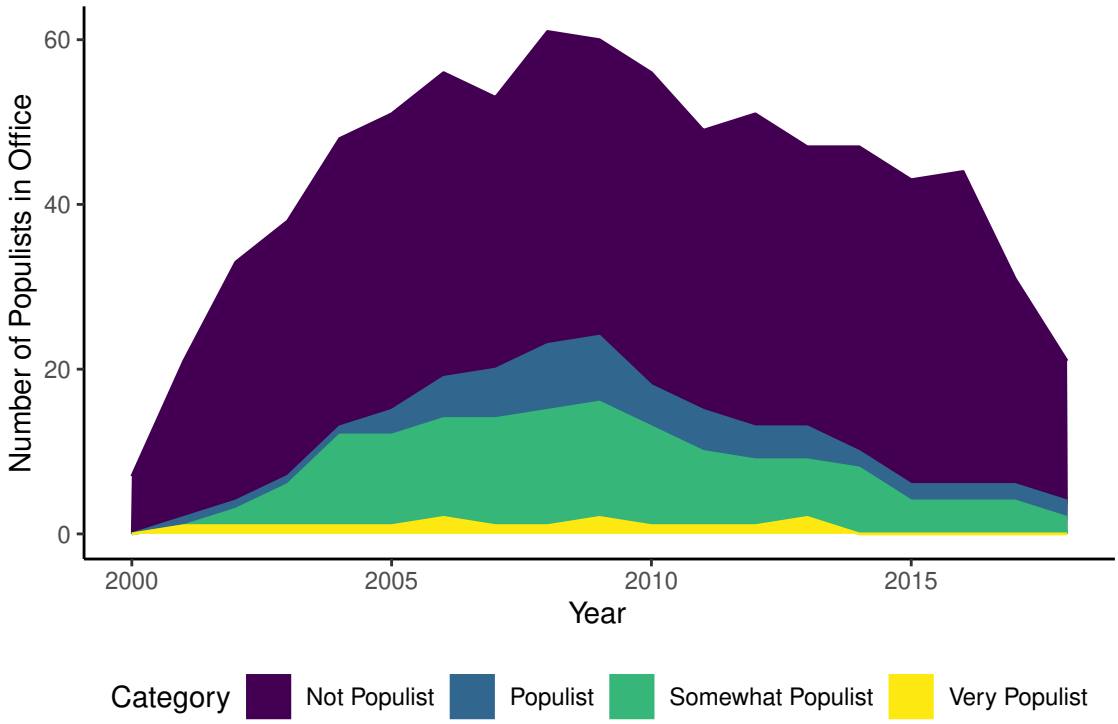
Introduction

In the early 2000s, a spectrum haunted the world: populism. "It is a populist *zeitgeist*," someone said (Mudde, 2004, p. 551). *L'esprit du temps*, the spirit of times. It would go like the wind, spread like a virus, touching even mainstream parties. But who are these populist leaders? What are their political parties? More importantly, to what extent do they threaten democracy? Scholars have pointed out several actors: Jörg Haider's *Freedom Party of Austria* (FPÖ), Silvio Berlusconi's *Forward Italy* (Forza Italia), the French Jean-Marine Le Pen's *National Front* (FN), the Dutch Pim Fortuyn's *Pim Fortuyn List* (LPF) and Geert Wilders's *Party of Freedom* (PVV), the British *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP), and the German *Party of Democratic Socialism* (PDS), among others (Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011).

Regardless of departure and arrival points, it went overseas. Latin America had its third wave of populism just at the turn of the century, led by figures like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Indeed, as Figure 1 portrays, populism hit the world. Between 2000 and 2009, one can see an increase in the number of populist leaders worldwide before dissipating. Is it a wave or a ripple? What kind of damage can this cause? Tsunamis are not necessarily height waves but are instead characterized by their long wavelength and can still bring severe damage. However, let me reserve the discussion on the relationship between populism and democracy for later.

Time runs slow in historical terms. Although Mudde (2004) identified a populist *zeitgeist* in 2004, which others named a *wave* (Foa & Mounk, 2019; Quinlan & Tinney, 2019; Bale & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021), *era* (Gerbaudo, 2017), or a *mirror* (Panizza, 2005) or *shadow* of democracy (Canovan, 1981), the boom of populist studies came later. Two emblematic episodes might have led to that. First, the 2016 American elections placed a flamboyant attention-seeker maverick in office. Since his rise, Donald Trump (Republican Party) has been depicted as a populist for being an outsider, assaulting the political establishment, and claiming to represent the real American people. Second, the *Brexit* referendum, through which the United Kindom (UK) left the European Union (EU). Nigel Farage (UKIP) probably stands out as the primary figure of the movement that instilled in British people's minds repelling feelings towards the EU regarding issues like immigration, economic crisis, and sovereignty, fueled by an anti-establishment discourse.

Figure 1 – Populists in Power (2000 - 2018)

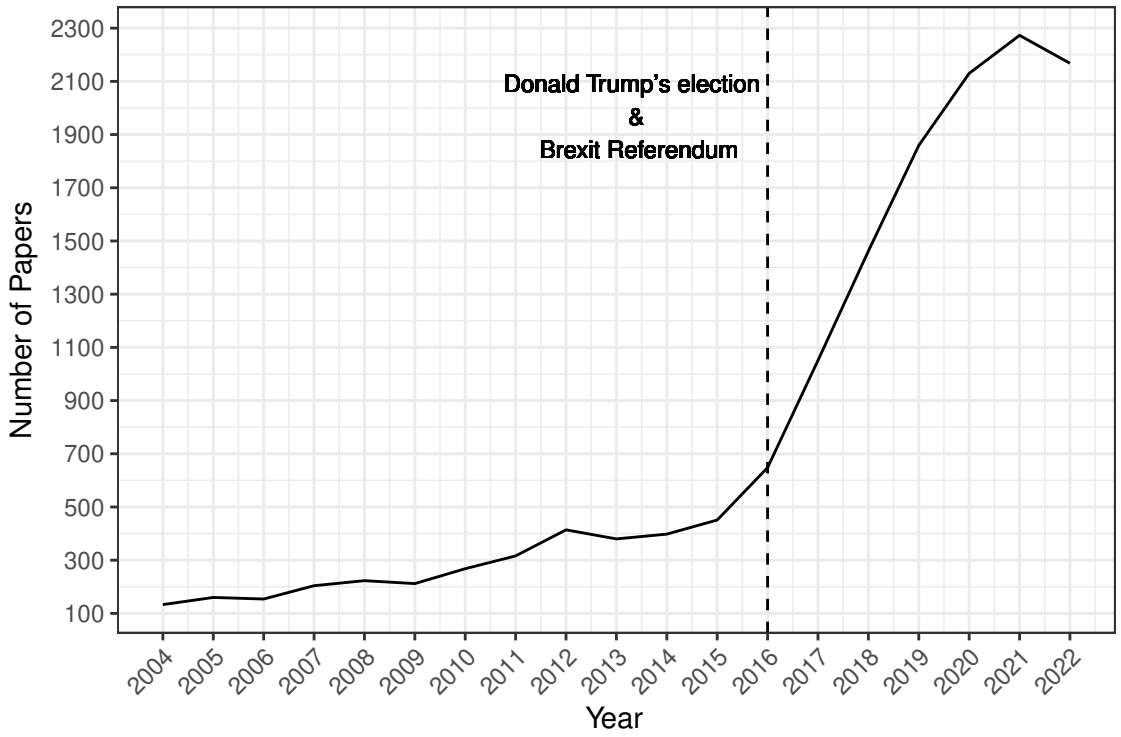


Source: Made by the author with data from *Global Populism Dataset*.

As Figure 2 shows, although published papers on populism have constantly increased since 2004, they did so more significantly from 2017 onward. Between 2016 and 2017, the number of papers with the term *populism* in the title, abstract, or keywords almost doubled. Then, it gradually increased up to 2021, slightly decreasing in 2022. The definition of the term has been contested in several fields, even beyond the academic realm. Not by chance, it has been loosely used by the media or politicians as a pejorative adjective to discredit and disqualify their opponents and even by populists themselves. However, the vagueness of the term is not due to laypersons only. When looking at how experts define populism, an issue emerges: there is no consensus around the concept. Therefore, pundits contributed to the ambiguity of populism as well, which unfolded into long-standing theoretical contests, leading some to suggest abandoning the category (Gomes, 1995).

Despite this dissertation being empirically oriented, considering the controversies around what populism is, I could not intend to measure it before defining it. To address this essentially contested concept, Chapter 1 brings a narrative review focused on populism as an analytical category. The main goal of this chapter is to reach a satisfactory definition in order to proceed with the empirical analysis. To do so, I first explore the main contributions of Brazilian literature between the 1950s and 1970s. I examine the primary definitional efforts and their limitations. Afterward, I engage in international debate, going from normative discussions to advocating for minimal concepts forged to empirical

Figure 2 – Papers with the Term *Populism* or *Populist* in Title, Abstract, or Keywords (2014 - 2022)



Source: Made by the author with data from *Scopus*.

application. Although some scholars stress that the confusion around populism definitions would reflect different empirical experiences (Taggart, 2000; Finchelstein, 2019), leading others to advocate for the maintenance of the concept's ambiguity (Brubaker, 2020), I finish this chapter by arguing that considering the ideational approach's advantages and potential agreement around its definitional attributes, this is the best theoretical effort to define populism.

One of the main applications of the ideational approach for the last fifteen years has been assessing political speeches. Authors applied it through different methods, like holistic grading (Hawkins, 2009, 2010) and content analysis (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015; Caiani & Kröll, 2017). In Brazil, the literature analyzed populism in political speeches by applying the above-mentioned methods (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020; Ricci et al., 2021; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). Ricci et al. (2021) results show Jair Bolsonaro, Fernando Collor de Mello, and Luis Inácio Lula da Silva as the three contemporary populist Brazilian presidents. In order to deepen their findings, in Chapter 2, I examine populism in the official speeches of the three alleged populist presidents in contemporary Brazil, considering their two first years in office. I apply dictionary-based man-machine content analysis to these documents. By a slight methodological modification suggested by the specialized literature (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn et al., 2014; Bonikowski & Girdon, 2015; Bonikowski et al., 2023), I verify their conclusions but bring evidence that how often these

presidents made populist appeals was underestimated by previous research. I also further identify the main social and political actors in their populistic appeals and around which axes they happen.

Unlike the literature on Brazil and Latin America, the European one is mostly on parties. Likewise, the methods and techniques employed vary (Hawkins & Silva, 2018; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Pauwels, 2011). The strong personalism (Ames, 2003) and lack of party institutionalization (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995) in Latin America could not have led the literature in another direction, so studies focused on the region are mainly on populist leaders. Although the reasons why parties are overlooked in Latin America are feasible, a significant part of the literature shows that parties matter in the legislative process (Figueiredo & Limongi, 2017) and voting choices (Samuels & Zucco, 2018). The rare populist studies that include Brazilian parties analyze just a few (Hawkins & Silva, 2018), and their findings do not match with expert surveys here and there. Therefore, a careful assessment of populism in Brazilian parties is urgent. That is what I do in Chapter 3. Following the specialized literature, I analyze and scrutinize election manifestos for presidential political contests from 2010 to 2022 by applying the same approach as the previous chapter. Results show that populism is present in the radical left parties but is also sparingly used by mainstream parties, exclusively in the 2018 elections. I thoroughly dissect what this populism is about to conclude that a few undemocratic positions on the radical left do not threaten democracy since they are insignificant parties.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I walk on thin ice to address the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy. It is consensus that Brazilian democracy's levels have declined in the last few years (Avritzer et al., 2021; Da Ros & Taylor, 2021; Cardoso & Silva, 2021; Tatagiba, 2021; Mendonça, 2021). Several scholars have depicted Jair Bolsonaro as the leading cause of such backwardness. I test this hypothesis by applying a synthetic control method model to find that Bolsonaro figures more as a symptom and continuer of Brazilian democratic backsliding rather than its cause. A second model tests the hypothesis of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment as an event of interest, with robust findings in this direction. If misused, impeachment can be detrimental to democracy.

In conclusion, this dissertation delves into the multifaceted realm of populism, spanning its conceptual underpinnings and manifestations in Brazil's political landscape. Having Brazil as a case, I explore a few facets, such as populism in presidential political speeches, election manifestos, and the intricate interplay between populism and democracy. Other aspects are yet to be explored, such as populism in political campaign speeches, in the legislative arena, on the local level, on social media, and at the public opinion level. The agenda is wide open, and in order to address all layers of populism, we simply need to acknowledge that Brazilian political science should embrace it.

1

From Ambiguity to Quasi-Consensus: The Path of a Contested Concept

Abstract

What is populism? The main goal of this chapter is to reach a satisfactory conceptualization of populism before proceeding to empirical analyses in the subsequent chapters. To do so, I present a narrative review focused on a set of selected definitions. After examining historical definitions in Brazilian literature and their limitations, I present and discuss the pros and cons of the three main contemporary approaches: the political-strategic, the cultural, and the ideational. These schools are focused on the empirical study of populism but have different understandings of the concept. I advocate for a minimal concept, which is best conceived by the ideational approach, considering its advantages compared to others.

1.1 Introduction

Let me start with a maxim: populism is a contested concept. So what? The problem is that misconceptualizations or different understandings of a category lead to infinite errors. One typical mistake is that several approaches "do not explain or understand populism itself" (Team Populism, 2018). A second main issue is that once the literature does not overcome the vagueness and ambiguity around populism definitions, how could one compare different experiences? Social sciences have several strategies on how to build concepts (Sartori, 1970; Goertz, 2006; Adcock & Collier; Collier & Adcock, 1999; Collier & Levitsky, 1997). Different assumptions have different implications on how one would operationalize these concepts empirically. Even though these are long-time concerns regarding populism, the initial efforts to define it are mostly theory-oriented, without empirical application concerns. Although endeavors to empirically understand and measure this phenomenon

are the main goals of the specialized literature nowadays, it is crucial to understand what populism is and is not.

The origins of populism as a phenomenon are related to two historical episodes in different parts of the world in the 19th century: The *People's Party* in the United States and the *Narodniks* in Russia. The former was an anti-elite and anti-establishment agrarian movement that sought control over the prices of its products and later organized into a party for radical democracy. The latter was founded by an intellectual elite whose primary objective was to value the peasant lifestyle in contrast to the modern one (Canovan, 1981).

Populism as a concept, however, appeared more systematically in the 20th century. The specialized literature usually points to Ionescu and Gellner's (1969) *Populism: its meanings and national characteristics* as the first collection of essays aiming to define the category. The book is the outcome of a seminar organized at the London School of Economics in 1967 and presents several definitional efforts. However, in Latin America, a few scholars were on the same subject, seeking to explain and theorize the specific context once populism was the main label attached to politicians in this continent, such as Juan Perón (Argentina), Getúlio Vargas (Brazil), and Jose Maria Velasco Ibarra (Ecuador). Over the ages, populism spread worldwide, and in Latin America, notably, populist leaders popped up once and then. During the 1990s, neoliberal populist figures like Fernando Collor de Mello (Brazil), Carlos Menem (Argentina), and Alberto Fujimori (Peru) were elected. In the 2000s, the so-called left turn brought radical populists such as Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia), and Rafael Correa (Ecuador) to office. Nonetheless, populism is not exclusive to Latin America.

In recent years, populism has become a customary word in almost everyone's mouth. After Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential elections in the USA and the approval of Brexit through a referendum, populism was revealed as the word of the year by the Cambridge Dictionary 2017 edition. A year later, in Brazil, the term is back on the trend with the campaign and election of Jair Bolsonaro. Throughout history, the term has been used as a pejorative adjective to disqualify political adversaries and disagreements without conceptual or semantic precision. Nevertheless, the term's vagueness is not restricted to the average citizen. It is also an issue inside political science and, more broadly, the social sciences, whose efforts in defining it have spanned decades.

Unmistakably, the preceding discussion prompted scholars to contemplate the phenomenon and explore different avenues for conceptualizing it. Roughly, there are two broad sets of approaches. On the one hand, historical-structuralist definitions sought to qualify populism by its temporal context. On the other hand, an array of sophisticated thoughts honed the term into a refined analytical category. From broad definitions covering pretty distinct experiences, where the concept works as a conceptual umbrella, to minimal definitions restricting populism to the realm of politics and limiting its definition

to a few elements, the contest around what populism is and is not has been a long one. In the following sections, I provide an overview of this debate.

1.2 Descriptive Approaches

Experts talk about a populist *zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004), era (Gerbaudo, 2017), about populism as a mirror of democracy (Panizza, 2005), or as its shadow (Canovan, 1999). Beyond these characterizations, authors often think of populism as a sequence of waves[1](Foa & Mounk, 2019; Quinlan & Tinney, 2019; Bale & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2021), usually counted as three (Mudde & Katlwasser, 2017).

Populism is nothing new in Brazilian and Latin American politics and society. Not by chance, De La Torre (2017) employed the expression "land of populism" to describe the continent. Brazil has been flooded by all three well-known populist waves that have hit Latin America (De La Torre, 2017; Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017, 2019). The first wave covered the democratic era from 1946 to 1964, also known as populist democracy (Ianni, 1968).

The second wave of Latin American populism began with Carlos Menem's election in May 1989 in Argentina. By December of the same year, Fernando Collor de Mello had won the runoff of the Brazilian elections. Finally, Alberto Fujimori joined the populist team in June 1990, becoming the ninetieth Peruvian president. As previously mentioned, this wave is called "neoliberal populism" (Weyland, 1999) because of the neoliberal policies that characterized these leaders' discourse and administrations.

Finally, the third wave overlapped with the second one since Menem and Fujimori were still in power when Hugo Chávez took office after winning the Venezuelan 1998 elections. Followed by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2002, Brazil), Evo Morales (2006, Bolivia), and Rafael Correa (2007, Ecuador), Chávez is the first name of the *pink tide*. This phenomenon brought several left-wing parties to power in Latin America, mixing populist and inclusionary appeals (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). A few of these cases unfolded into democratic decline, especially in Venezuela and Ecuador. Although Lula is listed, there are controversies about whether he is a populist leader or not, which will be explored in Chapter 2.

Throughout these waves, Latin American social science witnessed a few efforts to define populism. The first endeavors focused on the the first wave, and still receive lots of attention from scholars in the field. However, this historical-structuralist approach to

[1] The metaphor of waves is common in political science (Huntington, 1991). Paraphrasing Mainwaring & Perez-Liñán (2013), a populist wave is described by a significant increase of populist leaders or parties taking office.

populism is not very useful because it is interested in describing the phenomenon and the relationship between the actors involved rather than carefully conceptualizing it. I could not jump into contemporary debates before briefly examining this literature. By way of example, I will briefly discuss the case of the Brazilian *populist republic*. The period between 1945 and 1964 was exhaustively debated among scholars, who offered a few tentative definitions.

1.2.1 Populism in Brazil (1946 - 1964): A Historic-Structuralist Approach

The "populist democracy" (Ianni, 1968), "period" (Filho, 2010), or "republic" (Conniff, 2012) lasted from 1946, when Eurico Dutra took office, to 1964, when João Goulart fled to Uruguay to avoid capture while Brazil witnessed a military *coup d'état*. The idea of populism was so pervasive that not only leaders were considered populists, but the state itself was described as a populist institution (Ianni, 1991).

In the 1990s, Saes (1994) distinguished between the first populist wave in Brazil, known as "classic populism," and the subsequent wave, known as "neopopulism" or "neoliberal populism." A historical structuralist perspective defined the writing on classic populism (Weffort, 1978; Ianni, 1969; Andrade, 1979; Jaguaribe, 1954), emphasizing its social roots and connecting it to particular stages of economic development (Hawkins, 2009; Weyland, 2001). Therefore, their idea of populism is close to modernization theories, particularly those that focus on the industrialization of peripheral nations of the global economy, which would result in a stigma that would associate populism with a transitional process between traditional and modern societies. In this sense, populism would disappear once modernization found its way through society (Germani, 1971).

Looking at the big picture, populist regimes operate cross-class coalitions and seek popular mobilization to support import-substituting industrialization (Weffort, 1978; Andrade, 1979; Ianni, 1969). Jaguaribe (1954) suggests populism is a typical phenomenon of the masses. While the masses share their social origins and occupy the same place during urbanization and industrialization - they are workers - they differ from the proletariat because they have no class consciousness (Jaguaribe, 1954). During this process, massification is a *sine qua non* condition for populism to emerge. Thus, populism and populist democracy are characterized by the dominant class's inability to manage society and by the emergence of a charismatic leader capable of uniting the people through a shared identity (Jaguaribe, 1954).

Francisco Weffort (1978) points out that populism emerged during a political crisis and economic development. The characteristics of this political crisis are the old

oligarchies losing their hold on power, the new industrial classes' inability to rule, and the inclusion of the masses into politics (Weffort, 1978). Although one of the main features of populism in the 20th century in Brazil and Latin America is its link with the industrialization and modernization of the continent, in rural contexts such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, populism has also developed (de la Torre, 2017).

Because there was no class consciousness during this time, the masses could not speak for themselves. Therefore, all social groups rely on a charismatic leader who can bring together all the classes and their disparate interests in a political coalition that the majority will support. In the absence of a hegemonic group, with no social segment capable of playing any expected historical role, a populist leader emerges as a dominant form in a political void (Ianni, 1991). Even though Ianni (1968) does not offer a systematic definition and tantamount populism to "mass politics," "Vargas's economic development model," or "*Getulism*," the closest to a conceptualization is the idea of the urban masses manipulation by a charismatic leader who aims to industrialize the country (Ianni, 1968).

In his writings between the 1960s and early 1970s, Weffort (1978) also does not offer a straightforward definition of populism. On the contrary, his essay writing style presents some generic but traceable efforts. For the author, "Populism is essentially the glorification of public power. It is how the State has direct contact with the individuals gathered in the mass through the leader" (Weffort, 1978, p. 28). A few pages further, Weffort claims that "Populism [...] is always a popular way of glorifying a person who appears as the desired image for the State" (Weffort, 1978, p. 36). In Weffort's endeavors, populism is defined as a "governing style and mass politics" (Ferreira, 2001, p. 32). The Brazilian populist democracy is portrayed as a state represented by the leading individual who rules under perpetual ambiguity while balancing the antagonistic interests of the dominating classes. Yet, populism is more than just the embodiment of the authority of the state over social groupings. It is also characterized by the state's reliance on the political engagement of the metropolitan masses to legitimize its decisions (Weffort, 1978).

Weffort's definitions of populism emphasize strong personalism. It could be interpreted as a channel of interaction between the state and the populace, as mass policy, or even as a style of government. The coalition of all classes is one of many aspects of the governance style. The relationship between the leader and the people is another example of it. The idea of a leader manipulating the masses is prevalent in literature from the 1950s to the 1970s (Andrade, 1979; Weffort, 1978). However, they also claim that as the working people obtained some political and social rights (such as Work Laws), the relationship became ambiguous (Weffort, 1978; Gomes, 1995), although asymmetric. Despite Weffort's analytical skills, his notion of populism is nebulous and continues to change throughout his works.

Concisely, populism and the so-called populist democracy are best understood as

the state's sovereignty, represented by a charismatic leader who manipulates the masses and the dominant classes by bolstering the national industry while avoiding assaulting the old agrarian oligarchies.

There are several limitations to the ideas put forth by these authors. When analyzing the same period during the 1990s, Gomes (1995:55) argued for substituting populism for *workerism* because the latter would be a more appropriate category to describe "a set of political, party, and Union practices and ideas." The author likewise criticizes the concept of a historical role determined a priori for any social class (Gomes, 1995). However, detractors go much further. Hawkins and Kaltwasser (2018) stress that these definitions are restricted to a specific context or historical era, the one of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization.

As political alliances are not an exclusive characteristic of populists, having cross-class coalitions as a definitional element would be a shortcoming (Andrade, 1979; Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019). This approach also faced conceptual difficulties with the 1990s resurgence of populism in a neoliberal vein, which was opposed to the economic policies of classic populism (Weyland, 2001). To overcome these limitations, a strategy would be to restrict populism to the political domain, in contrast to definitions from the 1960s and 1970s, which depict populism as a phenomenon that crosscuts social, economic, and historical realms. Consequently, populist experiences hardly ever exhibit all of these characteristics - and sufficient but not necessary conditions lead to misunderstanding. Finally, since these definitions are confined to particular contexts, the concept cannot travel historically or geographically (Sartori, 1970).

Before delving into approaches that bring minimal concepts of populism, allow me to briefly present how the discussion about defining this term unfolded internationally.

1.3 International Literature on Populism: From Normative to Empirical Studies

Since Ionescu and Gellner rolled the ball in 1967, theoretical endeavors to define populism spread like wildfire. Several paths can be taken to organize these efforts. Internationally, scholars arrange schools of thought into different clusters but always list *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969) as the baseline. Product of a seminar held in London in 1967, this collection of essays aimed to solve disagreements around what populism is. A few suggestions came out of it. McRae (1969) points to populism as a moralistic apolitical ideology with conspiracies about power usurpation threatening the ordinary man. For Wiles (1969), populism is a syndrome in which the fundamental assumption is that the people have all the virtues. According to Minogue

(1969), populism is a mass movement through which individuals abandon their private interests to belong to something that transcends them. Finally, populism is conceived as a political-cultural dimension profoundly incompatible with democracy (Worsley, 1969). Although the idea of the book was to bring the controversies around populism to an end by asking whether populism has "any underlying unity, or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies" (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 1), "these studies do not much encourage broader conceptualization" (AlRoy, 1970, p. 65), with contextual and regional characteristics imbued to these definitions.

In the following decades, the literature moved forward in defining populism, although disagreements persisted. Germani (1973) characterizes populism as an outcome of a modernization and secularization progress based on a cross-class coalition, whereas Shils (1996) opposes it to pluralism since he describes populism as a Manichean departure from democracy that places the general will above institutions, rules, and norms. Canovan (1980) anticipates Finchelstein (2019) by arguing that no single definition would apply to all contexts and splits populism into agrarian and political populism.

A school of thought that gained many followers is the Essex School. Pushed by Laclau's (1977) first effort to define populism, the discursive approach is mobilized by contemporary authors (Mouffe, 2018; Katsambekis, 2019, 2022; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Stavrakakis et al., 2017) and also influenced subsequent approaches (Mudde, 2004; Ostiguy, 2017). For Laclau, populism is a political logic that builds collective identities (Laclau, 2005a, 2005b). This political logic divides society into two antagonistic groups: the people and the hegemonic bloc. Departing from a logic of difference where several social actors have distinct unheard demands to a chain of equivalences through which grievances are articulated, populists build collective subjects to contest political power (Laclau, 2005a).

Usually, these demands are grouped and canalized into institutional politics by a party or leader, as is the case of the Spanish *Podemos* or the Greek *SYRIZA*. For instance, SYRIZA capitalized on demands from distinguished social actors, such as peasants requesting land reform, urban workers better wages, women equal rights, the youth for a better future, and so on (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Although they have different demands, they have the same enemy: the elites. In the Greek case, it was not only national political elites but also supranational and international institutions such as the European Union or the International Monetary Fund. The concept of the people is probably the most promising take on populism by Laclau (1977, 2005a, 2005b). He argues that the people must be constructed, and it is an empty signifier. That means "the people" has no meaning a priori, and it is signified depending on the context, demands, and groups unsatisfied with the status quo.

More contemporary debates brought new airs to the discussion (Mouffe, 2005, 2018,

2019; Urbinati, 2019a, 2019b; Finchelstein, 2019; Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2019). Yet, these are primarily theoretical-analytical studies, usually within political theory, political philosophy, or history of ideas fields. Empirical-oriented approaches have also flourished in the last two decades. The three most compelling are the political-strategic, the political-cultural, and the ideational approaches (Kaltwasser et al., 2017). In the three following sections, I present each and their main limitations. In the end, I argue why I side with the ideational approach.

1.3.1 The Political-Strategic Approach to Populism

The political-strategy approach emerges in the context of Latin American populist leaders who did not fit into the classical populism definitions. Weyland (1996) identifies unexpected affinities between populism and coins the term *neoliberal populism* to analyze political leaders such as Carlos Ménem (Argentina), Alberto Fujimori (Peru), and Fernando Collor de Mello (Brazil). In this way, his concept's redefinition aims to overcome the limitations of economic (e.g., Sachs, 1989, Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991)[2] and historical-structuralist (e.g., Weffort, 1978, Germani, 1978, Ianni, 1969) definitions.

Whereas the former reduces populism to economic irresponsibility characterized by the trade-off between the distribution of benefits and the support of the masses, which would lead to economic and political collapse, the latter would be restricted to the historical context of modernization, industrialization, and the inclusion of the masses in the political life. As cumulative concepts [3], they are hardly operationalized. Thus, Weyland (2001) raises a fundamental question on populism's definition, one which takes a step back and discusses methodological strategies for building concepts in political science.

In the first moment, Weyland (2001) adopts a strategy similar to those of the authors in the ideational approach: a minimal definition, following Sartori's (1970) recommendations. Therefore, he criticizes two usual ways of concept construction. First, the cumulative fashion combines attributes from different domains, such as political, economic, historical, cultural, and so on, into one definition. Second, radial strategies combine sufficient but not necessary elements to classify a case as populist.

[2] Acemoglu et al. (2013, p. 772) "offer a simple model of populism defined, following Dornbusch and Edwards (1991), as the implementation of policies receiving support from a significant fraction of the population, but ultimately hurting the economic interests of this majority".

[3] Cumulative concepts, as Weyland (2001) defines, "elaborates definitions that combine the attributes from different domains stressed by various scholars through a logical 'and' ($\bigwedge$). Accordingly, only cases to which all of the main characteristics from different domains apply to qualify as instances of the concept" (Weyland, 2001, p. 2). Gerring defines it differently, arguing that cumulative concepts rank "the (binary) attributes commonly associated with a concept in a cumulative fashion, that is, as more or less essential to a concept" (Gerring, 2012, p. 137). Thus, this ordinal scale goes from a minimal to a maximal definition in a logic that allows us to say that the more attributes of the concept a case possesses, the more of the concept it is. The problem is that it does not allow us to say how much than others our case is since the concept is built in a binary fashion.

A cumulative example would be Cammack's (2000) idea of how populism should be operationalized. For the author, assessing populism depends on "an integrated analysis of *discourse*, *institutions*, and *political economy*, in a specified *historical conjuncture*" (Cammack, 2000, p. 152). Finchelstein (2019) offers one of the freshest notions of populism as a radial concept. The author suggests sixteen sufficient but not necessary elements that are dimensions of populism. The issue derived from both definitions is the same: the perpetuation of the confusion around populism's conceptualizations. Having attributes from different domains that are rarely satisfied or too many elements that could or could not characterize populism leads to misunderstanding and disagreement on what populism is. Even Roberts (1995), a representative of the political-strategy approach, is criticized by Weyland (2001) since he offers a multi-domain definition, contributing to the package of uncertain and vague concepts. Thus, Weyland plays an essential role in how political scientists have struggled to restrict populism to the political domain in his definitional endeavors.

However, Weyland himself faced some criticism of his definition and went from one methodological perspective to another in his efforts to define populism. Thus, more recently, the author has advocated for a fuzzy-set (Ragin, 2000) approach to define populism (Weyland, 2017). The switch is due to the alleged blurry thresholds to distinguish populists from non-populists. Therefore, defining it based on Ragin's (2000) suggestions would be a better strategy, especially regarding hard-to-define cases that conflate populism with other strategies or ideologies.

Before seeing the limits of the political-strategic approach to populism, the following subsection discusses the concept as suggested by this school in detail.

1.3.1.1 Defining the Concept

As the primary face of populism as a political strategy, Weyland (2001, p. 14) defines it 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." The main difference, when compared to the other approaches this chapter discusses next, is the focus on what populists do to achieve and exercise power. In Weyland's words (2017, p. 77), "a political strategy determines the principal ways and means by which a political actor captures the government and makes and enforces authoritative decisions."

A previous conception of populism as a strategy was offered by Collier and Collier (1991, p. 788), for whom it is "characterized by mass support from the urban working class and/or peasantry; a strong element of mobilization from above; a central role of leadership from the middle sector or elite, typically of a personalistic and/or charismatic

nature; and an anti-status quo, nationalist ideology and program." Such a definition was further used by other authors (Burgess & Levtisky, 2003) when analyzing how radical Latin American populist parties responded to neoliberal challenges from the 1980s and 1990s and their organizational capacity to adapt.

Authors who define populism from this perspective do not necessarily do it in terms of a strategy but also put it in terms of organizing or mobilizing (Moffitt, 2016). Barr (2018), for instance, states that populism is a means to achieve an end. Therefore, populism is a goal-oriented strategy. The means one uses to achieve one's goals can enclose different features, such as rhetoric and organization, which should be assumed as tactics related to a broad strategy, *i.e.*, they are the mechanisms through which one gains popular support.

Drawing upon social movements theories, Jansen (2011, p. 82) understands populism as mobilization and defines it as "any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people." For Pappas (2012, p. 2), "populism is seen as a strategic power game aiming to transform potential majorities into real ones by creating novel social cleavages." These cleavages are based on relations between "the people" and "the elite," "forged by a political leadership which aims to create a political movement" (Pappas, 2012, p. 2)

There are some disagreements among the authors mentioned above. For instance, whereas Weyland (2001, 2017) and Pappas (2012) understand populism as a *top-down* phenomenon where leadership is capable of mobilizing their followers, Jansen sees it as a grassroots movement. Hence, a populist rise would have a *bottom-up* direction. Another disputed point is on the organizational level of populist movements and parties. Weyland (2001) states that populism is characterized by party uninstitutionalization and lack of organization. Thus, it would happen in societies where party systems have no significant institutionalization level, and supporters are also unorganized and defined as an amorphous mass. However, Roberts (2006) states that populist movements can be organized at the party and civil society levels.

Weyland is undoubtedly the most prominent of these authors, notwithstanding the ongoing controversies. As a result, the following paragraphs primarily concentrate on the characteristics of Weyland's concept of populism as a political strategy (2001, 2017). According to Barr (2018, 87), the main elements of Weyland's definition are personal leadership, the heterogeneous mass of followers, how the leader communicates to the people, and the personification of politics.

As a personal leader who depends on mass support, the populist seeks to demonstrate his power and support through elections, mass mobilizations, referendums, and plebiscites. By bypassing the traditional vehicles that connect political forces and parti-

sans, the populist leader maintains a direct relationship with his followers based on loyalty and identification. Therefore, he or she creates an intense connection through public appearances that put them face-to-face with their followers in situations that depict them as ordinary men. Populist leaders also use other means to achieve their followers in this sense. Hugo Chávez, for instance, used to have a television show called *Hello President* (Aló Presidente, in Spanish), where he spoke daily to the nation in a very informal way. Following Chávez's footsteps, Rafael Correa also addressed Ecuadorean people weekly through his *Citizen Link* (Enlace Ciudadno, in Spanish). Likewise, Jair Bolsonaro communicated weekly to his followers through live-streaming videos on YouTube (Venturelli et al., 2023).

The unorganized mass represented by the populist leader is usually portrayed as the underdog, who has no voice in political life and suffers at the hands of powerful enemies who represent the establishment. They feel responsible for changing the nation's situation by supporting and electing a populist leader - the sole option to save them and overcome the crisis they are experiencing. Weyland insists on an unorganized mass of followers because most have no institutional bonds, which also characterizes the type of relationship since the personification weakens political parties, the traditional link between political leaders and their supporters. Not surprisingly, Weyland's (2021) more recent research focuses on how personalistic populist leaders might leave Latin America without parties and potentially without democracy.

Roberts (2006) offers an alternative and more effective approach from the political-strategy school. Acknowledging Weyland's (2001) takes on populism compatibility with market-oriented policies and the limitations of classic populism definitions, Roberts argues that the level of organization of parties (type of leadership) and supporters (type of followers) could not be definitional elements of populism. Therefore, he defines populism as "the political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites" (Roberts, 2006, p. 127). He thus suggests a typology of populism based on levels of organization (low and high) within two realms (party and civil society). *Organic populists* would have high levels of organization in both parties and civil society (e.g., Mexico under Cárdenas). In this case, the necessary condition of an unmediated or direct relationship between the leader and the masses falls to the ground since organized parties are precisely traditional means of communication between politicians and citizens. With low levels of organization in parties but high in civil society, Juan Perón or *Peronism*, is what Roberts (2006) names *Labor Populism*. APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), in Peru, would be an example opposite to Peronism, with a high level of party organization but a low in civil society, called *Partisan Populism*. Finally, what Weyland (2001) defines as populism is only a type of populism in Roberts's (2006) theorization. Low levels of the party and civil society organization characterize *Electoral Populism*, such as those seen in Fujimori, Menem, and Collor.

All in all, Weyland is still the most quoted author in the political-strategic approach to populism. While this conceptualization of populism provides essential steps in overcoming the limitations of previous definitions, it has several restrictions that should not be overlooked. Let me briefly comment on them in the following subsection.

1.3.2 Advantages and Limitations

According to its followers, the political-strategy approach has a few advantages. Barr (2018) stresses its historical continuities, analytical utility, and operationality. He argues that the political-strategic definition is connected with the previous understanding of populism (notably, the Latin American literature). However, this is not exclusive to this approach. As Moffitt (2016) noted, the ideational approach is partly based on McRae's (1969) concept. I would also point out that Hawkins's (2009) interpretation of populism incorporates Wiles's (1969) understanding of it, particularly the notion of the common man as virtuous. Additionally, Worsley's (1969) suggestion served as the basis for Moffitt's (2016) own categorization, especially in his most recent work co-authored with Ostiguy (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2020).

Barr (2018) states that the second advantageous point would be the concept's balance in the trade-off intension/extension (Sartori, 1970). Following Goertz's (2006) understanding of constructing concepts, it would be satisfactory at all levels, from the basic (the *genus* of the concept), descending to the secondary level (the definitional elements of the concept), and to its empirical indicators (specifics through which one gather empirical data). However, it is not all sunshine and rainbows.

To define populism as a strategy that seeks to achieve political power through personalistic leadership brings an explicit limitation. First, the definition is confined to political leaders. The concept would be operationalized only in countries with personalistic electoral connections. It implies weak parties or party systems with a low level of institutionalization. However, one has seen populism popping up in countries with different levels of party institutionalization. Also, the European literature on populism is mostly about parties, while in the United States, it is mainly about social movements. From the political-strategic approach, one could not study or talk about populism in movements such as *Occupy Wall Street* in the US, *Indignados* in Spain, or, more recently, the *Yellow Vests* in France. Similarly, it is not feasible to assess populism in the *Alternative for Deutschland* in Germany, the *Law and Justice* (PiS) in Poland, *SYRIZA* in Greece, or the *National Front* in France. Finally, populist attitudes are also out of reach of such a theory. In other words, populism at the individual level cannot be assessed from a strategic perspective, and studies have shown that populist attitudes matter, especially to make sense of successful populist parties and leaders (Akkerman et al., 2014;

Marcos-Marne, 2021). Concisely, populism cannot be limited to populist leadership.

Ostiguy (2017) argues that Weyland (2001) is wrong in defining populism based on an organizational criterion. For him, "defining populism as a power capability based on numbers and little organization for an individual ruler would simply appear to be a complex way of just referring to demagoguery" (Ostiugy, 2017, p. 90). Furthermore, Weyland's (2001) idea that populism is transitory and then necessarily fails or transcends itself is also flawed. Ostiguy (2017) brings Chávez as an example of a populist leader who remained in power for fourteen consecutive years, making populistic appeals, and would have spent even more years if he was still alive. Nevertheless, these are the most obvious critiques of the political-strategic approach. Besides these, Rueda (2021) has systematized substantive problems in this approach in three main issues: selective rationalism, leader-centrism, and normative bias.

Rueda (2021) criticizes Weyland's idea of populism, stating that it is founded on a rational choice theory assumption, especially that politicians are single-minded office-seekers. Arguing that the literature already found that politicians can also be issue-oriented or policy-seekers, Rueda (2021) claims that one will never know what a politician intends because we cannot measure intentionality in social science. To criticize the rationalist assumption in Weyland's theory is to endorse a historical critique in political science that recognizes that reason is not the exclusive basis for political actions. Even the rational choice theory states that agents try to achieve their goals using the best means according to what they consider better for them, based on beliefs, preferences, and strategic opportunities (Rueda, 2021).

Another flaw identified by Rueda (2021) in Weyland's theory is leader-centrism. This condition is related not only to the difficulty of analyzing political parties and movements but also to the lack of regard for populist voters' views, *i.e.*, the demand-side of populist identities. Weyland sees populist sympathizers as a disorganized and diverse group. However, Romney's (non-populist) and Trump's (populist) voters are pretty similar. The same is valid for Jean-Marine Le Pen and his daughter in France, despite Weyland's classification of the former as non-populist. The problem here is that leader-centrism ignores the role of organized social groups or institutions that have established partisans before the emergence of a populist leader. Ostiguy et al. (2021) also pointed out the negligence of the followers in the political-strategic approach, saying that these authors do not address why supporters follow populists or establish bonds with them. Leader-centrism can also lead to false positives. Historically, we have seen non-populist religious and labor-based personalistic leaders trying to achieve power in contexts of low levels of institutionalization (Hawkins, 2010).

Finally, Rueda (2021) criticizes Weyland's normative bias. As previously discussed, the relationship between populism and democracy is at the core of populism studies. For

Weyland (2013), populism is bad for democracy, especially considering the Latin American democratic backsliding after left-leaning leaders came to power in the 2000s (Weyland, 2021). One can notice two normative biases here. First, the argument is that left-wing populism is worse than right-wing. He says that "right-wing populism did not ruin democracy" in Latin America, while "left-wing populism has a more negative balance sheet" (Weyland, 2013, p. 26). The second issue would be the lack of "methodological empathy," or the "idea that researchers who focus on 'stigmatized' movements or ideologies need to avoid their normative bias and 'enter' the world of its protagonists" (Rueda, 2021, p. 180).

Considering the limitations of the political-strategic approach, it is necessary to discuss other definitions. The following section discusses the political-cultural approach to populism.

1.3.3 The Political-Cultural Approach to Populism

This approach considers populism a socio-cultural phenomenon. Highly influenced by Laclau's (2005a) definition of populism, authors emphasize social and cultural traits that characterize different groups within society. They come from an interdisciplinary perspective, mixing sociology, anthropology, and political science. Authors in this school have named the nature of the phenomena differently throughout their efforts. Populism's *genus* is defined as a style (Knight, 1998; Moffitt, 2016), a form of relationship between political leaders and their followers (Ostiguy, 2017), or performance (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2017). More recently, Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021) joined forces with the discursive approach to populism (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2021) to suggest that populism is a relational performative practice (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021). From that, studies addressing how populists visually represent the people and considering the visual politics of populism popped up (Moffitt, 2022a, 2022b).

But how do they differ from Laclau's theory? First, unlike the political-cultural approach, the discursive approach has real-life experiences, such as the *Podemos*, the Spanish party that emerged from social manifestations. *Podemos* claimed the label populist for themselves and had interesting election results in the last few cycles. Thus, Ostiguy believes that populism, as defined by Laclau (2005a), is a good political strategy but a terrible analytical tool (Facultad de Ciencias Sociales - UNC, 2020). This critique stems from the fact that this approach could not explain right-wing populism in Europe because every European populist is also nativist. However, applications of the concept to discuss right-wing party cases in Europe exist (Stavrakakis et al., 2017; Mouffe, 2005).

A second aspect where Ostiguy and Moffitt (2021) try to distance themselves from Laclau's definition is in "the people's" characterization. As suggested by Laclau (2005a),

"the people" is an empty signifier. "The people" could mean anything depending on the context from where it emerges. Nonetheless, Ostiguy (2017) argues that populism does not create "the people" but deals with established social, cultural, and national identities. "The peoples" are already given. They are differently articulated from experience to experience, but they already exist. Considering that "the people" cannot be an empty signifier because it cannot ever be totally empty of meaning, Ostiguy et al. (2021, p. 7) suggest, instead, the idea of "the people" as an "overflowing signifier," which I will delve into soon.

Finally, a third critique is that populism should not be about discourse only but rather contemplate reception (Ostiguy et al., 2021). In other words, it is about a specific type of political relationship between political leaders and their supporters based on social and cultural appeals that are positively received by the "low" (Ostiguy, 2017).

Significant attempts have been made to advance and refine the political-cultural theory. I will review their definitions below and then consider the main critiques of this approach.

1.3.3.1 Defining the Concept

Suppose populism is a style of doing politics, as Knight (1998) suggests, implying a strong bond between the populist leader and their followers. In that case, one could say that the origin of the socio-cultural approach is given in Weffort (1978). However, the type of relationship that defines populism for these authors is different. While the former is about the intensity of the relationship, the latter is related to an alliance involving different classes. Thus, whereas Knight (1998) implies a division of society, Weffort (1918) talks about bringing together social groups with distinct interests.

Kazin (1995) also belongs to the populism-is-a-style school. For him, it is about "a persistent yet mutable style of political rhetoric," "a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class," and opposed to a self-serving undemocratic elite (Kazin, 1995, pp. 1-5). Once populism is mobilized and supported by the people, "there is nothing ordinary Americans cannot accomplish" (Kazin, 1995, p. 2).

Moffitt (2016, p. 27-28) defines populism as a political style characterized by "repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life." The main elements in Moffitt's (2016) definition are the appeal to the people in opposition to the elite, bad manners, and a notion of crisis or a threat. The idea of looking like the common man since having the same habits, tastes, and manners is central for populists and leads Ostiguy (2017,

p. 73) to describe populism as "flaunting the low." Despite the horizontal aspect of this relationship, a vertical direction implies that the populist is a leader followed by the people.

In Ostiguy's (2017) formulation, populism is a form of relationship that has two edges. First, it is about the relationship between the leader and their followers. This affinity is created by "low" appeals that are positively resonated and received by specific social groups for historical, cultural, and social reasons. That is, it is a glorification of popular culture. The other side of the coin is the relationship expressed by a dyadic view that divides the people and the leader versus the "other." This infamous other is not opposed to the people for ideological reasons but because they have antagonistic political-cultural identities. Politics would be a two-dimensional space formed by political-cultural and socio-cultural dimensions (Ostiguy, 2009). Within this realm, anti-populist and populist appeals occur on a vertical axis, where anti-populists defend high culture and politics, whereas populists do otherwise (Ostiguy, 2017).

The political-cultural traits of those on the top are described by the fact that they behave as is expected when one is a public figure, using traditional means to communicate with the people, respecting politeness and civility implicit political rules (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021). In sum, they follow the rules, norms, procedures, and laws they must comply with. Considering their socio-cultural characteristics, they are highly educated, have good manners, act decorously, and are cosmopolitan (Ostiguy, 2017). Those on the bottom are described as having opposed manners. Regarding socio-cultural aspects, they might be rude and dress, act, eat, walk, and communicate like ordinary people. They are uninhibited and nativist. Their political-cultural features are personalism, ideological incoherence, authoritative behaviors, and affectionate, virile, strong leaders. Therefore, "populist actors constitute popular political identities through performative practices ranging from political speeches to transgressive 'low culture' performances which resonate locally" (Ostiguy et al., 2021, p. 4).

For Ostiguy (2017), populism is not about style only. It is also about showing off social features that cause a sense of similarity, sameness, or belonging/membership. Thus, people see populist politicians behaving as such and understand them as representing what they are and wish. Therefore, it is about politicizing some social markers and differences. It is about using them politically to relate to the people and appeal to them to build a collective identity around these features. Again, according to Ostiguy (2009), these features are not merely external but signs of commonality and similarity. Signs that the leader and the people have the same beliefs, values, and behaviors (it is cultural).

The mix of Moffitt's (2016) and Ostiguy's (2009, 2017) approaches led the authors to offer a relational performative approach to populism (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021). They place the "embodied and passionate dimensions of the populism at the forefront" (Ostiguy

& Moffitt, 2021, p. 48) by focusing on the nature of the relationship between the leader and the people and its aesthetic dimensions. Thus, populism is not only discourse (Laclau, 2005a) but a practice through which political leaders build a socio-cultural relationship and identification with the people, in opposition to the elite and a sociological "other" (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021) while also distinguishing themselves from this political elite through political-cultural aspects. Straightforwardly, "populism is something that is done, embodied, and enacted" (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021, p. 49).

Through this transgressive way of identifying and bringing the low to the center of the stage, political leaders do not perform top-down political communication with their followers. Instead, the relational aspect of populism shows that it is a two-way path on which populists make claims on behalf of the people, but the latter approve, reject, and transform these claims (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021). While drawing inspiration from Laclau (2005a), the latest progress in this school involves taking one more step away from the author. This critique assumes that the people cannot be considered an empty signifier since the entity cannot be devoid of meaning. Therefore, they propose a theory of the people as an overflowing signifier, "one with a multiplicity of particular, quite concrete, and 'never-lost' meanings, linked to traits and practices of the leader himself, which moreover acquires sense within quite situated language games (and certainly within a semantic field)" (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021, p. 54). Concisely, it is precisely the potential multiple meanings ascribed to the same populist signifier that turns it appealing and strong.

In its recent efforts, this approach is focused on mechanisms of representation beyond institutional politics to defend its relational performative approach. These go from speeches and rallies to media acts, TV performances, dressing, etc. For the authors, it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that "most populist leaders have been true masters of the microphone and now television, making it a 'show': from Perón and melodramatic Evita on the balcony, to the Alo Presidente TV shows of fleshy Hugo Chavez, to Trump" (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2021, p. 67). Although it is hard to contest the last part, their conceptual construction is yet deficient, as shown in the following subsection.

1.3.3.2 Advantages and Limitations

Once populism is aesthetic rather than moral or strategic, authors in this school defend that the political-cultural approach would be the only one able to assess populist practices and performances (Ostiguy, 2017). The elements of their definition focus on the relationship between the leader and the people, in opposition to the high socio-cultural and political traits. These attributes allow one to focus on aspects through which one can assess populism that are absent in other approaches' definitions. The political-cultural

approach would be a better tool, especially in a highly mediatized era, where politicians show off themselves on TV and social media (Ostiuguy & Moffitt, 2021).

Ostiguy (2017) argues that the focus on performance is so essential that it would work as a corollary to Weyland's (2001) theory, working as a causal mechanism that connects populist practices to massive support. In other words, what makes the people support populist leaders is how they bypass traditional institutionalized means of communication to reach the people. He argues that shifting Mudde's (2004) theory ideas of a pure people and corrupt elite to an authentic people and nefarious elite shifts the focus from moral to what matters: representation. This shift would be crucial to understanding and assessing populism since it is a form of relationship characterized by a political performance that is acted to represent the neglected authentic people (Ostiguy, 2017).

Furthermore, they introduce the idea of an overflowing - and not empty - signifier in the concept of the people, overcoming previous limitations (Ostiguy et al., 2021). They question how one would identify with an empty signifier. Although an interesting point, I understand that the idea of an empty signifier does not mean a signifier devoid of meaning but instead that as "an acoustic image, albeit without fixed concept (*signifié*)(...) which allows the *signifiant* [signifier] to signify" (Mehlman, 1972, p. 24). As a post-structuralist, Laclau (1977, 2005a) challenges the structuralist paradigm by untethering the meaning from the signifier (Saussure, 2011). He sides with notions like Barthe's (1977) or Lacan's (2006), for whom an empty signifier has no definitive signified or that fixing any specific meaning to any signifier, and vice-versa, is impossible.

In other words, "the people," in Laclau's (2005a) theory, has no fixed meaning but always means something depending on the context and circumstances in which it is built. Laclau (2005b:43) himself uses the term "floating signifiers." Not by chance, empty and floating are used interchangeably in linguistics. Although the second is a better choice, the usual meaning attributed to these terms is the same. In the end, overflowing and floating are similar metaphorical adjectives. Overflowing suggests that the signified exceeds the boundaries of the signifier, whereas floating indicates that no meaning is rooted in the signifier. They use different metaphors for the same idea. So, nothing is new here.

Coming to its further limitations, a second point to stress in the political-cultural approach is that it empties populism of substance. Seemingly, populism is about appearances and externalities, remaining superficial. Knight (1998) alludes to something that is already in Weffort (1978, p. 226) when defining populism: "Populism therefore connotates a political style, what Weffort refers to as its external features." Therefore, populism would be characterized by leaders who talk, dress, walk, and look like the people. Indeed, several populists would fit into this definition, but not all of them (Mudde, 2017). Populism is probably more profound than that.

What populists have in common is how they see the world. They make anti-

establishment appeals in the name of the people, but they do not necessarily look alike. Think of Bolsonaro, for instance. He led massive motorcades and has been seen eating street food, all covered by *farofa*. Quite different from Silvio Berlusconi, whose habits had nothing to do with the popular ones. Marine Le Pen, a populist herself, said, "Bolsonaro says unpleasant things" (UOL, 2018). On the one hand, several populist leaders like Evo Morales or Pedro Castillo dress, eat, and look like ordinary people. On the other hand, others are precisely the opposite of what people look like, as Donald Trump proves. Therefore, limiting populism to performance might lead to confusion since populists can be very different from each other. The focus on how the leadership looks and the valorization of these mundane aspects are closer to personalism, where individual qualities are more important than the party's ideology for citizens to identify with a political group, than populism itself. Populism, from the political-cultural approach, seems to be a combination of personalism with the glorification of popular culture and low social classes.

Another step back of the political-cultural approach is its tendency to reintroduce populism as a multi-domain concept. One of the main critiques of classic definitions is the accumulation of historical, social, cultural, political, and economic characteristics to describe the phenomenon. Confining populism to the political realm represented a significant advancement, especially in minimally defining and operationalizing the concept (Weyland, 2001). However, when this approach conflates social, cultural, and political elements without clearly specifying the necessary and sufficient components for classifying a case as populist, it leads to a lack of precision and rigor. In other words, by adopting a multi-domain concept, proponents of the political-cultural approach inadvertently perpetuate the ambiguity and vagueness of the concept rather than enhancing its clarity and utility.

Authors from the political-cultural approach played with the semantics of substance and form. For instance, Knight (1998, p. 223) quoted Oscar Wilde as saying, "In all matters of importance, style and not content is the important thing." Ostiguy et al. (2021) went further and blurred distinctions by bringing Samuel Beckett to play: "Here, form is content, content is form. . . . It is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to" (Beckett, 2005, p. 1067, as quoted in Ostiguy et al., 2021, p. 1). Despite the proven erudition, these efforts still have several limitations, as examined above. In the face of their semantic plays on high-level literature but insufficient theoretical outcomes, before moving to the ideational approach, I will leave them with another Beckett (1983, p. 7) quote from his second-to-last work: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

1.3.4 The Ideational Approach to Populism

Because of the careful forging of a minimal concept, the ideational approach has attained more followers than others in recent years. It has been applied to supply and demand side studies in different regions of the world and historical periods, proving its versatility, operability, and capability to travel. Both of the most important datasets on populism use such an approach: *The Global Populism Dataset* and *Popu-List*. In addition, many studies have applied the ideational approach to different sources to assess populism in politicians (Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015; Bonikowski et al., 2023; Ricci et al., 2021; Tamaki & Fuks, 2020; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023; Tamaki & Venturelli, 2023), parties (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn et al., 2014; Dar, 2023; Meijers & Zaslove, 2020; Cocco &. Monechi, 2021), and public opinion (Rooduijn, 2018; Akkerman et al., 2014; Hauwaert et al., 2019, 2020; Silva et al., 2020; Hawkins et al., 2020).

This school defines populism as a set of ideas (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018), ideology (Mudde, 2004), a Manichean discourse (Hawkins, 2009), or thin ideology (Mudde, 2017; Mudde & Katlwaser, 2017). To address the time-tested contest around the term's definition, they adopt a rigorous methodological approach to define populism. This long-lasting struggle to define populism is partially based on limited regional definitions that hinder cross-national or regional comparison. In addressing the problem of comparison in social sciences, they followed Sartori's (1970) defense of minimal concepts. Because of its little intension (only a few constitutive elements) and high extension (it can be applied to a great range of cases), this strategy is advantageous (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013; Sartori, 1970). By defining populism based on an ontological and realistic approach (Goertz, 2006), the ideational theory is able to go from the most abstract level to empirical indicators, passing by an intermediary level of a concept's constitutive elements (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Goertz, 2006).

Authors from this perspective also address the dichotomous versus continuous concepts debate (Collier & Adcock, 1999). Although they define populism dichotomously for clarity purposes, they carefully introduce gradation, with a few scholars, after empirical applications, defending that populism is instead a continuous concept (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011) and others adopting diminished subtypes (Hawkins et al., 2018) to deal with cases in the gray zone. Therefore, the fruitful discussion and advancement of the concept within this school are foremost. The development of the ideational approach's definition of populism offers a valuable analytical category in a myriad of applications. It has been applied to descriptive, causal, exploratory, estimating, and diagnostic studies (Gerring, 2017). Beyond measuring and assessing populism in political speeches and manifestos (descriptive), applications to the causes and consequences of populism, to un-

derstand why populists succeed, how populist attitudes are related to populist elections, what leads people to vote for populists, among others, have been published in top journals. For becoming the most appealing approach, it is the one under more scrutiny, receiving criticism from all sides. Before exploring these and the potential responses, let me briefly introduce their populism conceptualization.

1.3.4.1 Defining the Concept

Following Sartori's *either-or* logic (1970), the ideational approach draws explicit boundaries to distinguish populism from other phenomena by clearly stating what populism is not. Populism is understood as a set of ideas that individuals and political actors hold. This set of ideas morally divides society and politics between two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite." On its negative pole, the contrary to populism would be elitism and pluralism (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019). Although elitism holds a similar Manichean worldview, it opposes populism because the actors involved occupy alternative positions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In other words, elitism states that "the people" is immoral and incapable of making political decisions and argues that "the elite," a selected capable sector, should take responsibility for decision-making processes. This enlightened group can rule politics and society. Pluralism, in turn, opposes populism because it understands societies as plural, with various groups, identities, beliefs, interests, and ideologies. In contrast, populism sees everything through a dyadic lens, homogenizing diversity into two antagonistic sides (Mudde, 2004).

One of the most compelling studies that plea for the ideational approach is Rooduijn's (2014) application of the leading contemporary definitions to consensual cases among scholars such as Hugo Chávez, Silvio Berlusconi, and Juan Perón, among others. In so doing, the author intends to check which definitional attributes are sustained. After testing it, he finds that only ideational attributes are common features shared by all populist parties and politicians he analyzes. People-centrism, anti-elitism, the homogeneity of the people, and the proclamation of a crisis would form the nucleus of populism (Rooduijn, 2014). Although the sense of a crisis is not precisely a definitional element of populism but rather something that precedes the emergence of a populist leader or party (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Judis, 2016), what one confirms after such the study is that populism is about the antagonism between the people and the elite (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). However, what is "the people," and what is the elite?

Taking one step down on Sartori's abstraction ladder (Sartori, 1970), one has people-centrism and anti-elitism. The idea of an antagonism between two groups is already present in previous definitions, even though it might appear in different terms, such as

an elite that usurps the common man's power (McRae, 1969) or the people opposed to a hegemonic bloc (Laclau, 1977). Whereas ideational scholars argue that the opposition between the people and the elite is moral (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins, 2010), others say it might be merely political or ideological (Katsembekis, 2019). Not by chance, Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011:1274) stress people-centrism and anti-elitism as the two components of populism, without mentioning moralism or a Manichean worldview, even though they state "elites are portrayed as corrupt and are contrasted with the general will of the people," implicitly tempering it with moralism. Be it as it may, let me explore these two elements.

"The people" is usually taken as an empty signifier, suggesting it has no meaning a priori and could mean different things depending on the context (Laclau, 2005). Populist appeals necessarily flirt with the people, claiming to restore democracy and give power back to the people, depicting the populist party or leader as the sole legitimate representative of the people (Muller, 2016; Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019). The people is a construct, and although it sounds like a homogeneous entity in a populist mouth, it is a signifier able to gather different groups and demands under a shared identity (Laclau, 2005; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Efforts in the specialized literature point out three ideal types through which the people is built in populist discourse: the people as sovereign, as the ordinary people, and as the nation (Canovan, 2005).

The people as sovereign refers to political power and is based on the democratic statement that the people is the source of power and should be able to rule itself (Canovan, 2005; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). These people might feel excluded from politics and unheard because of the abyss between the people and representatives. To bring these abstractions down to the earth, a passage illustrating the case is when Bolsonaro stated, "The biggest power [in democracy] is the power of the people, to whom I owe absolute loyalty." The construction of the people as ordinary people is based on social, cultural, and economic status represented by values and traditions demeaned by the elites (Mudde & Katlwasser, 2017). An excellent example of the people as the underdog comes from Lula da Silva's speech where he claims, "We will not allow corruption, tax evasion, and waste to continue depriving the population of resources that are rightfully theirs and that could greatly assist in their tough struggle for survival." Finally, the people as the nation is constructed in ethnic or civic terms, opposing "natives" to "aliens," and potentially conflates with nationalism (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2020). As an example, in February 2020, Bolsonaro built the people as the nation by saying, "No political party's interest could be ahead of the country's needs," using the word "country" to refer to the people's interests.

The elite is portrayed as corrupt, immoral, and self-serving (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019). A critical step in the Manichean opposition between the people and the elite is

identifying the former as an enemy (Hawkins, 2009). Intuitively, one can recognize elites by looking at their power positions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Among others, they might be political (e.g., parties and politicians), economic (e.g., billionaires, CEOs, CFOs), cultural (e.g., artists), intellectual (e.g., scholars), and mediatic (e.g., editors, anchors) elites. To ground some of these variations in reality, just think of Donald Trump's attacks on political elites (Democratic Party) or Podemos and SYRIZA's assaults on the European Union. According to Podemos and SYRIZA, austerity policies inflicting loss of social rights in Greece and Spain were partially due to IMF, national banks, and economic elites. During their presidential campaigns, Chávez and Morales denounced national economic elites for blocking the way to democratization once they prevented them from taking office, which would favor their selfish interests. In 2017, Donald Trump tweeted "The FAKE NEWS media (...) is the enemy of the American People." Similarly, Bolsonaro spent four years striking the media (Venturelli et al., 2023) and scientific, cultural, and intellectual elites during the pandemic. Yet, what would oppose the people to the elite is morality (Mudde, 2004).

Depending on who defines it, populism gains a third element. Mudde (2004) adds the general will as a definitional attribute of populism, whereas Hawkins (2009) brings the Manichean worldview as an essential component. Both are strongly related to the main constitutive elements. The idea of the general will corresponds to the people's general will, though of as a homogeneous will. The Manichean worldview refers to the set of ideas that leads a populist to morally oppose the people and the elite. To clarify these points, let me bring two essential contributions to define populism in this school of thought and examine these other elements.

The first clear-cut definition in the ideational school was proposed by Mudde (2004:543), who defined populism "as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, '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." From here, one has the nature of populism: an ideology. Later, it was described as a "thin ideology" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 7), a concept borrowed from Freeden (2013) to refer to a set of ideas that do not offer answers for major social issues, such as immigration and global warming. The general will, as a constitutive part of populism, is a Rousseaunian concept that refers to the capacity of the people to unify around a common interest that is more than mere aggregation of individual preferences (Mudde, 2004). Although sometimes the only thing in common among those forming the people is their enemy (Laclau, 2005), when populists succeed in forming cohesive identities, they might appeal to self-government and democratizing democracy, claiming they will hold plebiscites and referendums and striking representative institutions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Muller, 2016).

A second proposal suggests that "populism is best conceived in minimal terms as a unique set of ideas, one that understands politics as a Manichean struggle between a reified will of the people and a conspiring elite" (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018: 3). One can interpret "set of ideas" as a euphemism for ideology, particularly if understood as "thought-patterns of individuals and groups in a society which relate to the way they comprehend and shape their political worlds" (Freeden, 1998, p. 749). Once the gene of populism is the same in both cases, there is one thing to be said: Populism sees politics as a Manichean struggle between the good people versus the evil and conspiring elite (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018). Although the idea of a Manichean worldview is already present in the first formulation (Mudde, 2004), Hawkins (2009, 2010) stresses it in these terms. Therefore, this Manichean discourse assigns a moral dimension to every issue, no matter how narrow, particular, pragmatic, or technical, so that no ambivalent positions are possible; everything has two sides, the right and the wrong, or it is about a cosmological struggle between the good and the evil (Hawkins, 2009; de la Torre, 2000).

Now that I have defined populism according to the ideological approach, let me briefly comment on its main criticisms and address them.

1.3.4.2 Limitations

The ideational approach has been the most prominent approach to populism in the last twenty years. Because it gained more and more followers, its challengers have collected criticisms against it. The first point I would like to bring up is the critique of the nature of populism (Ostiguy et al., 2021; Moffitt, 2016). As the reader remembers, for the political-cultural approach, populism is a style or performance. Moffitt (2016) argues that populism cannot be a thin ideology once Freeden himself criticized this idea by saying that populism is not an ideology at all and that Mudde probably misread him. Riding the topic, Aslanidis (2018) argues that there is a methodological inconsistency in building and defining a concept as a thin ideology but opposing it to full ideologies.

However, if a thin ideology, as Freeden (2013) proposes, is a set of ideas that does not provide answers for major social issues, populism seems to fit well into this category. Populist appeals are oriented by ideas, beliefs, values, and a worldview that describes how one approaches things in politics. Although populists have no prompt answers, their substance varies according to the other ideologies to which populism is attached. As the literature observes, populism is usually attached to other ideologies because it cannot provide the necessary answers by itself (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). If attached to socialism or nationalism, the answers will be different. Whereas socialism is a full ideology, nationalism is a thin one (Freeden, 1998). However, intuitively, anyone would oppose nationalism to cosmopolitanism. The latter, different from nationalism, is a full

ideology that addresses several major social and political issues, such as human rights, global warming, immigration, and inequality, among others, with consistent solutions. Therefore, if Aslanidis (2018) criticizes populism, it should do the same for nationalism, particularly as defined by Freeden (1998). In the end, it does not matter if full or thin, ideologies can be defined in opposition to each other. Defining a concept through what it is not is a valid and long-used strategy (Sartori, 1970; Elster, 2007; Goertz, 2006).

Another common point of criticism of the ideational approach is the assessment of populist ideas (Ostiguy, 2017; Barr, 2018). These authors ask how we know a populist is saying what they think. In other words, they argue that the ideational approach confuses sincerity with a performance of sincerity (2018). These critiques are based on the belief that what matters is what populists do in power, not what they say (Urbinati, 2019b). Hawkins (2010) answers this point by saying that every politician's behavior is a product of their underlying set of ideas. What critiques seem to ignore here is that every theory has its assumptions. In this case, the ideational approach assumes that speech and practice are intertwined. As Rueda (2021) signs, one will never know what a politician intends because we cannot measure intentionality in social science. In other words, one cannot get into a populist's head or read their mind to check if what they say corresponds to their beliefs.

The other downside of populism in the ideational approach is that it fits into the highest level of Sartorit's (1970) abstraction level. As a universal concept with low intension and high extension, it is described by many as a stretched concept (Ostiguy, 2017; Barr, 2018). Because of its great extensions, it would lead to misleading classification since almost any case would fit into the category. Hawkins's (2009) classification of George W. Bush as a populist is a common case used to illustrate the supposed conceptual deficiency. Although I agree that Bush is a misleading case, I do not think that stems from the conceptualization itself. The problem derives from Bush's speech after the 9/11 attacks because of its highly moralized tone[4]. To address this issue, Team Populism has fined its training for new coders. I will return to this point to argue what appraisers list as a flaw I see as one of the main advantages.

A fourth weakness of the ideational approach would be the antagonism between the people and the elite based on morality (Ostiguy et al., 2021; Ostiguy, 2017; Katsambekis, 2020). The idea of a pure people is misleading, especially if one thinks of cases such as Chávez (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 90), who appealed to "zambos, mulatos, mestizos, whites, blacks." Katsambekis (2019) also shows that the people and the elite are frequently opposed on political, social, or ideological bases. However, even these political or ideologically motivated divides bring moral tones. For instance, when attacking the

[4] Hawkins (2009) uses four speeches by leadership, and Bush's famous one - the one in the aftermath of the 9/11 episode - mistakenly scores high for populism, leading coders to classify Bush as a populist, although he scores low in other speeches.

left (ideology), Bolsonaro points out their supposedly immoral choices in terms of policies. Left-wing parties in Brazil attack banks and economic elites in a social class cut but also moralize the issue once inequality and the poor suffering also stem from the rich' selfishness and contempt. If morality is not a criterion to understand the divide of the people and the elite, every political divide would be populism - which is not the case.

A final shortcoming in the ideational theory is the homogeneity of the people (Katsambekis, 2020). Examples abound of populist parties that brought together different social sectors to build the people (Katsambekis, 2019, 2020; Kioupkiolis, 2019; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Laclau's (2005a) own formulation also stresses the heterogeneity of this entity. However, the idea of homogeneous people is not related to objectively homogeneous people. It is not about sameness *de facto*, but rather how populists try to convince different individuals and/or social groups that they are members of this fictional part of society in opposition to the other side. In so doing, they instill the idea that these different social actors have the same interests, values, beliefs, and goals.

After addressing the leading comments on the ideational approach's insufficiency, let me list its main advantages.

1.3.4.3 The Advantages of the Ideational Approach

Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018, p. 1669) say that consensus was reached about the opposition between the people and the elite as the nucleus of populism among scholars in the ideational approach; they just disagree on populism's nature. Populism would be a "discourse" (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014), a "frame" (Aslanidis, 2018; Caiani & Kröll, 2017), a "moralistic imagination" (Muller, 2016), or a "political claim" (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). However, I would not say they are all cut from the same cloth. Authors from the ideational approach have classified populism as an ideology (Mudde, 2004), a thin ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), a worldview (Hawkins, 2010), or a set of ideas (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018). Although different terms, they refer to identical phenomena with the exact same nature.

I would go further by saying that most approaches somehow structure their definitions on the antagonism between the people and the elite, from classic definitions forged in Ionescu and Gellner (1969) and the Essex School (Laclau, 1977, 2005a) to the contemporary ones. Let me bring some passages that illustrate my point. In a recent paper, Moffitt (2022a, p. 2) said that "recent work on the topic broadly agrees that populism revolves around the central divide between 'the people' and 'the elite.'" Ostiguy (2017) uses different terms for the same thing when opposing the low and the high. Even Weyland (2022, p. 11) says that populist leaders pursue "political hegemony based on unorganized mass support and in confrontation with established elites." Therefore, authors from differ-

ent approaches have the people and the elite at the core of their definitions, even though they disagree about the nature of populism. Therefore, the first point of consensus among different approaches is that at the core of populism's definition must be the opposition between the people and the elite, as suggested by the ideational approach.

A few advantages of the ideational definition can be listed and compared to other definitions of populism. First, since populism is a phenomenon that gains different shapes worldwide, the main issue was to forge a category able to approach all this variation. Defining populism as a thin ideology allows one to comprehend why populism is so malleable in reality (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Because of its thin nature, populism is permanently attached to other ideologies. Consequently, from this approach, it is possible to develop subtypes of populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013).

Defined as a minimal concept at a high level of abstraction but able to go down to the earth and find empirical indicators that allow one to assess and measure populism in reality, the ideational approach overcomes the traveling problem (Sartori, 1970). Indeed, scholars from this approach carefully went step-by-step from background to a systematized concept, building indicators and assigning scores to cases (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Other approaches, in turn, have a mid-level abstraction and cannot be applied globally (Weyland, 2001).

Another benefit of the ideational approach is that it can be applied to different subjects. Since this definition is not limited to a type of mobilization or leadership, it can be used to assess populism in parties, politicians, social media, individuals, and public opinion, among others. In so doing, the ideational approach to populism allows us to address the supply (parties and politicians) and demand (individuals) sides of populism. As already shown, populist individuals are crucial to understanding why populists succeed (Silva, 2017a). When compared to other definitions discussed in this chapter, the ideational one has more versatility. While Weyland's (2001) definition does not work for parties, social movements, and individuals, Ostiguy's (2017) is hardly applied to public opinion research.

For the reasons presented above, plus the fact that tests have shown that only ideational definitional elements are shared by politicians, parties, and movements that scholars from different perspectives agree to classify as populists (Rooduijn, 2014), I side with the ideational approach and apply it to the following chapters.

Conclusion

As an empirical science, political science should be concerned about measuring its phenomena of interest. Indeed, this is the primary goal of this dissertation. Yet, as wisely

observed, before measuring anything, social scientists should know what they are measuring (Sartori, 1970). Particularly when it comes to essentially contested concepts, as is the case, carefully and rigorously defining the category is fundamental. I could not apply populism before giving the reader a perspective of how this concept has been defined throughout history. Although a narrative and potentially biased review, bypassing the script of systematic studies, this non-exhaustive consideration brings what experts of populism consider the main contemporary approaches (Kaltwasser et al., 2017).

I focused on historical-structuralist 20th-century Latin American literature's main definitional endeavors before briefly examining international normative efforts and, in greater detail, advocating for a minimal concept by examining the three main contemporary empiric-oriented approaches. After analyzing their pros and cons, I aimed to plead for the ideational approach. My enthusiasm for this school was based on a few advantages of the ideational definition compared to the limitations of the other approaches. If the reader needs to refresh their mind, please check the previous subsection.

Let me briefly comment on something before moving on to the next chapter. As the reader noticed, Brazilian literature on populism has existed since the 1950s. Yet, contemporary scholars, with a few exceptions, are either tied to classic, therefore vague and imprecise, conceptions of populism (Mussi & Kaysel, 2020; Swako & Araújo, 2019), have suggested abandoning the concept (Gomes, 1995), or persist in addressing its problems, ambiguities, and analytical shortcomings (Cassimiro, 2021). However, a significant development in the debate over the last fifteen years demonstrates that when rigorously methodological steps are taken to define populism, the category gains strength to be empirically applied across different sources, regions, and historical moments. Therefore, contrary to these outdated ideas and aligned with recent empirical efforts (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020; Ricci et al., 2021; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023; Tamaki & Venturelli, forthcoming), in Chapters 2 and 3, I apply the ideational approach to assess populism in alleged contemporary populist Brazilian presidents' official speeches and parties' election manifestos for presidential elections between 2010 and 2022, asking who is the most populist contemporary Brazilian president and whether there are populist parties in Brazil. Finally, in Chapter 4, I address one of the locomotives of the normative debate: populism and democracy. A handful of studies have described populist leaders as driving forces in democratic backsliding processes. Having Jair Bolsonaro as a case, I will deal with the question empirically.

2

Populism in Contemporary Brazil: Collor, Lula, and Bolsonaro

Abstract

Who is the most populist among the allegedly populist presidents in contemporary Brazil? What is their populism all about? The present chapter measures populism in political speeches by three alleged populist presidents in contemporary Brazil: Fernando Collor de Mello, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, and Jair Bolsonaro. Through a combination of automated and manually verified content analysis, the results indicate that Bolsonaro ranks as the most populist leader, followed by Collor and Lula da Silva. The chapter breaks down their populism by identifying the main social and political actors involved in it, as well as the main topics around which they make populistic appeals. It concludes by arguing that Bolsonaro's populism represented a threat to democracy to some extent and that right-wing populism is back in Latin America.

2.1 Introduction

After missing for a while, populism returned to the Brazilian political science's agenda in 2018, following the rise of Jair Bolsonaro as a competitive candidate in the presidential elections that year. Like a spark, pundits and the media began to classify him as a populist (Levitsky, 2018; Phillips & Phillips, 2018; Aguillera, 2018; Lissardy, 2018; Mello, 2018) or, even more emphatically, as a fascist (Lierly, 2018). Almost at the same pace, scholars began to make sense of Bolsonaro. Albernaz (2019) identified who is the people and the elite in Bolsonaro's populist appeals, stating that it is primarily an opposition between good citizens and corrupt and immoral leftist elites. Analyzing his campaign speeches, Tamaki and Fuks (2020) have shown that Bolsonaro is somewhat populist and brings nationalist and patriotic elements that might moderate his populistic appeals. Using

different methods but the same theoretical approach, Ricci and Venturelli (2023) measured populism, nationalism, and national populism in Bolsonaro's official speeches and found that the former president is indeed moderately populist but even less nationalistic.

Nonetheless, Bolsonaro's alleged populism is nothing new in Brazilian populism history. As part of Latin America, Brazil was also flooded by the three waves of populism that have drowned the continent. Since Getúlio Vargas, Brazil has seen many allegedly populist personalities, such as Adhemar de Barros (Jaguaribe, 1954), Jânio Quadros (Chauí, 2018; Queler, 2014), and even had its fourth democracy named a populist democracy (Ianni, 1968). The literature has exhaustively debated the Brazilian populist democracy (Weffort, 1978; Ianni, 1968; Ferreira, 2001; Bethel, 2018). When it comes to the Brazilian "populist Prince" (Groppo, 2009), a few argue that the first Vargas (1930 - 1945) is not a populist since such a category was yet to exist (Finchelstein, 2019), while others say the second Vargas (1951 - 1954) is not populist at all (Fonseca, 2010). Due to the lack of consensus around what populism is, the literature has historically struggled to analyze cases, with vague definitions and no proper methods to assess populism itself. Recent empirical studies have shown that Vargas is less populist than João Goulart, the last Brazilian president before the 1964 military *coup d'état* (Venturelli & Tamaki, 2021).

Concerning contemporary ones, sufficient evidence exists to think of a few of them as populists. By analyzing Brazilian presidents between 1985 and 2019, Ricci et al. (2021) found that Bolsonaro is the most populist president in contemporary Brazil, followed by Collor (1990 - 1992) and Lula da Silva (2003 - 2010). In this chapter, I focus on the three alleged populist leaders mentioned above to dissect their populisms. The reader should agree that they are different personalities with distinct ideological positions, parties, values, and ideas. If that is so, how do they all fit under the same umbrella? I measure populism in their two first years in office official speeches through a man-machine content analysis application, identifying who is the people and the elite in their populistic appeals.

At this point, the reader might ask why I would remake research others have already conducted. I will give them three main reasons. First, when it comes to Bolsonaro and, especially, Lula, there is no consensus on whether they are populists or not. In published work, Bolsonaro has shown moderate, if any, levels of populism (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020). The Global Populism Dataset (GDP), by Team Populism, states that Bolsonaro is precisely on the threshold separating non-populists from somewhat populists. Especially considering him in office, it is theoretically expected that populism will be less frequent in his speeches since keeping the anti-establishment discourse once one is part of it becomes more complicated than when one is the challenger. Lula da Silva is even more controversial. Scholars have labeled him as a populist (Ricci et al.,2021; Conniff, 2012; Grigera, 2017; Conceição, 2017; Weyland, 1996), whereas others argue he is a non-populist (Hawkins, 2009; Bathel, 2013; Hawkins & Silva, 2018). Lula da Silva is part of the pink tide

that brought several left-leaning leaders mixing populism and some sort of twenty-first socialism to office. All these leaders, such as Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, have been considered populists. Therefore, suspects that Lula da Silva is a populist are genuine.

The second reason I analyze partially coded and classified speeches by Ricci et al. (2021) is even more critical. They used sentences as units of observation. I argue that if one considers that a case is positive for populism when people-centrism and anti-elitism exist in the same unit of analysis, paragraphs are more beneficial. Why is that so? The appeal to the people and the attack on elites can be expressed in different sentences but within the same paragraph. Paragraphs are units that enclose a topic through a group of coherent sentences. Therefore, following Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011, 1275), I believe that "paragraphs are objectively traceable distinctions between arguments," so the chances of undermining the level of populism in a speech are lower when one uses paragraphs instead of sentences as units of measurement.

Third, I am expanding data. Ricci et al. (2021) only analyzed Bolsonaro's 2019 official speeches, while I am bringing one more year of data. Departing from the assumption that Ricci et al.'s (2021) findings are valid regarding who the populist leaders in contemporary Brazil are but potentially misleading about how populist they are, this chapter sheds light on the following controversial questions by addressing two identical research questions to verify their findings, and adding a third one overlooked: 1) Who is the most populist contemporary Brazilian president? 2) What is the intensity of populism in their speeches, and how miscalculated were they in previous research? 3) Finally, who are the people and the elites in their speeches, and what are the main issues they address when making populist appeals?

This chapter addresses these questions by applying the ideational approach to populism using automated content analysis followed by a hand-check by two coders, which I discuss in the following two sections. In the coding process (both automated and manual), I identify social and political actors who are part of the people and the elite, the terms presidents use to refer to them, and the dimensions that could organize their populist appeals and help one to make sense of them. These are explored in the results section, where I bring descriptive statistics, how they compare, and qualitatively explore their populism. Finally, I present the conclusions.

2.2 Populism

I define populism as a set of ideas that divide society and politics into two homogeneous and antagonistic parts: the good people and the evil elite (Mudde, 2004, 2017; Hawkins

& Kaltwasser, 2018).

Although dichotomously constructed in opposition to pluralism and elitism - populism is not these categories - it does not mean *degreeism* is forbidden. Indeed, the criticism of *degreeism* is about being aware of what one is measuring rather than not using gradation (Sartori, 1970). That means one must know what they are measuring before one measures something. Furthermore, when it comes to empirical applications of the ideational approach, studies have adopted different strategies, arguing that populism is best conceived as a continuous concept (Bonikowski et al., 2022; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Goertz, 2006) or at least one should forge typologies such as diminished subtypes (Hawkins & Silva, 2018; Collier & Levitsky, 1997; Collier & Adcock, 1999). Accordingly, almost 20% of the paragraphs in Donald Trump's (USA) campaign speeches in 2016 were populist, whereas less than 5% had been classified as such for the 2020 elections (Bonikowski et al., 2022). In the Latin American case, Hugo Chávez (Venezuela) and Evo Morales (Bolivia) are tagged as very populist, Getúlio Vargas (Brazil) is populist, Carlos Meném (Argentina) is somewhat populist, and Lula da Silva (Brazi) is labeled as non-populist (Hawkins, 2009). Nonetheless, some difficulties persist regarding the threshold - always arbitrary - that separates a populist from a non-populist in continuous scales or a "somewhat populist" from a "populist" when one is talking about diminished variations of populism. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be careful to ask who, among the cases, makes more populist appeals and infer from that who is the most populist leader.

A challenge faced by populists in power is to continue with their populistic appeals. That is so because anti-establishment is one of the definitional elements of populism. Therefore, how does a chief executive maintain their populist appeals once in power? In other words, how can one be anti-establishment if one is the establishment itself? Since the distinction between the people and the elite is moral rather than situational, populists in power can redefine the elites they target by claiming that the real power is not in their hands but under obscure and evil forces that can govern by bypassing them (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Also, they can continue attacking previous administrations and parties that recently left office, besides economic, intellectual, scientific, religious, and other elites, as if they are the sole legitimate representatives of the people. Thus, they can stick to the populist spelling book even though they are officially the political establishment. Indeed, for several scholars, it is precisely populists in power that matter - it is essential to see what populists do when in office and not what they say (Urbinati, 2019) since populism is a strategy to achieve and exercise power (Weyland, 2001). Hence, why should scholars analyze political discourse?

Political communication studies are one of the most prominent fields in political science. Once I understand populism as a set of ideas, looking at discourses is one of the best strategies to assess politicians' ideas. Not by fluke, studies on populism are commonly

on political speeches (Hawkins, 2009; Bonikowski et al., 2023; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015), election manifestos (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Hawkins & Silva, 2018; Cocco & Monechi, 2021), social media (Buccoliero et al., 2018; Jacobs et al., 2020; Maurer & Diehl, 2020; Waisbord & Amado, 2017), and even political images (Moffit, 2022a, 2022b). Politics, ideologies, beliefs, and policies are expressed through different forms of discourse. That said, considering that one of the means by which politics materialize is through discourse (Moreira, 2020), I follow the specialized literature and have official speeches as my sources. How I assess and measure populism in these documents is discussed in the following section.

2.3 Methods

Measuring populism in political speeches is nothing new. A few methods have been applied over the last decade. Hawkins (2009) borrowed holistic grading from educational psychology to make up one of the most promising datasets on populism. Coders have been trained to give scores from zero, which means non-populist, to two, a full populist, considering the entire speech. Team Populism released the Global Populism Dataset in 2019, classifying prime ministers and presidents from more than 40 countries from 2000 to 2018. Another technique commonly used is content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Rooduijn et al. (2014) applied content analysis to election manifestos in Western Europe and ran tests to guarantee intercoder reliability. Pauwels (2011), discussing insufficient reliability, time-consuming work, subjectivity, and potential disagreements, offered a computerized solution using a dictionary approach to assess populism in party literature in Belgium. Finally, Bonikowski et al. (2022) applied supervised machine learning to classify campaign speeches in the US from 1952 to 2020. Therefore, one has many possibilities when it comes to estimating populism. What should I choose?

Considering holistic grading and hand-coded content analysis are both time-consuming and susceptible to subjectivity and lower reliability; dictionary approaches do not understand the context and might lead to false positives; and supervised machine learning approaches are yet to improve once performance levels are low; I adopt "an integrated man–machine approach that filters out the disadvantages and emphasises the strong points of both methods," classical and automated content analysis, as suggested by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011: 1279-80). Therefore, to spend less time than manual methods, I apply a dictionary approach to identify paragraphs that are potentially populist, and to avoid misleading cases, two coders check the positive ones manually to ensure the terms of the dictionaries refer to populist appeals in their contexts. Let me take a step back before getting to this in detail soon.

I apply content analysis to 762 official speeches from the first two years of Col-

lor's, Lula da Silva's, and Bolsonaro's administrations, comprising 13844 paragraphs[1]. Content analysis is a method for making conclusions from different types of text (Krippendorff, 2004). One can choose different units of analysis, such as words, bigrams, n-grams, sentences, paragraphs, pages, and the whole text. In this case, I follow a few scholars and use the entire speech as the unit of analysis and paragraphs as a unit of measurement (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn et al., 2014; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015; Bonikowski et al., 2022). Whereas isolated or combined words can gain different meanings depending on the context, sentences tend to be short and bring only partial populism (Aslanidis, 2018). Larger units, such as whole speeches, are more complicated in achieving consensus among coders (Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990). Considering that a paragraph's role within a text is to introduce, develop, and conclude an idea and that paragraphs "represent objectively traceable distinctions between arguments" (Rooduijn et al., 2014, p. 566), I have paragraphs as my unit of measurement. These were binarily coded, and the percentage of populist paragraphs per speech was eventually computed. But what am I looking for in these paragraphs, and which steps did I take to get an outcome?

Populism is a latent concept, which means one cannot observe it directly. Therefore, I am looking for its two main constitutive elements: people-centrism and anti-elitism (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). This is the most efficient way to identify populism, that is, the concomitant existence of both in the same paragraph since the exclusive presence of the former should be taken as *demoticism* (March, 2017) and of the latter as anti-establishment (Pytlas, 2022). To assess populism in these documents, I followed standard steps in text analysis. First, I web-scrapped them from the official presidency website in PDF format. I then have them imported to R and split each speech into paragraphs. To prepare the data, I followed standard steps in text-as-data analysis (Cocco & Monechi, 2021): all words were turned into lowercase, punctuations, unnecessary spaces, footnotes, headers, footers, and numbers[2] were suppressed since they do not add meaning to these paragraphs. I made an exception for accents since the opposition in populist discourse is often expressed through a "we/us" versus "them" appeal. In Portuguese, we/us translates into "nós," and without the accent, it means "in/in the" (nos). Suppressing accents would lead to many false positive cases. After creating a data frame with all the information needed, the second step was to create two dictionaries, one for terms related to the people and another for words referring to the elite, to identify potentially populist paragraphs. I did so by drawing upon dictionaries already used by other scholars (Pauwels, 2011; Ro-

[1] Since some errors might occur due to a lack of standardization in PDF files, I have deleted paragraphs with less than ten words. From that, Collor dropped from 1559 to 1535 paragraphs, Lula da Silva from 7822 to 7592, and Bolsonaro from 4463 to 4346. Therefore, I dropped 371 paragraphs (2.7%), remaining 13473. Furthermore, following the literature, I have also excluded cheering and farewell paragraphs (Weber, 1990).

[2] Unlike Chapter 3, no opposition between the people and the elite took the form of "the 1% versus the 99%."

duuijn & Pauwels, 2011), but mainly based on a Portuguese version (Ricci et al., 2021), to which I have added a few more terms after reading a sample of my sources.

In the third stage, I ran both dictionaries over the paragraphs. The computer has scanned and provided an output highlighting all paragraphs that contain words related to these dictionaries. In the fourth step, I filtered those paragraphs with terms referring to the people and the elite and had two coders manually check these paragraphs. Coders were oriented to check if, indeed, the opposition between the people and the elite exists in these paragraphs and, if it exists in moral terms, to recode them as 1 (populist) or zero (non-populist). A third coder solved disagreements[3].

Finally, since I opted for two coders to ensure reliability in the hand-checking, I computed Krippendorff's alpha. With a score of $\alpha = 0.803$, it is sufficient for making trustworthy inferences (Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorff's alpha allows one to evaluate if the results are random or if there is a consistent assessment of the category in question. Whereas a score of 1 represents perfect reliability, zero is the extreme opposite, meaning its complete absence (Krippendorff, 2004). In social sciences, a score of at least 0.8 is necessary for drawing reliable inferences.

2.4 Results

Table 1 shows the results for all presidents concerning their speeches. Bolsonaro is the most populist president among the three, with 26.3% (88) of populist speeches. Collor follows him with 18.2% (25) and then Lula da Silva with 12.4% (36). The rule to classify a speech as populist is that there must be at least one populist paragraph. Therefore, one populist paragraph is necessary and sufficient to code a speech as populist. Although Lula da Silva addressed more populist discourses than Collor in absolute terms, the latter is proportionally more populist than the former. Ricci et al. (2021) found that Collor gave 19 (11.2%) populist speeches during his administration, Lula da Silva 175 (8.7%), and Bolsonaro 25 (12.2%)[4]. The intuition of using sentences instead of paragraphs as the unit of measurement has proven to be accurate, as it revealed that all presidents look less populist when examining sentences. Yet, one must be careful in making conclusions because Ricci et al. (2021) analyze all years of administration for these presidents, except for Bolsonaro, who is analyzed in his first year in office only. To compare Bolsonaro with all previous presidents, Ricci et al. (2021) bring data for all presidents considering their first year in office only. Let me compare my findings with this data to be more straightforward.

[3] I thank Paolo Ricci and Eduardo Ryô Tamaki for their work.
[4] They analyzed Bolsonaro's first year in office only.

Table 1 – Results for Speeches

	Fernand Collor		**Lula da Silva**		**Jair Bolsonaro**		**Total**	
Category	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*
Populist	25	18.2%	36	12.4%	88	26.3%	149	19.6%
Not Populist	112	81.8%	255	87.6%	246	73.7%	613	80.4%
Total	137	100%	291	100%	334	100%	762	100%

Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.br.

According to Ricci et al. (2021), Collor gave 17 (11.3%) speeches in 1990, Lula da Silva made populist appeals in 16 (7.6%) pronunciations in 2003, and Bolsonaro was populist in 25 (12.2%) discourses in 2019, their first year in office. When analyzing the same discourses but classifying paragraphs instead of sentences, one has the following: Collor, Lula da Silva, and Bolsonaro were populist in 21 (17.1%), 26 (18.1%), and 57 (27.9%) speeches, respectively. Again, results suggest that populism might be underestimated when coding sentences. Comparing the intensity of populism (percentage of populist paragraphs and sentences per speech) is trickier. When using sentences, one could mismeasure populism since people-centrism and anti-elitism can be in different sentences in the same paragraph. However, to compute the percentage of populist paragraphs, one divides positive cases by a smaller divisor since splitting texts into paragraphs instead of sentences leads to fewer observations. Hence, the quotient tends to be greater. Comparing Table 2 results with Ricci et al. (2021), for the first year in office of each president, one has the following percentage of paragraphs (sentences): Collor had 1.9% (1.3%), Lula da Silva 0.9% (1.3%), and Bolsonaro 4.3% (2.7%). Collor and Lula da Silva (1.26% with two decimals) have almost the same percentage of populist sentences in their speeches. However, when using paragraphs, Collor is slightly more populist than Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro is the most populist regardless of the unit of measurement, but the intensity is higher when coding paragraphs. Results are similar regarding the order of the presidents, but how often they make populist appeals varies depending on the unit of measurement.

Table 2 – Results for Paragraphs

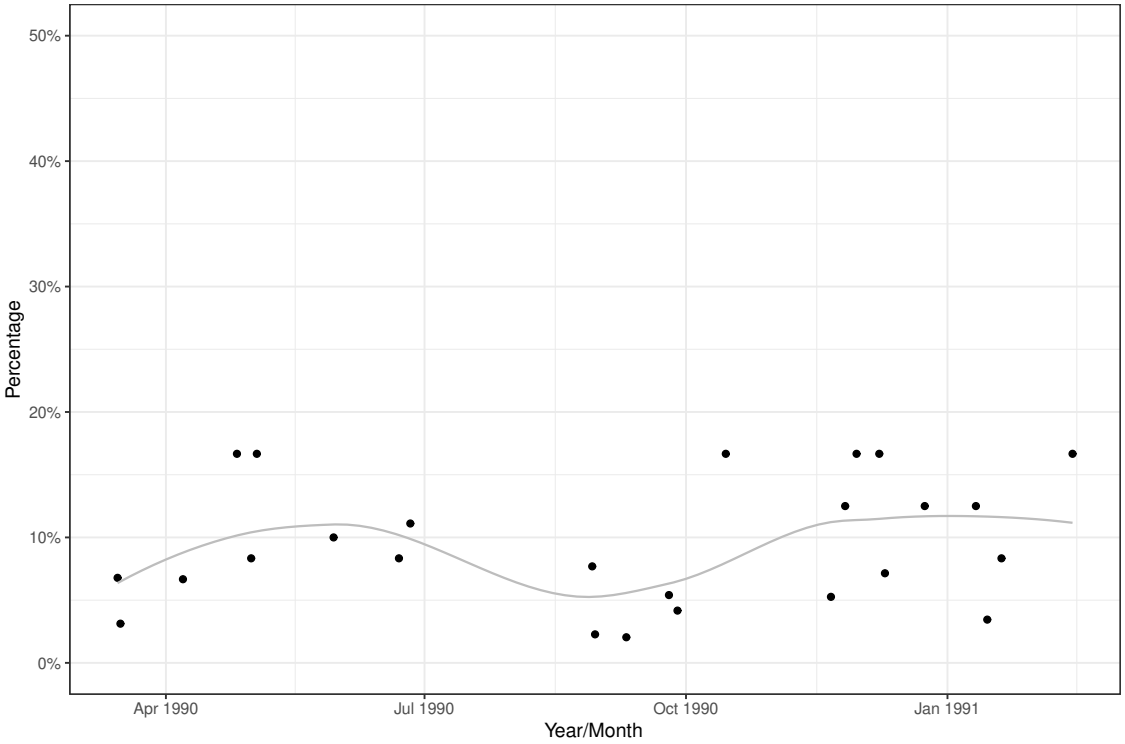
	Fernando Collor		**Lula da Silva**		**Jair Bolsonaro**		**Total**	
Category	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*
Populist	31	2%	47	0.6%	171	3.9%	249	1.8%
Not Populist	1504	98%	7545	99.4%	4175	96.1%	13224	98.2%
Total	1535	100%	7592	100%	4346	100%	13473	100%

Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.br.

Results in Table 2 suggest a low level of populism. Nonetheless, one should not expect populist appeals to occupy a significant part of presidents' official speeches once these are mostly related to pragmatic issues concerning the administration, such as ribbon-cutting speeches, ceremonies, addressing the nation during holidays, or launching a new

policy. As mentioned earlier, keeping populist appeals is harder once in office. Analyzing campaign speeches in the US between 1952 and 2020, Bonikowski et al. (2022) showed that only six presidents had more than 5% populist paragraphs in their speeches. Election manifestos tend to be even less intense, although very populist parties reach around 15% of populist paragraphs in their manifestos (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Therefore, considering the proportion of speeches in which they make some populist appeal is a better option (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2015). Although it is crucial to clearly define what populism is and what it is not and which leaders should be categorized as such, it is also evident that the frequency and intensity of their populist speeches vary. Therefore, even though populism is defined dichotomously, studies have shown that some gradation is helpful for two reasons. First, to compare populists among themselves and rank them in an ordinal list. That is, to understand who is the most populist. Second, to check how populism varies over time. Are they consistently populist, or do they make populist appeals depending on circumstances? Figures 3 to 6 address these points.

Figure 3 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Fernando Collor de Mellos's Populist Speeches (1990 - 1991)
Speeches With at Least One Populist Paragraph



Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

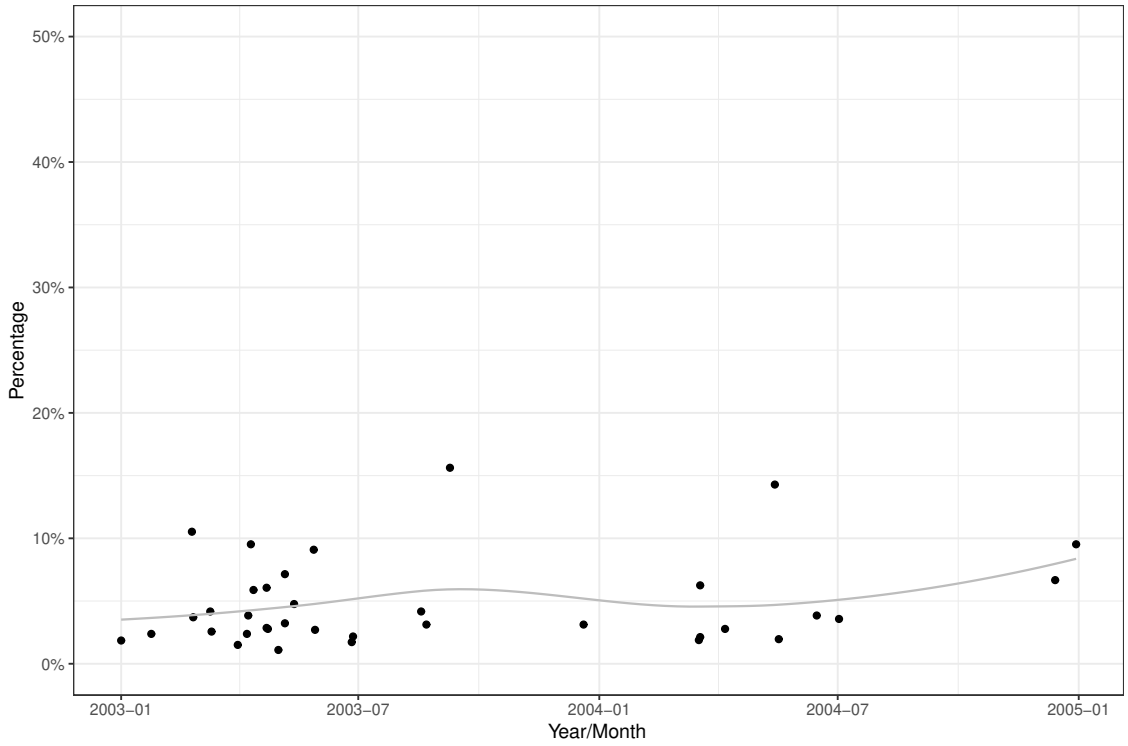
Figure 3 shows how populism varies in Collor's speeches. Each point represents a speech, with the month and year on the x-axis and the percentage of populist paragraphs on the y-axis. I have kept only populist speeches for better visualization[5]. When filtering

[5] See Figure 23 in Appendix A for all speeches

only his populist speeches, the intensity of populism increases to 6.4%. Collor has six most populist speeches with 16.7%, followed by three with 12.5%. The range of populism intensity in his speeches goes from 2% to 16.7%. Between his inauguration in March 1990 and October of the same year, the level of populism rose and declined, increasing again and continuing to plateau up to February 1991. Figure 3 shows that he was more populist between December 1990 and February 1991[6]. Unfortunately, no data is available for the rest of 1991, avoiding a direct comparison for Collor's second year in office.

Following the same logic, Figure 4[7] shows how populism changed over the first two years of Lula da Silva's administration. With a moving average slightly more consistent and lower than Collor's, Lula da Silva's populism range in populist speeches goes from 1.1% to 15.6%, with an average of 3.6%. Yet, he only has three speeches with more than 10% and eight others with more than 5%. Unlike Collor, Lula da Silva had more populist speeches at the beginning of his term, although his moving average was higher by the end of 2005.

Figure 4 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Lula da Silva's Populist Speeches (2003 - 2004)
Speeches With at Least One Populist Paragraph



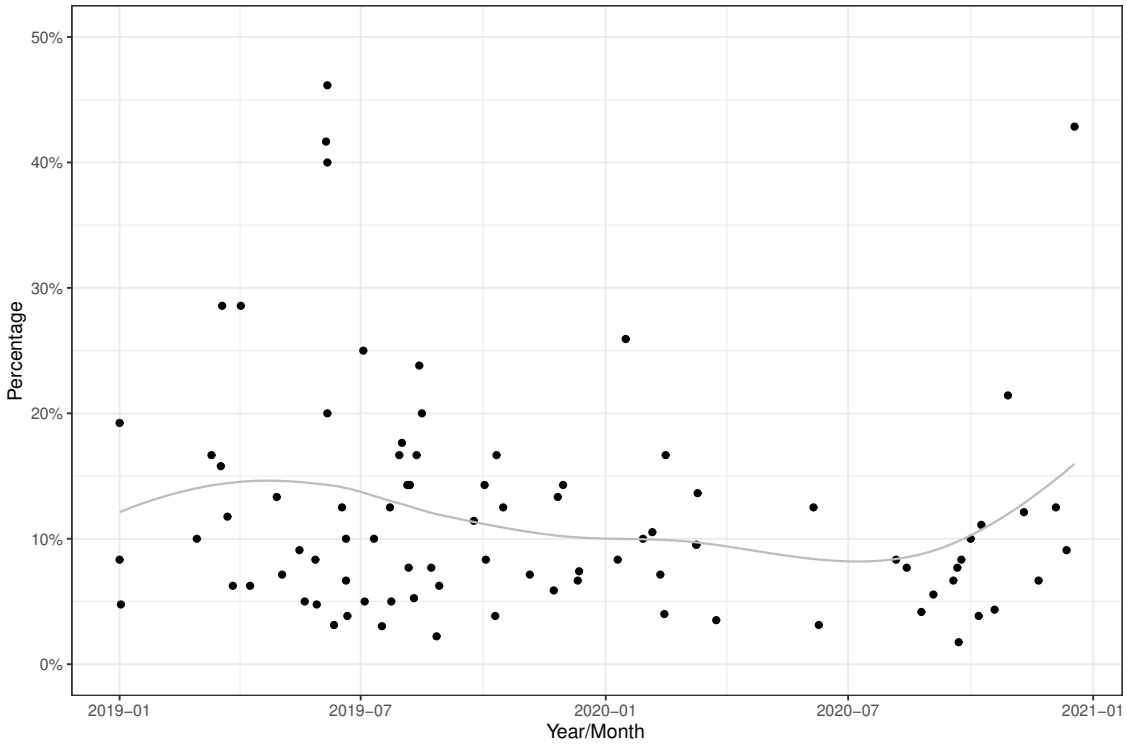
Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

Figure 5[8] brings the same for Bolsonaro. Considering only populist speeches, Bolsonaro's moving average remains over 10% for almost the entre period, with a steering

[6] That can be better visualized by looking at all speeches. Check Figure 23 in Appendix A.
[7] see Figure 24 in Appendix A for all speeches.
[8] Figure 25 in Appendix A for all speeches.

line leading to the peak by the end of 2020, suggesting that if a populist appeal is made in a speech, others will likely happen. With a populist paragraphs average of 9.7%, the range in Bolsonaro goes from 1.8% to 46.2%. Bolsonaro has ten speeches with more than 20% of populist paragraphs and twenty-eight more with more than 10% of populist paragraphs. Seventy-one out of his 88 populist speeches have more than 5% of populist paragraphs. His discourses' length might also influence Bolsonaro's higher populism. He gave shorter speeches, with an average of 19.8 paragraphs per speech, followed by Collor with 21.4, and Lula with 37.8[9].

Figure 5 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Jair Bolsonaro's Populist Speeches (2019 - 2020)
Speeches With at Least One Populist Paragraph



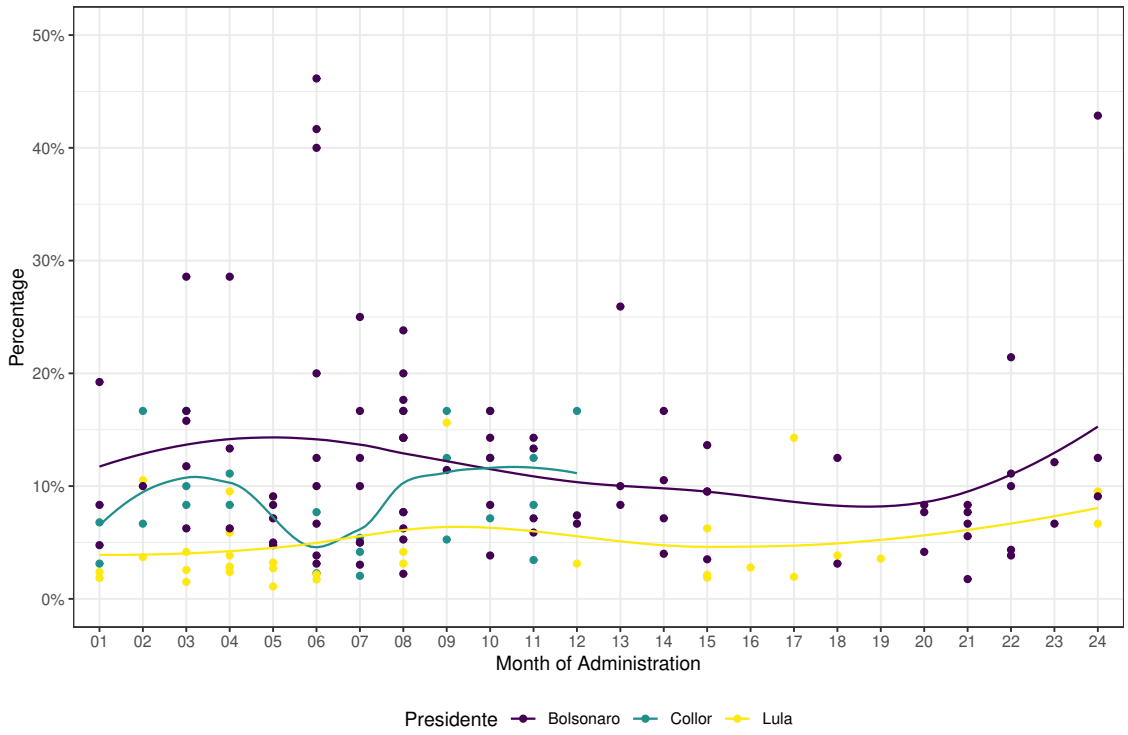
Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

Finally, Figure 6 shows how they compare considering populist speeches only [10]. Bolsonaro is more populist than Collor and Lula. Although Collor's populist speeches have more populist paragraphs than Bolsonaro's between their 10th and 12th months in office, the populist peak of the former is lower than that of the latter. If looking at all speeches[11], although lines still cross, it is clear that Bolsonaro is consistently more populist than others. Collor is more inconsistent in his level of populism throughout time, with ups and downs. Bolsonaro has moderated his populism since half of his first year in office but increased it again from July 2020 onward. Although Bolsonaro was more populist

[9] See Table 14 in Appendix A for a summary of data.
[10] see Figure 26 in Appendix A for all speeches.
[11] Figure 26 in Appendix A

in 2019 than in 2020, especially because of his campaign spirit during the onset of his administration, 2020 was disturbing. The mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic put him under the spotlight, with criticism of him increasing in the media, public opinion, foreign nations, and international forces. Not by chance, his responses came out in a populist fashion, by attacking the media, international political elites, and scientific and cultural elites, among others. I will explore this by bringing up the terms and social and political actors involved in the opposition between the people and the elite in the next subsection.

Figure 6 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Presidential Speeches
How They Compare

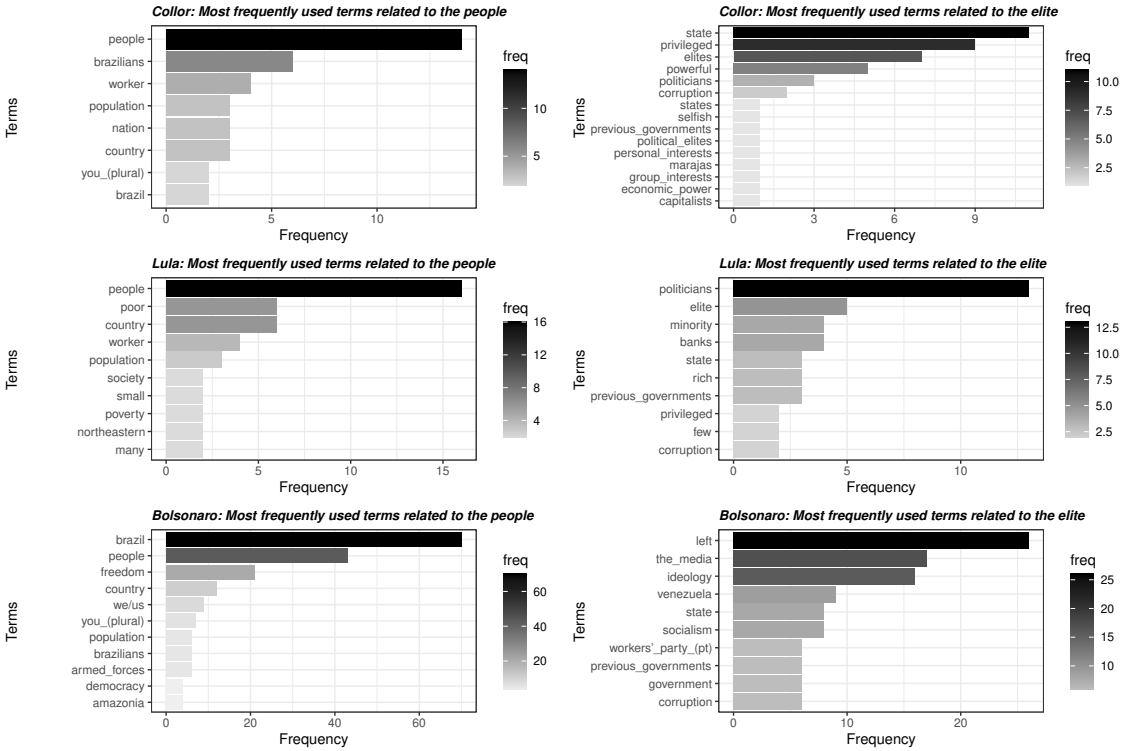


Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

2.4.0.1 Populism in-depth: Commonalities and particularities

This subsection thoroughly examines Collor's, Lula da Silva's, and Bolsonaro's populisms by exploring two things. First, it brings the most frequently used terms by each president in their populistic appeals. In doing so, I can identify which social actors make up the people and which elites they target. After counting these terms, I present how they connect to each other. In other words, I show the most frequently opposed terms. Secondly, while exploring these connections, I bring passages to illustrate the main topics around which Collor, Lula, and Bolsonaro make populist appeals, presenting differences and similarities.

Figure 7 – Most Frequently Used Terms
The People versus The Elite



Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

Collor was the first directly elected president after Brazil experienced twenty-one years of dictatorship. As displayed on the top-left side of Figure 7, during his first year in power, he appealed to "the people," "Brazilians," "workers," "the population," "the nation," and "the country." On the top-right side, the most frequent elite terms are "the state," "the privileged," "the elites," "the powerful," and "politicians." During the 1990s, Latin America underwent a neoliberal populist wave, by which populist leaders attacked the state for its inefficiency and corruption (Weyland, 2001; Knight, 1998; Roberts, 1995), having Collor as one of the faces of this phenomenon (Panizza, 2000). Collor became well-known for using particular terms, such as "my people" (minha gente, in Portuguese) or "shirtless" (*descamisados*) to refer to the people and "maharajas" (marajás) to attack the elites. The usage of shirtless refers to Juan Perón, who used this term to appeal to the poor in Argentina during the 1940s. The word maharajas, which is used to name Brazilian privileged political elites, means the "male ruler of an Indian state," according to the Cambridge Dictionary. In the second case, it is used as a pejorative adjective to attack selfish elites who entrenched themselves in the state. Although emblematic in Collor's rhetoric, they appear only once each in populist paragraphs.

In the middle of Figure 7, Lula da Silva's people and elite terms appear on the left and right sides, respectively. He appealed to "the people," "the poor," "the country," and "the workers." Following Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (FHC) administration, Lula da

Silva won the 2002 elections after contesting all runoffs since 1989. Founder and the head of the Workers' Party (PT), Lula da Silva, brought his origins as a labor union leader and the party's socialist old-days ideals by standing for the people against "politicians," "the elite," the selfish "minorities," "banks," and "the rich." He has also attacked "the state," but not in the same vein as Collor. In his case, the state, under FHC's government, has favored "multinational companies" but left those who most needed it adrift. The idea is that the state should be strong and sponsor development through investment, cash transfer, and social programs.

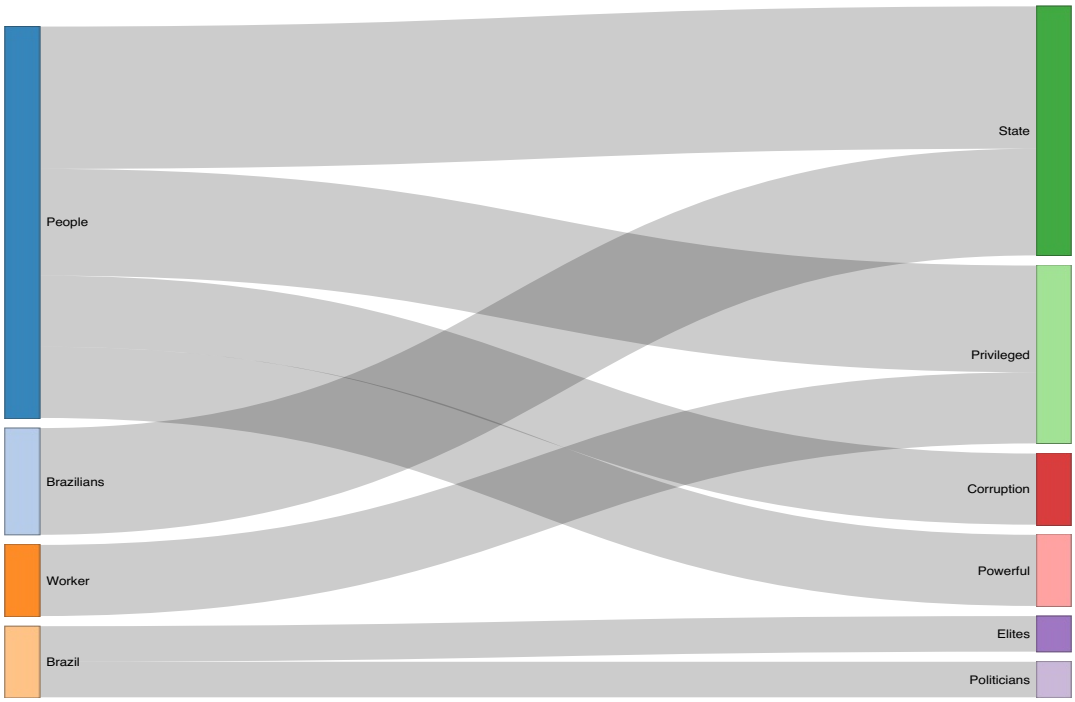
In the case of Bolsonaro's official speeches (bottom-left and -right sides of Figure 7), "Brazil," "the people," "country," and generics such as "we/us" or "you" emerge as the most frequent on the people's side. "Freedom" is a term that does not refer to a political or social actor precisely, but it is often posed as opposed to some elite. Terms like these are sporadic, and a shared example is "corruption," present in all cases analyzed. On the elite side, it is possible to realize that Bolsonaro's populism goes around ideology most of the time by attacking "the left," "ideology," and "socialism," but also the political establishment ("Workers' Party," "previous governments," and "government") and "the media." Rarely, Bolsonaro forges an international people (Moffit, 2017; Moffit et al., 2019), gathering Brazilian and Venezuelan people since they have the same enemy: left-wing parties and leaders. He names Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, and Nicolas Maduro as enemies, making them equivalent to the Workers' Party (PT) administrations. Bolsonaro suggests that if Brazil had elected the PT again, it would follow Venezuela's footsteps on a path toward socialism and authoritarianism.

A few particularities and commonalities are noted just by looking at these terms. Lula da Silva alternates between socially defined actors, such as workers, the poor, and generic people without defined social features (Canovan, 2005). In contrast, Bolsonaro and Collor mostly appeal to a generic people and often depict it through terms like country, Brazil, nation, and Brazilians. Considering the variance from the people's typology (Canovan, 2005), Lula da Silva usually builds the people as the underdog (common or ordinary men), while Bolsonaro and Collor primarily do it regarding the people as the nation. The elites vary in all cases, but they are mainly political and economic elites. They all criticize politicians, previous administrations, and the corruption committed by those in office before they came to power. The economic elites are named in Collor's and Lula da Silva's cases, as is the case of economic power, group interests, and the powerful in Collor's speeches, and banks, the rich, and the minority in Lula da Silva's pronunciations. Bolsonaro, in turn, conflates or even confounds political and economic elites, viewing them as a single group controlling everything in society and politics, such as public opinion, values, beliefs, and ideology.

From now on, I will focus on differences and similarities among Collor, Lula da

Silva, and Bolsonaro regarding the axes their populism revolves around and what is idiosyncratic in each case. Three sankey figures will illustrate the discussions. They show how these most frequent people and elite terms connect. Collor and Bolsonaro are more alike than Lula da Silva for being on the same ideological side. Yet, even though for different purposes or in a distinguished fashion, all the cases make populist appeals around similar topics. To begin with, they attack the political elites or the establishment. Since they were already in office when they addressed the pronunciations analyzed, they targeted the previous administration for the mess they left behind.

Figure 8 – Collor: Most Frequent Oppositions
The People versus The Elite

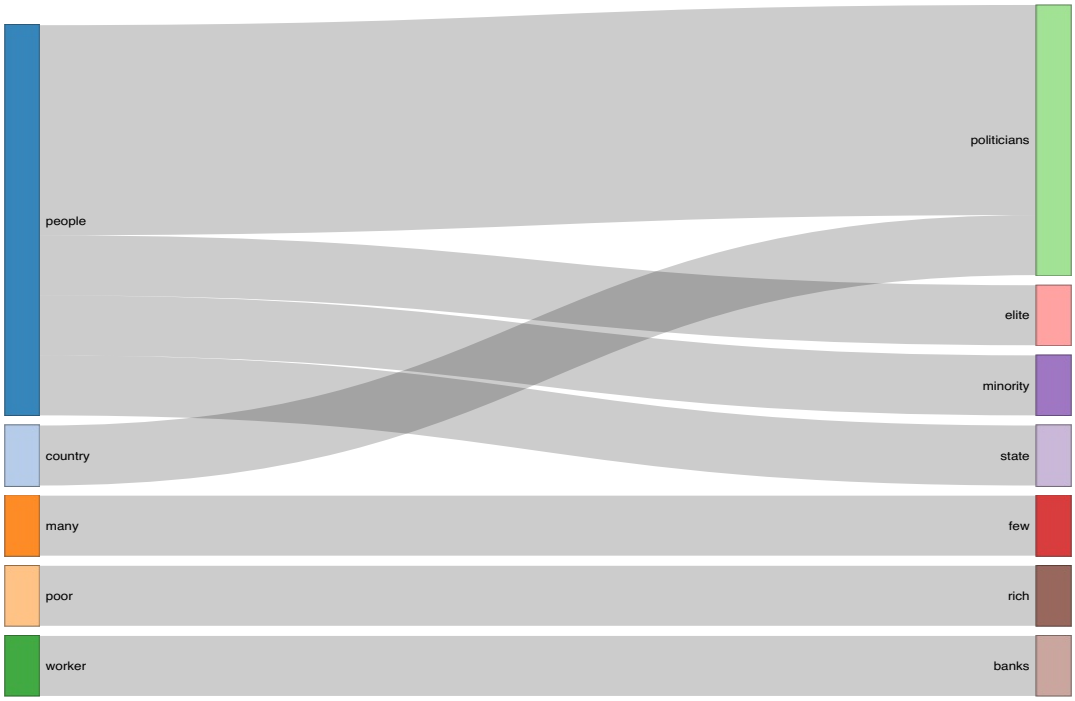


Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

Discussing the mismanagement of the Northeast Bank by the previous government, Lula da Silva said: "Either there was a lack of seriousness, or perhaps there were those who always believe they are smarter than others, who try to take advantage of public resources for themselves instead of considering the well-being of the people." As displayed in Figure 9, one of the main cleavages in Lula da Silva's discourses is dividing Brazil between many and few, poor and rich, workers and banks, by arguing that previous administrations had forgotten these people. The hyperinflation Brazil faced during the late-1980s and early-1990s was an outcome of the previous administration's irresponsibility, which left behind "a sick organism," according to Collor: "The economic instability, driven by the process of hyperinflation, was harmful to social coexistence, penalizing the poorest and undermining trust in institutions." As stressed by the literature, Collor "was un-

compromising in his attacks against the state's bureaucracy, the political establishment and, particularly, against President Sarney [who precedes him in the office]" (Panizza, 2000, p. 182). Discussing the Amazon Forest situation, a subject that garnered lots of criticism for him, Bolsonaro said that "the policy adopted in the past regarding this was irresponsible, using the indigenous people as political pawns to hinder progress in these states here," suggesting previous administrations environmental concerns prevent the region from prospering, which could benefit precisely indigenous people.

Figure 9 – Lula: Most Frequent Oppositions
The People versus The Elite

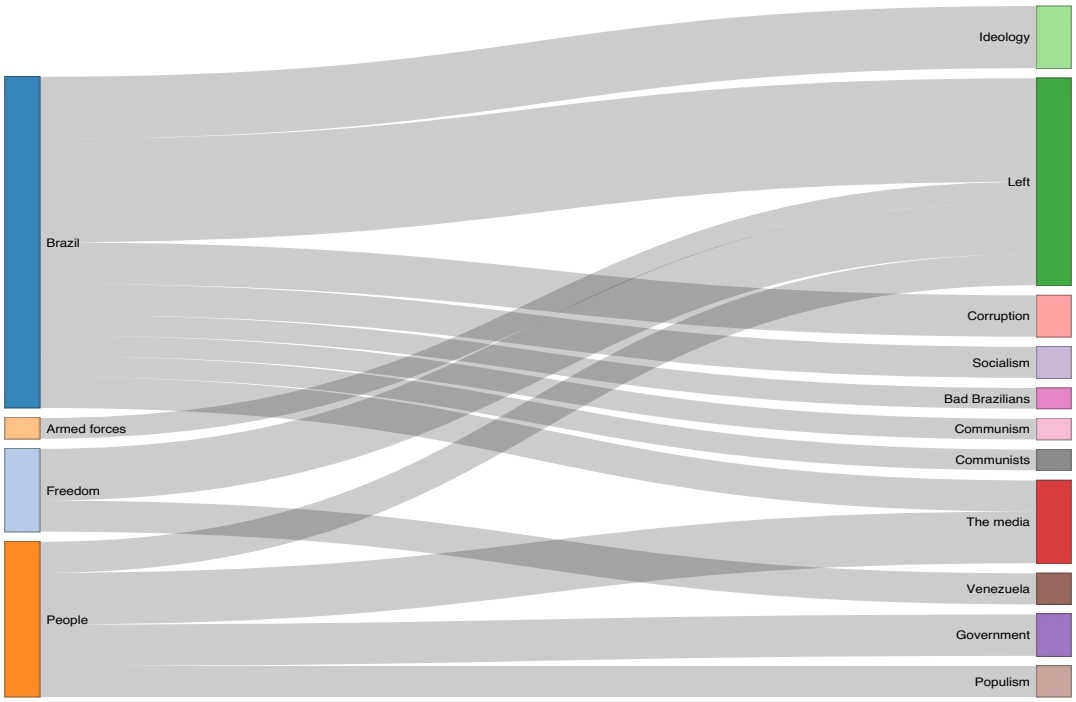


Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

The examples above focus on attacks against political elites, a classic populist feature. Primarily, they attack politicians and political parties, such as when Bolsonaro says, "Brazil is a wonderful country (...), but our main problem is our political class," when Collor strikes "political elites," "politicians," or Lula da Silva criticize that "congress members," "senators," "ministers," and "governments" change but "the people keep poorer than before." In Lula da Silva's case, as shown in Figure 9, politicians are the most often targeted elites, mainly opposed to "the people" and "the country." Therefore, the political class, as a whole, is the central elite or "others" in populist claims. Nonetheless, these appeals are also based on ideological reasons. In Collor and Lula da Silva, they are more subtle. For instance, Collor stands for a minimal state, expressing his liberalism, and Lula da Silva defends the usage of the state to promote economic development.

In Bolsonaro, ideology is more emphatic when he says, for example, that "this

Figure 10 – Bolsonaro: Most Frequent Oppositions
The People versus The Elite



Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.

flag will never be painted red," depicting the Workers' Party (PT) as "communist" or "socialist." Not by chance, in Figure 10, one sees the prominent elite actors as "ideology," "the left," "socialism," and "communism/communists" as opposed to "Brazil," primarily. During the 2020 local elections, he said, "This bunch of crooks and communists are shit. We will wipe out this red mob from Brazil in the coming elections." The overlap of the political class and ideology in Bolsonaro's populist appeals also brings leftist names in passages like "The people got tired of the old politics, tired of the politics of 'you scratch my back, I scratch yours,' tired of the negotiations, and the terrible example set by the PT governments, embodied in the figures of Lula and Dilma Rousseff" or when explaining what has motivated him to run for the presidency: "in 2014, with Dilma Rousseff's election, I thought: 'Wow, where is Brazil heading? How can these people be elected, reelected in Brazil?' We had just finished eight years of Lula with all those corruption accusations. Where are we going?" References to similar cases in Latin America are also usual, and countries and names like Venezuela, Cuba, Nicolas Maduro, and Alberto Fernández sporadically appear. These references are, to some extent, a continuation of his campaign discourse, characterized by anti-communist rhetoric that builds a narrative against the left and fosters a strong anti-PT sentiment[12], which for some scholars, helps

[12] *Antipetismo* is "a disdainful attitude towards the PT [Workers' Party]" (Samuels and Zucco Jr. 2018: 271).

to explain Bolsonaro's victory in 2018 (Hunter & Power, 2019; Rennó, 2020).

Another commonality is how they see the state. Bolsoaro resembles Collor's neoliberalism when criticizing the function political elites have attributed the state, making it inefficient and leading to economic chaos (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1996). Accordingly, "the state" is the primary term Collor uses to attack the elites, contrasting it mainly to "the people" and "Brazilians," as Figure 8 reports. The unexpected affinity between populism and neoliberalism led authors to drop structural and historical definitions of populism to forge a new concept (Weyland, 1996, 2001). Several authors have discussed this relationship regarding the 1990s in Latin America and Southern European countries (Knight, 1998; Cammack, 2000; Philip, 1996; Weyland, 1999; Panizza, 2000), but also contemporary European cases (Pauwels, 2010; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Both mainly contrast the state with the people. However, Bolsonaro glorifies particular liberal categories such as "entrepreneurs" and productive sectors like "agribusiness," whereas Collor opposed the state to "Brazilians" and "the people." According to the latter, "As the state strengthened, as this mammoth and the inefficient machine was built, the citizen was forgotten, the person was forgotten, the society was forgotten." For him, his administration was "overcoming the vices of economic disorder and a parasitic state."

Bolsonaro adds more layers to his populistic appeals targeting the state. In December 2020, mentioning how meeting Paulo Guedes (former Minister of Economy) made him a liberal, remembered: "Quickly, talking to him, he convinced me that he was on the right path: opening our economy; removing the state from the forefront of decisions, as it is the people who should lead the nation; lightening the burden of the state, reducing its size so that those who live off the work of others, if they ever return one day, cannot carry forward their harmful ideas and ideologies." He brings the classic neoliberal statement on limiting the state size. However, he does it by emphasizing how the state is responsible for hardship faced by the people (those who want to produce), how the power of making decisions should be in the people's hands, and seizing the moment to strike previous administrations that supposedly misused the power through the state due to their ideology. In his inauguration speech, Bolsonaro depicted the state alongside socialism as a mix of ideology and institutions that enslaved the people for the previous decades: "It is with humbleness and honor that I address all of you as the President of Brazil. I stand before the entire nation on this day, as the day when the people began to free themselves from socialism, free themselves from the inversion of values, from the overgrown state, and from political correctness". Yet, in Collor's and Bolsonaro's cases, sometimes it sounds like the state itself is not the problem. Instead, it is what political elites have made of it - they strengthened it to enrich themselves as individuals or groups, neglecting the people.

Lula follows the same logic of attacking how previous governments used the state. In this case, he does not mention how political elites enriched themselves through corrup-

tion but how the state made immoral choices, leaving the people unattended. Addressing homelessness issues, he said, "These citizens also have the right to housing. They cannot remain on the streets. The state must provide the conditions for these people to have a place to live. There's no other way. If the state has money to finance large economic groups, (…) we must have money to finance housing for those who cannot afford it." On another occasion, addressing a public health situation, Lula da Silva said, "Sanitation is the state's responsibility. However, the state fails to provide it, and the people end up walking on open sewage for decades and decades". Lula da Silva's appeals are on social justice, social rights, a welfare state, and equality, the usual subjects in left-leaning populistic appeals (March, 2011). Therefore, he does not believe in a minimal state but rather that the state should be repurposed to serve the people's will. Somehow, Lula da Silva's populism is intrinsically related to his administration's new developmentalism political economy (Schutte, 2013; Morais & Saad-Filho, 2011).

Finally, the third element they share is corruption. In populism studies, corruption is central in defining the elite, usually considered as such (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019; Mudde, 2004), and in populist leaders' mobilization for support through the fight against corruption (Roberts, 1995; Knight, 1998; Panizza, 2000). Interestingly, a few of them, like Abdalá Bucaram and even Collor have been removed from office for corruption (Philip, 1996). Corruption has been a central topic in Bolsonaro's rhetoric since his campaign, which rode the Car Wash wave and corruption scandals involving mainstream parties and companies in Brazil (Hunter & Power, 2019), being a determinant topic in the voting choice among his supporters (Rennó, 2020). During his administration, the opposition between his technical cabinet and previous ones, characterized by incompetent and corrupt traditional parties, continued (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021). In August 2019, he said, "Together, we will put Brazil in the prominent place it deserves. Together, we will sweep corruption and communism away from Brazil." Collor also had corruption at the core of his appeals, as his contemporary populist Latin American leaders, such as Alberto Fujimori (Roberts, 1998). In his inaugural speech, he said, "Nothing repulses the spirit of citizenship more than corruption." At the end of his first year in office, Collor made a balance by saying, "Our country is changing. We faced and defeated corruption; we put an end to the maharajas." Although a characteristic of the populist radical right (Mudde, 2016), corruption is also present in left-wing populists (Roberts, 2006). According to Lula da Silva, Brazil is a "poor country" partially because of "the South American elite, which ruled in a subservient manner, which governed this country in a subordinate way, engaging in the most absurd cases of corruption." As these passages show, even though coming from different places of the ideological spectrum, these leaders use similar language and their populist appeals and attack similar actors. From now on, I will spend some paragraphs discussing each president's populist particularities. The length for each is uneven, as it is the level of populism and because of the low variance in Collor and Lula

da Silva's populism, contrary to the high number of distinct terms used by Bolsonaro and topics he uses to build populist appeals.

Besides the state, politicians, political elites, and powerful corrupt, Collor brings the privileged, selfish elites with personal or group interests representing economic power, as seen on the top-right of Figure 7. Usually opposed to the people and Brazilians (Figure 8), this selfish elite used the state "for their own benefit" or "as an instrument to enrich themselves and their families." His administration is a struggle "against everything and everyone," the "sick selfishness of elites," "the economic power," and these "outdated elites that have led the country to rock bottom." Although coming from a political family, Collor portrayed himself as an outsider, an anti-establishment image also sustained for being originally from a poor Northeast state (Panizza, 2000). However, as illustrated, he also attacked economic elites and figured as an engine that pushed Brazil into a globalized anti-state scenario (Ricci et al., 2021).

Lula da Silva fits into the inclusionary populist category (Mudde & Kaltwasser). The opposition between the people and elite in Lula da Silva's discourse is, roughly, "the poor" or "worker" versus "the rich," which varies among "minority" (in the sense of a few who have the power), "banks," "privileged," and "few." This poor versus rich contrast put the people in the nucleus of his populistic appeals, defending the welfare state and giving a political voice to marginalized social groups (Ricci et al., 2021). Therefore, Lula da Silva's inclusionary populism contemplates the material dimension with social programs such as Bolsa Família, the political dimension with participatory institutions like National Conferences, and the symbolic dimension by standing for dignifying the underdogs' lives, illustrated by a passage from a ribbon-cutting speech when opening a copper mine in Northern Brazil: "That is what we want, not just for the minority. We want the Brazilian people to (...) achieve their citizenship, which is the fundamental right to work, study, and have breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day. The right to have access (...) to leisure, to knowledge." Lula da Silva's commitment to helping the less fortunate, efforts to diminish income inequality, and cash transfer programs led others to classify him as a populist (Conniff, 2012). Using classic populism definitions, Grigera (2017) argues that Lula da Silva is a populist because of the coalition he built favoring different social classes at the same time and his use of the state as an instrument to diminish inequality and foster redistribution of wealth. However, according to the ideational definition applied in this chapter, that is not what allows me to state that there are populist traits in Lula da Silva's speeches. Rather, it is the moral tone assigned to the divide between the people and the elite.

Finally, riding the inclusionary and exclusionary types of populism, the literature has tagged Bolsonaro as an exclusionary leader because "he does not accept specific groups in his notion of the people" (Ricci et al., 2021, p. 10). However, every populist

leader or party is exclusionary (Selcuk, 2019). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) suggest that the exclusionary populist can be thought of through material, political, and symbolic dimensions. In Europe, the material dimension is about excluding some segments from the benefits of the welfare state. Hence, immigrants who benefit from policies are under attack. In Brazil, Bolsonaro's attacks are against minorities that have benefited from progressive policies enacted by previous left-leaning governments, such as indigenous and quilombola people for land demarcation, LGBTQIA+ groups, and even cash-transfer beneficiaries. To demonstrate, in an event called "Worship service to God for the president's life," Bolsonaro said, "We inherited a morally, ethically, and economically devastated Brazil. They did everything against the family in the last twenty years. They invented everything to break down a nation's fundamental unit, the family. They shamelessly put in school textbooks that a child can choose their gender when they are twelve years old, that a family can be any random grouping of things."

In the same vein, European exclusionary populism wants to prevent immigrants from becoming citizens with political rights (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). In contrast, in Bolsonaro's speeches, it is hard to find clear statements defending that specific groups should be prohibited from participating in political life. Yet, undemocratic elements are present, especially when he disrespects and discredits the electoral system and the Supreme Court or if one considers the role militaries played in his administration (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). Figures 6 and 9 show that the armed forces are a frequent actor in Bolsonaro' 's construction of the people. The third element is symbolic and appears in European exclusionary populism through claims for the silent majority. Although populists use different terms to appeal to the people, the symbolic exclusionary element brings nativism to the discussion (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). Since immigration is not an issue that mobilizes political appeals in Brazil, this trait is shaped differently in Bolsonaro's discourse. He talks to the "real Brazilians," arguing that "the Brazilian population is Christian, and they are proud of it," often finishing his speeches with the motto "God, Homeland, and Family." In these cases, Bolsonaro's populism usually overlaps with nationalism, being classified as national populism (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). However, the type of nationalism Bolsonaro conflates with populism is neither civic nor ethnic (Bonikowski, 2016) but rather civilizational (Brubaker, 2017), as already shown (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). That is, he is not excluding from his notion of the people groups based on their ethnicity or civic status, but instead because they do not share the values of the authentic Brazilian people. The combination of populism and nationalism was first identified by Tamaki and Fuks (2020) in Bolsonaro's campaign speeches but proved to be less prominent than populism itself (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023), even though some insist that the combination of radical populism and Christian nationalism is what defines him (Barbosa & Casarões, 2023).

Bolsonaro populism has been under scrutiny by several scholars for the last few

years. Yet, systematic assessment of his populism is rare. For instance, Feres Júnior et al. (2023) mistakenly attribute to Bolsonaro the Liberal Social Party (PSL) 2018 election manifesto. Although one can intuitively infer that PSL's platform for the 2018 presidential elections was heavily influenced by Bolsonaro joining the party, it is misleading to conclude that he is the only one deciding on the document. Analyzing Bolsonaro's tweets in a two-year and a-half time frame, Moraes (2022) concluded demagoguery is more frequent than populism in his Twitter account. As of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a boom of studies on populist responses to the crisis emerged (von Bülow & Abers, 2022; Burni & Tamaki, 2021; Avritzer & Rennó, 2021; Rennó et al., 2021). Bolsonaro spread conspiracy theories, stressing how these are present in populist rhetoric (Pirro & Taggart, 2023) by opposing the first vaccine Brazil had access to because it was made in China (Gramacho & Turgeon, 2021) and reinforcing the idea that the virus was created in a laboratory, naming it "Chinese virus" (Kalil et al., 2021).

Finally, it is worth mentioning Bolsonaro's relationship with the media. Although supported by specific traditional media channels such as Record TV (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020), it is undeniable that social media played a significant role in his elections and throughout his administration. He regularly used social media to communicate directly with his followers, spreading fake and controversial news (Feres Júnior & Gagliardi, 2021). Like Latin American populists such as Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa, who held TV shows to address the people weekly, Bolsonaro did it through YouTube live streams, using derogatory language to demean the media and left-wingers (Venturelli et al., 2023). Bolsonaro portrayed the media as an elite that deceives the people by saying that "[we have] the wonderful people on our side and the freedom of social media, which brings you the truth, differently from a large part of the Brazilian media, the biggest fake news factory, a shame to the world." The troubled relationship, according to Bolsonaro, precedes his administration, since he came to power with "everything against [him] (...), with a significant part of the media constantly attacking with lies, slanders, or fake news."

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter addresses who the most populist Brazilian president is among the three alleged populist leaders in the last few decades. Applying the ideational approach to populism through a man-machine content analysis, the findings confirm Ricci et al.'s (2021) results, pointing out Bolsonaro as the most populist leader in contemporary Brazil, followed by Collor and Lula da Silva. In the latter's case, populism is so rare and inconsistently used that it is difficult to state he is an example of a populist leader. Although he used populist appeals in more than 10% of his speeches during his first two years in office, the average intensity is pretty low. Therefore, it is plausible to say Lula da Silva is

an ambiguous case that leads me to emphasize that populism is potentially a continuous rather than dichotomous category (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011), raising the necessity of thinking of thresholds to distinguish populists from non-populists. Also, if populism is about making appeals to the people and attacking the elites simultaneously, it is plausible to suppose that every politician will make some sort of populist appeal at some point. Yet, not all of them should be considered populists. To classify a leader as such, one should focus on the consistency of the use of populism.

Collor used populism more frequently and at a higher intensity than Lula da Silva. As the literature shows, his appeals combine neoliberalism and populism, empirically proving the insufficient definitions of the past. More than combining these elements as two distinct categories, Collor's populistic appeals often attack the state and its role in the Brazilian crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Bolsonaro is the most polemic one. His populism is multifaceted, and the terms used to refer to the people and the elite are more varied than in others. Beyond his global connections with populist leaders and parties such as Viktor Orban in Hungary and Donald Trump in the US, Bolsonaro is probably the face of the new right-wing populism in Latin America. Since the 1990s, Latin America has seen no right-wing populist taking office. Quite the opposite, the pink tide has flooded the continent with left-wing populists. Bolsonaro is not alone, though; he now has new friends in closer countries. To name just a few, think of the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, or even more recent figures, such as Javier Milei, who came in first place in the 2023 Argentinean primaries, or Carlos Pineda, barred from running in the 2023 presidential elections in Guatemala. An intriguing question is whether and how Bolsonaro will return to political competition, especially after the Supreme Electoral Court barred him from running for office until 2030, among other reasons, for organizing an event in which he called upon ambassadors to disqualify and raise doubts about the electoral system and especially electronic machine votes, and afterward spread the video through social media, inciting his supporters against the Electoral Justice and his adversaries. Therefore, Bolsonaro is an example of how populism can harm democracy. However, the discussion about populism and democracy, particularly if Bolsonaro undermined Brazilian democracy, is reserved for the final chapter.

Before that, I would like to discuss another topic overlooked by the literature. Studies on populism in Latin America usually focus on leadership, whereas in Europe, it is primarily about parties. To partially fill this gap, the following chapter measures populism in Brazilian parties by addressing another question in the same fashion as the present chapter: Are there populist parties in Brazil?

3

Are There Populist Parties in Brazil? An Analysis of Election Manifestos (2010 - 2022)

Abstract

Are there populist parties in Brazil? Brazilian parties are overlooked in populism studies. Despite the idea that elections in Brazil are characterized by personalism and statements about low party institutionalization, scholars have shown that parties matter for several reasons in the country. To fill this gap, the chapter measures populism in Brazilian election manifestos for presidential elections between 2010 and 2022. It applies a man-machine content analysis to show that populism is predominant on the radical left side of the ideological continuum. Yet, mainstream and right-wing parties also make populist appeals in the 2018 cycle. The chapter dissects radical left parties' populism and brings some details on the 2018 elections. It concludes by arguing that Brazilian populist parties do not represent a threat to democracy because their vote share is insignificant in both presidential and legislative elections. Yet, it is misleading to believe that populism in Brazil is only about leadership.

3.1 Introduction

Latin America is the land of populism (de la Torre, 2017). Let me rephrase it: Latin America is the land of populist leaders. Whereas in Europe the focus is on populist parties (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011, 2014; March 2017; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Mudde, 2016), Latin American literature is primarily on populist leaders (Germani, 1978; Weffort, 1978; Jaguaribe, 1954; Ianni, 1969; Saes, 1994). Contemporary studies, be it by Latin American or Latin Americanists, are also mostly on leadership (Hawkins, 2009;

Weyland, 2001; Panizza, 2000; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023; Ricci et al., 2021; Tamakis & Fuks, 2020). The scarcity of research on parties in populist studies in the region might derive from citizens' tendency to vote for candidates instead of parties (Ames, 2003). Furthermore, Latin America has uninstitutionalized party systems (Levitsky & Cameron, 2003; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995). Such a lack of institutionalization would have opened the door for personalistic and authoritarian leaders such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (Mainwaring & Scully, 2008).

Unsurprisingly, one of the most meaningful definitions of populism was forged while thinking about Latin American populists during the 1990s, including the idea of personalistic leadership in the concept itself (Weyland, 2001). Mentions of Latin American populist leaders have used the adjective personalist here and there (Weyland, 2003; de la Torre, 2018). Very often, the specialized literature evokes a populist leader to depict Latin American reality, from classic cases, such as Getúlio Vargas (Brazil) and Juan Perón (Argentina), to contemporary ones, like Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Hugo Chávez (Venezuela) (Weyland, 2017). One of the components of the perils of presidentialism thesis is the fear of the potential abuses of personalized power (Linz, 1990). Empirically, personalism negatively affects the levels of democracy (Rhodes-Purdy & Madrid, 2020), which makes studies on populist leadership and their relationship with democracy an essential one. However, should we ignore parties in Latin American populist studies?

Brazil has improved its level of party institutionalization since democratization (Braga et al., 2016) but never achieved levels such as Argentina's, Colombia's, or Uruguay's, among others (Rodríguez & Rosenblatt, 2020). Yet, Brazil is one of three countries in the region with higher levels of party institutionalization than a generation ago, characterized by an uneven institutionalization (Mainwaring et al., 2018), or an uninstitutionalized or rootless stability (Zucco, 2015). The literature has shown that parties matter within congress during the legislative process (Limongi & Figueiredo, 2017) and that some parties determine vote choice in electoral processes (Samuels & Zucco, 2018). Recently, an agreement around the Brazilian party system's institutionalization has been achieved (Mainwaring et al., 2018). Nonetheless, scholars disagree on the strength of the linkage between parties and voters (Mainwaring et al., 2018) since party identification in Brazil is historically low (Veiga, 2011). On the one hand, skeptical scholars state that those are weak bonds (Samuels & Zucco, 2014; Zucco, 2015). On the other hand, some say these ties are stronger than doubters think (Braga et al., 2016).

A few scholars have underlined some populist features in Latin American parties for different reasons. Yet, they do it by intertwining parties and leadership. For some, populist parties in the region are characterized by a top-down mobilization supported by an urban working class or peasants, typically with charismatic leadership and anti-status quo and nationalistic appeals (Burgess & Levitsky, 2003). Others emphasize charismatic

outsider leaders, direct mediation with supporters, unorganized parties dependent on the leader, and the use of clientelism and patronage to win elections (Casullo & Freidenberg, 2017). Still, studies on Brazilian populist parties are rare, and when they exist, they focus on a few cases, comparing them to other countries (Hawkins & Silva, 2019). In order to fill that gap, this chapter asks if there is any populist party in Brazil. To do so, I measure populism in electoral manifestos of Brazilian presidential elections between 2010 and 2022 through a two-step content analysis, mixing automated text analysis and human coding. Results show populist parties mainly on the left of the political spectrum but also in mainstream parties, exceptionally in 2018. Parties running in coalitions tend to be less populist than those running alone once they moderate their level of populism and avoid committing to policies that alienate potential partners in the alliance (Abdou & Ruedin, 2021). Whereas left-wing parties' discourse resembles Latin American parties such as the *Movement Toward Socialism* (Bolivia) and the *United Socialist Party of Venezuela* (PSUV), right-wing parties bring similar appeals to neoliberal populists from the 1990s (Burgess, 2003).

The chapter continues as follows: I will first discuss populism and how it has been analyzed in election manifestos. Secondly, I will present data, methods, and techniques. The results are split into two parties: I begin with numbers and descriptive statistics and then qualitatively analyze the aspects of Brazilian parties' populism. Finally, I present my conclusion and how these findings can potentially be unfolded.

3.2 Political Parties and Electoral Manifestos

Election manifestos[1] say a lot about parties. They not only present programmatic proposals and policies that parties will pursue in case of victory but also bring the parties' core values and ideals. Despite a significant part of the literature being on populist leaders, scholars have stressed the importance of studying populism in party organizations (Gergina & Soare, 2019; Heinisch & Mezzoleni; 2020, Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Hawkins & Silva, 2019; Meijers & Zaslove, 2020; Cocco & Monechi, 2021). Although a land of populist leaders, Latin American populism studies can learn from Heinisch and Mezzoleni (2020: 8), who, when discussing the intrinsic relationship between populist parties and leaders, state that "leadership strength and the organization's adaptive capacity necessitate one another to maintain party coherence."

[1] In Brazil, elections and party manifestos are different documents. Whereas party manifestos are more consistent and steady documents presenting parties' core values and ideas, and several parties do not update this document, election manifestos are documents delivered by parties or coalitions to the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) each electoral cycle. International literature uses these terms interchangeably, referring to what, in Brazil, one understands about election manifestos. I use election manifestos because it is the only document that allows me to observe how populism changes over time.

Studies on populist parties in Europe have different aims. Scholars have found that populism impacts party organization, with radical-left parties giving voice to intermediate bodies and radical-right ones becoming more leader-oriented (Vittori, 2019). Party systems have also been affected. Whereas left-wing populist parties upended long-standing trends in political competition, right-wing parties that incorporated populism could set the agenda and consequently define the driving issues in elections (Vachudova, 2021). Caiani and Graziano (2019) analyzed the nexus between populist parties' success and economic, political, and cultural crises. Several studies on populist parties in Europe capitalized on the trend of supposed populist zeitgeist (Mudde, 2004), which have been refuted by Rooduijn et al. (2014), who found that mainstream parties do not change their manifestos with the emergence of populist parties. Yet, before one explores the relationship and potential overlaps between populism and other phenomena, it is necessary to assess whether a party is populist or not.

Different approaches, methods, and techniques have been applied to assess populism in parties. Expert surveys are often used as a technique. Norris (2019) found that populist parties exist all over the ideological spectrum, arguing that when they conflate populism and authoritarianism, liberal democracy might be under threat. Wiesehomeier (2019) also uses expert surveys to show how important it is to create indicators for the different elements of the concept. Like democracy, populism is a latent concept, and measuring the attributes that compose it is a better strategy. Meijers and Zaslove (2020) corroborate this idea by creating a new and more complex approach. Their survey expert has shown that using anti-establishment rhetoric as a proxy for populism might be misleading, as Inglehart and Norris do (2019).

Moving from methods to sources, a substantive part of the literature applies a myriad of techniques to measure populism in election manifestos (Rooduijn et al., 2014; Hawkins & Silva, 2019; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; March, 2019; Saleem, 2021). Hawkins and Silva (2019) used holistic grading to code party manifestos and speeches. Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) compared classic and computerized content analysis methods to show that they validate each other since they lead to similar results. Yet, the authors recommend combining these methods, as I apply in this chapter. More recent applications (Cocco & Monechi, 2021) used supervised machine learning to assess populism in parties, verifying that populism is best conceived as a continuous concept, allowing for more fine-grained analysis, as previously noted (Rooduin & Pauwels, 2011; Meijers & Zaslove, 2020). Even though the level of populism is usually low in party manifestos (Rooduijn et al., 2014), particularly when compared to political leaders' speeches (Hawkins & Silva, 2019), analyzing party manifestos is a vital way to understand how and to what extent populist ideas penetrate these political organizations.

Studies on parties and elections in Brazil emphasize the personalist tradition that

characterizes the electoral context (Ames, 2003; Mainwaring, 1992, 2001). Still, a few of them bring programmatic elements looking at election manifestos, be it to place parties on a left-right scale (Jorge et al., 2018; Tarouco & Madeira, 2013) or to analyze policy and propositions they would pursue if victorious (Salles & Guarnieri, 2020). It is worth mentioning that parties must present election manifestos when registering their candidates on the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) since 2009. Therefore, one can access all election manifestos of parties running for executive offices at all levels since 2010. Yet, studies trying to assess levels of populism in Brazilian election manifestos are rare and small-N studies (Hawkins & Silva, 2019). A few expert surveys coded parties for populism, but they bring contradictory results compared to Hawkins and Silva (2019). *Political Representation, Executives, and Political Parties Survey* (PREPPS) list the *Socialism and Freedom Party* (PSOL) as the most populist party in Brazil, followed by the *Social Liberal Party* (PSL), and then the *Workers' Party* (PT) (Wiesehomeier et al., 2021). *Chapel Hill Expert Survey Latina America* 2020 (CHES) shows the PSL first place, followed by the PT (Martínez-Gallardo et al., 2022). Finally, the *Global Populism Survey* (GPS) has no index of populism but measures it as a latent concept. In building an index through an unweighted mean, one has the PSL first, then the *Brazilian Republican Party* (Republicanos), followed by the PT (Norris, 2019). The analysis of election manifestos, as the reader will realize soon, tells a different story.

What should one expect from these manifestos when looking at them through a populist frame? First, I expect radical parties[2] from both sides of the ideological spectrum to be more populist (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020; Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). Radical and extreme parties are part of what Mudde (2016) calls far-right and far-left parties. Whereas radical parties might be populist, they are not a threat to democracy, although they reject liberal democracy. Extreme parties, in turn, cannot be populist because they are intrinsically against democracy. Although the relationship between populism and democracy is not the aim of this chapter, it is noteworthy that the literature has already pointed out how populist parties potentially conflate populism and authoritarianism on the right (Stavrakakis et al., 2017) and on the left (de la Torre, 2017; Weyland, 2013), meaning they can undermine democracy. Considering the above discussion, hypothesis one is:

> *H1: Radical left-wing and radical right-wing parties are more populist than other parties.*

The onset of the twenty-first century witnessed several left-wing parties coming to

[2] Since I use different sources to place parties on the left-right scale, I have normalized all scales in an interval one from 0 to 1. Therefore, considering seven levels, I have the following: Radical Left: 0.00 - 0.14; Left: 0.15 - 0.29; Center-Left: 0.30 - 0.44; Center: 0.45 - 0.54; Center-Right: 0.55 - 0.69; Right: 0.70 - 0.84; Radical Right: 0.85 - 1.00.

power in Latin America. This pink tide has brought populist parties to office in Bolivia and Ecuador and has led scholars to typify populism in the region as inclusionary (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). Considering the success of this combination in the continent, I anticipate that Brazil has more populist parties on the left, especially the radical left, such as *Socialism and Freedom Party* (PSOL), *Unified Workers Socialist Party* (PSTU), *Popular Unity* (UP), *Brazilian Communist Party* (PCB), and *Workers Cause Party* (PCO). These parties' discourse portrays a division from a social class perspective based on a Marxist approach. Whereas the PSTU stated in 2014 that "a socialist program can end with imperial domination in our country... and finish with all exploitation and oppression," eight years later, they have an anti-system message when saying that power should be handled by workers and not politicians, arguing that "it is an illusion to think that this transition will occur peacefully through elections; the workers must fight for it. Only through a revolution will it be possible to wrest political power from the bourgeoisie." The radical right, according to established classifications (Tarouco & Madeira, 2015; Bolognesi et al., 2023), is almost absent in the Brazilian party system[3]. Parties that could be labeled as such have no internal coherence and cohesion as the radical left. Whereas congress members who represent *Bolsonarism* might have radical and even extreme behavior and positions, the Liberal Party (PL) or Social Liberal Party (PSL) themselves are diverse rather than homogeneous entities. The PSL, by which Bolsonaro ran in 2018, is no longer his party and joined the Democrats (DEM) in a party federation. To illustrate how they were ideologically incoherent, the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies during Bolsonaro's first two years in office was a *Democrats* (DEM) member and blocked several government proposals. That said, the second hypothesis follows:

> *H2: Considering the ideological coherence and cohesion of radical left-wing parties, I foresee they will have more populist appeals when compared to radical right-wing parties.*

The nature of political competitions can also influence the manifestos' content. In Brazil, parties can contest elections by running through coalitions that were previously built. Parties rationally choose to integrate coalitions to maximize their electoral support, whether in terms of growth or survival (Braga, 2006). Research on the Workers Party (PT) revealed that the more flexible the party became in building coalitions with center- and right-leaning parties, the more competitive it turned into (Ribeiro, 2014; Meneguello, 2012; Miguel & Machado, 2007). Populism is a set of ideas that morally splits politics and society into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite (Hawkins & Kaltawasser, 2018). Part of what defines populism is an anti-establishment claim. However, it is important to remember that in multi-party systems,

[3] Only Patriot has an ideological score over .85.

parties "have incentives to tone down their criticism, because they have to form coalition governments" (Rooduijn et al., 2014: 568).

Furthermore, populism is usually attached to other ideologies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Therefore, populism itself might be diluted in this mix. Scholars have shown that ideology has become less critical in forming coalitions, with inconsistent ideological alliances being more frequent than consistent ones in elections at different levels (local and national levels) and types (proportional or majoritarian) and among parties with different sizes (Carreirão & Nascimento, 2010). Despite assuming the presidential candidate's party is the most important in the coalition and their election manifesto, I anticipate that parties running through alliances will be less populist than those running alone. When building a coalition, parties with different ideologies and agendas gather to amplify their chances but also have to give in. Therefore, I believe parties in coalitions constrain or moderate each other. The third hypothesis is the following:

H3: Parties running in coalitions are less populist than those running alone.

The 2018 Brazilian presidential elections marked a departure from a long-standing pattern. Since 1989, the *Workers' Party* (PT) has made it to the runoff, and between 1994 and 2014, it competed in second rounds against the *Brazilian Social Democracy Party* (PSDB). Since 2015, with the rise of Operation Car Wash, culminating in Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, Brazil underwent a multidimensional crisis that paved the way for an "outsider" to contest the 2018 elections with real chances of winning (Hunter & Power, 2019). One of the definitional attributes of populism is the anti-establishment discourse. Politicians can capitalize on this type of appeal in a crisis context. By unveiling corruption scandals, Operation Car Wash has affected almost all parties and the trust of public opinion towards parties. In these circumstances, populist claims could be very appealing. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's campaign has brought a somewhat populist speech since the very beginning (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020), which could lead other parties also to make populist appeals as if they were contaminated (Mudde, 2004), especially if they understand that this type of ideas could bring electoral gains in the specific context. Consequently, the aspects that characterize Brazilian politics in 2018 lead me to the fourth hypothesis:

H4: The 2018 elections will have more parties making populist appeals than in previous elections.

Finally, I expect parties to make more populist appeals in the 2022 elections. The literature suggests that populism spreads like an infection, especially if it succeeds, contaminating other parties, including mainstream ones (Mudde, 2004). However, this is not

the case for Western European countries, where mainstream parties did not become more populist when challenging populist parties, while the latter toned down their populism once they succeeded (Rooduijn et al., 2014). Bolsonaro has shown populist traits in his campaign elections (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020) and throughout his term (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). His populistic appeals are part of what drove him to the office in 2018, but may also be part of his low approval rating by the end of his term, slightly above 20% (Tanscheit & Barbosa, 2023). These contradictory takes on the topic led me to formulate the last hypothesis, followed by its null hypothesis.

H5: The 2022 elections will have more parties making populist appeals.

H5.1: Populism is not contagious, and mainstream parties are not more populist in the 2022 elections than in the previous.

3.3 Methods and Procedures

Scholars have measured populism globally in the last decade. Mostly, they use survey experts. A few are specifically on populism, such as *The PopuList* (Rooduijn et al., 2019) and *Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey* (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020). However, these focus on Europe and lack information on Latin American parties. Others have populism as one of their interests and are broadly surveyed on political parties. Among them, I stress the already mentioned PREPPS (Wiesehomeier et al., 2021), CHES (Martínez-Gallardo et al., 2022), and GPS (Norris, 2019). Although valuable contributions to the debate, these experts are not necessarily specialists in populism but in parties. These datasets have between eight and seventeen Brazilian parties in their waves. However, none of them, except for PREPPS, which codes for Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), have data on radical left-wing parties, which I expect to have higher levels of populism.

When trying to assess populism empirically, scholars have looked at discourse in various forms, such as political speeches, election manifestos, and social and traditional media (Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014; Caiani & Kröll, 2017; Tamaki & Fuks, 2020; Ricci et al., 2021; Moffit, 2022; Bonikowski et al., 2022; Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). One of the most used methods is content analysis, "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004: 18). There are several units of analysis one can choose when classifying text. My unit of analysis is the manifesto by party-year, whereas paragraphs are units of measurement. I chose paragraphs as the unit of measurement instead of sentences or entire corpus of text for two reasons: 1) achieving acceptable reliability among coders is more complicated with larger

units (Weber, 1990; Krippendorff, 2004); 2) paragraphs are better than sentences once I am looking for the simultaneous presence of people-centrism and anti-elitism. Consequently, people-centrism and anti-elitism should be in the same paragraph since "relying on a single item such as anti-elite rhetoric may be misleading for a more comprehensive understanding of populism" (Wiesehomeier, 2019: 105).

But why code paragraphs instead of sentences? Concisely, because the appeal to people and the attack on the elite can be in different sentences but in the same paragraphs. In these cases, if sentences are the unit of measurement, they would be coded as non-populist, undermining the level of populism of a manifesto. Therefore, each paragraph is coded as a binary variable, scoring 1 when populist and zero otherwise. As described below, computer and human coders have done these jobs. Eventually, I calculated the percentage of populist paragraphs per manifesto.

To prepare the data, I followed several usual steps. In the Brazilian presidential elections between 2010 and 2022, there were 44 presidential candidates, as Table 3 displays. I divided the manifestos[4] into paragraphs, turned the words to lowercase, and removed punctuation, unnecessary spaces, topic or section titles, footnotes, headers, footers, and images. I keep accents because of an essential word in the people's dictionary: we (*nós*, in Portuguese). Populism is a dyadic view of politics and society that often materializes in language using we/us versus them appeals. Without the accent (*nos*), the word is a plural article that means "in/in the," which would lead to many false positives. Hence, I overlook some standard practices of text analysis when preparing the data.

Another example is not removing numbers since populist appeals might depict ideas such as the following by the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL): "to exploit the human being to ensure the accumulation for the benefit of 1% of the population, while 99% suffer the disgraceful consequences." The 1% versus 99% is a frequent expression used by Bernie Sanders in the 2016 primary elections in the U.S. and by the *Occupy Wall Street* movement. Although some scholars claim that this division is an objective reality and lacks a Manichean tone (Mudde, 2016), the argument sounds more like a defense from critiques by other scholars who believe Sanders should not be considered a populist because he does not build the people as a homogeneous entity, but as a heterogeneous instead (Katsambekis, 2022).

The second step is to create a dictionary. As I showed in Chapter 1, populism is a latent concept, so one needs to find references to the people and attacks on the elite in the same paragraph in order to consider it populist. For that purpose, I draw upon previous literature to build two dictionaries, one with terms related to the people and another with words referring to the elite (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Nishikawa, 2021). Primarily, I built upon a dictionary available in

[4] All data are available on the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) website and were scraped.

Table 3 – Brazilian Parties in Presidential Elections

Party	Ideology 2010 - 2014[1]	Ideology 2018 - 2022[2]	Election Year[3]
Workers Cause Party (PCO)	0.02	-	2010, 2014
Unified Workers Socialist Party (PSTU)	0.03	0.05	2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL)	0.07	0.13	2010, 2014, 2018
Brazilian Communist Party (PCB)	0.08	0.09	2010, 2014, 2022
Workers Party (PT)	0.32	0.3	2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB)	0.33	-	2014
Green Party (PV)	0.42	-	2010, 2014
Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB)	0.6	0.71	2010, 2014, 2018
Christian Social Party (PSC)	0.7	-	2014
Brazilian Labor Renewal Party (PRTB)	0.72	-	2010, 2014
Christian Democracy (DC)	0.73	0.81	2010, 2014, 2018, 2022
Democratic Labor Party (PDT)	-	0.39	2018, 2022
Sustainability Network (REDE)	-	0.48	2018
Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB)	-	0.7	2018, 2022
We Can (PODE)	-	0.72	2018
Free Fatherland Party (PPL)	-	0.73	2018
Social Liberal Party (PSL)	-	0.81	2018
New Party (NOVO)	-	0.81	2018, 2022
Patriot (PATRI)	-	0.86	2018
Liberal Party (PL)	-	0.78	2022
Popular Unity (UP)[4]	-	0.13	2022
Brazilian Labor Party (PTB)	-	0.61	2022
Brazil Union (UNIÃO)[5]	-	0.83	2022

[1] Average position, scale from 0 (left) to 1 (right) (Tarouco & Madeira, 2015). Normalized values.
[2] Average position, scale from 0 (left) to 1 (right) (Bolognesi, Ribeiro & Codato, 2023). Normalized values.
[3] Elections in which the party had a candidate running for the presidency.
[4] The same average as PSOL (2018-2022). Dissident members formed UP from PSOL.
[5] Average of Democrats (DEM) and Social Liberal Party (PSL) because they act as a party federation between 2022 and 2025.

the Brazilian literature (Ricci et al., 2021) and improved it by reading a sample of the manifestos. This process resulted in two dictionaries[5] that sum up to 197 words. Some examples are “people,” “Brazilians,” ”population,” “country,” “homeland,” and “family” in the people’s dictionary, and “elite,” “parties,” “politicians,” “bourgeoisie,” “corrupts,” among elite’s terms.

Steps three and four are intertwined. I apply a two-step content analysis, mixing an automated classification based on a dictionary approach followed by a human check of positive cases (Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016; Ricci et al., 2021). The main advantage of such an approach is that, compared to human coding, it is less time-consuming and hard-

[5] See Table 15 in Appendix B for all terms.

working than the former (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Furthermore, machine learning applications still have to improve to achieve better outcomes in terms of the performance of the models (Cocco & Monechi, 2021; Bonikowski et al., 2023) so that trust in a mix of a text-as-data approach and human judgment is a better strategy. Although one has subjectivity involved when humans are coding, techniques to ensure reliability allow for trustworthy inferences (Krippendorff, 2004).

In the third step, I run the dictionary over the paragraphs, and the computer gives me an outcome with potential populist paragraphs. Filtering by those paragraphs with a logic value true for populism, two coders hand-check the computer results, assigning 1 when the computer is correct and zero otherwise. A third coder resolves disagreements following the criterion that both "the people" and "the elite" should be present and opposed in a moral way. Those manually validated paragraphs are used to compute the percentage of populism in each manifesto. To ensure that results from human coders are not random but based on a shared idea of what populism is, I run an intercoder reliability test. A Krippendorff's alpha equals one indicates perfect reliability, whereas zero means the complete absence of it. In social sciences, one should consider conclusions trustworthy only when the alpha is equal to or above 0.8 (Krippendorff, 2004). Here, coders achieved $\alpha = 0.804$.

3.4 Results

Of the 44 election manifestos analyzed between 2010 and 2022, twenty-six (59%) include populist appeals, as Table 4 displays. Confirming hypothesis 4, the 2018 elections have more parties making populist appeals (10 out of 13, or 77% of them), followed by 2022 (64%), 2010 (56%), and 2014 (36%). For a manifesto to be classified as populist, it must have at least one populist paragraph, which would be a necessary and sufficient condition for the document as a whole to be coded as such. When categorizing a source as populist or not, rules are arbitrary once the literature has no thresholds established for this purpose. Unsurprisingly, among the twenty-six populist manifestos, six have less than 1% of populist paragraphs, and eight more have less than 5%.

Table 4 – Results for Election Manifestos (2010 - 2022)

	2010		**2014**		**2018**		**2022**		**Total**	
Category	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*
Populist	5	56%	4	36%	10	77%	7	64%	26	59%
Not Populist	4	44%	7	64%	3	23%	4	36%	18	41%
Total	9	100%	11	100%	13	100%	11	100%	44	100%

Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.br.

Table 5 shows the percentage of populist paragraphs by year. The average percentage for the whole dataset is 3.8%, peaking in 2022, with 5.1% of populist paragraphs. Low levels of populism are expected in this type of document once they are mostly policy-oriented (Rooduijn et al., 2014). Undoubtedly, in the 14 manifestos with less than 5% populist paragraphs, populism is insignificant. Alleged populist parties in Europe have no more than 15% populist paragraphs in their manifestos, and most have fewer (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Considering all election manifestos analyzed, only 3.8% of paragraphs are populist. This number is slightly higher when filtering populist manifestos only (5.7%).

Hypothesis 4 has two aspects worth mentioning. First, 2018 is the year with more parties making populist appeals, summing up to ten parties only in that year. That means 77% of parties running the 2018 presidential elections made populist appeals. Although it is impossible to infer what has caused that, theories suggest that crises precede the rise and potential success of populist parties and leaders and that parties can adopt populism when they see it as potentially beneficial in a particular moment (Mudde, 2004). Second, even though 2018 had more parties making populist appeals among those in coalitions, the percentage of populist paragraphs is higher among parties running alone.

Table 5 – Results for Paragraphs (2010 - 2022)

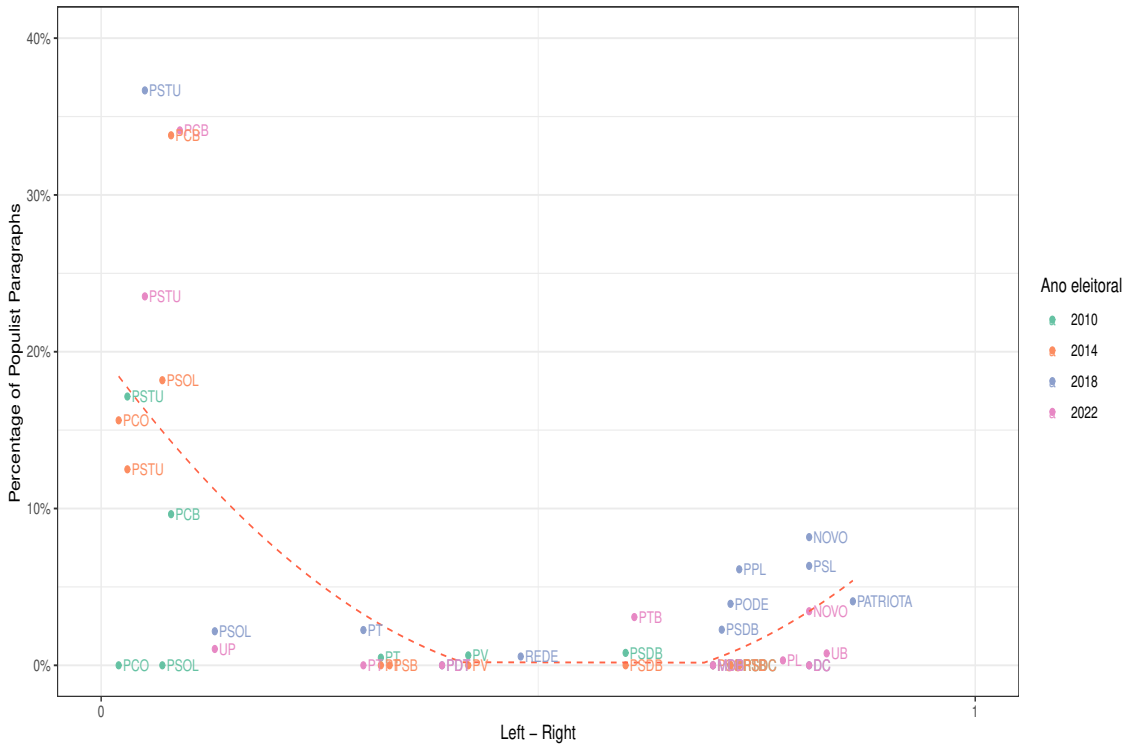
	2010		**2014**		**2018**		**2022**		**Total**	
Category	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*
Populist	17	4%	59	4%	79	3.1%	96	5.1%	251	3.8%
Not Populist	671	96%	1419	96%	2488	96.1%	1770	94.9%	6348	96.2%
Total	688	100%	1478	100%	2567	100%	1866	100%	6499	100%

Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.br.

Figure 11 shows the correlation between ideology and populism. It is clear how populism is higher among radical left parties. In Brazil, only one party is classified as radical right, PATRIOTA, with a score equal to 0.86 for ideology, and its 2018 election manifesto has less than 5% of populist paragraphs. The ideological placement of parties follows Tarouco and Madeira (2013) for 2010 and 2014 and Bolognesi et al. (2023) for 2018 and 2022. Since authors use different scales, I have normalized them through an index between 0 and 1. Although some populism is found among the most right-leaning parties, it is significantly lower than radical left populism. In fact, nine out of the ten most populist manifestos are by radical left parties. Therefore, I confirm hypothesis 1 since populism has higher levels on the extremes of the graphic rather than in the middle, where moderate center-leaning parties are located. I also confirm hypothesis 2, once the radical left is where populism appears at higher levels.

Table 6 shows the number of populist parties running through coalitions or alone. Hypothesis three is confirmed, although not valid for the number of populist parties running in coalitions in 2018. Yet, the percentage of populist paragraphs when parties in

Figure 11 – Percentage of Populism in Brazilian Party Manifestos and Ideological Placement (2010-2022



Source: Made by the author with data from divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br, Tarouco and Madeira (2013), and Bolognesi et al. (2023) .

Table 6 – Number of Populist Parties and Percentage of Populist Paragraphs by Running Condition (2010 - 2022)

	2010		**2014**		**2018**		**2022**		**Total**	
Condition	*Freq.*[1]	*Perc.*[2]	*Freq.*[1]	*Perc.*[2]	*Freq.*[1]	*Perc.*[2]	*Freq.*[1]	*Perc.*[2]	*Freq.*[1]	*Perc.*[2]
Coalition	2	0.6%	0	0%	6	2.5%	1	0.3%	9	2%
Alone	3	5.4%	4	20.3%	4	9.2%	6	15.1%	17	10.5%
Total	5	2.8%	4	20.3%	10	3.5%	7	7.3%	26	5.7%

[1] Number of Parties.
[2] Percentage of Populist Paragraphs.
Source: Made by the author with data from planalto.gov.br.

pre-election alliances make populist appeals is always lower. As the literature suggests, parties might change what they say and propose if something can repeal other potential coalition partners (Abdou & Ruedin, 2021), which might have led to lower populist intensity in parties running through coalitions. Furthermore, it is known that smaller parties tend to follow the lead party in coalitions (Brommesson & Ekengren, 2019), which can explain, for example, why the PCB support for PSOL candidacy in 2018 did not affect the levels of populism of the latter.

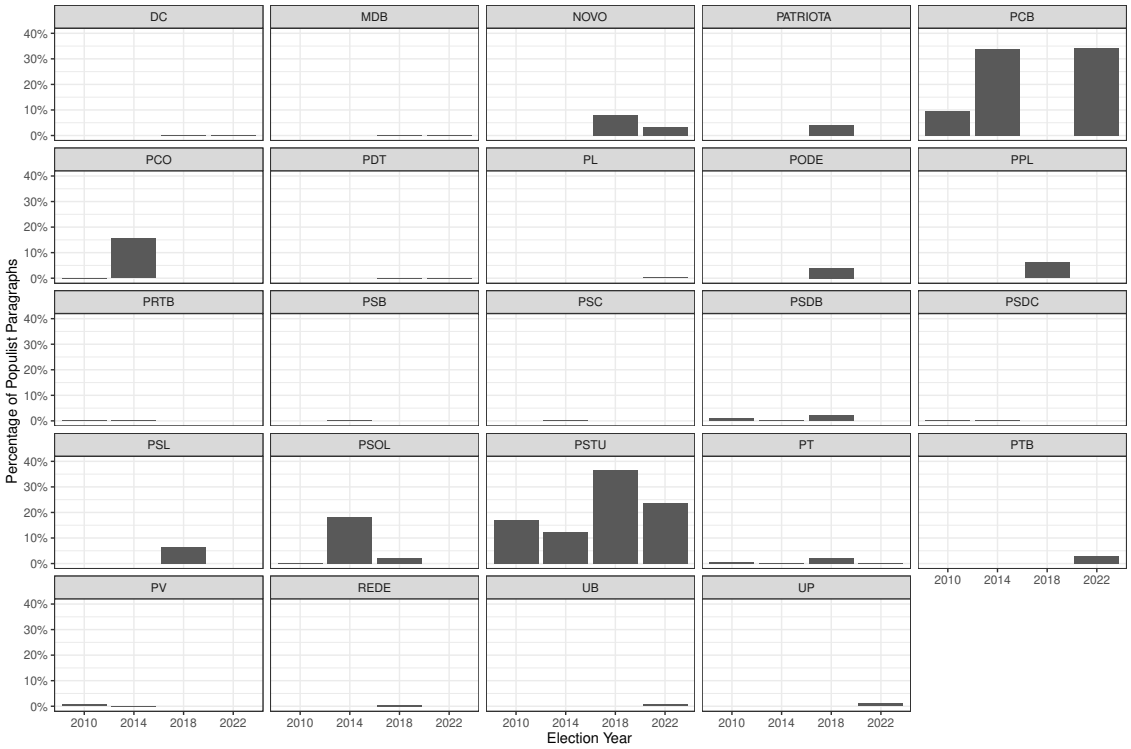
Hypothesis 5 does not sustain since the proportion of parties making any populist

appeal that year dropped from 77% in 2018 to 64%. Therefore, populism might be contagious at first glance, even though one should not take the higher number of parties making populist appeals in 2018 as caused by Bolsonaro and the PSL's rise only. Economic and political crises have been listed as preceding the emergence of populist movements and parties (Przeworski, 2019; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Judis, 2016; Skocpol & Williams, 2012), and 2018 Brazil was going through a multidimensional one (Hunter & Power, 2019). But looking at parties aggregated, 2022 was the year with the highest percentage of populist paragraphs (5.1%), followed by 2014 (4%), 2018 (3.1%), and finally, 2010 (2.5%) (Table 5). Even though one could think the 2022 numbers result from six out of seven populist parties running alone so that these autonomous parties were free to make populist appeals, it does not make sense. Especially when comparing 2022 to 2014, when all populist parties were running by themselves, while the average level of populism - considering all parties - was not. Yet, it is interesting that four out of eight parties running alone in 2014 made populist appeals, and these four are on the radical left of the political spectrum, making the intensity of populism among populist parties the highest in the time frame. They all (PCB, PSOL, PCO, and PSTU) had over 12% of populist paragraphs in their manifestos that year.

Figure 12 shows how consistent populism is among radical left parties. PSTU and PCB are the most clear-cut cases since they launched candidates for all elections analyzed, except for the PCB in 2018 when they joined a coalition headed by the PSOL. Looking at the most populist manifestos, the first nine are by radical left-wing parties (PSTU, PCB, PCO, and PSOL), and then NOVO and PSL appear on the list. With 36.7% of populist paragraphs, the most populist manifesto is PSTU's in the 2018 elections, followed by PCB's 2022 (34.1%) and 2014 (33.8%). Seven out of ten most populist manifestos have over 15% of populist paragraphs, at similar levels as European alleged populist parties (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). However, what is different among these parties?

It is well-known that left and right-wing populist parties have different subjects (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). On the one hand, left-wing populism conflates populism and some sort of socialism in Latin America, raising questions such as anti-capitalism and anti-globalism by targeting local elites and the United States for their imperialism (de la Torre, 2017). In contrast, in Europe, they focus on austerity policies imposed by local elites and the European Union (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). On the other hand, European right-wing populists usually conflate nativism with populism by attacking immigrants in defense of the traditional values of the national community (Caiani & Kröll, 2017). Latin American right-wing populists, in turn, also make anti-system appeals when attacking the elites and their progressive policies that undermine traditional values, but they have no xenophobic appeals. Instead, Latin American right-wing populists combine neoliberalism with populism, not only during the 1990s as well-known (Weyland, 1999; Roberts, 1995; Panizza, 2000) but also in Brazilian election manifestos for the last sixteen

Figure 12 – Percentage of Populism in Brazilian Party Manifestos (2010-2022)



Source: Made by the author with data from divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br/.

years, as I will discuss soon.

In the first exploratory approach, I ran a structural topic modeling to look for patterns (Figure 3, in Appendix 4). Although parties from different ideological places have distinct policy priorities, the language of these documents is similar. "Policy," "public," "country," "nation," "Brazilians," and "government," among others, are familiar words throughout manifestos. When predicting the probability of topics according to the ideological score (35, in Appendix B), it is interesting that terms such as "workers," "fight," and "against" are statistically significantly related to left-wing parties, whereas "Brazil," "Brazilians," and "govern" are the equivalent to right-leaning parties. Yet, some of these terms are usual in manifestos from parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum. Let me unpack these differences and similarities in the following and subsequent subsections, devoting a few pages to the radical left and fewer focused on the 2018 elections.

3.4.1 Radical left-wing parties: Capitalism, neoliberalism, and the bourgeoisie against workers

If the thin aspect of populism means it is an ideology unable to provide answers for major social and political issues, when combined with the term left, it gains content (Venizelos & Stavrakakis, 2022). This substance refers to classic leftist topics such as equality, the

welfare state, social justice, and internationalism (March, 2011). Part of the success of left-wing populist parties in Europe derives from their ability to adjust the class struggle demands and incorporate other frustrations (Dar, 2023). In Latin America, triumphant left-leaning populist parties and leaders came to office by mixing populist and inclusionary appeals (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). But what about the electorally insignificant radical left populist parties in Brazil? What is specific about them? What has changed over time? Moreover, what is consistent throughout the years analyzed?

To begin with, it is worth mentioning how the topics around which parties make populist appeals are contextual. The most evident themes in this dataset are related to what was happening in the year or previous years of the electoral cycle. For instance, in 2014, one of the topics was the World Cup, the world's greatest soccer tournament, which took place in Brazil that year. Condemning the government's stadium spending, the PCO claimed that "the people have no right to celebration (...) They only have the right to work and are oppressed by the capitalist coterie. They root against Brazil (...) because they want (...) the implementation of their policy of austerity, which means the expropriation of the majority in favor of banks and large monopolies that are robbing much more every day than what has certainly been (and is being) taken from the people through the World Cup business" (PCO, 2014). Two years after a provisory government following Rousseff's impeachment, the attacks on the elites often referred to the impeachment as a *coup d'état*. According to the PSOL, in 2018, Brazilian democracy was "undergoing an accelerated process of decomposition. With the judicial-media-parliamentary coup completed, [Michel] Temer is a president without legitimacy and lacking any social support," and the country was "heading towards an even more restrictive regime that disregards popular sovereignty" (PSOL, 2018).

Finally, in 2022, it is surprising that COVID-19 was not a topic based on which populist claims attacked Bolsonaro's administration. Among the populist radical left, only the PSTU brought COVID-19 to strike Bolsonaro. From these rare paragraphs, they say Bolsonaro "consciously delayed vaccination to impose massive contamination, resulting in the death of the most vulnerable, and thus, through genocide, achieve 'herd immunity'" and "ensured a corrupt scheme of overpricing vaccines" (PSTU, 2022). Furthermore, "large companies have become bigger and richer in these two years of the pandemic" by taking "advantage to push through policies that have inflicted shocking levels of misery upon workers and the impoverished population" (PSTU, 2022). Bolsonaro, of course, has been targeted by other parties by mixing Rousseff's impeachment and Bolsonaro's administration as sources of workers' disgrace. The PCB stated that "attacks on workers have intensified after the judicial-parliamentary coup of 2016, with the Temer government and, especially, under the Jair Bolsonaro government," labeling Bolsonaro as "the main threat to the working class" (PCB, 2022). All these populist appeals oppose the people to political elites, specifically those in office. While the 2014 attacks were on Rousseff's

administration, the subsequent elections had Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro as targets, following the populist playbook targeting the establishment. Despite these circumstantial aspects, some patterns persist throughout the years.

The radical left in Brazil conflates populism with socialism or communism. Their attacks are on political and economic elites, their ideology (neoliberalism), international elites (imperialism), and what they name "the system" (capitalism). For the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) in 2010, "The precarious living conditions of the majority of workers and the exclusion of large segments of the population (...) are caused by the capitalist system and the domination imposed on the working class by the bourgeoisie" (PCB, 2010). Similar to European radical left populists, while the hardship faced by the people is caused by capitalism, the enemies are social actors aligned with it, such as "banks and bankers, big businessmen, international speculators, big industrialists, etc." (Katsambekis, 2019: 33). This logic is present in several passages, such as "Banks are nothing more than institutions that usurp the wealth of the people" (PSTU, 2010), or when the same party says, "Banks that profit at the expense of the indebtedness of the poorest" (PSTU, 2014), or even by saying that "The majority of the population has become poorer, while big capital has increased its profit rate," evidenced by the fact that "the number of billionaires in the country has grown, while a large portion of the population has fallen below the poverty line" (PCB, 2022). Therefore, appeals to the people are often made using terms such as working class, majority of the population, or poor. These parties defend that the people should have better living standards and rights and should have power in their hands.

The people must have "labor rights" and "social rights - such as a dignified retirement, housing, healthcare assistance, and access to education" (PCB, 2010), which one could achieve via the distribution of "income, along with a progressive tax reform that taxes profits and dividends, large fortunes and inheritance" (PCB, 2022). In 2014, the PSOL complimented institutions used by Chávez in Venezuela and promised to "rebuild the decayed and hollow institutions of representation so that they correspond to the will of the people. We will create mechanisms of direct democracy that allow the people to take politics and the economy into their own hands to serve the interests of the majority" (PSOL, 2014). Arguing that in the current stage of the productive forces, everyone should be unemployed, the PSTU states that "this will only be possible by expropriating large corporations and planning production to ensure the needs of the workers and the people rather than prioritizing the profits of big business owners;" that is, "to avoid barbarism, socialism, expropriating large multinational and national companies" (PSTU, 2014). As radical left populist parties in Europe, Brazilian ones carry a "strong class undertones, appealing to all those humiliated, degraded and marginalized by the current political economic system," so that their "socialist ideological core is stronger than its populist appeal" and they "cannot be simply situated in the latter group" (Toplišek, 2019: 81-82).

In other words, socialism or communism comes first, and populism is only second in their ideological weaponry. These parties suggest using several mechanisms to make social justice and give power to the people. References to referendums, plebiscites, and reforms are frequent in radical left-wing parties' manifestos.

Attacking Michel Temer's administration after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, the PSOL claimed that "constitutional amendments passed during the interim of the last unelected government will be subject to a referendum and, if chosen by the majority, immediately repealed" (PSOL, 2018). In the same year manifesto, they advocate for more participation through "plebiscites and referendums" (PSOL, 2018). The PCB also defends reforming the "political representation, institutional, party, and electoral" systems, closing the Senate (unicameralism), and "The expansion of popular participation in decision-making through the calling of plebiscites and referendums on topics of utmost interest to workers" (PCB, 2010). Twelve years later, they insist on "closing the Senate and implementing a unicameral parliament" and state that new legislation would be necessary, according to which "the new parliament must call plebiscites and referendums when voting topics of national interest" (PCB, 2022).

As mentioned above, a few left-wing parties often refer to referendums. Such a claim is expected since the idea that politics should be an expression of the people's general will is part of populism' definition (Mudde, 2004). Yet, studies have found that not all populist parties support referendums, and many non-populist parties do it (Gherghina & Pilet, 2021). In the Brazilian context, a similar trend is verified. *Green Party* (PV), *Workers' Party* (PT), and Socialist Brazilian Party (PSB) also refer to referendums and plebiscites. In contrast, the *Workers' Cause Party* (PCO), a highly populist party, does not advocate for such instruments.

The general will is a central idea in the concept of modern democracy as well, understood as something more than aggregated individual preferences. Although potentially fictional, it is one of the elements of populism. However, populism exists when one can identify a moral opposition between the people and the elite. The general will is closely related to the people and gives populism a democratic tone. Nonetheless, one should be careful not to mistake the part as a whole. Therefore, half of the concept might be taken as demoticism (March, 2017), and the other is conceptualized as anti-establishment (Pytlas, 2022). The passages used as examples in the previous paragraphs do not necessarily come from populist paragraphs, but they illustrate common claims made by populist parties worldwide. Furthermore, they are all passages from manifestos by parties whose levels of populism are the highest in the sample. These parties somehow resemble left-wing populist parties in Europe, such as the Germans *The Left* (DL) and the *Party of Democratic Socialism* (PDS), or the Spanish *Podemos*, which also frequently oppose the people and the elites and demand economic, social, and political reforms considering the

people's interest (Hough & Keith, 2019; Kioupkiolis, 2019).

Changes proposed by these parties are mainly in terms of reform, confirming the argument that populists are mainly reformist and not revolutionary (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). Nonetheless, a few passages strike liberal democracy straightforwardly, stressing those electoral mechanisms are insufficient for the necessary structural changes. Skeptic about the elections, the PCB 2010 manifesto states that "there is an evident erosion in terms of the capacity of the electoral process to lead to the real resolution of the problems experienced by the population" (PCB, 2010). Similarly, the PSTU criticizes left-wing elites for offering bourgeois or reformist alternatives to conduct the "revolt to the endless electoral terrain" (PSTU, 2022), meaning that no factual issues will be solved in this sphere. When elections are not enough, they appeal to revolutionary claims. Claiming "there is no solution under the capitalist form, the market economy, and the bourgeois society" and that the only way is a "socialist revolution" that will "truly resolve the problems experienced by workers and popular sectors" (PCB, 2014), the PCB signals that "There is no reformist way out." The PCO also presents itself to the 2014 elections with "the central motto of defending the revolution, the workers' government, and socialism" (PCO, 2014). The PSTU brings its elections manifesto to the 2018 cycle as a "revolutionary and socialist alternative" (PSTU, 2014). Finally, the PSOL refers to a "democratic revolution" (PSOL, 2018). The ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy is present in these claims.

On the one hand, these parties advocate for more participation, radicalizing, and deepening democracy, making populism a potential corrective to democracy in denouncing the limits of representative liberal democracy (Mouffe, 2018). The democratizing aspects of populism might exist through inclusionary policies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013) or by encouraging citizens to participate in politics (Nemčok et al., 2022). Several studies have shown that left-leaning populists have been strangling democracy for a few decades in Latin America, even though using referendums (which sound democratic) in which opposition parties have no fair chance of winning (Weyland, 2013). According to Weyland (2021:54), this is mainly about leaders rather than parties, and parties themselves are suffering under populist personalistic leaders, leaving Latin America with a bad fate, a "region not only without parties, but also without democracy." Revolutionary-populist regimes, such as Venezuela under the *United Socialist Party of Venezuela* (PSUV) governments, have led not only to democratic backsliding but also to a transition to authoritarianism (Muno & Briceño, 2021). Of course, while these studies analyze successful populists, I am mainly examining parties with no significant representation, if any. Still, when stating that elections cannot change people's lives, the Brazilian populist radical left somehow discredits the electoral process and political institutions.

Regarding the radical left, there are two more noteworthy aspects related to the

people. First, the radical left has expanded its notion of the people by including different social actors. Historically, left-wing parties have mainly addressed the working class. Before 2018, only mainstream parties made references to LGBTQIA+ people, although PSTU mentioned homophobia in 2014. In 2018, the PSOL included minorities by saying that it is not about feminism or LGBT people but "it is a profound historical reckoning that a new left-wing program must undertake with the legacy of black and indigenous genocide, slavery, and oppression" (PSOL, 2018). For the PSTU, the violence against black and poor youth, women, and LGBT people is a consequence of "exploitation, inequality, and oppression imposed by capitalism" (PSTU, 2018). Four years later, they state the bourgeois ideology divides workers while trying to blame "black people, women, foreigners, LGBTQ+ individuals, communists" for the crisis (PSTU, 2022). Finally, the PCB argues that the struggle against oppression must target all forms of oppression, such as "sexism, racism, and LGBTphobia" (PCB, 2022). This tendency to address diverse social and political actors has also been seen in Europe (Katsambekis, 2019; Kioupkiolis, 2019; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014) and the U.S. (Katsambekis, 2022) since "struggles against sexism, racism, and other forms of domination have also become increasingly central" (Mouffe, 2019, p. 8). Due to "individual and collective actors who are carriers of newly emerging and diverse interests" (Damiani, 2020: 175), the populist radical left in Brazil had to include post-material demands in their populistic appeals.

Even so, diversifying the people within the Brazilian radical left did not balance the construction of the people around material and post-material issues. Figures 37 to 51 (Appendix B) show the most frequent terms for these parties (plus the PT as a control), considering the entire manifestos and populist paragraphs only. For instance, terms like "women" and "black people" exist in PCO's 2014[6] election manifesto, but the most frequent words in populistic appeals are "workers," "class," "bourgeoisie," "employers," "capital/capitalism," and "exploitation," among others. The 2010 PSTU[7] does not refer to women, LGBTQIA+, black, or indigenous people. In 2014 [8], despite these words not being among the most frequent and appearing only once in the entire manifesto, some of them appear precisely in populist paragraphs, such as "black people," "racism," and "sexism," whereas "homophobia/homophobic" appears twice. These terms suggest that PSTU brought new actors to their notion of the people. However, it continued to be mainly about "workers" and other terms related to socialism and material/economic issues. In the following years[9], several terms indicate that the party brought new topics to their agenda, even those not among the most frequent terms, like "environmental," "transphobia," "racism," "LGBTQIA+," "quilombola," and "indigenous." However, they kept building a more classic left-wing people, focused on the working class.

[6] See Figure 44.
[7] See Figure 37.
[8] See Figure 38.
[9] See Figures 39 and 40

The PCB[10] is probably the more traditional left-wing party. Although mentions of environmental issues, homophobia, sexism, abortion, the youth, black, indigenous, and *quilombola* people exist in their 2010 and 2014 manifestos, a reference to the LGBTQIA+ people came out only in 2022. The PSOL[11] is the less radical among radicals. Between 2018 and 2022, it is almost out of the zone, scoring 0.13 when the limit to be labeled a radical left party is 0.14. The 2010 PSOL's manifesto is not populist at all. Yet, they bring terms like "indigenous" and "racism" among the most frequent. Their subsequent manifestos are longer, and although some terms imply a diverse construction of the people, such as "women" and "black people," their populist appeals go around social justice, emulating other radical left parties.

Lastly, the most leftist party next to the radical ones, the PT, made populist appeals in 2010[12] and 2018[13] Since the party's populism was due in one paragraph only in 2010, no words in populist paragraphs appeared more than once. Broadly, the manifesto brought several social actors, such as "women," among the most frequent terms, but also mentioned black, indigenous, *quilombola*, and LGBTQIA+ people. Environmental issues have also been present in PT's manifestos since 2010. As of 2018, the party made more populistic appeals, using various terms in these paragraphs. Unlike previous parties, "workers" are not on the top. Indeed, they are not even among the most frequent words in populist paragraphs, although they are among the most frequent ones broadly. Interestingly, "reform" is more frequent than "revolution," which exists only in 2022 PSTU's most frequent terms for the entire manifesto. "System," a word that indicates anti-establishment attacks, exists in all parties, including the PT, although not in all years.

The second thing worth mentioning about the people is that, when attacking U.S. imperialism, following Latin American populists' playbook, these parties sometimes build what could be taken as an international or transnational people. These parties often advocate for integration among Latin American countries. This type of claim can potentially build an international people by appealing to separate national peoples who confront similar concerns and same opponents (international populism) or a transnational one by constructing a people that goes beyond national particularities and forms a cohesive and homogeneous unity beyond borders (transnational populism) (De Cleen et al., 2020). The only aspect that matters for transnational populism is building a people above the national level, independently of whom is the elite (Moffit, 2017). In the Brazilian case, American imperialism in the region is raised by several parties but opposed to a national people, such as the PCO and the PCB. A transnational people is not built by any party.

[10] See Figures 41 to 43.
[11] Figures 45 to 47.
[12] Figure 48.
[13] Figure 50.

One sees declarations that "Brazil will strive to create a hub of nations and peoples to fight against imperialism" and that Brazil, alongside Latin American people (plural), "will confront the blatant U.S. espionage in our countries" (PCB, 2014). Ideas such as the "offensive of imperialism against the masses worldwide" (PCO, 2014), and "principles of international solidarity and the integration of Latin American and Caribbean peoples" (PCB, 2022), always respect the particularity of each national people by separating them keeping the word people in plural. Therefore, these parties resonate with ideas from Latin American populist parties such as the PSUV under Chávez in Venezuela and the MAS under Morales in Bolivia, who had *Americanismo* as an ideology and claimed to fight against U.S. imperialism in the region (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013; Pirro & Taggart, 2022).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the moralism that opposes the people and the elite is subtle most of the time. However, explicit mentions of lies, manipulation, cheating, and corruption also exist. With their socialist program for the 2022 elections, the PSTU wanted to "contest the consciousness of the working class for this alternative against the illusions and lies with which the bourgeoisie and reformists deceive the people" (PSTU, 2022). To combat the "corrupt and traditional forms of politics, including clientelism, corruption, mass manipulation for electoral purposes," the PCB launched its presidential candidate in the 2010 elections (PCB, 2010). Although corruption is mainly a topic in right-wing populist parties, populist and mainstream parties on the left also refer to it, especially after Operation Car Wash.

Although populism is present at high levels in these parties' manifestos, especially PCB, PSTU, and PCO, it is related to social, economic, and ideological cleavages. As observed in a few European parties, these are more socialist or communist than populist, although the latter should not be neglected. In the following subsection, I will discuss the populism present in other parties. While mainstream left and right-wing parties use populism less frequently than the radical left, a few noteworthy aspects exist.

3.4.2 Beyond the radical left: The 2018 Elections and other parties

Regarding right-wing parties and left-wing mainstream ones, populism is shallow. The NOVO, officially founded in 2015, is a party that stands for liberalism, minimum state, and the free market. They launched presidential candidates in 2018 and 2022. In both years, they made populist appeals. They argue that it would be immoral for parties to fund their campaigns using money from taxes paid by citizens who reject them (NOVO, 2018). In 2022, opposing Bolsonaro, on the one hand, and Lula, on the other, they argue that choosing the lesser evil would perpetuate "corporatism and a government for specific

groups rather than those in need" when the country "is held hostage by electoral fiefdoms, privileges, secret budgets," among other improprieties (NOVO, 2022). Therefore, the state is the cause of Brazilians' misfortunes, and it would be time to "understand that Brazilians do not need a large state because they are poor; they are poor precisely because they have a large state" (NOVO, 2018). Therefore, NOVO resembles Latin American populist leaders' claims from the 1990s (Weyland, 1999) rather than illiberal contemporary European right-wing populist parties (Mudde, 2021).

2018 Jair Bolsonaro's PSL mixes conservatism and liberalism. Populism, in this case, revolves around moral topics such as corruption, a cultural war, and the defense of the traditional family, noted in passages like "Brazil needs to free itself from the corrupt (...) The Brazilian people need true freedom," or when they state that "In the last 30 years, cultural Marxism and its derivatives such as Gramscianism have joined forces with corrupt oligarchies to undermine the values of the Brazilian nation and family"(PSL, 2018). The PSL is a good case to discuss whether parties or leaders are populists. Bolsonaro directed attention to what he understood as threats to the nation's values during his 2018 campaign speeches (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020; Rennó, 2020). Furthermore, the 2018 elections were when the PSL had a competitive candidate for the first time. It is hard to state that a populist view of politics and society is something held by the party. Before launching an authoritarian populist for the presidency in 2018 (Avritzer & Rennó, 2021; Barbosa & Casarões, 2023; Lynch & Casimiro, 2021), the PSL supported the PSDB in the 2002 runoff, had less than 1% of votes in 2006, a blocked candidate in 2010, and supported the PSB in 2014. It has moved its support from right to left before embracing a radical right candidate. Therefore, the ideological inconsistency signals the likelihood of using populism in 2018 due to Bolsonaro joining the party and the contextual factors Brazil was undergoing at the time.

As hypothesized and confirmed, the 2018 elections had more populist parties than others in the analysis time frame. Unlike the previous elections, most parties that made populist appeals in 2018 are above 0.5 on the ideological index. Although the most populist party that year was a radical left one (PSTU), the following six were right-wing parties (NOVO, PSL, PPL[14], PATRIOTA, PODE, and PSDB). PATRIOTA, for instance, said, "It is inconceivable for the family in its natural form to be destroyed, for gender ideology and the legalization of abortion (...) Even the promotion of pedophilia in a sneaky manner by those who want to destroy what is most sacred in society [the traditional family] (...) it is the demoralization of the homeland" (PATRIOTA, 2018). While PATRIOTA appeals are exclusively moral, attacks coming from PODE focus on institu-

[14] I deliberately ignore the PPL because I believe its categorization is misleading. Dissidents from the Brazilian Communist Party founded the party. They supported Marina Silva in the 2014 elections and had João Goulart's son as their candidate for the 2018 elections. In 2018, after not achieving the performance threshold for legislative elections, they merged into the Communist Party of Brazil. That said, I firmly believe that its classification as a right-wing party is completely misinformed.

tions, especially the state, that must "evolve from its current dysfunctional, cumbersome, inefficient, patrimonialist state, enslaved by corporations and their hidden interests" to a state "connected to society and its needs" (PODE, 2018). These parties follow the populist playbook for right-wing populists in the continent, characterized by attacks on political elites and the state that have harmed Brazilians and demoralized the traditional family.

Two mainstream parties also made populist appeals in 2018 despite low intensity (around 2% of populist paragraphs each, as shown in Appendix B, Figure 33). PT and PSDB have contested all runoffs between 1994 and 2014. These two parties had structured the Brazilian party system for decades before Operation Car Wash's consequences. The PSDB aligns its populism with other right-wing parties, saying, "Brazil needs to rid itself of the evils of corruption and an inefficient state that drains money from the people through high taxes and provides low-quality public services" (PSDB, 2018). In contrast, the PT, with Lula da Silva imprisoned during the elections, attacked the "coup coalition" for reversing "the policies that valued labor over capital, the nation over the empire, and the oppressed and discriminated majorities and minorities over a misogynistic, racist, authoritarian, and exclusionary elite" (PT, 2018). Besides 2018, only in 2010 did these parties make any populist appeal, but both have less than 1% of populist paragraphs. To some extent, this confirms that 2018 was a particular year for populist appeals. Following Operation Car Wash's recent denunciations, Rousseff's impeachment, and several politicians jailed, more parties than ever portrayed politics in terms of a moral antagonism between the people and the elite.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter shed light on an overlooked subject in Brazilian political science: populism in parties. Contrary to what one would expect, populism is present in Brazilian parties' election manifestos. As hypothesized, populism is found on the extremes of the ideological spectrum, especially on the radical left side. PSTU, PCB, PCO, and PSOL are the most, if not only, populist parties in Brazil between 2010 and 2022. These parties conflate populism with socialism and communism, building a moral antagonism between the people and the elite, mainly over material and economic issues. To some extent, they resemble Latin American populist parties such as the MAS and the PSUV. Although they bring diverse social groups to build the people, they do so with some delay, especially compared to European parties. In maintaining a classic left-wing socialist notion of who is the people, based on workers - primarily urban - these parties look outdated, narrowing down their inner circles to a few individuals, having low levels of party identification and, consequently, derisory electoral outcomes.

Although these parties talk more about reform than revolution, the latter is not absent in their claims. As the literature notes, populist parties are mostly reformist, but some declarations targeting the insufficiency of liberal democratic mechanisms might sound revolutionary. Resonating Chávez's and Morales's appeals, they advocate for referendums, plebiscites, and more participation, bringing the power back to the people. However, some claims can sound undemocratic since they override established rules. In Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, this kind of statement was followed by democratic backsliding. In the Brazilian case, at least when coming from the radical left, one should not be concerned. These parties do not threaten Brazilian democracy because they have no political strength. Summed up, they had less than 2% of votes in all elections between 2010 and 2022. Even in congress, most of them do not have even one representative.

Right-wing parties and mainstream ones have low levels of populism, if any. It is interesting to verify that even mainstream parties make populist appeals sporadically, suggesting that populism might be a shadow of democracy (Canovan, 1980), emerging here and there, once and then. Even parties running in coalitions make populist appeals, although one should take that parsimoniously. I understand that the leading party in a coalition dictates the document, which, of course, must be approved by the partners in the alliance. Yet, it is expected that manifestos represent the leading party's ideas and worldview rather than being a patchwork of different parties from different placements on the ideological continuum. Notwithstanding, future research should analyze additional party literature, such as magazines, national meeting resolutions, websites, and foundation and party manifestos.

Another possible agenda is analyzing election manifestos at the local level. Do parties make populist appeals when running gubernatorial elections? The literature has historically overlooked this topic, and since vertical coalition is no longer mandatory in Brazil, variation among states and regions might occur even within parties. Likewise, another way to assess populism in parties is by looking at legislator speeches as a proxy. Brazilian congress has all parliamentary discourses available, and the combination of populism and legislative studies is also non-existent.

Scholars should also prioritize endeavors to apply different methods and techniques. Machine learning applications and Large Language Models are promising tools and have brought interesting results, although they have yet to improve. As a latent concept and low occurrence linguistic pattern, populism might be tricky to assess. Furthermore, contextual differences may also make it difficult for universal automated applications - both in terms of different sources and different regions and languages. The best possibility to advance in this topic is supervised machine learning, particularly building on previous artificial intelligence algorithms and fine-tuning them by active learning techniques. That is a crucial task once measuring populism is a time-consuming labor.

Finally, this chapter overcomes the idea that Latin America is about populist leaders rather than parties. Although populist leaders are often more emphatic than parties, and parties might reflect their leader's ideas, looking at how parties are consistently populist over time has brought evidence that Brazil has populist parties. Populism exists at a high level on the left, but some right-wing parties, especially in the last two elections, have also made populist appeals. If the ambiguity about populism being contagious or not persists, future electoral cycles are coming for us to check.

4

What if Bolsonaro had not been Elected in 2018? A Synthetic Control Method Application on the Brazilian Democratic Backsliding

Abstract

What is Bolsonaro's effect on Brazilian democratic backsliding? What if he was not elected? This chapter uses the synthetic control method to show that despite being a symptom and continuer of Brazilian democratic erosion, Bolsonaro is not the baseline of the episode. Dilma Rousseff's impeachment has a previous and greater causal effect in undermining democratic institutions in the country, proving that when misused, impeachment can harm democracy.

4.1 Introduction

Time is cruel. Once again, a wave of democratization stabilized and broke to then backwash. Since 1974, the world has democratized (Huntington, 1991). However, in a 2008 piece in Foreign Affairs, Diamond (2008) brought attention to a potential rollback. In 1991, Fukuyama said that history was over. We have reached the end of the road — no more concerns about ideological challengers or democracies breaking down. The wall fell, and democracy, capitalism, and liberalism won. Time is cruel. The Freedom House 2012 report showed that something went wrong. A few years later, Diamond (2015) wrote in the *Journal of Democracy* about the democratic recession. One year later, Bermeo (2016) defined how democratic backsliding occurs in contemporaneity. A year later, Norris (2017) argued that democracies are consolidated, and scholars have been alarmists. In the same year, Mechkova et al. (2017) argued that all in all, the balance was still positive. Two

years later, Lührmann and Lindberg (2019) threw in the towel and heeded the alarm to corroborate that an autocratization wave was undergoing — one of their examples: Brazil after the Bolsonaro election.

Bolsonaro has been labeled the "Trump of the Tropics" (Phillips, 2018) and has shown illiberal traits like Viktor Orbán (Mota, 2022). Unsurprisingly, they are all heads of government in countries whose quality of democracy has dropped significantly in the last few years. In the Brazilian case, democracy began eroding in 2016, after two years of Operation Car Wash, denouncing politicians, parties, and companies in the country, and an impeachment process that ousted Dilma Rousseff that year. From 2015, when Rousseff's impeachment trial began, to 2018, when Bolsonaro emerged as a presidential candidate, the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI[1]) decreased by 0.12 points, from 0.87 to 0.75. Between 2018 and 2021, it declined by 0.07 points, achieving a score of 0.68, to finally recover 0.01 points in 2022, when Lula da Silva defeated Bolsonaro in the presidential elections. During this fall, Brazilian democracy lost its status as a liberal democracy, turning into an electoral one (Lührmann et al., 2019).

The significant drop occurred before Bolsonaro came to power. Yet, the erosion continued with Bolsonaro's attacks on the media, the Supreme Court, and especially on minority groups, such as LGBTQIA+, indigenous, and quilombola people (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). Only 0.07 out of 0.19 points of the Brazilian democratic backsliding are Bolsonaro's responsibility. Therefore, it is slippery to attribute all of the blame for this autocratization episode solely to Bolsonaro. Nonetheless, one can invert the question and ask whether the process of restoring Brazilian democracy would not have been faster if Bolsonaro had not been elected.

For many scholars, Bolsonaro is the one to blame. Studies have linked the Bolsonaro administration to democratic backsliding in Brazil (Avritzer et al., 2021). Nevertheless, neither of them has established a clear causal relationship between them. Following Lührmann and Lindberg's (2019) rule, a potential autocratization process begins when a country declines at least 0.01 points on the EDI, and an actual autocratization episode occurs when the decrease sums up to at least 0.1. According to the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), the autcratization episode in Brazil began in 2015, when the country dropped 0.09 points - from 0.87 to 0.78 in 2016. Such an episode continued for a few years. By the end of 2022, the country has recovered 0.01 points, which would characterize the end of the autocratization process (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). However, what has caused it? To address this question through a causal research design, I apply the synthetic control method to measure the potential negative effect of Bolsonaro on Brazilian democracy. By creating a synthetic Brazil where the only difference is that

[1] The Electoral Democracy Index is one of the main indicators used in political science to assess democracy worldwide. It is part of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute annual expert survey, and it is also referred to as the polyarchy index throughout the text.

Bolsonaro has not been elected, I can estimate his weight in the democratic decline. Using data from V-Dem and the World Bank, I show that despite Bolsonaro's weight in that process, something that happened before had a more significant effect. In 2016, the year of Rousseff's impeachment, Brazil had the first significant decline in its polyarchy level. Therefore, I explore a second model with Rousseff's impeachment as the treatment. Results show that even though Bolsonaro contributed to the Brazilian democratic decline, the causal element of this process was Rousseff's impeachment, confirming that when misused, impeachment can harm democracy (Perez-Liñán, 2018).

The chapter continues as follows: First, I will discuss fundamental concepts such as democracy, democratic backsliding, and populism. Second, I will discuss the synthetic control method, detailing how I built a synthetic Brazil and its characteristics compared to the actual Brazil. Third, I present the results, followed by sensitivity and robustness checks. Fourth, I explore a second model with Dilma Rousseff's impeachment as the event of interest. Finally, I present the conclusion.

4.2 Democracy, Democratic Backsliding, and its Predictors

Modern democracy has been a succession of waves of democratization and autocratization (Waldner & Lust, 2018; Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019). The pendulum stopped on the democratic side in 1989, when the wall fell after a successful third wave of democratization, and humanity achieved the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). Huntington (1991) is more skeptical and states that social science cannot answer whether a third reverse wave would lead countries from democracy to autocracies. Democratic backsliding, erosion, or recession has been a subject of intense debate in the last years. On the one hand, several scholars argue that democracy is receding (Bermeo, 2016; Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019; Diamond, 2015). On the other hand, a few argue that no democratic recession is happening globally (Little & Meng, 2023; Norris, 2017; Levitsky & Way, 2015).

When moving from democracy to autocracy, it is a consensus that such a movement no longer happens through breakdowns or *coup d'état* (Bermeo, 2016; Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019; Levitsky & Zibllatt, 2018). The old days of democratic breakdowns (Linz & Stepan, 1978) and coups (O'Donnel, 1978) are gone. In current days, scholars talk about democratic recession (Diamond, 2015), erosion (Fish, 2001; Laebens & Luhrmann, 2021), decline (Kaufman & Haggard, 2019), backslide (Bermeo, 2016; Pérez-Liñan et al., 2019), or episodes of autocratization (Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019). Whereas these scholars see democracy undermining around the globe, others argue that the claim might be alarmist (Mechkova et al., 2017; Norris, 2017; Levitsky & Way, 2015). Nevertheless, it is

pretty contradictory that nowadays, democratic backsliding processes are originated by democratically elected officials (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

However, what do we talk about when we talk about democratic decline? According to Bermeo (2016: 5), democratic backsliding "denotes the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy." For Haggard and Kaufman (2021: 27), "Democratic backsliding is the incremental erosion of institutions, rules, and norms that results from the actions of duly elected governments." However, these definitions restrict setbacks or backslides to democratic systems. Waldner and Lust (2018) suggest that backsliding is not tantamount to transitions from one regime to another, and it represents more subtle degrees of change instead. For them, "Backsliding entails a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, within any regime. In democratic regimes, it is a decline in the quality of democracy; in autocracies, it is a decline in democratic qualities of governance" (Waldner & Lust, 2018: 95).

Luhrmann and Lindberg (2019) reject the terms democratic breakdown or backsliding. On the one hand, the use of breakdown goes back to sudden and violent movements from a democratic to an autocratic regime. On the other hand, democratic backsliding encloses three main issues: 1) it ignores that autocratic regimes can also autocratize; 2) the word back suggests going back to where they were before, ignoring that a country can move to a new, more autocratic place; 3) finally, sliding sounds like it is unintentional, which is not the case (Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019). They then suggest the term autocratization, arguing that "Semantically, it signals that we study the opposite of democratization, thus describing 'any move away from [full] democracy'" (Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019: 5). Since I am dealing with an autocratization episode within a democratic country, I will use these terms interchangeably, acknowledging that these episodes may happen in different types of regimes.

Although I recognize autocratization can happen in different types of regimes, my case of study is a democratic country. Therefore, I define democracy following Dahl's concept once the data I use is also based on its components. Dahl defines democracy as a form of government in which the power is conferred to the people, who govern through elected officials, characterized by free and fair elections, safeguarding individual rights, and the rule of law (Dahl, 1971), Dahl (1998: 44) uses "the term democracy loosely to refer to actual governments, not ideal ones" that meet a few well-known criteria. There are a few institutions that characterize and guarantee democracy: 1) elected officials make decisions on policy; 2) these officials are elected through free and fair elections periodically; 3) almost all adults have the right to vote and run for office; 4) free speech must allow citizens to express their ideas without fearing to be punished by the government; 5) citizens must have alternative sources of information rather than those produced by the state; 6)

citizens are free to organize themselves in associations, parties, organizations (Dahl, 1971). These definitional attributes are measured through indicators aggregated into an Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) by V-Dem. I will discuss them in the Measurement and Data section.

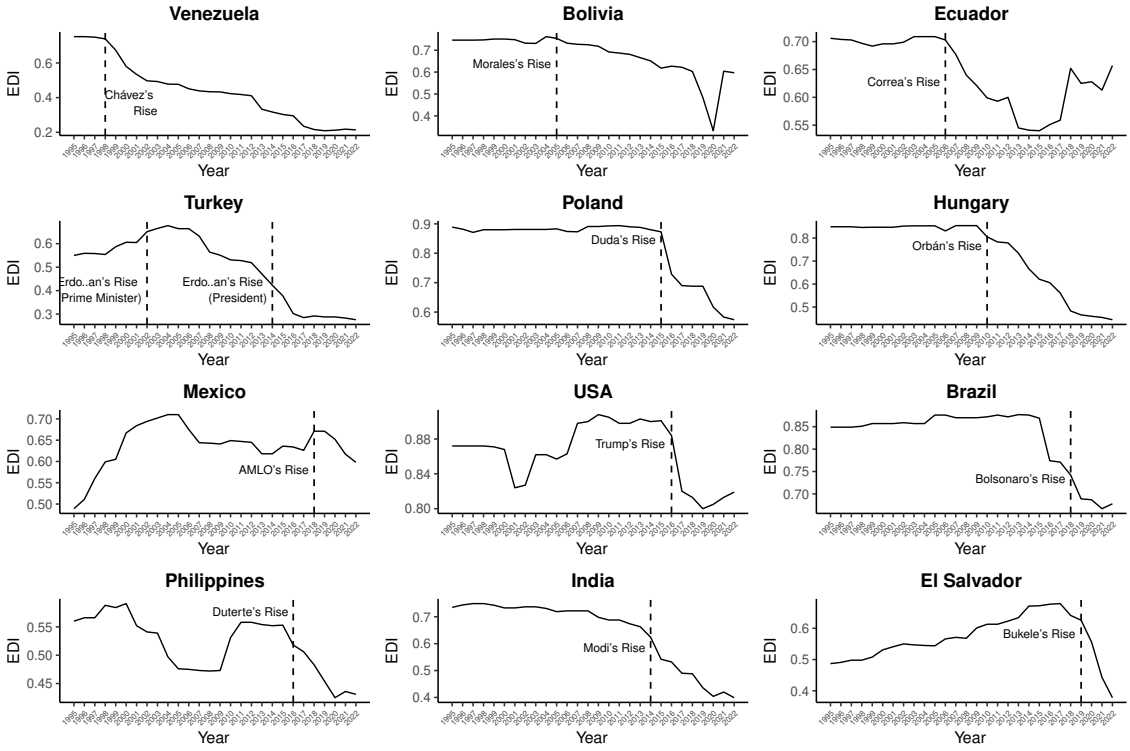
Although complex phenomena are multicausal, the question I try to address here is what has caused the democratic backsliding in Brazil, hypothesizing that Bolsonaro's emergence might be responsible for it. Why is that so? The answer to that question is two-fold. First, I must briefly discuss why populists have been taken as threats to democracy. Secondly, I should bring evidence that Bolsonaro is a populist and potentially dangerous to democracy.

Scholars have explored the relationship between populism and democracy (Muller, 2016; Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018; Ruth et al., 2019). On the one hand, the idea is that populism is intrinsically bad for democracy (Urbinati, 2019; Muller, 2016). On the other hand, scholars see populism as a potential correction of democracy (Mouffe, 2005; Laclau, 2005). Some scholars argue that populism disfigures democracy by attacking its fundamental values and ideas, such as the notion of the people, majoritarianism, and representation (Urbinati, 2019; Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018). Muller (2016) argues that populists are intrinsically antipluralists, delegitimizing other candidates or adversaries and presenting themselves as the only legitimate representative of the people, disrespecting liberal democratic principles. Vachudova (2020) shows how populist leaders threaten democracy in Hungary and Poland by demonizing opponents and attacking immigrant minorities. Populist leaders also led Latin American countries to a democratic recession (Weyland, 2021). Kaufman and Haggard (2018) also show how Venezuela, Hungary, and Turkey had backslid under populist administrations. Examples abound of countries that experienced a backlash once populists emerged and took office. Figure 13 shows how the rise of populist leaders precedes democratic backsliding episodes in several countries from different parts of the world. Each vertical line represents the year a leader got elected and/or took office. Vertical lines represent the level of democracy in each country over the years[2]. These countries' democracy declined at a different level, for distinct reasons, and at an uneven pace. Although it is impossible to infer causality from a descriptive plot, the idea is to visualize that populist leaders can potentially cause or accentuate democratic erosion once they emerge and come to power.

Venezuela and Ecuador declined at a faster pace than Bolivia. Poland and Hungary followed similar paths. Interestingly, Turkish democracy improved for three years under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before the erosion. Donald Trump's coming to office in the US had immediate consequences. It is puzzling that democracy was declining in Brazil and India before Bolsonaro and Narendra Modi came into office. Finally, Mexico, the Philippines,

[2] The index used is the Electoral Democracy Index, by V-Dem. I will discuss it soon.

Figure 13 – Populist Leaders Election and Democratic Backsliding



Source: Made by the author with data from V-Dem.

and, more recently, El Salvador are historically not full democracies, although the election of populist leaders worsened levels of democracy.

Bolsonaro is not only a populist but has features of what is understood as a populist radical right leader. Defining populist radical right parties, Mudde (2016) states that they conflate at least three features: populism, authoritarianism, and nativism. Populism is a thin ideology that splits society and politics into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the people and the elite, and assumes the people's will should drive politics (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019). "Authoritarianism refers to the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" (Mudde, 2016: 296). Finally, nativism is an extreme type of nationalism tempered with xenophobia. Usually based on an ethnic distinction between "us" and "others," understands foreigners as a menace to national homogeneity.

Several studies have shown Bolsonaro as a populist leader (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023; Ricci et al., 2021; Tamaki & Fuks, 2020). Ricci and Venturelli (2023) showed traits in Bolsonaro's populism that allow one to classify him as a populist radical right (PPR) leader, although nativism is absent in his speeches. As I have shown in Chapter 2, Bolsonaro's populism is highly ideological. It goes around an opposition between the people as the nation versus political elites (mainly left-wingers) and the media. Studies have labeled Bolsonaro an authoritarian leader (Avritzer & Rennó, 2021; Barbosa &

Casarões, 2023; Lynch & Casimiro, 2021) or pointed out how an authoritarian view of politics is behind the support for him (Chaguri & Amaral, 2023; Silva et al., 2022). His authoritarian traits emerge through two main aspects: the number of military personnel in his administration and his constant attacks on the Superior Electoral Court and the electoral system (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023).

Whereas populism and authoritarianism are present in Bolsonaro's appeals (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023), nativism is not. That is probably a consequence of immigration not being on the policy agenda in Brazil. Still, adapting the concept of civilizationism (Brubaker, 2017), Ricci and Venturelli (2023) listed social groups attacked by Bolsonaro as a threat to what the former president considers as the definitional characteristics of real Brazilians. Civilizationism is a type of nationalism that refers to a contrasting cultural identity. While used to differentiate Europeans and Muslims in Europe (Brubaker, 2017), in the Brazilian case, the threat to the national cultural identity is internal, represented by LGBTQIA+, indigenous, and quilombola people (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023). Although this cultural nationalism might gain ethnic traits, potentially overlapping with the understanding of nativism, it refers strictly to internal "others" in the Brazilian case.

Considering the context where Bolsonaro is inserted, and in line with other PRR leaders and parties' ambiguous relationship with democracy, that is, they accept democracy as a legitimate system, even though they attack its liberal values and institutions to erode it slowly without breaking it down, I side with other scholars (Ribeiro & Borges, 2020) and argue that Bolsonaro can be labeled as a PRR leadership that can potentially affect democracy.

If PRR leaders encompass populism, authoritarianism, and nativism (civilizationism, in Bolsonaro's case), they represent a menace to liberal democracy for several reasons. First, populism, as it is defined, is opposed to elitism and pluralism (Mudde, 2004). Once it has pluralism on its negative pole, it is intrinsically anti-liberal democracy. Although controversies around the normative debate about the relationship between populism and democracy, several cases of populists emerging and/or taking office have led to democratic erosion (e.g., Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Hungary, and Poland). Authoritarianism dispenses any explanation. As suggested by Linz (2000), authoritarianism is a form of government without free and fair elections, restricted political freedoms, and centralized strong power. If one adopts the either/or Sartorian logic to define democracy (Sartori, 1970), there is no other possibility, preferably than authoritarianism, to be its opposite. Hence, if PPR leaders bring authoritarianism as one of their tools, they are logically anti-democratic to some extent. As mentioned, how they attack democracy is subtle and no longer relies on violent and sudden movements against democracy. Finally, nationalism, especially in more extreme forms, such as nativism and civilizationism, operates an in-/out logic that is very exclusionary and potentially disrespects human and minority rights.

Excluding social groups that are national individuals in civic terms because they do not share the same values, habits, beliefs, and ideas or belong to a different ethnicity can be considered highly undemocratic.

The support for democracy decreased in Brazil, whereas an increase in the percentage of people who state that it does not matter if they live under a democratic or autocratic regime happened simultaneously (Hunter & Power, 2019). Besides his authoritarian traits, Bolsonaro does not behave as expected, considering the position he occupies (Limongi et al., 2022), using derogatory language to demean and debase his opponents, courts, and the media (Venturelli et al., 2023). When acting like that, he disrespects fundamental principles of how communication should happen in a democracy (Habermas, 1996; Downs, 1957). Bolsonaro's authoritarianism conflated with populism has also been shown by the literature (Nascimento & Braga, 2021), especially when it comes to military personnel in the government and his continuous attacks on the electoral court (Ricci & Venturelli, 2023; Guedes-Neto & Peters, 2021). Bolsonaro's illiberal attributes (Queiroz et al., 2022) unfolded in undermining checks and balances (Da Ros & Taylor, 2021), institutional harassment that led to a process of de-democratization (Cardoso & Silva, 2021; Tatagiba, 2021), and attacks on the media (Amorim, 2021) and democratic values (Mendonça, 2021). Consequently, one has sufficient reasons to believe Bolsonaro is accountable for the Brazilian democratic backsliding episode.

4.3 Synthetic Control Method

The synthetic control method (SCM) is almost a panacea for comparative politics studies and causal inference. Why? Consider one of the main problems in comparative politics: finding comparable observation units. Every observation, independent of the unit of analysis (countries, states, cities, parties, or whatever), encloses several idiosyncrasies. Especially when it comes to causal inference, measuring a treatment's effect by comparing it with another single control unit is imperfect (Abadie et al., 2015). Several methods have been developed in order to find the best possible counterfactual. The SCM is one of the most promising ones. Creating a synthetic control unit almost perfectly comparable to the treatment unit gives one an excellent counterfactual and comparison unit. The idea is that "the preintervention characteristics of the treated unit can often be much more accurately approximated by a combination of untreated units than by any single untreated unit. We define a synthetic control as a weighted average of the units in the donor pool" (Abadie et al., 2015).

The method has been used to measure the impact of terrorism on the economy (Abadie & Gardeazabal, 2003), the effect of a tobacco control program on the annual per-capita cigarette sales (Abadie et al., 2010), the economic consequences of 1990 German

reunification (Abadie et al., 2015) and democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kadt & Wittels, 2019), or how the emergence of a populist radical right party in the Netherlands affected social polarization in the country (Silva, 2017).

The SCM can be defined as a statistical technique developed to assess the impact of a significant change over a variable of interest over time (Silva, 2017). Through an algorithm, the SCM finds a weighted mix of comparison units to create a synthetic control unit with the values of predictors resembling the treated unit prior to the treatment (Abadie & Gardeazabal, 2003). Therefore, it weights the units in the donor pool accordingly to make the synthetic unit as similar as possible to the treated one, with predictor values very close to each other. In other words, "this method uses comparable units (countries, regions, etc.), to construct a 'synthetic control', which is a unit as similar as possible to the case of interest except for the structural transformation" (Silva, 2017: 7).

For instance, when investigating how a tobacco control program has impacted cigarette consumption in California (Proposition 99), Abadie et al. (2010:498-9) built a synthetic control California with a donor pool made of all other American states, except those "that adopted some other large-scale tobacco control program during our sample period... [or] raised their state cigarette taxes by 50 cents or more over the 1989 to 2000 period." Once the algorithm finds the best-weighted regions to create synthetic California, the number of cigarette packages consumed per person by year should match before the treatment (Proposition 99) and be compared afterward (Silva, 2017). If the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, that is, if there is no effect of Proposition 99 on per-capita cigarette sales, the number of cigarette packs per person after the treatment should be identical in both California and synthetic California. Otherwise - if the lines split after treatment - there is an impact of Proposition 99 on cigarette consumption.

The above-mentioned example illustrates the necessity of comparable units in the donor pool that have not experienced the event of interest. The algorithm will weight control units in order to make the dependent variable before treatment as identical as possible. The weight of units all sums up to 1, and although other predictors should have similar values, the most important match is the dependent variable pre-treatment (Silva, 2017). A more extended pre-treatment period is desired to match treated and synthetic units as well as possible and increase confidence that synthetic reproduces treated units reliably (Abadie et al., 2010, 2015). Although a considerable number of potential control units is necessary to achieve acceptable p-values, an excessive number of those might lead to over-fitting, which "arises when the characteristics of the unit affected by the intervention or event of interest are artificially matched by combining idiosyncratic variations in a large sample of unaffected units" (Abadie et al., 2015: 500). To create the synthetic Netherlands, Silva (2017) had 13 countries in the donor pool. However, only four have been picked by the algorithm to match the dependent variable as similarly as

possible. In Adabie and Gardeazabal's (2003) case, they selected all fifteen other Spanish regions to build a synthetic Basque country, but only Madrid and Barcelona contributed to it. The assumption that allows one to make causal inference from this method is that if the synthetic control can match the dependent variable between treated and synthetic units over time before treatment and closely resembles other potential explanations for the outcome, the sole motive for a difference between treated and synthetic units after the event of interest is the event itself (treatment).

4.3.0.1 A Synthetic Brazil

To assess whether Bolsonaro's election impacted Brazilian democracy, I built a synthetic Brazi[3]. I created this comparison unit using countries similar to Brazil to some extent. For that, I have selected countries from Latin America and BRICS that have not experienced the rise of a populist leader during the analysis period (1995[4] - 2021). Since I am hypothesizing that a populist leader might have caused the democratic backsliding, I cannot have another populist during the analyzed period in Brazil or countries in the donor pool[5]. The main goal of the SCM algorithm when creating synthetic Brazil is to weigh these countries in order to make its level of democracy as similar as possible to real Brazil prior to the event of interest. Therefore, if Bolsonaro's election did not affect the level of democracy in Brazil, the lines should have the same trend after the event. Otherwise, they should separate, creating a gap between both.

I use data from the Global Populism Dataset (Hawkins et al., 2019) to decide which countries should be dropped from the donor pool for having populists taking office between 1995 and 2021. Team Populism adopts holistic grading to code populism. They have an index from zero to 2, where zero means non-populist and two means very populist[6]. Therefore, the threshold to exclude a country is having a president who scores 0.5 or more in the considered time frame. Accordingly, I dropped Argentina, Mexico, India, Russia, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, Panama, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela. Three more cases are dropped because of missing data: Belize, Guyana, and Suriname.

Before presenting the average weights of the units that create synthetic Brazil, let me introduce the predictors used in the model. These predictors work almost as control variables in a regression. According to the literature, they are characteristics

[3] To do so, I used the Synth package for R (Abadie et al., 2011).

[4] I have chosen 1995 as the baseline because it is the first year of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in office - when Brazilian democracy is stabilized for a few years. Before that, Brazil elected Fernando Collor de Mello in 1989, who was impeached in 1992, and it is considered a populist (see Chapter 2).

[5] The donor pool is the set of countries (control units) based on which the algorithm builds the synthetic unit.

[6] Between 0 and 0.49, a leader is non-populist; somewhat populist if they score between 0.5 and 0.99; between 1 and 1.49, they are populist; finally, if a president scores 1.5 or more, they are very populist.

that potentially explain democratic backsliding. Therefore, to avoid confounders, I must include them in the model so that the SCM algorithm will make these features as similar as possible in actual and synthetic Brazil.

Although the most critical match is regarding the dependent variable before treatment, it is necessary to consider other potential predictors of democratic backsliding and make them as similar as possible (Abadie et al., 2015). Since I am interested in a decrease in the level of democracy in Brazil, hypothesizing that Bolsonaro's election may be the cause, I should control for other potential causes. Following the specialized literature, I list five tentative answers: (1) social polarization, (2) judicial independence, (3) respect for the constitution by the executive branch, (4) unemployment, and (5) income. I discuss each of them separately next.

Although polarization is a contested concept and has been related to the divide between Republicans and Democrats in the US congress (McCarty et al., 2016), there is also a debate around mass polarization (Fiorina et al., 2008). Since I am dealing with data from V-Dem, I define polarization as they do in their 2022 report. That means polarization should be understood as a process and condition that "induces both citizens and political actors to see politics as a battlefield between rival blocs, each posing an existential threat to the other, which renders them willing to endorse and undertake extraordinary, usually democracy-eroding or autocracy-endorsing, political acts" and potentialize "the most extreme or radical voices within each camp – extreme in their willingness to antagonize rivals and ignore democratic decorum" (Somer et al., 2021: 3). Such a definition, although accompanied by the adjective "pernicious," it is close to Iyengar et al. (2019) concept of affective polarization, stressing how the division of society into two antagonistic camps cues their members to distrust and negatively see their opponents.

Social polarization would lead to polarizing political appeals that portray opponents as threatening the people and nation (Kaufman & Haggard, 2018; Villa, 2005), making people and politicians more prone to support autocratic actions (Somer et al., 2021). One of the most illustrative cases is Venezuela under Chávez (Corrales, 2011). According to the V-Dem 2022 report, "Polarized publics are more likely to demonize political opponents and distrust information from diverse sources, and mobilization shifts as a result. The increase in misinformation and polarization further signals what may prove to be a changing nature of autocratization in the world today (Alizada et al., 2022: 9). Somer et al. (2021) find that polarization negatively correlates to the quality of democracy at statistically significant levels.

Another predictor of democratic backsliding is judicial independence. The argument is that "Liberal democracy cannot survive without checks and balances, and those cannot be applied without independent courts" (Shin, 2020: 104). V-Dem reports have shown a decline in judicial independence for consecutive years. The 2020 report states

that in Poland, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) has eroded democracy "by diminishing judicial independence through lowering the retiring age of judges and controlling judicial appointments" (Lührmann et al., 2020: 22), which is supported by other scholars (Aydin-Cakir, 2023; Vachudova, 2020). Reports continued to find evidence of a decline in judicial independence in 2021 (Alizada et al., 2021) and 2022, bringing the case of Nayib Bukele's El Salvador and his attacks on judicial independence by removing particular judges through a legislative vote (Alizada et al., 2022) before pushing court packing forward. Finally, several studies have shown the importance of judicial independence in halting democratic erosion (Laebens & Lührmann, 2021; Gibler & Randazzo, 2011), which is the case of countries such as South Korea, Moldova, and Ecuador (Papada et al., 2023).

The discussion around judicial independence is closely related to another predictor of democratic decline: when the executive disregards the Constitution. Changing the retirement age and court-packing are well-known maneuvers used by wanna-be-autocrat heads of state (Aydin-Cakir, 2023; Gibler & Randazzo, 2011). The rejection and willingness to violate or suspend the constitution are indicators of authoritarian behavior when it comes to forsaking the rules of the game (Levitsky & Zibblatt, 2018). Besides packing the Court, Viktor Orbán in Hungary has rewritten the constitution without widespread approval or referendum (Jenne & Mudde, 2012). Another concept to deal with these predictors of democratic backsliding is executive aggrandizement. By undermining checks and balances, incumbents hamper their opponent's power to challenge them (Bermeo, 2016; Sato et al., 2022). By weakening accountability institutions, Erdogan changed the constitution, named fourteen out of seventeen judges, and transferred the power of deciding which parties were legal from the court to the legislative body (Bermeo, 2016). Rafael Correa approved a new constitution in Ecuador, temporarily closed the congress, and passed a constitutional amendment eliminating presidential term limits (Bermeo, 2016). Therefore, there are several ways by which a head of state can disrespect the constitution and undermine judicial independence, even with a legal facade, be it by packing the court, changing the constitution in their favor, or changing rules, among others.

One of the strong theses in political science is that economic development causes democracy (Lipset, 1957). The opposite direction of this relationship points out a problem of endogeneity, and data support the argument that democracy causes economic development (Acemoglu et al., 2019). Although contemporary cases challenge this correlation, such as China, whose economic development is significantly higher than that of several democratic countries, studies have shown that rich countries are less prone to turn into authoritarianism (Przeworski et al., 1996; Boix & Stokes, 2002). One of the main variables predicting the probability of democratic resilience or breakdown is income levels, so the higher they are, the greater the likelihood of avoiding democratic failure (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997) and enabling transitions to democracy (Boix & Stokes, 2002).

Historically, economic crises are among the factors that precede *coups d'état* in several countries, such as Brazil (Skidmore, 1967; Geddes & Zeller, 1989) and Chile (Escalante, 2022). In contemporary Europe, the protection of the welfare state passes by the defense and priority of natives over immigrants, as the "French first" National Front's motto illustrates (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013: 160), or Trump's statement that Mexicans are taking Americans' jobs (Hobban, 2017). On the individual level, studies have shown that unemployed individuals are more likely to reject representative democracy (Córdova & Seligon, 2009). Thus, I include two economic indicators that could predict backsliding in the model: income level and unemployment. They should be as similar as possible to actual Brazil's levels.

4.4 Measurement and Data

Several institutions measure the level of democracy globally. The most used are Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), Freedom House, and Polity. They create indices that gauge democracy as a latent concept; therefore, they have many variables concerning aspects, constitutive elements, or institutions that define or guarantee democracy. Several methodological approaches are available in social sciences to define concepts and operationalize them. Many scholars have devoted attention to how to descend from abstract definitions to empirical indicators in order to capture these concepts in reality (Sartori, 1970; Goertz, 2006; Adcock & Collier, 2001). When it comes to democracy, it is no different, and political science has devoted much effort to developing ways to measure it (Munck, 2009; Teorell et al., 2019; Collier & Levitsky, 1997). V-Dem measures democracy as a latent concept, building a polyarchy index that aggregates five definitional elements of democracy: freedom of expression, freedom of association, clean elections, elected officials, and suffrage. It does so by yearly surveying experts worldwide. The question behind the index is "To what extent is the ideal of electoral democracy in its fullest sense achieved?" (Coppedge et al., 2023: 44).

Survey experts are used to assess and measure many phenomena in social sciences, and their value has been discussed by a few scholars (von Soest, 2023). Several institutes, such as V-Dem, Freedom House, Global Party Survey, and PopuList, use that approach. Scholars also use it for different purposes, such as measuring ideology (Bolognesi et al., 2022) or populism (Meijers & Zaslove, 2020). Yet, the inherent problem of subjectivity might lead other scholars to be skeptical regarding these surveys.

A recent study argues that datasets measuring democracy through expert surveys are based on "expert-coded and require the subjective judgment of coders" (Little & Meng, 2023: 6), so they might be biased. Coders participating in these expert surveys usually base their decisions on "media reports, more systematic academic study of the

country, personal experiences living in the country and interacting with other citizens and government officials" (Little & Meng, 2023: 13). Besides taking their own experiences as a source of information, relying on media reports on backsliding might also be biased, since those are usually regarding extreme cases, such as Hungary and Russia, and may mislead coders to take these parts as the whole, pointing out a nonexistent autocratic tendency worldwide. Unpacking V-Dem's polyarchy index, the authors argue that three out of five sub-indices are entirely subjective: freedom of expression, freedom of association, and clean elections indices. The authors suggest using objective measures[7], such as turnover, multiparty elections, executive constraints, and journalists killed or jailed (Little & Meng, 2023). Concisely, they argue that "the real average level of democracy in the world has been relatively flat if not slightly improving for the past two decades, but changes in coder bias have led to an apparent decline" (Little & Meng, 2023: 29).

V-Dem scholars have responded to Little and Meng in two working papers. In the first of them, Knutsen et al. (2023) raise important methodological and epistemological discussions. To begin with, they point out something fundamental: different definitions and operationalizations of democracy will lead to discrepant results. Whereas Little and Meng (2023) do not define democracy clearly and only mention a very minimal definition (Przeworski, 2019), Knutsen et al. (2023) argue that the agreement on how wanna-be-autocrats act nowadays demands a thick concept of democracy. In other words, since democratic backslash is subtle in current days, it is necessary to have a concept of democracy and operationalization that considers the nuance inherent to these processes (Weitzel et al., 2023). Since democracy is not a directly observable variable but rather a latent concept that aggregates several components, not just a few related to electoral processes, the indicators one chooses must reflect a previous definition of the phenomenon.

The distinction between subjective and objective measures touches on a core dilemma in social sciences. Is it possible for one to analyze facts free from their values, beliefs, and judgments? Moreover, is there any subject in social science that one can measure objectively? Knutsen et al. (2023) give an example of hard-to-define cases, such as Turkey, that, under a dichotomous variable (democracy/autocracy), would be tough to classify. To assess data on election and freedom of association, Little and Meng (2023) use, among others, the "objective" values of NELDA[8] (Hyde & Marinov, 2012). However, objective means "observer-invariance," meaning all coders assign the same value to the same case (Knutsen et al., 2023). The intercoder reliability of NELDA is between 58%

[7] They build an index with data from "NELDA (Hyde and Marinov, 2012), the Database of Political Institutions (DPI) (Cruz et al., 2021), an expanded version of data on executive constraints from Meng (2020), term limit evasion from Versteeg et al. (2020), and a database on journalists jailed and killed from the Committee to Protect Journalists" (Little & Meng, 2023: 3).

[8] NELDA stands for National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy. It is a dataset by Hyde and Marinov (2012) that brings several objectively measured variables, such as "whether the incumbent party lost the last election, the multiparty index, and the process violations"(Little & Meng, 2023, p. 23). The dataset is available at https://nelda.co/.

and 98% across their 58 indications (Knutsen et al., 2023). Therefore, the disagreement among coders shows that the objective data used by Little and Meng (2023) is affected by subjectivity.

To address the critique of potential bad vibes bias, Knutsen et al. (2023) present all steps V-Dem takes to avoid partiality. First, V-Dem does not measure democracy directly. Instead, they code more specific variables that are less likely to be affected by general pessimism. Secondly, all variables are ordinal scales defining what they intend to measure through the questions. Third, experts are well-established scholars with expertise in the sectors they code (e.g., parties, elections, civil rights), and usually citizens or residents in the countries they code. Finally, V-Dem uses a Bayesian Ordinal Item-Response Theory Measurement Model to aggregate data, correcting for expert reliability and scale perception variation. Whereas the former diminishes the weight of experts who diverge from the majority in terms of directionality (e.g., if one is grading a country as less democratic than the previous year and the rest is coding as more democratic, the weight of this isolated coder will be smaller in the final estimate), the latter corrects for those in disagreement with the majority in the ordinal scale. The second issue reflects different thresholds experts hold. Whereas a coder might think they have reasons to change a particular concept from 3 to 2 on the ordinal scale for a particular variable, others understand that this country should maintain the 3 for the variable in question.

All considered, I agree with Knutsen et al. (2023, p. 36) conclusion "that there is no compelling evidence of large and systematic bias across experts, countries, or time that could drive observed trends in global democracy, including the kind of 'bad vibes bias' hypothesized by L&M [Little & Meng, 2023]." V-Dem follows all necessary steps to successfully, although susceptible to subjectivity, measure democracy: they have a clear definition of democracy and democratic backsliding, create indicators capable of operationalizing and capturing the concept empirically, and use methods to correct potential biases by experts. All things considered, I should agree with a specific comment by Little and Meng (2023, p. 7): V-Dem has "the best data available which has been used to make the case for backsliding."

4.4.0.1 Data and Predictors

As already justified theoretically, I include in the model five potential predictors of democratic backsliding. Whereas the three first - polarization of society, judicial independence, and executive respects constitution - come from V-Dem, the last two are indicators of economic crisis originally from the World Bank.

To understand if "differences in opinions result in major clashes of views and polarization or, alternatively, whether there is general agreement on the general direction

this society should develop," V-Dem[9] asks, "How would you characterize the differences of opinions on major political issues in this society?" (Coppedge et al., 2022). Answers go from zero (serious polarization) to four (no polarization) on an ordinal scale.

Judicial independence is measured by asking experts if the high court, when deciding matters of government interest, reflects the government's wishes regardless of what the constitution says. Again, answers represent an ordinal scale that goes from zero, which means the court always decides according to the government's interests, to four, representing complete independence of the high court.

To assess to what extent the executive branch violates the constitution, V-dem asks experts to address the following question: "Do members of the executive (the head of state, the head of government, and cabinet ministers) respect the constitution?" responding in a scale from zero to four, where zero means that "Members of the executive violate the constitution whenever they want to, without legal consequences," and four indicates maximum respect for the constitution, once "Members of the executive never violate the constitution" (Coppedge et al., 2022: 115).

Unemployment comes from the World Bank and represents the share of the population without work but available and looking for employment. Income is also from the yearly database and reflects the constant value of international dollars for 2015.

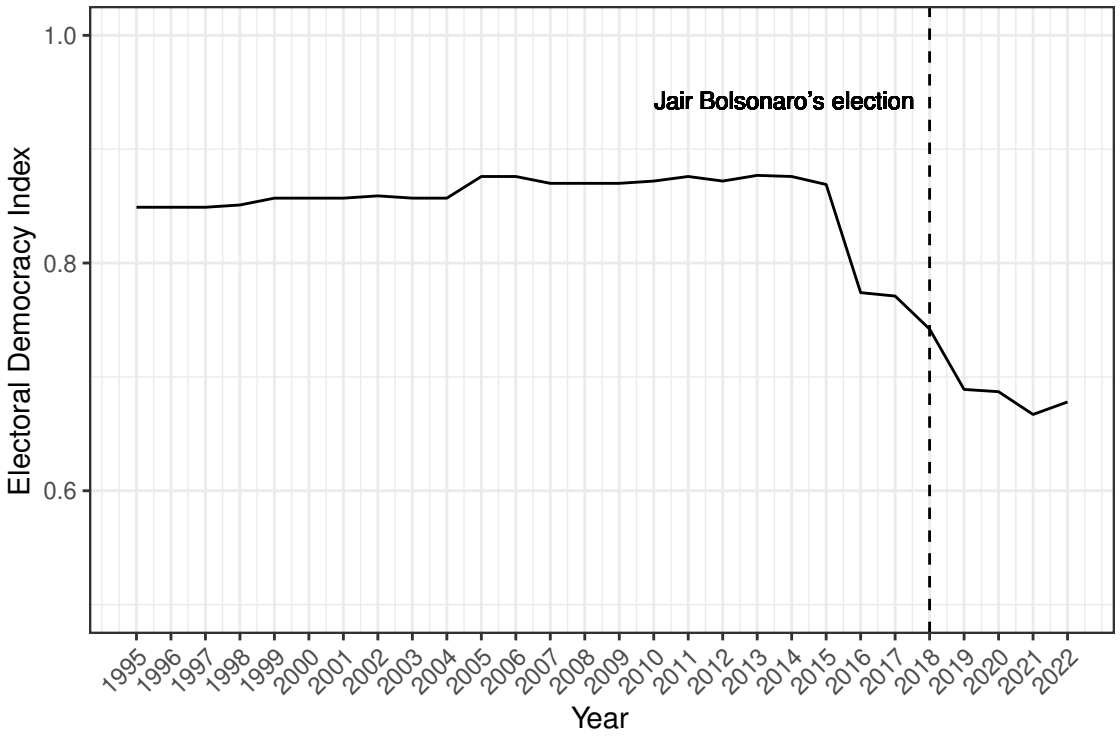
4.5 Results

To begin with, let me show the trend in the level of democracy in Brazil for the last 27 years. Figure 14 shows how Brazilian democracy has declined recently. The 2022 V-Dem report lists Brazil among the top ten autocratizing countries (Alizada et al., 2022). According to the report, increases in government censorship of the media, lack do commitment to democracy, attacks on minorities, demonization of political opponents encouraging political violence, calls for anti-democratic rallies, and removal of supreme court justices are among Bolsonaro's anti-democratic acts (Alizada et al., 2022). Although the decline stabilized, Brazil lost its Liberal Democracy classification between 2016 and 2022, becoming an Electoral Democracy.

As described above, I apply the synthetic control method to create the best counterfactual possible, an artificial Brazil as similar as possible to the real one, using data from comparable countries that compose a donor pool, except for Bolsonaro's election. Table 7 shows the weights of each control country in synthetic Brazil. While 82% of the counterfactual comes from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic completes the case. These countries sum up to 1, while the others in the donor pool score zero. The average

[9] For a detailed assessment of V-Dem indicators, please see Coppedge et al., 2022.

Figure 14 – Brazil's Democratic Level Over Time



weights indicate the best possible match of levels of democracy in synthetic and actual Brazil.

Table 7 – Country Weights in Synthetic Brazil[1]

Country	Weights*
Chile	0
China	0
Colombia	0
Costa Rica	0.82
Cuba	0
Dominican Republic	0.18
Guatemala	0
Jamaica	0
South Africa	0
Uruguay	0

[1] *Bolsonaro Model.*
* Country weights assigned by Synthetic Control Method.

Table 8 describes the characteristics of synthetic Brazil compared to actual Brazil and the sample average of the ten control units. Beyond the characteristics discussed in the section related to the method, I match the dependent variable in four specific points before intervention. Synthetic Brazil is built to make all predictors as similar as possible

to actual Brazil. To do so, the synthetic control method tries to match the predictors' values yearly between 1995 and 2017 with the optimization period between 1995 and 2018.

Table 8 – Description of Synthetic Brazil[1]

Predictors	Brazil	Synthetic Brazil*	Sample Mean
Polarization of Society	1.667	1.547	1.382
Judicial Independence	1.437	1.468	0.84
Execcutive Respects Constitution	0.908	1.183	0.973
Unemployment	12.33	8.444	7.838
Income	7299.919	10385.005	7533.049
Polyarchy 2010	0.872	0.858	0.634
Polyarchy 2014	0.876	0.852	0.636
Polyarchy 2016	0.774	0.842	0.634
Polyarchy 2018	0.742	0.832	0.626

[1] *Bolsonaro Model.*
* Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

One of the main issues when using relatively few units in the donor pool is finding suitable matches across several variables; therefore, relying on a good match for the dependent variable pre-treatment is necessary (Silva, 2017). Yet, by comparing synthetic Brazil's and sample mean's proximity to Brazil, one can see that the SCM algorithm makes synthetic Brazil averages closer to actual Brazil in all variables but "income" and "executive respects constitution." That is probably a result of Brazil having one of the highest income concentrations in Latin America, with the wealthiest 20% of Brazilians holding almost 55% of the total income[10], making the country one of the most unequal in the world (Coatsworth, 2007).

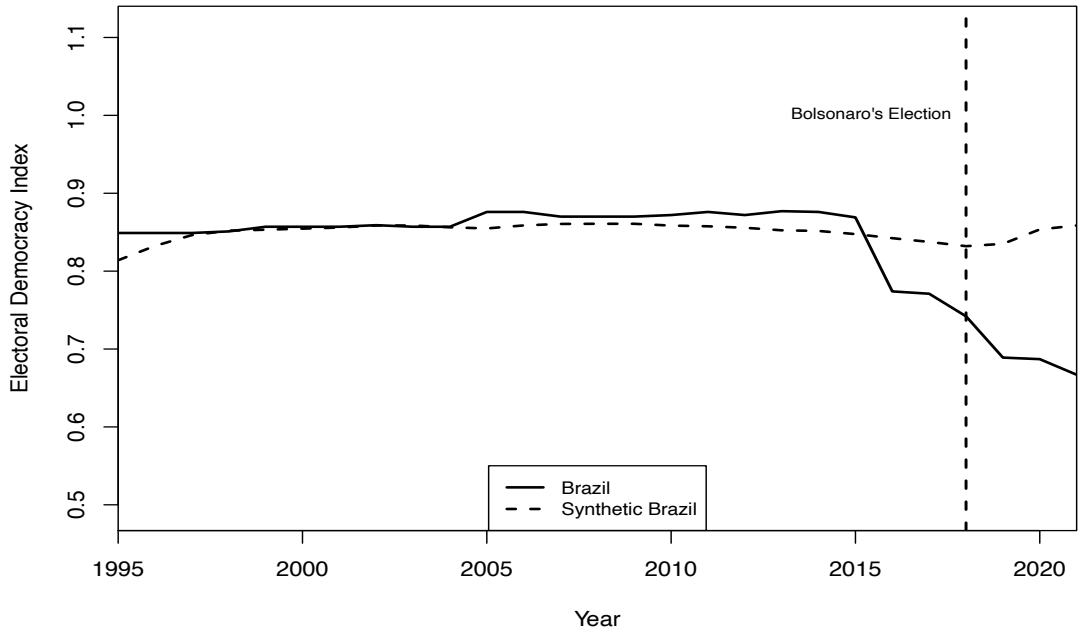
I consider 2018 the intervention because it was the year in which Bolsonaro was elected. Although pedants might argue that his administration began in 2019 only, I cannot separate cause and effect in the same year using V-Dem data. As they code each country yearly, at the end of the year, any event happening during 2019 would affect democracy's level for that year already. In other words, assigning the treatment in 2019 will miss the effect of Bolsonaro's first year in office on democracy. Therefore, even though one wants to argue that Bolsonaro taking office and beginning to rule should be the treatment, 2018 should be used to evaluate the consequences felt already in 2019.

Concerning the causal effect of Bolsonaro's election, Figure 15 shows Brazil as less democratic than its synthetic counterfactual after 2018. However, the gap between the lines began before Bolsonaro. 2016 is the first year of the decline, coinciding with Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Although Bolsonaro has deepened the backlash, the process has started before himself, as I will discuss in a separate section. From 2018 onwards, Brazilian democracy has declined yearly from 0.75 to 0.68 in 2021. Although the major

[10] See `https://www.statista.com/statistics/1050681/latin-america-income-inequality-country`

slice of the backward occurred between 2015 and 2016, Bolsonaro has continued making Brazilian democracy less democratic. Looking at another critical indicator, the Liberal Democracy Index, one sees a drop beginning in 2016, but the crossing of the threshold that classifies Brazil as no longer a liberal democracy happens after the first year of Bolsonaro's administration.

Figure 15 – Trends in the level of democracy: Brazil versus Synthetic Brazil

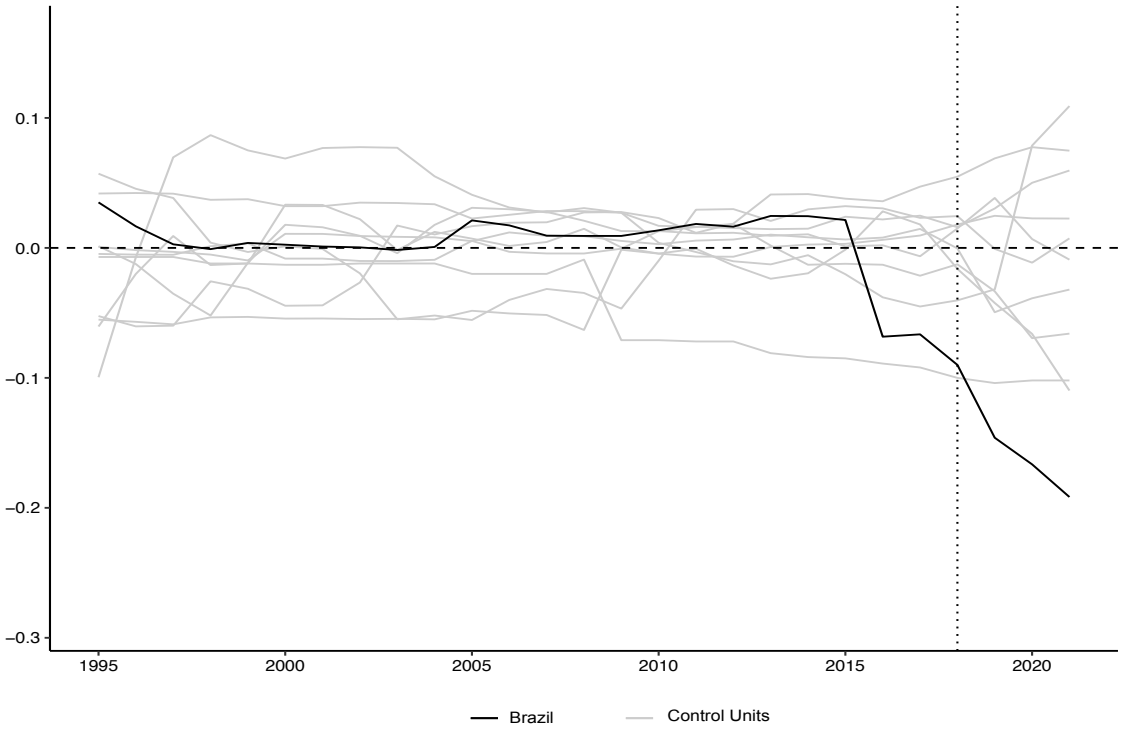


Figures 16 and 18 display placebo tests to evaluate the credibility of the results (Abadie et al., 2015). There are two tests to be run in this case: First, the SCM algorithm runs the same test for each control country as the treated unit. In other words, I "reassign the treatment in the data to a comparison unit. In this way, we can obtain synthetic control estimates for countries that did not experience the event of interest" (Abadie et al., 2005: 505).

The lines in Figure 16 show the difference between a country and its synthetic control. In doing so, SCM measures if the average treatment effect is higher in Brazil than in any control unit when they figure as the treatment unit. Countries with lines above zero after treatment became more democratic than they were. Those with a line above zero became less democratic than they were previously. This placebo test aims to verify which unit had the most significant effect considering the treatment. The black line refers to Brazil, and the grey lines refer to other countries. The gap between Brazil and its synthetic control is wider than any other country.

The second placebo test changes the intervention to another time point. Following

Figure 16 – Placebo test: Democratic backsliding gap in Brazil and ten control units



Abadie et al. (2015), I selected the middle of the pre-treatment course as the treatment in Figure 17. If the estimated effect in the placebo test is larger than the actual event, Brazilian democratic backsliding would have another cause rather than Bolsonaro's emergence. For this new model, I used the same donor pool and changed the training period accordingly. Figure 17 presents the trend of Brazilian democracy for the period. Although synthetic Brazil's democracy has a slight improvement after 2006, there is no evidence of a decline in actual Brazil's democracy in that period. Therefore, this result reinforces the effect of Bolsonaro on democratic backsliding.

Ideally, the lines in Figure 15 should fit up to 2018, but they separate earlier, suggesting that something has happened before. As mentioned above, 2015 was not a usual year in Brazil. With Operation Car Wash going forward and Rousseff's impeachment trial filed, the credibility of traditional parties and representative institutions collapsed. Considering that, I rerun the model with 2015 as the intervention point. Figure 18 shows suggestive results. The lines in the pre-treatment period have a better fit. Furthermore, they split precisely in the year of intervention. However, the sample was built excluding countries that had populist leaders during the period of analysis. To estimate the effect of Rousseff's impeachment on the democratic decline in Brazil, I must redo the donor pool following the appropriate criterion by removing all countries that have had at least one impeached president between 1995 and 2018. I will not discuss this in the next section but rather in the subsequent one.

Figure 17 – Placebo Bolsonaro's Election in 2006

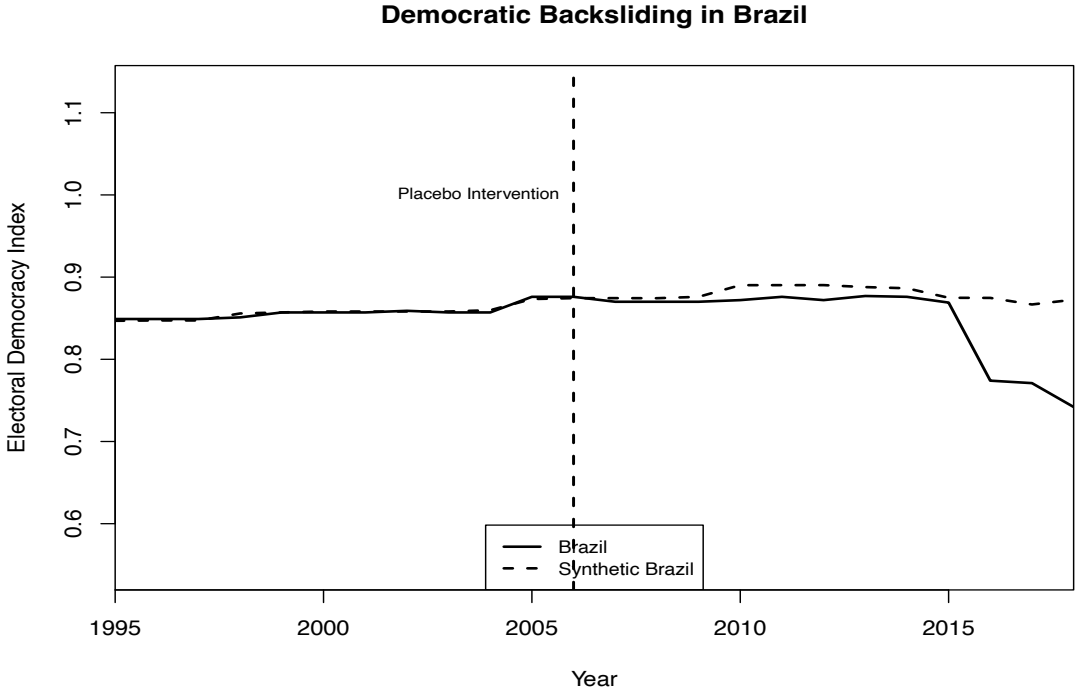
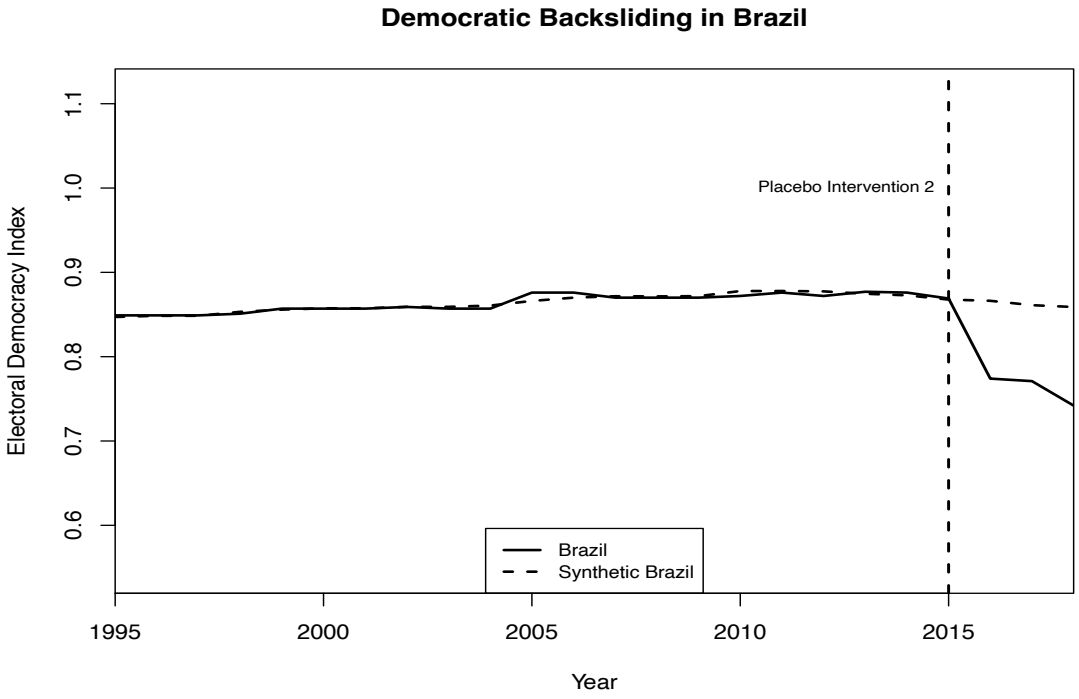


Figure 18 – Placebo Bolsonaro's Election in 2015

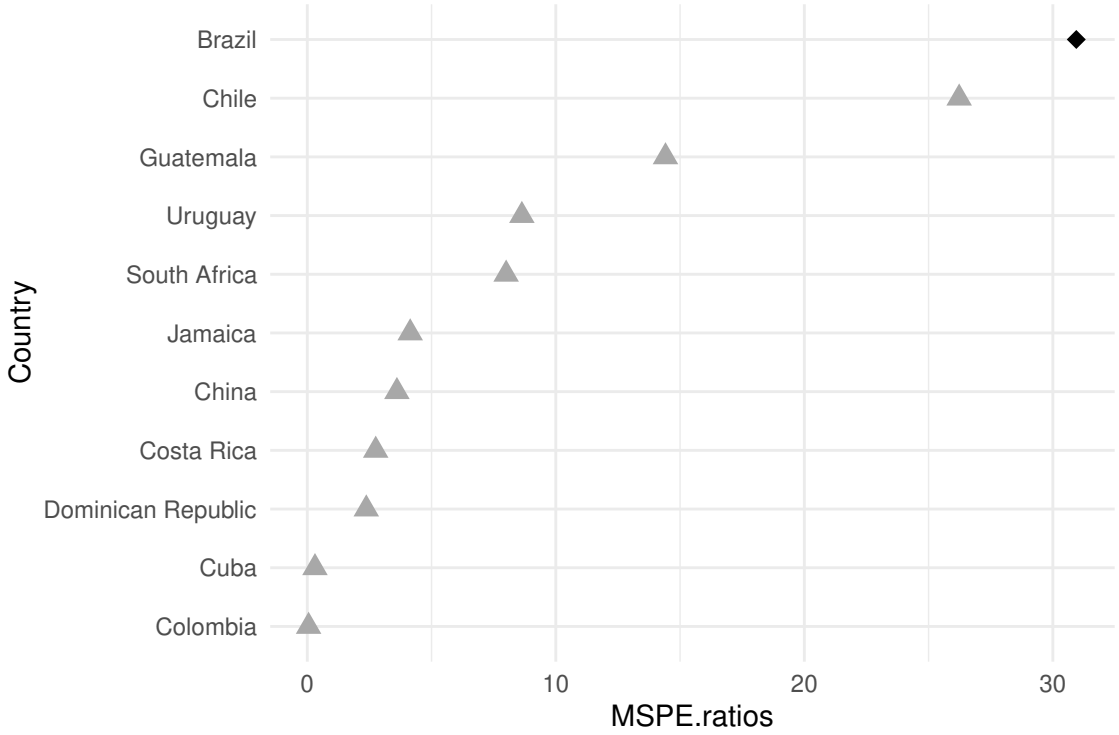


4.5.0.1 Sensitivity and Robustness tests

Despite the finding that something went wrong before Bolsonaro took office, I should validate my results through two robustness tests. First, let me introduce the mean squared

prediction error ratios. An excellent way to visualize the impact of the treatment in Brazil is by interpreting the mean squared prediction errors (MSPE) for Brazil and placebos. Whereas low values in the pre-treatment period indicate a good fit before treatment, high values in the post-treatment demonstrate a more significant treatment effect (Silva, 2017). The best way to visualize this test is through a graphic representing the post/pre-treatment ratio, where higher ratios point out a larger difference between treated and control units after treatment and smaller contrast before the event (Abadie et al., 2015). For the case under study, Figure 19 shows that when dividing post-treatment MSPE by the pre-treatment MSPE, Brazil has the highest ratio of the sample, reinforcing the effect of Bolsonaro on Brazilian democratic backsliding. Although the sample size (11) does not allow for achieving a p-value at the conventional significance level of 0.05, the MSPE ratio test shows that Brazil has the "best" and possibly lowest p-value (0.09) in the sample.

Figure 19 – Ratio of post-2018 mean squared prediction error (MSPE) to pre-2018 MSPE: Brazil and control units



Secondly, I follow the leave-one-out iterative process to check if any particular control country drives the outcome (Abadie et al., 2015). As shown in 4.5, synthetic Brazil combines Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. By omitting the control units with positive weights in synthetic Brazil one by one, the fitness of the lines will not be as good as it was, but it will allow me to verify if the outcome is a product of a particular unit. Like Abadie et al. (2015), I begin by omitting the "lighter" unit, the Dominican Republic. Tables 9 and 10 show the new average weight of units in synthetic Brazil and the means for the predictors, respectively.

Table 9 – Leave-One-Out: Synthetic Weights from Combinations of Control Units [1]

	*Countries and Weights**	
Number of Units	**Costa Rica**	**Dominican Republic**
Two	0.82	0.18
One	1	

[1] *Bolsonaro Model.*
* Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

Table 10 – Leave-One-Out: Characteristics for Combinations of Control Units[1]

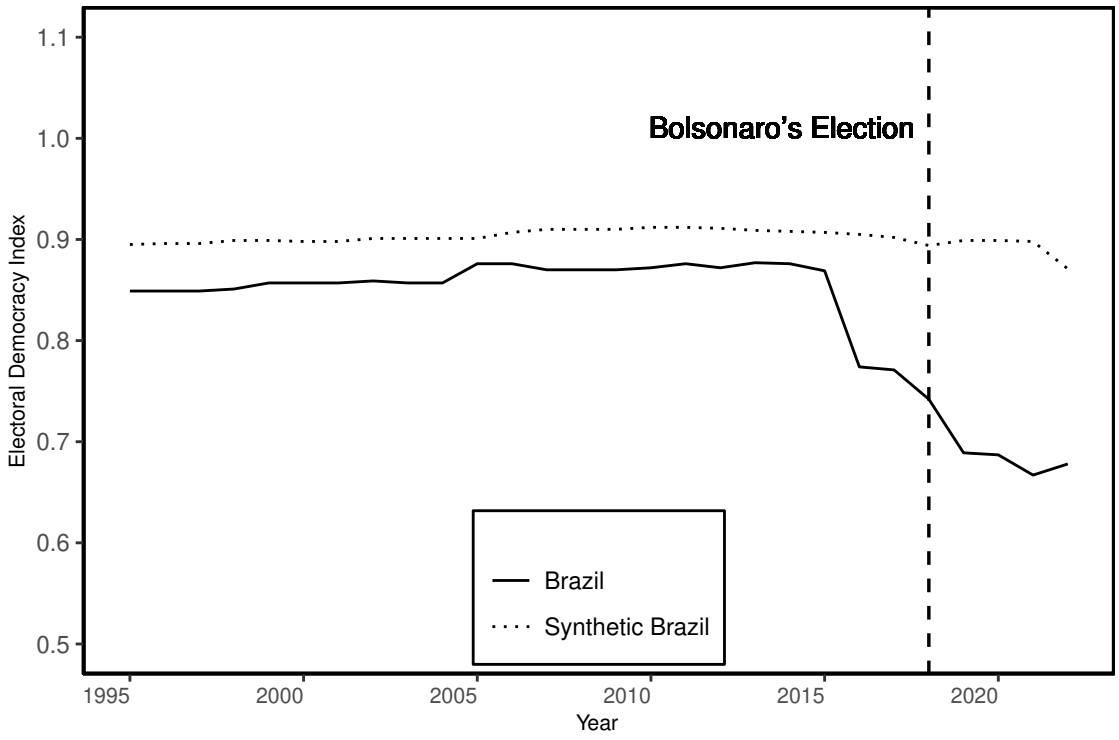
	Treated Unit	*N. of Units in Synthetic Brazil**		*LATAM & BRICS*
Predictors	**Brazil**	**2**	**1**	**Sample Mean**
Pol. of Soc.[2]	1.667	1.547	1.587	1.382
Jud. Ind.[3]	1.437	1.468	1.958	0.840
Exe. Res. Con.[4]	0.908	1.183	1.453	0.973
Unemployment	12.33	8.44	9.01	7.838
Income	7299.919	10385.005	11118.512	7533.049
Polyarchy 2010	0.872	0.858	0.912	0.634
Polyarchy 2014	0.876	0.852	0.908	0.636
Polyarchy 2016	0.774	0.842	.905	0.634
Polyarchy 2016	0.771	0.832	0.902	0.626

[1] *Bolsonaro Model.*
[2] Polarization of Society.
[3] Judicial Independence.
[4] Executive Respects Constitution.
* Country weights assigned by Synthetic Control Method.

Whereas fitness is compromised when creating a synthetic counterfactual with a subset of units – in this case, only one, since the original synthetic Brazil is made of two control countries –it is possible to see that the average trend of lines in Figure 20 is similar to the trajectory found in Figure 15. Yet, when synthetic Brazil is made of Costa Rica only, lines are more separate. Of course, this results from a partially flawed comparison since this part of the test directly compares Brazil to Costa Rica, and the second is among the most democratic countries in Latin America. As Abadie et al. (2015) argue, restricting the comparison to a single unit reinforces the method's strength once the combination of potential control units reproduces the treated unit more accurately.

In the next section, I explore another hypothesis: Rousseff's impeachment will be the event of interest that might have led to Brazilian democratic backsliding.

Figure 20 – Democratic Backsliding Gap between Brazil and Sparse Synthetic Control (1 Control Unit)



4.6 Impeachment: A Second Model to Explain the Brazilian Democratic Backsliding

Synthetic control is a very visual method. Results presented in the section above show that something happened before Bolsonaro's rise in 2018. Looking at the lines in Figure 15, one sees they separate before the intervention. When rerunning the model with treatment in 2015, the estimated effect of the intervention was significantly higher in Brazil than in control countries. Furthermore, it is higher than the estimated effect of the treatment in 2018. The result is likely to stem from Rousseff's impeachment. However, the test presented above is based on a sample that excludes countries that had the election of populist leaders in the period analyzed. To estimate the effect of Rousseff's impeachment on Brazilian democracy, I must build a different sample, following the same logic as in Bolsonaro's hypothesis but keeping countries that had presidents removed by impeachment out of the donor pool. Therefore, observing such a criterion, I dropped four countries from the sample: Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Paraguay. These countries, between 1995 and 2021, summed up to seven impeachments or impeachment-like removals: Bucaram (Ecuador 1997); Cubas (Paraguay 1999); Gutiérrez (Ecuador

2005); Lugo (Paraguay 2012); Pérez Molina (Guatemala 2015); Kuczynski (Peru 2018); Vizcarra (Peru 2020) (Llanos & Marsteintredet, 2023).

But why should one consider an impeachment trial a menace to democracy? Although it is common knowledge that more significant threats to democracy come from strong presidents who control congresses and courts, the misuse of impeachment and its use as an equivalent to coups in removing unpopular presidents bring some concerns (Perez-Liñan, 2018). An impeachment is "a subset of the universe of presidential crises, in turn an extremely hostile form of executive-legislative interaction. This perspective suggests that impeachment is not just a legal recourse to remove presidents who are proven guilty of high crimes; it is often an institutional weapon employed against presidents who confront a belligerent legislature" (Perez-Liñan, 2007: 9). This definition suggests that impeachments are legal but mainly political processes. Impeachment should be a mechanism used in extreme cases (Limongi, 2023), such as when presidents abuse their powers. Therefore, an impeachment can harm democracy when motivated by political opportunism or ideological reasons (Carey et al., 2018).

Some scholars are more severe and characterize Rousseff's impeachment as a parliamentary coup (Santos & Guarnieri, 2016). Carey et al. (2018) state that Rousseff was impeached because of a budget technicality, an ideological motivation because of Workers' Party policies, and finally, because those looking for her impeachment were trying to distract attention from their improprieties. Others are more skeptical and point out Rousseff's administration crisis (Limongi & Figueiredo, 2017). Finally, Limongi (2017) argues that the ideological element was present but was insufficient to explain Rousseff's impeachment. Her inability to maintain the coalition support and the politicians' interest in protecting themselves against Operation Car Wash are the primary reasons for her fate (Limongi, 2017). In other words, "Rousseff's impeachment trial was orchestrated by politicians involved in corruption scandals. For them, impeaching her was nothing more than a rescue operation. If she remained in office, it would not be possible to stop Operation Car Wash" (Limongi & Figueiredo, 2017: 94).

Synthetic Brazil for the impeachment hypothesis test is built from a sample of seventeen countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Russia, South Africa, and Uruguay. As Table 11 displays, Costa Rica has a significant weight in synthetic Brazil. South Africa, El Salvador, Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, and Uruguay complete the case. Except for the "executive respects constitution" and "income" predictors, Brazil better resembles its synthetic version than the sample average in all variables, as seen in Table 12.

I set 2015 as the treatment for two reasons. First, Rousseff's impeachment trial began in 2015. Second, for the same reason I did not use 2019 as the treatment in

Table 11 – Country Weights in Synthetic Brazil[1]

Country	Weights*
Mexico	0
South Africa	0.081
Russia	0
Colombia	0
El Salvador	0.056
Bolivia	0.042
Honduras	0.001
Argentina	0
India	0.001
Nicaragua	0
Chile	0.009
Costa Rica	0.804
Panama	0.002
Uruguay	0.001
China	0
Dominican Republic	0.001
Cuba	0

[1] *Impeachment Model.*
* Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

Table 12 – Description of Synthetic Brazil[1]

Predictors	Treated	Synthetic*	Sample Mean
Polarization of Society	1.825	1.475	1.393
Judicial Independence	1.46	1.707	0.329
Executive Respects Constitution	0.943	1.343	0.776
Unemployment	12.33	9.696	7.016
Income	7299.919	9823.476	6926.236
Polyarchy 2010	0.872	0.872	0.605
Polyarchy 2014	0.876	0.869	0.594

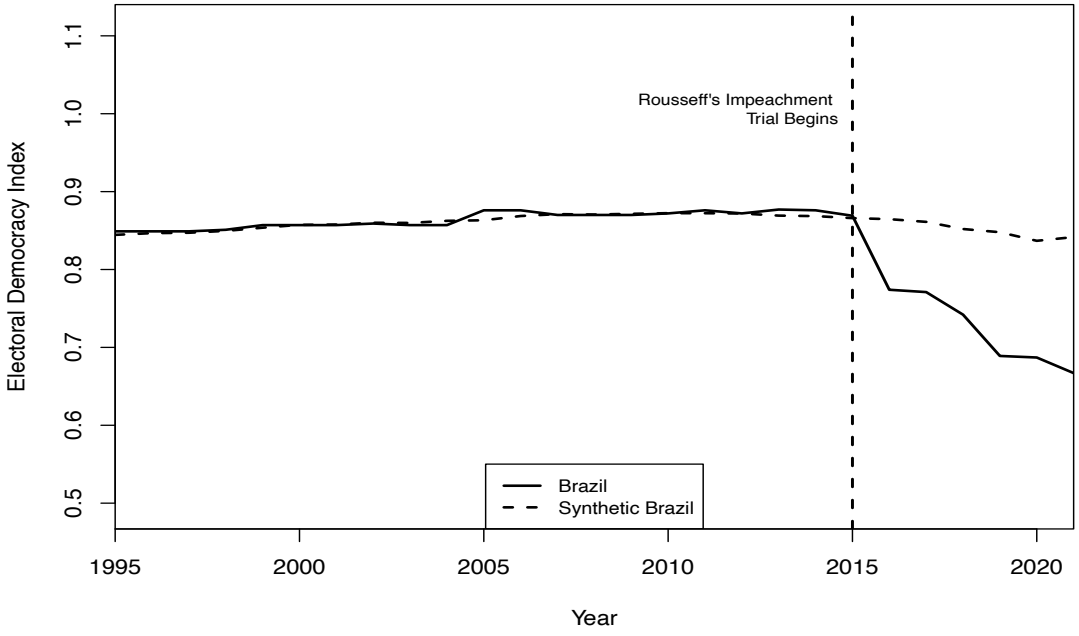
[1] *Impeachment Model.*
* Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

Bolsonaro's hypothesis, I cannot split 2016 into two to evaluate the effect of a cause in the same year the effects were felt. Therefore, if Rousseff's impeachment in April 2016 had consequences for democracy in the same year, I must push the treatment back to 2015. Predictors are the same as the previous test, except for the special ones. Here, I set two time points to improve the fit of the dependent variable line, 2010 and 2014.

4.6.1 Results

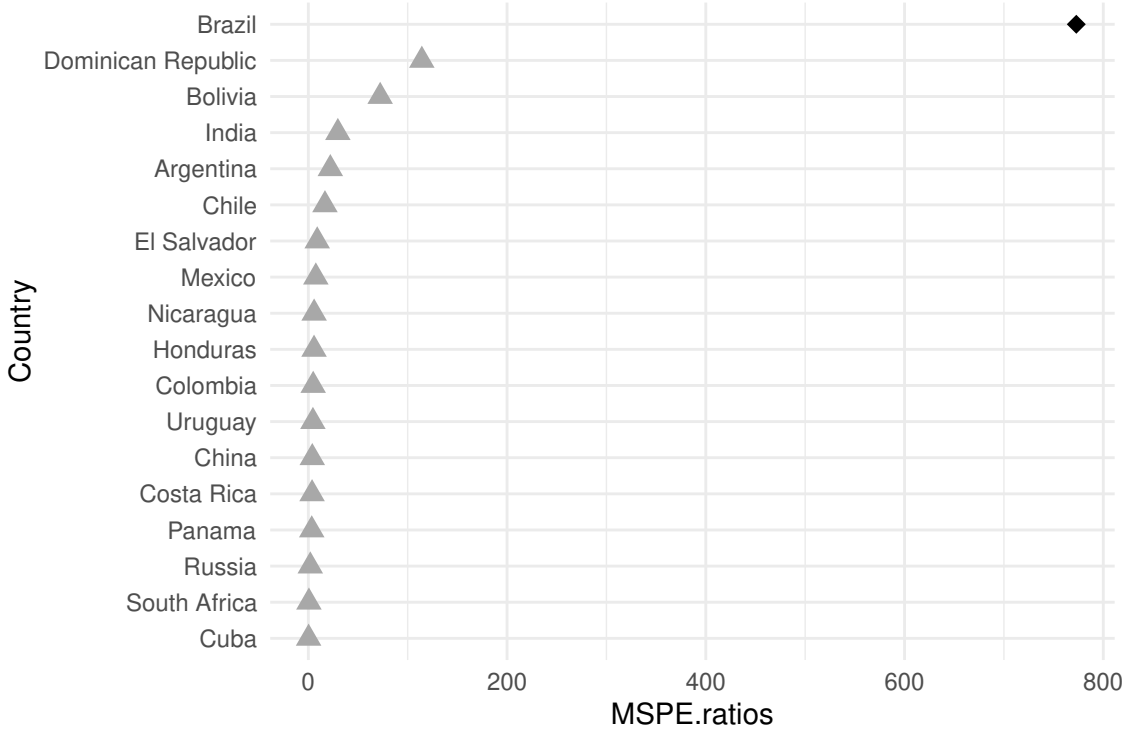
Figure 21 shows an almost perfect fit of lines before treatment. After 2015, they clearly split. Despite synthetic Brazil also experiencing some decline in democracy, actual Brazil goes deeper in its fall. Although the democratic recession continued after Bolsonaro took office, the autocratization episode started before his election, as one can see following the line's path. As already discussed by the specialized literature, Rousseff's impeachment demonstrated the limitations of this mechanism as a legitimate tool (Llanos & Marsteintredet, 2023). The trial did not follow the standard procedures expected in similar cases regarding fairness, legality, and due process (Perez-Liñan, 2020). Instead of bringing political stability, Rousseff's impeachment paved the way for intensifying the political crisis (Llanos & Marsteintredet, 2023). As expected, the outcome led to the emergence of an "outsider," saying aloud that he was the incarnation of antiestablishment and antipolitics (Santos & Guarnieri, 2016). Limongi (2023:19) meticulously describes the sequence of facts that led to Rousseff's impeachment, metaphorically concluding that several actors involved - politicians, parties, the media, the judicial system, and especially Operation Car Wash - "contributed to triggering the atomic bomb, which toxic effects are still felt." Therefore, Bolsonaro figures more as a symptom or consequence of the democratic decline process but also as its continuer.

Figure 21 – Trends in the level of democracy: Brazil versus Synthetic Brazil
Impeachment as Treatment



The impeachment model's mean square prediction error ratios are more compelling

Figure 22 – Ratio of post-2015 mean squared prediction error (MSPE) to pre-2015 MSPE: Brazil and control units
Impeachment as Treatment



than the first model. Among 18 countries, the estimated effect in Brazil is almost eight times the second country, as Figure 22 displays[11]. Despite not achieving the conventional norm, this model's p-value is 0.055, which is closer to acceptable values. The estimated effect of the impeachment on Brazilian democratic backsliding is also more significant than Bolsonaro's election effect. Nonetheless, I argue that Bolsonaro has continued to undermine Brazilian democracy, pushing it almost to the threshold[12] where Brazil is still a democratic country. If the trend is kept and according to V-Dem metrics, Brazil will turn into an electoral autocracy. Fortunately, winds are blowing in the opposite direction. Since Lula da Silva's victory in 2022, Brazil has recovered 0.01 points in its polyarchy index, ending the autocratization episode, according to Lührmann and Lindberg's (2019) rules.

[11] Sensitivity, placebo, and robustness checks are discussed in Appendix C.

[12] Considering V-Dem's confidence interval, in 2021, the Brazilian polyarchy index was somewhere between 0.6 and 0.72. Nonetheless, suppose the country had continued the pattern that started in 2015, when the backlash began, in the case of Bolsonaro's reelection. In that case, I speculate that in four more years, the likelihood of crossing the 0.5 line and turning into an electoral autocracy would be high.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to measure the effect of Bolsonaro's election on Brazilian democratic backsliding. I hypothesized that a populist leader's rise would undermine democracy. After discussing what democracy is and, more specifically, how one should define democratic backsliding, I discussed the method applied. The synthetic control method allows one to build better comparison units. Directly comparing Brazil to any other country will pose several limitations. It was shown that a synthetic Brazil resembles actual Brazil more closely, permitting one to make more reliable comparisons. I briefly engaged in the discussion around measuring democracy, bringing arguments of a recent contest that encloses several issues, such as conceptualization, operationalization, subjectivity and objectivity, and others.

Results point out that Bolsonaro indeed has an impact on Brazilian democratic backsliding. However, robustness checks raised some doubts about him as the sole accountable. To test another hypothesis that shook Brazil a few years before Bolsonaro's victory, I ran a second model with 2015 - the year Dilma Rousseff's impeachment trial was filed - as the intervention. The second test has proved more convincing, with a larger estimated effect.

Democracy is a hard-to-measure concept. Made of several components, one must observe many aspects of political and social life to classify a regime. V-Dem has the most used dataset for democratic backsliding and quality of democracy studies, among other subjects. To date, several studies have pointed out Bolsonaro as the cause of Brazilian democratic backlash, but no empirical evidence on it has been brought to the discussion, at least not at the aggregate level. By applying the synthetic control method on V-Dem data, I have shown that things are trickier than they look. Although Bolsonaro has deepened the autocratization process, he only went to the limit where Brazil is still a democracy. However, he is not the cause of the process. The democratic decline began before, precisely with Rousseff's impeachment. From then onwards, Brazilian democracy decreased yearly, moving from a liberal to an electoral democracy in Bolsonaro's first year in office.

Through a synthetic control method application, I conclude that Bolsonaro is part of the problem, not the problem itself. Using causal inference to state such an argument based on observational data might be slippery. However, it also brings some confidence that with all possibilities considered in the model, one has a more precise idea of what the cause of the outcome of interest is. This chapter illustrates the method's strength by demonstrating that a synthetic Brazil works better than any other single unit or a sample average for comparison purposes. It addresses a crucial question in Brazilian politics - the country's democratic backlash - by pointing out the events that caused it and measuring

their respective weights.

Finally, the chapter engages in two theoretical problems. First, the relationship between populism and democracy. Several scholars criticize normative perspectives on the debate since they input judgment a priori, characterizing populism as intrinsically evil or good to democracy. Here, I show Bolsonaro, almost consensually a populist leader, negatively impacted Brazilian democracy. Second, it touches on a more recent debate around the usage of impeachment as a mechanism to remove unpopular presidents. The idea that the misuse of such a tool might have drastic consequences for democracy is confirmed by the second model I have presented. In other words, impeachment is not only an instrument to remove minoritarian presidents from office. Indeed, when used without following standard steps in these cases, impeachment can harm democracy.

Conclusion

This dissertation contributed to populism studies and democratic backsliding fields by bringing evidence from Brazil. It showed that populism is present in Brazilian politics, although only a few studies are empirically concerned with it.

In Chapter 1, I brought up a narrative review to address an essentially contested concept: populism. I gave the reader an overview of how populism has been defined over time, focusing on Brazilian literature from the 1950s to the 1970s and then examining contemporary endeavors. I advocate for a minimal concept, specifically, the one offered by the ideational approach, since its careful design allows one to apply it empirically. Because of its little intension (only a few attributes) and high extension (capacity to travel), this highly positioned concept on Sartori's (1970) abstraction ladder proved to be the most appropriate. Consequently, I have applied it in the two subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 2, I examined populism in official presidential speeches. I looked at Fernando Collor de Mello's, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's, and Jair Bolsonaro's first two years in office. By comparing them, I validated Ricci et al. (2021) findings but also showed that the number of occasions they made populist appeals was underestimated. Furthermore, I brought details of their populisms, identifying who is the people and the elite in their discourse, as well as pointing out the main topics around which their populism revolves.

Chapter 3 follows the same logic as its predecessor. However, it focuses on an overlooked subject in populism studies: Brazilian political parties. I analyzed election manifestos from four electoral cycles to show that populism exists in Brazil, although among insignificant radical left parties. Yet, even though it was only a fleeting moment, mainstream and right-wing parties also made populist appeals in the 2018 elections, showing that populism is potentially contagious. Despite ephemeral among mainstream parties, populism is a constant among the radical left. I have shown in detail how they build their populistic appeals and pointed out they do not menace Brazilian democracy since these parties have no significant presence in congress and no slim chance of winning presidential elections.

Finally, I finished by discussing the relationship between populism and democracy. By asking if Brazilian democracy would have declined if Bolsonaro had not been elected

in 2018, I found that the democratic erosion began before he took office. Using the synthetic control method, I brought evidence that the baseline of Brazilian democratic erosion is instead Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Bolsonaro, in turn, is a symptom or a consequence and certainly a continuer of the decline.

This dissertation has deepened previous knowledge on populist leaders by widening the data the literature has so far analyzed. It also brought new evidence about parties, overcoming the common sense that in Brazil, populism is only about leaders. Finally, it brought evidence that Bolsonaro was not the sole responsible for the democratic decline. Future research should focus on a few yet-to-address topics. First, methods and techniques must be improved to assess and measure populism through machine learning and large language models. Even though dictionary approaches save time, they still demand hard work. When supervised machine learning applications achieve better performances, it will be possible to carefully analyze large corpora of text, considering contextual and semantic variations. Despite significant efforts in this direction (Bonikowski et al., 2022), I insist that results are yet to be improved.

Second, there are a few neglected subjects in the field. For instance, the literature forgets populism in campaign speeches, save for a few exceptions (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020). However, even those are limited since they only focused on Bolsonaro's case. Although Brazil has no dataset compiling campaign speeches throughout history, it is crucial to find a way to organize that - if not regarding the past, at least the future. Talking about the past, experts should analyze speeches by presidents of the *Populist Democracy*. Initial efforts have been made (Venturelli & Tamaki, 2021), but these are exploratory studies. Yet, to go further than the theoretical critiques about how the period has been defined historically, primary results show these leaders were not populists. The topic deserves a careful assessment.

The specialized literature entirely ignores populism on the local level and the legislative branch. That is not specific to Brazilian literature but is a general shortcoming. Although political speeches regarding state governors might be difficult to access, parties running in gubernatorial elections in Brazil must publicize an election manifesto. Beyond being mandatory, they are available for those interested in analyzing them. Legislator pronunciations, in turn, are public to anyone who wants to know what congress members in Brazil say. The demand side of populism is yet to be analyzed in Brazil. Although a few studies investigated if populist attitudes predicted voting for Bolsonaro in 2018 (Silva et al., 2022), there is a lot to be said about populist individuals/citizens in Brazil. However, to do so, the literature needs populist scales and questions included in public opinion surveys, which is absent in all Brazilian institutes.

In conclusion, what has been done in this dissertation is a drop in the ocean. The agenda in populism studies focusing on Brazil and Latin America is broad. To carefully

address all layers of populism, it is essential to recognize that Brazilian political science should fully embrace the subject. Hopefully, this research conveyed the message in a sufficiently compelling fashion.

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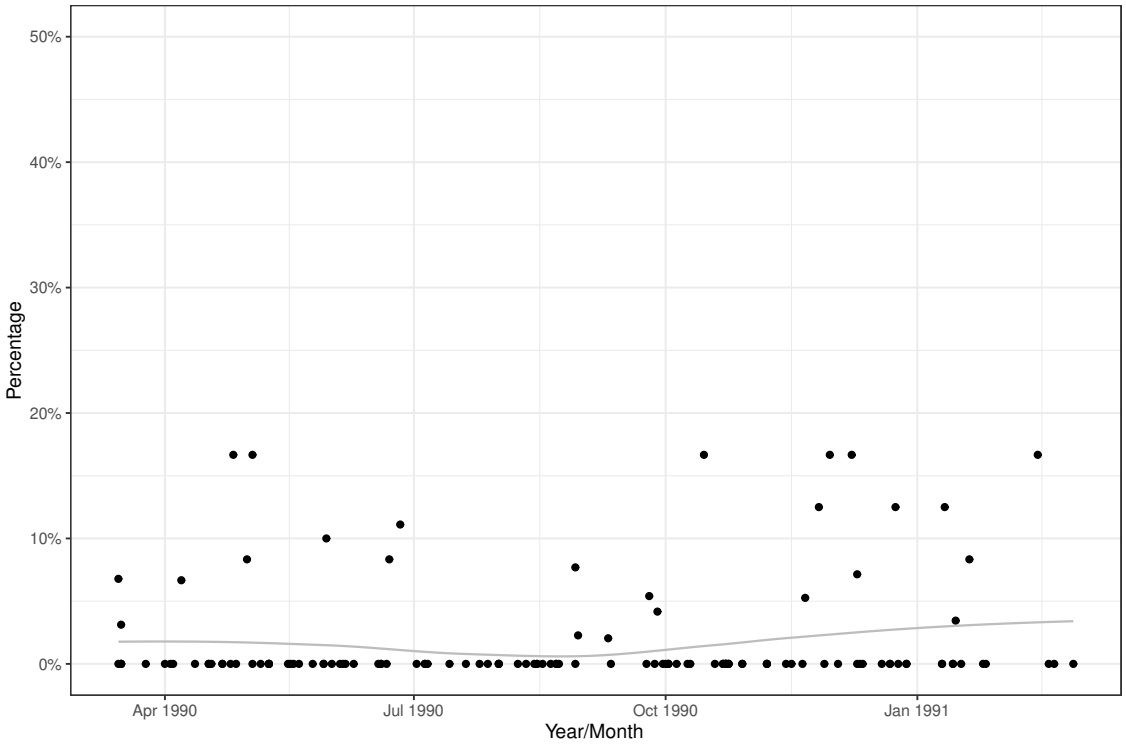
Appendices

A

Chapter 2 Appendix

The Chapter 2 appendix brings mostly figures to support the arguments presented in the results section. Table 13 shows the people's and the elites' dictionaries.

Figure 23 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Fernando Collor de Mellos's Populist Speeches (1990 - 1991)
All Speeches



Figures 23 to 26 show how populism varies in Collor's, Lula da Silva's, and Bolsonaro's speeches through the first two years of these presidents in office. Different from the graphics in Chapter 2's results section, these plots consider all speeches, not only populist ones.

Figure 27 shows the density of words per paragraph. Collor and Lula da Silva have

Table 13 – Populism Dictionary

Elite Dictionary
“ambientais”, “ambiental”, “ambientalista”, “ambientalistas”, “aquecimento global”, “banco”, “bancos”, “bandeira”, “banqueiro”, “banqueiros”, “brasilia”, “burguês”, “burguesa”, “burguesia”, “china”, “classe”, “classe alta”, “classe política”, “comunismo”, “comunista”, “comunistas”, “congresso”, “corporativistas”, “corrupção”, “corrupta”, “corruptas”, “corrupto”, “corruptos”, “cuba”, “demagogia”, “dinheiro”, “direita”, “direitista”, “ditador”, “ditadores”, “ditadura”, “ditatoriais”, “ditatorial”, “doutrina”, “doutrinação”, “elite”, “elites”, “empreendedor”, “empreendedora”, “empreendedoras”, “empreendedores”, “empresária”, “empresarial”, “empresárias”, “empresário”, “empresários”, “esquerda”, “esquerdalha”, “esquerdista”, “estado”, “Estado”, “fascista”, “fmi”, “foro de são paulo”, “gay”, “gays”, “gayzista”, “gênero”, “globalismo”, “globalista”, “globalistas”, “globo”, “governadores”, “governante”, “governantes”, “governos”, “ideologia”, “ideologias”, “ideológica”, “ideológicas”, “ideológico”, “ideológicos”, “imperialismo”, “imprensa”, “indígenas”, “índio”, “índios”, “inimiga”, “inimigas”, “inimigo”, “inimigos”, “judiciário”, “juiz”, “juízes”, “justiça”, “lgbt”, “máfia”, “marajá”, “marajás”, “maus brasileiros”, “mercado”, “mídia”, “mídias”, “militância”, “militâncias”, “militante”, “militantes”, “minoria”, “minorias”, “oligarquia”, “oms”, “ong”, “ongs”, “onu”, “partidária”, “partidárias”, “partidário”, “partidários”, “partido”, “partidos”, “petista”, “petistas”, “petralha”, “petralhada”, “petralhas”, “poder absoluto”, “poderoso”, “poderosos”, “político”, “políticos”, “populismo”, “populista”, “populistas”, “privilegiada”, “privilegiadas”, “privilegiado”, “privilegiados”, “privilégio”, “privilégios”, “pt”, “PT”, “quadrilha”, “quilombolas”, “rica”, “ricas”, “rico”, “ricos”, “setor privado”, “setor público”, “socialismo”, “socialista”, “socialistas”, “stf”, “sudeste”, “sul”, “supremo”, “supremo tribunal federal”, “totalitarismo”, “tse”, “velha política”, “venezuela”, “viés ideológico”.
People Dictionary
“a gente”, “amazônia”, “amiga”, “amigas”, “amigo”, “amigos”, “brasil”, “brasileira”, “brasileiras”, “brasileiro”, “brasileiros”, “cidadão”, “cidadãos”, “classe”, “média”, “classe”, “popular”, “cristã”, “cristão”, “cristãos”, “cristãs”, “família”, “massa”, “nação”, “nordeste”, “nordestina”, “nordestinas”, “nordestino”, “nordestinos”, “Norte”, “nós”, “país”, “pátria”, “pobre”, “pobres”, “pobreza”, “população”, “povo”, “trabalhador”, “trabalhadora”, “trabalhadoras”, “trabalhadores”.

most of their paragraphs with something between 50 and 150 words, whereas Bolsonaro tends to present shorter paragraphs, between 50 and 100 words.

Figure 28, in turn, shows the density of paragraphs per speech. Here, one sees Collor and Bolsonaro have shorter speeches, whereas Lula tends to talk more. But does the length of speeches correlate with the likelihood of it being populist?

Figures 29 to 31 show whether the number of paragraphs in a speech predicts whether it is going to be populist. All presidents have a similar and obvious pattern, with longer speeches being more likely to be populist. It is obvious because the rule adopted to classify a speech as populist states that a single populist paragraph is necessary and sufficient for the entire speech to be categorized as such. However, a difference is noted.

Figure 24 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Lula da Silva's Populist Speeches (1990 - 1991)
All Speeches

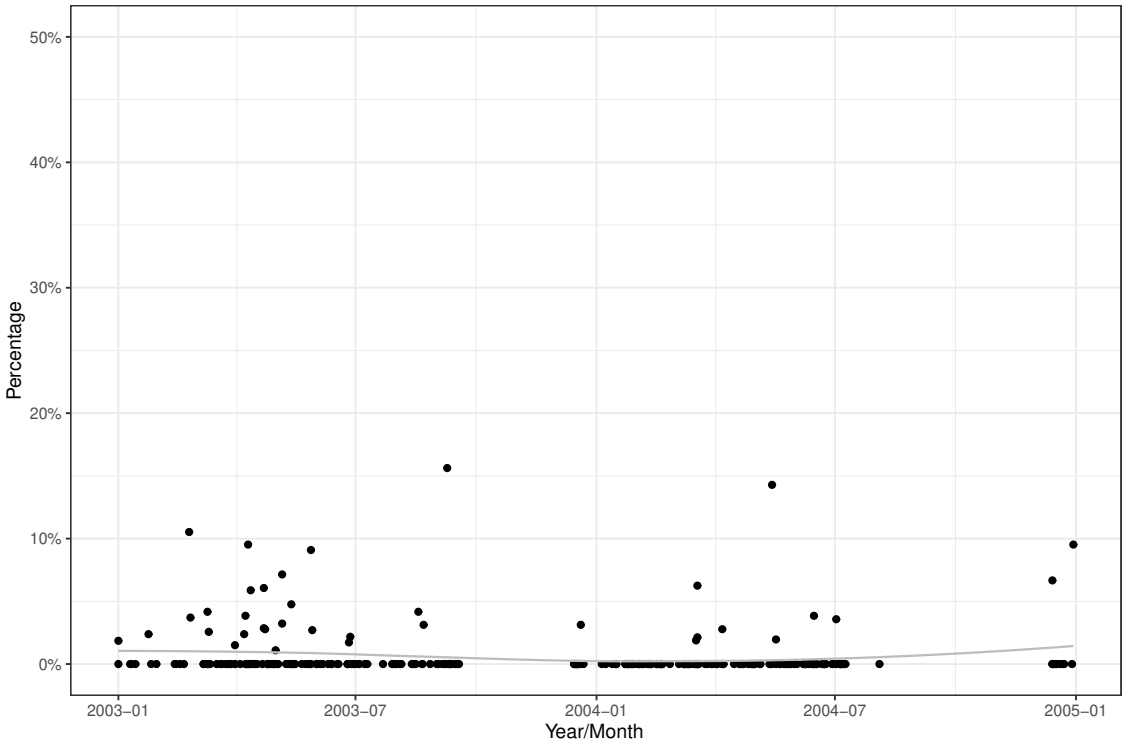


Figure 25 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Jair Bolsonaro's Populist Speeches (1990 - 1991)
All Speeches

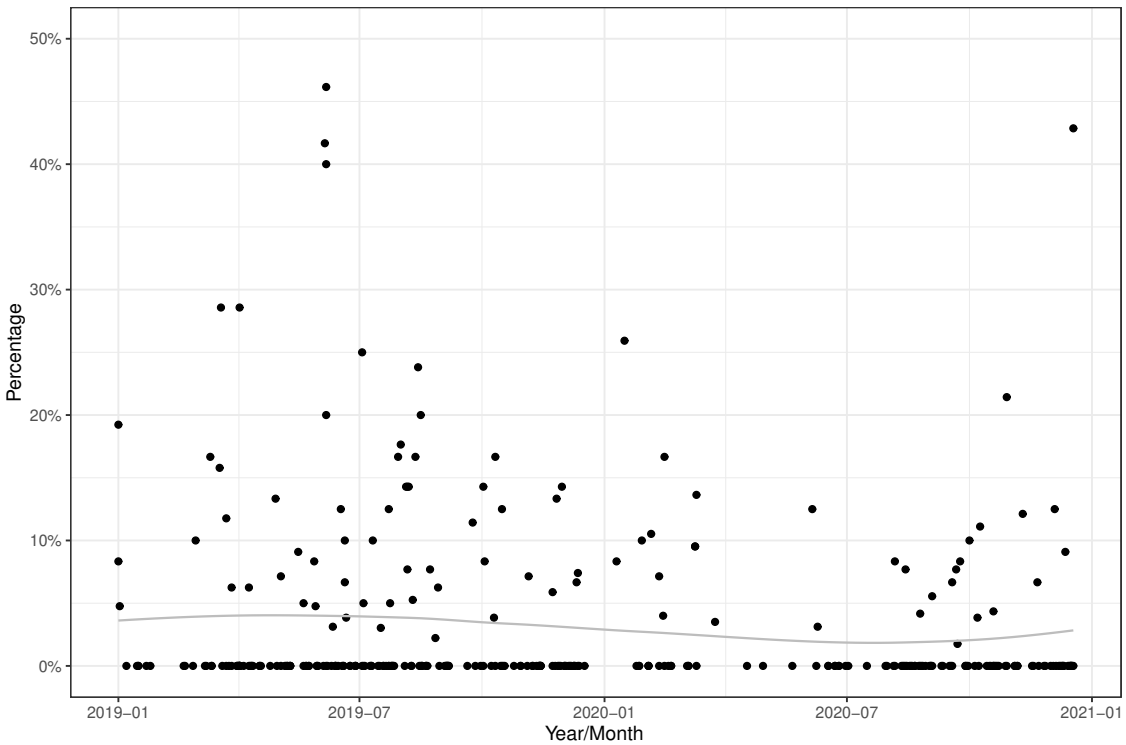


Figure 26 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Presidential Speeches
All Speeches

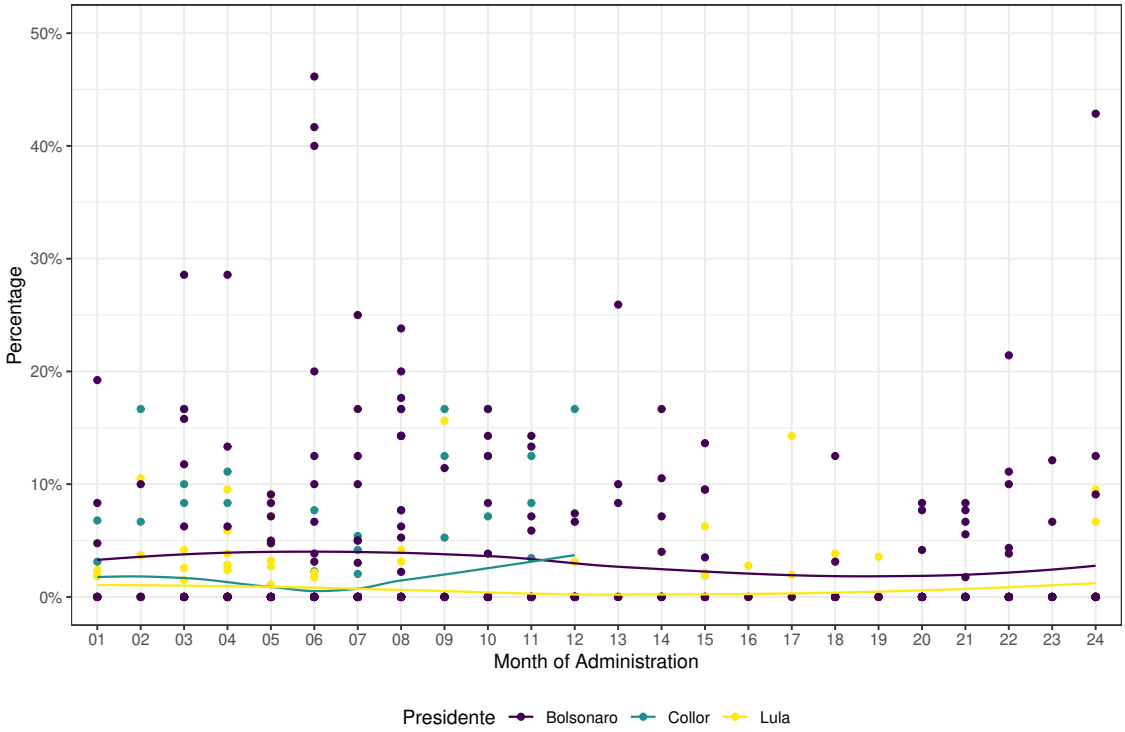
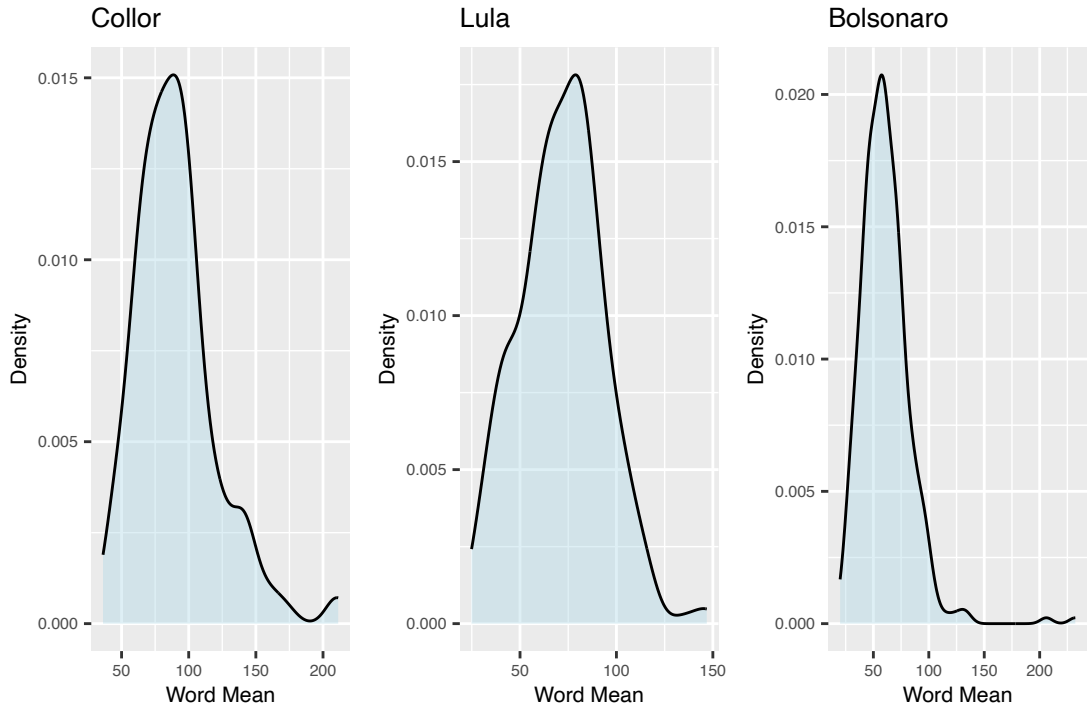


Figure 27 – Word Average per Paragraph by President



Bolsonaro is more consistently populist according to the number of paragraphs in his speeches, as depicted in Figure 31, with a smaller standard error and longest speeches

Figure 28 – Paragraph Average per Speech by President

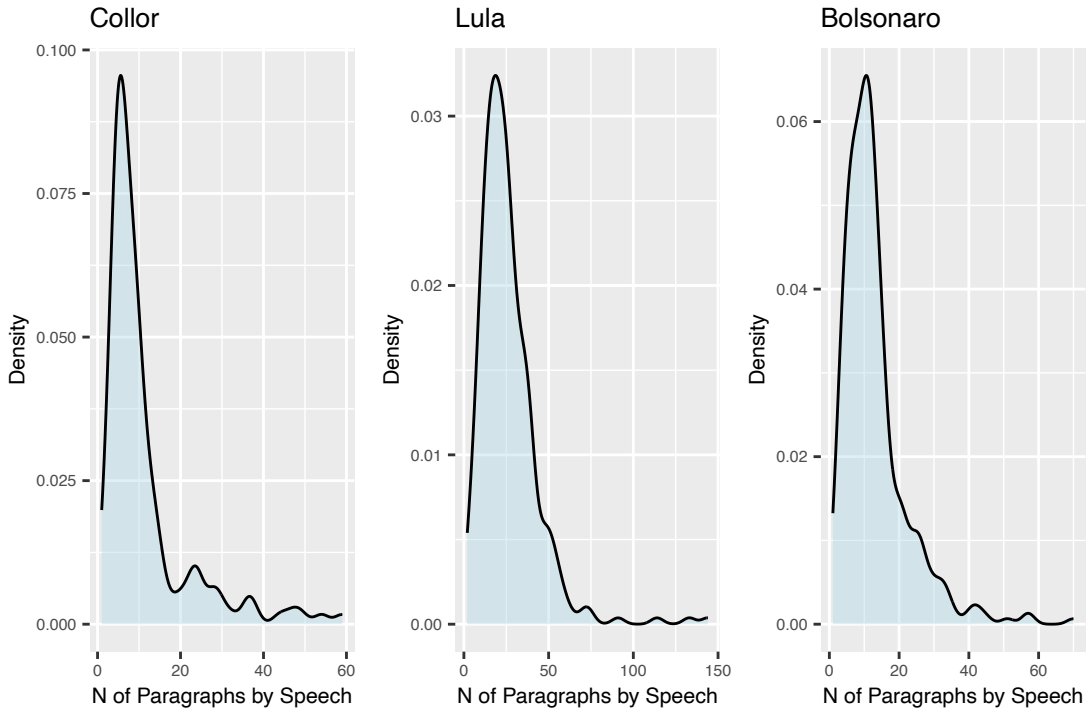
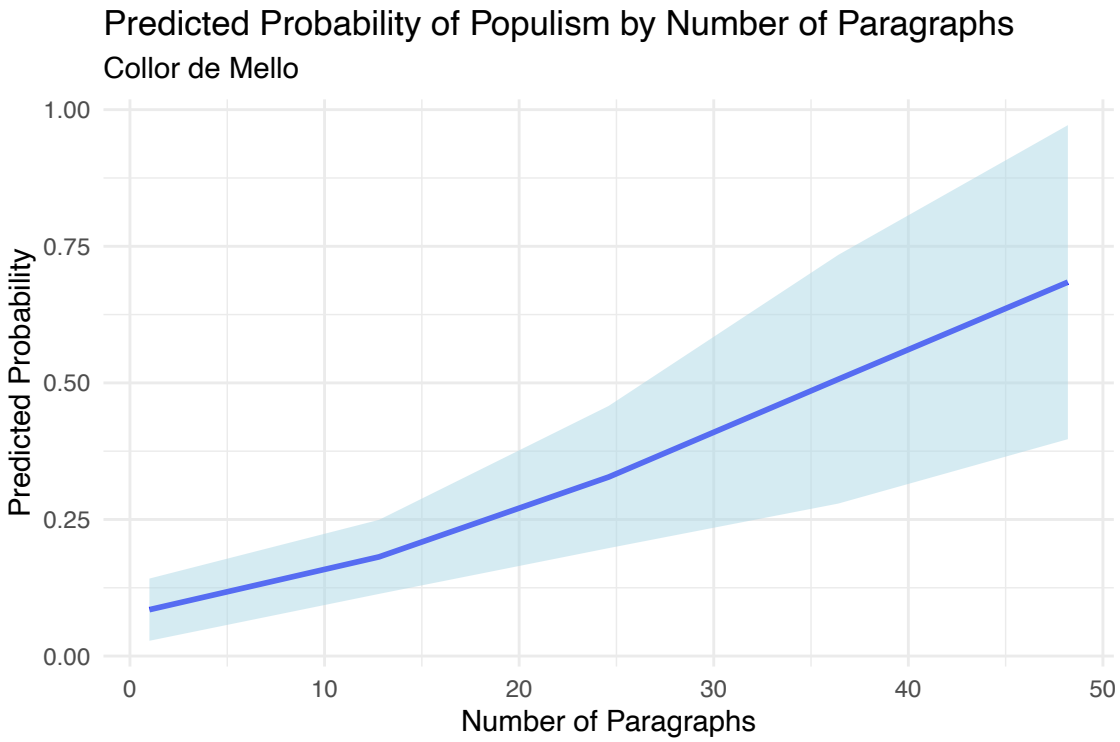


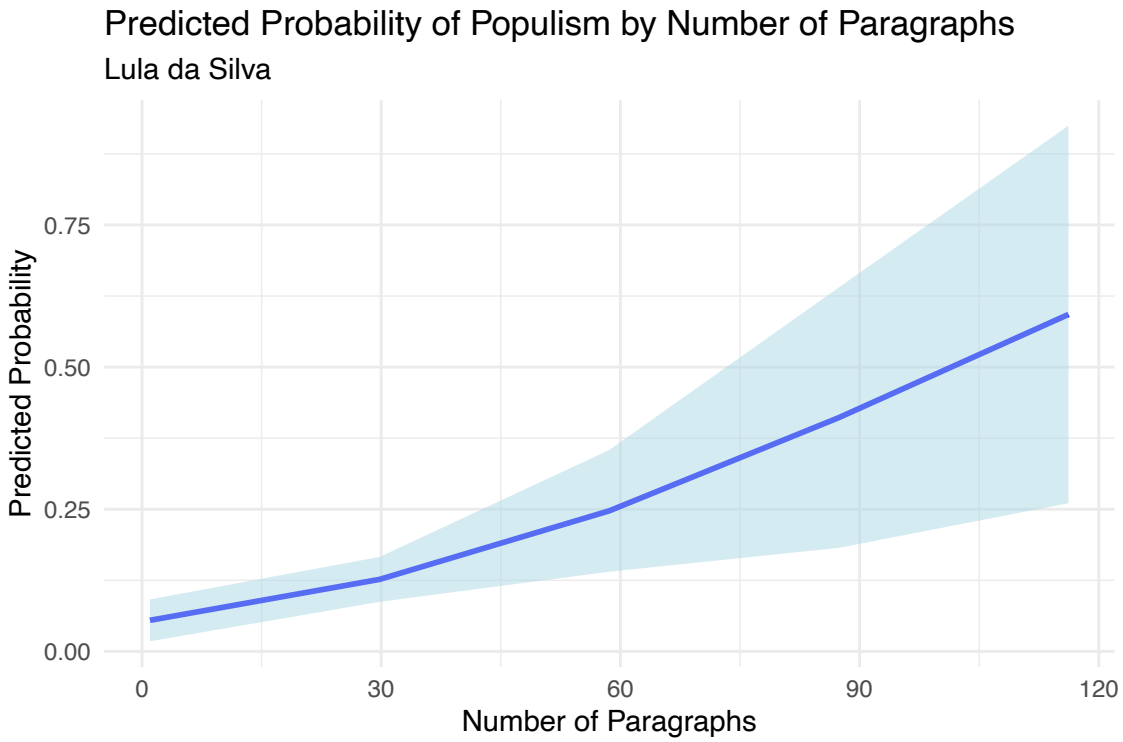
Figure 29 – Predicted Probability of Populism by Number of Paragraphs Collor de Mello



with a probability of being populist close to 100%, once one populist paragraph is a necessary and sufficient condition for the speech to be coded as such. Therefore, the more paragraphs, the greater the likelihood of being populist. In Collor's and Lula's speeches,

things seem to be random. Collor's more extended speeches have a probability between 37% and 98% to be populist, whereas Lula's prolongated pronunciations are likelihood of being populist are between 25% and 83%.

Figure 30 – Predicted Probability of Populism by Number of Paragraphs
Lula da Silva



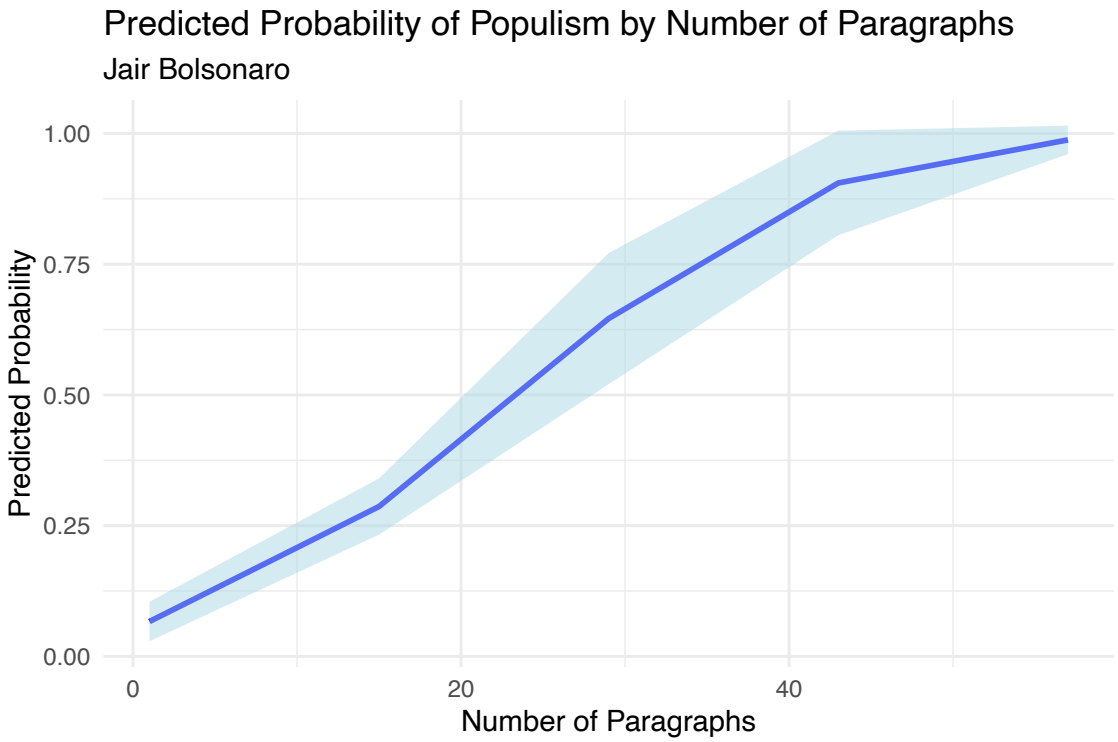
Finally, Table 14 shows a summary of data for Chapter 2.

Table 14 – Statistics of Presidents' Speeches

I[1]	II[2]	III[3]	IV[4]	V[5]	VI[6]	VII[7]	VIII[8]	IX[9]
Collor	137	25 (18.2%)	1559	31 (1.9%)	6.4%	21.4	10.3	16.7%
Lula da Silva	291	36 (12.4%)	7822	47 (0.6%)	3.6%	37.8	17.5	15.6%
Bolsonaro	334	88 (26.3%)	4463	171 (3.8%)	9.7%	19.8	9.4	46.2%
Total	762	149 (19.6%)	13844	249 (1.8%)	7.1%	18.17	14.8	46.2%

[1] President.
[2] Number of Speeches.
[3] Number of Populist Speeches.
[4] Number of Paragraphs.
[5] Number of Populist Paragraphs.
[6] Avg. Intensity of Populist Speeches.
[7] Avg. Paragraphs by Speech.
[8] Paragraphs Std. Dev. by Speech.
[9] Max Intensity.

Figure 31 – Predicted Probability of Populism by Number of Paragraphs
Jair Bolsonaro



B

Chapter 3 Appendix

Appendix B brings a little information to support arguments made through the third chapter or to make it possible to visualize a few things differently.

Table 15 shows the terms related to the people and the elite in their respective dictionaries.

Figure 32 shows how populism varies in radical-left parties' election manifestos. PCB became more and more populist over time. PSTU presents ups and downs but is always populist at high levels. Between 2010 and 2022, their manifestos always had more than 10% populist paragraphs. PSOL was non-populist in 2010, had almost 20% populist paragraphs in their 2014 manifesto, and then again scored near 0%. PCO's 2010 manifesto has only 2 paragraphs, and they are not populists. In 2014, in turn, they were the third most populist party. The PT works as a control here because outside the radical left realm is the closest party. The party made populist appeals only in 2010 and 2018, even though at very low levels.

In the 2018 elections, even mainstream parties made populist appeals, as is the case of the PSBD and the PT, as Figure 33. Yet, their manifestos had around 2% of populist paragraphs only. PSL's elections manifest, the party through which Bolsonaro ran and won that year, had around 6% of populist paragraphs. Figure 34 shows how mainstream and Bolsonaro's parties behaved in the 2022 elections. The PSDB did not launch a candidate and supported Union Brazil. Only the PL made populist appeals, at 0.3% level. Therefore, insignificant.

As mentioned in the results section of Chapter 3, to explore the main terms and how they correlate with ideological placement, I ran a structural topic modeling. Figure 35 shows the three main terms in each topic and what is the expected proportion of these words in a manifesto. Figure 36 displays how each topic correlates to ideology. In other words, if ideology predicts the topics in a manifesto. As one sees, topics 1 and 12 are statistically correlated with left-wing parties, while topics 5, 8, 13, and 15 are associated

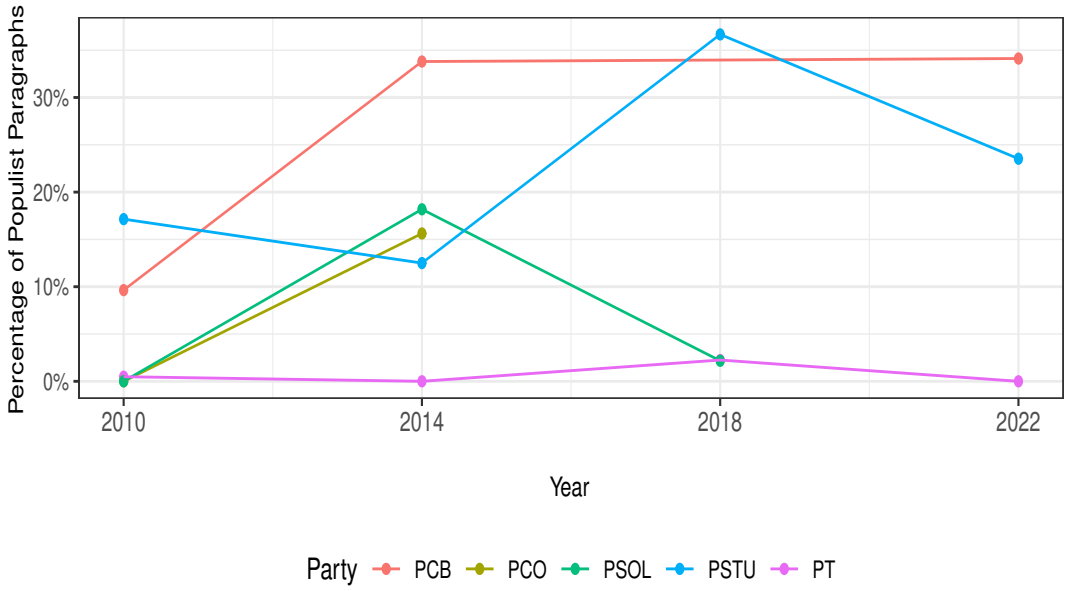
Table 15 – Populism Dictionary

Elite Dictionary
“ambientais”, “ambiental”, “ambientalista”, “ambientalistas”, “aquecimento global”, “banco”, “bancos”, “bandeira”, “banqueiro”, “banqueiros”, “brasilia”, “burguês”, “burguesa”, “burguesia”, “china”, “classe”, “classe alta”, “classe política”, “comunismo”, “comunista”, “comunistas”, “congresso”, “corporativistas”, “corrupção”, “corrupta”, “corruptas”, “corrupto”, “corruptos”, “cuba”, “demagogia”, “dinheiro”, “direita”, “direitista”, “ditador”, “ditadores”, “ditadura”, “ditatoriais”, “ditatorial”, “doutrina”, “doutrinação”, “elite”, “elites”, “empreendedor”, “empreendedora”, “empreendedoras”, “empreendedores”, “empresária”, “empresarial”, “empresárias”, “empresário”, “empresários”, “esquerda”, “esquerdalha”, “esquerdista”, “estado”, “Estado”, “fascista”, “fmi”, “foro de são paulo”, “gay”, “gays”, “gayzista”, “gênero”, “globalismo”, “globalista”, “globalistas”, “globo”, “governadores”, “governante”, “governantes”, “governos”, “ideologia”, “ideologias”, “ideológica”, “ideológicas”, “ideológico”, “ideológicos”, “imperialismo”, “imprensa”, “indígenas”, “índio”, “índios”, “inimiga”, “inimigas”, “inimigo”, “inimigos”, “judiciário”, “juiz”, “juízes”, “justiça”, “lgbt”, “máfia”, “marajá”, “marajás”, “maus brasileiros”, “mercado”, “mídia”, “mídias”, “militância”, “militâncias”, “militante”, “militantes”, “minoria”, “minorias”, “oligarquia”, “oms”, “ong”, “ongs”, “onu”, “partidária”, “partidárias”, “partidário”, “partidários”, “partido”, “partidos”, “petista”, “petistas”, “petralha”, “petralhada”, “petralhas”, “poder absoluto”, “poderoso”, “poderosos”, “político”, “políticos”, “populismo”, “populista”, “populistas”, “privilegiada”, “privilegiadas”, “privilegiado”, “privilegiados”, “privilégio”, “privilégios”, “pt”, “PT”, “quadrilha”, “quilombolas”, “rica”, “ricas”, “rico”, “ricos”, “setor privado”, “setor público”, “socialismo”, “socialista”, “socialistas”, “stf”, “sudeste”, “sul”, “supremo”, “supremo tribunal federal”, “totalitarismo”, “tse”, “velha política”, “venezuela”, “viés ideológico”.
People Dictionary
“a gente”, “amazônia”, “amiga”, “amigas”, “amigo”, “amigos”, “brasil”, “brasileira”, “brasileiras”, “brasileiro”, “brasileiros”, “cidadão”, “cidadãos”, “classe”, “média”, “classe”, “popular”, “cristã”, “cristão”, “cristãos”, “cristãs”, “família”, “massa”, “nação”, “nordeste”, “nordestina”, “nordestinas”, “nordestino”, “nordestinos”, “Norte”, “nós”, “país”, “pátria”, “pobre”, “pobres”, “pobreza”, “população”, “povo”, “trabalhador”, “trabalhadora”, “trabalhadoras”, “trabalhadores”.

with right-wing parties at statistically significant levels.

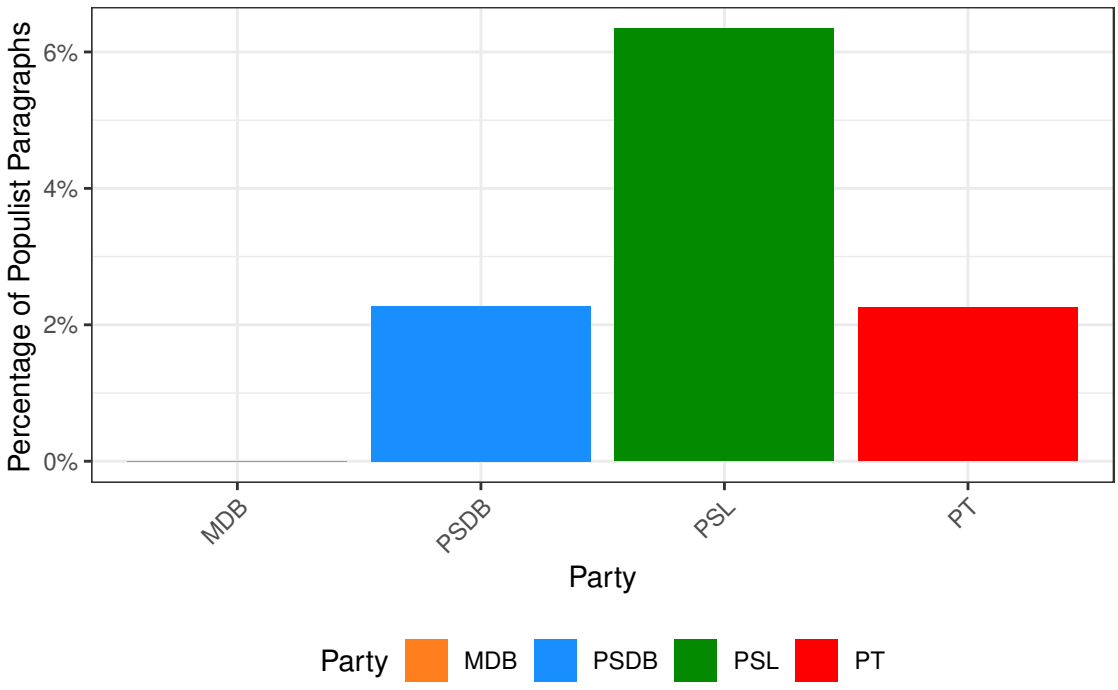
Figures 37 to 51 show the main terms in the radical left parties and PT's election manifestos. They are here to support the discussion of the main terms used by these parties. PT figures as a control again. The graphics on the left show the most frequently used terms in populist paragraphs, whereas those on the right represent the manifestos in their entirety. They are mainly to show how the themes present in their manifesto change or continue and how different terms related to the people have been mobilized by these parties throughout the years.

Figure 32 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in the Radical Left (2010 - 2022)
PT as control



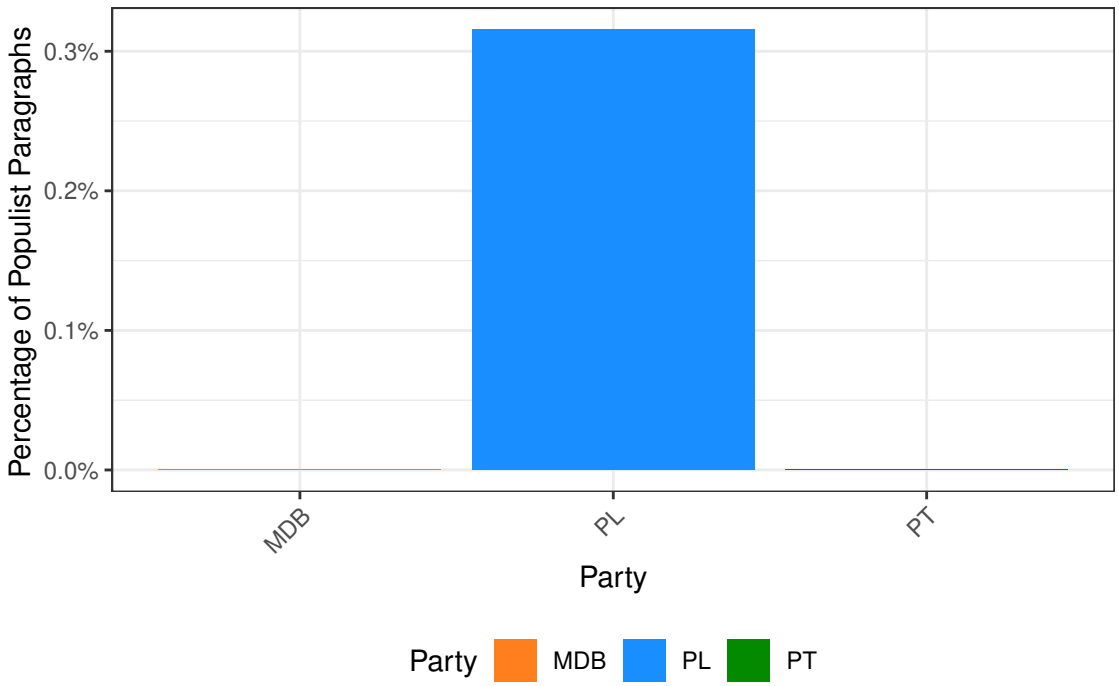
Source: Made by the author with data from https://divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br

Figure 33 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Mainstream Parties (2018)
Bolsonaro running for the PSL



Source: Made by the author with data from https://divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br

Figure 34 – Percentage of Populist Paragraphs in Mainstream Parties (2022)
Bolsonaro running for the PL



Source: Made by the author with data from https://divulgacandcontas.tse.jus.br

Figure 35 – Structural Topic Modeling

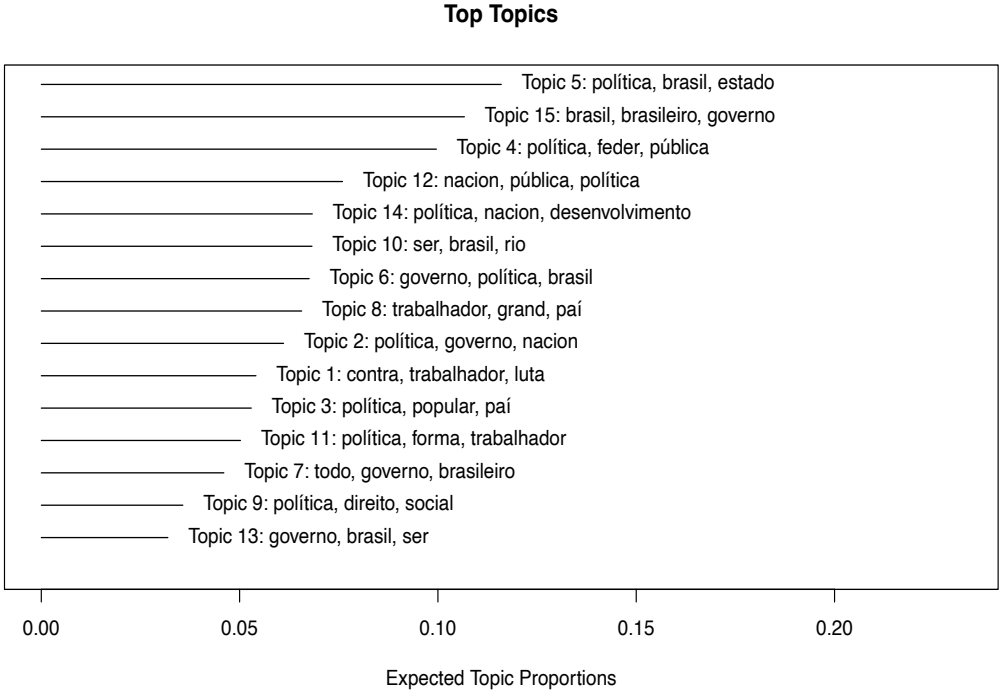


Figure 36 – Ideology and Topics

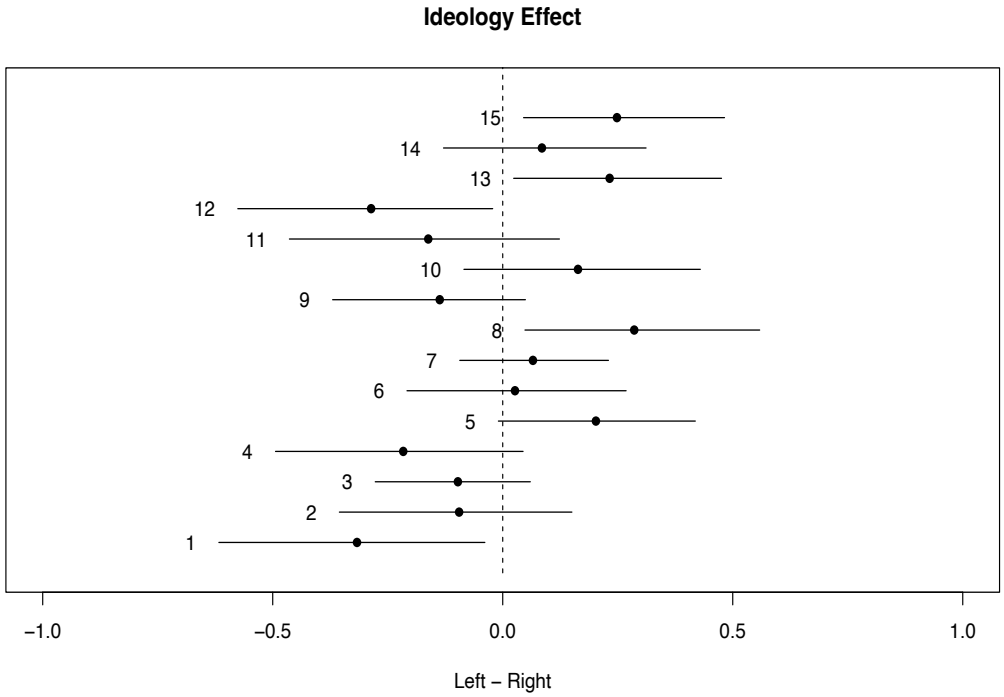


Figure 37 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSTU - 2010

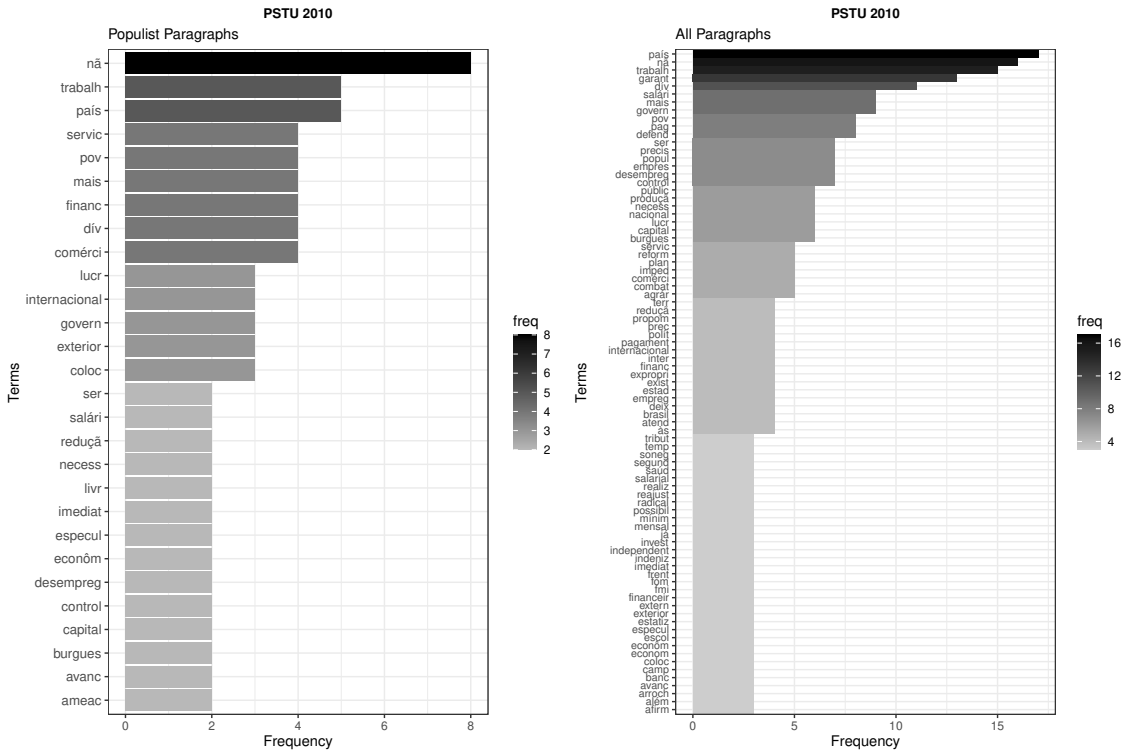


Figure 38 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSTU - 2014

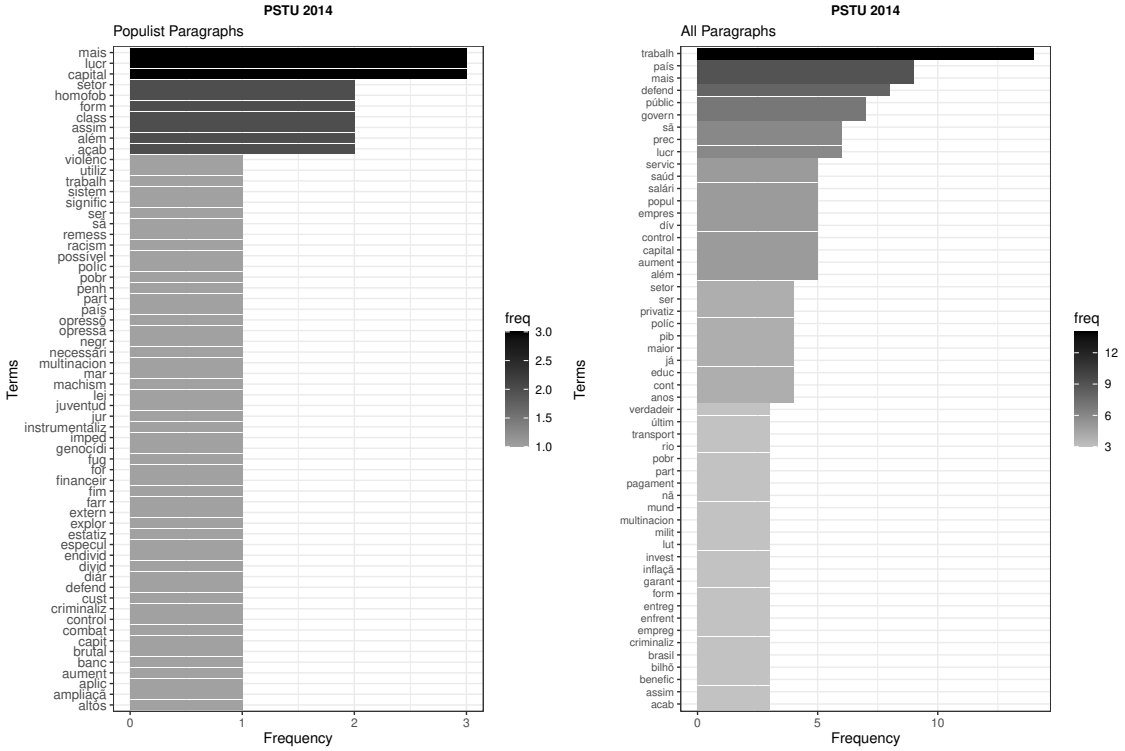


Figure 39 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSTU - 2018

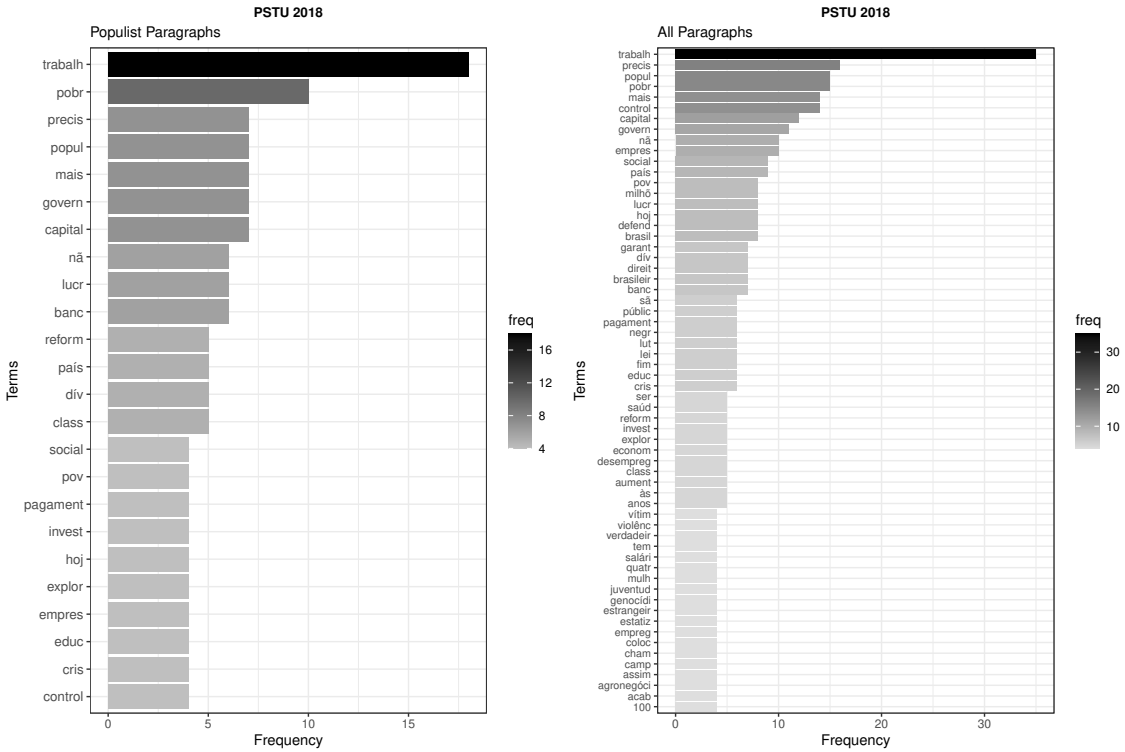


Figure 40 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSTU - 2022

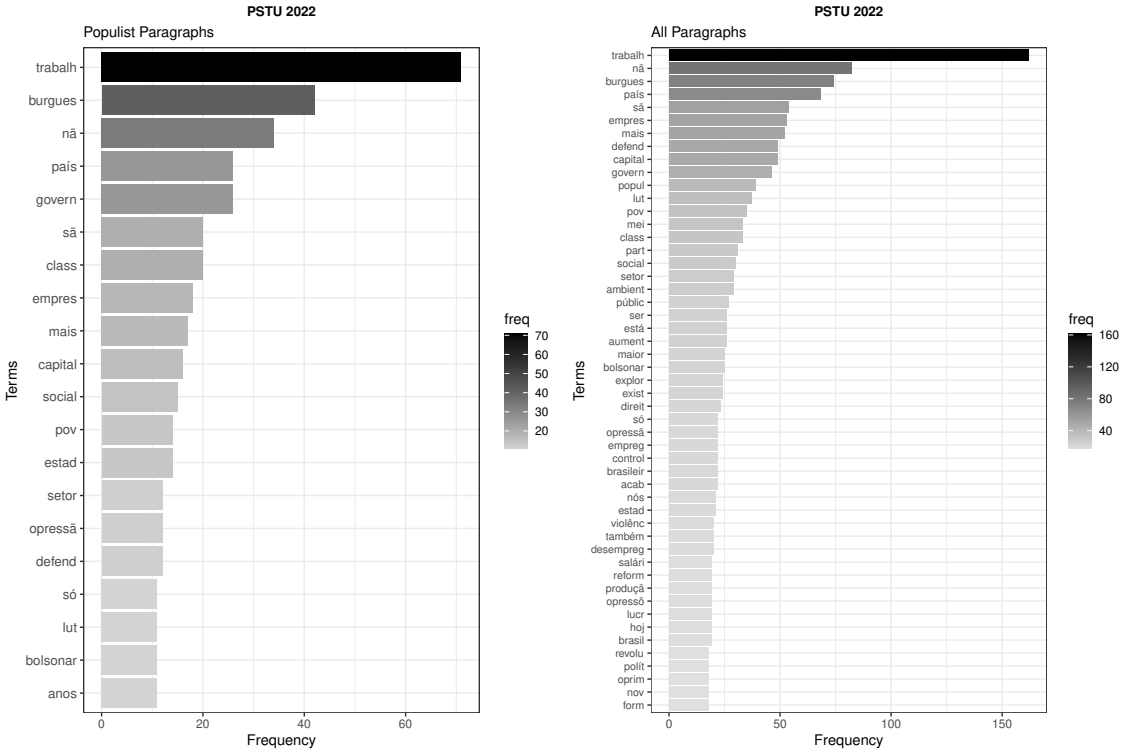


Figure 41 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PCB - 2010

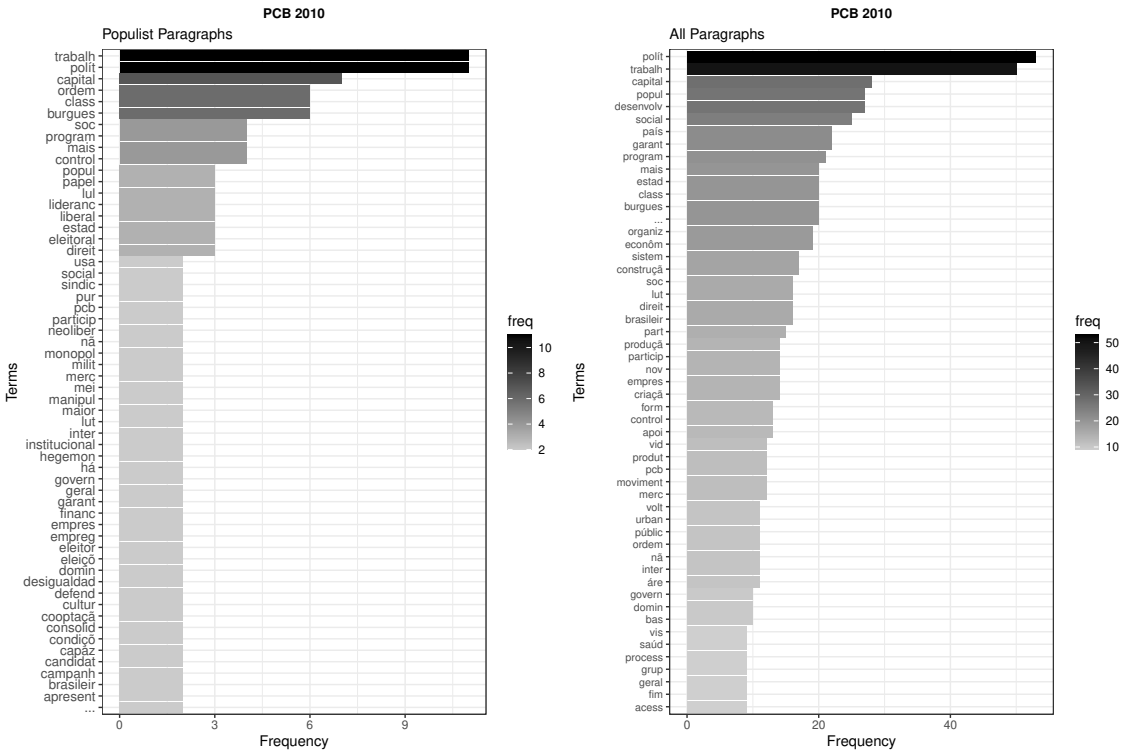


Figure 42 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PCB - 2014

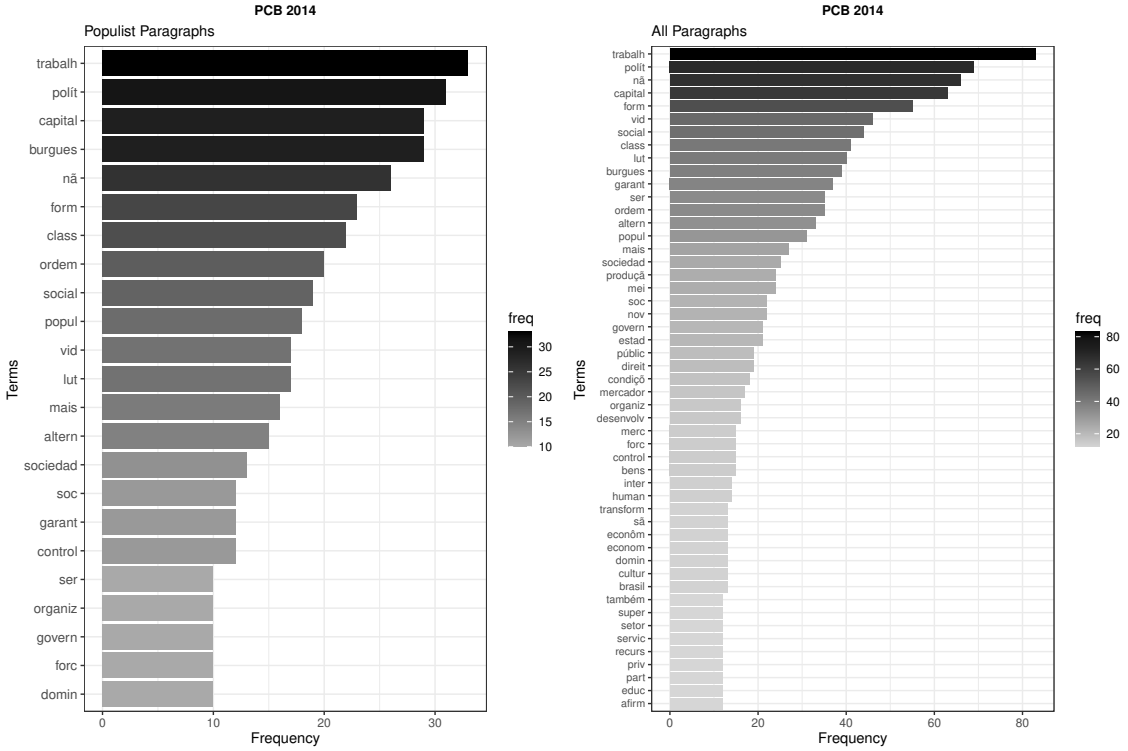


Figure 43 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PCB - 2022

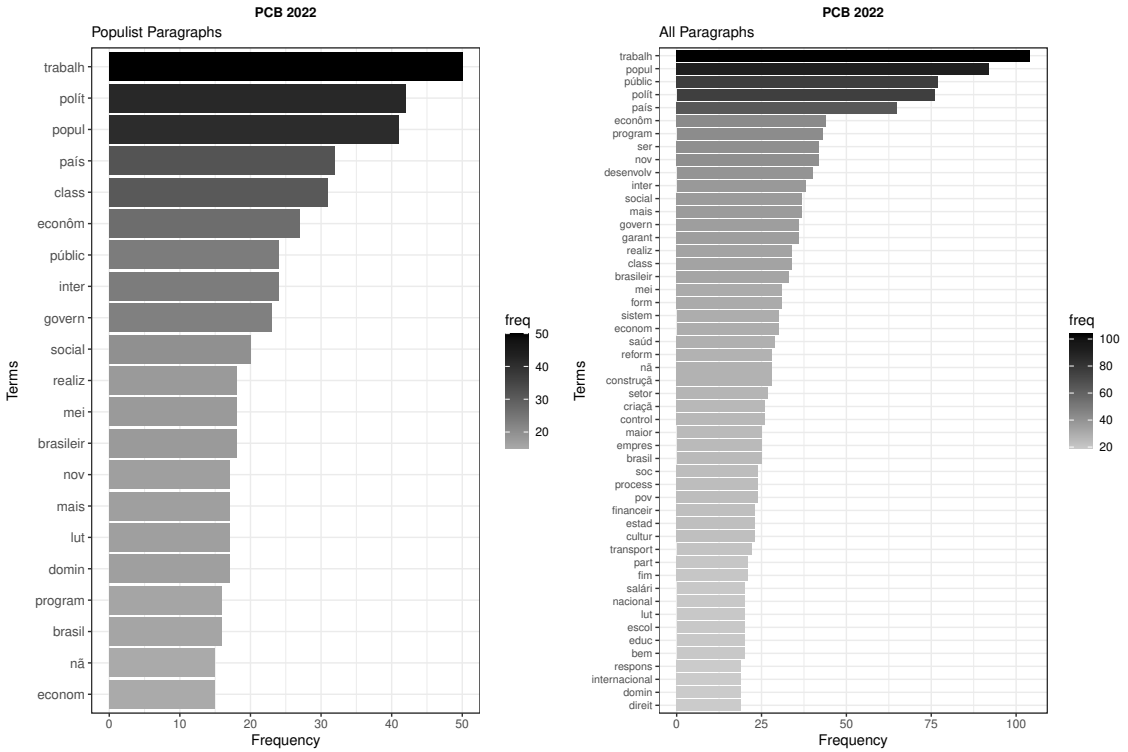


Figure 44 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PCO - 2014

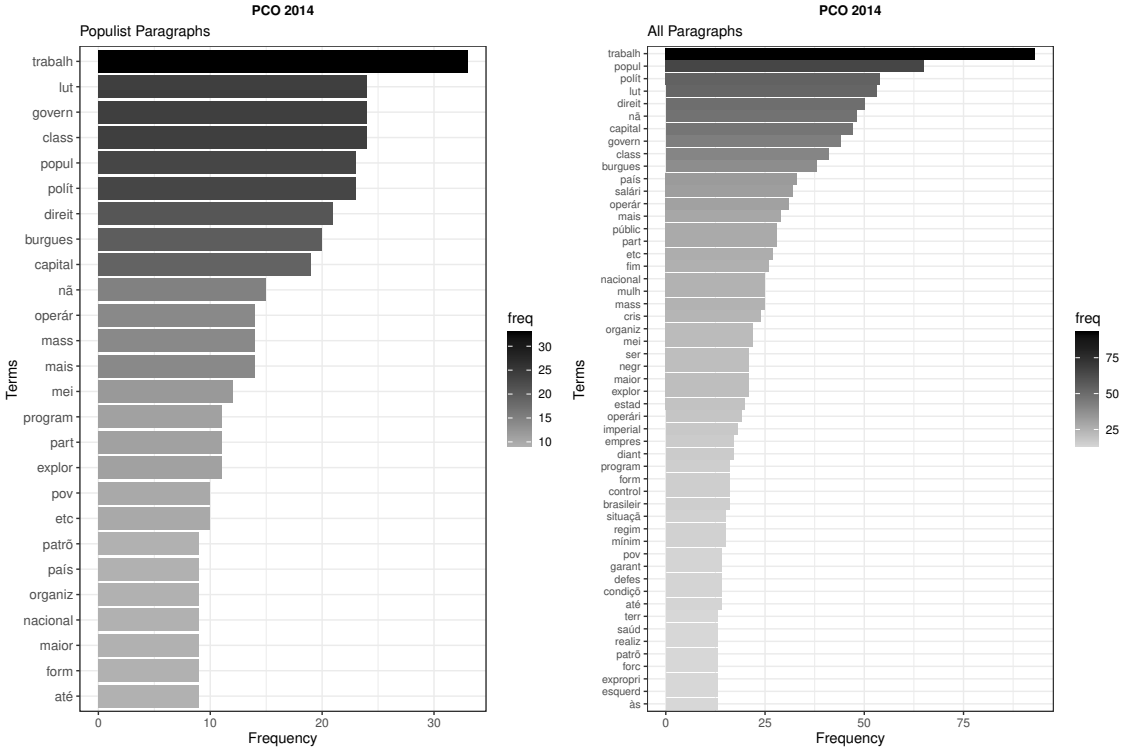


Figure 45 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSOL - 2010

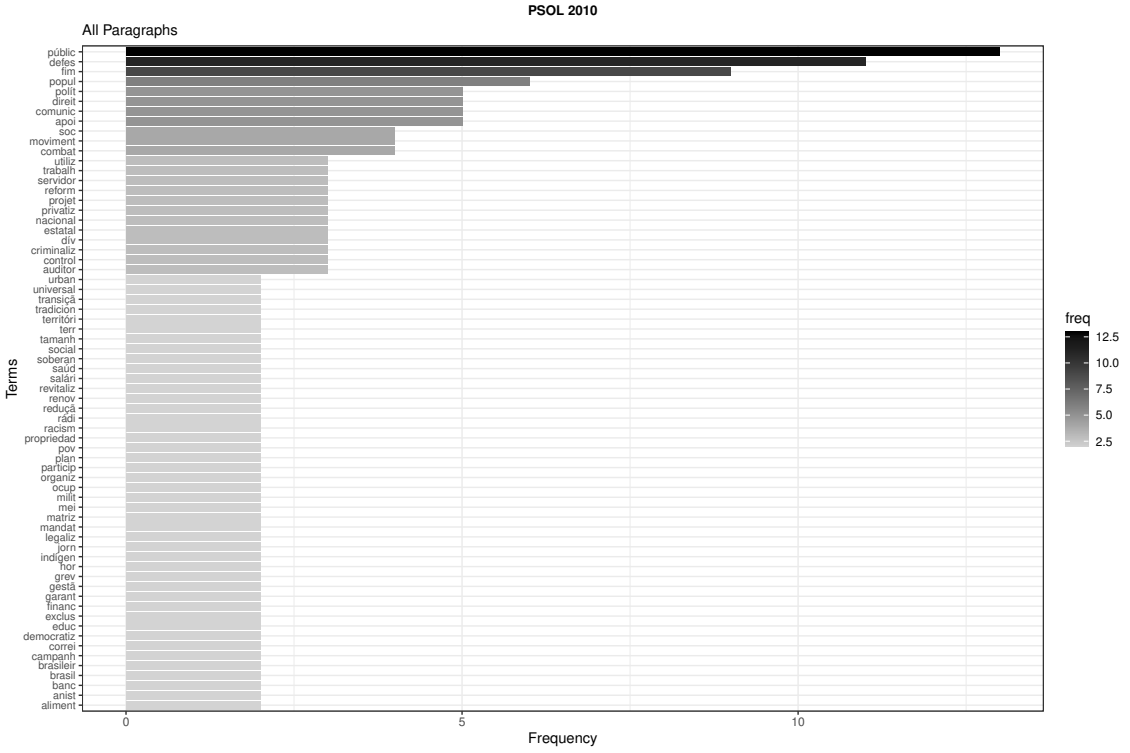


Figure 46 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSOL - 2014

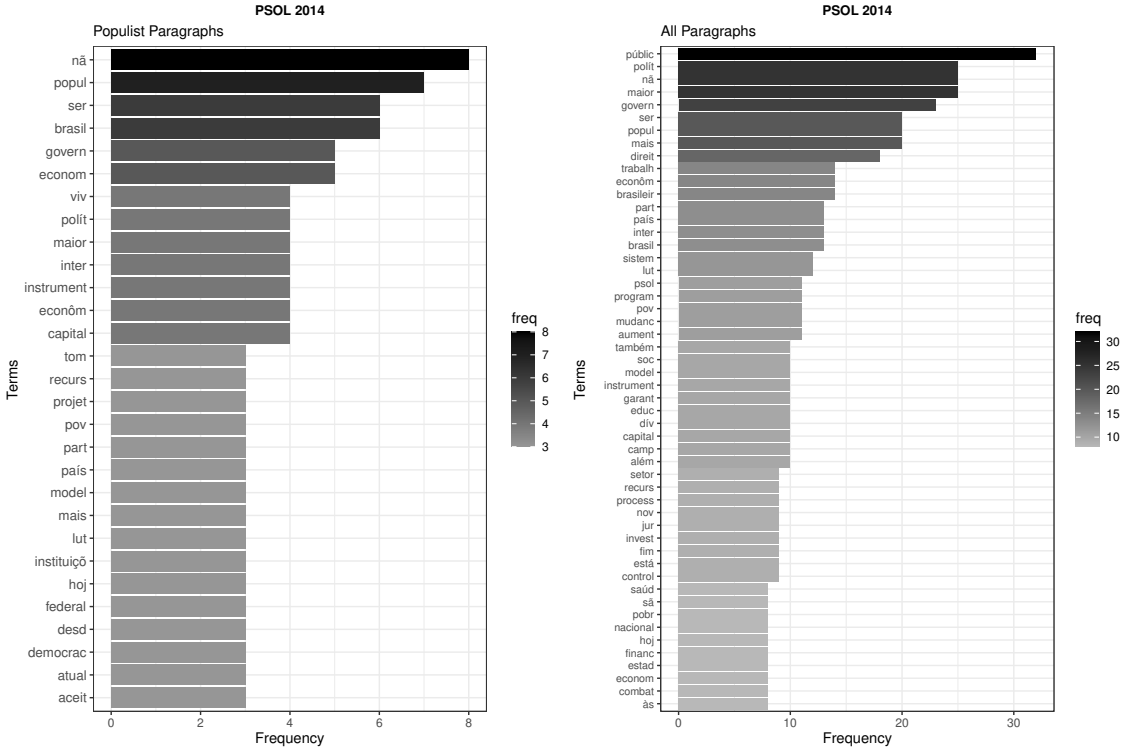


Figure 47 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PSOL - 2018

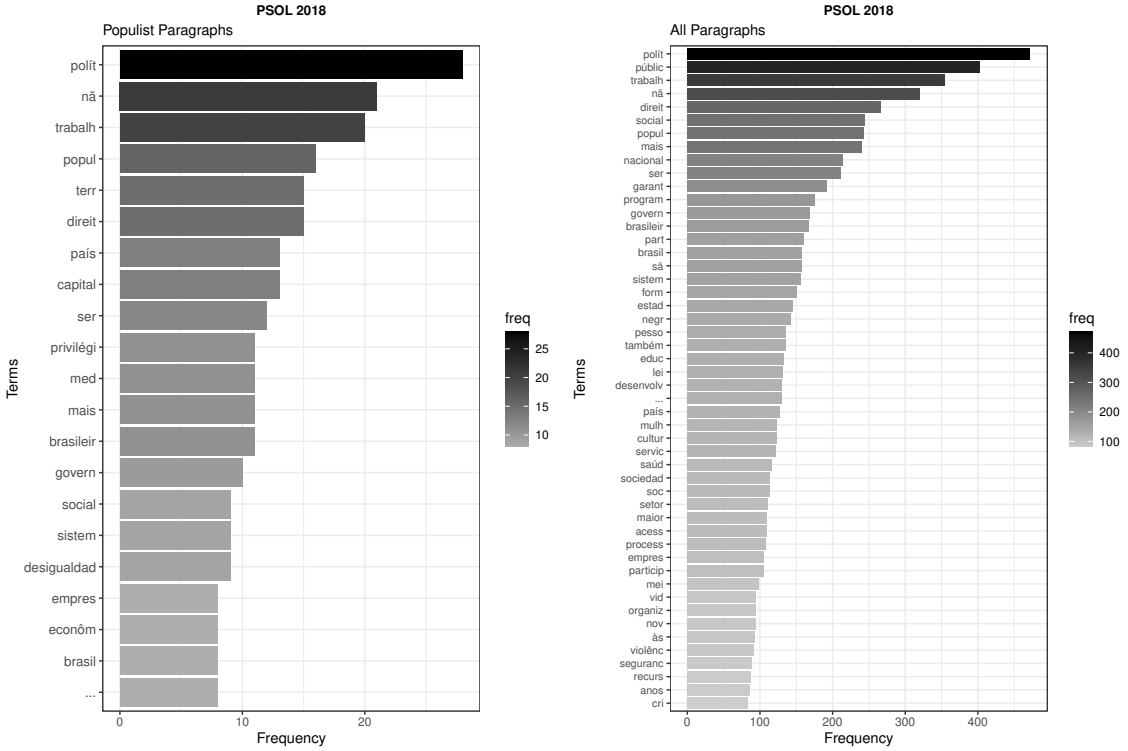


Figure 48 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PT - 2010

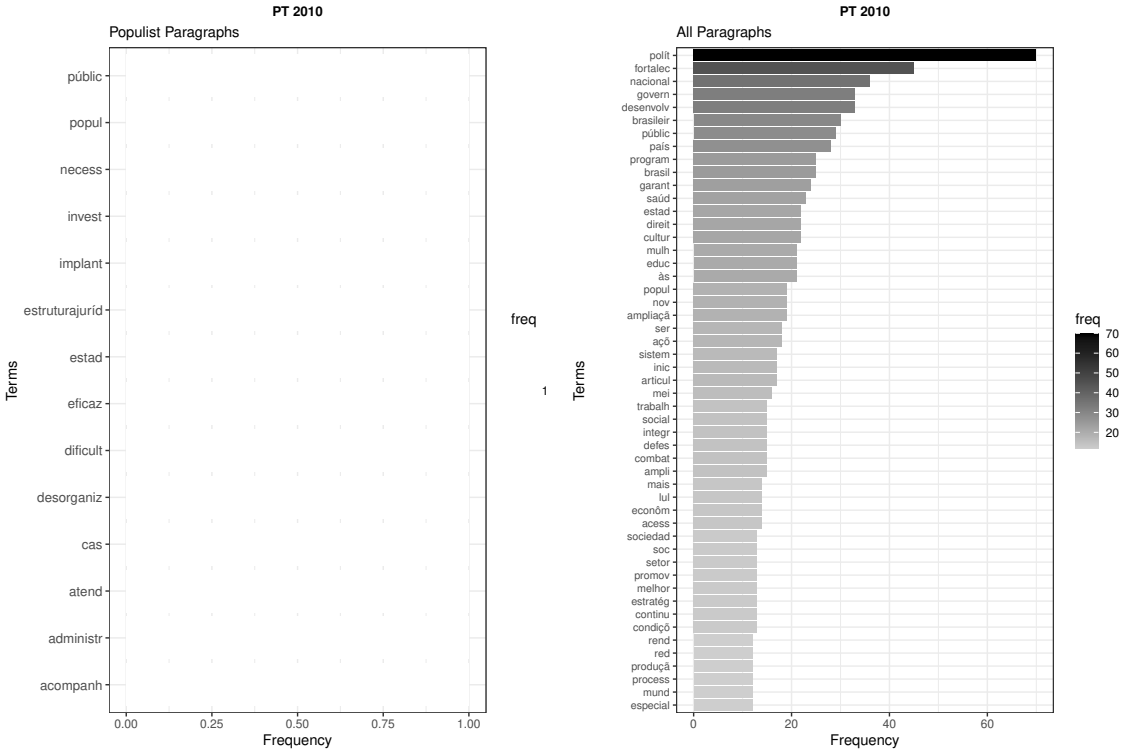


Figure 49 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PT - 2014

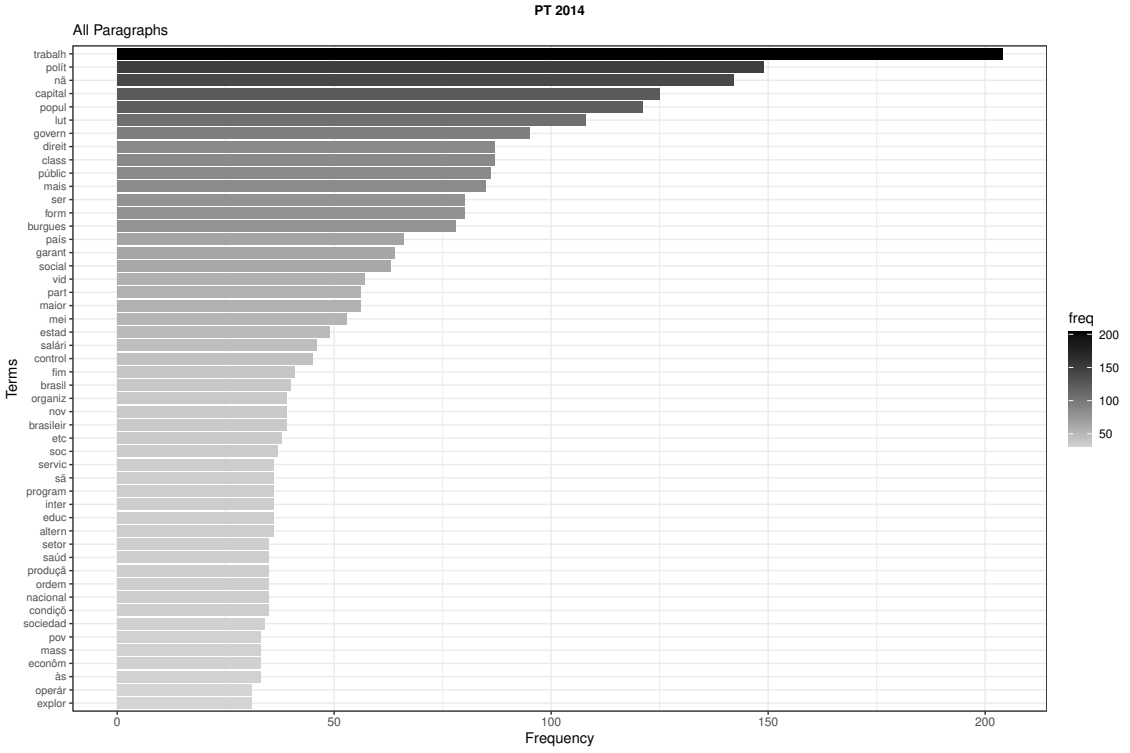


Figure 50 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PT - 2018

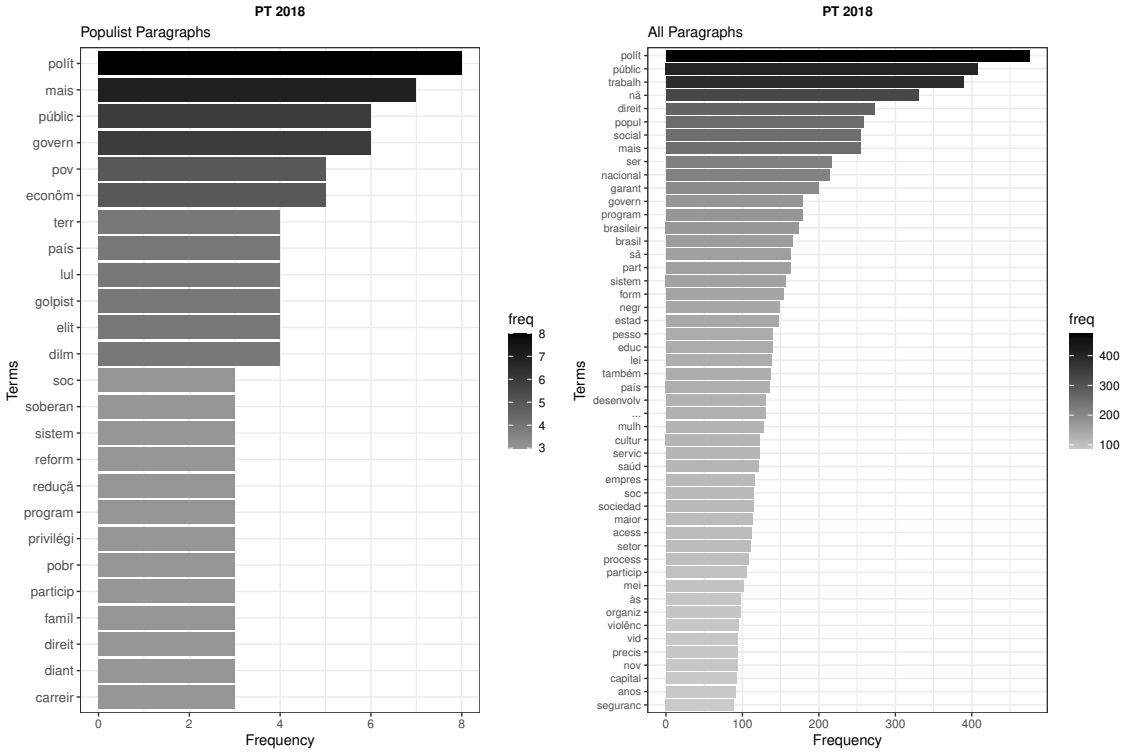
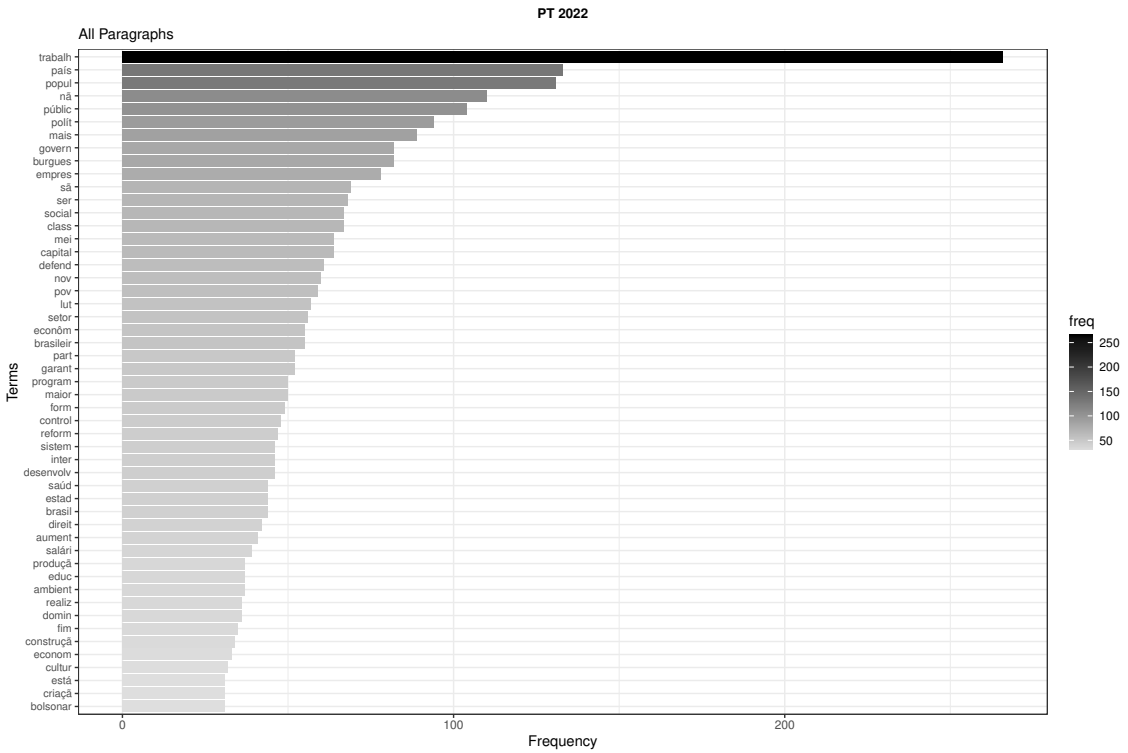


Figure 51 – Most Frequently Used Terms
PT - 2022

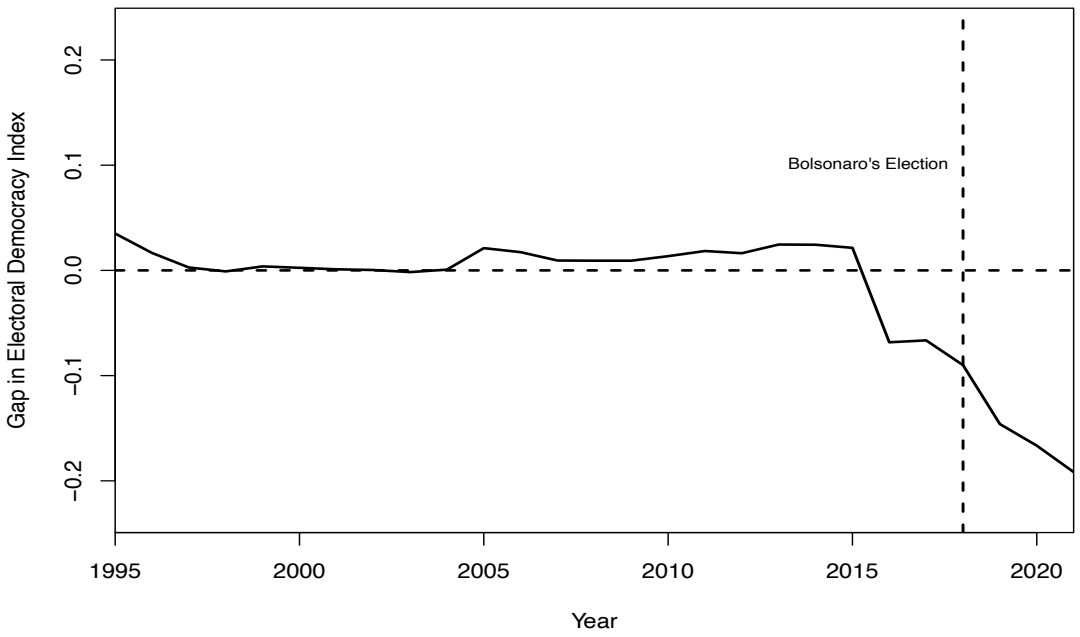


C

Chapter 4 Appendix

Appendix C brings results to support the models tested in order to explain why Brazilian democracy declined. First, Figure 52 shows the gap between actual and synthetic Brazil. As one sees, the democratic erosion began before Bolsonaro came to office, although it continued after his election

Figure 52 – Level of Democracy Gap between Brazil and synthetic Brazil



Most of the figures and tables, though, support the *Impeachment Model* presented in Chapter 4. Figure 53 shows the gap between actual and synthetic Brazil having impeachment as the event of interest. Two things are worth mentioning here. First, the lines indicating the level of democracy of Brazil and its synthetic control fit better than in the *Bolsonaro's Model* before treatment. Second, the lines split precisely in the year

of treatment. Considering that other predictors for democratic backsliding have been controlled, one can see the cause of such an episode.

Figure 53 – Level of Democracy Gap between Brazil and synthetic Brazil
Impeachment Model

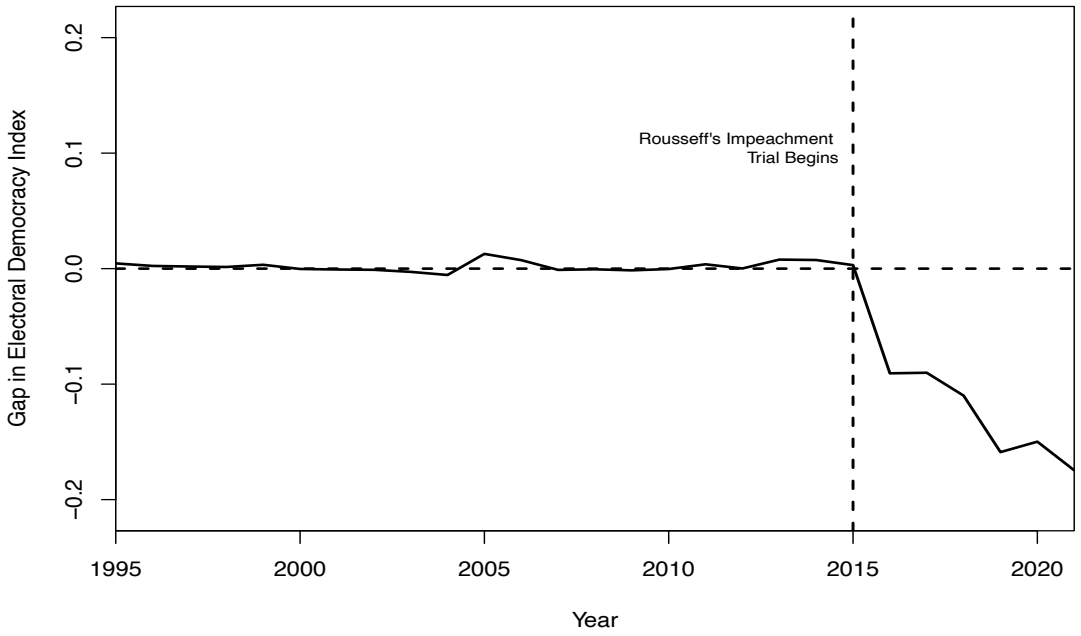


Figure 54 shows the placebos test to confirm that, after treatment, Brazil, represented by the black line, has the most significant gap compared with control units when they figure as the treated case. This is also confirmed in Figure 22 in Chapter 4.

Table 16 shows countries' weights in the leave-one-out robustness test to verify if results are consistent when excluding control groups that contribute to synthetic Brazil in the *Impeachment Model*.

Table 16 – Leave-One-Out: Synthetic Weights from Combinations of Control Units [1]

	Countries and Weights[*]				
Number of Units	**Costa Rica**	**South Africa**	**El Salvador**	**Bolivia**	**Chile**
Five	0.804	0.081	0.056	0.042	0.009
Four	0.123	0.061	0	0.816	
Three	0.123	0.061	0.816		
Two	0.254	0.746			
One	1				

[1] *Impeachment Model*.
[*] Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

Likewise, Table 17 shows how predictors behave in the test.

Figure 54 – Placebo test: Democratic backsliding gap in Brazil and 17 control units
Impeachment Model

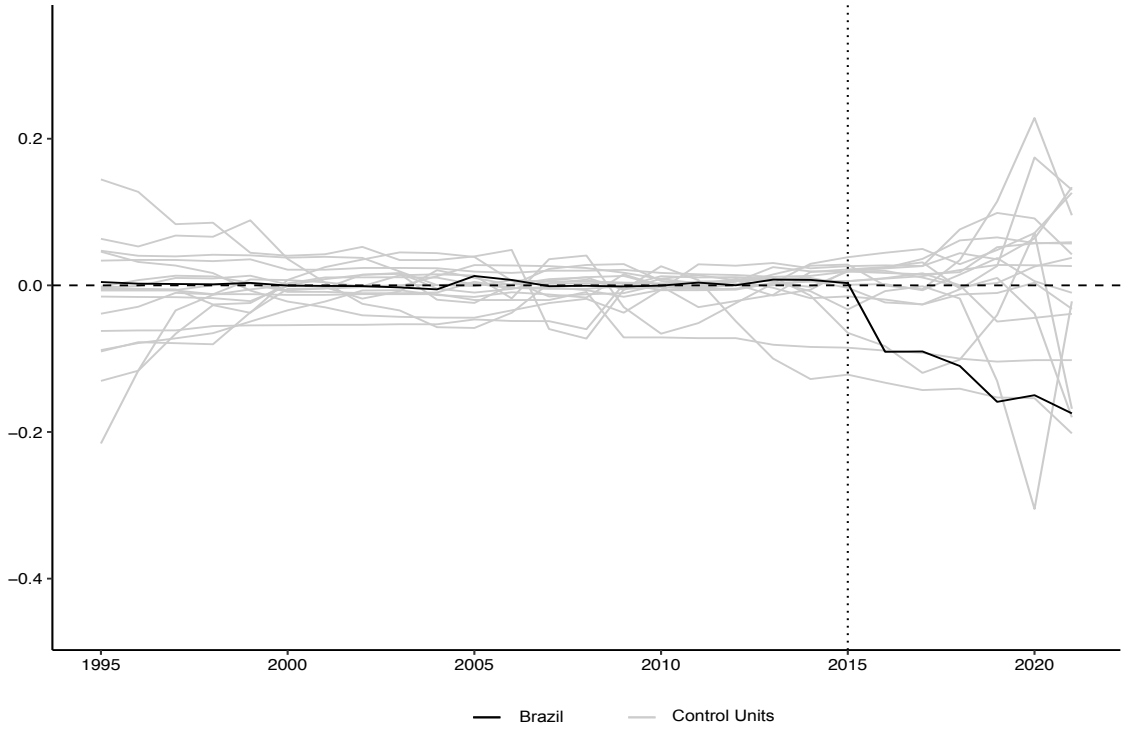


Table 17 – Leave-One-Out: Characteristics for Combinations of Control Units[1]

		Synthetic Brazil and Number of Countries[*]					
Predictors	**Brazil**[2]	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**Sample**[3]
Pol. of Soc.[4]	1.825	1.475	1.484	1.484	1.449	1.587	1.393
Jud. Ind.[5]	1.46	1.707	1.804	1.804	1.861	1.958	0.329
Exe. Res. Con.[6]	0.943	1.343	1.354	1.354	1.357	1.453	0.776
Unemployment	12.33	9.696	10.572	10.572	12.879	9.01	7.016
Income	7299.919	9823.476	9902.746	9902.876	9609.412	11118.512	6926.236
Polyarchy 2010	0.872	0.872	0.876	0.876	0.876	0.912	0.605
Polyarchy 2014	0.876	0.869	0.873	0.873	0.867	0.908	0.594

[1] *Impeachment Model.*
[2] Treated Unit.
[3] Average of LATAM and BRICS countries in the sample.
[4] Polarization of Society.
[5] Judicial Independence.
[6] Executive Respects Constitution.
[*] Weights averaged for the 1995-2018 period by Synthetic Control Method.

Finally, Figure 55 shows the gaps between Brazil and its synthetic versions in the leave-one-out test. It shows how the results are consistent and not a product of one control unit. Costa Rica, the most important control unit in synthetic Brazil, is directly compared with the case of study in the figure on the bottom right. As one sees, lines do not fit here, reinforcing the strength of the method by showing how comparing with a

single unit is always worse than building a synthetic comparison unit.

Figure 55 – Democratic Backsliding Gaps between Brazil and Sparse Synthetic Controls