

# LUISS



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## **The Process of Normalizing Insensitivity in Brazil: An Analysis of Bolsonaro's Populist Discourses**

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## INTRODUCTION:

Brazil is the largest and most populous country of South America which in the recent past has also had growing international relevance due to impressive sustained growth and development<sup>1</sup>. Nowadays, however, the tide has shifted. Other than being considered an important powerhouse, Brazil has been associated with inequality, economic difficulties, and corruption. In addition, the current Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, has drawn widespread attention to himself due to his unapologetic approach to public speaking. Bolsonaro, during his electoral campaign, has made several misogynistic, classist, and racist comments, a characteristic that earned him the nickname of “the Trump of the tropics” by the media<sup>2</sup>. Although the two controversial leaders do have their differences, they also share similarities that give validity to the name “Trump of the tropics”. First of all, both are populist leaders and populism has become a ubiquitous topic of the Western World in the past few years. With it, populist leaders adopt strategies tailored for specific national contexts to win over the “pure people” that make up the electorate. To understand Bolsonaro’s rhetoric, it is thus crucial to provide a solid definition of what populism consists of, therefore, providing a clear definition of populism is the first point that will be addressed in the introduction. According to Cas Mudde, there are three distinct characteristics that set populist leaders or parties apart: 1) they have a thin-centered ideology, 2) they split the electorate into two antagonizing groups with irreconcilable differences (therefore, it bases itself on a friend-enemy dichotomy) 3) the populist leader (or party) claims to represent the interest and the will of the “pure” people (i.e. the friends)<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, both have been criticized (and appreciated) for introducing insensitive speech to the public sphere, posing the risk of desensitizing the population to important issues of modern societies. Ultimately, it is important to understand that insensitive speech does not gain popularity due to discrimination *per se*, rather it becomes popular because it depicts the victim of said speech in a way that harms the “pure people”. Thus, the insensitive speech is seen as exposing the truth and a part of the population that compromises the well-being of the rest. The focus of this thesis will be to shed light on the Brazilian socio-economic context that paved the way for insensitive speech to enter the public discourse and how this phenomenon fosters the normalization of more extreme forms of speech in the public sphere.

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<sup>1</sup>Brics-Brazil 2019 (2019), What is Brics?

<sup>2</sup> BBC (2018), Jair Bolsonaro: Brazil's firebrand leader dubbed the Trump of the Tropics

<sup>3</sup> Mudde, C. (2004) *The Populist Zeitgeist*. Government and Opposition Vol. 39. 4th ed. Cambridge University Press.

The first chapter provides a theoretical framework on which the rest of the thesis will base itself. This section will be based on three different, yet not mutually exclusive, views on why populism has become so successful in the national contexts considered and the chapter itself will be divided into three subsections each addressing one of these specific approaches. The first subsection addresses the politics of resentment and is based on two articles, one by Manza and Crowley, another from Mutz, and a book from Cramer. The second sub-topic addresses skeptical views on globalization and affective polarization and explores three articles, one from Mijs and Gidron, one from Dhedari, and the third by Iyengar. Finally, the last portion of the first chapter addresses the socio-economic and cultural backlash thesis proposed by Inglehart and Norris.

The second chapter discusses the socio-economic issues Brazil has faced in recent years that have facilitated the introduction of insensitive speech associated with Bolsonaro's populism in Brazil. This chapter is also divided into three sub-sections, the first of these addresses the *Mensalão* and *Lava Jato* corruption scandals associated with Lula and Dilma's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party). The second sub-topic addresses the Workers' Party macroeconomic mismanagement especially in the few years preceding Dilma's impeachment of 2016 (i.e. circa 2014). Finally, the last portion of the second chapter addresses the social unrest and chaos associated with increasing crime rates.

The third chapter, on the other hand, focuses on Bolsonaro's speech, in particular, focusing on what it is he has said and why (using the theoretical framework) people seem to agree with him despite it being insensitive. The first portion of the chapter focuses on analysing some of his discriminatory statements and explaining why the Brazilian socio-economic context has favored the success of said statements. The second half, on the other hand, describes the phenomenon through which insensitivity, once it has been introduced within the public sphere, becomes more common or at least why people are less shocked by it. It describes the path-dependency that occurs when deviance is introduced and how deviance is portrayed as normal *vis a vis* previously established social norms rather than exposing them as wrong.

Finally, the conclusion will sum up the aforementioned points discussing drawing a link between the three chapters, thus, describing why the socio-economic context in Brazil was so important in Bolsonaro's success and the implications that normalized insensitivity in public discourse may pose a challenge for Brazilian Society.

## CHAPTER 1: Theoretical Framework

To understand how insensitive populist discourses enter the public sphere, it is fundamental to understand why the populist rhetoric resonates with the electorate to the extent that it does nowadays. The chapter at hand uses three separate, but not mutually exclusive, approaches to explain the possible reasons for populist success in Brazil. The first approach points to the resentment felt by traditionalists against progressive elites, the second refers to the polarization of the electorate that occurs due to group identity rather than issue positions, and finally, the third approach analyzes the socio-economic and cultural backlash theories proposed by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris.

### 1.1: Politics of Resentment

This section of the chapter is based on three articles explaining Donald Trump's success in the United States, however, the underlying assumptions can be useful to explain the Brazilian scenario as well. The white population alone in the United States (excluding Hispanics and Latinos) constitutes 60.1% of the total population, while African Americans and Hispanics comprise only 13.4% and 18.5% of the population respectively<sup>4</sup>. When facing elections, appealing to the white population in the United States provides more votes than appealing to African Americans or Hispanics due to the sheer size of that cohort, therefore, the hyper-representation of the majority allowed Donald Trump to seize the necessary votes to win the 2016 elections. The first article to be analyzed is Manza and Crowley's research of 2017, where the central research question addressed focused on whether Trump supporters were economically vulnerable or at least perceived themselves to be so. In a survey, the researchers asked respondents whether they believe it to be easier to climb the income ladder 20 years ago compared to today. Interestingly, those who perceived the income ladder to be more (or equally) static 20 years ago compared to today generally preferred Republican candidates other than Trump, conversely, those who felt pessimistic about the future preferred Trump as a Republican candidate. Thus, contrary to what was the common belief in 2016, it was perceived income mobility and resentment of the past that drove the electorate to vote for Trump<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau (2019), Quick Facts United States

<sup>5</sup> Manza, J., Crowley, N. (2017), *Working Class Hero? Interrogating the Social Bases of the Rise of Donald Trump*

As will be demonstrated in the second and third chapters, Bolsonaro similarly took advantage of Brazilians' pessimism. Despite appealing mainly to the wealthier, white, population, through corruption scandals, macroeconomic mismanagement, and increasing crime rates, Bolsonaro was able to appeal to less economically fortunate individuals through anti-corruption, nativism, and law and order rhetoric. In fact, the internal crises in Brazil increased pessimism and resentment towards the political left.

Similar to Manza and Crowley's article, Mutz's research from 2018 focuses on Trump voters' perceived status risk. The central research question in this article was whether Trump voters believed their social rank to be in jeopardy, thus, if they thought their status was at risk. Supporting the findings of Manza and Crowley, Mutz found that Trump voters did, at the time of the elections, perceive their social status to be at an increased risk. According to the research, typically white Christians had an increased risk perception regarding their status, explaining why high percentages of that cohort sided with the former President<sup>6</sup>. Supporting Mutz's results, the subsequent chapters delve deeper into how Bolsonaro took advantage of increased perceived status risk linked to economic recession and increasing crime rates to seize the votes of less secure voters.

Finally, "*The Politics of Resentment*" by Katherine Cramer addresses the dichotomy caused by resentment of American citizens to explain Trump's success. Cramer believes that resentment of a group of people arises from the question of "who gets what?". When a group of voters believe that they are being deprived of their fair share of resources or they believe that another group of people is being awarded too much *vis a vis* what they receive, resentment of the former sprouts<sup>7</sup>. Those who perceive themselves to be at greater risk (regarding their social position) tend to resent others in a process of scapegoating or finger pointing. In the Brazilian context, a political crisis and ill-considered government spending sparked the resentment of the lower strata of the population who felt mistreated by the government. During his electoral campaign, Bolsonaro took advantage of this resentment, constantly attacking the then dominant Workers' Party.

Although the three pieces of research analyzed in this section of the chapter focus on Donald Trump's elections in 2016, they offer useful insights on populist regime in general and

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<sup>6</sup> Mutz, D. (2018), *Status Threat, Not Economic Hardship, Explains the 2016 Presidential Vote*

<sup>7</sup> Cramer, K. J. (2016), *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*

what leads people to side with right-wing populism. Status risk and resentment may be seen as two separate yet connected phenomena that increase the likelihood of the other to happen. While status risk and resentment in the United States emerged in areas with sustained economic difficulties and a substantial concentration of marginalized workers, similarly, in Brazil status risk and resentment emerged due to a combination of social turmoil, political crises, economic recessions, and inaccurate policies.

## **1.2: Globalization & Affective Polarization**

The first article considered in this section understands populist success, *inter alia*, as a reaction to the drawbacks of globalization, and more specifically to immigration. Gidron and Mijs in 2019 found that economic crises, and hardships arising thereof, often translate to the acceptance of more radical populist rhetorics. The research question addressed in this paper is whether or not those who had their economic conditions worsened by a crisis are more likely to turn to radical populist parties. When considering a single individual, the research found that a worsened economic condition results in a greater probability of siding with a radical left-wing populist party due to more generous redistribution promises. Conversely, when the economy as a whole suffers from decreased dynamism, recessions, crises, economic hardship tends to translate into right-wing radical populism. Considering the right-wing, people turn to these parties do so due to growing resentment against minorities, explaining why anti-immigration rhetoric has worked in many countries where populism has been successful<sup>8</sup>. Bolsonaro too has adopted nativist rhetorics similar to Trump, Salvini, and other populists as the third chapter will demonstrate.

The resentment associated with an anti-immigrant stance can be found in Philip Cafaro's "*How Many Is Too Many? The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration Into the United States*" written in 2015. Cafaro believed, when the book was written, that the economic situation of the United States was unfit to provide for both Americans and immigrants, therefore, he proposed seven solutions to reduce migration. The first and second solutions propose first placing a temporary moratorium on all non-emergency legal migration, and subsequently, when the moratorium is lifted, placing a limit of maximum 300,000 immigrants per year. Cafaro

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<sup>8</sup> Gidron, N., Mijs, J. J. B. (2018), *Do changes in material circumstances drive support for populist radical parties? Panel data evidence from The Netherlands during the Great Recession, 2007–2015*

justifies these solutions by arguing that the macroeconomic conditions in the United States is unfit to sustain both Americans and exogenous growths in the labor force due to immigration<sup>9</sup>. The underlying argument in “*How Many Is Too Many? The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration Into the United States*” assumes a classic supply-demand mechanism. Cafaro argues that the increasing size of the labor force has two main outcomes: the first is increased competition, the second is a decreased bargaining strength of workers. According to the first argument, an increase in the supply of labor results in more people who are willing and able to accept lower wages (see graph 1). According to Cafaro, decreasing the levels of incoming immigration tightens the labor market resulting in a higher price of wages (i.e. wages), following the classic rhetoric of immigrants “stealing our jobs”. This approach fails to consider that, as explained above, economic crises increase the likelihood of populist success due to worsened economic conditions while attacking immigrants is usually the result of scapegoating. In fact, this view relies on an over-simplified model that fails to consider the different tastes and preferences of immigrants and natives. The responsiveness of wages to immigration is crucial to understanding whether this claim is actually true. The wage elasticity of demand tells us that the responsiveness of wages to immigration is actually close to zero since immigrants usually have very different tastes and preferences in labor when compared to natives<sup>10</sup>. In Cafaro’s book, however, it is clear how economic and social uncertainty lead to nativist approaches and scapegoating in a process described above.

Therefore, “does increased individual economic hardship translate to more votes for right-wing populism?”, not necessarily, a flourishing economy coupled with a worsened individual situation results in left-wing policies due to greater redistributive policies, while a struggling economy tends to side with nativist policies typical of modern right-wing populism.

Finally, Iyengar et al. found an emerging phenomenon in the United States that may be equally relevant to the Brazilian case: affective polarization. This phenomenon occurs in a political system where parties increasingly antagonize each other, resulting in party ideologies that grow constantly further apart from one another. The result among voters is an increased animosity between those who vote for right-wing and those who vote for left-wing parties. This effectively prevents, or hinders, discourses between the two sides that experience growing

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<sup>9</sup> Cafaro, P. (2015), *How Many Is Too Many? The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration Into the United States*, The University of Chicago Press

<sup>10</sup> De Brauw, A. (2017), *Does Immigration Reduce Wages?*, Cato Journal



separation. Another result of affective polarization, according to Iyengar et al.'s study, was an increase in the percentage of sorted partisans. Sorted partisanship is a phenomenon that occurs when voters increasingly identify with parties that reflect their own ideology, which paired with affective polarization, results in the public, like the political parties, viewing opposing views as constantly more distant, "hypocritical, selfish, close-minded, and they are unwilling to socialize across party lines." In real terms, liberals are more likely to side with Democrats and conservatives are more likely to side with Republicans. This is true for variables such as religion and ethnicity as well, for example, white evangelicals are now more likely to be Republican and African Americans more likely to be Democrats<sup>11</sup>. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, a similar phenomenon in Brazil has been emerging due to the failures of the Workers' Party that has caused the alienation of a large portion of the electorate.

### **1.3: Socio-Economic and Cultural Backlash Theories**

This section focuses on the article "*Trump, Brexit, and the rise of Populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash*" by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. The article focuses on the demand-side of public opinion, providing two different, yet not necessarily mutually exclusive, theories on how right-wing populism gathered support globally in recent years. The economic inequality thesis relies on the idea that economic inequalities within a political system causes certain cohorts of people to be less optimistic (perceived status risk) as well as social deprivation, fueling resentment in the lower stratum of society. Among these people, Inglehart and Norris quote: low-waged unskilled workers, those who have been unemployed for an extended period of time, households depending on diminishing social benefits, residents of public housing, single-parent households, and poorer white populations living in inner-city areas where high concentrations of immigrants reside. This cohort of people tend to be more susceptible to xenophobic, nativist, and anti-establishment rhetorics that are typical of right-wign populism since it blames "them" for stripping "us" of the well deserved prosperity in a process of scapegoating<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Iyengar, S., et al. (2019), *The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States*

<sup>12</sup>Inglehart, R. F. and Norris, P. (2016) *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*, pg.2

Bolsonaro's racist, misogynistic, and classist rhetoric attracted mainly the vote of white males, but is the economic insecurity thesis also applicable to the Brazilian elections of 2018? While the predominantly wealthy voters Bolsonaro attracted seem to contradict the economic insecurity theory, a closer look demonstrates that it may be one of the different variables in securing populist success. A large portion of poor voters (an estimated 35% - 40%) who previously voted for the left voted for Bolsonaro in 2018<sup>13</sup>, therefore, while the economic insecurity thesis in the Brazilian scenario cannot provide a complete explanation for populist success, it can provide an auxiliary one, uncovering why poor voters turned to the right in the last Presidential elections.

Mutz's status risk and Inglehart and Norris' economic inequality do share several similarities while having one crucial difference, which, however, does not necessarily make the two incompatible. Mutz on one hand refers to perceived status risk, this does not address the actual state of the subject (i.e. whether his condition improved, worsened, or stayed the same), it uncovers the way subjects *feel* about their status, not the actual state. Inglehart and Norris, on the other hand, focus on subjects' *de facto* living conditions (i.e. whether they belong to a certain cohort and whether that cohort is more susceptible to giving their vote to right-wing populist leaders). In the Brazilian scenario, both theses seem valid but not for the same class of people. In the wealthier population that voted for Bolsonaro we can find a partial explanation in their behavior in the status risk thesis, where crises have increased perceived risk. Conversely, the poorer population's behavior can be partially explained by the economic inequality thesis since those same crises have *de facto* worsened their living conditions favoring a law and order rhetoric.

The final approach addressed in this chapter is the cultural backlash theory, described by Inglehart and Norris in the same article in which the economic inequality thesis is addressed. According to this theory, increased popularity of populist parties or politicians cannot be explained as a purely economic phenomenon, rather it is a process that occurs as a part of society's response to progressive cultural changes. Inglehart and Norris explain that in post-industrial societies, new cultural regimes arise due to increased security and peacetime, for example, post-materialistic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan values progressively become the new norm. The new cultural regime represents a "revolution" that comes at odds with the old

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<sup>13</sup> Cowey, S. (2018), 'He Means Change': Brazil's Low Income Bolsonaro Voters, Al Jazeera

one, representing a “counter-revolution”. The cultural changes typical of these post-industrial societies tend to be advanced by progressive left-libertarian parties, while the older regime tends to fall in line with the conservative right. Older generations, white men, and less educated voters, according to the authors, are the group of people that usually oppose progressive cultural changes because they hinge onto the older cultural regime diving rise to the “revolutionary retro backlash” that paves the way for older values to have increased popularity<sup>14</sup>.

This theory also finds some validity in the Brazilian scenario for two main reasons: first, Bolsonaro’s electorate; secondly, the antagonization of the left. First, it must be addressed that following standard definition, post-industrial societies are those who have transitioned from a primarily industrial economy to an economy mostly dominated by the service sector<sup>15</sup>. 70.94% of Brazilian employment falls into the service sector, thus, it meets the precondition of being post-industrial. Addressing the two points mentioned above, not only is the Bolsonaro electorate mainly composed of white males, but the progressive left has dominated Brazilian politics in the past two decades. The official Workers’ Party website states that the party was born in February of 1980 to enact deep social transformation, pointing out its progressive character<sup>16</sup>. This explanation seems to explain why many wealthy, older, white males voted for Bolsonaro.

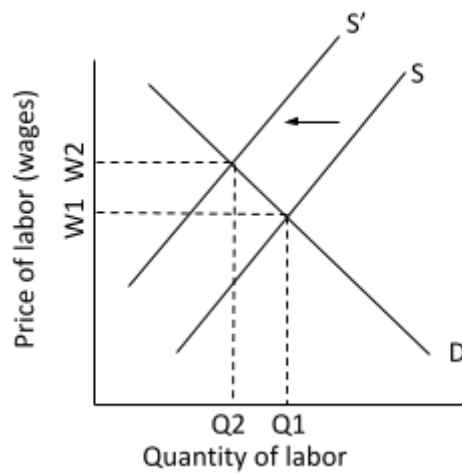
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<sup>14</sup>Inglehart, R. F. and Norris, P. (2016) *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*, pg.3

<sup>15</sup>Cambridge Dictionary, Definition of post-industrialism

<sup>16</sup>PT, Nossa História

GRAPH 1:



## CHAPTER 2: Socio-economic Crises

While the first chapter discussed the theoretical framework of the thesis, offering a variety of approaches attempting to explain how populism gains popularity, this chapter will explain the internal socio-economic issues that afflicted Brazil during the two decades following the 2000s. The chapter is divided into three parts; the first addresses political scandals and corruption, the second addresses the Workers' Party macroeconomic mismanagement, and the third part is dedicated to uncovering the sociological issue of increasing crime rates. The first sub-topic will provide a detailed summary of the Mensalão (Big Monthly Payment) and Lava jato (Carwash) scandals, uncovering how these caused anti-establishment sentiments to rise even before Bolsonaro's electoral campaign. The second sub-topic instead addresses some economic issues associated with the Workers' Party mismanagement, such as providing poor public services due to budget crises while spending millions for the Olympic Games. This, coupled with economic recession, unemployment, and general inactivity compared to the vibrant previous years, reinforced the disapproval of the political elites. Finally, the last sub-topic addresses the increasing crime rates in Brazil which made the population more prone to accepting Bolsonaro's crude law and order rhetoric.

### 2.1: Corruption Scandals

Mensalão, coined by the media after the news coverage, was a case of vote-buying by the Workers' Party under Lula's administration during 2005 and 2006. Initially, the accusations arose

from Roberto Jefferson, a Federal Deputy from the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Labor Party). The Brazilian Labor Party was one of the Workers' Party's allies during the first Lula administration. In 2005, Jefferson gave an interview to the *Folha de São Paulo* (a Brazilian newspaper) accusing the government at the time of a bribe collection scheme. According to Jefferson, the Workers' Party Treasurer, Delúbio Soares, gave members of governing parties, which included the *Partido Liberal* (Liberal Party) and *Progressistas* (Progressives), large sums of money in exchange for support for Lula's policies. After Jefferson's first accusations, others followed in reporting on events that involved other Workers' Party members which lasted until June of 2006, unraveling what was then the greatest corruption scandal in Brazilian history. The scandal led to the dismissal of two ministers and some important leaders of the Workers' Party as well as the resignation and removal from office within the Chamber of Deputies of four party leaders. In addition to the widespread dismissal of politicians, Lula needed to deal with the constant shadow of impeachment on his tail during this period.

The Attorney General of the Republic, accused politicians, and allies of the Lula government of receiving allowances in exchange for support in the National Congress. The scandal came afloat on the 14th of May of 2005 when *Veja* (Brazilian media outlet) released a video in which Maurício Marinho, an employee for Correios (a Brazilian company), received bribe money and mentioned a scheme within Correios. Marinho also states that three parties are involved in the scheme, all of which are "designated by the Brazilian Labor Party, by Roberto Jefferson". After the video leaked, Roberto Jefferson received some accusations, resulting in a surprise interview with *Folha de São Paulo*. In the interview, Roberto Jefferson stated that the Progressives and Liberal Party received payments of R\$30,000 to vote in favor of proposed bills in the interest of the Lula government. After the interview, on the 7th of July, the Liberal Party demanded the removal from office of Jefferson. Jefferson was then pulled into the center of the investigations and did not back down in reinforcing the denunciation of the Big Monthly Payment scandal. In a plenary session of the Ethics Council, Jefferson stated that he had received a sum of R\$4 million from the Workers' Party, which had not been declared to the electoral courts, and reported that he had informed the Chief of Staff, José Dirceu, about the payments, including Delúbio Soares' involvement. Jefferson informed the Chief of Staff that deputies were receiving R\$30,000 from base parties, interestingly, however, he also exonerated Lula of any involvement in the matter, who according to Jefferson, "reacted as if he had been stabbed in the

back”. Jefferson added, “Dirceu, if you do not get out of there fast, you will put on trial an innocent man, that is President Lula”. On June the 16th, the Chief of Staff fell, stating that he does not see himself outside the government, but a part of it, as well as declaring his passion for the Lula administration. Jefferson also spoke about the modality of the payments; i.e., they were made at the *Banco Rural* (a Brazilian private bank which is no longer active) where advisors of the Congressmen would collect the bribe money that supposedly ranged from R\$20,000 to R\$60,000. One of these withdrawals was made by the President of the Chamber João Paulo Cunha’s, Workers’ Party deputy, wife.

This is where Marcos Valério comes into play, Valério is a businessman who, during the scandal, was responsible for the bribe money. In fact, it was through the two businesses that he moved over R\$25 million between 2003 and 2004. He justified these movements stating that he took bank loans and gave the money to the Workers’ Party to finance their campaign. Marcos Valério, therefore, claimed to be the guarantor of one of the party loans which had a value of R\$2.4 million, however, he denied any links with Mensalão and said he was completely unaware of the issue altogether. There were other three guarantors besides Marcos Valério, one was the president of the Workers’ Party, José Genoíno, another was the Workers’ Party Treasurer, Delúbio Soares, and finally the Secretary-General, Sílvio Pereira. José Genoíno justified the presence of his signatures alongside that of Marcos Valério because it was the general custom in the Workers’ Party to sign the work of other party leaders in good faith of their work, therefore, he claimed to have signed those documents without even reading them since he trusted his “comrades”. On the 3rd of July of 2005, Genoíno also stated that he did not know Marcos Valério but trusted him because Delúbio Soares knew and trusted him. In Congress, the Workers’ Party justified the movement of large sums of money as a *caixa dois* (donations from private parties to candidates or political parties) that had not been declared rather than a scheme. Supporting this claim, Delúbio Soares stated on the 20th of July of 2005 that the funds used in 2003 and 2004, were used to pay off the debts of the campaign. In late July of 2005, the Secretary-General, Pereira, received a Land Rover Defender as a gift, valued at approximately R\$80,000, from a company that had ties with Petrobras (a Brazilian state-owned petroleum company). As a consequence, the three aforementioned guarantors were asked to step down from their positions as party leaders.

An advertisement businessman, Duda Mendonça, was later involved in the investigations as well, claiming to have received undeclared payments from the Workers' Party in a foreign bank account which was opened on Marcos Valério's orders. The Minister of the Secretariat of Communication, Luiz Gushiken, was involved thereafter for ordering the *Banco do Brasil* (a Brazilian bank) to sign an advertisement contract with DNA (a company owned by Marcos Valério) without bidding and to pay, furthermore, R\$20 million in advance. Despite the absence of concrete evidence incriminating Gushiken, the Attorney General, Roberto Gurgel, demanded the acquittal of Gushiken to the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* (Supreme Federal Court).

An important event during the scandal was the President's response to the corruption in an interview broadcasted by *Fantástico* (a Brazilian media outlet) on the 17th of July of 2005. Lula stated that investigations will continue to uncover the corruption that took place within his party and that the Workers' Party is to explain to Brazilians the mistakes it made. About a month later, on the 12th of August of 2005, Lula addressed a nationwide speech on TV, in which he states that he felt backstabbed and betrayed, that such practices are unacceptable, and that he was unaware of the corruption that unfolded before his very eyes. While the President did not explicitly refer by whom he had been betrayed, nor did he directly mention Mensalão, he did state that the Workers' Party, the government, and himself owe Brazilian citizens an apology for what occurred. Congressmen attempted to save their mandates or at least to salvage their political rights thereafter. Four Congressmen resigned, Valdemar da Costa Neto and Carlos Rodrigues from the Liberal Party, José Barba from *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (Brazilian Democratic Movement), and Paulo Roch from the Workers' Party. Roberto Jefferson, José Dirceu, and Pedro Correa, instead, were revoked<sup>1718</sup>.

Only a few years later, on the 17th of March of 2014, the then greatest corruption scandal in Brazilian history, Mensalão, was outclassed by another scandal, this time, even greater; namely, *Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash). Initially, the corruption scandal was given the name "*Lava Jato*" due to the use of a network of gas stations and car washes to move illicit funds, eventually, however, the investigations uncovered much greater issues. At first, only four criminal organizations were investigated and prosecuted for operations in the parallel exchange market, but later during the investigation, the Federal Public Prosecutor uncovered a massive

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<sup>17</sup> Jornal Nacional Globo (2012), Relembra o surgimento e a evolução do mensalão

<sup>18</sup> Agência Câmara de Notícias (2012), Mensalão: deputados divergem sobre prisão imediata dos condenados

corruption scheme involving the largest state-owned company in Brazil; i.e. Petrobras. The scandal involved cartels of important contractors that paid bribe money to executives of Petrobras and public figures. The value of the bribes ranged from 1% to 5% of the total amount of the overbilled contracts, this money was distributed through money laundering schemes which were investigated during the first stages of the operation.

The actors involved in the scheme were: contractors, Petrobras employees, financial operators, and political agents; however, what was their role in the scheme? Standard practice dictates that contractors competing to establish would secure a job at Petrobras as who does not, it is essentially a bidding war where the contractor willing and able to offer their job at the lowest price secures the job. During Operation Car Wash, however, contractors from construction companies formed cartels; i.e. they met in private to offer pre-established prices to Petrobras depicting the dynamic as competitive. The winner of the bidding war was decided during these private meetings with the purpose of securing a higher profit margin for the personal benefit of the parties involved.

Petrobras employees were not directly involved in the scandal; while they were aware of the cartels, they omitted their existence because they were external to them. The cartels were composed only of those who were directly a part of the cartel, with the addition of public agents if they were invited by the other members of the cartel to be involved. According to surveys given to the employees, direct and unnecessary negotiations occurred and overpriced contracts were signed. The conclusion of these contracts also took reduced time to unfold because the parties involved often ignored important stages in their conclusion, in addition, confidential information was leaked during these sessions as well.

Financial operators, on the other hand, were intermediaries within the operations, they were responsible for arranging the transfer of bribe money, but of vital importance was their role in delivering the money to the beneficiaries as clean. Financial operators usually followed two steps; the first was to transfer the bribe money overseas, usually using front companies (i.e. a company with all the characteristics of a real company which, however, is used as a shield to cover up for the illegal activities of another company/companies), which allowed the payments to be handed from the contractors in cash. Step two involved the intermediaries' role in moving the money from the contractors' cash payments to the beneficiaries. This usually occurred through the payments of goods or by transferring the cash abroad once again.



A year after investigations began, in March 2015, the verticalization of the investigation began as political figures began to be involved in the criminal schemes. In March, Attorney General, Rodrigo Janot, submitted 28 petitions to open criminal investigations against 55 political agents to the Supreme Court of the Republic. Those against which the criminal investigations were to be held were linked to political parties other than being responsible for appointing and maintaining executives at Petrobras. Due to the scandal, political agents are devoid of the privilege of office or other prerogatives and could be investigated also by lower courts. Relevant executives included: Paulo Roberto Costa, head of Supply appointed in 2004 until 2012 by the Progressives and supported by the Brazilian Democratic Movement; Renato Duque, head of Services appointed in 2003 until 2013 by the Workers' Party; Nestor Cerveró, head of International appointed in 2003 until 2008 by the Brazilian Democratic Movement. The Attorney General found these political groups to have acted in criminal association in a stable manner with the joint effort of committing corruption and money laundering. Fernando Baiano and João Vaccari Neto acted as financial operators on behalf of the Brazilian Democratic Movement and the Workers' Party<sup>19</sup>.

Not only was the sheer size of these corruption scandals an incredible force pushing anti-establishment sentiments in Brazil, but they occurred within less than a decade one from another. The Workers' Party administration, which began in 2003, was riddled with two of the largest corruption scandals in Brazilian history each taking place within less than a decade from the other. Supporting the aforementioned theoretical background, this is one of the crises that fosters resentment against the political elite in the population, offering a partial explanation as to why Bolsonaro's anti-establishment rhetoric resonated so deeply within the Brazilian electorate.

## **2.2: Socio-Economic Crises**

The rebirth of the political right in Brazil can also find another explanation in the macroeconomic mismanagements of the Roussef administration. Dilma Roussef was Lula's pupil and successor as President of Brazil which, however, found along her run as Head of State many economic obstacles which also led to sociological issues as a consequence. Some data on this economic mismanagement includes the comparison between growth rate and unemployment rate in Brazil under the Lula administration *vis-a-vis* the Dilma administration. While the growth in

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<sup>19</sup> Ministério Público Federal, Entenda o Caso da LJ

gross domestic product (GDP) stood at 7.5% in 2010, in 2015 it plummeted to negative 3.5% and continued down a rocky path of recession or anemic growth to this day<sup>20</sup>. Unemployment rates followed similar trends, with unemployment continuously decreasing from 2003 to 2010 (i.e. during the two Lula administrations), it rose to 6.6% in 2015 and reached almost 13% only two years later<sup>21</sup>. In fact, the politics of resentment against the political elite in Brazil can be linked both to corruption scandals and unwise public spending and economic policies during the reign of the left, leading voters to shift to the right which found an unapologetic leader in Jair Bolsonaro.

Although economic mistakes were undoubtedly made by the left during approximately a decade and a half in power, important milestones in development did occur, which explains the initial popularity of the Lula and Dilma administrations. Unfortunately, some of these milestones were reverted or took a hit from the economic recession of 2014 which crippled the country economically. If we are to use a definition of development as a combination of political, social, and economic freedoms, Brazil was on the right path to achieving greater development by improving living and economic conditions<sup>22</sup>. Some of the improvements seen under the Workers' Party rule were: a steady (albeit slow) decline in adolescent birth rates; an increase of female literacy rates from 86.5% to 92.06% from 2000 to 2014; an increase in male literacy rates from 86.23% to 91.37% from 2000 to 2014; a steady increase in GDP per capita (excluding the negative 1.08% growth of 2009); the Hunger Index fell from 11.8 in 2000 to 5 in 2015, effectively shifting the country's alarm status from moderate to low; under-5 child mortality rates decreased from 34.60 (per 1,000 births) in 2000 to 16.20 in 2014, and maternal mortality rates per 100,000 births fell from 69 in 2000 to 62 in 2014<sup>23</sup>. While these are not the only positive development goals achieved by the Workers' Party administrations, *Luz Para Todos* (Light For All) and *Bolsa Família* (a conditional cash transfer program) also had an immense positive impact on development<sup>24,25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> World Bank Data, GDP growth (annual %) - Brazil

<sup>21</sup> World Bank Data, Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - Brazil

<sup>22</sup> Sen, A. (2001), *Development as Freedom*

<sup>23</sup> Our World in Data, Brazil

<sup>24</sup> Eletrobrás, Programa Luz Para Todos

<sup>25</sup> Center for Public Impact (2019), *Bolsa Família in Brazil*

While the data, however, is unambiguously positive up to 2014, many development goals remained stagnant or worsened since then, meaning that some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be reached by 2030. By then, an estimated 7.6% of the population might still live in poverty, at less than \$3.1 per day, deaths from premature non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is likely to increase, and the goal of providing 98% of the population with access to improved sanitation will likely only reach 86%<sup>26</sup>. Clearly, the remarkable improvements of the 2000s seems much less impressive following the decline in 2014 and 2015.

Lula's administration had three main priorities. The first was to reduce inequality in Brazil. In 2002, just before his presidency, poverty by national poverty lines stood at 23.3% and income inequality stood at a score of 56.5, ranking it the second most unequal country in Latin America after Bolivia whose score stood at 58, by comparison, the Italian score stood at 33.3. For the attainment of this objective was the conditional cash transfer *Bolsa Família*. This objective clearly helped his rise to power in a time in which Brazilian society could only hope for improvements in the dire unequal conditions they lived in. A second objective emphasized by Lula was initiating more active participation of civil society in public policy, advocating for more radical forms of democracy. In this process, Workers' Party municipal leaders also focused on a more localized manner in engaging civil society more. Teixeira and Dagnino point out, however, that while the quantity of civil society participation in public policy undoubtedly increased, the quality of such participation is to be questioned as the effectiveness of civil society's participation is dubious<sup>27</sup>. Finally, the third focus of the Lula administration was to combat corruption and make the governance of Brazil more transparent. In this area, however, the objective was all but successful as discussed in the previous sub-topic where transparency was sacrificed for a more homogeneous coalition in government and private profit. While Lula's personal role in the *Mensalão* scandal is still a hotly debated topic, the Workers' Party as whole played in the driver's seat during this situation, where the objective was flat out ignored in return for good governance. Despite the mixed success of his objectives, Lula ended his second presidential term with an approval rate of 90%. It is important to outline, however, that while Lula's approval was very high by 2011, the party's approval rate was lower than the President's, showing how he had vested the image of a strong President while the party suffered from

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<sup>26</sup>Scott, A. C., et al. (2017), *Sustainable Development Goals Report: Brazil 2030*

<sup>27</sup> Dagnino, E., Teixeira, A. C. C. (2014), *The Participation of Civil Society in Lula's Government*,

constant controversy. All in all, the success of the Workers' Party from 2003 to 2011 was attributed to Lula, who was seen as a giving caretaker, while the shortcomings of the party, such as the political scandals, were attributed to the party as a whole, not to the President<sup>28</sup>.

Already by 2011 and 2012 the Brazilian economy had slowed down which was met by massive public expenditure by the Federal Banks to stimulate the demand while unfortunately overestimating the Brazilian productive capacity<sup>29</sup>. The government debt at this point reached a new high of 70% of the national GDP and interest rates reached 14%. Inflation was fought with price controls which, however, damaged domestic firms, including state-owned firms like Petrobras<sup>30</sup>. This can be seen as a further cause of the *Lava Jato* case in which contracts were inflated for increased profit seen as the price controls had detracted from the prosperity of national businesses. Despite having been Chairwoman of Petrobras from 2003 to 2010, Dilma was not impeached due to connections to the *Lava Jato* case since there was no concrete evidence of her involvement in the scandal. Rather, she was impeached for violating the Law of Fiscal Responsibility by using *pedaladas fiscais*, or accounting gimmicks, to give the illusion of having sturdier public finance. These gimmicks essentially involved delaying transfers by the State Treasury to national banks which violated the aforementioned law<sup>31</sup>. This practice was rejected by the Brazilian audit court and Dilma's approval rating in April of 2016 fell to a mere 13%<sup>32</sup>.

As a consequence of economic and political crises, Brazil, during the period preceding Bolsonaro's election, faced an increasing crime rate. To give a general idea of the situation, from 2015 to 2017, crime rates rose from 28.59 to 30.83, and when considering an even wider timeframe, the levels in 1990 stood at 19.66<sup>33</sup>.

To outline the general turmoil, it is important to address the population's unrest during this time. In 2013, Brazil faced widespread protests linked to the Workers' Party's economic mismanagement. The first protest addressed will be the 2013 protests against inflation and public expenditure on infrastructures to be utilized during the World Cup and Olympic Games. These protests began between May and June due to higher transport costs in São Paulo. While protests

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<sup>28</sup> Montambeault, F., Ducatenzeiler, G. (2014), *Lula's Brazil and Beyond: An Introduction*

<sup>29</sup> World Bank Data, GDP growth (annual %) - Brazil

<sup>30</sup> Freitas, L. (2016), *Brazilian Challenges: Untying Political and Economic Knots*

<sup>31</sup> Bloomberg (2015), *Rousseff Suffers Another Body Blow After Accounting Rejection*

<sup>32</sup> Freitas, L. (2016), *Brazilian Challenges: Untying Political and Economic Knots*

<sup>33</sup> Macrotrends (2021), *Brazil Crime Rate & Statistics 1990-2021*

were largely peaceful, they were met by more hostile reactions by the police who used rubber bullets and tear gas. Quickly, from a localized protest against rising transport costs, these events took a wider concept; i.e. increased public expenditure on infrastructures for the World Cup and Olympic Games despite precarious internal situations (as the ones described above). The protest rested on the belief that the state budget was being inadequately spent and demonstrates that already five years before Bolsonaro's campaign, widespread anti-establishment sentiments were already brewing in the tropical nation. Despite the largely peaceful nature of the protests, hundreds of thousands of people took the streets, drawing the attention of the UN and the international community as a whole due to the sheer size of the event<sup>34</sup>. This protest is estimated to have involved over one million citizens in over 100 cities across the nation<sup>35</sup>. The Vinegar Revolution, it took this name due to the widespread use of tear gas by police officers, was surely an important, yet not the only, case of public demonstrations against political actors in Brazil during the mid-2010s<sup>36</sup>. While bus fees did increase, authorities argued that the increase in price was actually much lower than national inflation levels, yet at the beginning of the protest 55% of "Paulistas" supported the protests while only a few weeks later (on the 18th of June) that number rose to 77%, demonstrating the widened scope of the revolt<sup>37</sup>.

2013 was not the end of it, unfortunately, as in 2016 widespread protests took place once again all throughout Brazil. While Dilma was still facing the troubles of a possible impeachment (which effectively prematurely ended her term before completing the four years in office and replacing her with Temer), the country faced protests targeted against the government in response to what was seen as the worst recession in recent years, coupled with the worst corruption scandal in Brazilian history, *Lava Jato*. These protests reached all 26 Brazilian states, including the Federal District where the President resides<sup>38</sup>. In addition, according to *Globo* (a Brazilian news outlet) over 3.6 million people joined the protests against the government in all of Brazil<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> BBC (2013), Brazil Protests Spread in Sao Paulo, Brasilia and Rio

<sup>35</sup> BBC (2013), Brazil unrest: 'Million' join protests in 100 cities

<sup>36</sup> Cammaerts, B., Jiménez-Martínez, C. (2014), *The Mediation of the Brazilian V-for-Vinegar Protests: From vilification to legitimization and back?*

<sup>37</sup> Datafolha (2013), Protestos Sobre Aumento na Tarifa dos Transportes II

<sup>38</sup> The Guardian (2016), More than a million Brazilians protest against 'horror' government

<sup>39</sup> O Globo (2016), Protestos contra Dilma reúnem 3,6 milhões em todos os estados

A localized case which requires special attention due to the severity of the outcome, was the police strike which took place in Espirito Santo in the beginning of 2017. Brazil's budget crisis, resulting in the inability to provide standard public services and reducing the wages of those performing these tasks, resulted in the state police deciding to go on strike in Espirito Santo. Theoretically, the police are forbidden from going on strike since they offer an essential service to the nation, yet they were able to find a loophole allowing them to bypass this limitation. Families gathered around the police station demanding better wages, preventing officers from patrolling the streets. Ironically, while being one of the most crime-ridden areas in Brazil, Espirito Santo also provides officers with some of the lowest wages in all of Brazil's state police departments<sup>40</sup>.

Concluding this chapter, it is clear when considering the increasing crime rates and economic insecurity why Bolsonaro's anti-establishment and law and order rhetoric struck a chord within Brazilians that jump started his popularity. While the anti-establishment rhetoric was addressed in the first subtopic (i.e. corruption scandals), it has been reinforced in this subtopic when addressing unwise economic expenditure and general economic failures of the left which resulted in the alienation of said parties and advantaged the right to flourish. Conversely, the widespread protests, increasing crime rates, and episodes of near anarchy led to increased social insecurity by the general population, especially poorer ones who live in situations of increased risk, resulting in a successful law and order campaign to establish increased security. Bolsonaro's position also seems to coincide (in some aspects at least) to other populist movements around the world, as his law and order approach is rooted in anti-globalization ideals (such as immigration is associated with crime and thus must be punished harshly) and conservative ideals antagonizing the progressivism of the left. As shown in Renno's study, Bolsonaro voters tend to emphasize aspects of harsh law and order approaches, such as: no decriminalization of drugs, lowering the age of maturity so younger people are penally responsible for their actions, and supporting the death penalty<sup>41</sup>.

### **CHAPTER 3: Discourse Analysis**

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<sup>40</sup> Washington Post (2017), Police went on strike in a Brazilian State. The result was near anarchy.

<sup>41</sup> Renno, L. (2020), *The Bolsonaro Voter: Issue Positions and Vote Choice in the 2018 Brazilian Presidential Elections*

The previous sections addressed the political, social, and economic state of affairs in Brazil that facilitated the introduction within the public sphere of Bolsonaro's unapologetic rhetoric. The following chapter, instead, will report some quotes of the current Brazilian President and analyze what discursive elements allowed such insensitive remarks to thrive. The first subsection is dedicated to such an analysis, following the order of previous chapters. The first quotes will address his political opponents, corruption scandals, and the political crisis, addressing the politics of resentment. Secondly, quotes about the economic crisis will be addressed, linking it to both the affective polarization study and the socio-economic thesis. Finally, quotes that emphasize law and order, religion, and conservative values in general will be addressed, with a focus on the increasing crime rates as one of the President's main concerns. The second sub-section of the chapter addresses the process through which these quotes normalize insensitivity by offering two approaches: Diane Vaughan's normalization of deviance and a post-Foucauldian reading of deviance normalization.

### **3.1: An Analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's Discourses**

As previously discussed, Bolsonaro's rhetoric resonated with widespread dissatisfaction with political elites which allowed scapegoating and finger pointing to be more openly accepted. Despite arrogant, rude, and insensitive comments, the statements the President has made have not been accepted because they are discriminatory *per se* rather they reinforce the idea that someone else is responsible for current misfortunes. The first quote analyzed in this portion regards his political opponents and was stated in during a video message directed to the nation. Bolsonaro stated:

*"Ou vai pra fora, ou vai pra cadeia [...] Esses marginais vermelhos serão bandidos de nossa pátria"*

*"Either leave or go to jail [...] these red outlaws will be banned from our fatherland"*<sup>42</sup>

First of all, focusing on what was said is important. Clearly, the President's quote contains authoritarian undertones that threaten to limit the freedom of expression and plurality of opinion which are important milestones of modern democracies. He threatens to either force his political opponents to exile or incarcerate them which poses a threat to Brazilian democracy. Secondly, he addresses his political opponents as "red outlaws" - referring to the fact that they

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<sup>42</sup> The Guardian (2018), Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro threatens purge of leftwing 'outlaws'

belong on the left of the political spectrum - in a menacing and threatening manner, inviting them to either leave or be banned from the country to avoid jail time. Quotes like these have caused political opponents, such as Haddad (his opponent during the presidential elections and member of the Workers' Party), to criticize him for threatening the rule of law, which is a foundational building block of modern democratic systems. Considering the corruption scandals described above, where a left-wing coalition was involved in two of the nation's greatest corruption scandals of Brazilian history with only about a decade and a half from one another, allows these ideas to gain popularity despite the dangerous underlying meaning of the President's message. Prior to Bolsonaro's successful election campaign, the Workers' Party dominated the Brazilian political landscape from Lula's administrations onwards. Dilma's approval ratings, however, had dropped to a mere 13% following ineffective and misguided economic policies and growing controversy around the two corruption scandals, which demonstrated the widespread dissatisfaction towards the political left. While the quote reported above is infused with elements akin to tyranny and authoritarianism, the public was prone to accepting such remarks based on the aforementioned dissatisfaction towards Bolsonaro's political opponents.

Appealing to the anti-globalist and socio-economic thesis, on the other hand, Bolsonaro has also spoken out about indigenous people and their habits, blaming their habits on foreign exploitation.

*"You want the indigenous people to carry on like prehistoric men with no access to technology, science, information, and the wonders of modernity,"<sup>43</sup>*

In this quote, Bolsonaro calls indigenous people prehistoric, alluding to the fact that they have "unevolved habits", and vests himself with the responsibility of changing those habits in the name of a westernized cultural regime. This quote may have secured popularity for two main reasons: blames foreigners for intentionally limiting growth in Brazil, and claims that economic prosperity is something that can be achieved by Brazil if these "enemies" are neutralized. As Inglehart and Norris point out in their study, economic insecurity and social unrest are two of the main reasons as to why people turn to nativist rhetorics and actively participate in scapegoating. Despite the deplorable quote in itself, these types of phrases have been accepted because Brazilians are now able to identify an enemy and reason for their misfortunes. While calling indigenous people prehistoric, the quote is presented in a heroic fashion since he depicts himself

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<sup>43</sup> The Guardian (2019), Bolsonaro declares 'the Amazon is ours' and calls deforestation data 'lies'



as the savior, ready to protect Brazil against the oppressive and exploitative developed countries. Therefore, following the theoretical framework provided in the first chapter, and the real life application thereof in the second, it is not a stretch to assume that insensitive remarks such as the one reported above have had success due to increased economic and social unrest, despite having post-colonialist tendencies, this quote has found approval due to general dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs.

Another aspect to address is the law and order rhetoric, which as previously discussed, finds its roots in a nation where increasing crime rates and social distress have paved the way for this rhetoric to work more effectively.

*“A good criminal is a dead criminal”<sup>44</sup>*

While criminals should be held accountable for their actions, modern democracies have the rule of law as a basic fundamental, where all are subject to fair trial for judgement. Despite evidence pointing to the fact that economic and social distress drive crime rates upwards, Bolsonaro has *a priori* stated that criminals should not only be harshly punished for their crimes - even with their lives - but it also completely ignores the underlying causes of Brazilian social decay, relying on law and order to swindle voters into buying his ideas. As previously stated, Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world, which may be one of these underlying causes, but alluding to the death penalty as a solution gives the electorate the mirage of increased security without actually solving the problems that Brazil faces.

On the other hand, the cultural backlash theory can provide an explanation for widespread support for homophobic and LGBTQIA+phobic rhetorics.

*“I would be unable to love a gay son. I won't be a hypocrite here: I would prefer that my son die in an accident rather than appear with a [gay] moustache. For me, he would be dead.”<sup>45</sup>*

Although about 10% of the Brazilian population identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community - meaning around 20 million people, the current President seems to have harsh thoughts on their needs and image<sup>46</sup>. The cultural backlash theory may provide a useful explanation as to why these ideas are accepted despite living in modern societies. Until 1985, Brazil operated under a military dictatorship and Bolsonaro has expressed support for it and

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<sup>44</sup> New York Times (2018), ‘We’ll Dig Graves’: Brazil’s New Leaders Vow to Kill Criminals

<sup>45</sup> World (2018), Jair Bolsonaro: 17 quotes that explain the views of Brazil’s fascist president-elect

<sup>46</sup> Brasil de Fato (2017), 10% dos Brasileiros são LGBTI, mas estão sub-representados na política

quoted saying that its only mistake was “torturing instead of killing people”<sup>47,48</sup>. Being a white heterosexual male, who belongs to an older generation that saw progressive and post-materialist values swoop over the Brazilian landscape, the cultural backlash theory can explain a great deal of why older white voters share these ideas. Bolsonaro, and many of his voters, hinge on archaic values such as homophobia as a counter-revolution to the progressive reforms made during peacetime. As Inglehart and Norris point out, cultural backlash occurs when, following a moment of conflict, post-materialism begins to thrive and find a greater push of the left-wing progressives. Likewise, the period following the dictatorship’s end was riddled with the Workers’ Party progressive ideals making the tropical nation a perfect candidate for the cultural backlash theory since it too is a post-industrial nation. The paper on affective polarization also offers an insight on ideas that grow further apart and believe that the more this phenomenon occurs, the easier it is for white Christians to turn to more radical conservative ideas, explaining the appeal Bolsonaro had on evangelical voters. In Brazil, about 50% of the population is Catholic and 31% is evangelical, that equals to a number of approximately 105 and 65 million people respectively<sup>49</sup>. Seizing their votes has been crucial for Bolsonaro’s success, but it also explains why his electorate sides with these insensitive ideals.

Finally, a concluding quote to be analyzed should be his slogan during the campaign.

*“Brasil acima de tudo. Deus acima de todos.”*

*“Brazil above everything. God above all.”*

To conclude this subsection it is worth mentioning that the slogan reported above appeals to religious values, which as has been seen, was crucial in making the President succeed. Overall, his appeal rests on conservative and law and order rhetorics that took advantage of an economically and socially unstable situation. The section that follows will explore how these speeches, once they enter the public sphere, become normalized.

### **3.2: The Normalization Process**

While the first portion of this chapter provided a few examples of insensitive discourse on behalf of the Brazilian President, this section is devoted to explaining how these become normalized in public discourse. The previous section demonstrated, through the research

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<sup>47</sup> Napolitano, M. (2018), *The Brazilian Military Regime, 1964-1985*, Latin American History

<sup>48</sup> World (2018), Jair Bolsonaro: 17 quotes that explain the views of Brazil’s fascist president-elect

<sup>49</sup> Globo Política (2020), 50% dos brasileiros são católicos, 31%, evangélicos e 10% não tem religião, diz Datafolha

provided in the first chapter, how individuals become more likely to accept these rhetorics, and how they dismiss the negative undertones, however, these practices as will be shown over time become normalized, and even those who do not condone certain ideas begin to view these discourses as normal. This section is based on Sociologist Diane Vaughan's monumental book "*The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance in NASA*" and Normalization and the discursive construction of "new" norms and "new" normality: discourse in the paradoxes of populism and neoliberalism - Michał Krzyżanowski.

According to Vaughan, the 1986 Challenger disaster was a process of normalizing a series of deviant behaviors that were accepted due to ignoring their deviant position vis a vis pre-existing norms. Vaughan states that in the case of the Challenger disaster, the incident could have been avoided had protocols been followed as they should, instead, a series of consequences arose from practices that downplayed the severity of the deviations. These practices include having meetings that reinforce the dismissal of deviance or oxymorons such as the acceptable risk that alter one's perception of the deviance at hand. When deviant positions begin to be accepted as normal, a path dependency is created that facilitates the normalization of further deviance<sup>50</sup>.

While public discourse is different from the Challenger Mission, the normalization of deviance does occur in this area as well. First of all, the previous section explains how Bolsonaro's insensitive discourse has become to be received as less deviant. Through a series of economic, social, and political distress, the electorate has become more inclined to accept such insensitive rhetoric and downplay the severity of what has been said. For example, the racist remarks on indigenous people may have been downplayed due to the fact that he blames "them" for being responsible for their "uncivilized" status. What is interesting, however, is that Vaughan considers the normalization of deviance as path dependant, thus, as Bolsonaro continues to say homophobic, misogynistic, racist, and inhumane things, their deviance vis a vis pre-existing norms - i.e. to be more cautious when speaking in public - is largely ignored as people begin to overlook the practice as deviant.

In addition, Vaughan sees the compromised credibility of critics as a method of accepting deviance. In fact, Bolsonaro's critics - as reported in the quote above - have largely been leftist,

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<sup>50</sup>Vaughan, D. (1996) *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance in NASA*

and more specifically petista politicians (politicians of the Workers' Party) and his attacks at their unfairness and untrustworthiness due to mismanagement of the national economy and corruption scandals have jeopardized their role as a sound voice criticizing the President. In Vaughan's analysis of acceptance of deviance, therefore, the normalization of insensitive speech occurs due to a series of socio-economic scenarios that make insensitivity more viable. At that point, once insensitive discourses arise, they become normalized due to repeated deviant actions and compromised credibility of opposing viewpoints.

Michał Krzyżanowski discusses a post-Foucauldian approach to discourse normalization. According to this view, normalization occurs in a top-down fashion, where a leader introduces a new (deviant) norm and legitimizes them. Subsequently, individuals or groups are disciplined to conform to these norms. Such a view relies on power classifications (social hierarchy) and discipline. Crucial to this view is the ability of the leader to either stigmatize or highlight social actors depending on which is helpful to legitimize the newly introduced "norm". Finally, the result should not be new conduct that most people are able to or feel comfortable following, rather a set of norms that have been ingrained in people's minds to the extent that opposing views are considered abnormal. This process is also path-dependent, so once it emerges it is difficult to stop, and normalizing further deviance becomes an easier task.<sup>51</sup>

In this view Bolsonaro would be the leader, imposing the new norm on the Brazilian population. The stigmatization of the political opposition legitimizes the newly introduced behavior similar to the phenomenon reported above. While the population is more prone to accepting these discourses under specific conditions, it is the leader who introduces such discourse to the public, thus acting as a channel that introduces insensitivity to the public sphere where people previously may have kept it in the private sphere since insensitivity was seen as a deviant position. Therefore, the main difference between the two approaches; while Vaughan's approach sees normalization as a horizontal phenomenon where constant downplaying of critical voices paired with a chain of marginal deviances that are exposed as normal rather than abnormal with respect to the previously existing norm, the post-Foucauldian approach sees the norm as top-down where a leader introduces and legitimizes a norm while stigmatizing critical voices as disciplining the population in following the newly established norm.

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<sup>51</sup>Krzyżanowski, M. (2020), *Normalization and the discursive construction of "new" norms and "new" normality: discourse in the paradoxes of populism and neoliberalism*

In reality, we can learn from both approaches, as foreshadowed before the process can be seen partially as a top-down phenomenon and partially as a horizontal phenomenon. As a top-down phenomenon, we can see Bolsonaro as the leader introducing new forms of speech in the public sphere while legitimizing them with façades (such as using economic exploitation as an excuse). On the other hand, as a horizontal approach, we can emphasize the role of the public in being in a situation where they are more prone to accepting such discourses, it is also the acceptance of the public that pushes the boundaries of what is the social norm, *de facto*, normalizing the discourse to the point where opponents view such discourses as less shocking than before. There are also similarities between the two approaches that are complementary. In Vaughan, the ability to downplay critical voices is important to make deviance acceptable and in the Brazilian case we can see how the research on affectionate polarization causes voters to view opposing points of view as stupid and absurd, however, the Workers' Party political and economic fiascos seem to legitimize the marginalization of the Brazilian left and thus give effectively annihilating the opposing viewpoint. In the post-Foucauldian approach, we see the leader's ability to highlight and stigmatize social actors and as we've seen in the speech analysis, Bolsonaro calls his opponents "criminals" referring to the aforementioned scandals thus, similarly to how the public downplays the opposing viewpoint through affectionate partisanship, Bolsonaro does so as well by attacking their credibility. Finally, both approaches view deviance as path-dependent, where once deviance is legitimized it occurs more often and it is rooted in pushing the boundaries of what is the pre-existing social norm. Therefore, deviance normalization can be initially seen as quasi-deviant behavior that continuously expands the boundaries of existing norms that clear the path for further deviance. Deviance normalization can be seen as the aggregate of small deviances that in the long-run revolutionize the social norms to the point where all parties begin to accept insensitivity more easily.

## **CONCLUSION**

To sum up the points discussed above, populism enjoys increased sensitivity in cases where a friend-enemy dichotomy is not only possible, but is actually exaggerated in order to engage both parties in antagonizing one another. The politics of resentment does not necessarily occur in people who live in precarious situations, rather, the articles examined in the first part of the first chapter explain that it is those who have become more pessimistic about the present that

are prone to antagonizing minorities. It can be boiled down to finger-pointing, where the perceived worsening status of a group of individuals find comfort in scapegoating as it gives them a concrete enemy against their misfortunes. In the Brazilian scenario, it has been discussed that macroeconomic mismanagement, recessions, inflation, and corruption have all contributed to giving wealthy white males an increased perceived status risk, explaining why the typical Bolsonaro voter falls within this category. The third chapter referred to affective polarization, which has become an important phenomenon in the United States, but which we can also see some elements of in Brazil. The initial Workers' Party administration in the beginning of the 2000s saw widespread approval by the masses, despite the *Mensalão* scandal. However, rather than the Workers' Party approval rates, it was Lula's that maintained especially high levels since the former President benefitted from an uncertain connection to the corruption scandal and was associated with *Bolsa Família* and development while the party as a whole took the hit of the scandal. When another corruption scandal hit Brazil in 2014 coupled with economic recessions, inflation, and worsening living conditions, the situation flipped. The population expressed widespread disapproval for the Workers' Party arising in affective polarization; i.e. people shifted to the right and completely antagonized anything coming from the left. On the other hand, the economic and social situation in Brazil since 2014, as discussed in the second chapter, have taken a downturn supporting socio-economic thesis explaining the popularity of Jair Bolsonaro. Finally, the cultural-backlash theory offers an explanation as to why people have suddenly shifted from siding with the progressive left for the past 15 years while now the "counterrevolution" pushes them to the right.

As it has been outlined, the first two chapters explain the socio-economic conditions within Brazil that have allowed discriminatory statements to enter the public sphere, conversely, the third addresses the process through which those discourses become normalized as well as offering examples of why his speech directly applies to the socio-economic situation stated above. While the socio-economic state of Brazil has favored the introduction of discriminatory and insensitive speech in Brazil, the path dependency created by constant deviance pushes the boundaries of pre-existing norms turning previously deviant positions into normal ones.

In conclusion, Brazil has been an important international actor in the past few decades, however, while in the past this relevance was linked to growing prosperity, it is now linked to corruption scandals and economic inefficiencies. The normalization of insensitive speech

ultimately poses a great challenge for Brazil's future in a time where widespread turmoil and crises due to the pandemic are common. In the near future the Brazilian government will have to face with inefficient responses to the Covid-19 pandemic which has crippled both economically and socially many states worldwide<sup>52</sup>. A more silent and long-term threat is posed by the informal and insensitive nature of public discourses due to Bolsonaro's rhetoric. As Vaughan's normalization of deviance has demonstrated, once deviance is accepted, it pushes the boundaries of pre-existing norms paving the way for future deviance as well. Therefore, Brazilians face the responsibility of reverting the deviance that has been introduced in the past few years which will be a difficult task since insensitivity has been normalized to the point where they have solidified their status as a part of the current cultural regime.

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<sup>52</sup> Donmez, B. B. (2020), 'Bolsonaro must be impeached for virus mismanagement'

## **Riassunto:**

Il Brasile è uno dei paesi al centro della scena politica mondiale, tuttavia, la ragione per cui ha questa rilevanza è cambiata di recente. Mentre prima era una nazione molto importante grazie alla sua crescita economica e al suo miracoloso sviluppo sociale, oggi la politica brasiliana è stata associata alla corruzione, all'inefficienza e, negli ultimi anni, all'estrema discriminazione. La politica dell'attuale presidente Jair Bolsonaro, o il Trump dei Tropici - come lo hanno soprannominato i media - è stata fondamentale per l'aumento dell'insensibilità verso le minoranze che si è verificato in Brasile in questi ultimi anni. Sono state fatte ampie ricerche su come i partiti populistici guadagnano popolarità, e più specificamente, come il contesto brasiliano era maturo per l'ascesa di un populista conservatore.

Tre nozioni importanti da tenere a mente, quando si affronta il successo populista, sono la politica del risentimento, il fenomeno della polarizzazione affettiva e le teorie socio-economiche e del contraccolpo culturale. La politica del risentimento si riferisce allo status socio-economico percepito dagli individui e non al loro status effettivo di per sé. Quando un individuo è più pessimista sul presente e sul futuro rispetto al passato, tende a rivolgersi a politici populistici che sottolineano il peggioramento delle condizioni dovuto ad altri attori che sfruttano quelli che hanno subito un torto. Gli individui "danneggiati" nella società - o in una lettura populista "il popolo puro" - sono quindi più inclini alla "colpevolizzazione" come meccanismo per far fronte al rischio di status percepito. La polarizzazione affettiva, d'altra parte, è importante perché spiega il fenomeno della divergenza degli ideali politici, dove la destra e la sinistra si allontanano sempre di più, portando a differenze inconciliabili tra loro. Una volta che questo fenomeno si verifica, coloro che votano per i partiti conservatori di destra, tendono a vedere i partiti progressisti di sinistra, come più distanti, ipocriti e indegni di considerazione. Infine, le teorie socio-economiche e contraccolpo culturale proposte da Inglehart e Norris, sostengono che gli strati meno sicuri della società, che vivono in povertà o in condizioni sociali precarie, votano per i partiti populistici di destra come risposta a una situazione in cui il capro espiatorio e gli approcci nativisti offrono una soluzione apparente alla loro situazione quando in realtà evitano di affrontare altre questioni di fondo. Inoltre, la tesi del contraccolpo culturale sostiene che il tempo di pace nei paesi post-industriali porta a un crescente post-materialismo e progressismo che alla fine innesca una controrivoluzione in cui i valori più tradizionalisti riprendono forza.



Nello scenario brasiliano, il quadro teorico offre una visione del perché la situazione in Brasile fosse matura per far prosperare le retoriche populiste. Due dei più grandi scandali di corruzione della storia brasiliana, le indagini *Mensalão* e *Operação Lava Jato*, hanno coinvolto quello che all'epoca era il partito predominante nella politica brasiliana: Il Partito dei Lavoratori di Lula e Dilma. Dopo questi due eventi, era inevitabile che il Partito dei Lavoratori riconquistasse la fiducia di una popolazione insoddisfatta che ha visto troppe volte la corruzione in un breve periodo di tempo, facilitando la retorica “anti-establishment”. Anche la situazione economica ha il suo peso. Mentre i mandati di Lula hanno visto grandi miglioramenti nello sviluppo sociale ed economico, la recessione del 2014 e gli alti livelli di inflazione dovuti a risposte inefficaci alle questioni macroeconomiche, hanno portato a una diffusa disapprovazione e a proteste di massa causando disagio economico e sociale. Infine, i crescenti tassi di criminalità e i continui disordini sociali hanno solo contribuito alla paura e all’aumento della percezione del rischio negli individui. La combinazione di tutti questi aspetti favorisce le letture della ricerca proposta nel quadro teorico. La corruzione contribuisce alla politica del risentimento, al risentimento contro i politici che hanno sfruttato il loro elettorato, e alla polarizzazione affettiva dovuta a un allontanamento dalla sinistra. Le crisi economiche e la spesa pubblica inefficace hanno contribuito al rischio di status percepito e reale. I crescenti disordini sociali e i tassi di criminalità sostengono la tesi socio-economica di individui che vivono situazioni precarie e preferiscono il populismo di destra, trovando anche conforto nella retorica di legge e ordine di Bolsonaro.

Infine, Bolsonaro durante la sua campagna elettorale ha tenuto discorsi insensibili e discriminatori, prendendo di mira le minoranze, i criminali, la comunità LGBTQIA+, le donne e altro. Purtroppo, però, questi commenti sono stati sostenuti dalla situazione disperata descritta sopra e, quindi, sono stati accolti a braccia aperte. Vaughan e Krzyżanowski offrono punti di vista simili, ma con leggere differenze, su come avviene la normalizzazione della devianza. In questo caso, la norma sociale preesistente è stata scavalcata spingendo i confini di ciò che è visto come accettabile, forzando un nuovo regime culturale in cui l'insensibilità legata alla retorica di Bolsonaro è stata vista come normale e ha avuto l'opportunità di diventare una vera forza con cui fare i conti nella politica brasiliana.

In conclusione, una sfida a breve termine, che i brasiliani devono affrontare, è la cattiva gestione della crisi dovuta al Covid-19. Tuttavia, una conseguenza a lungo termine del governo

di Bolsonaro è che molti anni di progresso sono stati abbandonati in nome delle crisi socio-economiche. Così, una vera sfida, per il Brasile ma anche per altri paesi del mondo, sarà quella di reintrodurre il “politically correct” e il sano giudizio politico piuttosto che il nativismo e la “colpevolizzazione”.

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