

Research Article

The Brazilian Far-right After Bolsonaro: How New Actors Are Using Disinformation Strategies to Mobilize the Audience on Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Although symbolically defeated by the left in the 2022 presidential elections, the Brazilian far-right, institutionally represented by former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro's government (2019-2022), continues to mobilize a significant portion of the electorate, repositioning its agenda within the mainstream of previously centrist and moderate politics. Given the central role of Bolsonarism (an ideological movement centered around Bolsonaro), this study aims to explore how the Brazilian far-right is adapting its narratives and rhetoric to seek greater support among voters. In this sense, we update the new uses of digital platforms and disinformation strategies adopted by the far-right parties and politicians to garner voter sympathy, especially from the center in the political spectrum. Through a Content Analysis, we identify five main manipulation tactics most commonly used on social media (Polarization, False Identity, Emotion, Defamation, and Conspiracy) associated with far-right rhetoric in the Brazilian context. In conclusion, we pointed out a change of this language, by the use of new platforms that now are playing a significant role in the way that Brazilian right and far-right actors communicate with the audience, such as a change of the topics in its traditional moral-emotional agenda, more based now in a transphobic discourse.

Keywords

Brazilian Far-right, Bolsonarism, Disinformation Strategies, Digital Platforms

1. Introduction

A Google Trends map shows that from the second half of 2016, people began extensively searching for the term "fake news". That same year, the Oxford Dictionary selected "post-truth" as the most significant word of the year; businessman and politician Donald Trump became President of

the United States, and the Brexit campaign for the UK's exit from the European Union was victorious. These indisputably connected events prompted a call for a science of "fake news" to understand individuals' vulnerabilities within the context of shared disinformation on social media [38]. The influence of

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fake news in electoral processes became absolutely evident, especially after the global explosion in 2018 of the scandal involving the illegal sale of millions of Facebook users' data to Cambridge Analytica (hired by both the Trump and Brexit campaigns). The report by journalist Carole Cadwalladr, published in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, denounced that Cambridge Analytica used the obtained data to create a system that allowed them to influence voter choices, primarily through the dissemination of false and/or distorted content. It was also in 2018 that far-right candidate Jair Messias Bolsonaro was elected President of Brazil in a controversial campaign fueled by fake news, as revealed by journalist Patr cia Campos Mello from *Folha de S. Paulo* (2018).

Previous studies highlight that the sharing of online disinformation is strongly correlated with right-wing partisanship (1), though the phenomenon is also observed, albeit to a lesser degree, among those identified with the left. This investigation reflects on disinformation in the digital environment from the Brazilian political context, particularly highlighting the weaknesses in informational education that allowed the rise and normalization of the far-right in the country, symbolized by Bolsonaro's government (2019-2022).

Although defeated at the polls by left-wing candidate Luiz In cio Lula da Silva from the Workers' Party (PT) and declared ineligible until 2030 by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) for abuse of political power, there are many indications leading us to assert that the toxic mix of the Bolsonarist *modus operandi* has definitively been incorporated into the political mainstream. However, the consequences of normalizing this extremism remain unpredictable - although some materialized in the tragic events of January 8, 2023, when the Pal cio do Planalto, the seat of the Brazilian Executive Power, was violently invaded by radical Bolsonaro supporters. Motivated by the idea that the Brazilian electoral system was insecure (a notion instrumentalized by the former president throughout his government) they incited an unprecedented turbulence in the country's history, destroying public property to obstruct the newly inaugurated government and establish a state of exception.

A clear sign of the radicalization of Brazilian political mainstream is the resurgence of public debates on ultra-conservative issues, such as the prohibition of abortion and civil marriage between same-sex couples, which has been allowed in Brazil by the Supreme Federal Court (STF) since 2011 [26]. The latter is currently under discussion in the Chamber of Deputies, which, in November 2023, approved a bill prohibiting marriage and stable unions between same-sex individuals.

Simultaneously, new far-right actors, such as the coach and digital influencer Pablo Mar al, who was a candidate for mayor of S o Paulo during this 2024's pools, the councilman candidate Lucas Pavanato (the most voted candidate of the city in this election) or the current federal deputy Nikolas Ferreira (the most voted candidate of Brazil in the last pools) are emerging and symbolically contributing to the

re-accommodation of the far-right agenda in Brazilian politics.

They employ a mechanism that, while keeping a radical base active and recruiting new young voters into political extremism, also builds new political arrangements aimed at effectively approaching centrist or undecided voters within the political spectrum.

While the dissemination of disinformation and extremist ideologies occurs mainly within a digital ecosystem where videos, photos, texts, online games, and memes circulate freely on social media and messaging apps points out that it is essential to demystify the idea that recruitment into radicalism occurs only online [27]. The story of how the new far-right was created, nurtured, and now floods the internet is much more complex and requires analysis based on both online and offline strategies. This paper specifically focuses on the disinformation strategies employed by the far-right actors in the online environment, after the fall of its greater leader, Jair Bolsonaro, currently ineligible until the year of 2030. The research goal is to explore how the Brazilian far-right adapts its narratives and rhetoric in search of proximity to the mainstream of politics.

In this regard, we seek to answer two questions:

- 1.Q1: What is Bolsonarism in terms of an expression of the Brazilian far-right?
- 2.Q2: What disinformation strategies are used by the Brazilian Far-Right and Radical Right to re-accommodate its agenda into the political mainstream?

In the first section of our work, we seek to answer Q1 by defining the characteristics of Bolsonarism as an expression of the Brazilian Far-Right, according to definitions by Konder (2019), Sedgwick (2019), and Lowy (2015) [20, 23, 37, 24]. In response to Q2, we first outline the main disinformation strategies used by Far-Right parties and politicians considering the dimensions identified by Roozenbeek and Van Der Linden [34, 35]: Polarization, Personification, Emotional Content, Provocative, Discrediting Opponents, Trolling, and Conspiracy. Second, we identify a change of the topics mostly used by them to mobilize the audience.

- 3.Q1: What is Bolsonarism as an expression of the Brazilian far-right?

In this section, we position Jair Messias Bolsonaro's government (2018-2022) and the ideological movement around his figure, popularly called bolsonarism, as an expression of the contemporary Brazilian far-right. To better understand the rise of Bolsonarism, it is essential to first define the far-right, exploring its intellectual roots on a global scale and its correlations with the Brazilian experience.

2. Right-wing, Radical Right, and Far-right

In political science, the concept of the "right" is associated with sectors of society that are socially and economically

privileged and seek to preserve their privileges through political discourse and action. Mudde [29] defines extremism as the antithesis of democracy, understood here as a political system where power is exercised by the people through the election of their representatives. In this sense, extremism rejects the belief in popular sovereignty. Radicalism, on the other hand, as argued by the author, positions itself against liberal (or constitutional) democracy without eliminating its classical institutions and checks and balances systems, such as the press and the judiciary. It is important to note that in this definition, radicalism accepts procedural democracy, while extremism does not [29, 36]. The radical right presents itself in discourse as anti-system but does not renounce adjustments that allow its participation in electoral contests and does not necessarily advocate for historical extremism and fascism, although it presents anti-democratic political agendas around political and cultural issues. Thus, when the far-right is in power, it tends to undermine liberal democracy incrementally.

2.1. The New Global Far-Right

Although the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps contributed to a backlash against the extreme-right and the disappearance of such thought from mainstream politics for many decades, Sedgwick (2019) observes that a new liberal mindset dominated the West. However, this status quo has been changing since the early 21st century. The shifts to the political right are numerous and complex because "terms like fascism and neo-Nazism are commonly used to distinguish this new far-right configuration but may be limited to certain contexts" [37].

The rise of this political category, especially in the United States and many European countries, reflects a socio-economic and cultural phenomenon that goes beyond the extremism of intolerance and violent ideas. Undoubtedly, a significant portion of citizens identified with far-right parties embraces racism, LGBTQ phobia, misogyny, and xenophobia, and many of them adhere to "ultra-conservative" values. Global new far-right parties support authoritarian measures such as increased police repression, harsher sentences, and the reintroduction of the death penalty to combat "insecurity" (often associated with immigrants). On other issues—such as neoliberalism, parliamentary democracy, anti-Semitism, homophobia, misogyny, or secularism, these movements are more divided [24], as illustrated in figure 1:

Regarding the rise of the new European far-right, Eatwell and Goodwin [8, 11] introduce the concept of "national populism." Before delving into the discussion proposed by the authors, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of the terms "nationalism" and "populism." Generally, nationalism is associated with the idea of nation and the notion of identity [32]. On the other hand, the concept of "populism," more complex and often controversial, has been used in academic circles as an explanatory key to encompass movements, parties, and leaderships under a single category, even if they

may be distinct [2]. This study adopts interpretations aligned with the premises of classical populism theory without avoiding criticism of its indiscriminate use.

Typology	Examples	Characteristics
I - Directly fascist and/or neo-Nazi parties	Golden Dawn (Greece); Jobbik (Hungary); Right Sector (Pravyy Sektor); National Democratic Party (NPD Germany); The newly created French "National-Socialist" and the anti-Semitic "National Reconciliation".	Their founders consider themselves heirs of the 1930s fascist movements. Directly linked to these parties, violent racist gangs attack and sometimes kill minorities such as Jews and Roma. In Eastern Europe, these groups are anti-communist.
II. Semi-fascist parties (have fascist roots and strong components but cannot be identified with the classic fascist pattern).	National Rally (France); FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria) - Austria; Vlaams Belang (Belgium).	The original founders had close ties to historical fascism, but their current leadership tries to "modernize" them by presenting a more "respectable" image, for example, replacing anti-Semitism with Islamophobia.
III. Far-right parties without fascist origins.	Lega Nord (Italy); Swiss People's Party (SVP); UK Independence Party (UKIP); Freedom Party (Netherlands); Progress Party (Norway); True Finns (Finland); Danish People's Party (Denmark); and Sweden Democrats (Sweden).	Most of these parties share anti-immigration rhetoric and Islamophobia.

Figure 1. European Far-Right and Radical Right Scenario (based on Lowy 2015).

In general, the use of the concept of populism is related to the need to express some "dysfunction" in democratic practice [4, 5]. According to Laclau [21, 25], populism can be defined not as a type of movement with a specific ideological orientation but as a political logic that can operate on different social bases. However, it is a phenomenon that arises in moments of hegemonic crisis when unmet democratic-popular demands are articulated by some class or fraction of a class against the dominant power bloc.

In general, in Latin America, the definition of populism from the 1930s to the 1960s corresponded to something quite specific: governments with anti-imperialist rhetoric or movements around charismatic figures who garnered broad popular support, such as Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina [2]. In the European context, Lowy [20, 24] recommends avoiding the use of the term populism to characterize the international far-right, arguing that it becomes a euphemism that deliberately or inadvertently helps legitimize it, making it more acceptable and avoiding terms like racism, fascism, and xenophobia. After all, who wouldn't be in the order of the people against the elites?

Having discussed the concepts of populism and made these reservations, let's return to Eatwell and Goodwin's [11] analysis of the rise of "national populism" (a term understood in this work as synonymous with the far-right). The authors observe that the phenomenon is linked to four main social changes that are causing growing concern among millions of people in the West:

- Distrust in the context of liberal democracy, traditional political elites, and democratic institutions, gradually fueling the sense that many citizens no longer had a voice in the national dialogue.
- The belief that liberal politicians are "eroding the nation" by encouraging immigration.
- How globalization has increased the sense of "selective

deprivation" among those who have always had privileges, especially the white middle class; and

d. The increasingly weak ties between traditional dominant parties and their voters, making politics more chaotic and unpredictable.

Although the defeats of Trump and Bolsonaro may indicate significant markers that the "brown wave," as the rise of the far-right is called, is weakening worldwide, Eatwell and Goodwin [11] argue that this is indeed a force that has come to stay, and there is evidence of this movement. The fluidity and broad scope of the national-populist agenda in different global sociopolitical contexts allow us to reject the simplistic stance that its supporters mainly fit the stereotype of the "angry old white man." Nor is it correct to infer that most of its voters comprise a mass of unemployed, low-income, and uneducated individuals. Although it varies from country to country, the far-right is widely integrated into society, attracting votes from conservative middle-class workers, women, the LGBT community, and youth. The recent Brazilian elections reflect this approach, though there are substantial differences between the global far-right and the Brazilian far-right.

2.2. The Rise of Jair Bolsonaro and the Repositioning of the Brazilian Far-right

Scholars point out that Bolsonarism did not originate in 2018 with Jair Bolsonaro's presidency. To understand the rise of the far-right in Brazil, it is necessary to look back, investigating the sociopolitical and economic context that allowed Bolsonarism to rise and garner the support of over 56 million voters for an authoritarian political project opposed to the democratic values and institutions that consolidated in the early 21st century. The Brazilian context also echoes some of the socioeconomic and political grievances that paved the way for the global far-right.

One analysis links the June 2013 protests as responsible for the emergence of the "new right" in the country. The dissatisfaction of thousands of Brazilians in the streets during those days would become one of the most important phenomena in contemporary Brazil. Thus, a "non-conventional right not accommodated by traditional political schemes" was born. Bolsonarism incorporates many aspects of the global far-right. According to Pinheiro-Machado [31], the movement was characterized by an ultra-conservative worldview that advocated a return to traditional values and adopted a nationalist and patriotic rhetoric. Indeed, the narratives associated with Bolsonarist demonstrations, especially on social media, align with themes such as defending the traditional family, patriotism, conservatism, authoritarianism, scientific denial, support for gun ownership, rejection of human rights (especially those of minorities), defense of anti-democratic values, and the cult of a leader (Bolsonaro), often referred to as a "myth." However, the historical context in which the radical right established itself in Brazil highlights its differences from the international radical right.

The Brazilian version of fascism (Integralism) was considerable relevant in the 1930s, but the current Brazilian far-right has little connection to this old matrix. Although neo-fascist groups increasingly challenge democracy in the country, it is not comparable, for example, to Greece's Golden Dawn. Another difference to consider is that Brazil does not have parties that openly advocate racism, despite the country not being a racial democracy. However, Lowy [20, 24] highlights some equivalences, such as the repressive ideology and the cult of police violence defended by the so-called "Bullet Caucus," strongly represented in the National Congress, and the intolerance towards sexual minorities, especially the LGBTQIA+ population, a theme galvanized by Neo-Pentecostal evangelicals [6].

On the other hand, a factor that does not have a direct equivalent in Europe and seems to be the most concerning element of the conservative far-right in Brazil is the appeal to the military. "The appeal to a military intervention, the nostalgia for the military dictatorship, is undoubtedly the most dangerous aspect of the recent conservative street agitation in Brazil" [1, 24]. The coup attempts on January 8, 2023, would confirm this analysis.

Regarding the demand from a segment of the population for the return of the military dictatorship in the country, Chau [4, 7] analyzes that, contrary to the supposed image of a national culture characterized by cordiality, Brazilian society is authoritarian and violent, with entrenched structures of hierarchy and a persuasive attraction to authority. Schwarcz [37] points out that especially in times of political crisis, the dream of "harmony" of the Military Regime is evoked in the country as if that period brought magical solutions to Brazil's structural problems.

Violence and authoritarianism are indeed intrinsic to Brazil's historical formation, which in the past decimated entire indigenous populations and imposed centuries of the violent slavery system, presupposing the power of one human over another, creating hierarchies between whites and enslaved blacks. Regarding Bolsonarism, Schwarcz [37] points out that this is a movement that, in fact, has its roots in our slaveholding past, which in turn is rooted in the specter of colonialism and the structures of patriarchy.

Q2: What are the disinformation strategies used by the Brazilian Far-Right to re-accommodate its agenda into the political mainstream?

In this section, we reflect about a change of the uses of digital platforms, such as the disinformation techniques by the Brazilian Far-Right and radical right after the fall of its greatest leader, the Former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro. To do so, it is necessary first to conceptualize disinformation and correlated situations such as misinformation, mal-information and fake news. In the field of Information Science (IS), a classic contribution comes from philosopher Don Fallis [9, 10, 12, 13], who defines "disinformation as false information whose function is to deceive someone." In this perspective, lies, fake news, or conspiracy theories are

forms of disinformation since the source intends for the information to be misleading to benefit itself. In sum, although they may differ in terms of how this function was given, all instances of disinformation are unified by the fact that they have a specific function: the intention to deceive. And because this function was given, the information is not misleading by chance or accident. However, inaccurate, incomplete, or even satirical¹ information can sometimes be misleading, but the source of the information did not intend to deceive people or systematically benefit from those who are deceived. If people are misled, it is only by accident. This is what the author classifies as misinformation.

Wardle and Derakhshan [39] highlight a third category associated with content that, although based on reality, is manipulated to defame the image of individuals, organizations, or countries (mal-information). The term fake news is described by Lewandowsky et. al [22, 23] as false content that uses journalistic language to deceive. However, the term's use is criticized by some academics, mainly because the expression has gained a pejorative connotation.

In sum, understanding disinformation extends beyond the broad concept of incorrect or demonstrably false statements. Recent literature has identified many dimensions of disinformation, arguing that fake news has been transformed into a political tool and that a reassessment of what constitutes misleading online content is necessary. Roozenbeek and Van Der Linden [34, 35], in particular, identify six of these dimensions that are most commonly used in the production of disinformation: Polarization, Personification, Provocative Emotional Content, Discrediting Opponents, Trolling, and Conspiracy.

- (1) Polarization: artificially amplifies existing grievances and tensions between different societal groups, such as political differences, to garner support or antagonism towards viewpoints and partisan policies [18].
- (2) False identity: involves deception in the form of falsifying the identity of online accounts. This includes impersonating a real person or organization, imitating their appearance, for example, by using a slightly different username [16]. This technique is commonly used on social media platforms, for example, when impersonating celebrities, politicians, or in various other online scams.
- (3) Provocative emotional content: produces material that deliberately plays on basic emotions such as fear, anger, or empathy to grab attention or frame a problem in a particular way. Roozenbeek and Van Der Linden [34, 35] show that emotional content leads to greater engagement and is more likely to go viral and be remembered by news consumers.
- (4) Conspiracy theories: create or amplify alternative explanations for mainstream news events that assume these events are controlled by a small, secret elite group of people [14, 9].
- (5) Discrediting opponents: diverts attention from accusa-

tions of bias by attacking or delegitimizing the source of criticism or completely denying accusations of wrongdoing.

- (6) Trolling: in the context of disinformation means deliberately inciting a reaction from a target audience using bait, making a deliberately offensive or provocative online post to upset someone, or provoking an angry response from that person [17].

There will always be new spaces, channels, and platforms that enable online communication and mobilization [30]. Additionally, the author emphasizes that a significant portion of the online hate ecosystem is self-organized and does not depend on popular platforms. This means that extremist groups, even if their channels are banned by court decisions or police actions, can constantly migrate to new platforms in response.

3. Dimensions of Disinformation Adopted in the Brazilian Far-right on Digital Platforms

Analyses of phenomena in the online context are particularly challenging given the constant changes in scenarios and political contexts that can influence the media communication strategies of the far-right. In this section, we contextualize the main disinformation strategies used during the four years of Bolsonaro's government. Subsequently, we analyze the actions of a public figure whom we believe embodies Bolsonaro's values, contributing to keeping the extremist militancy on alert: the congressman Nikolas Ferreira, from the Liberal Party (PL). To illustrate our argument, we analyzed his posts on his Instagram account (@nikolasferreiradm).

As previously highlighted in this study, Bolsonaro's presidential campaign and the four years of his presidency marked the rise of the far-right in Brazil and flooded public discourse, not with discussions about topics like social justice or strengthening democracy but with the threat that "communism" and "gender ideology" could take over the country, causing social chaos and moral panic.

The rhetoric that the "communist" left could take power still resonates in the collective unconscious of Brazilians months after the beginning of President Lula's third term, as seen in a survey published on March 19, 2023, by the Intelligence Research and Consultancy Institute (Ipec). According to the survey, 44% of Brazilians believed that Brazil was at risk of becoming a "communist" country under Lula's rule. Of these, 31% said they completely believed in the "communist threat."

The so-called cultural issues and the appeal to a "cultural war" that are foundational in the far-right Bolsonaroist rhetoric are intrinsically linked to this debate. In our study of political disinformation spread by the Brazilian far-right, we identified five manipulation patterns practiced during Bolsonaro's four years in office. Our empirical research considered the content

analysis of posts published by the fact-checking Lupa's Agency (@agencia_lupa) on Instagram, which primarily analyzes the accuracy of pieces circulating on messaging apps like WhatsApp within a selected period (2018 to 2022). During this period, over 1,200 pieces were identified and debunked as disinformation by Lupa agency. Specifically, we analyzed the content from August 16, 2018 (the date on which Brazilian electoral law authorized political propaganda for the presidential election), to October 30, 2022 (the end of the 2022 presidential election). We classified these persuasive messages according to five patterns: Polarization, False Identity, Emotion, Defamation, and Conspiracy, aligning with the findings of Roozenbeek and van der Linden [34, 35].

In 2018, Lupa's fact-checking agency was still imploring for its project to debunk disinformation related to the Brazilian presidential elections. Brazilian society was not exactly prepared to deal with disinformation and its consequences during that year. On Lupa's Agency Instagram account, the electoral process cover began on August 13, 2018. From that date until December, we highlighted only nine posts specifically related to debunking disinformation classified as (Polarization, Discrediting Opponents, and Provocative Emotional Content). From 2019 onwards, all previously mentioned manipulation patterns can be identified except trolling. Although this strategy was widely used by the radical right on social media, in our specific research, it was not possible to identify this type of pattern by applying content analysis on Lupa's Agency's Instagram account, as identifying this type of technique requires monitoring fake accounts (like bots) and interactions with their followers and sources that can systematically disseminate fraudulent content. For accessibility, we translated all the posts (originally written in Brazilian Portuguese).

3.1. Discrediting Opponents

On October 27, 2018, we draw attention to a piece of disinformation disseminated in a WhatsApp group of Bolsonaro supporters to encourage attacks against Patrícia Campos de Mello, a journalist working for one of Brazil's largest newspapers, Folha de São Paulo (Figure 2). She became a target of Bolsonaro supporters after publishing a report revealing an illegal scheme to spread fake messages on social media sponsored by businessmen and politicians.

In a piece of disinformation, an image shows a woman next to former Brazilian presidential candidate Fernando Haddad of the Workers' Party (the largest left-wing party in Brazil). The photo shared on WhatsApp bears the message: "This is journalist Patrícia Campos Mello who wrote a story against Bolsonaro. A Petista².". The message intends to discredit the journalist (viewing Bolsonaro supporters as an opponent) by suggesting that her work is biased and not neutral, which is one of the most important values of journalistic ethics.



Figure 2. Disinformation discrediting a Brazilian journalist.

3.2. Polarization

Among the disinformation cataloged in 2018, we highlight polarized content primarily intended to deceive left-wing politicians (especially the Workers' Party) to divide voters and provoke a sense of "us versus them." In one of these messages, for example, a manipulated image shows former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff next to former Cuban President Fidel Castro. The material comes with the phrase "Dilma and Fidel photographed together." Below, we reproduce the real image verified by Lupa's Agency. The record was taken by NY Daily News photographer John Duprey in 1959 when Fidel Castro was in the United States (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Above, the false content. Below, the real image.

3.3. Provocative Emotional Content

Among all the analyzed material, we highlight disinformation that stimulates an exclusionary ideology concerning social movements such as feminists, LGBT communities, anti-racist groups, and so forth. For example, to provoke moral panic, radical groups have deceived feminist movements by manipulating content to construct a narrative that they do not respect religious dogmas and are enemies of the "Christian faith." Frequently, these materials incite hate speech against these minority groups historically identified with left-wing parties and progressive groups.

In this scatological disinformation, for example, a manipulated image shows people performing sexual acts inside a church. The material comes with the phrase: "Feminists defecate and have sex inside a church" (Figure 4).

In another debunked disinformation, an unsettling image shows a woman covered in blood holding a doll. The content originating from a WhatsApp group falsely links this photograph to a "pro-abortion movement" (Figure 5). In Lupa's

Agency description, the true origin of the image is clarified: In reality, the photograph is part of the Baby Smash series created by Melissa Trotter, a Canadian digital artist. She specializes in horror images, most of which involve children.



Figure 4. Moral-emotional disinformation with misogynist content reproduced by Lupa's Agency.



Figure 5. Disinformation debunked about a false "pro-abortion movement" debunked by Lupa's Agency.

In Brazil, while progressive groups have been advocating for the decriminalization of abortion as a women's health issue, conservatives and radical groups have been building rhetoric that this procedure is a "free pass" to "kill children." Considering that Brazil has a conservative society where the majority of the population identifies with Catholicism, this is a delicate issue, and even left-wing parties have some reservations when dealing with it. During Bolsonaro's government, this topic was little explored by him and his supporters.

3.4. Conspiracy

During Bolsonaro's government, we identified that most conspiratorial content was related to anti-scientific, denialist, and anti-vaccine speeches and rhetoric that downplayed the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, it was also possible to find climate denialist narratives and disinformation that incorporate conspiratorial and polarizing content.

To better illustrate this format, we reproduce below debunked disinformation that comes with the so-called "communist domination plan of the Workers' Party." The message highlights 12 issues allegedly demanded by the party, such as a socialist referendum and criminal immunity for activists and members of social movements (Figure 6):



Figure 6. The false "communist domination plan by the Worker's Party".

3.5. False Identity

In this type of manipulation strategy, Lupa's Agency debunked some disinformation content within our analysis period, which led our research to initially conclude that this type of technique is no longer effective in deceiving the public, as today, social media users can easily verify if the usernames of news services linked to reports were classified as an official and verified account. We highlight a debunked disinformation that uses a fake username linked to the Folha de São Paulo's newspaper. The headline shows a confusing phrase falsely linking this magazine to an editorial questioning whether an

"acquittal of a white supremacist could encourage Bolsonaro supporters to randomly shoot people." In addition to impersonating the press, in our interpretation, this content also serves the function of discrediting the media as a whole (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Discrediting media disinformation.

4. The Change of the Disinformation Techniques: New Actors Reshaping the Far-right Agenda

The National Congress that emerged from the 2022 Brazilian elections is the most conservative since redemocratization. The last Brazilian pools, held in October 2024 for the elections of mayors and councilmen around the country confirmed that currently the national political mainstream is mostly formed by right-wing or extreme right-wing politicians. Many of the elected candidates come from agribusiness, have military backgrounds, and are affiliated with evangelical cults. The most voted federal deputy in Brazil during the 2022's pools was Nikolas Ferreira of the Liberal Party (PL), closely linked to Bolsonaro's clan. At 26 years old, he received more than 1.4 million votes [30]. This 2024's pools, Lucas Pavanato, from the Liberal Party (PL) was the most voted councilman in the city of São Paulo. What both candidates have in common is that they use a transphobic agenda, disseminating disinformation content on social media and mobilizing moral panic by focusing on this specific topic [38].

In our analysis, we believe that Nikolas Ferreira is emerging as the main leadership of Bolsonaro for the coming years, given his success at the polls and especially his ability to communicate through social media, incorporating the aesthetics that have solidly integrated into Brazilian politics. To support this hypothesis, this study applied content analysis to posts on the parliamentarian's Instagram account (@nikolasferreiradm) during January, February, and March 2023.

Based on the disinformation patterns we classified in our

analysis (Polarization, Personification, Provocative Emotional Content, Discrediting Opponents, Trolling, and Conspiracy), we analyzed the deputy's performance. In total, there were 21 posts, where we highlighted that, in summary, Nikolas Ferreira reproduces the Bolsonarist communication ecosystem, mobilizing emotions against left-wing ideologies and exploring the so-called 'cultural issues'—an umbrella term under which topics such as abortion prohibition and same-sex marriage find fertile ground for the Brazilian far-right."

During Bolsonaro's government, some research institutes indicated that Bolsonaro's radical supporters represent about 12% to 15% of the Brazilian adult population [33]. On the other hand, undecided or neutral voters may represent between 10% to 26% of voters [28]. Our hypothesis is that Nikolas Ferreira plays a significant role in maintaining, activating, and exciting the most extremist portion of Bolsonarism by reproducing, manipulating, and mobilizing emotions to keep militancy in a permanent state of paranoia. Bolsonaro's speech has a paranoid style that manifests between "anxiety and tension for what is to come: nothing has happened or is happening, but something threatening may be being generated now." [15].

To investigate the articulation between the Bolsonarist ecosystem and the public actions of Nikolas Ferreira, we are using as corpus analyses posts published by this deputy on his Instagram account (@nikolasferreiradm) during the first three months of the parliamentary mandate (January, February, and March 2023).

In a large part of his posts, Nikolas Ferreira incorporates the aesthetics of TikTok (Figure 8), exploring short videos using colloquial language laden with jokes and supported by memes and other visual elements to sustain his narrative. By doing so, he contributes to radicalizing the mainstream, including aesthetic signals that communicate emotions such as anger, using humor, wit, and clever codes that convey exclusionary and dehumanizing messages [27].



Figure 8. Nikolas Ferreira on the Tik Tok's platform.

On January 4, the deputy published a video addressing a well-known topic from the Bolsonaro ecosystem: abortion. "You, Christian, who voted for Lula Know that he placed a woman who supports abortion in the Ministry of Women." He adds, "Legal abortion is a cute word to say: you can kill your child according to the law."³ As we argued earlier, abortion is still a strong keyword to mobilize radical militancy, exploring a provocative emotional content strategy.

In this emotion-mobilizing universe, Nikolas Ferreira also evokes the morality agenda through another angle of the radical right ideological circuit: hate speech against the LGBT community. On March 8 (International Women's Day), he made a transphobic speech in the Chamber of Deputies, suggesting that "transgenders were emptying the place of women."⁴ For this behavior, he had his mandate questioned by the Chamber of Deputies' Ethics Council, but the case was dismissed. Exploring polarization in another video, Nikolas Ferreira publishes disinformation suggesting Lula's government's involvement in the Palácio do Planalto by radical Bolsonaro supporters. "Lula put a seal on the cameras that recorded images of the January 8 attacks,"⁵ said the deputy. However, this content is false and had already been debunked [3]. With this narrative, Nikolas not only uses the discrediting opponent technique but also stimulates in his audience a sense of "us versus them" (polarization).

Through this brief study, we observe the systematic use of disinformation techniques such as Polarization, Provocative Emotional Content, and Discrediting Opponents, with some new actors playing a role in keeping the most radicalized portion of Bolsonaro supporters by incorporating elements that contribute to radicalizing the mainstream, such as humor, memes, and other common elements in internet culture, reshaping the Bolsonaro ecosystem and creating new action lines that can form a consensus not only among radical Bolsonaro supporters but also among moderates and even undecided voters.

5. Conclusion

In this study we aim to highlight the new uses of digital platforms and disinformation techniques by the Brazilian Far-Right and Radical Right after the fall of the Brazilian Former President, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, considered ineligible until 2030. To do so, we first clarify the meaning of the ideological movement around Bolsonaro, popularly called bolsonarism, as an expression of the Brazilian Far-Right. We consider that Bolsonaro's government was based on hatred and exclusion, encouraging the use of firearms, rejecting human rights, promoting racist, sexist, and homophobic speeches and practices. Little by little, topics that, in another time, were considered tabu, have been normalized in the last years. In this sense, we believe that disinformation techniques spread on social media, especially applications such as Whatsapp, played an important role in the normalization of the bolsonarist rhetoric.

To identify the disinformation strategies used by Brazilian

Far-Right, we accessed a previous study which we could identify five patterns of manipulation techniques thought a Content Analysis of Lupa's Agency during Bolsonaro's government. Our findings were close to the dimensions identified in previous related studies [34, 35]: Polarization, Personification, Emotional Content, Provocative, Discrediting Opponents and Conspiracy.

With Bolsonaro acting just "behind the scenes", new Far-Right actors are emerging to occupy the lack of the Brazilian extreme right-wing, radical wing and right wing in the political mainstream. In this sense, we argue that personalities such as the federal deputy Nikolas Ferreiras are emulating the "new face" of the national Far-Right, using new platforms (using more shorts on YouTube or TikTok than Whatsapp disinformation content) and focusing in a moral-emotional agenda, especially, the transphobic one, to mobilize the audience.

More than asking how and why Brazilian society embraced the Bolsonaro project, we need to build ways to prevent and protect new generations from extremism. In our studies, we argue that since a large part of the Bolsonaro ecosystem employs disinformation techniques, we believe it is necessary to cognitively prepare people to identify these manipulation patterns adopted by the far-right in the digital realm (Polarization, Personification, Provocative Emotional Content, Discrediting Opponents and Conspiracy) and create new alternatives to stimulate media literacy between Brazilian audience.

Abbreviations

PT	Workers' Party
TSE	Superior Electoral Court
STF	Supreme Federal Court
IS	Information Science
PL	Liberal Party
Ipec	Intelligence Research and Consultancy Institute

Ethical Approval Statement and Informed Consent Statement

This research is based on a literature review and content analysis methods and does not involve human participants.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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1 Similar to the Sensacionalista Newspaper (<https://www.blogs.oglobo.globo.com/sensacionalista>), The Piauí Herald (<https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/herald/>), and the websites The Onion (<http://www.theonion.com>) and The Babylon Bee (<https://babylonbee.com>).

2 In common parlance, "petista" is a Brazilian term that refers to supporters of the Workers' Party.

3 Link available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnAqV8DKISo/>

4 Source: CNN (2023). Link available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB2YUgzfHvM>

5 Link available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CoYFCV5JSa4/>