

“Us” versus “Them”:  
Jair Bolsonaro’s Construction of a Populist Frame

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### I. Overview and Research Question

On October 28, 2018, retired military officer and far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro won a run-off election in Brazil against São Paulo mayor Fernando Haddad. Bolsonaro, who served in Brazil's Chamber of Deputies on behalf of Rio de Janeiro from 1991 to 2018, campaigned on a platform of anti-corruption, liberalization of gun laws, and the rollback of LGBTQ rights and protections. Throughout his campaign, despite his decades of political experience, he used discourse to position himself as a political outsider who would defend the Brazilian people against the corruption that came to define the presidencies of Dilma Rouseff and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Just six days before the election, Bolsonaro shared a video on his Twitter that vituperated the corruption of the previous administrations and attacked the media for their role in spreading false information. I aim to use this study to examine how Bolsonaro uses language to create a sense of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. More specifically, I will address the question: How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”? I am interested in exploring the mechanism through which Bolsonaro disseminates this conceptualization of what the Brazilian people are and are not, or perhaps what he wants them to be and what he believes that they should not be. Moreover, what groups does Bolsonaro target and isolate and with what implications? How does this mirror the tactics used by populist leaders across the world to capture power and maintain support?

In order to answer my research question, I plan to conduct an analysis of Bolsonaro's discourse; more specifically, I will use his tweets as the basis of my study of his language. I

argue that Bolsonaro disseminates an exclusionary populist frame through social media and interviews in order to establish himself as the best representative of the in-group and the defender against all out-groups.

## II. Methodology

I focus primarily on Bolsonaro's social media because of the high volume of Brazilian engagement with this platform and Bolsonaro's tendency to explicitly express his feelings about "the people" and "the others" through social media. As of March 13, 2020, Bolsonaro had 6.1 million followers on Twitter, but this number does not account for the number of individuals who see his posts when their friends share his posts or retweet his Twitter content. Conversely, these numbers do not necessarily mean that 11.2 million people support Bolsonaro and his policies, it just means they are following his activity. I analyze his tweets from October 14, 2018 to January 2, 2020 using the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti. During this time period, Bolsonaro tweeted 3,200 times, including retweets, quoted tweets and replies. For the purpose of this research, I only include tweets in English or Portuguese and tweets where I could view the original tweet, since some have been deleted or the links are no longer live. After cleaning my data according to this criteria, there are 2,854 tweets remaining for me to analyze. I search for how he describes "the people," the political right and left, and out-groups he has identified, including indigenous people, women, the LGBTQ community, and the former political elite. I use Bolsonaro's tweets to discover which actors he speaks favorably of, both at the domestic and international level, and which he posits as a threat to Brazil.

Bolsonaro's interviews throughout his campaigning and since his election in 2018 cannot be ignored when analyzing his discourse. While some politicians attempt to be covert with their messaging about particular groups or people, Bolsonaro uses media interviews and speeches to directly confront the groups he wishes to otherize in Brazil. Bolsonaro's comments have led to pushback from Brazilian activists, but he has yet to adjust his rhetoric to be more "politically correct." Interviews are not the focal point of my analysis, as I am primarily interested in the ways in which populists utilize social media to garner support; however, in some contexts, interviews with traditional media platforms provide useful contextualization for tweets.

### III. Literatures

I engage with three primary bodies of literature in this study. First, I examine how language is used to create otherness. I explore Dr. John E. Joseph's book *Language and Politics* (2006), as he argues that we use language to "organise our social existence" and this includes creating hierarchies within social groups and defining the in-group and out-group. Second, I narrow my focus to the topic of populism and I discuss how populism has been defined since the revitalization of the term at the Conference on Populism hosted by the London School of Economics in 1967. I consider several seminal works on populism, including Cas Mudde's (2004) argument that populism is a distinct ideology, though it is a thin-centered ideology. I also engage with Moffit and Tormey (2014) and their analysis of populism as a political style. I pay particular attention to Caiani and della Porta's (2011) conceptualization of populism as a frame, or a way of making sense of reality, as this is the definition of the term that will inform the remainder of this study. Third and finally, I review the relationship between social media and

populism. I explore Mazzoleni and Schulz's (1999) study on the mediatization of politics, and Mazzoleni and Bracciale's (2012) research on the ways in which social media has impacted politics and heightened the visibility of populists.

#### IV. Context/Background

Bolsonaro rapidly rose to power after the dramatic fall from power of Presidents Lula, Rousseff and Temer, whose presidencies were plagued by political corruption and the erosion of democratic institutions (Phillips et al. 2019). His rise to the presidency also marked the rise of the conservative Social Liberal Party (PSL), the party Bolsonaro was in from January 2018 to November 2019. Bolsonaro established the Alliance for Brazil (ALIANÇA) following his departure from the PSL. Given that Bolsonaro was elected as the PSL's nominee in October 2018 and that ALIANÇA is still in the process of formation, I concentrate my study on his experience in the PSL. The rapid growth in electoral success for the PSL accompanied the downturn in support for the center-left Workers Party (PT), which from 2002 to 2016 led the governing coalition in the Chamber of Deputies. In October 2018, the PSL went from having 1 seat in the Chamber of Deputies (0.83%) to having 52 seats (11.7%), and from 0 seats in the 81-seat Senate (0%) to 4 seats (11.3%), while the PT won 56 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (10.3%), which was down 3.7% from the 2014 election, and 6 seats in the Senate (14.5%), down 2.5% from 2014.

Since 2014, Brazil has been gripped by a corruption scandal known as *Operação Lava Jato*, or "Operation Car Wash." The Lavo Jato investigations have uncovered a dense network of corruption involving millions of dollars in kickbacks and bribes and more than 80 politicians

and members of the business elite, including former Presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Michel Temer (Gonzalez and Leme 2019). Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was extremely popular during his term as President from 2003 to 2010, was found guilty of accepting bribes and was sentenced to 12 years in prison in 2018. Dilma Rousseff, though not directly involved in the scandal, was impeached in 2016 for illegally moving funds between departmental budgets. Michel Temer, who took office after the impeachment of Rousseff, received an eight-year ban from running for office in June of 2016 after being convicted of violating Brazilian election rules (Greenwald 2016). In March of 2019, Temer was arrested as a precautionary measure as a part of the ongoing bribery investigations (Londoño and Casado 2019). The corruption in Brazil is widespread and entrenched, but the events of Operation Car Wash brought to light the magnitude of the democratic decay in Brazil and the dysfunction of democratic politics (Daly 2019, 14). Bolsonaro's historic rise to the presidency from the Chamber of Deputies demonstrates that the Brazilian people were discontented with mainstream political parties and were looking for an "outsider" to defend their interests.

Bolsonaro won Brazil's presidency with 55% of the vote, but polls indicate that over the first year of his presidency, his public support has declined (CNT/MDA 2019; IBOPE 2019). IBOPE, the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics, tracked public opinion from January 28, 2019 to December 8, 2019 and reported that there was a 20% decrease during this period in respondents rating Bolsonaro's government as "great" or "good." Conversely, there was a 27% increase in respondents rating his government as "bad" or "awful." Similarly, according to polls conducted by the Brazilian National Television Center between February 23, 2019 and August 25, 2019, there was a 9% decrease in respondents rating Bolsonaro's

government as “great” or good” and a 20.5% increase in respondents rating Bolsonaro’s government as “bad” or “awful.” These polls demonstrate that public support for Bolsonaro is not impenetrable. I will further discuss the decline in support for Bolsonaro in Chapter Five, as support for Bolsonaro has been further eroded by his dismissal of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion of media ownership and corruption in Brazil, it is important to have some background knowledge on the Brazilian media landscape in order to understand how Brazilians are receiving information. In 2019, approximately 70% of Brazil’s population, or 149 million people, accessed the internet, which represented a 7.2% increase from 2018 (Lopez 2019). Additionally, 81% of Brazilians aged 13 and above are active on social media, in comparison to 58% worldwide. However, television is still heavily consumed in Brazil and more than 70% of the national audience is shared among four major networks: TV Globo, SBT, Record and Band (Reporters Without Borders 2020). Media ownership and production is concentrated in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which make up the southern cluster of power, known as the “Concentrated South and Southeast.” Bolsonaro has a complicated relationship with mainstream media platforms, as he frequently purports that they espouse “fake news” and he attacks and discredits journalists. The concept of “fake news” and Bolsonaro’s engagement with the media will be further explored in Chapter 4.

Bolsonaro’s language has received little academic attention, perhaps because of how recently he was elected, but his inflammatory, exclusionary, populist rhetoric warrants study. The fear-mongering, nativist rhetoric that he espouses mirrors that of populists like Hungary’s Viktor Orbán, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and American President Donald Trump (Daly 2019, 3). Moreover, Bolsonaro disseminates distorted and false information. The Brazilian

fact-checking organization *Aos Fatos* reported that as of November 28, 2019, in his 331 days in office, Bolsonaro had made 518 false or distorted declarations. This study categorizes Bolsonaro as a populist because he uses language to construct and disseminate a frame, or a conceptualization of reality, that posits “the people” against “the others.”

## V. Analysis

There are three trends and themes that I will investigate within President Bolsonaro’s discourse. First, I expect that he will position himself as the defender of the will of the people. The concept of “the people,” though lacking in precise meaning to a scholar, can be, according to Canovan (1981), a political opportunity for populist leaders like Bolsonaro to “challenge existing political boundaries and to redraw the lines of battle in a new place” (282) Laclau (2006) argues that creating and disseminating a populist frame does not require a coherent, cohesive ideological backing, rather it relies on the loose construction of the concept of “the people” versus “the elites” or more generally, “the others.” Bolsonaro frequently references the corruption under Dilma Rousseff and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as evidence of the abuse of public office and of the Brazilian people that may occur when greedy, entrenched elites are elected. I expect that Bolsonaro demonstrates who “the people” are by articulating a specific set of moral values. Moreover, I anticipate that he positions himself as the defender of the people by condemning the former elites, supporting law and order, claiming to represent the will of the people, and vowing to bring Brazil to a status of greatness.

Second, I anticipate that Bolsonaro will produce a sense of cultural threat to help define who “the others” are in Brazil. Throughout his campaign and during the first few months of his

administration, Bolsonaro targeted the LGBTQIA+ community, indigenous people and women (Savarese 2019). Bolsonaro's homophobic, racist and sexist rhetoric is not only problematic for Brazil's international reputation, but encourages the "sexual exploitation of Brazilian women" and has led to increased fear of homophobic violence among LGBTQ and leftist activists (Phillips and Kaiser 2019). While Bolsonaro's language toward particular cultural and social groups in Brazil is hostile and inflammatory, it closely mirrors the cultural othering used by populists across the world (Daly 2019, 3). Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and United States President Trump propagate a similar frame to ostracize specific cultural and racial groups, such as immigrants, undocumented individuals, and people of color.

Third and finally, I predict that Bolsonaro will demonstrate hostility to the political left and solidarity with the right. Bolsonaro has claimed his contempt toward the "deceitful" media for their role in exaggerating the contemporary problems in the Amazon and has categorized many mainstream media platforms as sources of "fake news" (Wojazer et al., 2019). Bolsonaro argues that the PT is the source of the struggle of the Brazilian people, and positions both the party and its members as "the other." Whilst the political left, both within and outside of Brazil, is deemed by Bolsonaro to be "the other," I expect that he demonstrates solidarity with the political right. I look specifically at Bolsonaro's language about American President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, as I anticipate that he will express in-group unity with these leaders.

## VI. Roadmap

The rest of this thesis is divided into four parts. The first part is a literature review that addresses the concepts of linguistic othering, populism, and the media and populism. The second part gives a brief historical overview of corruption in Brazil and the circumstances that accelerated Bolsonaro's rise to power. The third part directly investigates Bolsonaro's rhetoric using data from his active Twitter account. I analyze if and how Bolsonaro's rhetoric demonstrates the three aforementioned patterns in populist discourse of the leader as the defender of the people, cultural threat, and solidarity with the right and hostility to the left. The fourth and final part offers concluding thoughts on the importance for populist leaders of constructing an in-group and out-group, and the tactics they utilize to accomplish this goal.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I use this research to examine how Bolsonaro uses language to create a sense of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. More specifically, I address the question: How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”? This research focuses solely on Bolsonaro, in lieu of the entire Social Liberal Party (PSL), because Bolsonaro is the foremost representative for the party, as the President of the country, and his inflammatory discourse contrasts the relative moderatism of his party (Mortari 2018). I argue that Bolsonaro disseminates an exclusionary populist frame through social media in order to establish himself as the representative of the in-group and the defender against all out-groups.

I engage with three bodies of literature in this literature review. First, I discuss literature from political science and sociology on how language is used to create otherness, with a focus on the importance of language in constructing collective identity. Second, I look at the three most popular definitions of populism in political science academic literature before I discuss why populism is best defined as a frame. Populism is defined as a frame in this research in accordance with the definition of a frame offered by Benford and Snow (1992 & 2000), who claim that frames are cognitive instruments that allow individuals to make sense of reality. Populism is a frame because it is a way of understanding reality as “the people” versus “the other,” and populism involves an active process of organizing experiences to elicit action. Third and finally, I discuss broadly the relationship between the media and politics before focusing on social media and populism from the disciplinary perspectives of communication studies and political science. These three topics will be considered in turn in order to provide an understanding of the theoretical rationale that allows me to analyze Bolsonaro’s rhetoric.

## I. Using Language to Create Otherness

The language of politics and the politics of language must be unpacked to understand how Bolsonaro manipulates language for political gain. According to John Joseph (2006), politics includes “any situation in which there is an unequal distribution of power, and where individuals' behaviour reflects the play of power (2).” Based on this definition, politics is intertwined with language and “every act of language is *potentially* political,” because from the construction of language to interpretation, there are power dynamics that influence language (7). There is a sliding scale of the politicization of language, meaning that not all language is equally political. One example that Joseph (2006) uses to explain this concept is a grocery list. Your grocery list is likely to be less political than a manifesto, but even a grocery list represents the power dynamic of a household, as it demonstrates that one or two members of the household determine what is being consumed by the remaining members of the household. When a head of household shops for organic food instead of non-organic foods, or in Whole Foods instead of Kroger, they are demonstrating the political dynamics within their house, because the essence of politics and power is whose will or choices prevail (17). Joseph (2006) argues that every choice about language among humans reflects some power dynamic, and thus all language is political. Bolsonaro operates within this understanding, as a human being, and thus his social media, interviews, and everyday interactions with constituents should be analyzed in order to decipher the overarching political intentions that inform his discourse.

Once we understand that language is political, we can discuss how language is used to construct identity. Written and spoken language, specifically intonation and colloquialisms, are

important to the signal and interpret identity (Joseph 2006). Identity and language are not intrinsic characteristics, rather identity is constructed based on education, region, social class, generation, and a myriad of other factors, and identity is subsequently performed and replicated throughout a population. Similarly, language is a learned ability and is influenced by the community one lives in, social standing, and both formal and informal systems of education (Joseph 2006). Language and identity, together, shape the ways in which individuals understand their own position in society and the position of those around them. Moreover, language is a critical way in which humans construct identity, ranging from the level of individual identity to national identity. All politicians play a critical role in assembling a cohesive, lasting national identity, and disseminating such an understanding in a way that encourages citizens to fit themselves within that identity.

The construction of identity often involves the creation of an in-group and an out-group. Dr. Christina Späti (2015) asserts that, “language or culture may be used as a means of identifying one's own group and distinguishing it from another group. In this process of inclusion and exclusion, language is referred to as a point of reference for the politicization of cultural difference” (4). Späti (2015) argues that in an increasingly multicultural and interconnected world, language is a critical component in conversations around national unity, identity, and minority rights. Groupings such as the nation are imagined communities (Anderson 1983), but nonetheless these imagined communities, subjective feelings of belonging to a group, and collective identities influence our experiences and perception of reality. Späti maintains that language is a critical part of these identities and can be the basis for inclusivity or exclusivity, since “language is used as an expression of sameness and of difference, of belonging and of

dissociation” (12). Language is a means through which people can create, shape, and maintain a collective grouping by clearly defining the boundaries of the in-group and out-group. In the Brazilian context, President Bolsonaro has attempted to redraft the definition of what it means to be a true Brazilian by establishing a firm delineation between the in-group and out-group.

One important process in the construction of identity and in the creation of an in-group and out-group is that of linguistic “othering.” John Powell (2017), Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkeley, defines “othering” as a process whereby people use language to “narrowly define who qualifies as a full member of society” (1). Powell (2017) contends that othering is often in response to major and rapid societal change, and is one part of a political process of “organizing and manufacturing fear.” Othering is a political process because it is not about personal contact, but instead, “it is based on the conscious or unconscious assumption that a certain identified group poses a threat to the favoured group” (Powell 2017, 1). Powell (2017) argues that othering is largely driven by politicians and the media and it is not a bottom-up process, since it is not the actual attributes of individuals or groups that lead to their ostracization. Instead, it is how those attributes are manipulated by those with power to control the political narrative. Only through the politicization of difference can individuals clearly identify who is “the other.” Language is the primary tool that Bolsonaro uses to distinguish “the other” groups, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Politicians often reference “the people” and “the other” and define each group within particular parameters to elevate their status as representatives of “the people” and defenders against “the others” (Laclau 2006). This sort of dichotomization is in no way random; it is an

inherently political and tactical recognition that carries important connotations. However, Laclau (2006) claims that “the people” is not simply an ideological expression, rather it is a “real relation between social agents” (73). In other terms, the concept of “the people” is a real way of creating unity within a group and division between groups. Laclau’s point highlights an important constraint of Anderson’s supposed “imagined community.” Though the nation and other collective identities are largely constructed and imagined, people perceive these identities as reality. Thus, the concept of “the people” is not merely an immaterial, intangible definition of a group. “The people” becomes a physical embodiment of an idea that individuals can see, interact with, and partake in. All of this is to say that “the people” is not just an idea, but can become a tangible manifestation of this abstract concept.

The dichotomic division of society by politicians is successful when the politician can clearly articulate that these groups are mutually exclusive and antagonistic, and that “the other” is somehow degrading the lives of “the people.” This articulation involves an evocation of frustration and channelling of frustration by political leadership toward a designated out-group. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) argue that it is most effective to frame “the elites” or “the system” as the source of crisis or breakdown, in opposition to “the people” who have been “let down” or “rendered powerless” (391). According to Moffitt and Tormey (2014), stressing the systems or processes that have supposedly benefited “the other” at the expense of the wellbeing of “the people” is an effective way for politicians to position themselves as the solution to the problems “the other” have created. Bolsonaro skillfully manipulated this tool during his candidacy for President to elevate his status to that of the people’s defender.

Many politicians have used language to create otherness, with varying degrees of success. In Hungary and Poland, the incumbent right-wing parties have, according to Vachudova (2019), “denigrated opposition parties and liberal civic groups as enemies of the people” and have “waged a war on feminism and women’s rights” in order to support policies that concentrate political power in the hands of a few and limit the capacities of the opposition. Vachudova (2019) argues that political competition in Hungary and Poland has shifted issue focus to concerns over identity. Accordingly, the national-conservative parties Fidesz and the Law and Justice Party (PiS) have used their propaganda regimes to propagate xenophobic and racist rhetoric that otherizes Muslims, refugees, and ethnic minorities. For Fidesz and PiS, this rhetorical pattern of othering, in conjunction with an illiberal agenda, has allowed them to successfully construct “the people” and “the other.” Bolsonaro’s tactic of linguistic othering closely mirrors the appeals used by Fidesz and PiS, but it must be investigated in light of the specific socio-political conditions in Brazil that put Bolsonaro in a position to gain prominence.

This section addressed the intersection of language, identity, and politics. I included Joseph’s (2006) sociolinguistic study as the focal point of this section, because it demonstrates how politics permeates language, and vice versa. Späti (2015) illustrates the ways in which language is used to construct the in-group and out-group. Powell (2017) focuses on the “sinister” tactic of linguistic othering, and argues that othering is used to divide, dehumanize, and gain power. Lastly, Laclau (2006), Moffitt and Tormey (2014), and Vachudova (2019) connect this tactic of linguistic othering to politics, and exhibit how and why politicians manipulate the attributes of particular groups to put them against one another. This section of the literature review provides a basis of understanding for how Bolsonaro uses language to construct the

in-group and out-group, or the “Us” versus “Them.” It is important to acknowledge that Bolsonaro is not operating within a vacuum, and politicians across the political spectrum have adopted the technique of linguistic othering to grab and concentrate power (Vachudova 2019). This section informs the following section on populism, as it explores one of the foundational concepts of populism, which is the dichotomic division between “the people” and “the other.”

## II. Populism

Bolsonaro’s tactic of linguistic othering is a prominent example of how he creates and disseminates a populist frame. In order to properly study the phenomenon of populism and how it is utilized by Bolsonaro, I must first acknowledge the decades-long academic debate over the definition and usage of the concept. Knight (1998) aptly articulates that there is a “pervasive unease” concerning the concept of populism because the definition is constantly being contested, denigrated, and updated. The concept is so intensely debated that some argue that the term populism is not even worth using anymore because there is no discernible meaning associated with it (Baker 2019). However, this sort of debate over the parameters and implications of terminology is not limited to populism, but is also evident in studies of liberalism, conservatism, and many other political concepts (Mudde 2004). Moreover, no matter how you define populism, there is consensus among scholars that one of the predominant features of populism is the dichotomic division of society between an in-group and out-group (Canovan 1981; Knight 1998; Mudde 2004; Laclau 2006; Caiani and della Porta 2011).

The scholarship on populism began in the 1960s with a conference held at the London School of Economics. Since then, there has been an explosion of academic attention paid toward

the subject as populist regimes have risen and fallen throughout Europe and Latin America. Though populism has been defined as a communication variable (Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2018), a struggle (Bray 2015) and a social logic (Laclau 2006), populism as an ideology (Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008), populism as a political style (Knight 1998; Moffitt and Tormey 2014), and populism as a political strategy (Weyland 2001) are three of the most frequently cited interpretations of populism. However, one of the newest arguments around populism is that populism should be understood as a frame, or a cognitive instrument that allows people to make sense of reality (Caiani and della Porta 2011). I will explore the three most frequently used interpretations in turn and unpack the strengths and weaknesses of each before offering what I believe to be the most sound conceptualization of populism as a frame.

### Populism as an Ideology

The earliest wave of study aimed at defining populism tended to situate populism as an ideology (Laclau 1977; MacRae 1969; Wiles 1969). This warrants the question: What is an ideology in the context of politics? Ideology, similarly to populism, is a term that is debated among scholars as frequently as it is cited, and the study of ideology has changed since its Marxist origins. Ideology, in Marxist thought, refers to “certain aspects of a thought process which seem to originate in one's own psyche,” but, “are in fact socially and historically conditioned” (Samalin 2018). More broadly, ideologies are systems of ideas or a set of beliefs shared by members of a group that guide thinking and behavior. In accordance with this broad understanding of ideology, Cas Mudde (2004) argues that populism is a distinct ideology, but he concedes that populism is a “thin-centred ideology” (544). Mudde (2004) claims that populism is thin-centred, because it exhibits a restricted core that is attached to a more narrow range of

political concepts (544). One of the core weaknesses of the definition of populism as an ideology is that unlike full ideologies, thin ideologies like populism are less refined and consistent, and can be molded to fit with or within full ideologies.

Stanley (2008) argues similarly to Mudde (2004) that populism should be conceived of as a distinct ideology because it can convey a distinct set of ideas about the political; however, populism is a ‘thin’ ideology because “it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions” (95). Even though Mudde (2004) and Stanley (2008) support defining populism as an ideology, they concede that populism is not a complete ideology and thus acknowledge that this definition of populism lacks coherency. The definition of populism as a frame, on the other hand, does not need to fit the strict parameters of an ideology and can be molded to fit social conditions while remaining steadfast to the core dichotomic division between “the people” and “the others.”

One of the great strengths of populism is that it can mold itself to adhere to many different contexts and can be adopted by individuals from across the political spectrum, but, since ideologies are not as flexible as populism, populism is not best defined as an ideology. Hugo Chávez, Bernie Sanders, Viktor Orbán, Narendra Modi, and Jair Bolsonaro have all been defined as populists, despite the obvious ideological divide among them (Lewis et al. 2019). While Sanders is campaigning for the 2020 United States presidency to “achieve economic, racial, social and environmental justice for all,” Bolsonaro has come out against support for land rights for indigenous people and said he would be “incapable of loving a gay son” (Lehman 2018). This example demonstrates why populism is not an ideology because two politicians labeled as “populists” can have widely divergent ideological positions. This is important to note

because populism is much more malleable than other ideologies. Each iteration of populism involves the revelation of a different “social truth” and no two populist leaders or movements look exactly the same (Molloy 2018). Thus, populism is not best defined as an ideology. But, populism as a frame allows for a broader scope of application and manipulation to fit a country’s cultural and social conditions.

### Populism as a Political Style

Populism is also often defined as a political style (Knight 1998; Moffitt and Tormey 2014; Moffitt 2016). A political style is “performed, embodied and enacted” across various social and political conditions (Moffitt 2016). Knight (1998) argues that populism is best defined as a political style because this definition enables flexibility and “historical fidelity” (233). The failure of populism as an ideology is the rigidity of what defines an ideology, so the concept of “historical fidelity” is particularly important. It highlights that populism as a style is a malleable concept that can be tailored to the specific social, political, and historical conditions of a country. However, populism entails the dissemination of a particular narrative of emphasizing “the people” versus “the other” that not all leaders subscribe to. Additionally, while Knight (1998) claims that “Leaders’ are surrogates for movements/parties/regimes,” some populist leaders form an agenda separate from their party, and can be successful in building their authority based on this independent, self-serving agenda. In fact, Bolsonaro pushed the Social Liberal Party in Brazil to adopt more socially conservative policies and brought the party from the fringe of Brazilian politics into the mainstream (Mortari 2018).

Moffitt and Tormey (2014) similarly argue that “thinking of populism as a political style contextualises populism’s position in the contemporary ‘stylised’ political landscape and brings

representation to the forefront of discussions about populism” (387). The definition offered by Moffit and Tormey (2014) aims to encapsulate the performative and relational aspects of populism, as opposed to simply the discourse of populism. While many politicians that are labeled as populists adopt similar tactics of giving disruptive media performances and avoiding “political correctness,” this explanation is too broad and fails to adequately differentiate between personalistic leaders and true populists. All politicians are performative to some extent because this is an effective method of gaining public attention, but populism as a style does not clearly delineate between politics and populism. I use the concept of populism as a frame because it demonstrates the clear development of the “Us” and “Them,” but still maintains the flexibility required to connect ideas, actions, and language.

Populism as a political style captures the “repertoires of performance that are used to create political relationships” (Moffitt 2016, 387). This definition, and the one offered by Knight (1998) incorporates leaders across the political spectrum because it focuses on the performative elements of populism instead of the ideational elements of it. I do not use the concept of populism as a political style in this research and instead use populism as a frame. Populism as a frame bridges the gap between populism as an ideology and populism as a political style. It emphasizes the importance of the ideological notion of a dichotomic division of society, while also stressing the significance of the dissemination and performance of this notion through platforms like social media.

### Populism as a Political Strategy

The third most utilized definition of populism is populism as a political strategy. A political strategy, according to Weyland (2001) is characterized by, “the principal ‘power

capability' that a prospective or actual ruler deploys" (12). Political strategy focuses on the methods and instruments of winning and maintaining power. This definition goes beyond the broad conceptualization of a political style to focus on specific ways in which a leader can gain and exercise power. Weyland (2001) argues that populism is best understood as a political strategy wherein the leader appeals to the people for support and to combat the corrupt elite (14). There are many strengths to this definition of populism, including that it highlights instruments such as social media and socioeconomic clout that populists use to garner backing. However, this definition does not capture the core idea of populism, which is to distinguish between "the people" and "the other." Populism as a frame encapsulates this idea, as the reality that the populist frame constructs is one that is divided.

### Populism as a Frame

In order to explain why I present populism as a frame, I must first explain what a frame is and how it differs from an ideology. As stated by Benford and Snow (2000), "frames help render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action" (613). Framing is an active process that allows individuals to construct their sense and understanding of reality. Though reality is often described as the objective state of the world, Benford and Snow (2000) argue that every individual experiences a different reality, which is shaped by the unique intersections of their identity, such as their generation, geographic location, and socioeconomic status (626). Framing is an ongoing process with three distinct tasks of "diagnostic framing," "prognostic framing," and "motivational framing" (615). Diagnostic framing is the identification of a problem and the attributes of the problem, followed by prognostic framing wherein a proposed solution is articulated, and finally motivational framing

is a rationale for collective action to address the problem. Benford and Snow (2000) conclude that frames simplify and condense the world to mobilize constituents, gain bystander support, and demobilize antagonists (614). The idea of a frame best encapsulates populism because it calls attention to the importance of building a clear problem and solution, which often manifests as an in-group and out-group, and calls on people to construct their reality and act based on this thinking. I will discuss the ways in which Bolsonaro creates a diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation for action in the fourth chapter as I unpack his discourse.

A frame differs from an ideology in several important ways. First, a frame is more flexible than a formal ideological system, and thus can be molded to fit a particular social or historical context (Tarrow 1992, 190). Ideologies are more rigid than frames and if populism was a rigid, universal ideology, leaders would not be able to successfully manipulate it to fit their political context while remaining true to the ideology. Second, framing, unlike an ideology, is an active, ongoing process with distinct tasks of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation (Benford and Snow 2000). Populist leaders repeat this process time and time again in order to diagnose reality as problematic and situate themselves as the answer to the particular issues of a society (Caiani and della Porta 2011, 182). Populism is not a one-size-fits-all model, but is an active process adopted and crafted by leaders like Bolsonaro to garner electoral support and support for exclusionary policies.

Caiani and della Porta's (2011) introduce an argument that populism is best understood as a frame. In their analysis of right-wing discourse in Germany and Italy, Caiani and della Porta (2011) argue that the populist frame is one that posits "the people" against some other group, such as the political elites, and language is the primary way in which this frame is

operationalized and promulgated. Caiani and della Porta (2011) demonstrate through their analysis of extreme-right discourse in Germany and Italy that the goal of the prognosis of the populist frame is to concentrate power in the hands of an exclusive group of elites who claim to represent the people (196-197). Populist discourse is aimed at excluding elites, ethnic minorities, and political adversaries. Moreover, they demonstrate that populist discourse is *“territorially-ethically and culturally specified,”* meaning that populists frames are tailored to be specific to the ethno-national characteristics of a nation. Populists stress the importance of “the preservation of the national identity of the people” by emphasizing the distinction between ethnic in-groups and out-groups (190). I am utilizing Caiani and della Porta’s frame analysis of populist discourse in written texts as a model for my analysis of Bolsonaro’s media discourse in the fourth chapter.

### Conclusion

Though this literature review has primarily explored definitions of populism, I must acknowledge the rise of populists across the world within the last ten years and potential explanations for this rise. The processes of neoliberalism, deregulation, and globalization and the changes brought about by these processes have created an environment wherein populists can thrive (Flew and Iosifidis 2019, 7-9). The rise of populism cannot be attributed to a single factor, but certainly includes the aforementioned processes, as well as the failure of mainstream parties to respond to economic slowdown (2). One of the most important factors in the spread of populism that will be further explored in the third section of this literature review is social media. The social spaces of social media attract massive numbers of people and allow populists to communicate directly with their constituents for very minimal cost (9).

I recognize that no definition of populism will ever perfectly encapsulate the behaviors, language, and policies of all populists in all circumstances. I argue though that populism defined as a frame most accurately captures the fact that populism is a way of understanding reality as dichotomically divided between groups of people.

### III. Media, Politics and Populism

Social media has transformed the dynamics of social movements, political campaigns, and the ways in which information is created and disseminated (Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2012; Calderaro 2018). The intersection between social media and politics is necessary to explore in this literature review in order to understand the broader landscape of political discourse in the media that Bolsonaro is situated in. Some authors, like Picazo-Vela et al. (2012) say social media helps politicians and the political process, by enabling them to more easily reach their constituents, improved citizen participation, and increased political participation. However, other authors present the drawbacks, including the spreading of false information, the creation of an “echo chamber,” for individuals with similar beliefs, and the usage of underhanded tactics among political opponents (Zúñiga et. al 2012; Garrett 2019). It is important to note the benefits and drawbacks of social media in the realm of politics because this literature review will focus specifically on how a populist frame is crafted, legitimated, and disseminated through social media. I will refer to these benefits and drawbacks as I analyze how populist leaders utilize the tool of social media to appeal to “the people” and ostracize “the others.”

Even before the advent of social media, the role of the media in politics was prevalent. It is important to understand the relationship between traditional media and politics before

exploring the relationship between social media and politics, as the former lays the groundwork for the latter. The characteristics of the former relationship are present and amplified in the latter relationship, but there are also some critical differences that will be later explored. According to Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999), the mediatization of politics is a process wherein mass media “produce political content and interfere with political processes” (250). Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) demonstrate that in the European context, media influence is counterbalanced by political parties and institutions (258). The media does not have unchecked power in the realm of politics because political parties and political institutions retain a significant proportion of power in liberal democracies. However, this study took place in 1999, before social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook even existed. These platforms have transformed the landscape of communication and the mediatization of politics.

Social media has rapidly accelerated the mediatization of politics by allowing political leaders to disseminate individualized content and directly interact with constituents, as well as creating niche interest networks where people can constantly interact with others who share their ideals (Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2012, 4). Populist leader’s connection with their constituencies via social media is free from being filtered by journalists or other gatekeepers of media. The ubiquitousness of the platform of social media allows for the “viral diffusion,” or vast circulation, of content from populists (3). Bolsonaro is the perfect example of a leader who has capitalized on the mediatization of politics in order to gain political relevance in a relatively short period of time.

Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2012) argue that social media and the general mediatization of the world has profoundly impacted the landscape of populist communication. They use empirical

evidence from Italy's populist leaders and demonstrate that 67% of Facebook posts from these leaders contain at least one of the three dimensions of populism, which are an appeal to "the people," attacking the *élite*, and ostracizing others. Mazzoleni and Bracciale's (2012) study importantly indicates the prevalence of the themes of populism in social media postings, particularly the "rhetorical construction of the 'us' against 'them'" (4). Moreover, this research demonstrates that direct contact with constituents is one of the primary benefits of social media for populists. We have seen the mainstream news media openly criticize populists, such as the criticism CNN offered of Donald Trump during his 2016 presidential campaign, and social media allows them to circumvent the channel of mainstream news media. The constant dialogue that social media enables allows populists like Bolsonaro to constantly be shaping and reinforcing their messages.

There are several trends that emerge in the interactions between contemporary populist leaders and social media. Social media has been utilized by populist movements and leaders around the world, ranging from Podemos in Spain to Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the United States. Bolsonaro has even been referred to as the "Trump of the Tropics" for his inflammatory posting on social media that mirrors the American President (Meredith 2018). Gerbaudo (2018) argues that though social media is certainly used by mainstream politicians, "the underlying narrative and dominant value orientation of social media run counter to the key traits of establishment politics" (752). Though social media has become an arena for establishment and anti-establishment politicians to fight for the attention and support of the public, the rise of social media has coincided with a profound economic crisis and populists have benefitted from the fact that social media has come to be associated with challenging the existing

world order (747). Additionally, the celebrity element of social media lends itself well to populism, as platforms like Twitter provide relatively unknown individuals with an opportunity to quickly gain fame and recognition. Millions of people can come together “multiplying the power of each of its members” in support of a populist, whereas these individuals would otherwise be disconnected (751). This element of social media allows populists to attract public attention and for supporters of populists to create a sense of community that traditional media outlets like television news and newspapers do not provide. Bolsonaro provides a perfect example of the reciprocity between populists and social media. He benefits from the anti-establishment value orientation of social media and simultaneously reinforces this value orientation by disseminating an anti-establishment message. This understanding will inform my discussion of Bolsonaro’s rapid rise to prominence in Brazilian politics in the following chapter.

An important intersection of social media and populism that Krämer (2018) explores is anti-media populism and the reaction of non-populist media to right-wing populism. Krämer (2018) argues that the relationship between populists and the media can take many forms. There is the relationship I have already discussed wherein populists use social media platforms as a vehicle for spreading their message. Conversely, populist leaders often consider the mainstream media to be elitist and a censored expression of the will of the people (451). As previously mentioned, the landscape of media is changing, as populists no longer have to go through traditional channels of network news shows or newspapers in order to connect with people. Populists may criticize the mainstream media for being elitist without facing the possible repercussions of the media blocking their communication with their constituents and the international community. Thus, Krämer’s (2018) analysis helps establish a foundational

understanding of why the relationship between the mainstream media and populists is so contentious, and why they often turn to less restrictive social media platforms to spread their messages.

Alvares and Dahlgreen (2016) assert that the discourse espoused by populists through social media does not often fit within traditional understandings of politics; rather, “their discourses usually build on simplifications and strong emotional appeals” (50). Though all politicians depend on emotional discourse in some way, populism, particularly populism on social media, is distinct because the language is often aggressive and directly confrontational towards a group or individual (53). Alvares and Dahlgreen (2016) point to the right-wing populism in Europe today that, though varying in ideology, spread the idea that corrupt politicians are to blame for the disenfranchisement of the people, and these attacks are often targeted at specific politicians (52-54). Bolsonaro has similarly tested the pre-existing boundaries of political language, as he frequently directs his attacks at Dilma Rousseff and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and blames them for the struggles of Brazilians. These attacks are highly emotional and intend to rouse anger toward the political establishment. He “others” particular groups of people through his language and similarly presents them as a source of the problems in Brazil.

#### IV. Conclusion

This literature review engaged with literature on linguistic othering, populism, and the media and populism. These bodies of literature will help me answer the question: How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”?

I argue that Bolsonaro disseminates an exclusionary populist frame through interviews and social media in order to establish himself as the single representation of the constructed in-group and the defender against out-groups. Each of these bodies of literature provides contextualization and rationale for Bolsonaro's tactical usage of rhetoric to gain power. Linguistic othering is a powerful tool utilized by political leaders across the spectrum in order to create a sense of chasmic division between "the people" and "the others" that only the defenders of the people can address. The strategy of linguistic othering perfectly fits within the literature on populism as a frame. "The other" are diagnosed as the problem, the prognosis is the politician who presents themselves as the defender of "the people," and the motivation is to support that politician. Lastly, the literature on populism in the context of social media is important to understand the reciprocity between social media and populist leaders, as they both embody an anti-establishment value orientation. Populists can use the networks created through social media to expand their visibility and rapidly gain support. The literature on linguistic othering, populism, and media and populism provide a fundamental understanding of these concepts. I will utilize these literatures as a foundation for my understanding that will inform the following chapters.

### CHAPTER 3: CORRUPTION IN BRAZIL

How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”? I argue in this thesis that Bolsonaro disseminates an exclusionary populist frame through interviews and social media in order to establish himself as the representative of the in-group and the defender against all out-groups. In this chapter I analyze the conditions in Brazil leading up to Bolsonaro’s election in 2018. Did corruption in Brazil catalyze Bolsonaro’s ascension to the presidency? Many hypotheses have been proposed to explain Bolsonaro’s rise to the presidency, including that Bolsonaro is part of a global trend that gave us Brexit and Trump and that Bolsonaro skillfully crafted an image of himself as a man of the people (Winter 2018). I contend that corruption in the Brazilian state must be included in explanations of Bolsonaro’s rapid ascension to the presidency because he directly responded to the corruption of the Workers Party. Additionally, he made a steadfast promise to dismantle the establishment and usher in an era of change, which in turn garnered him widespread electoral support.

The corruption embedded in Brazil’s bureaucracy and government is vast and complex. Corruption exists in all levels of the Brazilian state, ranging from the smallest municipalities to the highest ranks of the national government (Segal 2015). I explain in this chapter the most significant and the largest corruption scandal in Brazil’s modern history: the *Lava Jato* scandal (also known as the Petrobras scandal). The *Lava Jato* scandal involves the state-owned oil company Petrobras, which engaged in money laundering and allegedly accepted bribes in return for awarding construction contracts at inflated prices. Several well-known politicians and members of the Workers Party (PT) are embroiled in this corruption scandal, including former presidents Lula da Silva, Rousseff and Temer. I include this historical overview of corruption in

Brazil because Bolsonaro capitalized on the weakness of the PT in his presidential campaign and frequently cites PT corruption as the root cause of the suffering of the Brazilian people. The “other” that he puts in opposition to the “us” frequently refers to the political left and the PT.

The remainder of this chapter is broken into three parts. First, I provide a historical overview of the *Lava Jato* scandal, including how politicians became entangled in the scandal and were subsequently punished in the ongoing criminal investigation into the corruption. This section illuminates the depth of corruption in Brazil and the engagement of members of the PT in fraudulent and corrupt activities. Second, I discuss the implications of the Petrobras scandal and Operation Car Wash for the broader landscape of Brazilian politics. Operation Car Wash refers to the ongoing investigation in Brazil into fraud and corruption within the government, major corporations, and the state-owned oil company Petrobras. Bolsonaro used language to position himself as the antithesis of corruption and as the solution to the problems Brazil was facing. Third, I discuss other sources of corruption in Brazil that Bolsonaro responded to throughout his campaign. Specifically, I explore the corruption of the media and police, as these are two sources of corruption beyond Operation Car Wash that Bolsonaro often discusses. This chapter is not a complete explanation of all sources of corruption in Brazil. However, it demonstrates the massive scale of the corruption in Brazil and helps explain why Bolsonaro’s uncompromising populist language garnered such significant appeal leading up to the 2018 election.

#### 1. Lava Jato scandal

In 2008, businessman Hermes Magnus reported an attempt to launder money through his company, Dunel Indústria e Comércio. Magnus’s accusation set off a domino effect of

investigations into complicated, large criminal rings, which came to be known as “Operation Car Wash.” Operation Car Wash is an ongoing criminal investigation conducted by the Curitiba Branch of the Federal Police of Brazil into the *Lava Jato* scandal. According to prosecutors, the core of the scandal dates back to 2004 when “a small number of top Petrobras officials colluded with a cartel of companies to overcharge the oil company for construction and service work” (Segal 2015). Petrobras, at this time, occupied a critical place in the Brazilian market, accounting for roughly 10 percent of the country’s GDP (Segal 2015). Petrobras is a part of the international conglomerate Odebrecht, a company whose name has become synonymous with corruption (Reiff 2018). Executives from Odebrecht have confessed to paying bribes for contracts not only in Brazil, but in at least ten other countries, including Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela (Gallas 2019). The scandal started simply as a kickback scheme of Petrobras executives accepting bribes in the form of cash, cars and luxury items. However, it evolved into a multi-billion dollar corruption scheme wherein Petrobras executives accepted bribes in return for awarding construction contracts at inflated prices.

When Operation Car Wash began in 2014, it focused on black market money dealers, known as *doleiros*, who utilized small businesses to launder the profits of crime, but police soon realized that many *doleiros* were working on behalf of the Petrobras executive Paulo Roberto Costa (Watts 2017). From 2004 to 2012, Costa served as the Director of Supply for Petrobras, a position that allowed him to approve major contracts. Costa was arrested in 2013 for involvement in the kickback scheme and agreed to cooperate with the investigation after being offered “rewarded bargaining,” or an advantageous plea deal (Arruda de Almeida and Zagaris 2015). In his testimony, he described how he and other Petrobras executives consciously

overpaid on specific contracts since “they were guaranteed business on excessively lucrative terms if they agreed to channel a share of between 1% and 5% of every deal into secret slush funds” (Watts 2017). Costa recounted how Petrobras executives used those slush funds to funnel money to politicians who had appointed them to the Petrobras Board of Directors. The main objective of this racket was to keep the governing Workers Party coalition in power.

Lula da Silva, known widely as “Lula,” was the first president to be convicted in the *Lava Jato* investigation. In 2017, Lula was found guilty of accepting a seaside apartment in exchange for contracts awarded to the construction firm O.A.S. He was sentenced to 12 years and one month in prison, but was released in November of 2019 after Brazil’s Supreme Court ruled that convicted defendants cannot be jailed until their appeals to higher courts have been exhausted (Darlington 2019; Dwyer 2019). Lula maintains that the charges against him were politically motivated and manipulated. He has spoken out against the presiding judge in his case, Sergio Moro, since Moro became Bolsonaro’s Minister of Justice after his 2019 inauguration. It is possible that Lula’s trial was unfair given the evidence of corruption that has come out against Judge Moro. In a series of private chats obtained by the online news publication *The Intercept* in Brazil, Judge Moro mocked Lula’s defense and directed the media strategy of the prosecutors so that Lula’s case would seem rife with contradictions (Fishman et al. 2019). All of this is to say that, although there is evidence of Lula’s corrupt activity, there is also evidence that he did not receive a fair, impartial trial. Moreover, despite the fact that Bolsonaro uses language to position himself as separate from the corruption scandal, his administration is still entangled in the web of corrupt Brazilian politics.

In December of 2015, a petition was issued in the Chamber of Deputies for the impeachment of then president Dilma Rousseff. Rousseff was charged with criminal administrative misconduct and disregard for the federal budget after she allegedly moved funds between the budgets of various departments of the government, which is illegal under Brazilian law. Although Rousseff was the president of the Petrobras Board of Directors from 2003 to 2010, this fact was not included in the impeachment trial on the grounds that a sitting president could not be investigated for crimes committed prior to their election. In April of 2016, Rousseff was formally impeached and, in May of 2016, the Brazilian Senate voted to suspend her presidential powers. On August 31, 2016, the Senate voted to remove Rousseff from office, finding her guilty of breaking the aforementioned budgetary laws (Shoichet and McKirdy 2016). After her impeachment, Rousseff, former president Temer and many other PT party members were charged with forming a criminal organization that participated in collusion throughout the *Lava Jato* scandal. Rousseff continues to deny any involvement in corrupt, fraudulent activity. Bolsonaro argued throughout his campaign that Rousseff's corruption contributed to the suffering of the Brazilian people and he positioned himself as the best defender against the establishment PT and other elites enriching themselves by way of the state.

Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer, the two presidents after Lula, are entangled in the corruption scandal, largely because of the testimony of one man: Marcelo Odebrecht (Gallas 2019). Odebrecht was sentenced to 19 years in jail after he claimed that some of the R\$48 million in funds that he donated to the campaigns of Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer was obtained through illegal means, such as through the acceptance of bribes (Gallas 2019). Odebrecht provided proceeds of his corrupt dealings to the campaigns of PT members Rousseff

and Temer. Though both Temer and Rousseff denied all allegations of fraud, in March of 2019, Temer was arrested in São Paulo. Temer was freed on appeal five days after his imprisonment. Only a week later, he was charged with corruption based on allegations that he used a middleman to procure a suitcase full of money from controlling shareholders at JBS S.A., the world's largest meat processing company (Brooks 2019). In May of 2019, Temer turned himself into federal police custody. Bolsonaro only referenced Temer once in his tweets since October of 2018, likely because Temer extended an olive branch to Bolsonaro after his election, for example by inviting him to the 2018 G-20 Summit ("Brazil's Temer Invites Bolsonaro to G-20 Summit" 2018).

The *Lava Jato* investigation began in 2014 focused on money laundering, but quickly evolved into a "sprawling war" against Brazilian corruption (Long 2019). This section focuses on the role of former presidents in the scandal, but politicians at all levels of government were embroiled in this corruption. Senators, mayors, federal deputies, and governmental ministers have all become the subject of warrants for search and seizure, temporary and preventive detention or arrest (Felter and Labrador 2018). Additionally, the repercussions of the investigation have spilled beyond Brazil's borders. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and former Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski have all been implicated in the *Lava Jato* scandal (Felter and Labrador 2018). Corruption is not a new phenomenon in Brazilian politics. President Fernando Collor de Mello resigned in the midst of his 1992 impeachment trial and Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government was riddled with accusations of collusion and corruption (Moreno 2015). However, the magnitude and depth of corruption unveiled in the Operation Car Wash investigations is unparalleled in Brazilian history.

Bolsonaro habitually cited this corruption as the reason for the suffering of “the people” and he argued that he was the antidote to the exploitation of the state by elites. The next section will explore the impact of this corruption scandal on Brazilian politics; specifically, did *Lava Jato* and the corruption of the Workers Party prime Brazil for populism?

## 2. Impact of *Lava Jato* on Brazilian Politics

Prior to the *Lava Jato* scandal investigations, Bolsonaro’s party, the Social Liberal Party (PSL), was relatively insignificant in Brazilian politics. The PSL was founded in 1994, but only first gained a seat in the Federal Chamber of Deputies in 2002 and did not earn a seat in the Federal Senate until 2018. Bolsonaro himself only joined the party in early 2018. Between 2014 and 2018, the PSL saw a significant increase in electoral representation. As stated previously, not only was Bolsonaro elected to the office of the president on October 7, 2018, but the party went from having 1 seat in the Chamber of Deputies (0.83%) to having 52 seats (11.7%), and from 0 seats in the 81-seat Senate (0%) to 4 seats (11.3%). The PSL went from being an insignificant, fringe party to having almost as many seats in the Chamber of Deputies as the PT. This change in electoral representation coincided with an ideological shift spearheaded by Bolsonaro. Whereas the ideological foundation of the party was previously unclear, after Bolsonaro joined the PSL in January of 2018, the party adopted more socially conservative policies (Social Liberal Party 2020). Bolsonaro’s linguistic othering was just one way in which he promoted and bolstered the party’s new social conservatism.

The rise in support for the SLP has coincided with a sharp drop for the PT. From 2002 to 2016, the PT led the governing coalition in the Chamber of Deputies and saw massive electoral

success. Since 2010, however, the PT has seen a steady decrease in the number of elected officials to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. In the 2018 federal election, the PT won 56 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (10.3%), which was down 3.7% from the 2014 election, and the PT won 6 seats in the Senate (14.5%), down 2.5% from 2014 (Election Resources 2018). These changes might seem marginal, but a difference of 2 or 3 percentage points is significant in a country where over 30 parties are represented in the national legislature. Though I cannot determine conclusively what caused the ultimate decline of the PT, the evidence suggests that Brazilians were disillusioned with the corruption in the party and responded to Bolsonaro's frame of "us" versus "them."

The *Lava Jato* investigations contributed to the electoral rise of Bolsonaro and the PSL. However, they were not the only cause of disillusionment with mainstream politicians and parties, particularly given that, as previously stated, corruption is not a new phenomenon in Brazil. The *Lava Jato* scandal investigations certainly shaped the landscape of the 2018 presidential campaign, as Bolsonaro positioned himself as the anti-corruption, change-making leader that Brazil needed. Kolling (2019) argues that, "In the end it seems that many of those who voted for Bolsonaro did not vote so much for him and his controversial remarks about women, the poor, people of colour, indigenous people, LGBT people etc., but because they wanted change and did NOT want the PT back in power" (1). Bolsonaro, to some, was the lesser of two evils, and he benefited from the votes of some individuals who otherwise might not support his right-wing language and policies. Populists like Bolsonaro harness popular discontent against the corruption of the elites to mobilize formerly apathetic, unsatisfied and frustrated constituents to support bottom-up, people-centered politics (Chacko 2018, 544). Bolsonaro was

able to capitalize on the *Lava Jato* scandal to position himself and his party as alternatives to the “business as usual” corruption of the PT and former ruling elites. In doing so, he cast himself as the defender of “the people” against “the other.” In the next chapter, I explore how Bolsonaro responded to the corruption of the PT elites and created a narrative to differentiate himself from them.

### 3. Other Sources of Corruption

The *Lava Jato* scandal was not the only source of corruption in Brazil. In this section, I discuss two other areas rife with corruption within Brazil: the media and police. I have chosen to focus on media and police corruption because these are two sources of corruption that Bolsonaro promised to address once he became president. Regarding the media, Bolsonaro has accused many media outlets of inaccurate and fraudulent reporting, including *The New York Times*, *O Globo* and *O Estadão*. He claims that the left aims to use media control as a part of implementing a totalitarian, corrupt state. Bolsonaro is a staunch advocate for increasing police power and he advocates for the transformation of the police into an effective body for fighting drug trafficking and violence. The center of his political platform was to “clean up” historically violent neighborhoods by killing criminals “like cockroaches” (Phillips 2019). Bolsonaro is also connected to the police by his family, as his son, Eduardo, is a former member of the federal police. Similarly to the *Lava Jato* scandal, Bolsonaro utilized the corruption of the police and media to his advantage to situate himself in defense of “the people.”

A noteworthy site of corruption in Brazil is within the media. Though the Brazilian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, there are several factors that limit and corrupt

this freedom within the media. First, media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few families in Brazil that are closely linked to the political class. Many major landowners and industrialists also serve as legislators and control local media outlets (“BTI” 2018). According to Reporters Without Borders (2020), 32 federal deputies and 8 senators are currently partners in media companies or broadcasters, and at least half of investigated community radio stations have a political connection. This, according to Reporters Without Borders (2020), is a risk to media pluralism and is a site for corrupt activity. Bolsonaro has criticized “big media,” such as the *Grupo Globo* conglomerate, for this disproportionate ownership and argues that “big media” is responsible for blackmail, misinformation and the manipulation of Brazilian people. There is no evidence to suggest that *Grupo Globo* is conspiring against Bolsonaro, but this reality has not stopped him from railing against the media group.

Bolsonaro benefited from the dissemination of “fake news” on mainstream media platforms and social media. One important site of “fake news” was the popular messaging app, WhatsApp. As of 2019, there were 120 million active WhatsApp users in Brazil, which is more than half of the population of 210 million (Reid 2019). Avelar (2019) argues that, during the 2018 presidential campaign, “Brazilian [WhatsApp] accounts were the target of massive spamming operations by digital marketing agencies,” a claim which has been acknowledged by Whatsapp executives. Though it is unclear if Bolsonaro’s campaign was directly involved in this manipulation, the vast majority of misinformation shared on Whatsapp was in favor of Bolsonaro and reinforced his anti-establishment narrative. For instance, “sixteen percent of right-leaning false content tried to dismiss the political system and mainstream media as corrupt” (Avelar 2019). WhatsApp is not an inherently corrupt media platform. However, pro-Bolsonaro

influencers within the WhatsApp ecosystem “actively manipulated news stories and created misinformation meant to go viral” (Reid 2019). Thus, WhatsApp was transformed into a site of fraudulent and duplicitous conduct.

The concentration of media ownership, political involvement in media and the dissemination of fake news on popular media platforms are three prominent areas of corruption in Brazilian media. Therefore, in some ways, Bolsonaro’s criticism of mainstream media is warranted. Not only is Brazilian media increasingly corrupt, Brazil continues to be one of the most dangerous places for journalists, “with harassment, intimidation, and violent attacks recorded each year” (Freedom House 2017). As violence against journalists and corruption of the media increased, trust in media declined. The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism documented 141 cases of threats and violence against journalists covering the 2018 election, with the majority of these threats being carried out by hitmen and Bolsonaro supporters (Human Rights Watch 2018). Between 2015 and 2018, the level of trust in media amongst the general public in Brazil dropped from 54 to 41% (Statista 2020). Bolsonaro capitalized on dwindling levels of trust to position himself amongst “the people” in opposition to the “fake news media.”

The second source of corruption, beyond the *Lava Jato* scandal, is corruption of the police. The pervasiveness of violence in Brazil and the ineffectiveness of police in addressing violence is startling. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Brazil has the eleventh-highest homicide rate in the world, with 2017 statistics estimated to reach 30.5 murders per 100,000 people (UNODC 2017). What is perhaps most shocking about this statistic is not only that police have proven ineffective in preventing murders, but police also cause a significant proportion of homicides per year in Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil’s second-biggest city, police

were responsible for almost a third of violent deaths in 2019, with this rate being upwards of 38% in areas surrounding the capital (Nogueira 2019). The other 60 to 70 percent of homicides in Brazil are perpetrated largely by men involved in organized crime against poor, young, black men in urban centers (Darlington 2018). While some police killings are in self defense, extrajudicial executions are common amongst police and the excessive use of force was cited in three-quarters of police killings in São Paulo in 2017 (Human Rights Watch 2019). In operations supposedly aimed at drug traffickers, police have killed innocent civilians (Santoro 2019). In the first quarter of 2019, Rio de Janeiro police killed an average of 7 people per day, with a total of 434 cases from January to March. In the same quarter in 2018, there were 368 deaths by police (Grandin and Rodrigues 2019). Bolsonaro promised throughout his campaign to protect “the people” with an aggressive law-and-order agenda. Bolsonaro frequently praises the violence of police in his tweets and justifies the mounting homicide toll in Brazil on the grounds that preemptive police violence is the only way to dismantle organized crime (Marcello and Paraguassu 2019). Bolsonaro’s promise to end police corruption does not translate to ending police violence. Rather, his narrative of “defending the people” contradicts the reality wherein he has strengthened legal protections for soldiers and police who have killed Brazilians.

The high rate of police killing is rooted in two areas: systemic corruption within the Brazilian police and the presence of paramilitary groups that rule much of large cities like Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro has a high rate of police killing and also is home to the most corrupt of Brazil’s police forces. According to the 2013 National Victimization Survey, carried out by the Ministry of Justice, 7.2% of people in Rio said they had been forced to pay bribes to a police official (Cawley 2013). Moreover, of the total percentage of individuals who reported being

victims of police extortion, 30.2% of these people were in Rio de Janeiro, while 18.2% were in the country's biggest city, São Paulo (Amado and Serra 2013). The 2013 National Victimization Survey is the most recent data available on this type of corruption and extortion, but it is improbable that the situation has improved. Freedom House's 2019 "Freedom in the World" report concludes that, "Brazil's police force remains mired in corruption," as serious police abuses continue. Despite the prevalence of corruption, Bolsonaro has remained steadfast in his support for Brazilian police.

The second factor that contributes to the high rate of police killings is the presence of extrajudicial militias. These "militias" are composed of both former and current members of the military police and the military (Miranda 2019). Since the early 2000s, militias have slowly taken control of neighborhoods throughout Rio de Janeiro. First, militias drive out organized crime groups, such as the infamous drug-trafficking organization First Capital Command (PCC). Then, militias replace the power structures of crime organizations and establish their own protection and extortion rackets. Militias enact bizarre "taxes" on local businesses, such as taxes on cooking oil, and "routinely murder those who cross them, disobey them or speak too freely about them" (Phillips 2018). Despite the track record for violence, some Brazilians believe that these militia groups are the "lesser evil," in comparison with gangs like First Capital Command because militias protect residents from drug traffickers (Barbara 2019). It has become increasingly difficult to disentangle official actions of the police and the work of these unregulated, rogue militias because militias are made up of current police and claim to work for the same goal as the police of preventing drug trafficking and violence. Regardless, we see that Brazil's police sector is entrenched with corruption and violence. During his tenure as a

congressman, Bolsonaro frequently supported the use of militias and continues to defend the narrative that the best way to protect Brazilian people is through preemptive police violence.

#### 4. Conclusion

I include this chapter on the *Lava Jato* investigations, the implications of the investigation for Brazilian politics and other sources of corruption to illuminate the conditions under which Bolsonaro was elected. Corruption in Brazil is ingrained in the fabric of many different institutions, including major corporations, politics, media and the police. The rise of Bolsonaro and the SLP was historic for the rapid speed at which they gained such significant power. Bolsonaro capitalized on the perceived failings of the PT and former PT presidents Lula, Rousseff and Temer in order to propel himself and his party to the forefront of Brazilian politics.

The great paradox of Bolsonaro's presidency is that while he purports himself as the anti-corruption defender of the people, his administration and family are shrouded in corruption scandals. Bolsonaro's cabinet includes at least seven people entangled in the *Lava Jato* corruption scandal, including his Chief of Staff Onyx Lorenzoni, who admitted in May 2017 to having received R\$100,000 in shush money funds from JBS (de Lara 2018). Moreover, his son, Flavio Bolsonaro, was accused in 2019 of money laundering and misuse of public funds (Fonseca 2019). There is little evidence that Bolsonaro is tackling corruption and when he makes an effort to accomplish this, his efforts are shrouded in controversy. When he initially appointed federal judge Sergio Moro as Minister of Justice and Public Security, he received widespread support, as Moro's judicial work in the *Lava Jato* scandal was widely praised. However, as evidence of corruption emerged against Moro, Bolsonaro's supposed anti-corruption effort was

severely undermined. Bolsonaro's anti-corruption platform appears to simply be a rhetorical tool he used to garner support. In the next chapter, I sketch specific ways in which Bolsonaro referenced corruption and situated himself as the defender of the people during the 2018 campaign and through his first year in office.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS: “US” VERSUS “THEM”

### **I. Introduction**

#### A. Research Question and Argument

I use this chapter to answer my research question: How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”? I will use Bolsonaro’s tweets as evidence of how he creates the categories of “the people” and “the others.” I chose to analyze tweets because Twitter is one of the primary platforms that Bolsonaro uses to connect with his constituents. I argue that Bolsonaro disseminates an exclusionary populist frame through social media and interviews wherein he posits himself within the in-group against out-groups. Bolsonaro’s exclusionary language promotes a narrow conceptualization of who belongs amongst “the people” and paints some groups as adversaries within their own country.

In my analysis, I highlight three trends in this data. First, Bolsonaro positions himself as the strongest, and best defender of the people against any “other” group or groups. The concept of defending the people against the other is the backbone of the populist frame. Regardless of the political situation or circumstance, we find that populists tend to build their basis of support on the grounds that they can defend their targeted in-group in a way that other politicians could not (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 5). Populists claim that the will of the people is the only legitimate source of authority, but the concept of “the people” inherently depends on there being some other groups that are opposed to “us” (Ibid, 7-8). I find that Bolsonaro will use his social media to assert himself as the defender of the in-group of Brazil against all out-groups.

Second, I find that Bolsonaro fabricates a form of cultural or racial threat that clearly demarcates the in-group he is defending versus the out-group he wishes to ostracize. Though it is fundamental for populists to position themselves as the defender of the people, it must be clear who they are defending the people against (Caiani and della Porta 2011, 192). Populists often target and attack minority cultural and ethnic groups, both within their sovereign borders and beyond their borders. In my analysis, I find stark evidence to show that Bolsonaro others the LGBTQ community, women, and indigenous people. I find clear evidence of “othering” against a background in which Bolsonaro claims to have adopted a “color-blind” and “genderblind” viewpoint. That is, he claims he does not consider skin color, gender or race to be important. For example, On October 24, 2018, he tweeted:

The best way to show respect to people is to treat them as equals, valuing them for their character and competence, not color or sexuality, nor as if they were more fragile and incapable. Nobody likes to be treated like a poor thing. Brazil is one! It belongs to all of us!

Similarly, on December 21, 2018, he tweeted:

I published the nomination of ministers in my networks and it was very clear that the criteria for the choices was technical. I did not go out asking the region of birth, skin color, or sexuality of each one, since this is irrelevant to the demands of our country!

Though on the surface this color-blind and gender-blind language might make Bolsonaro seem like he is treating all people equally, in fact color-blindness and gender-blindness are counterproductive ideologies that ignore the systematic discrimination and prejudice that women and people of color face (Trujillo-Pagán 2018, 401). Bolsonaro is doing a disservice to Brazilian

women by claiming that their gender identity is irrelevant, because this shows disregard for the rampant sexism and misogyny in Brazilian society, as well as the pervasiveness of sexual violence, harassment, and gender-based discrimination.

Third and finally, I find that Bolsonaro exhibits hostility toward the political left, whether this be the Workers Party within Brazil, or left-wing international leaders. In addition, I find that he articulates solidarity with other right-wing leaders, like United States President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Thus, Bolsonaro's definition of the "us" and "them" is not limited to Brazil's borders, but also encompasses international actors.

These three trends illustrate how Bolsonaro constructs exclusive categories of the "us" and "them." He uses language to position himself as the defender of a constructed in-group against a constructed out-group. I contend that the in-group and out-group are constructed because the people positioned in each group are not inherently interconnected. The LGBTQ community, indigenous people and the political left are not intrinsically related. Rather, Bolsonaro groups them together as the out-group in opposition to the in-group, which is similarly a constructed group. Thus, Bolsonaro constructs a populist frame of "us" versus "them."

## B. Research Methods

My data comes from Twitter. I pulled President Bolsonaro's tweets from October 14, 2018 to January 2, 2020. During this period, he tweeted 3,200 times, including retweets and direct mentions to his followers. I cleaned the data using the software ATLAS.ti so that it would not include instances in which he responded to a private individual's account or when he included a link to another Twitter page or website that was no longer functioning or active. If I could not view the original tweet he was responding to, it would be impossible for me to

understand the context of his response. Additionally, I removed three tweets in Japanese and seven tweets in Italian, because I cannot read either of those languages. For the purpose of this research, I translated Bolsonaro's tweets from Portuguese to English, or I noted when his original tweet was in English. After cleaning the data, there were 2,854 tweets from Bolsonaro remaining for me to analyze.

The next step in organizing this data was assigning codes to the remaining tweets. I created codes corresponding to the three themes outlined above that I expected to find in his language. This basis of codes was vital for me to organize the data into manageable, succinct groupings. I searched for specific terms, as evident in *Figure 1*, that corresponded to each of the overarching themes I expected to see in his language. Some of the themes that will be discussed in this chapter are more open-ended, such as the idea of defending the people. One could claim that when Bolsonaro tweets about the economic advancement of Brazil, he is, in some way, demonstrating his interest in defending the people. However, for the purpose of this study, I only include language that explicitly iterates the idea of a "defense," so I searched for language like guard(-ing), enemy, threat and protection.

Initial Language Query		
Theme 1: Defending the people	Theme 2: Cultural and racial threat	Theme 3: Threat of the political left & solidarity of the right
povo/pessoas/população (people) Brasileiros (Brazilians) contra (against) família (family) nós (us) defender (defend) guardar (guard) Violencia (violence) soberania (sovereignty) esperança (hope) mudança/evolução/mudar (change/to change) futuro (future) demanda(-s) (demands) interesse (interest) primeiro/a (first) Potencial (potential) inimigo (enemy) ameaça (threat) salvar (to save) salvador (savior) proteção (protection) Crime (crime) Maioria (majority) corrupção (corruption) Militar(-es)/marinha (military) violência (violence) Bem-estar (well-being) restorar (to restore)	mulher(-es) (women) senhoras (ladies) feminismo (feminism) gay (gay) sexualidade (sexuality) transgênero (transgender) homossexual (homosexual) homofobia (homophobia) indígena (indigenous) índio(-s) (Indians) Quilombola*	a esquerda (the left) Cuba PT (Workers' Party) operário/a (worker/laborer) Marxista (Marxism) doutrinado/a (doctrination) socialismo (Socialism) militancia (militancy) Militantes (militants) Mídia (media) Imprensa (press) Jornalismo (journalism) O Globo (The Globe, newspaper) A Folha (newspaper) mentira(-s) (lies) a maquina (machine) Conservador (conservative) verdade (truth) Estados Unidos (United States) EUA (USA) Trump americano/a (American) Netanyahu

**Figure 1: Initial Language Query. Includes all words and phrases I searched for within ATLAS.ti based on the three broad themes I aim to explore.**

\*Quilombolas are Afro-Brazilian residents of quilombo settlements that were first established by escaped slaves in Brazil. The legal land rights of Quilombolas and indigenous people in Brazil are typically grouped together.

In each of the three body sections of this chapter, I include a table reporting the percentage of Bolsonaro's total tweets that discuss the theme at hand. In each section, I also include specific examples in each section of the language that he disseminates that directly speaks to the themes of defending the people, cultural threat and solidarity with the right and hostility to the left.

### C. Roadmap

The remainder of this chapter will be broken up into three sections. I analyze, in turn, whether or not Bolsonaro positioned himself as the defender of the people, perpetuated the idea of a cultural threat, and demonstrated hostility to the political left. I use both the coded tweets and interviews as the evidence for this section.

#### A. **Bolsonaro Positioning Himself as the Defender of the People**

I argue that Bolsonaro uses his language to position himself as the defender of "the people." He accomplishes this in five broad ways, which I will unpack and provide examples for. First, he distinguishes who "the people" are by articulating a specific set of moral values that true Brazilians respect and uphold. The moral values he favors are freedom, family and the Christian faith. Second, he condemns the former corrupt Brazilian elite and claims that they exploited the Brazilian people. Third, he positions law and order at the forefront of his administration and promises to bolster the military to demonstrate his resolve to protect the people from gangs, crime, and violence. Fourth, he claims to represent the will of the people, while labeling other politicians as self-interested and driven by money and external forces. Fifth and finally, he

promises to bring Brazil, and the Brazilian people, to a position of international greatness, so that they will no longer be economically and politically exploited.

**Figure 2: Number of tweets and percentage of total tweets referencing Bolsonaro’s narrative of “defending the people”**

Theme 1: Defending the People				
Values of “the people”	Condemning former elites	Supporting law and order	Representing the will of the people	Promising to restore national greatness
91 mention freedom (3.2%) 79 mention family (2.8%) 85 mention God (3%) 18 mention biblical verses (<1%)	110 mention the PT (3.8%) 16 mention corruption, but do not explicitly mention the PT (<1%)	160 mention police and military (5.6%) 72 mention crime (2.5%) 47 mention violence (1.6%)	138 mention the will of the people (4.8%) 23 use the hashtag #NasRuasComBolsonaro (<1%)	130 use the Brazilian flag emoji (4.6%) 53 mention the future (1.9%) 29 mention “Brazil above all” (1%)

\*The percentages in this table represent the percentage of Bolsonaro’s total tweets (2,854) that mention the theme at hand.

### I. Values of “The People”

Bolsonaro presents many values in his rhetoric that could be said to be a part of his linguistic construction of the “us” that he is defending. For the purpose of this study, I focus on freedom, family, and faith, as Bolsonaro classified these three values as something that Brazilians should believe in (Londoño and Darlington 2018). Bolsonaro explicitly mentions freedom in 3.2% of his tweets, most often in reference to individual freedoms and the freedom of the press. On June 1, 2019, he tweeted:

There is no democracy without freedom of expression. I will never demand the firing of a journalist for criticism against me. I’ve been the target of far worse things for decades. I

trust people's ability to discern good from bad journalism and draw their own conclusions.

Freedom, in this case, is correlated to the functioning of democracy and Bolsonaro argues that people have the right to discern what is good journalism and what is not. Liberty and freedom are key values of "the people," and while perhaps on the surface it might seem like the concept of freedom would unify all Brazilians, he invokes it in a way that suggests there is an enemy of freedom within Brazil. Often, Bolsonaro posits the PT or the "fake news" media, both of which will be discussed later, as the antithesis to the people's value of freedom.

Family is the second value of "the people" that Bolsonaro articulates, with 2.8% of his tweets explicitly mentioning family. In a tweet from August 10, 2019, Bolsonaro celebrated the traditional, heterosexual family unit, as he wrote:

Tomorrow is our day, FATHER'S DAY, celebrate, enjoy OUR DAY with your WIFE and CHILDREN. GOD BLESS our FAMILIES.

Family is a central pillar of the "us" that Bolsonaro aims to construct, but the scope of what is included under the umbrella of family is married, heterosexual couples with children. Family units often do not look like this, as homosexual couples, unmarried couples, and couples without children all exist within Brazil. However, the family value of "us" is a very narrow conceptualization of the word.

Although Brazil is a secular state, Bolsonaro references Christianity in his language as a way of constructing the in-group, as 3% of his tweets mention God. Faith was a focal point of Bolsonaro's presidential campaign, as his slogan was "Brazil above everything, God above everyone." Bolsonaro garnered the electoral support of Christian Coalitions, as he clearly

indicated in his language that the Christian faith and God would be central to his governance. In 11 of Bolsonaro's 18 tweets referencing biblical verses, he mentions John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This quote allows Bolsonaro to unite "the people" under the values of freedom and religion and otherize non-Christians and atheists.

## II. Condemning Former Elites

Bolsonaro uses his language to position the former ruling elite in Brazil as the source of strife among the Brazilian people and situates himself as their savior and defender. As Figure 2 indicates, the PT is a frequent topic of Bolsonaro's tweets and the PT is frequently associated with corruption (16 tweets) and lying/lies (9 tweets). For instance, on January 3, 2019, Bolsonaro wrote:

For a long time, many Brazilians were used as a manipulated mass. They lost their valuable individuality to become the object and source of income for politicians. The change aims to liberate them from political slavery in order to give them back the right to represent themselves.

In this tweet, "the change" Bolsonaro is referring to is the end of the Workers Party (PT) administration and the beginning of his term as President, which he argues will give the people the right to represent themselves once again. He claims that the Brazilian people were exploited by the political elite that came before him, and that the change he aims to usher in will finally free them from "political slavery." This tweet accomplishes two important goals for Bolsonaro: first, he demonstrates that there was a problem in Brazilian society of exploitation of good people by corrupt politicians. Second, he is able to position himself as the solution to this problem and indicate that he is separate from the corruption that plagued the previous

administrations in Brazil. The populist frame depends on the tactic of building a problem and solution, and Bolsonaro succeeds in effectively constructing a populist frame by pointing to the past corruption of elites in Brazil.

### III. Law and Order

Central to Bolsonaro's narrative of defending the people was a focus on law and order and strengthening the military to combat violence and defend the people. Out of the five subsections of "defending the people," Bolsonaro's mention of military and police was the most frequent, with 5.6% of his total tweets referencing military and police. He tweeted on November 19, 2018:

Brazil, a paradise for criminals and a source of income for inhumane dictatorships, should give way to a Brazil whose good people will be our highest priority.

Again, in this tweet, Bolsonaro points to the past corruption in Brazil, but he also accurately highlights that the issue of crime has plagued Brazil for decades.

In a series of tweets on combating corruption on October 27, 2019, he claimed that the efforts of his administration to strengthen the military and the police were allowing him to succeed in creating a Brazil for the "good people." In his category of "good people," he celebrated the work of the Civil and Military Police of the State of Paraíba, Military Firefighters and the Federal Highway Police in dismantling *Novo Cangaço*, a violent, organized crime group prominent in Northeast Brazil. Though *Novo Cangaço* continues to work as an active gang in Northeast Brazil, when Bolsonaro presents these statements, he claims that his administration has made tangible changes in the realm of law and order to protect the Brazilian people from violence and corruption.

#### IV. Will of the People

The populist frame depends on the construction of the “us” versus “them,” but, in order for leaders to effectively position themselves as the defender of the “us,” they must claim to solely represent the will of the people. It is challenging to encapsulate exactly what language embodies this theme, since it could be argued that references to economic growth and development are examples of the “will of the people.” However, for this study, I utilized 161 tweets when Bolsonaro explicitly mentioned public interest, citizens, the Brazilian people or the other phrases in Figure 1. I include the #NasRuasComBolsonaro because during his campaign, Bolsonaro used this hashtag as a form of expressing in-group solidarity with the Brazilian people. Bolsonaro perfectly encapsulated this sentiment when he tweeted a video of one of his public speeches on June 12, 2019 with the message:

Who should lead the nation’s destiny are you, the people. You have to give us a plan. Our obligation is not to hinder them [the people].

He captures the populist sentiment that political ideas and action should come directly from the people, instead of from interest groups or from self-interested politicians. Bolsonaro also capitalized on frustration with left-wing leadership and promised dramatic change to bring the will of the people to the forefront of Brazilian politics. Thus, he has focused both his language and policies on areas where the Workers Party, which is the left-wing party that held the Brazilian presidency for thirteen years, was perceived to fail. These areas include security, education, and strengthening the economy (Sims 2019). Bolsonaro positions himself within the “us” in Brazil by articulating that he sides with the will of the people and will focus on their needs.

## V. International Greatness

The final way in which Bolsonaro situates himself as the defender of the people is through his promise to bring Brazil to a position of international greatness, and thus end the exploitation of the Brazilian people. In 53 (1.9%) of his tweets, Bolsonaro references a better future for Brazil, with an additional 29 (1%) of tweets mentioning “Brazil above all.” On October 26, 2018, he tweeted:

WE ARE GOING TO MAKE BRAZIL A GREAT NATION! Good night to all!

The usage of the word “we” instead of “I” implies that the Brazilian people will be a part of Brazil’s transformation. Bolsonaro’s campaign slogan, “Brazil above everything, God above everyone,” similarly reflects his vision of Brazilian greatness. Moreover, Bolsonaro used the Brazilian flag emoji in 4.6% of his tweets and capitalized on the connotation of the flag as a symbol for national prestige so that he did not even have to explicitly say that he would make Brazil a great nation.

Bolsonaro creates and disseminates an exclusionary populist frame, wherein he presents himself as the defender of the people. He argues that the former left-leaning leadership exploited the Brazilian people, and that he is best suited to defend the people against all forms of manipulation and subjugation. One way in which he claims to defend the people is through the strengthening of the military and police with increased funding and legal protections. Moreover, he asserts that he and his administration aim to uplift the will of the people, while other politicians are self-interested and would ultimately ignore the people’s desires. By heeding the will of the people and defending their values of freedom, family and faith, he claims that he will bring Brazil to a position of international greatness. This section has primarily focused on the

ways in which Bolsonaro situates himself within the in-group in Brazil and the ways in which he claims to be committed to defending this group against internal threats. The following section will highlight the groups he otherizes within Brazil.

## B. Cultural Threat

Throughout his political career, Bolsonaro has ostracized many different social groups within Brazil with his harsh and even offensive language. This section will focus on three specific social groups that he has positioned as the out-group: LGBTQ people, women, and indigenous people. While Bolsonaro clearly articulated through his tweets that he was the defender of the people, his language around cultural threats within Brazil is more nuanced. He clearly expresses hatred for the LGBTQ community. His language on women and indigenous people expresses sexist and racist ideas more subtly. As discussed earlier, Bolsonaro claims to have adopted “colorblind” and “gender-blind” perspectives, wherein gender and race do not matter to the way he behaves and the “us” that he constructs includes all people, regardless of their identities. Both the gender-blind and color-blind perspective are widespread in Brazil, a country that officially considers itself to be a “racial democracy” where Brazilians, Europeans and Africans could live in racial harmony. However, this mythology erases the history of the valorization of “whiteness” and the economic privileges enjoyed by white settlers in Brazil (Araujo 2015). Similarly, the “gender-blind” narrative overlooks the rampant sexual harassment and sexual violence in Brazil (Zileli 2014). In Bolsonaro’s language, sexism and racism persist and will be explored in this section.

**Figure 3: Number of tweets and percentage of total tweets referencing Bolsonaro’s narrative of cultural threat**

Cultural Threat		
LGBTQ Community	Women	Indigenous People
8 mentions (<1%)	23 mentions of women as a group (<1%) 7 mentions of a color-blind and gender-blind viewpoint (<1%)	24 mentions of indigenous people (<1%) 50 mentions of the Amazon (1.8%)

\*The percentages in this table represent the percentage of Bolsonaro’s total tweets (2,854) that mention the theme at hand.

I. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Community

Although less than 1% of his tweets referenced the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, he nonetheless positions them within Brazil as “the other.” On December 19, 2018, he tweeted a link to a YouTube video with the caption, “How to refute the transgender ideology in two minutes.” The video depicts Dr. Michelle Cretella, the Vice President of the American College of Pediatricians, arguing that human sexuality is binary and that the transgender ideology is a “delusion.” In this tweeted video, Bolsonaro undermines and otherizes transgender people in two ways; first, he claims that transgender is an “ideology,” instead of a real, valid identity; second, he encourages his followers to watch a video that invalidates and dehumanizes transgender people. Thus, Bolsonaro positions the LGBTQ community as “the other” and encourages his followers to do the same.

In addition, Bolsonaro associates the PT with the dissemination of this “transgender ideology,” or the spreading of gayness. He tweeted on October 26, 2018:

No one lied more than PT in this election. They are masters at cheating. They changed the government plan several times after their totalitarian bias was exposed. Now they say they respect the family, democracy and justice, but we know the mission of the gay kit's father is to release the leader of the gang!

The "leader of the gang" that Bolsonaro is referring to is former President and PT party leader Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro argued that Lula da Silva was puppeteering Fernando Haddad's presidential campaign from jail, since Haddad openly supported Lula da Silva even after he turned himself in for charges of money laundering and passive corruption (Andreoni et al. 2018). Bolsonaro claims that Haddad's party, the PT, disseminates "gay kits," or materials that promote tolerance of gay people. The term "gay kit," which was frequently used by Bolsonaro and his political allies, came to represent a textbook created by the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, Transvestites and Transsexuals (ABGLT), Pathfinder Brasil, ECOS-Comunicação em Sexualidade and Replotina-Soluções Inovadoras em Saúde Sexual e Reprodutiva. This textbook provided strategies for teachers to fight homophobia in the classroom (Gazeta do Povo). Bolsonaro has distorted what the "School Without Homophobia" textbook aims to accomplish, which is to create classrooms free of homophobia, and claims that PT has disseminated it in schools to get children to become homosexuals. Bolsonaro fabricated the connection between the PT and the textbook, since the only possible relationship was that Fernando Haddad, the former Minister of Education, knew about the development of the textbook (Gazeta do Povo).

Bolsonaro's disdain for the LGBTQ community is not new. In a 2011 interview with Playboy magazine, he said he "would be incapable of loving a homosexual son" (Sullivan 2018). Bolsonaro said he would rather his son "die in an accident" than fall in love with a "bigodudo,"

or a macho man (Lehman 2018). Despite the increasing visibility of the LGBTQ community and the growing legal rights for members of the community, such as same-sex marriage in 2013 and legal gender changes in 2018, Bolsonaro continues to belittle and otherize LGBTQ people. Bolsonaro's homophobia has manifested in his policies too. Just hours after his inauguration on January 2, 2019, he removed concerns regarding the LGBT community from being considered by the Brazilian human rights ministry (Gstalter 2019). Bolsonaro's removal of protections for the LGBTQ community is troubling because although LGBTQ people are becoming increasingly visible through large Pride events and activist mobilization, there are still high rates of homophobic violence perpetrated in Brazil, particularly against transgender people. At least 445 LGBTQ Brazilians died in 2017 as victims of homophobia and according to the Trans Murdering Monitoring project, almost 40% of trans murders globally in 2018 took place in Brazil (Lopez 2019). Bolsonaro uses inflammatory, homophobic language and policies to position the LGBTQ as the "other" within Brazil.

## II. Women

The way Bolsonaro speaks about women is more complex than his direct attacks against LGBTQ people in Brazil; nonetheless it embodies misogyny and sexism and positions women as the "other." For this analysis, I look only at instances when Bolsonaro refers to women as a group rather than when he mentions an individual woman, since I am more concerned with how he discusses the collective group instead of individuals.

Comparably to the situation wherein Bolsonaro attacked the "gay kits" in schools, he has also condemned the teaching of gender ideology in schools. Bolsonaro opposes the teaching of gender ideology because he argues that it is antithetical to the values of family and faith

discussed in the previous section. On September 3, 2019, Bolsonaro said that he directed the Ministry of Education to draft a bill to prevent the inclusion of gender studies in elementary schools. He wrote:

The Attorney General (AGU) decides who is responsible for legislating on gender ideology, a matter under federal jurisdiction. I directed the Ministry of Education (MEC), aiming at the principle of the integral protection of children, provided for in the Constitution, to prepare a draft law that prohibits gender ideology in elementary education.

As previously mentioned, Bolsonaro claims that women are a part of the “us” because he is blind to divisions of gender. The directive in this tweet demonstrates that Bolsonaro aims to institutionalize gender-blind thought by removing the study of “gender ideology” from schools. Though he outwardly claims that women are a part of the in-group, the removal of “gender ideology” erases the ongoing issues of sexism and gender-based violence from Brazilian schools. The rates of femicides and intimate partner abuse are astronomical in Brazil, a country that had the fifth highest rate of female homicides in the world in 2015 (Cavendish de Moura and Hollingsworth 2019). Erasing this problem from the curriculum of schools does not erase the problem from society, and rather it does a disservice to female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence by silencing the reality of their experiences.

Bolsonaro’s comments on the role and status of women in Brazil did not begin with his presidency. In April 2017 at Rio de Janeiro’s Hebraica Club, he said, “I have five children. Four are men, and then in a moment of weakness the fifth came out a girl.” Of the 211.9 million people that live in Brazil, at least 106 million are women, but these women confront a long

history of patriarchy and discrimination (Xavier 2015; Phillips 2018). Bolsonaro's language perfectly encapsulates the continued reality of sexism in Brazil. Even as women mobilize through organizations like Think Olga, a non-governmental organization that empowers women through social media and through the dissemination of information, women continue to confront structural and cultural barriers to equality. Women, on a surface level are positioned by Bolsonaro within the "us." However when you explore his policies, such as that of erasing "gender ideology" it is evident that misogyny and sexism persist and Bolsonaro positions women as the "other" in Brazilian society.

### III. Indigenous People

Bolsonaro has made many racist remarks about indigenous people in Brazil and even once praised the genocide of native people on the North American continent. He explicitly mentioned indigenous people in 24 of his tweets, but talked about native lands of Amazon in 50 tweets. Most often in discussion of the "integration" of these lands into the rest of Brazil. Throughout his presidency, his focus regarding indigenous people has been framing the forced assimilation of indigenous people as beneficial for them. He wrote on January 2, 2019:

More than 15% of the national territory is demarcated as indigenous and quilombola land. Less than a million people live in these truly isolated places in Brazil, exploited and manipulated by NGOs. Together, we will integrate these citizens and value all Brazilians.

Quilombolas are Afro-Brazilian residents of quilombo settlements that were first established by escaped slaves in Brazil. The legal land rights of Quilombolas and indigenous people in Brazil are typically grouped together. While Bolsonaro presents the assimilation of indigenous people as an altruistic ambition, he is signaling his intention to rollback protections

for indigenous land, specifically land in the Amazon. The protection of these lands is guaranteed in the Brazilian Constitution, but throughout the entirety of his presidential campaign, Bolsonaro promised to cut funding for indigenous services and nationalize indigenous land that he would open up for tourism and economic development. He tweeted his intentions for indigenous lands on February 16, 2019:

To reintegrate Indians into society, leads to conditions so that they can feel Brazilian and not just be treated as an exploited mass and divided by people contemplating power plans. We have the most mixed people in the world and we are all the same!

Again, Bolsonaro iterates the colorblind perspective wherein all people are the same, but he also signals the importance of “reintegration.” In reality, reintegration often entails the seizure of lands for commercialization. The fear among indigenous leaders, particularly in the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau Indigenous reserve which is frequently invaded by loggers and miners, is that Bolsonaro’s rhetoric will embolden violence perpetrated by “*grileiros*.” *Grileiros* are armed bands of land grabbers who have been increasingly staging attacks against the community since 2018 (Cowie 2019). According to a 2019 report from Brazil’s Indigenous Missionary Council, in the first nine months of the Bolsonaro government, there were reports of 160 cases of land invasion, illegal exploitation of natural resources, and damage to property in 153 indigenous territories. These statistics represent a significant increase from 2018 wherein only 111 incidents of this type were reported in 76 indigenous territories (Beretz 2019). It is impossible to infer a causal relationship between Bolsonaro’s language and the invasion of indigenous communities, but he reinforces the idea that Brazilians should neither respect the demarcation of indigenous territories nor should they respect the existence of these people. Bolsonaro’s othering of

indigenous people legitimizes the violent actions of *grileiros* and further isolates scattered indigenous subgroups from the rest of the Brazilian population.

#### IV. Conclusion

Bolsonaro creates and disseminates a populist frame wherein reality is constructed based on the idea of “Us” against “Them.” Three groups that he positions within the “other” are the LGBTQ community, women, and indigenous people. Despite the hostile and even violent language he has used in reference to these groups, he garnered some support from members of these communities. Even after millions of women united behind the *#EleNã* (*#NotHim*) campaign, which aimed to stop Bolsonaro’s rise in September of 2018, he garnered the electoral support of millions of women (Watson 2018). Bolsonaro’s racist, sexist, and homophobic language was treated by the LGBTQ people, women, and indigenous people that voted for him as less important than the policy and political changes he promised to bring to Brazil. Regardless of the impact of his language, the frame that he creates and spreads is one wherein LGBTQ people, women, and indigenous people are not a part of the in-group in Brazil. The demarcation between the in-group and out-group is critical for populists like Bolsonaro to create and articulate. The “us” versus “them” frame allows populists to position themselves as the defender of the in-group against the out-group.

#### C. Hostility to the Left and Solidarity with the Right

I argue another group that Bolsonaro considers to be the “other” is the political left, both within Brazil and outside of Brazil. At the same time, he aligns with right-wing politicians from around the world, including United States President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu. While Bolsonaro associates the left with fake news, violence, and corruption, he associates the political right with power and strength. This section will focus on how Bolsonaro conceptualizes the left as the “other” and the right as the “us.”

**Figure 4: Number of tweets and percentage of Bolsonaro’s total tweets demonstrating hostility to the left and solidarity with the right**

Hostility to the Left and Solidarity with the Right	
Hostility to the Left	Solidarity with the Right
183 mention “fake news” (6.4%)	92 mention Trump and/or the United States (3.2%)
110 mention the PT (3.8%)	45 mention Netanyahu and/or Israel (1.6%)
93 mention the left, but do not explicitly mention the PT (3.3%)	
24 mention Cuba (<1%)	
16 mention corruption, but do not explicitly mention the PT (<1%)	
10 mention Socialism/Marxism (<1%)	

### I. Hostility to the Left

Bolsonaro points to the Workers Party (PT) as a root cause of the persistent corruption in Brazil. Bolsonaro was particularly vocal in his criticisms of the PT in the three weeks between the first round of the presidential election and the run-off between him and PT candidate Fernando Haddad. On October 19, 2018, he wrote:

For the PT it is not just an election, but to prevent a gang from being dismantled by the Brazilians. Check it out! It’s not fake, it’s a FACT!

In this tweet, Bolsonaro is alluding to both the years of corruption that riddled the administrations of former Presidents Lula da Silva and Rousseff, both of whom belonged to the PT party, and the alleged corruption of his competitor, Haddad. In September of 2018, Haddad

was charged by São Paulo state prosecutors with corruption for allegedly obtaining illegal payments from the construction conglomerate UTC Participações (Brooks and Fonseca 2018). Bolsonaro positions the PT as oppositional to “the Brazilians” who are trying to dismantle their “gang.” Thus, he delineates between the Brazilian people and the PT, who are the other.

Out of all of the linguistic themes discussed in this chapter, Bolsonaro most frequently references the idea of “fake news” as a part of his criticisms of the left. Bolsonaro associates the left and the PT with “fake news,” a topic which 6.4% of his tweets mention. Out of all themes discussed in this analysis, Bolsonaro mentions “fake news” with the greatest frequency. Thus, a critical piece of his frame is that the left and the “other” are a source of lies, misinformation and deception. Similarly to American President Trump, for Bolsonaro, “fake news” is used as a catch-all to encompass the media outlets, journalists and information that he deems to be in opposition to him. Bolsonaro has criticized several prominent media outlets in Brazil, including *Folha de S. Paulo*, which is the most frequently circulated newspaper and online news source in the country, as of 2019 (Statista) 2019). On November 20, 2019, he tweeted, in regards to *Folha*:

*Jornaleco* [a pejorative term in Portuguese referring to poorly written or unfavorable publication] cannot live without LYING.

- I suspended my subscription and many businessmen have canceled advertising contracts with this newspaper of fake news and misinformation.

Bolsonaro argues that *Folha* is a *jornaleco* because of the “fake news and misinformation” that they supposedly disseminate. Though *Folha* is not a left-wing media outlet, Bolsonaro conflates *Folha* with the political left and thus associates it with deception. Not only does this otherize

those working to produce *Folha*, but also the millions of Brazilians who utilize *Folha* as their primary news outlet.

Bolsonaro also argues that corrupt leftism has infiltrated Brazil's academic institutions, and he promises to improve the Brazilian educational system by ousting leftist thought. On January 2, 2019, Bolsonaro tweeted, in English:

One of our strategies to get Brazil to climb from the lowest spots of the educational rankings is to tackle the Marxist garbage in our schools head on. We shall succeed in forming citizens and not political militants.

The cultural “Marxist garbage” Bolsonaro refers to in his tweet includes the teaching of gender ideology, sociology, political correctness, and multiculturalism (Woods 2019). He presents Brazilian leftism as “garbage” and the source of political militancy in the country. Bolsonaro positions Marxism as the root cause of corruption in Brazil and promises to uphold the will of the people by wiping out the teaching of Marxist ideals in schools. The “us,” in this tweet, refers to academics that reject political militancy and Marxism and instead train dutiful citizens and uplift capitalist values.

Throughout his presidential campaign and thus far through his presidency, Bolsonaro has presented himself as the “anti-corruption” leader. Two weeks after the 2018 election, he posted a video on his YouTube account titled: “PT: A Machine of Corruption and Lies!” The video showed a series of headlines and news stories from PT-supporting media outlets that allegedly were spreading lies about Bolsonaro and his campaign. It highlights the *Lava Jato* scandal, which is an ongoing criminal investigation by the Federal Police of Brazil, and asserts that the thirteen years of the PT's national leadership were plagued by corruption.

Bolsonaro also is hostile towards the international political left. One target of his criticisms has been the Cuban government. Since 2013, Cuba and Brazil participated in a program called “More Doctors,” which allowed thousands of Cuban doctors to serve in Brazil. However, in November of 2018, Cuba announced that it was recalling the 8,517 doctors it had deployed in the most rural and impoverished areas of Brazil in response to Bolsonaro’s “tough stance” against Cuba (Darlington and Casado 2019). In response to this action, Bolsonaro tweeted a series of justifications for his criticisms of the “More Doctors” program, including:

“Currently, Cuba takes most of the salary of Cuban doctors and restricts the freedom of these professionals and their families. They are withdrawing from *Mais Medicos* for not agreeing to review this absurd situation that violates human rights. Regrettable!”

This abrupt departure of thousands of doctors was an incredible challenge for Bolsonaro, as access to free health is a right under Brazilian law, and thus his administration was tasked with finding replacement health care providers. However, instead of repairing Brazil’s relations with Cuba in the aftermath of the “More Doctors” fiasco, Bolsonaro has continued to criticize the socialist government, tweeting on May 5, 2019:

“In my Government, the flame of democracy will be maintained without any media regulation, including social media. Anyone who thinks differently is recommended an internship in North Korea or Cuba.”

In this tweet, Bolsonaro conflates Cuba with media censorship, limited democratic freedoms, and the authoritarian regime of North Korea. To Bolsonaro, as previously mentioned, socialism and Marxism are sources of corruption, fake news, and evil. Thus, the left is positioned as the “other.” The next section will explore how Bolsonaro positions the political right as the “us.”

## II. Solidarity With the Right

Although Bolsonaro demonstrates hostility to the PT and the political left across the world, he frequently references right-wing leaders Trump and Netanyahu as members of the international community that are a part of his in-group. These leaders reciprocate the sentiment and communicate solidarity with Bolsonaro. On January 1, 2019, the day of Bolsonaro's inauguration, President Trump tweeted his support and wrote:

Congratulations to President @JairBolsonaro who just made a great inauguration speech  
- the U.S.A. is with you!

Bolsonaro responded to President Trump in English with the message:

Dear Mr. President @realDonaldTrump, I truly appreciate your words of encouragement. Together, under God's protection, we shall bring prosperity and progress to our people!

This is just one example of numerous interactions between Bolsonaro and Trump over Twitter wherein they express support for one another. Both Bolsonaro and Trump utilize a populist frame and delineate between the in-group and out-group. Their tweets of support to one another serve to reinforce the validity of the narrative that the "us" is any group that belongs within the political right. The populist frame of one leader is thus reinforced and legitimized by another populist.

Bolsonaro similarly lends support to right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In March of 2019, Bolsonaro visited Israel after making a promise to move Brazil's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, like the move Trump made in May of 2018. On March 31, 2019, Bolsonaro tweeted:

“We just arrived in Israel. We were welcomed by Prime Minister @netanyahu and were able to say words about this friendly nation and the purpose of our trip. Shalom!”

Bolsonaro’s relationship with Netanyahu marks a dramatic shift in Brazil’s foreign policy, since under Dilma Rouseff’s government, Brazil condemned the use of force by the Israeli government in the Gaza Strip and recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv (Jelmayer 2014). The friendliness between Bolsonaro and Trump and Bolsonaro and Netanyahu signifies how Bolsonaro has shifted Brazilian foreign policy to center around the development of close relationships with right-wing leaders.

### III. Conclusion

Bolsonaro’s embrace of fellow populist leaders Trump and Netanyahu runs counter to the foreign policy objectives of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. Both Lula da Silva and Rousseff sought to distance Brazil from these foreign powers in order to make the country an independent political and economic powerhouse (Garcia 2019). Bolsonaro’s reversal of this trend represents how he is reconstructing what Brazil’s in-group and out-group should be. He is partaking in the creation of a new far-right global order that involves the othering of left-wing powers, both within and outside of his country. Bolsonaro shares Trump’s tendencies of acting aggressive towards minorities and attacking the press. Both Trump and Bolsonaro share the objective of deconstructing the existing political order within their respective countries. Moreover, they demonstrate how the populist understanding of reality manifests in the language of political leaders, wherein some constructed in-group is positioned against an antagonistic out-group.

#### D. Chapter Conclusion

I used data from Twitter in this chapter to answer my research question: How does Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro create exclusive categories of “the people” and “the others”? I argued that Bolsonaro constructs and disseminates an exclusionary populist frame that positions “us” against “them.” I explored three trends in his language that support his populist frame. He presents himself as the defender of the people against some “other,” he identifies cultural threat, and he ostracizes the political left while embracing the political right.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Some scholars have argued that there is a “playbook” that populists like Bolsonaro utilize in order to garner support and power (Phillips et al. 2019; Vachudova 2019). Populists present themselves as antithetical to mainstream politics and as defenders of the people. They increasingly use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to circumvent traditional media outlets and mobilize their constituents against some threat, whether that be an external or internal enemy. Donald Trump, Viktor Orban and Rodrigo Duterte alike adopt an “us” versus “them” linguistic, populist frame and position themselves as the strongest defender of the “us.” I argue in this thesis that Brazilian President Bolsonaro disseminated an exclusionary populist frame wherein he presented himself as the defender of the in-group against the out-group.

The in-group, according to Bolsonaro, includes all those who adopt and uphold the values of freedom, family, and Christianity that he articulates, as these values are what define the “true” Brazilian. Additionally, members of the political right, both within and outside of Brazil’s borders are a part of the in-group that Bolsonaro constructs. Bolsonaro positions himself as the defender of the in-group in five primary ways. Bolsonaro articulates the aforementioned moral values of freedom, family, and the Christian faith as the defining markers of a true Brazilian, condemns the former elites, promotes the military and police, claims to represent the will of the people and vows to restore Brazilian national greatness. Thus, Bolsonaro constructs a definitive in-group and positions himself as the leader and defender of the in-group.

The out-group is made up of the political left and the “fake news” media, which Bolsonaro identifies as the enemy of the Brazilian state and people. The “fake news” media, which was discussed in 6.4% of the tweets included in this study, is associated with the

manipulation and deception of Brazilians. Similarly, the corruption of the left, according to Bolsonaro, is a significant source of strife for Brazilians that Bolsonaro promises to combat. The out-group also includes groups that he uses his language to erase, “assimilate” or belittle, including women, the LGBTQ community and indigenous peoples. The language of assimilation is notable, as Bolsonaro adopts a genderblind and colorblind perspective wherein he argues that he does not see gender or race differences as important. As discussed in Chapter 4, this perspective minimizes and trivializes the experiences of women and people of color in Brazil and erases issues of racism, sexism and misogyny.

Bolsonaro’s language is especially relevant to study in the age of COVID-19. Throughout March and April of 2020, Bolsonaro repeatedly dismissed the severity of the coronavirus pandemic, which he has deemed as a “little flu” that could not hurt him (Savarese and Biller 2020). Even after members of his own staff tested positive for COVID-19, he continued to encourage constituents to ignore recommendations for social distancing and go about their lives normally. In early-March, Bolsonaro attended and embraced supporters at a protest against the Supreme Court and Congress (Richmond 2020). Not only was this against the recommendation of his own health minister, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, Bolsonaro’s aggressions against the National Congress and Supreme Court constitute an impeachable offense. Article 85, Number II of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 provides that it is an impeachable offense to infringe upon the “free exercise of the powers of the Legislature, Judiciary, Public Ministry and constitutional powers of the units of the Federation.” Bolsonaro has faced calls for impeachment for his mismanagement of the COVID-19 crisis and repeated violations of the “dignity, honor and decorum” of the presidential office (Meyer and Bustamante 2020). Bolsonaro’s legitimacy and

public support have been undermined by his handling and rhetoric around the coronavirus pandemic. According to a survey from Datafolha in early-April, 39% of respondents said Bolsonaro's handling of coronavirus was "bad" or "awful" and his approval level has dipped to its lowest point since he took office in January 2019 (Mello 2020). Bolsonaro risks reelection in 2022 if no serious measures are taken to properly address the spread of COVID-19.

I envision several avenues for future research on this topic. First, while I mentioned the likes of Trump and Orban, it would be interesting to directly compare Bolsonaro's language and the populist frame he constructs with other populists. Do the in-groups they construct look the same? Who are the people they position as the other? Why might the in-group and out-group look different for populists in different countries? Second, it would be worthwhile to explore if and how Bolsonaro's language resonates with Brazilians. Do they support his tactics of linguistic othering, whether that be by retweeting his tweets or rearticulating his ideas? Although it is important to study how Bolsonaro constructs the "us" and "them," it is equally important to discover whether or not the public is receptive to this frame. Third and finally, how are activist groups mobilizing in response to Bolsonaro's "othering?" How is the LGBTQ activist community mobilizing to protect their rights? Are feminist groups trying to further the goals of the *#EleNã*o movement?

Populism is a hot topic of research and discussion in the contemporary work of political scientists. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is continued debate about the usage and meaning of the term, but we continue to study it because the patterns and tactics used by populists seem ubiquitous. It is not enough to say that populists are just charismatic, anti-establishment leaders. What makes populists distinct is that their understanding of reality is contingent upon the

existence of an in-group, which they are a part of, that is in clear opposition to an out-group. There is a discernible “us” and “them” according to populists, like Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro’s language warrants further study because this “us” versus “them” conceptualization of reality must continue to be interrogated and unpacked. Why is this such a powerful narrative? Can there really be an “us” without a “them”?

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