

Conspiracy Theories and Foreign Policy Narratives

Globalism in Jair Bolsonaro's Foreign Policy

by

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An analysis of more than 2,000 speeches and social media posts on foreign policy issues from four members of Jair Bolsonaro's government from January 2019 to December 2020 suggests that a conspiracy theory called "globalism," which explains current events using a series of intrigues and stratagems carried out by fictitious enemies to undermine the national order, has not only taken root in Brazil's foreign policy narrative but consistently been used over time by the cabinet members responsible for that policy. It also indicates that the use of "globalism" is not just a political strategy to persuade voters but a world-view embedded in Bolsonaro's far-right cabinet.

Uma análise de mais de 2.000 discursos e posts provenientes de redes sociais sobre questões da política externa do Brasil por quatro membros do gabinete do governo de Jair Bolsonaro de janeiro de 2019 a dezembro de 2020 indica que a teoria de conspiração denominada "globalismo," que explica atualidades em termos de uma série de intrigas e estratégias implementadas por inimigos fictícios para minar a ordem nacional, não se arreigou apenas na narrativa exibida na política exterior brasileira mas também se utilizou há anos pelos mesmos membros do gabinete que são responsáveis por sua elaboração. Isso significa que o uso do "globalismo" não é só uma estratégia política para convencer eleitores mas é também uma visão do mundo que é enraizada no gabinete de Bolsonaro cuja origem reside na extreme direita.

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In a world where fake news has become the new normal (Lazer et al., 2018), conspiracy theories are too serious to be seen as simply a hoax or a lunatic's dreams. Political leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have used conspiracy theories in their foreign policy narratives, and these ideas have had a real impact on people's lives. Indeed, political margins have become ubiquitous, and conspiracy theories have invaded foreign affairs from the hinterlands. Now the world must respond to the fact that such ideas have captured the popular consciousness and political power.

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The growing body of research on conspiracy theories in Europe and the United States shows that people's beliefs in conspiracies are associated with many political concepts, among them populism, ideology, identity, and even violence (Oliver and Wood, 2014; Silva, Vegetti, and Littvay, 2017; Vegetti and Littvay, 2022; Mancosu, Vassallo, and Vezzoni, 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2014). Scholars are becoming aware of the concrete influence of conspiracy theories on everyday politics and are no longer looking at them as simple intellectual frauds. There is a growing international-relations literature exploring the international implications of populist rhetoric tackling conspiracy theories marginally (Stengel, MacDonald, and Nabers, 2019; Boucher and Thies, 2019; Özdamar and Ceydilek, 2019; Wajner, 2021; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015; 2017; Casullo, 2019; Moffitt, 2017; De Cleen, 2017; Plagemann and Destradi, 2018; Guimarães and Silva, 2020), along with a handful of studies analyzing conspiracy theories directly. These studies seek to assess whether and how conspiracy theories influence international politics, reconstructing the diffusion of the conspiracy narratives in foreign policy with anecdotal evidence (Sakwa, 2012; Aistrophe, 2016; Yablokov, 2015; Hellinger, 2019; Roniger and Senkman, 2019; Wojczewski, 2021).

In this article we take a step farther by systematically analyzing whether and how populist leaders use conspiracy theories in their foreign policy narratives. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, we use text-as-data methods and qualitative content analysis to provide a systematic account of the way populist governments use conspiracy theories to create foreign policy narratives and in what circumstances conspiracies are used. Thus we aim to answer the following question: How does a populist government use conspiracy theories to structure a foreign policy narrative?

We take Jair Bolsonaro's administration in Brazil as an illustrative case of a pathological political ethos that has changed a traditionally stable and highly professional foreign policy into a series of conspiracy tales. We show that the officials responsible for Brazil's foreign policy making reproduce a set of ideas called "globalism" as justification for their acts and discourses in foreign policy. For them, "globalism" is a set of plots carried out by international agencies and China to impose "cultural Marxism" through the use of international law against the will of the "true people," seen as inherently nationalist, anticommunist, and Christian.

To understand whether Bolsonaro's government has employed conspiracy theories in the Brazilian foreign policy narrative, we analyzed 2,041 official speeches, interviews, and YouTube videos of four public officials—Jair Bolsonaro, Eduardo Bolsonaro (former president of the House Committee on International Affairs), Ernesto Araújo (foreign minister), and Filipe Martins (special foreign affairs adviser to the president)—from January 2019 to December 2020. We used human-coding textual analysis to select foreign policy speeches and social media posts and consider what we present here the largest classification to date of foreign policy documents about the Bolsonaro administration.

We have divided the article into four parts. First, we review the literature on conspiracy theories and populism to understand the relationship between conspiracy theories and populist foreign policy narratives. Second, we characterize

Bolsonaro's government conspiracy-related worldview and map the conspiracy-theories scenario among officials. Next, we report the results, and finally we discuss the implications of our findings for the literature.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES, POPULISM, AND FOREIGN POLICY

When academics or commentators identify conspiracy theories in foreign policy discourse, they regularly locate them not just on the political fringes of liberal democracies but also on the periphery of global power (Aistrope, 2016: 16). Yet conspiracy theories do not belong to the ordinary operation of international politics, where rational diplomacy should be the predominant type of narrative. However, some populist presidents seem to have moved conspiracy theories from the fringes to the center of their official foreign policy narratives. Sakwa (2012: 581–590) has argued that conspiracy theories are becoming a “distinctive mode of engagement” in foreign affairs, carrying a specific and Manichean view of how international politics work.

We do not know, however, precisely what the distinctive type of foreign policy inspired by conspiracy theories is. Almost no studies seek to understand whether conspiracy theories affect foreign policy narratives and, if so, how. Except for studies that discuss the international factors that give shape to conspiracy theories, such as international Judeo-liberal alliances and international communist infiltration (Aistrope, 2016; Yablokov, 2015; Hellinger, 2019; Gray, 2010), the literature on conspiracy theories has not yet properly addressed whether they systematically affect foreign policy. Roniger and Senkman's (2019) and Sakwa's (2012) studies are among the few to have done so.

However, while the analysis of conspiracy theories' influence in the international-relations literature is still incipient, there is growing evidence that they are associated with ideology, identity, discourse, and resentment of the elite. For instance, Oliver and Wood (2014: 952) have shown that half of the American public “consistently endorses at least one conspiracy theory and that the likelihood of supporting conspiracy theories is strongly predicted by a willingness to believe in unseen intentional forces and an attraction to Manichean narratives.” Mancosu, Vassallo, and Vezzoni (2017: 1) find that belief in conspiracy theories in Italy is not only widespread but also negatively associated with education and positively with religiosity. Vegetti and Littvay (2021: 2) have shown consistent evidence that conspiracy theories provide narratives that may help people “channel their feelings of resentment toward political targets, fueling radical attitudes and even violence.” There is also some evidence that belief in conspiracy theories is associated with factors signaling a lack of personal significance (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Finally, Silva, Vegetti, and Littvay (2017) have shown that it is associated with multiple subdimensions of populist attitudes such as antielitism and a good-versus-evil view of politics.

In our view, there are two reasons for this deficiency of the international-relations as contrasted with the domestic-politics literature. First, any academic foreign policy analysis has to focus either on a supposed rational diplomatic discourse or on the influence of essential concepts such as religion, ideology, or economic interests. Hence, the conspiracy-theories concept has been seen as too

narrow and rare to be taken seriously. Second, the social phenomenon of the far-right rise is too recent for the literature to have responded appropriately. Only recently has it become clear that many far-right politicians use conspiracy theories to push their foreign policy agendas (Plagemann and Destradi, 2018; Guimarães and Silva, 2021; Wojczewski, 2021).

While there is in fact a growing literature on the international implications of populism (Özdamar and Ceydilek, 2019; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015; 2017; Casullo, 2019; Moffitt, 2017; De Cleen, 2017; Plagemann and Destradi, 2018; Guimarães and Silva, 2021), these studies are focused on populism as a baseline conceptualization rather than on understanding how populist foreign policies operate. The exception is Wojczewski (2021), who analyzes conspiracy theories' relationship with populism and foreign policy to understand how it mobilizes "the people" in international relations, using the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany as a case study. Indeed, the concept of populism does elaborate international politics in many terms other than conspiracy theories, but it seems that combining studies on populism and conspiracy theories into a single approach, as Wojczewski (2021) has done, would improve the analytical quality of the scholarly debate.

The conspiracy theory is not a neutral concept used merely to describe a particular political ideology or narrative but an evaluative term with significant pejorative connotations among academics. For Coady (2006: 5), "to allude to an account as a conspiracy theory is to make a judgment about its epistemic status; it is a way of branding an explanation untrue or insinuating that it is based on insufficient evidence, superstition, or prejudice." For Byford (2011: 22), the effectiveness of a conspiracy theory "as a strategy of exclusion and the means of 'cutting out' rival interpretations rests on the existence of the widespread intellectual presumption among academics against, or even hostility towards, conspiracy theories." As Jeffrey Bale (2007: 47) has put it, "very few notions nowadays generate as much intellectual resistance, hostility and derision within academic circles as a belief in the historical importance or efficacy of political conspiracies."

Nevertheless, conspiracy theories are more than just a hoax. Given the increasing evidence that they have political consequences, they cannot be automatically dismissed. Even skeptics agree that they can have political consequences when empowered by professional politicians (Hofstadter 1996 [1965]; Keeley, 1999; Pigden, 1995; Coady, 2006; 2012). In fact, Coady (2006: 4–5) argues that it is not so much that conspiracy theories have an exaggerated view of the prevalence of conspiratorial behavior as that they have an exaggerated view of how successful this behavior tends to be. The imaginaries of conspiracy theories are characterized by a "racialized understanding of agency—hyper agency—wherein elite individuals are constituted as causally driving and controlling history" (Millar and Costa Lopez, 2021: 3). Furthermore, once a professional politician exercising power uses them to impose his counternarrative, conspiracy ideas become the state's official narrative and, thus, the reality, as the example of Donald Trump has shown (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2019).

Moreover, Fenster (2008: 84–90) has suggested that conspiracy theories can become a strategy for reallocating power among different political actors, "helping to unite the audience as 'the people' against the imagined 'Other,'

represented as a secretive 'power bloc.'" As Karl Popper (1962: 123) once argued, a conspiracy theory has "very little truth in it. Only when conspiracy theoreticians come into power does it become like a theory which accounts for things that happen."

Despite their capacity to mobilize political actors, conspiracy theories are frequently wrong about how political events occur. For Fenster (2008: 11), they frequently "lack substantive proof, rely on leaps of logic, and oversimplify the political, economic, and social structures of power searching for an enemy." Conspiracy theories function as oversimplified realities demanding hyperactivity on the part of the beholder. More important, they very frequently express virulent hostility toward minorities and political adversaries, who tend to be seen as enemies that deserve elimination. For Dentith (2018), a conspiracy theory has three essential features: conspirators, secrecy, and objectives secretly desired by its main agents such as the elimination or sidelining of specific enemies.

The dominant explanation for conspiracy theories in the literature is the pathological model. According to Gray (2010: 4–10), this approach is centered on a public paranoia dependent on fallacies that lead to the distortion of analysis. Hofstadter (1996: 4) describes conspiracy theories as an expression of the "paranoid style"—"an alternative element in politics, one that operates at the margins but occasionally threatens the mainstream, consensus-driven operations of politics. Moreover, conspiracy theories rely on political entrepreneurs with a proper paranoid style to be effectively advertised." Paranoid political leaders tend to promote counterconspiracy theories to oppose the ones prevailing among their supporters. However, the "paranoid-style" hypothesis has its limitations. For example, Gray (2010: 22) argues that Hofstadter's analysis does not look into the dynamics between in-groups and out-groups that sustain conspiratorial narratives and therefore does not properly address the political impacts of paranoia in everyday politics. Our analysis seeks to fill this gap in foreign policy by looking into whether and how the belief in conspiracy theories affects foreign policy making.

Populist leaders are prone to use conspiracy theories. For Saull et al. (2015: 5–25), along with its historical forebears the contemporary far-right articulates politics as a conspiracy. The conspirators' identification and location have changed, but the theme of conspiracies associated with elites directed by "foreign" or "cosmopolitan" forces remains the same. The locus of the purported conspiracy is elites that are disengaged from the "true indigenous people." Implicit in this worldview is a demand for the reconfiguration of political society—a need to "cleanse" the political body of alien and corrupting influences.

Mudde (2000: 41–45) shows that extreme right parties in Europe exhibited not only a simplified version of nationalism in which the political power belonged to the "true people" but also a set of anti-Semitic and anticommunist conspiracy theories that motivated their behavior. More recently, in their analysis of the far-right in the United States, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) have shown that Islamophobic and global-warming conspiracy theories have also gained acceptance on the far-right.

Populists also use conspiracy and counterconspiracy theories to target (or create) their political adversaries. As Plagemann and Destradi (2018: 4) have

argued, populist leaders tend to mock or disdain political competitors, arguing that they “might not be part of the proper people to begin with.” In such an imaginary, “majorities act like mistreated minorities” and enemy images are kept alive so that “governing [is] a permanent campaign against the people's imaginary enemies” (Müller, 2016: 42). Conspiracy theories are also used to target not only domestic enemies but foreign ones, using foreigners as scapegoats for political purposes. The set of powerful foreign enemies ranges from international Jewish conspiracies to communist infiltration and liberal international institutions. For these populists the problem is that “instead of responding to the ‘true’ people, the government has been captured by those nefarious foreign forces” (Ostiguy, 2017: 108).

In this context, it should not be a surprise that populist leaders often use conspiracy theories to justify their protection of the “true people.” For them, there is always a secret plot led by the elite to control the people's will under way (Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Mudde, 2016), and they respond to it with extravagant counterconspiracy theories that aim to secure their position in power and their place in the collective imaginary as the only representatives of the genuine people capable of protecting them. In this connection, Wojczewski (2021) argues that populist leaders appeal to their bases through a narrative that blames conspirators for the people's problems and identifies the leaders themselves as the only political force capable of reversing the plot against them.

As Oliver and Wood (2014: 953) have argued, conspiracy theories are motivated by specific political messages and individual predispositions. They function as a critical strategic element of the populist message. They ignite the predispositions of individuals who tend to see the world in black-and-white and are prone to mobilize. Van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Pollet (2015) have shown that people at political extremes endorse conspiracy theories more strongly than those at the political center. The extremes of the political spectrum tend to see each other as inherently evil and dangerous (Brandt et al., 2014; Swami et al., 2018).

It seems clear that conspiracy theories and the recent populist attacks on democracies are closely intertwined. The rise of populism in recent decades represents the increasing tensions within liberal democracies. More than ever, constituencies are governed by elected officials and powerful bureaucrats who continue to gain power in an ever-growing technification of life (Mouffe, 2018; Mudde, 2016). The same can be said in international politics, where the growing influence of international organizations is under attack by populists (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019). Just as in domestic politics, in international relations conspiracy theories provide believers with a unified narrative against external enemies that serves domestic interests. Thus, both in domestic and in international scenarios where elites can easily be seen as paper tigers, the use of conspiracy theories by Manichean populists is rampant. At the same time, Giry and Tika (2020) argue that the discipline has provided very little empirical qualitative research on specific organized groups of conspiracy theorists, especially in Latin America. There are a few studies on conspiracy theories in Latin America (Hopper, 2020; Roniger and Senkman, 2019), but no study has systematically addressed their role.

MAPPING BOLSONARO'S FOREIGN POLICY

In 2019, a national survey carried out by the opinion institute Datafolha showed that more than 11 million people in Brazil (at least 7 percent of the population) believed that the earth was flat, with poorer and religious respondents being more prone to do so (*Folha de São Paulo*, July 19, 2019). Another survey conducted in 2021 (UOL, May 7, 2021) showed that 22 percent of Brazilians believed that the earth was flat, and 50.7 percent believed that the coronavirus was made in a Chinese laboratory. Bolsonaro has profited tremendously in this environment. After analyzing more than 5,000 speeches of Brazilian presidents since the return to democracy in 1985, Ricci, Izumi, and Moreira (2021) found that Bolsonaro most often uses the duality elite-vs.-people (in 12.5 percent of his speeches). Kalil et al. (2021) have shown that he is constantly mobilizing fear, connecting an alleged “communist conspiracy” to the coronavirus pandemic by creating the terms “Chinese virus” and “Chinese vaccine.”

Without any doubt, in 2018 Brazil turned to the extreme right. For the election specialist Jairo Nicolau (2020: 14),

Bolsonaro's victory is the most impressive accomplishment in the history of Brazilian elections. He ran with a micro party, spent virtually no campaign money, had the shortest TV time for a competitive candidate in any presidential race. He also ran a campaign rejecting what manuals always recommend: moderate speech to convince the centrist voter. And still, Bolsonaro won in most of Brazil's metropolitan areas, gaining the support of men and evangelicals as no candidate before him had.

The impressive combination of political factions that elected Bolsonaro eventually found a place in his cabinet. In interview-based research, Kalil et al. (2018) identified 16 types of Bolsonaro supporters according to social class, race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and beliefs, ranging from radical evangelical zealots to moderate antileft voters. In our view, these different types of voters found political expression in five political factions that emerged victorious in the 2018 campaign: the ideological, the evangelical, the agribusiness, the military, and the neoliberal.

The first group, made up of hard-core antiglobalists such as the former Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo, the international affairs adviser Filipe Martins, Environment Minister Ricardo Salles, and Deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro (one of the president's sons), was greatly influenced by the late controversial self-proclaimed philosopher Olavo de Carvalho. Rooted in the United States and a friend of Steve Bannon's, he defended ultraconservative foreign affairs ideas (Teitelbaum, 2020; Guimarães and Silva, 2021).

The evangelical group was led by Human Rights and Family Minister Damares Alves, the informal representative of the highly influential evangelical congressional caucus. For this group, the close relationship with Israel established by Bolsonaro was the most critical foreign policy issue, and they have shown steady support for Bolsonaro's international agenda (Guimarães et al., 2022; Almeida, 2019; Smith, 2019).

The third faction, strongly supported by the agribusiness caucus in Congress, was led by Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina. For this group, environmental

policies need to be relaxed and the government must secure stable international trade, especially with China, Brazil's most important trade partner. When Bolsonaro's administration was at odds with Beijing in 2019–2021, the agribusiness sector pushed for the removal of Araújo, who was seen as anti-China and antiglobalist (Mello, 2019; Camarotti, 2021).

The fourth group included many former and active military personnel. The Bolsonaro administration relied extensively on the military to run the state, since its political party had almost no government expertise. This group tends to be very nationalistic and sovereignty-oriented, primarily with regard to the protection of the Amazon. Its leaders are the vice president and retired general Hamilton Mourão, the retired general Augusto Heleno (the president's security chief), and Secretary for Strategic Affairs Admiral Flávio Rocha (Hunter and Vega, 2022; Guimarães and Silva, 2021).

Finally, the neoliberal faction includes the powerful Minister of the Economy Paulo Guedes, an ultraliberal “Chicago Boy” who had been Bolsonaro's primary adviser for economic and financial issues during the campaign. For this group, Brazil must join the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and undertake deep market-oriented reforms. Although highly ineffective in terms of legislation and reform, the neoliberal group has partially succeeded in convincing the rest of the administration of the importance of Brazil's fully joining the OECD (Mello, 2020).

In our view, however, the struggle to control the foreign policy narrative among these groups has been reduced to only two factions—the antiglobalists and the military—with the former apparently dominant. Bolsonaro's inner circle slowly isolated the military, and many, especially those closest to the president, were fired or demoted.¹ Nevertheless, some military personnel retained relevant ministries and secretaries over the years, such as the Ministry of Defense and the Special Secretary for Strategic Affairs.² In international affairs, however, the military has not been able to create an alternative narrative to the dominant antiglobalism. Mourão tried to counter Bolsonaro's position toward China but eventually had to backtrack under Bolsonaro's antiglobalist pressure.³

Many academics and pundits see the antiglobalist foreign policy of Jair Bolsonaro as the most controversial in history (Spektor, 2019; Spektor and Fasolin, 2018; Chagas-Bastos and Franzoni, 2019; Casarões and Fledes, 2019, Guimarães and Silva, 2021). Former diplomats have criticized Bolsonaro's personality, suggesting that his foreign policy expresses his worst traits. Former Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Lafer has argued that “Bolsonaro's confrontational personality . . . operates from the distinction between them and us. His foreign policy is an expression of that strategy. The current foreign policy has nothing to do with reality. . . . Instead of asserting the Brazilian presence internationally, we are fighting imaginary enemies” (quoted in Duchade, 2020). However, Bolsonaro's foreign policy is more than just an expression of the president's pathologies. It is supported by a vast network of public officials, entrepreneurs, digital influencers, and religious and social groups that resonates with his positions on multiple foreign affairs issues. Moreover, studies have revealed an organic and self-sufficient network of extreme-right supporters across all social classes and religions and in tandem with the administration's

internal factions that supports Bolsonaro's electoral victory and his administration (Kalil et al., 2018; Gallego, Ortellado, and Moretto, 2017; Rocha and Solano, 2019; Smith, 2019).

The investigation of the conspiracy theories in Bolsonaro's foreign policy begins with a look at its three elements—the conspirators, the secrecy, and the plan. The most common conspiracy theory found among his officials is globalism and involves plots carried out by international agencies and leftist governments to impose "cultural Marxism" through the use of international law against the will of the "true people," seen as nationalist and having pro-Christian values (Busbridge, Moffitt, and Thorburn, 2020), and the alignment of contemporary communist regimes such as China and Cuba with these international bureaucrats to make "cultural Marxism" the standard moral background for international law. In Bolsonaro's worldview, globalism is an ideology that germinates in every sphere of life from foreign policy to basic education. For him, "the globalist agenda is aimed at class division. Divided and valueless people are easily manipulated. Changing the educational guidelines implemented over the decades [in Brazilian schools] is one of our goals to prevent the manufacturing of political activists" (Facebook, March 3, 2019). Eduardo Bolsonaro (Facebook, January 24, 2020) has summarized what "globalism" means as follows:

The uber capitalist George Soros, who has a project to destroy the millenary Western civilization by attacking its fundamental Judeo-Christian values, does in the United States what Viktor Orbán did not allow him to do in Hungary: an anti-Western university. Like any good globalist, in the best New Left style, he will deny this intention. . . . Anyone who celebrates Soros's attitude has the same worldview and agrees with him or is a naïve pawn in this political chess game.

For Olavo de Carvalho (Carvalho and Dugin, 2012: 38), Bolsonaro's intellectual guru, being a globalist is an excuse to be bullied by the traditional media: "I have written pages without end in the Brazilian media, to the point of being accused, for this reason, of being 'a conspiracy theorist,' the standard defamatory label that the globalist elite uses most frequently to intimidate those who dare to challenge it." And, finally, Araújo (2019) puts all the elements of globalism together in a synthetic paragraph in the U.S. conservative journal *The New Criterion*:

In foreign policy, the system played the globalist tune without a flaw. It helped the transfer of power from the United States and the Western alliance to China; it favored Iran; it worked tirelessly to raise a new socialist iron curtain over Latin America by fostering left-wing governments. . . . Brazil was indeed a wonderful showcase for globalism. Starting with a traditional crony capitalism . . . the country went through fake economic liberalism in the 1990s, until it got to globalism under the Workers' Party: cultural Marxism directed from within a seemingly liberal and democratic system, achieved through corruption, intimidation, and thought control.

In sum, for the antiglobalist faction, antiglobalism is a worldview that gives meaning to political action. For Olavo de Carvalho, the real America and the

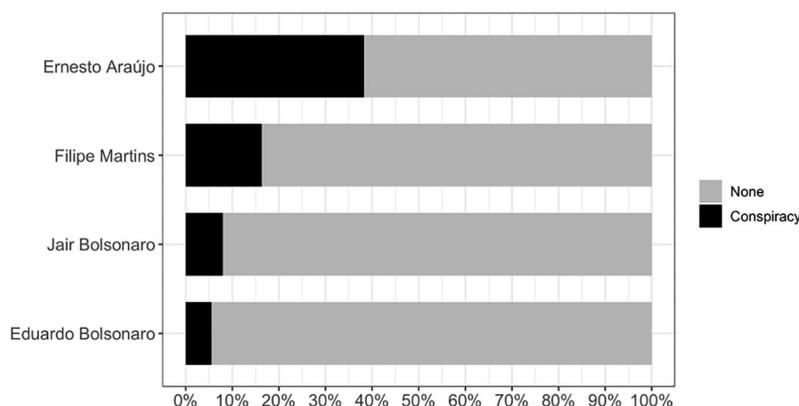


Figure 1. The proportion of documents referring to conspiracy-theory terms per official.

real Brazil were not the center of globalism but its primary target. Conservatives worldwide had to join forces to fight globalism in all its manifestations (Teitelbaum, 2020: 318). Everything that was not included in a narrow and fraudulent version of “Western Civilization” built on Christian values had to be fought to guarantee a supposed order that had historically guided Western societies. One of his most prolific students, Alexandre Costa (2015: 147–149), argued,

The New World Order will be, first and foremost, anti-Christian. The repressive spiral that leads us to this suffocating reality advances without facing resistance and uses mechanisms such as political correctness, fashion, and fear. It is made up of increasing embarrassment and isolation that will undoubtedly lead to persecution and condemnation of all who defend the words and examples of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

To understand whether globalism was embedded in Bolsonaro’s government narrative, we analyzed 2,041 speeches, Facebook posts, interviews, and videos from four officials who were key to the development and implementation of Bolsonaro’s foreign policy between January 2019 and December 2020. Of these items, 353 were considered official speeches and were collected from websites such as the Foreign Ministry and the Presidency, and the remaining 1,683 were collected from Facebook and YouTube. In this encompassing database—which probably includes the vast majority of speeches on foreign policy ever uttered by these four officials—there were 1,009 from Eduardo Bolsonaro, 848 from Jair Bolsonaro, 141 from Ernesto Araújo, and 43 from Filipe Martins. The proportion of documents referring to globalism per official varied (Figure 1), with Araújo employing it the most.

The frequency of references to globalism in the narratives of all four officials (Figure 2) indicates that the use of this element has been consistent over time.

The distribution of official versus non-official documents per individual (Figure 3) shows that for Eduardo Bolsonaro and Filipe Martins virtually all their speeches were non-official.

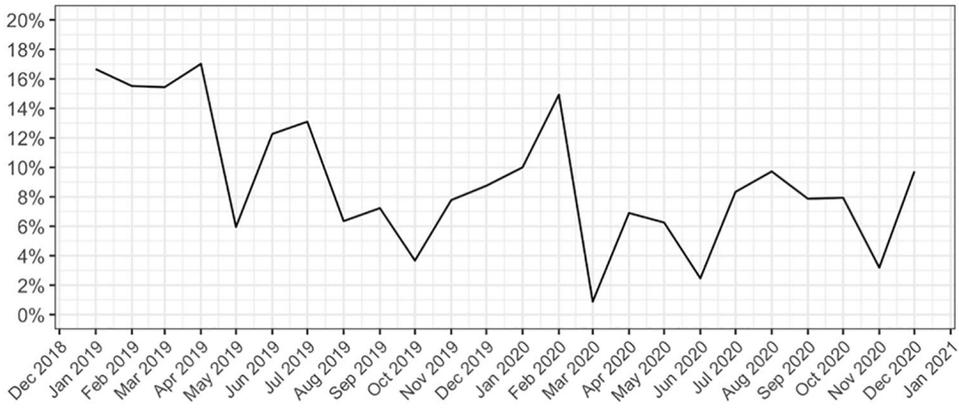


Figure 2. The use of conspiracy-theory terms over time by the four officials.

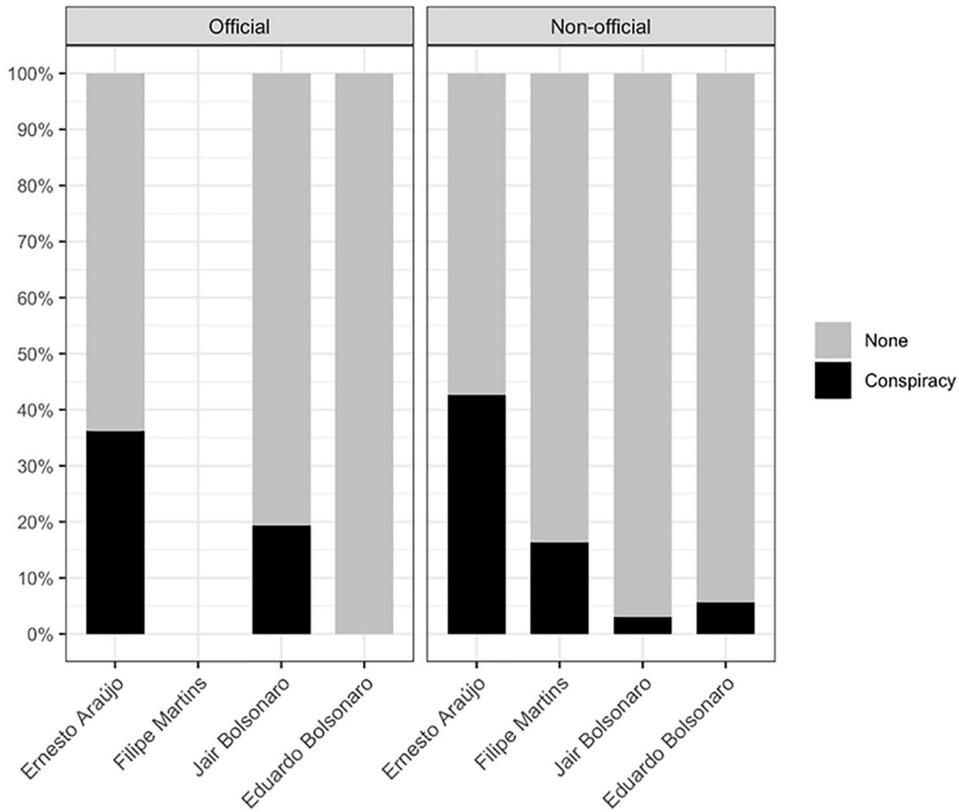


Figure 3. Official and non-official speeches of each of the four officials, showing the proportions of conspiracy-theory terms in each category.

The associations between “globalism” and other terms, some of them conspiracy-theory terms, in official and non-official documents (Figures 4 and 5) show a general similarity in their use across these categories.

These results may be summarized as follows: Antiglobalism has become the official narrative of Brazil’s foreign policy. Anecdotal evidence had already

shown that “antiglobalist rhetoric was one of Bolsonaro’s main foreign policy identities” (Guimarães and Silva, 2021). Here we have shown that “globalism” was present to various degrees in the speeches of all the cabinet members responsible for Brazil’s foreign policy making: the president used it in his official narrative, while Araújo used it in 40 percent of his official speeches and Martins in around 20 percent of his unofficial ones. Two of the central figures in designing Brazil’s foreign policy have argued that imaginary enemies are trying to turn Brazil into Cuba or Venezuela.

The term “globalism” was pervasive in the speeches of all four officials and was consistent over time, indicating that it was not just a strategic tool for capturing radical followers but an ideology embedded in the cabinet’s worldview. These officials appeared to use conspiracy theories indiscriminately regardless of the arena. While the use of “globalism” was slightly more frequent in official documents, this may have been an artifact of sample size. The “globalism” narrative seemed to be cohesive in both official and non-official documents. There was apparently not much difference between what the president said officially and what he said non-officially. The concept was related to “freedom,” “ideology,” and “Marx” in both arenas. There was no official narrative for the elite as contrasted with an unofficial narrative for the people.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has four implications for the academic debate on the use of conspiracy theories.

1. It shows how a far-right cabinet can systematically use conspiracy theories to enact foreign policy narratives. The literature had yet to show empirically how conspiratorial ideas that originated in the ideological fringes could be introduced by populist leaders into an official state discourse and become the cornerstone of a foreign policy narrative. Most of the studies either tackled the relationship between conspiracy theories and foreign policy laterally or analyzed it with anecdotal evidence. Here we have provided a more systematic account that corroborates the assertion in the literature that populist foreign policies use conspiracy theories to justify their actions or convince political supporters.

2. While the concept of populism has much more to say about foreign policy than conspiracy theories do, the systematic analysis of conspiracy theories sheds light on a relatively obscure aspect of the way populist leaders act and behave. Moreover, the way populist leaders use conspiracy theories to develop foreign policy narratives elucidates the more refined daily operation of populist ideas in foreign policy. The concept of globalism is the concretization of the elite-vs.-people opposition in foreign policy making.

3. For a long time the literature on conspiracy theories focused on the characterization of what they meant and how they worked in radical minds. More recently, the specialized literature in political science has shown growing evidence of its political consequences for violence, party politics, and elections. Our study contributes to this debate in providing a systematic account of the way conspiracy theories are used in foreign policy narratives.

4. Bolsonaro's foreign policy is under increasing academic scrutiny. Many studies are trying to grasp what it means for Brazilian foreign policy to have a far-right populist as its primary driver—something unparalleled in its foreign affairs. Also, many studies are analyzing the rise of populist foreign policies in Latin America. Our contribution to this growing literature is hard evidence of the way a populist foreign policy constructs its narrative and when the use of conspiracy theories occurs.

We have not attempted to describe the reasons for or even the consequences of adopting conspiracy theories in foreign policy narratives. Nevertheless, drawing on our findings, we have formulated some questions: What kinds of international alliances does a conspiracy-theories-based foreign policy create? How does it affect regional integration? What are themes in the agenda that become relevant for a country whose cornerstone is the fight against globalism? Do typically economic and commercial issues lose ground to moral and security considerations? We will answer these questions in future studies.

NOTES

1. Bolsonaro fired the moderate general and Secretary of Government Carlos Alberto de Santos Cruz when he said that he "did not know any of Olavo de Carvalho's books" and considered the writer "wacky." General Maynard Santa Rosa, who was in charge of the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs, left the government claiming that he quit because he "did not have the support of his superior" (*The Guardian*, June 13, 2019; see also *Folha de São Paulo*, November 4, 2019).

2. At the beginning of the administration, the military influenced some critical issues, such as Venezuela. However, internal disputes between the Olavists and the military have ended, mainly with the military's being fired or losing influence. Some examples of isolation of the military wing can be seen in the growing political distance between Bolsonaro and his vice president (*Defesanet*, July 8, 2019).

3. While Bolsonaro had condemned China on multiple occasions, Mourão had a more realistic view of the relationship. On May 19, 2019, he traveled to China, trying to create an amicable atmosphere after Bolsonaro had visited Taiwan during the campaign and thus created an uncomfortable situation with Beijing. His successful trip was pragmatic in its approach and mostly aimed at the neoliberal wing, but he was advised to cancel some of his interviews by the Presidency (*Defesanet*, July 8, 2019).

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