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## **Populist Framing Mechanisms and The Rise of Right-Wing Activism in Brazil**

**Tayrine Dias  
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### **Abstract**

This article presents an analysis of the use of populist framing mechanisms by grassroots right-wing organizations. It brings together the social movement literature on framing and the populist literature to understand how actors build an emergent field of activism in a highly contentious context. Based on the analysis of a sample of 4,574 Facebook posts published by five civil society organizations during the campaign to oust Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, it argues that two mechanisms - reductionism and antagonism - enabled actors to focus on similar targets and diagnostics, while maintaining relevant differences when seeking to motivate followers and present prognostic frames. These were key mechanisms used by all the actors, albeit with different contents, depending on the frame task. This article contributes to filling gaps between the framing and populist literature, and in shedding light onto the relevance of populist communication in the rise of right-wing activism.

**Keywords:** populism; populist framing mechanisms; impeachment; right-wing organizations; protests

## **Introduction**

On August 31, 2016, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was removed from office, after twenty-two months of massive mobilizations that divided the country and shook its political structures. Calls for protests came from a loosely tied network of actors, among them self-proclaimed right-wing grassroots organizations, many of which did not exist a few years earlier. These actors launched a successful multitudinous campaign that relied heavily on online social media communication, using framing mechanisms that both tapped into and further polarized Brazilian politics.

These phenomena are not exclusive to Brazil. Around the world there is evidence of the rise of grassroots right-wing activism as well as the use of social media by actors across the ideological spectrum to mobilize and polarize. Taken together in a context of political crisis, such as the impeachment of an elected President, these processes can put a significant strain in the political system. We still know little, however, about the characteristics of these emergent actors, their strategies and their impacts. This article sheds light on these debates by comparing framing tasks and specifying the framing mechanisms used by actors as they engaged in collective action.

To accomplish these goals, we bring together two strands of theoretical analysis that have evolved with little cross-fertilization: the framing approach in social movement theory, and the debates about populism and populist communication. Based on the framing literature, we identify and compare three key tasks of signifying work for mobilization: the creation of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames (Benford & Snow, 2000). The literature on populism, in turn,

helps understand the variation in content produced by actors, as well as the interconnections across frame types. We build particularly on recent debates about actors' online communication strategies and populism (e.g. Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2018). By bringing together the framing literature in social movements and the populist literature, we show how actors that are not the typical populist leader or party - such as the civil society organizations analyzed in this article - use populist framing mechanisms in the context of creation of an ideological field of activism.

With Faletti and Lynch, we understand mechanisms as middle-range arguments about “how things happen” (2009, p. 1147). In this article, framing mechanisms describe the signifying work developed through the construction of arguments for mobilization. Populist framing mechanisms, more specifically, articulate and interrelate particular types of frames, setting the discursive focus in order to “combine a broad range of societal grievances around a populist discourse of ‘us, the good people’ against ‘them, the corrupt elite’ ” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 104). Based on this argument, we identify two populist framing mechanisms that were at the core of the narratives produced by the right-wing organizations that called for the ousting of Dilma Rousseff. First, *reductionism*, which subsumes most grievances into a single signifier, so that the scope of issues is broadened but their meanings are reduced, allowing groups to claim that there is a systemic and encompassing problem without elaborating the details of their views. Second, *antagonism*, understood as the definition of dichotomic boundaries between specific enemies that should be eliminated and a virtuous people.

In this article, we argue that the framing mechanisms of antagonism and

reductionism enabled actors to build unified diagnostics and targets, while at the same time presenting different motivating messages and maintaining relevant differences or contradictions in terms of views for the country's future. In spite of performing different functions, the two mechanisms reinforced each other, and cannot be understood in isolation: while the first enabled the creation of identification boundaries, the later allowed actors to create meaning that appealed to a wide audience. The use of such mechanisms is not new in contentious politics' rhetoric. However, their use by grassroots right-wing organizations during the impeachment campaign sets it apart from previous protest cycles. It shows a trend towards a radicalization of protestors' discourse, which built on and further fueled feelings of indignation and hatred targeted at specific political actors, and unified around an anticorruption rhetoric that subsumed various other grievances.

This article is organized in five parts. In the section below, we discuss in more detail some of the main concepts and arguments of the framing and populist theoretical debates. We then briefly describe the methods and data used in this article, and offer a concise historical overview of the rise of right-wing activism in Brazil. The following section presents the content analysis of a sample of 4,574 Facebook posts published by five key organizations during the impeachment campaign: Free Brazil Movement (Movimento Brasil Livre), Brazil to the Right Movement (Movimento Endireita Brasil), OnTheStreets (NasRuas), Outraged ON LINE (Revoltados ON LINE) and Come To The Streets (Vem Pra Rua). We conclude by summarizing the main findings of our analysis and discussing an agenda for future research.

## **Framing and populist communication: creating narratives for political battles**

For the past thirty years, scholars have investigated how social movement actors engage in the dispute for meanings through the creation of collective action frames. This perspective aimed at shifting the focus of the social movement literature toward the analysis of beliefs, values and ideology, by arguing that social movements are actively engaged in creating meaning, which is central in the process of mobilization (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 613). A concept inspired by the work of Goffman (1986), collective action frames are defined by Benford and Snow (2000, p. 614) as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization".

Collective action frames are key to the success of social movements because they include and exclude events or characters from a proposed narrative, tie events and actors in specific ways and change how situations, actors and objects are understood. To better specify the differences among these functions, Benford and Snow (2000) proposed a typology of frames, based on core tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. Diagnostic frames present the key *issues* and propose *who should be held accountable* (p. 616). Prognostic frames emphasize the *results* expected from taking action. Motivational frames, in turn, promote a "*call to arms or rationale for engaging in [...] collective action*" (p. 617), which might invoke cultural references, economic and social status or the emotions of the audience (Snow, 2013, p. 3). Together, these frames define the actor's point of view about which are the problems and who is to blame for them, identify possible solutions, and put forward arguments to convince and inspire their audiences.

This literature has acknowledged the challenges that heterogeneous groups of

actors face in creating such common frames, by identifying “frame alignment” processes (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986). Frame alignment was defined by Snow et al. as the “linkage of individual and SMO (social movement organizations) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (p. 464). Nevertheless, because of its emphasis on alignment and congruence, the literature has been criticized for a tendency to portray frames as a “discrete and clearly bounded map of meanings” (Steinberg, 1999, p. 741), and “as relatively stable meaning systems, akin to modular texts or maps, which can endure for long periods of time” (p. 739).

Framing theorists themselves have acknowledged that there is a dearth of research on how movements vary in their beliefs and claims across time, actors, and contexts (Snow et al., 2014; Lindstedt, 2017). That is, the process of meaning construction may be more disputed, fragmented or problematic than the conceptual framework put forward by the framing literature suggests. This process is best understood as “a social production among and between actors that involves agreement, dissension, and ambiguity— sometimes minor, but at times considerable” (Steinberg, 1999, p. 745).

The literature that debates the recent rise of populist politics helps in understanding framing processes as disputed and problematic. This literature has focused on actors’ narratives, styles, and communication strategies (e.g. Bos, Brug, & Vreese, 2011; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Engesser, Fawzi, & Larsson, 2017), but with little dialogue with the social movement literature on framing. This literature allows us to understand framing as a process in which contradictions are part of the

creation of broad political coalitions that do not necessarily want to adopt precise or well-defined frames across diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational tasks, but rather use signifiers that can embody different meanings and relate to different grievances.

Furthermore, the literature on populism in general, and on online communication in particular, has highlighted the relevance of social media for populist actors, given its affordances: as a direct channel for communication, circumventing traditional media and other gatekeepers, and as an arena to diffuse messages to a fragmented audience, based on broad frames and attention-maximizing content (e.g. Engesser et al, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2018; Fielitz & Thurston, 2019). As Engesser et al have argued, “populism is particularly well-suited to be communicated online” (2017, p. 8).

In spite of the relevance of these findings, online communication in social media does not necessarily have to be based on a populist style of communication, as Engesser et al themselves recognize (p. 9). Whether actors use populist framing mechanisms or not, to what extent, and why, are key empirical questions, whose answers vary according to actors’ ideologies and the political context. In this article, we show that right-wing grassroots organizations that participated in the campaign for the ousting of President Dilma Rousseff in Brazil used two such mechanisms to communicate with their audiences through social media: antagonism and reductionism.

The literature on the rise of populism has argued that at the core of this phenomenon is the discursive reclaiming of the legitimacy of a part of the people (patriots, or the good citizens, for example), which presents itself as the whole people (*populus*) (e. g. Müller, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2018). For Laclau, “populism



requires the dichotomic division of society into two camps - one presenting itself as a part which claims to be the whole” (2005, p. 83).

This discursive work of building dichotomic boundaries is what we call in this article the framing mechanism of antagonism. It goes hand-in-hand with the mechanism of reductionism, which is related to what many authors refer to as “thin ideology” (e.g. Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2014; Engesser et al., 2017; Kriesi, 2014) or “fragmented ideology” (Engesser et al, 2016). Populism, according to this perspective, is made of a small set of elements that “can be enriched with more substantive add-on ideologies, such as nationalism, liberalism, and socialism, which may result in left- wing populism or right-wing populism” (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 3). It is not the equivalent of the absence of ideology, but, quite the contrary, it is a mechanism that allows a broad coalition of actors to present a message that focuses on a key issue that subsumes but does not invalidate all others.

Thus, actors claim that all grievances can be reduced but are not restricted to a simple one, such as corruption, identified as a construction of the establishment and/or of the ruling elites, which control (and therefore can be blamed for) everything. Eliminating these enemies, then, should suffice for solving all problems. Such mechanism functions as a discursive reduction that allows for different actors to participate and in doing so to interrelate multiple demands. It is not an inclusive and flexible expansion of a particular frame or a congruent process of frame alignment, as the literature on framing would characterize this process (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 624-625).

## **Methods and data**

Not every actor that took to the streets against the government of Dilma Rousseff was a right-wing actor, nor did they all adopt populist framing mechanisms. Many were simply displaying their discontentment with the economic and political situation, and were not necessarily either engaged in ideological discussions or in supporting right-wing policies. However, most of the organizations calling for protests openly defined themselves in contrast to the left, and as part of the process of creation of a new right-wing in Brazilian politics.

In order to better understand the framing mechanisms used by right-wing civil society activism, we selected five self-proclaimed right-wing organizations that were among the main organizers of the protests, all of which were created in or after 2000: Free Brazil Movement (Movimento Brasil Livre), Brazil To The Right (Movimento Endireita Brasil), OnTheStreets (NasRuas), Outraged ON LINE (Revoltados ON LINE) and Come To The Streets (Vem Pra Rua). These groups led the calling and organization of multitudinous protests through an intense use of social media platforms, becoming, in practice, the communication front of the campaign (Dias, 2017; Interview 1). They represent various strands across the right-wing spectrum, which eventually built an informal coalition in favor of the ousting of Dilma Rousseff.

We retrieved 45,721 posts, published by the managers of the five organizations' Facebook pages between November of 2014 and August of 2016. We did so using *Netvizz* (Rieder, 2013), a Facebook app that extracts public posts on the platform<sup>i</sup>. From the whole database of posts, we randomly selected a stratified sample, choosing 10% of the posts for each group to yield a sample of 4,574 posts.

The messages were manually categorized using the software *NVivo10*, based on a mix of deductive and inductive coding procedures, following research designs that combine theory-driven and data-driven approaches (e.g. Bardin, 2012; Elo et. al, 2014). Messages were first coded in three broad categories, according to the differentiation in the framing literature among diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational types of frames. The second step was to create inductively subnodes<sup>ii</sup> according to the specific arguments presented in each message. The Facebook posts were coded into more than one node when more than one type of frame or content were identified, resulting in a multiple non-exclusive coding procedure. That is: a single post could fulfill up to three core framing tasks, and could display multiple particular frames at the same time. The underlined excerpt summarizes an *economic crisis* diagnostic frame, and the bold excerpt a *Dilma out!* prognostic frame.

The empirical analysis of frequency of frames is complemented by other data sources, namely documents and qualitative interviews with key actors. We conducted 9 in-depth interviews with leaders of Students for Liberty, the Free Brazil Movement, Come To The Streets, and Brazil To The Right, in November of 2015 and October of 2016 (see the list in Annex 1). We also gathered secondary data that helped us understand the genealogy of the right-wing organizations being studied. We collected activists' public speeches (e.g. published books and social media videos) and newspaper articles containing comments from leaders.

### **An emergent political field of right-wing activism**

The successful mobilization of grassroots right-wing actors in 2015 and 2016 was unexpected. Although right-wing activism is not new, it had not taken to the

streets in massive numbers for fifty years. Furthermore, these actors that called for the mobilizations in favor of the impeachment initially did not have clear ties to established social movement organizations nor to political parties. Lastly, they created a very heterogeneous coalition around the impeachment campaign. Although these actors portrayed themselves as “right-wing”, they encompassed various political ideologies, including monarchism, conservatism, libertarianism and anarchocapitalism, as well as groups that differed strongly in their commitment to democracy. We know little about these differences and about actors’ strategies to overcome them. The highly contentious political context of polarization that has characterized Brazil’s recent history overshadowed relevant variations among actors.

The strong presence of right-wing organizations in the massive street mobilizations that pushed for Rousseff’s ousting was the result of a slow but continuous process of creation of an emerging field of right-wing activism that traces back to the beginning of the 2000s. Emergent strategic fields of action are, as defined by Fligstein and McAdam, “social spaces where rules do not yet exist, but where actors, by virtue of emerging, dependent interests, are forced increasingly to take one another into account in their actions” (2011, p. 11). The impeachment campaign was crucial to strengthen ties among groups and set the moving boundaries of this emergent field.

While right-wing activism has long existed, the human rights atrocities and the lack of popular support in the last period of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) created a social stigma around the identity of right-wing actors. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, actors with right-wing preferences struggled not to be publicly identified as such (Power & Zucco Jr., 2009; Madeira & Tarouco, 2011).

This, however, does not mean that right-wing groups were absent from political life nor that they were powerless. Right-of-center political forces have always had an important role in Latin America, and Brazil is no exception. Even in the context of the “turn to the left” in the region in the 2000s, they remained able to have strong representation in parliament and influence the agenda as well as the contents of public policies (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014, p. 2).

Right-wing activism is not, therefore, a new phenomenon. However, this emerging field of activism has been purposefully constructed by civil society actors that reclaim the legitimacy of right-wing ideals and to pursue political change under those ideals. They have built an organizational structure and constructed common understandings about the country’s political problems and solutions, and how to frame them. Activism is defined in this article in broad terms, as “the pursuit of opportunities to defend contentious causes” (Abers, 2019, p. 23). It includes actions by agents within and outside the State, and it includes both digital practices and offline mobilization. We put emphasis, therefore, on the porous, informal, and potentially unstable contours of this field, as well as on its internal heterogeneity. The process of construction of this field can be roughly divided into two phases: the first, the articulation phase, stretches from the beginning of the 2000s to the June 2013 cycle of protests. The second, the mobilization phase, goes from 2013 to the ousting of Dilma Rousseff in 2016.

The first phase is characterized by the creation of new organizations and the use of street protests as a strategy to denounce governmental corruption. Small protest events were organized in the context of an important corruption scandal that engulfed the then President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva’s administration, the so-called

“Mensalão” scandal. At that time, however, these protests did not become massive. Although at least 26 Presidential impeachment requests were filed during Lula’s first term (2003-2007), none of them came even close to threatening his administration (Bragon, 2006). In spite of this scarcity of mobilization, the first efforts of articulation of anti-Lula and anti-Workers' Party groups date from this period.

When Lula was reelected President, in October of 2006, right-wing groups such as Nariz de Palhaço (Clown’s Nose) protested against the government’s corruption (Estadão, 2006). Among these activists was the pop singer Lobão, who ended up becoming one of the most active celebrities campaigning for the impeachment of Rousseff and was already a vocal supporter of Jair Bolsonaro’s Presidential candidacy (von Bülow & Dias, 2019). That same year, Ricardo Salles - who became President Bolsonaro’s Environmental Minister in 2019 - founded the Movimento Endireita Brasil (Brazil To The Right Movement) with a group of lawyers and businessmen (Machado, 2011). They wanted to “moralize politics” and “resurrect the right-wing spectrum of Brazilian politics” (Machado, 2011; Interview 1). In 2007 another opposition group was created by businessmen, celebrities, employers’ unions and other civil society groups: the Cansei! (Enough!) Movement (Bertolotto, 2007; Azevedo, 2007; Tatagiba, Trindade & Teixeira, 2015). If the anti-corruption protests only gathered a few thousand people in the streets of São Paulo in 2007, four years later they gathered around 30,000 people (Nascimento, 2011; iG São Paulo, 2011a).

At the same time that middle class, businessmen and celebrities were creating new organizations, young student movement leaders were building transnational ties with right-wing organizations in the United States and in other countries (Gobbi, 2016). In 2009, they created the Brazilian branch of the U.S.-based organization

Students For Liberty. In 2011, one of its satellite groups – Aliança pela Liberdade (Alliance for Liberty), self-identified as anarchocapitalist and libertarian – was the first right-wing led group to win the elections for one of the student movement’s most important federations, at the University of Brasilia, in the capital city. The victory of this group in Brasilia paved the way for strengthening the Students For Liberty organization in other universities and helped in the foundation of other organizations, chief among them the Free Brazil Movement and the think tank Popular Market Institute (Instituto Mercado Popular) (Gobbi, 2016).

These actors were also involved in the creation or renovation of right-wing parties, thus broadening the boundaries of the emergent field beyond civil society organizations. In 2011, they contributed to the founding of the Partido Novo (New Party). Another group founded a party fraction called Livres (Free) within the Partido Social e Liberal, PSL (Social and Liberal Party). There was no unified strategy of how to participate in party politics.

In 2013, a major cycle of protest swept Brazil, two years into Dilma Rousseff’s first administration. The so-called “June Protests” separate the first and the second phases of construction of the emergent field of right-wing activism. In this period, right-wing organizations became the most visible forefront of mobilizations against the government, based on a mix of online and offline repertoires of collective action. The June protests were sparked by the rise in public transport fares, but quickly escalated to criticisms of the lack of public services and their poor quality and the high expenditure and corruption scandals related to the 2014 Soccer World Cup, gathering a wide spectrum of grievances that showed deep dissatisfaction with the political system and the government. The right-wing organizations that had been

organizing for the past decade were well positioned to take advantage of these general feelings of dissatisfaction. The protests turned increasingly into opposition and right-wing mobilizations, in which a patriotic repertoire (Alonso, 2017; Alonso & Mische, 2017) was displayed: the national flag, anthem and colors were commonly used as rallying symbols, appealing to a sense of nationhood, while political party flags were burned and groups chanted against the Workers' Party (Arruda, 2013). This was a general rehearsal of what would be the impeachment campaign.

In the context of these mobilizations, yet new right-wing organizations were created, oriented towards protests. Members of the Brazilian branch of Students for Liberty, for example, created then the Free Brazil Movement. As one of its founders explained:

“We created the Free Brazil Movement in 2013, in fact, because we (Students for Liberty) can't get involved in activities of political nature. We can't defend, for example, that Dilma (Rousseff, Brazilian President) has to be impeached, or that such a bill has to pass or fail. In the context of the 2013 demonstrations, we created another organization to participate in them.” (Interview 2)

In spite of a decline in popularity, Rousseff was reelected President in 2014, by a narrow margin of votes. That same year, however, her government and the Workers' Party (along with a dozen others, from the left to the right of the political spectrum) were once again engulfed in a corruption crisis that originated the *Lava Jato* (Car Wash) task force. The President faced a perfect storm: an economic crisis, a political crisis, and a strong opposition (in Congress and on the streets). While the



Workers' Party had become the most popular party in the beginning of the 2000s, the succession of corruption scandals and the sense of betrayal that came with them helped fuel a strong anti-Workers' Party feeling, known as "*antipetismo*" (Samuels & Zucco, 2018).

The "Dilma Out!" cycle of protests started with the participation of a few thousand people in the streets of São Paulo (Uribe, Lima, & Lima, 2014). It reached its peak in March 2016, with at least 3 million participants in hundreds of cities (O Estado de S. Paulo, 2016). In August of 2016, the Brazilian Senate finally voted to oust Dilma Rousseff, based on charges of creative bookkeeping of the annual federal budget. In the streets in front of Congress, a temporary wall divided those that were fighting for the impeachment, and those that were denouncing a parliamentary coup against the President.

### *The "Big-Five"*

A broad coalition of actors participated in the campaign for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. What brought these actors together was the common goal of removing the President. Beyond that, right-wing organizations that called the protests differed on their trajectory, the policies they defended, and on ideas about what the best post-Rousseff scenario would be (Fávero & Reverbel, 2015). Up until August of 2015, they still publicly diverged on whether calling for Rousseff's impeachment was the best course of action. While they all explicitly situated themselves to the right of the political spectrum, what that meant was not the same for all organizations.

The organization Outraged ON LINE is the oldest of the five analyzed in this article, having been founded in 2000. As the content analysis will show, it is also the one that sponsors the most extreme views on politics (Alonso, 2017, p. 54), often

based on moral and religious arguments. In 2010, when Rousseff, Lula and their party still held strong institutional and popular support, the leader Marcello Reis (a former evangelical minister) created the organization's Facebook page, which reached more than 2 million likes before being removed by the platform in August 2016, days before the impeachment trial at the Senate. This organization was also one of the most vocal supporters of a military intervention as a solution to Brazil's problems, a demand that was not supported by organizations such as Free Brazil Movement and Come to the Streets.

The organization OnTheStreets was founded in 2011, and in that same year it participated in anti-corruption protests that took place in various Brazilian cities (Nascimento, 2011; iG São Paulo, 2011b). Some of their demands were the application of the Ficha Limpa (Clean Slate) Act in the 2012 municipal elections, the end of vote secrecy in the National Congress and tougher laws against corruption (Rodrigues, 2011). Along with Outraged ON LINE, they first demanded the annulment of the 2014 elections, based on illegal financing claims. It also argued in favor of a military intervention, to give Brazil a chance “to save itself from a dictatorship such as the Venezuelan one” (Facebook post, November 1, 2014).

The Free Brazil Movement and Come To The Streets were created in 2013 and 2014, respectively. The first gathers young right-wing libertarian and conservative leaders that were responsible for a political whirlwind in the student movement years before (Gobbi, 2016), and the second is a center-right group founded by businessmen (Galhardo & Hupsel Filho, 2015). Both saw the 2013 June Protests as an opportunity that showed right-wing groups they can mobilize people to take to the streets (Chequer & Butterfield, 2016; Gobbi, 2016). They were also together in their

denial of military intervention as the best solution to Brazil's problems, and were keen on affirming their commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

The last of the five organizations analyzed, Brazil To The Right, was founded in 2006 by five lawyers and businessmen (Folha de S.Paulo, 2014, Machado, 2011). The group advocates the reduction of the size of the Brazilian state and tax burdens, and in favor of the expansion of individual freedom, such as civilian possession of firearms (Interview 1, Folha de S.Paulo, 2014). In 2010, the founder of the organization, Ricardo Salles, ran for state representative in São Paulo, but was not elected (Machado, 2011), being nominated in 2018 Minister for the Environment in President Bolsonaro's Cabinet. According to the interviewed leader, "Brazil To The Right arose precisely to put right-wing people in politics." As in the cases of Brazil Free Movement and Come to the Streets, the June protests were also important for Brazil to the Right leaders: "this movement [June protests] showed to the right-wing groups that it was possible to organize demonstrations... It ended up being, in fact, the beginning of the rescue of Brazil" (Interview 1).

In spite of their differences, these groups joined forces and engaged millions of Brazilians protesting in more than 100 cities of the country for Rousseff's ousting (Dias, 2017; Fávero & Reverbel, 2015). Together with smaller organizations, they used WhatsApp groups to coordinate activities, share tasks related to the protests, and confirm their participation in protest events (Interview 1; Butterfield & Chequer, 2016). With the external world, they communicated mainly through their Facebook pages. As the analysis below shows, these organizations successfully built shared diagnostic frames, while displaying a variety of prognostic and motivational frames that allowed them to engage a broad audience.

## The long night: encompassing narratives of chaos

A crucial task in the process of constituting an emergent right-wing field was to conceive messages that brought together the various groups and set the basis for a joint campaign for the Presidential impeachment. The organizations analyzed in this article did so by heavily relying on populist framing mechanisms, namely reductionism and antagonism, in order to bring together a broad set of grievances and demands that were heterogeneous and at times incongruent demands. The frame analysis of Facebook posts published during the impeachment campaign shows that actors portrayed a political context of imminent tragedy and chaos, with an emphasis on the common definition of what the problems were and who was to be blamed.

### *Diagnostic frames: corruption and the Workers' Party*

As explained above, diagnostic frames are used by actors to point to grievances as well as to whom should be blamed. Compared to the other types of frames, these were the most recurrent in our database (at least half of the posts of each organization presented diagnostic frames), as well as the ones that showed less heterogeneity among the five organizations. They focused mainly on one problem - corruption - and one actor responsible for it - the Workers' Party (see tables 1, 2 and 3).

Table 1. Diagnostic Frames: grievances (most frequent - % of posts)

Organization	1st	2nd	3rd
Brazil To The Right	Corruption - 23.9%	Socialism, communism or left-wing ideals - 17.6%	Bad public management - 11.3%
Free Brazil Movement	Corruption - 20.4%	Lies, illusion or manipulation - 12.1%	Bad public management - 11.7%

OnTheStreets	Corruption - 27.7%	Impunity, delay or obstruction of justice - 13%	Bad public management - 12.9%
Outraged ON LINE	Corruption - 38.5%	Lies, illusion or manipulation - 13.3%	Bad public management - 10.1%
Come To The Streets	Corruption - 18.7%	Impunity, delay or obstruction of justice - 12.9%	Bad public management - 11.6%

Source: Dias (2017), based on content analysis of Facebook messages collected through *Netvizz*.

Table 1 presents the three most common issues outlined by the organizations' Facebook posts as the country's key problems. The data shows a clear hierarchy in the definition of what is wrong: corruption is the most cited problem by all the actors. Of the 4,574 posts analyzed, approximately 28% denounced corruption. Corruption played the role of a key encompassing diagnostic frame that subsumed and around which the other problems gravitated. It was not, however, any kind of corruption, but the corruption perpetrated by a specific actor. In this sense, their grievances were *reduced* but not restricted to corruption, which was ressignified as any action from the enemy - the Workers' Party (see table 2).

That corruption by the Workers' Party was exceptional, that is, different from corruption by other actors, is an idea that appears repeatedly in the posts analyzed, as well as on the interviews (e.g. Interview 4; Gobbi 2016) and on the public declarations of leaders. Actors claimed that the corruption scheme uncovered by the *Lava Jato* task force was unprecedented in human history, and, moreover, that every political action or project undertook when the Party was in power was corrupt and illegitimate. Joice Hasselmann, former journalist, right-wing activist and congresswoman elected in 2018, explained such reasoning during a radio interview

broadcast live on Facebook<sup>iii</sup>:

My fight is against corruption. Lots of people ask me: ‘are you against the Workers' Party?’ I am against it and against all corrupt [parties]. [...].There are corrupt politicians in all parties, I don’t know any party which is 100% clean [...]. The question is, the Workers' Party has a criminal political project of power [...]. The Workers’ Party has to be extinct.

Carla Zambelli - founder of NasRuas - followed Hasselmann and declared, in the same radio interview:

[...] The difference is that the people steal for themselves, they steal to get rich, (but) the Workers' Party steals to remain in power [...] This is why we argue that the Workers' Party should be extinct, and we also argue for people not to vote for their allies [...].

Table 2. Issues associated to Corruption in Facebook Posts

Associations of Corruption and Other Issues	Example (posts or sections of posts)
Corruption and the economic crisis	The one responsible for the greatest economic debacle in decades, involved in the biggest corruption scandal in history, she has to leave her post immediately. The country cannot take it anymore! [...] (Free Brazil Movement, January 21, 2016)
Corruption and the Workers’ Party political project of hegemony	UNBELIEVABLE! Everything is under their control! Everyone is working for the criminal project of power except the judge Gilmar Mendes! Dilma Out! Workers' Party Out! Lock Lula up! Impeachment now! (Outraged ON LINE, April 4, 2016)

Corruption and leftist ideology	The Workers' Party government not only broke Brazil through bad political and economic decisions based on an outdated ideology. The Workers' Party government transformed our country in a large investor in their bureaucratic interests, sucking up public resources to a transnational project of power sustained by a big corruption scandal. [...] The available resources go to Cuba, Venezuela, Angola, etc. to support the populist demands from other left-wing dictatorships [...] #NoMoreWorkers'Party (Brazil To The Right, March 30, 2015)
Corruption and the Workers' Party anti-people policies	The Workers' Party has forgiven the debts of African dictators but keeps the debt of Brazilians. [...] The Workers' Party is against the people. Removing this gang from power is essential to have hope for a better future. (Free Brazil Movement, August, 12, 2015)
Corruption and bad public management	Petrobras' downfall is the perfect depiction of the Workers' Party way of governing: wrong decisions and lack of expertise along with carrying out a gigantic corruption scheme in the company. (Come To The Streets, January, 13, 2016)
Corruption, lies and impunity	A group of Come To The Streets activists protested today against corruption and impunity by staging a symbolic burial of the Workers' Party. [...] Banners with the 13 electoral lies of the Workers' Party were used during the demonstration (Come To The Streets, November, 14, 2015).

Source: elaborated by the authors based on posts collected on the organizations' Facebook pages, via *Netvizz*. Posts translated from Portuguese by the authors.

While the source of corruption zoomed in on the Workers' Party, its impacts were widely spread. As table 2 shows, the issue of corruption was presented by actors as being the key to understanding the other problems faced by the country. The problem of "bad management" encompasses Rousseff's decisions to cut spending on education, to increase spending on advertising, to allocate resources abroad, and to increase taxes. It also includes discussions about the fiscal improprieties that led to the formal accusations against the President in the Brazilian Congress. Although these became the legal basis for the impeachment process, they were not the primary focus of actors' diagnostic framing efforts.

For organizations such as the Free Brazil Movement and Outraged ON LINE, posts that referred to “lies, illusions or manipulation” were often associated with left-wing parties, especially with the Workers' Party, Rousseff herself, or Lula. From 522 posts of our sample coded with this frame, around 40% mentioned one or more of these actors. They sought to deconstruct their images and credibility by portraying them as the enemies of the Brazilian people, who only cared about themselves and their positions, as this post stresses: “Dilma, the Brazilian people do not deserve to go through what they are going through, entirely due to your stubbornness and pride. At least once, have in mind the country and not yourself! Resign!” (Come To The Streets, August 10, 2016).

Throughout the impeachment campaign, the recurrent indictments and the new leads discovered by the *Lava Jato* task force provided evidence that fueled the arguments that Brazil was going through an unprecedented situation of extreme jeopardy to the country’s institutions. In this context, organizations such as OnTheStreets and Come To The Streets highlighted “impunity, delay or obstruction of justice” as a problem. In the narratives developed by these groups, the politicians indicted for corruption were guilty even before due legal process, so that any strategy, attempt to fight the accusations or deny them, was reproachable.

The analysis of messages that attributed blame confirms that organizations specifically targeted the Workers’ Party and its main leaders. As table 3 reveals, even though the campaign had the goal of impeaching President Rousseff, the data shows that, for the five organizations analyzed, the protests had a broader aim: these were demonstrations against the Workers’ Party. In the specific case of posts published by Brazil To The Right, the Workers’ Party is mentioned more than twice as often than



Rousseff herself.

This antagonism built on and contributed to increasing the *antipetismo* feelings, portraying the Workers' Party (and its supporters) as enemies of the people. In fact, all five organizations also characterized members and sympathizers of the Party as criminals. This logic did not allow any room for a position outside of the anti and pro-Workers' Party poles, as the following post by Outraged ON LINE exemplifies: "If you are not against the Workers' Party, then you are as dirty as they are [...] The struggle will not end until we remove this criminal organization from power. Together we are stronger, with God we are unbeatable" (January 3, 2015). This reasoning was also used to put pressure on parliamentarians, combined in the following post with the prognostic frame of impeachment: "You [Congress representative] either vote for the impeachment or you are an enemy of Brazil. Those who do not vote are [also] the enemies" (Free Brazil Movement, April 16, 2016).

Table 3. Diagnostic frames: blame attribution (most frequent - % of posts)

Organization	1st	2nd	3rd
Brazil To The Right	Workers' Party - 34.8%	Lula - 23.9%	Rousseff - 14.9%
Free Brazil Movement	Workers' Party - 22.5%	Rousseff - 19.0%	Lula - 10.8%
OnTheStreets	Rousseff - 22.6%	Workers' Party - 20.7%	Lula - 14.4%
Outraged ON LINE	Lula - 31.4%	Rousseff - 28.1%	Workers' Party - 27.1%
Come To The Streets	Rousseff - 19.0%	Lula - 12.7%	Workers' Party - 9.6%

Source: Dias (2017), based on content analysis of Facebook messages collected through *Netvizz*.

*Prognostic frames: fighting the enemy*

In comparison with diagnostic frames, there is greater heterogeneity among organizations when it comes to presenting solutions. These reveal multiple approaches to engage in antagonist politics, that range from strengthening the penal state to impeaching the President, banning a political party, and imprisoning political opponents. They are different species of the same genre: fighting the enemies of the people as the solution for all their grievances. Moreover, the combination of ubiquitous antagonistic politics is not contradictory with economic liberalism as prognostic (see Table 4). Rather, it functions as an add-on ideology that follows similar logics to previous neopopulist experiences in Latin America. This is not something new, as populism has been used in Latin America to implement neoliberal politics since the 90s (Collins, 2008, p. 65).

Not surprisingly, the Presidential impeachment was the most cited proposal, presented by the organizations as the first and fundamental step to deal with the chaos, a chaos that had been created by the Workers' Party. In these messages, the impeachment of Rousseff, the ousting of the Workers' Party and the imprisonment of the Party's leader, Lula, became one and the same goal. By separating them in our coding analysis, we are able to show how actors focused on fueling *antipetismo* feelings. "Workers' Party Out" appears as the most cited frame for the organization Brazil To The Right and the second in other three cases (see Table 4).

Table 4. Prognostic frames (most frequent - % of posts)

Organization	1st	2nd	3rd
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Brazil To The Right	Workers' Party out - 19.9%	Lula's imprisonment- 9.7%	Impeachment - 5.6%
Free Brazil Movement	Impeachment - 20.0%	Workers' Party out - 5.8%	Economic liberalism - 3.8%
OnTheStreets	Impeachment - 23.9%	Workers' Party out - 10.1%	Lula's imprisonment - 7.0%
Outraged ON LINE	Impeachment - 42.4%	Workers' Party out - 39.9%	Lula's imprisonment - 24.9%
Come To The Streets	Impeachment - 19.2%	Imprisonment of corrupt politicians, murderers or thieves - 2.5%	Anti-corruption laws - 2.3%

Source: Dias (2017), based on content analysis of Facebook messages collected through *Netvizz*.

Policy proposals for after the impeachment were not among the most relevant topics of discussion on organizations' Facebook pages. Exceptions are represented by posts by the Free Brazil Movement and Come To The Streets, which hinted at the agendas they sought to pursue: economic liberalism for the former, and anti-corruption measures for the latter. Both of these were, in fact, widely shared among the right-wing organizations analyzed in this article. Even in those cases, however, the small percentage of posts discussing these policy-related issues shows that this was not important in the online framing of prognostics (see Table 4). Differences among the actors were more visible during protests themselves. Organizations such as Free Brazil Movement and Come to the Streets, which were critical of groups that defended military intervention as a solution to the country's crisis after the impeachment, sought to position themselves in different places in the streets and when camping in front of the National Congress (Chequer & Butterfield, 2016;

Hupsel Filho & Galhardo, 2015).

*(Un)stable union: a heterogeneous emergent field*

Finally, motivational frames are the most heterogeneous types of frames (see Tables 5 and 6). Among the five groups analyzed, there was little convergence on how to “call to arms” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617), how to engage the “we” (Gamson, 1992), or how to justify the urgency or importance of mobilization, all of which are included in this type of framing. Brazil To The Right used humor and sarcasm to motivate its audience and criticize left-wing ideals. As one of its leaders argued, humor is “the most corrosive weapon against bad politicians” (Interview 1). Outraged ON LINE, in turn, often emphasized that they represented the good, fighting against evil to prevent moral debacle and the loss of Christian values. OnTheStreets balanced both the nationalistic imaginary and conservative arguments to galvanize a sense of urgency, in close ideological proximity to Outraged ON LINE.

Table 5. Motivational frames (most frequent, % of posts)

Organization	1st	2nd	3rd
Brazil To The Right	Criticism of the left - 14.2%	Morality and religion - 8.6%	Contradictions or hypocrisy of left-wing ideals and/or supporters - 7.9%
Free Brazil Movement	Evidence of protesters participating in demonstrations - 9.2%	Morality and religion - 8.2%	Democratic, pacific and popular nature of the protests - 8.0%
OnTheStreets	Nationalism - 15.4%	Morality and religion - 13.3%	Pressure on politicians, institutions or businessmen - 11.8%
Outraged ON LINE	Morality and religion - 40.9%	Nationalism - 35.8%	Imminent need or urgency to act - 30.8%

Come To The Streets	Pressure on politicians, institutions or businessmen - 20.8%	Support of the police, authorities, or the <i>Lava Jato</i> task force - 13,7%	Nationalism - 12.9%
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Source: Dias (2017), based on content analysis of Facebook messages collected through *Netvizz*.

While the Workers' Party and its allies represented the enemy, the *Lava Jato* prosecutors were portrayed as national heroes whose work had to be supported through citizens' mobilization. All five organizations openly defended the Lava Jato task force, although only Come To The Streets and OnTheStreets used such motivational frame in more than 10% of the posts (13,7% and 10,3% respectively). It varied from manifestations like “[...] Full support to the *Lava Jato* task force, Judge Sergio Moro and the Federal Justice and Police agents” (Come To The Streets, February 10, 2016) to a deified image of them, as in “Heroes! For those who still do not know: the team of the Lava Jato task force Operation Car Wash! [...]” (Outraged ON LINE, December 25, 2016).

On one hand, the calls for pride in defending Christianity and its morality were constitutive of the appeal to rally around national symbols, as elements associated to the virtuous people. On the other, the call was made for the people to differentiate themselves from the left and corrupt politicians. Come To The Streets and Free Brazil Movement went for different approaches: the first mostly motivated its audience by arguing in favor of publicly supporting or calling politicians and public authorities out, while the second tried to bring people to the streets by showing those were multitudinous, democratic and popular protests, in which everyone should take part.

Table 6. Examples of motivational frames in Facebook Posts

Nodes	Examples
Morality and Religion	Good, honest, decent and orderly people, we have to show to this criminal faction called the Workers' Party that we do not accept or will not accept this crap [...] JOIS US, INVITE, SHARE, TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER AND WITH GOD WE ARE INVINCIBLE. [...] (Outraged ON LINE, November 19, 2014)
Pressure on political parties, politicians, institutions or businessmen	Let's keep our support and the pressure onto the TCU [Public Accounts Court] ministers so that they REJECT Dilma's government fiscal improprieties and the fiscal responsibility crimes she committed (Come To The Streets, June 27, 2015).
Nationalism	Today [Holiday commemorating the Brazilian Republic]! Historical day! Millions of Brazilians will take to the streets against this! Against anti-patriotism! Against Dilma's Workers' Party hate for Brazil! Not even on this day they celebrate the green and yellow of our flag! [...] This is why we have to rebel and take down this party! Whatever it takes! (OnTheStreets, November 15, 2014)
Evidence of protesters participating in demonstrations	The Free Brazil Movement thanks its members all over the country and all those who are going [registering on Facebook events] and the other serious movements such as Come To The Streets. We are already millions. March 15 is the beginning of the end of the Workers' Party. (Free Brazil Movement, February 21, 2015).
Criticism of the left	So a person does not need to be a Franciscan to be left-wing. But they need to ignore how the economy works. And be obnoxiously hypocritical to constantly condemn others' greed and profit while they only think of accumulating more money to live like super-rich capitalists. Meanwhile they repeat they only want material equality and to help the poor. (Excerpt from blog post reproduced by Brazil To The Right on their page, November 13, 2014)

Source: elaborated by the authors based on posts collected on the organizations' Facebook pages, via *Netvizz*. Posts translated from Portuguese by the authors.

As Tables 5 and 6 show, evoking God, Christianity and the evilness of communism/leftist ideology were prominent features in the framing of motivations, often linked to references of patriotic symbols. The expression “our flag will never be red”, used extensively in Facebook posts and protest banners, was a call to fight

against left-wing ideals, identified in Brazil with the color red, as indicated in the following post: “Don’t let yourself be manipulated, our focus now must be WORKERS’ PARTY OUT!!!! DILMA OUT!!!! Our flag will never be red!!!!” (Outraged ON LINE, February, 27, 2015).

The analysis of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames of the five right-wing organizations successfully united during the impeachment campaign by reducing the diagnosis around the frame of corruption, portraying the blamed ones as enemies, and bringing a myriad of motivational arguments that allowed them to mobilize feelings of fear, rage and indignation, and to engage with a broad audience.

### **Final Remarks**

The ousting of President Dilma Rousseff was a dramatic chapter in Brazil’s democratic history. As this article shows, right-wing civil society organizations carried out a successful 22-month campaign for the impeachment of Rousseff by using populist framing mechanisms to set the focus on one issue, *reducing to corruption* various other grievances such as the economic crisis, the Workers’ Party political power agenda, leftist ideology in Brazil and elsewhere, and so on. Moreover, the enemies in this narrative were not necessarily the President being ousted, but primarily the political party that had been in power for the previous fourteen years.

The cross-fertilization between framing analysis in social movement studies and the literature on populism helps in understanding the power of weaving diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames through the mechanisms of reductionism and antagonism. The reduction of grievances to a heroic fight of the *good people* against corruption and its perpetrators created a common denominator

around which these groups were able to communicate with broad sectors of Brazilian society, in spite of their internal differences. First, because virtually nobody would identify themselves as a defender of corruption, making every social demand also a grievance against corruption. Second, because corruption can subsume most if not all problems: it is rather easier to claim that public health care services are precarious or the country's economy is in crisis due to corruption than to discuss specific measures to tackle those issues.

The populist framing mechanisms of reductionism and antagonism describe 'how things happened' in the campaign for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, but they are also "portable concepts" (Faletti & Lynch, 2009, p. 1159). While determined by the context in which they were deployed, these mechanisms are useful to understand the rise of right-wing activism in other political arenas, and how they build broad coalitions among heterogeneous groups. This article delves into the process of constructing a new emergent field of right-wing activism that had in the campaign for the impeachment one of its key moments to set the moving boundaries of such field around *antipetismo* feelings. It does not, however, purport to analyze the whole field, which includes many other important actors. Furthermore, the analysis focuses only on the content of Facebook communication, with its specific characteristics. To know more about the values and identities of the right-wing actors requires a research that considers not only the narratives, but also their actions, which goes beyond the goals of this article.

The campaign for Rousseff's impeachment shows the ability of this emergent right-wing field of activism to mobilize people, online as well as on the streets. It is a phenomenon that cannot be understood without analyzing the step-by-step process of



organization of the field that began over a decade before the impeachment within civil society, led by students, celebrities, businessmen and religious actors without clear ties to political parties. In the aftermath of the impeachment, many of these actors have moved to electoral politics, either supporting candidacies or putting forward their own candidates, and often fighting among each other or even regretting the polarization they helped to propel. It remains to be seen, however, whether the temporary alliance in favor of the impeachment and against the Workers' Party will survive in the future.

#### **Annex 1 - List of interviews cited in the article**

Interview 1 - Brazil To The Right - November 3, 2016, São Paulo, Brazil

Interview 2 - Free Brazil Movement - February 2, 2016, Brasília, Brazil

Interview 3 - Come To The Streets - November 10, 2016, São Paulo, Brazil

Interview 4 - Free Brazil Movement - October 10, 2015, São Paulo, Brazil

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Facebook's API has changed its data collection rules significantly, which affected *Netvizz* and jeopardized its performance as this research was conducted. The data collected on Free Brazil Movement's page is incomplete between July 27, 2016 and August 22, 2016. After several tests and attempts of data retrieval using *Netvizz*, we could not collect the posts for those weeks. Moreover, the page of Outraged ON LINE was removed by Facebook in August 28, 2016 (Estadão, 2016). The data obtained through *Netvizz* from its old page ranges from November 2014 to July 27, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> The total number of subnodes attributed to each groups' subset of posts varied from 72 to 209, considering diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames. For a detailed explanation of this coding strategy and an analysis of the data, see Dias, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup>

<https://www.facebook.com/nasruas/videos/vb.142574502501122/1091334334291796/?type=2&theater>