VIDERE
V. 13, N. 28, SET.-DEZ. 2021
ISSN: 2177-7837

Recebido: 10/07/2021.
Aprovado: 12/09/2021.

Páginas: 37-64.

DOI: 10.30612/videre.v13i28.15251

The bullet caucus: from the National Congress to social media

A bancada da bala: do Congresso Nacional às mídias sociais

El frente de las armas: del Congreso Nacional a las redes sociales

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Abstract
This paper discusses the discourses of congresspeople elected in 2018 as part of the so-called bullet caucus. To achieve this goal, we first explore the conditions that allowed this group to rise. While elections belong to the world of institutional politics, a number of social trends, both in Brazil and internationally, informed the creation of a distinctive identity by those congresspeople. Discourses attacking human rights and that have circulated in Brazil since the last democratic transition deserve special attention. Following this initial contextualization, we then discuss the arguments these congresspeople mobilized on social media during the 2018 election campaign, seeking to understand how they refer to issues such as violence, conflict, and human rights.

Keywords: Bullet caucus. Violence. Punishment. Discourse. Social media

Resumo
O presente trabalho tem o objetivo central de apresentar os discursos mobilizados por parlamentares eleitos em 2018 como parte da assim chamada bancada da bala. Para cumprir esta tarefa, nos dedicamos, antes, a uma breve discussão acerca das condições que permitiram a emergência deste fenômeno. Embora inscrito no mundo da política institucional, há também uma série de traços sociais, nos contextos internacional e brasileiro, que contribuíram para que estes parlamentares forjassem sua identidade nestes termos. Merece atenção especial, o espaço ocupado por discursos contrários aos direitos humanos no Brasil, desde o período da última transição democrática. Em seguida a esta contextualização, nos dedicaremos a organizar os argumentos mobilizados por este grupo de parlamentares em suas mídias sociais durante a campanha eleitoral de 2018, buscando assim compreender de que maneira se referem a temas como violência, conflito e direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave: Bancada da Bala. Violência. Punição. Discurso. Mídias sociais.

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Resumen
El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo principal presentar los discursos movilizados por los parlamentarios electos en 2018 como parte del llamado "frente de las armas". Para cumplir con esta tarea, nos dedicamos, más bien, a una breve discusión sobre las condiciones que permitieron el surgimiento de este fenómeno. Aunque inscritos en el mundo de la política institucional, también hay una serie de rasgos sociales, en el contexto internacional y brasileño, que contribuyeron a que estos parlamentarios forjaran su identidad en estos términos. El espacio que ocupan los discursos contra los derechos humanos en Brasil merece una atención especial desde el período de la última transición democrática. Siguiendo esta contextualización, nos dedicaremos a organizar los argumentos movilizados por este grupo de parlamentarios en sus redes sociales durante la campaña electoral de 2018, buscando así entender cómo se relacionan con temas como la violencia, el conflicto y los derechos humanos.

Palabras clave: Frente de las armas. Violencia. Castigo. Discurso. Redes sociales.

INTRODUCTION

On October 21, 2018, exactly seven days before the runoff of the presidential elections, supporters of then candidate Jair Bolsonaro[1] met on *Paulista Avenue,* an iconic place in São Paulo—and elsewhere in the country—to express their endorsement of the future president. In his speech addressed to these supporters, Bolsonaro said, "*Petralhada,* you all go to the beach-end. You will have no chance in our homeland because I will cut all your perks."[2] The brief speech addressed the need to "clean up" the country from "*petismo*" [3] and corruption, without mentioning any proposals, projects, or government programs.

The 2018 elections marked an important turning point in the trajectory of the New Republic, which began in the mid-1980s. Previous events had already revealed institutional instability, such as the major demonstrations in June 2013, the 2014 "car wash operation,"[4] the challenge to the 2014 election results by the defeated candidate Aecio Neves, and the questionable impeachment process of former president Dilma Rousseff of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), Workers' Party. But in 2018, for the first time, the winning candidate was someone who openly praised the military dictatorship (1964–1985), making the fate of the young Brazilian democracy even more uncertain.

1 The Partido Social Liberal is a liberal social party.

2 Translated by the author and available at https://reinaldoazevedo.blogosfera.uol.com.br/2018/10/22/leia-a-integra-do-discurso-de-bolsonaro-transmitido-ao-vivo-durante-manifestacao/. "Petralhada" is a negative way to refer the activists in Brazilian Workers' Party. The "beach-end" is an expression widely used by agents involved in the authoritarian period repression to refer to the location where the Brazilian navy executed some of the regime's adversaries. See https://valor.globo.com/politica/noticia/2018/10/28/vao-para-a-ponta-da-praia-local-de-execucao-gritam-bolsonaristas.ghtml.

3 A reference to identification with or support to the Workers' Party.

4 See https://theintercept.com/2020/03/12/united-states-justice-department-brazil-car-wash-lava-jato-international-treaty/.

The rise of Bolsonaro, however, has its roots in historical processes that can and should be investigated. His appearance is not just a matter of chance, and his discourse were not all formulated in the context of the current crisis. For more than two decades, Brazilian democracy has lived with the presence of figures like Bolsonaro in elected positions at different levels of the legislative power. Their participation in the public debate has always been—even in a caricatured way—based on the demand for greater and tougher punishments for criminals, the defense of the shared interests of agents belonging to the repressive forces of the State, and the defense of violence as a method of resolving social conflicts. Although presented in a simplistic way, this worldview—and the political agenda that results from it—was shared by other parliamentarians, who at the turn of the 21st century became known as the "bullet caucus," the central topic of this paper. Although this movement arose around 2003 in the context of debates on civil disarmament,[5] the platforms and types of political representation based on these types of discourses had developed beforehand.

Even during the country's re-democratization process in the 1980s, important authors pointed out that guaranteeing civil rights constituted a sensitive point in the country's effort to overcome the authoritarian past. Not only did the risk of coexistence between democratic order and systematic violations of these rights seem evident (Paixão 1988; Pinheiro 1991), but the circulation of discourses against human rights, which classified them as "privileges of criminals" (Caldeira 1991), represented an important challenge to the nascent regime. As Caldeira (2000) recalls, although human rights violations are common to almost all countries in the world, democratic public debates that express opposition to them seem to be a unique feature of Brazil. This diagnosis, though, needs to be revisited in light of recent political movements in which ultranationalist, xenophobic, racist, and violent platforms have gained traction in central countries such as the United States, France, Italy, England, and others. Nevertheless, the historical presence of actors who hold discourses against human rights puts the Brazilian context in a unique position to understand current global trends.

The central objective of our work is to understand the discourses formulated by congresspeople in the bullet caucus. We believe this will contribute to a broader understanding of the current political moment, as it sheds light on historical processes that have led to the recent authoritarian turn in Brazilian politics. To fulfill this purpose, we have divided this article into two parts: the first part is dedicated to examining the political, social, and international elements that contributed to the conformation of the bullet caucus phenomenon in Brazil; the second centers on the analysis of certain arguments used in the campaigns of the congresspeople elected in 2018 as part of this

5 See https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2005/oct/24/braziliangover.

group in the National Congress.[6] Such arguments were extracted from the analysis of their communications on Twitter during the official campaign period between August and October 2018.

1 BULLET CAUCUS: AN OBJECT OF DIFFICULT DEFINITION

1.1 Institutional politics: a first step to understanding the group

The high fragmentation of the Brazilian party system sometimes makes it difficult to determine a direct association between each organization and the agenda that situates it in the political spectrum. Studies have indicated an increase in the number of parties represented in the National Congress at each legislature (Araújo and Silva 2016). Although the executive branch has instruments to induce the formation of coalitions and party leaders have prerogatives to ensure cohesion and fidelity of their party members, it is not always easy to intuit the themes that are central to the activity of congresspeople only by looking at the party to which they belong. This has led to different debates in Brazilian political science, from the controversy over the stability and functionality of our power arrangement reflected in the debates on "coalitional presidentialism", to the different attempts to position the actors on the right-left axis (Tarouco and Madeira 2013).

The limitation of such definitions opened space for other researchers to investigate new dynamics that would contribute to the explanation of congressional life in the country. Nobre (2013) developed the concept of *peemedebismo*,[7] where representatives of different parties join around agendas of common interest to accumulate veto power in such areas. The impossibility of each party to form a consistent majority encouraged congresspeople to seek peers from other party organizations to form thematic blocks. During the transition from the military dictatorship to democracy, Lessa (1989) linked the old order to the organization of political actors for the construction of a veto power in relation to the advancement of agendas they considered particularly sensitive. At that time, the difficulties in building clearly identifiable parliamentary majorities allowed thematic groups that were limited to vetoing guidelines contrary to their interests to organize. Araújo and

6 For the purposes of this text, we use the list of members of the bullet caucus available in the X-Ray of the New Congress 2019–2023 report, prepared by the Inter-Union Department of Parliamentary Assistance (DIAP) and available at https://www.diap.org.br/index.php/noticias/agencia-diap/88975-diap-lanca-a-radiografia-do-novo-congresso-2019-2023. This is a monitoring group of congress activity, publishing reports since 1980s, which allows us to perceive objects in a historic perspective.

7 The term is a reference to the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, or PMDB, known in Brazilian politics for its elasticity in working with different governments, no matter their political agenda.

Silva (2016) point to research on "congressional fronts" (thematic groups formed in Congress across party lines) as a fertile possibility for legislative studies to find additional tools for understanding politics. The authors also take party fragmentation as a starting point to affirm the difficulties in producing consensus, which would lead to a favorable environment for the emergence of "fronts". These would be spaces for the coordination of representatives from different regions and parties, often associated with lobbies that operate in Congress. They state that although fronts and caucuses are already part of the vocabulary of journalists, activists, and analysts, academic research in political science still lacks further systematization about the phenomenon.[8]

Examining these fronts allows some analogies with our research topic: a recent phenomenon we call "supraparty caucuses." These caucuses differ from fronts, which are officially registered in the legislative houses, have signed memberships, and sometimes bring together people with opposing perspectives. For example, the Parliamentary Front for Public Safety in the current legislature has among its signed members figures as diverse as Delegado Éder Mauro (PSD-PA)[9] and Marcelo Freixo (PSOL-RJ),[10] the former defending harsher and more violent punishment to criminals and the latter aligned with human rights standards.

The caucuses,[11] in turn, are informal and do not have any official records that clearly define their membership, their objectives, and their decision-making processes. They can be organized according to regional or thematic criteria, and due to their low degree of institutionalization, they are difficult to analyze (Araújo and Silva 2016). The same caucus can be related to different congressional fronts. The bullet caucus members participate in several fronts, such as in the defense of life, in the defense and promotion of public and private safety professionals, in support of the adoption of certain forms of police organization, among others.

The bullet caucus is often cited alongside the evangelical (Bible) and agribusiness (rural) caucuses as expressions of the most conservative sectors of Brazilian politics in the legislature (Quadros and Madeira 2018). Its emergence dates back to the debates over the approval of the Disarmament Statute in 2003, during which politicians in favor of the new legislation criticized their opponents as lobbyists for the arms industries and began to call them the *bullet caucus*. To refute the bullet caucus classification, congresspeople critical of disarmament began to assert themselves as standing in favor of life, or *good citizens*. At that time, the existence of a

8 With the exception of a few monographic works or texts on specific fronts, we so far have not found broader studies that give a more comprehensive account of the phenomenon (Araújo and Silva 2016).

9 Partido Social Democrático, or Social Democratic Party.

10 Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, or Socialism and Freedom Party.

11 *Bancada* in Portuguese.

bullet caucus was not a hot topic in the media or in academic research, although many of the congresspeople identified as advocates for the interests of armed institutions were already active. Congresspeople aligned with military worldviews have existed since before the return to democracy, maintaining their presence in all legislatures. Caldeira (1991) identifies them as playing a central role in the diffusion of anti-human-rights discourses during the 1980s.

However, after the 2000s, and especially after the debates around civil disarmament, these parliamentarians started to identify themselves as a collective, forming a group that would act together in subsequent legislatures. It should be noted that, in 2003, when the disarmament statute was approved, one of the main opponents of the draft bill, Congressman Alberto Fraga (PFL-DF),[12] registered in the Chamber of Deputies the "Parliamentary Front in Defense of Public Safety", which would be registered again in all of the following legislatures. Still in that same legislature, Fraga registered the "Parliamentary Front for the Right to Self-Defense", which would play a central role in articulating the *No* campaign in the 2005 referendum on the full ban on firearms trade for civilians that had been stipulated by the 2003 disarmament statute. If, in the context of the disarmament statute, most parliamentarians used to refute any relationship with the arms industry, it is noticeable that some began to build a group identity, even if they rejected the accusations of being lobbyists for the industry.

Since then, there has been a steady growth in public references to the bullet caucus, whether in newspaper articles or even in congressional speeches. The difficulties in defining the caucuses, identified by Araújo and Silva (2016), apply to this case. We are not talking only about politicians who came from the public safety and/or military forces, nor can we define them just by campaign financing. The list of members in the caucus varies according to the analyst, especially when the legislatures change, but there is a certain consensus around some of its fundamental lines of congressional action: the defense of the shared interests of the repressive forces of the State; demands for criminalizing conducts and increasing penalties for those that are already criminalized; and advocacy for increased civilian access to firearms (Faganello 2015; Novello 2018; Macaulay 2019).

Despite the definitional difficulties, which make it difficult to create an objective list with the members of the bullet caucus, we believe that its emergence and consolidation can help shed light on important aspects of the role of violence in the production of a certain notion of order in contemporary Brazil. The solutions to definitional difficulties are diverse, ranging from an increased focus on the professional origins of representatives, such as authors who work only with parliamentarians from

12 Partido da Frente Liberal, or Liberal Front Party.

the repressive forces of the State (Berlatto et al. 2016), to the use of lists published by mass media.[13] Recognizing that the definitions here have more of an operational role rather than an objective understanding of reality – and having more of an interest in analyzing discourses than in conducting a precise sociology of the actors who enunciate them –, we decided to use the list of congresspeople in the bullet caucus organized by the Inter-Union Department of Parliamentary Assistance (DIAP). Such an option is justified by the continuous work, by this organization, in preparing "x-rays" of Congress since the first legislature of the New Republic. These documents provide an overview of representation at each new election, dividing congresspeople based on their links to interest groups, professional backgrounds, and other criteria. In this sense, although these "x-rays" may be occasionally challenged, they have an element of continuity that also helps in future comparisons.

1.2 Social dynamics and the deeper roots of the bullet caucus

So far, we have discussed the bullet caucus in its institutional dimensions as a phenomenon facilitated by a series of particular dynamics of the Brazilian political game. Those include party fragmentation, the organization of thematic blocks of representatives, and the advent of debates around laws that mobilized different actors depending on the agenda: public safety, violence, punishment, and human rights. However, a phenomenon of this nature cannot be reduced to its political institutional aspect, which makes it necessary to look at the social conditions and dynamics that made it possible for the caucus to emerge and expand over the last few decades.

Some of the central elements for the definition of the bullet caucus have their origins well before the emergence of the organized block of congresspeople. Among them, we highlight the articulation of discourses contrary to human rights, present at least since the transition to democracy in the 1980s. At that time, public safety policies driven by the state governors who opposed the military regime were strongly criticized by political and social actors linked to the old authoritarian order. Higa and Alvarez (2019) demonstrate how André Franco Montoro's initiatives to humanize prisons in São Paulo were the target of moral panic campaigns. Caldeira (2000) argues that these measures were faced by an increasingly widespread discourse that associated human rights policies with privileges for criminals.

13 Different sources point to different sizes of the bullet caucus in the current legislature, which means the inclusion or exclusion of different names, based on different criteria, not always made explicit. https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/especial/noticias/bancada-da-bala-quase-triplica-em-2019-aponta-levantamento/ https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/eleicoes/ 2018 / noticias / 2018/10/09 / eleicoes--2018-bancada-da-bala-senado-major-olimpio-bolsonaro.htm
https://www.dw.com/pt-br/a-nova-cara-das-bancadas-do-boi-da-bala-e-da-b%C3%ADblia/a-45838451.

Along those lines, Novello (2018) explores the emergence of what she calls a *security caucus*, composed of politicians elected to the São Paulo State House with professional origins in the repressive forces of the State, particularly in the police.[14] These local representatives, still a minority and less central in the public debate of the 1980s and 1990s, had an agenda similar to what we now believe to be that of the bullet caucus. Some particularities stand out, such as the intense debate about urban space, which is not so decisive in the national scope. We also noticed a greater concern with the shared interests of the professional categories represented by these politicians. The current president's trajectory is exemplary of this development: he began his political career in the 1990s focused on topics such as salaries for public officials, working conditions, and external controls over police action and then moved to wider issues in order to present himself as a contender in the presidential race. Also, according to Novello (2018), social media is now an important vector of the transition from what she classifies as a security caucus to the current bullet caucuses. Although the author does not see radical changes in the speeches enunciated over time, she perceives changes in the scope and tone of the permanent campaign they have taken on, mainly through new information and communication technologies.

The growth of these caucuses and the power of their discourse are related to a growing concern with urban violence as a central theme of public debate since the 1980s. This appears in the way that news reports approach cases of violence (Capiglione 2015) and in the moral panics that take place around certain images of criminals (Higa and Alvarez 2019). Fears (Zaluar 2019) and the imaginary construction of which social classes/sectors are considered dangerous (Malaguti 2003, 2015) produced public safety policies based on the logic of war and, concomitantly, political discourses anchored in the need to reinforce authority and guarantee the functioning of the order and social hierarchies historically present in Brazil.

In the Brazilian social sciences, the theme of violence also assumes an increasingly important place in a series of debates and the theoretical/methodological instruments that seek to account for the new reality (Campos and Alvarez 2017). The first conclusions establish the historical threads of various forms of violence that have marked our social formation, paying attention to certain notions of order. In this context, we highlight, for example, Paixão (1988) and Pinheiro (1991), who interpreted the "new" problem of urban violence in the public debate in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting on whether it just updated historical forms of violence in the country. What unites such different moments is a demand for the control of social groups without power resources. Some of the sociology of violence's early findings in this period

14 At that moment, the security caucus was not only made up of police officers but also had communication professionals, for example. This reinforces the difficulty presented above of establishing a single criterion for belonging to groups that, although with some thematic cohesion, are internally diverse.

pointed toward the continuity in the victims' profiles, which is as much or more important than the continuity of the mechanisms and operators. That leads to the theme of racism as an inescapable element for understanding violent events in Brazil.

In this context, combined with a series of institutional incentives already discussed, certain candidates realized they could benefit from specializing in public safety issues, expanding the demand for punishment, defending police corps, and giving speeches about the division of society and the need to wage war in defense of good citizens.

1.3 Global context: democracies in crisis and punishment on the rise

We observed, therefore, that bullet caucuses are an important object of research because they articulate political-institutional conditions and social dynamics in their composition, across different moments in time. Nevertheless, the incorporation of a spatial dimension of the analysis also contributes to a better framing of what we intend to understand. We are not, therefore, restricted to a singularly Brazilian history of the construction of modes of political representation based on the demand for order, punishment, and, ultimately, the use of violence by the constituted authorities.

The center-periphery relation, the way ideas, discourses, and repertoires of action circulate and are received in Brazil, is a fundamental question of our social and political thinking (Schwarz 1988; Lynch 2013). In the current environment, the acceleration of integration and communication flows in the context of global processes makes this reception even more intense. Naturally, it is not a question of pure appropriation of external debates, but of how those are locally incorporated and overlap with local traditions and histories.

The medium-term history that we have presented above, from the 1980s to the present, is built on a timeframe that can also be used to understand broader processes. According to Robert Dahl, the second half of the twentieth century saw the deepening of democratization in countries considered "advanced." This process was simultaneous with the development of the welfare state and the expansion of a language of rights, especially with the role of human rights in the post-World War II period. The association between democracy and human rights was also the engine of political changes in the Global South, where the protagonists of the transition processes in the 1980s and 1990s based their public interventions on the inseparability of this conceptual pair. However, even in the midst of democratization, it was possible to observe both the persistence of authoritarian practices and arrangements, and the emergence of new forms of challenges to human rights in the countries of the Global South. An example of this are the punitive platforms supported by various political and social actors, with their concrete effects on the levels of incarceration and use of

violence by agents and institutions of the State.

There is an abundant bibliography, at least since the 1970s, discussing the role of punishment and prison in contemporary societies (e.g., the studies of Michel Foucault) and, from the 1990s onward, a more specific discussion on the punitive turn or the penal management of poverty, based on authors like David Garland (2001) and Loïc Wacquant (2001). In South America, these studies were received and reinterpreted by several researchers concerned with understanding local processes of incarceration, expansion of control mechanisms, and violence in general (Sozzo 2016, 2020). At some point these issues were understood as "authoritarian remains" or dysfunctions of an incomplete democratization process (Teles and Safatle 2015), but now they share the landscape with the rise of far-right politicians who hold very restrictive conceptions of democracy.

This movement is not restricted to countries in the Global South, as shown by recent diagnoses about the crisis of liberal democracy in the Western world. Both in the academic bibliography and in other spaces of public opinion, such as newspapers, magazines, and television programs, it has been common to hear that democracies are at risk. Authors as diverse as Levitski and Ziblatt (2018), Brown (2015), and Castells (2018) have discussed the reasons why democratic institutions and values are in check. If a few decades ago, in the early 1990s, the consolidation of democracy in central countries and the democratization of peripheral countries were seen as inexorable movements, today there is enormous uncertainty about the capacity of the political systems in different parts of the world to preserve themselves. While Levitski and Ziblatt (2018) point out that the risks to democracy today come from actors who operate within their institutions, Brown (2015) warns of the deconstruction of the political community in the context of hyper-atomization brought about by the policies and new forms of subjectivity typical of neoliberalism. Also in this direction, Fraser (2006, 2018) points out the difficulties in balancing distributive and recognition conflicts in contemporary democracies.

In Brazil, many have reflected on the recent democratic crisis and sought to determine its main vectors. Santos (2017), for example, indicates that there is a process of "oligarchyzation" of liberal democracies around the world, restricting the space of popular will and, thus, lowering the scope of representation. More recently, with the street protests against Dilma Rousseff and the election of Jair Bolsonaro, some have lamented a kind of eternal return of Brazilian authoritarianism while others have focused on what they consider to be a new right, which would have among its distinctive aspects the intense connection between the use of networks and the occupation of streets (Rocha 2018). This so-called new right would be a Brazilian expression of phenomena observed in other parts of the globe, articulated by think tanks such as

Heritage or Atlas, pressuring the public debate in a nationalist, xenophobic, denialist, and often racist direction. In fact, representatives of this new trend who obtained the best electoral results participated significantly in social media, with sophisticated intervention techniques in the public debate, as in the cases of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump.

When studying the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil through interviews with supporters of the new president, Solano (2018) identifies punitivism as one of the most distinctive elements in their discourse. She says that despite disagreements over how to classify recent political movements (new right, alternative-right, populist, extremist, anti-systemic), it is possible to identify some common features through research. The idea that *criminals* have privileges and are now portrayed as victims of society, in a dangerous subversion of values, is one of the most recurring. As a consequence, there is a belief that police forces occupy the frontlines in the fight against the enemies of *good citizens* and must therefore receive political support against the smear campaigns they suffer. According to the author, this thinking was central to the election of Bolsonaro and, as our research shows, inform the public manifestations of congresspeople who were elected in his support to compose the so-called bullet caucus.

Although the phenomena brought up here are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, the focus of this text is the analysis of a series of discourses (Foucault 1996) that are not exactly about the same topic as in the study of the so-called new right, or even in the broader debate on the crisis of democracy. Even if our analysis is related to these themes, our goal is to understand the discourses performed by the representatives that are now part of the bullet caucus. Such discourses, as mentioned in the introduction, carry distinct temporalities and are inescapably diachronic. They include the long time period of the notions of order that founded the Brazilian social experience; the medium-length time period of discourses against human rights in the 1980s; the representation of shared interests of police officers in the 1990s; the recent resistance to modernizing initiatives such as the statute of the disarmament in 2003, which played a central role in the organization and the identity of this group; and, finally, the very recent praise of the authoritarian past, questioning the forces that sustained the New Republic, and a strong criticism of impunity and moral corruption in our society (Benetti 2017).

As expected, these distinct temporalities also articulate different flows of ideas, discourses, and action strategies. Even before globalization and the technological revolution, our peripheral condition has always forced Brazil and Brazilians to have permanent contact with global processes. This flow remains, producing new syntheses and new strategies for political action by the actors we analyzed. If the Bolsonaro

family itself relies permanently on its relations with Steve Bannon and with former American president Donald Trump, it would be reductionist on our part to imagine that the strength acquired by the discourses we most recently analyzed constitutes a peculiarity of Brazil. Even so, remembering this long trajectory, as we did above, avoids a spontaneous apprehension of political movements, which reads them as pure novelty and thus fails to recognize their local contours forged over time.

In summary, the growth of movements critical to the tenets of liberal democracy in many parts of the world and the recent political avalanche brought about by the unexpected rise of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil are two elements that dragged our object of focus to the center of the debate around the international and national conjunctures. On the one hand, this change in the political winds of the past five years confirms the relevance of the themes we had been researching before. On the other hand, the complex network of causes for these large-scale phenomena requires attention so that the object defined here—the bullet caucus—is not diluted or lost in other important aspects of the current situation, crises in Western democracies included. Therefore, this essay addresses two subjects: the novelty brought by social media to contemporary political debate and the not-always-new content of the discourses mobilized by actors who focus public debate around issues of violence, punishment, public safety, and human rights.

2 THE USE OF TWITTER BY BRAZILIAN CONGRESSPEOPLE ELECTED IN 2018

In light of the context presented above, we analyze the communication of parliamentarians elected in 2018 who are part of the current bullet caucus, according to the DIAP criteria. In previous sections, we defined this group based on its demand for tougher punishment, the criminalization of conducts, the defense of the shared interests of public safety agents, and the defense of increased access to firearms by ordinary citizens. We demonstrate that while the rise and electoral success of politicians with this profile and agenda is not exclusive to Brazil, it is also enabled by a series of previous social dynamics in the country. Nevertheless, 2018 is a milestone for the growth of the bullet caucus, which, according to DIAP, has grown from twenty-two to seventy members in the National Congress between 2015 and the aftermath of the 2018 elections. The election of Jair Bolsonaro, a former member of the group, for the presidency of the Republic certainly contributed to the discussions on punishment being brought to the forefront of the national political debate.

According to Novello (2018), one of the distinctive elements of the current bullet caucus in relation to the older politicians, who enunciated punitive and anti-

human-rights discourse, is the intensive use of new information and communication technologies. Debate about the influence of such technologies in the Brazilian political process is not new. Over the past decade, several authors have researched various aspects of the intersection between institutional politics and the internet, focusing on the uses of the various digital platforms (Marques et al. 2011; Carlomagno 2015; Amaral and Pinho 2017; Gomes 2019). Even so, the 2018 elections represented an unprecedented moment in terms of the centrality of these tools in political communication. The winner of the presidential election bet heavily on social media as a means of communication, overcoming the challenges imposed by his reduced support in the party system and, consequently, by the limited television time in mandatory political ads (Braga and Carlomagno 2018). The 2018 election, therefore, brought together two important novelties in relation to the previously observed functioning of the Brazilian political system: (1) for the first time a politician nostalgic of the previous military dictatorship came to the presidency; and (2) for the first time a candidate lacking the tools hitherto central to communication with the electorate, such as a coalition of parties and television time, betted almost all his chips on digital platform communication.

Considering this scenario, our research sought to understand whether the same intensity in the use of social media was true in the case of the bullet caucus and, mainly, what the discourses enunciated by the candidates for parliament in this environment were. Our research consisted of surveying the accounts of the seventy congresspeople of the current bullet caucus on Twitter and analyzing their publications during the official election campaign period between August and October 2018. Below we present some of the results.

2.1 The use of Twitter by bullet caucus candidates in 2018

Among the seventy congresspeople elected in 2018 listed by the DIAP as members of the bullet caucus, there was a huge disparity in the use of Twitter throughout the campaign. Just over half registered activity on the platform (forty candidates), and many created their accounts only after the election results. Even among those who used this social media platform it is possible to record extremes, such as Eduardo Bolsonaro, who published more than four hundred times (more than eight posts per day on average), and Captain Wagner, who made only two posts during the electoral period. In all cases, most publications involve little or no interaction with other Twitter users, confirming the use of the tool in a unidirectional way.

A superficial analysis of each candidate's profile on Twitter is enough to understand how central or marginal this tool was in the communication strategy of

their campaigns. Fifteen of the forty accounts with activity in the campaign period had fewer than fifty posts, which means less than one per day on average (Cabo Junio Amaral, Filipe Barros, Sergeant Fahur, Jerônimo Goergen, Fábio Henrique, Aluisio Mendes, Major Olímpio, Dayane Pimentel, Paulo Ramos, Alê Silva, Daniel Silveira, Gurgel Soares, Colonel Tadeu, Soraya Thronicke, and Capitão Wagner). The different intensities of presence on the platform were not, however, a factor of each candidate's profile, nor were they determinants of the type of communication that each candidate used in his/her campaign. In less active accounts throughout the electoral period, there were different forms of communication with the electorate, representatives from all regions and with different ages, professional politicians looking for reelection, and also new candidates. In other words, it was not possible to find a pattern among candidates who chose not to use Twitter or to use Twitter with low intensity. While Dayane Pimentel used her four publications to mobilize followers in favor of presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro, Alê Silva posted a series of links referring to other channels with campaign information. On the other hand, there were cases such as Filipe Barros or Jerônimo Goergen, who maintained an almost personal use of the platform, without making their candidacies or the electoral process central to their posts.

The categories formulated by Marques et al. (2011), in the analysis of José Serra's profile, and Almeida et al. (2019), in Bolsonaro's account, are useful to understand the communication of candidates in 2018. Many accounts include (1) the promotion of ideas, (2) negative campaigning, (3) mobilization, and (4) an agenda. However, these elements appear with different intensity in each campaign, revealing different strategies to communicate with the electorate. Particularly with candidates who used Twitter to publish their agendas, there was little room for other topics, with occasional manifestations of politicians' positions on such other matters. It is worth mentioning that the way in which the categories mentioned above appear in the analyzed material requires some adaptation. When it comes to promoting ideas, we rarely observe the presentation of concrete campaign proposals, such as bills or promises to allocate resources. Most of the time the ideas promoted appear as opinions about everyday events, as in the case of supporting police operations that result in the death of suspected criminals or defending abstract ideals, such as the defense of the traditional family. The negative campaigning, on the other hand, is more easily identifiable and, in the case of the congresspeople analyzed, referred almost exclusively to former President Lula, the Workers' Party, and the left in general. The mobilization posts often highlighted the success of some event held, the endorsement of public figures and collective actors to the campaign, and, when the congressperson at hand sought reelection, the accomplishments of the previous term, such as the allocation of amendments and resources to a region or sector in public administration. The dissemination of the agenda, which predominated in

some profiles, is often confounded with mobilization when calling voters to follow campaign events while portraying the candidate's meetings, leaflets, street walks, and motorcades.

Still, regarding the congresspeople's general remarks on Twitter, it is worth highlighting some cleavages that contribute to organizing different forms of communication between candidates and the public. The language used allows us to divide candidates who took on a formal tone in their communication and others who communicated more informally. The former were mostly candidates for reelection, such as João Campos, Alceu Moreira, Officer Gonzaga, and Captain Augusto. They focused on disseminating an agenda and defending the work carried out in the last period.

> Find out more about my work in the House of Representatives in favor of the military police and firefighters, in particular, and for the safety of all, in general. Get to know my proposals by visiting my website: http://www.subtenentegonzaga1231.com.br #semlutanaohaconquista pic. Twitter.com /2Meyq5sjzE (Subtenente Gonzaga)[15]

Even so, this tone was not adopted by all candidates for reelection, including politicians in office, such as Flávio Bolsonaro, Eduardo Bolsonaro, and Delegado Éder Mauro.

> Bolsonaro gave a beating to Globo's "sealing" journalists. Brazil has a way, but it needs a president with balls to put us in track. # Bolsonaro17 # ForçaeHonra # EM5500 #BancadadaBala #FederaldoBolsonaro pic. Twitter.com / NofyGeQONe (Delegado Eder Mauro)

Candidates who used Twitter to publicize their campaign rallies tended to restrict their communication to local issues, although in some cases they expressed their position on the presidential election or touched on national agenda themes. Alceu Moreira and Edio Lopes are good examples of this regionalized campaign profile.

> Mostarda and Tavares farmers and fishermen, I'm with you! I talked to the community in the region about the Lagoa do Peixe National Park, a conservation unit located on the South Coast. #RSnoRumoCerto #AlceuMoreira #DeputadoFeeral #Mostardas #Tavares pic. Twitter.com / va3TybKM1Q (Alceu Moreira)

On the other hand, we observed a large number of candidates who based their entire campaign strategy on associating their images with the presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro (PSL). By presenting themselves as the most legitimate representatives

15 We have gathered every tweet from every bullet caucus candidate who use Twitter during the official campaign period and from this database we chose some examples to illustrate our arguments. All of them are available in the original Twitter accounts, in Portuguese.

of Bolsonaro in each state, these candidates functioned as promoters of the presidential campaign. They were, for the most part, non-incumbents with a strong appeal to the idea of political renewal by the right, reactivating a conservative pride that had been dormant throughout the New Republic. This is the case of figures such as General Girão, Joice Hasselmann, Major Vitor Hugo, Carlos Jordy, Hélio Lopes, Delegado Éder Mauro, Delegate Pablo, General Peternelli, Sanderson, and, obviously, the current president's two sons, Flávio and Eduardo Bolsonaro.

> Gratitude is a feeling of good men. Thank you @jairbolsonaro. I have already been beaten for being the first journalist to stay by your side, captain, but time showed that I was right. Let's go # JoiceFederal1771 # Bolsjoice1771 pic. Twitter.com / hf7YYz7Zgv (Joice Hasselman)

Even among the congresspeople listed above, there are differences in how they articulate their proximity to Bolsonaro's candidacy and national themes. Both types of candidates mixed this profile with other forms of communication, and those who remained closer to the repercussions of the presidential race used a Twitter account verified in other countries as a second venue for commenting on electoral debates, interviews, and other live events.

Candidates who sought greater proximity to the national debate and the presidential race were also the ones who resorted to negative communication on the platform the most. They were constantly attacking those they identified as their main opponents: the policies, ideas, and leaderships of what they considered the left. They frequently associated left-wing politicians with diseases, moral corruption, or crime.

> Traffickers give orders from inside the prisons, Haddad goes to jail to find out Lula's directives for the PT electoral campaign. A criminal has to be treated like a criminal! # FlavioBolsonaroSenador177 # BolsonaroPresidente17 pic. Twitter.com / 1SyigBSAHt (Flavio Bolsonaro)

Candidates who avoided involvement in the national debate (or at least did so in a less assertive manner) communicated in a more positive tone, avoiding direct mentions of opponents.

> TAKING CARE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD #EDUBEM! Sulivan Mota, president of IPREDE, had the support of Eduardo Girão to continue his mission of helping children. He tells why Eduardo should get to the Senate. Watch and tag friends. Spread this message # EduBem900. pic. Twitter.com / gy85OMetKH (Eduardo Girão)

The cleavages between a formal and an informal tone, positive or negative messages, and national or local themes are some of the possibilities for classifying candidates into different groups according to the type of political communication they

promote on Twitter. It is beyond this essay's objective to explore more systematically the affinities and differences between the candidates' profiles. These initial observations contribute to a broader panorama of how this social media platform is used, which serves as an introduction to the topic that is at the heart of this work: the discourses on violence, punishment, public safety, and human rights that were driven by this specific group of candidates during the 2018 election campaign.

2.2 Discourses on violence

The discourses of these selected candidates on violence, punishment, public safety, and human rights took different forms throughout the electoral campaign. The variety of tones and content described above is also found in the most specific thematic section we intend to analyze. After carefully reading all the profiles in the official campaign period, we identified three types of arguments that, although interconnected, are worth discussing in greater detail. They concern (1) the relation between safety and punishment; (2) the defense of a war against crime; and (3) the connection between different forms of moral corruption. The last two arguments were most common among candidates who guided their campaigns by a greater proximity with the presidential race. The first argument, on the other hand, appeared in all accounts, albeit with enormous variations as to how the arguments were presented.

2.2.1 Public safety and punishment

The first aspect noticed when analyzing bullet caucus candidates' posts is the idea that citizens' safety depends on the State's punishment instruments. Absolutely no candidate proposes any alternative to guaranteeing public safety that does not involve the punishment of those considered a threat. At no time are there any proposals on prevention or the possible role of other State institutions in the production of a safer society. Likewise, there is no mention of the possibility of connecting public safety institutions with other public policies and/or other sectors of the State. This is true both for politicians who advocate for greater punishment within legal limits, through legislative changes, and for those who advocate for more flexible laws so that public safety officers can use violence with fewer restrictions and controls. This is a first difference that appears in the way candidates for Congress approach the relationship between public safety and punishment, separating two distinct and clearly identifiable groups of congresspeople: those who openly advocate for greater discretion in the use of violence by agents on daily events, and those who consider punishment as a

legislative prerogative, restricted to lawmaking processes. The difference becomes visible when it comes to the public support offered to police operations that result in the death of suspected criminals.

> I pay tax so policeman can kill tramp, and not to pet them. # BolsonaroPresidente17 https: // Twitter.com / JornalOGlobo / status / 1034632723594403840 ... (Carlos Jordy)

> Congratulations to the Military Police of Niterói, they canceled 6 CPFs [social security numbers] of highly dangerous criminals, who were bringing terror to the population! # Bolsonaro2018 # BolsonaroPresidente17 # FlavioSenador177 #brasil pic. Twitter.com / YiKoO4hDzr (Flavio Bolsonaro)

Candidates who support this open defense of violence by State agents also push for harsher legislation on crime and statutory reforms in a more punitive direction. In their opinion, these are two sides of the same effort to combat those who corrupt the social order.

> No more rubbing of a criminal's head. The omission of the state, the impunity, coupled with fragile and foul laws, created criminal factions, and only the opposite of that, that is, the state's attention, strong laws, and severe punishments for criminals, can dismantle organized crime. (Sergeant Fahur)

On the other hand, it was also possible to observe candidates who do not articulate their discourse on punishment through the repeated support for the use of force by State agents. In this sense, we highlight the case of Marcos do Val, who ran for Senator in the state of Espírito Santo, who stresses his distance from the idea that "a good criminal is a dead criminal," a common motto within this group of congresspeople. In highlighting his history of cooperation with US special security forces, he frequently reaffirms that public safety solutions include the use of police intelligence, better investigations, and new training for agents, among other similar initiatives. Even so, his discourse remains centered on the logic that impunity is the fundamental reason for the crisis that he identifies in the field of public safety. This diagnosis is common to all candidates, who defend the role of public safety agents in the formulation of solutions in this area. The premise is that the work of police officers and other public safety agents is constantly undermined by the action of other political and social actors, which would be at the origin of their movement in search of representation in institutional politics.

> Correcting: Arrested committing criminal acts, Criminals victimize themselves after committing crimes. 12665 lawsuits were filed against police officers who are increasingly discouraged from fighting

> crime. #Bolsonaronaredetv pic. Twitter.com / aLp4jexqQy (Cabo Junio Amaral)

> This recognition, on the part of society, must happen with due respect for the service of those who swear to fight and die for the country. On the part of the authorities, it is up to them to provide the best instruments, legal and material, for the fullness of that fight. (General Girão)

This is where the shared interests of public safety agents meet the broader discourse on public safety, violence, and punishment. The election of military personnel, current or former public safety officials, or candidates very close to these sectors becomes a mechanism for overcoming obstacles, in society and institutions, to the fulfillment of their fundamental mission. Each improvement that is guaranteed in the working conditions of the police, each source of external control over their activity that is removed, each amnesty that is granted to striking military movements reinforces the idea that only public safety agents can and should think about this issue, always in a way to guarantee more and harsher punishment to those who are considered criminals and/or dangerous. The circumscription of those who are legitimized to talk about public safety has to do with the logic of war discussed next.

2.2.2 The war against crime

The articulation between the defense of punishment as the sole solution to violence and the advancement of the shared interests of State agents is directly related to the notion that the tension between public safety and crime must be understood through a warfare framework of analysis. Posts that mobilized a military vocabulary, with terms such as *mission*, *combat*, *honor*, *battle*, *bravery*, and *heroism*, among others, were frequent. The appreciation of public safety professionals is presented as a recognition for their role in defending those who are on the right side in this war: *citizens*, *good citizens*, *honest citizens*, and other variations.

> Good Morning! This past week I met a lot of honest and good people. Sharing with these people the indignation I feel when I see the insecurity that plagues our country gives me the certainty that I am following a correct, just and straight path! # KatiaSastre2240 #CoragemParaFazer pic. Twitter.com / 24gIolOHKP (Katia Sastre)

Impunity, which, as seen above, is treated as the true root of unsafety, would not be an accidental product of malfunctioning institutions, but the result of the work of organized groups contrary to the defenders of order. Violence is presented as an orchestrated work, the result of actions by those who have not only broken their social ties but also want to attack and destroy the world from which they came. It is as if

criminals existed before the crime itself and their objective went beyond the most immediate material or symbolic gains. It is not the crime, the lawless action, that must be prevented, but the criminal, the figure of the enemy, that must be confronted and combatted. In the specific case of the electoral race, it is noteworthy how these congresspeople dedicated themselves to associating political opponents with the idea of crime or criminals. Little effort was made to define the characteristics of a criminal, the place he or she occupies in society, and his or her motivations. His or her figure is always presented from a negative perspective, as that of one who wants to corrupt values, attack the universe made of good citizens, and overthrow authority.

2.2.3 Facing political opponents: corruption, impunity, and the system

We can now return to the point discussed in the first topic about the relationship between public safety and punishment. We identified a common perception about the corrosion of authority. It is not by chance that the solutions offered always involve reinforcing the role occupied by State agents, either by defending the policeman's actions in the streets or by creating investigative systems and training models that better prepare police officers. In any case, as seen above, public safety officers must have the exclusive right to speak about, think of, and conduct public safety policies.

The valorization of authority is perceived as the only way to establish discipline. The worldview implicit in this defense is what Celso Castro (2011) defined as an authoritarian utopia, according to which the fundamental values of military organizations are transposed to society as a whole. In these deeply hierarchical organizations, discipline is responsible for keeping each individual in his or her place, working according to the reproduction of the status quo. It is a model that does not have any room for conflict, given that the relations between the actors are always vertical and criticism is perceived as a threat, insubordination, or lack of commitment to the institution. This ideal is evident in the recurring defense of the use of military personnel in traditionally civilian functions, such as education.

> Less gay-kits[16], more moral and civic education. Less gender ideology, more militarized schools. Less indoctrination, more education. Shall we talk about it? I await you on my [Facebook page]! #Educacao # MajorVitorHugo1701 # Bolsonaro17 pic. Twitter.com / aSF0teVH73 (Major Vitor Hugo)

Interestingly, the same congresspeople who defend the reconstitution of

16 This is a reference to misinformation spread by president Bolsonaro during the elections, when he claimed that when his adversary, Fernando Haddad, was Minister of Education, he ordered the distribution of pedagogic materials for elementary schools that encouraged kids "to become gay". See: https://theconversation.com/how-jair-bolsonaro-used-fake-news-to-win-power-109343

authority are those who take a stand against the system, against everything that is out there, presenting themselves as outsiders carrying the transformation.

> The "system" is much bigger than you think. Now it is agonizing and will fight against Brazil until the last second; but you will lose! (General Peternelli)

This move is possible through the association between politicians, human rights defenders, the press, and the *criminals*. In this line of thought, violent crime, armed criminality, and the dramatic events of daily unsafety would be only the most evident manifestations of a moral crisis that pervades all sectors of society, also taking place in institutions, political parties, and spaces of social organization, among others. The moral decay argument is common to different conservative discourses, in different times and spaces.

> The causes of the ethical and moral crisis, which is the basis of all other crises in our country, are increasingly red. It will take long years, perhaps decades, of hard work to unify the country. Politics needs honest and capable people for this mission. pic. Twitter.com / bhFmYFbDQE (General Girão)

In the specific case of the campaign we analyzed, this argument was articulated in conjunction with the constant allusion made by then presidential candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, to the period of military dictatorship (1964–1985). Thus, the somewhat undefined idea of a "system", constantly mobilized, seems to allude to actors and institutions that are related to the construction of the New Republic and Brazilian democracy in the last three decades.

> Generals, captains, good citizens of that country, revolted by the state of our Motherland, our civic and moral duty is to rescue it. The mission is noble. The ranks are very well profiled. pic. Twitter.com / uoW42vuYQU (General Girão)

The discourse that identifies a crisis of authority in the country, manifested in widespread impunity and the devaluation of public safety professionals, is the same that is found in the defenders of human rights, in certain social movements, and in the progressive parties considered to be allies of "criminals", that is to say, the actors who work actively to prevent the war from being won by good citizens. It is, therefore, a discourse of restauration. But to restore authority, discipline, hierarchy, and order, it is necessary to fight the bad guys in their various forms, in their different manifestations—from the violent criminal to the corrupt politician to the morally distorted press.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The recent Brazilian political conjuncture, especially since 2013, brought sudden and sweeping changes to well-established patterns in the relationship between political actors, challenging the parameters used by analysts to produce understanding about Brazilian politics.

Our work seeks to help understand such complex phenomena by addressing a fragment of the recent situation. Although partial, we believe that it summarizes part of the problem by articulating relevant aspects of the current crisis. In this sense, we highlight two components, with different durations, that seem to have taken an increasingly central place in the public debate over the last few years: tougher discourses on punishment by political actors and the intensive use of social media.

Contrary to what the successful presidential campaign indicated, the use of social media, at least in the case of Twitter, in congressional campaigns was not equally intense. We found significant differences in the use of this platform. Approximately one-third of the congresspeople elected in the bullet caucus used the platform intensively throughout the electoral period, whereas the rest preferred to engage in other political communication strategies. Although social media has grown in importance, it is not yet possible to assert that it has overtaken the dynamics of communication between voters and candidates. It is possible to deepen research in this area to understand more precisely the existing divides and the elements that determine why specific political segments choose to communicate through different platforms. That was not our intention in this text.

Our central concern was to understand how certain discourses appear in a given social media platform (Twitter) throughout the campaign. In this sense, we focused specifically on more frequent and important arguments. We realized that even a group that could be assumed to be homogeneous has outstanding differences. We found important cleavages in the tone of communication—institutional vs. informal, negative vs. propositional—as well as with regard to topics—national vs. local themes, relationship with the presidential race/lack thereof.

We conclude, therefore, that the forms of communication employed by political actors when using Twitter are not obvious. In other words, we cannot imply that members of a group such as the bullet caucus will use the same discourse. Instead, we must, through careful analysis of their communication practices, understand whether there are elements common to all of them and also what the marked differences in their participation in the public debate are. Hence, we can better understand how groups and discourses are formed and what transformations they go through in new environments of communication and political action. The next step in the research would be to expand the scope of analysis for other congresspeople in order to observe

whether the characteristics of the discourses we analyzed herein also appear in profiles other than the bullet caucus ones. Perhaps we will find that the defense of punitive platforms is central to the discourse of more political actors than we can imagine.

Our research revealed that all the profiles included the defense of punishment as the only way to build a safer society. This discourse perceives unsafety as a result of moral factors, which makes it essential to strengthen authority for the preservation of the good social order and the protection of those who are considered good citizens. This framework for the interpretation of crime and insecurity had already been identified by authors dedicated to the theme in Brazil (Paixão 1988). Between the 1970s and 1980s, when the theme of urban crime took on a greater role in the public debate, different authors perceived two types of narratives about the problem: on the right of the political spectrum, crime is perceived as a matter of moral order, a fight between good and evil, to be solved by the mechanisms of punishment, that is, by the imposition of force; on the left, the social character of the issue is highlighted, there being assumptions that only a series of social, economic, and cultural transformations, operated together, could solve the challenges then faced (Vansconcelos 2012).

After investigating the electoral communication of bullet caucus members, we confirm the permanence of this oldest cleavage, but we can go beyond it, qualifying new tensions and perceiving the paths through which it is reenacted. We established a difference that seems fundamental between those who advocate for legislative changes and those who support the violent action of State agents on the streets. The question of which actors have the legitimacy to judge and decide on the use of violence does not seem to be unimportant. The defense of increasing autonomy both for the armed institutions of the State and for their agents—summed up in the motto of greater "legal backing" for public security professionals—suggests the return of a relevant theme in the country's redemocratization process, when much was discussed about the extension of military power and the need for civilian controls over its exercise. In a country where the public monopoly on violence is a challenge yet to be faced (Adorno 2002), the establishment of clear procedures for the use of force is a subject of significant political dispute.

Perhaps that is why the 2018 campaign is so emblematic, as it allows us to resume the threads of this dispute without failing to update them in new terms. In this sense, we highlight the association between moral corruption and the New Republic (or even democracy), which is very striking in the discourse of those candidates closest to current president Jair Bolsonaro. If, at the transition to democracy, we observed a dispute for civilian control over military power, it is not surprising that now the defense of the autonomy of the armed forces of the State is associated with a diagnosis of the moral weakness of the democratic regime, of its incapacity and lack of strength

to face the evil that permanently threatens the world of the good. By recovering the social and political conditions that allowed for the appearance and growth of the so-called bullet caucus, as well as the fundamental axes of its discourse, we contributed to the recovery of the history that allowed the emergence of the current bloc in power. Even so, aside from the claims of novelty, the reasons that allowed the expansion of their social bases of support remain to be explained.[17]

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17 Some aspects of the so-called bullet caucus discourses cannot be further explored here. Issues related to racism and gender, which often accompany punitive discourses in the country, would need to be explored better at another time. Racism, although present, is often not made explicit, as pointed out by numerous reflections that have already studied the specifics of racism in the country (Freyre 1933, 1936; Guimarães 2004; Nogueira 2007). Gender issues, in turn, have been the subject of heated political disputes in recent years in Latin America (Biroli et al., 2020). How such axes are organized within the scope of the speeches characterized here is a matter to be explored in due course. But the preliminary analysis of the campaign material reveals a surprising silence of congresspeople on such issues when addressing the problem of violence, especially when it comes to racial debates.

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