



**The birth of the brazilian technoconservative ecosystem and the convergence of the attention economy with the culture war**

**O nascimento do ecossistema tecnoconservador brasileiro e a convergência da economia da atenção com a guerra cultural**

**El nacimiento del ecosistema tecnoconservador brasileño y la convergencia de la economía de la atención con la guerra cultural**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article proposes an analysis of the forms of organization as well as the techno-political strategies used by individuals, groups and companies that identify themselves as conservatives and that actively operate through their profiles in WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube, not only



monetizing their content, but also conforming what we are calling the Brazilian techno-conservative ecosystem. The text is based on an ethnographic research carried out on the mentioned platforms using the passive observer (lurker) technique, and is structured in two sections. The first section examines the transformations of the last two decades, highlighting the relationship between the growth of the extreme right in the 21st century, with speeches that revolve around a cultural war, intellectually and politically led in Brazil by Olavo de Carvalho and Jair Bolsonaro, respectively. The second section presents a diagram of this Brazilian techno-conservative ecosystem, linking its agenda with some of the main authors and books used to legitimize the speeches of digital influencers who have millions of followers on their social networks.

**Keywords:** digital conservatism, right-wing politics, attention economy, cultural polarization, technopolitics.

### RESUMO

O artigo propõe uma análise das formas de organização, bem como das estratégias tecnopolíticas utilizadas por indivíduos, grupos e empresas que se identificam como conservadores e que operam ativamente por meio de seus perfis no WhatsApp, Instagram e YouTube, não apenas monetizando seu conteúdo, mas também conformando o que estamos chamando de ecossistema technoconservador brasileiro. O texto baseia-se em uma pesquisa etnográfica realizada nas plataformas mencionadas, utilizando a técnica do observador passivo (lurker), e está estruturado em duas seções. A primeira seção examina as transformações das últimas duas décadas, destacando a relação entre o crescimento da extrema direita no século XXI, com discursos que giram em torno de uma guerra cultural, liderada intelectual e politicamente no Brasil por Olavo de Carvalho e Jair Bolsonaro, respectivamente. A segunda seção apresenta um diagrama desse ecossistema technoconservador brasileiro, relacionando sua agenda com alguns dos principais autores e livros usados para legitimar os discursos de influenciadores digitais que têm milhões de seguidores em suas redes sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** conservadorismo digital, política de direita, economia da atenção, polarização cultural, tecnopolítica.

### RESUMEN

El artículo propone un análisis sobre las formas de organización así como las estrategias tecnopolíticas utilizadas por individuos, grupos y empresas que se identifican como conservadores y que operan activamente a través de sus perfiles en WhatsApp, Instagram y YouTube, no solo monetizando su contenido, sino también conformando lo que estamos llamando el ecosistema technoconservador brasileño. El texto se basa en una investigación etnográfica realizada en las plataformas mencionadas utilizando la técnica de observador pasivo (lurker), y está estructurado en dos secciones. La primera sección examina las transformaciones de las dos últimas décadas, destacando la relación entre la plataforma basada en internet y el crecimiento de la extrema derecha en el siglo XXI, con discursos que giran alrededor de una guerra cultural, liderada intelectual y políticamente en Brasil por Olavo de Carvalho y Jair Bolsonaro, respectivamente. La segunda sección presenta un diagrama de este ecosistema technoconservador brasileño, vinculando su agenda con algunos de los principales autores y libros utilizados para legitimar los discursos de influencers digitales que cuentan con millones de seguidores en sus redes sociales.



**Palabras-clave:** conservadurismo digital, política de derecha, economía de la atención, polarización cultural, tecnopolítica.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The history of the territory now known as the Federative Republic of Brazil, particularly the transition from the monarchical to the republican period, was deeply marked by the presence and contestation of distinct conservative traditions. Among these, two stand out: one rooted in a scholastic epistemological orientation and the other influenced by positivism. The former upheld the defense of a colonial order led by the Crown and the Catholic Church, while the latter advocated for alignment with a secular, republican, liberal, and ostensibly scientific order, shaped by the European states of the time. These states, despite having colonized the Americas beginning in the 15th century, were undergoing profound political, cultural, and economic transformations due to the American and French Revolutions. In Brazil, the armed forces, influenced by positivism, began to support this emerging political trend, ultimately leading to the establishment of the republic following Brazil's independence in 1889.

Studies on Brazil's transition from monarchy to republic reveal that the conservative tradition defended by the Brazilian Crown—an inheritance of the Portuguese Empire rooted in colonial, mercantile, and Christian foundations—was in conflict with another form of conservatism. This latter conservatism, secular and ostensibly scientific, was championed by the military, who were influenced by liberalism and, above all, evolutionism. These influences remain evident in contemporary narratives from segments of the Brazilian armed forces. This is particularly clear in the document titled "*Projeto de Nação: O Brasil em 2035*" (*National Project: Brazil in 2035*), published in 2022 by the Vilas Boas Institute, the Sagres Institute, and the Federalist Institute—all of which are directly or indirectly linked to the Brazilian armed forces. The document asserts, without any scientific basis, that:

Even considering that, in the 21st century, any political-ideological profile is marked by contours that are difficult to define, it can be argued that the majority of Brazilian citizens identify themselves as evolutionary conservatives in the psychosocial realm and as liberals who are nevertheless aware of their social responsibility to support society's underprivileged layers through sustainable public policies (Sagres, 2022, p.15, freely translated).



However, while acknowledging these and other distinct strands of conservatism in the country's history—often marked by internal conflicts—it is important to highlight the findings of our investigations, which indicate that, in the mid-1990s, Brazil experienced a political realignment spearheaded by the conservative Brazilian writer Olavo de Carvalho (2014).

This realignment occurred because Carvalho managed to bring together diffuse conservative, traditionalist, and neoliberal segments with other extremist factions linked to Catholic, Protestant, business, military, integralist, and monarchist groups, among others. His objective was to revive this political spectrum, which, until the early 21st century, had been directly associated with censorship, persecution, torture, and death carried out by the military following the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil, which was followed by a civil-military dictatorship lasting until 1985 (Pierucci, 2013).

By proposing an ethnography involving individuals, groups, and companies identifying as conservatives and operating through their profiles on WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, it was possible to observe that Olavo de Carvalho's articulation with representatives of various far-right segments—reaching individuals from diverse backgrounds—coincided with the transition from Web 1.0, also known as the dot-com internet, to Web 2.0, or platform-based internet (Rosa, 2019). This transition is significant because the far-right progressively gained political ground in the 21st century, not only in Brazil but internationally, through the strategic use of digital platforms and the attention economy. These advances were accompanied by narratives asserting the existence of an ongoing cultural war that threatens Western ways of life (Da Empoli, 2019; Teitelbaum, 2020; Stefanoni, 2022).

From these initial observations, it becomes evident that the emergence of Brazil as a republic stems from conflicts between different conservative traditions—most notably colonial and evolutionary conservatism. This political spectrum, however, has undergone significant transformations throughout the country's history, culminating in its current configuration as proposed by Olavo de Carvalho. Carvalho successfully revived this spectrum with considerable assistance from digital platforms, resulting in what we have termed *technoconservatism* (Rosa, Angelo, Almeida, Vieira, 2024) or Brazil's *technopolitical conservatism* (Rosa, 2022). This phenomenon is organized around an informational ecosystem made possible exclusively through digital platforms. In this context, it is essential to address the interplay between economic and militaristic discourses, assuming that...



The internet claimed by Silicon Valley is portrayed as an ideal reflection of the Hayekian universe, where the dynamics of cyberspace, much like those of the free market, are similarly characterized by a "catalytic," "transcendental," spontaneous, diffuse, decentralized, emergent, and, above all, anti-statist order (Ceolin, 2022, p. 39, freely translated).

This article is the result of various investigations conducted by the authors into the different forms of articulation employed by the far-right through the actions of individuals, groups, and companies actively engaged on digital platforms. These actors establish the State, collectivism, communism, globalism, feminism, LGBTQ+ advocacy, indigenous rights, environmentalism, marijuana advocacy, and other similar causes as their main adversaries—if not outright enemies. Moreover, it is important to note that the research presented here is based on ethnographic procedures, specifically the "lurker" or "lurking" technique, wherein the researcher observes discussions on pre-selected social media platforms without engaging with questions or comments in these electronically mediated spaces (Orgadi, 2009).

Despite the analytical and textual limitations inherent to the subject under scrutiny, we will present some preliminary findings from these investigations. These findings explore the methods of far-right articulation, aiming to highlight their key agendas while examining the ways in which they seek to confer legitimacy upon their discourses through various strategies. These include investments in advertising and the instrumentalization of their primary "cultural warfare" arsenal—books (Rosa, 2022).

The decision to ethnographically study representatives of Brazilian technoconservatism, who operate daily across various digital platforms, was primarily motivated by the desire to understand their main methods of organization, legitimization, and dissemination of their narratives. The choice to focus on WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube is justified by their status as the most widely used social networks in Brazil in 2023, with 169 million, 142 million, and 113 million users<sup>1</sup>, respectively. Additionally, these platforms were selected to analyze the different modalities of interaction mediated by such digital companies, which operate as platforms, in both public and private dimensions.

For instance, WhatsApp allows access to private data shared within closed groups, accessible only through invitations sent via private phone numbers of these individuals. Instagram, by contrast, offers greater transparency regarding the sources of the information

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rdstation.com/blog/marketing/redes-sociais-mais-usadas-no-brasil/> Accessed on 07/09/2024.



produced and shared, given its nature as a digital platform that publicly provides user-generated content—if permitted by the user. YouTube, owned by Alphabet (unlike WhatsApp and Instagram, which are Meta platforms), serves as the primary engine for disseminating this type of conservative-leaning content, where Olavo de Carvalho emerges as a central figure. This is evident in the advertising expenditures made by companies such as *Brasil Paralelo* and *Revista Oeste*, which openly identify as conservative and recognize Olavo de Carvalho as one of their key intellectual references<sup>2</sup>.

This article is divided into two sections. The first examines the transformations that have occurred over the past two decades, emphasizing the far-right's activities, which found in Olavo de Carvalho and Jair Bolsonaro their intellectual and political vanguards, respectively, of the Brazilian techn conservatism that emerged in the 21st century. The second section not only outlines the agenda embedded in contemporary conservative discourses but also highlights the main authors mobilized to legitimize their narratives on gender, the environment, and race.

## 2 THE EMERGENCE OF TECHNOPOLITICS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FAR RIGHT

Starting from the premise that the transformations occurring in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century—particularly due to the increased use of the internet and digital platforms—are marked by phenomena such as the datafication of life (Lemos, 2021), data colonialism (Silveira, 2021), and platformization (Poell, Neiborg, Dijck, 2020), it becomes evident in analyses like Shoshana Zuboff's (2020) on what she terms "surveillance capitalism" and Nick Srnicek's (2018) "platform capitalism," among others, that our behaviors have increasingly been shaped by artificial intelligence. This modulation occurs through the capture of data we freely provide with every click or movement of the mouse while connected to the internet.

The data captured by these digital platforms are sold by corporations such as Google and Facebook to be used for predictive purposes by other companies. Zuboff (2020) calls this

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<sup>2</sup> <https://revistaforum.com.br/midia/2024/3/19/brasil-paralelo-gastou-r-22-milhes-em-redes-na-meta-em-anos-dobro-da-secom-155935.html> Accessed on 07/09/2024.



commodified data *behavioral surplus*. The resulting products are then sold in what she describes as "markets of future behaviors," where predictions are turned into commodities.

In his article *Psychology of Digital Crowds and the Analysis of the Democratic Subject*, Christian Dunker (2019) explores the political effects of these digital platforms, identifying the greatest threat to Brazilian democracy today as the narratives associated with what Theodor Adorno called the "fascist syndrome." According to Dunker, this syndrome arises when dominant emotions are grounded in segregative hatred, characterized by "the dualistic reduction of people into leader-follower or winner-loser categories, as well as the essentialist projection of enemies. Here, mass identification predominates, alongside a kind of hypnotic reaction of hatred that spreads by contagion" (Dunker, 2019, p. 128).

This diagnosis of segregative hatred, manifesting through a hypnotic reaction on digital platforms, also finds resonance in the works of Giuliano Da Empoli (2019). Da Empoli discusses the relationship between the international far-right and their political activities on social networks. He observes that during the dominance of traditional corporate media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, institutional politics displayed a centripetal tendency. In this context, the more consensual and coalition-based a political campaign was—and the more airtime it secured for propaganda—the higher its likelihood of electoral success.

However, with the growing use of digital platforms worldwide, Da Empoli notes the emergence of a centrifugal trend. This means that the more extreme, radical, polarized, vehement, or violent the discourse, the greater the chances of its amplification. This amplification is driven by the advertising-based business models of these platforms, which prioritize attention-capturing strategies over the quality or accuracy of the information disseminated.

Thus, the political polarization of the 21st century can be understood as an effect of radicalization promoted by digital platforms, as analyzed by Giuliano Da Empoli (2019). This phenomenon arises because the collection and subsequent commercialization of social media users' data have been weaponized not only for directing consumer interests but also for predictive political purposes. One notable example is the acquisition of personal data from over 80 million Facebook users by Cambridge Analytica. At the time, Cambridge Analytica was working on Donald Trump's U.S. presidential campaign under Steve Bannon's coordination. Their strategy involved using disinformation to manipulate user attention and sway Democratic votes (Rosa, 2019; Da Empoli, 2019; Mello, 2020).



Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the relationship between the rise of artificial intelligence, algorithms, and computers—technologies that were developed under strong state sponsorship during and after World War II and throughout the Cold War. These technological advancements were driven by the global power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, as both nations sought political, economic, and cultural dominance.

Although Alan Turing is widely credited with laying the groundwork for the creation of computers, particularly with his groundbreaking work in the 1930s (Miskolci, 2016), it is worth noting that his contributions were instrumental in the development of the first three computational technologies during and after World War II: the Z3 (Germany, 1941), the Colossus (United Kingdom, 1943), and the ENIAC (United States, 1946).

The communication network that became possible through the creation of computers was primarily developed through the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). In September 1969, ARPA launched ARPANET, the first computational communication network, connecting the University of California (Los Angeles and Santa Barbara), Stanford University, and the University of Utah. Its initial purpose was to create a communication system resistant to nuclear attacks (Miskolci, 2016).

This historical trajectory demonstrates that surveillance capitalism, platform capitalism, and platformization are consequences of the hypermilitarization that characterized the 20th century and extends into the 21st (Bordin, 2021). The international far-right's cultural war serves as a strategy to destabilize liberal democracies (Castells, 2018).

By leveraging digital platforms to produce and disseminate radical discourses that threaten liberal democracies—advocating for both Christian religious fundamentalism and free-market competition while addressing topics such as gender, the environment, drugs, and affirmative action—Olavo de Carvalho played a pivotal role. He curated, translated, and published works by conservative anti-communist authors through Brazilian publishers to legitimize his extremist narrative. Carvalho became one of the most influential contemporary conservative intellectuals in Brazil, offering his *Online Philosophy Course (Curso Online de Filosofia – COF)*<sup>3</sup>. These lessons often revolved around conspiracy theories linking entities such as the Workers' Party (PT), the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), communism, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the São Paulo Forum, and even international

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/@cursodefisofia> Accessed on 07/09/2024.





organizations like the United Nations (UN), to alleged strategies aimed at the destruction of Western civilization.

Thus, while the concept of technopolitics originally emerged from resistance strategies and social movements—primarily associated with the left—it has undergone a transformation due to the increasingly intense use of digital platforms. Political polarization, disinformation, and hate speech have become discursive practices embedded in the business models of these companies, which also profit from the commercialization of user data for predictive purposes (Zuboff, 2020). “In this sense, technopolitics also manifests as an emotional language of politics that permeates the everyday lives, practices, and symbolic universes of movements and individuals” (Panico, 2020, pp. 568-569).

According to Bruno, Cardoso, Kanashiro, Guilhon, and Melgaço (2018), the transition to the 21st century—previously characterized by the Benthamian/Foucauldian panoptic model that had served as an almost obligatory reference in the field of surveillance—seems to have given way to new sociotechnical and geopolitical arrangements. These changes have prompted a shift in focus among researchers, requiring new theoretical reflections on the subject. This shift is largely due to a significant increase in internet usage through digital platforms, resulting in: i) the intensification of algorithmic applications, ii) the hypertrophy of the "surveillance capitalism" model, iii) the recurrence of predictive effects on the behavior of individuals and populations, and iv) the development and experimentation of resistance strategies and efforts to counteract asymmetries associated with the specificities of contemporary surveillance. Therefore,

Both the development of new forms of surveillance and control and the experimentation with resistance and subversion strategies that engage with these dynamics constitute what we call "technopolitics." Emerging sociotechnical arrangements enable unprecedented strategies for contesting the use of technologies and for the aggregation of heterogeneous actors aiming to create, reinforce, or overturn forms of domination or exploitation—or even to cultivate new modes of existence and/or organization. In this sense, technopolitics can be broadly understood as a toolbox for addressing the sociotechnical conflicts of the present. They establish themselves as essential for analyzing, understanding, and acting within the world being shaped in the early decades of the 21st century—a movement likely to gain even greater significance in the years to come. Rather than pointing toward a scenario dominated by technological dystopias, we recognize technopolitics as a strategic battleground for a wide diversity of forces and actors (Bruno, Cardoso, Kanashiro, Guilhon, Melgaço, 2018, pp. 7-8, freely translated).

In this context, what we call Brazilian technoconservatism—or technopolitical conservatism with a Brazilian perspective—encompasses the use of emerging sociotechnical



arrangements led by companies operating as digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and others. These platforms capture and commercialize data extracted from their users, which is then utilized for predictive political purposes through emotional stimuli and disinformation.

Our research has revealed that conservatism has gained political breadth and legitimacy as a worldview largely due to the emergence of an attention economy driven by digital platforms. This economy operates by converting users' histories into products that are commercialized for predictive political purposes. The dissemination of the belief in an ongoing cultural war enables strategies aimed both at capturing the attention of users—framed as communities—and at neutralizing the activities of their perceived enemies. Additionally, it facilitates the extraction of political advantages through behavioral modulation enabled by algorithms and artificial intelligence.

### **3 ECOSYSTEM OF BRAZILIAN TECHNOCONSERVATISM**

Although various strands of Brazilian conservatism are, in their own ways, connected to their respective international counterparts, it is important to note that some issues prominent in the Global North—particularly in the European and U.S. contexts—are not as salient in Brazil. For instance, immigration, while directly tied to racial issues such as Islamophobia abroad, is less prominent in Brazilian conservative discourse. However, many similar themes exist between Brazil and Latin America, including the defense of free-market competition, Judeo-Christian values, the patriarchal family model, and compulsory heterosexuality. Yet, there are also cases where boundaries are less clear, such as with homonationalists and eco-fascists, who blur lines on topics like gender, sexuality, and the environment (Stefanoni, 2022).

Starting from the premise that the transformations at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century—particularly the intensification of digital platform usage—have made it possible for artificial intelligence to modulate behavior (Zuboff, 2020), this phenomenon extends beyond the economic realm to influence institutional politics, disrupting contemporary liberal democracies (Castells, 2018; Da Empoli, 2019). However, this does not imply that other modes of contemporary subjectivation outside digital platforms do not exist, nor does it mean



that behaviors have been universally and exclusively shaped by social media without any form of contestation or resistance.

Our research indicates that individuals, groups, and companies identifying as conservative in contemporary Brazil have been and are being shaped through the concatenation of various dimensions or layers of subjectivation, which are instrumentalized through digital platforms. The business model of Big Tech companies, operated through an attention economy, amplifies the reach of hate speech and disinformation that directly benefit the Brazilian and international far-right (Da Empoli, 2019; Rosa, 2022; Stefanoni, 2022).

We propose that these layers of subjectivation are organized into what we call the ecosystem of Brazilian technoconservatism. This ecosystem is structured around: i) Alternative media, which fosters a sense of belonging to a community supposedly immune to the ideological "contamination" of progressive and revolutionary intellectuals allegedly associated with communism, seeking to dismantle Western values rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition; ii) Publishers, such as Record, Ludwig von Mises (LVM), Armada, Instituto Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira, É Realizações, E.D.A., Danúbio, Katechesis, Ecclesiae, Avis Raras, Vide Editorial, among others; and iii) Publishing networks, such as Faro Editorial and CEDET<sup>4</sup>. The latter benefited directly from Olavo de Carvalho's curatorship in the selection, translation, and publication of books to legitimize his narratives, as was the case with publishers like É Realizações.

It is also necessary to highlight the direct connection between Brazilian technoconservatism and the CEDET group, which has over sixty iv) partner publishers<sup>5</sup> operating commercially across various regions of the country. Additionally, the ecosystem includes v) virtual bookstores<sup>6</sup>, created and organized in partnership with this network of publishers, in collaboration with vi) digital influencers such as Rodrigo Constantino, Ernesto Lacombe, Ana Caroline Campagnolo, Ítalo Marsili, Guilherme Freire, Antonia Fontenelle, Livraria E.D.A., among many others. These actors, including politicians, have amassed thousands or even millions of followers. This is exemplified by Brazil's most-voted federal deputy in 2022, Nikolas Ferreira (PL/MG)<sup>7</sup>, who has millions of vii) followers instrumentalized to disseminate extremist content.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cedet.com.br/> Accessed on 07/09/2024.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cedet.com.br/editoras-parceiras> Acesso em 09/07/2024.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cedet.com.br/livrarias-virtuais> Acesso em 09/07/2024.

<sup>7</sup> <https://livrariadonikolas.com/> Acesso em 09/07/2024.



The ecosystem also includes viii) national and international conferences, such as municipal, state, and national gatherings, as well as the CPAC (the world's largest conservative event). Originating in the United States in 1974, CPAC held five editions in Brazil during the Bolsonaro administration and up to 2024, bringing together conservatives from various strands. Additionally, it involves ix) religious groups of Christian tradition, x) military actors, xi) businesspeople, and other societal segments that adopt anti-communist rhetoric (Rosa, 2022).

The agenda articulated through this technoconservative ecosystem targets sexual and reproductive rights, environmental protection, the demarcation of Indigenous lands, affirmative action policies, labor unions, social rights, and the regulation of illicit drugs, among other issues. At times, it aligns with the positions advocated by the European and U.S. far-right, while at other times it diverges (Stefanoni, 2022). In this context, it seeks to dictate behaviors and "truths" from a prescriptive moral standpoint, which includes the normalization of sexual conduct, the imposition of a family model, the criminalization of drugs, and even the criminalization of communism—as evidenced in Bills 5358/2016 and 4425/2020 proposed by federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro (PL/SP), son of former president Jair Bolsonaro.

Based on the elements outlined above, we find it relevant to examine this ecosystem led by the far-right in Brazil, proposing a diagram composed of different dimensions through which a certain subjectivation process associated with Brazilian technoconservatism operates (Rosa, Angelo, Vieira, Aguiar, 2024). Thus, we will proceed from the understanding that...

The diagram is no longer a file, auditory or visual; it is a map, a cartography, coextensive with the entire social field. It is an abstract machine. Defined by functions and unformed materials, it ignores any distinction between content and expression, between a discursive formation and a non-discursive formation. It is an almost mute and blind machine, though it is what enables seeing and speaking. There are many functions and even diagrammatic materials because every diagram is a spatiotemporal multiplicity. Moreover, there are as many diagrams as there are social fields in history (Deleuze, 2019, p. 41, freely translated).

In this context, we propose that the diagram presented—composed of a technoconservative subjectivation (Rosa, Angelo, Vieira, Aguiar, 2024) articulated across different dimensions or layers and gravitating around an anti-communist discourse imported from McCarthyism by Olavo de Carvalho—updates the principles outlined by authors of the so-called modern conservative movement in the United States (Souza, 2021), as well as by other



representatives of distinct neoliberal, conservative, and traditionalist approaches from both the Global North and the Global South.

Indeed, the citation of conservative authors has been consistently used by representatives of this political spectrum to lend legitimacy to their discourses, no matter how absurd they may be. One example of this mindset can be found in a passage from *A Short History of Man* by Hans Hermann-Hoppe (2018, p. 134), an economics professor at the University of Nevada (USA) and a prominent representative of the Austrian School of Economics and paleolibertarianism. After completing his doctorate under Jürgen Habermas at the University of Frankfurt in 1974, Hoppe became a disciple of Murray Rothbard in the United States. In the book, he states: "The rich are generally brilliant and inventive, and the poor are generally foolish, lazy, or both. It is unlikely that fools, even if they form a majority, will systematically outperform and enrich themselves at the expense of a minority of brilliant and energetic people."

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that conservatism often begins with a strong critique of modernity. This is why many of its variants intertwine or even merge with traditionalism. According to Sedgwick (2020, p. 55), "a traditionalist may simply be a conservative, likely someone nostalgic and wishing to restore the customs of their youth," or "someone who prefers an established practice over something that replaced it" (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 55).

Sedgwick (2020) identifies three distinct phases in the history of traditionalism. The first phase, until the 1930s, was marked by René Guénon as the leading intellectual of traditionalism, proposing his perennialist philosophy through articles and books that circulated among a small group of followers. In the second phase, "attempts were made to put Traditionalist philosophy into practice, primarily in two very different contexts: Sufi Islam, as an example of Eastern metaphysics, and European fascism, as a form of rebellion" (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 56). The third phase, after the 1960s, saw "Traditionalist ideas gradually penetrating broader Western culture, eventually spreading to the Islamic world and Russia" (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 56).

For Sedgwick (2020), the traditionalist movement begins with the staunch defense of tradition, understood as beliefs, values, and practices transmitted since time immemorial. Traditionalists argue that these were progressively lost in the West during the second half of the second millennium AD. As traditionalist authors highlight, the main problem of modernity stems from the belief that "modern Western civilization is in crisis due to the loss of the transmission



of tradition, as explained in *The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927)” (Sedgwick, 2020, p. 55), a work by René Guénon (1977), often cited as the founder of perennialism, also known as traditionalism or the Traditionalist School.

René Guénon is not only considered the most important traditionalist intellectual but also significantly influenced the trajectories of Olavo de Carvalho and Steve Bannon—who vehemently defended a type of Western traditionalism aligned with free-market competition—and Alexander Dugin (2012), who, contrary to the aforementioned authors, advocates an anti-liberal and anti-American perspective, as seen in his book *The Fourth Political Theory* (Teitelbaum, 2020; Rosa, 2022). The divergences between the conservative perspectives of Olavo de Carvalho and Alexander Dugin are evident in their co-authored book, resulting from a debate titled *The United States and the New World Order* (Dugin; Carvalho, 2012).

These distinct variants of modern and traditional conservatism can be identified in the far-right populism of the 21st century, particularly in the rhetoric of figures often referred to as “gurus,” such as Vladimir Putin's consultant Alexander Dugin in Russia, Donald Trump's Steve Bannon in the United States, and Jair Bolsonaro's Olavo de Carvalho in Brazil. All three identify as conservatives and attest to some inspiration from the traditionalism inaugurated by René Guénon, as demonstrated by Benjamin Teitelbaum (2020).

Despite their shared connection to traditionalism, Alexander Dugin, Steve Bannon, and Olavo de Carvalho hold divergent views on various issues. However, they find common ground in their defense of a “values agenda,” which includes Judeo-Christian principles, compulsory heterosexuality, and the patriarchal family model. Differences emerge, though, in their stances on neoliberalism and free-market competition, as critiqued by Dugin (2012).

Their critiques of modernity, as well as of classical liberalism, communism, and Nazifascism, have led these thinkers, in their own ways, to promote rhetoric that challenges liberal democracies. On one hand, this has resulted in the endorsement of free-market competition as an intrinsic condition of human existence, as advocated by Steve Bannon and Olavo de Carvalho. On the other hand, it has led to its outright rejection, based on the argument that economic liberalism has created a world that disregards the most important aspect of civilization’s history: tradition, as asserted by Dugin (2012).

Thus, while Dugin (2012) represents an anti-liberal and anti-imperialist agenda that identifies the United States as its primary adversary, Olavo de Carvalho and Steve Bannon



advocate for free-market competition and U.S. imperialism. They draw on a variety of authors, notably Austrian economists like Mises and Hayek, paleolibertarians like Rothbard and Hoppe, and representatives of the modern U.S. conservative movement (Souza, 2021), such as Russell Kirk (2013) and the fusionists, who ground their arguments in anti-communist literature. The lack of familiarity with conservative authors in Brazil is highlighted by Olavo de Carvalho (2018, pp. 230-231, freely translated), who reflects on the dissemination of these ideas, many of which were introduced by him:

The first person to mention Roger Scruton to me, in the early 1990s, was Daniel Brilhante de Brito, the most cultured Brazilian I have ever met. I cited the English philosopher in 1993 in *The New Age and the Cultural Revolution*, predicting—nothing is easier in this country—that his work would hardly reach the awareness of our compatriots. Seven years later, the *Critical Dictionary of Right-Wing Thought*, funded with government money and authored by the crème de la crème of the outspoken left—104 intellectuals who promised to exhaust the subject—still shamelessly displayed their total academic ignorance of an author who, by that time, was already regarded in his country and the U.S. as one of the most vigorous thinkers in the conservative field. One can only offer as mitigation the fact that Scruton was not excluded out of personal spite. On the contrary, they were rigorously democratic in distributing their ignorance: they were equally unaware of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, Murray Rothbard, Russell Kirk, Thomas Sowell, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Alain Peyrefitte, and practically all the other authors without whom no "right-wing thought" could even exist to be "dictionary-ized."

Although leftist conservatism associated with Alexander Dugin is growing, it remains quite incipient in Brazil compared to its neoliberal counterpart promoted by Olavo de Carvalho. However, it can be found in movements such as *Nova Resistência*<sup>8</sup>, which operated within the Democratic Labor Party (*PDT*)<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, it is important to note that we will not analyze Dugin's resonance in Brazil, as we recognize the greater relevance of Olavo de Carvalho in shaping Brazilian technoconservatism.

From the works published by the publishers that make up this Brazilian technoconservative ecosystem, it is possible to understand the connection between their agendas and the authors frequently invoked to legitimize their discourses. Therefore, while their themes are diverse, we will focus on three of the main topics emphasized by this Brazilian far-right movement, spearheaded by Olavo de Carvalho: gender, the environment, and race. These topics

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<sup>8</sup> <https://novaresistencia.org/sobre-nos/> Accessed on 15/07/2024.

<sup>9</sup> <https://congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/area/pais/por-ordens-de-lupi-pdt-expulsa-50-infiltrados-de-extrema-direita/> Accessed on 15/07/2024.



are typically framed by technoconservatives using universalist assumptions, often linked to evolutionary or scholastic perspectives that prescribe models of conduct to be followed not only politically but also economically and culturally.

Regarding gender-focused publications, particularly critiques of feminist movements and studies, as well as LGBTQIAPN+ activism and queer studies, three books stand out as essential: *Ideologia de Gênero: Neototalitarismo e a Morte da Família* (Gender Ideology: Neototalitarianism and the Death of the Family) by lawyer Jorge Scala; *Feminismo: Perversão e Subversão* (Feminism: Perversion and Subversion) by state deputy Ana Caroline Campagnolo (PL/SC); and *12 Rules for Life* by psychologist Jordan Peterson, undoubtedly the most internationally significant of the three, with considerable influence among young audiences. These works are consistently cited to justify inequalities between men and women, naturalizing behaviors based on universal biological and religious principles. These principles serve to legitimize the patriarchal family model and compulsory heterosexuality (Rosa; Zamboni; Vieira, 2023; Souza; Rosa, 2023).

Regarding the environment, a particularly important book for Brazilian technoconservatives is *Psicose Ambientalista: Os Bastidores do Ecoterrorismo para Implantar uma Religião Ecológica, Igualitária e Anticristã* (Environmental Psychosis: Behind the Scenes of Ecoterrorism to Establish an Ecological, Egalitarian, and Anti-Christian Religion) by the self-styled Brazilian prince Dom Bertrand de Orleans e Bragança. This book was published by the publishing house of the *Instituto Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira*, named after the founder of the *Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP)*, an organization born from Brazil's Catholic far-right. In this work, the author claims that:

(...) we are faced with a very different reality. Radical ecology—described as an ecological religion by some serious and renowned scientists—has triggered an environmentalist psychosis. Under the pretext of saving nature, it in fact severely violates property rights, restricts agricultural and livestock production, and imposes limits on the legitimate economic progress of all segments of the population (Orleans e Bragança, 2022, p. 11, freely translated).

From this excerpt, it becomes evident how the defense of private property and free-market competition is universally framed as a kind of intrinsic social nature for any society aspiring to achieve the status of civilization. Within this framework, the environment is treated as a territory of potential products that must be exploited solely to ensure socioeconomic development. For





this to happen, Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, and other original populations are expected to conform to Judeo-Christian values to overcome their supposed state of inferiority. In other words, it is through this ethnocentric, Eurocentric, and even racist lens that the discourses of Brazilian technoconservatives are shaped. This perspective is echoed by Brazil's former Vice President, General Hamilton Mourão<sup>10</sup>, who stated: “We have a culture of indolence, which comes from Indigenous culture. I am Indigenous. My father is from the Amazon. And malandragem [trickery]? Nothing against it, but malandragem originates from Africans. So, this is our cultural melting pot” (Zamboni, Rosa, Souza, Bordallo, 2023, p. 158).

Here, it becomes clear that the discourse of population and societal hierarchization intertwines with environmental narratives, opposing all ways of life that do not conform to neoliberal capitalism. As a consequence of this opposition to social rights, we also find within the literature promoted by the international far-right the involvement of Black intellectuals who oppose racial quotas and other affirmative action policies. One prominent example is economist Thomas Sowell, a Black scholar with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, who has taught at universities such as Cornell, Amherst, and UCLA. In his book titled *Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study of Quotas and Preferential Groups*, Sowell (2016, p. 256, freely translated) argues:

Despite the tendency to view preferential groups and quotas as transfers of benefits—a zero-sum process—there are, in fact, many ways in which such transfers can become negative-sum processes, where what one group is allowed exceeds what another gains, leaving society as a whole worse off.

This passage clearly demonstrates an attempt to discredit affirmative actions, as well as other social rights, which are treated as commodities by the majority of those who identify as conservatives in Brazil and who operate under the influence of Olavo de Carvalho. Consequently, numerous references to Thomas Sowell (2016) can be found in statements made by digital influencers and politicians who discredit progressive arguments in defense of rights, favoring criticisms aimed at opposing state interventions and investments designed to reduce social inequalities.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/politica/2023/02/5070941-mourao-sobre-ianomamis-indio-quer-celular-caminhonete-e-ar-condicionado.html> Accessed on 15/07/2024.



#### 4 CONCLUSION

The article sought to highlight some of the key elements that shape the far-right agenda in Brazil, identified as Brazilian technoconservatism. This concept emphasizes the close relationship between conservative actions and digital platforms, which, as demonstrated in our research, originate from military and commercial stimuli. Despite textual, analytical, and methodological limitations, it is hoped that this article contributes to expanding the debate on the activities of this political spectrum and the strategies employed to legitimize its discourses, especially through the dissemination of polarizing and disinformative content.

Furthermore, it is essential to understand how technoconservatism not only reflects but also shapes contemporary political, social, and cultural dynamics. By exploring the instrumentalization of digital platforms by far-right actors, we observe the creation of an informational ecosystem that amplifies hate speech, reinforces social hierarchies, and challenges social, environmental, and minority rights. These practices directly challenge democratic principles and initiatives aimed at reducing inequalities, requiring increasingly interdisciplinary and critical analyses of the impact of digital technologies on the public sphere.

Finally, this analysis opens paths for future investigations into the relationship between conservatism, technology, and power, inviting researchers to explore how technoconservative narratives interact with phenomena such as political radicalization, cultural wars, and disinformation. It is hoped that the elements presented here provide a foundation for broader reflections that deepen the understanding of the strategies and impacts of this movement and its relationship with social and political transformations in Brazil and beyond.



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