

Strange fruit: The rise of Brazil's 'new right-wing' and the Non-Partisan School Movement

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Abstract

The new right-wing Brazilian Non-Partisan School Movement (in Portuguese, Escola Sem Partido, or ESP) was created in 2004 to denounce 'indoctrination in schools'. It has, however, had greater repercussions via a strong presence on social media. The objective of this article is to analyse these discussions on Twitter. ESP's official discourse and theoretical discussions about the role of social networks supported this study. The content and network analyses of the tweets reveal the following relevant conclusions: the dissemination of content is much stronger than any discussion, on the part of both the new right wing and the left-wing partisans; there is a predominance of ESP supporters in a discussion that has characteristics of an 'anti-public sphere'; communication between these two groups is weak; and the tone of the content spread by ESP supporters resonates with many features of president-elect Jair Bolsonaro's communication style.

Keywords

Activism, Brazil's new right-wing, Jair Bolsonaro, Non-Partisan School Movement, Twitter

Introduction

Much has been written on the growth of street protests and the new social movements in Brazil during and after the wave of mass mobilisations that characterised the events of June 2013. A large literature now exists on the 'Brazilian Spring', highlighting attributes such as the use of digital platforms by supporters and activists (Cammaerts & Jiménez-Martínez, 2014; Porto & Brant, 2015), the roles of mainstream and alternative media in framing the movement (Fonsêca, 2013), the protesters' partisan identification (Winters & Weitz-Shapiro, 2014) and the roots and possible developments of the movement (Vanden, 2014).

It is fair to say that 'what started as a protest against a 10-cent (.20 real) increase in the public transportation fare ... widened into a protest against general conditions and government action, if not against the whole neoliberal model' (Vanden, 2014: 233); that the 'demonstrations remobilized the collective forces' of an 'insurgent citizenship, reclaiming them for a new generation and for the contemporary streets of Brazilian cities' (Holston, 2014: 894); and that

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'broad segments of the population (from the lower and middle classes) had begun to mobilize and seek new and different political involvements and [progressive] responses' (Vanden, 2014: 237–8). Yet this is only one side of the coin. It is true that 'the protests articulate their arguments through new identity politics and through the medium of the internet' (Holston, 2014: 896); however, among the new identities raised were also conservative, right-wing and even far-right groups.

The protests started with young left-wing activists (mostly students) and rapidly broadened to include hundreds of thousands of middle-class protesters, generally with little in common. A 'struggle for ownership of protests' (Watts, 2013) – the political direction of the movement – soon ensued. From the beginning, there were signs of a possible turn to the right of the movement, such as the insistent rejection of political parties, as well as of Brazil's traditional social movements, civic organisations and workers' unions as legitimate participants. As Mische (2016: 43) argues, 'many long-time activists feared that this rejection of partisanship was an indicator of right-wing or even "fascist" tendencies within the movement'. Under these circumstances, the demonstrations often acquired a strong middle-class and anti-left tone.

Right-wing opposition attempted to kidnap the movement, seizing the opportunity to grow by criticising the left-wing government. In fact, the right-wing – until then hopelessly disorganized – became more active and visible. After the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, only a few isolated groups had claimed and expressed direct identification with right-wing ideas. Likewise, the inequalities of Brazilian society seemed to make these non-progressive political views unpopular. Right-wing politicians and parties therefore usually labelled themselves as being at the centre of the political spectrum. But during the 2013 protests, many people defined themselves as right-wing supporters¹ and some far-right protesters defended the return of military rule.

Now, rather than feeling guilt or shame for their ideological standpoint, right-wing partisans feel free to express their opinions on the streets after a long era of silence – that is, since the pre-1964 coup mobilisations – through both mainstream and social media. It could be said that the 'big protests tree' of 2013 grew a 'strange fruit' – or, as Fortes (2016: 218) states, 'the "anti-PT [Workers' Party]" sentiment that eventually emerged out of the 2013 protests set the stage for the formation of a new ideological and activist Right in Brazil'. This new right found a great front man in Jair Bolsonaro, the authoritarian populist who won the recent presidential elections in Brazil, after a campaign in which political violence overshadowed policy debate. Due to the cases of violence inspired by then-candidate Bolsonaro, an analyst (Sovik, 2018) also used the 'strange fruit' metaphor in direct connection with the violence, to which it can be added that 'many [people] fear that attacks will continue' (Brooks, 2018).

In this context, this article aims to shed light on one of the main political purposes of Bolsonaro: to halt 'left-wing indoctrination in public schools'. This claim is strongly supported by the Non-Partisan School Movement, and we will analyse the conservative activism of this movement on social networks in Brazil. The focus of this study is on clarifying the internal communication features of this mobilisation, created by right-wing actors on the internet.

The new right wing and the Non-Partisan School Movement

The June mobilisations posed difficult challenges for the Brazilian left, but protests against Dilma Rousseff's government were even worse. They took place from 2015 until the president's impeachment, then protesters took to the streets due a confluence of dissatisfactions: the economic crisis, the poor quality of public services and the corruption scandals – mainly the Lava Jato operation, which involved millions of dollars in bribes and implicated more than 80 politicians as well as members of the business elite, including the former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. It should be noted here that right-wing partisans learned new methods and tactics of mobilisation during the events of June 2013, which they used in these anti-PT protests.

Paradoxically, those engaged with this 'new right' share some features with leftist groups, such as street mobilisation and the strong use of social media to spread their political messages. Due to this first feature, Delcourt (2015: 13) points to a similarity between Brazil's new right and the Tea Party in the United States, while others draw parallels between the Brazil's radical right and Trumpism (Vigna, 2017). In trying to explain what is new in Brazil's 'new right', Cowan (2016: 348) highlights 'the context of social media, new technologies, and the entrenchment of identity politics'.

These features explain why a previously unknown movement called the Non-Partisan School Movement (henceforth referred to as ESP, the acronym of its Portuguese name, *Escola Sem Partido*) gained momentum and is now an important agent of the 'new right wing' in Brazil. Indeed, from the obscure creation of ESP in 2004 until 2014, the media ignored it (Brait, 2016: 162), and it only started to gain greater public visibility when its ideas took to the streets with protests against Dilma Rousseff. The picture of a man with a poster that read 'No more Marxist indoctrination – Enough of Paulo Freire' was all over social media.² The educator Paulo Freire is widely recognised around the world, and holds the title of 'patron of education in Brazil', but the leftist background of his ideas is abhorred by the right wing, so many conservative personalities, politicians, and groups (such as *Movimento Brasil Livre* [Free Brazil Movement], MBL) started to support ESP.

ESP was founded by attorney Miguel Nagib, who was inspired by similar initiatives in the United States, such as the now-defunct No Indoctrination website, in which students reported 'biased' teachers. This and other US initiatives did not, however, take the step that seems to have been fundamental for ESP to become more visible in Brazil: proposing legal initiatives to prevent 'indoctrination'. As legislative projects have obvious implications in the daily life of schools, they received media attention, generating reactions and thus more social repercussions.

Since it was launched, ESP has had a close relationship with the digital environment as it emerged from a website,³ which still exists today, that disseminates its proposals and receives tip-offs on 'ideological indoctrination' in schools and maintains profiles on Facebook (with almost 206,000 followers) and on Twitter (about 41,300 followers).⁴ The movement seems to have understood, as other right-wing political actors have, that its causes can now be articulated and disseminated through the internet (Engesser et al., 2017: 1110).

ESP's legal activism began in 2014 when Nagib wrote a draft Bill at the request of radical right-wing congressman of the Christian Social Party (Partido Social Cristão, PSC) Flávio Bolsonaro, Jair Bolsonaro's son. Later, other conservative politicians sought ESP support for initiatives against 'indoctrination in schools'. ESP is thus a strong supporter of this kind of action, and its website currently indicates another electronic address, with the suggestion of legislative texts (and municipal executive decrees) related to the proposal.⁵ According to a survey of the Teachers Against Non-Partisan School collective, ESP has inspired 124 legal initiatives so far, of which 90 are at the municipal level (with nine approvals), 22 are state initiatives and 12 are federal.⁶

The legislative projects inspired by ESP define the students as a 'captive audience' that must be protected from 'biased teachers'. Thus, to prevent 'indoctrination', one of these projects proposes to put a mandatory poster in elementary school classrooms with the 'teacher's obligations' – that is, rules such as not promoting their 'own interests, opinions, ideologies or ideological preferences' and 'fairly provid[ing] the students with ... the main versions, theories, opinions, and perspectives relevant to the subject'.⁷

Educational researchers have criticised this and other dimensions of ESP (e.g. Frigotto, 2017), such as the restriction of teachers' freedom and autonomy (values highlighted in the federal Constitution). It is clear that ESP seeks to impose parameters and control devices external to the educational context. At the same time, ESP's 'pluralistic' concern is inconsistent, mainly because it is linked to the idea that content and perspectives should be presented in a 'neutral' way. It

could produce socio-pedagogical contradictions, such as a lack of explanations for the reasons behind a teachers' strike.

In this case, teachers could be accused of 'promoting their interests', and it is important to note that the coincidence of ESP's legal and political activism increased after the cycle of student mobilisations (2015 and 2016) in public schools. In these cases, there was a strong political activism and youth mobilisation to improve education (Romancini & Castilho, 2017: 94). Civic debate and advocacy would be hindered or impaired with the approval of laws inspired by ESP, which would foster ideals of a technical and conservative education (Penna, 2017: 38).

A moral dimension was later added to the movement's conservative political dimension. Authors such as Miguel (2016: 595) note that the growth of ESP occurred when it came to emphasising not only 'ideological indoctrination', but also the fight against 'gender ideology'. In discussing this aspect, Franco (2017: 238) points out that ESP promotes a caricature of the theoretical field on the subject, pejoratively called 'gender ideology', associating it with a negative image and immoral behaviour. Indeed, it is possible to observe the same trend in other Latin-American countries, where the right wing creates a 'threatening fiction over' this term (Gallo, 2017). This could be an indication of the circulation of topics and issues of debate among right-wing groups in Latin America, likely benefited by the internet, which boosts the right-wing groups' articulation at the global level.

Analytical and theoretical dimensions

ESP's official discourse and conservative expression on the internet

Although studies on ESP are concerned mainly with critically exposing the characteristics of the movement, there are also some discussions about the movement's communication, as in work by Penna (2015, 2017) and Franco (2017).

Penna argues that ESP uses 'fascist discursive strategies', which relate to the demonisation of the 'other' – especially the teachers who were accused of being indoctrinators. The texts on the ESP's website refer to these individuals with deprecatory and dehumanising language: teachers who promote school 'contamination' are an 'army of partisans', so education must be 'disinfected' (Penna, 2017: 43).

These characteristics are exacerbated further in graphic content (cartoons and memes) spread on the internet by supporters, according to the author. The 'other' in sight might be the Workers' Party, 'communism' or thinkers associated with supposed indoctrination, always in terms of the perspective of dehumanisation of these opponents of the 'indoctrination-free' school. It is possible to see an example in the meme where Gramsci is shown as a vampire in a coffin, receiving a stake to the heart that represents the ESP movement, shared on the Facebook profile of ESP's founder.⁸

A simplistic and antagonistic discourse is thus elaborated, in which 'disqualification is not through a rational argument, but through personal attacks and images that represent the teacher, the school and its thinkers as threats to innocent children' (Penna, 2015). To the right wing, Gramsci and 'cultural Marxism' are seen as symbols of the left's 'indoctrination' project, as well as of Paulo Freire in more pedagogical terms.

In his study of ESP's website, particularly the section devoted to criticism of 'gender ideology', Franco (2017: 237) emphasises that the movement does not elaborate its own original discourse, but usually appropriates and manipulates texts and other types of content that have already been produced. The other strategy is to republish controversial news relating to extraordinary cases in school environments – such as a story about a principal who displayed images of sex between men to students who had been in a fight. In this way, an attempt is made to create the 'false

impression that the expansion of gender discussions has engendered a moral relaxation so great that it would have led to a much more frequent occurrence of such cases' (Franco, 2017: 238).

Selectivity and similar bias are found in cases such as supposed problems in textbooks, as pointed out by ESP. The concern is not to make a critical analysis of these issues, but rather to construct a Manichean perspective of the struggle between the 'good' (represented by the right-wing movement) against the 'evil' people (proponents of gender diversity treated as immoral). In summary, aspects such as Manichaeism, simplification, more reactive than argumentative content and a right-wing bias characterise the language used by official ESP channels, according to these authors.

Discourses of leaders and supporters

Among previous studies on the communication of ultra-right groups, Padovani (2016) notes that there is a trend in media being used by such groups to spread their ideologies. The channels then analysed (mainly websites) showed an inherently top-down form of communication. Nowadays, however, due to changes in the digital media environment, the author asks whether this model would still be applicable in arguing 'that we need to become more attentive to audience members' own contributions to the making of ultra-right discourses' (Padovani, 2016: 403). Indeed, this highlights the relationship between the discourse of the leadership and that of the followers in the age of interactivity.

The concepts that highlight characteristics such as leaderlessness, horizontality and spontaneity in social movements – as 'swarms' (Hardt & Negri, 2005) or 'networks' (Castells, 2008) – are not perceived in ESP, in comparison with the previous description of its origin and development. An alternative theoretical perspective is given by Gerbaudo (2012), who coined the term 'choreography of assembly' to stress the complex impact of social media in the 2011 movements in Egypt, Spain and the United States. Particularly noticeable in our use of this theory is the hypothesis 'that far from inaugurating a situation of absolute "leaderlessness", social media have in fact facilitated the rise of complex ... "soft" forms of leadership which exploit the interactive and participatory character of the new communication technologies' (Gerbaudo, 2012: 13).

Public sphere on the internet

The discursive production of social movements occupies a place in the spheres where debates about society occur – especially in Brazil. For Cammaerts (2007: 73), the contemporary landscape with a growing number of voices, each with different content, as well as several channels of expression makes the Habermasian model of a unified public sphere (a space of rational and consensual discussion of the society) almost inviable, yet the discursive differentiation and fragmentation of voices would not necessarily be negative for citizenship and democracy. From an agonistic pluralistic perspective, the author defends a democratic normative model in which different public spheres coexist (including counter-hegemonic ones), some of them interacting between themselves. Some of these spheres seek to penetrate the dominant public sphere, controlled largely by the state and the market, while others remain independent.

It is in these counter-hegemonic spheres that actors and social movements can connect and organise themselves to promote change. They can thus develop an 'understanding of civic engagement as both contestation and proposals for alternatives, as practices beyond protest' (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015: 7). Downey and Fenton (2003: 194) associate the dominant public sphere with media of this type, and counter-spheres with 'civic media'. In this way, it is possible to understand social media as an environment for counter-spheres; however, this environment has problems such as the commercial nature of platforms and surveillance:

At the same time, a lot of the information that we receive via social media platforms presents one aspect of an issue, bits of information or factoids, connecting likeminded users (within specific alternative public spheres) rather than challenging our presumptions or offering new perspectives. (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015: 7)

Due to such aspects, Cammaerts (2007) develops the notion of the 'anti-public sphere' – that is, the meeting of individuals who are against values of the culture of citizenship. In this case, unlike the idealised, potential or real form of democratic dialogue and the discussion space through which the notion of the public sphere was conceived for bourgeois liberal democracies, anti-public spheres serve as anti-democratic propaganda forums. In other words, they operate as spaces that empower participants of the conservative and reactionary movements, acting as 'echo chambers in which opinions and ideologies are reinforced and reproduced, and never challenged, critically questioned or held to account' (Askanius & Mylonas, 2015: 61).

The role of political extremism (right-wing and left-wing alike) in the emergence of digital echo chambers is highlighted by Bright (2018), who indicates that the confidence people have in their own beliefs is the main factor for a group not being open to debate. A group that communicates online, however, in relative isolation from those who think differently (for different reasons – among them safety), does not necessarily constitute an anti-public sphere, since the communication of this group can have criticality and internal dialogue, as well as appreciation of democratic values in an autonomous counter-hegemonic sphere model. On the other hand, what tends to predominate in anti-public spheres are precisely the types of authoritarian discourses, that promote hatred, intolerance, violence, and stigmatisation of certain social groups, constructed as the 'other'.

Research questions

From the previous discussion, we address the following research questions:

- 1 What is the position of people who are involved in Twitter discussions about ESP: against, favour or neutral? Is there any interaction among these people? If so, of what kind? In other words, is it possible to find a digital counter-hegemonic public sphere or an anti-public sphere?
- 2 Do supporters radicalise the discourse of the leadership of ESP, making extremist positions linked to the cause more explicit? This question is linked to Padovani's (2016: 401) claim that this is a common situation in ultra-right movements.
- 3 Is it possible to note, in conversations about ESP on Twitter, actors with greater influence, producing/spreading items with higher virality – possibly 'soft leaders', in the terms of Gerbaudo's theorisation?
- 4 Are there periods of greater activity during the period of analysis? If so, by which group? Why and what kinds of content were shared the most?

Research methodology

To understand these issues, data collection for our case study was carried out in various forms: bibliographic and media sources about ESP as well as Twitter data that addressed this subject. It is important to highlight that the number of Twitter accounts of Brazilian users is around 27.7 million (Aslam, 2018) – that is, 23.8 per cent of the 116 million Brazilian internet users. Although this is not as high a percentage as for other networks, its spreadability is high because Twitter's business strategy clearly relies heavily 'on playing a vital part in the corporate media ecosystem of news propagation' (Puschmann & Burgess, 2014: 47). Several studies point out that the architecture of Twitter as a political platform, used to spread data among other users, who 'can be both individuals and collectives, with aims that are strategic, casual, or a dynamic

combination of both' (Puschmann & Burgess, 2014: 47). Our study thus collected and analysed a set of tweets that approached the subject under scrutiny in order to understand such dynamics.

Tweets were collected during a seven-month period (28 May to 28 December 2017), using the hashtag #escolasempartido; during this time, nothing particularly significant was noted in terms of political changes associated with this movement. We ran tests with other hashtags before choosing the one that was most used and that had the greatest representativeness. The probable existence of ordinary people's activism against and for ESP – beyond the leaders of the movement or other institutions – also justified this option.

It is necessary to recognise Twitter's sample limitation as, despite the use of hashtag structure discussions on this platform, not all messages and conversations on the subject are captured (not all people use the hashtag). However, the use of thematic hashtags indicates a commitment to participating in a general debate, since following and posting a hashtag makes it possible for the user to communicate with the surrounding community (Bruns & Burgess, 2015: 13). In other words, 'hashtags have the intertextual potential to link a broad range of tweets on a given topic or disparate topics as part of an intertextual chain, regardless of whether, from a given perspective, these tweets have anything to do with one another' (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015: 5).

After data collection (the corpus contains a total of 8365 tweets), using the digital tool TAGS, tweets were transferred to another piece of software (Tableau) to perform some descriptive analysis. This approach allowed us to understand the temporal dynamics of hashtag usage; the amount of original content (tweets); content with mention to other users; as well as retweets appropriation, contextualised in the network analysis; this helped us to understand the dynamics of communication exchanges. In this case, the tools used were Tableau and Gephi. In order to select the metrics for analysis, we took Larsson and Moe's (2012) article as a point of departure, as the authors analysed the uses of Twitter in the Swedish elections in 2010. Finally, some of the most popular tweets were identified and studied. These were subjected to a semantic analysis in order to clarify the questions to investigate.

Analysis⁹

Descriptive analysis

The corpus contains a total of 8365 messages, 5662 of which were retweets, 1692 original tweets and 1011 @mentions (tweets with mentions to other users) (Table 1). There were 4574 profiles that had participated actively in the conversation mediated by the hashtag #escolasempartido and produced some content.

Table 1: Types and positions of tweets

Tweet type/tweet position	@mention		Tweet original		Retweet (RT)		Tweets sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Favourable to ESP	925	12.1	1407	18.5	5283	69.4	7615	91.0
Against or neutral to ESP	86	11.5	285	38.0	379	50.5	750	9.0
Sum	1011	12.1	1692	20.2	5662	67.7	8365	100.0

In Table 1, we can see the tweets classified among those who support the ESP cause and those who are neutral or against it (mostly in this sub-group). The classification of tweets under these variables was relatively simple due to the fact that the messages were short, clearly indicating their position. The analyses indicated a broad predominance (as might be expected) of the right wing (supporters who produced 91 per cent of the messages with the hashtag). The type of tweet that represents a clearer interaction (@mention) represents a minority in the whole

(12.1 per cent), with retweets (67.7 per cent) and original tweets (20.2 per cent) prevailing. Both the tweets of users favourable to the cause and those of those who were critics or neutral have this characteristic. In other words, the type of tweet most characteristic of communicational exchanges – not just the dissemination of content or expression of opinion – constitutes a minority in both groups (12.1 per cent for ESP and 11.5 per cent for critics/neutral). ESP-contrary and neutral users, meanwhile, produced more original tweets (38 per cent vs. 18.5 per cent).

Analysing the tweets' distribution on a timeline shows that ESP-friendly tweets (in blue) almost always prevail against counter or neutral messages in relation to the movement (in orange) (Figure 1).

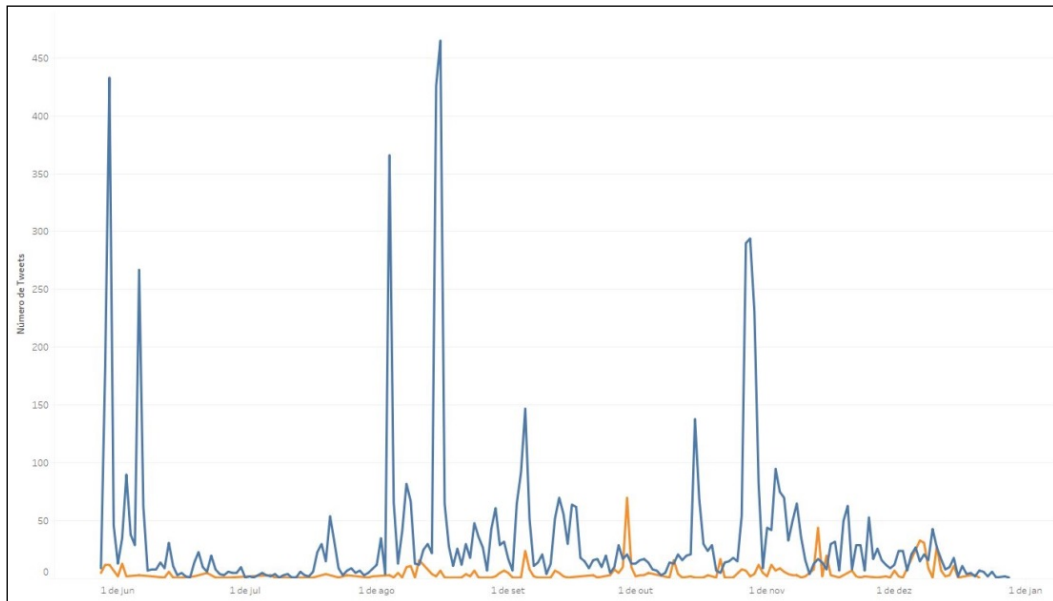


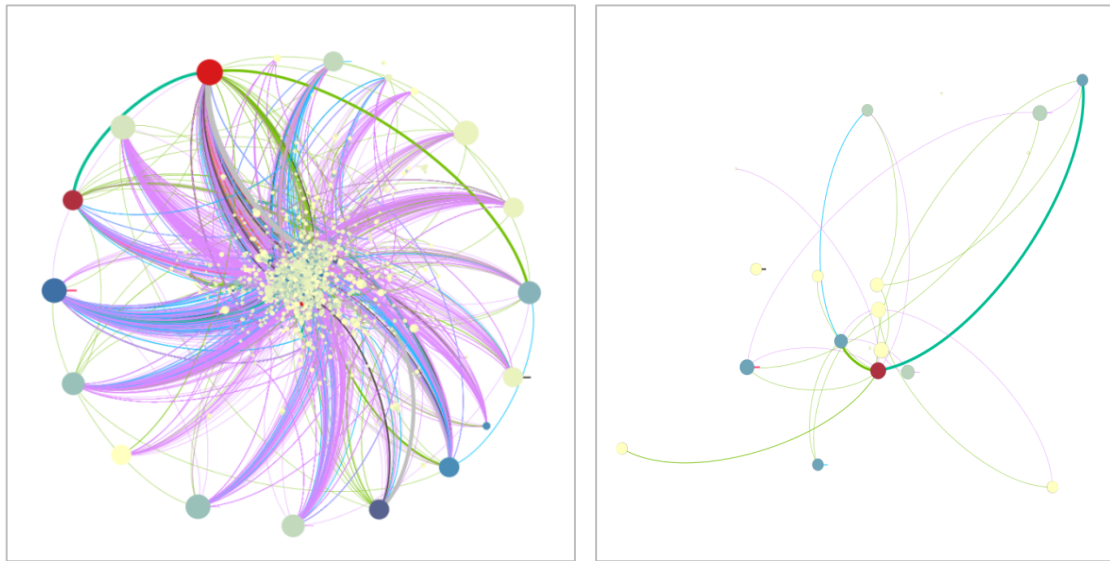
Figure 1: Tweets timeline

We can see five major 'peaks' in the circulation of pro-ESP content, and we will explore them later (as well as the smaller 'peaks' of tweets against the right-wing movement). However, we will present the network analysis in the next topic, reinforcing these peaks of descriptive analysis, as well as indicate characteristics of content circulation among users, identifying the main actors and their discourses.

Network analysis

As mentioned in the methodological section, we used social network analysis as a method to explore the tweets indexed by the hashtag *#escolasepartido*, as we can see in Figure 2.

It is possible to observe in the first image (Figure 1) that the general network topology (created with Yifan Hu's Gephi layout) indicates that there is a small set of more influential Twitter actors in conversations about ESP, represented by the larger points around which the discussion takes place. The smaller points at the centre represent the other actors who mentioned the issue less often. On the other hand, the edges in lilac highlight that the number of connections between subjects that had a great potential of virality largely correspond with the retweets.



* In the second image, the main actors of the network were identified with Gephi's scale of degree 40 >.

Figure 1: #escolasempartido full network with main actors*

In the second image in Figure 1, following the indicated metrics, the colour of the nodes (points/actors) represents the *output degree* of each user – that is, the darker its colour, the more messages were sent by this actor, and the lighter the colour, the more messages they received. Since the size of the node depends on its *input degree*, the larger the node, the more messages were directed there. It is possible to classify the most active users on the network according to Larsson and Moe's (2012) categories: (1) senders (darker, smaller points), (2) receivers (lighter, larger points) and (3) receptors (darker, larger points).

We can see in the examples of relevant users identified (Table 2) that the main profiles are of common people, usually right-wing individuals.¹⁰

Table 2: Classification of actors on networks, by messages' output and input degree

User category	Examples of identified users
Senders	user1, antesdepoisfede, user2
Receivers	bolsonarosp, user3, user4, user5, user6, user7, user8, deptsostenes, odecarvalho, conexaopolítica
Sender-receivers	user9, user10, user11, user12, user13

In accordance with the data presented previously, only one account (user2, highlighted in bold red) in Figure 1, opposes ESP. Three individuals (right-wing congressmen Eduardo Bolsonaro¹¹ and Sóstenes Cavalcante,¹² and 'philosopher' Olavo de Carvalho)¹³ and an informative profile aligned to the cause (*conexaopolítica*) were important receivers. In short, the network was characterised by the pro-ESP activism of 'ordinary' individuals – an aspect that will be discussed later.

On the other hand, from the second network we were able to identify the most central and influential actor in the network, represented by the largest red point. Considering this information with the qualitative analysis, we find a very active and conservative individual (user9). In addition, between those who sent and received the most messages (with the hashtag #escolasempartido), we also noted a point of stronger links (wider edges) – that is, the viral power of their links and content is very strong. In the next section, we analyse what became viral on this network.

Semantic analysis

As noted, there were five ‘peaks’ of ESP content’s circulation, which took place on 30 May, 6 June, 4 August, 16 August (one day after a demonstration convened by the ESP movement) and 28 October 2017. Table 3 highlights the characteristics of these tweets, as well as the figures of those most retweeted.

Table 3: Types of ESP-friendly tweets on days with more activity

Day	@mention		Original tweet		Retweet (RT)		Sum of tweets		Tweet with more RT	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
30 May	24	5.5	26	6.0	383	88.5	433	100.0	314	72.5
6 June	6	2.2	19	7.1	242	90.7	267	100.0	203	76.0
4 August	5	1.4	6	1.6	355	97.0	366	100.0	354	96.7
16 August	15	3.2	59	12.7	391	84.1	465	100.0	67	14.4
28 October	14	4.8	43	14.6	237	80.6	294	100.0	127	43.2

Table 3 highlights the importance of retweets in the discussion, indicating which had achieved greater popularity. It was not possible to reproduce the image of the first tweet (whose text is the following: ‘GLOBO X ESCOLA SEM PARTIDO – Vejam a manipulação da Globo atacando a #EscolaSemPartido na minissérie *Os Dias Eram Assim*’ [GLOBO X NON-PARTISAN SCHOOL – See Globo’s manipulation in attacking #NonPartisanSchool in TV series ‘Days Were So’]), because whoever elaborated it had their account suspended. As for the others (Figure 2), we can observe the general appearance of right-wing content.



Sources: <https://goo.gl/uNggvL>, <https://goo.gl/unJ9w1>, <https://goo.gl/mSNP6C> and <https://goo.gl/jFPQ3A>.

Figure 2: Posts with most retweets by users favourable to ESP¹⁴

Looking at these tweets and user accounts, we see the relevant use of media, including those produced by users themselves, and also that these accounts are those of real people (not bots). The case of the first tweet (which is not in Figure 2), however, allows us to problematise the ‘amateurism’ of the productions and the ‘spontaneous’ content of mobilisation as the individual who wrote the message (user3) is, or was, in fact an employee of congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro.¹⁵ This man has a YouTube channel¹⁶ with several videos in support of Jair Bolsonaro, and his tweet seems to have been written with the goal of being highly propagated in the discussion, especially because there is a short video in which the user himself speaks to the camera in a critique of the TV series *Os Dias Eram Assim* (in a free translation, ‘Days Were So’), a series that tried to show daily life during Brazil’s military rule, defending ESP¹⁷ in an emotional

way (calling the channel ‘dirty Globo’). This assessment stemmed from the understanding that this series in fact attempted to undermine the ESP movement.

The second tweet (the first in Figure 2, by user6), in turn, uses one medium (*JornaLivre*) fully aligned to ESP, biased and of low quality, to disseminate this story, and is a perfect example, among other manifestations, of this right-wing trend. On the other hand, the following two content excerpts, from the accounts of Eduardo Bolsonaro and user9, used static images that seek, in the first case, to ‘prove the indoctrination’ and, in the second one, to criticize the ‘troublemaking’ enemies of ESP.

The strongly emotional tone comes back in the fifth tweet (by user10), also accompanied by a short video, in which a teacher says that ‘students should not be used as mass of manoeuvre’ and that the problem of Brazil’s education is not a lack of resources but rather the formation of ‘partisans’ in schools. It thus makes an association – common among ESP’s supporters – between the education’s lack of quality and ‘indoctrination in schools’. The problem, she says, will be solved next year when, ‘God willing, we will have a right-wing president’.

The most significant tweets from these five days of intense circulation of content (left or neutral) appear in Table 4. Obviously, it should be pointed out that the production of this type was much smaller and it is possible to perceive again the importance of retweets and that a low number of @mentions equally draws our attention.

Table 4: Types of ESP-opposing tweets on days with more activity

Day	@mention		Original tweet		Retweet (RT)		Sum of tweets		Tweet with more RT	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
29 September	0	0.0	8	11.4	62	88.6	70	100.0	56	80.0
13 November	0	0.0	7	15.9	37	84.1	44	100.0	36	81.8
7 December	0	0.0	5	15.1	28	84.9	33	100.0	13	39.4
8 December	1	3.2	6	19.4	24	77.4	31	100.0	17	54.8
11 December	2	7.1	0	0.0	26	92.9	28	100.0	25	89.3

All the most retweeted tweets in this group were still online, so it was possible to reproduce them (Figure 3). It is important to note that the third-day tweet was also the most widespread on the fourth day, so there are only four tweets in the figure.



Source: <https://goo.gl/RYC67p>, <https://goo.gl/xB9U6E>, <https://goo.gl/gpnmEC> and <https://goo.gl/7G2pzm>.

Figure 3: Tweets most retweet by users against to ESP¹⁸

It is possible to notice that the use of media (along with the tweet) properly created by the users is less frequent, where a cartoon made by the author himself is preferred (user2); the dissemination of a critical material to ESP by an online vehicle (*Nexo Jornal*), an online newspaper that seeks to distinguish itself by more analytical approaches; a council woman’s report contrary to ESP (in two tweets transmitted by an institutional account) and, finally, another message,

composed by a council woman from the Workers' Party on the same subject. Critical and informative content is what prevails in these tweets.

However, there are no significant discussions either among these ESP-opposing users or between ESP-opposing users and those who are in favour of the proposal. There are a few (usually teachers – perhaps because they are the group most affected by ESP) who try to escape from what we might call the intrinsic limits of Twitter – that is, the message format limited to 280 characters (the limit used to be 140 until mid-2017). They seek, for example, to elaborate more developed texts on another platform and make it available in more fruitful conversations.¹⁹ Another teacher published a set of tweets with links to discuss the subject with another user (favourable to ESP).²⁰ In both cases, however, the discussion had no follow-up. At least these frustrated debates do not have the general fate of the conversations between left-wing and right-wing users on Twitter – that is, ironies²¹ on the meaning of the proposal, rudeness²², accusations²³ or mutual cursing.²⁴

Discussion and final considerations

Following the objective and the research questions, we present a more general and conclusive data analysis. In relation to RQ1, we wanted to identify who was involved in discussing the topic (friendly, against or neutral) and found that it was mainly right-wing supporters of ESP who used the hashtag #escolasempartido. We also found that there were few interactions between groups in favour and those against the cause. Even in both main profiles of participants, we notice an uncivil way of using the media – that is, a use that does not encourage debate, but rather reinforces general beliefs, tending towards emotional – even inflammatory – language, as observed by Perrin and Vaisey (2008) in letters to the editor. Unlike these authors, we did not find two parallel audiences, as both supporters and non-supporters showed the same uncivil behaviour towards the other group (as would also be observed in Brazil's presidential election). Perhaps the network of discussion studied can be seen as 'antisocial': deeper dialogue is thin both between opposing groups and internally in each of them (in this case, phatic messages of mutual support prevail). The notion of 'anti-public spheres' (Cammaerts, 2007) thus seems to be valid in the description of what represents the subject investigated.

In relation to RQ2, the official/unofficial communication of the movement on the internet is very close, in themes and language, to debates on Twitter. Thus, in most cases, these right-wing discourses on social media do not 'radicalise' the movement positions. There is, however, a critical tone of debauchery in the conservative enunciation of ESP that permeates the communication of leaders and supporters alike. It is possible to characterise the tweets' discourse more broadly as an expression of an emotional character that seeks to convince not by well-grounded ideas but rather by a rhetoric of 'accusation' and 'indignation'.

At this point, it is important to note that these features match the rhetoric of Bolsonaro's presidential campaign, particularly in terms of his strong emphasis on topics of morality and 'against political indoctrination'. He also used to lie (for example, when, during an important TV interview on Globo Network, he mentioned the so-called 'gay kit' (Romancini, 2018) that had been given to students at public schools) and was 'accused of benefiting from an undemocratic and criminal industry of fake news' (Phillips, 2018). His supporters shared this content on all digital platforms, mainly WhatsApp.

In response to both RQ3 and RQ4, it can be said that, while communication seems fairly horizontal (there were 4574 profiles involved), with a low presence of 'official' voices of ESP, we identified 'soft leaders' in the case of individuals, such as user3 and user9, who tried to appear only as supporters, but could potentially be professional activists with conservative causes (this is certainly the case for the former). They produced and shared content many times, using participatory media techniques (narratives like YouTubers, memes and short videos with the ability to be broadly disseminated). This type of content, following analyses of 'peaks', dominates

the periods of greater activity on Twitter. At the time (2017), this was a relative novelty in the political communication of Brazil's right-wing views; however, such content also marked Bolsonaro's use of social media in his campaign.²⁵

Some authors argue that Twitter offers more opportunities for participants from extremist movements (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016: 596), due to the reduced textual space. This limitation makes the discussions much less argumentatively developed. In fact, it is difficult to develop the nuances and opacities that characterise the deepest messages based only on the texts of tweets. This, coupled with a more mediated rather than dialogical character of what participants post, might hinder the crucial component of public debate: the development of a well-grounded opinion. This is mainly due to the fact that this kind of discussion involves more complex issues (Bergie & Hodson, 2015: 264), with education certainly being one of them.

The fact remains that we do not yet know whether this emotional and antagonistic way of communicating, born in digital networks, has been transferred to broader political discourse of Brazil's right-wing groups (e.g. Bolsonaro's campaign and potentially his future government) or whether there is an interplay or mutual reinforcement between these spaces. It is true, though, that previously Bolsonaro and other actors of the Brazilian right wing made outrageous statements, often seen only as jokes, with no consequences.

Bolsonaro's victory changes the game. Today, promoting more dialogic and rational ways of communicating is a new topic for Brazilians. We need to discover how to produce it, both in tweets and on the streets.

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Notes

- ¹ A survey with protestors in the city of São Paulo in June 2013 shows that 20.7 per cent of them identified their political orientation as ‘right’ (Porto & Brant, 2015: 193).
- ² This picture can be seen here: <https://goo.gl/1b3Qt5>.
- ³ See <http://www.escolasempartido.org/>.
- ⁴ Respectively at <https://pt-br.facebook.com/pg/escolasempartidooficial> and <https://twitter.com/escolasempartid>.
- ⁵ See <https://www.programaescolasempartido.org>.
- ⁶ See <https://goo.gl/56BSXE>.
- ⁷ See <http://escolasempartido.org/deveres-do-professor>.
- ⁸ See <https://goo.gl/KpGNqd>.
- ⁹ For ethical reasons, we prefer not to use the real names of user accounts that are not individuals or public entities in the presentation of the data analysed in the sequence.
- ¹⁰ This feature is observed in images used by individuals on their Twitter profiles (e.g. right-wing symbols, the Brazilian flag, photos of Jair Bolsonaro), as well as the types of messages they usually publish on Twitter.

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- ¹¹ He is the third child of Jair Bolsonaro. On the first round of the elections, on 7 October, he received the most votes of any federal congressman in Brazil's history (1,843,735).
- ¹² He is a member of the Evangelical caucus and was re-elected on 7 October with 94,203 votes.
- ¹³ This individual has a history of defence of conservative causes using social networks. Gatehouse (2015) provides some information about Carvalho and other Brazilian right-wing partisans.
- ¹⁴ Texts on the posts: 'Socialism and Liberty Party (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, PSOL) have lost school's council to students' parents' (first post); 'There is no indoctrination in school, buddy, trust me. #EscolaSemPartido' (second post); 'School is not a political committee and students are not electoral partisans' (third post); 'Firstly, get indoctrination out of schools. #EscolaSemPartido' (fourth post).
- ¹⁵ We discovered this through this post in a Facebook group: <https://goo.gl/17aJ23>.
- ¹⁶ Available at <https://goo.gl/wQpBVY>.
- ¹⁷ Although the user account has been suspended, the video is available on YouTube: <https://goo.gl/pqVxk5>.
- ¹⁸ Texts on the posts: 'Amem #ensinoreligioso (religious education) #STF (Brazilian Supreme Court) #escolasempartido' (first post); 'The map that plots #EscolasemPartido's projects in the country. Mapping allows identification of political parties and religious group of supporters. Story by @NexoJornal:' (second post); '#URGENTE (breaking news) councilwoman @samiabonfm denounces a coup to approve #EscolaSemPartido's project at @camarasp' (third post); 'Lost to (councilman) Holyday, today. The Non-Partisan School Project was not voted. #escolasempartido is #escolacomcensura (censored school)!' (fourth post).
- ¹⁹ It is the case of a user who tried several times to interact with ESP partisans, showing a text against this cause (<https://goo.gl/ctGVBR>); however, he was not able to generate debates.
- ²⁰ See <https://goo.gl/FcD6ya>.
- ²¹ See <https://goo.gl/bPF2ia> and <https://goo.gl/GYGT4e>.
- ²² See <https://goo.gl/xhjDbm> and <https://goo.gl/Rx8n7D>.
- ²³ See <https://goo.gl/VdRd3E> and <https://goo.gl/aZVxDh>.
- ²⁴ See <https://goo.gl/aJ5MXG> and <https://goo.gl/UZPjMM>.
- ²⁵ It is important to note that the first public speech by Bolsonaro after the election was via a live stream on Facebook.