

BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Unveiling the Paradox

**Bolsonaro's Openness to Venezuelan Refugees as a Challenge to the
Narratives of Right-Wing Populism**

Bachelor Thesis

Bratislava, 2024

Adela Sadloňová

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Adela Sadloňová

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is the work of my own and has not been published in part or in whole elsewhere. All the literature and other sources I used are listed in the bibliography. The language proofreading of the thesis was provided by online proofreading tool Grammarly.

In Bratislava, February 16, 2024

Adela Sadloňová

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Abstract

Author: Adela Sadloňová

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University: Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts

Thesis Advisor: Mgr. Clarissa do Nascimento Tabosa, PhD.

Head of the Defence Committee: Prof. PhDr. František Novosád, CSc.

Thesis Defence Committee: Prof. PhDr. František Novosád, CSc., doc. Samuel Abrahám, PhD., prof. PhDr. Iveta Radičová, PhD., Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, PhD., prof. Silvia Miháliková

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The thesis aims to explore the relationship between right-wing populism and anti-immigration narratives and policies. According to the traditional narrative and several academic studies, right-wing populism is predominantly associated with a dismissive stance on immigration, based on nativist principles. By using the securitisation theory of the Copenhagen School, the case study analyses the attitude of a former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro towards refugees during the Venezuelan crisis. Bolsonaro successfully took advantage of the situation by adopting a securitising discourse directed at Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the Brazilian left. Combined with offering support to the Venezuelan opposition and showing hospitality towards the refugees, Bolsonaro was able to politically benefit from the crisis by blaming the left responsible for the alarming situation in Venezuela. On these grounds, Bolsonaro deviates from the far-right mainstream by adopting a welcoming approach towards the refugees in order to securitise the political left in Brazil and beyond. The thesis aims to challenge the conventional narrative and contribute to a broader understanding of the complexity of the right-wing populist strategy.

Keywords: Bolsonaro, Brazil, immigration, left, refugees, right-wing populism, securitisation, Venezuela

Abstrakt

Autorka bakalárskej práce: Adela Sadloňová

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Členstvo komisie pre obhajoby bakalárskych prác: doc. Samuel Abrahám, Ph.D., prof. František Novosád, CSc., Mgr. Dagmar Kusá, Ph.D., prof. Silvia Miháliková

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Cieľom tejto práce je preskúmať vzťah medzi pravicovým populizmom a proti imigračnými naratívami a politikami. Podľa tradičného naratívu a viacerých akademických štúdií sa pravicový populizmus spája prevažne s odmietavým postojom k imigrácii, založenom na nativistických princípoch. Na základe teórie sekuritizácie Kodanskej školy sa v prípadovej štúdií analyzuje postoj bývalého brazílskeho prezidenta Jaira Bolsonaro k utečencom počas krízy vo Venezuele. Bolsonaro úspešne využil situáciu tým, že zaujal sekuritizačný diskurz voči venezuelskému prezidentovi Nicolásovi Madurovi a brazílskej ľavici. V kombinácii s ponukou podpory venezuelskej opozícii a prejavom otvorenosti voči utečencom dokázal Bolsonaro z krízy politicky ťažiť, a to tak, že obvinil ľavicu zodpovednú za alarmujúcu situáciu vo Venezuele. Na základe týchto skutočností sa Bolsonaro odchyľuje od bežného rámca krajnej pravice tým, že zaujal ústretový prístup k utečencom s cieľom sekuritizovať politickú ľavicu v Brazílii i mimo nej. Cieľom tejto práce je spochybníť konvenčný naratív a prispieť k širšiemu pochopeniu komplexnosti pravicovo-populistickej stratégie.

Kľúčové slová: Bolsonaro, Brazília, imigrácia, ľavica, utečenci, pravicový populizmus, sekuritizácia, Venezuela

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Introduction

Beginning in the summer of 2010, the Venezuelan migration crisis has become one of the most serious challenges in the modern history of the Latin American continent. The socio-economic instability, followed by political crisis has led the country to a humanitarian catastrophe. Shortages of food, electricity, and medical care, accompanied by insecurity, crime, and human rights violations, have become an everyday reality for millions of Venezuelans. The situation escalated in 2015, following the global fall of oil prices, which the Venezuelan economy relies on, condemning much of its population to extreme poverty. The authoritarian government of leftist President Nicolás Maduro has failed to address the critical situation, resorting to increasing repression instead. Furthermore, the arrival of the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 overwhelmed an already dysfunctional healthcare system, providing millions of Venezuelans with another reason to migrate. These were the factors leading to the largest recorded refugee crisis in the recent history of the Americas (IOM, 2022).

The migration crisis that followed has had far-reaching consequences for the entire continent. Among the most affected countries have been Colombia and Brazil, Venezuela's western and south-eastern neighbours. Colombia is currently the second country in the world hosting the largest number of refugees or people in need of international protection counting 2.5 million, just behind Turkey with 3.7 million (UNHCR, 2022). Brazil, as the continent's leading power, has also played a significant role in managing the crisis, accepting a substantial number of Venezuelan migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. As of October 2020, Brazil hosted at least 261,400 Venezuelans, representing 18% of the total 1.3 million migrant and refugee population in Brazil (World Bank, 2021). The Brazilian administration has played a crucial role in diplomatic efforts concerning the political situation in Venezuela, as well as in the domestic management of the crisis. This includes generous asylum granting, implementation of integration programmes, and provision of humanitarian aid.

These figures are particularly interesting because, for four years of the massive Venezuelan exodus (2019-2022), Brazil was led by a nationalistic populist president,

Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a former army general. As a presidential democracy, the president of Brazil is equipped with a wide range of powers, allowing him or her to make decisions on various policies, including those concerning migration. In the name of conservative ideology, Bolsonaro's political agenda has been characterised by advocating for economic growth, often at the expense of the environment and indigenous populations, restoring order by increasing domestic security, and promoting traditional values associated with Christian evangelical faith. Besides this, Bolsonaro is known for his admiration of the military government ruling Brazil from 1964 to 1985, misogynist statements, as well as his strong opposition to abortions and LGBTQ rights (Britannica, 2023). Regarding immigration, Bolsonaro's stance is generally against benevolent policies, arguing in the name of Brazil's sovereignty and fight against crime and violence. He portrays immigration not only as a security threat, but also as a threat to national culture. Bolsonaro successfully confirmed these convictions in Brazil's withdrawal from the UN Migration Pact during his administration (Londoño, 2019). However, when it comes to Venezuelan migrants, he adopted a different approach, referring to them as “brothers who need our (Brazilian) help” (Muggah, Abdenur, 2019).

Bolsonaro's profile aligns him with the far-right of the political spectrum. Emphasising his own ideological convictions has gone hand in hand with attacks on the political left, portraying it as dangerous to Brazil and as a threat *per se*. Targeting the political left played a crucial role in the context of 2022 presidential elections in Brazil, as Bolsonaro's main opponent was Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a well-known leftist candidate. Bolsonaro faced a tough opponent given Lula's widespread popularity and historical significance. He had already served as president for two consecutive terms (2003-2011), leaving office with 83% approval rate (Bloomberg, 2010). Moreover, Lula is considered the founder of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (The Workers' Party) and the driving force of the modern united Brazilian left.

Given Lula's popularity, Bolsonaro's securitisation of the left turned into one of his main political weapons in his run for re-election. By the securitisation of the left, we mean the way Bolsonaro presents the political left as an existential threat, embodied in the example of devastated Venezuela. This enabled him to take the extraordinary measure within the far-right politics, represented by the welcoming approach to

migrants. In most cases, Bolsonaro adhered to the established custom of far-right principles. He generally opposed foreign immigration, especially in large numbers. However, what is puzzling about the case of Bolsonaro's response to the high influx of Venezuelan migrants is the fact that he and his government took a different stance, which departs from the standard.

The case study addressed in the thesis deviates from other cases in which far-right governments adopt an anti-immigration position (Lutz, 2018; Mudde 2013, Rydgren, 2008). We question what explains Bolsonaro's open doors position towards Venezuelan migrants? Our main argument is grounded in the securitisation theory from the Copenhagen School that looks at how particular actors frame certain issues as threats in order to justify the adoption of extraordinary measures. We argue that in the case of Brazil, the benevolence of far-right populist President Jair Bolsonaro towards Venezuelan migrants did not correspond with his general stance on immigration to Brazil. Nor did it reflect the traditional right-wing populist attitude to the issue. Adopting a welcoming approach to arriving Venezuelans fitted into Bolsonaro's domestic political agenda, using migrants as a tool to achieve political and ideological objectives in the upcoming elections. Simultaneously, it represented a part of the broader strategy of securitisation of the political left in Brazil and Latin America as such.

1. Historical context

1.1 The Venezuelan disaster

Venezuela's modern history has been closely linked to oil, which is simultaneously its blessing as well as its curse. After the discovery of rich oil reserves in the Orinoco Belt in the 1920s, the country experienced rapid economic growth. It successfully transformed into a powerful petrostate, becoming one of the five founding members of OPEC and a dream destination for thousands of desperate Europeans escaping World War II. Unlike older Latin American democracies such as Mexico (1911-1913), Argentina (1916-1929), and Uruguay (1919-1933), Venezuela did not end up in a violent coup after the democratic revolution in 1958 that replaced a military dictatorship. For the following decades, Venezuela served as an example to its continental neighbours, being the most modern and prosperous country in Latin America (Reid, 2017, p. 167).

However, the distribution of oil profits was highly unequal, mainly benefiting a small powerful elite, leading Venezuela once again towards authoritarianism. Despite numerous development measures and rapid modernisation, the country was still facing increasing political turmoil, economic hardship and growing corruption. The economic boom was unsustainable, and the country's dependency on oil, its main source of wealth, took its toll. The one who took responsibility into his hands was military commandant Hugo Chávez, who organised two unsuccessful coup attempts. However, in 1998, he was finally successful, becoming a democratically elected president known for his socialist program promising a "social revolution" (also known as The Bolivarian Revolution) that would bring Venezuela's wealth back (Lee, 2017).

Although his agenda helped improve the living conditions of many Venezuelans, particularly those from lower social classes, it was very costly and eventually led to even deeper indebtedness. Chávez took advantage of high oil prices, which only lasted until the late 2000s. Consequently, he was no longer able to sustain his massive development programs funded by oil exports. As a result, Venezuela's progress came to an end and was replaced by a rapid decline. Since then, the country has fallen into a

severe economic, political, and ultimately humanitarian crisis. The situation has worsened significantly after Nicolás Maduro took over the presidency (Lee, 2017).

Since 2013, the country has turned into turmoil, facing unprecedented economic, political, and societal problems. Millions of Venezuelan citizens have been suffering from scarcity of basic goods, including a lack of food supply, regular power cuts, inaccessible medical care, and other failures to meet the essential needs. The 2015 global fall in oil prices exacerbated the situation further, as the Venezuelan economy has remained dominantly reliant on oil extraction, processing, and export. The subsequent hyperinflation led to protests, which were violently suppressed by the government of Nicolás Maduro, the leftist president. Maduro has been attempting to consolidate his position through massive repressions towards the protesters and potential political enemies. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic he implemented a state of emergency, which has enabled him to further strengthen his control over the population (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

The recent findings show that Venezuelan intelligence services are responsible for committing crimes against humanity of unprecedented dimensions, which are perpetrated to ensure that Maduro's government stays in power. There are two officially recognised perpetrators: the military intelligence service, known as DGCIM - the Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence - and the civilian intelligence agency, known under the acronym SEBIN - Bolivarian National Intelligence Service. The main task of these units is to eliminate both external and internal enemies of President Maduro's regime (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Based on findings of the Human Rights Council's *Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, there has been increasing evidence of extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment since 2014. The growing trend of committing these acts is a consequence of declining democracy, economic collapse, institutional dysfunction, omnipresent corruption, dominance of the army over other state forces and several more factors. All of them result in impunity and inciting violence.

The victims include individuals from all strata of the society, such as government critics, opposition leaders, military dissidents, civil servants, judges, journalists, human rights defenders, and mainly ordinary people (Human Rights Council, 2020). Nevertheless, the country, especially its southern region bordering with Brazil, has become a battlefield for several players. The first one is represented by state armed forces and intelligence services of Nicolás Maduro's government. The second one can be encompassed by the term Colombian guerrilla groups, consisting of National Liberation Army (ENL), Patriotic Forces of National Liberation (FPLN) and groups emerging from FARC - the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. These foreign armed units are taking advantage of the decaying state and often replace the state apparatus by introducing their own rules over the conquered areas. (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The third, no less important element, are so called *sindicatos* - armed criminal gangs operating around the gold mines, which have grown in significance due to the state's financial inability to extract oil. All these units are simultaneously trying to take control of the territory, usually by violent means (Crisis Group, 2019).

Maduro's government has completely failed in fulfilling the needs and protecting the rights of Venezuelan citizens. On the contrary, it does the exact opposite in order to secure its own political survival. The variety of actors, consisting of state forces and guerrilla groups, creates a vicious circle of insecurity and organised violence. Venezuela has turned into a failed state, ruled by a repressive government, military, and criminals that are often hardly distinguishable from one another. The everyday existential concerns coming from the non-fulfilment of a wide range of basic physical and emotional needs leave millions of Venezuelans with no choice. The only solution to ensure a better future for them and their families has been to leave their homeland. Thus, the country that used to provide refuge to thousands of people escaping World War II has become the venue of one of the largest human displacement crises in the world.

It is precisely the left-wing Venezuelan government that is arguably responsible for the destruction of the country and the unprecedented crisis affecting all areas of life for its inhabitants. Poverty, violence, and instability are direct consequences of its defective economic policies and violent enforcement of legitimacy. In the context of a

destroyed country, Bolsonaro saw an opportunity to benefit from the situation and use the fleeing people as a tool for electoral success.

1.2. Brazil's response to Venezuelan crisis

The economic situation in Venezuela has led to an unprecedented crisis, with more than 7.7 million people forced to flee since 2015 (UNHCR, 2023). Given the severity of the situation, it has required a thorough collective approach.

The unfortunate political developments in Venezuela and their far-reaching implications resulted in the creation of a multilateral body named the Lima Group. It was established in August 2017, bringing together 18 countries of the continent with the aim to find common solutions to the crisis. Among its main tasks was pointing to the massive human rights violations, especially regarding the freedom of expression, and increasing number of political prisoners. Moreover, it criticised the breakdown of the democratic rule and urged Maduro to enable free and fair elections in Venezuela. Although the Lima Group lacked a common institutional framework, it significantly helped to create a common discourse regarding the issue, which had been previously denounced or underestimated by some of the countries in the region (Serbin Pont, 2018).

From the position of a bordering country, as well as a regional leading power, Brazil's response was highly significant. It was one of the countries that initiated and decided upon Venezuela's suspension from the regional trade organisation MERCOSUR (The Common Market of the South) for the “rupture of the democratic order” on August 5, 2017 (MERCOSUR, 2017).

The influx of Venezuelan migrants to Brazil intensified in 2018, as the conditions in Venezuela had dramatically worsened. On May 5, 2019, Brazil decided to withdraw most of its embassy staff from Venezuela. However, unlike the embassies of its continental neighbours, the Brazilian embassy in Caracas remained open, thus avoiding breaking diplomatic relations entirely. This was primarily due to the fact that Brazil wanted to keep the borders open, as there were about 10,000 Brazilians residing in Venezuela and hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan refugees who needed to cross the border to Brazil (Paraguassu, 2020).

The area most affected by the migratory flow has been the Brazilian state of Roraima, the first destination of fleeing Venezuelans after crossing the border. After reaching the border town of Pacaraima, the majority of the people headed to Boa Vista, the capital city of the northernmost state. These locations have also served as rescue centres, where most of the humanitarian aid has been distributed. The turning point in the crisis management occurred after the then President of Brazil, Michel Temer, visited Roraima in February 2018 and declared a state of social emergency. Consequently, the powers of state and local authorities have been devolved to the Brazilian federal government. This has assigned the armed forces, specifically the army and the police, to lead most of the operations while providing \$60 million in funding from the federal budget to handle the situation, expecting a further intensification of the exodus (Rendon et al., 2018).

Two key official strategic operations have been introduced. Both of them, along with several other government initiatives, have been coordinated under the umbrella of a government agency named Casa Civil. The first one, named *Operação Acolhida* (Operation Welcome), concentrates on the provision of humanitarian aid, including shelter, food, and medical care. The second one, known as *Operação Escudo* (Operation Shield), intensifies customs control with the aim of ensuring security and preventing threats, such as drug or human trafficking, to which refugees are extremely vulnerable (Rendon et al., 2018).

Considering that this thesis focuses on a welcoming approach towards refugees from Venezuela, the emphasis will be placed on Operation Welcome. It is important to note that Jair Bolsonaro assumed the presidency on January 1, 2019, only two months after his predecessor, Michel Temer, had announced the beginning of the action. Therefore, the majority of the operation was carried out during Bolsonaro's administration.

The unprecedented wave of migrants arriving in Brazil required that the Brazilian federal government took a complex response to effectively manage the humanitarian challenge. Operation Welcome started on February 28, 2018, and has been conducted mostly by the Brazilian Army with significant help from non-governmental and international organisations. This includes UN bodies, namely IOM, UNHCR, and UNICEF, as well as many civil, religious, and philanthropic entities.

The operation provides emergency assistance to incoming refugees based on three pillars:

- (1) *Border Management* - securing reception, identification, health checks, immunisation of incoming migrants;
- (2) *Accommodation* in the border cities, including food, education, health and psychological care, and social protection;
- (3) *Voluntary Relocation* - migrants may choose to move to other parts of Brazil with better prospects for economic opportunities and integration (IOM, 2023).

The response has become more efficient since December 2019 when Brazil's National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) decided to accept thousands of asylum-seekers as refugees on a *prima facie* basis. As a result, the entire recognition process has accelerated, and 21,000 Venezuelans have been granted refugee status without the need for an interview (UNHCR, 2019). This decision has helped to address the critical situation and the burden of the massive number of Venezuelans seeking asylum in Brazil, which amounted to 53,713 in 2019. The previous year, this number reached 61,391 (Integral Human Development, 2022).

According to the latest data from December 2022, the operation has provided a total of over 2.6 million attendances, registered more than 450 thousand people, and integrated more than 89.9 thousand Venezuelan migrants and refugees (Casa Civil, 2022). Once the identification process has been completed, migrants are required to get vaccinated against epidemic diseases in the region, namely MMR, yellow fever, and chickenpox, to be allowed to stay in Brazil. The vaccination is provided directly at the border (Ommati, 2021).

The operation pays special attention to child migrants, who are provided with a “Passport for Education”, a kit that includes information about school enrolment in Brazil, as well as materials that facilitate cultural orientation for arriving families in the new country (OIM, 2023). Incoming Venezuelans also have access to social assistance programs provided by the Brazilian government, which target households with the lowest incomes. The most popular welfare program in Brazil, known as *Bolsa Família*, provides cash transfers to poor families if they ensure that their

children attend school, get vaccinated, and have their health regularly monitored. In 2020, there were approximately 16,700 Venezuelan beneficiaries of *Bolsa Familia*, and this number continues to rise (UNHCR, 2021).

Despite several shortcomings stemming from the large number of refugees, language barriers, bureaucratic obstacles, and militarisation of the action, Operation Welcome has fulfilled its purpose and served as a model for other countries in the region dealing with the influx of Venezuelan migrants.

1.3. Partido dos Trabalhadores and the Brazilian left

In order to explain Bolsonaro's decision to welcome Venezuelan refugees and understand his strategy of securitising the political left, it is necessary to consider the political developments and current societal situation in Brazil. In 1980, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Workers' Party, was founded in São Paulo. It was formed as a coalition of leftist groups in response to the chaos caused by the decline of the military regime and the massive industrial strikes of 1978-1979. Lula gained fame as the main figure of these strikes and took the leading position within the party.

PT is unique in Brazil's history as the only party created from below, with its foundation rooted in the organised working class, including workers, trade unionists, students, and intellectuals. The party's ability to avoid destructive internal conflicts and attract leftists from across the political spectrum has made it “the biggest, most original, and most successful left-wing party” in Latin America (Reid, 2014, p. 140-141). Alongside this success, Lula, who himself started as a poor factory worker, has emerged as the undisputed leader of the Brazilian left.

After three unsuccessful presidential campaigns beginning in 1989, Lula finally won the 2002 elections and defended his position four years later. Despite several scandals happening during his administrations, he enjoyed great popularity, especially among citizens with lower incomes, thanks to providing vast government social programs that lifted millions of people out of poverty. Thus, he earned the status of the “champion of the poor” (Reid, 2014, p. 157). His agenda has been based on fighting poverty and inequality, and his rhetoric naturally emphasises this need, which has led to accusations of populism. However, Lula has avoided the dangerous element of

division between “us” and “the others”. The most significant measures introduced during his administrations include the *Bolsa Família* (a large-scale welfare program for poor families), *crédito consignado* (consumer credit), the introduction of university quotas, and raising the minimum wage. Although Lula's government has lifted many people out of poverty and provided their children with education, it has not been without corruption scandals. The most visible one, called *Mensalão* (a neologism for “big monthly payment”), occurred during Lula's first government (2003-2007). The leftist coalition did not have a majority in Congress, and several of its members were accused of buying parliamentary votes based on monthly payments to get projects passed (Memória Globo, 2021). Nevertheless, Lula managed to distance himself from the scandal and maintain power. He owes much of his success to his personal charisma, rhetorical skills, and ability to appeal to the poorer strata of society, from which he himself comes.

Leaving the office with an 83% approval rate (Bloomberg, 2010), he chose Dilma Rousseff as his successor since the Brazilian constitution did not allow him to run for the office for the third consecutive time. As a graduate economist, she was named the Minister of Mines and Energy in 2003 and became the chair of the Brazilian state-run oil concern Petrobras. In 2005, Lula named her chief of staff. Dilma was known for her determined and strong personality, as a former guerrilla group member imprisoned and tortured during the dictatorship, as well as a survivor of cancer. Her reputation, together with Lula's tremendous help, led her campaign to a successful end, and in 2011 she became the first female president in Brazil's history (Britannica, 2023).

Dilma's domestic agenda did not differ much from that of her predecessor. The emphasis was placed on ensuring economic growth, reducing poverty, tax reform, and increasing employment. However, similar to Lula, she was unable to protect her government from scandals. Several of her officials were arrested due to allegations of corruption, while the *Mensalão* scandal reappeared, this time reaching directly to Lula. Growing economic problems further destabilised her position. The opposition took advantage of the situation and initiated her impeachment, despite concerns about whether it was in line with the Brazilian Constitution.

After a long and exhausting process, Dilma was eventually impeached in August 2016. She was blamed for corruption and taking measures that resulted in unprecedented damage to Brazil's economy. However, she has never admitted to any of the allegations. She was consequently replaced by Michel Temer, the then-conservative vice president, who led the country until 2019 when newly elected Jair Bolsonaro took office (Britannica, 2023).

In the meantime, Lula was sentenced to twelve years in prison for corruption and bribery. Nevertheless, he was released by the Supreme Court 580 days later on November 8, 2019 (Aljazeera, 2019). Moreover, in May 2022, Lula officially announced his sixth presidential candidacy, standing against Bolsonaro's re-election (Bloomberg, 2022). Throughout the last decade, Brazilian society has found itself in an extremely polarised situation, divided between supporters of the PT and its opponents. Given these circumstances, targeting the PT and domestic, as well as external leftist figures was essential for Bolsonaro's political survival.

1.4. Bolsonaro's approach to migrants in general

Bolsonaro's conservative ideology is also reflected in his attitude towards immigration to Brazil. The question of national sovereignty and Brazil's right to decide its internal affairs independently was one of the key pillars of his political agenda. In this respect, migration policy is no exception. Since the beginning of the electoral campaign in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro has adopted an exclusionary approach to foreign immigration, which has remained unchanged even after taking office.

During the 2018 campaign, one of Bolsonaro's main promises was Brazil's withdrawal from the UN Global Migration Pact, also known as the Marrakesh Pact, which he announced just a few days after taking office in January 2019. Bolsonaro stated that the government's main focus is to prioritise national sovereignty in order to ensure the safety of both Brazilians and immigrants. However, he emphasised that each country has the right to design its own migration policies without any external influence (Bolsonaro, J., 2019).

Bolsonaro also reminded that “*Brazil is sovereign to decide whether or not to accept migrants*” and stressed that foreigners entering the country must respect Brazilian laws, rules, customs, culture, and sing the national anthem. He rejected the idea of the Migration Pact, which, according to him, was implemented by third parties (France 24, 2019).

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted by the United Nations on December 19, 2018, in Marrakech, Morocco, is the first intergovernmental pact that defines the principles of a common approach to international migration. The cooperative framework includes 23 objectives aimed at facilitating migration, preventing its risks on all levels - local, national, regional, and global - and promoting sustainable development (General Assembly, 2018). However, despite its unprecedented nature, the agreement is not legally binding. Therefore, Bolsonaro's decision to withdraw from the pact was primarily a symbolic gesture. Nevertheless, this decision may harm Brazil's reputation and its relations with the countries that condemned his action.

In addition to this, Bolsonaro also criticised Brazil's Migration Law from 2017 that passed under Temer's administration, which replaced the regulatory framework from the 1964 Military Dictatorship. The new legislature has guaranteed the entrance of foreigners to Brazil without discrimination, ensuring them a wide range of civil, economic, social, and cultural rights and liberties. Moreover, it has ensured migrants access to healthcare, education, and justice, as well as reduced bureaucratic requirements for people in need of humanitarian help, namely stateless people and asylum seekers. The law has also rejected xenophobia, racism, and all forms of discrimination, and it has specified penalties for the crime of human trafficking (Governo do Brasil, 2017). In other words, the Migration Law of 2017 has practically put migrants on an equal footing with Brazilian citizens when it comes to basic rights and privileges. However, Bolsonaro's interpretation of the law was that it enabled unrestricted entry and gave foreigners more rights than Brazilians had (El Periódico, 2018).

Eventually, Bolsonaro introduced several changes regarding the 2017 Migration law. At the end of July 2019, his government passed Decree No. 666, which amended the previous migratory legislation. The decree sets criteria for the deportation of migrants

based on suspicion of involvement in crimes such as terrorism, criminal organisations, drug trafficking, history of violence in stadiums, child pornography, etc. Consequently, the migrant may be considered a “security threat” based solely on suspicion, without requiring a court order, and therefore may be deported from the country (Mendes, Menezes, p.313).

In general, the approach to international migration in Brazil during Bolsonaro's administration has become more restrictive. Like other right-wing leaders, Bolsonaro also emphasised the importance of national security and public order, which they believe is threatened by foreign immigration. However, when it comes to migrants from Venezuela, Bolsonaro's approach has changed dramatically. Not only does it represent a departure from the traditional far-right approach to immigration, but it also contradicts his overall stance on racial and cultural issues.

“The fragility of the military is worrying because it is weakened to confront the MST, Haitians, Senegalese, Bolivians, Venezuelans and now the Syrian refugees arriving in Brazil. A scum of the earth is arriving in Brazil as if we did not have enough problems to solve” stated Bolsonaro in September 2015 (IN Hebenbrock, 2021).

It is important to note that the fleeing Venezuelans were mostly of mixed racial background, while Bolsonaro's perception of racial equality raises serious concerns. Moreover, they were humanitarian migrants, which means, they represented more of an economic burden rather than a benefit brought by, for example, voluntarily migrating high-skilled professionals. As for the religious aspect, the vast majority of Venezuelans are Catholics, while Bolsonaro's electorate consists predominantly of Evangelicals. Following these patterns, we can assume that besides the extraordinary measure within the far-right politics represented by welcoming refugees, there was another one embodied in Bolsonaro's openness to otherness, which he must have defended before his predominantly white evangelical electorate. The situation has become even more complicated due to growing resentment of the Brazilian population towards the refugee influx, triggered by several crime incidents (Mendonça, 2018). As a result, Bolsonaro found himself in a difficult position where the only possible justification for his benevolent approach to Venezuelan refugees was the securitisation of the political left.

2. Exploring the right-wing populist narratives

2.1. Securitisation theory

Given the focus of the research, which aims to investigate the securitisation of the political left, it is essential to begin by defining the theory. The Copenhagen School represented by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998), draws on constructivist theory and provides a theoretical framework for examining how issues are socially constructed and presented as security threats. According to Buzan et al. (1998), securitisation is a situation in which, through a *speech act*, a matter can be framed as a threat, regardless of the objectivity of the danger it may pose, in order to justify the adoption of extraordinary measures. It is upon particular communities to decide whether the threat is real or not and how it should be managed.

Buzan et al. (1998) recognise three categories of issues according to their importance: The first category is constituted by *non-politicised* issues, which are outside the public discourse and state's attention. The second one is represented by issues that are *politicised*, meaning they become part of the public policy, requiring official decision and allocation of resources. *Securitisation*, as the third category and the last stage of this process, comes to being when the issue is “presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (p.24).

In terms of methods of analysis, securitisation can be directly studied through political discourse and constellations. Therefore, there is a particular focus on analysing the speech acts of a potential securitising *agent*, whether it be an individual or a group of individuals, whose goal is to frame a specific problem as a security threat to a *referent object* (audience). The securitising agent is typically represented by the government, opposition, specific political officials, and interest groups (Buzan et al., 1998, p.36, p.40). However, various entities operating outside the state structures can also play a role in this process, including individuals, NGOs, private institutions, and other actors without political affiliation.

However, merely presenting something as an existential threat to a referent object does not automatically mean that securitisation itself is taking place. Unless the

referent object accepts the issue as an existential threat justifying extraordinary measures, we are only speaking of a process called the *securitisation move* (p.25). A successful securitisation requires three necessary steps: “existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules” (p.26). In other words, it occurs only when the actor succeeds in convincing the audience about the urgency of the issue in a particular moment, enabling him to act outside the general procedures.

In order to reduce the complexity, and thus facilitate overall inquiry, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998) identify five sectors of security analysis: military, political, economic, social, and environmental. These sectors help us divide the whole, in order to better address particular patterns of interaction. According to the authors: “*The military sector is about relationships of forceful coercion; the political sector is about relationships of authority, governing status, and recognition; the economic sector is about relationships of trade, production, and finance; the societal sector is about relationships of collective identity; and the environmental sector is about relationships between human activity and the planetary biosphere*” (p. 7). However, it is important to note that these sectors do not exist independently but are mutually connected, while they “*remain inseparable parts of complex wholes*” (p.8).

In order to examine Brazil's response to the crisis during Bolsonaro's administration and his approach to Venezuelan migrants in particular, it is useful to focus on the political and societal sectors of analysis. The political dimension involves migration policy, border control, as well as asylum and other procedures related to migration. However, regional cooperation, whether in the form of the Lima Group or providing humanitarian aid, also falls precisely within this sector of analysis. The societal sector covers the social consequences of the migration crisis. This includes ensuring that the basic needs of migrants such as food, healthcare, and shelter are met, but also covers the measures for their successful integration into Brazilian society. This cannot be achieved without granting access to education and employment. Given that integration is a two-way process, it has been necessary to educate Brazilian society about the situation of Venezuelan refugees, in order to prevent and combat potential xenophobic and racist tendencies. Speaking specifically of the securitisation of the political left, aimed to strengthen the anti-PT sentiment and increase Bolsonaro's support, it is

precisely the subject of analysis within the political and societal sectors. Therefore, these two sectors will be given priority.

Given the focus of this thesis, the three remaining sectors do not play a significant role. Nevertheless, it may be useful to mention them, in order to justify the decision to focus on the political and societal sectors of analysis. The management of Operation Welcome was indeed the responsibility of the Brazilian military, however, there were not any major security threats arising from the situation itself. Therefore, the military sector is not relevant in this case. The environment of the states of Roraima and Amazonas, which are to a large extent located in the Amazonian rainforest, was affected by the creation of migrant settlements. Moreover, the rapid population growth as a result of forced migration goes hand in hand with greater demand for natural resources necessary for human survival. This all has direct environmental impacts. From the economic perspective, the overall management of the crisis required a significant number of financial resources. Nevertheless, all three dimensions are, in the realm of this thesis, subordinate to political and societal sectors.

Given that, according to Buzan et al. (1998), any issue can be presented as a security threat, ideologies are no exception. There have been several perspectives on ideology developed throughout the last two centuries. In this thesis, we will follow the definition formulated by Freedman (2001):

“A political ideology is a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions, exhibiting a recurring pattern, that competes deliberately as well as unintentionally over providing plans of action for public policy making in an attempt to justify, explain, contest, or change the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community.”

The spectrum of political ideologies is wide, and any of them can be framed as dangerous. The existing literature provides a variety of examples of the securitisation of ideology based on a given historical and geopolitical context. During the Cold War period, competing ideologies were mutually securitised by the capitalist Western bloc countries led by the United States and the communist Eastern bloc headed by the Soviet Union. Following the end of the Cold War, the focus has been shifted to the global war on terrorism. The securitisation of the terrorist ideology further increased

following the 9/11 al-Qaeda attacks against the US. Another group of literature focuses on populism and the dangers it poses to democratic procedures (Kivimäki, 2022).

Kivimäki (2022), who analysed the securitisation of ideologies in the US, recognises three categories of the state's ideological targeting based on their effect on democracy: “an ideology can be described as dangerous for its justification of violence, its anti-democratic commitment, and for being against (American) power or ideology.” He examines political discourse based on creating specific narratives and framings. The words used can either belong to the category of “security speech” or “ideology speech”. The words *threat*, *terror*, and *military* are essential parts of the first category. As for the second category, it includes words as *ideology* and *propaganda*. The word *threat* is seen as the main proxy of the securitising move since it refers to something that is presented as a security threat.

2.2. Populism in Latin America

The term populism is generally connected to political actors who oppose the principles of representative liberal democracy. However, defining populism in this way can be misleading, as there are various perspectives on the phenomenon. Yet there has been no consensus among scholars whether populism can be regarded as an ideology at all. Some argue that it is more accurately described as a set of ideas or specific type of rhetoric (Norris, 2020).

The most commonly accepted definition is the one proposed by Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde (2004), who views populism as

“an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (p. 543).

In Latin America, populism has a long history. Populist leaders are characterised by making political calculations, using economic and non-economic tools to achieve their goals in order to take or maintain power. At the same time, the efficiency and sustainability of the imposed measures play a minor role (De Castro, Ronci, 1991).

This form of rule has had far-reaching consequences for the development of the continent.

Latin American populism is mostly associated, but not identical, with the political left. The classic examples of leftist Latin American populist leaders include Juan Perón in Argentina, José María Velasco in Ecuador, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. However, populist features may also be found among right-wing conservative figures, such as Peru's Alberto Fujimori and Columbia's Álvaro Uribe. Brazil has also experienced rule under populist leaders, for example in the final years of fascist president Getúlio Vargas (Reid, 2017).

Reid (2017) points out three reasons why populism has been so successful in Latin America. Firstly, the persistence of extreme inequalities of wealth and income, combined with nostalgia over periods of rapid economic growth. Secondly, the deeply rooted narrative that the abundance of natural resources and their diversity is what makes Latin American countries rich. Natural wealth undoubtedly matters, however, economic progress is not achievable without necessary effort and effective institutions. Therefore, the populist strategy of blaming corruption, oligarchy, imperialism, and foreign investors for poverty often proves unjust. Lastly, it is the replacement of class politics with identity politics where the racial element plays an important role. Politicians of native Indian or *mestizo* (of mixed race) origin take advantage of their background, creating among the masses a feeling of being “one of us”. Such leaders may help to make democracy more participatory, despite potentially harming it in other ways. When it comes to Brazil, it represents a specific case. This is due to the fact that the resistance to neoliberalism has not been as strong as in other countries in the region, as it has been successful to benefit from its integration into the global market. This means that “the mobilisation of “unrepresented masses” and the crisis of representation that provide the founding moment of populism, though present, are less radical” (Grigera, 2017).

The consequences of populism on the continent's performance vary from one country to another. Based on the historical examples from Latin American countries, in some of them populism represented a response to inequality and the dominance of powerful conservative groups. However, in many cases, the opposite was true, leading to

authoritarianism and economic hardship, especially in the case of poorer countries (Reid, 2017, p.9).

2.3. Right-wing populism and immigration

Right-wing populism combines populist rhetoric and manners with right-wing politics, which is based on conservative principles, emphasising the importance of tradition, religion, and free-market economy. Based on the premise that people sharing a state's territory are culturally homogenous, it stresses the national sovereignty of countries. This goes hand in hand with unequal treatment of different groups, always prioritising the native population. It is associated with a nativist approach towards others, including immigrants and other minorities (ECPS, n.d.). The existing literature portrays right-wing populism as opposed to welcoming immigrants, as in some countries, the opposition of far-right parties to immigration and multiculturalism is the central topic of their electoral success (Mudde, 2013). The dismissive approach to foreign immigration is usually defended in the name of protecting the native population from the “dangers” posed by immigrants.

Speaking of right-wing populist parties, their most important common feature is the nativist approach towards otherness, resulting in exclusion (Mudde, 2007). When it comes to immigration, the exclusivist element plays a crucial role in populist discourse of arrival. The reason, as Rydgren (2008) puts it, is that “the ideology and discourse of the new radical right-wing parties are based on ethno-nationalism and opposition to immigration and the multicultural/multi-ethnic society” (p.739). Based on data from various surveys, he argues that immigration scepticism is one of the key factors influencing people's choice of giving their vote to a radical right-wing party. The reasons vary from fear of being impoverished at the expense of immigrants (“They will take our jobs.”) to xenophobia and racism (Rydgren, 2008). Nevertheless, the relationship between right-wing authoritarian populism and immigration is not uniform, given the different political and economic situation in particular countries.

Lutz (2018) examines the logic behind immigration and integration policy when far-right parties participate in government. He argues that immigration policy is largely determined by economic needs, meaning that even countries with a far-right party in government can take measures to attract desirable migrants (high-skilled

professionals). On the other hand, they attempt to discourage the arrival of undesirable ones (humanitarian and family migrants), usually by imposing restrictive policies. This results in greater selectivity of immigrants, rather than necessarily decreasing their overall numbers. However, the perspectives of different far-right parties may vary in this respect, as some of them tend to prioritise cultural homogeneity before economic benefits brought by immigrants. When it comes to integration policy, far-right parties try to avoid integration and equal rights for migrants and native population. Lutz (2018) points out that far-right parties active in government focus primarily on restricting integration policies aiming to affect immigrant's rights, instead of their numbers.

In the United States, during President Trump's administration, the White House would frame immigrants as a threat to national and economic security, whether they entered legally or without authorisation. Trump's approach was primarily focused on reducing refugee flows and elimination of temporary protection regimes. This resulted in the massive politicisation of immigration across the entire continent. It can also be argued that there has been an intensified militarisation of migration policy, given the increased number of border guards and removal officers. Trump's approach towards immigrants was literally embodied in the construction of the wall on the US-Mexican border aiming to slow down the influx of migrants from Latin America (Pierce, Selee, 2017). Trump's discourse was characterised by defending the country against illegal migration, arguing in the name of the violation of US law. This violation of the law, to which the society is particularly sensitive, has often been associated with Latin America's narco-business and human trafficking (Barragán-Romero, Villar, 2022).

Developments within the Eurasian area suggest that the typically right-wing approach may take on different forms. In most cases, there are traditional nationalist right-wing parties, such as Vox in Spain, the National Front in France, and UKIP in Britain, who strongly oppose immigration. What they all have in common is a discourse based on the distinction between “us” and “the others”, portraying the latter as a threat to the former. This perceived danger then justifies their calls for, or possibly implementation of, measures such as tightening immigration laws, deporting illegal migrants, or mobilising the border police.

The rhetoric of Santiago Abascal, the leader of the nativist and anti-immigrant party Vox, is typical by the demonisation of migrants and refugees. He refers to them as *rapists*, *criminals*, or *terrorists*, and blames them for committing crimes and violence. Abascal believes that immigration is a destructive force to Spanish culture, particularly in regard to immigration from Muslim countries (Barragán-Romero, Villar, 2022). In the context of Spain, it is also important to consider the internal conflicts, namely the efforts of regions like Catalonia and the Basque Country to achieve independence. Abascal effectively benefits from demonising immigration because the unity of Spain is already at risk due to the cultural and linguistic differences between the various regions. The arrival of people from a completely different cultural background would only further complicate an already tense situation.

As for Marine Le Pen, despite her efforts to change the radical image of the National Front party since replacing her father in the lead, the rhetoric on immigration has essentially remained unchanged. Le Pen strongly emphasises national sentiment, rejecting immigration, and calling for the imposition of tougher security measures. Instead of making immigration the core topic of the National Front's agenda, she has subtly incorporated it within other issues present in French society, particularly in the economic debate. The immigration agenda of the National Front is primarily presented as a solution for ensuring social and economic security, as well as French traditions and way of life (Stockemer, Barisione, 2017). Le Pen uses slightly harsher rhetoric in relation to Islam and migrants from Muslim countries, stating in one of her speeches: *“In France, we drink wine whenever we want. In France, we do not force women to wear the veil because they are impure... In France, we get to decide who deserves to become French”* (Financial Times, 2017).

However, occasional exceptions are also present. Altinörs (2021) provides a comparative analysis of the authoritarian populism-migration relation in Britain and Turkey. In Britain, immigration represented one of the crucial topics during the Brexit campaign. The issue was taken up by the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the right-wing populist party, specifically by its leader Nigel Farage, presenting immigration as a threat to national sovereignty, economic security, and culture. Similar to other Western European leaders, Farage placed special emphasis on Muslim migrants:

“There is a particular problem with some of the people who have come here and who are of the Muslim religion who do not want to become part of our culture. So, there is no previous experience in our history of a migrant group that comes to Britain that fundamentally wants to change who we are and what we are” (The Guardian, 2015).

Unlike that, the Turkish President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) decided to adopt a welcoming approach towards Syrian refugees, allowing more than four million of them to enter the country. Erdogan has frequently criticised the opposition's sceptical stance towards Syrian refugees, emphasising the importance of Islamic sentiment and unity. In addition, Erdogan often links the approach of Western European countries to Middle Eastern refugees with Islamophobia. According to Altinörs (2021), the difference in the use of populism in the two countries is influenced by the current geopolitical context. Altinörs states that “Turkey is considered a country of origin, transit, and destination for migrants, while the UK is primarily seen as a country of destination” (p.304). In terms of cultural factors, UKIP in Britain frames immigrants as a threat to native culture. In contrast, in Turkey, there is a sense of hospitality towards “Muslim” Syrian refugees, which aligns with Erdogan's broader strategy of Islamist populism that includes a religious element.

Drawing on these findings, it can be concluded that Bolsonaro's approach to Venezuelan migrants deviated from the conventional approach of right-wing populists towards humanitarian migrants. We argue that the welcoming attitude towards the arriving Venezuelans was driven by his domestic political agenda, using them as a means to achieve political and ideological objectives in the 2022 elections. Additionally, it formed part of a broader strategy to securitise the political left in Brazil and Latin America as a whole. In the language of the securitisation theory, the existential threat posed by the political left justified Bolsonaro to take an extraordinary measure within far-right politics, represented by a welcoming approach to humanitarian Venezuelan migrants.

3. Methodology

The thesis aims to examine the relationship between right-wing populism and anti-immigration narratives and policies. This is accomplished through qualitative discourse analysis of speeches and statements made by securitising actors regarding the Venezuelan migration crisis. The discourse analysis provides a comprehensive framework for social research, allowing the integration of different disciplines and perspectives to address specific issues. By *discourse*, we mean “a social activity of making meanings with language and other symbols in some particular kind of situation or setting” (Mautner, et al., 2017). Considering the relationship between the two variables within the different geopolitical environments, the chosen research method is a case study. This method allows us to explain particular phenomena in different environments. It is especially useful when it comes to analysing speech acts and writings of policy actors, as provided in this thesis (Evera, 1997).

Based on the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory, we will analyse discourse by examining statements published in reliable online news articles and posts on social networks such as Twitter and YouTube. This analysis will focus on the speech acts of potential securitising actors, namely Jair Bolsonaro, his presidential spokesman, and his politically active son Eduardo. These actors essentially function as one entity. The referent object, or what is being threatened, are the Brazilian citizens, specifically Bolsonaro's potential electorate, to whom the security threat of the political left is presented. Following the hypothesis, the focus is primarily placed on examining Bolsonaro's approach to the leftist Venezuelan government, presenting the left as an existential threat to Brazil and the entire continent, and his approach to the Venezuelan migrants in particular.

The samples were gathered via a search engine and Jair Bolsonaro's personal Twitter account using these combinations of keywords in English, Spanish, and Portuguese:

- a) the Brazilian left
- b) Lula (and PT)
- c) Venezuelan crisis, Bolsonaro
- d) Venezuelan migrants, Bolsonaro

About one hundred sources were analysed from June 2018 - six months before Jair Bolsonaro entered the presidential office - to October 2022 when another presidential election was held. The language proofreading was facilitated by online proofreading tools, specifically by Grammarly. I used the output to help revise my writing and improve the overall fluency of my own content.

The thesis describes the historical-political developments in Venezuela in the context of the crisis, explaining the reasons behind the massive forced migration. Furthermore, Brazil's response to the situation in Venezuela is presented, with a particular focus placed on the steps taken during Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022). Special attention is placed on the strategy of securitisation of the political left, providing answers as to why Jair Bolsonaro resorted to it. Another broader area of analysis is Bolsonaro's stance on immigration to Brazil in general, which is eventually compared with his approach to Venezuelan migrants in particular, recognising their exceptional status.

The theoretical framework consists of the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory, represented by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1998). This theory is based on a constructivist perspective, which argues that reality is the product of intersubjective collective meanings, reciprocal interactions of states, shared identities, and interests determined by them (Wendt, 1992). In addition to examining the discourse and providing a chronological description of the historical-political events in the region, the thesis also includes an analysis of Brazil's migration policy, as well as provides necessary quantitative data related to the study.

When discussing immigration, it is necessary to specify the classification of migrants according to their status. This distinction is important because the concepts are often misunderstood and assumed to be identical. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the difference between a migrant, an asylum seeker, and a refugee. According to the UN Convention (1951) a refugee is an individual who has been forced to flee the country of his or her usual residence due to persecution or fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking refuge but whose status has not yet been granted or recognised (UNHCR, 2006). These two terms are often used interchangeably.

The term *migrant* lacks a universal definition covered by international law. While the terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker* strictly relate to forced external migration (such as fleeing war, persecution, or natural disasters), the term *migrant* also encompasses people who voluntarily change their usual place of residence within the borders of a nation-state. This may include reasons such as economic opportunities, family reunification, or studying abroad (IOM, 2019). However, in order to avoid confusion, in this thesis, we will refer to all migrants from Venezuela leaving the country in recent years as refugees. Although not all Venezuelan migrants fall into the refugee or asylum seeker category, simplifying the terminology will benefit the clarity of the work.

4. Securitisation of the political left

4.1. The left as a threat to the entire continent

The incompetence of Maduro's government and the political repression affecting all strata of Venezuelan society enabled Bolsonaro to take advantage of the situation. During an official visit at the Brazilian embassy in Washington DC in March 2019, Bolsonaro explicitly stated that he has *“always dreamed of liberating Brazil from the evil ideology of the left”* (IN Belaich, 2019). Considering the severity of crimes Maduro's leftist government is responsible for, the association of the *left* with *evil* becomes evident and gains power. The ultra-conservative, right-wing president Bolsonaro is thus positioning himself as a guardian, a Messiah, who would not allow something similar to happen in Brazil. Nevertheless, the conflict between Bolsonaro and Maduro has a more complex ideological background.

The situation in Venezuela has already been exploited by father and son Bolsonaro in the election campaign. On January 10, 2018, they published a video entitled *“Venezuela and Brazil: a documentary you will not see on TV.”* In the video, Jair Bolsonaro explicitly states that leftist parties in Brazil *“are not different”* and that *“the Workers' Party supports Maduro.”* He adds that *“Venezuela has oil, it has a lot of things to take away from Maduro's dictatorship”* and it too *“has a way to boost the economy, democracy, and freedom.”* He assured that *“we (Brazil) are here for you”* and from his part, (Venezuelan) people can count on him (Bolsonaro, J., 2018).

In an interview provided by Eduardo Bolsonaro, the influential and politically active eldest son of the former Brazilian president, he stated that Nicolás Maduro is a *“criminal linked to crimes such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and guerrilla warfare,”* and that is why *“force must be used to remove him from power”* (Bolsonaro, E., 2019). In his previous post on Twitter, Eduardo Bolsonaro emphasised that *“Maduro's narco-dictatorship is a cancer that needs to be eradicated”* (Bolsonaro, E., 2019). Maduro's involvement is directly linked to left-wing ideology, so these personal attacks can also be seen as part of the securitisation of the political left.

Jair Bolsonaro himself did not resort to insulting language towards Maduro, except for using the term *dictator*, but rather focused on the alarming consequences of his rule and addressing the Venezuelan public, positioning himself as their saviour. The abuse of the Venezuelan disaster continued even after Bolsonaro's victory in the presidential elections. The attacks were targeted not only at the Venezuelan, but also the Brazilian left, specifically at his predecessors Lula and Dilma Rousseff, both members of the Workers' Party. In his message posted on January 17, 2019, after meeting an exiled Venezuelan president of the Supreme Court, Miguel Ángel Martín, he stated the following:

“We know how this misrule came to power even with the help of presidents that Brazil has already had, like Lula or Dilma, and this makes us responsible for the situation you are in, in part. So, we pray to God, first of all, and then we will continue to do everything possible to restore democracy and freedom” (Presidência da República do Brasil, 2019).

Another of Jair Bolsonaro's strategies to target Maduro and the left as such, and to attract Venezuelan population, was the open support for the Venezuelan opposition leader, and by some countries the recognised president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. Besides standing against Maduro, he ideologically also belongs to the right side of the political spectrum. As the tensions between the two countries over Maduro's repressive policies and the increasing flow of migrants into Brazil escalated, Bolsonaro again publicly backed Guaidó, saying that

“Brazil accompanies with great attention the situation in Venezuela and reaffirms its support in the democratic transition that is being processed in the neighbouring country. Brazil is alongside the people of Venezuela, President Juan Guaidó and the freedom of Venezuelans” (Bolsonaro IN Simões, 2019).

Earlier in the day, Bolsonaro said that the Venezuelan people are *“enslaved by a dictator supported by the PT, PSOL (leftist parties in Brazil) and their ideological alignments”* ... *“We support the freedom of this sister nation to finally live in a true democracy,”* he added (IN Simões, 2019).

When Bolsonaro used the term *dictator*, he was referring to Maduro's authoritarian regime, massive human rights violations, and the destruction of democracy in the country. By saying that the people were *enslaved*, he was referring to the problems they faced in liberating themselves from the government's oppression. His claim that Brazilian leftist parties supported Maduro's regime was meant to link the two and portray the left as actively participating in the inhumane practices. In doing so, he aimed to present the left as an existential threat *per se*. Later, the then presidential spokesman, General Otávio do Rêgo Barros, ensured “*unlimited support*” for Venezuelans, while urging “*all countries, identified with the ideals of freedom, to stand alongside the president in charge Juan Guaidó in the search for a solution that puts an end to Maduro's dictatorship, as well as restoring institutional normality in Venezuela*” (IN Simões, 2019).

The support has been mutual and present also during the pre-election period of 2022. In another video published on Bolsonaro's Twitter on October 2, 2022, Juan Guaidó states the following:

“We want to thank the Government of Brazil and its president Jair Bolsonaro for the support that you have maintained with our migrants and refugees that have been welcomed in their territory and for their support for the UN Human Rights Mission. In a few days, you Brazilians will have the opportunity to vote in a free and fair election, which is a reason that inspires our fight in Venezuela. We hope that Brazil continues to be allied with a democracy, not with a dictatorship” (Guaidó, J., 2022).

It is possible to deduce that by *democracy*, Guaidó means Bolsonaro's re-election and the continuation of his rule, while by the term *dictatorship*, he understands the potential victory of the leftist candidate Lula. In fact, Bolsonaro's securitisation strategy has remained unchanged for the entire length of his presidential term. As the 2022 elections approached, his attacks on the political left gained in intensity:

“Everyone knows that Lula made propaganda for Hugo Chávez. Dilma did too. Lula always defended that the regime in Venezuela was very good. But you are seeing what is happening there” (Estado de Minas, 2022).

In addition to this, Bolsonaro expressed serious concerns about the growing success of left-wing candidates in other Latin American countries.

“Politics is polarised. You see what the other side thinks, what others in South America think like him (referring to Lula), where these countries are going. (...) What's happening in South America, we have to worry about it. (...) “Do we want this for Brazil? Will this policy work here?” he asked (IN Haubert, 2022). The new leftist wave spreading throughout South America represented, according to him, an existential threat to Brazil, just as to the entire continent. “If the left returns to power, in my opinion, it will never leave power and this country will follow the same path as Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Colombia. Brazil will be just another wagon on that train”, stated Bolsonaro in one of his pre-election interviews, referring to the negative consequences these countries experienced under leftist governments (IN Welle, 2022). “The whole of South America is going to turn red and, in my opinion, the United States will become practically an isolated country”, he added, suggesting that if Latin America becomes predominantly leftist, it will lead to political division and weakening of relations between the US and the region (IN Welle, 2022).

These were the *securitisation moves* of Jair Bolsonaro, making the Venezuelan crisis grist for his mill, trying to politically benefit from the situation. However, in addition to his attempts to discredit Lula in the domestic elections, Bolsonaro's efforts could form a part of a broader political strategy. The year 2022 was marked by another “leftist wave” spreading over Latin America. Before the presidential election in Brazil took place, six out of the seven largest countries in the continent had been dominated by leftist leadership. This included Colombia and Mexico, which had both traditionally belonged to right-wing bastions, leaving Bolsonaro as the last standing right-wing leader in the region (Raisbeck, 2022). In this way, Bolsonaro's securitisation of the political left can be described not only as an attempt to increase his political support in Brazil by attacking his leftist opponents, but also as an endeavour to frame the political left *per se* as a threat to the entire continent, based on the example of devastated Venezuela. The logic of this action can be explained by the desire to obtain right-wing allies throughout the region, of whom he has been steadily losing, due to the growing success of the leftist candidates.

The strategy of Jair Bolsonaro consisted of a combination of several elements, including attacks on Maduro, as well as domestic and foreign left-wing leaders, portraying all of them as a threat (securitisation of the political left). This was accompanied by supporting the Venezuelan opposition and allying with other right-wing forces (e.g., Guaidó). The final, and for the purpose of this thesis, the most important part of Bolsonaro's agenda, was the welcoming approach to refugees. This represented an *extraordinary measure*, turning the entire process into a successful securitisation of the political left, enabling Bolsonaro to act beyond the general principles of far-right politics, which is primarily associated with a dismissive approach to foreign immigration.

4.2. Bolsonaro's approach to Venezuelan migrants in particular

From the very beginning of his presidency, Bolsonaro's approach to Venezuelan migrants has been extraordinary and suspiciously benevolent. Compared to migrants from other countries, Venezuelans have been granted special treatment. Bolsonaro would often refer to them as those who *"fled hunger, violence, and dictatorship"* (Estado de Minas, 2022). He used their misfortune to politically benefit from the situation, blaming Maduro and the left, including the Brazilian left, responsible for their suffering: *"At the end of the day, (Venezuelans) are citizens, our brothers, and they are going through serious difficulties under the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro"* (Exame, 2018).

As shown in the previous section, the election of Maduro was framed as a matter supported by Lula himself and the Workers' Party. During a military ceremony in November 2018, a few months before taking office, Bolsonaro stated that Venezuelans *"are fleeing a dictatorship supported by the PT, Lula, and Dilma, and we cannot leave them to their fate"* (France 24, 2018). Furthermore, he ensured that his government would not expel the Venezuelan refugees, as they *"are not merchandise or some product that can be returned"* (France 24, 2018). This approach differs considerably from the anti-immigration agenda, including the promise of withdrawal from the UN Migration Pact, which has been typical for him since the beginning of his political career. Such a stance is fundamentally different from the mainstream right-wing approach to migration.

His strategy consisted not only of accusations and verbal attacks on the leftist leaders and highlighting the overall success of Operation Welcome conducted throughout his administration, but also of a positive portrayal of himself. During his official visit to the Boa Vista refugee camp in October 2021, Bolsonaro stated that *“Brazil is a country that has deep respect for the suffering of others,”* and pointed out that Brazil *“is a humanitarian country”* that *“does its job of welcoming and integrating.”* Regarding the Venezuelan refugees, he ensured that *“We (Brazil) will do our best to integrate them into society”* (IN Mello, 2021).

Bolsonaro would often personally meet Venezuelan refugees, either directly in camps or at various events. He sought the presence of children, positioning himself as the one who saved their childhood and provided them with an opportunity for a better future. It was precisely children, who became an effective tool within his securitisation strategy. Referring to the children as to the most affected victims of the Venezuelan disaster, caused by the leftist government, enabled him to maximise attention and captivate the emotions of the audience:

“I am going to take the opportunity to show Brazil how a regime can destroy a nation. We have Venezuelan children here, the result of the dictatorship of the socialist regime that began to be imposed back then.” (...) *“A country rich in oil, gold and other things, which began to deal with the harmful politics of Chávez and Maduro, and today is a suffering people. I only ask Brazilians to think about their country, so as not to get into the situation of these children.”* (Casa Civil, 2020).

In a post from January 2022, Bolsonaro shared a photo of himself surrounded by a group of refugee children, while holding a baby in his hands. Interestingly, it is evident that the photo captures a moment from the very same visit in Boa Vista about three months ago. This indicates that the collected visual material was used for his own political promotion over a longer time period and repeatedly. In the description below, he states the following: *“BRAZIL HOSTS VENEZUELAN FLEEING SOCIALISM / Host nation. More than 61,000 (92%) have been internalised under the current administration of the Government of Brazil. More than 700 Brazilian municipalities have already welcomed migrants and refugees from the neighbouring country”* (Bolsonaro, J., 2022).

Bolsonaro's anti-leftist agenda was also translated into the activity of Casa Civil, the Brazilian state department. The article informing about the developments of Operation Welcome and highlighting its achievements from January 2020 is entitled *Socialism Excludes, Brazil Welcomes* (Casa Civil, 2020). Given the political context, the title does not address the failure of the Venezuelan left in particular. It implies that *socialism* (the left) *as such* excludes and harms, which includes the Brazilian left as well. Neither the word *Brazil* has a neutral connotation. On the contrary, the meaning behind refers specifically to “Bolsonaro's Brazil”, not Brazil in general, its people, or the country potentially governed by the left. A similar logical pattern is followed in most of his statements where reference to Brazil is made.

Bolsonaro indirectly pointed to the privileged position of Venezuelan refugees during the first month of his government. This occurred on the same day when he announced Brazil's withdrawal from the Marrakesh Pact: “*We will never refuse help to those in need, but immigration cannot be indiscriminate. Criteria are needed, seeking the best solution according to the reality of each country. If we control who we let into our homes, why would we do differently with our Brazil?*” (Bolsonaro, J., 2019).

Despite Brazil's definitive withdrawal from the UN Migration Pact, Bolsonaro assured that his government would still support Venezuelan refugees stating: “*Brazil has become an international leader, given our commitment and dedication in supporting Venezuelan refugees arriving in the country through the border state of Roraima.*” He highlighted the success of the Operation Welcome that helped hundreds of thousands of people “*who have been displaced as a result of the deep economic and political crisis fuelled by the Venezuelan dictatorship.*” Additionally, he specified the importance of the army playing a crucial role in completing “*humanitarian and logistical tasks to welcome and protect newly arrived families at the border*” (IN Valdés, 2020).

As demonstrated, in the case of Bolsonaro's treatment of Venezuelans, we can observe an interesting paradox. The key principles outlined in the UN Global Migration Pact, which Brazil withdrew from as a result of his decision, remained respected. Brazil's approach to the Venezuelan crisis was complex, emphasising respect for human rights and including not only temporary measures, but also a range of bureaucratic and facilitating processes aimed to finally integrate refugees into society.

Paradoxically, Bolsonaro's actions aligned with the same principles he had previously criticised, presenting them as a threat to national sovereignty and security in the form of incoming migrants.

According to the latest data, helping Venezuelans had majority support among Brazilians, suggesting that accepting them was advantageous to Bolsonaro. In a Latinobarometro opinion poll, 52.9% of the population perceived their arrival positively, while 46.6% of respondents stated the opposite (Latinobarometro, 2020). This suggests that the consistent support for Venezuelan refugees may also have had a statistical basis. Venezuelans were undoubtedly the most successful of all people applying for asylum in Brazil. In 2022, the number of asylum requests from Venezuela counted 34,073 from which 4,158 were accepted and, what is more important, none of them has been rejected (World Data, 2022). The asylum procedure is a long and complicated process, therefore many of the applications have not been considered yet. However, given the current trend, there is a low probability that many of them will be rejected.

The fleeing Venezuelans undoubtedly needed help, and the approach to them represented by the Operation Welcome could be seen as discriminatory towards other migrants coming to Brazil. Additionally, compared to the majority of asylum seekers from different countries, Venezuelans were advantaged. The acceptance rate of asylum applications is a good indicator. Considering the number of asylum applications, Venezuela is followed by Cuba (91.8%), Angola (32.1%), and Colombia (78.3%) (World Data, 2022). The high acceptance rate of applications from Cuba may not be a coincidence, as the country has been ruled by the left for decades, and Bolsonaro has been attacking it in a similar way as the Venezuelan left (Pérez, 2018). Although it is not fully possible to prove to what extent the Brazilian president can directly affect the results of asylum procedures, he or she is the one who names ministers and can influence them.

From Bolsonaro's point of view, it was the “*best solution according to the reality*” of Brazil, as the decision to accept the Venezuelan refugees fit into his strategy of securitising the political left that he has been seeking to “liberate” the country from. Moreover, the quantitative data regarding the asylum procedures provide evidence of

positive discrimination of people seeking asylum in Brazil from countries ruled by the political left during his administration.

Conclusion

The Venezuelan migration crisis has been an unprecedented challenge with far-reaching consequences on the entire Latin American continent. It required complex solutions and effective regional cooperation, in order to ensure the survival and security of the fleeing migrants. In this context, Brazil emerged as one of the key political players, showing hospitality to hundreds of thousands of displaced people, despite the paradox of being led by a far-right president.

Unlike other right-wing populist leaders, the former Brazilian president (2019-2023), Jair Messias Bolsonaro, decided to take a welcoming approach towards refugees fleeing Venezuela. While implementing a massive humanitarian operation, known as *Operação Acolhida*, he portrayed himself as the saviour, the Messiah, who would not allow the same scenario to happen in Brazil. Bolsonaro abused the failures of Venezuela's government led by leftist president Nicolás Maduro to present himself as a defender against the “evil ideology” of the left. According to him, the left represents an existential threat to Brazil, as well as to the entire continent. Bolsonaro and people close to him, de facto acting as one entity, used the refugees as a fruitful tool to present the Brazilian left, as well as the left *per se*, as a threat by associating it with Maduro's authoritarian politics and human rights violations.

The securitising strategy consisted of targeting both domestic and international leftist figures with the aim to discredit them. This was particularly crucial for Bolsonaro in the context of the upcoming presidential election in 2022, where his main opponent was the well-known leftist candidate, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. However, the securitisation discourse could also be seen as a response to the growing success of left-wing leaders in various Latin American countries, making leftist ideology dominate the region again. This combination of securitising discourse and hospitality towards the refugees enabled him to politically benefit from the situation by blaming the left responsible for their suffering.

On these grounds, Bolsonaro deviates from the traditional right-wing populist narrative associated with a dismissive approach to humanitarian migration. In the

language of the Copenhagen School theory, the existential threat posed by the political left justified Bolsonaro's adoption of an extraordinary measure, which, in this respect, was the far-right leader's openness to refugees. Therefore, the decision to welcome the fleeing Venezuelans was not merely an altruistic act, but rather a necessary step in line with his vision of “liberating” Brazil from the influence of left-wing ideology and preventing its further rise in the region.

Resumé

Táto práca skúma vzťah pravicového populizmu a imigrácie v kontexte politickej a humanitárnej krízy vo Venezuele, pričom sa zameriava na masívny príval utečencov do Brazílie počas vlády krajne pravicového prezidenta Jaira Bolsonaro. Hlavným cieľom práce je negovať konvenčný naratív, ktorý spája pravicový populizmus s odmietavým postojom k imigrácii, predovšetkým z humanitárnych dôvodov.

Prvá kapitola vysvetľuje historický kontext v oboch krajinách, ktorý je nevyhnutný pre pochopenie Bolsonarovej otvorenosti voči utečencom. Vo vzťahu k Venezuele opisuje politický vývoj v krajine s dôrazom na príčiny a dôsledky humanitárnej krízy. V prípade Brazílie sa zameriava na tri oblasti. Prvou je reakcia krajiny na krízu vo Venezuele, rozhodnutie prijať státisíce utečencov a zavedenie humanitárnej operácie zvanej *Operação Acolhida*. Druhou je história a význam politickej ľavice v krajine, konkrétne strany *Partido dos Trabalhadores* a jej predstaviteľov, predovšetkým Bolsonaroho najväčšieho súpera v prezidentských voľbách v roku 2022, bývalého prezidenta Lulu. Treťou je Bolsonaro prístup k imigrantom vo všeobecnosti, ktorý sa zhoduje so zaužívaným pravicovo-populistickým naratívom.

Druhá kapitola predstavuje teóriu sekuritizácie Kodanskej školy, pričom bližšie opisuje sekuritizáciu ideológie, nakoľko práve sekuritizácia politickej ľavice bola primárnou motiváciou Bolsonaroho konania. Táto kapitola sa tiež zameriava na populizmus a jeho históriu v regióne Latinskej Ameriky. Neskôr sa špecificky venuje pravicovému populizmu a jeho vzťahu k imigrácii, s odkazom na tradičný naratív spájajúci pravicový populizmus s nativistickým teda odmietavým postojom k imigrácii. Tretia kapitola opisuje podrobnú metodológiu výskumu založenú na kvalitatívnej diskurzívnej analýze s použitím teoretického rámca sekuritizácie Kodanskej školy.

Posledná kapitola predstavuje diskurzívnu analýzu sekuritizačných aktov, predovšetkým samotného prezidenta Jaira Bolsonaro. Sústreďuje sa na dve konkrétne oblasti, a to na sekuritizáciu politickej ľavice ako hrozby pre Brazíliu a celý kontinent, a na Bolsonaro benevolentný prístup voči utečencom z Venezuely. Z pohľadu teórie

Kodanskej školy existenčná hrozba, ktorú predstavuje politická ľavica, oprávňovala Bolsonaro prijať mimoriadne opatrenie v rámci krajne pravicovej politiky, ktorým bola v tomto prípade jeho otvorenosť voči utečencom.

Kombinácia sekuritizačného diskurzu a otvorenosti voči utečencom umožnila Bolsonarovi politicky ťažiť zo situácie tým, že mohol prezentovať ľavicu ako existenčnú hrozbu zodpovednú za ľudské utrpenie a seba samého ako ochrancu, teda riešenie. V závere práce je tak dokázané, že krajne pravicový populizmus môže, paradoxne, zaujať prívetivý postoj k imigráciám z humanitárnych dôvodov. V tomto prípade však nešlo o altruistický čin, ale o súčasť komplexnej stratégie s cieľom zdiskreditovať politickú ľavicu v Brazílii a zabrániť jej ďalšiemu vzostupu v regióne.

Zistenia tohto výskumu môžu napomôcť k širšiemu pochopeniu komplexnosti stratégií pravicového populizmu a spochybneniu tradičných naratívov, ktoré sa považujú za jeho prirodzené znaky.

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