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How does the new right circulate ideas? Critically understanding the new right-wing: actors, media and practices

¿Cómo la nueva derecha difunde sus ideas? Una visión crítica de la nueva derecha: actores, medios de comunicación y prácticas

Como a nova direita difunde suas ideias? Uma análise crítica da nova direita: atores, mídia e práticas

Stefan Klein[*]
Clara Ruvituso[**]
Wiebke Keim[***]

ABSTRACT
Throughout the world, right-wing political parties and regimes have gained power in the last decade. Better understanding how related political ideas and concepts have traveled throughout these contexts has become a relevant issue. Some of the questions that guided this special issue were: How does the new right circulate ideas? Which actors, practices and media are mobilized? What are the disputes and how they present themselves in the field of ideas? The articles featured here focus on the presence of specific actors, movements, or practices within right-wing politics in Latin America and on how these actors mobilize their ideas through various media to achieve their political goals.

Keywords: right-wing politics, new right ideas, knowledge circulation.

[*] University of Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brazil.
Doctor in Sociology, associate professor in the Department of Sociology (SOL) at University of Brasilia. CNPq Research Productivity Fellow. sfk@unb.br

[**] Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Berlin, Germany.
PhD in Socilogy from the Universität Rostock, researcher at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (IAI), Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. ruvituso@iai.spk-berlin.de

[***] University of Strasbourg, Strasbourg, Alsace, France.
Research director at the MISHA-Maison Interuniverstaire des Sciences sociales et des Humanités d'Alsace, University of Strasbourg. wiebke.keim@misha.fr

RESUMEN

En todo el mundo, los partidos y regímenes políticos de derecha han ganado poder en la última década. Comprender mejor cómo las ideas y conceptos políticos relacionados se han difundido en estos contextos se ha convertido en una cuestión relevante. Algunas de las preguntas que han guiado este número especial han sido: ¿Cómo difunde la nueva derecha sus ideas? ¿Qué actores, prácticas y medios de comunicación se movilizan? ¿Cuáles son las controversias y cómo se manifiestan en el ámbito de las ideas? Los artículos que aquí se recogen se centran en la presencia de actores, movimientos o prácticas específicos dentro de la política de derechas en América Latina y en cómo estos actores movilizan sus ideas a través de diversos medios para alcanzar sus objetivos políticos.

Palabras clave: política de derechas, ideas de la nueva derecha, circulación del conocimiento.

RESUMO

Em todo o mundo, partidos e regimes políticos de direita conquistaram poder na última década. Compreender melhor como as ideias e conceitos políticos relacionados se espalharam por esses contextos tornou-se uma questão relevante. Algumas das perguntas que orientaram esta edição especial foram: Como a nova direita difunde suas ideias? Quais atores, práticas e meios de comunicação são mobilizados? Quais são as disputas e como elas se manifestam no campo das ideias? Os artigos aqui apresentados enfocam a presença de atores, movimentos ou práticas específicas na política de direita na América Latina e como esses atores mobilizam suas ideias por meio de diversos meios de comunicação para alcançar seus objetivos políticos.

Palavras-chave: política de direita, ideias da nova direita, circulação de conhecimento.

Introduction

Our initial motivation as editors of this special issue stemmed from our decades-long collaborative work on the production and circulation of academic knowledge (see, among others, Keim *et al.*, 2014; Keim *et al.*, 2023). Within that framework, the question of right-wing ideas – their production and circulation, and their presence in the media – did not take centre stage. However, the emergence of new authoritarian movements in Europe and Latin America has changed our questions and research agenda on knowledge production. Among us, various degrees of interest emerged regarding how authoritarian forms of politics and practices had spread and (re)emerged in so many different social contexts. In this sense, some of the questions that led us to propose this special issue were: How does the new right circulate ideas? Which actors, practices and media are mobilized? What are the disputes and how they present themselves in the field of ideas?

This special issue comprises five articles that focus on the presence of specific actors, movements, or practices within right-wing politics in Latin America and on how these actors mobilize their ideas through various media to achieve their political goals. One of them focuses on Mexico, another one on Argentina, and the remaining three address different case studies in Brazil. Despite their different concerns and methodological approaches, all articles analyse potential shifts in how the political right has been organizing to express its ideas, leading to an increasing division of labour among different types of actors, while also challenging certain established truths about their *modus operandi*.

Actors, media, practices: the multiple forms of positioning right-wing ideas in the twenty-first century

As the various articles in this dossier demonstrate, right-wing ideas are promoted by a diverse range of both established and new actors. Groups centred around the liberal professions, such as physicians and lawyers, promote their ideas by leveraging the prestige associated with their expertise and professional knowledge. Thus, anti-intellectualism is not always a defining feature of the right; actors also contest the intellectual field from

positions that can sometimes shift from marginal spaces to central ones. Two articles on Brazil focus on the presence of liberal professionals who mobilize prestige and common interests to exert or attempt to exert an effect on broader audiences. In the article "*Necromedicina no país da cloroquina: caminhos da adesão de parte dos médicos brasileiros à extrema-direita no século XX*" (Necromedicine in the land of chloroquine: paths of political alignment of some Brazilian physicians with the far right in the 21st century), Pedro Cavalcanti and Sidartha Sória analyse the ideas put forward by right-wing physicians, particularly in the context of the pandemic crisis under the Bolsonaro government in Brazil. Whilst the public mobilisation of right-wing ideas initially emerged as a corporate critique of the public health policies of the previous left-wing President Dilma Rousseff (the presence of Cuban physicians was particularly polarising), it was the pandemic context during Bolsonaro`s government that provided the stage for the most visible defence of corporate or class interests by right-wing physicians. The authors highlight the three central ideas put forward by right-wing physicians against state health measures designed to mitigate the pandemic: the thesis of natural immunity, the overemphasis on 'clinical' data over scientific evidence, and the argument in favour of doctor-patient autonomy in decision-making (including, among other things, advocating the use of chloroquine or early interventions). By appealing to professional expertise, pro-Bolsonaro physicians played a central role in legitimizing the denial of the severity of the crisis. Drawing on Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, pro-Bolsonaro physicians are understood in terms of a 'necro-medicine' that manifested itself in the ability to manage death according to corporate interests. Whilst the authors refer to studies that highlight the central role of social media and algorithmic logic in understanding the positions of so-called "medical populism" (p. 15), the scientific denialism of physicians should be understood primarily in terms of class interests. For example, defending the primacy of clinical practice over scientific knowledge undoubtedly has greater profit-making implications during the crisis; it is not the result of manipulative algorithmic disinformation. Thus, the authors show how, in the later pandemic context, criticism of vaccination was mitigated, responding more to corporate interests than to the positions of the pro-Bolsonaro supporters.

The second professional group studied in the context of this special issue are lawyers. In her article "*A 'verdade', o 'mal', os 'esquerdistas' e a 'nação brasileira': investimentos intelectuais à direita do Direito*" (The "truth," the "evil," the "leftists," and the "Brazilian nation": intellectual investments to the right of law) Treicy Giovanella presents the findings of a significant study of three books published by members of the Public Prosecutor's Office. These books reflect a specific profile dedicated to a conservative political worldview, particularly with regard to Christianity, morality, family and property, and those authors' efforts to participate in the public intellectual debate. The lawyer-writers analysed in the article publish chronicles, opinion pieces, and poems with small, peripheral publishing houses. In Giovanella's analysis, this cultural production appears to serve as a "means of distinction" among peers, while the legitimate forms of legal representation are properly contested. Thus, erudition (manifested through quotations in Latin, or from novels or films) evokes interpretative and reflective capacities. What is at stake for the group is expanding the political potential of their writings and achieving practical transformative effects on behaviour and cultural practices. This represents the strongest association between written production and conservative political activism. Although still a minor phenomenon in terms of impact, the author notes that these lawyer-writers employ strategies to mobilise their technical credentials for participation in public debate, viewing the publication of books – one of the central cultural goods – as a prominent cultural model.

Other contributions to this special issue examine the practices of young people within the new right-wing movements in Argentina and Brazil, emphasising the diversity of these phenomena. Attacks on universities and faculties, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, by right-wing influencers in Brazil appear to reveal the new right's most anti-intellectual facet. Conversely, the Argentinian 'Mileista' youth studied in the article demonstrates a particular interest in reading, appealing to the search for "truth" through figures closely associated with the intellectual tradition.

In their article "*Performances políticas da extrema direita no Brasil: invasões na FFLCH-USP e a circulação digital do ódio ao conhecimento*" (Political performances of the far right in Brazil: invasions at FFLCH-USP and the digital circulation of hatred towards knowledge), Marcelo de Tróia and Bruno Ciorlia Nascimento discuss the wider context of several attacks – whether

in person or online – targeted at universities, specially the humanities. Their case study examines how the Faculty of Philosophy, Literature and Humanities at Brazil's most prestigious university, the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), was targeted by far-right actors in 2025. The authors present these attacks as a planned political performance that mobilizes symbolic fascist repertoires and situates these actors within a digital ecosystem driven by the logic of online viralisation. The aforementioned faculty was invaded eight times throughout the last year, and the authors analyze three of these episodes in depth. It is worth noting that, on two occasions, the person responsible for organizing and recording the attack was an elected politician, a city councillor of São Paulo, what highlights the institutional clashes that have been emerging in recent years. By analysing the actors' performances, as well as the content of their discourses and attacks, De Tróia and Nascimento point out the ways in which "anti-intellectualism" and "fascism" manifest themselves.

However, in the study of right-wing libertarian youth in Argentina, a new way of understanding the notion of right-wing anti-intellectualism comes into play. In their article "*¿Cómo las ideas libertarias interpelan a las juventudes? Etnografías de la "batalla cultural" en la Argentina de Milei*" (How do libertarian ideas resonate with young people? Ethnographies of the "culture war" in Milei's Argentina), Nicolás Welschinger, Ezequiel Saferstein and Pablo Semán examine the sociocultural mechanisms that enable the circulation of libertarian ideas. Such mechanisms are understood, particularly, as an ecosystem of discourses, reading practices, and cultural consumption that configure what the authors called a "cultural battle" against progressivism and that are central to understanding the processes of political subjectivation among the younger generations. The authors relate this to the role played by the Covid-19 pandemic in revitalizing new forms of youth sociability, mentioning a "locked-down generation" (p. 14). They further identified the ability of right-wing political forces – united from a certain point onward around the figure of Javier Milei – to capitalize on dissatisfaction with social distancing measures, with a focus on the restriction of individual liberties. These changes are also related to how knowledge is produced, which impacts who is recognized as knowledge producer, and changes the way academic and cultural autonomy is preserved in the face of these new actors and their public interventions. Thus, they conclude arguing that one could identify the

shaping of an emotional education for this generation, since this libertarian right manages to engage them not by imposing a doctrine, but by offering an emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual framework.

Finally, in their article "The (failed) construction of a far-right actor: Mexico's Frenaa and its media representations" Leandro Rodríguez Medina, Mario Fergnani, and José Flores Capriles focus on Frenaa (Spanish acronym for *Frente Nacional Anti Andrés Manuel López Obrador* / National Anti-AMLO Front) and, specifically, on how the Mexican press has constructed this actor and its image. The Frenaa movement, which emerged in 2020 as an explicitly reactionary collective organized around opposition to the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, coincided with the consolidation of a progressive government that its opponents portrayed as a threat to liberal democracy and national sovereignty. The authors characterize it as a proto-far-right actor, an actor in the early stages of formation, lacking decisive influence in public debate, and unable to build a broader front around itself. From an ideological perspective, Frenaa identifies with ultranationalism, authoritarianism, moral conservatism, and a strong anti-communist orientation as central elements linking it to long-standing right-wing movements. The analysis of the Mexican press developed in the article reveals that, far from normalizing the emergence of these actors, the press acted as a mechanism for delegitimization. This specific case contrasts with current literature that attributes the rise of the new far-right to the mass media, offering some insights into national specificities regarding the dynamics of a growing shift to the right that are often assumed to be global. While there is a relevant literature identifying FRENAA as part of a broader far-right ecosystem marked by moral conservatism, antagonistic identity construction, and discursive polarization, the authors argue that Frenaa illustrates what we might describe as a proto-far-right actor, an actor only incipiently constituted as such, lacking decisive weight in public debate and unable to build a broader front around itself. Thus, their empirical findings show that press framing frequently operates as mechanisms of delegitimation, ridicule, and symbolic containment, complicating assumptions about linear processes of mainstreaming. In combination with the other articles, this provides a broader perspective on the strategies and forms of political mobilization among the political right.

The new global right: common agendas and differences

When observing such different efforts to advance new interpretations of how these actors' organization and agendas have shaped contemporary right-wing politics, it might be also relevant to examine their strategies on a macro-political scale. In France the Le Pen family successfully transitioned power between generations; this year we are seeing a similar process in Brazil, with the older son of former president Jair Bolsonaro emerging as the main and so far, best positioned candidate[1] in the presidential run against the incumbent Lula.

An attempt to account for asymmetries concerning the production and circulation of knowledge on the topic of our special issue reveals that, although there has been extensive research on the intersection of far right and genderized politics, it seems to be less than the concept of hypermasculinity (Keim, 2021) should warrant. The ideal of hypermasculinity is foundational to far-right ideologies and must therefore be recognized as a defining element. Hypermasculinity is deeply intertwined with the notion of "gender complementarity", a principle invoked to oppose gender equality and to reassert traditional family structures in opposition to feminism and gender diversity. This idea of gender complementarity often draws on religious arguments, as seen in the Vatican's response to the 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. The Catholic Church, alongside Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish allies, resisted international progress on sexual and reproductive rights, viewing these developments as a precursor to the global acceptance of abortion – a challenge to traditional motherhood, and a legitimization of homosexuality (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017, p. 263). Beyond religious justifications, other far-right factions emphasize biological rationales to legitimize hypermasculinity and gender complementarity (Villa, 2017, p. 104).

In campaigns against gender equality and gender pluralism, far-right actors frequently align with broader, more moderate groups – including conservative parties, conservative Catholics, Salafist movements, men's rights activists, and homophobic networks. Within these mobilizations, gender serves as a "symbolic glue", enabling the formation of extensive

[1] While we were finishing these introductory reflections, a corruption-related scandal implicated this son of former president Jair Bolsonaro, possibly affecting his level of success. It remains to be seen how far this will impact his candidature.

coalitions even among actors with divergent ideological backgrounds (Kováts & Põim, 2015). For instance, during the 2013 *La Manif pour tous* movement against same-sex marriage, in France, important fragments of the *Front National* marched alongside conservative Catholics. These latter sought to conceal their religious foundations in order to adapt to a largely secularist context (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer & Tricou, 2017; Dubslaff, 2017). Anti-genderism has also become a common theme in Germany, around which a variety of collective actors converges, including fractions of the (neo)conservative and the far-right movements (Villa 2017, p. 99).

Across Europe, anti-gender movements also frame the issue as an external imposition, often attributing it to "imperial" forces such as the EU or the UN. Two issues related to the essays published here also reflect the relevance of a gender perspective in the study of far-right actors and strategies: firstly, the absence of gender as a theme and, secondly, the fact that, among the authors of the articles, only one is a woman. Besides the long-standing obstacles faced by women in academia, perhaps the aggressive manifestation of hypermasculinity in contemporary right-wing politics may also discourage gender as a research topic.

Coming back to similarities and differences between the two main contexts under scrutiny, another common trait lies in the "antiestablishment" discourse of many right-wing political actors, which expresses a deep crisis of representation. In terms of its economic and ideological aspects, in Europe, the pitfalls of assembling the European Union are a centrepiece to understanding it. In Brazil, particularly, the response to PT's (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Workers' Party) three consecutive terms of office, with Lula being re-elected (from 2003 to 2010), and then managing to contribute towards the election of his successor, Dilma Roussef (2011), who was also re-elected, but suffered an impeachment nearly halfway throughout her second term, culminated in several movements that split from the so called *Jornadas* (*Journées*) of 2013. Paradoxically, Jair Bolsonaro, a former military officer who, before becoming president, had been an elected federal parliamentarian for 27 years, became the leader or representative of this antiestablishment stance.

Thus, the importance of collectively organizing research on this topic seems to be even higher, allowing, from the outset, for different viewpoints on the same topics. As already evident in this small sample of articles, this

further reinforces the relevance on combining multiple methodological approaches, that can be used to collect data and produce critical reflections that account for the heterogeneous media, actors, and contexts that shape how these new political right-wing forms and practices manifest themselves.

In many European countries, particularly in France and Germany, where two of the organizers live and work, the far right has gained ground. In France, Marine Le Pen and the *Rassemblement National* (former *Front National*) has gained relevant support, while in Germany the *Pegida* (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* / European Patriots against the Islamization of the West) movement and the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland* / Alternative for Germany) party where able to instil relevance to right-extremist ideals that had long been rejected in these countries. When considering the circulation of certain political concepts, terms or ideas, it is worth recalling Wiebke Keim's (2021) reflection, when she argues that it would be more accurate to speak of "post-fascism"[2] in reference to the authoritarian or "far-right" movements in Europe. This concept of having surpassed authoritarian manifestations and rulings probably has to be taken with a grain of salt when considering Latin America – particularly, Brazil, where the efforts to keeping authority and political power during and immediately after the 2022 elections almost amounted to a coup d'état. Similar forms of protest had already been seen in the USA after Donald Trump lost his first attempt at re-election, culminating in Capitol attacks on January 6th 2021. Such event made Robert Paxton, a leading historian of interwar fascism, change his mind. He agreed that this was real fascism (The New York Times, 23 Oct. 2024).

While a common denominator among most, if not all, of these European movements lies in their anti-immigration stance, the context of Latin America is different. This does not mean we cannot point to manifestations of xenophobia. But, on the one hand, there is a much lower presence of contemporary immigration, turning this into a relatively marginal issue. And more importantly, there are less significant cultural differences in this phenomenon, as a significant part of the immigration comes from other Latin American countries, meaning less differences in terms of language or

[2] The relation between capitalism and fascism has been extensively discussed by critical theory. It could also be taken up, as has been done before (Klein & Regatieri, 2018), to reflect on the role played by the "crisis" as an important factor to galvanize authoritarian tendencies.

religion. On the other hand, the relevance of a right-wing values agenda gravitating around several (neo)liberal economic pressures (for example, privatization of state-funded services), anti-abortion rights, scientific negationism, etc. point to a rather complex set of perspectives. It further implies that there are agendas of convergence and alliance between such groups, whether on a national or an international scale, while other issues may be more controversial even among those who do identify as being part of (far) right-wing politics.

The growing convergence between these movements serves to defend the Christian faith and the Christian civilization. In the European context, the rather general term "Islamization" has gained prominence as a central issue over the years. While in most of Latin America the Islamic religion is rarely present, the manifestations of so called "Afro-Brazilian religions" are increasingly being called into question, ostensibly in defence of Catholicism, Protestantism, and sometimes – as was repeatedly seen during the Bolsonaro government – Judaism. On some level this has also been coupled with a call to restore the Christian traditional family, thus contributing to an anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ agenda. Thus, it is possible to argue that elements of a cultural worldview based on the dominance of a white, male population underlies these far-right movements.

Another relevant issue that is gaining prominence in several countries in Latin America, due to their presidential regimes with direct elections of the president, is the role of charismatic – in the Weberian sense – and populist leaders. Jair Bolsonaro, in the case of Brazil, probably stands out, as well as, more recently, Javier Milei in Argentina. Considering the moment this reflection is being prepared, in April and May 2026, it goes without saying that Donald Trump took the same path, in perhaps an even more extremist[3] stance, as he was able to back up his rhetoric with military power.

As can be seen in the articles, the concept of right-wing actors or politicians as "antiestablishment", as those who speak on behalf of "la gente de bien", the good people, along with the prominence of various forms of antifeminism, cannot be overlooked when seeking to understand how these discourses were able to thrive among the youth. For many, this also means a change of heart when it comes to their relations with politics: former

[3] Here we make a distinction between "extremist" positions, that we shall associate with right-wing politics, and "radical", for the left-wing actions and stances.

enthusiasts of left-wing values mention how they were somehow able to see the lies, and therefore found a new sense of political dedication in the words and/or performance of Bolsonaro, Milei and Trump (or Orbán and Le Pen).

One should also not ignore the role played by the narrative of communism (and the need of still battling it nowadays) in South America, particularly in those countries that endured long-lasting dictatorships throughout the twentieth century, as was the case in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. In this sense, regardless of its accuracy, there remains a strong appeal to the idea that the left is working towards implementing a communist government (or dictatorship...). Such a narrative is reinforced where there remains a Worker's Party, as in Brazil, although they have democratically elected a president for over four terms now, and most of the economic and political agenda does not resemble communism (or socialism). This is, in fact, a significant difference in comparison to Europe, where the prospect of any communist government does not withstand a closer examination of political agendas and organizations.

Furthermore, there is a component of defending (absolute) free speech that resembles the reflection on repressive tolerance outlined by Herbert Marcuse (1965). This presents contradictions but also makes room for interesting and profound debates concerning what can be (or, rather, should be) tolerated in discourses that likely fall more squarely into the category of hate speech, but are repeatedly presented as legitimate viewpoints. We quote Marcuse to illustrate the actuality of his thought:

> As deterrents against nuclear war, as police action against subversion, as technical aid in the fight against imperialism and communism, as methods of pacification in neo-colonial massacres, violence and suppression are promulgated, practiced, and defended by democratic and authoritarian governments alike, and the people subjected to these governments are educated to sustain such practices as necessary for the preservation of the status quo. Tolerance is extended to policies, conditions, and modes of behavior which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery (Marcuse, 1965, p. 82).

To put it into a nutshell: there seems to be a double-standard when defending (or also attacking) tolerance. When discourses and practices aimed at eliminating humans or keeping existing inequalities are called

into question, right-wing politics usually reacts by denouncing attack to freedom of speech and ask for tolerance. But when minorities fight for their existence, pushing legislative measures and changes to uphold or create a few rights, they cannot be tolerated since they seem to go against the (right) liberal values.

As can be seen in the article that discuss what the authors deem to be a necromedicine – which became established throughout the Bolsonaro government during the pandemic, with relevant support from medical staff –, there is a rising scientific (or pseudoscientific) effort to sustain viewpoints that had been considered overcome as a consequence of scientific discovery. While we are not suggesting an approach based on absolute scientism, the way universities and academic knowledge have been questioned and delegitimized have also become more prevalent in these discourses and practices.

The complexity, or polylectic, of defiance has already been sociologically discussed through the idea of *scripting defiance* (Sitas *et al.*, 2022). This special issue offers an outlook on concrete cases through which these scripts manifest themselves in society, thus allowing those interested in these studies, as well as a broader academic public, to gather insights reflecting the changes and multiple forms of manifestation of the new right wing. Such contributions are vital to avoid simplifying explanations, and to counter a recurrent tendency of producing one size fits all interpretive models. We hope you enjoy reading it.

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