

**ELECTORAL CONSPIRACISM ON YOUTUBE: DISPUTE OVER THE FRAMING
OF ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES BY BRASIL PARALELO**

***CONSPIRACIONISMO ELEITORAL NO YOUTUBE: DISPUTA DE
ENQUADRAMENTOS SOBRE URNAS ELETRÔNICAS PELA BRASIL PARALELO***

***CONSPIRACIONISMO ELECTORAL EN YOUTUBE: DISPUTA SOBRE EL
ENCUADRAMIENTO DE LAS URNAS ELECTRONICAS POR BRASIL PARALELO***



André FURLANI¹
e-mail: andresampfurlani@gmail.com

How to reference this paper:

FURLANI, André. Electoral conspiracism on YouTube: dispute over the framing of electronic voting machines by Brasil Paralelo. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 1, e025004. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp1.19672



| **Submitted:** 18/09/2024
| **Revisions required:** 11/01/2025
| **Approved:** 14/06/2025
| **Published:** 12/09/2025

Editors: Prof. Dr. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbaux
Prof. Me. Paulo José de Carvalho Moura
Prof. Me. Luana Estela Di Pires
Prof. Me. Lucas Barbosa de Santana
Prof. Me. Maurício Miotti

¹ Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte — MG — Brazil. Master's Degree in Political Science from UFMG.

ABSTRACT: This article proposes a framing analysis of the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, published on the eve of the second round of the 2018 elections on the YouTube channel of the production company Brasil Paralelo. The documentary film can be characterized as a conspiracy theory and is useful for analyzing the formation of an extreme right-wing discourse against electronic ballot boxes and the Brazilian electoral system. We started from a literature on disinformation, conspiracy theories, and post-truth, as well as an understanding of the historical debate on electronic ballot boxes and the context of the crisis of democracy, to think about the framing carried out by Brasil Paralelo based on two frames: technical (un)reliability and (anti)democracy. The framing analysis sought to identify specific processes of selection, salience, and omission, as well as the use of cognitive reorganization strategies and elements that make up a conspiratorial atmosphere. It is concluded that Brasil Paralelo, through the documentary, composed the scenario of post-truth and crisis of democracy by stimulating distrust against the electoral system; hijacked technical arguments critical of the electronic voting system; established boundaries between friends and enemies, aligning itself with Bolsonaro; and omitted important facts and events of the political context.

KEYWORDS: Brasil Paralelo. Electronic voting machines. Framing. Conspiracy theory. Post-truth.

RESUMO: Este artigo propõe uma análise de enquadramento do documentário *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, publicado às vésperas do segundo turno das eleições de 2018, no canal do YouTube da produtora Brasil Paralelo. O filme documentário pode ser caracterizado como uma teoria conspiratória e é útil para analisar a formação de um discurso de extrema direita contra as urnas eletrônicas e o sistema eleitoral brasileiro. Partiu-se de uma literatura sobre desinformação, teorias conspiratórias e pós-verdade, bem como da compreensão do debate histórico sobre as urnas eletrônicas e o contexto de crise da democracia, para refletir sobre o enquadramento realizado pela Brasil Paralelo a partir de dois frames: (in)confiabilidade técnica e (anti)democracia. Buscou-se identificar, na análise de enquadramento, processos específicos de seleção, saliência e omissão, bem como o uso de estratégias de reorganização cognitiva e elementos que compõem uma atmosfera conspiratória. Conclui-se que a Brasil Paralelo, por meio do documentário, compôs o cenário de pós-verdade e crise da democracia ao estimular a desconfiança contra o sistema eleitoral; sequestrou argumentos técnicos críticos ao sistema eletrônico de votação; estabeleceu fronteiras entre amigos e inimigos, alinhando-se ao bolsonarismo; e omitiu fatos e eventos importantes do contexto político.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Brasil Paralelo. Urnas eletrônicas. Enquadramento. Teoria conspiratória. Pós-verdade.

RESUMEN: Este artículo propone un análisis de encuadre del documental *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, publicado en vísperas de la segunda vuelta de las elecciones de 2018 en el canal de YouTube de la productora Brasil Paralelo. El documental puede caracterizarse como una teoría de la conspiración y es útil para analizar la formación de un discurso de extrema derecha contra las urnas electrónicas y el sistema electoral brasileño. Partimos de la literatura sobre desinformación, teorías de la conspiración y posverdad, así como de la comprensión del debate histórico sobre las urnas electrónicas y del contexto de la crisis de la democracia, para reflexionar sobre el framing llevado a cabo por Brasil Paralelo a partir de dos marcos: la

(in)confiabilidad técnica y la (anti)democracia. El análisis de framing buscó identificar procesos específicos de selección, saliencia y omisión, así como el uso de estrategias de reorganización cognitiva y elementos que componen una atmósfera conspirativa. Concluimos que Brasil Paralelo, a través del documental, ha instigado un escenario de posverdad y crisis de la democracia al estimular la desconfianza en el sistema electoral; ha secuestrado argumentos técnicos críticos sobre el sistema de voto electrónico; ha establecido fronteras entre amigos y enemigos, alineándose con Bolsonaro; y ha omitido hechos y acontecimientos importantes del contexto político.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Brasil Paralelo. Urnas electrónicas. Encuadre. Teoría de la conspiración. Posverdad.*

Introduction

The crisis of liberal democracy, concomitant with the rise of a public sphere mediated by social media, has been a subject of significant attention in recent years (Runciman, 2018; Mounk, 2019; Empoli, 2019). Concerns revolve around issues such as the spread of disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories (Dourado, 2020; Piaia, 2021; Aggio, 2021; Mendonça *et al.*, 2023); the attention economy as a driving force behind a post-truth regime (Harsin, 2015); and echo chambers (Sunstein, 2017), which distance social groups from shared truths and foster a tribalized public sphere (Mendonça; Aggio, 2023). The convergence of these factors has had profound consequences on public opinion, which has become increasingly polarized and calcified into seemingly irreconcilable ideological groups (Nunes; Traumann, 2023).

The deepening of the democratic crisis in Brazil has been directly linked to this significant transformation of the public sphere, accompanied by new political propaganda strategies. This process was marked by the mass demonstrations of June 2013, mobilized through Facebook, which profoundly disrupted institutional politics (Nobre, 2022). Following the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the imprisonment of Lula da Silva, Jair Bolsonaro's electoral victory became a striking symbol of the fragility of Brazilian democracy, as he was elected on an anti-political platform, portraying the military dictatorship in a positive light (Avritzer, 2019) and employing not only populist but also violent rhetoric against his opponents, in disregard of constitutional principles. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's rise was characterized by an increasing occupation of the digital environment by conservative and reactionary actors who, directly or indirectly, endorsed his authoritarian ideals, with particular emphasis on the media company Brasil Paralelo².

Beyond his characteristic aggressiveness, a crucial aspect of Bolsonaro's discourse—already evident in the years preceding his election—was his attack on electronic voting machines. Historically supported by a large portion of the Brazilian population (Tavares; Moreira, 2011) and regarded as a fundamental technology for democratic consolidation (Carvalho, 2021), electronic voting became the subject of heated political debate after the 2014 elections, due to the refusal of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party to accept the electoral

² Brasil Paralelo is a media production company primarily focused on audiovisual materials, especially documentaries with a reactionary and, recurrently, conspiratorial ideological bias. Although it does not explicitly declare any direct association with Bolsonarism, it reinforces common discourses by constructing narratives designed to justify typical far-right positions.

outcome and Bolsonaro's proposal to implement printed vote receipts through a supplementary article to Law No. 13.165/15, popularly known as the "mini electoral reform," in 2015. Over the following years, a disinformation campaign emerged on social media, aiming to generate distrust toward the system responsible for consolidating electoral preferences, with a significant spike in postings during the 2018 election period (Ruediger *et al.*, 2020).

In that same year, on the eve of the presidential runoff, Brasil Paralelo released a video on its YouTube channel entitled *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*³ (Electronic Voting Machines Dossier). Its approach, which will be analyzed in this article, is noteworthy not only for its disinformative content but also for consolidating a conspiratorial narrative against electronic voting machines, one that appropriates techno-scientific arguments and challenges previously well-established and widely accepted frames within public opinion. The conspiracy theory alleging electronic voting fraud was reinforced throughout Bolsonaro's administration, with the participation of the Armed Forces, and was used as a means to legitimize an attempted coup d'état between 2022 and 2023, when Bolsonaro was defeated by Lula da Silva in his bid for reelection (Furlani, 2024).

This article proposes a framing analysis (Entman, 1993; Mendonça; Simões, 2012) of the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, aiming to understand how Brasil Paralelo addresses the issue of electronic voting machines within a historical moment marked by democratic crisis and the rise of Bolsonaroism. The analysis focuses on identifying which elements are selected and made salient in the narrative, as well as which are omitted. To this end, the article first revisits discussions on online disinformation, conspiracy theories, and post-truth. It then provides an overview of the technical and political debate surrounding electronic voting machines prior to the disinformation campaign. A brief characterization of Brasil Paralelo is also presented, followed by an analysis of the documentary based on the dispute between two central frames regarding electronic voting machines: "technical (un)reliability" and "(anti)democracy."

³ The aforementioned documentary was removed from digital platforms, likely by a court order issued by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE). However, it was later reposted by other channels and downloaded by the author for the purposes of analysis and research. At present, it is no longer available on YouTube.

Disinformation, conspiracy theories, and post-truth

In 2016, the term *post-truth* gained prominence when it was chosen as the Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary. According to the dictionary, the term denotes “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion or personal belief.” (Winner, 2016). Its selection took place in the context of Donald Trump’s election in the United States and the Brexit victory in the United Kingdom. Both processes were marked by the use of new political propaganda techniques on social media, based on microtargeting strategies and disinformation⁴. According to Harsin (2018), post-truth can be understood as a breakdown of social trust, manifested primarily in the growing distrust toward media outlets—particularly journalism—which had long been regarded as the principal institution for articulating the public truth.

The topic of fake news and disinformation has gained significant prominence in studies on political communication in recent years (Dourado, 2020; Piaia, 2021; Mendonça *et al.*, 2023). While falsehoods have long been present in politics, the emergence of a new public sphere, mediated by social media algorithms, has amplified the reach of deceptive narratives that mobilize emotions and affective responses. Moreover, the logic of these platforms—founded on the *attention economy* and the personalization of content—has fostered *ideological bubbles*, or “echo chambers” (Sunstein, 2017), which expose individuals to radically divergent interpretations of the shared world, thereby magnifying the impact of false news. With regard to YouTube, research indicates that its algorithmic recommendation system contributes to user radicalization (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2020). This scenario, which some have described as an *epistemic crisis* (Benkler *et al.*, 2018; Mendonça; Bernardes, 2022), generates negative effects on the stability of democracies, being associated with the rise of authoritarian populists and the erosion of citizens’ trust in political institutions (Runciman, 2018; Mounk, 2019; Empoli, 2019).

In the specific case of the debate surrounding Brazilian electronic voting machines, Ruediger *et al.* (2020) identified a significant increase in Facebook posts and YouTube videos expressing distrust in the Brazilian electoral system between 2014 and 2020, with a marked peak in 2018. Over the entire analyzed period, there were 16,107,846 interactions with this type

⁴ Over the following years, a scandal emerged regarding the operations of Cambridge Analytica, a company contracted for both Trump’s and Brexit campaigns. Utilizing data obtained through Facebook, the company identified voter profiles and delivered targeted content—frequently false—to mobilize them politically. The term *microtargeting* refers to this strategy of personalizing political content, in contrast with the previously standard mass communication approaches.

of content on Facebook and 23,807,390 views of related videos on YouTube. In 2018, the same year in which Brasil Paralelo released its documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, 534 videos on electoral distrust were uploaded to YouTube.

The analyzed YouTube videos and Facebook posts, ranging from fabricated news to decontextualized information, are described by Ruediger *et al.* (2020) as an example of *informational moral panic*—a concept employed by Stanley Cohen (2011) to refer to “public anxieties triggered by the perception of a threat to societal values and interests, activated by mass media coverage” (Ruediger *et al.*, 2020, p. 8, our translation). However, according to the authors, the dissemination of such content on digital platforms constitutes an expansion of this informational moral panic, now adapted to a public sphere structured around social media interactions.

Regarding the object of this study—namely, the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas* produced by Brasil Paralelo—the concept of *conspiracy theory* proves particularly fruitful. Uscinski (2020) defines a conspiracy theory as a narrative that seeks to explain past, present, or future events based on the notion that powerful groups act in secret against the common good. Conspiracy theories may be true or false, but they invariably challenge the explanations provided by established epistemic authorities, such as science and journalism. Furthermore, conspiracy theorists frequently accuse such authorities of concealing “the truth.” In this sense, it can be inferred that conspiracy theories possess two fundamental conceptual dimensions: one political and the other epistemological. The political dimension is inherent because such theories always address some form of power asymmetry, whether real or imagined; the epistemological dimension arises because, at least on an individual level, adherence to conspiracy theories is often driven by a genuine desire to uncover the truth. Understanding the conspiratorial dimension of what is commonly labeled *fake news* or disinformation is crucial, as conspiracy theories provide the interpretive frameworks that underpin and give meaning to the lies and decontextualized information shaping public opinion today (Aggio, 2021).

The popularity of conspiratorial thinking is amplified by interactions on social media, as these platforms enable the formation of communities around shared beliefs that mutually reinforce one another and find resonance within populist rhetoric (Cesarino, 2022). Populism and conspiracism operate through dualistic and structurally similar rhetorical frameworks. While the former mobilizes the idea of a “pure people” against a “corrupt” or “malevolent elite,” the latter attributes the root causes of social problems to the secret machinations of elites or

allegedly powerful groups. Amid conflicts of narratives that mobilize negative affects, social cohesion erodes, and polarization intensifies.

In broader terms, Harsin (2015) argues that society is transitioning from a regime of truth to a regime of post-truth. As Foucault (2019) previously asserted, truth is a product of this world and is historically situated. Its production is grounded in discourses and apparatuses through which specific forms of knowledge are generated and legitimized. While truth was formerly established through scientific discourse and institutions typical of disciplinary societies, such as schools, universities, and mass media, it now necessarily passes through new forms of production, interpretation, and dissemination characteristic of platformization. In the dynamics of control societies (Deleuze, 2000), affluent political and economic actors mobilize “freedoms” and simulacra of political participation to contest truth and, consequently, power. According to Harsin, the main symptom of the post-truth regime is the proliferation of *truth markets*, observable both in contemporary political disputes on social media and in research commissioned by lobbying interests—for instance, in the tobacco and oil industries—to manufacture false controversies (Oreskes; Conway, 2011; Rajão *et al.*, 2022).

Building on Harsin’s (2015) insights, Letícia Cesarino (2021) contends that, as trust in expert systems diminishes—of which the Brazilian electronic voting system is a notable example—three *cognitive reorganization strategies* have emerged. First, there is an emphasis on personal experience and immediate perception. Amid competing claims to truth on social media, the logic of the “here and now” and “seeing is believing” gains prominence. Second, there is the use of hidden causal links, employed to connect real events to “alternative facts” and construct compelling narratives and, often, conspiratorial theories that mobilize social anxieties. Third, there is the positioning relative to the friend-enemy boundary, which, in a polarized society, becomes essential for the perception of truth.

As we will observe, these strategies are present in the documentary analyzed in this study. Before delving into the analysis, however, it is necessary to briefly outline the debate surrounding the electronic voting system, which, despite enjoying broad popular acceptance for over a decade, has also faced criticism over the years.

Electronic voting machines: from debate to conspiracism

In a country historically marked by democratic interruptions and electoral fraud, electronic voting machines have played a prominent role in stabilizing democracy during Brazil's New Republic (Nicolau, 2012; Carvalho, 2021). In addition to pacifying disputes over vote counting for more than a decade, these machines have enhanced citizen participation, facilitating voting for illiterate individuals and those with visual impairments, for example. According to Gastaldi and Rosendo (2012), their implementation also influenced political behavior: null and blank votes decreased significantly, and it became more difficult for “minor” candidates to gain visibility.

From a sociotechnical perspective, the electronic voting machine can be considered an inherently political artifact (Winner, 1980), as it is central to the functioning of elections and Brazilian democracy. Like other technological artifacts, its design emerged amid contestation, and the definition of its technological configuration—coordinating Brazilian democracy—produces effects on society and politics. While its importance for stabilizing the electoral process in Brazil is widely recognized, it is necessary to contextualize the technical debate surrounding its design (Carvalho, 2021; Machado; Oliveira, 2021; Aranha *et al.*, 2013; Aranha *et al.*, 2018; Graaf, 2017), to fully understand the discursive disputes (Vinhas; Prates, 2020; Rosa; Bianco, 2022) that have unfolded in an environment saturated with disinformation about electoral fraud (Ruediger, 2020).

The debate on electronic voting machines—particularly the controversy surrounding printed vote receipts—is as old as the machines themselves⁵. Indeed, Brazil's adoption of fully electronic elections represents an exceptional case⁶. Nevertheless, the design of the electronic voting system has faced reservations and criticism, particularly from computer scientists who have engaged in debates about the electoral system.

The debate, which has unfolded across multiple fronts⁷, can be understood as follows: on one hand, there are those who defend the electronic voting system for having been decisive

⁵ The 2002 elections provide an illustrative example. With electronic voting machines fully implemented nationwide, the External Printing Module was tested in some devices that same year. While the TSE concluded that the device caused more harm than benefit (TSE, 2003), the Brazilian Computer Society acknowledged the issues but reaffirmed in its report (Graaf; Custódio, 2002), the importance of vote printing for transparency and auditability.

⁶ See the study by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, available interactively at: https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/question?question_id=9349&database_theme=327

⁷ Vote printing has been debated in Congress at least four times. The first three debates resulted in its approval in 2002, 2009, and 2015. These measures were blocked by the Supreme Court or vetoed by the President of the

in eliminating the frequent fraud associated with paper ballot counting, thereby ensuring a level of electoral stability previously unknown (Nicolau, 2012; Gastaldi; Rosendo, 2012; Carvalho, 2021; Tavares; Moreira, 2011; Machado; Oliveira, 2021). The electoral technology built around the electronic voting machine is also credited with enhancing efficiency and inclusivity in Brazilian elections, thereby expanding social participation (Carvalho, 2021; Nicolau, 2012).

On the other hand, critics do not deny that electronic voting machines represented an advance but point to the system's lack of transparency and insufficient levels of software auditability (Aranha *et al.*, 2013; Aranha *et al.*, 2018; Graaf, 2017; Marcacini; Barreto Jr., 2019; Ferrão *et al.*, 2019). For these specialists, some of whom participated in the Public Security Tests (Aranha *et al.*, 2013; Aranha *et al.*, 2018), the main problem with the machines lies in their reliance on a "security through obscurity" model, in which only the TSE has complete knowledge of the system's functionality. Consequently, for most of the population, the electronic voting machine remains a "black box" (Graaf, 2017). The critiques of these computer scientists appear to echo the values of openness and information freedom promoted by the hacking community and its debates over the formation of the Internet in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Himanen; Torvalds, 2001). Although the Electoral Court and the STF did not adopt the proposal for printed vote receipts, these critiques have been important for the ongoing development of measures aimed at enhancing transparency in the electoral process.

Returning to Giddens (1991), it becomes evident that the issue of trust or distrust in electronic voting machines is linked to a fundamental characteristic of modernity, which he identifies as reliance on expert systems. According to Giddens, modernity is, in part, a lifestyle in which individuals are constantly enmeshed in expert systems in which they place a specific form of trust. When boarding an airplane, taking medication, or casting a vote in an electronic machine, individuals rely on the accuracy of knowledge they do not themselves possess and on the competence and correctness of technicians they do not know. In this sense, it is crucial to recognize that, in the case of a technology that underpins the entire political and legal framework of elections, the trust that modern society places in expert systems can be targeted in ways that undermine democracy by its adversaries.

The controversy surrounding electronic voting machines became particularly visible to the public during the 2018 elections, when three argumentative fronts emerged. According to

Republic under the Court's guidance. In 2021, during the vote on PEC 135/19, the proposal to print votes was rejected by the Chamber of Deputies. However, more research is needed to systematize all the debate that has already taken place on the subject.

Vinhas and Prates (2020), who analyzed the case drawing on Latour (2012), the first line of argumentation was the “program network”—comprising the TSE, allied academics, and traditional media—which defended electronic voting machines by emphasizing the democratic stability they provide, the security and audit measures coordinated by the Electoral Court, and the fact that no fraud had ever been detected. The other two fronts, constituting the “anti-program network”—critical computer scientists, particularly Diego Aranha⁸, and political-party groups associated with Jair Bolsonaro’s campaign—employed two distinct strategies:

The first emphasizes the need to open the black box of technoscience underpinning the reliability of the voting machine, as a means to strengthen confidence in the Brazilian electoral system, as noted by Professor Aranha. The second involves political-ideological argumentation in which political-party groups cast doubt on electronic voting machines as a way of questioning the outcome of democratic choices potentially contrary to their interests [...] (Vinhas; Prates, 2020, p. 33, our translation).

The latter strategy, associated with the rise of the far-right, built upon the first by appropriating technical arguments while subverting the principle of enhancing the credibility of the electoral system, relying instead on conspiratorial theories tied to antidemocratic interests. In this context, the conspiracy theory alleging fraud in electronic voting machines accuses the TSE of secretly manipulating elections to favor candidates from the Workers’ Party (PT) or the so-called establishment. While there are disagreements about procedures to ensure the security of the voting machines and the integrity of elections, epistemic authorities—both those within the program network and critical members of the scientific community—agree that there is no convincing evidence or proof of any type of fraud.

Narratives about electoral fraud have been common throughout Brazil’s history (Nicolau, 2012). However, the increasing digitalization of the public sphere and the growing number of individuals able to replicate messages and perpetuate rumors (Rosa; Bianco, 2022), in the context of a crisis in Brazilian democracy (Avritzer, 2019), elevate the issue to a new level. What Vinhas and Prates (2020) observed during the 2018 elections was later confirmed as a continuing trend by Rosa and Bianco (2022). According to the authors, online rumors about electoral fraud function as a self-perpetuating myth. In their words:

⁸ Diego de Freitas Aranha has a bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate in computer science. He became publicly known for being a technical voice in favor of printed votes and for having stirred up debates with representatives of the TSE after detecting alleged vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines.

Arguments become unbreakable because they draw on symbolic elements that endure over time. The repetition, characteristic of myth, reveals a kind of inscription in a circulating loop, which even prevents us from determining the historical situation being referenced. This means that what we perceive about the idea of electoral fraud, the tension around the voting machines, the dispute over auditable votes, the suspicion concerning secrecy and the invisible to the eye, the shadows, reveals much about how the mediatization of politics interacts with the pregnance of myth and the archetypal images that shape it (Rosa; Bianco, 2022, p. 367, our translation).

From this overview, two points can be inferred. First, the electronic voting machine, despite its clearly positive effects on democracy and strong popular acceptance over more than a decade, has always been subject to disagreements between politicians and technical experts. This demonstrates that the debate initially unfolded during times of democratic normality, with the improvement of the electoral system as its horizon. Second, it becomes evident that trust in expert systems (Giddens, 1991), such as the Brazilian electronic voting system, can be undermined by conspiratorial narratives, rumors, and falsehoods that gain traction in a digitalized public sphere and point toward a post-truth regime (Harsin, 2015; Vinhas; Prates, 2020; Cesarino, 2021; Rosa; Bianco, 2022).

In the case under analysis, a new discursive formation emerged in resonance with Bolsonaro's candidacy, appropriating technical criticisms of the electronic voting system to construct a conspiratorial theory that accuses the TSE of manipulating elections in favor of the so-called establishment and the political left. Since the electronic voting machine has become a symbol of democratic consolidation in Brazil, attacking it through conspiratorial insinuations constitutes an attack on democracy itself. The documentary produced by Brasil Paralelo serves as a particularly fertile object for analysis, as it elaborates in detail the conspiratorial theory that contests previously well-established framings of Brazilian electronic voting machines.

The construction of parallel narratives

Brasil Paralelo Entretenimento and Educação S/A is a Brazilian company founded in Porto Alegre in 2016 by Filipe Valerim, Lucas Ferrugem, and Henrique Viana. Initially dedicated to producing documentary videos for YouTube, the company now operates its own streaming platform, offers courses, and produces e-books, among other products. On its official

website, it declares a mission: “to rescue good values, ideas, and feelings in the hearts of all Brazilians.” It also aims “to become the most culturally influential ecosystem in Brazil.” According to its own figures, it already has over 400,000 subscriber members and 3.6 million YouTube subscribers⁹. Additionally, in 2022, it reported a revenue of R\$150 million (Amorim, 2023). Although the producer presents itself as an impartial and reliable source of news and information, it clearly exhibits a conservative bias, appealing to historical revisionism and conspiratorial narratives.

Brasil Paralelo emerged amid the crisis of democracy in Brazil, and its growth accelerated alongside the rise of the far right. The scale it quickly achieved can be explained not only by its ability to produce various documentaries and videos of considerable editing quality amid the conservative wave but also by its advertising expenditures. Between August 4, 2020, and January 30, 2023, Brasil Paralelo was the largest advertiser in the category of “social issues, elections, or politics” on Meta platforms, investing R\$16.3 million in 48,843 ads. It has also made substantial economic and strategic investments with Google, ranking among the top YouTube advertisers and frequently appearing at the top of search results for various topics (Granjeia; Almeida, 2023). Through a solid digital marketing strategy, Brasil Paralelo has established itself as the politically oriented media organization with the greatest digital reach and impact in contemporary Brazil.

According to Felinto (2023), beyond the ideological content of Brasil Paralelo’s documentaries, attention must be paid to the “conspiratorial atmosphere” created through the choice of soundtracks and visual effects, which contribute to shaping the contemporary conservative imaginary and generate a sense of constant suspicion. Felinto analyzes this phenomenon in the context of the trilogy on education in Brazil, titled *Pátria Educadora*, which alleges a purported leftist indoctrination through schools. The reactionary and conspiratorial nature of these productions, coupled with revisionist interpretations of history that diverge from scientific consensus, is also evident in other works previously analyzed, such as *1964: O Brasil entre armas e livros*, addressing the military coup (Rodrigues, 2022); *7 denúncias: As consequências do caso Covid-19*, on the coronavirus pandemic (Gruner; Cleto, 2021); *Brasil: A Última Cruzada*, narrating Brazilian history from a colonizer-centered, white, European, and Christian perspective (Moraes; Cleto, 2021); and *Cortina de Fumaça*, dealing with environmental denialism and colonial imaginaries (Santos *et al.*, 2024); among others. As the

⁹ See: <https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/o-que-e-a-brasil-paralelo>. Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.

company's name suggests, the core argumentative thrust of its productions is the presentation and defense of perspectives parallel to those offered by established epistemic authorities. As previously noted, conspiratorial theories are typically structured around the construction of powerful enemies who supposedly determine historical developments to the detriment of the common good, alongside persistent contestation of epistemic authorities and the knowledge they produce (Uscinski, 2020; Aggio, 2021).

The documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas* conforms to this pattern. This short film, slightly over 30 minutes in length, mobilizes emotions and statements to generate a conspiratorial atmosphere (Felinto, 2023). Released on the eve of the second round of the election that brought Jair Bolsonaro to victory, its narrative initially raises doubts about Dilma Rousseff's 2014 victory, appropriates excerpts from statements by certain technical critics of the voting machines, and attempts to link the electronic voting system to a supposed authoritarian strategy for the left to remain in power. The video then narrates the 2018 electoral race, emphasizing Jair Bolsonaro and the knife attack he suffered. Toward the conclusion, it suggests fraud occurred during the first round, citing statements from voters, supposed experts, and even Olavo de Carvalho. Overall, the documentary demonstrates the discursive and ideological alignment of Brasil Paralelo with the rising Bolsonarism and the belief system founded by Olavo de Carvalho (Rocha, 2023), reflecting an authoritarian and conspiratorial tradition within Brazilian political thought.

Framing Analysis

This article proposes a framing analysis of the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas* to examine how Brasil Paralelo contests two common frames concerning electronic voting machines: (in)technical reliability and (anti)democracy. The concept of framing is employed here to illustrate how interpretive schemas shape social interactions and influence individuals' subjective engagement with events (Mendonça; Simões, 2012). Framing allows for understanding what is occurring in a particular situation and how a narrative relates to a given context.

According to Entman (1993), the concept of framing is often criticized for an alleged lack of methodological rigor or for not belonging to an established field of knowledge. Nonetheless, its potential lies precisely in its capacity to integrate multiple disciplines and forms

of knowledge in qualitative analyses aimed at exploring the influence that a text or other communicative artifacts exert on consciousness.

Frames essentially involve processes of selection, salience, and omission. To frame is to select certain aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text. By identifying both the selected and salient aspects, as well as the omitted ones, it is possible to infer the force and intentionality of an argument. Entman (1993) further asserts that frames: 1) define problems, 2) diagnose causes, 3) make moral judgments, and 4) suggest solutions. The analysis that follows seeks to identify these discursive dimensions.

Regarding the different applications of the concept, Mendonça and Simões (2012) indicate that framing has been operationalized in three ways: 1) interactive situation analysis, 2) discursive content analysis, and 3) strategic effect analysis. In this article, framing is employed as a method of discursive content analysis to dissect Brasil Paralelo's approach to electronic voting machines.

In this context, it is understood that the electronic voting machine has predominantly been discussed in the public debate in terms of technological efficiency and as a key element for democratic stability in the New Republic, which generated social trust. Accordingly, two frames are identified: "technical reliability," of an epistemological nature, and "democracy," of a political nature.

However, it is demonstrated that Brasil Paralelo aligns with anti-democratic reactionism and misleading narratives about electoral fraud, formulating a more elaborate conspiratorial theory that inverts the meaning of the established frames to produce new frames related to electronic voting machines: "technical unreliability" and "anti-democracy." These two frames are closely intertwined, insofar as only a reliable device can guarantee the integrity of both elections and democracy.

In this context, it is understood that the electronic voting machine has predominantly been discussed in the public debate in terms of technological efficiency and as a key element for democratic stability in the New Republic, which generated social trust. Accordingly, two frames are identified: "technical reliability," of an epistemological nature, and "democracy," of a political nature. However, it is demonstrated that Brasil Paralelo aligns with anti-democratic reactionism and misleading narratives about electoral fraud, formulating a more elaborate conspiratorial theory that inverts the meaning of the established frames to produce new frames related to electronic voting machines: "technical unreliability" and "anti-democracy." These

two frames are closely intertwined, insofar as only a reliable device can guarantee the integrity of both elections and democracy.

(In)Technical Reliability

As previously noted, the electronic voting machine is an artifact whose contribution to democratic stabilization is indisputable, enjoying 94.4% popular approval in 2010 (Tavares; Moreira, 2011). By the end of 2022, following a disinformation campaign mobilized by the far right, only 35% of Brazilians reported “high trust” in the device (Valor Econômico, 2022). The decline in confidence in the machines and political institutions more broadly (Santos *et al.*, 2020), in its Brazilian particularities, mirrors the crisis of liberal democracies in other countries, all related to the platformization of the public sphere, disinformation, and the fragility of expert systems (Cesarino, 2021). This section seeks to demonstrate how Brasil Paralelo frames the issue of the technical reliability of electronic voting machines, understanding it as an epistemologically grounded frame on the subject.

David Beer (2016), in discussing the social notion of algorithms, asserts that the social sciences must examine not only what specific algorithms are capable of in terms of social determination but also what they evoke in people’s imagination. The electronic voting machine can be understood as an algorithm, insofar as it is based on a finite set of codes designed to solve the aggregation of electoral preferences, although it does not independently make decisions. However, the inherent opacity of expert systems (Giddens, 1991) can be discursively manipulated in various ways. In this case, it is evident that discourses originating from critical actors engaged in a technical and scientific debate aimed at improving the electoral system are appropriated to incite fears and anxieties regarding the corruption of democracy, contributing to the formation of a conspiratorial imaginary.

Figure 1 – Framing the electronic voting machine as suspicious



Source: Brasil Paralelo, screenshot.

Figure 1, appearing within the first minutes of the film, exemplifies the creation of a “conspiratorial atmosphere” (Felinto, 2023). The electronic voting machine is highlighted at the center of a simple table in a dark room, with a single light focused on the device. As the camera approaches, the light flickers, and binary codes rapidly move across the machine’s screen against a black background. The visual cues clearly suggest suspicion. In the background, audio excerpts from news broadcasts announcing Dilma Rousseff’s 2014 election victory are played.

This atmosphere is reinforced through the documentary’s narration and editing techniques. Throughout the video, for instance, a tense and suspenseful soundtrack is used, a style commonly and stereotypically associated with conspiracy documentaries, suggesting a hidden plot to be unveiled in each scene. At several points, the lighting is adjusted to a darker, greenish tone, giving the impression that the subject matter is ominous and secretive.

The introduction to the topic of electronic voting machines is presented through excerpts from statements made by computer scientists, primarily Diego Aranha and members of his team, who participated in the Public Security Tests, either through public hearings or videos sourced from social media. These excerpts are selected to emphasize only the perspectives highlighting vulnerabilities in the security and auditability of the electronic voting machines, while supportive perspectives are either omitted or inconsistently presented. Thus, arguments from proponents of electronic voting are not represented equitably, nor are the security measures and transparency mechanisms implemented by the TSE mentioned.

This strategy of selection, salience, and omission (Entman, 1993) ultimately presents the debate in a biased manner, even distorting and exaggerating the arguments of the technical experts themselves. The position of these experts is aimed at developing more efficient and transparent forms of auditability and responsiveness, despite tensions with the TSE. However, in the documentary, they are framed within a narrative of distrust and delegitimization of elections in Brazil¹⁰, effectively hijacking their technical critique.

Technoscientific language is thus employed as a means to legitimize the argument, as is evident in the focus given to “*Operação Antifraude*,” another initiative by Brasil Paralelo during the 2018 elections, which is highlighted in the documentary (Mota; Couto; Rocha, 2018). A man named Hugo César Hoeschl speaks solemnly about a study to be conducted alongside the TSE’s vote counting. He addresses the camera directly, with a dark room and several operational computers as his backdrop. He announces that TSE data will be subjected to statistical analysis based on Benford’s Law, used for fraud detection, and that the results will be published a few days after the first round of the 2018 elections. He states that a similar study was previously conducted on the 2014 presidential election, indicating a 73.14% probability of data manipulation. Hoeschl concludes by calling the audience to action: “the publication will be sent to the international scientific community and disseminated to the Brazilian public. Brazil needs as many people as possible to know that this operation is underway. Only then will we reduce the risk of fraud. Your mission is to share this message.” Later in the documentary, he returns, claiming a 77.68% probability of electoral data manipulation during the first round of 2018¹¹.

¹⁰ Although he supports the use of printed ballots as a method for auditing the software of electronic voting machines and the electoral process as a whole, Diego Aranha is emphatic in stating that there is no evidence of fraud in Brazilian elections conducted via electronic voting machines, thereby distancing himself from far-right narratives regarding the device, which he has, on other occasions, described as “terrible.” (Schreiber, 2021).

¹¹ It is important to note that a subsequent study, published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal and employing the same methodology—statistical analysis based on Benford’s Law—found no indications of irregularities in the vote counting process (Figueiredo Filho *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 2 – Hugo César Hoeschl presenting Brasil Paralelo’s “*Operação Antifraude*”



Source: Brasil Paralelo, screenshot.

Through technoscientific performativity, the documentary generates a false controversy by using an alleged expert who misuses scientific credentials, ignores existing literature and qualified debate on the subject, and focuses on manufacturing uncertainty (Rajão *et al.*, 2022). In this respect, it aligns with the third argumentative line regarding the reliability of electronic voting machines identified by Vinhas and Prates (2020)—namely, the line that formulates conspiratorial theories and alleges fraud to contest electoral outcomes that are politically inconvenient. It is noteworthy, however, that arguments raised by representatives of the second argumentative line are appropriated and instrumentalized to foster social distrust in democracy.

The *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas* also includes videos of voters frustrated with problems experienced on electronic voting machines during the first round. All complain about being unable to vote for Jair Bolsonaro. In every election, some machines inevitably present issues and are replaced by the competent authorities; moreover, in 2018, there was no abnormal increase in defective machines. The use of videos captured “in the heat of the moment” demonstrates an appeal to emotion and reflects another cognitive reorganization strategy: personal experiences and immediate perceptions serve as organizers and legitimizers of a particular perception of truth (Cesarino, 2021).

Different strategies for legitimizing “truth” are persuasively employed within the promotion of distrust toward epistemic authorities. Moreover, there is an encouragement of skepticism toward the political and epistemic system as a whole, as exemplified in a statement by Lucas Ferrugem: “[...] they have corrupted everything, the state-owned companies, the

Congress, the Executive, the Judiciary, research institutions... all of which are being questioned as well. What guarantees that the voting machines are secure? This is a question that is currently under debate in society.” In this way, Brasil Paralelo positions itself so as to intensify the anti-system sentiment that had already been developing within the Brazilian population (Nobre, 2022; Furlani, 2024).

Table 1 – Elements of the Technical Unreliability Frame

Selection	Salience	Omission
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positions of technicians in favor of printed ballots.• Statements of a supposed “specialist” alleging the possibility of electoral fraud.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasis on technicians’ criticisms of electronic voting machines.• Emphasis on the “imminent” electoral fraud in 2018, announced by the supposed “specialist.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technical arguments supporting electronic voting.• Security and transparency measures implemented by the TSE.

Source: elaborated by the author.

Distrust toward electronic voting machines is, in this sense, constructed through a specific framing, in which positions opposing the device are selectively emphasized. Conversely, arguments broadly supported by technical and scientific literature—such as the democratic stabilization promoted by electronic voting—are omitted. Likewise, updates to the technology and the transparency and security policies implemented by the TSE are not mentioned. Beneath a veneer of technical discourse, a conspiratorial narrative emerges, aiming to weaken the Brazilian electoral system. The debate is further presented from a politically biased perspective, aligning with a particular and distorted understanding of democracy, which will be analyzed in the following section.

(Anti)Democracy

“Democracy” is a term in constant contestation, referring not only to its different theoretical currents—elitist, participatory, or deliberative—but also to its use in everyday political struggles and, at times, its instrumentalization by those seeking to undermine it. For example, military coups are often justified “in the name of democracy” (Bermeo, 2016), or

authoritarian populists claim democratic values of popular sovereignty to bypass checks and balances and consolidate power (Weyland, 2017). Thus, the concept of democracy varies depending on the context and the speaker.

Analyzing how *Brasil Paralelo* approaches democracy, a resonance is observed between the company's conspiratorial discourse and Bolsonaro's populism, which, at the time, was on the rise and about to assume the federal executive. This relationship is first evident in the discursive construction of friends and enemies. Both conspiratorial and populist narratives establish clear boundaries between allies and adversaries, victimized citizens and a corrupt elite, purity and danger, "us" and "them" (Cesarino, 2022). Vehement criticisms and direct accusations target the PT and the TSE, suggesting that both represent the establishment, while rhetorical strategies regarding the presentation of each argument demarcate what is considered true or false, reliable or unreliable.

The documentary also employs the narrative strategy of hidden causal links, which are sometimes merely implied rather than explicitly stated. Throughout the film, disparate issues are concatenated without clarification of their interrelations, leaving the audience to infer connections. This narrative technique is evident from the opening voiceover by Filipe Valerim:

The same party has been in government in Brazil for almost two decades. 70,000 homicides per year, the largest corruption scandals on the planet, and the worst rankings in education. Brazil began to grow suspicious. All Brazilian votes are cast via the DRE collector, and Brazil is the only country in the world with a fully electronic system and no printed vote confirmation (*Brasil Paralelo*, 2018).

Here, a series of imprecise correlations are drawn between the PT and various social problems, often exaggerated, and a causal link is suggested between the implementation of electronic voting and the PT's repeated victories in the federal executive. No evidence is provided for these claims, yet the narrative's construction encourages their acceptance. It is also noteworthy that both Dilma Rousseff's impeachment and Lula da Silva's imprisonment are omitted from the documentary—events that would certainly undermine the theory that the PT is part of a supposed establishment maintaining a simulacrum of democracy.

Hidden causal links, as previously noted, are identified by Leticia Cesarino (2021) as a form of cognitive reorganization within the emerging post-truth regime and are fundamental to the construction of conspiracy theories. Moreover, it is essential to understand that the attribution of causality for certain problems implies the assignment of responsibility. In this

sense, hidden causal links are directly connected to the discursive construction of enemies—in this case, the TSE and the PT.

In a later segment, a statement by a parliamentarian in favor of electronic voting machines is reproduced. The selected excerpt portrays a faltering speech, in which the parliamentarian stammers and speaks in a fragmented manner. Immediately afterward, a statement by Eduardo Bolsonaro is shown at the rostrum of the Chamber of Deputies, firmly defending printed voting, emphasizing a procedural explanation of how printed voting works, with the stated aim of “demystifying” this voting method. While the statements of technical critics of electronic voting and far-right politicians are framed positively, as if they were revealing truths and fighting for justice, the statements in defense of electronic voting are carefully curated to convey an impression of insecurity, deceit, and embarrassment.

At another point, the narrative recounts the beginning of the 2018 electoral period and highlights the stabbing attack against Jair Bolsonaro. The mention and the centrality attributed to the attack reinforce the conspiratorial narratives propagated by the far right at the time and consolidate Bolsonaro’s image as a persecuted and “anti-system” candidate¹². The narrative surrounding Bolsonaro’s stabbing serves as a prelude to the reproduction of a video of him, recorded from his hospital bed, where he speaks slowly, showing signs of suffering:

In 2015, I took advantage of an ongoing project in the Chamber and amended it [...] we secured printed voting, which was the only guarantee we would have in 2018 [...] to say that whoever voted for João, it would be counted for João. Whoever voted for Ana, or Maria, it would go to Maria. Dilma Rousseff vetoed our project. She vetoed our project. We overturned the veto. We cannot fail to remember [sic] that in 2014, in Quito [...] I did not see this in the Brazilian press, perhaps it was published in some other paper out there. Dilma Rousseff, in Quito, among other measures [...] decided to create a South American electoral technical unit. The PT discovered [...] the path to power: electronic voting (Jair Bolsonaro, 2018, our translation).

¹² As is well known, the investigation into the attack against Jair Bolsonaro has already been concluded, determining that the perpetrator, Adélio Bispo, acted alone. See: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/radioagencia-nacional/geral/audio/2024-06/adelio-foi-o-unico-responsavel-por-facada-bolsonaro-conclui-pf>. Accessed in: 15 Sep. 2024.

Figure 3 – Bolsonaro’s hospital video after the stabbing, attacking electronic voting machines



Source: Brasil Paralelo, screenshot.

Bolsonaro’s conspiracy theories regarding the stabbing and electronic voting machines are thus endorsed by Brasil Paralelo. The context of the recording, marked by physical vulnerability, has legitimizing effects through the mobilization of emotions such as compassion and empathy. At other moments, while narrating the evolution of voting intention polls, the documentary highlights Bolsonaro’s lead and his growth over the months. Furthermore, the documentary’s release on the eve of the second round of the elections indicates an intent to generate anxieties that would benefit Bolsonarism in the event of an electoral defeat.

A striking omission stands out in this regard: although Bolsonaro and his allies are a constant presence throughout the documentary, there is no mention of his public defense of the military dictatorship. This brief production by Brasil Paralelo demonstrates the company’s ideological proximity to Bolsonarism, despite its claims of impartiality. The construction of the field of friends and enemies—shaped through the mobilization of emotions and the selective use of inclusion and omission—reveals a bias in a narrative that ostensibly seeks to present itself as neutral and disinterested. Moreover, the documentary emerges as evidence of the company’s alignment with efforts to destabilize public trust in democracy.

The narrative construction of “friends” and “enemies” throughout the documentary is also intertwined with the distortion and inversion of the concept of democracy. Democracy, when understood in its minimalist sense (Przeworski, 1999), refers exclusively to the capacity of the political system to conduct elections and legitimize winners. By fostering distrust regarding vote counting, the very legitimacy of the principal pillar of the democratic system is

brought into question. These actors, aligned with the authoritarianism of a political movement that regards the military dictatorship as a positive reference, claim that elections are rigged by the Electoral Justice itself, positioning themselves as supposed “democrats” denouncing the current democratic system as a sham. As aptly stated by Marcos Nobre: “for Bolsonaro, the process of redemocratization is responsible for all the country’s ills. Whoever can understand the phrase ‘the democracy of the dictatorship was the true democracy’ will be able to understand Bolsonaro” (Nobre, 2022, p. 20-21, our translation).

At the end of the documentary, the narrator asserts that “there is no better auditor than the voter himself.” The alleged need to implement printed voting is framed as an opportunity to expand popular participation in the electoral process. This narrative, characteristic of authoritarian populisms, relies on simplistic views of citizen participation to elevate the principle of popular sovereignty above constitutional limits and institutional competencies. In the case of populism, popular sovereignty is transferred to a personalist leader and used as a mechanism to strain the system of checks and balances, thereby disempowering citizenship (Weyland, 2017). The conspiratorial critique of electronic voting machines thus appears to be tied to this distorted conception of democracy.

Table 2 – Elements of the “Anti-Democracy” Frame

Selection	Salience	Omission
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positions of Bolsonaro and his allies. • Positions of politicians defending electronic voting. • Position of Brasil Paralelo promoting distrust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on statements by Bolsonaro and his allies that convey security and victimization. • Emphasis on the inconsistency of statements by defenders of electronic voting machines. • Criticism of PT governments, the left, and the establishment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian positions of Jair Bolsonaro. • Impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. • Imprisonment of Lula da Silva.

Source: compiled by the author.

As can be seen in Table 2 above, the conspiratorial narrative presented by Brasil Paralelo aligns with Bolsonarism in terms of the contextual elements and political figures portrayed. Not only does it present Bolsonaro and his allies positively—through statements endorsed by the documentary—but it also seeks to generate empathy toward him. This is further reinforced by

the participation of Brasil Paralelo's own founders, who are shown making critical remarks about democratic institutions and PT governments. In contrast, only selected and fragmented statements from public officials defending electronic voting were included, often those that appeared inconsistent, awkward, or obscure.

The omissions are also significant. There is no mention of Bolsonarismo's ties to the authoritarianism of the military dictatorship, nor of defining events in the 2018 political context, such as the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff or the imprisonment of Lula da Silva. These omissions appear strategic, as their inclusion would contradict the documentary's central argument.

Finally, the way Brasil Paralelo constructs its conspiratorial narrative can be summarized using Entman's (1993) framing model, namely: problem, cause, moral judgment, and solution. At the outset, a problem is presented: the consecutive presidential victories of the PT, allegedly resulting from the manipulation of the democratic process by the Electoral Justice. A cause for this problem is also suggested, portraying the electronic voting machine as a technology that enables election fraud without leaving evidence. Moral judgments and suppositions are then made regarding the political intentions of progressive leaders and representatives of the Electoral Justice who advocate for electronic voting. Ultimately, the adoption of printed voting is proposed as the solution, justified by the fallacious argument of popular participation.

Final considerations

This article aimed to conduct a framing analysis of the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, produced by Brasil Paralelo. As in other productions by this company, the study demonstrated a deliberate intention to create a conspiratorial atmosphere (Felinto, 2023) through specific processes of selection, salience, and omission (Entman, 1993). It was argued that disproportionate emphasis was placed on critical arguments against electronic voting machines—initially voiced by technical experts and subsequently reinforced by Bolsonaro and his allies—while favorable perspectives on the electronic voting system were either omitted or presented in a distorted manner. Key elements of the political context were also strategically

excluded to reinforce the narrative of electoral fraud. Moreover, the analysis identified cognitive reorganization strategies characteristic of the emerging post-truth regime, namely: the appeal to personal experiences and immediate perceptions, the construction of hidden causal links, and the establishment of a boundary between “friends” and “enemies” (Cesarino, 2021). Thus, it is observed that the deliberate fabrication of conspiracy theories and false scientific controversies contributed to the post-truth landscape and the erosion of democracy in Brazil.

By applying framing analysis methodology to the understanding of contemporary conspiracy narratives, this study sought to highlight the deliberately political nature of phenomena often treated merely as issues of misinformation. The analysis was essentially qualitative and interpretive, and robustness was pursued through the mobilization of extensive literature spanning fields such as communication, political science, computer science, and science, technology, and society studies. As Entman (1993) argues, the strength of framing analysis lies precisely in its capacity to integrate contributions from different disciplines to situate the text within its broader context. However, the results are, naturally, limited and subject to contestation and debate.

Finally, this article underscores the importance of a careful and critical analysis of conspiratorial and disinformative content in order to unveil its communicative strategies and the mechanisms that render it appealing to public opinion. Furthermore, it is argued that the retrieval and analysis of audiovisual productions by Brasil Paralelo—even when no longer available online—carry significant value for understanding the historical trajectory of Brazil’s democratic crisis. They also serve as a warning regarding the potential resurgence and reinvention of such conspiracy theories in the future.

REFERENCES

- AGGIO, C. Teorias conspiratórias, verdade e democracia. **Sociedade da desinformação e infodemia**. Belo Horizonte: Fafich/Selo PPGCOM/UFMG, 2021. (Olhares Transversais; v. 1).
- AMORIM, L. Com 500 mil assinantes, Brasil Paralelo quer evitar polêmicas e sonha ser "a Disney brasileira". **Exame**, 17 Feb. 2023. Available at: <https://exame.com/negocios/com-500-mil-assinantes-brasil-paralelo-quer-evitar-polemicas-e-sonha-ser-a-disney-brasileira/> Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.
- ARANHA, D. F; BARBOSA, P; CARDOSO, T. N. C; LÜDERS, C; MATIAS, P. Execução de código arbitrário na urna eletrônica brasileira. In: SIMPÓSIO BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA DA INFORMAÇÃO E DE SISTEMAS COMPUTACIONAIS (SBSEG), 18., 2018, Natal. **Anais [...]**. Porto Alegre: Sociedade Brasileira de Computação, 2018. p. 57-70. DOI: 10.5753/sbseg.2018.4243. Available at: <https://sol.sbc.org.br/index.php/sbseg/article/view/4243>. Accessed in: 29 Jun. 2023.
- ARANHA, D; KARAM, M; MIRANDA, A; SCAREL, F. **Vulnerabilidades no software da urna eletrônica**. Relatório: versão 1.0.1. Departamento de Ciência da Computação – Universidade de Brasília (CIC/UnB), 2013.
- AVRITZER, L. **O pêndulo da democracia**. 1. ed. São Paulo: Todavia, 2019.
- BEER, D. The social power of algorithms. **Information, Communication & Society**, v. 20, n. 1, 1-13, 2016. DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1216147. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1216147#abstract>. Accessed in: 23 Feb. 2020.
- BENKLER, Y; FARRIS, R; ROBERTS, H. **Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190923624.001.0001. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/book/26406>. Accessed in: 15 Aug. 2022.
- BERMEO, N. On democratic backsliding. **Journal of Democracy**, v. 27, n. 1, p. 2-19, 2016. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/on-democratic-backsliding/>. Accessed in: 8 Dec. 2022.
- CARVALHO, V. O protagonismo da urna eletrônica no processo de combate à fraude eleitoral. **25 anos da urna eletrônica: tecnologia e integridade nas eleições**. Salvador: Tribunal Regional Eleitoral da Bahia, 2021.
- CESARINO, L. Pós-verdade e a crise do sistema de peritos: uma explicação cibernética. **Ilha: Revista de Antropologia**, Florianópolis, v. 23, n. 1, p. 73-96, 2021. DOI: 10.5007/2175-8034.2021.e75630. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ilha/article/view/75630>. Accessed in: 14 May 2023.
- CESARINO, L. **O mundo do avesso: verdade e política na era digital**. São Paulo: Ubu, 2022.

COHEN, S. **Folk devils and moral panics**: the creation of the Mods and Rockers. Estados Unidos; Canadá: Taylor & Francis, 2011.

DELEUZE, G. **Post-Scriptum sobre as Sociedades de Controle**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34, 2000.

DOURADO, T. **Fake news na eleição presidencial de 2018 no Brasil**. 2020. Tese (Doutorado Comunicação e Cultura Contemporâneas) – Faculdade de Comunicação, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, 2020. Available at: <https://repositorio.ufba.br/handle/ri/31967>; Accessed in: 03 Sep. 2023.

EMPOLI, G. Da. **Os engenheiros do caos**. São Paulo: Vestígio, 2019.

ENTMAN, R. Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. **Journal of Communication**, v. 43, n. 4, 1993. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/joc/article-abstract/43/4/51/4160153?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false>. Accessed in: 23 Sep. 2020.

FELINTO, E. “Nenhum Brasil existe”: atmosferas conspiratórias e cosmovisão reacionária nos documentários da Brasil Paralelo. **Significação**: Revista de Cultura Audiovisual, [S. l.], v. 50, p. 1–13, 2023. DOI: 10.11606/issn.2316-7114.sig.2023.208380. Available at: <https://revistas.usp.br/significacao/article/view/208380>. Accessed in: 07 Jan. 2024.

FERRÃO, I. G.; CHERVINSKI, J. O.; DA SILVA, S. A.; KREUTZ, D.; IMMICH, R.; KEPLER, F.; RIGHI, R. da R. Urnas Eletrônicas no Brasil: linha do tempo, evolução e falhas e desafios de segurança. **Revista Brasileira de Computação Aplicada**, [S. l.], v. 11, n. 2, p. 1-12, 2019. DOI: 10.5335/rbca.v11i2.9056. Available at: <https://seer.upf.br/index.php/rbca/article/view/9056>. Accessed in: 20 Aug. 2025.

FIGUEIREDO FILHO, D; SILVA, L; CARVALHO, E. The forensics of fraud: Evidence from the 2018 Brazilian presidential election. **Forensic Science International: Synergy**, v. 5, 2022. DOI: 10.1016/j.fsisyn.2022.100286. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2589871X22000717>. Accessed in: 13 Aug. 2023.

FOUCAULT, M. **A microfísica do poder**. 10. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2019.

FURLANI, A. **Crise da democracia e urnas eletrônicas**: uma análise de discurso das lives de Jair Bolsonaro. Dissertação de mestrado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciência Política da UFMG. Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2024. Available at: <https://repositorio.ufmg.br/handle/1843/79593>. Accessed in: 15 Mar. 2025.

GASTALDI, H; ROSENDO, R. Urna electrónica en Brasil: cambios en el proceso electoral y el comportamiento de los votantes. **Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública**, [S. l.], v. 2, p. 73-107, 2012. DOI: 10.14201/rlop.22274. Available at: <https://revistas.usal.es/cuatro/index.php/1852-9003/article/view/rlop.22274>. Accessed in: 20 Aug. 2025.

GIDDENS, A. **As consequências da modernidade**. Tradução de Raul Flickr. São Paulo: Editora Unesp, 1991.

GRAAF, J; V. DE. **O mito da urna**: desvendando a (in)segurança da urna eletrônica. 1st ed. 2017.

GRAAF, J; V. DE; CUSTÓDIO, R. **Tecnologia Eleitoral e a Urna Eletrônica**: Relatório SBC 2002. [S.l.]: Sociedade Brasileira de Computação, 2002.

GRANJEIA, J.; ALMEIDA, R. Por dentro da máquina do Brasil Paralelo para dominar as buscas no Google. **Núcleo Jornalismo**, 31 Jan. 2023. Available at: <https://nucleo.jor.br/especiais/2023-01-31-a-maquina-do-brasil-paralelo>. Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.

HARSIN, J. **Post-truth and critical communication studies**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.757. Available at: <https://oxfordre.com/communication/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-757>. Accessed in: 14 May 2023.

HARSIN, J. Regimes of posttruth, postpolitics, and attention economies. **Communication, Culture & Critique**, v. 8, 327-333, 2015. DOI: 10.1111/cccr.12097. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cccr.12097>. Accessed in: 18 Jan. 2023.

HIMANEN, P; TORVALDS, L. **A ética dos hackers e o espírito da era da informação**. [S.l.]: Editora Campus, 2001.

MACHADO, R; OLIVEIRA, F (2021). Idas e vindas do voto impresso. **25 anos da urna eletrônica**: tecnologia e integridade nas eleições / Frederico Franco Alvim, Jaime Barreiros Neto, Marta Cristina Jesus Santiago (coords.). — Salvador: Tribunal Regional Eleitoral da Bahia, 2021.

MARCACINI, A. T. R.; BARRETO JUNIOR, I. F. Aspectos jurídicos, políticos e técnicos sobre sistemas eletrônicos de votação e a urna eletrônica brasileira. **Revista Brasileira de Estudos Políticos**, v. 118, 17 jun. 2019. Available at: <https://pos.direito.ufmg.br/rbep/index.php/rbep/article/view/696>. Accessed in: 09 Mar. 2023.

MENDONÇA, R; AGGIO, C. As metamorfoses da esfera pública ou a nova mudança estrutural. In: MENDONÇA, R. F.; SARMENTO, R. **Crises da democracia e esfera pública**: debates contemporâneos. Belo Horizonte: Incipit, 2023.

MENDONÇA, R; BERNARDES, C. Crise epistêmica e democracia: amadores e especialistas. In: TATAGIBA, L. *et al.* **Participação e ativismos**: entre retrocessos e resistências. Porto Alegre: Editora Zouk, 2022.

MENDONÇA, R; FREITAS, V; AGGIO, C; SANTOS, N. Fake news e o repertório contemporâneo de ação política. **DADOS**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 66, n. 2, e20200213, 2023. DOI: 10.1590/dados.2023.66.2.301. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/dados/a/M47Czv8v8HzwQ6DKjBqJvjg>. Accessed in: 10 Feb. 2024.

MENDONÇA, R; SIMÕES, P. Enquadramento: diferentes operacionalizações analíticas de um conceito. **Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais**, v. 27, n. 79, 2012. DOI: 10.1590/S0102-69092012000200012. Available at:

<https://www.scielo.br/j/rbcsoc/a/ptZ9Qp9Qn7n7PdZDJZZXv3L>. Accessed in: 12 Jan. 2024.

MOTA, M.; COUTO, M.; ROCHA, G. Mensagens com conteúdo #FAKE sobre fraude em urnas eletrônicas se espalham nas redes. **O Globo**, 6 out. 2018. Available at:

<https://oglobo.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/mensagens-com-conteudo-fake-sobre-fraude-em-urnas-eletronicas-se-espalham-nas-redes-23134205>. Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.

MOUNK, Y. **O povo contra a democracia**: por que nossa liberdade corre perigo e como salvá-la. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019.

NICOLAU, J. **Eleições no Brasil**: do império aos dias atuais. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2012.

NOBRE, M. **Limites da democracia**: de junho de 2013 ao governo Bolsonaro. São Paulo: Todavia, 2022.

NUNES, F; TRAUMANN, T. **Biografia do abismo**: como a polarização divide famílias, desafia empresas e compromete o futuro do Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Harper Collins Brasil, 2023.

ORESKE, N; CONWAY, E. **Merchants of Doubt**: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming. Bloomsbury Publishing. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010. v. 102, n. 3.

PIAIA, V. R. **Comunicação política e construção da realidade**: o WhatsApp nas eleições presidenciais de 2018. Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia) - Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos, 2021. Available at:

<http://www.bdtd.uerj.br/handle/1/17481>. Accessed in: 04 Aug. 2022.

PRZEWORSKI, A. Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense. In: SHAPIRO, I.; HACKER-CORDON, C. **Democracy's Value**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

RAJÃO, R; NOBRE, A; CUNHA, E; DUARTE, T; MARCOLINO, C; SOARES FILHO, B; SPAROVEKD, G; RODRIGUES, R; VALERA, C; BUSTAMANTE, M; NOBRE, C; LIMA, L. O risco das falsas controvérsias científicas para as políticas ambientais brasileiras. **Revista Sociedade e Estado**, v. 37, n. 1, 2022. DOI: 10.26512/S&E.v37i1.44658. Available at: <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/sociedade/article/view/44658>. Accessed in: 03 Aug. 2023.

RIBEIRO, M. H.; OTTONI, R.; WEST, R.; ALMEIDA, V. A. F.; MEIRA, W. Auditing radicalization pathways on YouTube. **Proceedings of the 2020 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency**. New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2020. DOI: 10.1145/3351095.3372879. DOI: 10.1145/3351095.337287. Available at: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3351095.3372879>. Accessed in: 12 May 2022.

ROCHA, J. C. C. **Bolsonarismo**: da guerra cultural ao terrorismo doméstico: retórica do ódio e dissonância cognitiva. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2023.

ROSA, A. P.; BIANCO, E. C. V. Mito do complô: embates de sentido na circulação de boatos sobre fraude eleitoral. **Esferas**, v. 1, n. 24, p. 351-369, 2022. DOI: 10.31501/esf.v1i24.13817. Available at: <https://portalrevistas.ucb.br/index.php/esf/article/view/13817>. Accessed in: 29 Nov. 2023.

RUEDIGER, M. A.; GRASSI, A.; DOURADO, T.; CALIL, L.; PIAIA, V.; ALMEIDA, S.; CARVALHO, D. **Desinformação on-line e eleições no Brasil: a circulação de links sobre desconfiança no sistema eleitoral brasileiro no Facebook e no YouTube (2014–2020)**. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2020.

RUNCIMAN, D. **Como a democracia chega ao fim**. São Paulo: Todavia, 2018.

SANTANO, A. C. As narrativas e as necessidades: o sistema eletrônico de votação brasileiro a partir de uma análise de política pública. **A&C - Revista de Direito Administrativo & Constitucional**, Belo Horizonte, v. 22, n. 88, p. 75–101, 2022. DOI: 10.21056/aec.v22i88.1587. Available at: <https://revistaaec.com/index.php/revistaaec/article/view/1587>. Accessed in: 20 Aug. 2023.

SANTOS, C.; MICHELOTTI, A.; MENDONÇA, R. “Cortina de Fumaça” - Negacionismo ambiental e imaginário colonial no YouTube. **Mídia e Cotidiano**, [S. l.], v. 18, n. 1, p. 74–95, 2024. DOI: 10.22409/rmc.v18i1.59776. Available at: <https://periodicos.uff.br/midiaecotidiano/article/view/59776>. Accessed in: 20 Jan. 2025.

SANTOS, E. R.; HOFFMANN, F.; DUARTE, S. A (DES)CONFIANÇA DOS BRASILEIROS NA DEMOCRACIA. **Revista Opinião Jurídica**, Fortaleza, v. 18, n. 27, p. 170–191, 2020. DOI: 10.12662/2447-6641oj.v18i27.p170-191.2020. Available at: <https://periodicos.unichristus.edu.br/opiniaojuridica/article/view/2455>. Accessed in: 20 Aug. 2024.

SCHREIBER, M. 'Não há evidência de fraude': Diego Aranha, professor defensor do voto impresso, rebate discurso bolsonarista. **BBC News Brasil**, 10 ago. 2021. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-58152337>. Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.

SEGATA, J. LATOUR, B. Reagregando o Social: uma introdução à Teoria do Ator-Rede. **Ilha Revista de Antropologia**, Florianópolis, v. 14, n. 1,2, p. 238–243, 2012. DOI: 10.5007/2175-8034.2012v14n1-2p238. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ilha/article/view/2175-8034.2012v14n1-2p238>. Accessed in: 20 Aug. 2022.

SUNSTEIN, C. **#Republic**: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

TAVARES, A.; MOREIRA, D. O voto eletrônico no Brasil. **TSE: Estudos Eleitorais**, v. 6, n. 3, 2011.

TSE. TRIBUNAL SUPERIOR ELEITORAL. **Relatório das Eleições 2002**. Brasília: TSE, 2003. Available at: <https://www.tse.jus.br/eleicoes/eleicoes-antiores/eleicoes-2002/candidaturas-votacao-e-resultados/resultados-das-eleicoes-2002>. Accessed in: 21 Aug. 2024.

USCINSKI, J. **Conspiracy theories: a primer**. London: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2020.

VALOR ECONÔMICO. Urnas dominaram fake news em 2022. **Valor Econômico**, 17 nov. 2022. Available at: <https://valor.globo.com/politica/coluna/urnas-dominaram-fake-news-em-2022.ghtml>. Accessed in: 13 Sep. 2024.

VINHAS, O.; PRATES, C. D. Seguindo a construção de fatos e mapeando redes: urnas eletrônicas brasileiras são confiáveis?. **Século XXI – Revista de Ciências Sociais**, [S. l.], v. 10, n. 2, p. 9–37, 2021. DOI: 10.5902/2236672535900. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufsm.br/seculoxxi/article/view/35900>. Accessed in: 20 May 2023.

WEYLAND, K. A political-strategic approach. In: KALTWASSER, Rovira; C., TAGGART, P.A.; ESPEJO, P.O.; OSTIGUY, P. (eds.). **The Oxford Handbook of Populism**. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2017. p. 48-73. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/27977>. Accessed in: 19 May 2020.

WINNER, L. Do artifacts have politics? **Daedalus**, v. 190, n. 1, p. 121-139, 1980.

GLOBO.COM. Pós-verdade é eleita a palavra do ano pelo Dicionário Oxford. **G1**, 15 Nov. 2016. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/pos-verdade-e-eleita-a-palavra-do-ano-pelo-dicionario-oxford.ghtml>. Accessed in: 19 May 2020.

CRedit Author Statement

- ☐ **Acknowledgements:** I am grateful to all the researchers who reviewed preliminary versions of this work and contributed to its final form. I want to express my deepest thanks, first and foremost, to Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça and to my colleagues from Margem – Research Group on Democracy and Justice at UFMG, for their careful reading and valuable comments. I also extend my gratitude to Natasha Bachini and Victor Piaia, who provided insightful feedback during the SPG: *Mediatization, Platformization, and Political Discourse* at ANPOCS, in 2023. Finally, I thank Marcelo Pereira, Sofia Campos, and Bruno Saliba de Paula, who co-coordinated with me the Science, Technology, and Society Working Group at the IX Graduate Student Seminar of the Sociology Graduate Program at UFMG, in 2024, and offered important contributions.
 - ☐ **Funding:** This work was initiated during my Master's in Political Science at UFMG, which was funded by a CAPES scholarship.
 - ☐ **Conflicts of interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.
 - ☐ **Ethical approval:** Ethical principles were respected. This research did not require review by an ethics committee.
 - ☐ **Data and material availability:** Not applicable.
 - ☐ **Authors' contributions:** Not applicable.
-

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation

