

**POPULISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM: AN ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP'S
TWITTER**

***POPULISMO E AUTORITARISMO: UMA ANÁLISE DO TWITTER DE DONALD
TRUMP***

***POPULISMO Y AUTORITARISMO: UN ANÁLISIS DEL TWITTER DE DONALD
TRUMP***



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How to reference this article:

MORAIS, J. A.; MILANEZI, F. S. Populism and authoritarianism: An analysis of Donald Trump's twitter. **Estudos de Sociologia**, Araraquara, v. 28, n. esp. 1, e023011, 2023. e-ISSN: 1982-4718. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52780/res.v28iesp.1.17094>



| Submitted: 05/03/2023
| Revisions required: 22/04/2023
| Approved: 11/05/2023
| Published: 01/08/2023

Editora: Prof. Dr. Maria Chaves Jardim
Editor Adjunto Executivo: Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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ABSTRACT: Liberal democracy, as we know it today, after a long period in which it was hegemonic and seen as the only possible form of government, has suffered instabilities regarding its legitimacy in several countries, especially in the United States, where its institutionality was designed, applied and consolidated. In recent decades, there has been a growing distrust and dissatisfaction with institutions and politics in general, starting from different sectors of the US society, opening space for the rise of political leaders who positioned themselves against the so-called establishment, either with a more progressive proposal, as in the case of Bernie Sanders or more conservative, as in the case of Donald Trump, elected President in 2016. Thus, this article aims to analyze how Trump's communication strategy exerts a rhetoric of delegitimization of institutions. For that, the article will bring the automatic speech analysis through tweets made by Trump's personal account.

KEYWORDS: Donald Trump. Democracy. United States. Populism. Twitter.

RESUMO: *A democracia liberal, tal como conhecemos hoje, após um longo período em que era hegemônica e vista como a única forma de governo possível, vem sofrendo instabilidades quanto a sua legitimidade, em vários países, em especial nos Estados Unidos, onde sua institucionalidade foi pensada, aplicada e consolidada. Nas últimas décadas, há uma crescente desconfiança e insatisfação com relação às instituições e à política em geral, partindo de setores diversos da sociedade estadunidense, abrindo espaço para a ascensão de lideranças políticas que se posicionavam contra o chamado establishment, seja com uma proposta mais progressista, como Bernie Sanders ou mais conservadora, como no caso de Donald Trump, eleito Presidente, em 2016. Assim, o presente artigo objetiva analisar como a estratégia de comunicação do Trump exerce uma retórica de deslegitimação das instituições. Para isso, o artigo trará a análise automática do discurso através de tweets feitos pela conta pessoal de Trump.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Donald Trump. Democracia. Estados Unidos. Populismo. Twitter.

RESUMEN: *La democracia liberal, tal como la conocemos hoy, después de un largo período en el que fue hegemónica y vista como la única forma posible de gobierno, ha sufrido inestabilidades en cuanto a su legitimidad en varios países, especialmente en Estados Unidos, donde se diseñó su institucionalidad. aplicada y consolidada. En las últimas décadas, ha habido una creciente desconfianza e insatisfacción con las instituciones y la política en general, a partir de diferentes sectores de la sociedad estadounidense, abriendo espacio para el surgimiento de líderes políticos que se posicionaron en contra del llamado establecimiento, ya sea con una actitud más propuesta progresista, como en el caso de Bernie Sanders o más conservadora, como en el caso de Donald Trump, presidente electo en 2016. Así, este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo la estrategia de comunicación de Trump ejerce una retórica de deslegitimación de las instituciones. Para ello, el artículo traerá el análisis automático del discurso a través de tuits realizados por la cuenta personal de Trump.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Donald Trump. Democracia. Estados Unidos. Populismo. Twitter.

Introduction

Since before the beginning of his government in the United States in 2017, Donald Trump was already known for being a personality of blunt and controversial political opinions, using public space and prestige that he had as a billionaire and television show host to conquer media space. With the advent of social networks and the popularization of the internet, Trump began to use social networks, especially Twitter, as a means of propagating his ideas. As a result, there was speculation about how Trump's relationship with social networks would be during his term, since, previously, only Barack Obama had exercised the presidency of the United States with Twitter as a means of communication with the population, using it with low frequency and under filtering by political advisors (KOIKE; BENTES, 2018).

Trump, in turn, adopted a more direct communication strategy, without the diplomacy and modesty expected of a president of the republic, in line with the country's political tradition, adopting unusual behavior on social networks, which is even contraindicated in the area of political communication, such as the excessive use of adjectives, the time of publications (many made during the night), the direct attack, through insults, to political opponents and the propagation of false news, lies and inaccuracies (KOIKE; BENTES, 2018). In this sense, Donald Trump not only left his political mark on his government actions – it can be said that his government will be historically remembered not because of that –, but mainly in the way he communicated with the population and in the changes that this resulted in the way politicians use social networks electorally and even in the exercise of their mandates, a new model of communication can be observed, copied to a greater or lesser extent by leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Nayib Bukele (El Salvador) and Viktor Orbán (Hungary), for example. This movement of far-right leaders has been considered by many authors to be a new type of populism of worldwide scope, being called metric populism and algorithmic populism or even authoritarian populism (CASULLO, 2018; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019; MOUFFE, 2019; BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020; MALY, 2020; VARIS, 2020).

As characteristics of these governments and this new type of populism are attacks on political opponents, attacks on the press and institutions, that is, an authoritarian rhetoric is observed, as well as the positive reinforcement of authoritarian behaviors on the part of their supporters against their political opponents or against institutions that are perceived as an obstacle to the realization of their political ideas (KOIKE; BENTES, 2018; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019; BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020). From this, the present article aims to analyze how Donald Trump's communication strategy exercises a rhetoric of delegitimization

of institutions. The proposed working hypothesis is that the delegitimization of institutions is undertaken as a justification for the mishaps of the Government through a populist strategy of creating a common enemy, requiring reinforcement in support for the leader entrusted with the task of facing them.

The article uses the qualitative protocol, based on the automatic speech analysis of seven tweets by Donald Trump attacking institutions throughout his presidential term (2017-2021). The tweets were posted on 4 February 2017, 19 June 2018, 31 July 2018, 26 May 2020, 8 September 2020, 27 November 2020 and 6 January 2021. Quantitative surveys based on previous research by Koike and Bentes (2018), Gomes and Dourado (2019) and Bernardi and Costa (2020) were used to reinforce the weight of attacks on institutions based on the volume of tweets produced with this content.

The article is divided into three parts, in addition to the introduction and final considerations. The first will seek to understand the functioning of liberal democracy, its historical development and the growth of authoritarian values in democracies considered consolidated. In the second part, the phenomenon of populism will be understood and how it employs a discursive strategy to confront and delegitimize opposing political positions. In the third part, Donald Trump's tweets will be analyzed, understanding the rhetoric employed and the way in which it stimulates disbelief in institutions.

Authoritarianism and Democracy

Democracy is a political regime created in Ancient Greece and classified by Plato as the degenerate form of exercise of power by the people, which is the harbinger of a restoration that centralizes power in a single person in the name of order (MOUFFE, 2019). Although a lot of time passed between the creation of democracy in Ancient Greece and its contemporary recovery and what is understood by democracy – especially in its applicability and institutional arrangement – having differences in relation to the original proposal, it is possible to understand that, in greater or lesser scale and even if in different ways, its intention is to allow the people to influence political decisions.

If in Ancient Greece democracy was exercised by the people directly, through assemblies, contemporary democracy adopts a system of political representation based on the election of people in charge of deciding political processes within an institutional framework created in the United States in the 18th century (LIMONGI, 2001). However, this

institutionality was created precisely to prevent democracy, removing the majority of the population from power. About democracy, Madison (2001, p. 290, our translation) states that: “That is why such democracies have always been the scene of disturbances and controversies, have proved incapable of guaranteeing personal security or property rights and, in general, have been as brief in their lives as they were violent in their deaths”.

Democracy, therefore, was considered a confusing regime, which would lead to anarchy and tyranny of the majority, endangering the class of owners (MADISON, 2001). That is, like Plato, the creators of the political system that is now considered the model of democracy also did not consider it positively or likely to be a successful means for the political conduct of society. However, everything created by the federalists³ would become synonymous with democracy, especially after the publication in 1835 of *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville (2005). Thus, the division of powers, the system of checks and balances, as well as all the government mechanisms that would dictate the functioning of politics, became what is known today as liberal democracy (LOSURDO, 2004).

Authors who would later defend liberal democracy managed to justify the contradiction between institutions and the exercise of democracy by the people. Bobbio (1987) argues that liberal democracy is the most effective form of political control by the people, through political representation and the periodicity of its renewal through elections that would involve the population and would enable the inspection of the exercise of representation by the represented and, if necessary, the replacement of the person entrusted with the task of exercising the mandate. However, this situation would only be possible in a context in which there was an agreement between all political actors and between society itself in the sense of respecting the rules of the electoral dispute, avoiding any kind of cheating or contestation of its legitimacy by mainly of those defeated in the election (BOBBIO, 1987). This would be important for the victory of the losers, in a new election, to be fully accepted by the new losers (who were previously victorious), consolidating the political system above personal or party pretensions.

The bet on institutions as strongholds of the good functioning of democracy and maintainers of the natural democratic order can be found in several authors who perceive the people in general as a secondary element in the political life of a society, as it is possible to perceive in Schumpeter (1961, p. 328) when he points out that “the democratic method is an

³ The Federalist is a series of texts published in newspapers by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, under this pseudonym, where the basic elements that will constitute the new nation are publicly discussed, as well as the new form of government that was being built. Subsequently, the texts were collected in a book and published.

institutional system, for making political decisions, in which the individual acquires the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the votes of the voter”, summarizing democracy to periodic voting and not conceiving as possible or virtuous democratic forms that operate in another way, considering that the decisions taken by representatives are more successful and effective than the alternatives that could be chosen directly by the majority. In Schumpeter's view (1961) the population would invariably be satisfied with the effects of measures that in principle were unpopular. Dahl (2001), on the other hand, understands that the majority must pressure the representatives so that their will is established, in an idea that all citizens are responsible for the direction that a society takes and a government that decides policies that go against the popular will is distorted from its original purpose.

For Dahl (2001, p. 107), “the only viable solution, although quite imperfect, is for citizens to elect their most important officials and hold them more or less accountable through elections, discarding them in the following elections”. In other words, dissatisfaction with representation is a possible element that must be resolved within the electoral process, since “it is extremely complicated to satisfy these demands of democracy in a political unit the size of a country; to tell the truth, to some extent almost impossible” (DAHL, 2001, p. 107). These conceptions differ from Schumpeter's (1961) view regarding the way in which the population should define the directions of politics, but it does not differ in the way of doing so through periodic elections of representatives. For these authors, the population must have a passive role in politics most of the time, limiting its activity to the days determined for the election of representatives, which institutionally may make sense, but can also cover up a dissatisfaction that can even take the form of mobilizations and assertive contestations about the behavior and attitudes of political representatives.

If dissatisfaction with the institutional policy, the “system”, the establishment or the status quo is growing and the change mechanisms seem ineffective, the population may not be satisfied with the effect of unpopular measures and may not believe in the possibility of change through the mechanisms that led to this situation, which are elements conducive to the elevation of “anti-system” and authoritarian outputs (MOUFFE, 2019). Dalton and Welzel (2014) noticed a growth of authoritarian values in already consolidated democracies, however, what seems paradoxical is part of a phenomenon that developed historically and made elections of leaders with anti-democratic discourse unsurprising even in countries that, according to the liberal parameters, would have a strong and robust institutional framework.

Claiming that the confrontational model of politics and left-right opposition had become obsolete, celebrating the “consensus at the center” between center-right and center-left, the so-called “radical center” promoted a technocratic form of politics in accordance with which politics would no longer be a partisan confrontation, but the neutral administration of public affairs (MOUFFE, 2019, position 201).

This vision of a policy that would have transcended politics itself, being a mere reproduction of what had been analyzed and recommended by a neutral technical body, is what Mouffe (2015, 2019) calls post-democracy, where there is a “center consensus” which prevents any dispute that points to more assertive guidelines, accused of ideological irrationality, leading to what the author calls post-politics, a vision of modernization of politics where “right” and “left” would no longer differ in their practice. Like this,

[...] the existing institutions fail to guarantee the loyalty of the people, in the attempt to defend the existing order. As a result, the historical block that establishes the social base of a hegemonic formation is dismantled, and the possibility of building a new subject of collective action – the people – appears, capable of reconfiguring a social order considered unfair (MOUFFE, 2019, position 281).

Norris and Inglehart (2019) point out that the United States is undergoing a transformation in the local political culture due to a growing youth group that, step by step, changes support for democracy and questions the functioning of institutions. The authors, however, point this out with reservations that this pattern may not be maintained, since the democratic tradition can make any authoritarian advance flow back, returning to the previous stage of stability. However, it is also recognized that the speeches and behavior of popular political leaders tend to influence the country's political culture, as well as seeking rhetorical foundations in the beliefs and opinions of the population (CRUZ, 2005). Thus, it is possible to state that the rise of an authoritarian political leadership takes place in a terrain that is fertile for this type of phenomenon, at the same time that this leader can influence the delegitimization of democracy and institutions, especially when he suffers some difficulty in implementation of campaign promises.

Populism

Although appearing in previous works, the term populism as a concept for analyzing a political or sociological phenomenon gained strength in Social Sciences from the 1960s onwards, as an explanation of a phenomenon common to Latin American countries during the first half of the 20th century. In this sense, Gino Germani (1973) and Torcuato di Tella (1973) stand out as Latin American authors on the phenomenon of populism, in addition to Francisco Weffort (1980) and Octávio Ianni (1975, 1973) in Brazil. Initially, the concept was proposed as something inherent to underdeveloped countries, explaining a supposed cultural and political backwardness of Latin America in relation to European countries and the United States. Germani (1973) points out some historical elements common to Latin American countries that would explain the specificity of their policy, where the incorporation of the masses into institutional politics did not happen through representation, but through national-popular revolutions, which would contrast with solid democracies and would lead to a more authoritarian culture dependent on charismatic leaders. Di Tella (1973), in turn, understands that populism is the result of the non-existence of a successful political liberalism combined with an effective workers' organization movement, a fact that could be observed in underdeveloped countries. For the author, populism

[...] It is a political movement with strong popular support, with the participation of non-working-class sectors with significant influence in the party, and supporter of an anti-status quo ideology. Its sources of strength or "organizational ties" are:

- I. An elite located in the middle or higher levels of the stratification and endowed with anti-status quo motivations.
- II. A mobilized mass formed as a result of the "revolution of aspirations", and
- III. A generalized ideology or emotional state that promotes communication between leaders and followers and creates collective enthusiasm (DI TELLA, 1973, p. 47-48).

Di Tella (1973) points out that populism can have three different political compositions: the first would have the political command of a clerical or military elite with some popular support, the second would have the political command of a petty-bourgeois intellectual elite allied with sectors of the workers and the third, which would be composed of the same groups as the first, but without popular support. Ianni (1975, p. 20) understands that populism

[...] is oriented towards preventing the worker from suffering the economic, social, cultural and political consequences in original accumulation [...]. In essence, populist movements, parties and governments were, or still are, as

the case may be, inspired by an understanding of economic, social and political relations that are based on the hegemony of use value.

In this sense, in populism there would be the co-option of the working class by predominant national economic sectors interested in a project of projection of national interests against imperialist forces, under an anti-system discourse in the midst of social ruptures with the order then established, generally related to a period of modernization of underdeveloped countries. The author converges with Weffort (1980) in the analysis that populism shaped institutions and the way of doing politics in Latin America, leading to a process of institutionalization of political relations, popular organization, union struggle and using the state apparatus to limit the scope and possibilities of action of the popular movement, resulting in the integration of workers into the political system through corporatism.

Mostly, the first analyzes about the phenomenon of populism in the Social Sciences, although divergences appeared between the authors, converged to the understanding that this was a phenomenon associated with underdevelopment and the disruption of a natural order of incorporation of the masses into the political process, generating greater acceptance of centralized, authoritarian political figures with no commitment with the respect for the democratic process. However, what is currently observed and which was the reason for the resumption of the concept of populism in the Social Sciences is the emergence of populist leaders and political movements in countries considered until then as strong and consolidated democracies, breaking with the analyzes that pointed to this as a exclusive phenomenon of underdeveloped countries, especially in Latin America. In this sense, it can be said that Laclau (2005) brought important contributions to the debate, understanding populism as an epiphenomenon, based on a way of doing politics through the division of society into two antagonistic groups (us and them), which could contain any segment, class fraction, political forces, ideological groupings or identity groups, depending on how the political forces that make up the structure that controls political power would operate. There is, therefore, relevance in understanding how the masses relate to the populist leader, in a two-way relationship that differs from the classic model of the 20th century.

If in the 20th century the incorporation of the masses into politics took place with an alliance between classes having as a means a corporatist policy based on state unionism⁴, in the 21st century the masses are already incorporated into the political process through elections, having a relationship with the political leader initially as a representation relationship where

⁴ See Boito (2006).

this representative is no longer someone postulating a position, but the representative of a collectivity in the fight against a common enemy (IANNI, 1975; WEFFORT, 1980; CASULLO, 2019, NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019). In this sense, populism ceases to be a phenomenon underlying an abrupt and violent incorporation of the masses into institutional politics, to become a political form of uniting the population around an anti-establishment figure, which personalizes the confrontation in a way of doing politics rejected by part of the population and seen as the origin of existing material problems or a conservative collective morality threatened by modernity (MOUFFE, 2019; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019).

The main cases of far-right populism in democracies considered strong are Donald Trump and Boris Johnson⁵. Both arise in traditional parties of their countries: the Republican Party, in the United States, and the Conservative Party, in the United Kingdom, respectively, and are responsible for the radicalization of their parties, both openly right-wing, but in two-party systems in which cohesion around the parties enables a wide range of self-affirmed political positions as right. Trump was known as a controversial and aggressive president with regard to opponents, promoting constant attacks, and it can be pointed out that

Favorite targets include the mainstream media ('fake news'), elections ('fraudulent'), politicians ('drain the swamp'), political parties ('dysfunctional'), public-sector bureaucrats ('the deep state'), judges ('enemies of the people'), protests ('paid rent-a-mob'), the intelligence services ('liars and leakers'), lobbyists ('corrupt'), intellectuals ('arrogant liberals') and scientists ('who needs experts?'), interest groups ('get-rich-quick lobbyists'), the constitution ('a rigged system'), international organizations like the European Union ('Brussels bureaucrats') and the UN ('a talking club'). In Trump's words, 'The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of the popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong' (NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019, p. 4).

Trump, therefore, presented himself as someone outside politics and anti-establishment, a representative of popular dissatisfaction with the direction taken by the country's administration, viewed with suspicion due to the lack of transparency and the possibility of influencing the population in politics. According to Mouffe (2019), the former president of the United States was elected in a campaign appealing to national identity, going back to a glorious past that was threatened by various groups, mobilizing hate speeches against minorities and the denial of progressive policies that promoted gender equality, rights to the LGBTQIA+

⁵ There are other notable cases of populist movements that achieve notable results, such as *Rassemblement National* in France, *Lega Nord* in Italy, *Vox* in Spain, among others.

population, reproductive rights and affirmative action, in addition to xenophobia, especially against Latin Americans, configuring what Norris and Inglehart (2019) classified as authoritarian populism.

Trump's populism is not limited to expressions of prejudice and hatred against specific groups, but to a form of communication in which the former president allows himself to invest in an authoritarian and aggressive rhetoric legitimized by a supposed representation of the popular will, promoting authoritarian values in the name of the intolerance of a majority, which would confront what the federalists proclaimed as the differential of the US political system (MADISON, 2001; LOSURDO, 2004; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019). Thus, Norris and Inglehart (2019, p. 18), when analyzing the factors that lead to support for Trump, state the following:

We believe that this is indeed an important part of the explanation for support for authoritarian populism – but, by itself is over-simplified, because xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic attitudes are linked with a broader range of socially conservative values. The authoritarian reflex is not confined solely to attitudes toward race, immigration, and ethnicity, but also to the rejection of the diverse lifestyles, political views, and morals of ‘out-groups’ that are perceived as violating conventional norms and traditional customs, including those of homophobia, misogyny, and xenophobia.

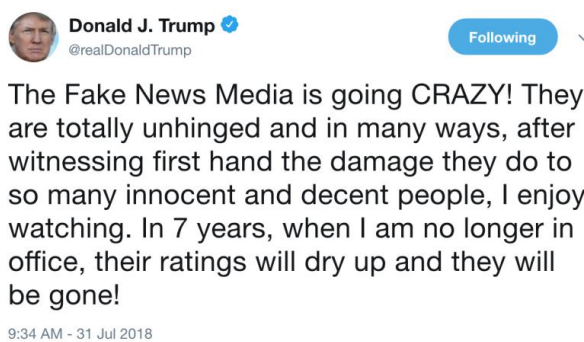
In this sense, it can be said that the strategy of positioning Trump as an anti-system or anti-establishment part of the reinforcement of common prejudices in a large part of the population in a historically conservative and Christian country, engendering this with attacks on groups and institutions that would promote of an agenda that does not respect the traditions and beliefs of this people (MOUFFE, 2019). According to Mouffe (2019, position 454, our translation): “Right-wing populists do not address the demand for equality and construct a ‘people’ that excludes numerous categories, usually immigrants, seen as a threat to the identity and prosperity of the nation”. Thus, space arises for directing dissatisfaction with the institutional policy towards issues seen as a distortion of the popular will, and this confrontation is up to the leader, who suffers a hard resistance from the groups considered hegemonic and, because of this, need their support in the fight against this common enemy (NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019). Hence the need to establish support for the charismatic leader in the midst of actions that can be considered controversial and the justification for acting in the sense of attacking and weakening the institutions.

Trump attacks

The Trump Administration stands out for its hitherto unusual use of social networks in direct communication with the population, as well as the way it behaves in the face of more traditional mass media vehicles. Traditional media were the object of projection by politicians, being a reason for greed and tension for the exhibition space and being part of the political communication strategy throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st (MIGUEL, 2002). In this sense, their power to decide who to give space to, and to which agendas to give space, having influence on the public agenda and debate was consolidated and it was difficult to find cases of politicians, especially among those who fulfilled mandates, who directly confronted the media in general (MIGUEL, 2002). Social networks, however, changed this scenario, giving rise to populist political leaders who dispense with traditional media, often entering a collision course, and favoring communication via social networks and even encouraging discredit towards traditional communication vehicles, highlighting the cases of Donald Trump (United States), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil) and Nayib Bukele (El Salvador). One of the possibilities that open up with this type of strategy is the construction of political narratives based on fake news and distortions of facts, based on the creation of filter bubbles that legitimize the political agenda of the president without any verification of information or space to the contradictory (KOIKE; BENTES, 2018; GOMES; DOURADO, 2019; BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020). In this context, the right environment is formed to propagate the political narrative that the populist leader is someone anti-system or anti-establishment, requiring the fight against institutions that would perpetuate interests contrary to those of the true people (MOUFFE, 2019). From this, Trump articulated a political campaign based on the growing distrust of Americans in relation to their institutions (BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020).

According to a survey carried out by Koike and Bentes (2018), in a universe of 161 tweets made in the period from 1st of May to 6th of May 2017, Trump promoted attacks and criticisms of democrats, institutions, commercial media and public figures in 58. With the exception of a small sample period, it can be concluded that attacks on institutions have featured prominently on Donald Trump's Twitter since the beginning of his term. In this sense, the way in which Trump operates these attacks can be analyzed in sequence, aiming to delegitimize the institutions.

Figure 1 – 31 July 2018 Tweet in which Trump attacks media outlets



Source: Colby (2018)

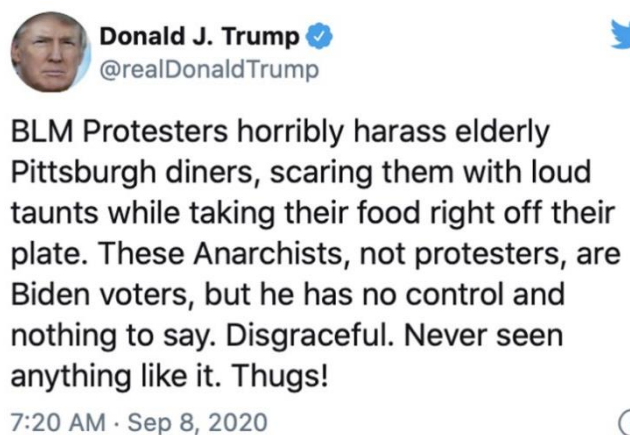
In Figure 1, it is possible to see a tweet in which Donald Trump speaks out against what he calls Fake News Media, a term widely used throughout his mandate to discredit any media vehicle that was not considered his ally (BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020). Regarding the use of the term Fake News by Trump, Gomes and Dourado (2019, p. 36-37) point out that:

The choice of the expression “fake news”, however, adds another characteristic, arising from the notion of “news”, to the already known idea of reports that claim to be factual, but that practice the counterfeiting of inventing or altering the facts to which they allegedly refer. With this expression, moreover, considerable emphasis is placed on the fact that these are not just any factual narratives, but journalistic reports, news stories. This implies, here, the authority and credibility of the institution of journalism and its production processes of authorized and credible reports on the facts of reality. These are not just any false reports, but counterfeits of journalism itself. [...] This is the reason why the expression “fake news” has become reversible: when a liberal⁶ uses it, he refers to news about invented facts or reports that alter the facts according to the political conveniences of those who create them; when a right-wing conservative, such as Trump or Bolsonaro, uses it, the reference is to journalism in general, considered, by them, an institution already compromised, that is, already invaded and controlled by liberals and the left.

In this sense, there is a delegitimization of the independent press that is committed to fact-finding and to journalism that is not merely official. This occurs so that the only news certified as reliable and credible by the populist leader are those inside the filter bubbles, rejecting criticism and what is pointing out the contradictory (MOUFFE, 2019; BERNARDI; COSTA, 2019).

⁶ The term liberal refers to the US political context.

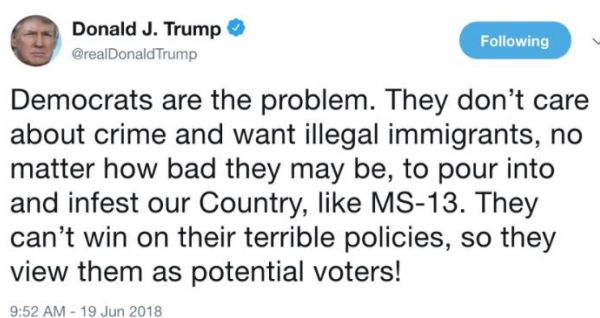
Figure 2 – Tweet of 8 September 2020, in which Trump attacks the Black Lives Matter movement



Source: CBS PITTSBURGH (2020)

Trump was also notable for taking a vehement position against social movements, mainly linked to progressive agendas. In Figure 2, it is possible to see an attack by the former US president on a demonstration organized by the Black Lives Matter movement, in which the president classifies them as anarchists and qualifies their actions as a mere electoral pretext against him, as well as a justification for creating confusion through provocations, justifying any reaction from their constituents. Thus, Trump characterizes the group as the “they” referred to by Laclau (2005), mobilizing his base of followers in his defense, since prejudice against minorities and dissatisfaction with movements of self-affirmation and struggle for rights for minorities makes part of his rhetoric (MOUFFE, 2019; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019).

Figure 3 – Tweet of 19 June 2018 in which Trump attacks the Democratic Party

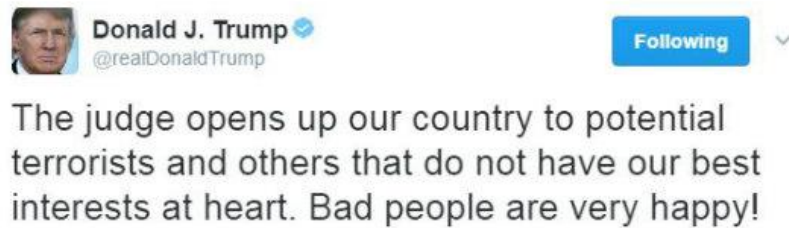


Source: Trump (2018)

Another constant target of attacks by Trump is the Democratic Party – the opposition party in the US two-party system –, as can be seen in Figure 3. Amidst the debate about building the wall with Mexico, Trump accuses them of being a problem, worrying more about their potential voters than the damage that would be caused by illegal immigration into the country.

The public exposure of criticism and disagreements between the two parties is something natural and even healthy for democracy, however Trump's attacks against the Democratic Party do not express a mere divergence of political agendas, but rather the constant attribution of the opponent as a problem, a target and an enemy to be fought.

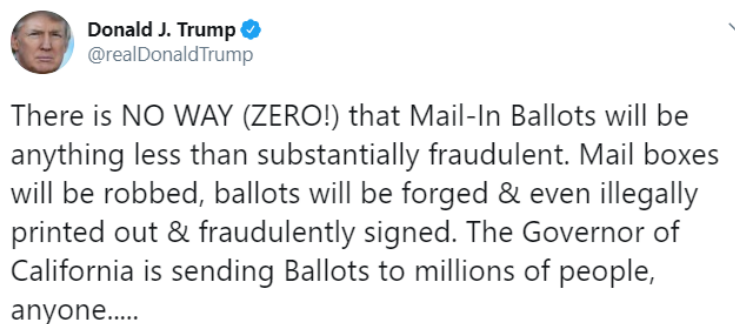
Figure 4 – Tweet of 4 February 2017 in which Trump attacks the judiciary *



Source: Brennan Center for justice (2020)

In Figure 4, you can see Trump attacking the country's Judiciary. In yet another case, the former president uses xenophobia to propagate a political strategy of “us”, here manifested in the figure of good people concerned about the possible invasion of terrorists in the United States, against a “they” that guides their actions in evil (LACLAU, 2005; MOUFFE, 2019). In this case, the Judiciary would have taken a measure which is obviously wrong, whose only explanation would be the lack of concern for the common American citizen.

Figure 5 – Tweet of 26 May 2020, in which Trump attacks California Governor Gavin Newsom

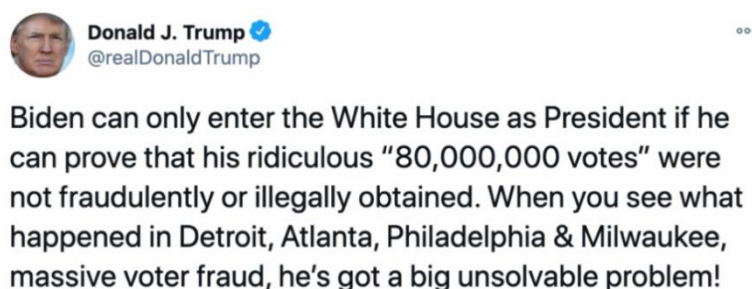


Source: Trump (2020)

In figure 5, it is possible to see Trump attacking the Governor of California in the midst of the controversy of votes by mail in the 2020 presidential elections. Here Trump uses the same speech that he would repeat months later, when he was defeated in the presidential election, that the vote by mail it would be insecure and could be easily cheated. The attack on opposing governors, as well as on mayors, was repeated throughout the term, especially in the

midst of controversies and contrasting positions between the parties. Here, both the fact that there was a delegitimization of the opposition, accusing it of colluding with a crime, was repeated, as well as the reinforcement in the narrative of a “they” united against a “us”.

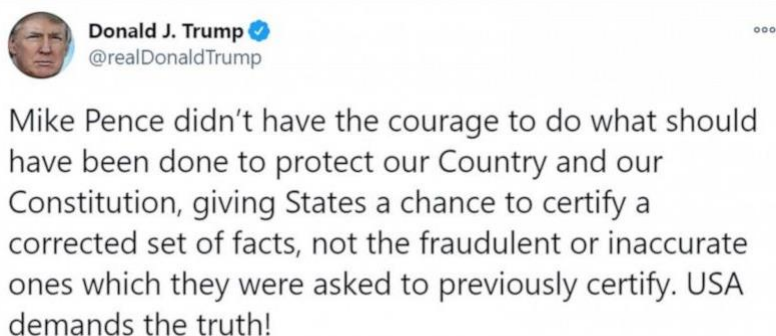
Figure 6 – Tweet of 27 November 2020, in which Trump accuses the electoral system of being fraudulent *



Source: The Courier (2020)

After losing the 2020 presidential election, Trump did not recognize defeat and accused the United States electoral system of allowing fraud in several states (those in which his victory was reversed after the arrival of votes via mail). It was the first time that the US tradition of the defeated candidate not recognizing the opponent's victory was broken.

Figure 7 – Tweet of 6 January 2021, in which Trump accuses Mike Pence of treason *



Source: Lane (2021)

In Figure 7, Trump directs his attacks at his vice president, Mike Pence, for not participating in his plan to disrupt the session of the United States Congress that would ratify the election result. The former president accused him of betraying him and of not making an effort in the search for the truth. Thus, Trump turned his own vice into an opponent who would be siding with those who bring danger and bad things to good citizens.

In common with all the posts selected here, it can be highlighted the fact that Trump constantly appeals to a populist discourse, according to the conception of Laclau (2005), in

which there is a “we”, composed of his supporters who would be the group of true patriots and good people, and a “they”, made up of all opposition, China, international organizations, and people belonging to other powers and institutions, who would be united against his government. In this sense, any person, collective or institution that has expressed disagreement with Trump's actions in the Presidency is framed not as a legitimate opponent or person who does his job, but as a threat to that group that the leader represents. Norris and Inglehart (2019), as well as Bernardi and Costa (2020), point to a growing distrust of institutions on the part of Americans. The fact that Trump uses rhetoric that delegitimizes institutions such as the vice presidency, Congress, opposition parties, former president Barack Obama and the Supreme Court not only makes sense as a speech based on the opinions and suspicions of the population, but also reinforces the feeling of disbelief on the part of his supporters, since institutions, when they do not behave in accordance with their interests, are classified as a group interested in creating problems for citizens.

Final considerations

The classic bibliography of Political Science attributed a status of robustness and infallibility to liberal democracy in the countries where it was created, despite the fact that, in their origins, the systems of government derived from what was idealized by the federalists were idealized as being deliberately exclusive, anti-democratic and anti-popular. At the end of the 20th century, the liberal democratic model was consolidated and there seemed to be no risk in countries with a long democratic tradition. However, the beginning of the 21st century was marked by an increase in dissatisfaction with democracy and distrust in institutions, even in countries where it was believed that they were not prone to authoritarianism (MOUFFE, 2019; NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019; BERNARDI; COSTA, 2020). This behavior generated the rise of an anti-system or anti-establishment tendency, enabling the emergence of authoritarian, anti-democratic and populist leaders and political movements. In this sense, the concept of populism is recovered in order to explain recent phenomena, albeit with a new interpretation of its concept. If originally populism was a predominantly Latin American phenomenon, linked to underdevelopment and dependence on imperialism, today it manifests itself in developed countries with a long democratic tradition, causing apprehension regarding its consequences. One of the most prominent cases is Donald Trump, since he accredited himself to the Presidency of the United States without having previously been elected to any public office, basing his

political agenda on a diffuse anti-establishment rhetoric and contradicting a communicative profile more official and diplomatic, as previous presidents have traditionally behaved.

Trump used a populist strategy in his communication, making use of a campaign of direct communication with the public, even when official government announcements and the expression of opinions on controversial or sensitive subjects, rejecting and even ridiculing the mass media, accused by the former president of being Fake News media, except for those who unconditionally supported his actions. Through his Twitter account, Trump attacked opponents, institutions and even former allies who did not agree with specific actions or who broke politically with the former president. In this sense, through automatic speech analysis, it was possible to verify that Trump sought to operate through a strategy of creating a “us”, composed of him and his supporters and who would represent the true American patriot, against a “they”, composed of by institutions, personalities, companies, media vehicles and any person, entity or institution that was contrary. Thus, it is possible to confirm the developed working hypothesis, since Trump's rhetoric attacked the institutions with the intention of creating a common and uniform enemy that threatened him and all his supporters, since he was the representative of the legitimate US citizen, as there is no commitment to the institutions or maintenance of liberal democracy, only his power project.

The results presented show a warning about the short-term effects that the presidency of Donald Trump caused to institutions and liberal democracy in his country. However, it is still necessary to understand its long-term effects, based both on his individual behavior in the coming years, as well as paying attention to the movements of his political base, since, even electorally defeated, the effect of Trump cannot be disregarded.

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CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: Not applicable.

Financing: Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval: Not applicable.

Availability of data and material: All data used are referenced in the article itself.

Author contributions: Both authors formulated the proposal of the article and made the final revision. The first two sections were written mostly by the lead author and the rest mostly by the other author.

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

