

Letters to the Next President: What do Brazilian Youth Say?

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the construction of citizenship and citizen identities takes place among young students in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Considering that education is responsible for fostering the sense of citizenship, this research asked 209 students from a public high school to write letters to a future Brazilian president and to answer an online survey on politics, democracy, and citizenship. Using the Thematic Analysis method, this paper investigates the content of these letters and the answers regarding presidential activities. The responses to both exercises express generic notions and unsuitable speeches regarding politics as well as a feeling of disbelief. It is argued that school education does not develop citizens who can perform their civic roles in society and that such detachment of the students may be a consequence of their incredulity toward politics, resulting in a narrow understanding of the matter.

Keywords

civic engagement, education, political behavior

Introduction

The interaction of the Brazilian youth with the political sphere can be characterized by a major interest in self-fulfillment and personal achievements, and

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the notions of democracy are considered distant and idealistic, like a political “what if,” but still diffused. Also, there is a recurring understanding that this interaction is not a topic of interest for some young people, as the engagement of that population in organizations, forums, councils, and social projects aimed at political promotion is low (Baquero & Baquero, 2007, 2014; Boghossian & Minayo, 2009; Dayrell et al., 2010).

Regarding the participation of the youth in a traditional political sphere, Boghossian and Minayo (2009) show that either young people do not participate in the political sphere, or they take part in other activities, independent of traditional political partisanship, such as demonstrations and groups of young people organized through social networks, for example. This can be explained by the fact that youth-oriented Brazilian programs and policies are generated from the perspective of traditional political actors (such as people in political positions, adults), rather than from student or youth movements. The authors discuss the assertion that young people’s opinion about politics is being formulated from the eyes of an external observer, which would differ from political participation in the spaces where politics is made.

On the other hand, there is a need to focus on the question of why schools no longer represent a reference space for collecting information of different natures in Brazil. Thus, schools no longer play the role attributed to them: socialization, access to knowledge, and shaping of the individual. In other words, although we find in literature the understanding that school and education are supposed to play a political role in society, socially we do not recognize education as the holder of this mission. Therefore, this scenario demonstrates that the media has become the new point of reference for thinking about the construction of the civic engagement of young people, since the formal and traditional institutions that promote the mediation of themes in the political sphere seem to no longer be recognized as the main conductors and mobilizers of political participation (Baquero & Baquero, 2014).

The media culture represents a field of great interlocution, creating a favorable environment for the diffusion of thoughts related to politics in the Brazilian society (Baquero & Baquero, 2014; Castro, 2009; Guareschi, 2006). This phenomenon has an important intertwining nature, which makes political thoughts also dependent upon and subjugated to the media, since the media will always reproduce a partial discourse, and will not promote the equal dissemination of diverse political thoughts. Another significant factor is that the level of schooling is referred to as one of the most relevant factors for the level of civic engagement of the population, not only under traditional approaches but also inside social media, according to data pointed out by Ribeiro et al. (2019). The authors indicate the education variable as fundamental for the development of the technical skills necessary to use the

internet efficiently. Therefore, even if we do not consider the most traditional or even offline approaches, participation and engagement through social media would also benefit from greater dialog with educational institutions.

Still regarding school, educational institutions in Brazil do not seem to be effective in promoting a properly democratic outlook, since young people are being guided by individualistic and consumerist values that are reflections of the process of globalization and contemporary technological development (Baquero & Baquero, 2007, 2014; Boghossian & Minayo, 2009; Dayrell et al., 2010; Nazzari, 2005). Studies also show that schools are not very open to the promotion of spaces for activities outside of the formal subjects, whether public or private schools, arguing there is disinterest and apathy among young people regarding political issues. However, there is indication that when these incentives take place, young people tend to get involved positively. Therefore, when proposed, involvement is possible. Although this interaction is not made available, authors argue for the importance that school institutions have in the process of introducing young people to the common world (Galston, 2001; Höfling, 2001; Kahne et al., 2016). The contradiction of these data allows us to question which mechanisms are producing the discourse of apathy, if, when stimulated, young people take advantage of spaces offered for their involvement with the political theme. Perhaps, precisely because schools do not promote stimulating spaces for debate and dissent within pedagogical environments, they also end up not promoting positive views about living politically.

If we think that education has a fundamental political function, we can also see it as a space for democratic action and promotion of better interaction between the youth and the aspects of living in a society in a participatory way. Young people are citizens long before they perceive themselves to be, and the school can be effectively the arena for the experimentation of their citizenship, its functions, and rights. This issue becomes important as the understanding of their rights allows for a closer relationship with the rights of others, a greater sense of collective identity, and a greater tolerance for differences. Also, the earlier young people are inserted into the functioning of a properly democratic public sphere, the sooner they will take ownership of responsibilities and recognize themselves as actors that can generate changes within the contexts and situations of their lives in society (Galston, 2001; Kahne et al., 2016; Rizzini et al., 2007).

An example of a civic engagement project is “Letters to the Next President,” created by Elyse Eidman-Aadahl. In this project, through the writing of letters to the future American president, young people were invited to think about the social and political realities that surrounded them. The author conducted the research with American students in 2016 (election

year), to give prominence to young people in the issues that were politically important to them, leading them to engage in a closer relationship with the political system, and providing them with a better understanding of the country's social situation. This project uses writing as an agency tool, as it understands that the possibility of written expression allows for a process of subjectification, of building ideas and, thus, of political identity. All letters were published on the website of the project (<https://letters2president.org/>), and are available for reading.

The theme of the present study is supported by the understanding of Baquero and Baquero (2014), which shows that a negative social reaction toward democracy is a current phenomenon in Brazil and Latin America, since the social feeling of abandonment by the State has been made explicit by the population. The authors argue that the population that is most affected by this discontent is the youth, whose beliefs about politics have been mostly negative. Simultaneously, young people are seen either as a social problem, or as a future solution, but not as protagonists of today's society.

Thus, supported by Elyse Eidman-Aadahl's research, this work aims to explore the view of young people on politics through their demands via a driving question: "What do you have to say to the next president of Brazil?" It also seeks to comprehend the understanding young people have about what is the role of the president of the country.

Methods

A public school in the south of Brazil was contacted by convenience in May 2018. The school needed to have a computer room with internet access, since the data collection was carried out through an online platform. After contacting the people responsible for authorizing the entry of the researchers into the institution, it was requested that the invitation be made to all high school students, to avoid selecting which students would participate. The total of 209 students agreed on participating. All participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the research, and all signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The project of the present study was approved by the UFRGS Research Ethics Committee, under code 57635315.6.0000.5334.

The present work will present the analysis of the students' responses to the driving question, which is based on Elyse Eidman-Aadahl's research, "What do you have to say to the next president of Brazil?" And the question, "Do you know what a president does? Please, describe." These questions were part of the questionnaire presented to students. As a method of analysis, the Thematic Analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. The material analysis is qualitative, made with the themes that emerged a

posteriori. All the participants were monitored by a team of volunteers, who invited each class to participate during school hours. The students who agreed to participate were led to the computer room. After being shown to the computers—on which the questionnaire links were already open,—the participants were informed about the theme of the research, the importance of talking about their perceptions without being concerned about right or wrong answers, and also that the researchers would be available if they had any questions while answering the questions.

After surveying the questions of the 209 participants on the online platform, all responses were tabulated on a spreadsheet. Three members of the research group took on the role of judges for the analysis of the material, and listed which topics were the most frequent in the responses of the participants. Three judges read the collected material and examined the most relevant topics in the students' responses. After discussing the initially coded themes, it was from the agreement of the three judges that the thematic axes presented for analysis in this work were determined. The answers are not necessarily excluded from one thematic axis or another. This can be seen in both the first and the second part of the work. Occasionally, it was identified that a response could be present simultaneously in more than one axis. In those cases, the authors decided to categorize answers in only one axis, the one that they were strongly linked to.

Results

First Part: "What Does a President Do?"

Regarding the first question of the questionnaire, the thematic axis constituted from the answers of the students were: "Unawareness" ($n=47$, 23.03%), referring to the answers that expressed a lack of knowledge to the practices attributed to the role of president; "Deliberation" ($n=68$, 33.33%), which is further subdivided into two sub-axis, the first being "About laws" ($n=44$, 21.56%), which involves the responses that presented an understanding that it would be up to the president to participate in proposals, approvals, vetoes and creation of bills of laws), and the second, "Decisions" ($n=24$, 11.76%), which corresponds to responses that understood the president as being responsible for decisions in a pure, generalist way). The third axis, "Representative" ($n=24$, 11.76%), corresponds to the responses that defend the role of the president as a representative of the people and the country. The fourth and final axis, called "Authority" ($n=65$, 31.86%), concerns the frequent responses that explained the president as someone who rules, commands, governs, in an understanding that he would be the holder of full power (Table 1).

Table 1. What Does a President Do? (t=204).

	N (%)
Unawareness	47 (23.03)
Deliberation	68 (33.33)
About laws	44 (21.56)
Decisions	24 (11.76)
Representative	24 (11.76)
Authority	65 (31.86)
Total	204 (99.98)

Unawareness. When asked about their understanding of what the president does, 47 participants expressed not knowing. This number corresponds to 23.03% of the respondents. There is a differentiation between the pure responses and the expressions of cluelessness with attempts at explanation. For example: “I am not entirely sure, I think he takes care of the economy, education, needs of the country, and represents us abroad, he has the final say in decisions regarding the country.”; “Not exactly. But I believe that the president makes important decisions for society, thinking about what is best for everyone.”

Deliberation. The participants who showed a deliberative understanding corresponded to 68 of the responses collected, 33.33% of the total number. This significant number of responses corresponded to the idea of decisions, whether they were related to the elaboration of federal laws and projects or pure decisions, as they are differentiated in the following sub-axes.

About laws. This sub-axis, which corresponds to 44 participants and, therefore, 21.56% of the responses, refers to an idea of what are the president’s duties, which would be, primarily, participation in the decision, elaboration, proposal, and veto of laws. For example: “Simply put, a president has the highest office in politics but his jurisdiction is small compared to that of other offices, since there is a whole process of passing laws and the president cannot promise any law, as he does not have the power of approval.”; “I know that he does not have absolute power over the country’s political issues, but the federal laws that are waiting to be passed go through him, just as he can propose laws to be passed by deputies, senators, etc. He also chooses ministers.”

The pattern of answers evidences a notion that the president participates in the development of laws, and also the notion of a greater arena of participation—concerning the three powers, the notion of the need for other actors for

such decisions to be made, and that the president would not have absolute power to make independent decisions: “The president makes the laws and decides the course of things.”; “The president has the role of enforcing the country’s laws.”

Decisions. There were recurring answers that showed that the president’s professional practice is to make decisions, purely. These answers correspond to 24 out of the total, equivalent to 11.76% of the statements in the questionnaires: “He manages the country and makes important decisions.”; “I think the president makes the important decisions about what happens to the country.”

Representative. In 24 responses to the questionnaire (11.76%), the statements contained the understanding that it is the President’s responsibility to be the one who represents the country. Or that he would be the Brazilian people within Brazil, or else the country in interactions with other countries. Some examples: “He represents the State following his proposals and his party’s policy. He has a great influence on smaller political offices. There are many things actually, I think a president should represent democracy, but unfortunately this has not been happening, because only the elite leads this country.”; “The president would be the person who represents us on the political sphere, we vote for him to bring improvements and represent us in the best way, putting into practice everything we need in our country.”

Authority. This last thematic axis represents the responses that contained an understanding that the President would be the one who has the role of commanding, ordering, and administering. More frequently, it was possible to observe the implicit understanding that he is the holder of absolute power in the country. There were exceptional responses that presented a speech that conceives the President as the one who takes care of the country. The present thematic axis was compatible with 65 of the responses, representing 31.86% of the sample. Examples: “Basically, he runs the country.”; “He controls the country, according to its rules.”; “Yes, he has control over the entire government, imposing rules, agreements, he takes away and gives everything that the Brazilian people had or may have.”; “Basically, a President ‘takes care’ of a country.”

Second Part: “What Do You Have to Say to the Next President of Brazil?”

Concerning the driving question, “What do you have to say to the next president of Brazil?”, the emerging central themes were presented around three

Table 2. What Do You Have to Say to The Next President of Brazil? ($t=196$).

	N (%)
Disbelief	63 (32.14)
Public versus private	62 (31.63)
The agendas	71 (36.22)
Social	39 (19.89)
Thematic tripod	32 (16.32)
Total	196 (99.96)

different sections: the first, called “Disbelief” ($n=63$, 32.14%) relates to the strong sense of disbelief concerning politics, which was sometimes also accompanied by a notion of politicians, politics and the whole system as ineffective, and that there is a lack of the least that is expected. The second thematic axis was called “Public *versus* private” ($n=62$, 31.63%), which corresponds to an incidence of responses that seem, at first, to confuse personal attributes with public practice, so that, at times, a moral appeal is also placed on the practices of the president and requests made to him. The third and final thematic axis was called “The agendas” ($n=71$, 36.22%), which corresponds directly to the agendas raised in the requests of the participating students. This third axis is also subcategorized, because, when political agendas were made explicit, they still differed between social agendas ($n=39$, 19.89%), more properly categorized in the responses, and empty agendas, constantly presented in a unified way, and even mentioned in the same order, called “Thematic tripod” ($n=32$, 16.32%) (Table 2).

Disbelief. The thematic axis called “Disbelief” was based on the fact that, of the 209 students who responded to the research, 63 expressed an important feeling of discredit and disbelief about different elements of the political world. This group corresponds to 32.14% of the respondents. The responses within this axis demonstrate a strong disinterest in asking any question to the next president of the country, as perhaps it was not something that would have any effect. This position shows that these young people believe that politics is somewhat ineffective and does not deserve the investment of their attention. It also evidences the idea of the politician as someone who does not comply, who lies and deceives to get votes from the population, and who works for his/her benefit. Some responses involved disbelief about Brazilian politics as a whole, responses that showed disbelief concerning candidates and/or politicians in general, and disbelief concerning the situation of the country. An example of this axis: “Currently, I don’t have any idea of who I

would vote for or simply support this year, pre-candidates, in general, are all the same, they are just saying what the people want to hear.”

The excerpt shows the idea that what the next president needs to accomplish is precisely what he proposes to accomplish. As if the opposite was expected. There is also criticism regarding the perception that candidates will not be effective in the actions they propose, because they only make promises to be elected, to occupy a position for their benefit, and not to play a representative role. This same argument is frequently evoked, as well as a constructed image of the Brazilian politician as someone who cannot be trusted. Some examples: “They should keep the promises they make in the elections, because they say things and do not comply with what they say. They only make misleading statements.”; “At the moment, we don’t have someone to trust to take office as the president of Brazil, because either our candidates have some involvement with corruption, or they don’t have good ideas.”

Another issue observed in the responses of this axis is that, if there is no good politician, and if politics is proven to be ineffective, this already presents itself implicitly as a way of explaining the lack of opinion about what needs to be done or requested. This thematic axis leaves open whether, through an argument of disbelief, young people would really be able to express themselves about social agendas that they understand as significant: “I think that the options, although diverse, basically lead to the same point. Although I have already done some research on most candidates for presidency, I have not seen any that are compatible with what I want.”

Another type of response within this axis were responses that expressed a pure disinterest in the theme of politics or in requesting anything from a president. Sometimes, under the argument that it “does not help” or that it makes no difference, the respondents did not make any request or criticism that presented objective content, as evidenced in the following excerpts: “Politics is not relevant to me”; “I don’t have much to say about it because I am not so interested in politics, I don’t care that much.”

Public versus private. This thematic axis corresponds to requests that, at times, placed more emphasis on moral appeals and personal attributions for the public office. Such requests appeared in 62 responses, comprising 31.63% of the statements. These were responses that presented a moral and individualistic context concerning the practice of the president. Like the previous axis, “Disbelief,” this axis presents answers that ask for honesty and an end to corruption. Along with these requests, appeals for “adjectives” are presented, such as being empathetic, fair, sensible, knowing. For example: “do an honest job”; “That he be an honest person and grants equal rights to everyone”; “I would say that the last presidents of Brazil were a reflection of what our

society is, in which most people want to win over others regardless of the situation, of always finding an easier way to get things, and when they get caught in the act, they try everything to blame someone else and do not admit what they have done, thus being corrupt. And I would ask our next representative not to be what most people are, as I believe that just as our society influences politics (because our politicians, before being politicians, are Brazilian citizens), I believe that a good and honest representative would influence our society, as an image of someone good to look up to.”

The agendas. The thematic axis called “The agendas” corresponded to 71 responses to the questionnaire, equivalent to 36.22%. This axis was further subcategorized into two sub-axes: “Social agendas” and “Thematic tripod.” These subcategories were chosen because we understand that, as the most relevant themes evoked in the responses were raised, two phenomena occurred: the first corresponds to the responses that presented the demands of young people in general. The second was the frequent evocation of a “single theme” form of expression, in which the answers presented the same writing pattern. These correspond to the “Thematic tripod,” which will be explained below.

Thematic tripod. The fields of education, health and safety were mentioned by an important part of the responses collected. However, how these three words were most frequently evoked showed a kind of “empty agenda.” Unlike the answers presented in the later section, in which these fields were mentioned with greater propriety, some responses united the terms “education, health, and safety” with no examples, but always together. There were 32 responses from the “Thematic tripod,” axis, corresponding to 16.32% of the responses to the questionnaire. Some examples: “May the next government of our country be more concerned with the population and not with themselves, invest in health, education, and safety, which are precarious in our country.”; “I expect a person with a conscience, who helps those in need and does things that can improve safety, health, and education in our country.”; “May he prioritize education, health, and safety, especially education, which is what will make the country better.”

Social agendas. The thematic sub-axis “Social agendas” corresponds to the answers that contained, within writing, a content that effectively related to social issues. They were responses that contained a direction for what could be done, improved or modified by the president. The responses that had some content in this perspective corresponded to 39 in total, 19.89% of the responses collected. Of these responses, a frequent theme was the reduction

of inequalities, as exemplified in the following response: “A president needs to have minimum capacity and knowledge to be able to run the country. Yet, there is no point in having the knowledge and putting the country at the top, if the cost is to neglect the social differences present in it. Creating an economy based on social differences will always create poverty and suffering.”

The answer presented shows a concern with an economic format based on social inequalities and a critical position in this regard. This position regarding social difficulties was a frequent agenda, and is often alongside the agenda of reducing inequality for sexual and gender diversity, as well as for racial diversity. As for the issue of race, there is also a positioning regarding the importance of a school curriculum that covers issues referring to the ethnic-racial history of the Brazilian people: “To care for people of minority groups. May they make Brazil a fairer country for those who like the same sex, women, and black people!”; “May he pay more attention to social issues such as LGBTphobia, feminicide, and racism. To pay more attention to the deaths of young black people in Brazilian communities and to give more power to the State and less power to private enterprises that have interests that are different from those of the population.”

In addition to the theme of equality and safety, expressed in multiple ways, some responses contained criticism against inflation, taxation, and the difficulty of access to resources for people with greater financial difficulties. This theme can be perceived in the following excerpts: “I hope that the president improves safety in the country and that he collaborates for people to pay fewer taxes”; “May he invest in the rights of people with low income and in improving health, schools, taxes. . . May food prices be in line with Brazilian income. And that social inclusion is guaranteed in any establishment.”

Regarding what is called “crisis,” a greater frequency of responses was noted. Responses that present an implicit or stated understanding of a current crisis are frequent. However, no specific or definitive explanation was found in any response as to which crisis the respondents referred to: “I have to tell the president to just fix things up and that Brazil has to get out of this crisis that we are going through today.”; “As much as it seems that there is no way out, he will have to find a way to get us out of this crisis.”

In addition to the agendas presented in the respondents’ statements, there is a frequent concern about the structure offered by the State, not only concerning the physical conditions of educators and health professionals, but also their recognition. The physical structure of hospitals, the need to build more community health centers, and improving working conditions for professionals in this area, were also mentioned: “We need broader projects for the education of young people and children, because from this process we make the population more ethical and more educated. Teachers need to get

more attention from the governments, since our schools are devalued, and, in this way, our families have become the main base of education available. Health could be faster, with an increase in the number of doctors and professionals for the area, the creation of new hospitals and health centers. Moreover, improvements in education would strengthen safety, making professionals from these areas feel appreciated by society and its government.”; “I think Brazil would be better with more financial resources, schools open on weekends, a better structure and a more privileged health network, among other things.”

Discussion

Based on both questions presented, it was possible to verify that this group of young people has a tenuous relationship with the political sphere. Either by the disbelief argument, more easily evidenced by the driving question, or by a lack of knowledge concerning the presidential office role. Regarding the driving question, part of the respondents expressed an understanding that politics are not worth the investment, since the results of political practice do not offer the improvements that are promised to the population. Therefore, they avoid it, to the point that at times they have difficulty in answering what would be the president’s duty. As for the thematic areas of the second question—“Deliberation” and “Representative,”—the answers were not wrong. The president of the country is responsible for deliberating and representing the population inside and outside the Brazilian territory. But the present work draws attention to the substantially poor responses given by these young people. Answers were always simple, often uncertain and generalist. How these responses were elaborated can also serve as confirmation for the discussed argument, that this population is distant from the political class and that, indirectly, they end up removed from the founding idea of democracy: popular participation.

In comparison to the respondents of the original Letters to the Next President survey, the poor responses given by Brazilian students is noteworthy. Students who participated in the United States demonstrated more political appeal in their responses, but not only that. Their responses contained more elaborate ideas, which could be an evidence of more politically critical views. Even when contrary to the current government, the responses were critically based on the political views that were relevant for each student. Even when showing their disbelief, the letters were based on agendas that had to do with their realities, criticism of political representatives from their territories, and current problems that were consistent with the presidential office. They also shown more contextualized ideas, historically and socially.

It is possible to think that, perhaps, under the argument of disbelief, the population justifies a culture of detachment, which also prevents them from even understanding the reasons for this skepticism. The present study questions whether disbelief itself is being used as a pretext for lack of knowledge, thus serving as a cover for political alienation.

The different social contexts between Brazil and the United States must be taken into consideration. Regarding the country of the original project, there is a concern on the part of the State for the population to have a greater interest in participatory policies to guarantee their involvement in the country's electoral period (Adolina et al., 2003). Since the vote is not mandatory, the US State invests in civic engagement practices in public and private education. Kahne et al. (2016) start from an educational structure that has space for such investments. They problematize the digital age as being responsible for the agency and the voice of young people and the importance of educators being qualified to also propose engagement through these tools in a democratic way. This is not a reality in the Brazilian context. Brazilian education does not ensure, in the curriculum, a discipline that deals with aspects of political participation.

Perhaps it is because of this distance from the view of "education as a community" (Kahne et al., 2016), that the democratic purpose of education is not being exercised in Brazil institutionally. It appears that a possible reaction to the historical moment of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil has influenced the withdrawal of subjects that dealt with politics from within schools. After the end of the dictatorship period, the discipline of Moral and Civic Education—at the time with its conservative bias and with a pro-regime content—was not replaced by any other. Perhaps this taboo related to a citizenship education discipline exists because, the last time a discipline like this was proposed, there was an almost explicit element of social control.

The social agendas elaborated in the analyzed responses contained the theme of the reduction of inequalities (social, ethnic-racial, sexual, and gender diversity), safety, concern with job offers, taxation, concern with health and education conditions, and concern with the "crisis" that hangs in the social discourse in which they are inserted. These are themes present in the daily lives of young Brazilians, but they are brief appropriations, which make us think again of Marcovitch's (2018) argument about lay and non-propositional opinions (without understanding of the institutional mechanisms involved for their opinions to be put into effect). These are political agendas and politically relevant issues. However, it is difficult to discuss reflexively and critically about political agendas when little is understood about them, or even about what can be done about them. Likewise, it is difficult to participate actively in a democracy when there is a lack of knowledge about how to be involved with it.

Another point worth mentioning is the thematic axis called "Authority." This axis corresponded to an understanding that, as illustrated above, there was a frequent implicit understanding that the president is the holder of sovereign power. This axis shows a crisis of what is most significant for a democracy: the power of the people. It highlights the possibility that we are, as a society, training passive young people only capable of obedience, which was once expected by this population for guaranteeing the dictatorial regime. Faced with this issue, we cannot give the school responsibility for something that seems, *a priori*, to be greater than this institution. Concerning this issue, the results presented in the axis find support in the study by Vilanova et al. (2018), which discusses, even if indirectly, the characteristics of right-wing authoritarianism in Brazil. This study shows that even people who state they are not pro any party have a high degree of authoritarianism in the Brazilian context. Thus, it can be thought that the youth expresses a belief that the president's role is that of control, command, and centralization of tasks, which may be related to this authoritarianism and this submission to authorities, latent in our culture. Again, Baró's (1988) ideas lend support to an understanding of the silent way that certain social norms are imposed on the population's discourse.

The subject of submission also finds support from the study by Meditsch (2005), which shows that Brazilian politics is supported by a strategy of "disinformation." The author argues that disinformation starts from the choice of what is conveyed by politicians in electoral times, which is dissociated from the printed documents of their coalitions. It is not only journalistic mediation that refrains from fully informing the population, but politicians themselves as well. The content of the candidates' proposals through television and radio are more associated with generic intentions than with concrete agendas. In other words, the political debate is impoverished even when it does not involve journalistic mediation: "The phrase 'forget what I said'. . . is not only a recurring motto of the Brazilian political elite when they get to power, regardless of their original ideological position, but also, apparently, a winning electoral strategy." (Meditsch, 2005, p. 43).

Regarding disinformation as a strategy, one can think of another phenomenon observed in the results of the present study: the "Thematic tripod." This body of work questions whether the synthesis of this ready-made speech that evokes education, health and safety is not exactly the reflection of the political misinformation of the Brazilian population, particularly of young people. Evoking this tripod guarantees, both to the general population and politicians, a speech that touches institutions that are the responsibility and under the care of the political class. This does not mean that concerns about these areas should not be seen as relevant. However, it can be questioned whether

the “Thematic Tripod” is also used to cover up alienation, keeping the population away from real contact with agendas that would be important for their realities. The question is raised of whether disbelief could be used to cover up alienation. Similarly, the “Thematic Tripod” may be performing the same function. This pattern of response does not seem, at first sight, to have greater elaborations regarding the areas of need mentioned. When the Tripod is evoked, one is in doubt as to which investment is needed in the field of education or how can there be more safety, or what improvements are missing in the health department—unlike the next sub-axis, in which responses that addressed the same areas brought greater clarity to what they were saying. The results presented are insufficient to prove the cover-up thesis.

It is common in the literature to show that the media culture influences the distance between the general population and the political class, sometimes in the form of “disinformation” (Marcovitch, 2018; Meditsch, 2005; Rodrigues et al., 2012). The consequences of media negativity on the receiving public, the political discourse and the opinion of society is extremely relevant. According to Guareschi (2006), it is communication, i.e., the media, that builds reality. The media defines what exists and what does not exist, but also gives an “evaluative connotation” to the evidenced content (p. 30). In other words, the media makes little purposeful opposition to the material it disseminates.

Regarding the thematic axis named “Public versus private,” one can illustrate this occurrence from what de Holanda (2013) characterized as the “Cordial Man.” The phenomenon presented in the results shows a characteristic tendency of Brazilian culture to overlap private issues and issue pertaining to the public sphere. The author criticizes the Brazilian people’s difficulty in differentiating their posture in common spaces, and the tendency to cover with affection (private) all the social relations they establish. Within the criticism of the hybridization of these spheres in the Brazilian culture, there is also an explicit criticism of the mixture between the family sphere and the political world. He argues: “the State is not an expansion of the family circle” (de Holanda, 2013, p. 141). Sérgio Buarque states the wrong assumption that the State and the institutions derived from it would descend by simple evolution of the family, when in fact they belong to essentially different orders. He also defends that it is only through the transgression of the family and the domestic sphere that the State is established, and the subject becomes a citizen. The responses in the “Public versus private” axis contained requests that refer to the individual and personal sphere. The attributions of “honesty” or being “someone good” are personal characterizations, and are not objective. In the same way, as described by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the respondents confuse the attribution of qualities that are subjective and talk about the public sphere as a family property.

Final Considerations

This study could present some limitations such as the fact that the data collection was not carried out in a Presidential's election year, and the participants were addressing their letters only hypothetically. Nevertheless, it is possible to see a vulnerable political subjectivation and a citizen identity that lacks ownership over public life as characteristics of the youth studied. The public and the private are sometimes confused in the speech of the participants. Such a mixture of family and public is a factor that intermingles with the theme of political disinformation, as well as disinterest, in the same way as the "Thematic tripod." Perhaps, in a way, the central themes appearing in the present study explain each other: from identity constructions with fragile citizen formation, it can be understood how elements such as disinformation, disinterest, and empty themes ("Thematic tripod") emerge. Or, also, the discourse of a crisis that presents itself in a phantasmatic way and is quite distant from crises that exist in the daily lives of young Brazilians. Also, when political agendas are referenced, they appear in timid and brief manifestations.

Accordingly, it is perhaps this distance, present in the disbelief discourse and the lack of property of the population to speak about politics, that allows the perpetuation of a culture of "politics for politicians" in Brazil. When citizens are not involved, they do not take ownership of the social discipline that has the very function of protecting them. And with that detachment, we cannot expect citizens to be able to monitor, evaluate, participate, and change the living conditions that they experience in their daily life.

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