

THE IMPACT OF BOLSONARO'S ANTI-IMMIGRANT RHETORIC IN BRAZIL

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1- MOTIVATION & BACKGROUND

Brazil has experienced a deep increase in immigration rates in the past decades. According to migrant and refugee reports issued by the Brazilian Government in 2022, in 2020 the number of new immigrants registered was 24.4% higher than a decade prior, with the number of refugees increasing from only 86 in 2011 to 26,500 in 2020.

This increase has made immigration a bigger concern, particularly among conservative voters, leading to the wider spread of anti-immigration discourse.

The main question is whether this growing "rejection of immigrants" was influenced by the rhetoric of Brazil's former president, Jair Messias Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro is known for his strong stance against immigration, as seen in statements like, "The scum of the earth is showing up in Brazil, as if we didn't have enough problems of our own to sort out," in reference to immigrants.

2 - RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent Jair Bolsonaro's rhetoric influenced the rejection of immigrants in Brazil?

3 - METHODOLOGY

To analyze Bolsonaro's discourse, various sources were examined:

1. **Official Speeches:** Archives from the government websites of the "Câmara dos Deputados" (Chamber of Deputies) and the "Presidência da República" (Presidency of the Republic) were accessed to review Bolsonaro's speeches from 1991 to 2018, during his mandate as a deputy, and from 2018 to 2022, during his presidency, searching for mentions of migration-related topics.
2. **Scholarly Articles:** Relevant studies, including articles on voter alignment with Bolsonaro and analysis of nationalism and xenophobia in Brazil, were consulted to contextualize the findings.
3. **Newspaper Interviews:** Several newspaper articles, which discussed both Bolsonaro and immigration, were reviewed. These articles included interviews in which Bolsonaro addressed migration-related topics.
4. **Social Media:** His posts on Twitter/X were analyzed using keywords such as "Venezuelans," "immigrants," and "migration pact" to identify instances of anti-immigrant rhetoric. These posts often led to additional sources, such as interviews on YouTube and Facebook.

4 - FINDINGS

Bolsonaro rarely addressed immigration in his official speeches, focusing instead on Venezuela's political crisis and warnings about socialism rather than talking about immigrants themselves. However, his social media posts and interviews featured explicit anti-immigrant rhetoric, portraying immigrants as burdens and rejecting international agreements like the UN Global Compact for Migration, designed to facilitate global migration.

5 - CONCLUSION

Bolsonaro's anti-immigrant rhetoric was mainly spread through the internet, by social media posts and interviews with newspapers, using polarizing language to frame immigrants as threats. His official speeches largely ignored the immigration topic. However, given society's reliance on the internet as a main source of information, his ideas got widely spread across the population. With that, the discourse Bolsonaro promoted online was a powerful tool in shaping public attitudes and influencing the narrative against immigration.