

Political-Discursive Behavior of the São Paulo Business Elite in the Crisis that Ended Dilma Rousseff's Second Term (2014–2016)

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Dilma Rousseff's second term as president of Brazil, slated to run from 2015 to 2019, was curtailed by her impeachment amid a systemic crisis in which the São Paulo business elite, represented by the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), the major Brazilian business association, played an active political role. In order to understand FIESP's behavior, its official notes and releases were assessed by political discourse analysis with regard to actors and institutions, both mobilized and articulated, as well as elements of interest and opinions. Our findings indicate FIESP's leading role in the pro-impeachment movement, the strengthening of institutionalized state-corporate channels, the strategic use of different discourses to co-opt political capital, the demonization of the progressive Workers' Party (PT), and the promotion of distrust in all that is political. Our analysis also revealed social manipulation by business elites through their control of the mass media.

Keywords: Dilma Rousseff, Brazil, FIESP, business elite, mobilization, political discourse analysis

O segundo mandato de Dilma Rousseff como presidente do Brasil, previsto para 2015 a 2019, foi reduzido por seu impeachment em meio a uma crise sistêmica na qual a elite empresarial paulistana, representada pela Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo (FIESP), a maior associação empresarial brasileira, desempenhou um papel político ativo. Para compreender o comportamento da FIESP, suas notas oficiais e comunicados foram avaliados pela análise do discurso político em relação aos atores e instituições, tanto mobilizados quanto articulados, bem como elementos de interesse e opiniões. Os achados indicam: o papel de liderança da FIESP no movimento pró-impeachment; fortalecimento dos canais institucionalizados estado-corporativos; uso estratégico de diferentes discursos para cooptar capital político; demonização do Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) progressista; e a promoção da desconfiança em tudo o que é político. A análise também revelou

a manipulação social por parte das elites empresariais através do seu controle das representações sociais para as massas.

Palavras-chave: Dilma Rousseff, Brasil, FIESP, elite empresarial, mobilização, análise do discurso político

Introduction

In mid-2016, Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff was impeached after active opposition from a well-articulated front led by the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP)—the major representative of both São Paulo and national business and manufacturing sectors (Singer 2019; Diegues and Rossi 2020; Cardoso 2020). FIESP's support for the president's ouster was open and public, and this article unravels its political behavior as stages in the exercise of political representation by separating mobilization, articulation, and identification into three political momentums involving aggregation and manipulation strategies.

We assess FIESP's political discourse in its official press notes from Rousseff's reelection in October 2014 through December 2016, several months after her removal from office in August 2016. The qualitative results are combined with a series of related articles by *Manchetômetro*, a media watchdog service that performs sentiment analysis of news coverage in Brazil, and other relevant literature. In summary, this analysis tackles the aggregational and oppositional dimensions of the major Brazilian business elite's representative organization, which succeeded in ousting the president via a coalition of center-right opposition.

Our main argument is that the Brazilian business elite represented by FIESP led an oligarchic oppositional movement to depose the president, with supporting roles played by the Legislature and liberal right-wing parties, the Judiciary and Federal Police, and the media. We analyze political actions by FIESP, its internal fragmentations, and its direct relations with Rousseff's vice president, Michel Temer, through its director, Paulo Skaf, a businessman and politician affiliated with the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB).

In the first part of the article, a brief history of Brazilian economic representation in terms of elite theory underscores FIESP's importance as the representative of the industrial and business sector. Critical discourse analysis follows, and its results are contrasted with the *Manchetômetro* series and other literature. The article then highlights the forms of social and ideological associative constructions present in the findings, which include a homogenization of regional business federations and sectors, as well as a sharing of objectives to manipulate public opinion toward the

demonization of Dilma Rousseff and of “all that is political,” increasing the general distrust of political institutions in Brazil.

This analysis shows that a renewed common neoliberal agenda led by FIESP generated an oppositional association with other elites, each performing different roles to legitimize the impeachment legally and politically. FIESP’s task was to sensitize public opinion against supposedly economic misdoings by Rousseff that impacted prices and raised taxes.

This research contributes to the understanding of recent critical political events in Brazil and to studies of business elites and associations of the empowered as examples of liberal oligarchic systems (Domingues 2018).

Elite Theory and FIESP

The economic elite comprises individuals who are outstanding in concentrating monetary capital while exercising economic power, and also those who historically have been active agents in transformation processes in world and local politics and policies (Cárdenas 2020; Neves Costa 2014; Serna 2013; Bresser-Pereira and Diniz 2009; Harvey and Maclean 2008; Hartmann 2000). One elite subgroup or fraction is characterized by its directorship of large industries and companies, as distinguished from other minority economic elite groups identified as agricultural, transnational, banking, and financial. The business elite also includes members of representative associations, which add a political component.¹ The current research outlines the strategies and outcomes of the business elite’s political engagement, including interest aggregation through mobilization, associative efforts through articulation, and identity strengthening through hegemony-based epistemologies.

Since 2012, Brazil has undergone a systemic institutional crisis that has affected society and politics. Many power centers in the hands of the elites aligned themselves with situational elements to lead events that worsened after October 2014, when Dilma Rousseff was reelected, and climaxed with her removal from office in August 2016. Her vice president, Michel Temer, who had been appointed acting president when Rousseff was suspended in May 2016 to face trial, served as president until the elections in October 2018, when the far-right Jair Bolsonaro won. FIESP’s political engagement in Rousseff’s downfall is a public and undeniable fact. As André Singer (2019, 61) puts it: “the government’s approval rating falls to 30%. FIESP initiates an anti-tax campaign, which will later become imbricated with the impeachment

¹ Studies have revealed the linkage between sociocultural capital, representation associative affiliation, and political mobilization regarding the corporate class (Bond, Glouharova, and Harrigan 2010).

campaign, both symbolized by a yellow duck, 12 meters high, emblazoned with the slogan 'We won't be played for suckers', or literally, 'I won't pay the duck.'"²

In Brazil, the São Paulo business elite, represented by FIESP, is widely studied and referenced (Muniz 2010; Barbosa 2008). It is important, as Paulo Neves Costa suggests (2014; 2007), to draw a separation between FIESP's role as a representative of a particular economic class in its relations with the national government, and its role as a representative of a particular economic sector (that is, the business community) in those relations. Between Rousseff's reelection in October 2014 and December 2016, several months after her removal, how did FIESP behave politically? What strategies did the Brazilian business elite employ to effect Rousseff's impeachment in terms of association, mobilization, and aggregation? And of those, what types of association, interest aggregation, and political insertion derived from FIESP's efforts? These are important questions addressed by the current research.

FIESP as Representative of the National Business Elite

FIESP is composed of 52 representative units throughout the state of São Paulo, representing 25 sectors alongside 133 employers' associations and more than 130,000 national industries that generate 42% of the Brazilian GDP. It has been an economic agent of great relevance for national and regional politics, influencing the course of historical events and the most important sociopolitical transformations of the twentieth century (Barbosa 2008).³

FIESP is not only affiliated with the National Confederation of Industry (CNI), but actually cofounded it during the first administration of Getúlio Vargas in 1930. Both the CNI and affiliated federations, including FIESP, maintain certain historically common characteristics in the performance of Brazilian industrial unionism, such as "the capacity of employer organizations to raise public funds. . . , the formation of qualified labour; [and] concern with disseminating the actions and positions of the entity" (Guilmo 2017, 12).⁴

As a powerful private associative network of São Paulo's industrial sector, FIESP has the capacity to decide important aspects of Brazil's destiny, with consequent impacts on South America (Brisola and Balestro 2018; Kan 2015; Colistete 2012). FIESP initiates actions to promote and implement certain public policies related not only to the economy (which is of legitimate interest to it), but also to fields such as health,

² *Não vou pagar o pato* is a popular idiom meaning that a person is not going to pay for something they did not do, symbolized here by a *pato de borracha* (dead-eyed, yellow rubber duck).

³ Relevant studies of FIESP's history are Couto 2019 and Duarte 2020.

⁴ Translations from the Portuguese throughout the article are the author's.

education, and infrastructure.

Studies of the Brazilian business community have described its fragmented nature.⁵ Fragmentation commonly occurs among business sectors and is also propelled by Brazilian federative arrangements. As Constantino Mendes (2012) explains, the economic development model in Brazil created spatial disparities according to different productive settings, bringing to economic policies certain debates regarding Brazilian regions: the high concentration of productive segments in the Southeast and other metropolitan areas along the coast, and agrarian interests in the other interior states. But within this fragmented environment, scholars regularly assign more importance to FIESP than to other business associative institutions. Moreover, the fragmentation of interests within the business community does not diminish FIESP's decisive role regarding the process of economic integration, and more broadly, in the construction of Brazil's interests: "The interests of the states are not exogenous or fixed, but, on the contrary, determined by established social relations in the domestic and transnational sphere, including the action of non-state actors" (Velasco Júnior 2015, 198). Economic groups are important nonstate actors.

Célio Barbosa's *A FIESP e o estado nacional: de escudeiros e opositores* (2008) concludes that FIESP reformulated its interests in the past at a political-ideological level, reshaping its faithful support of a neoliberal program into a defense of redemocratization by the mid-1980s. The ideas driving FIESP, then, historically have shown their relevance in promoting systemic, national transformations with extraterritorial effects, which reinforces the relevance of our study.

Theoretical Framing of the Business Elite in Brazil

As defined by the Brazilian sociologist Paulo Roberto Neves Costa (2014), business elite subgroups are defined according to their activity, bifurcating into two fronts. One is characterized by the subgroup's prominent position in the main capitalist activity of managing companies as large industrialists. The other includes the business community whose exercise of political activities on behalf of their peers or of representative institutions distinguishes them from the rest. However, these practices are not confined to a specific group, nor are they mutually exclusive.

⁵ One of the main sources of fragmentation within the economic class is contradictory views regarding internationalization among sectors that depend differently on national or global markets (Goxe and Belhoste 2019). Paulo Velasco Júnior (2015) indicates, regarding business participation in MERCOSUR, that the lack of cohesion in a business sector's national action plan hinders the deepening processes on integration, leaving governmental actors as protagonists. Smaller business sectors handle the integration process only when it is appropriate to them.

On the development of entrepreneurship demand patterns in Brazil, Eli Diniz (1996; 1999) highlights the corporatism between the business community and the state, with the sectorization of business's demands that marginalized the weight of their collective interests and led to their minimal impact on public decisions by the 1990s.⁶ The presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) represented an important turning point. Cardoso lent strong support to the neoliberal agenda (Diniz 2010), and was backed by the business elite, who supported a “consistent industrial policy focused on increasing exports and the competitive insertion of the country in the international scenario” (Diniz and Boschi 2003, 28). The logic of competitiveness that prevailed during the Cardoso government broke with the corporatist model, and resulted in a complex and dynamic representational system of interests that determines the relations between individuals within subgroups, as well as between the private and public sectors (Bataglia, da Silva, and Klement 2011).

These changes led to a debate about a possible ongoing process of deindustrialization in Brazil. In this regard, Antônio Diegues and Caroline Rossi (2020) discuss how deindustrialization and slow development in the Brazilian economy during the first decade of the twenty-first century were the consequence of the input of external knowledge to reorganize local production toward exports, and this shift distanced the national productive infrastructure from the benefits brought by technology and innovative practices. Diegues and Rossi conclude that FIESP's position was to make economic policies such as taxes and national interest rates accountable for a crisis whose solution would involve educational infrastructure, local production organization, public sector reform and investment, and innovation.

Some have referred to these developments as the “Americanization of public/private relations.” By this, they mean an associative institutionalism based on sectoral demands, under a competitive logic and new lobbying capacities in the incidence of policies, given the business elite's greater power to organize the appropriation of the public opinion. In spite of the fragmentation of interests in the entrepreneurial class, Diegues and Rossi (2020) highlight the supposed convergence between representative entities—the CNI, FIESP, and the Institute of Studies for Industrial Development (IEDI).⁷ This converging institutional setting indicates a structural change of economic policy that targets the “need to prioritize the goal of development with technological training and employment generation” (Diniz and Boschi 2003, 28).

⁶ Among their demands were public policies related to foreign economic insertion that were “compatible with the preservation and strengthening of the local industrial park,” combined with an “inflexibility” regarding demands of the working class (Diniz 2003).

⁷ Peter Kingstone (1998) discusses the establishment of IEDI to oversee business representation nationwide in view of the challenges faced by FIESP. His work concludes that IEDI did not succeed, given the lack of participation by industrialists and businessmen in the debate around development.

The new institutionalism promotes new organizational patterns of industrial sectors with greater capacity of negotiation with the executive and legislative powers.

The economic policies of the early twenty-first century both affected, and were affected by, the country's particular political context. Brazil's middle-class party representations do not hold a quantitative majority, but are qualitatively empowered politically. As Singer (2019) shows, the "elevated role" played by these groups as described above, contributed to greater political polarization. Amid the Lulism and anti-Lulism generalized media campaigns, public opinion became increasingly divided, fomented by an empowered business elite with direct influence in the legislative arena through Skaf and Temer's party, the PMDB. In fact, Igor Borck (2019) mentions the ease with which Brazilian industrialists effectively channel their ideologies into the Legislature. FIESP managed to mobilize its ideas not only in terms of the defamation of the left and of political questions, but also in terms of popular support and the benefits of neoliberal reforms. It thus aggregated the interests of a heterogeneous group of classes, including a plurality of the Legislature aligned with the business elite's ideology, which, according to Singer, is flexible enough to appeal to a variety of political parties.

Other theorists who have sought to explain the relationship between the business elite and the state in Brazil are instructive here. Mahrukh Doctor (2007; 2010) focuses on institutionalized efforts to channel relations between entrepreneurship, the state, and civil society. In the case of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, or Lula (2003–2010), the governmental framework constituted formal channels, such as the Economic and Social Development Council, which in fact favored the interests of the industrial sectors based in São Paulo, although they constituted only 48% of the national groups. Doctor concludes that while Brazil follows the corporatist logic of political organization at the macro level, at the micro level there is a growing pattern of relations between small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the development model, despite their being subject to the hegemony of central institutions and corporations.⁸ At a hegemonic level of the interest patterns of large multinationals, corporatism increases the influence channels, improving business representation within governments. A feature of the Brazilian political structure is that the business community's influence grows as a function of individual negotiations with executive and legislative politicians, through donations to political campaigns (Schneider and Karcher 2012).

For Ben Schneider (1998), from a statist perspective, the relationship between the business community and the state constitutes a political organization that shapes

⁸ For more on the Brazilian developmental model during Lula's government, see Boschi and Pinho 2018.

corporate collective action in terms of the selective benefits offered by the state to associative processes. Associations with greater lobbying power are those that originally were founded for a reason other than lobbying power, usually some selective incentive, with special reference to business associations and their power to generate public policies.⁹

Critically to this article, when Rouseff came to power, she proposed a New Economic Matrix that combined developmentalism with the neoliberal measures favored by FIESP in its “FIESP Agenda.”¹⁰ This matrix, which empowered the business and corporatist agents, was built from the pragmatic perspective of strengthening corporatist ties (Duarte 2020) and flexibilizing independent state-led economic policies (i.e., a state with autonomy to create economic policies without the influence of the business class), while also inserting new productive classes into political representation (Pinho 2017; Boschi and Gaitán 2012). Although their constitutions originated from state incentives, many associations became autonomous, turning into an eventual “counter-power” as critical actors in the policy-making process. And ultimately, Rouseff’s New Economic Matrix led to her downfall.

Summarizing, we define FIESP as a pluralistic and sectorized economic group, although supposedly homogeneous from an institutional perspective, with political and social influence. Its intention to maximize profits generates social actions that are easily co-opted by developmentalist statist discourse, especially in an environment in which the charismatic legitimacy of the traditional elites is giving way to a cultural capital-based scientific legitimacy. Within this context, the commonsensical discourse of public opinion has been appropriated, based on the new developmental rhetoric.

Methodology

The main methodological approach in this research is political discourse analysis (van Dijk and Mendizábal 1999), using the critical discourse premise based on constructivist analyses of semantic, dialectic, intentional, and political exercise (Fairclough 2019). However, we understand that an object-focused discursive approach hinders the inclusive analyses of other social agents outside FIESP as representative of the Brazilian business elite. Research on associative political practices requires a macro vision that this article achieves by adding the series from *Manchetômetro* and other literature about Rouseff’s impeachment. In this way, we not only corroborate the findings from the political discursive behavior analysis, but also go beyond the discursive-related approach to unravel new forms of association,

⁹ Schneider is drawing here on Mancur Olson’s work on “byproduct” lobbying theory.

¹⁰ Singer (2015; 2018) outlines the developmentalism in Rouseff’s New Economic Matrix.

aggregation, mobilization, and articulation.

First, we structure the code matrix on which we employ political discourse analysis by outlining the three momentums in political practice: *hegemonic articulation*, *communicative rationality*, and *political mobilization*, and within them, the variable *interests*, *objects*, and *values* in the content of FIESP's discourse. Then, we examine the *Manchetômetro* articles to assess qualitatively the main Brazilian newspaper headlines and textual discourses related to politics and the economy, through a sentiment analysis of media coverage of neutral, negative, positive, or ambivalent sentiments, related to the objectives and interests of the actors involved and of the media itself (Feres Júnior 2016).

Hegemonic Articulation, Communicative Rationality, and Political Mobilization

These three momentums operate as interactional variables that are at the core of the analytical process. Analyzing the hegemonic articulation of identity, rational articulation of goals, and mobilization of ideas as different associative strategic momentums of interelite and interclass relations, enables an assessment of the dynamics through which the bases of the business elite's interests and ideals are legitimated.

Hegemonic articulation of political identity and belonging occurs in the subject group and in the associated collective. Communicative articulation toward common objectives and goals occurs in the public sphere between different agents based on clearly defined targets.

Hegemonic articulation of political identity and belonging is the epistemological level of the constituent discourse. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1987) perceive this articulation as containing partially-fixed meanings through a chain of equivalent elements, taken as floating signifiers, which originate from social antagonisms. In terms of identity, a totality of these elements is functionally effective in homogenizing the group, precisely because of its incapacity to fix total meaning. Uncertainty regarding general elements such as democracy, freedom, or corruption makes heterogeneous groups associate around common ideas in supposed unity (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

Communicative rationality, at a practical, outward, tangible level, speaks of Jürgen Habermas's communicative intersubjectivity (1999), which invests in mechanical, positivist, and argumentative associations toward a common goal, under a criterion of manipulation of the material world through the management of relations.

Apart from these two levels, the mobilization momentum is about setting an idea in

motion, therein holding a political meaning¹¹ (Cameron 1974), as signifiers channel social interactions between different groups of power and subordinates, framed to propagated their interests by mobilizing ideas. Mobilization is understood as a momentum of idea-propagating strategies, originating in the individual/institution seeking social interaction through the generalization of interests. As Andres Moravcsik (1997, 517) puts it: “Socially differentiated individuals define their material and ideational interests independently of politics and then advance those interests through political exchange and collective action.”

The symbolic nature of mobilization has ramifications for interest aggregation and the breadth of FIESP’s political stances. Regarding articulation, we analyze the formation of political movements, fronts, and other associative efforts. More profoundly, the situational strengthening of the business and industrialist identities, with stronger ties to national responsibilities, promote external-horizontal cooperation over ideological changes, with serious impacts on democracy and popular trust in institutions.

Interests, Objectives, and Values

In addition to the three aforementioned momentums, this research assesses the political content elements related to business representation. In this regard, the composition and disposition of social actors, especially the elites, reflect a triad of inherited values, shared interests, and desired objectives (Robirosa 2002). These represent a hierarchy of values composing the overall political sense of identity that shapes social practice in mobilization and articulation contexts. There is not only one interest, but a set of group interests that, based on a main profit-maximization goal, produce meaningful and logical actions that differ in meaning when contrasted to those of other social actors or individuals. These content-related variables are present both in the internal political debates and discourses, and through external discursive practice aimed at public opinion, civil society, and other social actors and power groups, in either vertical or horizontal interactions.

Moreover, these interests set a pattern that is promising for future research on intersectoral relations within the business elite. We discover differences between FIESP’s interests and those of other elites with whom FIESP articulated the oppositional front against Rousseff by combining FIESP’s official press releases in the media with the *Manchetômetro* article series on media relations with Presidents Rousseff and Temer and other elites.

¹¹ This political meaning differs from that of social movements and other movement concepts.

Political Discourse Analysis

FIESP's discourse meets all the necessary criteria in van Dijk and Mendizábal's (1999) characteristics of political discourse: it targeted at influencing public opinion and society with the intention of changing reality, combined with a breadth of scope, public and media content, a local semantic organization, and the presence of a public agenda.

FIESP's political discourse is representative of the class whose values and ideologies refer to economic policies of incentive and promotion of the class. The institution is composed of companies, employers' associations, industries, and associative entities whose actors are the entrepreneurs, shareholders, directors, and owners of companies and industries. It seeks to represent Brazilian economic interests, and used mobilization and articulation to influence public opinion in a situation of economic crisis and of allegations of corruption during the nationwide police investigation known as the *Lava Jato*.¹²

Corpus of Research and Variables

The corpus of this research is official FIESP notes, extracted from an advanced Google search, totaling 71 notes. The first parameter is the origin of these Textual Units (UTs) which is the official website, <http://www.fiesp.com.br>, and the official FIESP campaign website, www.naovoupagaropato.com.br. These UTs were published between October 2014 and December 2016, and all contained a direct textual mention of the president and vice president. Moreover, these UTs included at least one of the following terms: "Skaf," "Steinbruch,"¹³ or "CNI."

The 71 UTs were subdivided into three groups: the first ("FIESP-Dilma," FD) is established by the obligatory existence of the terms "Fiesp," "Governo," and "Dilma"; a second group ("FIESP-Temer," FT) is established by the existence of the words

¹² *Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash) was a nationwide operation by the Brazilian Federal Police against corruption in government, contracting, and public enterprises such as Petrobras. According to van Dijk (2017, 201), "The prosecution of this corruption scandal, called *Lava Jato* (Car Wash), was (and still is) a huge operation, leading to the accusation (and some convictions) of many famous business people as well as politicians of several parties. . . . Again, both the prosecutors, especially judge Sérgio Moro, in the southern city of Curitiba, the centre of the *Lava Jato* operation, as well as the media, focused especially on the PT and Lula. Dilma herself, a former president of the Petrobras company, was never formally accused of corruption, but the media still routinely associated her with the scandal and repeatedly accused her (and Lula) of obstructing the official *Lava Jato* operation."

¹³ Benjamin Steinbruch was the Chief Executive Officer of the Brazilian steelmaker Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional, a company implicated in the *Lava Jato* scandal.

“Fiesp,” “Governo,” and “Temer.” The third group (NP) comes from the *Não vou pagar o pato* website, bearing the same textual parameters as the first group (FD), because the political campaign ceased when Temer took office in August 2016. Of those 71 UTs, 3 were found to belong to two groups at once, bring the final corpus to a total of 68 UTs, or units of analysis. The discourse analysis followed the chronological order of the UT issue dates between December 2017 and January 2019. The terms and expressions in the texts were coded as related references appeared.

Variables that codify the textual units are related to sentences whose semantics involve: (1) articulation, be it external or internal, horizontal or vertical, or a space for articulation between third parties, as well as self-representation; (2) mobilization, whether horizontal or vertical, or internal; (3) criticism, be it at general level, and either negative or constructive, toward the government and directly related to economic policies; and (4) elements of concern, whether negative or positive, interests and objectives. All these codified variables were used to analyze the discourse of FIESP across the designated time frame and were divided into four discursive moments, as detailed below.

The Manchetômetro Article Series

The Laboratory of Media and Public Sphere Studies (LEMEP) at the Institute of Social and Political Studies of Rio de Janeiro State University (IESP-UERJ) qualitatively analyzes the headlines of Brazil’s major newspapers in a project called *Manchetômetro*. This ongoing media coverage uses “sentimental analysis” for providing data on either negative, positive, neutral, or ambivalent semantics regarding a specific agent or a topic of either political or economic concern. *Manchetômetro* has assessed qualitatively headlines and other pieces of the most relevant newspapers of mass distribution. Data are easily accessible on their main page¹⁴ in a graph-making feature in which researchers designate the topic of interest, the time frame, and a particular newspaper.

The *Manchetômetro* article series provides corroborating research on FIESP, since the media were relevant actors through which FIESP’s ideological remarks and political campaign were propagated. As this article aims to include associative practices of the business elite, we address other elites such as the media, the Legislature, political parties’ boards of directors, the Judiciary and the Federal Police, along with social movements with which FIESP mobilized interest aggregation, articulated an opposition coalition, and liaised politically.

Manchetômetro is not only a database, but also a research project. It releases a series of articles based on trends and novelties found across its analysis. Regarding

¹⁴ <http://manchetometro.com.br/>.

Rousseff's downfall, Giovana Teodoro (2016) contextualizes the role taken by the mass media to comment on the course of the economy. We find traces of an oppositional, antagonistic treatment that the largest newspaper's editorial section (*O Globo*) gave to Rousseff. Luna de O. Sassara and João Feres Júnior (2016) remind us of the visual character of the front cover of the main newspaper of São Paulo one day before the Senate's vote to oust Rousseff. An entire page picturing Temer portrays the end of a critical era and the challenges Temer would face to cleanse Brazil from mistakes by Lula, Dilma, and the PT. The visual aspect of the editorial becomes even more biased with Temer pictured on an entire newspaper page, whereas Rousseff's election as the first female president of Brazil had occupied only half a page.

By the time Rousseff was reelected in 2014, *Manchetômetro* had already denounced *O Globo*'s biased treatment of her and her party, the PT. It claimed that the newspaper criticized Rousseff and the PT during the campaign while shielding oppositional candidates (Feres Júnior, Barbabela, and Candido 2014), and gave more favorable treatment to Temer as he began to oppose Rousseff and rose to power (Bandeira and Feres Júnior 2017). Little attention was given to Temer's alleged involvement in corrupt actions to hinder the *Lava Jato* investigation. This "honeymoon" between the media and the new president was not even shaken by true corruption allegations (Vieira, Sassara, and Feres Júnior 2017; Sassara et al. 2017).

Paulo Skaf, the president of FIESP and affiliated with Temer's party, the PMDB, stated in 2017 that it was not FIESP's role to talk about Temer's possible resignation amid allegations of corrupt practices. Thus, the same federation that one year before had been publicly in favor of Rousseff's ouster now disregarded Temer's accountability (Venceslau, Weterman, and Ítalo 2017). This brings us to Fernanda Perrin's (2019) inquiry about whether FIESP's recent political actions derive from sectoral and class interests or from Skaf's political interests and PMDB affiliation. She traces the transformations around Skaf's political ascension, not only regarding the interaction between the business group and the government, but also within the business elite itself, in a reorganization of internal class structures. The discussion pictures FIESP's access to political power by means of the PMDB, including through Temer (as vice president), together with other institutional channels promoted by the corporatism of the Brazilian industrial scenario.

The following findings come from the political discourse analysis of FIESP's official press releases, according to the parameters explained, with *Manchetômetro*'s analyses as a counterpoint.

Major Findings

In this section, we highlight our major findings. The section is subdivided into the

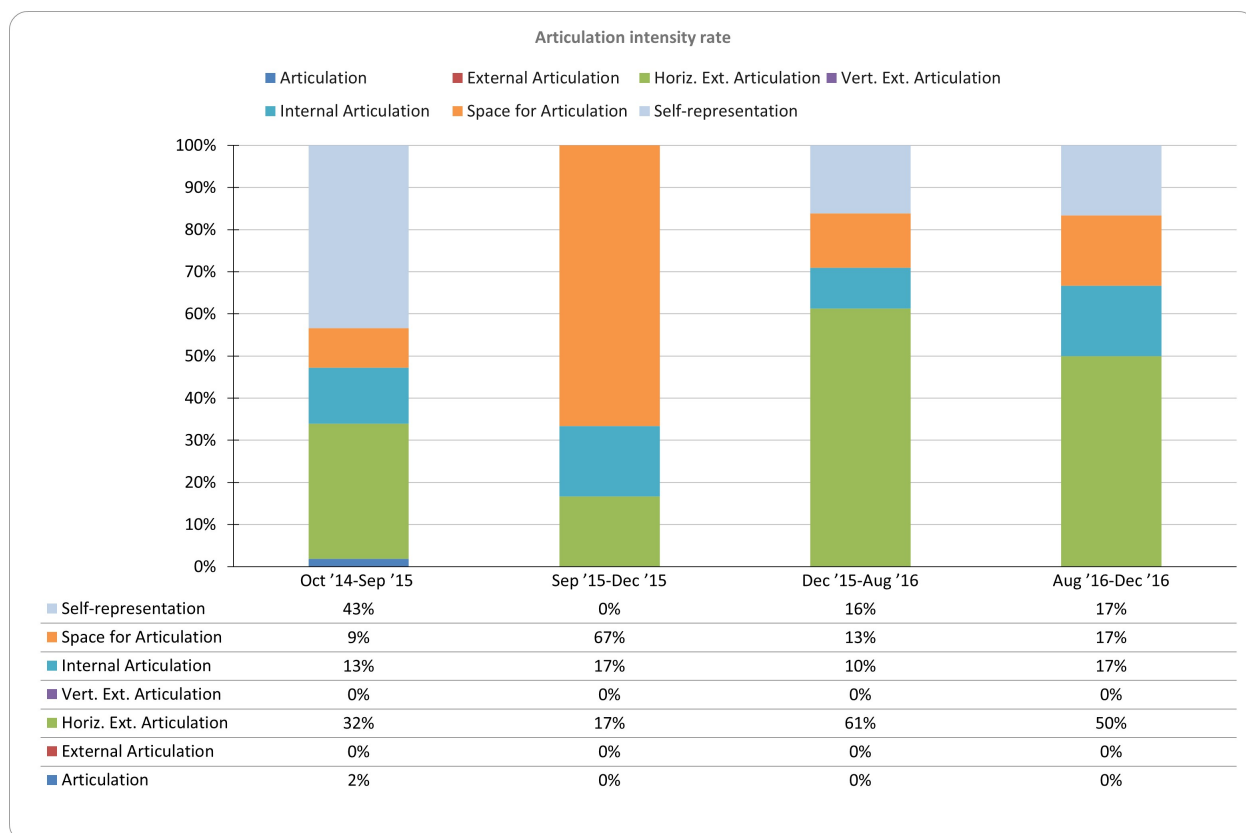
preliminary quantitative findings, and qualitative findings regarding actors and institutions, FIESP and public interests, and the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign. In subsequent sections, we analyze the demonization of Rousseff and the PT; FIESP's concerns, interests, and objectives; and policy reforms promoted by FIESP. In the final sections, we provide our discussion and conclusions.

Preliminary Quantitative Results

Our research established four different discursive moments. The first went from Rousseff's reelection to the beginning of the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign from October 2014 to August 2015. The second featured FIESP's political campaign, marked by mobilization against the CPMF tax increase,¹⁵ from September to December 2015. The third moment began with direct public support for the president's impeachment process, from March to August 2016. The fourth covered the period after the removal of Rousseff and the beginning of Temer's administration. These four discursive moments ground the rest of our analysis. The figures below show the behavior of FIESP's political discourse according to the code intensity (i.e., the number of times a given word appears) in each discursive moment.

In terms of articulation (Figure 1), we see that in the discursive moment, self-representation and articulation with other groups of power are approximately three times more intense than internal articulation. In the second moment, FIESP serves as a networking space for diverse actors besides the entity itself. The articulating behavior is maintained through the later moments, with intensity variation in articulation with other elites, reaching its apex during the campaign for Rousseff's removal in August 2016. This is highly suggestive of the contextual nature of the coalition, formed temporarily to depose Rousseff and to implement the FIESP Agenda. Among the actors present in FIESP's official releases are governmental agents, other business associations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intellectuals, and researchers.

¹⁵ The Contribuição Provisória sobre Movimentação Financeira (Provisional Contribution on Financial Transactions), CPMF, was a financial transaction tax suspended in 2007, which negatively impacted Brazilian competitiveness because it was charged on each financial transaction at each stage of production, making highly complex products more expensive. Although this tax originally was intended to subsidize areas such as health, social policies, and the fight against poverty, its possible reimplementaion by the Rousseff government generated criticism from the political opposition.



[Figure 1. Articulation Intensity Rate]

The absence of vertical articulation (i.e., from one level of society to another) with civil society is notable. It suggests that FIESP's political interactions did not reach the masses despite the democratic narratives in their discourse. The rates of articulation between the industrialists and businesspeople associated with FIESP remain regular. This suggests that even though the Brazilian business sector is fragmented, a momentary cohesion was formed to achieve the goals that FIESP, as an elite organization, put forward nationwide.

Regarding mobilization (Figure 2), it is interesting to note that vertical mobilization, or the selling of ideas to civil society in order to co-opt public opinion, begins in the second phase, with the campaign against tax increases. Before that, FIESP had acted according to its associative function of advocating before the government for public policies representing the interests of São Paulo's industry and entrepreneurs, which is why mobilization before other power groups (horizontal) is predominant in the first moment. The rate of internal mobilization is sustained in almost a quarter of the mobilization actions during the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign, in both the second and third moments (against the tax increase, and in favor of presidential impeachment, respectively). It is notable that after Temer took office in the fourth

moment, there were no longer any efforts to sell ideas to civil society, for agents had already been mobilized (in regard to collective interelite actions). The high horizontal mobilization (i.e., among members of the same level of society) during the impeachment process is demonstrated by the development of the *grande acordo nacional* (hereafter referred to as the Great National Agreement), in which liberal and right-wing leaders involved in *Lava Jato* investigations joined forces to protect themselves by controlling the legal process through the ascension of Temer, which required Rousseff's removal.¹⁶

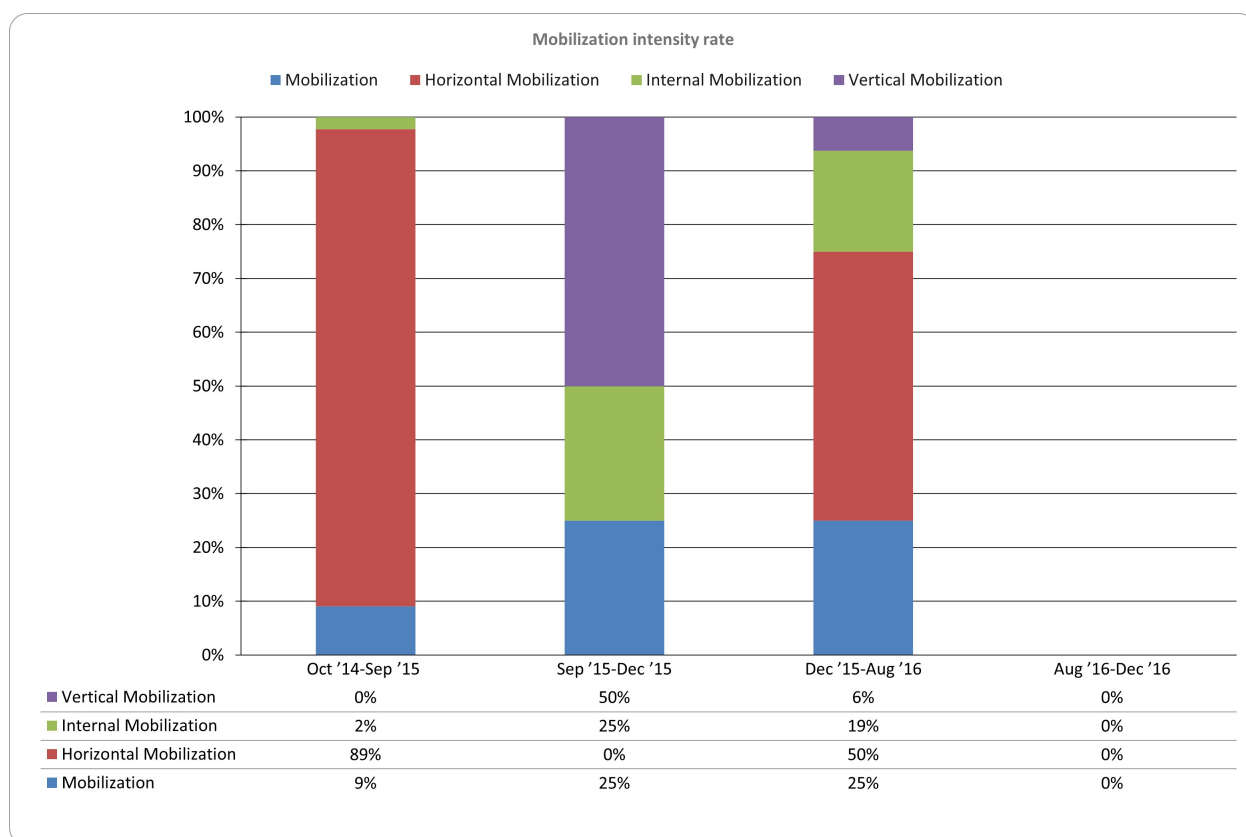
This goes hand in hand with the "honeymoon" between the media and Temer in political coverage related to the federal government as soon as Rousseff was removed. According to Sassara et al. (2017):

March 2015, September 2015, December 2015, and March-April 2016, the ratio between negative and neutral [mentions] is around 4 to 1! In May 2016, the month in which the Senate approved the opening of the impeachment process and removed Dilma Rousseff and her team, this trend was interrupted. The number of negative news items started a downward trajectory: it dropped by half compared to April and continued to decrease until August, remaining at a stable level until October. Also in May, favorable news—which is generally rare in political coverage—reached an all-time high: 124 entries. Note that afterwards, this type of news received much more space: the monthly average of news favorable to the government was 16.5 between January 2015 and April 2016; after Temer's inauguration, however, this average rose to 69.6 per month. The conjugation of the two factors—decrease in the volume of unfavorable news and increase in favorable news—resulted in a totally unprecedented picture in the entire time series covered by *Manchetômeter*: from July to October 2016 the curves of favorable and negative news practically overlap.

Before continuing, it is important to identify certain relational aspects of these findings. More than half of the observational units come from media-channeled FIESP official releases, instead of press notes from their website (or from sectorized

¹⁶ Eduardo Militão, "Machado fecha delação," *Correio Brasiliense*, n. 19356, 24/05/2016. Política, p. 3 (available at <https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/bitstream/handle/id/522747/noticia.html?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> and visited on 22 September 2020). Other newspapers besides *Correio Brasiliense* also published this piece of news: *El País Brasil* (available at https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/05/24/politica/1464058275_603687.html) and *G1* from *Globo* (available at <http://g1.globo.com/politica/operacao-lava-jato/noticia/2016/05/em-gravacao-juca-sugere-pacto-para-deter-lava-jato-diz-jornal.html>).

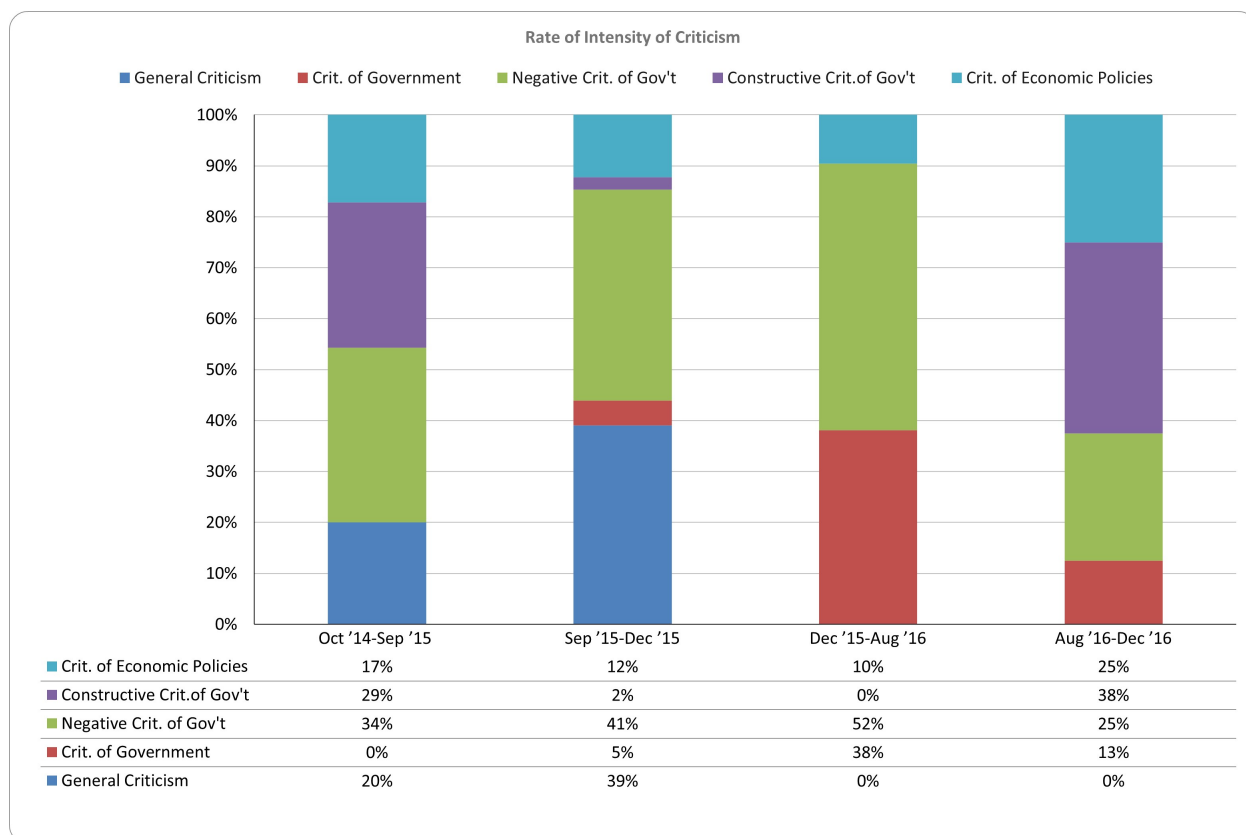
webpages), which depicts a third articulative pathway toward associations between FIESP, the media, and the national president, apart from the corporatist channels institutionalized in the previous government and the close party/ideological ties between coaffiliates FIESP director Paulo Skaf and Vice President Michel Temer of the PMDB. Temer often received businessmen and FIESP officials in meetings and other spaces, although this was rarely reported in the mass media, and always attached to positive mentions about Temer's new government.



[Figure 2. Mobilization Intensity Rate]

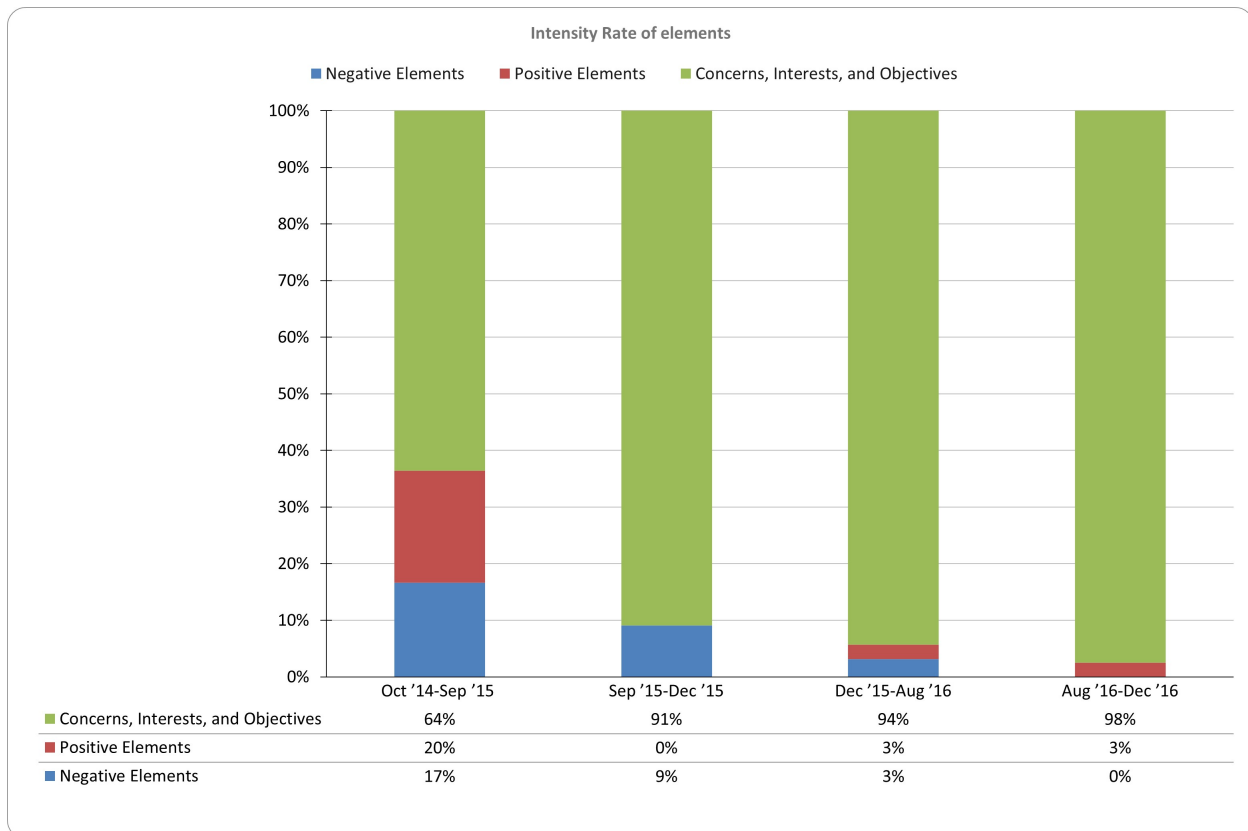
Concerning criticism (Figure 3), management criticisms appear that are not necessarily good or bad in regard to intentionality, but rather of a bureaucratic nature. At first, there is a balance between general criticism of the government on various issues, both negative and constructive, and, to a lesser extent, criticism of economic policies. As the campaign commences, however, we observe more negative and generalized criticism of the government, ultimately becoming a completely negative discursive structure targeted at turning public opinion against Rousseff and everything related to her political life. Negative numbers indicate manipulative and operational discourse strategies for the construction of meaning within the social imaginary. As soon as Temer took office, the occurrence of constructive criticism

toward the government skyrocketed, while negative terms disappeared.



[Figure 3. Rate of Intensity of Criticism]

In Figure 4, we see the intensity rate of the elements of FIESP's concerns, interests, and opinions. This is the code with the greatest strength and persistence. Note that the negative elements decline over time, disappearing in the fourth phase during the early months of Temer's government. It is to be expected that in public and institutional discourse there may be a discursive differentiation between demands and criticisms, so even if the negative criticisms reached their peak during the impeachment process, the ideological elements would have been exposed separately in order to discourage any association between moral judgment and propositions or issues of interest.



[Figure 4. Intensity Rate of Elements]

A word count at each phase of the most mentioned thirty terms reveals the basic content of FIESP's discourse. It shows a general intensity in the terms "FIESP," "Brazil," and "country." In the first discursive moment, there is a prominence of elements such as "industry," "commerce," "exports," FIESP's Department of Foreign Relations "Derex," "government," "development," "politics," "economy," and also "Temer." In the second moment, with the advent of the public mobilization against taxes, a massive incidence appeared of terms such as "duck," "increase," "congress," "campaign," "CPMF," "burden," "tax," "problem," "Paulo Skaf," "society," and "signatures."

By the third moment, the main political campaign objective had evolved toward directly supporting Rousseff's ouster, and the most recurrent terms were "impeachment," "Dilma," "taxes," "companies," "crisis," "duck," "Ciesp" (the Center of Industries of the State of São Paulo), "Temer," and "labor." In the fourth moment, entrepreneurship's interests were aligned with the new Temer government, and the prominent terms of discourse became those derived from the associative function of policy promotion, similar to those from the first phase: "measures," "reform," "program," "proposal," "minister," "meeting," "Temer," "credit," "economy," "work,"

“extra,” and “process.”

Actors and Institutions

The actors and individuals with which FIESP mobilizes and articulates in this study are politicians, jurists, academics, diplomats, ambassadors, other national and international associative unions from all continents, plus company directors and organized civil society, with a heavy paradiplomatic agenda. At first, there was a close relationship between the business community and Vice President Temer through the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), with which FIESP director Paulo Skaf also was associated.

With the creation of the National Front against Tax Increases, an interest group was institutionalized as the great initiator of a public campaign that included “more than 160 entities from various sectors” in a business oppositional coalition, within a greater articulation with other elites, according to FIESP itself. FIESP self-identified as “Brazilian industry” and presented itself as the public advocate for “unity so that good sense, balance, and public spirit can prevail in Brazil.” Further articulation and mobilization processes are noted in the rest of our findings, especially related to FIESP’s political campaign.

FIESP and Public Interests

The discourse propagated by FIESP managed to co-opt the part of the population that is sensitive to the rise in prices for school materials and other products, guiding their indignation toward the centralization of blame around the president. FIESP’s discourse presented a seeming absence of class groups in Brazilian society, as if the interests and concerns of the general masses were similar to those of the economic, industrial, and neoliberal elite. In an attempt by FIESP to pose as common citizenry, it made a discursive equation between the “Brazilian population,” “protesters,” “Fiesp,” and “hungry taxpayers.” It intermingled civil society and the business community, dissociating the distinction between popular and class mobilizations. Another example is Skaf’s effort to sum up the popular component by mentioning “all the unionized assemblies, the street movements, [. . . and] the trade unions.” These movements included the “Free Brazil Movement” (*Movimento Brasil Livre*, MBL), and “Come to the Streets” (*Vem pra Rua*). Combining groups of workers and an uncritical mass public, the anti-Rousseff movement appeared to be widespread, with a seeming homogenizing majority and a feel of democracy.

This discourse aimed to eliminate focal policies, while calling for the construction of “bottom-up” policies at the local level, as exemplified by the Central Brazil Movement in the Midwest region that articulated around the popularization of business demands,

which were intentionally mixed with local and popular social movements. Given the public nature of its financing, it gives the democratic-popular impression of a true republican-elitist campaign.

The Não vou pagar o pato Campaign

We characterize the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign as a project of vertical mobilization between the interests of FIESP and the disjointed demands of civil society. At the same time, it demonstrates a horizontal articulation with groups from the legislative branch, thus forming an oppositional group against the national executive that articulated internally and mobilized in the social arena, composed of other social agents besides FIESP. This alliance aimed to reverse the results of the 2014 election by removing the president but keeping the vice president by means of a juridical operation based on highly-contested legal grounds.

What we see in the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign is a vertical and instrumental mobilization in the form of a symbolic, social, and political co-optation. It is vertical because it goes from the business elites to the popular masses; and instrumental for the objectives of FIESP, which started and financed the political movement. But its interests did not coincide with those of the movement itself, or its populist rhetoric. The discursive tools were strategically chosen at timely moments, adding a window of opportunity for the appearance of similar concerns among different social classes. However clear the intentions may have been, the popularization of the elitist movement did not lead to results that were satisfactory to all, especially to the majority in the less privileged social classes. As Cardoso (2020, 123) points out: “these movements are profiled as a majority from the middle class, with people dressing in Brazilian soccer t-shirts and bearing the *pixuleco* [an inflatable Lula doll wearing prisoner clothes] and the inflatable FIESP duck on the streets and demanding presidential impeachment (some asked for the military to return to power).”

The role played by the mass media in propagating FIESP’s discourse cannot be overlooked. We already mentioned observations by Sassara and Feres Júnior (2016) with regard to the main newspapers running a full-page image of the yellow rubber duck, conveying FIESP’s campaign to mold public opinion. Interestingly, in the course of the time frame analyzed and regarding the newspapers’ part in the process, FIESP’s words moved from the economic or political sections to appear on the front cover, with pictures of giant rubber ducks and popular appeals calling for action.

The yellow rubber duck, alluding initially to high and unnecessary taxes, changed meaning over the summer of 2016. It became directly related to the removal of President Rousseff, along with the demonization of all political elements linked to left-

wing views considered progressive, redistributive, social, and reparative.¹⁷ Despite the uncoded categorization of “rubber duck” in the current analysis, it serves as an example of a symbol that unites the most diverse subjective and homogenized senses in never-closed and undetermined meanings (Laclau 2013).

At first, the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign aimed to generate popular support by sensitizing a dissatisfied but alienated mass public to prices, taxes, costs, and any other negative economic symptom caused by the PT government, but later its political objective became direct support for Rousseff’s removal. This evolution suggests that, in the context of an unconscious dissatisfied public, FIESP managed to occupy popular dissatisfaction with semantics of economic aspects. Other elites connected to FIESP’s movement within the Great National Agreement would have other responsibilities regarding public opinion.

Demonization of Rousseff

The negative criticism was directly aimed at President Rousseff and no one else, as if all responsibility for bad governance belonged exclusively to one person. Within this simplification, other actors and influential elements were (fortuitously or not) forgotten, such as the Central Bank, the political opposition to Rousseff in the Legislature, the markets, international crisis effects, and FIESP itself. Studies have analyzed the participation of other elites in the cooperative articulation of the anti-Rousseff movement, such as the media and far-right-wing parties (van Dijk 2017), and business and industrial interests (Davis and Straubhaar 2020). Our research demonstrates that the tone of the criticism toward the government went from anti-tax increase to direct criticism of President Rousseff.

The blame attributed to government mismanagement is interesting, because it failed to mention the financial intertwining and subterfuge of some public bodies and large private sector companies. Skaf called on senators and deputies to act quickly to bring about “the removal of the president, so that we can have a new scenario, an oxygenation.” This reinforced the political nature of FIESP, showing its capacity to insert itself in the legislative and political fields.¹⁸ The general criticism of the president was based on a lack of productivity-promoting public policies, especially

¹⁷ Adil Lepri (2018) discusses the plasticity in the symbolism of the yellow rubber duck put forward by FIESP in direct representation of Rousseff’s impeachment process and the dispute over symbolic territory within media and public spaces.

¹⁸ Skaf was elected in 2004 as the first oppositional director in years and FIESP leader, against industrialist Claudio Vaz. Skaf’s discourse included terms such as “political transit” and “political relations” as prerequisites to occupy the position as head of FIESP. His victory indicated that FIESP chose the political pathway of representation according to Skaf’s personal political plans, instead of a technical-business directorship (Cotta 2004).

regarding small entrepreneurs and micro and medium industries, which affected the “emerging masses,” as, in FIESP’s view, the PT’s organization of capital allowed no space for fluidity and innovation.

Speeches with negative, demonizing characterizations of the government were instrumentalized by the political opposition, while the discourse co-opted social and political capital by associating FIESP’s interests with those of the public. This aggregating of interests was possible only because of the oligarchical oppositional consensus, in which each liberal and neoliberal right-wing elite had a specific role within the Great National Agreement not only to protect the powerful from the *Lava Jato* investigations, but also to reinstate the right into power, despite any possible consequence to democratic institutions.

FIESP’s Concerns, Interests, and Objectives

The diversification of themes publicly proposed and defended by FIESP is notable, as they are a mix of the interests of the business class broadly speaking, those specific to some sectors, and the general concerns of Brazilian society. Not only did FIESP temporarily bring together and strengthen the business sector, but it also led an umbrella of representations in the form of leader, knowledge-holder, and supposedly neutral social agent.

The interest of FIESP in increasing the competitiveness of Brazilian products is logical and understandable. However, low competitiveness does not only or directly result from taxation, but also from other complementary factors, such as the tax and exchange system, cultural factors, class fragmentation, regionalization and globalization, international law, the bureaucratic burden on institutions, low qualifications of the labor force, price deregulation, and lack of institutional confidence.¹⁹

As one example among many, FIESP presented competitiveness in the private sector as a positive phenomenon, which is an important point in industrial-entrepreneurial thinking. In parallel, it proposes, at the level of action, interventions in public law that allow “solving the problems of the infrastructure.” The location of both elements of information in the same paragraph leads to the assumption that the fundamental “problem” is related to the “lack of competitiveness” in the public sectors, as was the case in the telephone sector before privatization in the 1990s (Quintella and Costa 2009).

¹⁹ The relationship between competitiveness and national economy is in fact a debated issue in terms of state-market relations (Copley and Moraitis 2020) and within a global capitalist imaginary of interstate competition (Linsi 2020).

In defending Rousseff's ouster, the FIESP, representing the business community and legitimized by direct surveys conducted by the institution itself, determined that: (1) the *Lava Jato* investigations affected collective decision-making; and (2) there were no other culprits in a situation of systemic crisis, despite the complex, plural, and competitive system of power.

In our textual analysis, elements such as "corruption," "punishment," and "lava jato" were added to "tax increase," "CPMF," "economic crisis," and "government inefficiency." The discursive-textual elements of the tax increase from the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign were added to the "loss of credibility and confidence in President Dilma Rousseff and her inability to recover them" as well as to the "*Lava Jato* and the punishment of the corrupt." It is as if textual-discourse factors were added for a more efficient sociopolitical co-optation for a group's particular interest in removing the president. These judicially-based allegations were the responsibility of the Federal Police and prosecuted by federal judge Sérgio Moro, so FIESP used the mainstream media²⁰ to communicate to the public the allegedly illegal and corrupt practices of Lula and Rousseff.²¹

Although the movement led by FIESP was supposedly nonpartisan, our analysis showed that FIESP leaders drew ideological lines between the PT and the PMDB. For instance, Thomaz Zanotto, the director of FIESP's Department of Trade and Foreign Affairs (DEREX), expressed an ideological element in describing the qualities of Marcos Pereira, the new minister of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade appointed by Temer after Rousseff's ouster. Zanotto called Pereira "skillful, intelligent, and with an ideological discourse contrary to that of the Workers' Party (PT)." On the other hand, he offered a positive assessment of the PMDB, saying that "Temer has a good relationship with congressmen, which favors the implementation of measures in the transitional government."

Public Policy Reforms Sought by FIESP

FIESP's concerns, interests, and objectives described in the previous section led it to promote a number of public policy reforms. In this section, we briefly describe the structural changes sought by FIESP after Rousseff's ouster, including constitutional reform, provisional measures, and legislative chamber votes. These reforms may not

²⁰ For more on the relationship between the media and Judiciary operations during Rousseff's downfall and the impacts on democracy, see Sousa 2020.

²¹ The broadcasting and mass mediated judicialization during the *Lava Jato* showed a shift from the Executive to the Judicial and the role of prosecutor Sérgio Moro in a public media system in which companies hold the power of mainstream content (Feres Júnior, Melo, and Barbabela 2020).

have been in the long-term best interests of civil society, industrialists, or the social-political organic system; however, FIESP fed public opinion with elements of information of an ideological nature designed to reflect various class interests.

Certain that the National Congress could have been an obstacle to structural legal reform, FIESP defended the establishment of a constitutional convention (also called an “exclusive constituent assembly”), because only in this way “could we think about the future.” It also supported a public expenditure reform, which comprised the Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC) 241, or the so-called Ceiling (or Capping) Proposal, opening the way for a provisional reform. A proposed political reform introduced into the debate the proportional representation electoral system and parliamentarianism, or semipresidentialism. A proposed tax reform was the object of dispute around the return of the CPMF; thus, it was not as present in FIESP’s discourse (insofar as it did not help with politically opposing Rousseff). Some of these proposed reforms were approved by Congress and implemented during the Temer administration, such as the Ceiling Proposal and a partial political reform.

The proposal that received the most notoriety was labor reform, which also was passed and implemented. The business community’s related interests were plentiful and clear. Among them were reducing taxes on bonuses and gratuities to increase incentives, loosening collective agreements such as collective moral harm, creating greater flexibility regarding lunch break periods, exempting certain expenses from income tax or making them deductible (for transportation, health, and food), establishing job quotas for apprentices and trainees and equalizing quotas for persons with disabilities between private and public sectors, extending work day hours along with the flexibilization of extra-hour limits, authorizing the dismissal of employees whose labor contracts had been suspended for more than two years, and creating mediation and/or conciliation mechanisms for the resolution of labor disputes.

Although these reforms promoted regional integration (for instance, relations with UNASUR and MERCOSUR), it was not to prevail over bilateral negotiations, which suited FIESP’s interests. As for outsourcing, a fundamental element in making labor relations more flexible—and thus favored by FIESP—the reform established the possibility of similar work conditions to outsourced personnel, while also opening the way for dismissal and cheaper rehiring, especially regarding core activities.²² Moreover, as we have already noted, FIESP’s quest for increasing competitiveness adopted a more global outlook (depicted in its relations with diplomats, ministers, and other national governments from all continents), overshadowing regional

²² This reform measure was sanctioned on March, 31, 2017, by President Temer. Available at <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2017-03/temer-sanciona-lei-que-permite-terceirizacao-em-atividade-fim-das-empresas>

integration efforts.

The multitude of areas covered by the labor reform enacted under President Temer suggests a pluralistic composition of elites who amalgamated their interests under the umbrella of this renewed FIESP Agenda (Singer 2015), conveying the transformations as designed to increase competitiveness. From the beginning of Lula's first term to Rousseff's second mandate, the FIESP Agenda's production fundamentals changed in accordance with the new finance-based market that replaced the commodities-based export model from the first decade of the twenty-first century, thus impacting the business approach to labor and financial reforms.

Discussion

This research found that the mobilization of ideas at a horizontal level functions as an interactive social practice for increasing the bases of legitimization of business political demands vertically. As consumers of the mass media relate to legal or rational authority framed by institutionalism, the number of people co-opted by the idea increases. Despite the Brazilian business elite's perception of the poor and the underprivileged as ignorant, which lowers elite support for redistribution (López et al. 2020), the popularization of discourse (in an informal key) on inter-elite relations during the public campaign increased popular consent. It shows that the business elite had a symbolic, influential impact on the middle class's representation of themselves, and they embraced the elite's representation as their own, thus reflecting the fundamental strategy of political discourse and social manipulation. Moreover, the wider middle class created by redistributive policies from the Lula and Rousseff governments also played a part in this transformation in the self-perception of one's own wealth.²³

The reference to Brazil's "strategic" international relations does not impart a discourse of articulation or of consolidation of previously-mobilized consensual elements along with other international actors, but rather of a "commercial" dimension, through a sales-like discourse over Brazilian economic assets to international capital (transnational companies, productive chains, and distribution and commercialization of goods and products). In fact, textually, this research reveals that a good part of the FIESP interactions are mobilizing in nature.

Discursively, FIESP's overall objective is to articulate itself in the national scenario as a representative of an entire Brazilian industrial-business group, despite internal fragmentation within and between business collectivities. The indiscriminate and yet strategic use of terms such as "São Paulo's entrepreneurship," "FIESP," and "Brazilian

²³ See more on perception and representation of the new rich class in Smith Maguire 2019.

businessmen” manipulates society’s representation with respect to FIESP’s seeming hegemony in representing not only the interests of national entrepreneurship, but also the interests of the entire Brazilian nation.

FIESP’s importance is undeniable. It is expressed both by recognition and acknowledgement from the highest governmental cadres—the Ministry of International Relations and Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Cities, *Casa Civil* (an Executive branch office directly connected to the presidency), the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Development, the president, and legislators—as well as civil society, the media and other nongovernmental, nonpolitical elites. Therefore, we conclude that the presence of government representatives whose discourse meets the objectives and interests of the business community is framed as articulated, in a contextual-conjunctural environment. It entails the discursive reflection of an associative reality among actors with interests coincidentally similar, over a rational agreement on collective practices aimed at reinstating the right and the new FIESP Agenda, more financialized and less reliable on redistribution.

As contemporary sociological theory tells us, positions of command would rationally and legally grant their holders institutionalized capital in the form of symbolic social recognition and political representation based on their skills, knowledge, and capacities.²⁴ The contradiction herein is the amount of knowledge and discursive-manipulative strategies known by the elites, as compared to the absence of this kind of knowledge in the thinking process of the laity, making the masses susceptible to buying into the economic elite’s interests as their own. The media appeared as the actors through which a series of different elites’ interests refracted into a mass communication flow for building popular support from public opinion to the oppositional interests from the elites.

In view of the disparity between FIESP’s support for a popular manifestation and its ideals of labor and political reforms, this economic group’s political intention was to manipulate social representation in its favor. The totality of the business elite social attributes would be transferred and unknowingly embodied by the popular classes, seeming to be “natural” working class attributes, based on the rule of the democratic majority, as a representation of a patriotic, popular-like elite movement. Hence, there was a temporary standardization of demands in the field of economic power, simplifying the heterogeneity of power politics in the Brazilian social system. In fact, we have shown that at the beginning of 2016, the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign shifted its *raison d’être* from FIESP-led business class efforts to increase competitiveness against tax rises to a national cross-social, widespread campaign in favor of ousting Rousseff.

²⁴ This is based on Max Weber’s scheme of legitimation of power by hierarchies.

By separating praxis from political ideology—and the demonization of the latter due to its political nature—FIESP discourse entails not only a demonization of the leftist, progressive Workers' Party, or Lula and Rousseff-related themes, but also a general mistrust in political institutions as a whole, for democracy itself was at stake during this right-wing legislative-judiciary-business coup d'état.²⁵ In contrast to the negative discourse on the political, the economic field is often related to "good" practices that derive from competitiveness, employment, progress, and development, which "cannot be co-opted by ideologies," including political ideologies. This antagonism at an epistemological level is itself a manipulated representation of a world where economic policies would be free from ideological inputs, as an element of interest representation transmitted temporarily during this conjuncture through communication and knowledge channels within the mass media.

The discourse that was previously formal toward the government started to have a more informal tone as the strategic communicative actions determined by the political popularization of the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign simplified the textual elements and combined communicative efforts on questioning, mobilizing, and co-opting larger collectivities among the public. Therefore, a discourse closer to the common citizen was constructed, one that reached popular epistemological reasoning via simplified symbolics through channels such as the media—including social media—with both instrumental and horizontal political discursive contents.

As we have shown, the Great National Agreement connected the opposition elites. Having achieved the objectives sought by the FIESP media campaign, combined with that of other populist-aspiring, right-wing social movements, opposition elites succeeded in challenging and altering the 2014 electoral results through a concerted, systematic, anti-left plan of action. Our research methods are limited and cannot thoroughly explore other actors' roles in deposing Rousseff. However, the business elite's responsibility for sensitizing public opinion in regard to the economic impacts of the crisis, the rise in prices, and tax reimplementation, is well documented in the current study. These were combined with legal aspects driven by law enforcement elites, the political legitimation procedure confirmed by legislative voting, and legal defamations that constructed narratives in which Lula, Rousseff, and the left were linked to corruption. Today the false equivalence between Lula and the current president Jair Bolsonaro portrayed in the media comes from this artificial demonizing representation of Lula (Davis and Straubhaar 2019; Cardoso 2020). All of these different intentional actions were amassed in the media, with the participation of PMDB members Skaf and Temer. The close ties between Skaf and Temer are evoked by Duarte (2020) and Perrin (2019), and are curiously not very present, or even treated as relevant, by the media.

²⁵ For more on the parliamentary coup, see Cardoso 2020 and Santos 2017.

Our research confirms the new lobbying capacities of the São Paulo business sector, as well as its increased power of organization and strengthened institutionalization in and outside the state of São Paulo. Even though other state business federations did not adhere formally to the pro-impeachment campaign (Maciel 2016), the importance of FIESP as a leader for the sector, not to mention the shared directorship with the National Industry Confederation (CNI) and FIESP's close ties to the PMDB and Temer, allowed it to gain social relevance in the political arena, as a constituent of the shared symbolics—the forms of collective representations, capable of appropriating mass discourse. As Schneider and Karcher (2012) claim, paradoxically, the political system promotes the power of the business community based on direct negotiation with the executive and legislative powers, with strong legitimacy in its presence within the political space.

Conclusions

This research details the creation of the National Front against Taxes as a new business association across different industry sectors, despite the internal fragmentation of the business class. At first, the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign appeared as a political movement exclusively focused on Brazilian competitiveness, supported by business interests. However, it managed to bring together other elites' interests around deposing Dilma Rousseff, restoring the right wing to power under the FIESP Agenda's economic guidance. As the campaign shifted toward directly promoting the president's ouster, an articulation of responsibilities and interests dictated each elite's part in the orchestrated Great National Agreement led by FIESP, the PMDB, and the media, along with the juridical elite, liberal intellectuals, and liberal parties giving legislative support. Amid allegations of bias and ideologization around Rousseff's removal, each elite played its part to generate legitimacy in public opinion.

The qualitative data from FIESP's official releases combined with the *Manchetômetro* articles indicate that FIESP was responsible for sensitizing the population regarding the rise in taxes and its effects on consumer prices, together with reinforcing the consequences of PT administrations for the economy. Moreover, it managed to co-opt popular manifestations together with liberal movements in São Paulo—such as the Free Brazil Movement and Come to the Streets—which brought the trappings of democracy, anticorruption, and the defense of national interests. The Federal Police and the Judiciary helped by providing legal grounds for demonizing Lula and Rousseff. The Legislature aided by projecting the appearance of political legitimacy, especially by justifying votes in favor of the impeachment process on the basis of "God," "family," and "Brazil." These meanings, as described by Laclau (2013), gathered under a wide umbrella of subjective understanding liberal right-wing social agents and other audiences susceptible to media manipulation.

As we have demonstrated, FIESP mobilized its political interests through at least three channels: the *Não vou pagar o pato* campaign, institutionalized business channels such as unions and other associations that became part of the articulated opposition front (at first against taxes and later against Rousseff), and the relationship between FIESP President Paulo Skaf and Vice President Michel Temer.

In summary, this study shows the public presence of the business community represented by FIESP through the formation of a public political discourse. The political behavior of FIESP is apparent in the ways in which the business elite's concerns and opinions were propagated. FIESP, an advocate for the interests of the Brazilian business class, turned into a national protagonist in its active political participation for the presidential impeachment process, and then returned backstage after Temer took office, thus rebalancing forces of power in favor of anti-leftist movements. Having the mass media at its disposal, as well as institutionalized channels to the government and atomized, dissatisfied public opinion, made it possible for FIESP to transform the course of Brazilian political events, as it has long done throughout its history.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Miguel Serna for his advising and the Sociology Department at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of the Republic of Uruguay (FCS-UDELAR). I am also thankful to Dr. Paulo Roberto Neves Costa, for his valuable remarks. I appreciate the assistance offered by Dr. Eduardo Barbabela from Manchetômetro. I acknowledge the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel – CAPES for its financial support so that I could prepare this manuscript for publication.

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