

Stereotyped images and role dissonance in the foreign policy of right-wing populist leaders: Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump

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Abstract

Populist leaders unfold anti-elite rhetoric to sustain the ‘in-group’ morale of the ‘people’ they represent. Populist projects contain an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dimension constituted by the stereotyped images that serve to inform the role-selection process in foreign policy. When images shaping roles on the international stage are used against the ‘out-group’, they become stereotypes of other actors. Therefore, this article explores how anti-pluralist populist leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump use stereotyped images, and how these images – which speak to intention, affective tags and the evaluation of options – shape the foreign policy role behaviour of the states in question. The article develops a framework at the interplay of images and roles to analyse how these two aspects are used by the leader in an oversimplified manner to delineate boundaries between self and other, and thus to identify the membership base of the populist project versus those who are seen as a threat to their populist foreign policy.

Keywords

Bolsonaro and Trump, foreign policy, images, populism, roles

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populism has become a pressing global phenomenon. Brazil, Hungary, India, Italy, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, to name just a few examples, are countries in which populist leaders have made it to power in recent years. While right-wing populist leadership cannot be considered a constant for some of these countries, the eventual international consequences of populist leaders’ actions may remain long after they are gone from power.

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Among these consequences, there are changes to the way certain roles have been played under anti-pluralist and anti-liberal order populist leaderships, while at the same time these leaders have also brought in new roles for the state. For instance, Donald Trump (2017–2021) tried to establish a role relationship of friend with Vladimir Putin. Trump's role actions undermined an extant US role of rival to Russia. At the same time, the constant blaming of international institutions as the representations of a global elite impacted on the expectations of others that no longer saw the United States as a responsible great power. Similarly, President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil (2019–present) has referred to the deforestation of the Amazon as a myth and fantasy of global elites designed to weaken Brazil's sovereignty. This promoting of national sovereignty has undermined Brazil's multilateralist role and its commitments to global climate goals. Bolsonaro has also attacked multilateral institutions, while undermining the value of multilateral regional-cooperation schemes too. These actions have created tensions between key features of long-standing expectations of Brazil playing the roles of regional power and regional leader and other roles that this populist leader has recently cast such as anti-globalist.

The above-mentioned examples show that populist leaders' international actions undermine certain roles of the state that have been enacted recurrently in foreign policy hitherto. They also show that the populist leader holds images of the self and the other that inform foreign policy behaviour. Thus, this article addresses two interrelated questions: What type of images do right-wing populist leaders such as Bolsonaro and Trump construct and advance of the self and the other(s)? How do these images shape the foreign policy roles of the state in question?

I argue that images of the self and the other are simplified constructs that the populist leader uses to describe and evaluate foreign policy goals and options. The populist leader relies on and uses images of self and other to include and exclude groups and institutions at home and abroad according to how they fit the populist leader's preferred foreign policy or not. These images emerge from the core of the populist project at home: that is, people (friend) versus elite (enemy). These images of the people as friend and elite as enemy have also shaped and produced a new way to enact foreign policy roles (new style of playing roles of the state), and in some cases have brought new foreign policy roles into play – thus creating role conflict and role dissonance between the roles articulated and performed by the populist leader and those roles of the state that have been recurrently played in the past.

In light of this, the article develops a theoretical framework at the interplay of stereotyped images and roles in which images capture the intentions of the populist leader and roles actual foreign policy behaviour. Stereotyped images are ideal types (gestalts) and constructs used – in this case by the populist leader – in an unidirectional and oversimplified manner to delineate boundaries between self and other (Cottam, 1992: 13–14). These types of stereotyped images, such as friend/foe, are used to identify the membership base of the populist project versus those that are seen as a threat to it both domestically and internationally.

The article empirically focuses on the cases of Bolsonaro and Trump, as these two leaders have adopted highly nationalistic frames that impact on the foreign policy of their respective states. Both populists have advanced new types of foreign policy rhetorics that affect long-term related goals and behaviours. In other words, these populist leaders have

been able to rely on their own unmediated images of the world to inform some foreign policy roles. Populist leaders such as Bolsonaro and Trump are good cases to unpack theoretically how images shape foreign policy roles and how their own images of the self and the other produce role conflict and role dissonance. Elgström (2000) argues that images tend to create stabilising effects in normal institutional contexts in which foreign policy bureaucracies take centre stage. However, as populist leaders are able to sideline the traditional foreign policy bureaucracy and institutionality of the state (cf. Destradi and Plagemann, 2019), images of the leader predominate – with destabilising effects for some of the foreign policy roles of the state. This theoretical framework applies to leaders with the political will and sufficiently strong presidencies to dismantle institutional constraints, and thus advance their own views in foreign policy. Furthermore, this framework captures overall patterns of foreign policy regarding populist leaders' views and stances against the international arena and what they see as locations (institutions and elite groups) forming potential threats to the populist project.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: First, the conceptualisations of populism in Comparative Politics, and how they have been used in the study of populist foreign policy, are assessed. Second, the analytical framework – situated at the interplay of images and roles – is introduced. Third, the general patterns observable in Brazil's foreign policy under Bolsonaro at the interplay of images and roles are analysed, especially with regards to role conflicts and dissonance. Fourth, the international role actions of Trump are then covered in a manner similar to the previous case. Fifth and finally, the two cases are compared, and therewith the value of the theoretical frame established to study populist leaders' foreign policies illustrated.

The study of populism in International Relations

Populism has been conceptualised as a political strategy, discourse and thin-centred ideology. As a political strategy, the populist leader exercises power with the support of mostly unorganised followers with whom they establish an unmediated and direct relationship. The populist leader's mission is to fix the country for the people and fight against the elite, as a dangerous adversary (Weyland, 2001). Populism is also considered a discursive practice, one structured through empty signifiers. These signifiers are 'people' and 'elite', with the relational discursive practice employed being antagonistic in nature (Laclau, 2005). Finally, populism can be understood as a thin-centred ideology which needs ideological companions to gain traction – such as nationalism, socialism and liberalism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In these approaches, there is a core premise: people versus elite as well as the general will. In Comparative Politics, these research strands have influenced how populism is scrutinised in international politics.

The focus on populist foreign policy started with a debate on whether there even is a populist foreign policy ultimately (Chryssogelos, 2018; Plagemann and Destradi, 2018; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2017; Wehner and Thies, 2021a). Chryssogelos (2018) analyses how anti-elite positioning at home is key to understanding the anti-global elite approach of populism in foreign policy. Plagemann and Destradi (2018), in looking at the case of India, conclude that being populist at home does not necessarily involve a substantial change in one's foreign policy. Wehner and Thies (2021a) concentrate on Latin America;

while they show there are populist foreign policies to be found there, it is also evidenced that the latter are not monolithic. Not all populist projects are anti-pluralist and anti-liberal order given they can also locate themselves within the international order (Stengel et al., 2019; Wajner, 2021; Wehner and Thies, 2021a).

Although populism does not necessarily constitute a uniform type of foreign policy, what the above-mentioned studies show is the continual presence of the triad: people, elite and general will in the leader's or government's international rhetoric. Therefore, the 'pure' people as construct can be manipulated and stretched by the leader to include and exclude groups from the project as much as the anti-elite component that targets the 'corrupt' elite at home and abroad can. The pure people and the anti-elite dimension are key features in a populist foreign policy then (Wehner and Thies, 2021a).

In this crusade against the elite, the populist leader centralises foreign policymaking and excludes the traditional bureaucrats and diplomats involved herein, as these groups are part of that undesirable elite (Destradi and Plagemann, 2019). Thus, this article builds from the conclusion that the leader has the power to advance his or her own images of the other having displaced those bureaucrats from the making of foreign policy. It also builds from a notion of populism in which the leader, in the role of defender of the people, is positioned centre stage to advance his or her own understandings of people versus elite. What follows also goes a step further in adopting a theoretical lens in which the people (friend) and the elite (foe) are considered images that the leader upholds and stretches out in his/her articulated narrative. These images of people and elite held by the leader are what shape the chosen foreign policy roles vis-à-vis the state.

Stereotyped images and roles: the people versus the elite

Images

Image theory is a well-established approach in foreign policy analysis by now (Chaban et al., 2017; Cottam, 1977, 1994; Elgström, 2000; Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995; Hoyt, 2000). It underscores how self-images, external images of the other and the situational context are all key for relevant actors to make sense of the world. Images are cognitive simplifications of the social reality an actor faces. Images are road maps and focal points to interpret and act upon a constructed reality (Cottam, 1992; Elgström, 2000). Thus, images are cognitions that provide the image maker with choices for action based on the initial diagnosis of the situation (Shimko, 1991: 34–36). Images also have an affective and normative dimension. Images help the individual to evaluate and categorise the self and the other, ranging from good/bad to more complex forms of positioning. Images provide the image maker not only with a descriptive view of the situation but also with value judgements of one's own and others' course(s) of action (Cottam, 1992; Elgström, 2000; Herrmann, 2013). Images as cognition are also linked to affective tags like fear, anger and anxiety if the dominant image is of enemy – or joy, content, pleased and serenity in the case of a friend image (Cottam, 1994; see also, Herrmann, 2013).¹

Policymakers tend to use stereotyped images of the other as enemies, rivals and friends as much as they do hostile/friendly and superior/inferior frames. Stereotyped images are non-complex depictions of the other; yet, despite their simplistic nature, they

are recurrently used as road maps for evaluation and guiding intentions in foreign policy. A negative image of another as enemy or inferior is relational, as it comes in tandem with a benign image of the self (Cottam, 1994: 17–30). Others can also be seen as friends when the image maker notes a resemblance in certain attributes and values.

Images can indeed change, despite being resistant thereto and producing stabilising effects in the foreign policy of a given actor: for example, the United States and Soviet's mutual images of foe during the Cold War (Elgström, 2000; Herrmann, 1985; Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995). One key condition for images to evolve includes an eventual change of leadership in the country in question (Chaban et al., 2017). As the populist leader is able to bypass and in some cases even dismantle parts of the foreign policy apparatus seen as part of the elite (Destradi and Plagemann, 2019), then they enjoy few constraints to reliance on their own unmediated images of the self and the other. While a focus on the populist leader is key to understanding the impact of images of friend and foe in foreign policy, they do not tell us much about the type of behaviour actually displayed. Images only capture intentions and the evaluation of options, but they do not necessarily speak to actual foreign policy behaviour. It is here where roles can create, then, that nexus between intention and behaviour in foreign policy.

Roles

Roles in symbolic interactionism are social positions in an organised group as well as the type of actor it is possible to be within a given society (Thies, 2010).² Roles are relational, as any role needs a counterrole (Thies, 2013; Wehner, 2015). Roles are action based, as they tell the self and the other how someone is likely to act within the parameters and expectations attached to a specific role.³ Expectations of others are key, as all actors need their enactment of an existing role (or of a new one) to be accepted by another (see Thies, 2010). Role expectations can come from both domestic and international others (be this a general or significant other), and the search for another by the self in a specific social context depends on whether the latter attributes more significance to a specific audience, social cues or a particular significant actor at home or abroad (Teles Fazeiro, 2021). Roles can also induce conflict when the expectations of self and other do not match. Role conflict is a product of the incompatibility between one desired role and the way it is to be enacted (behaviour) vis-à-vis the expectations of others over how that role should be contrariwise played (intra-role conflict) (Wehner, 2016).

Yet, role conflict also includes inter-role conflict as well, which happens when others expect the self to play a different role than the one selected (Wehner, 2016). For instance, role conflict can be salient in processes of role change. In this case, the new role may clash with other roles that have become key features of what the state is as international actor (Thies and Wehner, 2021). A new role or new ways to play an existing role are likely to be contested by different domestic actors (Cantir and Kaarbo, 2012, 2016).

Moreover, when a role entrepreneur (leader) seeks to advance a new role or brings about new ways to play an existing one, then the international actor (the state) might experience role dissonance – especially if the new role clashes with a role that is seen as a more permanent part of the state in question's behaviour. Role dissonance can be defined as the inconsistency between two or more roles, in which one undermines the

other(s) (Breuning and Pechenina, 2020: 22). Role dissonance can be contained by actors, but when it becomes salient in foreign policy and triggers an identity crisis in the self then the level of domestic contestation and role conflict regarding the new role increases. Yet contestation when a new role creates dissonance may not impede the locating of it regardless (Breuning and Pechenina, 2020), as the populist leader acts as a role entrepreneur who is able to sideline key institutions and actors from the role-making process.

Thus, the populist leader is able to advance new sets of role behaviours based on the their images of the self and the other, and able to engage in short-term strategic actions too. These new role-plays tend to compete with and undermine other roles the state can uphold as they are enacted internationally. Moreover, the leader can also act as an agent of role change when he or she has been able to sideline the institutional foreign policy apparatus of the state. Yet, change spans from moving away from an existing state role towards a new role altogether to adjusting how certain roles of the state are enacted and played by the leader (Thies and Wehner, 2021).

The interplay of images and roles

Images of people (friend) and the elite (enemy) as maps to evaluate options help constitute and shape the role-conception process. However, the friend and foe images present in the construction people versus elite do not necessarily lead to a selection of the roles friend and enemy, respectively. The normative dimension of roles – how to evaluate and categorise the self in relation to another – is influenced not only by the cognitive process of filtering that reality but also regarding how the image arrived at is shaped by affective tags. For instance, images are, as noted earlier, linked to affective tags such as fear, anger, joy and anxiety (Cottam, 1994: 23–24).

An enemy image can create fear or even indifference vis-à-vis the other meanwhile. An enemy image that causes fear may lead the actor to protect itself from the other by adopting an isolated role in order to reduce the chances of harm. If there is a response of indifference instead, the sense of threat may be reduced and that enemy image may cause the leader to select more confrontational roles such as hostile power vis-à-vis that other. If the actor feels threatened by the other and wants to protect itself from the social environment, then it may isolate itself – while at the same time adopting a rogue role that gives a sense of protection. It may also be the case that an enemy image towards a particular social setting, such as globalisation, may not make the leader select an isolated role but instead manifest active behaviour to undermine that social setting through enacting an anti-globalist role (see Guimarães and Silva, 2021).

Like the enemy image, a friend one does not necessarily translate into a friend role. Instead, the friend image can lead the leader to adopt an ally partner or a faithful ally role. These two roles involve a degree of alliance, but the intensity of the role relationship is rather different in each case (Holsti, 1970: 267). An image of friend may not lead to a faithful ally role, as the self may see that friend image as a source of certainty regarding adopting an active and independent role itself: in other words, following its own path. A friend image cannot be translated into an aligned role either. Argentina adopted a neutral role informed by the friend image towards the United Kingdom during large parts of

World War II. This role was encouraged by the United Kingdom during most of that conflict, as such a neutral role helped secure the delivery of food provisions to the United Kingdom (Thies and Wehner, 2021). Thus images can complement roles in the study of foreign policy, as images provide road maps regarding intentions and the evaluation of options in foreign policy; images are, as noted, not the same as the actual behaviour of an actor though. In this sense, role-play is the observable patterns of behaviour of an actor because images as expressing intentions can manifest in different types of foreign policy role-playing. Images provide the leader with a set of possible role choices that are relatively consistent with the images of the people (friend) and elite (enemy).

Thus, the images a leader holds about the people and the elite are important to understand populist foreign policy behaviour. Images about enemies and friends start from the leader's own perspective, as defender of the people, about who the people of the populist project are and who those against it are: the elite. These images shape the selection of roles, while the latter also become analytical devices to capture small adjustments and major changes to the types of relationships the populist leader seeks to establish vis-à-vis other leaders, states and international institutions.

Before proceeding to the empirical analysis, it is pertinent to briefly elaborate on the use of narrative analysis. The article relies on an interpretive narrative method introduced to analyse role theory in foreign policy (see Wehner, 2020). An interpretive narrative analysis focuses on the images that give rise to action-based roles, on the behavioural patterns of populist leaders and his or her close advisors as key actors within the narrations, and on their rhetorical justifications when casting a new role or bringing in new ways to enact an existing one (Wehner and Thies, 2021a). This method allows us to interpret and capture these leaders' views and stances against the international arena, and what they identify as locations (institutions and elite groups) seen as potential threats to the people of the populist project. The nexus domestic–international – in the form of bilateral interactions, regional and multilateral institutions and elites – comprises both the actors and locations of these narrations. As populist leaders and their teams are social actors, their narrations contain not only images and roles of the self but also the reactions and expectations of others.⁴ Furthermore, there are aspects and actors that do not neatly fit into the stories they advance and how they make sense of the past and present. However, such storylines can be strategically manipulated to forcefully bring certain leaders and institutions into desired social categories regarding the self and the other.

The populist foreign policy of Jair Bolsonaro

Brazil previously actively played the roles of regional power and regional leader. Brazil has also played the roles of multilateral state and regional integrator to face up to the demands of the regional and international settings. Even under the presidency of right-wing Michel Temer (2016–2018), Brazil showed its overall commitment to the liberal international order and multilateralism, despite some deeper changes at the regional level such as the suspension of its membership – with Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru all following suit – of the regional group Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in 2018. UNASUR was seen by these countries as having been co-opted by Venezuela's left-wing ideological project. Foreign policy is one

of the most stable policy areas of Brazil, as it is assumed to be a state matter (Pereyra Doval, 2019: 62; Saraiva, 2020). Despite a domestic political crisis that impacted on Brazil's rising ambitions, meaning the end of Dilma Rousseff's government (2011–2016) (Malamud, 2017), the country's foreign policy continued to operate in a rather inert manner in the context of that ongoing domestic crisis (Saraiva, 2020: 20). It is against this backdrop that Bolsonaro would adopt new roles for the Brazilian state once in power and reinterpret the performance of existing roles upheld by the state.

Bolsonaro used stereotyped images of friend and foe first during his electoral campaign. Bolsonaro saw himself as a fixer of the country and promised to bring a new sense of order. He blamed the traditional elites for the current state of the nation (Pereyra Doval, 2021). Bolsonaro referred to the people using an 'us versus them' (people versus elite) construction, and questioned the elite that had damaged the country:

We are indeed different from those who ruled over us over the past 20 years – PT [Workers' Party] and PSDB [Brazilian Social Democracy Party]. With us, you will be in first place; you will be our bosses! Together we can change Brazil; we won't have another opportunity! (Tamaki and Fuks, 2020: 113)

In addition, an enemy image was also constitutive of his political project as much as the references to the Brazilian people were. The elite was identified here as those forming part of the previous governments: 'The other side is the return of the past, is the corruption, the lies, the contempt of family, is the approximation of dictatorships' (both quotes cited in Tamaki and Fuks, 2020: 116).

In his speeches, Bolsonaro stresses enemy images of the PT, of the left in general, of Venezuela and of non-governmental organisations that have promoted values he sees as undermining the traditional Brazil. In these references, there are underlying images of the people as good and benign while the elite is depicted as the enemy. Once in power, Bolsonaro as defender of the people relied on these images for the enactment of roles in the international realm.

According to Guimarães and Silva (2021), Bolsonaro has located, specifically, three roles to be played internationally: anti-globalist, nationalist and anti-foe. The anti-globalist role takes form in the rhetoric and actions advanced with regards to multilateral institutions, seen as the arenas in which the national, traditional, political and global elites gather. This constitutes the location of a left-leaning national and global elite that has allegedly undermined the sovereignty of the Brazilian state. The anti-globalist role is the behavioural manifestation of the enemy image of both domestic and global elites. The nationalist role is expressed in a narrative of sovereignty wherein the notions of a traditional Brazil and the people are key. As such, the nationalist role is not a new one as it has been previously performed in Brazil's history, especially under the erstwhile period of authoritarian rule. Sovereignty under this role is put at the forefront of the narrative to justify decision-making in foreign policy. The role of anti-foe is expressed in the depiction of friends and foes at home and abroad. Most actors have performed this role internationally, but what is new here is the enactment of it by adding an antagonist dimension around notions of people versus elite and people versus global elite.⁵

Yet these three roles that Brazil enacts under Bolsonaro's key personal agency do not prevent the adoption of strategic cooperation with ideological adversaries when necessary: namely, as a response to the demands of key domestic actors who benefit from trade-driven relationships with China or the regional group Mercosur (Mongan, 2019). In these cases, the key ideological drivers of Bolsonaro's foreign policy take a backseat. In this context, he uses references to the core ideological project in a rather 'thin' manner when interacting with important states that are economically relevant but ideologically different (cf. Guimarães and Silva, 2021).

Furthermore, Bolsonaro has also sidelined and undermined other roles of the state (leader and regional integrator) that were previously key for Brazil's project as regional power (Mongan, 2019). In fact, Bolsonaro went a step further than his predecessor Temer in finally withdrawing the country from UNASUR – an institution that was created and advanced under Brazil's leadership. Instead, Bolsonaro adopted a follower role when both Chile and Colombia articulated the new regional group PROSUR, established in 2019 (Zhebit, 2019), and since then has not shown much interest in this initiative. This rather back-burner approach to this new integration scheme (and similarly to Mercosur as well) is driven by domestic economic needs, and the prioritisation of the anti-globalist and nationalist roles (Saraiva, 2020). The latter hamper the possibility of Brazil enacting regional integrator and leadership roles, as regional schemes are part of the multilateral architecture of global governance. In fact, Bolsonaro's Brazil has *de facto* assumed a follower role in South American affairs.

Bolsonaro also relied on an enemy image of the elite to make sense of the international arena, claiming that the national elite promoted and has benefitted from global institutions. The global elite also became the target of his populist rhetoric. Institutions and policies initiated by that global elite have been criticised as undermining the core values constitutive of what Brazil inherently is (Zhebit, 2019). Bolsonaro questioned the United Nations, pejoratively calling it a place 'where globalist laws are made'; he also referred to the UN Human Rights Council 'as useless and as a location full of communists' (BBC, 2019).

Echoing Bolsonaro's stance towards the international and multilateralism, former foreign affairs minister Ernesto Araújo (2019–2021) referred to these global locations using an anti-elite perspective. The left-wing political camp was identified as the elite at home and abroad: 'Globalism is the economic globalisation that became driven by Cultural Marxism' (Araújo, quoted in Casarões and Leal, 2021: 12). In addition, Bolsonaro has based role action on this enemy image and located anti-globalist and nationalist roles for the Brazilian state. For example, he denies the existence of climate change – abandoning Brazil's previous influence as global role model vis-à-vis environmental protection. Instead, he blames global elites for the crises engulfing the Amazon rainforest (Muggah, 2020). He has also become a passive actor within Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), adopting a pragmatic approach to this alliance whenever necessary (Zhebit, 2019).

As Bolsonaro's enemy image informs his decision-making, he also holds friend images of others. The United States under Trump became his reference point, and Bolsonaro has sought to advance an ally role relationship with that country (Pereyra Doval, 2019: 55). Bolsonaro has expressed his admiration for Trump as a fellow true defender of the people

(*Financial Times*, 2019). Moreover, Bolsonaro has followed Trump in key international initiatives such as ones regarding Cuba, Israel and Venezuela. Adopting a new followership role to the United States under Trump was also key for Bolsonaro achieving the status of major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally of that country (US Mission Brazil, 2019). In fact, Casarões and Leal (2021) conclude that Brazil's revised positioning made it withdraw and walk away from multilateral debates by now playing the anti-globalist and nationalist roles – debates which Brazil used to lead before. Instead, Bolsonaro approached other right-wing populist governments upon resorting to this anti-foe role rationale (see also, Guimarães and Silva, 2021). The purpose of establishing close relationships with representatives of states such as Hungary, India, Israel, Poland and the United States was to continue playing in a rather strategic way the anti-globalist role and furthermore to avoid falling into an isolated role position when taking distance from states and institutions seen as part of the global elite (anti-foe role). These established relationships were informed by seeing a resemblance of similarity in the respective leaders' populisms, and thus perceiving the world from an image-making position of friends (the people) versus a national and global elite.

These three roles of anti-globalist, nationalist and anti-foe have produced conflict and dissonance vis-à-vis other roles adopted by the Brazilian state as regional power, regional leader, regional integrator and multilateralist – to the extent that these latter roles are no longer salient in its foreign policy behaviour. They were recurrently performed in Brazil independent of the ideological positioning of previous leaders, spanning from F. H. Cardoso (1995–2003) to Rousseff, and even including the right-wing Temer; the latter prioritised a multilateralist role over regional ones. After Bolsonaro took power, the domestic contestation of these new roles by the political opposition and the bureaucratic elite in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased, yet the support of the people of the populist project allowed him to advance new roles and bring in new ways to perform existing ones.

This domestic contestation has created role conflict, as domestic groups (those groups seen as part of the elite) would prefer Brazil to be leading regional cooperation in South America given her clout as regional power. Brazil has also adopted an anti-globalist role that has limited her active engagement in multilateral forums. The anti-globalist role of Bolsonaro has undermined the role of multilateral Brazilian state, generating role dissonance and conflict too. The country's foreign policy has instead prioritised bilateral role relationships that allow the cementing of Bolsonaro's desired roles for the Brazilian state. In this context, Trump became Bolsonaro's significant other – with the friend image having led Bolsonaro to adopt a followership role regarding the United States of Trump (Guimarães and Silva, 2021).⁶ These different roles – shaped by the viewing of the world through the images of friend and foe – have created role dissonance and role conflict between what Brazil as a state has previously been as international actor and what it is and wants to be under Bolsonaro's leadership and his notion of defender of the people.

The populist foreign policy of Donald Trump

Trump's acceptance speech as presidential candidate at the Convention of the Republican Party in 2016 contains the images he holds about the people and the elite:

Every day I wake up determined to deliver a better life for the people all across this nation that have been neglected, ignored, and abandoned [. . .]. These are people who work hard but no longer have a voice. I am your voice. I have embraced crying mothers who have lost their children because our politicians put their personal agendas before the national good. (Trump, 2016)

Similarly, Trump in his inaugural speech as president once again connected the images of the American people as good and the elite as the enemy. For Trump, the elite had failed the American people because it put its self-serving interests first:

For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left, and the factories closed. The establishment protected itself but not the citizens of our country' (Trump, 2017).

Once in power, such images of the people (friend) and elite (foe) were as recurrent as they had been during his electoral campaign. They became the cornerstone of how US foreign policy was advanced and the types of role relationships Trump envisaged for the country. Foreign policy started from these antagonistic images of the people and the elite, with Trump the defender of the people (Löfflmann, 2021). Thus, he would give priority to domestic political aspects that put the American people first in his foreign policy (Lacatus, 2021).

These images of the people and the elite informed US economic, political and security relations abroad, and shaped Trump's rhetoric of his country's foreign policy being in a constant state of crisis (Homolar and Scholz, 2019). These images of the people and the elite also shaped the selection of roles and the chosen role behaviour of the United States. Regularly, the latter has performed the roles of stabiliser of the international system and global hegemon. It has also adopted a leader role and established key alliances with Western democracies to provide security and act as custodian of the international system. The United States has been seen in Asia and Europe as a security provider as much as a faithful ally. As the main promoter of democracy and human rights within the international system, the United States has also become traditionally a kind of 'defender of the faith' regarding these norms and values (Thies, 2013).

These are just a few of the roles that the United States has enacted historically and which have been constitutive of its identity as international actor; these roles have also helped establish the country's reputation as a reliable partner and leader of the free world (Löfflmann, 2019: 125–129). In fact, some of these roles can be traced back to the Truman Doctrine, while others developed and were adjusted through role-play over time. Yet these roles have remained relatively stable within the role set of the United States. In other words, the United States has over the years developed a rich social life as global hegemon and great power of the international system (Thies, 2013).

However, Trump's selection of roles was informed by his images of friends and enemies of the populist project, and thus of the American people. These roles (such as anti-globalist) as well as new ways of enacting the nationalist and anti-foe ones, alongside other potential roles of the state such as the rival one regarding China, affected and undermined key features of long-standing expectations of US role-playing (Löfflmann, 2019: 120–125). For example, Trump targeted immigration coming via the border with

Mexico. While he depicted immigration as a threat to the American people (nationalist role), once in power he took actual measures to reduce flows. He implemented a zero-tolerance migration policy in 2018 which split up families, with children separated from their parents in detention centres (BBC, 2020). This step was highly contested domestically and internationally, as it went against international human rights principles. The United States had previously advocated and led these core standards on immigration in multilateral settings.

In addition, the United States under Trump started to altercast Putin as friend even though the role relationship between the United States and Russia had previously been that of rivals. Yet the results of this process of altercasting did not deliver a 'thick' role relationship here. Trump also presented himself as a good deal maker, so he used these skills to negotiate with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. After a difficult start in which Trump named the latter 'rocket man', once they met Trump started to praise Kim Jong-un and highlight his leadership skills – relying on the anti-foe role. This type of rhetoric undermined the credibility of the US' roles as promoter of democracy and human rights advocate whenever they were selected and played during Trump's mandate. In addition, the US' faithful allies around the world started to distance themselves from these actions, especially European partners – as they undermined the core values of the liberal international order.

Moreover, the United States adopted an anti-globalist role in which some previous international commitments were questioned and even dismantled. Trump withdrew from international agreements in which the United States previously exerted the role of leader to bring states together to agree, for example, on climate change action – such as the Paris Agreement. He also pushed Canada and Mexico to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (Löffmann, 2021). At the same time, he also withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal – leaving Europe as the main custodian and guarantor of that agreement. This move was perceived as bringing greater instability to the Middle East, going against established expectations of the United States playing the role of regional stabiliser there.

Similarly, Trump also questioned the value of institutions such as NATO while simultaneously exerting pressure on its other members to commit more economic resources to this institution. Such a request of NATO partners is not a new demand in US foreign policy, but the debate helped Trump to enact and reinforce the anti-globalist role. While Trump may still have seen the United States as performing a faithful ally role vis-à-vis fellow NATO partners, the enactment thereof was perceived as changing by the rest of the alliance's members (Wehner and Thies, 2021b). For them, the United States distanced itself and undermined the value of this institution when it did not notify them of the withdrawal of its troops from Syria. This was also true when Trump decided to reduce the numbers of US troops stationed in Germany without first consulting with NATO allies (Bentley and David, 2021).

These behaviours are consistent with an anti-globalist role and with the notion of 'America First' (nationalist role) via which the people of that particular populist project felt represented and would become the main voices regarding expectations of Trump's role-making and role-play while in office. Yet, this anti-globalist role advanced by Trump undermined and created dissonance vis-à-vis other roles of the US state such as faithful ally, security provider and global leader. At the same time, these actions also made peers

and allies distance themselves from the United States under Trump and question that country's reliability as international partner. In other words, the expectation from European allies was now that the United States of Trump could not always be trusted to act as a responsible great power (Peterson, 2018: 647–648).

Meanwhile, the US role relationship with China continued being one of rival. While there is consistency over time on the rival role vis-à-vis China, Trump brought his own way of interpreting and performing this role. He enacted the role of rival to China in a more confrontational manner than his predecessors (anti-foe role). Previous presidents were careful in enacting the rival role, as both of these countries also implemented patterns of mutual accommodation – while China also secured the audience of other states and of the United States regarding it being a peaceful riser (Thies and Nieman, 2017). Unlike his predecessors, Trump started a tariff war against China in 2018.⁷ According to Trump as defender of the people, China pursues unfair trade practices that are detrimental to the US' workers and people (Lacatus, 2021). In addition, once the Covid-19 pandemic started to hit the United States, he begun blaming China for it. In his daily speeches, the enemy image took form in recurrent references to the 'Chinese virus' (rival role) (Wang, 2020).

Thus, the domestic images cast by Trump about the people and elite informed his country's foreign policy role behaviour. Even early on in his election campaign, Trump had started to link the images of the people as friend and the elite as enemy, while locating himself as defender of the American people. These images of friend and foe were also used and manipulated to make and justify decisions taken at the international level. Trump located, as noted, new roles such as anti-globalist, and brought in new ways of enacting the nationalist and anti-foe ones – pertinent to the roles of rival to China and ally of Europe as well. Other roles became less salient in the US role set too, for example, those of guardian and guarantor of the stability of the liberal international order.

His role actions also created distance with key allies that no longer saw the United States of Trump as a responsible great power, global leader and advocate of key values like democracy and human rights. Trump's new roles, in tandem with the way he enacted the more permanent ones of the US state, were seen as detrimental to the stability of the international order that it had previously built as global hegemon. Even Trump's sometimes-erratic behaviour on foreign policy issues, attributed to his personality traits (Drezner, 2020; Thiers and Wehner, 2022), became a constraint on enacting the roles of the US state. In other words, new roles as well as the way other more traditional ones were played and enacted by Trump created role dissonance over the US' global leader and responsible great power roles. Moreover, he also brought about role change. Yet, these new roles were highly contested domestically by the political elite and bureaucracy; such contestation was used by the populist leader to continue fuelling the rhetoric of him being the defender of the people and to deepen the image of national and global elites being the enemy of the people, a key part of the populist project.

Conclusion

This article focused on the nexus of images and roles held by populist leaders such as Bolsonaro and Trump. Images are oversimplifications of the self and the other. Populist

leaders' own images of the people and the elite are key to understanding how the roles advanced create dissonance and conflict vis-à-vis other previously salient roles of the state in question as international actor. Similarly, populist leaders reinterpret the roles of the state; when enacting them, they bring their own image of the people and elite to the table. As populist leaders have been able to personalise the foreign policy process, their own stereotyped images of the people (friend) and elite (foe) have informed the foreign policy roles of the state. Images of friend and foe tell us about the populist leader's intentions regarding foreign policy, while the latter take behavioural form in the roles enacted and played internationally. These roles as seen are overall consistent with the stereotyped images of friend and enemy held by that leader.

The two cases studied in this article analysed overall patterns of foreign policy behaviour. Yet, they showed some interesting common aspects. Both leaders could innovate regarding the role sets of their respective states while also bringing in new ways to enact other more permanent roles of the state. Both leaders have brought about new roles informed by these images of friend and foe, creating role dissonance vis-à-vis what Brazil and the United States, respectively, have previously established as their reputations as international actors. The roles of anti-globalist, nationalist and anti-foe played by these two presidents have undermined other roles previously upheld by their respective states. While there seems to have been more lasting role change in Brazil's case, with Bolsonaro having made the regional power and leader role of peripheral relevance in that country's identity, Trump's new role of anti-globalist went along with adjusting the enactment of some of the pre-existing roles of the US state such as NATO ally, global hegemon, rival to China as well as anti-foe and nationalist.

In both cases, nonetheless, expectations from other states are that the United States and Brazil should enact roles commensurate with them being responsible powers. Whether the new role advanced or the new ways to enact existing ones brought forth by these two populist leaders are here to stay, and whether these innovations will continue to undermine the key features of long-standing expectations of United States and Brazil role-playing internationally, remain to be seen. However, the effects of these roles cast and played by Bolsonaro and Trump being performed internationally may not totally disappear once they are gone from power – at least not immediately. Even if new governments, respectively, bring back the most stable roles of each of these states, the re-establishing of previous role relationships involves also rebuilding trust with significant others and fulfilling those other actors' own expectations too.

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Notes

1. Herrmann stresses the need to develop a research agenda at the interplay of images and emotions.
2. On the conceptual apparatus of foreign policy role theory, see: Breuning (2011, 2018), Cantir and Kaarbo (2012), Harnisch (2011), Thies (2010) and Wehner and Thies (2014).
3. Symbolic interactionist role theory highlights the social dimension of roles, as incorporating both social and group factors in the role-conception process. In symbolic interactionism, roles are not purely a cognitive process of the individual that remain in the mind while lacking a social dimension. Roles are performative in this approach, as they locate the self against others' expectations in a social context in which the other also has agency to prescribe, expect and shape the role of the self (McCourt, 2014; see also, Wehner and Thies, 2014). A purely cognitive approach to role theory has the same problem as that of images: namely, of being only descriptive and evaluative devices overlooking concrete action or behaviour.
4. Interpretive narrative analysis allows the researcher to make interpretations of the actors' own narrations and interpretations of their social realities, which is known as a double hermeneutical dilemma. On the specific and explicit methodological steps to conduct interpretive narrative analysis in foreign policy role theory, see: Wehner (2020).
5. On anti-global elitism being a distinctive feature in populist foreign policy, see: Chrysogelos (2018). These roles and conceptualisations are also analysed for the case of Trump in the following.
6. The recent change of government in the United States, and its eventual impact on Bolsonaro's foreign policy, is not considered here.
7. This anti-foe and anti-globalist role was also played regarding the European Union, as Trump's tariff war also extended to this actor per his followers' expectations.

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