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ARTICLE

MILITARIZATION, POPULISM, AND DISCOURSES OF LEGITIMATION OF CIVIC-MILITARY SCHOOLS ON SOCIAL MEDIA[1]

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ABSTRACT: This exploratory study analyzes the process of legitimizing civic-military schools on social media, based on 40 publicly accessible posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), retrieved through searches covering the period from April 2024 to June 2025 and selected according to minimum engagement and profile audience criteria. It starts from the hypothesis that this process is structured according to a populist logic. Drawing on Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Letícia Cesarino (2019), six analytical categories are proposed to interpret the publications: moral and political polarization; leadership as a spokesperson for the people; exclusive mediation; crisis narrative and permanent mobilization; accusatory projection; and populist militarism. The study further argues that the expansion of the civic-military model in education contributes to social militarization, understood as the naturalization of power relations based on military *ethos*, a phenomenon with historical roots in Brazil. The results indicate that the model is promoted as a solution not only to the problems of public education but also to broader moral and social dilemmas, extolling values such as discipline, order, and patriotism, while criticism is dismissed as ideological or contrary to the popular will. The study acknowledges its limitations, such as the need to expand the corpus in later stages and incorporate the analysis of counter-narratives. It contributes to understanding the discursive dynamics that legitimize the militarization of education in contexts marked by political disputes on social media.

Keywords: Civic-military Schools, Militarization, Populism, Digital populism, Social media.

MILITARIZAÇÃO, POPULISMO E DISCURSOS DE LEGITIMAÇÃO DAS ESCOLAS CÍVICO-MILITARES NAS REDES SOCIAIS

RESUMO: Este trabalho exploratório analisa o processo de legitimação das escolas cívico-militares nas redes sociais, a partir de 40 publicações de acesso público no Facebook e no X (antigo Twitter), recuperadas em busca com recorte temporal entre abril de 2024 e junho de 2025 e selecionadas por critérios de engajamento mínimo e de audiência dos perfis. Parte-se da hipótese de que tal processo se estrutura segundo uma lógica populista. Com base em Ernesto Laclau (2005) e Letícia Cesarino (2019),

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propõem-se seis categorias analíticas para a interpretação das publicações: polarização moral e política; liderança como porta-voz do povo; mediação exclusiva; narrativa de crise e mobilização permanente; projeção acusatória; e militarismo populista. Argumenta-se, ainda, que a expansão do modelo cívico-militar na educação contribui para a militarização social, entendida como a naturalização de relações de poder baseadas no *ethos* militar, fenômeno que possui raízes históricas no Brasil. Os resultados indicam que o modelo é promovido como solução não apenas para os problemas da educação pública, mas também para dilemas morais e sociais mais amplos, exaltando valores como disciplina, ordem e patriotismo, enquanto críticas são desqualificadas como ideológicas ou contrárias à vontade popular. Reconhecem-se os limites do estudo, como a necessidade de ampliação do corpus em etapas posteriores e a incorporação da análise das contranarrativas. O trabalho contribui para a compreensão das dinâmicas discursivas que legitimam a militarização da educação em contextos marcados por disputas políticas nas redes sociais.

Palavras-chave: Escolas cívico-militares, Militarização, Populismo, Populismo digital, Redes sociais.

MILITARIZACIÓN, POPULISMO Y DISCURSOS DE LEGITIMACIÓN DE LAS ESCUELAS CÍVICO-MILITARES EN LAS REDES SOCIALES

RESUMEN: Este trabajo exploratorio analiza el proceso de legitimación de las escuelas cívico-militares en las redes sociales, a partir de 40 publicaciones de acceso público en Facebook y en X (antes Twitter), recuperadas en búsquedas con un recorte temporal entre abril de 2024 y junio de 2025 y seleccionadas por criterios de interacción mínima y de audiencia de los perfiles. Se parte de la hipótesis de que dicho proceso se estructura según una lógica populista. Con base en Ernesto Laclau (2005) y Letícia Cesarino (2019), se proponen seis categorías analíticas para la interpretación de las publicaciones: polarización moral y política; liderazgo como portavoz del pueblo; mediación exclusiva; narrativa de crisis y movilización permanente; proyección acusatoria; y militarismo populista. Se argumenta, además, que la expansión del modelo cívico-militar en la educación contribuye a la militarización social, entendida como la naturalización de relaciones de poder basadas en el *ethos* militar, fenómeno que posee raíces históricas en Brasil. Los resultados indican que el modelo es promovido como solución no solo a los problemas de la educación pública, sino también a dilemas morales y sociales más amplios, exaltando valores como la disciplina, el orden y el patriotismo, mientras que las críticas son descalificadas como ideológicas o contrarias a la voluntad popular. Se reconocen los límites del estudio, como la necesidad de ampliar el corpus en etapas posteriores e incorporar el análisis de las contranarrativas. El trabajo contribuye a la comprensión de las dinámicas discursivas que legitiman la militarización de la educación en contextos marcados por disputas políticas en las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: Escuelas cívico-militares, Militarización, Populismo, Populismo digital, Redes sociales.

INTRODUCTION

The political strengthening of the Armed Forces and their presence in civilian spheres were defining features of the Bolsonaro administration, providing fresh momentum to a broader, historical process of militarization in Brazil, understood here as the expansion of military elements and the incorporation of military-derived values and practices into the civilian aspects of social life. While not entirely unprecedented, this phenomenon took on new dimensions with the National Program for Civic-Military Schools (PECIM-*Programa Nacional das Escolas Cívico-Militares*). Established in 2019, the proposed model seeks to normalize a military presence within basic education by integrating security personnel and

military regulations and concepts into the daily routine of public schools. Although the PECIM was officially terminated in 2023, the model continues to spread, driven by state and municipal governments, and remains a key agenda item for the country's far-right.

The narrative that seeks to legitimize civic-military schools valorizes military personnel as moral and civic agents, attributing to the military institution's values the capacity to create an environment more conducive to learning. This narrative has gained traction on social media, where the model is promoted as a solution to problems such as violence, indiscipline, poor academic performance, and school dropout rates. In contrast, traditional schools are frequently shown as spaces dominated by so-called "left-wing ideological indoctrination." According to this view, the political left opposes the model because, allegedly, it shows no concern for the educational development of the youth or the future of the country.

This article examines how social media constructs the legitimation process for civic-military schools, focusing on posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Drawing on the contributions of Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Letícia Cesarino (2019), the study starts from the hypothesis that this legitimation is structured according to a populist logic, operating through the construction of political antagonisms, the discrediting of mediating institutions, the promotion of direct communication between leaders and "the people," and permanent mobilization in the face of an alleged crisis.

Historically, the Armed Forces have exerted significant influence over the Brazilian political landscape and the collective social imagination, an influence that also extended to the field of education, as evidenced by the imposition of the subject "Moral and Civic Education" during the military dictatorship. This process intensified under the Bolsonaro administration. In recent years, the number of members of the security forces elected to political office has grown substantially. Concurrently, the figure of the military officer and the values associated with the institution have been increasingly exalted, both in right-wing social demonstrations and in the formulation of educational policies, such as the PECIM and the state-level initiatives derived from it in places like Paraná and São Paulo. Although this model did not originate with the federal program, the program served as the primary catalyst for its spread; as Cássio (2026, p. 37) notes, "PECIM primarily served as a catalyst for militarization within school systems."

This process is situated here within a broader conceptual framework. As Mathias (2004) argues, militarization is not limited to the occupation of civilian positions by military personnel; rather, it entails the incorporation of values, practices, and rationalities of military origin into public administration. Ceceña (2009) understands the militarization of social relations as a complex process of naturalizing power relations, sustained by the maintenance of specific imaginaries. Drawing on these contributions, this article argues that the expansion of civic-military schools contributes to the deepening of social militarization, understood as a cultural contest over the construction of a common sense that naturalizes power relations based on the military ethos: a set of norms, values, and behaviors that shape the identity of armed institutions. In this sense, the militarization of schools is part of a broader process of social militarization. It should be noted that this is not the position articulated by proponents of the model. Official documents present the program as a measure to combat inequality of opportunity and violence, to foster human and civic development, and to promote effective school management (Brasil, 2021, p. 4).

Within this intersection of militarization, populism, and education, this exploratory research is situated. The objective is to analyze how discourses in favor of civic-military schools seek to establish legitimacy and promote this model as a solution to structural problems in education. The focus is on the symbolic strategies that underpin this legitimation and that, as argued here, are established through discursive patterns rooted in a populist logic.

The exploratory nature of this research imposes certain limitations on the study. The corpus was selected through purposive, non-probabilistic sampling. The analysis identifies and describes recurring discursive patterns within content that supports the civic-military model, arguing that these patterns operate according to a populist logic, specifically, the digital populism described by Cesarino (2019). While the analysis describes the distribution of these patterns within the examined corpus, it does not allow for an estimation of their frequency across the entire body of publications on the subject. Furthermore, this study does not offer a systematic analysis of counter-narratives, which would require a different sampling strategy. In this sense, what is presented here is a sample of the discursive strategies employed to legitimize the model, a foundation that can be expanded upon by future research.

The article is organized as follows: after this introduction, a brief historical context regarding the process of militarization in Brazil and its integration into the educational sphere is presented. Next, the theoretical framework, the methodology employed in the empirical research, and the analytical categories proposed for interpreting the publications are outlined. In the final remarks, the main findings and the limitations of the research are discussed.

MILITARIZATION AS A HISTORICAL PROCESS

Militarization can be understood as a multidimensional process, the manifestations of which extend beyond the strictly military sphere. Mathias (2004) identifies three complementary, though not interdependent, forms of this process: 1) the occupation of positions within the civilian public administration by military personnel; 2) the application of military doctrines to public policy; and 3) the transfer of military values to public administration, that is, when the political ethos (the polis) begins to merge with the military ethos.

Brazil is not an isolated case in the region. Amoroso Botelho et al. (2023) identify a recent intensification of the militarization of democratic politics in Latin America, particularly through the granting of political-administrative functions and positions of power to the Armed Forces. Among the cases analyzed, they point to Brazil as a paradigmatic example, given the military's presence across various levels and policy areas since the return to democracy, with a particular emphasis on the Bolsonaro administration.

In previous works (Cavalcante, 2025a, 2025b), I discussed the historical role of the Armed Forces as an active social force in the trajectory of national politics. The persistence of this influence following the military dictatorship, evident in the redemocratization process, which included an amnesty for torturers, and in the 1988[2] Constitution, which preserves "an extensive legacy from the past intact,

[2] Article 142 of the 1988 Constitution entrusts the Armed Forces with the defense of the nation, the safeguarding of constitutional powers, and, upon the request of any of these powers, the maintenance of law and order. This provision has been interpreted by certain military and civilian sectors as support for a supposed "moderating role" for the Armed Forces. This interpretation is reinforced, for example, in the document "Defense Scenario 2020–2039," (*"Cenário de Defesa 2020–2039")* published by the Ministry of Defense in 2017, which calls for the deployment of the military in situations of political

including military tutelage as a last resort for any purpose..." (Fernandes, 1989, p. 347), reflects a democracy marked by the enduring presence of authoritarian legacies.

Nozaki (2021) reinforces this interpretation by pointing out that the Armed Forces' history of involvement in internal repression, such as controlling strikes and conducting policing operations, contributed to the military's self-perception as guardians of national unity, grounded in an elitist view according to which the people would be incapable of leading a national project.

Bolsonarism, as a far-right movement that, in its ideological makeup, incorporates both a revival of the memory of the dictatorship and a bellicose worldview (Rocha, 2021), can only be fully understood through its military dimension. This component is rooted in the rejection of politics as a space for dialogue and in the subordination of the political sphere to a military logic.

During the Bolsonaro administration, the presence of military personnel in public administration intensified significantly. In 2020, there were 6,157 military personnel in civilian positions, including within ministries, the health and education sectors, and on the boards of state-owned enterprises, representing a 108% increase compared to 2016 (Nozaki, 2021, p. 10). Concurrently, there has been an electoral surge of representatives from public security forces. Colonels, generals, police chiefs, police officers, and firefighters have increasingly occupied seats in both the legislative and executive branches. According to data from the Instituto Sou da Paz (2024), the number of federal deputies elected with this background grew by 950% between 2010 and 2018, rising from four in 2010 to 42 in 2018. The figures for municipal elections are also striking: considering candidates for mayor, deputy mayor, and city councilor, there were 7,349 candidates in 2012 (849 elected); 6,840 in 2016 (851 elected); 8,296 in 2020 (786 elected); and 6,827 in 2024 (849 elected), the vast majority of whom ran for city council.

This phenomenon is, in part, based on the high level of social credibility enjoyed by the Armed Forces. According to a 2024 Datafolha survey, 37% of the population states that they have "a great deal of confidence" in the institution. Although this figure has declined from the 45% recorded in 2019, the Armed Forces remain the most trusted institution among those surveyed. Conversely, the National Congress and political parties show the lowest levels of trust: only 10% and 7%, respectively, claim to have full confidence in these institutions.

Militarization and education

Ceceña (2009) conceives of the militarization of social relations as a complex phenomenon that extends beyond open warfare, encompassing actions that perpetuate worldviews and naturalize power relations through the maintenance of specific imaginaries. In other words, beyond the mere occupation of official posts or political offices, militarization also reaches the level of subjectivity, transforming military values into benchmarks for social normality and guiding principles for public policy. It is, therefore, a cultural battle over the construction of meaning, with education serving as one of the contested arenas.

instability: "Given the political-institutional situation, a significant portion of the population could rise against the political class and demand change, leading to violence, a scenario that would likely bring the Armed Forces into the political arena by virtue of Article 142 of the Federal Constitution (safeguarding of constitutional powers)" (Brasil, 2017, p. 40).

During the military dictatorship, school curricula and the selection of teachers were subject to military control. One example was the mandatory inclusion of the subject Moral and Civic Education in schools at all levels. Established in 1969 via Decree-Law 869, and not repealed until 1993 by Law number 8,663, this subject aimed to cultivate values such as devotion to the nation, religious morality, and obedience to the law. In addition, other reforms were implemented to steer public education according to a technicist approach. The impacts of this educational approach drew significant criticism and remain a subject of debate among experts (Cunha, 2014).

In recent history, as part of a broader political movement, there has been a resurgence of a discourse that challenges the progressive orientation of Brazilian education. Expressed through the *Escola Sem Partido (*School Without Party) movement and amplified during the "marches against corruption" amid the crisis of the Dilma administration, this discourse manifested itself through a strong rejection of Paulo Freire's legacy, education incorporating a gender perspective, and what is termed "left-wing ideologization" or "cultural Marxism", a generic label with no concrete correspondence to any current of Marxist thought, which attributes control over cultural and educational institutions to the left and casts teaching activities as suspected ideological indoctrination. This discursive offensive was incorporated into Jair Bolsonaro's 2018 government platform, which stated: "Over the last 30 years, cultural Marxism and its offshoots, such as Gramscianism, have joined forces with corrupt oligarchies to undermine the values of the nation and the Brazilian family" (Bolsonaro, 2018).

This set of conservative agendas, which has been gaining momentum over the last two decades, represents a regressive reaction to ongoing social, political, and economic transformations. As Pereira Cunha and Ota (2023) demonstrate, conservative groups began to organize in response to the inclusion of more pluralistic agendas within educational policies. The passage of Law 10.639 in 2003, which mandated the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture in basic education, was followed in 2004 by the emergence of the School Without a Party movement and the creation of the School Without Homophobia program. The latter was countered in 2010 by the promulgation of the Brazil-Holy See Agreement, which addressed religious instruction in public schools (Carreira, 2022, as cited in Pereira Cunha & Ota, 2023). The authors argue that this conservative agenda frequently relies on false claims about educational institutions, such as accusations of "leftist indoctrination," "premature sexualization," and "disorder", to justify initiatives like the School Without a Party movement, the campaign against so-called "gender ideology," and the establishment of civic-military schools. Transformed into instruments for attacking public education, these measures carry elements of exclusion, racism, and intolerance.

The militarization of public schools and its recent expansion call for critical analysis. However, it is important to distinguish between the various models of military-linked schools that exist in the country. On one hand, there are institutions focused on professional military training, such as the Agulhas Negras Military Academy and the Army Command and General Staff College. On the other, there are the traditional "Military Schools", affiliated with the Army or the Military Police, which primarily cater to the children of military personnel. Civic-military schools, by contrast, represent a distinct model: they seek to normalize military-style training within basic education by incorporating military regulations and concepts into the daily life of public schools, through diverse arrangements regarding management, administration, and structure (Saraiva, 2023).

It is worth noting that the militarization of public schools predates the PECIM program. Cássio (2026, p. 35) mentions that the integration of military personnel into administrative and

pedagogical roles within schools under the jurisdiction of state education departments was already emerging before 2019, specifically within the state school systems of Amazonas, Bahia, Goiás, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Rondônia, Roraima, and Tocantins, a process driven primarily by the state system in Goiás[3]. However, from 2019 onward, the model expanded significantly across the country, reaching 1,578 militarized schools by May 2026, an increase of 595% compared to 2019 (Cássio, 2026, p. 25). The federal program did not initiate this phenomenon; rather, it nationalized it and served as a catalyst for its adoption across state and municipal school systems (Cássio, 2026, p. 37). This helps explain why the program's revocation in 2023 did not halt the expansion of the model.

The PECIM proposes a shared management model between Departments of Education and military institutions, with participation being voluntary and subject to consultation with the school community. It is presented as an alternative for addressing issues such as poor academic performance, school violence, and unequal opportunities, drawing inspiration from existing Military Schools as a model of excellence. According to the document Guidelines for Civic-Military Schools (*Diretrizes das Escolas Cívico-Militares)*:

> This model is based on the military schools and will be implemented in the final years of ensino fundamental (grades 6 to 9) and in high school education in public schools with low Ideb (Basic Education Development Index) scores and students in vulnerable conditions.
> In light of the above, we view the implementation of the Civic-Military Schools Program as an important measure for combating inequality of opportunity and violence, and for fostering human and civic development. Furthermore, it promotes sound school management, offering young people the chance to become the protagonists of their own lives, citizens who will go on to contribute to the development of their municipality, state, and country (Brasil, 2021, p. 4).

Proponents of the model argue that the presence of military personnel in charge of discipline would not interfere with the school's democratic or pedagogical management. The regulations for civic-military schools, as set out in the Civic-Military Schools Manual, state that the duties of the monitor corps are "complementary to, not in competition with, those of the teaching staff" (Brasil, 2020, p. 33). This same framing is echoed in the program's guidelines, which assign the responsibility for supporting the teaching and learning process exclusively to the teaching staff (Brasil, 2021, p. 13). However, the PECIM documents establish a parallel structure that extends throughout the school, administratively linked to the Ministry of Defense or to state and municipal security agencies.

> Art. 31. The Monitor Corps is responsible for educational management and must promote activities aimed at disseminating human and civic values that encourage the development of good behavior and attitudes in students, as well as their holistic formation as citizens within the school environment, outside of the classroom. Art. 32. Military personnel in the Monitor Corps, including the School Management Officer, shall be administratively affiliated with the Ministry of Defense or with state or municipal security agencies, as applicable (Regulations for Civic-Military Schools, Brasil, 2020, p. 28).

The school administration is supported by this School Management Officer, who advises the principal on educational, didactic-pedagogical, and administrative matters (Brasil, 2021, p. 13). The Educational Management Officer, as coordinator of the monitors, is responsible for maintaining school discipline, participating in the development of Values Projects in collaboration with the pedagogical coordination team and teachers, and participating in class council meetings (Brasil, 2021, pp. 29–30). Among their thirty-nine other assigned duties, the monitors are tasked with fostering the development

[3] See also Santos (2020) and Alves and Toschi (2019).

of attitudes and values, contributing to the students' ethical, emotional, social, and symbolic formation, and cultivating a spirit of civic-mindedness, helping students understand the importance of holding and participating in ceremonies honoring national symbols (Brasil, 2021, pp. 31–32). In theory, school management remains the responsibility of a civilian professional, which distinguishes these institutions from traditional military schools, where the administration is led by personnel from the Armed Forces or the Military Police[4]. Pedagogically, however, what emerges is the transposition of a barracks-style logic into the school environment, characterized by rigid rules that restrict even simple activities, such as play or group discussions (Ferraz, 2024).

With the end of the Bolsonaro administration and the election of President Lula, the Federal Government, through the Ministry of Education (MEC), mandated the progressive discontinuation of the PECIM program, as outlined in Circular Letter 4/2023/COGEF/DPDI/SEB/SEB-MEC, issued on July 10, 2023 (Brasil, 2023). The directive aimed to facilitate the gradual withdrawal of military personnel involved in the program and to restore the educational model guided by the MEC. Federal funding was subsequently halted. Nevertheless, this directive proved insufficient to prevent the continuation and expansion of the model at the state and municipal levels, as evidenced by the data already presented. Governors who support the model argue that there is significant social demand, citing waiting lists, and have been developing their own state-level policies to ensure its persistence, with local variations in how it is implemented.

The expansion of the civic-military school model in Brazil, though currently surrounded by legal uncertainties[5], should not be understood as an isolated educational policy, but rather as part of a broader contest over meaning within the political, cultural, and institutional spheres. At stake are fundamental questions regarding the role of education: who provides it, how, and for what purpose? The growing adoption of this model by state and municipal governments, often driven by campaign promises and narratives centered on combating "ideological indoctrination", reveals that its legitimacy rests less on technical or pedagogical foundations and more on political antagonisms and discourses of crisis. Having become a core platform for the right and far-right in the country[6] the model finds in social media a strategic space for its public legitimation.

In this process, proponents seek to confer legitimacy upon the military ethos by presenting it not as an ideological choice, but as a technical, moral, and necessary response to the alleged crisis in public education. It is therefore essential to understand legitimation as an active discursive process of meaning-construction, one capable of imbuing certain practices with an appearance of neutrality while simultaneously delegitimizing others. The task is to grasp how specific narratives position this model as

[4] There are differences in how the model is organized across states, particularly regarding shared management. In Paraná, the position of civic-military director was abolished in 2021; the responsibilities of the role were subsequently limited to the coordination of civic-military activities and reassigned to the highest-ranking military monitor (Dombrowski Netto; Moreira, 2024).

[5] The Office of the Attorney General (AGU-*Advocacia-Geral da União*) argues that the model is unconstitutional, contending that the creation of educational models is the exclusive prerogative of the federal government and that there is no legal provision for military personnel to perform teaching or school support functions (STF CONVOCA [...], 2024).

[6] Among the states investing in the expansion of the civic-military school model, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Paraná stand out. In São Paulo, Governor Tarcísio de Freitas (Republicanos) has announced a goal to implement at least 100 civic-military schools by 2025 (Bocchini, 2024). In Minas Gerais, Governor Romeu Zema (Novo) has proposed an 8,000% increase in the number of such schools (Búrigo, 2025). Meanwhile, in Paraná, Governor Ratinho Junior (PSD) has made significant progress, with a total of 345 civic-military schools operating in 2026, according to information available on the Paraná State Department of Education portal.

an effective and desirable solution, while delegitimizing approaches associated with pluralism, democratic participation, and critical pedagogy.

In analyzing the institutional promotional materials for the PECIM (Civic-Military Schools Program), Gomes (2022) identifies two primary legitimation strategies: moral evaluation and rationalization. The first operates through a discourse that casts the military as restorers of order amidst a context of familial and moral "disintegration", a form of "compensatory moralism" that invests security force personnel with the symbolic authority to reconstruct lost values. The second strategy is anchored in the language of efficiency, presenting the model as the driver of significant improvements in educational metrics, discipline, and school safety. These strategies do more than just justify the model; they symbolically construct it as "necessary," transforming the advocacy for civic-military schools from a mere policy option into a moral crusade against "left-wing ideological indoctrination" and the alleged "failure" of the public school system.

POPULISM AND DIGITAL POPULISM AS A POLITICAL AND DISCURSIVE LOGIC

Social media, more than mere vehicles for information, have become mechanisms for generating political belonging, reorganizing the symbolic space of politics and transforming the relationship between leaders, institutions, and the public. Letícia Cesarino (2019; 2022) observes that these platforms do not merely disseminate content; they also help structure the functioning of movements such as Bolsonarism. These networks facilitate the circulation of emotional, alarmist, and moralizing messages, which reinforce perceptions of threat and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Supported by algorithms and engagement dynamics within networks of trust, such as WhatsApp groups and ideologically aligned profiles, an illusion of direct communication between leader and people is constructed, bypassing traditional forms of political mediation.

This configuration fosters the emergence of what Cesarino (2022), drawing on Victor Turner, terms *anti-structural publics*: groups that reject traditional means of democratic participation and contribute to the erosion of the foundations of the liberal consensus. In the case of Bolsonarism, one observes the formation of a highly reactive and engaged public, whose political identity is structured around resentment, indignation, and a belief in a redemptive mission to restore order. This is a political logic marked by antagonism, which positions itself against values identified as belonging to "the system", allegedly dominated by "cultural Marxism."

In this context, discourses promoting the civic-military school model find fertile ground to take root. The articulation between militarization and populism, facilitated by social media networks, allows these schools to be presented not merely as an educational proposal, but as moral trenches against the "indoctrination," "chaos," and "degeneration" of the youth. It is at this juncture that the concepts of populism[7] and digital populism, as formulated by Ernesto Laclau and Letícia Cesarino, become essential for understanding how such discourses are organized and legitimized within the social imagination.

[7] It should be noted that my use of the concept of populism refers to a political logic mobilized, in this instance, by a far-right project. However, as Laclau argues, populism is not defined by any specific ideological content. Rather, it is a particular form of political articulation that can be employed by various projects, whether on the left or the right. That said, I find the generalized way in which the term is often used to be problematic, frequently applied indiscriminately as a label for governments with vastly different orientations, as if they all shared the same proposals and objectives. Such an interpretation ends up stripping the concept of its substance, reducing it to the mere mobilization of "the people" while ignoring its complexity as a political and discursive logic.

In *La razón populista*, Laclau (2005) proposes understanding populism as a political logic, a specific mode of operation for the political, through which collective identities are constructed. From this perspective, the "people" is neither a pre-existing unit nor a sociological datum, but rather a contingent and performative construction, articulated through chains of equivalence among heterogeneous social demands. These demands are unified by means of "empty signifiers", broad, indeterminate terms such as "justice," "freedom," "the people," "nation," or "order", which are capable of condensing diverse meanings. The vagueness of populist symbols is not a flaw, but a condition for their functioning, as it allows for the unification of heterogeneity. It involves the mobilization of a diffuse *plebs* which, through the mediation of a charismatic leader, is transformed into a *populus*: a part that presents itself as the legitimate totality of the political community.

Populist logic, therefore, requires the creation of antagonisms. The construction of an "internal enemy", whether political, cultural, or moral, is a prerequisite for mobilizing "the people" as a legitimate political subject. This enemy also functions as an "empty signifier," shaped according to the specific context and the sentiments being stirred. The role of the charismatic leader is central to this process: they serve as a focal point for symbolic and emotional condensation, gathering various demands under their own figure and presenting themselves as the embodiment of the collective will, a figure capable of protecting "the people" against "those at the top," "the usual suspects," or "the system."

In populist logic, the relationship between the people and their leadership is sustained by discrediting traditional channels of mediation, such as political parties, the press, and democratic institutions, and by establishing exclusive means of communication, presented as privileged conduits for the "truth." On social media, this mechanism intensifies, as it enables direct communication between the leader and their followers, consolidating spaces that reinforce political identities and antagonisms.

Cesarino (2019) delves deeper into this approach by analyzing the emergence of *digital populism*, a concept she develops based on empirical observation of Bolsonarista groups on social media, particularly on WhatsApp, during the 2018 election period. According to the author, digital media are co-producing new forms of populism, especially conservative ones. Digital populism should, therefore, be understood as a mechanism for producing political hegemony, with a discursive foundation structured around alarmist and conspiratorial content.

The author argues that digital media played an ambiguous role in the decade leading up to Bolsonaro's election. In 2013, during the June Journeys (*Jornadas de Junho)* protests, social media, then still centered on Facebook, acted as a catalyst for disorder, fragmenting the public sphere. By 2018, however, with WhatsApp holding hegemony, these platforms became central mediators for the promise of order and a new moral contract between the people and their leader. Through a chain of discursive equivalences, the diffuse multitude of 2013 was gradually transformed into a unified political identity: the Bolsonarista *populus*.

Inspired by the metalinguistic explanatory scale proposed by Laclau, Cesarino (2019) identifies five metalinguistic functions that structure the content of digital populist discourse. These functions are performative; that is, they do not seek to represent an objective reality, but rather to produce effects on the recipient, constituting publics and meanings where none previously existed. They are as follows:

1. *Antagonistic friend-enemy boundary*: establishes a radical division between "us" and "them," turning political debate into an irreconcilable conflict. Its effectiveness depends on the enemy's continued engagement in the dispute.

2. *Equivalence between leadership and the people*: unifies diverse demands under the figure of a charismatic leader, presented as the authentic embodiment of the popular will.

3. *Permanent mobilization through threat and crisis*: relies on oversimplified, alarmist, and conspiratorial narratives, keeping the public in a constant state of alert.

4. *Mirroring the enemy and inverting accusations*: adopts the same codes and methods as the "enemy" to flip criticisms and delegitimize opponents.

5. *Creation of an exclusive media channel*: attacks the professional press, experts, artists, and institutions, presenting the populist "bubble" as the legitimate space for the truth.

The concept of digital populism and these five metalinguistic functions constitute a valuable analytical toolkit for understanding the discourses that promote the civic-military model on social media. Patterns such as the construction of antagonisms, the narrative of crisis, permanent mobilization, and the creation of exclusive spheres of truth appear recurrently in the publications analyzed.

In this sense, the hypothesis guiding this exploratory study is that the legitimation of the civic-military model is constructed through discursive patterns that operate within a populist logic. To understand these dynamics, I draw upon the five metalinguistic functions proposed by Cesarino, adapted here to the scope of this research. These functions serve as interpretive categories, guiding the empirical analysis that follows.

METHOD

For the empirical research, a qualitative and exploratory approach is adopted, aimed at identifying discursive patterns in posts concerning civic-military schools. The corpus consists of 40 publicly accessible posts, published primarily between April 2024 and June 2025[8], collected from X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook through searches for three Portuguese terms: "*escolas cívico-militares*," (civic-military schools), "*escola cívico-militar*," (civic-military school) and "*militares na educação*" (military personnel in education). These two platforms were chosen because they are commonly used as virtual spaces for political debate in the country, whereas Instagram has become more centered on the circulation of images. Data collection took place between May and June 2025, with the temporal filter for the searches set to the year preceding the start of the consultation period. One of the posts in the corpus is hosted on Instagram; it was identified during the searches conducted on the two aforementioned platforms. A second post predates the defined search timeframe but was nonetheless returned by the platforms' own mechanisms, as their temporal filtering proved imprecise. Both were retained due to their relevance to the research subject. The search combined the three terms using the "OR" operator, and data collection was concluded purposively and sequentially: each retrieved post was evaluated at the time of the search and included in the corpus if it met a minimum engagement criterion. This criterion thus served as an inclusion filter during the collection process, rather than as a post-hoc screening applied to a pre-existing, closed dataset. For this reason, there is no record of the total number of posts returned by

[8] The period analyzed, defined by the search filter and the timing of data collection, coincides with the intensification of public debate surrounding the adoption of the civic-military model by São Paulo's state school system.

the searches. This limitation regarding traceability is acknowledged: it is not possible to determine the proportion of selected material relative to the entire set of results returned by the platforms, results which vary depending on the time of the search and the platforms' algorithmic ranking criteria.

The selection process combined two criteria. The first concerns circulation: posts had to garner at least 50 likes, in addition to comments and shares. This threshold does not measure statistical representativeness; rather, it serves as a baseline, as the focus is on publications that actually circulated, rather than the entirety of what was posted on the topic. The resulting corpus largely falls well above this minimum: the median is 967 likes; only one post has fewer than 100; 20 exceed one thousand; and seven surpass five thousand.

The second criterion concerns the audience of the profiles: only posts from accounts with a wide reach were considered. The median number of followers is approximately 158,000; 27 profiles have over 100,000 followers, and four have more than one million. These include digital content creators, politicians, military-affiliated political figures, and media outlets, ranging from established press organizations to digital channels aligned with either the right or the left.

The decision to limit the dataset to 40 posts stems from the research design. The analysis requires a full reading of each post, the comments it generates, and the profile of the creator, as well as the manual coding of categories, procedures that are incompatible with large-scale automated data collection. Furthermore, this phase is exploratory in nature, serving as part of a broader investigation into the militarization of basic education; the objective here is to identify patterns and develop analytical tools. Expanding the corpus remains, for the time being, a task for future research[9].

Finally, it is important to note that the search terms correspond to the lexicon employed by the model's proponents, whereas critics of the model tend to use expressions such as "militarization of schools," "militarization of education," or "a school is not a barracks", all of which are absent from the search. The predominance of favorable publications, 26 out of 40, alongside the presence of only one critical publication, stems from the combination of this specific lexical scope and the purposive selection process described above, which is consistent with the research objective. This does not imply an absence of criticism toward the model within the digital debate.

Based on the recurring discursive patterns identified in posts that favor the model, and drawing upon the metalinguistic functions described by Cesarino (2019), six analytical categories were developed. These categories guide the interpretation and help to understand how the discursive legitimation of civic-military schools is constructed.

The six proposed categories are:

- Moral and political polarization
- Leadership as a spokesperson for the people
- Exclusive mediation
- Crisis narrative and permanent mobilization
- Accusatory projection
- Populist militarism

[9] For access to the database of the corpus analyzed, see De Sá Cavalcante (2025).

ANALYSIS OF PUBLICATIONS

The posts analyzed were, for the most part, produced by political actors from the right and far-right, as well as digital content creators aligned with this ideological spectrum. The authors' profiles and any potential party affiliations were examined, along with the predominant tone of the discourse and the nature of the interaction generated (support, criticism, or neutrality[10] regarding the model). Of the 40 publications, 15 (37.5%) originated from politicians: nine from state deputies, three from federal deputies, one from a senator, one from a city councilor, and one from a governor. Notably, many of these individuals are affiliated with the Liberal Party (PL) or have a background in the military.

Table 1. Distribution of posts by author type and stance toward civic-military schools (ECM)

	By stance expressed in the posts			
Author type	**In favor of ECM**	**Against ECM**	**Neutral**	**Total**
Right-wing alternative information channel	2	0	1	3
Left-wing alternative information channel	0	0	2	2
Newspapers and traditional media outlets	2	0	10	12
Content creators	7	1	0	8
Politicians	6	0	0	6
Politicians with a military background	9	0	0	9
Total	**26**	**1**	**13**	**40**

Source: Author's creation based on posts collected from Facebook and X (April 2024-June 2025).

Table 2. Distribution of posts by politicians and politicians with a military background according to party affiliation

Party affiliation	**Number of posts**
Partido Liberal (PL)	9
Progressistas	1
Novo	1
União	2
Republicanos	2
Total	**15**

Source: Author's creation based on posts collected from Facebook and X (April 2024-June 2025).

For posts on the X platform, reach ranged from 2,000 to 200,000 views. Across both networks, reactions varied from 51 to 29,000 likes; comments ranged from 4 to 3,000; and shares spanned from 3 to 9,600. Although it is not possible to precisely distinguish between authentic and automated profiles, the data indicate a broad circulation of the analyzed messages and a high potential for dissemination.

In many of the posts, two or more of the analytical categories can be observed in combination, manifested either explicitly or more subtly. The following section describes how each of these is expressed within the publications, highlighting the strategies used to discursively legitimize the civic-military model in the digital environment:

[10] A post is considered "neutral" when it merely reports an event without explicitly expressing a value judgment.

1. *Moral and political polarization*. This discursive pattern expresses the antagonistic dimension of the political sphere by creating a symbolic boundary that pits two irreconcilable camps against each other: on one side, "the people"; on the other, their "enemies." This cleavage shapes political identities and generates moral consequences, transforming political disputes into confrontations between good and evil. The posts reinforce this framing by placing the "defenders of the people", on one side: right-wing leaders, representatives of the traditional family, patriots, military personnel, and supporters of the civic-military educational model. On the other side, there are their "enemies": the left, labor unions, the Lula administration, the Supreme Federal Court (STF), teachers, and critics of the model. Civic-military schools are presented as symbols of order, discipline, and morality, while their opponents are portrayed as threats to the youth, education, and the nation. The debate over education is thus shifted into a moral confrontation, in which criticizing the model is equated with betraying the country's interests.

2. *Leadership as a spokesperson for the people*. This pattern reflects the populist mechanism of equating leadership with the people, forged through a direct, affective relationship that bypasses institutional mediations. In the posts analyzed, this identification is projected primarily onto Jair Bolsonaro, though it also extends to other right-wing figures, such as Tarcísio de Freitas. Consequently, civic-military schools cease to be merely an educational proposal and instead come to symbolize an alliance between the "people" and their leaders.

3. *Exclusive mediation*. The defense of civic-military schools takes place through specific channels—such as the social media profiles of politicians, military figures, and influencers—which function as spheres of direct communication with "the people." The content prioritizes emotional testimonials and symbolic imagery (students in uniform, the raising of the flag), bypassing technical or pedagogical mediation. Subjective experience replaces rational argumentation, while the "conservative bubble" is presented as the locus of truth, in opposition to the alleged manipulation by established institutions. The message is amplified by an engaged digital base, rendering any institutional mediation not only unnecessary but also unwelcome.

4. *Crisis narrative and permanent mobilization*. Public education is repeatedly portrayed as a system in collapse, dominated by "left-wing ideological indoctrination" and marked by indiscipline, violence and pedagogical failure. The crisis evoked is presented as structural and moral, attributed to the actions of the left and "militant" teachers. This alarmist discourse mobilizes people through fear, indignation, and a sense of abandonment by the state, creating an atmosphere of urgency that justifies the presence of public security forces in schools. The civic-military model is presented as a redeeming solution, the only viable alternative. The narrative fuels the need for permanent mobilization against the enemy: the "system", leftist infiltrators", the federal government, labor unions, or any critical voice. All opposition is treated as a threat to the interests of the people, shifting the educational debate into the realm of culture war.

5. *Accusatory projection*. Criticisms of the civic-military model are delegitimized through a strategy of inverted mirroring, which projects onto opponents the very attributes historically associated with the right and the far-right, such as authoritarianism, elitism, and intolerance. Critics are portrayed as "communist dictators," "elitists," or "manipulators." The focus shifts from the content of the criticism to the alleged intent of those who formulate it. The accusation that the left seeks to keep the people in a state of ignorance in order to preserve its own political dominance effectively hollows out the debate. According to this logic, those who criticize the model are supposedly driven by a fear of losing privileges,

or they embody the very things they denounce: authoritarianism, ideology, and policies contrary to the interests of the people.

6. *Populist militarism*. This final category directly articulates elements of populism with symbols and rhetoric rooted in the military sphere as a strategy for legitimation. In the publications analyzed, civic-military schools are presented as a comprehensive solution to the country's educational, moral, and social crisis. The rhetoric combines populist mobilization with a military ethos, exalting discipline, hierarchy, patriotism, and obedience as the pillars of a project to regenerate the youth, the school system, and the nation. This legitimation rests on two axes: moral evaluation and rationalization. The former casts the military figure as virtuous, incorruptible, and naturally suited to restore order and provide guidance to the youth. The latter draws upon selective data, such as the IDEB (Basic Education Development Index), to construct an appearance of technical superiority that silences pedagogical critiques. This rhetoric is manifested in images of uniformed students saluting, as well as in emotional testimonials presented as evidence of efficacy. War metaphors reinforce the discourse: the "combat" against indoctrination, the "defense" of the youth, and the "rescue" of values within a school system portrayed as being "under siege", a situation in which militarization emerges as the only way out.

Table 3. Posts in favor of the model: excerpts and identified categories

Excerto da publicação	Categorias
"Tarcísio refutes PSOL's claims and defends civic-military schools in a statement submitted to the Supreme Federal Court"	1, 2
"Long live Paraná's civic-military schools," accompanied by a video of uniformed students describing school rules	1, 3, 4, 6
"Court grants a union's request and suspends Tarcísio's Civic-Military School program. What are they afraid of?"	1, 3, 4
"Breaking: A São Paulo Court of Justice judge, acting individually, suspends Tarcísio's civic-military school program"	1, 4
"Civic-military schools: besides not listening to poor people, the left must not like them either"	1, 5
"I support civic-military schools! They are among the best in the country!"	6
"Do you agree that civic-military schools are the best in Brazil? Yes or no?", accompanied by a ranking from Paraná.	3, 6
"Do you understand why it is important not to support civic-military schools? Knowledgeable people are difficult to control," accompanied by a news report about a military school shortlisted for an international award.	1, 5, 6
"No to civic-military schools,' the left shouts. They have plans for your children," accompanied by a video of teenagers allegedly using drugs at school.	1, 4, 5
"I support Bolsonaro and whomever he endorses [...] I support civic-military schools [...] And you, my friend?"	2, 3, 4
"Civic-military schools are a thorn in the left's side," accompanied by an interview with Tarcísio de Freitas about Ideb, school dropout rates, and crime.	1, 2, 3, 6
"The left tried to stop it, but in vain. São Paulo will indeed have civic-military schools! The people of São Paulo are grateful," accompanied by an image of uniformed students beside the national flag.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
A civic-military school "that has been suffering from a lack of support from the federal government," but is "a benchmark across all educational metrics in the country."	1, 2, 4, 6
"Freedom of choice: parents will decide on alternative educational models"; schools that "preserve order and discipline"; an "effective program that was terminated by the Lula administration."	1, 2, 4, 6
"I will go before the full Supreme Federal Court to defend civic-military schools!"; they are "more beneficial, safer, and more effective"; "I will be your voice in Brasília."	1, 2, 3, 4, 6

"A model of discipline, respect, and values [...] they teach responsibility, hierarchy, and civic-mindedness."	6
"Civic-military schools in our region: what do you think? #safeschool #futureofeducation #disciplineandnewvalues," accompanied by a poll about six schools adopting the model.	2, 3, 6
"It is ABSURD for the UN to want to end a model that delivers nothing but excellent results wherever it is implemented."	1, 3, 4, 6
"Congratulations, my friend @tarcisiogdf, for defending a model that works! [...] I know how much this education transforms lives. Let us overcome the prejudice of the left, which insists on sabotaging what works."	1, 2, 4, 5, 6
"We fought for CIVIC-MILITARY SCHOOLS [...] And none of this would have been possible without our friends and partners who joined this cause for EDUCATION in our state. Let us move forward together, because this is only the beginning."	2, 3, 4, 6
"As a legislator and a military police reservist, I speak based on data and experience [...]. Those who block this model are choosing to leave our young people in a state of neglect."	1, 3, 4, 5, 6
"70 civic-military schools in São Paulo: a victory for our struggle!"	2, 4, 6
"A shameful September 7. Civic-military schools are out, and MST guerrillas are in."	1, 4, 6
"Congratulations, Governor. Today, with the civic-military schools law signed in São Paulo, it is our state's young people who benefit from more opportunities."	2
"Do you support and want a civic-military school in your city?", accompanied by a petition to strengthen the model in Minas Gerais.	2
"Many parents dream of these schools for their children"; in the accompanying interview, "the left proposes nothing and only gets in the way of those who do."	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Total by category	**1:17 / 2:14 / 3:12 / 4:16 / 5:5 / 6:18**

Source: Author's creation based on posts collected from Facebook and X (April 2024-June 2025).

Key: 1. Moral and political polarization; 2. Leadership as a spokesperson for the people; 3. Exclusive mediation; 4. Crisis narrative and permanent mobilization; 5. Accusatory projection; 6. Populist militarism. Categorization considered each post in its entirety, including text, images, and video; the column reproduces the most representative excerpt. A single post may contain elements of more than one category. The authors' identities, profile types, and engagement indicators for each post are provided in the research database.

The distribution of posts in favor of the model across the analytical categories shows that these strategies operate in combination. The most frequent combinations show that moral and political polarization, crisis narrative and permanent mobilization, and populist militarism underpin the core argument used to legitimize civic-military schools. This configuration appears in ten of the 26 publications: there is an "enemy of the people" who has created a crisis, necessitating a state of constant mobilization; the civic-military model is presented as the response to this crisis, addressing education, values, and security, and is framed as capable of regenerating the youth.

Sample of the publications analyzed

From the 40 publicly accessible publications that make up the corpus, five were selected as a sample[11], based on the representativeness of the analytical categories. As previously mentioned, it is common for two or more of these categories to be present simultaneously, manifested either explicitly or in a more subtle manner.

[11] Screenshots were included to facilitate a better understanding of the material analyzed. The images were used exclusively for academic purposes, with the identities of users or individuals who are not public figures protected by blurring or anonymizing personally identifying visual information.

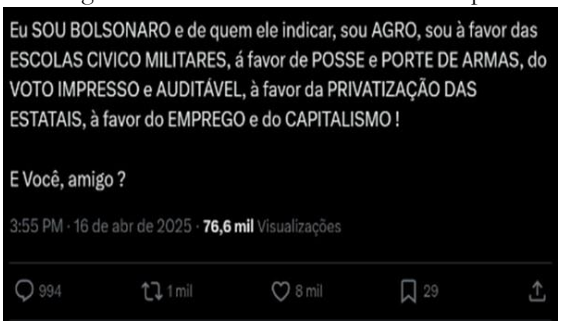
Figure 1- Screenshot of a social media post



Post on X, author: State Representative Gil Diniz (PL-SP).

The post by Representative Gil Diniz (Figure 1), with 3,000 likes, 563 shares, and over 21,000 views, exemplifies nearly all of the proposed categories. The phrase "the left tried to stop it, but it was in vain" establishes a divide between "the people" and their "enemies," triggering moral and political polarization. The mention that "the people of São Paulo are grateful" reinforces the notion that Governor Tarcísio acts in direct alignment with the popular will, employing a strategy that positions the *leader as the spokesperson for the people*. The image of uniformed youths alongside the national flag evokes values associated with populist militarism, such as discipline, patriotism, and moral regeneration. The reference to the left's resistance, and the project's success despite it, sustains a *narrative of ongoing crisis and constant mobilization.* Finally, the use of the representative's personal profile, devoid of institutional or technical mediation, illustrates the logic of *exclusive mediation*.

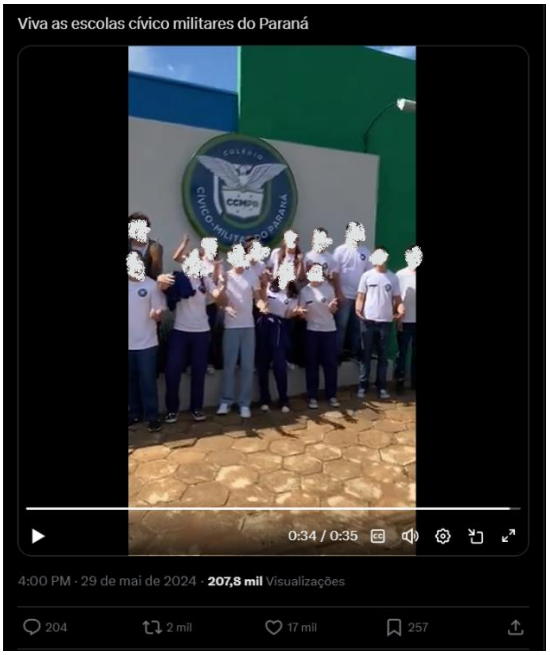
Figure 2 – Screenshot of a social media post



Post on X, author: content creator (180,000 followers).

With 8,000 likes, 1,000 shares, and over 76,000 views, the post shown in Figure 2 directly addresses the reader ("And you, my friend?"), reinforcing a logic of *exclusive mediation* and *permanent mobilization* by seeking engagement from more than 180,000 followers. The declared loyalty to Bolsonaro, and to "whomever he designates", frames his *leadership as that of a spokesperson for the people*. By bringing together issues frequently portrayed as being under threat from the left (the carrying of firearms, privatization, capitalism, printed voting records, and civic-military schools), the post also activates a narrative of crisis and *permanent mobilization*, calling upon its followers to reaffirm their ideological stance.

Figure 3 – Screenshot of a social media post



Posts on X, author: content Creator (137,000 followers).

In Figure 3, the post, which has garnered 17,000 likes, 2,000 shares, and over 207,000 views, extols the model through a video in which students from a civic-military school in Paraná proudly describe practices considered "obvious" in that environment: saluting teachers, wearing uniforms, keeping hair tied back, refraining from using cell phones in the classroom, and maintaining regular

attendance. The video, which has a lighthearted and mobilizing tone, concludes with a direct invitation for other young people to join civic-military schools. The content leverages *populist militarism* by linking discipline and hierarchy to the regeneration of both the youth and the school system. The direct participation of students, using informal language, reinforces exclusive mediation, promoting engagement through affective identification, without technical or pedagogical mediation. The final invitation encourages *permanent mobilization*, presenting the model as an expanding movement. Although it does not explicitly mention opponents, the emphasis on practices associated with order and rigor functions as a form of implicit *moral polarization*, indirectly contrasting the civic-military school with the traditional school, which is framed as permissive.

Figure 4 – Screenshot of a social media post



Post on Facebook, author: Governor Tarcísio Gomes de Freitas (SP-Republicanos).

With 29,000 likes and 440,000 views, the post from February 11, 2025 (Figure 4) features an excerpt from an interview given to the program Oeste Negócios, accompanied by the following text:

> There is no shortage of examples demonstrating the importance and quality of civic-military schools as a strong option within the public education system. Many parents dream of having their children attend such schools, and we will make this project a reality starting next year. Oh, and we have also begun to dream of the Colégio Militar de São Paulo, which, I am certain, will become a benchmark institution.

In the video, the governor states that "the left proposes nothing and only gets in the way of those who do," and cites the states of Paraná and Goiás as successful examples of the model, attributing to it positive outcomes such as strong IDEB (Basic Education Development Index) scores, reduced dropout rates, higher student self-esteem, improvements to the surrounding environment, and a decline in crime. He also notes the high demand for this model among mayors, school administrators, and families.

The statement "the left proposes nothing and only gets in the way of those who do" triggers moral and political polarization by setting the "people" and their representatives against the left, which is portrayed as an obstructive force. Tarcísio presents himself as a leader capable of realizing the "dream"

of families, reinforcing his role as a *spokesperson for the people*. His defense of this model relies on "success stories" from other states, aspirations attributed to families, mayors, and administrators, as well as vague references to educational indicators. Added to this is the exaltation of discipline, hierarchy, and security as factors that improve the area surrounding the school and students' self-esteem.

Citing the *Colégio Militar de São Paulo* as a desirable benchmark fuels confusion between two distinct models, with this perceived equivalence serving as a factor that encourages support. By using as a reference institutions whose structure, organization, and socioeconomic profile stem from rigorous selective processes, reserved spots for the children of military personnel, and the charging of fees, this discourse attributes an excellence to "military management" itself—an excellence that actually arises from other causes. Camilo et al. (2023) identify this mechanism in the state of Paraná, where official promotional material for the implementation of "civic-military" schools pointed to the Colégio Militar de Curitiba as a reference, leading families to expect that same standard.

These elements link the model to the regeneration of youth and society, highlighting the logic of *populist militarism*. The tone of the discourse is marked by a sense of urgency and combativeness, presenting the model as a solution to the structural problems of public education, a framing that activates a *narrative of crisis and permanent mobilization*. Finally, although the actor is institutional, the use of a personal social media page to communicate directly with "the people", bypassing technical-pedagogical mediation, triggers a logic of exclusive mediation.

Figure 5 – Screenshot of a social media post



Post on Facebook, author: State Representative Major Mecca (SP-PL).

The post from May 5, 2025 (Figure 5), shared on the personal profile of State Representative Major Mecca, combines text and an image to defend civic-military schools and attack the Supreme Federal Court. With over a thousand likes and a thousand shares, the post includes the following text:

> As a legislator and a military police reservist, I speak based on data and experience: civic-military schools do not discriminate based on social class - they provide discipline, organization, and encouragement to study. That is where the difference lies: the same student, with the same

> teachers, but now with proper leadership and clear rules, learning what it means to be a citizen. Those who block this model are choosing to leave our young people in a state of neglect.

The image of Justice Flávio Dino, depicted with communist symbols, associates the Supreme Federal Court (STF) with an ideological left, a force presented as an enemy of the youth's future. The phrase "when communist ideology speaks louder than the future of our young people" exemplifies moral and political polarization, framing an antagonism between good (order, discipline, citizenship) and evil (communism, neglect, disarray). The assertion that blocking this model amounts to "choosing to keep our youth in a state of neglect" activates a *narrative of crisis* and *permanent mobilization*, appealing to a sense of urgency and the need to fight against destabilizing forces.

By asserting that the same student achieves better results when subject to clear rules and guidance, "learning to be a citizen", the discourse reinforces *populist militarism*, presenting values typical of the barracks as pedagogical solutions. The publication also employs a strategy of exclusive mediation, replacing institutional debate with direct, affect-laden communication directed at the speaker's base. Finally, by accusing the Supreme Federal Court (STF) of acting out of ideology and claiming that civic-military schools "do not discriminate based on social class," the state representative engages in *accusatory projection*; he inverts the terms of the criticism, positioning himself instead as neutral, technical, and experienced.

Analysis of interactions with posts

The comments identified in the posts analyzed reveal a marked political antagonism, with a predominance of expressions in favor of civic-military schools. Many of these expressions adopt an aggressive tone and convey distrust toward democratic institutions. The discursive dynamic within the comments expands upon the meanings of the original posts, reiterating the patterns identified in the analysis.

Many of the favorable comments associate the civic-military school model with concepts of order, discipline, respect, and security, contrasting it with a public school system portrayed as "disorderly," "ideologized," and "dominated by militants." Terms such as "indoctrination," "militant fools posing as teachers" (professores militontos), and "Paulo Freire-ism" appear frequently, creating a dichotomy between "real" education and a caricature of public schooling associated with the left. This reinforces a polarization in which defending the model is equated with safeguarding the future of the youth, while criticizing it is seen as tantamount to negligence, chaos, and decay.

Entities such as the UN, the Supreme Federal Court (STF), the federal government, labor unions, and critical educators are characterized as ideological and held responsible for the collapse of education. Conversely, proponents of this model, despite advancing discourse that is itself markedly ideological, position themselves as possessing truth, technical expertise, and experience. Terms such as "communists" and "Workers' Party (PT) gang," along with offensive references to Supreme Court justices, reinforce this symbolic inversion and the delegitimization of institutional mediations.

Civic-military schools are viewed as a solution to the educational collapse, and as institutions that must be shielded from threats allegedly posed by judicial rulings, international recommendations, or federal policies. Indignant remarks directed at "the system" invoke conspiracy theories and denounce purported efforts by the left to "destroy what works" or prevent "the right from governing."

The emotional testimonies from parents, students, alumni, and even individuals who have "witnessed" the success of former students of civic-military schools reinforce a logic of exclusive mediation, in which personal experience takes the place of technical or pedagogical arguments. Such accounts are treated as irrefutable proof of effectiveness, rendering any form of external evaluation or critical analysis unnecessary.

Although they represent a minority among the publications analyzed, critical comments regarding the model were also identified. These point to risks such as authoritarianism and the militarization of schools, the loss of pedagogical autonomy, and social selectivity, suggesting that the model is aimed at containing poor youth, while the children of the elite attend schools with more anti-authoritarian educational approaches. Some of these criticisms include allegations of abuse and questions concerning the training of the military personnel who work in these schools.

Despite the presence of these dissonant voices, the body of comments as a whole reinforces the perception that social media platforms operate as arenas for legitimizing the civic-military model. More than mere spaces for dissemination, they function as contested territories for shaping common sense—a blend of information, opinion, resentment, and mobilization, where "anti-structural publics" (Cesarino, 2022) emerge. These publics are highly reactive and engaged, defined by a political identity centered on the notion of "restoring order." In this context, the debate on education is captured by the dynamics of populist militarism: "we are at war against the system; it is necessary to combat indoctrination, defend the youth, and reclaim traditional values and love for the homeland, and militarization is the only solution".

• Comments on posts in favor of civic-military schools:

1) *Congratulations, Governor, this is exactly what parents dream of for their children, bringing discipline into their lives.*

2) *My son attends a civic-military school here in Paraná, and it's excellent! It offers security, learning, discipline, and organization. The quality of education is truly very good. We need more civic-military schools!*

3) *I support this. My niece attended a civic-military school and has excellent employment opportunities. My neighbor did too, and she has a great job. An education based on discipline prepares young people for life.*[12]

4) *CIVIC-MILITARY SCHOOLS FOR A BETTER FUTURE for our children!*

5) *Quality education, with respect for family traditions and the nation.*

6) T*hese schools will save Brazil.*

7) *Congratulations, Governor Tarcísio, this is exactly what we need in São Paulo. Crime is out of control, and children no longer respect their parents or their teachers. A civic-military education is the best alternative to get things back on the right track.*

8) *Isn't meritocracy about earning what you get? Just look at the results of grade progression: students moving on to the next grade without being ready. Being inside these schools and seeing the actual results is very different from being an educational theorist. Civic-military schools, absolutely! Just look at the students' performance.*

[12] The third comment deserves attention. The civic-military model began to expand in 2019, so by 2024–2025 it would be unlikely for its graduates to have established professional careers. The account probably refers to traditional military schools, suggesting that confusion between the two models operates as a factor encouraging support.

9) *Very good! At least there won't be any indoctrination by deranged leftists there.*

• Comments on posts that respond to criticisms or address questions regarding the constitutionality of the civic-military school model:

10) *Simply because the LEFT is against the family and traditional moral values!!!*
11) *It is the parents who decide. Governor @tarcisiogdf has already made it very clear that no one is forced [to participate]. The left is afraid because they will no longer be able to indoctrinate children with gender ideology or the Paulo Freire teaching method.*
12) *Young people being prepared for the future, the nightmare of those "indoctrinators" who masquerade as teachers.*
13) *If advocating for respect toward teachers and banning cell phones in the classroom is "fascism," then my name is Benito.*
14) *The left is always working to destroy any prospect of a promising future. They are depriving children of the opportunity for a quality education. They are scoundrels.*
15) *Only leftists, who are opposed to the development of young people, could see this as something bad.*
16) *The problem is that the left needs to mass-produce imbeciles, following the Paulo Freire model, in order to survive.*
17) *When will this dictatorship end? I can't stand seeing so much persecution anymore.*
18) *Look at the judiciary meddling in the duties of the executive branch, which was elected by the people. My daughter attends a civic-military school; it's a normal school, people are civilized, and they sing the national anthem. The problem is that the left has taken over education and the judiciary, and now they want to control families, too.*
19) *Since when does the UN get to interfere in Brazil's education system? Do they happen to have any solutions for the abysmal quality of education, the violence, drugs, vandalism, threats against teachers, and all the issues surrounding poor academic performance? The UN, the very same organization that harbors terrorists in its embassies, that turns a blind eye to the number of children dying of hunger in war, or being kidnapped, abused, and trafficked, all while doing absolutely nothing? The same organization that sustains itself on the misery of others, while pretending to be a body concerned with humanity? No one believes in these international institutions anymore.*
20) *A LAWSUIT FILED BY THE WORKERS' PARTY (PT) GANG, A GROUP THAT HATES THE IDEA OF CITIZENS BECOMING EDUCATED. THEY PREFER TO KEEP PEOPLE IN IGNORANCE SO THEY CAN ENSLAVE THEM. THE PT IS A CURSE THAT PLAGUES THE BRAZILIAN PEOPLE. THEY HAVE NEVER INVESTED IN EDUCATION, AND NOW THEY WANT TO HINDER THOSE WHO ARE ACTUALLY DOING THE WORK.*
21) *I suppose, by their logic, that a state of total chaos, assaulting teachers, staging fake drug deals, dancing to funk music while half-naked, being indoctrinated by militant teachers, defacing walls, and showing little regard for learning, must be what they consider "constitutional." For fuck's sake!*

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results of this exploratory research indicate that the legitimation of civic-military schools on social media is structured, to a large extent, through discursive strategies associated with a populist logic. Based on an analysis of 40 posts on Facebook and X, between April 2024 and June 2025, six recurring discursive patterns were identified: moral and political polarization, leadership as a spokesperson for the people, exclusive mediation, a narrative of crisis and permanent mobilization, accusatory projection, and populist militarism.

These categories reveal the articulation of meanings around a narrative that presents the civic-military model as a solution not only to the problems of public education but also to broader moral and social dilemmas. This rhetoric is anchored in affects, national symbols, and personal experiences, exalting values such as discipline, order, and patriotism, while simultaneously dismissing criticisms of the model as merely ideological or contrary to the popular will. Such a symbolic construction contributes to the naturalization of power relations based on a military ethos and, consequently, to the deepening of social militarization.

In this process, social media emerge not merely as channels for the circulation of content, but as arenas for affective mobilization and the contestation of common sense. Within these spaces, the school is portrayed as a symbolic trench in a "culture war," and the debate on education is captured by the dynamics of populist militarism: war against the system, order versus chaos, patriotism versus betrayal, the people versus the elite, and the right versus the left. Comments on the posts analyzed reinforce this logic, revealing a social base engaged around conservative and authoritarian values. Although critical voices are also present, the pro-militarization discourses highlight the effectiveness of digital populist strategies in constructing a narrative that seeks to become hegemonic.

These findings have implications for the debate on educational policy. If the legitimation of this model is built upon antagonisms, individual testimonials, and discursive mechanisms designed to evoke strong emotional responses, then a scientific and pedagogical rebuttal must identify the material determinants that such populist discourse obscures, while also addressing the concrete problems it leverages, namely, demands for security and the structural conditions of public schools. The expansion of this model relies on consultations with school communities, processes that the literature has documented as having flaws (Camilo et al., 2023; Duenha de Souza; Espinosa de Mello Aguirre, 2021; Dombrowski Netto; Moreira, 2024), yet which state and municipal governments cite as evidence of democratic legitimacy. Since these consultations also take place within the discursive field described here, official approval ratings should be interpreted with caution. A key agenda for future research is to understand how these discourses reach schools and their communities, and what factors determine whether the model is embraced or rejected.

It is important to highlight that this article did not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the phenomenon, but rather to shed light on the discursive mechanisms that contribute to the legitimation of the civic-military model. The findings presented here, though limited, contribute to an understanding of how the militarization of education is being promoted on social media, as part of a broader process of social militarization and a struggle over competing visions for the country. For future research, it would be relevant to expand the research corpus and incorporate an analysis of counter-narratives to the civic-military model.

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The content underlying the research is included in the manuscript.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest concerning this article.

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An artificial intelligence tool was used as an auxiliary resource for text revision and translation in the preparation of this manuscript. Claude was used to revise the grammar and style of texts written by the author and to translate the title, abstract, and keywords into English and Spanish. All material produced or suggested by the tool was reviewed, checked, and validated by the author, who bears full responsibility for the manuscript's content, the data presented, the interpretation of the results, the definition of the methodological procedures, and the formulation of the arguments.