

GOVERNANCE UNCOVERED EPISODE 57 TRANSCRIPT

The International Nationalism of Bolsonarismo and its Impact on Local Communities in Brazil

Hello and welcome to Governance Uncovered, a podcast brought to you by the Governance and Local Development Institute at the University of Gothenburg. This podcast is supported by the Swedish Research Council.

In this episode, we are joined by GLD fellow Fernando Brancoli, who is an Associate Professor at the Institute for International Relations and Defense, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He is also an Associated Researcher at the Orfalea Center for Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Fernando and host Ellen Lust discuss Fernando's book *Bolsonarismo - The Global Origins and Future of Brazil's Far Right*, published with Rutgers University Press in November 2023. The book looks at the rise of the far-right alliance that emerged in Brazil in 2020 around the figure of former president Jair Bolsonaro, exploring how Bolsonarismo has developed a specific political orientation through its partnerships with other groups, practices, and subjectivities within Brazil, as well as internationally.

Ellen and Fernando talk about how the rise of far-right movements and Bolsonarismo has impacted and continues to impact different types of local communities within Brazil. Fernando points to the interaction between transnational, national, and local influences when explaining Bolsonarismo and how local communities have organized themselves in response. He parallels former and current leaders like Victor Orban, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Donald Trump and suggests that Bolsonaro can be considered an international nationalist who aimed to create alliances to keep international actors out of Brazil. He also gives examples of how indigenous communities have utilized both cross-community and transnational relations and created new platforms of engagement and governance to build resistance.

Discussions about this and much more will follow in the episode. We hope you find it interesting; let's get into it.

Fernando, thank you for joining us today. I'm very excited to talk to you about your forthcoming book, *Bolsonarismo - The Global Origins and Future of Brazil's Far Right*. I think it's a really fascinating read of a very important period and actually a really important issue of the rise of the far right, which is a global issue these days. Today we'll be talking about what we see in Brazil, and Particularly how it impacts different types of local communities within Brazil. So I look forward to learning from you.

Hi, Ellen. It's a pleasure to be here and with the GLD team. Super happy also to be able to launch the book and discuss this since it's so out-of-the-box. So yeah, really excited to be here. Thank you again.

Excellent. And let's actually just start with talking a little bit about President Bolsonaro. He came to presidency of between 2019 and 2022. And you talk a little bit in the book about the rise of the president and about what it meant for Brazil. So can you maybe start with just a description of that for us?

Yes. So well, Bolsonaro was a congressman for almost 30 years. He was part of the military before he joined the Congress. He was always a sort of, well, not really important, congressman, he was also making some bizarre speeches, such as defending Brazil's dictatorship, and against human rights, but was not being taken serious, I would say by most of the political scenario in Brazil. And after a while I would say bunch of different crises in Brazil regarding economic crisis, there was a huge corruption scandal in the country, Bolsonaro was quite smart to be able to surf this wave of discontent, I would say, with political traditional agents to portray itself as sort of different agent that could clean the country and things like that. Although he was a congressman for almost 30 years, he was quite smart, I would say, to portray to say himself as the savior, I would say of the country between this multi-crisis from economic crisis, political crisis and corruption crisis. And again, a lot of anxiety regarding changes in Brazil culture, such as the rise of the black community in Brazil in the last 15 years, the rise of LGBT rights in Brazil, I would say part of the population was also quite anxious regarding those changes. And Bolsonaro sort of represented. So I would say the challenge right now, and I think me and a lot of other colleagues, we are dealing with, is that there is a sort of tendency to deal with this as Bolsonaro as the figure, as the only reason of it. And what I think we are trying to do right now is changing a little bit of the view as Bolsonaro as the symptom, he is the result of a gigantic crisis that the country was dealing with, and I'm saying this because as we speak here, there is a really good chance that until the end of the year, Bolsonaro is going to jail. But I don't think Bolsonaro is going out of the Brazilian political scene. So I think we're dealing with this paradox right now. He was in Brazil for the government for four years. He will not be able to get reelected and was really, really tense for Brazil's progressive movements, I would say. It was also during the COVID pandemic. Brazil, along with the United States, was the country with the most proportional deaths in the Western Hemisphere. In part because Bolsonaro and his group were basically dealing with saying that the virus was not that bad and that vaccines were not safe, was sort of mimicking Trump's politics. And of course, there's a lot of expressions and consequences for Brazil's political scenario or local communities, as you mentioned here. Think we can discuss this later. There was, of course, a lot of strategies from local communities to better deal with the those challenges. And then we see the threats coming from the Bolsonaro government.

But you're right, I mean, many of the things that you talk about in the book in terms of both his rise and being able to have been, in a sense, in the establishment, although you also make the point that he is not an apologetic far right, there is a consistency, even if he he was always in the establishment, but then able to sort of portray himself as a non-establishment figure. And then some of the, the kinds of policies, I mean there were lots of echoes to me, as an American and lots of

echoes of Trump in the sort of the description and the discussion of of him, and I think a lot of what you say in terms of the not necessarily being about a person, but really about a symptom of what's taking place and the struggles that are taking place within society, is an important way to think about it. You talk about what you call as the elements of the far right. And so again, just to kind of lay the land, I'd like to get you to characterize the far right as you see it and and describe it in the book.

Yes. Well, I think there's a bunch of different points that are quite interesting to look at the far right and how it's differentiated itself from traditional conservative and right groups. I would say the very first one is really explicit discourse and actions regarding democratic values and democratic tools to manage the society. I mean, Bolsonaro was quite explicit saying that he was be a democratic because he was not able yet to be road, part of the democratic values. He was of course, making a lot of strong statements that Supreme Court that was blocking some of his actions. They were not really good. That if he was able to, it would close it. But I think this is a really good point. First point, the second one, I would say it's a sort of populist discourse that try to divide society in a binary between us and them, between the good citizen, in Brazil that would be the 'cidadão de bem', like the good citizen, portraying good values. And the other ones. So the cidadão de bem is the one respecting national values. He's respecting the family, he's of course portrayed as a heterosexual family, with a father and a mother and kids. And he's following the traditional religion, like the Christianity, not the African religions in Brazil. So this division between society and the really binary way was also, I think, quite important in far right Brazil. And I think in general, Trump, Orban and different want to be authoritarian leaders, and also are engaging in this kind of thing. And what I was quite interested also on the book, and I would say in my current research, is how those contemporary far right groups are quite transnational. If you look to Bolsonaro, if you look to Trump and you look to Orban and all different kinds of body, in India also, they are actually quite smart to create strategies that should be already used in different countries. I mean Bolsonaro was in love with Trump. He was like to be portrayed as Trump. He received Orban a lot of times in Brazil, I mean he was also quite in love with Netanyahu in Israel. So I think that far right, if you look to the contemporary far right, it's not only a local issue, there's transnational subjectivities, strategies, alliances that have been made. I think we are now going to focus a little bit on our talk about the local dynamics in Brazil, but I would say contemporary far rights are quite interesting also on how transnational movements can be inserted in local politics. And regarding Bolsonarismo, I think it's, although it's began with Bolsonaro, we can see it's way bigger right now then Bolsonaro. And I like to portray it in sort of two different axes. The first one could be a sort of vertical axis, Bolsonarismo can be perceived as high politics in a way, so it would be the top of the axis, in the sense that it would be like ministries will be high companies or businessmen, the religious figures that really high-ranking ones, they are portrayed as Bolsonaristas, they are moving this kind of far right discourse in Brazil, but then it can go below those vertical axis and understand that Bolsonarismo is also about the really small creature, the [?] creature, talking in small churches in the neighborhood of Brazil. It can be the small businessman saying that he's now driving an Uber, or things like that, and now he's a self-made man and that states should be out of his way to make money. And it could be also these small paramilitary groups that are always quite active in Brazil right now, and defending Bolsonarismo ideas and far right ideas. And I would say this horizontal axis could be how Bolsonaristas or Bolsonarismos was also portrayed in different far right groups. You can see Bolsonaristas on the agricultural level that have been pushing for non-land reform and against traditional progressive groups that are trying to make discussions of how land should be better

divided in Brazil. But it's also connected to, I would say, the evangelical groups in different areas and also paramilitary groups and military groups in Brazil. So I think the combination of this vertical and horizontal axis helps to understand how different the Bolsonaroistas, and far groups are in general, you can be the high-ranking military in the government, but also the paramilitary group in the streets of Rio Janeiro, you can be the businessman in Sao Paulo trying to create different norms or change the norms regarding the safety of the workers in in general, but also the guy driving an Uber and saying that he is a self-made man. So I think this works, this sort of cartography, works for Brazil, but I would say it's also quite interesting to try to insert this narrative in different far right groups in Brazil, so that's what I tried to do on the book and I think was quite interesting to build those gaps in the end of the day.

Yeah, I agree and actually I wanna think about, because you're right, basically what you're saying is that the far right encompasses this huge range of people and groups, and in some ways perspectives. And you mentioned that one of the things that ties them together is a notion of us versus them, where a rather conservative version, we might say of, of society, right, that it should be heterosexual couples with kids, and et cetera. When we think about it on the international sphere, because you're right that there's a lot of your work is looking at the transnational movement of the far right. I mean, it also seems like what brings people together is a notion of inward-looking nationalism. And I just wonder if you would agree with that, that while it's a transnational movement in some ways, and obviously Trump and Orban and Netanyahu, and Bolsonaro, all of them sort of wanna be a club, but they're a club of people who also at the same time look inward in terms of saying that we're separate and basically back to an inward-looking nationalism. Is that a fair statement?

No, definitely. And I think that's a great point, Ellen, especially because it's a sort of paradox, right? It's like the international nationalist somehow, in the sense that bunch of their narratives are connected to protecting the country, but protecting the values of the country that's endogenous forces trying to destroy the values that were created in a mythical golden era in the past, but at the same time, they are engaging transnationally in this kind of things. I think a great part of my time on the book and my current research was actually intervening those guys and trying to ask them, how do you connect those dots? How you keep saying that Brazil should be protected by alien invaders, that can be the transnationals, nationals, NGOs protecting the indigenous community, and feel like this, but at the same time connecting to people that are trying to also protect the nationalism forces. I think what they are trying to answer and what they, on my interviews, what they say is well, we all agree we should stay in our own spot. We all agree that nationalism and the values are quite important, but somehow we can create alliances to keep everybody on their own boxes. So you can have Brazilian say yeah, we should deport every single Brazilian from the US because we had no reason going there. So it's made a lot of nonsense if think about it, but it's connected to this idea that transnational forces are trying to erase nationalism, trying to erase the values, and somehow we should protect itself. But at the same time, I would say something that connects those dots and connect Bolsonaro with Netanyahu with Trump, is the sense or the discourse that Western values are being attacked by indigenous forces. And this is quite interesting saying as a Brazilian because for a long time a lot of my US friends say, listen, Brazil is not part of Western values, you are something else. You're Latin America. You have values combined with African values. So it's not really [?] and a lot of racist comments has been done regarding this. But Brazil is trying to protect itself as sort of

'we have to fight against attacks from outside, that trying to mining the Western values' that Brazil inserted somehow. So I would say we, Brazil far rights is trying to protect national values, but at the same time, those national values are included in a more broader scope, that western civilizations and things like that. So that's why for example, there is some bizarre portrait of Brazilians as Knights Templars protecting from barbarians, although there's nothing more far from Brazil as Templars or medieval Knights and things like that. Although, those narratives and those symbols can also be inserted in Brazil in this way, but I totally agree there is a sort of paradox. Portraiting nationalism and transnational way somehow. But I think this is not connected to again a binary between us, the West, against the rest that somehow is trying to mining those things and and again this is going to materialize in a sort of interesting way. For example, Bolsonaro was not a big fan of China, was of course trying to mimic Trump in a while. There was a lot of racist comments regarding this. So trying to insert those narratives also in this vertical and horizontal axis was also quite interesting. As you mentioned, the far right is quite different inside the groups and being able to see how those different groups portrayed for example China or Israel was also I think part of my research and was of course quite interested to check out the difference between the groups portrayed in a political scene.

It's fascinating. Can you tell me a little bit, when we're talking about the national, of course, there's another element, which is the indigenous populations. And you talk a little bit about how, basically how the far right and Bolsonaro are responding to and treating the indigenous populations. There was a statistic you gave that really struck me, where you're talking about the, basically the rise in fires. You said there's an 87% rise in fires from 2019 to 2020 in indigenous communities, and so can you just tell me a little bit about this nexus between the environmental issues, the indigenous community and then Bolsonaro or the far right?

And it's great being talking about this here and because I was using GLD discussions for a while, on my book for the last years, because a lot of the discussions of how local communities try to react to this kind of thing. So I was writing this and also thinking about a lot of the incredible work we have been doing here at GLD, so for me it is sort of finishing the cycle right now, being able to talk to regarding this. And I think the first point is indigenous community in Brazil, it's also connected to the Amazon rain forest and I think it's important to describe how the Amazon is inserted in the imaginary of Brazil. It's of course portrayed by Bolsonaro in a lot of the far right groups as the force of richness, but also future richness. We have not been able to gather the richness yet, it's like always a sense of anxiety that someday we'll be able to get it. But at the same time, the Amazon is also connected to a sense that people from the outside want to steal it. And for example, I've been teaching in the last years from time to time, to the military, like human rights to the military, it has been quite challenging, as you can imagine. And I ask them if they believe, for example, the US or Europe in general, that they want to steal the Amazon and the verb is 'to steal.' And I would say almost 90% of them will say yes. They want to steal the Amazon. So there is this sense that like a thing like a piece of wood that people can put behind their backs and just run away to the US, so there is a sense that there is that profound richness just waiting to be gathered by the Brazilian population. But at the same time, it's also someone wants to steal it, also an external force. And the indigenous community, who of course are spread from all across those territories, they are portrayed also in this sense, because by one hand they can be converted into 'proper Brazilians' and I am using gigantic votes here, to be able to help the Brazilian nationals to gather that richness. But

they are also quite potential enemies from the state because they can be used by the US and the Europe as forces somehow will help the Amazon to be steal by those forces. So the indigenous community has also been portrayed in this paradox world. So when Bolsonaro, he has [?] so you have to make them a Brazilian because they are not Brazilian yet, although of course they are. But I mean, this should be inserting them in the Christianity, traditional family, I would say business-like values, so they could be proper Brazilians. And then the national values will guarantee that they are not disloyal to the country. So when Bolsonaro came into power, he was basically accusing those indigenous groups that they have been working with external NGOs to help them to steal Brazilian land, to steal Brazilian richness. This should not be able to continue. So what he tried to do during these ages was by one hand, he taught every single indigenous land demarcation. So there is a norm in Brazil that indigenous community, they can ask the federal government, specific kind of land and specific territory that is going to be governed and is going to be somehow used by them. So Bolsonaro stop this saying no, no no, this is creating a different country in inside Brazil. So we're not doing this anymore. Yes, please go ahead.

It becomes communal land. Am I correct about that?

Yes, exactly and then. If you look to the numbers, most of the land in Brazil has now been completely protected, environmental issues and other ones, by the indigenous community. So of course this was connected to the Bolsonaro argument that we should include the narratives for the far right, within the indigenous community. So what he was saying is by one hand, they need to be proper Brazilianized. They must be inserted into Brazilian values and religious movements. Even the more symbolic things for Brazilian clothes, Brazilian music was also saying those are not Brazilian nationals. I think for me as now GLD fellow was particularly, he was using the word governance. They have a different governance, and they should change the way they are behaving, the norms, their strategies, their values, to be more equal to the Brazilian governance. And the other hand, the Brazilian business model should be applied here and that's why we had such a gigantic deforestation. What they are saying is the forests, not being used, is not good for us. We should then use mining, deforestation, be able to use cattle, all those areas to make the country rich and to include this in this sort of notion. So that's why during the last four years during Bolsonaro's age, we got the most deforestation proportionally in Brazilian history. We got a huge number of indigenous infants getting killed by diseases, but also we get kidnapped of indigenous by religious missionaries because what they're saying was no, we have to insert in them those Brazilian traditional narratives. So it was a tragedy, but at the same time, those groups, they were quite courageous to keep fighting back. So what I was trying to do in a little bit of the book and now what I'm trying to look at also here at GLD, is also how those indigenous created interesting different set of governances and different set of strategies to react to this. And again, I think this was quite interesting because they were also quite transnational. So although Bolsonaro was also a transnational movement in a way, and using transnational strategies to productivities and alliances to push this deforestation movements, the indigenous community, they were quite smart also to understand that resistance and the resistance confidence methods should also be transitional. So they were sending, I would say diplomats, no traditional diplomats, to different countries and different places in the world, the UN, the Nordic Countries, Equatorian countries to the midway, saying no, we need to create a sort of broad strategy to react to this. So I would say it's been absurdly interesting and I would say courageous to watch how those indigenous communities are actually creating also theoretical concepts to describe what

they're creating. So I would say what I've been trying to do is also discuss with those indigenous movements how they are creating specific governance methods and creating specific governance theoretical framework to describe what they've been dealing to. So this has been blowing my mind that they will be quite generous being able to talk to me regarding these kind of things and although it was of course a tragedy on how Bolsonaro reacted to this, it was included, of course, in this far right narrative between traditional values, business and everything else. But then there it is, just really they were able to fight back in a quite interesting way.

So has it changed the ways in which they coordinate across them? Do we see any of that? You know, in terms of the extent to which this becomes an external threat that promoted not only sort of outreach to other countries, et cetera, but also promoted any kinds of cooperation across communities?

Yes, it was incredible, especially because of the young indigenous leaders, who were able to gather support outside, but then they came back to their communities and they completely changed the way they were making decisions because for a long time it was a sort of hierarchical community. I mean, with the Kasiki, the chief who were making most of the decision and what we witnessed in the last four years was a completely change on this. Although it is still connected to one or two leadership, there was a gigantic rise of women participation of collective ways to create methods of decision making, of how funds being received, for example by the UN, how they were going to be used on those areas because some of the UN fund was not coming directly to the Brazilian government, they were directly being funded to their community, so they they'll be able to use this in a different way. So you've got, I would say, a completely new set of norms and strategies on how to govern those areas. And this was absolutely interesting because it was also not only connected to a specific group in a specific area. Since they were changing their behavior, I would say of governance in different communities, they were talking to each other and creating this gigantic community. So for the first time, for example, during the Brazilian government, we got a traditional meeting between more than 15 different indigenous groups coming along and creating a really a result of discussion on how to better provide funds. For example, during the pandemic because the government was not doing anything, on how to discuss, for example, gender violence and gender and infant discussions of this kind of thing. So it was super interesting, because it was a tragedy, of course, it was a moment of, some people could describe it as attempted genocide, but at the same time, we witnessed how those groups changed completely, their behavior, their strategies and things like that. And I think this is really interesting, even for progressive groups in Brazil, because for a while there was, I would say, not really a recognition of how those communities are agents or changing their future and how they are able to create platforms of governance on their own, even or progressively left-wing groups. There was also listen, you are great, but let us tell you guys how you're supposed to live your life. So it's what a tragedy. It was not a great moment, but even in those really bad specific moments, it was incredible to witness how they change this kind of thing. So I have a bunch of students and different colleagues now, discussing with indigenous community how to better describe these new platforms of engagement and and governance. And again, it's more a result of interconnected with different communities all across the country. And I would say it's way more gender equal than it was in the past for the last years.

And that's so fascinating both because of the the agency within the communities, right, in terms of how to how to respond and the coordination across them, but also that what you're really pointing to on both sides is this, what some people think of as going across different scales, right. These various levels of transnational, the national, and the local communities and how they're actually all interacting in, in different ways, it's really fascinating. I wanted to sort of turn the attention to a second group that I found really interesting in your book, and that was thinking about the kind of the agricultural communities. And here you, you make a point that I learned from, which is this, that rather than think of it as a single community, really thinking of it as distinct communities within the agricultural sector. So can you tell us a little bit about what you found there?

Yes. Well, in the last I would say 20 years, Brazil's GDP is really connected to us being able to export commodities. So the agriculture, I would say the GDP in Brazil are almost, 70% is connected to commodities, so it's now in a huge political leverage at the same time those agricultural groups because, well, a lot of the capacity, I would say, of the state on these places is how those agriculture sectors are going to be able to push for more richness exporting and things like.

But if you look into those groups, like you mentioned, they are not the same ones. You do have gigantic conglomerates of really rich groups. They are one of the most rich companies, I would say, in Latin America these days. Those are really connected in the last years with more conservatives and far right groups because they perceive, for example, environmental norms as a sort of a way to make more money. But also in the way to better create new lands for the cattle for agriculture systems and things like that. And traditionally those agriculture groups, they are also connected to, I would say, more conservative values in Brazil. Therefore, the countryside, they say families should be protected from the openness of the last year regarding gender equality and things like that. But at the same time, like what we have been witnessing is how those groups, especially because we got transnational movements in Brazil in the last years, they're saying, listen, we will, we have to follow the rules regarding Environmental Protection because we are selling a lot of those stuff to the European Union and they do have gigantic amount of norms on how to be able to sell soil and things like that. So you have division right now on those groups and a division on how to better connect to transnational movements and things like that. What I'm trying to look into right now and what I'm quite scared, right now, this is regard center-left government in Brazil now, with Lula, some of those agriculture, not the mega business one, in the medium level, they are quite rich but they are not absurdly political average. They're start to discuss that they should have more autonomy regarding protection from land reform and I would say from social movements that usually go to land and say, listen, we should divide this, this is too big. And also protection from the indigenous community. And when I say protection, I'm saying basically paramilitary groups. So what we are looking right now is if we are seeing a reaction for far-right groups, say we are not going to change our behavior, we want more autonomy. We want the enemy.. this is connected to Bolsonaro authorizing during his four years in government, the amount of weapons and ammunition that agriculture groups could buy, he basically opened them to buy more than 100 rifles per year, each group, so they have been armed in the last years, I would say as a reaction of, has led to Brazil now with the center left government into power. I would say in summary, agriculture is a big thing in Brazil, but they're not homogeneous. You do have different groups discussing how we should portrait ourselves in the world and how, what kind of norms they should be following. But at the same time, I'm quite scared, and I mean, this is an interesting research, but also a quite scary moment because they have been quite vocal saying that, listen, if the Lula government tried to change environmental laws, if Lula tried to create indigenous

territory that somehow is going to block the expansion of Brazil agriculture, we will fight back. And we will fight back creating alternatives, military defense groups, as that's how they call it. And then I think this could create a different and violent scenario in the country because this is basically, menacing, they are creating autonomous paramilitary groups which already exist in some urban areas in Brazil, so we'll have to look on this, because again, this is also trusting different narratives on environmental protection, Brazilian traditional values from the countryside, and somehow protecting from outside values and norms. This is crossing different anxieties, I would say, that are quite important for far-right groups and somehow it's connected to Brazil richness as in GDP growth. So we cannot just ignore them. So if I would make a bet, what would be the biggest challenge in Brazil in the last five years like you mentioned, we will have to look to the different agricultural groups. We cannot demonize them and say they are all conservative, far right extremists. They are not. I mean, they're really different on themselves, but we'll have to look how they behave and how they react to different challenges in the next years.

And again, the echoes to the issues that that we see in the States are also so clear to me, right. It's a there's a lot of the same sentiment and and at least in the US, it's connected to a long-standing belief in the, and especially many of the rural communities. First of all, because guns are used for hunting and there's a sort of that aspect. But just also sort of right to arms sentiment. Do you have the same thing in Brazil? Does that also echo there?

That's quite new actually. So Brazil, although we had a history of, I mean people using weapons in the countryside to defend themselves or for hunting like you mention, this idea as the weapon as a tool to protect your family against the state or against external threat, which is historical in the US. Especially close to the Constitution, this was not present in Brazil at all. This is a construction in the last ten years, and it's also connected to a sort of macho, sexist movement, how the man should use the weapon to protect himself and this connects to, as I would say, with Brazilian far-right and conservative groups being more close now to the US. So it's more connected to these sort of things. So you look to Bolsonaro's sons who are also congressmen. They have been saying that if you are a man, or a a proper man, you should have a weapon to protect your family. You should somehow be able to defend against the state, which is a completely coincidental movement of the US narrative regarding the amendments and how every citizen should be able to buy it. I think this is quite an interesting connection between Brazil and the US far-right, because this is brand new interpretation of Brazil in a sense. And there is also our economic side. Brazil is one of the few countries who are actually producing a lot of the weapons, the Taurus, for example, it's a big company. So those groups are lobbying in Brazil Congress, they are connected to specific political groups. So there is also, I would say, an agenda regarding this. And of course, I mean the sexist macho movement is also connected to the station with gender movements and new groups in Brazil. We got in the last 15 years, empowerment, I would say, of gender and feminist groups in the country. For example, for the first time I had no more women in my class in my university, as men. So this is also a reaction on how the society are changing. And I mean this collective is also to a change of norms regarding domestic violence and norms and the workers for women and things like that. So I would say this rise of weapons in Brazil is also connected as a reaction of the macho being, somehow feeling threat of that. What? What? What is happening? There's a lot of girls and women now on universities now on the field of business, there's a lot of anxiety from white men and weapons are also connected to

this. So again it's a cross-border movement. It's also, it's values, environmental, transnational, gender things too.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I want to take us to a third set of community in an area that I have found interesting and and I need to understand better, which is the role of drug cartels. And you mentioned very briefly the urban militias or urban based militias. Can you help me to understand a little bit the relationship between the Bolsonaro and the far right more generally, and the cartels and other urban militias?

Yes, well, Brazil got a problem with narco trafficking since a long time, almost 50 years, and those groups are not only connected to Brazil because that, for example, they're exporting cocaine to Europe. But the cocaine is producing Colombia. So there is also a transnational trend here. For a long time, the drug traffickers and the the drug cartels, they were connected to the periphery of Brazil and through the more poor areas, they enjoy as sort of safe havens in those areas. I'm speaking from Rio de Janeiro, who is quite famous for the Favelas, the poor communities on the hills, and those groups have been operating there for a long time, and it's also a connection on middle classes in Brazil, starting saying we should do something regarding those threats, those groups. And there is of course a racialized component because the narco traffickers would be inserted in poor areas that are historically connected to black communities in Brazil. So for a long time we got those problems and those groups creating a lot of violence. And of course, the groups that are more victims to it, the black poor community where they are inserted, although the most vocalized groups are of the middle class. That from time to time are subject to those violence. And for a long time, those groups, those narcotraficantes have been operating in Brazil, and during the 90s, something different started to happen. Groups of former policemen from Army personnel created militias to fight those narcotrafficking groups. What they say was, well, the government is doing nothing regarding those narco traffickers, those groups are basically creating a parallel state, so we should create a defense malicious to better protect us, 'the good citizens,' against those people in all their hills, who are selling drugs and are menacing the society. And that's when Bolsonaro and a lot of different congressmen say, well, that's a great idea. These are the good citizens. They're not narco traffickers. They are basically defensive militias trying to protect themselves from the narco traffickers, so we have statements from Bolsonaro and also different congressmen saying this was a great idea. That since the state was not capable of fighting narco traffickers groups, we should somehow support those militias formed by former policemen and military, army, navy, and things like that. But then what we witnessed in the years that were passing is that those militiamen, they were quite fast to adapt the strategies of the narco traffickers. They witnessed that they could sell the drugs and make a lot of money. They could somehow ask or demand for taxes of the local businessmen to operate, to make it mandatory for the illegal vans who goes to the favelas to pay for them, to be able to circulate there. So in a way, those malicious slowly change through something connected to the narco traffickers. With one gigantic difference. They are really well connected to the congressman. So they are not only the traditional narco traffickers operating outside state borders, outside, I would say, the narrative of traditional governors, they were really connected to congressmen on state or municipality and even federal level. Bolsonaro has been giving medals to explicit leaders from those militias in the last 15 years saying that they are the protectors of the traditional values and there is of course a racialized component here, component to values, the favelas has been portrayed traditionally as a site of African religion movements. So, they are not evangelical

Christians. They are black bodies. So somehow they were quite easy being portrayed on this binary of the far-right that we were discussing in the beginning of our talk. They are non-Brazilians somehow, and they should be attacked in the sense. So what I've been trying to do with different colleagues in the last years is going to these areas of militias right now because they are governing different areas in Rio de Janeiro these days. But they are not a parallel state. Because they are actually embedded in the state, they have congressmen floating in the area. They have leaders of the militia now running for congress. So when we portray themselves in a parallel state, we are actually ignoring how connected to traditional governance they are, but how they are quite smart and powerful to actually change state behavior. So I publish a paper of different colleagues a couple of years ago that we track how police operations against narco trafficking or criminal groups were behaving in the last years and we were able to prove that these days the police in Rio de Janeiro are basically fighting narco traffickers and ignoring the militia. And why they are ignoring the militias and they were able to track, because the militias are able to change the political behavior because they inserted it in the police, they inserted it to politics and things like that. So what we are discussing is, and a lot of different colleagues in Brazil, is this sort of hybrid governors or embedded governors, that those groups are creating a set of norms, strategies and behavior on local level. The time that the stores are supposed to open and close, what kind of bodies you can show in the communities are basically run by the militia, but they're not a parallel governors because they are somehow negotiating this with traditional governance with the traditional government officials. So they are way more scary, way more complicated to the state, I would say, than the traditional narco traffickers, because they are being able to insert their narratives inside this state. And again, this is not only traditional Congress municipality, we are talking about Bolsonaro, the president saying that the militias are supposed to be the future of Brazil. And the way to defend the Brazilian values.

Yeah, in some ways, it reminds me a little bit about when we think about the mafia, right. And it really draws into question whether people who are acting as state actors, as president, or parliamentarians, et cetera, do so on the basis of the state or if they do so on other basis, it's it's incredibly important questions. Yeah, yeah.

No, definitely. And there is a lot of comparisons with the mafia. There is also an emphasis on how the mafia has its own sort of behavior and norms. They're not common criminals. Somehow they're better organized. Yes, exactly. So I think there's a lot of, they resonate with a lot of the middle class in Brazil, saying no, no, they're not like the traditional drug Lords that they don't know how to behave. Those guys, they have some norms and some rules, which is quite crazy, but that doesn't how this operates here.

I want to thank you again for taking time to talk to us, but also just for sharing your book, which again congratulations, is forthcoming from Rutgers. And for just excellent work, it's very, very interesting. And I think what you've really pointed me to, which is probably an important correction for me, is I often think about communities and compare different communities and different governance at the very local level, but really thinking about this local, national and transnational influences and the the interrelationships between them. Which I've learned a lot from. So thank you very much.

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Thank you, Ellen. And everyone who's been doing the organization of the podcast, I am a huge fan of podcast format. Huge fan I would say, of what GLD has been doing, trying to provide the incredible platform to people discuss the research. So I'm super happy to be able to discuss this here and also excited for the next, both events and research we're going to do together here, so, yeah, thank you again.

Thank you so much.

We hope that you found this episode interesting. More information about Fernando and his book can be found in the description below. Don't forget to like, share, and subscribe. Thank you for listening!