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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**Support** - None.**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Completed but not published.**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202640014**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 4 April 2026 and was last updated on 4 April 2026.**INTRODUCTION**

Review question / Objective Considering the fragility of liberal democracy in Brazil and the growing influence of the far-right in Europe and other geographical contexts (Mota & Forte, 2023), this study aims to examine the configurations assumed by the far-right phenomenon, with the objective of advancing a clearer conceptual understanding of its definition and distinguishing attributes.

The expansion of far-right movements has increasingly challenged contemporary political systems in both Brazil and Portugal, contributing to the reconfiguration of power relations between the State and society, and posing risks to democratic institutions as well as to social policy frameworks. In response to these developments, this study adopts a Systematic Literature Review approach to address the following research question:

How is far-right thought characterized, and what are its main attributes, agendas, and modes of operation?

Within this scope, the review seeks to identify and systematize the key characteristics of far-right thought by mapping its principal attributes.

Rationale It is not difficult for a critical observer to perceive the historical challenges democracy faces in developing in Brazil and other parts of the world such as Portugal. Here, we refer specifically to liberal (or constitutional) democracy—that is, a conception of democracy as a political regime based on the existence of individual rights, the organization of political parties, and the regular holding of elections, with representation as the form of political power exercise.

Both in Brazil and other countries like Portugal, liberal democracy itself struggles to establish itself as a political regime and enters the 21st century in crisis (Castells, 2018).

However, in the Brazilian case, this difficulty is not paradoxical. It derives from the particular process of capitalist development in Brazil, marked by bourgeois autocracy, as noted by Fernandes (1987). The same author identifies the intersection of two processes in the constitution of capitalism

in Brazil: the first refers to the fact that bourgeois domination rests on a strong autocratic trait, leaving very little space for the development of liberal democracy and its associated political processes; the second concerns the strengthening, with the institution of free labor, of an “opposition within the order” arising “from above.” According to Fernandes (1987), this opposition results from the fragmentation of the dominant sectors’ interests in the post-abolition period, generating more divergences within the bourgeoisie itself.

Moreover, with the consolidation of an effectively bourgeois social order, in which the bourgeoisie and proletariat are in opposition, the existence of “bottom-up” opposition movements becomes more viable and possible. Thus, to manage these two processes, the national bourgeoisie preferred to rely on accommodation and interest composition in the first case, as well as on the use of force, repression, cooptation, and paternalism to confront the second. In this way, it was through “autocratic procedures,” on the one hand, and on the other, “[...] successive accommodations, that what could be called the conservative consolidation of bourgeois domination in Brazil rests” (Fernandes, 1987, p. 209).

It is also noteworthy that the affirmation of capitalism in Brazil, by prioritizing the construction of an economic and political environment necessary for consolidating a typically capitalist market and accommodating the diverse interests of the emerging Brazilian bourgeoisie, did not accompany the socio-political and cultural developments historically required by this process in other countries. Rather, there is “a strong pragmatic dissociation between capitalist development and democracy” (Fernandes, 1987, p. 292).

Analyzing the socio-historical characteristics of democracy in Latin America, Mazzeo (2019) draws attention to the fact that:

Liberalism, a product of democratic-bourgeois revolutions—such as the classic English and French revolutions, as well as the specificity of the American revolution—which brought profound changes in social relations and created conditions for the development of complete capitalist relations and free wage labor [...], in Latin America acquires a particular characteristic in which its ideosocietal components, determined by the conditions of production relations themselves, generate a liberalism with autocratic tendencies. Despite all the debate about the nature of Latin American liberalism (whether it is “inside or outside” its historical scope), we believe this sui generis liberalism objectively reflects the historically particular form of capitalist

development in Latin America. (Mazzeo, 2019, p. 16)

In other parts of the world such as Western Europe, capitalism developed in a particular way, generating within the European context a center and a periphery—as is the case with Portugal—which decisively influenced the contours assumed by democracy in these countries, making Portugal’s democracy relatively recent.

However, this recently acquired democracy—about five decades old—in Portugal faces, as in other countries (including Brazil), the growth in the number of political parties with right-wing orientations and some even classified as far-right.

Condition being studied This Systematic Literature Review included all types of studies focused on the far-right theme and sought to explore the following outcomes:

The incidence of far-right thought in various political contexts of different countries, considering its framing within European and American realities

Characteristics of the far-right concerning the development of democratic values and practices

The association of the far-right with populist and extremist practices.

The research was conducted between April and June 2025.

METHODS

Search strategy To address the problem statement and objectives, a search strategy was adopted focusing on two electronic databases: Web of Science and SCOPUS; an Organizational Repository of Journals from CAPES (Brazil); as well as other sources and websites. The search terms used in the review were:

“right wing thinking” OR “far-right thinking” OR “extreme right political ideology” OR “right wing extremism” OR “right wing politics” OR “right wing populism” AND “features” OR “characteristics” OR “traits” OR “concept” OR “attributes” OR “definition.”

It is noteworthy that the search employed the Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” to combine different results and was conducted to locate these terms within studies, specifically in keywords, abstracts, and titles.

Participant or population For study selection, the literature review adopted the following inclusion criteria:

I. Studies published between 2020 and 2024, justified by the concentration of research on the far-right during this period.

II. Studies developed within the fields of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities.

- III. Peer-reviewed articles and book chapters.
- IV. Studies written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese.
- V. Studies reporting on geographical contexts/ regions framed as Europe (including the United Kingdom) and the Americas.
- VI. Studies available in open access (full text).
- VII. Studies with diverse methodological designs, i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and observational studies.

Intervention Not Applicable.

Comparator Not Applicable.

Study designs to be included Not Applicable.

Eligibility criteria The eligibility criteria were most explained in the section of participants or population, however its most useful to share the exclusion criteria, namely:

- I. Studies written in languages other than those specified above.
- II. Articles that, despite including the keywords, were unrelated to the research question.
- III. Studies lacking relevant articulation with the underlying question of the review.

Information sources The intended sources were screened from electronic databases, referring to scientific papers peer reviewed . It used grey literature referring to previous work done by researchers.

Main outcome(s) Following the guidelines associated with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al., 2021), the initial step involved identifying studies from the selected databases and institutional repository. A total of 7,962 studies were identified in the Web of Science database and 138 in Scopus. The CAPES journal repository yielded 51 studies, and other sources and websites contributed 8 studies, totaling 8,159 studies.

Of these 8,159 studies collected through the search, 7,986 were removed as duplicates. This resulted in 173 studies that were gathered for the screening phase.

During this phase, titles and abstracts were read to determine which studies met the inclusion criteria, with 144 studies found not to meet the established criteria.

The screening phase retained 29 studies for full-text reading. Following this in-depth reading, 12 articles were excluded for various reasons (see Figure 1), resulting in 17 studies included in this systematic review.

Additional outcome(s) Synthesis of Findings

The analysis of the included studies reveals a consistent and multidimensional understanding of contemporary far-right populism across different geographical and methodological contexts.

From a descriptive perspective the studies demonstrate a strong concentration in European settings, although relevant contributions also emerge from the United States and Latin America. Methodologically, there is a balanced combination of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches, reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon. The diversity of research designs—including ethnographic studies, surveys, content analyses, and comparative electoral analyses—highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the field. From an analytical perspective three main thematic dimensions emerge:

(1) Conceptions of Populism:

Populism is consistently framed as both an ideology and a political style, centred on the dichotomy between “the people” and a corrupt elite, and grounded in the notion of politics as the expression of the “general will.” The literature also points to a conceptual shift, with populism increasingly associated with right-wing and far-right political movements.

(2) Characteristics of Far-Right Thinking:

The studies identify a set of recurring features, including authoritarian and performative leadership styles, nativism, and the prioritisation of national sovereignty over supranational institutions. Additionally, far-right discourse is marked by emotional appeals, resentment, anti-elitism, and the rejection of rational or deliberative political debate.

(3) Strategies for Dissemination and Expansion:

The expansion of far-right thinking is closely linked to contexts of social and economic crisis, where fear and conspiracy narratives are mobilised. The literature also highlights the strategic alliance between authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism, as well as the central role of social media and digital platforms in amplifying these ideas and facilitating broader public engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that far-right populism operates as a dynamic and adaptive phenomenon, combining ideological, discursive, and strategic elements that reinforce its influence in contemporary democratic societies.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis The review was conducted independently by the principal investigator and two reviewers from the research team to clarify any doubts. Studies

(based on titles and abstracts) were selected and analyzed by the principal investigator, while the two reviewers ensured that the studies met the inclusion criteria. In the subsequent stage, full-text readings were performed to confirm compliance with the inclusion criteria. Disagreements regarding article inclusion were discussed and resolved by the two reviewers.

Strategy of data synthesis Following the selection of studies, the data extraction process was initiated. This process comprised two levels of analysis:

Descriptive Data: Systematization of the data, considering authors, year of publication, objectives, geographical context, and study design/methodology. This resulted in the construction of a table (Table 1) documenting all included studies.

Analytical Data: Interpretation of the collected data, identifying the main findings of the studies in terms of underlying concepts (i.e., characteristics and attributes of far-right thinking). This resulted in the development of a summary table (Table 2) and the presentation of the study's conclusions.

Thematic Narrative Synthesis:

The descriptive data were summarized in a table (Table 1), while the analytical data were grouped based on the identification of themes and subthemes, along with their correspondence to the respective authors and studies (Table 2). The results section of the systematic literature review was structured in order to address the predefined research question.

Accordingly, a critical and systematic analysis of the studies providing relevant data to answer the research question was conducted, and the narrative synthesis presented the main conclusions.

Furthermore, the organization of the results section, focused on the research question, was defined based on the collected data, which enabled the identification of additional relevant categories that contributed to a deeper understanding of the topic.

Subgroup analysis Not Applicable.

Sensitivity analysis Not Applicable.

Language restriction Portuguese and English Language.

Country(ies) involved Brazil and Portugal.

Keywords Democracy; Far-Right Thinking; Systematic Literature Review.

Dissemination plans The findings will be deepened and compared for scientific paper submission.

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Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

