

The environmental agenda under dispute: misinformation and discursive desistance in the Vatican

La agenda ambiental en disputa: desinformación y resistencia discursiva en El Vaticano

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Abstract

*This paper is justified in the context of digital polarization and ecological crisis, wherein the encyclical *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis, a moral call to secular action, was the subject of a discrediting campaign through a series of strategies characteristic of post-truth and infodemic by groups opposed to the ecological agenda of Pope Francis presented in the document. The main objective is to analyze the discursive strategies employed by conservative political, media, and religious actors, principally American, to discredit said agenda. Methodologically, Critical Discourse Analysis and Relevance Theory are employed on a sample of statements from media outlets such as Fox News, The Federalist, the Heartland Institute, among other actors and media. The results identify three strategies: the delegitimization of papal authority in science and economics; the negative ideological association with Marxism and globalist agendas; and the disassociation from Catholic orthodoxy through the articulation of macro-themes reinforced by diverse lexical, argumentative, and syntactic resources, as well as the presence of ostensive and inferential resources linked to these strategies. The encyclical, which represents an ethical-religious call for ecological responsibility, was processed by its opponents not as a proposal to be debated but as an identity threat to be neutralized.*

Keywords

Ecology, desinformation, infodemia, postruth. Catholicism, moral, ethics, ideologies.

Resumen

El presente trabajo se justifica en el contexto de polarización digital y crisis ecológica, donde la encíclica *Laudato Si'* del Papa Francisco, un llamado moral a la acción secular, fue objeto de una campaña de descalificación mediante una serie de estrategias propias de la posverdad e infodemia por parte de grupos adversos a la agenda ecológica del Papa Francisco presentada en el documento. El objetivo principal del estudio presentado en este escrito es analizar las estrategias discursivas empleadas por actores políticos, mediáticos y religiosos conservadores, principalmente estadounidenses, para descalificar dicha agenda. Metodológicamente, se emplea el análisis crítico del discurso y la teoría de la relevancia sobre una muestra de pronunciamientos de medios como Fox News, The Federalist, el Heartland Institute, entre otros actores y medios. Los resultados identifican tres estrategias: la deslegitimación de la autoridad papal en ciencia y economía; la asociación ideológica negativa con el marxismo y agendas globalistas; y la desvinculación de la ortodoxia católica mediante la articulación de macrotemas reforzadas por diversos recursos lexicográficos, argumentativos y sintácticos, así como la presencia de recursos ostensivos e inferenciales vinculados a estas estrategias.

Palabras clave

Ecología, desinformación, infodemia, posverdad, catolicismo, moral, ética, ideología.

Introduction

Decades ago, with the recent emergence of the internet, the digital space was imagined as a great space for pluralistic coexistence. However, with the passage of time, the result has taken a different turn: segmentation based on

affinities in opinions, misinformation, and the infodemic, from which polarized positions are taken in various fields.

In this context of digital polarization and out of concern for the current global environmental crisis, Pope Francis issued a document that will be central to his pontifical legacy, the encyclical entitled *Laudato Si* (2015), which establishes a moral and ethical position from Catholicism on urgent ecological and humanitarian issues to be resolved on earth, in secular, non-religious political and economic decision-making. This implies that Pope Francis is making a pastoral and doctrinal call to the secular world to act in the face of the threat to humanity in the coming years.

In this text, we analyze how the environmental message of Pope Francis' proposals in his encyclical *Laudato Si* has been discredited. This is done from the perspective of Teun Van Dijk's discourse analysis and relevance theory, analyzing the positions that were constructed from the post-truth space in response to the Gospel message. The first section discusses the conceptual perspective of the infodemic and post-truth, a second section analyzes the position of Christianity and Catholicism in the face of the world crisis, a position that is not placed in the theological world but in the secular moral world so that it can be received not only by Catholics but by society as a whole, and a third section presents the results and discussion of the positions taken by various economic and political actors who responded to and discredited the papal message.

Post-truth, disinformation, and infodemic

Contemporary politics and public discourse are immersed in an epistemic crisis originating in the complex interaction of hypermoralizing tribalism, post-truth, disinformation, and infodemic. These elements form a reciprocal causal chain in which an ancestral psychological predisposition is transformed into a strategy of ideological manipulation (Marina, 2025), amplified by a chaotic and saturated communicative ecosystem. The fundamental driver is hypermoralizing tribalism (Malo, 2021), understood as the human propensity for social division into "Them-Us" (Maffesoli, 2004), an anthropological universal that sets limits on the application of ethical norms. This division is driven by ideology, which acts as an identity marker:

Ideology is a marker of belonging to a group or coalition of great relevance; beliefs confer group identity, open the doors to group membership, and also

signal that identity to the outside world. Ideas and beliefs are not only a personal matter, but fundamentally a group matter. (Malo, 2021, p. 175)

The further beliefs are from neutral truth, the better they function as a distinguishing sign of group loyalty.

From moral imperative to rejection of reality

Hypermoralizing tribalism provides the cognitive and affective infrastructure that paves the way for post-truth, exploiting the individual's need to protect their group identity (McIntyre, 2018). This dynamic manifests itself through three interconnected psychological mechanisms. First, the rejection of dissonant facts (García-Marín and Aparici, 2019): when empirical evidence challenges the moral convictions of the group, it is systematically reinterpreted or dismissed. Second, motivated reasoning (Ruiz, 2023), which operates alongside confirmation bias; instead of seeking the truth objectively, the tribal mind finds justifications for pre-established conclusions that favor the group, facilitated by the automatic functioning of cognition that minimizes cognitive effort. Third, moral disengagement (Marina, 2021): by perceiving convictions as absolute, the ends justify the means, legitimizing lies or manipulation if they serve a morally superior goal, which makes morality a powerful and dangerous force in contemporary politics (Malo, 2021). These mechanisms culminate in post-truth, defined as the circumstance in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs (McIntyre, 2018), subordinating factual truth to emotional or ideological truth.

Disinformation and infodemic: strategy and environment

If tribalism establishes the psychological cause and post-truth the ideological end, disinformation acts as a deliberate weapon to deceive (García-Marín and Aparici, 2019), while the infodemic represents the environment that guarantees its massive impact (Cárdenas Rica and Polo, 2019). Disinformation exploits pre-existing cognitive biases (Marina, 2025); by presenting narratives aligned with what the group already wants to believe, it finds fertile ground. Paradoxically, true evidence that contradicts a false belief can strengthen it through the backfire effect, as it activates defensive mechanisms that reinforce the original belief. Another central feature is its emotional content (Murolo, 2019): false narratives activate fear and outrage, powerful emotions

that mobilize and motivate sharing. This content is amplified by the infodemic, understood as the environment of information overload and unregulated digital communication (Gabelas and Marta-Lazo, 2019), which facilitates the spread of errors and falsehoods into social epidemics (Marina, 2025).

The decline of traditional media as guardians of factual truth has contributed to the phenomenon. In their attempt to show “objectivity,” many media outlets have created “false equivalencies” between verified information and opinion (García-Marín, 2020), undermining public confidence in factual truth (Desmurget, 2020). Social media has transformed the information ecosystem, creating echo chambers that reinforce tribal beliefs and amplify confirmation bias (Hoechsmann *et al.*, 2019). Digital platforms act as “supernormal stimuli” (Barret, 2010) for moral outrage: anger spreads faster than other emotions (Silverman, 2016), and misinformation designed to inflame rage is more successful when shared (Hari, 2023). Furthermore, fake news reaches more people and spreads faster than real news (Vosoughi *et al.*, 2018), becoming established before it can be corrected.

The confluence of tribalism (willingness to believe), post-truth disinformation (strategy of deception), and infodemic (means of propagation) creates a vicious circle: moral division facilitates the success of disinformation, which, amplified digitally, reinforces tribal identity, weakening the critical thinking and epistemic humility necessary for democracy. Post-truth and the infodemic are manifestations of ideological supremacy triumphing over factual reality (McIntyre, 2018), immersing the individual in a reality where the distinction between true and false becomes blurred, undermining the foundations of rational debate and representing the greatest epistemic challenge to democracies.

The Catholic Church and its environmental stance

One of the main characteristics of Christianity, unlike two other historical universal religions such as Judaism and Islam, is its relationship with the world through the figure of Christ, who acts as a link between the sacred and the profane, between the transcendent and the immanent (Gaytán, 2012).

In this relationship, Christianity promotes a secularized view of the world based on the autonomy of the temporal from the sacred, a view akin to modernity (Cruz Esquivel and Mallimaci, 2017; Gaytán, 2012). This elective affinity between Christianity and modernity will drive an accelerated process of secularization, in which religion will be displaced as the center of the ex-

planation of the world by a multiplicity of dimensions that have in common that they derive from the decisions of individuals and not from God. The link will prevail by appealing to the ethical and moral responsibility of human beings (Sánchez Echeverría, 2022).

At this point, we observe the double effect of Christianity in placing its evangelical message about human dignity and nature in and from the secular: the first effect is the power of its moral and ethical message, which challenges individuals for their actions under the gaze of the sacred. Despite this, it has a contrary effect, as it leads to questioning that message not from the transcendent, but in the secular world itself, so that everything it expresses or points out becomes debatable, rejected, and even refuted in its interpretation.

Morality and environmental ethics from the perspective of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church, as a relevant institution within Christianity, has significant normative importance in modern society. This relevance is manifested both in its criticism of anomie or loss of morality in the face of phenomena such as individualism and social relativism, and in its role within the process of secularization itself.

The Church highlights three key moments that gave meaning to its message on human dignity and the environment. Paradoxically, this message took root in the secular sphere, placing it in a field of political conflict with economic and political actors who are not governed by religious morality, but by an ethic oriented toward performance and remuneration within legal agreements (Massaro, 2023).

The first moment corresponds to the 19th century, with the Social Doctrine of the Church, defined in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. Although this encyclical did not explicitly address the environment, it set precedents regarding the dignity of workers in the face of industrial capitalism and the defense of private property as a natural right. *Rerum Novarum* sought a balance between human dignity, denouncing labor exploitation, and the defense of individual freedom for the achievement of the common good. It also raised an implicit concern for the care of the environment by stating that the earth was given to all human beings, and therefore the hoarding of goods should be avoided. Similarly, it recognized responsibility toward future generations and the poor, themes taken up again by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015), which extends

the concept of social justice to environmental justice, criticizing the irrational exploitation of resources and consumerism that deepens poverty in the 21st century (Raso, 2025).

The Catholic Church and the environment in the 21st century

The second crucial moment is the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), convened by Pope John XXIII and concluded by Pope Paul VI. This council sought to update the presence and evangelical message of Catholicism in the face of contemporary challenges. Among its documents, the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes* stands out. Although it did not explicitly address the environmental crisis, it outlined theological and pastoral principles that point to human responsibility both towards our fellow human beings and towards the world. The Council emphasized that the earth and the life it sustains are gifts from God entrusted to humanity for its care, criticizing the unlimited overexploitation characteristic of capitalism (Madrigal, 2025).

However, secular society, especially the capitalist sectors responsible for negative environmental impacts, did not interpret *Gaudium et Spes* as a clear criticism of unlimited progress, perceiving its message as rather diffuse and focused on justice, poverty, and the Church's social commitment (Télez, 2006).

Pope Francis, who participated in the Council and inherited this social agenda, issued the encyclical *Laudato Si* in 2015, which represents an explicit commitment to the environment and a direct criticism of the paradigm of capitalist progress. Among its central points is a model of integral ecology that calls for the urgent care of our common home, taking up the legacy of *Rerum Novarum* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The message focuses on environmental degradation, indifferent individualism, and the need to rediscover the divine meaning of God in the world, emphasizing human responsibility for the world given by God, a concept he defines as Integral Ecology (Ballinas, 2016).

Materials and method

The heuristic route followed in this study is based on critical discourse analysis, which analyzes the ideological, cognitive, and contextual components of discourse. Critical discourse analysis is understood as the study of language in use, i.e., the understanding of the relationship between context and communicative acts (Van Dijk, 2017).

The objective of this text is to recover the phenomenon of disinformation through moralization and ideologization in Pope Francis’ proposal for integral ecology in his ecological agenda manifested in the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

To this end, statements in different media outlets, press releases from commentators, political and religious actors identified with ideological orientations critical of Pope Francis’ proposal for integral ecology were analyzed, clarifying the existence in the same media outlets analyzed of voices in favor of the Pope’s proposal. However, for the purposes of this paper, the analysis focuses on those who oppose the document.

Both direct and indirect sources are used for this analysis. Direct sources are those in which the direct discourse of political actors is retrieved from textual or video media, and indirect sources are press releases or columns in which statements by actors from various sectors are retrieved. These speeches were retrieved from Google’s news search engine by entering the search terms “criticism” + “*Laudato Si*,” with the search coinciding with either indirect or direct sources involving political and religious actors and media leaders in the United States. The sources consulted are presented below:

Table 1

Media and news outlets consulted

Source	Media
What Pope Francis gets right and wrong about climate change (Montgomery, 2015)	Fox News
Pope Francis is the Catholic Church’s Obama – God help us (Shaw, 2013)	Fox News
Gutfeld: Pope Francis should love capitalism (Gutfeld, 2015)	Fox News
Greg Gutfeld ‘Marxist’ & ‘Malthusian’ Pope Francis is ‘the most dangerous person on the planet’ (Gutfeld, 2015)	Fox News
Fox Business Host Stuart Varney Lectures Pope Francis About Capitalism (Varney, 2013)	Fox Business
Pope’s ecological agenda questioned: “He is badly advised” (Infobae, 2015)	Infobae
The Pope’s Economic Populism. It’s a Problem (Stanley, 2015)	Religion & Liberty Online
‘The Pope is imprudent when he speaks of scientific conjecture’ (Stanley, 2015)	Religion & Liberty Online

Rush Limbaugh Bashes Pope Francis (Limbaugh, 2013)	CowgerNation
Letter #21, 2024, Thursday, June 20: Viganò (Viganò, 2024)	Inside the Vatican
The Return of Catholic Anti-Modernism (Reno, 2015)	First Things
The reputation of being a “Marxist” that haunts Pope Francis in the US (BBC Mundo, 2015)	BBC News Mundo
A Roundtable On ‘Laudato Si’ (The Federalist editors, 2015)	The Federalist
Heartland Institute Experts React to Pope Francis’s Comments about the Climate Before Congress (Burnett et al., 2015)	Environment & Energy (The Heartland Institute)
J.D. Vance Is Right and the Pope Is Wrong on “Climate Change” (Ruse, 2024)	Crisis Magazine
The False Prophets of Climate Change (Clark Schal, 2019)	Crisis Magazine

Based on discourse analysis and relevance theory, the methodological development is presented on three levels:

Macrostructural and contextual analysis

Macrostructures represent the overall content or meaning of a discourse. They are essentially the themes of the text (Van Dijk, 2005). In the present context, the analysis of the macrostructure and context models is carried out on the major themes presented by the various articles and/or press releases analyzed in this study, as well as the context models that give meaning to the interpretation of the various statements in relation to Pope Francis’ ecological agenda.

Microstructural and semantic analysis

Microstructures focus on how meanings are constructed to influence the interpretation of the recipients. Through microstructures, ideologies become apparent through the use of terms and syntactic resources (Van Dijk, 1996). In addition, they are fundamental tools for executing the general strategy of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of the other. They emphasize and/or mitigate characteristics of one’s own group and of others (Van Dijk, 2002). The aspects to be recovered are semantic elements such as lexicography and syntax, rhetorical and argumentative construction, in order to trace the construction of meanings in the discourses used by the sources consulted.

Cognitive pragmatic analysis

Cognition is the set of beliefs and social representations shared by its members, which is why it is assumed from a pragmatic perspective, promoting mutual understanding of discourse without the need for exhaustive explanations (Van Dijk, 2002).

With the support of the ostensive-inferential model of relevance theory, which is based on the communicative and informative intention of the senders and the inference of the receivers in acts of communication (Pons Bordería, 2004), the elements that are recovered are the use of ostension in the text, inferential processes, and the evaluation of the relevance of the information.

This methodological approach is more clearly represented in the following table:

Table 2

Search elements by level of analysis

Level of analysis	Search elements
1. Macrostructural and contextual analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The geopolitical context at the time.• The media outlets publishing the article.• Main ideas and global themes of the articles and speeches.
2. Microstructural and semantic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive and negative lexicography: words used to describe “us” versus words used to describe “them” (communists, globalists, among others).• Use of metaphors (Agenda 2030 is a Trojan horse).• Use of fallacies, including <i>ad hominem</i> fallacies, which consist of the sender disqualifying the content of the discourse; false dilemmas, which consist of establishing inconsistent relationships, among others.
3. Pragmatic cognitive analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identification of ostensive elements in the text such as rhetorical questions, striking metaphors, and categorical statements.• Analysis of inferential processes such as explicatures, which consist of identifying information that is already taken for granted by the receivers; and implicatures, which are ideas that are suggested without being explicitly stated.• Evaluation of relevance based on the knowledge that reinforces the discourse, the confirmation of pre-existing biases, and the identification of the absence of effort on the part of the receivers to understand the messages.

Subsequently, the corresponding cross-referencing of information was carried out, analyzing how macro-themes are constructed through the micro-structures of discourse, and how cognitive and pragmatic resources acquire relevance for the recipients.

The information was processed with the technical support of the atlas.ti program in thematic coding, in which, first, an open coding process of emerging ideas and themes was carried out, and subsequently, an axial coding process was carried out by classifying and grouping them into more generic codes according to the levels of analysis.

Results

This section presents the results of the analysis carried out in two stages: the first presents the macrostructural and contextual analysis, and the second articulates the microstructural analysis with the cognitive-pragmatic analysis.

Criticism of *Laudato Si*: The context and major macro-themes

On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* on the care of our common home was published. From that moment on, various reactions emerged, both of openness and resistance, in different sectors. This document arrived in the United States amid tensions between acceptance and rejection of the 2030 agenda, with prior aversions to Pope Francis and some of his orientations, with statements such as "Pope Francis is the Obama of the Catholic Church: God help us" (Shaw, 2013), and "[...] This is pure Marxism coming out of the Pope's mouth" (Limbaugh, 2013).

The reasons for rejection have been diverse, including the denial of the link between human actions and climate change; the apology for capitalism and consumer society as engines of development; the rejection of global efforts to address complex, systemic, and multifactorial realities that go beyond the local level; and the link between ecological issues and other agendas such as gender equality, which provokes adverse reactions from some sectors.

Opposition to the social and ecological agenda intensified in the context of Pope Francis' visit to the United States on September 25 of the same year, preceded by his visit to Cuba. At that time, the president was Democrat Barack Obama, who was favorable to the 2030 agenda (Naciones Unidas, 2015).

Prior to the emergence of the *Laudato Si* document, Pope Francis had already presided over two world meetings with popular movements in October 2014 at the Vatican and in July 2015 in Bolivia. The second meeting in particular generated adverse reactions:

[...] some of the expressions used by Pope Francis in Bolivia last week, during the second World Meeting of Popular Movements, not only reflected specific issues emphasized by Latin American populists, but also shared some of their misguided diagnoses of the region's problems. (Stanley, 2015)

In the various meetings with popular movements, a common agenda is proposed: the slogan of land, housing, and work; the defense of our common home and the promotion of integral human development; and the overcoming of exclusionary globalization and a culture of waste (Francisco, 2024).

In various critical statements regarding Pope Francis' ecological agenda, there is questioning of the scientific and political legitimacy of the content of the *Laudato Si* document and its warnings about the effects on integral ecology as the center of his proposals, receiving criticism such as that stated by Robert Sirico, founder of the Acton Institute: "The Pope is imprudent in speaking about scientific conjecture." (Stanley, 2015).

As for the scientific assumptions, they question the impertinence of incorporating controversial information into an encyclical, which is a prescriptive document for believers. In the opinion of some actors and media outlets, these areas go beyond the Pope's authority. The Pope exceeds his religious authority in seeking to influence political decisions on climate change, according to the media, with complete ignorance or silencing of the moral implications. Thus, by taking his discourse into a secular arena in which he lacks competence, his discourse is discredited, as stated by a Fox News commentator:

[...] Personally, I don't want my spiritual life mixed up with my political life. I go to church to save my soul; it has nothing to do with my vote. Pope Francis has linked the two. He has made direct criticisms of a specific political system and characterized that system negatively. I think he wants to influence my politics. (Varney, 2013)

The discrediting of Pope Francis' statements in this vein has the following discursive mechanisms: 1) the separation of the pope's role as a spiritual authority and his lack of authority to speak on matters related to science, despite the ethical implications underlying them; 2) linking Pope Francis' proposals

on integral ecology with discourses belonging to particular political agendas, even left-wing ideologies, as part of a program that transcends the ecological aspects of ideologies judged by opponents as left-wing; 3) dissociating Pope Francis' statements from traditional Catholic orthodoxy.

In the footsteps of ideology: microstructural and pragmatic cognitive analysis

Below is an articulation of each macro-theme with microstructural and semantic analysis, and with cognitive and pragmatic analysis interrelating the macro-themes, their semantic resources, and the implied relationships assumed in the recipients.

The disassociation of Pope Francis' authority

One of the discursive strategies used to delegitimize Pope Francis' proposal for integral ecology is the transfer from the pastoral to the secular sphere. Among the syntactic resources used in the secular context is the separation between "them," the ecclesiastical hierarchy and its sphere of authority, and "us," the laity with the legitimacy to enter spheres from which the ecclesiastical hierarchy must remain outside. This idea is reinforced by establishing inferences aimed at denying the binding nature of the document for all believers. As it is not a dogmatic document and contains controversial information, as stated by Nicholas G. Hahn III, editor of *Real Clear Religion*:

[...] The problem with posing as a scientist or legislator is that it dilutes the Catholic Church's authority on matters of faith and morals. Sometimes, it can also lend itself to climate alarmism or peculiar advice. Such as when Pope Francis worries about the melting of the polar ice caps and claims that catastrophic predictions are not so far off. Or when he criticizes the use of air conditioning and considers it an "act of love" to wear a sweater or turn off unnecessary lights. (The Federalist editors, 2015)

This remains controversial, especially for all believers for whom Pope Francis represents an important moral and spiritual authority. There are even those, especially political actors, who assert the need to distance themselves from the contents of these documents in their role and functions as religious leaders, given the pope's supposed lack of authority on these issues, as sta-

ted by Jeb Bush, Republican presidential candidate in 2015, using dysphemisms: [...] I hope the priest in my parish doesn't punish me for saying this, but I don't get my economic policies from my bishops, cardinals, or my Pope (BBC Mundo, 2015).

Similar to the discrediting of Pope Francis in relation to scientific information, some actors inside and outside the Church point out Pope Francis' ignorance of technical issues of capitalism, arguing that the economic and social content of the document is irrelevant. Thus, the link between certain practices of capitalism and the increase in poverty and inequality is, in the opinion of some media, technically untenable. This criticism is reinforced by some lexicographical resources such as those used by J.D. Vance:

In short, as faithful Catholics, we are not obliged to believe that the world is turning into a huge pile of garbage, as Pope Francis claims. Nor are we obliged to agree with his personal scientific view that catastrophic climate change is already here or even real. (Ruse, 2024)

Some of the more moderate critics on this issue consider Pope Francis' warning about the relevance of linking technical decisions on economic policy with their moral implications to be pertinent. However, they discredit these points in the document as technically irrelevant given the irrationality of criticizing the capitalist production model and the use of non-renewable energies as logical and unquestionable, as stated below: "The poor have no time for those who romanticize their 'customs' as something other than poverty from which they deserve to escape" (The Federalist editors, 2015).

These statements are reinforced by misrepresenting the contents of the encyclical, promoting fear and rejection through fallacies that are easy to assimilate on an emotional level: "He condemned progress, technological advancement, and innovation; he believes that the Enlightenment was a mistake. If it were up to him, we would not even have the innovations that save lives" (Gudfeld, 2015).

In his view, Pope Francis' statements are more ideological than moral or technical in nature. The criticism contains an apology for capitalism for its benefits in generating wealth, its relationship with freedom, and the latent danger of a system that nullifies the creation of wealth and freedom.

While in other areas the Church has pointed out the divorce between faith and life, those opposed to Pope Francis' agenda endorse this divorce, as Republican candidate Rick Santorum stated at the time: "[...] the Church has been

wrong on scientific issues several times and should ‘leave science to scientists’ and focus on issues of ‘theology and morality’” (BBC Mundo, 2015).

This implies that the document is not prescriptive, as it addresses an issue outside the scope of the Catholic hierarchy.

Ideologies linked to Pope Francis’ integral ecology

By linking proposals on climate change to certain partisan or political factions, Francis’ proposals are discredited *a priori*. The identification of criticism of capitalism and its effects on poverty and social inequality links the document’s ethical proposal to the social representation that links any criticism of this system to communism or left-wing ideologies or movements.

The document is described as a shift by the Church beyond its mission and a prelude to the introduction of proposals contrary to its essence, as stated by artist and writer Maureen Mullarkey: [...] “*Laudato Si*” is a Trojan horse that justifies the Catholic Church’s embrace of leftist ideology and the powers that promote it (The Federalist editors, 2015).

The use of metaphors and dysphemisms are some of the microstructural resources used to discredit *Laudato Si*, which is identified in the analyzed discourses as an ideological deviation reinforced by fallacies that promote infodemic and misinformation. One of the fallacies used is that of improper generalization:

The only novelty here is the rejection of gender ideology, a phenomenon that in itself deserves magisterial attention. But these orthodox inclusions serve as a vehicle to insinuate total surrender to pseudoscience and the eco-fascism derived from it. (in A Roundtable On ‘*Laudato Si*’)

Among the ostensible elements presented in the speeches is Pope Francis’ link to ideologies that are considered risky. As Michael McKenna states, the Pope is “[...] selling a brand of Latin American-style socialism,” and in an article in *Crisis Magazine*: “But the left-Catholic political divide says we must believe that the world is becoming one big pile of garbage.” (Ruse, 2024).

The links between Francis’ agenda and other agendas with which the Church has significant differences, such as gender ideology, the family model, abortion, among others. Pope Francis’ ecological agenda is discredited by linking it to other agendas in the speeches of his opponents.

As an apology for the criticism against Pope Francis, the benefits of industrial and technological progress are endorsed, which Pope Francis also does in the document. However, pointing out its side effects on human and natural life is judged as aversion to progress itself, which is magnified by the various media outlets opposed to Pope Francis' agenda through discursive resources that appeal more to the emotional than the rational sphere in seeking reactions from the recipients of the discourse based on fear and rejection, as stated in an article in *First Things*:

[...] In this encyclical, Francis expresses surprisingly anti-scientific, anti-technological, and anti-progressive sentiments. In fact, this is perhaps the most anti-modern encyclical since the Syllabus of Errors, Pius IX's arrogant rejection in 1864 of the presumptions of the modern era. (Reno, 2015)

Any moral reference to the need for limits on the dynamics of capitalism is identified as the product of a political ideological bloc that is disqualifiable *per se*. That is why Francis is criticized for distancing himself from the most relevant issues that had been addressed in the past due to the importance of the ecological agenda in criticizing the current production model. As a mechanism of ideological linkage, Pope Francis' proposal is associated with actors and proposals that are morally rejected by conservative sectors, as stated in a publication by the Heartland Institute: "The agenda promoted by President Obama, Pope Francis, the United Nations, and Climate Crisis, Inc. means that our crowded masses will be forced to share ever-increasing scarcity, ever-lower living standards, and ever-fewer jobs and opportunities" (Burnett *et al.*, 2015).

The disconnect between Pope Francis' pronouncements from traditional Catholic orthodoxy

The inappropriateness of his content and approach stems from the ideologies and sectors linked to his ideas, which are reinforced by negative lexicography:

[...] The most dangerous person on the planet is someone who seeks a strange new respect from his adversaries, and that is precisely what the Pope is doing. He does not want to be the grandfather Pope; he wants to be a modern Pope. All he needs is dreadlocks and a dog with a bandana to look like an Occupy Wall Street participant. Meanwhile, the meeting will focus on the right

and ask: how will conservative Catholics deal with the “apostles” of climate change? (Gutfeld, 2015)

In this text, it is possible to see microstructural elements such as the use of metaphors (*grandfather Pope*, *his dreadlocks and a dog with a scarf*, and *Occupy*) as a lexical device to discredit the consistency of Pope Francis’ proposals, while also being a fallacious *ad hominem* device, as it is a criticism directed at Pope Francis himself. The criticisms do not recognize the systemic and multifactorial dimension that transcends the local in the impacts of climate change, which require coordinated efforts, a role that has been carried out by the United Nations with the 2030 agenda. These initiatives are rejected as *globalist* or as initiatives of *the new world order*. One way in which criticism of Pope Francis’ agenda is intensified is through its association with groups that are morally reprehensible to Catholic orthodoxy:

[...] Globalism demands ethnic replacement: Bergoglio promotes uncontrolled immigration and calls for the integration of cultures and religions. Globalism supports LGBTQ+ ideology: Bergoglio authorizes the blessing of same-sex couples and imposes the acceptance of homosexuality on the faithful, while covering up the scandals of his *protégés* and promoting them to the highest positions of responsibility. (Viganò, 2024)

What is judged to be an infiltration of ideologies or proposals into the Church is the prelude to the delegitimization of Pope Francis as an authority. Such infiltration was not allowed in the past: “Benedict XVI and John Paul II refused to bow to the liberal agenda, and as a result, such displays of tenderness received little media coverage” (Shaw, 2013).

Thus, the rejection of the *Laudato Si* document takes on an ideological aspect in the face of what is judged to be the technical impropriety of the document due to its criticism of capitalism and the proposed practices of self-restraint, self-limitation, and the search for alternatives that are more friendly to an integral ecology.

Furthermore, it takes on a moral aspect when the document is judged for its use of emphatic language that alerts readers to its affinity with groups, movements, and initiatives that are distant from, or even opposed to, traditional Catholicism. The emphasis on social issues rather than traditional issues such as the family and sexual morality, rather than being related to an urgent need, is linked to a sectoral infiltration:

[...] Yes, there are obligatory reaffirmations of the Catholic Church's traditional positions on the sanctity of life, the primacy of the family, and the rejection of abortion... But these inclusions of orthodoxy serve as a vehicle to insinuate a total surrender to pseudoscience and the eco-fascism derived from it. (The Federalist editors, 2015)

Thus, based on these ideological implications, rather than rejecting content, the morality of ideology and the possible groups linked to it are rejected, as stated in an article entitled "The False Prophets of Climate Change" (Clark Schal, 2019).

[...] Consider, for example, the impending moral disaster of the Amazon synod. In the wake of *Laudato Si* and other apocalyptic statements by Pope Francis, the synod seems poised to adopt such a laudatory tone toward the environment that it threatens to drift into neo-paganism, denigrate humanity's special role in creation, and subvert the Church's primary function: to bring souls to salvation. (Clark Schal, 2019)

Conclusions and discussion

The analysis developed in this study allows us to identify the discursive strategies through which traditional American political, media, and even religious actors articulated their opposition to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*. The findings confirm that resistance to the pontiff's ecological message does not operate primarily on the level of scientific or theological refutation, but rather through mechanisms of disqualification typical of the post-truth ecosystem and the infodemic.

Three predominant discursive strategies were identified. The first consists of dissociating Pope Francis' epistemic authority from scientific and economic issues through various lexical devices such as warnings to the recipients of the discourse. The second strategy identified corresponds to negative ideological linkage, whereby the content of the encyclical is associated with previously stigmatized social representations: Marxism, communism, Latin American socialism, the globalist agenda and, by extension, movements such as gender ideology and woke activism, through the saturation of these inconsistent labels and associations in the discourses. The third strategy involves disassociating Francis' pontificate from traditional Catholic orthodoxy. The Pope is presented as an agent of ideological infiltration who has diverted

the Church from its spiritual mission toward unrelated secular causes. This narrative constructs a discontinuity between Francis and his predecessors—particularly Benedict XVI and John Paul II—suggesting that the ecological agenda constitutes a break with magisterial tradition. Paradoxically, this reading ignores the doctrinal continuity that the document itself establishes with *Rerum Novarum* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

These three strategies, operating in an articulated manner, cast doubt on the legitimacy of the sender. The findings reinforce the theoretical characterization of post-truth as the subordination of objective facts to emotional and ideological appeals.

The limitations of this study include the bias inherent in the selection of exclusively critical sources, which, while consistent with the stated research objective, prevents the characterization of the entire discursive field surrounding *Laudato Si*. However, it corroborates the findings of other studies that document resistance to the contents of the encyclical through silence and the absence of its contents in Catholic and conservative Protestant worship in the United States (Kaurov *et al.*, 2025), as well as the rejection of the document from various sectors (Chaves, 2023).

In short, opposition to *Laudato Si* is a prime example of how post-truth works in contemporary public debate. In discourses critical of the encyclical, which represents an ethical-religious call for ecological responsibility, rather than a proposal for debate, it is seen more as an ideological threat to be neutralized. This study contributes to the understanding of the discursive mechanisms through which infodemics and hypermoralizing tribalism can undermine the conditions for democratic dialogue on the civilizational challenges of the 21st century.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence
The authors DECLARE that, in the preparation of <i>the</i> article <i>The environmental agenda in dispute: disinformation and discursive resistance in the Vatican</i> , no Artificial Intelligence tools were used at any stage of the research process.