SOCIAL POLICIES IN TIMES OF AUSTERITY AND POPULISM

LESSONS FROM BRAZIL

Edited by
NATÁLIA SÁTYRO

ROUTLEDGE

SOCIAL POLICIES IN TIMES OF AUSTERITY AND POPULISM

Featuring the latest research by Brazilian-based scholars previously inaccessible to an English-speaking audience, this book is a timely, authoritative, multidisciplinary overview of social policies in Brazil during the Temer austerity and the Bolsonaro populist presidencies. The breadth of policies studied herein provides clues on the political agenda, preferences, and strategies during this tumultuous period in Brazil's history.

Divided into four parts, Part I is a contextualization: it brings basic understanding of Brazilian social policies, explains the trajectory of the Brazil political landscape, including the growth of a populist right-wing movement, the economic crisis and the increase in poverty and inequality in Brazil prior, and the threat to democracy brought about by the disinformation ecosystem. Part II discusses social security, social assistance, conditional cash transfers, and healthcare. Part III analyzes the neoliberal strategies to social investment policies, specifically labor, family, and education. In Part IV, the authors turn their attention to non-conventional topics that are not typically included in research on welfare state retrenchment, including the environment and indigenous rights, and police violence and gun control.

Social Policies in Times of Austerity and Populism is unhesitatingly recommended to all those who teach welfare state politics, comparative public policy, development studies, Brazilian politics, and right-wing politics.

Natália Sátyro is Associate Professor of Political Science at Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. She was also the coordinator of Asociación Latinoamericana de Ciencia Política (ALACIP) Public Policy Research Group (GIPP, 2013–2024) and she is the Convener of International Political Science

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Lessons from Brazil

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1

INTRODUCTION

Elements to reflect on dismantling of social policies in Brazil

Natália Sátyro[1]

1.1 Introduction

Brazil has been the scenario for a socio-political experiment throughout recent years. In 2016, a right-wing coalition brought Michel Temer (PMDB, per its Portuguese name, Brazilian Democratic Movement Party[2]) to power after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (PT, per its Portuguese name, Worker's Party). This put an end to 13 years of administration by the Worker's Party. Temer, who was Rousseff's vice president, took over and began implementing a political project that was the opposite of the one his ticket had won with at the polls two years before (Sátyro, 2021). Brazil was facing one of its worst economic crises, which had already been foreseen in 2014 (the year of Rousseff's re-election). In addition to Dilma Rousseff's political inability, her economic policy cost her a lot (Pérez-Liñán, 2007). The process that removed her from power followed all rites and procedures within the law and with the approval of the Supreme Federal Court, under the supervision of Supreme Minister Enrique Ricardo Lewandowski. However, the process was based on a fallacy, namely the Portuguese term "pedalada fiscal," referring to the practice of taking out loans from state banks to cover for a budget deficit, and it is a well-known fact that it was the absence of political support that caused the greater trouble. Whether her impeachment was a coup or not, as well as what was the contribution of different political and institutional actors, is not the subject of this book. The fact is that this political movement rearranged the articulation between the Legislative and Executive branches. Historically, the Brazilian Congress had always been more to the right than the Executive (Power and Rodrigues-Silveira, 2019).

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According to Kershe and Marona (2022), in the morning of March 17, 2014, the beginning of Operation Car Wash (*Operação Lava a Jato*), mentioned in the press as the "strongest action for fighting corruption in history" (quote from the authors), occurred. It was a spectacular launch, with over 400 federal police officers, 81 search and seizure warrants, 18 warrants for pre-trial detention, and 19 for coerced conveyance, distributed over 17 municipalities (Kershe and Marona, 2022). It became stronger in the following years and, in parallel to its actions, opinion polls showed the corrosion of the Brazilian party system and the disbelief aimed at democratic institutions, especially parties. Thus, we come into 2018, the year of presidential elections, when the main candidate Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (PT) was arrested, and this, along with many other reasons, led to the election being won by a candidate from the populist ultra-right. That is, in 2018, by direct election, Jair Messias Bolsonaro (PSL, per its Portuguese name, Social Liberal Party) was elected in Brazil, with a campaign based on authoritarian speech, support of a military dictatorship, and an ultra-right position regarding social issues. His anti-system discourse organically fit in with the anti-corruption banner of Operation Car Wash. Along with that, the Brazilian Congress steered further to the right. The Social Liberal Party, which had only one seat prior to 2018, won 52 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and grew to reach 99 seats in 2022. And the left was entrenched while facing a majority composed by the center-right and the ultra-right. During this period, which began in 2016 and lasted until the end of the Bolsonaro government (December, 2022), a systematic process of retrenchment of social welfare policies was carried out, as well as a programmatic one, as we will see ahead (Pierson, 1994). The purpose of this book is to bring together studies that analyze the drivers and the scope of the changes and reforms in the Brazilian system of social protection over those seven years to understand how we came from the Brazilian "golden era" of social protection to the dismantling of these systems by two consecutive right-wing administrations in the head of the executive branch, one of them an ultra-right government.

From the point of view of the evolution of well-being in Brazil, what happened during this period? Was there a retrenchment of social policies? It is important to note that the well-being of the population was already declining in the face of the economic crisis, which can be seen by the increase in poverty, as we will see in Chapter 6. After a period of continuous decline in poverty and extreme poverty rates, they grew again in 2014 (Chapter 6), a year in which the economy was already showing clear signs of the severity of the crisis that effectively exploded in 2015. A reversal of the previous trajectory of decrease in poverty rates took place. There was a recrudescence of the social situation and a very quick return to the situation of 10 years prior (Vinhaes et al., 2022; Jannuzzi and Sátyro, 2023). With the covid-19 pandemic, which devastated the planet, there was a break in this negative evolution due to the Emergency Aid payments – a cash

transfer program (Chapter 10) that, being temporary, also had temporary effects. Despite the well-being of the population being only a proxy for what interests us, it allows us to have an idea of the dimension of what had been happening.

In the face of a more critical crisis between 2014 and 2015, there was a cost for the poorer population. In 2020, due to the federal response to the covid-19 pandemic with the Emergency Aid payments, there was an increase in well-being with a decrease in poverty. However, such investment only took place in the most critical period of the pandemic, and in a scenario of deregulation, financial withdrawal, and other extremely restrictive institutional changes to the protection system, as it will be shown in this book; there is the return of economic growth, but Brazil is back in the map of hunger. To make it worse, inequalities of every kind remain, leaving us with a very heterogeneous country in term of well-being (Sátyro and Cunha, 2018b).

In case the reader does not already know (it will be described in detail on Chapter 4), Brazil had already been coming from a scenario of fiscal austerity and entered a severe economic crisis (2014–2015) that claimed its costs. What followed was the end of a 13-year long period of left-wing governments based on a broad coalition of support, an impeachment process, two years of a government that we can describe as mainstream right-wing, followed by the election of a president from a populist radical right party (PRRP) who was not re-elected in 2022 but who received 58 million votes against the winner's 60 million. Half of Brazilian society actually did support his re-election, a fact that needs to be taken seriously when analyzing the country`s current political life. From a social point of view, in this same period, an accentuated worsening of conditions can be observed and, for the two right-wing governments, many reforms, re-regulations, and deregulations of social policies can be mentioned. Assuming that after CF88 there was a paradigm shift in Brazilian social protection and was the construction of a system in which the set of policies have a universal vocation and that the State assumed a leading role, being able to speak of a welfare state (Chapter 2). The basic questions are: Are we facing a dismantling of the Brazilian social welfare regime? Are we facing a dismantling of the Brazilian social welfare state? How has this regime changed? In which direction?

Ferragina (2022) proposed to analyze high-income countries using a double movement between compensatory policy spending and favor of employment-oriented policies. The central questions that guided him were: "To what degree are different welfare regimes and countries moving away from compensatory policy spending and in favor of employment-oriented measures? Is the reduction of compensatory policy spending prevailing over the expansion of employment-oriented policy spending, or are we facing an equilibrium?" A secondary question of this book is that, faced with the ultra-right in the presidency, which drinks both from the waters of neoconservatism and neoliberalism at once (Brown, 2006; 2015; Cooper, 2017), are these questions the best ones?

The ultra-right does not fit into a taxonomy that only considers mainstream parties; they have created a different *modus operandi*. Nunes and Traumann (2023) show that, in Brazil, people's perception of proposals from the political left and right were very similar in terms of social and economic policies. After the electoral success of Bolsa Família, even the right-wing parties understood the importance of serving the most vulnerable part of the population and the left needs to convince them of fiscal responsibility. Santos and Traumann show that the extreme right understood this and differentiated itself from conservative agendas.

And this ultra-right, in an era of fake news on large digital platforms, leads us to argue that it could even have a different way of dealing with the classic strategies of blame avoidance and credit claiming. Studies on the ultra-right already have a certain density, but for the most part, it had been present in the political scene as a supporting actor. Przeworski showed the strong presence of such parties in Austria, France, Switzerland, and Denmark (Przeworski, 2020: 118–119). If we think about the last few years on the global stage, we have had a spread of the radical ultra-right as a phenomenon that gains strength in countries of different expressions on the global stage, making it to presidency or representing the state as prime ministers, or simply with strength in parliament: Donald Trump in the USA (2017–2021); the permanence of Viktor Mihály Orbán in Poland in his fourth term; the victory of Giorgia Meloni's far-right party in Italy in 2022; Ulf Kristersson, Prime Minister of Sweden, in a coalition of three center-right parties that rely on the support of the ultra-right Sweden Democrats; the 42% votes that Marine Le Pen received in 2022; Bolsonaro in Brazil (2019–2022); the growth of the far-right in Spain; the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) in government with the Christian Democratic-Conservative Austrian People's Party (OVP) from 2000 to 2006 and from 2017 to 2019; to pinpoint a few.

Have these governments prioritized certain areas? Has there been stability in any social policy arenas? Has there been a greater retrenchment of compensatory policies, in favor of employment-oriented measures or universal policies? In the case of Brazil, was there a project for the dismantling or refocusing of social policies? According to Rathgeb and Busemeyer (2022), the literature on party politics and voting behavior as well as the literature on comparative political economy and welfare state research are neglecting the role of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in terms of their association with the welfare state itself and, as it is known, missing variables create biases. This is certainly due to the fact that only very recently the PRRPs have grown electorally to the point of being specifically researched. The contribution of this book takes place in this particular point for this field of research. A basic question that the book addresses is whether, in Brazil, PRRPs are really different from the mainstream right, and, if so, in what ways?

In order to shed light on this phenomenon, a collective effort was carried out that resulted in a large multifaceted case study. A collective project with researchers from different institutions and academic backgrounds made it possible to deeply analyze what happened within nine different sectorial arenas. Among the *classic compensatory policies*, the project analyzed **social security**, **social assistance**, **conditional cash transfer**, as well as policies for **healthcare**, which in Brazil is a universal right. As for policies considered as *social investment*, such as those for the **labor market** and **family policies**, the latter shows a movement that is completely opposite to what had been seen in the literature by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for there was explicit reinforcement of gender roles due to the neoconservative stance of the ultra-right, with a return to the idea that care should be provided within the family unit, the "traditional" one. As for **education policies**, the basis for social investment in human capital as well as a constitutional right in Brazil, access is paradoxically so unequal that the educational heterogeneity directly impacts citizens' insertion in the labor market and income, which makes it the bedrock for the high levels of inequality in the country. The reader will also find *two other policies* that are not usually part of the analyzed set within social welfare regimes, such as **environmental policies** and **public safety** and **gun control policies**. The authors were urged to consider in their analyses, as far as possible, four moments in time: first, the effects of the 2015 economic crisis, still under Rousseff's government; second, Temer's actions, especially Constitutional Amendment N 95 of 2016 considered a New Fiscal Regime (see Chapter 2); third, Bolsonaro's agenda and actions; and, finally, the pandemic. The way in which the Brazilian ultra-right dealt with these agendas will give us clues to better understand their preferences and strategies, but we need to compare them with the mainstream right to understand their peculiarities. The breadth of policies will allow for looking beyond the impact of the pandemic specifically.

Before reading about each of the policies, the reader will be given a contextualization within five dimensions: The structure of the welfare regime from the Federal Constitution and the Temer and Bolsonaro`changes with a break in the trajectory from 2016. The *political arena*, with the growth of a populist ultra-right, and the *economic situation* unfolding since the 2000s. Added to this, an analysis of the trajectory of *poverty and inequality* in the country since the 1990s. The book also makes a contribution to the debate with an analysis of the *disinformation ecosystem* and why it represents a threat to democracy, in an attempt to begin to understand how the spreading of fake news works as a kind of macro-strategy for obfuscation (in Piersean terms), as well as the concept of blurring (Rovny, 2013; Rovny and Polk, 2020), in a fixture that mixes credit claiming with blame avoidance.

We will bring a conceptual discussion of what this dismantling means, its strategies, as well as some general hypotheses of what led to such process. At this point, the authoritarian and neoliberal values of the PRRPs will be discussed, as well as their adaptation to countries outside Europe. After that, the plan of the book is presented with the organization of the chapters and their contents. This will allow the reader to be prepared to understand the analysis of each of the arenas and their idiosyncrasies within a complex federative system.

1.2 Defining dismantling as a multi-dimensional concept

Institutional changes are always in the agenda for the research field of public policies, even if the debate on institutional changes is much wider (North, 1993; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Tang, 2017). Specifically within changes in public policies or the systems of social protection, there is a more restricted debate on expansion, adaptation, retraction, or dismantling of social policies. Ferragina (2022) suggests the existence of a continuum between retrenchment and expansion and organizes the literature on "retrenchment" and "dismantling" into three main interpretations on the changes in welfare state (2022:706). According to the author, the first one considers welfare state change as retrenchment. This approach focuses on the political battle against protection from old risks, basically the reduction of transfers for poor individuals and families. From that perspective, there are several solutions to deal with new risks, from neoliberal strategies to social investment policies. The second group focuses mostly on continuity over change insofar as welfare states are rooted in old historical and political legacies. The strength of path dependency and of organized groups for the protection of rights halts major structural changes. The third one focuses on the ability/capacity of the welfare state to adapt to times of "permanent austerity," that is, to the new political economy context (2022:706). In this last interpretation, the retrenchment concept and the cost-containment idea are joined. In some way, this variation connects to the same line of thought of Green-Pedersen (2004) when he affirms that "much of the disagreement about the dependent variable actually originates from scholars having different theoretical perspectives and not always being fully aware of the implications of their theoretical approaches to welfare state retrenchment" (2004:4). This literature holds many approaches and interpretations of what retrenchment is or what dismantling actually means.

By taking stock of existing research on the retrenchment/dismantling of welfare regimes, this book aims to be a case study, a collective work drawn from the mixed approaches related to the concepts as well as the methodologies. Here, the debate brought up by Green-Pedersen on the dependent variable within the study of welfare state retrenchment is key. According to Green-Pedersen (2004), the "dependent variable problem" is about defining the object of the entire

retrenchment debate. This involves such questions as which changes to welfare states should be classified as retrenchment; how one can separate retrenchment from reform and reconstruction; and which data are most appropriate for empirical investigations of retrenchment outcomes. (2004:3–4). That is, when we deal with the idea of dismantling, we may be dealing with an array of phenomena and strategies which can encompass "policy termination, welfare state retrenchment, deregulation, etc." and these strategies, according to Jordan et al. (2013), are instruments which will be strongly determined by each specific arena of social policy being analyzed (Jordan et al., 2013:796).

In fact, although it is known that concepts usually change the focus of the analysis, we will be working complementarily with the concepts instead of being exclusionary when we analyze the Brazilian social protection system. According to Bauer and Knill (2014), policy dismantling is "a change of a direct, indirect, hidden or symbolic nature that either diminishes the number of policies in a particular area or reduces the number of policy instruments used, and/or lowers their intensity. It can involve changes to these core elements of policy and/or it can be achieved by manipulating the capacities to implement and supervise them" (2014:35). This is our point of departure. When analyzing high-income countries, there is resistance to use the term "retrenchment" (Jordan et al., 2012). Jordan, Green-Pedersen, and Turnpenny (2012) are questioning whether governments terminate, deregulate, or retrench policies, because those are different strategies for policy dismantling. The Brazilian case encompasses reforms, cutbacks, (de)regulation, and efforts to contain and reduce social expenditures, and when they are observed all together, there is no doubt we are dealing with welfare retrenchment and policy dismantling, as noted by Pierson (1994) and Bauer and Knill (2014).

To this end, there are analyses presented in ten different arenas. Some of them are not in the usual scope of social well-being analyses, as is the case for environmental policies or public safety policies. However, they will help build an argument regarding a broader process of dismantling. Looking at the whole system, we are not dealing with a simultaneous expansion and reduction policy. The findings show dismantling/retrenchment because we are demonstrating a set of arenas and the use of most of the strategies together. The book's proposal is to give the whole picture, or at least a broad set of social arenas and their "reforms," to allow us to deeply observe the extension of the changes implemented in Brazil, as a country case study. This does not mean a change in the focus, as pointed out by Green-Pedersen, by comparing different studies with different set of policies, but, on the contrary, it guarantees the affirmation that distinct strategies occurred and that we can sustain that in fact there was systemic retrenchment as well as programmatic retrenchment in the terms of Pierson (1994). Moreover, the ways of implementing such changes to policy are diverse, and take the form of reforms, regulations, de-regulation, termination, among others.

The need for a broader framework is present when we consider the distinction of the rules in the different policy sectors analyzed in this book, as well as that each of them has a different legacy. That is, their institutionality is distinct, and even within each arena there will be differences. For example, within the conditional cash transfers (assistance/non contributive), the Continuous Cash Benefit is a benefit that has a constitutional guarantee, while the Bolsa Família Program, not being constitutionalized, does not have the same guarantee and becomes more vulnerable to reforms (Chapter 10). In terms of different legacies: Social Security, a system that is 90 years old, should be more resistant than Social Assistance, a teenage policy. That is why this book proposes to analyze different policies and will work with different concepts of welfare state changes as well as distinct dismantling strategies. The work in its entirety will assess the *commitment to equality*, as the utlimate measure of social justice commitment sought by the welfare state, a conceptual concern brought by Green-Pedersen (2004), with which this book is aligned.

The entire work will allow us to use analytical categories developed by Bauer and Knill (2014) when they propose the dimensions of policy density and policy intensity in the conceptualization of policy dismantling. It will also be possible to observe the use of *retrenchment as cutbacks* which, according to Green-Pedersen, "is a question of cuts in people's welfare entitlements. (…) [and that] such changes are cuts in benefit levels, stricter eligibility criteria or shorter duration of benefits." (2004:7) as seen in the Social Security Reform of 2019 (Chapter 7). However, as noted by the author, the concept is too restricted to handle changes that go beyond budgeting. Thus, even though in times of fiscal austerity, budgeting is a central axis and mandatory in the analysis, there will also be areas in which the concept of *retrenchment as institutional changes* will be more appropriate, as it is understood as "qualitative changes, that is, a break with basic institutional principles" (2004:9). Yet, the author's own conclusion is that the cuts are actually a type of institutional change (Green-Pedersen, 2004).

In theoretical terms, each analytical category among all those can have different weights in the different worlds of welfare capitalism we are focusing on. This perspective is even more compelling given our concern with analyzing the commitment to equality and the fact that, according to Sátyro and Cunha (2018b), there are different regimes of well-being co-existing in the Brazilian territory, which is another way to demonstrate the institutionalized inequality that is characteristic of Brazil.

1.3 Under what conditions do politicians engage in policy dismantling?

A question the book tries to answer is: Are we facing a retrenchment or dismantling or just a moment of fiscal and economic crisis? Considering that,

in fact, we are facing a case of dismantling, the unfolding questions are: Under what conditions do politicians engage in policy dismantling? Why do politicians dismantle?

First, it is necessary to understand the coalition presidentialism in Brazil and how the political arena is organized. Currently, Brazil has 31 political parties registered at the Superior Electoral Court and 23 with representatives at the House of Representatives, elected in 2022. In 2018, the House was formed with representatives from 30 different parties, but Bolsonaro ruled with about 15 effective parties at the Chamber, which means a very fragmented Legislature. And to govern in Brazil there is the need to dialogue with the Legislature, which means presidents need to build cross-party coalitions because their parties always control a minority of seats. Added to that is the fact that Dilma Rousseff's impeachment rearranged the playing board. Power and Rodrigues-Silveira (2019) showed at least three things: That the Legislature was always more to the right than the Executive, that there was an equilibrium between a left-wing Executive and a more right-wing Legislature throughout all of the PT administration, and that the impeachment did change the composition of the Chamber to an extremely conservative one, worse than the time before the PT administration. Adding two other facts to that, one cyclical, as with Bolsonaro's election, a more right-wing House composition in Brazilian history was also elected, and another structural, that the Federal Constitution of 1988 gave presidents strong proactive and reactive powers, meaning that they have sweeping constitutional powers. However, with a highly fragmented party system, it will always be necessary to build coalitions in order to form governments, even informal ones. Despite the executive presidential power, they need to be closely related with the Legislature (Mainwaring, 1997). According to Guimarães and Braga (2019), before Rousseff's impeachment, there was a deterioration of the way the coalition occurred within the "coalition presidentialism" which culminated with the removal of President Rousseff. Since then, more changes have been reported regarding the way decisions are made within the parliament, with a centralization of power, changes in the budgetary process, in the distribution of positions, and in the President's power to dictate the agenda, which changed the rules of the game.

Secondly, the ideology of governments is a central analytical factor explaining the phenomenon, what Bauer et al. (2012) call *political preferences*. After years of expansion of the welfare state, this was proven to be one of the main factors (Hibbs, 1977; Korpi, 1983; Schmidt, 1996), and time brought about the questioning of its strength; going through the conceptually and methodologically dense literature, it becomes clear that the loss of the ideological element could be an explanatory factor. The presence of institutional constraints, and more specifically the times of austerity induced both the right and the left to adjust to the center. This occurs even within a single country, as is the case with Brazil (Sátyro, 2013). It is possible to think that, to some extent, parties tend to the

center when facing institutional constraints and austerity. However, this is all part of a dynamic debate. In a recent study on social policies in Latin America, Niedzwiecki and Pribble (2022) suggest that the right-wing parties are more engaged in retrenchment, and partisanship is an analytical factor that needs to be considered to explain variation, even though it is not a sufficient category in itself. That is, the debate goes on, and when it concerns far-right parties, Chueri affirms that "recent studies suggest that PRRPs' distributive preferences go beyond the clash between simply expanding or retrenching welfare" (2022:383).

There is no doubt that the analytical lens suggested by Kitschelt and McGann (1997) coming from the *winning formula* they attributed to right-wing populist parties, which is cultural authoritarianism along with an economic neoliberalism as the space for action and definition of preferences, is still in the agenda. This positioning of the PRRPs served to attract an electorate previously mobilized by the left in permanent austerity times. Since then, from Mudde (2007) to more recent authors, many assume that there is an ideological core of the PRRPs, which is constituted by the categories of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, which guide their preferences and actions with respect to social and economic policies. Coming from these three analytical categories, Rathgeb (2020) developed his argument that they guide the PRRPs to choose which electorate/citizen groups are considered as "deserving or undeserving of welfare support" (2020:640). According to Rathgeb (2020), each of these three analytical categories brings a dimension to the analyses of deserving vs. undeserving groups. Thus, for him the "nativism leads PRRPs to exclude non-citizens from welfare support." The authoritarianism allows for the classification between the "hard-working" vs. the "lazy free-riders" in such a way that the informal and unemployed are associated with a lack of deservingness. And the populism is based on the rhetoric of the "corrupt elite" from whom we have to withdraw privileges (2020:640).

However, recent studies argue that the analytical categories in the *winning formula* became insufficient for understanding the strategies and preferences regarding the view of the PRRPs on the welfare state. The focus of the analysis should also be on what they classify as "deserving" and "undeserving" (Röth, Afonso and Spies, 2018; Lefkofridi and Michel, 2014; Rathgeb and Busemeyer, 2022; Abou-Chadi and Immergut, 2019; Enggist and Pinggera, 2022; Bergmann et al., 2021; Busemeyer et al., 2022; Chueri, 2022; Rathgeb, 2020). Rathgeb (2020) develops the "distributive deservingness" line brought by Hausermann and Kriese (2015:206) and the "deserving benefit recipients" that can be found in Busemeyer et al. (2022).

According to Chueri (2022), this refers to the promotion of a "dualistic" welfare state: On one side, protectionism for the "deserving" and, on the other side, a neoliberal focus for those classified as "undeserving." Chueri (2021; 2022), Ennser-Jedenastik (2020), Abts et al. (2021), Otjes et al. (2018), and Rathgeb (2020) suggest that the confluence between the narratives of nativism,

authoritarianism, and populism are fertile soil to develop the rhetorical classification of the "groups deemed 'benefit deserving'." In fact, Chueri (2021; 2022), Enggist and Pinggera (2022), Otjes et al. (2018), and Rathgeb (2020) suggest a dual situation in which, on the one hand, there is a "selective universal" provision of benefits for the "deserving," and, on the other hand, a neoliberal welfare logic is applied to the "undeserving" groups. It is clear that this classification is subjective and, according to Otjes (2019), there is a feeling and a perception that these groups are untrustworthy and parasitic, and any support given to them has to be in very similar terms to those of the liberal/residuals regimes, even if this is not a characteristic of the welfare regime of the country being analyzed (Otjes, 2019).[3]

In the same way, Enggist and Pinggera (2022) suggest that the PRRPs mobilize more socio-cultural agendas, to which we would add the adjective "moral," that are not related to class perspective or economic questions. The authors counterpoint the mainstream literature (which does not refer directly to the PRPPs), developing the point of view that says the imbroglio is not over the size of the welfare state and its objectives, principles, or what needs should be addressed (investment in human capital or basic protection, for example). According to the authors, the PRRPs have preferences and "priorities" that go beyond the debate between investment vs. consumption or recalibration, as far as they introduce as priority a moral agenda with cultural issues from a neoconservative perspective. For Enggist and Pinggera, the PRRPs differentiate themselves from the center and the left by making very clear what type of welfare regime they prefer for each populational group.

We must now add other dimensions to this discussion, such as the fact that different governments had different risks of being punished electorally, while we also assume that they want to remain in power. Right-wing administrations can benefit electorally from retrenchment of the welfare state (Persson and Svensson, 1989; Klitgaard et al., 2014; Bonoli, 2012; Giger and Nelson, 2011; Schumacher et al., 2013; Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2015). This means that the idea of systemic and, mainly, programmatic retrenchment can be attractive to right-wing governments. In contrast, one would expect that left-wing governments would be punished for it (Giger and Nelson, 2011; Schumacher et al., 2013; Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2015; Wenzelburger, 2014). Based on this, it is necessary to also think about strategies to implement distributive preferences and about who would be affected by the interventions; after all, regardless of the party, politicians want to preserve their chances of re-election, even when they want to implement policy-dismantling agendas. So there is a need to focus on which strategies are chosen by politicians and what segments of the population are chosen to lose something (Bauer and Knill, 2014:30–31). What strategies were used, who was affected by the reform, the extent "to which the costs and benefits of dismantling are distributed across the affected actors; and the

extent to which these actors were able to organize and mobilize for or against it" (Bauer et al., 2012:41). Thus, it is key to answer the question of who will be affected. In this case, we consider Jordan et al. (2013), questioning "who gets less, when and how" (2013:4), paraphrasing Laswell (1936 – apud Jordan et al., 2013), revising his political concept of "who gets what, when and how" and suggesting a version for policy dismantling. This takes us directly to the rhetoric between deserving and undeserving groups. According to Otjes (2019), there is a skepticism regarding the so-called undeserving groups and a perception that they should not be treated equally. Moreover, the fact that the "undeserving" groups, in general, are groups of people who are less likely to have veto power, they are less politically organized, with less capacity to mobilize support in Parliament, such as immigrants, informal workers, and people who are poor or extremely poor (Bonolli, 2012:107; Palier, 2001:103). Therefore, it is easier to place the weight of retrenchment on them. This, in turn, goes with the strategy of the "path of least resistance" (Bonolli, 2012).

As for the strategies themselves, policy dismantling needs to be a combination of blame avoidance and politically feasible options (Wenzelburger 2014), even when the politician wants to credit claim. And, in times of fake news at systemic levels, this has become a strong strategy (Chapter 5). Especially because, for PRRP governments, the idea of systemic retrenchment is perfectly consistent with their general preference of less taxing and government spending. Therefore, even when they have the option to claim the credit, they will pursue strategies.

Over the last few decades, three analytic proposals stood out regarding the understanding of the strategies used by politicians interested in dismantling social policies. In a seminal study, Pierson (1994) shed light on this debate by emphasizing three strategies for dealing with retrenchment: obfuscation strategies, which consist on the conscious manipulation of information related to the retrenchment. In this case, politicians give less emphasis to the negative effects, be it because of the spreading of the consequences over time or because of their diffuse distribution, *decrementalism*. It is also possible to create difficulties for the average reader in being able to connect the negative effects to the policies or for them to even be capable of tracking the consequences of such changes. Another strategy would be the division of the benefit recipients, of the constituencies, which means implementing reforms and changes that are perceived differently by different communities, making it difficult to collectively act against such reforms. Lastly, the technique of offering compensation to the groups with more organizational capacities, leaving the greater costs to those who have less ability to organize and pressure.

This is rational action, we could say, abstract strategies, that can take place in different ways of instituting change. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) developed a typology for institutional change that helps put the Piersonean abstraction into more concrete terms. For them, there are basically four ways

of instituting change: displacement, layering, drifting, and conversion. That is, a policy or program that is completely replaced by another in a radical change that presents in a moment of punctual balance, *displacement*; or there is a series of new layers instituted within a policy through new rules, amendments, additions, or subtractions done to a policy in such a way that it changes its initial characteristics to another proposal, *layering*; another possibility is when, coming from externalities and external shocks a given policy has its capacity altered, so even when its instruments remain the same it starts fulfilling other purpose, *drifting*; finally, the authors highlight that it is possible to change and not change at the same time. Through new formal interpretations, the instruments and procedures can remain unaltered, but the implementation starts happening in a different way, *conversion* (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

After that, Bauer and Knill (2014) proposed a new concept of dismantling based on the number of objectives and instruments in the policy, what they call density, as well as one based on the type, quality, and configuration of the instruments used, what they call intensity, as we have seen. They propose ideal types constructed based on two dimensions: if the decision to dismantle is a decision taken actively or by inaction, and if the politician intends to give visibility or to hide the negative consequences of the reforms undertaken. Based on these two dimensions they propose the following types: 1) *dismantling by default* when there is no active decision for dismantling (No Dismantling Decision) and when there is the intention to minimize the visibility of the effects (Low Visibility); 2) *dismantling by arena-shifting* when there is an active decision to dismantle (Active Dismantling Decision), but there is no intention to make neither its authorship nor its effects visible (Low Visibility); 3) *dismantling by symbolic action* for the cases in which there no concrete action for dismantling (No Dismantling Decision), while using the strategy of giving visibility to the intention even if it does not follow an action (High Visibility); and, lastly 4) the *active dismantling* type, in which there is the intention of and concrete actions for dismantling (Active Dismantling Decision) and they want credit for it, therefore openly sharing it (High Visibility) (Bauer et al, 2012; Bauer and Knill, 2014). That is, these authors somehow incorporated the concern brought by Pierson, which led to the debate on blame avoidance and credit claiming and to the development of obfuscation, division, and compensation strategies. However, the concern with commitment to equality, brought by Green-Pedersen, which for us is central to the debate, was still secondary.

On March 17, 2019, in a meeting with eight businesspeople from the United States, Bolsonaro made the following statement: "Brazil is not an open terrain where we intend to build things for our people. We actually have much to unbuild, much to undo. So that we can then do things. If I serve at least as an inflection point, I'll be happy."[4] This statement holds symbolic content that

brings us back to the concepts and strategies of symbolic dismantling from Bauer and Knill (2014), but mostly a discursive construction typical of what Lynch and Cassimiro (2022) call reactionary populism, with a messianic tone of salvation that appears in many of his statements. Also, it shows more than the credit claiming strategy, in a clear intention of being "the" great leader in this endeavor.

1.4 Structure and contents of book

The book is divided into two parts. In the first, the objective is to offer the reader information that contextualizes and helps us find part of the explanatory factors for the phenomenon analyzed, that is, the changes that were imposed on the Brazilian social protection system between 2015 and 2022. In Chapter 2, "Social policies in Brazil: an introduction," Natália Sátyro shows the basis of social protection in Brazil ever since the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF88), which enshrines the return of democracy in 1985. The author brings forth the constitutional principles that enable the understanding of the paradigmatic change that the Letter meant, and added to this there are notions of how intergovernmental relations are articulated in the Brazilian Federation. Next, the author presents the main change undertaken by Temer's administration and analyzes Bolsonaro's Government Plan, presented for the 2018 elections. In Chapter 3, "Political Parties, Ideological Preferences and Social Policy: Accounting for right-wing strategies in Brazil after the left turn," André Borges carries out an analytical mapping of the political scenario, including relations between the Executive and the Legislative in recent years, with a focus on the advance of the right. Following that, in Chapter 4, "The political economy of the Brazilian economic crisis (2014–2022) – economic policy, ideas and the limits of neoliberal austerity measures," Alexandre Q. Guimarães and Marco Flávio da C. Resende offer a longitudinal analysis of the economic and fiscal choices from Rousseff's administration to Bolsonaro's, showing the immediate consequences of the policies undertaken. In a scenario where fake news became a (mis)governance strategy, this subject is mandatory. Eliara Santana and Isabele B. Mitozo, in Chapter 5, "Disinformation and democracy," discuss the use of disinformation as a political strategy of obfuscation and how much of a threat this is to democracy and, more specifically, to social policies. Currently, in PRRP analysis, no assessment can do without understanding fake news as intentional actions, with means to ends. Finally, in Chapter 6, "Poverty and inequality over the last 30 years," Pedro H. F. Souza presents a longitudinal analysis of poverty and income inequality rates, focusing on how the reversal of the trajectory that prevailed until the mid-2010s had negative consequences for the population.

This informs the reader in advance of what is to come and enables the authors of the second part to focus on the analyses of social policies without having to

explain the political and economic processes that influenced each of them in every chapter. Given the complexity of such phenomena, there was a need for further investigation. In other words, it is from this panorama that the reader reaches the second part of the book, prepared to better understand what happened between 2015 and 2022. And, as stated throughout this introduction, the authors were urged to consider four events in their analysis: the economic crisis (2014–2015), the entry of Temer and the New Fiscal Regime approved, the arrival of Bolsonaro, and then, the covid-19 pandemic.

In the second part, this book presents a set of nine policy analyses of different natures. Initially, the reader will find four chapters that analyze compensatory policies, called Social Welfare (*Seguridade Social*) in the CF88. In Chapter 7, "Authoritarian populism and fiscal austerity: the dismantling of social security in Bolsonaro's government," Arnaldo P. Lanzara and Fernanda Pernasetti analyze the pension reform debated during Temer's administration and approved in November of 2019, the first year of Bolsonaro's government. The authors show that despite having failed to capitalize on the system, the new regulation induced a migration to the private sector. In Chapter 8, "The Unified Health System in danger and the sequelae of the Bolsonaro era," Jose Angelo Machado and Mauro Lúcio Jerônymo analyze the Unified Health System. In this chapter we also recognize health policies as the great locus for science denialism. Finally, social assistance policies are divided into two chapters. In Chapter 9, called "Socio-assistance services: One dies of starvation and no one sees," Natália Sátyro, Eleonora S. M. Cunha, Bruno R. Pinheiro, and Fernanda C. da Silva specifically analyze the provision of social assistance services, demonstrating that there was an inflection that began in 2015, for budgetary reasons, but which was later reinforced through regulation, resulting in a reduction in the provision of basic services. The Bolsa Família Program and the Continuous Cash Benefits are analyzed by Joana Mostafa in Chapter 10, "Non-contributive cash transfers: borderline social protection," which shows the different patterns of dismantling of the two main programs, but the greater fragility of the PBF and its massive instability during this period.

Moving on, the reader will find an analysis of three policy sectors that are considered classics for social investment: education, family policies, and the labor market. In Chapter 11, "Credit-claiming and nondecision-making as an ideological agenda: did Bolsonaro succeed in changing education policies in Brazil?," Sandra Gomes and Catarina Segatto show the strength of the symbolic strategy. Then, in "Brazilian family policies under the neo-conservatism rhetoric of Bolsonaro," Gabriel P. P. Andrade and Natália Sátyro demonstrate how family policies constituted a symbolic locus for Bolsonaro, becoming one of the major pieces of evidence of the former president's conservative bias. In Chapter 13, "Labor market from 2015 to 2022: heightened risks and dismantling policies,"

Regina C. Camargo and Pedro R. M. Barbosa, regarding labor market policies, demonstrate the neoliberal tone of the reforms undertaken.

Finally, in a last moment, two policies outside the traditional scope of welfare regimes are brought to the reader. In Chapter 14, "Opportunities and strategies of the process of dismantling of Brazilian environmental policy," Maria Dolores Silva and Ana Luiza M. de Medeiros analyze environmental policies, showing the liberal desire through deregulation, but not only. The chapter written by Ludmila Ribeiro, Valéria C. Oliveira, and Alexandre M. A. Diniz, "Police violence in Brazil: how was Bolsonaro's government involved?," bring forth a debate that is one of Bolsonaro's central interests: public security, specifically gun control.

Finally, in the "Conclusion: policy dismantling and system retrenchment," I take stock of what was developed in the book in a comparative analysis, showing the social policy-dismantling processes and the similarities between the mainstream right and a PRRP.

Notes

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2 In 2017 PMDB changed its name and is now simply Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB).

3 In many moments in Bolsonaro's speeches such construction becomes clear, to the point of dehumanizing certain groups. In one of his weekly live streams in April, 2020, the president spoke of indigenous populations in a tone that may have been complimentary: "The Indigenous have changed, they are evolving… Ever more so each day, the Indigenous is a human being like us." www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX7Xrs2Y3QY

4 See on Twitter the video of Jair Bolsonaro's son, Eduardo Bolsonaro: https://twitter.com/BolsonaroSP/status/1107596301133406209

Or in the news article: https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/temos-de-desconstruir-muita-coisa-diz-bolsonaro-a-americanos-de-direita

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