Chapter 17

A “Pink Tide” Then a “Turn to the Right”: Populisms and Extremism in Latin America in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract This chapter gives a brief historical account of previous and current waves of populism in Latin America and their intermeshing with systemic factors, and discusses the historical relationship between populism, democracy and neoliberalism, giving particular focus to Bolivia, Chile and Brazil.

Introduction

A quick glance at Latin America’s current political landscape could give us the impression that the “pink tide” of left-wing governments of the early twenty-first century, which brought to power Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil, has reached its limits, and the region is now experiencing a “turn to the right” evidenced by the election of Chile’s Sebastián Piñera in 2017, Colombia’s Iván Duque in 2018 and, most infamously, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, also in 2018. The ousting of Bolivia’s Evo Morales could be read as the clearest signal of the pink tide’s evanescence. Similar to the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the growth of the right-wing populism in Europe, Latin America would be experiencing a surge in support for right-wing populist parties and movements.

Notwithstanding such picture of the last round of Presidential elections, in this chapter, we argue that one cannot homogenize the turn to the right in Latin America. In order to develop the argument, theoretically and empirically, the chapter is divided in two parts: in the first part, we give a brief historical account of previous and current waves of populism in the region and their intermeshing with systemic factors, and discuss the historical relationship between populism, democracy and neoliberalism in the region, giving particular focus to the current political landscapes of Bolivia and Chile. In the second part, we explore the conditions of possibility of the extreme right’s operationalization of political power in Latin America,

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drawing on Brazil as a case study. Through the distinction between access and exercise of power, we look at how the extreme right in Brazil managed to gather the necessary popular support to come to power, how it has been exercising power for the first year of Bolsonaro's term and outline why his government cannot be described as another version of right-wing populism.

Before we proceed, it is important to clarify the concept of populism we are using, since i. the term can acquire quite different meanings depending on context, political orientation and theoretical affiliation, and ii. a clarification is important for differentiating populism from extremism. For example, in Europe, the word populism seems to bring to mind nativism and xenophobia, whereas in Latin America, the word is more usually associated with clientelism and economic mismanagement (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017:2). Indeed, two key features of populist discourses, "regardless of [their] specific political orientation, [are] the central role of the reference to the signifier 'the people' and its opposition to the dominant ideology" (Stavrakakis 2014:505). The framing of the political debate is dichotomous. Thus, the two operational criteria or discursive conditions necessary to identify a party or a movement as populist are the prominence of (or the privileged position occupied by) the core signifier "the people", around which other signifiers are articulated; and the division of the socio-political field between two opposing groups: the people and the elite (Stavrakakis 2017:4).

Populism, Democracy and Neoliberalism in Latin America: A Brief History

When discussing Latin America's history of populism, it is common to discern three waves of the phenomenon (Kaltwasser 2014a; Kaltwasser 2014b; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). The first, between the 1940s and 1960s, saw populist leaders taking office in Argentina (Juan Domingo Perón), Brazil (Getúlio Vargas) and Ecuador (Jose María Velasco Ibarra). In an era marked by migration to urban areas and industrialization, these leaders implemented social programs and corporatist projects designed to incorporate previously marginalized segments of the population into the citizenry. During this first wave, the state was expanded, the economy was partially nationalized and protectionist trade policies were implemented. In this context, "the people" was often depicted as a "virtuous and mestizo community composed essentially of peasants and workers, but not of inhabitants of indigenous and African descent" and "the elite" as "an oligarchy which, due to its alliance with foreign imperialist forces, was not qualified for promoting national sovereignty" (Kaltwasser 2014a:5). This first wave came to a halt with the military regimes of the 1960s and 1970s.

The second wave of populism, characterized by the support for neoliberal ideology and policies, began in the early 1990s and had as figureheads Carlos Menem in Argentina (1989–1999), Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil (1990–1992) and

Alberto Fujimori in Peru (1990–2000). In a context marked by, on the one hand, Latin America’s 1980s’ debt crisis and hyperinflation, and, on the other hand, the end of the Cold War, transition to democracy and the Washington Consensus (on the merits of privatization, deregulation, liberalization and fiscal discipline), these leaders reproduced the consensual mantra of the time, that is, that liberal democracy and market economy were the only viable political and economic models. “The elite” was equated with defenders and supposed benefitters of state-led development, deemed responsible for catastrophic economic management, whereas “the people” were seen as “a passive mass of individuals whose ideas and interests could be inferred by employing opinion polls” (Kaltwasser 2014a:5).

These leaders presented themselves as political outsiders, forged alliances with business communities and had the support of foreign and domestic groups for the implementation of neoliberal reforms (Kaltwasser 2014b:159). At first, these leaders were able to garner popular support by solving problem of hyperinflation, restoring economic stability and effectively directing collective discontent with these countries’ dire economic situation against political and state actors seen as the “establishment” (Kaltwasser 2014b:148). In addition, these second-wave populist actors appealed to the poor in the informal sectors, by promising to incorporate them into the market economy and by employing targeted spending programs (Kaltwasser 2014a:5). These free market policies, however, led to unemployment and a growth in inequality, generating further discontent and paving the way for the third wave of populism in Latin America.

The pink-tide governments in Latin America in the early twenty-first century, particularly those of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, presented “the people” as “all those who are excluded and discriminated against (such as indigenous groups and impoverished sectors)” and “the elite” as “as the defenders of neoliberalism and the political actors who support a Western model of democracy that is not suitable for Latin America” (Kaltwasser 2014a:6). By “Western model of democracy”, these leaders meant deliberative and liberal conceptions of democracy, “in which citizens are treated as passive entities, mobilized periodically by elections, in which they do nothing more than select their representatives” (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017:17), while they favored majoritarian and participatory conceptions of democracy (Kaltwasser 2014a:7). In this sense, they presented their populist platforms as democratic forces which, by mobilizing, giving voice, representing, incorporating and integrating excluded sections of society, increased democratic accountability and contributed to a more inclusive political system (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017:83).

These left-of-center governments, as well as governments of other political orientations in Latin America during the first decade of this century, benefited greatly from the global natural resource boom caused by China’s economic growth. As global suppliers of agrarian and mineral commodities, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Mexico reaped material benefits from growing Chinese demand as oil exporters; Chile and Peru as copper exporters; and Brazil and Argentina as iron ore and soybeans exporters (Kaltwasser 2014b:160).

Although presenting themselves as critics of neoliberalism and imperialism, pink-tide leaders did not differ from their neoliberal counterparts in Peru and

Colombia when it came to mining, oil and industrial agriculture, a contradiction that led to former Ecuadorian Minister of Energy and Mines, Alberto Acosta, to claim that Correa's government had "replaced Uncle Sam with Uncle Chen", relying on China "to sustain social programs and political position at the expense of real development" (Zaitchik 2019). In fact, the exploitation of natural resources led to disputes between populist leaders and indigenous communities they claimed to represent and include, particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia.

In spite of the social and environmental effects of these development projects based on the export of raw materials and commodities, socio-economic indicators improved during the boom years as a result of redistribution policies: between 2002 and 2012, some 70 million people were lifted out of poverty, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Greater access to consumption and employment maintained support for these governments while the bonanza lasted. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 began to have impact on Latin America a few years later, through the collapse of natural resources' prices. Growth slowed and many of those who had been lifted out of poverty saw the erosion of their gains.

This frustration and discontent eroded the support for pink-tide governments and, from 2015 onward, conservative politicians espousing a neoliberal ideology acceded to power once again in many Latin America countries: Mauricio Macri in Argentina in 2015, Michel Temer in Brazil in 2016, Sebastián Piñera in Chile in 2017 and Ivan Duque in Colombia in 2018. The election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018 and the ousting of President Morales in Bolivia in 2019 would signal the move toward the far right of the political spectrum, bringing a combination of neoliberal economic policies and more authoritarian and repressive forms of political rule.

Our argument in this chapter is that, although we can discern a growing support for far-right, anti-democratic currents in Latin America, these currents seem stronger only in a handful of countries (Brazil and Bolivia, in particular). In other places, the picture is more mixed, as the victory of leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico's 2018 presidential elections, the electoral defeat of center-right Mauricio Macri in Argentina to Alberto Fernández, from the left-wing faction of the Justicialist Party in 2019, and protests against the center-right government of Sebastián Piñera in Chile in 2019 testify. In order to clarify this complex political landscape, we propose now to analyze, in the next section, the cases of Bolivia and Chile and, in the following one, the case of Brazil in more detail, for the latter seems to be the extremist outlier in the region.

The Contradictory Cases of Mass Protests in Bolivia and Chile

The 2019 mass protests in Bolivia and Chile appeared to signal opposing tendencies in the region. In Bolivia, mass protests led to the downfall of one of the most prominent opponents of neoliberalism in Latin America, whereas in Chile, the protests

indicated a general discontent with neoliberal policies implemented by center-rightist President Sebastián Piñera and some of his predecessors. Hence, governments from opposing ends of the political spectrum faced popular unrest.

Evo Morales’ 14-year presidency collapsed amid accusations of election fraud and the President’s disrespect for the 2016 constitutional referendum, in which the majority of the population voted for presidential term limits. Violent confrontations ensue between his supporters, who praised Morales for the reduction of poverty and inequality and the political and socio-economic inclusion of indigenous groups, and his opponents, who claim to be defending liberal democracy and fundamental freedoms. Hence, in the Bolivian case, different conceptions of democracy were at loggerheads.

It is important to note that those opposed to Morales included right-wing conservative politicians (such as interim President Jeanine Anez), part of the business community, urban unions, middle-class professional organizations, students and environmentalists (Iamamoto 2019). Therefore, even though his opposition indeed included right-wing groups, it also included sectors identified with the Left who distanced themselves from Morales due to his disrespect for the popular vote and his extractivist development model. In fact, some indigenous groups, whose socio-political marginalization and impoverishment were abated during Morales’s term, had been criticizing and opposing Morales’ extractivist policies and their socio-environmental impacts on their traditional modes of living since at least 2011. In that year, lowlands’ indigenous groups organized a series of demonstrations to oppose the construction of a highway passing through a national park and indigenous ancestral territory (Iamamoto 2019).

If Bolivia in the 2010s was a “poster child” of pink-tide opposition to neoliberalism, Chile has long been considered a model of political stability and pro-market policies in Latin America, being lauded by conservative politicians such as Argentina’s Mauricio Macri and Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro as an example to be followed. The country has been praised for its “responsible” monetary and fiscal policies, the strength of its financial and banking sectors, its economic growth and high-performing stock market, as well as for being one of the world’s most open economies (Kowalczyk 2019).

Even Concertación and Nueva Mayoría, the center-left coalition that governed Chile for most of the post-dictatorship period (1990–2009; 2014–17), followed the general guidelines of the free market economic model, in spite of the implementation of gradual reforms aimed at alleviating the consequences of the economic model inherited from the Pinochet dictatorship (Meléndez & Kaltwasser 2017:524–525). During the periods governed by the center-left coalition, households in extreme poverty declined from 10.6% to 3% and those in poverty from 22.7 to 6.2. In addition, the coalition managed to slightly reduce the country’s inequality, which had risen sharply during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1989) (Kowalczyk 2019).

Supporters of Chile’s neoliberal model often point out to the extraordinary period of economic growth experienced by the country—between 1990 and 2019, Chile suffered only 2 years of recession; the 21% growth in average real income between

2000 and 2018; and the “very respectable” 65% increase in the real minimum wage over the same period (Saldías 2019) as proof that neoliberal policies can also generate inclusiveness.

Although incomes have risen, one of the highest inequality coefficients in the world has made Chile one of the most expensive countries of Latin America. Higher costs of living coupled with low social spending and the privatization of water and social services (including education, health care, transportation and pensions) have led to long working hours, lack of affordable social services and security, low pensions and growing household debts (Kowalczyk 2019). The downside of free-market policies has meant stress and desperation for most Chileans. While Chile’s protests erupted as an immediate response to a raise in the Santiago Metro’s subway fare and increased due to the government’s use of disproportional police violence, they also signaled widespread dissatisfaction with the high cost of living, growing indebtedness, privatization and inequality brought about the neoliberal economic model.

With these two contradictory cases of mass protests as reactions to neoliberal policies enforced by populist governments in mind, the next section analyzes the case that can be considered the region’s outlier. Because of its distance from the concept of populism we are employing in this chapter, and its subsequent closeness to right-wing extremism, we address the current political scenario of Brazil through a theoretical framework that distinguishes the access to from the exercise of political power.

Understanding Right-Wing Extremism Through the Access and Exercise of Political Power

This section brings about a twofold argument: Bolsonaro’s government constitutes a right-wing or conservative strand of extremism, produced by an alliance between upper classes’ neoliberal leanings, evangelical social conservatism and military authoritarianism (Goldstein 2019:258), which has an anti-democratic character, being more a child of right-wing dictatorships of the 1960–1980s than previous waves of populism in the region surveyed in the previous section. In this sense, we argue that Bolsonaro’s far-right government is an outlier in the region and is not representative of a broader right-wing populist current in Latin America. In this section, we outline why this is so, exploring how the extreme right in Brazil operationalized such alliance in order to gather the necessary popular support to come to power and how it has been exercising power for the first year of term.

In Latin America, we have a shortage of studies within social and political sciences about the strategies and mechanisms of the extreme right. According to several analyses mainly concerning phenomena from the twentieth-century Europe like Fascism, Nazism, extremism, radicalism, totalitarianism and authoritarianism (Adorno 1951; Arendt 1951; Lipset & Raab 1978; Chomsky & Herman 1979; Bobbio 1996; Paxton 2004), the extreme right differs from the right-wing populism

in at least one crucial, structural dimension: the ultimate refusal of democracy. In his chapter about the distinction between extremists and moderates, Bobbio says that:

“it is hardly surprising that extremists of both the left and the right despise democracy for the virtues it fosters and requires for its survival. Their terminology agrees in defining ‘mediocracy’, meaning government both by the middle classes and by mediocrities. Democratic mediocrity was a typically Fascist theme, but it can be found in revolutionary radicalism of any form” (1996:25).

In line with such reasoning, the German political scientist Uwe Backes affirms that:

“extremism thus aims at “*monism*” and “*monocracy*” in the sense of the enforcement of a bundled claim to power which – if at all possible – eliminates any competition, does not tolerate variety and opposition, seeks to render it harmless at the very least, stops political change, obstructs and suppresses the autonomous commitment of groups and individuals at least when this stands in the way of the ambitions of the rulers” (2004:249).

Significantly, these analyses present reasoning that account for the wave of right-wing dictatorships in Latin America between the 1960s and 1980s, and it is beyond the present scope to deepen the discussion of the left/right variants of extremism, conceived by Bobbio as antithetical terms. However, it seems useful for the present argument to inquire, at first: looking at the Brazilian 2018 presidential election, can we place Jair Bolsonaro at the extreme right of the political spectrum, and if so, on which bases? Secondly, looking at the first year of his mandate, can we say that Bolsonaro’s government is extremist, and if so, what does it imply?

These questions shed light on an important aspect already identified as such in recent literature on the impact of the right on Latin American democracy: “on the one hand, the stabilization of democratic *access* to political power, and on the other hand, the development of institutions that seek to democratize the *exercise* of political power” (Luna & Kaltwasser 2014:16; Mazzuca 2010). The research agenda on the exercise of political power originates from the theoretical framework of Guillermo O’Donnell et al. (2004) entitled the quality of democracy, which expands Robert Dahl’s definition of polyarchy (1971) toward a distinction between democratic *regime* and democratic *state*, and has been proved useful to better access the democratization processes in Latin America from the 1980s.

Whereas the Brazilian 2018 presidential election has developed within democratic rules, it seems that current interpretations about the first year of Bolsonaro’s mandate that emphasize its anti-democratic character (Ballestrin 2019; Brum 2019; Chauf 2019; Goldstein 2019) are looking at the means to exercise political power. Then, to assume Brazil as an anti-democratic state is a natural development of a patrimonialist status of the current administration, embracing Mazzuca framework about the exercise of political power that says:

“The qualitative component of the administration is the specific mechanism or set of mechanisms by which state resources are transformed into goods and distributed. Within a given state, these mechanisms may vary across sections of the territory, social groups, and policy realms, but a key distinction is whether goods and services are provided according to universal/general standards, like merit and need, or particularistic decisions based on personal connections and the ruler’s discretion. Particularistic criteria are naturally associated with

the portion of state resources that is appropriated by the rulers. (...) Following Weber again, extreme forms of appropriation and particularism in the exercise of state power define the patrimonial type of administration, or patrimonialism” (2010:343).

In those interpretations, we find terms such as post-democracy (Crouch 2004), de-democratization and democracy without demos (Rancière 2010) to set some sort of connections between the global phenomena of the far-right’s rise in an attempt to derive a spatio-temporal understanding for the current political scenario of Brazil. They advance relevant features of the present generation of right-wing extremists, such as: to play on popular fear and ethnic tensions (Barber 2019); ideological polarization on topics like abortion, gender or immigration; cultural and artistic censorship; rejection to secular humanism or anti-intellectualism (Bobbio 1996:23); “monitory democracy” (Keane 2009; Stavrakakis 2016); “moralization of politics” (Rubim 2009); and anti-pluralism and tribalism (Galston 2018:106).

By contrast, we propose a reflection alternative to the debate around democracy and (anti)democratic means. Certainly, Brazilians have been experiencing a harsh cutback in the quality of democracy since January 2019 but, at the same time, we argue that so far it is not in the interest of upper economic classes to undertake regime change. Therefore, the proposal consists in switching the focus from political to psychological conditions of access and exercise of power resorted by Bolsonaro and his class coalition. The essence of their acts and discourses mainly propagated through social media consists in manipulating fearfulness, risk and threats in a way that directly hits the psychological structure precisely of the poor people. We call *the politics of social antagonism* (Nunes 2019) the whole project that has been undertaken in Brazil at least since September 2018, which will be further explored in the case study.

The Politics of Social Antagonism in Brazil

As analyzed in details in Chap. 12 in this volume by Guilherme and Ribeiro Hoffmann, Rousseff’s impeachment, in August 2016, delimited the turn to the right through Michel Temer’s neoliberal economic agenda and insensitivity to social issues. We see a clear distinction between Temer political personality and the overall agenda of his term, and Jair Bolsonaro exercise of political power. Therefore, accounting for what we call *the politics of social antagonism*, we look at the bases for Bolsonaro election and the means for governing over 2019.

Right-wing extremism is ostensibly related to anti-democracy for those reasons that have to do with the history of Europe during the 1930s. However, another crucial aspect to identify in right-wing extremism is the leadership rhetoric before coming to power. By the beginning of the presidential campaign, Bolsonaro had around 12% of voting intentions: how did he and his class coalition manage to get the necessary support of the mass to win the pool? It is important to bear in mind the evolving atmosphere of political, social and economic convulsion in Brazil since at

least June 2013. Then, although being a phenomenon without a consensual day zero, “bolsonarism” is one among manifold causes and circumstances for the electoral victory. For this reason, we focus on the project of a given class coalition that is bigger than “bolsonarism” and Bolsonaro himself (Nunes 2019).

We argued that a radical triangle of fearfulness, risk and threats was manipulated through discourses of “lives are risky, caution is warranted”, “the world is a dangerous place, we have terrorist threats, criminal violence, illness, immigration”, and “the only source of reliable aid and support in difficult times is our own family. We must respect our elders’ religious and beliefs” (Barber 2019). Such existential insecurities that emerge in liberal democratic regimes, which “rest on a philosophy of individual freedom (...) can also induce people to seek psychic security through submission to external authority” (Galston 2018:108). Bolsonaro was named by a coalition consisted of landowners, military, Evangelicals and upper economic classes as the one with answers to wide existential insecurities—simple answers, like punishment, penalties, prison, gun bearing, reduction of criminal age, imposition of conservative values through censorship in culture and education and, above all, the suppression of minorities considered the opponents of the “traditional society” within an era of deteriorating conditions of social reproduction.

These conditions are the outcome of a triple crisis that Western liberal democracies are experiencing, gradually, since the 1980s, which are intrinsically connected with each other: financial, environmental and of representativeness. As explored in details in many chapters of this volume, the financial crisis of 2008 has highly contributed for the far-right pattern of “repressive egalitarianism”, an expression coined by Theodor Adorno in 1951.¹ In Latin America, a continent with sharp inequalities, the repressive egalitarianism translates into both a reactionary politics of recognition and a regressive politics of redistribution (Nunes 2019).

The first is implemented through the suppression of minority rights, which were acquired by means of inclusion and meritocracy policies, undermining precisely such progressive feature of neoliberalism (Nunes 2019). The second is confirmed by the fact that Bolsonaro and his Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, have never proposed a structural change. Rather, they aim to preserve and expand the free market economy on the basis of attracting foreign capital in strategic sectors, deregulating labor relations, privatizing strategic and non-strategic state-owned companies, and putting regulatory agencies at the service of the free market.

Overall, in 2019, Brazilians saw several demonstrations of extremism in politics, economy, culture and public security “on behalf of the real yearnings of the conservative people in Brazil and other countries of Latin America” to recover the “traditional order”, which is based on “the principles of God, homeland, family, property, individual freedom, and the right to self-defense”, according to *Carta de Foz*, the final document launched in the occasion of the first Conservative Summit in the

¹ The logic of repressive egalitarianism, according to him, is when fascists “emphasize their being different from the outsider but play down such differences within their own group and tend to level out distinctive qualities among themselves with the exception of the hierarchical one” (Adorno 1991:146).

Americas, an event designed by the Bolsonaro family and their political party (PFL), held in Foz do Iguaçu on eighth December 2018.

The conservative yearnings, then, have materialized, for instance, through the censorship (resource cuts via public notices and show cancellations) of national agencies like ANCINE and FUNARTE to movies and performances with gender and LGBT themes,² the extinction of the Ministry of Culture,³ prohibitions in the Book Biennial,⁴ the attack to the feminist philosopher Judith Butler in São Paulo,⁵ the proliferation of attacks on African-based religions,⁶ and the deep funding cut of the public universities.⁷ In parallel, the sustained version of neoliberalism is, according to Marilena Chauí, the new totalitarianism, in which “the society becomes the mirror for the State, defining all social and political spheres not only as organizations, but taking the market as a central reference, as a specific type of organization: *the company*” (2019).⁸

The conditions of possibility for the operationalization of political power by the extreme right in Latin America, such as those entrusted by Bolsonaro, can be clearly seen in Latinobarometer 2018, closing the crisis circle with the aspect of representativeness:

² <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/expresso/2019/10/05/A-sombra-da-censura-na-a%C3%A7%C3%B5es-do-governo-na-%C3%A1rea-cultural>.

³ <https://blogs.oglobo.globo.com/afonso-borges/post/e-assim-em-janeiro-de-2019-foi-extinto-o-ministerio-da-cultura.html>.

⁴ <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2019/09/08/autores-e-editores-fazem-manifesto-contra-censura-na-bienal-do-livro-do-rio.ghtml>; <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/expresso/2019/09/06/O-que-h%C3%A1-de-ilegal-na-censura-de-Crivella-na-Bienal-do-Rio>.

⁵ <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2017/11/1936103-judith-butler-escreve-sobre-o-fantasma-do-genero-e-o-ataque-sofrido-no-brasil.shtml>; <https://epoca.globo.com/cultura/noticia/2017/11/filosofa-judith-butler-e-agredida-em-congonhas-antes-de-deixar-sao-paulo.html>.

⁶ <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/2019/09/relatos-apontam-proliferacao-de-ataques-as-religoes-afro-brasileiras.shtml>; <https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/denuncias-de-ataques-religiosos-de-matriz-africana-sobem-47-no-pais-23400711>.

⁷ https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2019/05/01/interna_politica,752508/corte-geral-de-30-nos-orcamentos-das-universidades-federais.shtml.

⁸ It is worth mentioning that the market is also the engine of Bolsonaro’s policies that affect the environment. Notwithstanding we affirm that left and right do not differ much in relation to the exploitation of natural resources (see page 4), in 2019, Brazilians witnessed an exacerbation of skepticism about climate change. While the “Green Economy” is growing worldwide, the Bolsonaro government was responsible for several square kilometers of fire in the Amazon. Discussions and accusations took place between scientists and the Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, culminating in the exoneration of the former director of the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe), Ricardo Galvão. For more information, see: <https://g1.globo.com/natureza/noticia/2019/08/11/nos-usamos-publicacao-cientifica-nao-balela-diz-ex-diretor-do-inpe-a-ministro-do-meio-ambiente.ghtml>.

SOURCE: <http://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

Among these eight institutions and the 18 countries surveyed, Brazilian respondents ranked the country in fifth place in trust in the Church⁹ and third in trust in the Army. By contrast, they ranked Brazil in 16th position in confidence in Congress and the last position (along with El Salvador) in confidence in political parties. Marta Lagos, the Director of Latinobarometer in Chile, analyzed: “The fragmentation of the party system speaks of a high rate of leadership expiration and the emergence of new figures that increasingly represent small groups of citizens. (...) The second dimension is the elites. Corruption has deeply penetrated presidents, parliaments, members of the executive branch in many countries, undermining the image of democracy, confusing the population. A corrupt regime cannot be a democracy” (2018:5–6).

⁹There is a huge debate in Brazil with regard to the turning to politics of certain religious groups, as well as their power of influence and electoral decision. Notably, the Evangelical Neopentecostals, represented by the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* and *Assembleia de Deus*, drove the growth of around 10% in the number of elected parliamentarians in 2018. For more information, see: <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2018-10/em-crescimento-bancada-evangelica-tera-91-parlamentares-no-congresso>; <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/expresso/2019/07/13/O-fortalecimento-evang%C3%A9lico-no-Brasil-e-na-Am%C3%A9rica-Latina>.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we advanced the argument that the turn to the right in Latin America mirrors, in some respects, global trends, although it is far from uniform, being stronger in some countries more than others. In a region known for a rich tradition of populist governments and movements, of both left and right variants, we argue that it is important to take into account systemic factors which have impacted on the region as a whole (such as Global Financial Crisis of 2008, commodities' prices boom and bust) and their differential political effects, while not losing sight of local specificities.

In our view, the three case studies, Bolivia, Chile and Brazil, allow us to see clearly the multiplicity of political struggles taking place in the region, since they concern the deposition of a left-wing populist leader (Bolivia), protests against a right-wing conservative government (Chile) and the election of a right-wing extremist (Brazil), all taking place within a year. We addressed a particular understanding that populists, left-wing or right-wing, in Europe or Latin America, mobilize the term "the people" in a variety of ways, delimiting the boundaries of who the people are, who is in and who is out (Fitzi et al. 2019). Populists say they represent "the people" (in Latin America, "el pueblo"/"o povo") against others, be they corrupt elites, transnational corporations, international finance institutions, globalists, leftists, migrants, refugees and so on.

Nonetheless, the question of why the poor vote for the right is not new, albeit still complex, for academic researchers within social and political sciences (Frank 2007; Huber & Stanig 2009; Suryanarayan 2019; Galston 2018). The majority of studies highlight strategies of conservative political parties, as well as non-electoral means of the right to broaden its influence and increase its scope of political action (Domínguez 1997; Middlebrook 2000; Payne 2000; Eaton 2011; Luna & Kaltwasser 2014). A mix of neoliberal ideology of individualism, competitiveness and personal responsibility, and evangelical social conservatism at the structural level have been generating support among the middle and lower classes in those three countries for less state intervention in the economy, more violent and punitive measures to maintain law and order, and freedom of speech to manifest racist, homophobic and sexist positions.

Against this background, we raised the questions of what identifies right-wing extremism as such, and how a move toward the far right could have taken place in Brazil. We drew on a theoretical framework that distinguishes the access to from the exercise of political power, and we claimed that more attention should be given to psychological rather than just to political conditions for the establishment of a far-right government. Applying the theoretical framework, we called the politics of social antagonism the project that encompasses a class coalition strategy to come to power, and the following measures to implement its economic, political, cultural and security agendas.

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