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Reaction and Resistance: Imagining Possible Futures in the Americas

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From the President

by **Jo-Marie Burt** | LASA President

Last November, far-right libertarian Javier Milei was elected as president of Argentina. His election, surprising but not unexpected, highlights a regional trend that inspired the theme of the 2024 Congress, *Reaction and Resistance: Imagining New Futures in the Americas*: the rise of extreme right-wing parties and movements in Latin America and across the globe. In this issue of *LASA Forum*, Latin American scholars from a variety of disciplines reflect on this dynamic, considering the implications for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

This issue of *LASA Forum* follows the summer issue, which also included a dossier related to the theme of LASA2024. That included essays from a diverse group of scholars and activists analyzing collective forms of resistance in the Americas. The next issue will focus on the problem of land disputes and forced displacement in rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities throughout the Americas, largely the result of mining, agro-industry, and mega-development projects as well as illicit economic activities such as illegal logging and mining. All of these themes will be featured prominently at the LASA2024 Congress, which will take place in a hybrid format from June 12–15 at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia.

Alongside preparing these issues of *LASA Forum,* the LASA2024 Program Committee has been busy organizing for the 2024 Congress, along with the LASA Secretariat and the dozens of LASA members who have volunteered their time as Program Track Chairs, Section Chairs, and members of LASA's numerous prize committees. Here I report on some highlights of the preparations for the Congress, including the process of evaluating the nearly 2,500 proposals received by our members; efforts to obtain external funding to make LASA2024 more inclusive and accessible; and the ways we are working to build bridges between the recent LASA/Africa Continental Congress in Accra, Ghana, with the 2024 Congress in Bogotá.

LASA2024 in Bogotá

The LASA Secretariat and the LASA2024 Program Committee, consisting of myself and Program Co-Chairs María Eugenia Ulfe and Desmond Arias, have been working intensively on preparations for the 2024 Congress. Between September and November, the LASA2024 Program Committee, alongside 83 Program Track Chairs, reviewed 1,572 individual paper submissions and 948 session submissions, including 697 panels, 141 roundtables, 55 workshops, and 55 book presentations. In addition, the Sections submitted 104 sessions. Other submissions include 10 Presidential Sessions, 17 invited Sessions, 12 Featured Sessions, 48 Business Meetings, and 15 Receptions.

We are especially grateful to the Program Track Chairs who volunteered their valuable time to review and evaluate the submissions. Due to the large venue at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, we were able to accept the vast majority of proposals, with a rejection rate below two percent. Letters confirming acceptance to the 2024 Congress were sent out in November.

LASA2024 will also facilitate the organization of several Pre-Conferences at the conference site. To date, LASA has received submissions for eight Pre-Conferences. The deadline for submissions was extended until the end of January at the request of the Section Chairs. LASA2024 will also feature the traditional Film Festival, Book Exhibit, and student mentorship program. The Book Exhibit will offer discounted rates for independent publishers to ensure a broader variety of publishers at LASA2024.

Diversity and Inclusion Efforts for LASA2024

LASA has always been a space for critical and interdisciplinary intellectual exchanges as well as networking opportunities for scholars, students, activists, practitioners, and policymakers from the North and the South. A series of factors, including the pandemic, economic instability across the region, and the precariousness of academic work, make it difficult for many academics and activists to participate in intellectual exchanges such as LASA.

With these concerns in mind, I have made efforts to secure additional funds for LASA2024. My primary goal has been to find ways to ensure that LASA2024 includes a broad diversity of views and perspectives from scholars, students, activists, and practitioners from underrepresented communities, including indigenous, Afro-descendant, and LGBTQIA+ communities. Another objective is to facilitate the participation of activists and practitioners who are critical sources of knowledge production about a range of issues in the region and whose expertise and perspectives will make valuable contributions to the discussions at LASA2024. I also wanted to find ways to facilitate the participation of Colombian students, scholars, and activists who reside outside of Bogotá in the LASA2024 Congress.

I am delighted to report some success in these efforts, having secured grants from the Ford Foundation and from The Open Society Foundations. These funds will facilitate the participation of scholars, students, and activists from historically underrepresented communities as well as activists and practitioners working on critical issues in the region in the presidential and invited panels being organized by the LASA2024 Program Committee. These sessions will focus on critical issues linked to the LASA2024 program theme, including the rise of the extreme right in the Americas; the closure of civic spaces and authoritarian regression; feminism and LGBTQIA+ rights in the present anti-rights climate; forced disappearance as an ongoing practice in the region; extractivism, land conflicts, and forced displacement in rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities; the impact of illicit economies on local communities and democratic governance; climate change and attacks against environmental defenders; nature and rights; and global perspectives on racial justice. In addition, several panels will focus on Colombia, including panels on the peace process; restorative justice and local community peacebuilding; and art and politics.

The funds will also be used to provide travel grants to LASA2024, particularly for students, scholars, and activists from historically underrepresented groups and for Colombians who reside outside of Bogotá and who will present papers at the Congress. In addition, a special fund will be set up for indigenous, Afro-descendant, and LGBTQIA+ students from Colombia who reside outside of Bogotá to participate in LASA2024.

These efforts aim to strengthen LASA's inclusion of new members from younger generations, revitalize the participation of older generations of LASA members, facilitate participation of historically underrepresented groups, and encourage transversal intellectual communities that will broaden and deepen analysis of critical issues and policy responses.

The need is far greater than the funds available, no doubt. Donations from private foundations do not–and likely cannot–resolve what is a broader problem of structural inequality that makes the Congress inaccessible for many of our members. It is up to us as members of LASA to think

creatively about how we can make membership to the Association and participation in the Congress more accessible.

Building Synergies: The LASA/Africa Continental Congress and LASA2024 in Bogotá

The LASA2024 Program Committee is also working to build upon the connections and synergies of the LASA/Africa Continental Congress, which took place in Accra, Ghana, in November 2023, at the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá.

The Continental Congresses are an exciting new initiative of LASA. The first Continental Congress, the LASA/Asia Continental Congress, took place virtually in 2022 under the leadership of Past LASA President Dr. Gioconda Herrera, followed by the hybrid 2023 LASA/Africa Continental Congress in Accra, led by Past LASA President Dr. Mara Viveros-Vigoya. Dr. Joanna Boampong was a key partner at the University of Ghana, which hosted the LASA/Africa Congress. The Colombian Embassy in Ghana, under the helm of Ambassador Daniel Garcés Carabalí, was one of the main sponsors of the Congress and facilitated the participation of several Afro-Colombian scholars, activists, and artists. The leadership and support for the Continental Congress initiative shown by LASA Executive Director Milagros Pereyra-Rojas has been key to its success.

The LASA/Africa Continental Congress was an incredible opportunity to exchange knowledge and build connections among scholars, students, and activists in Latin America and Africa working on common issues and themes. I was especially impressed with the comparative discussions about democratic backsliding, panels analyzing the comparative impact of extractivist industries on rural, indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, and discussions about the African diaspora, enduring efforts to combat everyday and institutional racism, and reparations for slavery. We will report more fully on the LASA/Africa Continental Congress in a future issue of *LASA Forum*.

I came away from the Accra Congress convinced of the importance of finding ways to bring the lessons learned from that historic meeting to the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá. To that end, a portion of the funds raised for LASA2024 will be used to invite African scholars and students who helped organize and who participated in the Accra Congress to speak about their experiences at a panel at LASA2024 in Bogotá. The Colombian Embassy in Ghana has expressed interest in continuing its partnership with LASA to facilitate meaningful debate and intellectual exchanges between scholars, students, activists, and practitioners working in Latin America and Africa.

The LASA Community

An academic association such as LASA promotes academic excellence by providing a space for its members to share their research, develop new collaborations, and learn from other members of the community. LASA is also highly valued by its members because of its commitment to interdisciplinary and collaborative research, and its understanding of the importance of including the expertise of nontraditional scholars, activists, practitioners, and policymakers in its activities and events. I hope that our efforts to make LASA2024 more accessible will contribute to strengthening LASA's commitment to diversity and inclusion, which is critical to sustaining its role as a vital global community of knowledge production and exchange. //

The "New" Extreme Right in Latin America

by **Enrique Arias and Jo-Marie Burt**

On November 19th, 2023 Javier Milei was elected president of Argentina, winning 56% of the popular vote in run-off elections. His campaign called for a radically libertarian economic agenda that included eliminating the central bank, dollarizing the economy, and massive cuts in social programs, retirement and pension funds, among other things. His public safety policies focused on empowering security forces by increasing military and police budgets, adopting a zero- policy tolerance towards crime, reducing regulations for firearms markets, re-establishing the military's "moral authority" lost after the fall of Argentina's brutal dictatorship in 1983, and closing the ESMA Museum and Memory Site, which is based at the former Naval Mechanics School, the site of some of the dictatorship's most infamous crimes (Lambertucci 2023).

The election of Milei in Argentina—a 40-year-old democracy that has experienced several transfers of power between parties, where a consensus rejecting the military dictatorship appeared firm, and where progressive rights were expanding—draws renewed attention to the rise of a new and complex reactionary right in Latin America. Ultra-conservative groups railing against "gender ideology" and "cultural Marxism," and steeped in hyper-nationalism and anti-globalist rhetoric, have gained traction in institutional politics as well as at the societal level around the globe. But the extreme right in Latin America is also very much a home-grown phenomenon: in part a reaction to the "Pink Tide" governments that overtook the region in recent years, even as it is deeply rooted in the colonial legacies of Christianity, patriarchy, and white supremacy embedded in concepts such as *hispanidad*.

Given this context, we invited several colleagues to reflect on the ascendance of extreme right movements and parties in Latin America for this issue of LASA Forum. This dossier dialogues with the special program track on the extreme right in Latin America for LASA2024, as well as the broader theme of the Congress, ***Reacción y resistencia: imaginar futuros posibles en las Américas***. Our objective is to foster debate regarding the rise of the extreme right in the Americas. What explains the rise of extreme, right-wing ideologies and political movements? How "new" is the extreme right in Latin America, and what differentiates it from the "traditional" right? What types of threats does the "alt-right" pose to democracy and broader understanding of rights in the region? What role do international ties play in supporting the far right in the Americas, and how do these ties drive right-wing politics? How does the extreme right today express itself in culture and to what extent are cultural and social activism important to the right? What role do ties to the military and paramilitary groups play in advancing the far right's agenda?

Today's extreme right-wing politics in Latin America is embodied by Argentina's Milei, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele and former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, as well as also-rans who remain key political players, including Rodolfo Hernandez in Colombia, Rafael López Aliaga in Peru, Guido Manini Ríos in Uruguay, and José Antonio Kast in Chile. The extreme right has a marked populist and putatively anti-elitist rhetoric. These leaders are savvy about social media (Goldstein 2019), engage in revanchist cultural politics, and are well-networked internationally. As in the past, some on the Latin American right embrace ties to

the military and paramilitary groups to advance their agenda. Many have hardline, punitive approaches to controlling crime, including the use of state of emergency decrees and the militarization of public security. While far-right politicians participate in democratic elections and often succeed in them, they generally lack a serious commitment to democratic norms and institutions, and once in power, may use democratic institutions to concentrate power and weaken democracy from within. The right has also promoted a "culture wars" approach to politics, for example through its embrace of so-called gender ideology, which claims that reforms benefiting women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, such as reproductive rights and the right to same-sex marriage, are the result of an imposed system of beliefs that threaten "Christian values" and corrupts society (Mayka and Smith 2021). Indeed, many of these new right-wing movements and parties are a reaction against progress made in delivering rights to women, sexual minorities, and historically excluded non-white majorities in the region (Escorfier, Payne, and Zuliver 2023; Luna and Rovira Kaltwasser 2021).

The ascendance of extreme right movements and parties has been analyzed extensively in the Global North. Scholars have devoted considerable attention to the election and government of Donald Trump in the United States, the rise and fall of the far-right UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the United Kingdom and the 2016 Brexit referendum), the election of far-right governments in several European countries including Italy and Poland, the onset on electoral authoritarianism Hungary, and the more limited but still significant electoral successes of the Alternative for Germany (AFD) in German, and the National Front (FN) in France.[1] The literature on the rise of this new extreme right-wing politics in the Global North focuses in part on the complex adjustments imposed on the welfare states in these countries by the economic challenges of globalization that have moved jobs offshore, and the related challenges posed by migration (Mudde and Rovira 2013). The stories told in these narratives focus on increasingly local working classes—often ethnically homogeneous—that have been displaced from high-quality work as jobs move abroad, and who feel threatened by migrants they perceive to be taking "their" jobs, all amidst neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state (Pierson 2017; Mckenzie 2017). Extreme right parties position themselves as representatives of ethnically homogenous people who are "native" to their respective countries (Brubaker 2017).

While the "alt-right" in the Global North has found traction by focusing on migration, Latin-America's far right has had greater success focusing on domestic law and order issues and the "culture war" posturing described above. The Bolsonaro administration openly promoted nostalgia for Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), promoting the flawed idea that brutal policing can resolve the country's serious crime and violence problems. In El Salvador, Nayib Bukele's administration has pursued a visually striking and highly repressive gang control policy based at least partially on negotiation focused on restoring order in that country. The victims of these policies are disproportionately poor and from these countries' non-white majorities. Authoritarian and populist leaders are often able to forge alliances with populations that live in fear of crime, often including people from poor, targeted communities who often suffer the most from crime. By dividing citizens between "good" and "bad" and offering the hope of security, the right-wing and populist leaders mobilize a base of support even among some in communities directly suffering from their policies.

This dossier includes contributions from LASA members analyzing this "new" extreme Latin American right from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Collectively, these articles help us better understand the nature, objectives, and impact of the contemporary right in its political, economic, social and cultural manifestations.

[1] On the United States, see Pierce (2017). On the UK, see McKenzie (2017). On Italy, see D'Alimonte (2019). On Poland, see Fomina and Kucharczyk (2016). On Hungary, see Ágh (2015). On Germany, see Schwander and Manow (2017). On France, see Facchini and Jacek (2021).

Some of the topics that these essays examine include how inequality and the failure of both center-left and center-right parties to address this contribute to the rise of the new right, the relationship between a growing disenchantment with democracy, nostalgia for bygone dictatorships and the rise of extreme right-wing movements and parties, the ways that religious change and extremism has contributed to new political alliances strengthening a different type of far-right politics, and the way Latin America's far-right movements are being supported and promoted by global right-wing networks (Harris 2023).

In his essay, "El ascenso de la ultraderecha en América Latina: inesperado, rápido y duradero," Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser argues that the far right is here to stay in Latin America because its leaders have found a niche apart from both the center-left and right. The extreme right in Latin America, Rovira argues, is hemmed in by the enduring problem of inequality, which has been exacerbated by the neoliberal economic model championed by the traditional right in the region since the 1980s. Growing displeasure with the "Washington Consensus" brought center-left parties to power across the region; their policies even made some progress in tackling some of these durable inequalities, but the problem persists. The far-right refocuses the question of inequality, blaming self-dealing elites, while also emphasizing "traditional values" and seeking to mobilize voters' cultural and political resentments against sexual minorities, indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendant citizens in support of reactionary policies. All of this, Rovira argues, is abetted by a robust international far-right network that now regularly meets and provides support to these leaders around the globe.

Anthony Pereira's essay, "Understanding Right-Wing Populism (or the Extreme Right)," takes up many of these same questions, delving into the nature of these transnational networks. He argues that to understand the far right in Latin America today we need to examine its historical and transnational roots. There is a long tradition of radical populisms on the left and the right in Latin America, Pereira argues, including such notable examples as Juan Perón, Getúlio Vargas, Alberto Fujimori, and Abdalá Bucaram. In many ways today's far right roots itself in that tradition. Pereira notes that right-wing populism constructs cross-class coalitions in different countries by finding grievances to polarize the population to peel off voters from other electoral coalitions. This populism, for Pereira, is nested in a global right-wing epistemic community that Latin America's right-wing leaders can draw from to reinforce and advance their ideas.

In "'Gender Ideology', Refeudalization, and the *Reproductive Reconquista,"* Gabriela Arguedas-Ramírez examines how the far right globally and in Latin America use debates about gender and sexuality to advance their agenda. Arguedas-Ramirez examines the roots of the concept of "gender ideology," a framework that sees as profoundly flawed foundational concepts in feminism and LGBTQIA+ mobilizations of the late 20th century such as the social construction of gender and sexuality and the role of gender hierarchies as forms of oppression. The author then connects this to what she refers to as re-feudalization, a process by which inequality is reinforced and maintained by empowered non-state actors. This process elevates religious groups and ideas in social and economic debates and empowers private charities over the state in providing basic social support. All of this has implications for the future of politics in the region as it is realized in the policies of politicians such as Jair Bolsonaro and Nayib Bukele.

In "El Salvador's State of Exception," Sonja Wolf shows the importance of public safety and how its manipulation by elites can facilitate the rolling back of democracy. Examining Nayib Bukele and the roots of his political movement, the author shows the important role that insecurity and populist responses to insecurity can play in undermining democracy and developing support for a right-wing government. For Wolf, Bukele's gang-related state of emergency/exception is a key component of his effort to build and maintain power in El Salvador, with an eye to the general elections in February 2024. Bukele's government has used fear and its own performative responses to that fear to generate support and limit the

political space of potential critics in the media, academia and the political opposition. Wolf highlights the many resonances between the Salvadoran experience under Bukele and that of other new far-right regimes in the region. She notes in particular the ways that popular fatigue with the inefficacy of established parties, in the case of El Salvador's ARENA and FMLN parties fueled the spectacular rise and endurance of Nayib Bukele, in ways that resonate with Rovira's essay.

Camila Rocha and Esther Solano take up the matter of the far right at the heights of Brazilian politics in their essay, "*A ascensão de Jair Bolsonaro e as classes populares.*" They note that Bolsonaro was elected in 2018 with support from the working and middle classes, even though he is a far-right ideologue allied with business interests who rejected the idea of redressing inequalities. This was not because the working and middle classes did not understand their interests, they argue, but rather because of how class interests have changed in the 21st century, marked by the rise of digital communication and where new epistemic communities have emerged within society that have changed how populations mobilize. For Rocha and Solano, while social inequality is understood as a problem among Brazil's popular classes, it is not seen as a collective problem but rather one based on individual choices and failures. In an environment where out-of-touch elites are portrayed as pushing the country against the interests of workers, during the economic crisis of the 2010s, economic failure became conflated with moral failures. Bolsonaro, with his dictatorship-era nostalgia and a social media-based movement, became the reactionary solution to these moral failures in which the struggling middle class could stop blaming themselves for their economic plight and instead reproach empowered elites.

In his essay, "*Marielle Franco, Militias, Jogo do Bicho, and the Bolsonaros: State-Embedded Organized Crime and the Far Right in Brazil,*" Damian Platt examines Brazil's political system from the perspective of Rio de Janeiro's criminal history. Here he connects Jair Bolsonaro's political roots to how during the military dictatorship (1964-85), former members of Brazil's armed forces participated in the *Jogo do Bicho*, the illegal lottery racket in Rio in which numbers are associated with animals (*bichos*). Former military officials developed strong connections with the underworld, enabling the emergence of protection rackets connected to security forces known today as *milícias* that control various legal and illegal markets. These groups have supported various political leaders in Rio including Bolsonaro and other members of his family. Platt shows how the contemporary far right is grounded in the legacies of the right-wing history of Brazil in its contemporary post-dictatorship politics. Thinking about how the contemporary new right is lodged within these violent histories is a critical element of understanding and studying this phenomenon.

We still have much to learn about the extreme right in Latin America. What is the relationship between economic elites and the far right? In many instances, arguments about the fraudulent nature of elections are central to the far-right's bid to win or hold onto power, as we saw in the January 6th insurrection in the United States, in Peru's elections in 2021, when Keiko Fujimori and her allies mobilized lawyers from powerful firms to the countryside to help "prove" that Pedro Castillo had been elected fraudulently, to Bolsonaro's dismal January 6th repetition, and Alejandro Giammattei's effort to alter the overwhelming electoral victory of Bernardo Arévalo in the August 2023 run-off elections in Guatemala. How are the tactics of the far right altering, challenging, and in some cases undermining democratic rule? How is the rise of the far right affecting the rights of the most vulnerable populations in the region? We hope this dossier and the discussions to follow at the LASA2024 Congress in Bogotá will contribute to these debates and to centering attention on the need for further research on the extreme right in the Americas.

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El ascenso de la ultraderecha en América Latina: inesperado, rápido y duradero[1]

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América Latina y el mundo están transitando momentos de acelerados cambios, en donde un actor ha comenzado a jugar un rol clave: la ultraderecha. La literatura al respecto ha venido creciendo de manera exponencial primero en Europa y luego en los Estados Unidos, y en Latinoamérica, poco a poco, están emergiendo debates conceptuales, empíricos y teóricos sobre este fenómeno. El presente ensayo pretende nutrir este debate y, para ello, 1) provee información contextual; 2) brinda una revisión conceptual; 3) discute algunas explicaciones, y 4) plantea finalmente que la ultraderecha latinoamericana debe ser vista como un fenómeno duradero que probablemente tendrá un impacto significativo en la región.

1) Del giro a la izquierda a la irrupción de la (ultra)derecha

Quienes no conocen muy bien América Latina pueden caer fácilmente en el error de pensar que se trata de una región donde priman los liderazgos de izquierda. Al fin y al cabo, figuras como Fidel Castro en Cuba, Salvador Allende en Chile y Hugo Chávez en Venezuela han marcado la historia de la región, generando tanto atracción como rechazo a nivel global. Sin embargo, esta lectura es problemática por al menos dos motivos. Por un lado, Latinoamérica también ha contado con varios líderes de derecha que han sellado el decurso de no pocos países y que han tenido injerencia a nivel regional. Basta pensar en los casos de Augusto Pinochet en Chile, Alberto Fujimori en Perú y Álvaro Uribe en Colombia. Por otro lado, la gran mayoría de los liderazgos emblemáticos de la izquierda latinoamericana se han caracterizado por defender posturas progresistas en temas económicos antes que culturales. Esto es particularmente evidente en la así llamada “izquierda radical” de los años 2000. Cuando Chávez en Venezuela, Correa en Ecuador y Morales en Bolivia hablaban del “socialismo del siglo xxi”, lo hacían para referirse sobre todo a la necesidad de transformar el modelo económico para favorecer a los sectores populares, pero sus agendas programáticas decían poco sobre cuestiones de índole moral. Y cuando se referían a estas últimas, por lo general su postura era más bien ambigua o incluso conservadora. Aun cuando es cierto que Chávez, Correa y Morales avanzaron en el reconocimiento de determinados derechos, no estuvieron exentos de muchas contradicciones y problemas en el cumplimiento de las agendas feministas y especialmente LGBTQ+ (De la Torre 2017). A su vez, los principales líderes de la “izquierda radical” de los años 2000 fueron hombres que hicieron profusa gala de su masculinidad y, por tanto, difícilmente podrían ser catalogados como figuras emblemáticas del progresismo en términos culturales.

Para comprender la competencia política entre derecha e izquierda en América Latina es importante destacar que esta región se caracteriza por mantener elevados niveles de

[1] Gran parte de las ideas acá desarrolladas se vinculan con conversaciones mantenidas durante el *workshop* sobre la ultraderecha en América Latina que se llevó a cabo en el Instituto de Ciencia Política de la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile los días 10 y 11 de agosto del 2023, en el que participaron los siguientes académicos: David Altman, Sandra Botero, Rodrigo Cornejo, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Kirk Hawkins, Carlos Meléndez, Manuel Meléndez, Lucio Rennó, Talita Tanscheit y Lisa Zanotti. Agradezco a cada una de ellas y de ellos por la presentación de trabajos inéditos y/o por las reflexiones vertidas allí.

desigualdad socioeconómica, lo cual hace muy difícil que fuerzas de derecha que favorecen el libre mercado y, consecuentemente, la limitación del gasto social puedan conquistar a amplios segmentos del electorado. Dicho de otra manera, como producto de los altos niveles de pobreza y desigualdad social que caracterizan a gran parte de los países latinoamericanos, resulta esperable que las fuerzas de izquierda que defienden políticas redistributivas tengan una ventaja comparativa en las elecciones. Junto con Juan Pablo Luna, desarrollamos este argumento en mayor detalle en un libro editado hace algunos años (Luna y Rovira Kaltwasser 2014), en el cual, a su vez, planteamos que es necesario estudiar cómo la derecha se ha ido adaptando al sistema democrático para continuar ejerciendo influencia. Asimismo, argumentamos que un potencial (re)surgimiento de la derecha difícilmente podría ir de la mano de la defensa de políticas económicas de corte "neoliberal", sino que, más bien, lo haría a partir de la politización de otros temas que son transversales al clásico debate entre "Estado versus mercado" de los que la derecha puede apropiarse para diferenciarse de la izquierda. Esta tesis cobra particular relevancia hoy en día, ya que se puede observar un rápido e inesperado ascenso de actores de ultraderecha a nivel regional.

Por bastante tiempo el tema de la ultraderecha fue visto en América Latina como un fenómeno lejano, que acontecía más bien en las economías más avanzadas del mundo. El triunfo de Donald Trump en los Estados Unidos en el año 2016 fue quizás el primer llamado de atención respecto del aterrizaje de la ultraderecha en las Américas. Sin embargo, el primer caso latinoamericano que generó interés y preocupación —tanto a nivel académico como público— fue la irrupción de Jair Bolsonaro en Brasil, quien gobernó ese país entre 2019 y 2022. Si bien es cierto que la agenda programática de Bolsonaro enfatizaba ideas clásicas de libre mercado (privatización de empresas estatales, reducción del gasto público, etc.), su novedad proviene más bien de la adopción de posturas muy conservadoras en cuestiones de género y de la agenda LGBTQ+, políticas contrarias a la acción afirmativa para la población afrodescendiente, así como una defensa irrestricta de políticas de mano dura para enfrentar la delincuencia. Como bien han señalado Timothy Power y Wendy Hunter (2019), el ascenso de Bolsonaro debe ser entendido como una reacción iliberal, la cual se explica en gran medida por una "tormenta perfecta" marcada por cuatro crisis simultáneas: 1) una crisis económica causada por una prolongada recesión; 2) una crisis política producto de la creciente polarización y caída de la confianza en los partidos políticos establecidos; 3) una crisis de corrupción puesta en primer plano por la investigación Lava Jato, y 4) el deterioro de la situación de seguridad pública. Justamente debido a esta singular "tormenta perfecta" que se dio en Brasil, en cierto sentido podría pensarse que el ascenso de la ultraderecha sería un fenómeno local antes que regional.

Sin embargo, la realidad actual indica más bien lo contrario. No solo parece ser evidente que el bolsonarismo continuará sin la existencia de Bolsonaro (Rennó 2023), sino que también es posible observar que figuras de ultraderecha han comenzado a ganar terreno en varios países de la región. Basta pensar en Javier Milei (La Libertad Avanza) en la Argentina, Guido Manini Ríos (Cabildo Abierto) en Uruguay, José Antonio Kast (Partido Republicano) en Chile, Rafael López Aliaga (Renovación Popular) en Perú y Nayib Bukele (Nuevas Ideas) en El Salvador. Aun cuando el peso electoral de estos distintos casos es desigual y es difícil saber de antemano si eventualmente podrán conquistar el Poder Ejecutivo (ya sea por sí solos o en coalición con otras fuerzas políticas), no cabe duda de que la ultraderecha ha irrumpido en la escena política latinoamericana. Su ataque al progresismo y a lo que es considerado como políticamente correcto parece ser una herramienta útil al momento de movilizar a votantes a lo largo y ancho del continente (Stefanoni 2021).

2) Conceptualización

Antes de intentar hacer sentido sobre este rápido e inesperado ascenso de la ultraderecha, me parece relevante ofrecer una aclaración conceptual. Al hacer uso de la noción de ultraderecha (*far right*), nos referimos a un

fenómeno global que, siguiendo el trabajo de Cas Mudde (2019), se caracteriza por defender posturas conservadoras en cuestiones culturales antes que económicas y en mantener una relación conflictiva con la democracia, en especial con el andamiaje liberal del sistema democrático. Visto así, la ultraderecha no debe ser confundida con la derecha convencional. En un sentido abstracto, ambas derechas argumentan que la mayoría de las desigualdades existentes son naturales y, por tanto, el Estado debe hacer poco para erradicarlas. No obstante, se diferencian tanto en la radicalidad con la que postulan esta idea como también —y, sobre todo— en cómo se vinculan con el régimen democrático. Lo propio de la derecha convencional es que acepta las reglas del juego democrático y defiende sus ideas dentro de ese marco. Por el contrario, la ultraderecha sostiene sus argumentos sin mantener un apego estricto a las instituciones tanto formales como informales de la democracia; a veces incluso puede terminar atacando de manera directa algo tan central como el resultado mismo de las elecciones (basta pensar en el asalto de la ultraderecha a las sedes de los poderes Ejecutivo, Legislativo y Judicial en Brasilia a inicios de enero de este año).

Parte del desafío conceptual que supone estudiar a la ultraderecha en América Latina pasa por distinguir su versión actual de manifestaciones que se dieron antes en la región. Dicho de otra manera, ¿en qué se diferencia Pinochet (ultraderecha de antaño) de Bolsonaro (ultraderecha contemporánea)? Dos sean quizás los puntos centrales para contrastar. Por un lado, la ultraderecha actual se caracteriza por definirse a sí misma como democrática y por hacer uso de las herramientas propias de la democracia para llegar al poder. Esto marca una divergencia con la antigua ultraderecha que usualmente puso poco o ningún énfasis en el respeto de la democracia y menos aún en intentar usar los mecanismos democráticos para gobernar. Por otro lado, lo propio de la ultraderecha contemporánea es que enfatiza por sobre todo cuestiones culturales antes que económicas.[2] Mientras que la antigua ultraderecha latinoamericana estaba obsesionada con el ataque a la agenda de transformación económica propiciada por las ideas marxistas (Weyland 2019), la ultraderecha actual se centra fundamentalmente en la conservación de valores tradicionales y en una agenda de mano dura contra la delincuencia.

Estas dos diferencias son importantes porque nos ayudan a comprender tanto el impacto que la ultraderecha latinoamericana puede tener sobre el régimen político como cuáles son sus potenciales bases de apoyo electoral. Dado que las ultraderechas actuales se presentan a sí mismas como democráticas y hacen uso de las elecciones para llegar al poder, el ataque que hacen al sistema democrático es relativamente gradual y sutil. Tal como señala la creciente literatura sobre retrocesos democráticos, lo propio de la ultraderecha es ir llevando a cabo modificaciones que dañan los mecanismos de contrapeso que son inherentes a la democracia liberal y, de tal manera, ir propiciando una gradual transformación del régimen político en dirección hacia una mayor concentración del poder (Vachudova 2020). A su vez, dado que la ultraderecha latinoamericana de hoy en día adopta valores moralmente conservadores y defiende el punitivismo penal, puede conquistar a amplios segmentos de la ciudadanía que están a favor de dichas temáticas. Esto marca una diferencia importante con la agenda clásica de la derecha convencional, la cual tiende a ser más bien economicista y suele centrarse por tanto en la promoción del libre mercado, dificultando así la movilización de sectores mayoritarios de la sociedad. De hecho, al poner énfasis en temas culturales, la ultraderecha puede movilizar a grupos evangélicos que subscriben posturas moralmente conservadoras y que provienen mayoritariamente del espectro popular. En todo caso, Taylor Boas (2023) revela que el proceso de movilización del voto evangélico no es automático, ya que depende de determinadas condiciones estructurales (por ejemplo, que la

[2] Por cierto que los así llamados regímenes burocráticos autoritarios del Cono Sur también tenían un componente cultural significativo, pero su énfasis radicaba sobre todo en el ataque al comunismo y el marxismo, lo cual debe ser entendido en el contexto histórico del momento marcado por el peso de la Guerra Fría.

comunidad evangélica no esté internamente dividida y del peso que los temas sexuales han venido cobrado a nivel social).

La definición que acá se brinda se vincula de manera directa con una amplia tradición de estudios sobre la derecha en Europa y su creciente fragmentación en dos bloques: la derecha convencional y la ultraderecha (véanse, por ejemplo, Akkerman, De Lange y Rooduijn 2016; Bale y Rovira Kaltwasser 2019; Mudde 2007). Dicha literatura enfatiza que lo propio de la ultraderecha de hoy en día radica en su oposición visceral hacia los valores progresistas que han venido ganando terreno en gran parte de las sociedades en las últimas décadas. Ahora, como bien indica Lenka Bustikova (2020), la ultraderecha contemporánea no debe pensarse sobre la base del ataque a un determinado grupo social (por ejemplo, los inmigrantes) o de la defensa de una política específica (por ejemplo, medidas xenófobas), sino como una reacción a las políticas de adaptación a favor de aquellas minorías que han venido ganando terreno y, por tanto, alteran el poder relativo de los grupos dominantes. Esto quiere decir que cuáles minorías son concebidas como más desafiantes varía entre contextos nacionales y regionales. Por ejemplo, la reivindicación articulada por la ultraderecha europea se dirige primordialmente contra los migrantes (sobre todo los del mundo musulmán), mientras que la ultraderecha latinoamericana parece más bien centrar su reclamo principalmente en contra de la igualdad de género, los derechos sexuales y las políticas de discriminación positiva dirigidas a las poblaciones indígenas y afrodescendientes.

3) ¿Por qué gana terreno la ultraderecha en América Latina?

Visto así, el enfoque conceptual que acá se propone está en bastante sintonía con varios de los incipientes trabajos sobre la (ultra) derecha en la región latinoamericana (al respecto, véase Rovira Kaltwasser 2022). Así, por ejemplo, el trabajo de Mayka y Smith (2021, 3) acerca de la "derecha de base" (*grassroots right*) en América Latina indica que la derecha debe ser concebida "como un conjunto diverso de individuos y organizaciones que buscan mantener jerarquías sociales que son percibidas como tradicionales o naturales. [...] Dichas jerarquías incluyen áreas como el patriarcado, la dominación económica de grandes empresas o latifundios, o la subordinación de individuos LGBTQ+ e indígenas latinoamericanos". A su vez, las autoras señalan que, en contraste con época anteriores, la derecha de base en América Latina se distingue sobre todo por la centralidad otorgada a los temas sexuales como, por ejemplo, la oposición al aborto, los derechos LGBTQ+ y la educación sexual en los colegios. Y, con razón, ellas indican que esta derecha hace uso de varias de las estrategias de movilización y organización que ha venido desarrollando la izquierda en las últimas décadas.

Por su parte, el reciente libro sobre "la derecha en contra de los derechos" plantea que esta debe concebirse como "una movilización colectiva tanto institucional como extrainstitucional que busca controlar, desmantelar o revertir derechos específicos promovidos por comunidades y grupos previamente marginalizados y restaurar, promover o avanzar un statu quo ante derechos políticos, sociales, económicos y culturales tradicionales" (Escoffier, Payne y Zulver 2023, 3). Desde este ángulo, la ultraderecha latinoamericana busca restituir un orden anterior. No es casualidad que justamente los temas de género y sexualidad sean el "mínimo común denominador" que se puede encontrar entre los proyectos de ultraderecha defendidos por figuras como Bolsonaro en Brasil, Bukele en El Salvador, Kast en Chile, López Aliaga en Perú y Milei en la Argentina.

Teniendo una mayor claridad conceptual sobre el fenómeno en cuestión, cabe preguntarse cómo explicar el rápido e inesperado ascenso de la ultraderecha en América Latina. Hoy en día no contamos con una teoría que responda a esta pregunta, pero podemos ofrecer al menos tres argumentos tentativos. Dependiendo de los contextos nacionales, algunos de estos argumentos son más relevantes que otros y por cierto que el conjunto de ellos no ofrece una explicación definitiva, sino que más bien deben ser pensados como propuestas que nos ayuden

a comprender por qué la ultraderecha ha venido experimentado un crecimiento electoral a lo largo de la región.

En primer lugar, parte del éxito de la ultraderecha es circunstancial. Producto del desgaste de las izquierdas luego de una época de hegemonía, resulta esperable que los responsables sean castigados y las derechas (tanto ultras como convencionales) puedan aprovechar este contexto a su favor. Por ejemplo, no es descabellado pensar que muchos de quienes apoyan a Milei en la Argentina lo hacen como un voto castigo en contra de la situación económica que vive el país y que solo una fracción de sus votantes adhieren con vehemencia a la agenda de ultraderecha. Lo mismo se puede pensar para el caso de Brasil, donde Bolsonaro logró movilizar tanto a personas con posturas moralmente conservadoras como a quienes a la luz del escándalo de corrupción desvelado por el Lava Jato rechazan a los partidos políticos establecidos, en particular al Partido de los Trabajadores (Rennó 2020).

En segundo lugar, el ascenso de la ultraderecha se relaciona en ciertos países con el desgaste de la derecha convencional. En aquellos lugares donde esta última ha ido perdiendo legitimidad y/o capacidad de postular una oferta programática atractiva, los actores de ultraderecha pueden crecer electoralmente con mayor facilidad. El caso de Chile es emblemático en este sentido. Sebastián Piñera ha sido uno de los líderes clave en el proceso de moderación programático de la derecha chilena (Madariaga y Rovira Kaltwasser 2020), pero su último gobierno (2018-2022) terminó sumamente desgastado tanto por el estallido social como por la pandemia, dejando así un vacío que pudo ser utilizado hábilmente por el proyecto de ultraderecha liderado por José Antonio Kast y el Partido Republicano.

En tercer lugar, el crecimiento de la ultraderecha es un fenómeno global y, por tanto, quienes representan estas ideas en América Latina se pueden nutrir de redes de apoyo transnacionales. Dicho de otro modo, hay en marcha un proceso de difusión que favorece a quienes promueven proyectos de ultraderecha. Ejemplo de ello es el rol de la ultraderecha española (VOX) y su creación del Foro Madrid, que ya ha organizado dos eventos en nuestra región (en Bogotá en el año 2022 y en Lima en el año 2023) para intercambiar ideas y desarrollar estrategias conjuntas respecto de cómo lidiar con el así llamado “marxismo cultural”. Este último concepto es usualmente utilizado por la ultraderecha para argumentar que la Escuela de Frankfurt es responsable de los movimientos progresistas modernos, las políticas de identidad y la corrección política (Jamin 2014). Parte de la difusión de estas ideas se relaciona con la intención deliberada de la ultraderecha latinoamericana de denunciar al chavismo y su hoy en día agonizante intento de formar una coalición regional de la izquierda radical (Mayka y Smith 2021, 12).

4) La ultraderecha latinoamericana: una tendencia que llegó para quedarse

Los tres argumentos arriba descritos nos sirven para empezar a comprender el inesperado y rápido ascenso de la ultraderecha en la región. Sin embargo, una última cuestión relevante consiste en precisar si este fenómeno terminará siendo pasajero o duradero. Mi intuición es que la ultraderecha que está emergiendo será una fuerza persistente en los próximos años, aunque con diferente peso electoral a lo largo de la región. En todo caso, hay investigaciones que muestran que el impacto de la ultraderecha no descansa solo en su capacidad de ganar elecciones, sino también en su habilidad para modificar la agenda política y pavimentar el camino para la radicalización de la derecha convencional (Bale y Rovira Kaltwasser 2021; Mudde y Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Mudde 2019). Por el mismo motivo, sería un error definir el éxito de la ultraderecha latinoamericana sobre la base de cuántos gobiernos logra formar. Más certero sería analizar cuál es la capacidad que tiene para alterar el debate público, erosionar la democracia y afectar los derechos obtenidos por diversos grupos desfavorecidos que han logrado importantes avances en las últimas décadas.

¿Y por qué podemos pensar que la ultraderecha latinoamericana será un fenómeno duradero antes que pasajero? El principal motivo es que la literatura académica y la evidencia empírica desmitifican un argumento bastante popular: la idea de que el ascenso global de la ultraderecha va de la mano con un giro en la opinión pública en contra de la globalización y/o de posturas progresistas en términos culturales. De hecho, estudios recientes demuestran que las actitudes de la ciudadanía sobre la globalización y los valores liberales no han sufrido cambios drásticos, pero sí es cierto que cada vez más personas votan por fuerzas políticas de ultraderecha con posturas antiglobalización y antiprogresistas (Walter 2021). Esta paradoja también parece estar dándose en América Latina, donde, por ejemplo, los datos indican que no hay un aumento de las actitudes en contra del matrimonio igualitario y/o en contra de la posibilidad de que personas homosexuales compitan en elecciones (Abreu Maia, Chiu y Desposato 2022), pero sí vemos la expansión electoral de líderes de ultraderecha en países como la Argentina (Milei), Brasil (Bolsonaro) y Chile (Kast).

La paradoja en cuestión es reveladora porque da pie para pensar que la expansión de la ultraderecha en América Latina obedece a la aparición de actores políticos que buscan movilizar al electorado mediante el desarrollo de ideas que fomentan la politización de temas culturales antes que económicos. Justamente porque la focalización del debate en torno al clivaje "Estado versus mercado" rinde limitados frutos para la derecha latinoamericana, actores de ultraderecha parecen optar crecientemente por la explotación de temáticas como la sexualidad y la seguridad ciudadana, para así promover ofertas programáticas exitosas e intentar producir un realineamiento electoral. De ser cierta esta tesis, la ultraderecha es un agente que llegó para quedarse, porque sirve para diferenciarse de la izquierda y conquistar a importantes segmentos del electorado. Al fomentar la polarización, las fuerzas de ultraderecha parecen lograr activar demandas latentes y articularlas en torno a un programa común que no solo reduce el peso electoral de la izquierda, sino que también deja en una situación incómoda a la derecha convencional. A su vez, esto vendría a corroborar la tesis de Larry Bartels (2023) respecto de que la democracia hoy en día parece erosionarse desde arriba (por las élites) y no tanto desde abajo (por la ciudadanía). El desafío académico entonces pasa por llevar a cabo análisis empíricos acerca de la transformación de las actitudes y preferencias de las élites, sobre todo en relación con el régimen democrático. De ellas depende mayormente que la democracia perdure o se erosione.

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Understanding Right-Wing Populism (or the Extreme Right)

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It is significant and welcome that the LASA 2024 program committee has created a special program track on the extreme right in Latin America and beyond for next year's Congress in Bogotá, Colombia. There is a need for creative new scholarship on the extreme right, which has had and continues to have a major impact on politics in much of the world, including Latin America. It has become "dominant in the present" (Finchelstein 2017, xi) and generated a series of urgent questions, including some about the impact of the extreme right on democracy. It has also stimulated new debates within and across a variety of humanities and social science disciplines. This article defends a particular approach to the study of the extreme right in Latin America, one that puts it in historical and global context and connects it to previous waves of right-wing politics in the region. It briefly describes antecedents to the extreme right and some of its contemporary manifestations, discusses some challenges of doing work in the field, and proposes some questions for future research.

Lineages of the Extreme Right in Latin America

The precursors of today's extreme right-wingers in Latin America were nineteenth-century conservatives struggling to deal with the consequences of the French Revolution and political independence. They revered traditional social hierarchies and "order," which they often took to be God given. Conservatives were sometimes skeptical of science and mistrustful of criticisms of authority. They usually supported slavery, the exclusion of Afro–Latin Americans from citizenship, and the acceptance of the indigenous only on condition of their assimilation to the norms and practices of the white population. The conservative preference was for a strong and centralized state, a limited franchise, and a dominant landed elite. If sovereignty was ultimately based on the people, it was exercised and embodied by a powerful and sometimes charismatic leader, a substitute for the premodern absolute monarch.

In the mid-twentieth century, classic populists in Latin America also had affinities with the extreme right wing of the current period. The governments of Juan Domingo Perón (1946–1955, 1973–1974) in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945, 1951–1954) in Brazil, and José María Velasco Ibarra (1944–1947, 1952–1956) were attempts to present an alternative model to Soviet communism as well as liberalism and socialism (Finkelstein 2017, xv). While the attempts were not fascist, their national developmentalist ideology shared elements with fascism, and their use of the media (particularly radio) was aimed at promoting national integration and state-building.

A third group of antecedents of today's extreme right is the neoliberal populists of the 1990s. Carlos Menem (1989–1999) in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000) in Peru, Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–1992) in Brazil, and Abdalá Bucaram (1996–1997) in Ecuador cultivated personalistic attachments to followers, concentrated power in the presidency, and engaged in neoliberal reforms (Weyland 1999).

The contemporary extreme right in the region defies simple generalizations and spans a variety of movements, parties, governments, and leaders and distinct sets of contexts and grievances. It includes the governments of Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) in Colombia, Jimmy Morales (2016–2020)

in Guatemala, Nayib Bukele (2019–present) in El Salvador, Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) in Brazil, and Rodrigo Chaves (2022–present) in Costa Rica, as well as the presidential candidacies of José Antonio Kast in Chile in 2021 and Rodolfo Hernández in Colombia in 2022.

An example of the power of the extreme right can be seen in contemporary Argentina. In the presidential primaries of August 13, 2023, which took place in the midst of an economic crisis, the first-place candidate with about 30 percent of the vote was Javier Milei of the Freedom Advances (La Libertad Avanza) party. Milei went on to win the presidential election on November 19. It is not clear at this point exactly how he will govern, but his victory in the race is likely to have a major impact on Argentine politics.

Milei is a pugnacious 52-year-old economist and congressman who is an admirer of former president Jair Bolsonaro of neighboring Brazil. He argues that Bolsonaro actually won the 2022 Brazilian presidential election. Milei promises not only to bury Kirchnerismo, associated with the governments of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007); his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015); and her successor, Alberto Fernández (2019–present), but also to get rid of the "useless," "parasitical" and "corrupt . . . political caste." Milei offers a combination of radical economic and cultural measures. He claims that he wants to abolish the Central Bank, dollarize the economy, privatize all state enterprises, reduce the primary fiscal deficit (before interest payments) to zero in his first year, introduce vouchers in the education system, liberalize access to firearms, prohibit abortion, and cut the number of ministries from 18 to eight. The latter would include the closure of the Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity as well as the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (because "climate change is a socialist lie").

Milei has called the pope a "communist" and thinks the idea of social justice is "an aberration." His vice-presidential running mate Victoria Villaruel is a defender of Argentina's military dictatorship of 1976–1983. Milei's strong showing in the primaries was celebrated by Jair Bolsonaro and his son, the Brazilian congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro, José Antonio Kast (who ran in the 2021 presidential elections in Chile), Santiago Abascal, the leader of Spain's Vox party, and the leaders of the Brothers of Italy party, currently part of the coalition government of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.[1]

What is the appropriate term to describe Milei? The new president himself says he is a "libertarian liberal" and an "anarchist of the market" (Alonso 2023a). There are many other terms that might fit—for example, *demagogue* or *national populist*—or calling him a member of the alt right, extreme right, or new right. However, one of Milei's intellectual heroes, the late US economist Murray Rothbard (1992, 7), used another term that encapsulates Milei's political style and ideological position. In an article that anticipates the candidacy of Donald J. Trump, written almost fifteen years before the 2016 presidential election in the United States, Rothbard called for the emergence on the national stage of a "right-wing populist."[2]

Right-Wing Populism

A minimalist understanding of right-wing populism classifies it as movements, parties, leaders, and governments who engage in transgressive political performances that oppose "elites" in the name of the "people," rely at least in part on unmediated communication between

[1] Information on Milei in this and the preceding paragraph comes from Alonso (2023a), Derbyshire (2023), *The Economist* (2023), Goñi (2023a, 2023b), Lissardy (2023), and Smink (2023).

[2] To situate Rothbard in the context of US politics, he idolized Senator Joseph McCarthy, reviled the civil rights movement, and supported the Louisiana politician (and former member of the Ku Klux Klan) David Duke. Rothbard is unusual in embracing the "populist" label. Steve Bannon, President Trump's former adviser, also uses the term approvingly. Most politicians described as populist vehemently reject the characterization and apply it instead to their opponents. See, e.g., Bolsonaro (2022, 5).

a leader and followers, and spread right-wing ideological messages such as antiglobalism, traditional social values, and ethnic or religious nationalism. This definition accommodates the three main approaches to populism in the literature, which define it in ideological, organizational, and discursive or performative terms. Right-wing populism can thus be distinguished from other forms of populism with different (especially left-wing) host ideologies, and movements, parties, governments, and leaders that do not rely on populist discourses, performances, or styles.[3] Equally important, right-wing populism "usually brings together multi-class alliances that cut across different social sectors," with "hierarchies of grievances" that vary from country to country (Panizza 2023, xxvii). In addition, it is often hostile to pluralism, preferring to see the authentic and downtrodden "people" as a single entity (Wolf 2022, 179).

Right-wing populism is a type of mass politics that is to the right of traditional conservatism. It frames politics as a moral crusade. It has an aversion to "globalism" and multilateralism and defends national sovereignty, a hard-line approach to law and order, the patriarchal family, conservative social values, and religion. And it has brought leaders to power in Poland, Hungary, the Philippines, India, Turkey, the United States, Brazil, El Salvador, and elsewhere. One of the most interesting things about right-wing populist leaders is how they have innovated in terms of the use of social media, presentational style, and ideological content. Right-wing populists can often generate wild enthusiasm amongst their supporters. In Rothbard's (1992, 13) words: "Centrist politics, elitist politics, is deliberately boring and torpid. The people get put to sleep. . . . But right-wing populist politics is rousing, exciting, ideological, and that is precisely why the elites don't like it." Another important aspect of right-wing populism is its ambivalent relationship to liberal democracy, which it sometimes threatens.

Right-wing populism offers to "take back control" from the forces of transnational technocratic elitism (Lind 2020, xxiii). Instead of multiculturalism, pluralism, and tolerance, it offers religious (and often ethnic) nationalism. In place of multilateral and supranational governance, it suggests traditional national sovereignty. Rather than the separation of powers, constraints on executive power from legislative, judicial, auditing, and investigative bodies, and the protection of minority rights of liberal democracy, it shows a preference for a strong leader who embodies the will of the people and engages in a plebiscitary form of governance. In the face of increasingly assertive social movements demanding rights for the indigenous, immigrants, women, and sexual, gender, regional and religious minorities, right-wing populism offers the God of state-sanctioned religion, the patriarchal family, and the rites and symbols of the mainstream identity of the national majority. Unlike traditional conservatism, it wants not to maintain the stability of the status quo but to radically deconstruct fundamental aspects of the current social order.

In economic policy, US and European versions of right-wing populism appear to differ from their Latin American counterparts. In the first two regions, and especially after the financial crisis of 2008–2009, right-wing populists usually offer economic protectionism and nationalism as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism, as well as social safety nets for "the people"—the deserving "real" people of the nation. In Latin America, in contrast, right-wing populists are more likely to offer a hard version of neoliberalism, at least rhetorically. But both variants attempt to offer the prospect of popular sovereignty and a new order that is fairer to those made vulnerable or uncomfortable by the cultural and socioeconomic status quo (see the articles by Sonja Wolf on Bukele and Camila Rocha on Bolsonaro in this issue).

[3] The weight of ideology in defining right-wing populism is subject to debate. Weyland (2019, 329–330), for example, writes: "It is typical of populism that it lacks ideological definition. . . . Populism's lodestar is opportunism . . . rightwing parties and movements can only turn populist if they dilute their extremist ideology fundamentally and turn it into a loose, vague mentality."

Challenges in the study of right-wing populism

There are several challenges to using right-wing populism as a concept in analysis. One is the contested nature of the label "populist." Some scholars avoid the term because of perceived inconsistency and bias in its use, especially when it is used casually to dismiss anything or anybody that offends establishment interests. However, many terms used in scholarly analysis are contested. The fact that some words are used offhandedly in everyday speech does not mean that they cannot be employed in the service of what Laclau (2018, 249) calls "obstinant rigor." The rich tradition of writing about populism in Latin America provides a framework that allows us to see the extreme right in historical and global perspective. This can be done in a way that is not dismissive of those who support right-wing populists; rather, the aim is to understand the reasons people support such movements, to take the right-wing populist critique of contemporary liberal democracy seriously (de la Torre 2019, 24), and to engage with scholars who admire right-wing populism (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Goodwin 2023).

Another challenge is to use the comparative method to gain an understanding of what is truly distinctive and what is shared across localities, nations, and regions. As Panizza (2023, xxviii) writes, "There are still significant lacunae in the study of the political makeup of right-wing populism in Latin America that make comparisons between regions difficult, but there are parallels and differences between the rise of right-wing populism" in different regions.

A third task is to complement comparison by uncovering transnational networks in which narratives and tactics are shared. Cowan (2018), for example, has shown how conservative Christian organizations (both Catholic and Protestant) in Brazil such as Tradição, Família e Propriedade (Tradition, Family and Property) worked to build a right-wing network linking the United States and Brazil and opposed to "cultural Marxism," abortion, homosexuality, "gender ideology," and other perceived ills of modern society. This network eventually fed into the support base of the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, a base sometimes referred to as the alliance of beef, Bible, and bullets (Lapper 2021) in reference to agribusiness, conservative (and especially Evangelical Protestant) Christian organizations, and the police and military as well as non-uniformed gun enthusiasts and gun manufacturers.

Uncovering such transnational links is no easy task. The meetings of right-wing populists are not always public, and much of their communication is encrypted. Some of the most innovative research on right-wing populism involves the gathering and analysis of text on public social media sites or private ones to which researchers have gained access.

Publicly available sources are still valuable and can sometimes show where affinities and connections lie. One example comes from the book of the right-wing populist activist and writer Christopher Rufo. Rufo is currently involved in a hostile takeover of the New College of Florida, a public liberal arts college. Rufo and five other trustees, appointed in January 2023 by Florida's governor, are busy remaking New College along the lines of Hillsdale College, a conservative Christian college in Michigan. The new board of trustees fired the previous president and replaced her with a president who is the former Florida state house speaker (paying him $400,000 per year more than his predecessor), deferred the decisions on tenure of five professors in the spring of 2023, and shut down the gender studies program (Anderson 2023; Petti 2023; Spitalniak 2023).

Rufo's outlandish book *America's Cultural Revolution* tries to stimulate moral panic by alleging that the miniscule revolutionary left of the 1960s somehow managed to take over the entirety of US education, government, and business by means of a stealthy and nihilistic "cultural revolution." He makes the case for a "counterrevolution" even though his career at the Heritage Foundation, the Discovery Institute, and the Manhattan Institute, and now as a trustee of New College, is a refutation of his own argument.

In his book Rufo expresses admiration for the education policies of Jair Bolsonaro because they were opposed to the ideas of Paulo Freire (Rufo 2023, 330n4). He does this without mentioning the deep cuts to university research (in the natural sciences as well as the humanities and social sciences) under Bolsonaro; the harrowing disorganization, ineptitude, and callousness of the Ministry of Education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; or the allegations of corruption against some of the top officials in the ministry (Bueno 2023; Matos 2022).

More generally, there are strong parallels between the right-wing populist playbook with regard to education in Florida and Brazil. (This mirrors a broader affinity between extreme right-wing politics in Latin America and the United States.[4]) In both places alleged subversion (Marxism and communism in Brazil, "woke" ideology and critical theory in Florida) is used as an excuse to try to restrict freedom of thought and expression, intimidate educators into silence and conformity, and impose a single standard of "correct" education in areas such as history and sociology in an approach that mirrors the defense of religious dogma in pre-Enlightenment Europe. In both places, right-wing populists are aggressively using their power over the educational bureaucracy to impose a political ideology in institutions in which the freedom to question and think independently are supposed to be valued. They are doing exactly what they accuse the left of doing, and they justify their authoritarianism in terms of the highest values of excellence, equality, dignity, and freedom (Rufo 2023, 281). The hypocrisy of right-wing populists in this particular area is troubling, and it poses real problems for democracy. Democracies in which large swathes of the population are constantly vilified as "communist" or "woke" by people in authority are compromised and incomplete. The very real distortions and exaggerations of some censorious versions of left-wing thought should not become a reason to create a new form of McCarthyism.[5]

Questions for further research

There are at least three areas in which more research on right-wing populism is needed. The first is in understanding the drivers of support for right-wing populist movements, parties, leaders, and governments. The second is in analyzing under which circumstances, why, and how right-wing populist governments dismantle elements of liberal democracy. And given the second, the third is which alternatives to right-wing populist politics are most effective.

With regard to the first issue, how material and nonmaterial changes contribute to demands for right-wing populism needs to be more clearly understood. Economic factors and changes in the workplace combine with social and cultural forces, as well as psychological ones, to contribute to the rise of these movements, but the causal mechanisms within and distinctive trajectories of these movements are not always clear. An additional element is the role of digital technology in these movements. Is there an elective affinity between digital media and right-wing populism (Gerbaudo 2018; Zuboff 2019), or are social media platforms tools that can be used well by people of any political persuasion?

The second issue requires empirical work. For example, right-wing populist governments use history to build an identity with supporters, and more insights into this process are needed. The evocation of threats and conspiracy theories such as those supposedly posed by "gender ideology" and "cultural Marxism"; the invocation of a "middle class" ideology of hard work, individual responsibility, and opposition to the expansion of welfare state measure; and attacks on "globalism"

[4] An example of this affinity can be found in the case of Henry "Enrique" Tarrio, a leader of the Proud Boys whose 22-year sentence for his involvement in the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol is the longest to have been given to anyone prosecuted for those events so far. Tarrio is a Cuban American who grew up in Miami. See Wendling (2023).

[5] For a cogent critique of right-wing populist attitudes and tactics in education, see Srinivasan (2023). She writes, "Much of what is under attack . . . is not the abuse of academic freedom, but academic freedom itself." And she adds, many "right-wing culture warriors . . . subscribe to 'free speech' and 'academic freedom' only when, and to whichever ideological ends, it suits them."

can all be elements of right-wing populist government, but so can more tangible policies such as social policies, protection for favored industries, and benefits to religious groups. In addition, does right-wing populism veer toward fascism, as some authors claim (Cox and Skidmore-Hess, 2022; Finkelstein 2017, xvi–xvii), and if so, what are the drivers of that process?[6]

Peruzzotti (2022) argues that democratic hybridization takes place when elected populist governments dismantle major elements of liberal constitutionalism. Alter and Zurn (2020) imply that right-wing populism arises as part of a pattern of backlash politics, a distinct form of contentious politics marked by a retrograde aim of returning to a prior social condition and disruptive and transgressive goals and tactics that challenge the establishment. The analysis of Rocha (2021) in the Brazilian case converges with this approach somewhat, in that she locates the beginning of the rise of Bolsonarism in the second term of President Lula (2006–2010), as a reaction to Lulism (see also Alonso 2023b).[7] Vieira, Glezer, and Barbosa (2022), examining the first two years of the Bolsonaro administration in Brazil, claim that President Bolsonaro used "infrapolitics," or decrees and administrative regulations, to achieve authoritarian ends, sending him on a collision course with the Federal Supreme Court. And Csaba Győry and his colleagues are embarking on a major comparative study of the resilience—or not—of the rule of law in the face of various threats, including the instrumentalization of the law by right-wing populist regimes, a practice that elsewhere and in a different context has been called "authoritarian legality."[8]

Finally, what are alternatives to right-wing populism? Lero (2023, 124) recommends a new paradigm for economic development and a proactive democratic vision. Arato and Cohen (2019, 110) argue for "a new version of the welfare state" that can be fought for on domestic and international levels as a means of reducing the rise of inequality of recent decades. Fukuyama (2019, 166) wants the promotion of "creedal national identities built around the foundational ideas of modern liberal democracy" with the use of "public policies to deliberately assimilate newcomers to those identities." Wolf (2023, 379) argues for the restoration of citizenship so that democracies once again provide opportunity, security, and dignity to large and expanding majorities. There are also fierce debates amongst scholars about whether left-wing identity politics is a barrier to or accelerant of right-wing populism.[9]

Not all right-wing populisms threaten democracy. And there are other threats to democracy aside from right-wing populism. Right-wing populism can serve as an alert that democracy is not working. But at its most pernicious, it is a harbinger of simplistic pseudosolutions, as well as hatred, violence, and authoritarianism. Unless there is a better understanding of the causes of this type of mass politics, its impacts on society and institutions, and its metamorphosis in power, we may be in danger of witnessing continuing de-democratization around the world. That is why the panel discussions and roundtables that emerge from the call for this new special track at the next LASA conference in Bogotá in 2024 give us much to look forward to.

[6] For a good analysis of the differences between fascism and right-wing populism, see De la Torre and Srisa-Nga (2022, 98–113).

[7] Rocha (2021) traces the origins of what she calls the new right in Brazil in liberal think tanks and virtual communities dedicated to discussing the ideas of thinkers such as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, and Olavo de Carvalho.

[8] See the website of the conference "Rule of Law, Resilience and Erosion: The Interplay between Institutional Design and Everyday Practice" organized by the Institute for Legal Studies at the Centre for Social Sciences, October 12–14, 2022, Budapest at https://www.reconstitution.eu/en/events/calendar/detail/rule-of-law-resilience-and-erosion.html. For an application of the concept of authoritarian legality, see Pereira (2005).

[9] Piketty (2020, 961, 965), although he rejects populism as a concept, argues against the "identitarian menace" in its right- and left-wing forms, claiming that class cleavages should take precedence in politics. What he advocates is a focus on the property regime, fiscal, social, and educational systems and the management of borders to reduce economic inequality and strengthen democracy.

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"Gender Ideology," Refeudalization, and the Reproductive Reconquista: A (G)local Perspective

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The expansion of extremely conservative social and political movements has gained attention in recent years. However, this sociopolitical phenomenon is not new. In certain aspects, it has been gestating for more than fifty years, particularly with the rise of the Christian Right in the United States and the instrumentalization of religious narratives and emotions for geopolitical purposes. At the same time, other facets of the new right in Latin America have deeper historical roots that can be traced to persisting colonialist projects.

Different terms have been used to describe these movements: neo-conservatism, anti-rights movements, anti-globalization movements, ethno-nationalisms, left- and right-wing populism, among others. A more productive way to name this phenomenon, though, is *refeudalization* (which I define later).

In the global context of extreme right-wing and neoconservative assemblages, a particular phrase has been deployed by neoconservative and right-wing leaders in Latin America and some European countries and with extraordinary success: *gender ideology*.[1] The literature analyzing this term, its origins, and its meanings has grown impressively during the past few years.

In this article, I present a different way of looking at and understanding the broader picture behind the emergence of this concept, one based on how neoconservative movements have been developing in the United States, Latin America, and some European countries over the past 20 to 30 years, and drawing on empirical research and reports. My purpose is to center reproductive politics in the analysis while recognizing that there are important elements that feminist approaches to the study of neoconservatism have largely ignored. In this piece, I try to connect complementing frameworks through what I call the *reproductive Reconquista*.

The reproductive Reconquista

The reproductive Reconquista is the common drive, inspired by a romanticized Christian sense of destiny, honor, belonging, order, and certainty, that has stirred an assemblage of diverse conservative political movements across different regional and cultural contexts, in a quest to defend what they believe to be the good society. Their vision of a good society demands that the state be rooted in Christian moral and political commitments. They believe this project of society is under attack on at least two fronts. The first is political globalization, which is imposing narratives of international human rights, thereby jeopardizing national sovereignty and tradition. The second is the cultural front, where

[1] This is not exclusively of the right: left-wing political leaders have also made use of this rhetorical device. In fact, a leftist president, Rafael Correa, was the first president in Latin America to ever use the term in a public statement. However, despite the affinity some on the left might feel toward the narrative, it is mainly associated with right-wing conservative political strategies.

contemporary progressive social movements, such as antiracist, feminist, LGBTQ, and migrant movements, among others, are undermining the sacred structure of the family.

At the core of sociocultural conservative nostalgia is the traditional notion of family as the most fundamental basis of the good society they envision. From their point of view, this sacred, though secularized, conceptualization of family has been under constant attack for decades. Their mission is to reconquer the social, political, and symbolic spaces that they believe have been lost to the unyielding process of globalization, which, to them, is necessary to save not just the traditional sacred family but also, and even more importantly, the state and the nation.

To understand more clearly their motivations, I briefly describe what these groups perceive as the most relevant attacks they must confront. First was the sexual revolution and the feminist movement of the 1960s. In their view, the invention of contraceptives, the proclamation of sexual pleasure as independent of reproduction and marriage, and the secular education of children were all part of a carefully drafted plan to redefine what is a good society and what is a legitimate state.

Second was the gradual scientific and technological advances that facilitated human intervention and control in reproduction and sexuality. These groups have perceived this technoscientific development as a dangerous and disrespectful interference in the sacred order of things. All these scientific developments demonstrate, for them, the dangers of doing science without respecting the divine and the sacred.

Third, they began to perceive interventions of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and World Health Organization in issues of national interest, such as public health, constitutional rights, and the interpretation of the law according to international standards of human rights, as an *abuse of power*. For the ultraconservative right, these interventions are undue meddling into matters of national interest that force countries to accept definitions and norms, such as gender and reproductive rights, in a way that undermines individual freedoms and national culture and traditions.

The quest for a reproductive Reconquista should not be seen just as a mere moral endeavor led by religious extremists or fundamentalists. It is much more than that. There is, of course, a connection with these Christian righteous expressions of religious integralism. But this project goes beyond the salvation of the soul and the protection of moral values in quite complex ways. The Reconquista is not only moral but also political, economic, and cultural. The project aims to retake the political power and freedoms that conservatives and their allies feel have been taken from them in illegitimate and violent ways.

To understand its nuances, let us focus on the term *Reconquista* (I am, of course, appealing to what it is popularly known as the Spanish Reconquista). As García-Sanjuán (2020 133) explains:

> the notion of a Spanish Reconquista is the product of 19th-century Spanish Nationalist thinking. Although developed as an academic concept, it played, at the same time, a crucial political and ideological role, thus holding a very powerful and potentially toxic ideological burden, chiefly consisting of the idea that Spain is a nation shaped against Islam. Its dual academic and ideological nature makes it a highly problematic concept that greatly contributed to produce a largely biased and distorted vision of the Iberian medieval past, aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic presence (al-Andalus) and therefore at legitimizing the Christian conquest of the Muslim territory.

Similarly, the term *gender ideology* was developed by neo-integrist Catholic scholars working closely with the Vatican (Arguedas-Ramírez 2020b). The term was designed to give the appearance of secular and academic reasoning. However, it is fundamentally a neo-integrist narrative that conveys the rejection of feminist claims and, more importantly, transmits the idea that gender ideology is a lie made up to

defend political agendas that negate rational and scientific evidence. In this way, their ideological motivation is hidden behind the accusation that they are directing at their adversary. For these neo-integrist Catholic intellectuals, *gender ideology* designates the core feminist philosophical arguments on which women and LGBTQ movements are rooted: gender roles are socially constructed and enforced through violence, gender hierarchies are forms of oppression based on the concentration of privilege on certain males, and sexuality is naturally diverse. These ideas, for neoconservative intellectuals, are "ideology."

Likewise, the narrative of the Spanish Reconquista has been weaponized in Spain by right-wing political organizations, such as the extreme right-wing political party VOX. Moreover, VOX's narrative has been celebrated by right-wing extremists in other countries. In 2018, when VOX won twelve seats in Andalusia's senate, the American Ku Klux Klan leader and Nazi sympathizer, David Duke, posted a tweet celebrating the result: "the Reconquista begins in the Andalusian lands and will be extended to the rest of Spain" (*El País* 2018). In France, the extreme right-wing politician Éric Zemmour founded the nationalist political party Reconquête (Pidgeon 2023), promoting an inflammatory narrative based on nationalist, xenophobic, and conservative tropes. Reconquête and Vox generally share the same political objectives and strategies, such as instigating xenophobic hate, moral authoritarianism, and nationalist emotions. As explained by Cuenca-Navarrette (2023), both political parties argue that secularization leads to the destruction of the society they see as superior and endangered by mass immigration, demographic decline and the loss of traditional values. The only way to stop this menace is by defending a civilizational project based on Christian universalism.

The concept of a reproductive Reconquista points to an ongoing and far-reaching political, economic, and cultural process. The social transformation the movement is trying to achieve is profoundly ingrained in politicized religious beliefs that shape individual and collective identities while also serving as outlets for social groups that feel betrayed and abandoned by the ruling class. They also profoundly clash with political ideals and institutions embedded in the Enlightenment.

This fantasy of reconquering political institutions, geographical territories, social and economic privileges, and entitlements, such as the power of dominion—the theocratic idea that Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions[2]—is tremendously appealing to large swaths of the population in many different countries. Cultural and geopolitical differences notwithstanding, we should pay attention to the commonalities between the diversity of neoconservative mobilizations. For instance, extensive research has been conducted on protests against gender ideology, sexual education, contraceptive access, and other sexual and reproductive rights issues in countries such as Paraguay, Chile, Costa Rica, Poland, Hungary, the United States, Mexico, Germany, Spain, and Brazil (Vaggione and Machado 2020; Arguedas-Ramírez 2020a).[3] They share the same basic messaging and strategies because they are all connected to a broader sociopolitical project, which a handful of organizations have been supporting with funding, training of conservative activists, and other strategies, for many years (Fitzgerald and Provost 2019). In 2020 openDemocracy published a database and an investigative report detailing how Christian Right fundamentalist organizations in the United States have spent millions of dollars supporting conservative religious-political groups working against women's and LGBTQ rights in Europe,

[2] "Dominionism can be summarized as the theocratic idea that Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over every aspect of society by taking control of political and cultural institutions: for example, over the role of government, the form and content of public education, and eliminating rights related to bodily autonomy" (Clarkson 2022). See also Dorrien (2005).

[3] See also the Spring 2020 dossier "Las ofensivas antigénero en América Latina: https://forum.lasaweb.org/past-issues/vol51-issue2.php.

Latin America, and Africa. They have managed to evade taxes and controls because the money moves through organizations registered as churches. In this way, they do not have the legal obligation to disclose financial operations (Archer and Provost 2020).

The question that follows is, then, what are the territories, privileges, and power that this reproductive Reconquista is trying to take "back"? First of all, women's bodies, and not only for reproductive and sexual purposes, but also for economic and symbolic purposes. Privileges linked to an idealized traditional masculinity and to hierarchies of power and prestige require strict social norms based on gender roles. For instance, without a clear masculinist gender order, there is no basis for establishing and normalizing the reproductive division of labor, the imposition of care as a feminine raison d'être and, therefore, a political economy that makes acceptable an economic system based on the exploitation of women's domestic work. From this perspective, it can be easier to understand why feminist and gender studies have become the target of right-wing populist political leaders across the globe, including Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and congressman Fabricio Alvarado in Costa Rica.

In some regions, the nationalist or racial dimension of the reproductive Reconquista is more salient than in others, but all have in common a strong xenophobic feeling fueled by the fear of being replaced by another race or culture (a conspiracy known as the Great Replacement). Therefore, the only way to prevent been replaced by another "race" or culture is by incentivizing reproduction by the "superior race" and obstructing reproduction of the undesirable "inferior races." In this way, it is clear that the neoconservative "pro-life" narrative that criminalizes abortion, the structure of health care, and social determinants of health that induces a highest maternal mortality rate in Afro-American women, and the practice of forced sterilization of migrant women in detainee centers in the United States do not constitute an internal contradiction in their moral code. On the contrary, there is internal consistency within the ideological framework of reproductive Reconquista.

The reproductive Reconquista shares with the Spanish Reconquista key elements of illusion, nostalgia, and fantasy. Never did the Catholic Church or men as a collective or the economic elite in any particular time and place have absolute control over women. Even in the most violently patriarchal societies, women have always found ways to resist or to negotiate spaces of freedom and self-determination. Nonetheless, the idea prevails in contemporary sexist discourse that there was a time when men exerted absolute dominion over women, either because that is the natural way of things or because it is the will of God. The contemporary narrative that sustains the existence of such a thing as the Spanish Reconquista is also based on a distorted image of the past, in which "Spaniard" Christians valiantly reclaimed control over territories that were invaded by Muslims.

As García-Sanjuán (2020 140) explains: "This approach stands for the most powerful myth of the origins of the Spanish nation, which, accordingly, would have been shaped in the fight against Islam. On the other hand, it represents a highly biased reading of the past aimed at delegitimizing the Islamic half of medieval Iberia and at legitimizing the other Christian half. When weaponized for political goals, this approach is not only misleading but also extremely toxic and even dangerous."

Both Reconquistas are based on the fantasy of power and dominion over the *other*. This dominion is the source of their honor, identity, and sense of purpose. The reproductive Reconquista is fueled by the symbolic power of a lost world in which everything followed the natural or divine order of things. Their project, therefore, is to reclaim once more that which they see as theirs to hold and control. Therefore, the particularities of the reproductive Reconquista in Latin America are inextricably linked to the colonial legacy that still endures in that region. As Martínez (2009) describes, the dominant matrix in Latin America, rooted in its

historical colonial origins, has linked religion, politics, and the market for centuries through networks of sociability that include politicians, businesspeople, and cultural and religious leaders. In this way, a social-political-religious field emerged that cuts across all socioeconomic classes and sectors of society. This complex field, can be traced from the present back to the independence of Spain.

Additionally, Catholic and Evangelical hierarchies played decisive roles in Central American during the period of the Cold War. According to Cangemi (2018), before the Second Vatican Council, Central American elites were very close to the Catholic Church. But after the rise of liberation theology and the rise of a Catholicism more critical of social injustice and inequality, elites turned to neo-Pentecostal groups linked to US conservative and anticommunist groups. The paradigmatic example of such an alliance is Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt (Tureck 2015). This progressive Catholic phase did not last long, however. During the papacy of John Paul II, while Cardinal Ratzinger was head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, liberation theology priests, nuns, and laypeople were persecuted, tortured, and killed by national-security-doctrine military governments with US funding. The Vatican did nothing to protect them and, in some instances, even demonstrated more affinity to those governments than to the victims of the right-wing campaign against social justice movements (Levine 1990).

In any case, the Cold War set the stage for Protestant denominations to grow at a steady pace, threatening Catholicism's hegemony in Latin America. Despite the historical competition between these Christian traditions, today strategic and pragmatic alliances prevail. There is not much left of liberation theology Catholicism. Most Evangelical and Catholic churches and organizations have accommodated their narratives in a way that is useful to a right-wing politics. More specifically, Catholic neo-integralism and neo-Pentecostal fundamentalism have joined forces in the reproductive Reconquista, as can be seen clearly in their mutual support for the campaign against gender ideology (Hodzic and Bijelic 2014; Garbagnoli 2016).

The bottom line is that these political-religious movements are stronger together. They have been tremendously successful in deploying political strategies to limit and even revert the protection of sexual and reproductive rights in many countries. The generalized effect of these mobilizations in the United States, Latin America, and Europe has debilitated the fundamental pillars of the secular state: scientific education, freedom of speech, and religious neutrality in public policy matters (Brown 2006).

The link between the reproductive Reconquista and refeudalization

According to Neckel (2013, 2019), *refeudalization* refers to a series of connected economic and political processes of privatization of public assets and spaces, the hyperconcentration of power in nonstate actors, the reprivatization of social policy and services (as private charity or as family obligations), and the financialization of the economy. But most important: "Over the past two decades, numerous capitalist countries have experienced developments in social inequality which exhibit clear signs of refeudalization. Characteristic features of this development are the extremely one-sided preferential treatment of those at the pinnacle of society. These social elites enjoy historically unprecedented levels of wealth, while the lower strata are not only pauperized, but are increasingly exposed to relations of work that no longer satisfy the elementary standards of modern contractual relationships" (Neckel 2019, 6).

Kaltmeier (2022, 303-304) explains that refeudalization refers "to those elements, discourses, and positions that show a high analogy to feudal elements but unfold their effectiveness in the current capitalist world system." He developed seven theses based on the particularities of the Latin America's context: the refeudalization of the social structure, the economy, values, spaces, the political field, identity politics, and political rationality.

Now, how do the reproductive Reconquista and refeudalization connect with each other? The cases of Trump in the United States and Bolsonaro in Brazil serve as examples. Right-wing populism, inflamed by neoconservative narratives calling for heroic warriors to defend tradition, honor, and order, have transformed the contemporary political landscape in a way that reminds us, somehow, of medieval religious wars.[4] Then, I propose to include neoconservative reproductive politics, deprivatization of religion, and antidemocratic politicization of religious activism as marks of refeudalization. The particular process of desecularizing the public and political spheres produced by the reproductive Reconquista is fundamentally antidemocratic because its main goal is to gain moral and political control over every aspect of daily social life. Even though the process of secularization in Latin American has been incomplete and, to some extent, a legal formality, its effects were crucial for consolidating democratic regimes in the region and granting basic rights for women. In the United States, for instance, secularity was a foundational characteristic of the Constitution, but it has been eroded through conservative judicial activism.

In fascist, colonialist, and nationalist political projects, reproductive politics has a determinant place because the reproduction of the people they believe to be superior must be secured. These economic and political projects require something that, to this day, cannot be replaced by any technological means: pregnancies. Consequently, women's bodies are indispensable. And even more indispensable are women's subjectivities. The reproductive Reconquista needs women socialized to be devoted to traditional motherhood. But more importantly for this project, children must be educated to oppose and fight against the enemies of the reproductive Reconquista: mothers have the duty to raise the future fighters for righteousness.

That is why public education is at the center of the culture wars. Many Evangelical fundamentalist and Christian nationalist communities in the United States have been promoting homeschooling because they consider secular education a moral threat to their children. But in the framework of the reproductive Reconquista, the objective no longer is to protect children from external influences but to demand and achieve a total transformation of the public education system. In other words, their mission is to desecularize public education using secular strategies, such as appeals to constitutional rights, political participation to elect their candidates, and the promotion of conservative teachers to workplace activists (Apple 2006).

As has been studied by Morán Faúndes and Viaggioni (2012), among others, neoconservative movements are emulating successful political and social strategies implemented by progressive organizations and political parties. They are doing it also at the international level (Zaremberg, Tabbush, and Friedman, 2021), competing against feminist and other social organizations at forums such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations (Moragas 2020; Morán-Faúndes 2022). Their efforts have been directed against the advancement of women's and LGBTQ rights, and against any form of legal limitation in the individual exercise of religious freedom. Weaponizing conscientious objection has been key to obstructing women's reproductive rights (e.g., abortion, contraception, voluntary surgical sterilization) in Latin America and in some European countries (Sonfield 2018).

By claiming they are defending freedom and fundamental values, these warriors of the reproductive Reconquista are trying—and with success in some instances—to reconquer as many aspects and spaces of daily life as possible: education, health care, arts and entertainment, electoral politics. This process is

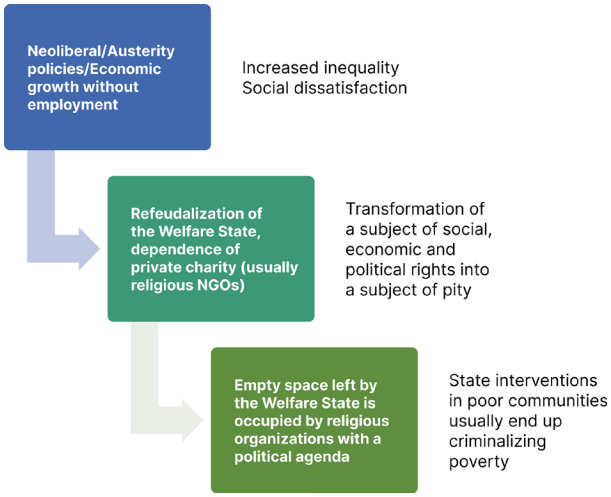
[4] In this space it is not possible to elaborate on the role of Medievalism in the reproductive Reconquista and refeudalization. But it is relevant to point out that Medievalist imaginary played a role in online narratives in favor of Trump and Bolsonaro. There were memes and pictures of them dressed as crusaders and even gatherings of supporters wearing medieval paraphernalia. See for instance Pachá 2019, Millar 2021 and MacLellan 2023. Also relevant is the link between criminal gangs and neo-Pentecostal Militias in Brazil (Hinz et al 2021).

radically antisecular and antidemocratic. They reject the idea that religious mandates are circumscribed to their specific community of believers. However, their rhetorical strategies are not restricted to religious tropes. On the contrary, in this reproductive Reconquista, a variety of communications strategies has been displayed for specific needs and audiences—for instance, narratives from Catholic neo-integralism, which has produced an extensive arsenal of documents using refine philosophical argumentation without referencing sacred texts (Arguedas-Ramírez 2020b). And they know how to capture media and social attention, deploying more colorful political slogans such as "Con mis hijos no te metas," "No a la ideología de género," "Cultural Marxism," "Culture of death," or "God made them Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve."[5]

A powerful example of the consequences of the continuing desecularization of the public sphere (Bettiza 2012) is the US Supreme Court's ruling regarding the right to abortion. The *Dobbs* case, as it is known, revoked the rights guaranteed in *Roe v. Wade*. This ruling would not have been possible without Trump's three Supreme Court appointments. It is evident that even though Trump is no longer in office, his legacy will have far-reaching consequences, even beyond the US jurisdiction. This is also a sign of the ongoing process of refeudalization.

To illustrate the socioeconomic impact of refeudalization from a social justice point of view, Figure 1 describes how economic, social and political issues interconnect. When the welfare state retreats from where it is needed the most, other sociopolitical actors fill that void. In Latin America that includes drug gangs and Evangelical fundamentalist churches (Misra 2023; Petri 2012; Brands 2010). But more important is that, when the state stops providing a minimum amount of support for vulnerable individuals and families, women are immediately expected to provide all the care work (Arguedas-Ramírez 2020b; Bateman and Ross 2020; Bergallo et al. 2021).

Figure 1. How refeudalization looks from a social justice point of view, based on Latin American examples.



Moreover, refeudalization is intertwined with neoconservative religious ideologies of individual salvation and poverty and vulnerability as signs of moral failure and lack of faith. The so-called prosperity gospel is at odds with the ethical and political principles of the welfare state. Neoconservatism denounces any social or redistributive public policy as "socialist" or "communist." Although Catholic neo-integralists do not follow the prosperity gospel, they agree with neo-Pentecostal fundamentalism in considering charity (the virtue of *caritas*) as the divine response to poverty and suffering. In this way, these organizations produce what I have conceptualized as "faith clientelism," a specific disciplinary exercise of power (Arguedas-Ramírez and Chaves 2022). In exchange for food, medicine, and moral support, these political-religious organizations demand loyalty, obedience, and gratitude. This view of poverty not as a social problem to which the state and society must respond but as a consequence

[5] See, for instance, the declarations of Argentina's extreme right candidate (and now, sworn President of Argentina) Javier Milei against *marxismo cultural*. https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2022/05/20/javier-milei-y-su-guerra-contra-el-marxismo-cultural-la-oscura-historia-detras-del-termino/.

of moral failures of the individual, is functional to the neoliberal state, and it is a step forward in the refeudalization of the state and society. The consequences are already evident. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates how prejudice against redistributive policies induces even vulnerable individuals to vote against candidates who support taxing the wealthy to fund social protection policies (Witko and Moldogaziev 2023).

At the core of these neoconservative narratives lies the idealization of the "natural" family, with one provider and one caretaker, free of state intervention. According to this ideological framework, this specific notion of family is essential for a good society and any other kind of family is a threat to the natural order of things. That is to say, the good society demands the specific model of femininity and motherhood that perpetuates and legitimizes the sexual division of labor and care and the specific model of masculinity and fatherhood that perpetuates the authority of the paterfamilias over women and children.

Conclusion

In Latin America there are several examples of how the reproductive Reconquista is unfolding hand in hand with the ongoing process of refeudalization. In 2022 Bolsonaro came very close to winning reelection in Brazil's presidential elections despite the several corruption cases filed against him. In Costa Rica, with the support of neo-Pentecostal fundamentalist politicians, the right-wing populist Rodrigo Chaves won the presidency in 2022, endangering one of the most stable democracies in the region. But the most revealing sign of the crisis we are dealing with is the undeniable success of the extreme neoconservative and libertarian Javier Milei in the last open primary elections (known as PASO, for *primarias abiertas simultáneas y obligatorias*) in Argentina, just two years after the legalization of abortion. The PASO elections in Argentina are mandatory primary elections for all directly elected national positions. Party lists and precandidates must receive at least 1.5 percent of the vote (at the constituency or national level, depending on the office) to advance to the general election.

These politicians, as well as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, many Republicans in the United States, and others in Poland, France, Germany, and Spain, have deployed clear messages aligned with the reproductive Reconquista's narrative and its *cri de guerre*: the war against gender ideology.

The neoliberal assimilation of feminist and LGBTQ+ political demands, known as pink washing or gender washing, is the prelude of the reproductive Reconquista. Three decades ago it seemed that Latin American societies were starting to change their masculinist-patriarchal hierarchies. But that change was superficial and limited to just a few demands, ones that were easily assimilated by the neoliberal culture in a way that maintained the structural causes of inequality, discrimination, and oppression. Nonetheless, those symbolic and insufficient changes were enough to threaten conservative sectors.

Refeudalization, as the consecutive step in the current mode of neoliberalism in extremis, is necessarily incompatible with feminist and social justice demands. Then not only moral conservatives turned against those winds of gender and sexual emancipation. The economic rationale of extreme accumulation, dispossession, and extractivism works better under the sociocultural conditions of extreme religious conservatism and hegemonic masculinity. That is why the reproductive Reconquista is part and parcel of the refeudalization process, and it will continue to move forward for the foreseeable future because it appeals to large swaths of the population who sincerely believe that gender ideology is a real social danger.[6]

[6] This paper was finished before the election in which Milei won the Presidency.

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El Salvador's State of Exception: A Piece in Nayib Bukele's Political Project

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Introduction

On March 27, 2022, after 87 people had lost their lives in a three-day murder spike (OUDH 2022b, 13), El Salvador's Legislative Assembly decreed a one-month state of exception. The measure, which has since been extended, suspends constitutional guarantees of defense and due process. It forms part of President Nayib Bukele's broader approach to the gangs that have long terrorized low-income neighborhoods and small businesses. As part of their publicity offensive, the authorities shared striking images of hundreds of tattooed detainees crouched together, their heads shaved and dressed in nothing more than white boxers. The new Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT), where much of this material was produced, was inaugurated in January 2023 with a reported capacity of 40,000 individuals. This would make it the largest prison in the continent, although an independent journalistic investigation found that the facility is designed to house fewer than 21,000 inmates (Urbina and Segura 2023).

The registered homicide rate dropped from 18 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021 to just 8 the following year (Human Rights Watch and Cristosal 2022, 7), prompting President Bukele to declare that El Salvador is now the safest country in the Americas. In communities that had endured threats, extortion, and mobility restrictions, there was a palpable sense of respite. Opinion on the state of exception has, however, been sharply divided. While human rights NGOs and investigative media have exposed systematic abuses associated with it, Salvadorans have largely applauded the measure. Elsewhere in the region, many citizens and politicians look favorably on the "Bukele model." As one prominent journalist put it: Bukele's crackdown is effective, popular, and brutal (Grillo 2023).

The state of exception looks set to remain in place until at least the 2024 general elections. In this article, I argue that the measure is less of a security strategy than a piece in Bukele's political project that aims to cement his rule. Structured into four sections, the article discusses the security and political context prior to the state of exception; examines this legal condition; looks at Bukele's undemocratic practices; and situates Bukele in the far right in Latin America. I conclude with some reflections on El Salvador's outlook for 2024.

No War, No Peace

To understand the state of exception's appeal and apparent success, it is worth reviewing what the 1992 Peace Accords did and did not accomplish. The agreements were designed to help El Salvador transition from war and authoritarianism to peace and democracy. Although they stipulated reforms in various areas, they were mostly political accords that ended 12 years of fighting and allowed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla movement to become a political party. The organization participated in competitive elections, but the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) successfully held the presidency until 2009. The security sector reforms remain unfinished. The Armed Forces were withdrawn from public security tasks but resumed this role in 1993 amid a postwar crime surge. The National Civilian Police (PNC) was created with a quota system that brought in not only civilians but also members of the guerrilla

and the disbanded security forces. Over the years the PNC turned into one of the institutions with the highest number of human rights complaints. Since much-needed socioeconomic reforms were never seriously attempted, the structural problems that contributed to the outbreak of the armed conflict persisted and facilitated the development of gangs. Building a democratic and human rights culture would prove even harder.

The Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the Barrio 18, which split into two rival factions in the mid-2000s, are El Salvador's main street gangs. These groups emerged in impoverished immigrant neighborhoods of Los Angeles where Central American refugees sought shelter in the 1980s. When El Salvador's civil war started to fizzle out, the United States stepped up its deportations of non-citizen gang members. Continued marginalization, the allure of a foreign gang culture, and the lack of gang policies meant that MS-13 and Barrio 18 could grow in both size and criminal involvement.

In 2003 President Francisco Flores (1999-2004) launched a *mano dura* policy, ostensibly designed to stamp out the gangs, but with the actual aim of positioning ARENA favorably in the next presidential elections. The strategy relied heavily on joint police-military patrols and neighborhood sweeps. The accompanying narrative painted gang members as irredeemable monsters, rather than human beings rooted in a social context, and legitimized violence against them. The *mano dura* strategy not only saw a sustained rise in homicides but had other, unintended, effects on what would eventually be some 60,000 gang members. Mass incarceration, rather than separating offenders from society, led the gangs to reinforce their leadership and organizational structure and to make extortion systematic.

President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014), who led the first FMLN government in the postwar period, had intended to abandon gang suppression in favor of social prevention. But a brutal 2010 gang attack on a passenger bus prompted a return to the approach undertaken by his two predecessors. When the ensuing crackdown did not produce the anticipated results, the Funes administration decided to negotiate a truce to lower the homicide rate in exchange for benefits to the gangs. During this high-profile process, initially pursued secretly to avoid a political fallout, the recorded homicide rate fell precipitously (OUDH 2022, 45). Years earlier, however, the gangs had started to dump their murder victims in clandestine graves to avoid criminal responsibility for their crimes. Between January 2010 and February 2022, 1,121 illicitly buried bodies were recovered (OUDH 2022a, 49). The truce began to unravel after a year amid unfulfilled government pledges and disagreements in Funes' cabinet. The knock-on effect was an unprecedented jump in the homicide rate to 106 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2015 (Human Rights Watch and Cristosal 2022, 7). In addition, the gangs learned that they could pressure governments to cede to their demands by driving up the body count–precisely what triggered Bukele's state of exception in March 2022.

Bukele's victory in 2019 came as a surprise in a country where two established parties had dominated the electoral landscape since the end of the civil war in 1992. His rapid political rise and swift dismantling of democratic institutions have been nothing short of astounding. A law school dropout and son of an influential businessman, Bukele managed his family's PR firm before his father's ties to the FMLN eventually propelled him to successfully run as that party's mayoral candidate in a town just outside San Salvador. Three years later, in 2015, the young Bukele's popularity and marketing savvy led him to be the elected FMLN mayor of San Salvador. During this time, he became known for redeveloping the capital's downtown area and constructing an upscale market with a public library. Early on, Bukele distanced himself from the party, and his increasingly acrimonious and publicly aired conflicts with the FMLN led to his expulsion in 2017. He quickly sought other ways of pursuing his presidential ambitions. When New Ideas, the party he formed in March 2018, did not manage to register on time for the 2019 elections, Bukele decided to run on the ticket of the Great Alliance for National Unity (GANA), an ARENA splinter

party. Voter disenchantment with ARENA and the FMLN–three Presidents were indicted or convicted of corruption–helped him to a resounding victory (IUDOP 2019a, 7).

Elected on an anti-establishment platform, and at 37 years old the youngest head of state in Latin America, Bukele established himself as an unconventional politician. Often sporting a leather jacket and a backward baseball cap, he is a prolific Twitter (now X) user who likes to publicly mock his critics and once described himself as "the world's coolest dictator" in his social media profile. His Territorial Control Plan (TCP), to date unpublished, promised to recover territories under gang control through police and military deployments. While its results remain unclear, the plan has afforded the Armed Forces greater prominence and resources than under previous administrations.

The Horrors of the State of Exception

The state of exception decree suspended the constitutional rights to freedom of association and assembly, to legal representation, to privacy in communications, and to being informed of the reason for arrest. It also significantly expanded the use of pretrial detention. Legal reforms lowered the age of criminal responsibility for children accused of gang-related crimes from 16 to 12 and created a reward system for citizens providing tips. In a blow to press freedom, they also established a prison sentence of up to 15 years for anyone who publishes gang-related information.

The clampdown hid the fact that the Bukele government had negotiated with the leaders of the country's largest gangs. The aim was to reduce the homicide rate and gain electoral and governance benefits in return for concessions to the gangs, including the non-extradition of MS-13 members to the United States (Martínez, Cáceres, and Martínez 2021). As mayor of San Salvador Bukele had entered a similar pact with the gangs, even though in 2015 the Constitutional Chamber had declared such agreements to be illegal. When despite this most recent pact some MS-13 members were arrested, they answered this betrayal with the aforementioned March 2022 murder spree (Martínez 2022). Since the start of the state of exception, at least 72,600 individuals have been arrested (Urbina and Segura 2023). During the first 15 months of the state of exception, the authorities released 5,178 individuals, including–curiously–1,586 (31 percent) profiled gang members (Flores, Jordán, and Segura 2023). What drives the apprehensions is the police officers' daily arrest quotas as well as the anonymous tip line (Quintanilla and Valencia 2022).

Bukele frequently posts about the state of exception's apparent successes, such as the decline in recorded homicides and extortion. The murder rate, already on a downward trend since 2016 (OUDH 2022a, 45), is now impossible to verify independently since all information related to the state of exception has been classified. Doubts certainly surround the measure's effectiveness. For one, as recorded homicides have dropped, the number of reported disappearances has increased. Between January 2020 and June 2022, the police were informed of 4,060 disappearances (OUDH 2022a, 4). A leaked internal document showed that the PNC underreported homicides and disappearances throughout April and May 2022 (Canizalez 2023). Since then, official homicide statistics have been massaged by excluding gang members killed in clashes with the police as well as bodies recovered from clandestine graves (OUDH 2022a, 47).

By mid-March 2023, human rights NGOs had received 4,723 human rights complaints involving 5,082 victims (SSPAS 2023, 37). Testimonies refer to arbitrary detention, illegal entry of private property as well as inhumane conditions and ill-treatment in detention. Most reported abuses concern arbitrary arrests, targeting particularly low-income neighborhoods and made mostly on charges of the broadly defined crimes of illicit association or membership of a terrorist organization. The adduced evidence is questionable and includes anonymous phone calls, "nervous appearance," or hearsay on social media. Environmental activists, union leaders, and journalists have also been caught in the dragnet, signaling that the state of exception

is being used to silence critical voices. Hearings are marred by due process violations. Presided by anonymous judges who received orders to remand people in detention regardless of any exculpatory evidence (OUDH 2022b, 55), each proceeding involves hundreds of defendants who are assisted by overworked public defenders (Human Rights Watch and Cristosal 2022, 4).

El Salvador's prisons have long been notorious for their squalid and overcrowded conditions, and the mass arrests have only aggravated this situation. With more than 105,000 detainees, the country now has the world's highest incarceration rate–almost two percent of the population (Cristosal 2023, 37). In the CECOT, apparently a model facility for abuse rather than modern prison management, up to 80 people share a single cell (Urbina and Segura 2023). The human rights violations in the penitentiary facilities are shocking in their scale and brutality: inmates have severely limited access to food, water, and healthcare, and the acute lack of hygiene is making people sick. Since the start of the state of exception, human rights NGOs have documented 181 deaths in custody as a result of beatings and torture or being denied medication or medical assistance (Sheridan 2023). Some detainees died when they could no longer ingest food because they had endured beatings so severe that their stomachs and intestines were destroyed. The authorities often fail to investigate the circumstances of the deaths or to notify the families of the deceased. Sometimes the bodies were simply buried in mass graves. The Salvadoran state has rejected allegations of widespread abuses as baseless, but the opacity surrounding the state of exception means that the true magnitude of human rights violations remains yet to be uncovered.

Notwithstanding the work of civil society organizations, reactions to the measure inside and outside of El Salvador have been generally positive–unsurprisingly perhaps, considering that citizens have long tired of the violence and politicians seek "solutions" that will deliver results in the short term. Domestic opinion polls show consistently strong support for both the TCP and the state of exception (IUDOP 2020, 5; IUDOP 2022b, 11; IUDOP 2023a, 6). The abuses, it seems, are an acceptable price to pay if they happen to others. Over time, however, views of the state of exception have become more critical, especially among individuals who have higher education or who know someone who has been arbitrarily detained (IUDOP 2022a, 9; IUDOP 2022c, 12). One survey even suggests that people have adjusted their routines and behavior for fear of being arrested (IUDOP 2022a, 8-9). In countries from Guatemala and Costa Rica to Colombia, Ecuador, and Argentina, a toxic mix of rising violence and political leaders' desire for popularity has created many admirers of the "Bukele model." In December 2022, Honduran President Xiomara Castro adopted a similar state of exception, but relatively few arrests have been made. Bukele's strategy is not easily exportable to contexts with different political scenarios and criminal group dynamics. In El Salvador, it is the unprecedented expansion of executive authority that has enabled the current wave of repression. But if such security regimes were to become the norm, they would pose major challenges to democracy and the rule of law in Latin America.

Bukele's Extinction of Democracy

New Ideas has its origins in a diaspora movement that had become disillusioned with the FMLN and wanted to offer Bukele a vehicle for the presidency. Bukele and his family and close friends seized control of the party at its inception (Rodríguez and Quintanilla 2022). As President, he has surrounded himself with the same trusted circle. He garnered widespread attention when he made Bitcoin a legal tender in 2021 and announced several large infrastructure projects such as a second airport, a rail system, and a monorail, though rising liquidity problems have delayed their implementation. Troublingly, amid corruption allegations, Bukele has weakened autonomous bodies such as the Institute for Access to Public Information and ended the cooperation agreement with an international anti-corruption commission. Throughout his administration, the Armed Forces have acquired a political role they did not previously have in the postwar period. This became symbolically clear in February 2020 when Bukele entered

the Legislative Assembly with armed soldiers to intimidate the lawmakers into approving a loan request. (The approval was subsequently given.) A year later, New Ideas gained a two-thirds majority in the Legislative Assembly, which has since rubber-stamped executive initiatives such as the state of exception and appointed government loyalists in key institutions. The legislative body illegally removed and replaced the Attorney General as well as the Constitutional Court magistrates and forced lower-level judges into retirement. (The new Attorney General has shelved investigations into the Bukele administration's gang negotiations.)

The President's attitudes toward the media show that he tries to control not only the country's institutions but also the public narrative. The government has co-opted much of the mass media by using advertising revenue as a carrot-and-stick tactic and enticing journalists from opposition outlets with lucrative salaries. Investigative media have been attacked through digital and physical harassment, surveillance, and spurious criminal investigations. At least a dozen journalists have fled the country after receiving threats (Kinosian 2022). Bukele himself pointed out the importance of social media when he took a selfie the first time that he addressed the United Nations General Assembly. Official social media channels aggressively promote his administration's flagship projects and security achievements. Supportive YouTubers, who have millions of followers but spread false or misleading information, on some days churn out more than 200 pro-Bukele videos. Today these content creators get press credentials more easily than professional journalists (Rauda Zablah 2023). On the other extreme, government-sponsored bots and trolls viciously attack its critics (Kinosian 2022). The media strategy seems to pay off.

Opinion polls show that the President receives consistently high approval ratings (IUDOP 2019b, 1; IUDOP 2020, 5; IUDOP 2021, 1; IUDOP 2022c, 17) and is the most well-liked leader in Latin America (Kinosian 2022). Bukele has been helped to popularity by Salvadorans' generally favorable interpretation of the TCP and the state of exception (IUDOP 2020, 5; IUDOP 2022c, 17; IUDOP 2023b, 3). However, it remains unclear why citizens hold these views when the TCP has never been made public and the measure is accompanied by egregious abuses. One survey revealed that 41 percent of respondents were unaware that the state of exception suspends constitutional rights (IUDOP 2022a, 5). Other polling instruments suggest that people's positive assessment of Bukele's security strategy is the result of the way they consume news: 45 percent do so through broadcast television and 44 percent through social media, especially Facebook (CEC 2023, 60, 62; IUDOP 2019b, 9; IUDOP 2023b, 10).

As the President himself has recognized, El Salvador is no longer the country it once was. In a short time, he has virtually eliminated the checks and balances that existed, and he seems hungry for more changes. Bukele has already asked for a leave of absence to run in the February 2024 general elections, despite a constitutional ban on a second term. A CID-Gallup survey in November 2023 showed that 93 percent of Salvadorans supported his re-election (Delcid 2023). Electoral reforms passed in June 2023 reduced the number of legislators from 84 to 60 and the number of municipalities from 262 to 44. The voting formula was also modified, paving the way for New Ideas to become the only party in the Legislative Assembly. Bukele encounters few obstacles to his ambitions due to continued discontent with ARENA and the FMLN as well as the appeal of his modernization narrative that gives people hope and pride in their country. A political attitude survey conducted in August 2023 showed that Bukele has become a cult figure who 40 percent of respondents ranked as more important than the Constitution (CEC 2023, 48). While opinion polls suggest that Salvadorans highly value democracy and human rights (CEC 2023, 56; IUDOP 2021, 12), these appear to be abstract ideas that people cast aside once their survival and welfare are at stake. Opponents of Bukele have made clear that they intend to put up a fight, but opposition participation in the elections looks to be largely symbolic at this point.

Bukele and the Far Right in Latin America

Bukele is a symptom of a broader political discontent that has favored the rise of the far right in Latin America. Countries from Costa Rica to Ecuador, Uruguay, and Peru currently have conservative governments. But it is Argentine President-elect Javier Milei who perhaps best illustrates why the populist right is able to galvanize voters across the region. Milei defeated Sergio Massa, the economy minister for the ruling Peronist coalition, in the November 2023 run-off. A libertarian economist and TV personality, 53-year-old Milei had no political experience prior to becoming a legislator in 2021. The leader of the far-right Liberty Advances coalition, he raffled off his monthly congressional salary and sported a rocker aesthetic on the presidential campaign trail. Milei presented himself as an outsider who vouched to uproot the "parasitic political caste" and described the national currency as "excrement." A consummate political showman, at rallies he brandished a chainsaw when he vowed to slash government spending and drastically reduce the number of government ministries. With his vulgar and provocative style, Milei has dominated the national conversation in Argentina. Beyond dollarizing the economy, Milei proposes to end free public education and free public health care, reinstate the abortion ban, loosen gun laws, and deploy the army against drug gangs. He understood how to connect with citizens who had tired of decades of economic mismanagement and corruption, and who perceived politicians as privileged and out of touch with reality. The protest vote for Milei has created uncertainty about Argentina's economic and political future. But it is unclear to what extent his proposals would find support in a Congress that is dominated by center-right and center-left parties.

Milei and his movement sought visibility in the streets while Bukele prioritized the use of digital technologies for his campaign. Milei's bellicose rhetoric and attacks against the press resemble those of Brazil's former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro because they had the same social media strategist. The Argentine politician gained a huge following thanks to an outpouring of YouTube and TikTok videos, often done by unpaid, college-age Internet influencers. (TikTok was also crucial to the victory of Ecuador's new President Daniel Noboa, the 35-year-old son of the Andean country's richest man.) Social media can channel popular discontent and give voice to grievances. The far right, in Latin America and elsewhere, has learned how to use these platforms to present information in a compelling manner and engage citizens directly. Social media algorithms, however, favor content that maximizes user engagement and companies' profits–content that appeals to people's emotions and threatens democracy by spreading misinformation and hate speech, creating echo chambers, and fostering political polarization.

Aside from incendiary rhetoric and the use of digital technologies, opposition weaknesses make it easier for the populist right to gain influence. Leftist and centrist parties either do not put forward ambitious proposals to tackle problems such as underemployment, crime, corruption, climate change, or migration, or find that the political reality of governing forces them to abandon their campaign pledges. Leftist presidents from Peru's Pedro Castillo to Chile's Gabriel Boric and Colombia's Gustavo Petro all found that pandemic-battered budgets, rising inflation, the effects of climate change, or the lack of congressional support made it challenging to meet voter expectations. When progressive and moderate politicians are perceived as unreliable or incompetent, they lose credibility with voters and inadvertently increase the chances of far-right parties gaining ground. The politics of right-wing populists, such as Bukele, Milei, or Bolsonaro, deepen the divides in what are fragile democracies and make dispassionate dialogue about public problems harder. Moreover, there is a risk of a broader shift to the right as more moderate parties emulate far-right contenders to court voters. Progressive parties may become credible electoral options again if, rather than talking about the dangers of the far right, they present tangible solutions to the problems that citizens care about.

Conclusion

Repressive security strategies are neither effective nor sustainable. El Salvador needs to perform professional criminal investigations and offer its young people legitimate alternatives to gangs. The longer the country avoids strengthening civilian institutions and implementing holistic, rights-respecting security policies that can be independently monitored and evaluated, the longer citizens will demand *mano dura* approaches to crime and violence. The United States has supported these strategies technologically and financially to reduce the gang threat to its own jurisdiction. Their enduring appeal speaks to the politics of security policies, to leaders' preference for solutions that research evidence has demonstrated to be unworkable but that promise a comfortable illusion of safety. It is these strategies, rather than the phenomena they claim to tackle, that fuel violence.

Nayib Bukele seduces Salvadorans with the dream of a country that confidently navigates a path to peace and development. But the dream he is selling masks a darker reality. When more people realize that the violence persists, only the perpetrators have changed, and the country's economic woes are intensifying, the bubble will burst. El Salvador has started to resemble Nicaragua, a place where blatant corruption and repression have received little international condemnation. How will the international community react when Bukele runs for the presidency again, successfully, perhaps? The situation in El Salvador is a reminder that the Peace Accords, much maligned by Bukele, were just the beginning of the arduous task of democracy building. Political and human rights education might help avoid a return to the authoritarian past, but as with any structural challenges, there are no quick fixes. In the meantime, victims' painful testimonies, journalists' candid reports, and contemporary Salvadoran writers' insistent stories demand to be told. They may help create the empathy that these times require and enable people to see Bukele for what he is: a politician driven by private gain, not the public good.

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A ascensão de Jair Bolsonaro e as classes populares[1]

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A eleição de Jair Bolsonaro não foi um raio em céu azul, mas fruto do encontro entre dois acontecimentos distintos, porém relacionados: a consolidação paulatina de uma nova direita brasileira entre os anos de 2006 e 2018, e o surgimento de um novo fenômeno populista no país a partir de 2014: o bolsonarismo. Tais acontecimentos, no entanto, ainda que tenham se apoiado de modo intenso em mobilizações digitais, não se difundiram para as classes populares somente pela ingenuidade de vítimas da desinformação em massa, mas sim, como procuraremos apontar, em virtude de processos sociais e políticos específicos que atravessaram o país em anos recentes.

Tendo isso em vista, na primeira seção deste artigo abordaremos de forma breve a formação de uma nova direita brasileira a partir de 2006. Na segunda parte, trataremos da construção do bolsonarismo a partir de 2014, e, por fim, apontaremos os principais elementos que fizeram com que parte significativa das classes populares optasse pelo ex-militar nas eleições de 2018.

O surgimento da nova direita brasileira

A nova direita brasileira começou a se organizar a partir de fóruns de discussão na internet logo após a reeleição de Lula em 2006, buscando romper com os limites do pacto democrático de 1988, que haviam condicionado a atuação da direita tradicional desde então[2]. Em 2006, boa parte dos analistas políticos considerava que Lula não sairia vitorioso das eleições, tendo em vista o impacto do escândalo de corrupção, conhecido popularmente como mensalão. Ainda que o escândalo tenha custado a permanência de importantes quadros petistas no governo e manchado a imagem do partido, que desde sua fundação, nos anos 1980, advogava pela ética na política, Lula foi reeleito com base em uma votação expressiva da população mais pobre do país. Durante seu segundo mandato, o ex-metalúrgico tornou-se cada vez mais popular em virtude de um pequeno milagre econômico (CARVALHO, 2018) baseado no ciclo de alta das *commodities*, nos aumentos reais do salário mínimo e na criação e expansão de programas de combate à pobreza, fazendo com que milhões de pessoas melhorassem significativamente seus patamares de renda e consumo (POCHMANN, 2012).

Nessa época, a popularidade de Lula era tal que, quando grupos e movimentos posicionados à direita do espectro político tentaram protestar contra o governo nas ruas, foram alvo de desdém e escárnio até mesmo de políticos contrários à gestão petista. Sem se sentirem representados pela oposição institucional ao Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), os descontentes passaram a frequentar a internet em busca de um ambiente no qual pudessem se expressar livremente contra o governo e a esquerda. Nesses espaços digitais,

[1] Publicado em Avritzer, Leonardo; Kerche, Fábio; Marona, Marjorie (orgs.). 2021. Governo Bolsonaro: retrocesso democrático e degradação política. 1ª ed. 21-34. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.

[2] O pacto democrático de 1988 ao qual fazemos referência aqui, que passou a balizar a política brasileira desde então, está baseado na combinação entre a Constituição de 1988 e o arranjo de governabilidade conhecido na ciência política brasileira como “presidencialismo de coalizão”.

buscavam conhecer pessoas que pensassem de forma semelhante, seja porque defendessem o livre mercado, punições mais severas para criminosos, a instauração de um novo regime militar ou mesmo a volta da monarquia. Desses encontros começaram a surgir novos grupos de estudo e atuação política nas universidades, organizações civis, ideias de novos partidos, movimentos sociais e lideranças intelectuais e políticas entre as quais se destacou o papel desempenhado pelo escritor Olavo de Carvalho.

Desde a metade de 1990, Carvalho defendia, por meio de livros e artigos em jornais e revistas, a ideia de que o país foi tomado por uma hegemonia cultural esquerdista após a redemocratização. Essa hegemonia, que remete ao pacto democrático de 1988, se refletiria na influência exercida por intelectuais de esquerda, que ocuparam posições de prestígio em editoras de livro, nas redações dos grandes veículos de comunicação nacional e nos cursos de humanidades das principais universidades do país, mais notadamente na Universidade de São Paulo (USP). De acordo com Carvalho, esses intelectuais seriam incapazes de realizar reflexões profundas sobre o Brasil que se destacassem no panorama intelectual mundial e, portanto, contentavam-se em repetir, de modo irrefletido, chavões inspirados nas últimas modas intelectuais vindas dos Estados Unidos. Para ele, um exemplo dessa reprodução de modismos era a defesa de lutas contra opressões de gênero e raça, conhecidas popularmente como "pautas identitárias". Extremamente ativo na internet, ainda em 1998 Carvalho passou a divulgar suas ideias em um blog e, mais tarde, em 2002, em um site colaborativo. No ano de 2004, ele já era tema de pelo menos quatro comunidades de discussão na falecida rede social Orkut, além de ministrar aulas em cursos on-line e realizar transmissões de áudio pelo site Blog Talk Radio, análogas aos *podcasts* atuais.

A propagação em meios digitais da ideia de que estaria vigente no país uma hegemonia esquerdista unificou os descontentes com o governo petista, a despeito de suas diferenças, e influenciou de modo direto ou indireto boa parte da nova direita em gestação (ROCHA, 2019). A influência de Carvalho também se fez presente por meio de uma estratégia contra-hegemônica radical baseada no uso de uma performatividade disruptiva e do choque intencional, denominados pelo crítico literário Michael Warner (2002) como "contrapublicidade". Bastante ilustrativo nesse sentido, é bastante ilustrativo um texto no qual Carvalho (2013) defende conscientemente o uso do palavrão com o objetivo de chocar, ao romper com o decoro que condiciona o debate público *mainstream*, compreendido pelo autor como uma "camisa de força":

> O USO DO PALAVRÃO
>
> Eu uso esses palavrões porque são NECESSÁRIOS.
>
> São necessários no contexto brasileiro para demolir essa linguagem polida que é uma camisa-de-força que prende as pessoas, obrigando-as a respeitar o que não merece respeito.
>
> Então, às vezes, quando você discorda de um sujeito, mas discorda respeitosamente, você está dando mais força pra ele do que se concordasse. Porque você está indo contra a ideia dele, mas você está reforçando a autoridade dele. A autoridade é a respeitabilidade.
>
> O problema dessas pessoas, desses bandidos de que eu estou falando, não são as ideias. É justamente o fato de que são canalhas.
>
> São canalhas, são bandidos, são ladrões.
>
> V-Ã-O T-O-D-O-S T-O-M-A-R N-O C-U!

Assim, as sementes da nova direita já estavam espalhadas pela internet e fora dela quando, após a eleição de Dilma Rousseff, em 2010, a economia começou a dar seus primeiros sinais de desgaste, e movimentos anticorrupção passaram a se expressar em várias capitais do país em 2011 e em 2012, ano do julgamento do mensalão. Desse modo, durante os grandes protestos que levaram multidões às ruas contra a classe política, em junho de 2013, grupos ligados à nova direita puderam crescer e florescer no âmbito da sociedade civil, perdendo o receio que possuíam até então de se manifestar em público.

A ascensão de Jair Bolsonaro

Ao mesmo tempo em que a nova direita se fortalecia, o bolsonarismo nascia a partir de uma reação conservadora mais ampla a uma série de avanços do campo progressista que ocorreram ao longo do primeiro mandato de Rousseff. Em 2011, foi criada a Comissão Nacional da Verdade para investigar crimes praticados durante a ditadura militar; no mesmo ano, o Supremo Tribunal Federal (STF) reconheceu a união entre pessoas do mesmo sexo e, em 2012, a vigência das cotas raciais em universidades públicas e o aborto de fetos anencéfalos. Além disso, em 2014 foi sancionada a chamada "Lei da Palmada", que proíbe castigos físicos no tratamento de crianças e adolescentes. Ao mesmo tempo, os movimentos negro e LGBTQIA+ (Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Transexuais, Queer, Intersexuais e Assexuais) conquistavam maior destaque no debate público. Também entre 2011 e 2012 surgiam as Marchas das Vadias em todo o país, e discussões a respeito de gênero tornaram-se cada vez mais frequentes nas mídias tradicionais e na internet.

Nessa época, a internet já era um meio extremamente popular de disseminação de conteúdos que antes circulavam de forma mais restrita. Imagens de militantes protestando com os seios de fora ou em performances sacrílegas nas ruas, com destruição de santas católicas, introdução de crucifixos no ânus, bem como cenas de apropriações da figura de Jesus Cristo como homossexual ou transexual, circularam no Brasil, chocando grande parte da população cristã, tornando o cenário propício para a ascensão de políticos conservadores, como Jair Bolsonaro.

Capitão da reserva e contumaz defensor da ditadura militar, Bolsonaro iniciou sua carreira política no Congresso Nacional nos anos 1990, com o apoio de militares de baixa patente do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, bem como de famílias de militares que perderam influência e prestígio após a redemocratização, base que posteriormente se ampliou para abarcar forças policiais. Desse modo, assim que a Comissão da Verdade foi criada, o capitão da reserva se tornou um de seus maiores opositores no Congresso. Seu histórico de posicionamentos contrários aos direitos humanos também o gabaritou para exercer, ao lado de lideranças políticas cristãs conservadoras, um papel de destaque no contra-ataque aos avanços de pautas LGBTQIA+, como, por exemplo, a pressão para barrar a distribuição de cartilhas escolares de combate à homofobia, pejorativamente popularizadas como "Kit Gay".

Assim como Olavo de Carvalho e a nova direita emergente, Bolsonaro e seus filhos, que ocupavam cargos políticos de destaque, também investiram na contrapublicidade como forma de chamar atenção para suas pautas na esfera pública que, na percepção de Carvalho, eram menosprezadas no debate público *mainstream*. Tal menosprezo seria um sinal de que a manifestação de determinadas visões de mundo e modos de vida estaria sob ameaça iminente, o que justificaria o emprego da contrapublicidade (ROCHA; MEDEIROS, 2020). Em 2012, durante uma *live*, Flávio Bolsonaro, deputado estadual do Rio de Janeiro de 2003 a 2019 e atual senador, entregou a Olavo de Carvalho a Medalha Tiradentes, honraria concedida pela Assembleia do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, e fez o seguinte discurso:

> Eu que penso de uma forma contrária, não tenho espaço nenhum, espaço nenhum na imprensa, é aí fica a explicação do que muitas pessoas nos criticam, e certamente o criticam também, Olavo, pela forma como coloca algumas discussões. *Porque é preciso criar o fato, chamar a atenção, chocar, sobre determinados assuntos para que isso tenha espaço na imprensa e a população como um todo tenha acesso a essa discussão.* A maior prova disso é o famoso "Kit Gay". Se não fosse uma atuação mais ostensiva do deputado Jair Bolsonaro, jamais estaríamos sabendo que crianças, por enquanto das escolas públicas, a gente não sabe qual será o próximo passo, pode atingir as escolas particulares, porque tenho certeza que as classes médias e as classes altas se engajam também nessa discussão, nós jamais saberíamos que havia

esse incentivo à sexualidade, seja para o lado homossexual ou pro lado heterossexual, Olavo, para crianças de seis anos de idade.

Em resposta, Olavo de Carvalho afirmou: “Eles querem fazer clientela para os pedófilos, quem é que não percebe isso aí?”.

Ao final do primeiro mandato de Rousseff, em 2014, em meio à reação conservadora que ganhava cada vez mais apoio entre a população, Bolsonaro se reelegeu deputado federal com quase meio milhão de votos e começou a ser cultuado por milhares de pessoas atraídas pela radicalidade de seus posicionamentos e pela autenticidade que transmitia em suas aparições públicas. Rousseff também havia sido reeleita, no entanto, passados apenas seis dias de sua vitória, movimentos ligados à nova direita, organizados dentro e fora da internet, convocaram o primeiro protesto de rua pedindo seu impeachment. A manifestação contou com a participação de um dos filhos de Jair Bolsonaro, Eduardo Bolsonaro, eleito pela primeira vez para a Câmara Federal em 2014, ao pegar carona no sucesso eleitoral do pai (ROCHA, 2019).

Os protestos pela derrubada de Rousseff se repetiram até que, no início de 2015, alimentados pela indignação popular com os novos escândalos de corrupção divulgados pela operação Lava Jato[3], conseguiram reunir, segundo estimativas da Polícia Militar, quase dois milhões de pessoas, em sua maioria vestidas de verde e amarelo. Entre os manifestantes não era difícil flagrar pessoas com camisetas ou cartazes com os dizeres: “Olavo tem razão”, em alusão ao escritor que havia se tornado um *best-seller* ao ter suas obras reeditadas poucos anos antes. No entanto, a maioria dos participantes dos protestos não eram refratários apenas ao PT, mas também a todos os partidos e lideranças políticas tradicionais, incluindo os de oposição ao governo, de modo que Jair Bolsonaro era um dos poucos políticos, senão o único, que conseguia aprovação daqueles que protestavam nas ruas (SOLANO; RIBEIRO; ORTELLADO, 2016). O militar direitista, atento às opiniões e ao clima da época, que se radicalizava à medida que as crises política e econômica se aprofundavam, adotou um discurso antissistema e surfou na onda que lhe parecia favorável, anunciando oficialmente sua candidatura à presidência ainda em março de 2016, poucos meses antes da derrubada de Rousseff do poder.

Naquele mesmo ano, Bolsonaro filiou-se ao Partido Social Cristão (PSC), que reunia lideranças cristãs conservadoras e militantes da nova direita, oriunda dos fóruns de internet, movimentos e organizações da sociedade civil. No entanto, o militar não era um consenso entre os membros da nova direita mais alinhados à defesa radical do livre mercado; afinal, Bolsonaro era conhecido por defender o intervencionismo estatal praticado durante a ditadura militar. Por esse motivo, o pré-candidato à presidência decidiu se aliar ao economista Paulo Guedes, radical defensor do liberalismo econômico, selando, dessa forma, uma aliança política entre aqueles que pregam pela radicalidade de mercado e setores que defendem o conservadorismo nos costumes e punições mais severas para criminosos.

Bolsonarismo e classes populares

Inicialmente, o discurso de Bolsonaro possuía um apelo significativo, especialmente entre as classes médias e altas. Afinal, eram justamente as pessoas desses estratos que frequentam os fóruns de internet desde a metade dos anos 2000 e compareceram em massa aos protestos pelo *impeachment* de Rousseff, além de expressarem simpatia pela política econômica defendida por Paulo Guedes. No entanto, com o tempo, parte significativa das classes populares passou a se interessar pela figura de Bolsonaro. Para entender tal fenômeno em maior profundidade, nos

[3] Foi uma força tarefa encabeçada pelo Ministério Público e pela Polícia Federal iniciada em 2014 de combate à corrupção política e empresarial. A operação dominou os noticiários brasileiros por mais de seis anos, e se tornou parte do imaginário nacional. Desencadeada no âmbito de investigações que apuravam desvios de dinheiro em licitações emitidas pela empresa Petrobras, a operação conseguiu prender grandes empresários, altos funcionários da Petrobras e políticos dos mais altos escalões do país. A operação foi, e continua a ser ainda hoje, alvo de inúmeras críticas e denúncias por conta do recurso frequente a expedientes jurídicos e midiáticos controversos.

últimos anos procuramos investigar os anseios da maior parte dos eleitores de Bolsonaro, que compõem o que denominamos "bolsonarismo popular moderado". "Popular", porque corresponde àqueles que pertencem às faixas de renda C e D, ou seja, à multidão de trabalhadores precarizados e "nanoempreendedores" de si mesmos, na formulação da socióloga Ludmila Costhek Abílio, e que constitui a maior parte da população brasileira. E "moderado", em contraste com bolsonaristas radicalizados, movidos por uma identificação profunda com o militar que não é apenas de ordem política, mas sobretudo emocional e existencial.

Assim, nos últimos anos, entrevistamos dezenas de pessoas que enxergaram em Bolsonaro uma possibilidade de mudança profunda do cenário político nacional[4]. Descontentes com a atuação do PT e do sistema político em sua totalidade, essas pessoas sentiram-se representadas por sua retórica antissistema, anticorrupção, antipetista, antiesquerdista, militar e patriótica, e por seu apelo à valorização da família, da ordem e dos bons costumes. O militar era visto como uma saída não só para as crises política e econômica, mas também para o que percebiam como uma crise moral, conforme procuraremos apontar a seguir.

Bolsonaro como resposta à crise política

As ideias que apareciam com maior insistência nas entrevistas com eleitores de Bolsonaro das classes populares eram as de "mudança" e "esperança". Para as pessoas entrevistadas, o militar representaria "alguém diferente", um *outsider*, um candidato antissistema capaz de enfrentar uma institucionalidade percebida como completamente corrompida. Bolsonaro seria um político diferente, na visão das pessoas, porque seria honesto e autêntico:

> Essa eleição foi uma grande mudança. Trouxe esperança de mudança na política. Antes era só mais do mesmo (mulher, São Paulo).

> Eu votei nele porque ele é diferente e acho que é o único que vai mudar. A gente tem esperança (mulher, Porto Alegre).

> Ele é verdadeiro, e ele, às vezes, não tem papas na língua. Ele não tem que fazer pose. Eu acho que isso é um valor importante, mesmo que doa que a verdade seja colocada (mulher, São Paulo).

Para as pessoas entrevistadas, Bolsonaro seria alguém firme o suficiente para não se deixar levar pela lógica dos partidos tradicionais, percebidos como indistintos, fisiológicos e preocupados apenas com os próprios privilégios. Daí sua capacidade de capturar o voto de protesto, frustração e raiva contra um sistema político percebido como velho frente à novidade política representada pelo militar, a qual aparecia como um valor em si mesma.

Nesse contexto, a corrupção situa-se no centro dos argumentos do menosprezo pelo sistema. A criminalização da política e do Estado foi enfatizada sobretudo durante a condução da operação Lava Jato, por meio da qual seu principal representante, o juiz Sergio Moro, que mais tarde seria ministro da Justiça do governo Bolsonaro, impôs uma estratégia anticorrupção que tinha por base um processo penal moralista, punitivista e regido pela lógica do espetáculo (CASARA, 2016), em que a política e o Estado figuravam como inimigos do povo. Desse modo, havia entre os entrevistados uma percepção generalizada de que não só os políticos profissionais seriam corruptos, como também o próprio fazer político despertava afetos negativos:

> É tudo igual, PT, PSDB, tudo corrupto. [...] É o jeitinho brasileiro, não tem jeito. Brasileiro é corrupto mesmo (homem, Porto Alegre).

> Política é aquela coisa: você acredita, mas não confia (homem, São Paulo).

[4] Os dados utilizados neste capítulo fazem referência a pesquisas realizadas com o apoio da Fundação Friedrich Ebert em 2019 e 2020, bem como à pesquisa "O conservadorismo e as questões sociais", realizada em 2019 pelo Plano CDE, com apoio da Fundação Tide Setúbal. Os relatórios completos das pesquisas encontram-se disponíveis nos sites de ambas as fundações.

> Política é engano e corrupção. Você nunca acredita 100% num candidato (homem, São Paulo).

A negação da política como atividade coletiva também era acompanhada por um sentimento de frustração muito intenso com o Partido dos Trabalhadores, que era expresso com vergonha e tristeza. Afinal, vários eleitores de Bolsonaro haviam votado no PT anteriormente, porém sentiam que o partido lhes havia traído a confiança e, portanto, não seria mais merecedor de seu voto:

> Eu votei no Lula porque parecia um político diferente na época, falava a língua da gente e dizia que ia acabar com a corrupção (homem, São Paulo).

> Eu sempre fui PT, mas pela corrupção, essa vergonha toda no Brasil, o PT me deixou muito chateada, muito insatisfeita, e eu caí naquela de votar no Bolsonaro. Foi uma eleição assim: a favor do PT *versus* contra o PT, foi bem difícil (mulher, São Paulo).

> O PT liderava e, querendo ou não, muita coisa mudou com o PT, principalmente pra classe mais baixa, hoje em dia a gente queria mudança mesmo devido à roubalheira que foi demonstrada, então eu dei um voto de confiança para o Bolsonaro (homem, São Paulo).

Bolsonaro como resposta à crise econômica

Na retórica utilizada por vários integrantes da operação Lava Jato e por Bolsonaro, o Estado seria intrinsecamente corrupto e ineficaz, de modo que a saída, não apenas política, mas também econômica, passaria pela substituição das prerrogativas do Estado pela iniciativa privada. Essa lógica teve uma penetração não desprezível entre as classes populares:

> O Estado não funciona. Olha as empresas públicas, tudo corrupto e não têm competitividade. Tinha que privatizar um monte de coisas e ia funcionar melhor (homem, Porto Alegre).

Contudo, ainda que fosse comum a percepção de que serviços privados funcionariam melhor do que os serviços públicos, a totalidade dos entrevistados apontava que a gratuidade deveria ser mantida, considerando que a maioria da população brasileira é pobre e não teria como arcar com saúde e educação privadas. Ainda que a privatização de empresas e serviços fosse desejada de forma mais enfática por alguns entrevistados, a maioria possuía certa desconfiança na venda irrestrita de estatais e apostava que a saída para a crise econômica passaria necessariamente pela geração de emprego e renda, combinada com a adesão a uma ética empreendedora, individualizante e meritocrática.

Para os entrevistados que possuíam condições financeiras mais estáveis, ou eram mais jovens, o empreendedorismo como complemento de renda, e/ou forma flexível de trabalho e sem patrões, era visto com bons olhos. Na percepção desse grupo, a renda gerada dependeria principalmente do esforço do indivíduo, e tal comportamento deveria ser incentivado na sociedade.

Já para as pessoas mais empobrecidas, empreender era uma forma de sobrevivência para a qual se era empurrada por uma situação econômica desfavorável. Esse estrato preferia ter uma renda mais estável e acesso a trabalhos com carteira assinada:

> Emprego de carteira assinada mesmo tá cada vez mais difícil, tanto que o povo tá optando pelo quê agora? Trabalhar por conta própria, porque se for esperar melhor [emprego] não tem mesmo, não. Você sai toda vez de madrugada pra arrumar emprego e as portas tão fechadas. Tá difícil mesmo. Hoje você anda na rua e vê as casas todas fazendo lojinha pra trabalhar por conta própria, porque é um meio de sobreviver, senão vai morrer de fome, porque não tem melhora (mulher, Rio de Janeiro).

Segundo dados do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica (IBGE), em 2019 o desemprego atingiu 13,2 milhões de

trabalhadores, e, em 2018, 11,2 milhões de brasileiros atuavam na informalidade. Os dados revelaram ainda que 3,8 milhões de brasileiros têm sua principal fonte de renda em aplicativos como Rappi, Uber e iFood. No entanto, ainda que os trabalhadores entrevistados afirmem que se encontram desprotegidos do ponto de vista trabalhista, segundo dados do Índice de Confiança na Justiça no Brasil da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (ICJBrasil) de 2017, só 29% dos brasileiros confiam nos sindicatos.

Tais condições produzem, como consequência imediata, o sofrimento psíquico dos trabalhadores e uma enorme insegurança existencial rrelacionada a uma dinâmica de desfiliação social e desintegração de estruturas de sociabilidade e desfiliação (CASTEL, 2005). Porém, ainda que para a quase totalidade dos eleitores de Jair Bolsonaro das classes populares que entrevistamos a desigualdade social seja o principal problema do país, o sofrimento social não é percebido como algo coletivo, produzido pelo capitalismo contemporâneo, e, sim, como um fenômeno de ordem individual. Essa leitura dá lugar a sentimentos de fracasso e culpa, de modo que a ética da meritocracia toma o lugar da politização do sofrimento (COELHO, 2013), apontando para o diagnóstico produzido por Dardot e Laval (2016) acerca do neoliberalismo como uma razão totalizante da vida social:

> Se tiver perseverança, muda a realidade. [...] Minha avó passou por coisa bem mais precária. Hoje tem mais oportunidade. Hoje os pobres conseguem mudar a própria situação (homem, Recife).
>
> Para combater a pobreza, tem que gerar empregos para ganhar dignamente seu dinheiro, dar dinheiro, não. A pessoa tem que lutar (homem, São Paulo).

Bolsonaro como resposta à "crise moral"

Por fim, também era muito comum entre os entrevistados uma visão saudosista de um passado romantizado no qual haveria mais ordem, no qual os valores morais seriam mais importantes e se viveria melhor. Na atualidade, a sensação experimentada é de desordem e decadência, sobretudo no âmbito da família:

> O que a gente vê hoje é uma decadência da vida familiar (Homem, São Paulo).
>
> A estrutura familiar caiu drasticamente. Pessoas despreparadas colocam filhos no mundo e as crianças crescem revoltadas. [...] O mundo precisa de pessoas boas, de mães que cuidem direito dos filhos (homem, São Paulo).
>
> Os valores da família estão perdidos, as pessoas perderam o elo familiar. Falta conversa, contato (mulher, São Paulo).

Os entrevistados acreditam que recuperar a convivência familiar para reestabelecer a ordem na sociedade é fundamental. Contudo, a percepção de desordem e decadência também está relacionada à sensação de piora nos âmbitos da economia e da segurança pública nos últimos anos, a qual, por sua vez, está atrelada à expressão de sentimentos de vulnerabilidade, insegurança e abandono por parte do poder público. Tais sentimentos estão conectados à dicotomia, expressa por vários entrevistados, entre batalhadores *versus* bandidos, lógica muito utilizada para ordenar relações sociais, ilustrada com casos concretos do cotidiano:

> Eu já fui trabalhar, cheguei em casa e minha casa tinha sido invadida, duas vezes [...] e eu moro praticamente atrás da delegacia. [...] Não é só na rua, [...] me sinto indefesa em qualquer lugar (mulher, Rio de Janeiro).
>
> Eu não deixo meus filhos saírem sozinhos. A gente vai ao shopping junto e até para ir ao shopping fico com medo. Aqui do lado, mataram um outro dia. Não dá para sair mais à noite (mulher, Porto Alegre).
>
> Cidadão de bem é aquela divisão. É quem trabalha, não pratica crime, tem família. O outro lado é o bandido (mulher, São Paulo).

Os "batalhadores", termo também utilizado pelo sociólogo Jessé Souza (2012) para se referir a essa população, são, na visão dos entrevistados, aqueles que se esforçam para alcançar seus

objetivos e superar os muitos obstáculos do cotidiano. Eles possuem valores e pagam impostos, em contraposição aos "bandidos", que seriam pessoas corrompidas, de mau-caráter, que buscam facilidades na vida. Na percepção dos entrevistados, o espaço público estaria se tornando cada vez mais perigoso, especialmente para crianças e jovens, sensação relacionada ao aumento da violência e à sensação de insegurança, somando-se ainda a percepção de que o espaço público teria se tornado palco de práticas imorais, como troca de afeto entre pessoas do mesmo troca de afetos entre homossexuais, sexualização precoce, protestos de rua em que haveria nudez, pornografia e desrespeito a símbolos religiosos. Além disso, há um entendimento compartilhado de que o feminismo degradaria as mulheres e de que o afeto entre casais homossexuais, tido como obsceno, não deveria ser demonstrado em público, principalmente na frente de crianças:

> Não vou ter marido, não vou ter filho. [...] Por que tem que ser tão ao pé da risca? [As feministas] querem tirar a identidade da mulher (mulher, Recife).

> Ver homem na rua de mãos dadas me incomoda. Eu não me importo, mas longe de mim. Tem alguns que sãos baixos, exagerados, agridem as famílias e as crianças (homem, Porto Alegre).

Embora todos reconheçam que ainda existe muito preconceito e violência contra pessoas negras, mulheres e a população LGBTQIA+, e que são abundantes os relatos de casos sofridos pelos próprios entrevistados, ou por familiares e conhecidos, o entendimento partilhado é o de que tais episódios não estariam relacionados a questões estruturais, mas principalmente à falta de educação e respeito de certos indivíduos. Há ainda, entre os entrevistados, um sentimento de rechaço a setores progressistas, que consideram a defesa de valores tradicionais estúpida e fascista. Todos esses aspectos somados contribuem para que várias pessoas rejeitem as políticas afirmativas e os setores que as defendem.

Tendo tudo isso em vista, a opção por Bolsonaro se justificaria na medida em que o militar representaria a recuperação de valores tradicionais, da segurança e da disciplina nos âmbitos público e privado a partir da promoção das ideias de ordem, autoridade e hierarquia. Desse modo, na visão dessas pessoas, a superação das desigualdades, preconceitos e violências estaria relacionada à ação do Estado apenas em duas dimensões: (1) estímulo à geração de empregos para os mais pobres; e (2) incentivo para que, no âmbito privado, as famílias possam proporcionar a seus filhos uma educação baseada em valores cristãos para que possam vir a ser cidadãos respeitosos, esforçados e resilientes – justamente o que propôs o governo do capitão de reserva.

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Marielle Franco, Militias, *Jogo do Bicho*, and the Bolsonaros: State-Embedded Organized Crime and the Far Right in Brazil

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The relationship between the far right and organized crime has deep political roots in post-dictatorship Brazil. No recent incident has revealed the reach of such interests more starkly than the 2018 assassination of Rio de Janeiro's socialist city councilor and long-standing human rights defender Marielle Franco, which exposed the tangled relationships between organized crime, police death squads, and politics in the country. Alarmingly, but not surprisingly, these entrenched connections extend to the onetime army captain and former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and his family, revealing the hypocrisy of the anti-anticorruption, law-and-order rhetoric he championed while successfully campaigning to win the nation's highest office.

Insecurity, state violence, and politics complement one another in Brazil. As presidential candidate, Bolsonaro publicly championed the killing of criminal suspects (saying on Jornal Nacional, Brazil's most viewed news program, in August 28th 2018: "If a policeman kills 10, 15, or 20 with 30 bullets each he must be decorated, not charged"), deploying traditional populist rhetoric used by hard-line right-wing candidates come election time. However, the 2018 election campaign pushed further than usual, with loud public promises to make it easier for more police to kill more people. Despite already-frightening numbers of police killings, individual cases of which are rarely scrutinized, Bolsonaro committed to introducing new legal mechanisms to protect police who kill from investigation. In Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel, a former judge running for the state governorship, used terminology normally reserved for the killing of cattle when pledging to deploy snipers in favela communities. João Doria, gubernatorial candidate in São Paulo, offered to pay the legal costs for police investigated after fatal shootings. The homicidal posturing paid off. All three candidates won comfortably. None contemplated tackling root causes of violence. They consciously sought to perpetuate them. In Brazil, violence is a modus operandi.

Following a last-minute endorsement by the Bolsonaro family (Jair Bolsonaro has three sons who all hold political positions), Witzel shot from 1 percent in early polls to a 41 percent second-round victory. Taking office in January, Rio's new governor did not delay in delivering the promised violence. In a few hours in February 2019, during a single operation in a favela, his police shot and killed 13 suspects. These included nine young men in a house who, according to witnesses, were trying to give themselves up. During Witzel's first 90 days in office police killed 434 suspects, surpassing all prior statistics and accounting for 50 percent of violent deaths in the state of Rio. By the end of 2019, Witzel's police force had shot and killed 1,810 alleged suspects, the highest annual number on record and significantly higher than the estimated 999 fatal victims of police shootings for the entire United States that year, as recorded by the Washington Post in 2020. Rio de Janeiro state has a population slightly more than 16 million, compared to the more than 330 million in the United States. Standard

practice is to register these killings as "deaths in a confrontation." However, research has consistently proved that extrajudicial executions are the norm. In 2009, a Rio public prosecutor told Human Rights Watch that "almost all" the killings taking place in confrontations he investigated were "farces" (Human Rights Watch 2009).

The instant transformation of Bolsonaro and Witzel's pledges into reality demonstrated precisely how the far right deploys lethal state and parastate violence to spread terror and regulate and maintain social inequality in Brazil. Cops who kill with impunity, drug traffickers, and death squads have long terrorized low-income communities across the nation. Vigilante death squads with "links to the police were born in the Americas in Rio de Janeiro" (Rose 2005, 258). In rural areas, local police and hired gunmen provide such a service. In cities and their peripheries, absence of the state and lack of regulation in poor neighborhoods and favelas offer a wealth of illicit opportunity. Whoever provides security in these areas can step in to control the local economy and service provision. Rio's militias, illegal paramilitary groups known locally as *milícia*, are the latest manifestation of such parastatal despotism. For all these actors, political endorsement of the police as killing machine is an implicit call to arms.

Since the early 2000s, the *milícia* (militia), often constituted or supported by off-duty or former police, firefighters, prison guards, and members of the armed forces, have expanded and grown in power across Rio de Janeiro, flushing out drug traffickers from communities and taking territorial control. Once installed, the militia establishes itself as both local security provider - charging all residents and businesses a "tax" - and de facto government, overseeing political access to the community, all businesses, and installing and running services such as TV, internet, gas, and water. Militia members are known to torture and kill innocent residents to spread fear in the communities they dominate. Militias use traditional death squad activity to preserve, expand, and diversify their extensive legal and illegal business interests. Militia leaders include city councilors and elected representatives in the state parliament. Because of their close official ties, police raids on militia areas and consequent gun battles are infrequent.

Militias originated in Rio's West Zone, which includes the opulent, aseptic Barra da Tijuca neighborhood, home to the 2016 Olympic Park. The West Zone, where more than one in three of the city's voters live, is a political power base. In 2008, a then-obscure Rio politician and Barra resident, Jair Bolsonaro, defended militias in a BBC interview, claiming that they provided security, order, and discipline for poor communities.

Gun ownership rocketed by 98 percent during Bolsonaro's first year as president, confirming his intent and ability to arm his supporters. Weapons newly obtainable to the public included the Brazil-made T4 semiautomatic rifle, previously available only to the army. In April 2020, he revoked decrees that existed to facilitate the tracing and identification of weapons and ammunition. One week later, he tripled the quantity of ammunition available for purchase by civilians.

The rise of Jair Bolsonaro and his subsequent onslaught on democratic institutions, represented the greatest setback for social progress in Brazil since the military coup of 1964. With more guns and ammunition than ever before now available to the general public, more than 2,500 members of the armed forces employed in senior government positions and strong, vociferous support from the rank and file of the police and armed forces, Bolsonaro and his backers held Brazilian society to ransom. His political philosophy, wrote Fernando de Barros e Silva, editor of the respected Piauí current affairs magazine, represented "the victory of the militia model of management of Brazilian violence."

Central to Jair Bolsonaro's activity in Rio de Janeiro, where he began his political career, was a family aide called Fabrício Queiroz. Queiroz's friendship with the former president dates to 1984, when he served as army recruit under Bolsonaro. On leaving the army, Queiroz joined Rio's military police. He remained friends with

Jair Bolsonaro and worked for his eldest son, current senator Flávio Bolsonaro, for eleven years, between 2007 and 2018, after joining his Rio state assembly parliamentary team on secondment from the police. Although his formal job was to provide security for the politician, Queiroz was essentially Flávio's right-hand man for more than a decade.

The unofficial role of Queiroz as the Bolsonaro family's "Mr. Fixit" came under intense scrutiny following numerous alarming allegations: that he ran a ghost employee scheme for Flávio, who siphoned off salaries of no-show employees for personal use; that he was involved with militias; and that he (and Flávio) was associated with Adriano da Nóbrega, the now-dead suspected founder of the death squad believed to have carried out the assassination of Marielle Franco in 2018.

Such revelations expose the Bolsonaro family's proximity to entrenched, intertwined political and criminal interests that have deep historical and territorial roots in Rio de Janeiro, roots that spread across Brazil. Marielle Franco, an Afro-Brazilian LGBT human rights defender raised in a favela, who highlighted and campaigned for years against police excesses in Rio's low-income communities and participated in a highly effective Rio state parliament commission of investigation into militias, stood in direct opposition to such interests.

The killing of Marielle Franco and the *jogo do bicho*

"What I have to say, nobody would like to hear: there is a battalion of murderers acting for money in Rio today, most of them coming from contravention. The Homicide Police and the head of the Civil Police know who they are, but they receive money from *contraventores* not to touch or direct the investigations, thus creating a network of protection so that the contravention kills whoever it wants. Tell me, in recent years, which murder case has targeted a *contraventor*?" In 2018, Orlando de Curicica, a former policeman, was falsely accused of ordering Marielle Franco's murder in a fabricated setup designed to protect the real culprits. His statement (above) to reporters helped blow the lid on the cover-up, revealing the extent to which organized crime penetrates Rio's police and state (Araújo and Otávio 2018). Central to this corruption is the *jogo do bicho*, or *contravenção*, as he refers - Rio's illegal gambling mafias.

Comprehending the reach of these groups is key to understanding organized crime in Brazil and its historical hold on the state. Prominent assassins, like Adriano da Nóbrega, suspected of working for *jogo do bicho* operators, are connected to militias, the Bolsonaro family, and the murder of Marielle Franco.

Conventional narratives and study around law and order and public security in Brazil, both inside and outside the country, focus on the power of prison-based criminal groups and favela-based drug factions such as the Primeiro Comando do Capital (First Capital Command) and the Comando Vermelho (Red Command). These narratives sustain a discourse that lays the foundation for repressive policing and human rights abuses against poor populations while often ignoring state-embedded organized crime and corruption. In reality, these groups and factions exist within and depend on a sophisticated, opaque criminal structure involving state actors and more established organized crime groups. Such mafias are protected by social silence in Brazil. Considered part of everyday life and taken for granted by the public, their inner workings are largely ignored by the media and little studied by academia. They belong to "the universe of the undiscussed" (Bourdieu 1977, 168).

For this reason I studied Rio de Janeiro's gambling mafias for my master's thesis at Cambridge University. My curiosity was vindicated by the words of a Rio de Janeiro police chief who told me:

If you go deeply into this [*the jogo do bicho*], at the very minimum you'll be studying the history of the Republic or better, the history of Brazilian politics since the proclamation of the Republic. . . . The history of organized crime in Rio de Janeiro

and Brazil begins with the *bicheiros*. The first criminal organization in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil is [*run by*] the *bicheiros*. But there's no organized crime without the state - it penetrates the state. In our case it confuses itself with the state itself. You get to a point where you don't know what is the state, and what is a *bicheiro*. (Platt 2013, 70)

The *jogo do bicho* (animal game) is an illegal lottery akin to a numbers racket. It is played across Brazil. It originated in Rio de Janeiro over a century ago, and tickets can be bought today on street corners across the city (and the country). For the millions who play, *jogo do bicho* is part of everyday life. Yet despite its apparent simplicity, to bet on the lottery is to participate in a time-honored process that enables corruption and undermines social progress in Brazil.

The freethinking entrepreneur João Drummond (known in Brazil as Baron Drummond) invented *jogo do bicho* in 1892, at a moment of dramatic change in Rio de Janeiro, to raise funds for a zoo - hence the name and the practice of certain numbers being associated with particular animals. Initial prohibition of the game rose out of an unclear stance by the authorities on what constituted criminal activity, reflecting a need to control and regulate popular practices. This criminalization created an underground illegal economy and network of relationships that nourished the activity. Juridical ambiguity and an inconsistent approach from the authorities contributed to a failure to stop its growth (see Chazkel 2011). Full criminalization of all gambling across Brazil in 1946 saw the rise of powerful *jogo do bicho* bankers in the 1950s and 1960s, initiating a new golden era for the lottery. These bankers not only came to control the lottery but also all illegal gambling rackets in Brazil, such as casinos, bingo, and from the late 1980s onward, electronic gaming machines.

Protection was essential to their activities. The *jogo do bicho* racketeers functioned in a criminal structure maintained and protected by state actors, principally members of the police forces, who illegally sold their services to protect the illegal markets. According to the Brazilian scholar Michel Misse, when an illegal product creates a secret economy to survive, it spawns a second clandestine economy, constituted by the illegal provision of services to the first. This helps elucidate webs of operational relationships that might sustain illicit activities, such as *jogo do bicho* or drug trafficking. The common factor is a service that he calls "political merchandise," constituted principally by favors offered by state agents who expropriate state powers to protect the interests of a third party, or raise funds from actors involved in illegal economic activity through extortion. He shows how, in this way, the informal illegal market is constituted by a logic of double illegality, with demand for illegal services existing parasitically alongside a market for illicit produce (Misse 2006, 198).

This process conceded considerable power to the *bicheiros* (lottery organizers) and both created and trivialized a dual illegal market, a by-product of the game's criminalization in law but not in practice. This notion of the illegal as banal, Misse believes, was transferred subsequently to marijuana and eventually cocaine. It was accompanied by growing impunity, which stemmed from widespread nonrecognition of the game's prohibition (Misse 2006, 199–200). Not only did *jogo do bicho* establish a functioning model of illicit relationships replicated by the illegal drug industry; it also blurs distinctions between what constitutes criminal and socially acceptable behavior, at the center of a series of ambiguous legal and criminal situations. *Jogo do bicho*, drug trafficking, and political corruption all depend on clandestine relationships and the illegal sale of state services. This late twentieth-century foundational matrix paved the way for the arrival of the militia at the beginning of the twenty-first.

The 1960s were tumultuous in Rio de Janeiro. The national capital was transferred to Brasília, and for the following fifteen years the city became known as the state of Guanabara, before its rebirth as the capital of Rio de Janeiro state in 1975. During these years, *jogo do bicho* thrived. While the city attempted to come to terms with lost revenue and stature, the illegal lottery bosses grew more powerful. They financed public works and lined political pockets. They weathered

crackdowns. A few prominent bankers began to emerge as major players. Most famous was the charismatic Castor de Andrade. This private school–educated law graduate, a "gentleman" from a traditional suburban family, expanded his practice to new dimensions, acquiring metalworks, gas stations, and a fish-processing factory. He made connections with the Sicilian Cosa Nostra and even steered his local football team, the humble Bangu Athletic Club, to victory in the 1966 state championships. Under the 1964–1985 dictatorship, Castor and his friends formed an alliance with the junta. The bankers, known locally as *bicheiros,* learned from the military and centralized their operations.

Links between *jogo do bicho* and state repression against the left and the working class were further cemented throughout the 1970s. Middle-ranking members of the military intelligence apparatus migrated from the dictatorship to the *jogo do bicho* infrastructure. One man who capitalized on this moment was Captain Ailton Guimarães. Guimarães came to prominence in 1969 as part of a team that killed an 18-year-old dissident named Eremias Delizoicov. Before Delizoicov died —shot 33 times— he managed to wound two of his would-be captors, including Guimarães, who he shot in the leg. For his efforts, Guimarães won the Medalha do Pacificador, a tribute meted out to regime darlings.

During these years, criminality among military agents was common. Guimarães drifted from antisubversive activities to contraband, specifically extortion of smugglers. Eventually he was denounced, investigated, captured, and even tortured by his own colleagues. His reputation as an incorruptible agent of repression in tatters, Guimarães introduced his network of crooked officials to major players in the *jogo do bicho*.

The dirty war, carnival, and politics

Jogo do bicho has long influenced both Rio politics and the city's carnival. The Sessim David clan has controlled politics in Rio's outlying Nilópolis, a sprawling satellite city in the Baixada Fluminense, for more than four decades (Bezerra 2010). Anísio Abrãao David is patron of Beija-Flor (hummingbird) samba school. Samba schools are social and cultural collectives that parade in official competition at carnival. The schools, which began in the 1930s and 1940s, grew out of poverty. The schools needed discipline, hierarchy, organization, and funding and could not survive without external intervention.

The shrewd *bicheiros* were quick to perceive the potential of such idiosyncratic organizations. Patronage of schools provided them with a formidable social structure for negotiating strategic partnerships on their own terms and a means of exploiting the universal popularity of carnival to camouflage their interests. They used the schools to form all manner of relationships in their favor, both "upward" with groups such as politicians, the media, and businesses, and "downward" to garner popular support and a potential electoral base (Chinelli and Da Silva 1993, 219–220). Patronage also allowed *jogo do bicho* bankers to portray themselves as social entrepreneurs with a genuine interest in supporting and developing the poor. When in the early 1980s Anísio, Castor de Andrade, and Guimarães cofounded a managing committee along the lines of a mafia-style Cupola for *jogo do bicho*, they simultaneously secured total control of Rio's official carnival parade when they founded LIESA, the independent league of samba schools. LIESA still runs the parade today.

While his "cousins," the Sessim David family, went into politics, providing him with extra protection when necessary, Anísio used the samba school both to eulogize and to build partnerships with the military regime. In 1973, 1974, and 1975, Beija-Flor celebrated carnival in the form of direct tributes to the junta and generals partied in Nilópolis. The sambas were pure propaganda, earning Beija-Flor the nickname "the Official School of the Dictatorship."

Canny Anísio, using political clout, made sure that the Arena, the junta's party, always won elections in Nilópolis. Military intelligence conducted a campaign against rival mayors and councilors in the region, accusing them of corruption and clearing the way for the Sessim and Abrãao clans, leaving Anísio free to take over *jogo do bicho*

in the Baixada Fluminense. He reciprocated by finding work for former officials in his businesses, and even at Beija-Flor, where they worked as security enforcers. These employees included torturers who consequently infected life at the samba school with fear and their dirty war ethos (Otávio and Jupiara 2015).

Among them was Paulo Malhães, a retired colonel who gave testimony about his dictatorship activities to the 2014 National Truth Commission established under former president Dilma Rousseff. During 20 hours of interviews, Malhães described in detail how he disposed of the body of Rubens Paiva, a left-leaning civil engineer and politician who "disappeared" in 1971. Malhães also confessed to directing operations at an interrogation center called "the house of death." Lawyers believe that 22 dissidents died under torture there. In April 2014, within weeks of testifying before the truth commission, Malhães was murdered at home in suspicious circumstances.

In 2018 then senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president's eldest son, canvassed for votes in Nilópolis alongside Anísio David's brother Farid, mayor of Nilópolis, and Simão Sessim, Anísio's cousin. Simão Sessim held a congressional seat in Brasília for 40 years. After failing to win reelection in 2018, Sessim was appointed official representative for Rio's state government in Brasília.

The *jogo do bicho* and illegal police death squads have long dominated politics and conducted lethal social cleansing campaigns against undesirables and opponents in the Baixada Fluminense and beyond. This model - a fusion of necropolitics (Mbembe 2019), territorial control, organized crime, and traditional politics - — has been appropriated by the militia, thought to operate today in more than half of Rio de Janeiro's neighborhoods.

Militias, the Crime Office, and Marielle Franco

When Castor de Andrade died of a heart attack during a card game in 1997, his death sparked a family dispute and lethal power struggle. Castor had a son, Paulinho, involved in the family business. Paulinho had a playboy reputation and was nowhere near as popular as his father. When Castor died, his gambling operation in Rio's sprawling West Zone was supposed to pass to his more business-minded nephew, Rogério. When Paulinho refused to hand the operation over, Rogério allegedly had him killed. The murder triggered a war over the family empire. Castor's son-in-law stepped into the fray. Rogério traveled with a large security detail and seemed untouchable. But in 2010 enemies nearly got him with a daytime car bomb that unleashed panic in the West Zone's affluent Barra neighborhood. Rogério survived the attack. His 17-year-old son Diogo, who had taken the wheel that morning, died on the spot.

The assassination attempt involved men close to Rogério. These included his own head of security, a sergeant in the fire brigade who, a few months later and reportedly on Rogério's orders, was shot and killed while riding his Harley-Davidson. At the time of the car bomb, federal police estimated monthly turnover for the West Zone electronic gambling business at $5 million a month. Organizers forced bar and bakery owners to install virtual poker units on their premises. The venomous de Andrade family dispute even divided Rio's civil police force, with different groups of police aligning themselves to either side.

These years saw the fortification and further emergence of the militias across the West Zone. Without the firm hand of Castor, the "gentleman" godfather who had reigned absolute for decades, quarrelling *bicheiros*, police factions, and militias transformed western Rio de Janeiro into a war zone. A high-profile player in this conflict was ex-policeman Ronnie Lessa, who had retired after losing a leg in a car bomb attack in 2009. The bomb had detonated underneath his personal vehicle as he drove home from work. At the

time of the car bomb incident, Lessa reportedly worked as hired gun for Rogério Andrade. Detectives believed that whoever bombed Lessa also planted the explosive that killed Rogério's son a year later.

In 2023, Ronnie Lessa is in custody, accused of firing the bullets that killed Marielle Franco in 2018. Somewhat extraordinarily, before his arrest, Lessa lived in Barra Villas, the same gated community as Jair Bolsonaro. Lessa and his alleged accomplice met there the night they are thought to have killed Franco. Bolsonaro has denied ever knowing Ronnie Lessa.

Lessa was much more than a mere gunman. He was a militia leader who operated several drinking-water distribution networks across the city. The 2019 seizure of 117 machine guns at his friend's house exposed him as one of Rio's leading arms traffickers. He also ran illegal bingo activity in Rio's upscale Barra district. In October 2018 he was recorded negotiating the return of electronic gambling machines seized in a raid with one of Barra's highest-ranking civil policeman. As a retired policeman, Lessa also received a monthly state pension. As a gunman, prosecutors believe he belonged to the Crime Office, a group of former police who worked as assassins, principally for *jogo do bicho*.

In February 2020, a huge police operation involving detectives from Rio tracked and killed another suspected member of the Crime Office, Adriano da Nóbrega, in the northeastern state of Bahia. The former military police sharpshooter had long-standing links to both the Bolsonaro family and *jogo do bicho* in Rio de Janeiro. He is alleged to have controlled militia operations in large swathes of Rio's west zone. He was very close to Flávio Bolsonaro and appears to have participated in a corruption scheme run out of Flávio's parliamentary office when he was a Rio state politician. Flávio employed members of Adriano's family and even admitted that Nóbrega gave him shooting lessons.

Recent revelations concerning Marielle Franco's assassination come from a taped confession made under oath and released to the press in June 2023. Here, Elcio de Queiroz —the former military policeman accused of driving the vehicle from where Ronnie Lessa allegedly fired the shots that killed Franco— reportedly informed police investigators that Bernardo Bello, a leading Rio de Janeiro *bicheiro*, supplied the murder weapon and car. Bello, arrested in Colombia in 2022 and currently on the run in Brazil, was a close associate of Adriano da Nóbrega and is thought to be the godson of Captain Guimarães, the former military regime torturer and founding member of the *jogo do bicho* Cupola. In 2017, Guimarães appointed Bello president of Vila Isabel, his samba school.

Conclusion

Brazilian rightwing politics has roots in paramilitary violence and crime in Rio de Janeiro. This paramilitarism is historically seeded in an alliance that developed during the military regime between security officials and organized crime in Rio. Today that violence has reemerged on the national stage through the Bolsonaro family and their tapping into a right-wing populist nostalgia for violent, dictatorship-era policies. For four years, a military-dictatorship-supporting, far-right president with well-documented links to Rio's mafias governed Brazil. To better understand the Bolsonaro family's influence and power, it is crucial to acknowledge the history and impact of state-embedded organized crime on Brazilian democracy. Marielle Franco's life and work challenged all those interests. Her death was a tragedy, and countless Brazilians have mobilized to defend her legacy. Current president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has appointed her sister, Anielle Franco, federal minister for racial equality.

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George A. Collier (1942-2023) Committed Anthropologist and Bridge with Latin American Critical Thinking

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George Allen Collier died on Tuesday, November 14th in Oakland, California. He was a North American anthropologist specialist in Chiapas, a representative of critical North American anthropology, and an intellectual and political bridge with Latin American theoretical traditions.

As an undergraduate student at Harvard University, he went to Chiapas, in the Mexican Southeast, for the first time in 1960, and since then created an academic and close bond with this territory and its people, that he maintained for forty years. His ethnographic window to understand the Indigenous reality of Chiapas was the Tzotzil municipality of Zinacantan where he lived, worked, and created bonds of ritual kinship. His research contributed to the critique of the culturalist and functionalist perspectives on Indigenous communities that hegemonized Anglo-American anthropology in those years. In many ways, he was ahead of his time, methodologically and theoretically, pointing out in the 1960s the importance of locating Indigenous populations in the global economic processes and analyzing cultural dynamics from a historical perspective. In this way his work made a bridge between the Latin American theories on internal colonialism and the ethnographic work on community characteristics of the Harvard Chiapas Project, by documenting how national economic and global processes influence the social and cultural dynamics of the Tzotzil world (Collier 1975, 1976, 1989, 1990). This openness to theoretical and political dialogues with Latin America characterized his anthropological research and teaching career.

Photo by Jane Collier

Before knowing him personally, I had read about his research during my undergraduate studies in the National School of Anthropology and History in Mexico City (ENAH) in the classic book of Cynthia Hewitt de Alcantara *Anthropological Perspectives on Rural Mexico* (1984*)* in which she reviews distinct perspectives of the Mexican peasant, revealing the theoretical influences of the authors, generally from the other side of the Atlantic or across the Northern Border. Maybe, while not intending it, the author made a very colonial representation of Mexican social sciences, always influenced by the Global North's theories. However, in this book, there was an author who reversed that trend: George Collier, whom she described as influenced by the Latin American Dependency Theories and in dialogue with the work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltran (1973). In contrast with many other North American anthropologists, for George Collier, Mexico was not only a place to do fieldwork but a space of theoretical and political learning. When I had the privilege of having him as my professor at Stanford University, he was the only one who included in his teaching programs authors such as Arturo Warman, Lourdes Arizpe, Hector Díaz Polanco, and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, inviting his non-Spanish speaking students to use dictionaries or to work in a team with those of us who spoke Spanish, in order to enrich these debates. It was because

of his interest in maintaining these academic dialogues that all his books have been published in English as well as in Spanish.

Because he was concerned with making bridges with historians, he co-edited with his colleague Renato Rosaldo and with the historian John Wirth the book *Inca and Aztec States, 1400-1800: Anthropology and History (1982)* that helps us locate contemporary dynamics of Indigenous peoples in long historical processes. Without using the language in fashion today of "decolonizing the curriculum" his teaching always had the intention of opening the epistemic horizons beyond Western knowledge. Because of this concern, he taught with his colleagues in the history department at Stanford the course "The World Outside of the West." He also taught an introductory course for freshmen called "Encounters" in which he questioned the monocultural origin of the United States, covering its internal diversity and recognizing the internal colonialism that continued dominating the lives of Native American, Afro American, Mexican-American peoples, among others. I was lucky to be his assistant on that course, to learn from his dynamic and irreverent form of teaching and utilizing diverse materials such as audiovisuals, graphic art, poetry, and opera.

His Latin American vocation would be exercised fully when he was the Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Stanford (CLAS) (1983-1990), converting the Bolivar House into a space for theoretical and political debates with visiting professors such as Rodolfo Stavenhagen. As director of the Anthropology Department (1990-1994), he promoted the application to the program among Latin American students and strengthened the bond with CLAS so that the students could be exposed to theoretical debates from other regions of the world.

In a time when many Mexican Marxist anthropologists had opted to do economic research to understand at a macro level the impact of capitalism on Indigenous communities, George Collier recuperated his abilities as an ethnographer to document these impacts on cultural and social daily life practices. Together with Jan Rus (1995) and Robert Wassestrom (1984), he broke with the ahistorical perspectives of his teacher Evon Vogt, to reconstruct the domination and power networks that the Mexican state had constructed to control the Indigenous peoples. Also in contrast to the idealized perspectives of the Indigenous communities that some Mexican critical anthropologists had, George Collier and his longtime colleague Jan Rus (1995) documented the political and economic power networks of the indigenous world. Their power ethnographies were fundamental to understanding the formation of Indigenous *cacicazgos* (*chiefdom),* the displacements, and dispossessions that gave origin to the present-day urban Indigenous communities in Chiapas. Maybe due to the influence of the feminist perspectives of his life partner, Jane Collier, he also documented the economic transformations that influenced the changes in gender relations and the loss of political and ritual power of women in Tzotzil communities (Collier 1994).

At the methodological level, he also was ahead of his time by using computers IBM and aerial maps – in a time when this technology was not of common use – in order to demonstrate the relation between kinship relations, the internal stratification of the indigenous communities, the formation of indigenous *cacicazgos,* and the transformation in land ownership.

In 1994, when the Zapatista uprising occurred, his studies on political economy and power in the Chiapas Highlands allowed him to contextualize the roots of this Indigenous movement within the framework of broader processes of domination and resistance in his book *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (1994), which was published in English the same year of the uprising, and in Spanish a year later (1995).

This same interest in locating community studies in history and the global economy led him to analyze the impacts of *Francoism* in an Andalusian community in the Sierra de Aracena in Southern Spain. Through meticulous archival work and oral history, he reconstructed the experience of the Andalusian socialists before

the war, and its almost total extermination during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) as well as the repression towards their families during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975) in his book *Socialists of Rural Andalusia*: *Unacknowledged Revolutionaries of the Second Republic* published originally in English in 1987, and in Spanish in 1992. This pioneering work on rural socialism documented the disappearance or murder of 90 militants in a community of 600 people, showing the world the bloody legacy of Franco at a time when the pact of silence continued to prevail in Spain.

Although his academic work inspired the anthropological research of many of his students, it was his generosity and commitment to building academic communities that most deeply marked those of us who had the privilege of having him as a teacher. Confronting the individualistic culture that neoliberal academia promoted in the 1990s, George and Jane Collier invited us to work collectively, to support each other in writing and do field work together, when this was possible, as was the case with my colleague and friend Liliana Suárez-Návaz and I when we did research with North African migrants in Granada. It was in 1990, within the framework of this fieldwork, that Liliana, Ramón González Ponciano, and I were able to visit George and Jane, Linares de la Sierra, the community that they call in their books "Los Olivos" and witness the affection and respect that these Andalusian peasants had for our professors, decades after their first fieldwork in the area in the 1960s. Their strategies for building community extended beyond the classroom, sharing and connecting their diverse worlds.

His house in San Francisco became a meeting space where George cooked Spanish recipes for his students with a love and skill that made those culinary memories one of the most endearing remembrances of our generation. In these monthly meals, we built an academic and emotional community, which 34 years later continues to connect us from Saint Petersburg, Chennai, Madrid, Mexico, Irvine, and Boston. Today there are many of us who mourn his departure, but we also celebrate his life and are grateful for how he marked our trajectories. Jane Collier, his life partner of more than sixty years, is accompanied in this mourning by her daughter Lucy and her grandchildren, Owen, Mary Fiona, Scarlett, and Kamron, but also by the large transnational family that they both built.

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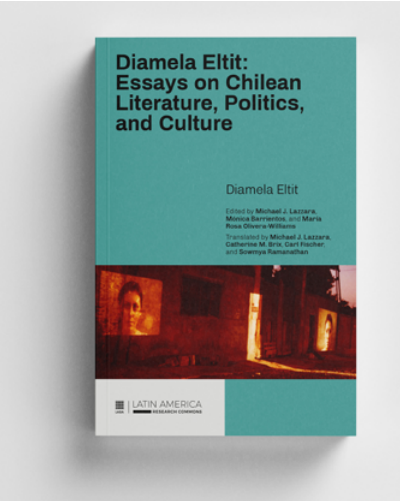

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