

Electoral Polarization, Class Politics and a New Welfare State in Brazil and Turkey

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We explain why and how the governing parties, AKP of Turkey and PT of Brazil, converged on the same path of relying on the poor as the main strategy to stay in power. With the neoliberal reorganization and internationalization of their economies, the capacity of these governments to set up developmentalist alliances with big capital, the middle classes and the organized working classes was weakened. Based on a most-different-systems design and on descriptive statistical analysis, we argue that both PT and AKP failed to build multi-class bases and thus had to mobilize the poor by using various strategies, most importantly expanding social assistance policies, which accelerated the emergence of a new welfare state.

Introduction

In 2013, Brazil and Turkey were suddenly in the international spotlight for hosting massive waves of street protests, ultimately challenging ruling parties that had been solidly in power, at that time, for more than a decade. Since 2013, social and political tensions have culminated. In 2016, a parliamentary and judiciary coup d'état in Brazil removed the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party – PT) from power, and a failed military coup in Turkey was followed by widespread authoritarian repression by the governing *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party – AKP). The two countries are very different culturally, historically and geographically, yet they went through a very similar pattern of socio-political polarization, which ultimately explains the breakdown of the existing democratic institutions in both countries.

Having come of age ‘from below’ and obtained power as political outsiders to the respective traditional systems, AKP and PT ruled uninterruptedly after 2002

(Turkey) and 2003 (Brazil), with increasing support from the poor. Electoral politics in both countries have been accompanied by social and cultural tensions, resulting in extra-parliamentary forms of conflict and struggle, ranging from protest waves to military and parliamentary coups and judiciary interventions. Both parties reached power during periods of deep economic crisis that brought substantial impoverishment and unemployment. Once in office they both relied on an ideology of economic growth as the main pillar for maintaining power, generated generous pro-poor policies domestically, and attempted to join the powers-that-be internationally.

We argue that while ruling culturally, historically and geographically very different countries, and coming from ideologically opposite poles (left trade-unionism for the PT and radical Islamism for the AKP), the two governments converged on the same path of ‘governing the poor’ as part of their strategy of maintaining power. We argue that this happened because, notwithstanding the ideological differences, in both countries governments have been facing a declining capacity to frame developments and establish class alliances with more structured sectors of the society (including big capital and the middle and organized working classes) because of the neoliberal re-organization and internationalization of their economies. The poor have emerged as a critical social base from which these ambitious political parties could derive political power for their long-term domestic and international political projects. Both political parties have historically developed ideological and organizational roots in the poorer classes and once in power they have also effectively delivered to the poor.

Three main features jointly unfolding are key to describe this pattern: (i) increasing class-based electoral polarization between, on the one side, mostly low-educated low-wage workers, small family farmers, the unemployed and underemployed (the ‘poor’, as we collectively call them here) voting for the ruling parties and, on the other side, the higher-educated urban middle and upper classes (by contrast, the ‘wealthy’) voting for opposition parties; (ii) the development of new sets of welfare policies targeting low income and marginalized groups (the poor); and (iii) the establishment of durable (by local standards) electoral hegemonies at the national level by once outsider political parties and leaderships, whose histories are embedded within those very same poor and marginalized populations.

This article is based on a most-different-systems (MDS) design comparative research strategy in order to point out the effect of class politics on government behaviour. By class politics, we mean electoral competition based on class-based mobilizations, policies and ideologies. Class politics do not only consist of bread-and-butter issues, but also are marked by various politicized cultural and social cleavages that take class divides as the main demarcation lines. We opt for the MDS design approach in order to compare PT and AKP because they are very different in many ways: ideologically (left – right), geographically (Latin America – Middle East), leadership structures (non-leader-based – leader-based), and historical origins (unions – middle classes). In spite of these stark differences, during their ascendancy to power as well as during their reign, both parties have converged on relying on the

poor as a critical, if not the only, strategy. This has involved sharply expanding pro-poor social policies. We contend that this commonality is explained by an observed similarity in both countries, namely that the increasingly neoliberal-inspired political economies in both countries have increasingly detached the governments from more structured sectors of society, resulting in an increasing electoral dependency on the poor. By the poor, we refer to the urban and rural population groups characterized by low incomes, informal or irregular employment or unemployment, and squatter housing. In short, we refer to what Portes and Hofman (2003) and Mike Davis (2004) call the informal proletariat.

In what follows, we first show the remarkable similarities found in the governing styles of the AKP and PT parties, including their relationship with their lower-class constituencies. We then present empirical evidence of what we are calling electoral polarization in which the poor emerge as the widest, if not the only, popular base of the ruling parties. Next, we give a political economic explanation of ‘why’ these parties had to rely on the poor, emphasizing their declining capacity to garner support from more structured sectors of the society. Finally, we explain ‘how’ PT and AKP managed to appeal to the poor, with an examination of the new lineage of welfare policies developed under these governments. We stress the novelty of these policies to make sense of the overwhelming support that both parties came to garner among the poor. We focus on the period between 2003 and 2016, during which both AKP and PT were ruling parties and shared very similar trajectories of political development. Since 2016, the trajectories of the two parties have diverged once again, with PT removed from office and AKP returning to overtly authoritarian policies as its main strategy.

The First Short History: AKP and its Protracted Struggle for National Power in Turkey

A coup d'état in 1980 set the political stage in Turkey for the Islamic movement to flourish and mobilize broader segments of the population (Keyder 2004). By the 1990s, the cadres of the Islamist movement, organized around the Welfare Party, had assumed positions of power in various ranks of the state bureaucracy, education, health, justice and state finance, and produced a mass base composed of newly urbanized informal workers that politically and demographically expanded as a consequence of rapid urbanization through push migration and economic deregulation (Öniş 2006; Shively 2008; Tugal 2009). Having initially gained municipal governments, particularly Istanbul and Ankara by the mid-1990s, and then become the governing party, the Welfare Party embraced and reached out to working class neighbourhoods with a rhetoric that combined justice and tradition, supported largely by welfare initiatives, and increasing the quality of urban services in these long-neglected areas (Tugal 2007). However, the military overthrew the Islamic government with a coup in 1997. This was a critical turning point for Turkey's political Islam, which would culminate in the establishment of the AKP in 2001.

In 2002, the AKP won the elections and gained two thirds of the seats in parliament. The party had originated from the Welfare Party in a reformed but politically more organized form, 'moderately religious' and neo-liberal in its essence (Dinçşahin 2012; Sarkissian and Ozler 2009). In 2001, the worst economic crisis in the history of Turkey hit the country after an exchange-rate based disinflation programme engineered by the IMF during the 1990s. The devastating effects of the crisis as well as of the recovery programme on the vast majority of people, rising poverty, unemployment and the resulting political grievances against the political parties of the 1990s created a unique opportunity for the AKP government to lay the basis for a long-lasting hegemony. When the AKP came to power in 2002, the 2001 financial crisis was nearly over and the AKP began implementing the IMF 'neoliberal' reforms that were already put into action by the economy minister, Kemal Derviş, of the previous government. The AKP embraced a neo-liberal economic agenda relaxing financial markets, accelerating privatizations and layoffs, limiting agricultural subsidies, and liquidating the welfare rights of private and public formal sector employees. For Tuğal, what the AKP accomplished was a 'passive revolution' against the anti-capitalist radicalism of the previous Islamist party (Tuğal 2007).

Politically, the AKP represented a coalition of the conservative provincial bourgeoisie and liberal/conservative intellectuals with massive popular electoral support from the poor. The bourgeois fractions that had supported the Islamist party in the 1970s transformed from small nationalist provincial entrepreneurs into big capitalists integrated into global networks (the so-called Anatolian Tigers). Islamic capital had organized itself into a business association, MÜSİAD, which became a smaller counterpart and rival to the organization of Istanbul-based secularist big capitalists, TÜSİAD (Gumuscu 2010; Somer 2007). The AKP, like its predecessor the Welfare Party, was supported financially and ideologically by this comparatively small but growing devout section of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes (Gumuscu and Sert 2009; Hosgör 2011), whose loyalty they secured by distributing public resources through central and municipal governments. In spite of its overt pro-capitalist policies, and supported by the small devout fraction of the middle and upper classes, the AKP and its founding leader Tayyip Erdoğan managed to appeal to the populous poor as the main source of electoral support rather than to the existing economic elites and middle classes that tend to identify themselves more with secularism and align themselves with economic globalization and cultural Europeanization (Keyder 2005; Yörük and Yuksel 2014). Although the AKP, then, managed to garner support from different segments of Turkish society, including the new growing conservative bourgeoisie and middle classes, the great majority of its votes came from the poor, as the most loyal section of Erdoğan's constituency.

Erdoğan's rising popularity in the 1990s as mayor of Istanbul had created anxiety among the secularist elite of the period, and he was put into prison for four months on the grounds of having invoked Islamist radicalism with a religious poem he read publicly. This widely lionized his image and evidently magnified his long-standing claim to be an outsider and a victim of the elite establishment. Coming from a lower middle-class neighbourhood, he had the ideological instruments, image and

discourse to continuously press home his rhetoric of being ‘a man of the people’, despite his intensive links to the then newly-growing, and now very powerful, conservative bourgeoisie (Aytaç and Öniş 2014).

Over the 2000s, the ruling AKP has been engaged in a decade-long intense political battle with the secularist nationalist economic and bureaucratic elite – the Kemalists. The Kemalist bloc consisted of the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP), the military and civil high-level bureaucracy, including the high courts, media institutions and secularist intellectuals, backed by the Istanbul-centred industrial and financial bourgeoisie. Both the AKP and the Kemalists did their best to annihilate each other’s political leverage via the mobilization of various judicial, social and bureaucratic forces. The Kemalist bloc attempted to wage a coup against the AKP in the mid-2000s, and the Kemalist bureaucracy tried to ban the AKP at the Supreme Court, the failure of which gave the AKP substantial leverage to initiate police and juridical operations against the civil and military leaders of the Kemalist bloc. Many high-ranking generals, politicians, university presidents, journalists and leaders of various influential Kemalist NGOs were put into prison on charges of being members of illegal organizations aiming at a coup (Dinçşahin 2012; Sarkissian and Ozler 2009). As Aytaç and Öniş have stated, Erdoğan claimed that it is precisely these institutions of ‘the political establishment’, such as the Constitutional Court and the High Judiciary, that ‘formed an alliance to prevent people from achieving power’ (Aytaç and Öniş 2014). The AKP argues that it represents the lower classes while the political opposition represents and stands for the economic and bureaucratic elites. The famous motto of the AKP, *Milli İrade* (The Will of the Nation) refers to the people, the Muslim lower classes as opposed to the secularist economic and political elite (Aytaç and Öniş 2014).

The ruling party’s success against the Kemalist elites left a radicalized secularist crowd orphaned. Their disappointment with the Kemalist leaders’ failure to challenge the AKP led to militant street activism as the sole remaining form of political opposition, culminating in the eruption of the Gezi protests in June 2013 (Yörük and Yüksel 2014). Shortly after the Gezi protests, Erdoğan’s rule was challenged once more in December 2013 through the largest corruption scandal in Turkish history, based on claims about a large network of bribery and corruption that involved some ministers as well as Erdoğan’s family and himself. It did not take long to understand that this was not a simple corruption scandal, but part of a larger political battle between the governing AKP and the Fethullah Gülen Community, with which AKP had allied itself against the Kemalist bloc until shortly before (Gürel 2015). The struggle between Gülen and Erdoğan eventually erupted in a failed military coup on 15 July 2016. After this failed coup, Erdoğan tightened his one-man rule through laying a heavy hand on all political opposition, the media, the universities, and the judiciary, as well as the economy. As such, Turkey’s ranking in the World Press Freedom Index dropped from 98 in 2006 to 151 in 2016. Erdoğan also launched a full-scale offensive against the Kurdish opposition that had recently gained unprecedented power (Aktan 2015). The chaos perpetuated by the Kurdish war was

intensified by the increasing attacks of Islamic State in big cities. Erdoğan was consolidating his rule but at the same time the country was being harassed by terrorist attacks, an ethnic civil war, a deepening economic crisis, and ever widening state violence.

In these years of contentious politics, the AKP garnered the necessary legitimacy and power from the dynamism, activism and massive support of the urban and rural poor (Öniş 2013; Yörük 2012). Erdoğan managed to survive the Gezi Protests, the corruption scandal, and the coup attempt, and gained even greater popular support than before, based on a counter-Gülen and counter-Gezi mobilization among the poor. Except for the brief defeat in the June 2015 elections, the AKP has won all elections at all levels with wide support from the poor, aided in this by increasing the level of pro-poor social assistance programmes and using an anti-elite populist discourse (Yörük and Yüksel 2014).

The Second Short History: PT, Trying to Appease All Sides

The Brazilian Worker's Party (PT) was born out of the 'new trade-unionist' movement that emerged with the 'economic miracle' of the 1970s, when the country was ruled by military dictators (Humphrey 1982). After a decade of very rapid industrial growth, the metal-workers' trade union of the industrial belt surrounding São Paulo, under the leadership of Lula da Silva, in 1978 broke the silence and led a series of strikes that came to be the keystone for the creation of both the National Union's Confederation (CUT), by far the largest in the country, and the Workers' Party (PT) (Comin 1996).

At the same time, in the historically violent countryside, several different populations displaced by the expansion of the economic frontiers towards the Centre and Northern regions of the country began to radicalize. Small-scale landowners, settlers, landless workers, and indigenous peoples were massively, systematically and violently expelled from their lands by both private and public agents as a result of large-scale agriculture, cattle raising, mining and hydro-energy production. In *favelas*, sprawling in the largest urban areas that turned into the receiving end of those displaced populations, myriad grassroots movements, protests and illegal organizations sprang up due to the chronic absence of almost everything from paved streets and potable water, to schools, health-centres and public transport (Sader 1988).

Landless rural workers (the powerful MST – *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*) as well as large parts of the grassroots social movements erupting in the outskirts of the urban areas owe much of their emergence, organization and ideological orientation to religious institutions, networks and agents such as the Theology of Liberation branch of the Catholic Church (Keck 1995). Even the new trade-unionism, whose social bases largely overlapped with the urban poor, was largely influenced and helped by religious institutions and individuals, including

high-ranking officials of the church (Azevedo 2004; Della Cava 1989; Klaiber 1998; Mainwaring 1986).

The PT was also joined by many small radical leftist groups, as well as by intellectuals and other mainly middle-class groupings of environmentalists, feminists, black activists, and human rights advocates that helped to impart a more 'socialistic' tone to the party's ideological rhetoric. Nevertheless, the party sought to widely represent the working people in general; that is, not only the industrial proletariat or the salaried classes, but also the self-employed, the landless farmers and indigenous groups. This ideal converged with that of the progressive branches of the Catholic Church who struggled for the 'preferential option for the poor'. Lastly, most of the leaders and public faces of the then new party were indeed workers, not professional politicians, intellectuals or bureaucratic cadres. A large part of them shared the Roman Catholic faith. The humble origins of the metal-worker Lula da Silva (himself Catholic), born in the 'backward' North-Eastern region of the country, is key to understanding both his popularity among the poor and the loathing he awakens among the upper classes (Bourne 2008).

In electoral terms, until 2002 the PT managed to grow consistently, relying mostly on large urban constituencies, where formal salaried work and union militancy tend to concentrate. Similar to the AKP in Turkey, it was at the helm of municipal administrations that the party started to implement institutional innovations, such as participatory budgets, and to give more priority to social investments, such as public transport, education, and social housing. Lula lost his first three presidential bids, but in all of them he came in second, consolidating his position as the main opposition leader. He eventually came to be seen by the elites and conservatives, which also includes the entire mainstream media sector, as the candidate to be beaten at all costs. As in Turkey, the economic hardships experienced by workers and the poor due to economic reforms, sluggish economic growth, the crisis of 1999, rising unemployment, informal labour, and declining wages paved the way for the PT to gain power nationally. It remained in power until the 2016 coup d'état, winning four consecutive presidential elections, an electoral hegemony unprecedented in the country's history.

Starting his first mandate in 2003, Lula and his party experienced quite a change in their constituency, nevertheless. The orthodoxy of their economic policies of the first years led the more leftist groups to break away from the party. Reforms in the public pension system considerably angered previously sympathetic civil servants.¹ Finally, as corruption scandals erupted in 2005, the party saw its support among the professional classes, younger and more educated people in general fade away (Singer 2012). In the opposite direction, economic growth alleviated unemployment, and wages – including the minimum legal wage that applies to tens of millions of

1. It is worth saying that, different from the AKP in Turkey, the PT has never been hegemonic in the parliament. In 2002, when Lula was elected president, amassing almost two thirds of the votes in the second round, the party took a meagre 17% of the deputy chairs. In his re-election in 2006, it received 16%. For an overview, see Terron and Soares (2010).

poor workers – started to rise faster than inflation. New social policies, such as the conditional cash transfer programme, *Bolsa Família*, began to reach tens of millions of the poorest citizens in the country, and party support among these constituencies grew sharply, pushing the party towards more ‘peripheral’ areas (North and North-east regions, smaller towns, rural areas, urban slums). Political realignment, as Singer calls it, happened in 2006, when support from the middle and upper classes vanished and abruptly turned into open and hostile opposition, while the informal-proletariat massively moved to support Lula. The ‘rich versus poor’ divide quickly surfaced (Singer 2012).

Once in power, the PT tried hard to build an alliance with big national corporations to which the state delivered huge amounts of subsidized credit. The party aimed to build the so-called ‘national champions’, mainly in commodities, construction and food sectors. In keeping to neoliberal macroeconomics, however, it deepened the de-industrialization process (Rodrik 2015), and ended up losing the support it had raised among the industrial bourgeoisie.² When the international crisis hit the external demand for commodities and the economy started to slow, Dilma Rousseff, who had served first as Minister of Energy and then Chief of Staff to Lula, and who succeeded him as President in 2010, decided to penalize the financial and rentier sectors. She pulled down interest rates by using the big federal banks to challenge the private banking sector through market competition. Yet, in failing to effectively boost the industrial sector and concomitantly confronting the interests of the financial and globally oriented sectors, the PT lost all support among the capitalist class (Bresser-Pereira 2016). The struggle between the PT and capital descended into a dirty war of corruption scandals, accompanied by a massive corporate media campaign against the government, which paved the way for overthrowing it, through a legislative coup in 2016, ultimately articulated and backed by different branches of the judiciary, including the Supreme Court.³

The parliamentary and judiciary coup d’état in 2016 brought to an end 13 years of PT ruling, but failed to establish a sustainable power alliance or even to stabilize the country politically. Lacking public support, the interim government was plagued by corruption scandals and pushed an extremely unpopular agenda of reforms: a 20-year freeze in social spending, the flexibilization of labour laws, and an aggressive

2. For detailed analysis see Singer (2015, ‘Cutucando onças com varas curtas’).

3. The Brazilian Constitution prescribes the president’s removal from office only if he or she has been criminally charged, which never happened to Dilma Rousseff; she was impeached on grounds of ‘accounting mismanagement’, for artificially lowering the public deficit official figures, an expedient used in every single year by every one of her predecessors as well as her successor in the last two years, without any consequence for them. See Mark A. Weisbrot, ‘Brazilian prosecutor finds no crime committed by Dilma: will the law count for anything in Brazil?’ *Huffington Post*, www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-weisbrot/brazilian-prosecutor-find_b_11092200.html; Glenn Greenwald, ‘New political earthquake in Brazil: is it now time for media outlets to call this a “coup”?’ *The Intercept*, 23 May 2016 <https://theintercept.com/2016/05/23/new-political-earthquake-in-brazil-is-it-now-time-for-media-outlets-to-call-this-a-coup/>; Jonathan Watts, ‘Brazil minister ousted after secret tape reveals plot to topple President Rousseff’. *The Guardian*, 23 May 2016. www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/23/brazil-dilma-rousseff-plot-secret-phone-transcript-impeachment

agenda of privatizations and market opening for foreign investors in the oil, gas and electricity industries, in aviation and aeronautics, and in land. Beyond this, almost all leaders of the mainstream parties were linked to corruption scandals in the same investigations aimed at the PT, and while they were not seriously bothered by either the Justice or the Federal Police, their popularity virtually collapsed. The ousting of Rousseff, in other words, did not improve the popularity of the politicians that wrested power from her in 2016, rather the opposite, and they had every reason to fear the ballot boxes.

The 2016 coup, however, was not the usual type of coup; once the undesirable government was ousted, everything else was kept in place; there was no replacement of the constitutional order (as happened in 1964), the congress and the existing political parties were not shut down nor were the judiciary courts interfered with. Moreover, the electoral calendar remained unchanged and, until 2018, all the polls showed Lula as the unchallenged frontrunner for the presidency. In a highly controversial set of trials, Lula then was convicted of corruption and give a 12-year jail sentence by Judge Sergio Moro, who subsequently became the Minister of Justice of the victorious candidate, Jair Bolsonaro. Moro was lionized in the media and Bolsonaro's entire campaign focused on corruption and security issues, running a massive fake news campaign through social networks and refusing to take part in public debates. Embracing a radical conservative rhetoric, Bolsonaro amassed the support of the evangelical sects, which control vast material and political resources, such as broadband networks and radio stations. Initially, Bolsonaro, a former middle-rank military who had been an obscure federal deputy for almost 30 years, was not the choice of the elites; but once it became clear that no one from the traditional mainstream parties would make a viable candidate this time, the support from capitalists (industry, banking and, above all, agri-business) came forth enthusiastically, greatly eased by his radical neo-liberal platform. From his prison cell, Lula⁴ managed to lead the polls until the Supreme Court ruled out any possibility that his name could be on the ballot. One month before the elections Lula appointed the former mayor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad, as the PT's candidate. Haddad did better than all other centre and left-wing candidates and jumped to the second round of the elections, in which he obtained 45% of the votes. He lost the national election, but was victorious in almost all the states in the poor north-eastern region of the country. After a year in government, public opinion surveys show that Bolsonaro can count on the firm support of middle- and high-income voters, while among the poor his popularity is deteriorating steadily. Polarization is alive and well in 2019 Brazil.

4. In mid-2019, a series of leaked conversations between Moro and the public prosecutors in charge of Lula's case, made public by the world-renowned journalist Glenn Greenwald, the same who revealed the Snowden files, has shown that the legal proceedings were gravely manipulated in order to produce the guilty verdict. The scandal was such that the Supreme Court has been forced to release Lula, and the entire set of processes against him is under scrutiny. Greenwald's revelations can be found in his electronic review, *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/brasil/>

The Poor as the Social Base of the Ruling Parties in Brazil and Turkey

We now characterize the significant parallels in class-based electoral polarization experienced in both countries, highlighting the role played by the poorest sectors of the electorate in supporting the ruling parties. We resort to electoral poll data, reflecting closely the actual results of the elections that followed, provided by DataFolha in Brazil and the KONDA research institute in Turkey. The DataFolha survey was conducted in October 2014 with a nationwide survey of 18,116 informants. The KONDA survey was conducted in July 2013 with a nationwide survey of 2629 informants.⁵ The analysis of the electoral polls from both countries shows that both the PT and AKP votes are negatively correlated with income and education, and positively with age (see Figures 1 and 2). The main opposition parties in both countries present opposite trends. Their votes are positively correlated with income and education, indicating a concentration of middle and upper-class support.

Both PT and AKP expanded their popular base among the poor over the course of their rule. Figure 3 shows that the rates of lower income votes in total AKP and PT votes have continuously increased. The share of votes coming from families with household incomes less than two minimum wages increased from 57% to 71% for the AKP between 2007 and 2015, and from 27% to 51% for the PT between 2002 and 2014.⁶

Figure 3 shows that between 2002 and 2015 households with incomes less than two minimum wages have increased in weight in the AKP's and PT's electoral base. This illustrates that both the AKP and the PT have relied increasingly on the votes of lower income groups. We do not claim that the AKP and the PT have received support *only* from the poor (there has been some middle and upper-class support as well), but the share of votes coming from the poor is very large and this composition has become even larger over time. But why did these parties converge on this particular track of popular mobilization? In the next section, we describe the structural dynamics that condition these parties to rely on the poor as the main pillar of sustaining political power.⁷

Party politics in Turkey and Brazil is not solely based on social class. Rather, there are many other social cleavages that characterize political polarizations, including secularism–religion, modernity–tradition, centre–periphery, ethnicity, race, and ideology (Çarkoğlu 2012; Çarkoğlu and Hinich 2006; Jefferson West 2005; Tezcür 2012). As such, AKP supporters can be considered as belonging to the social *periphery*, a categorization that is not confined to the domains of ideology and culture, but also comprises a lower-class dimension. In a similar vein, the opposition against the AKP has not only resulted from bread-and-butter issues but most often

5. DataFolha is available online, see: <http://eleicoes.uol.com.br/2014/pesquisas-eleitorais/brasil/2-turno/>. KONDA kindly shared the dataset with the authors. We thank KONDA for their cooperation.

6. There are no similar available data on the AKP for 2002 elections.

7. Here, we do not ignore the expansion of the middle classes in Turkey and Brazil. On the other hand, the rise of the middle classes, who tend to support opposition parties in both countries, is one of the challenges that the AKP and the PT have faced during their office terms. We argue that, failing to gain massive support from the middle classes, both parties resorted to the poor.

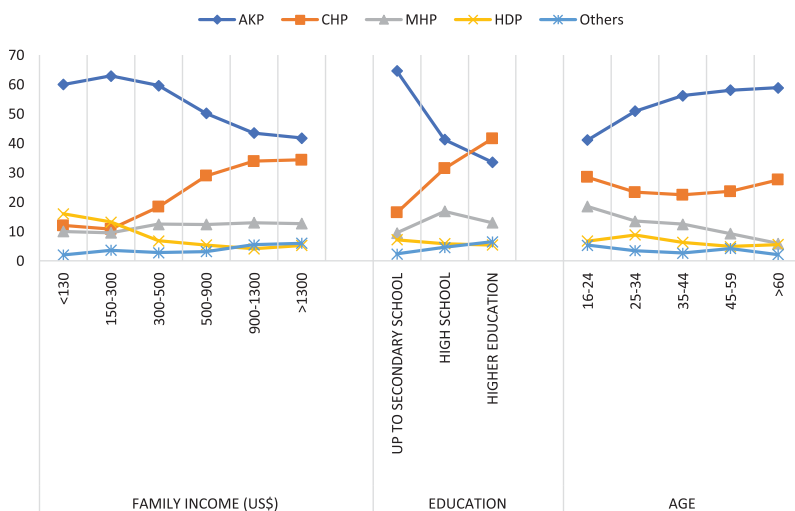


Figure 1. Vote rates of political parties by monthly family income (USD), education and age, Turkey (based on authors’ own calculations, using KONDA Barometre Survey 2015). (To view this figure in colour please see the online version of this journal.)

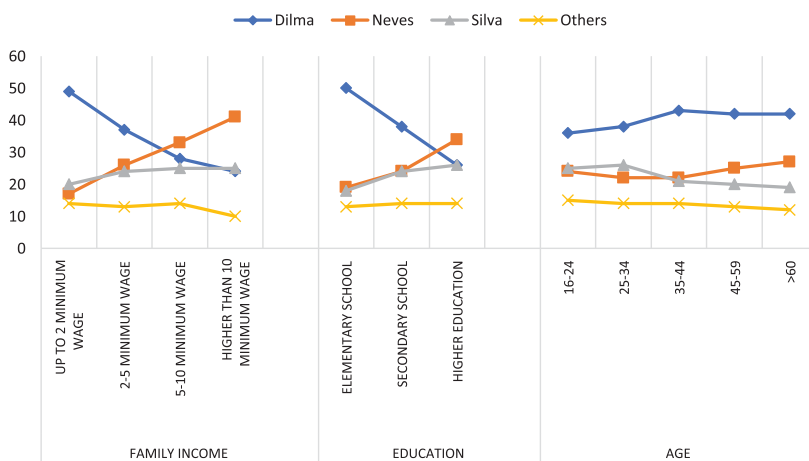


Figure 2. Vote rates of political parties by monthly family income (US\$), education and age, Brazil (based on authors’ own calculations, using Datafolha 2014, available at <http://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/> (last accessed 4 April 2020)). (To view this figure in colour please see the online version of this journal.)

from the cultural and political programmes and policies of the party. Gezi protesters, for example, differed from non-protesters (and government supporters) by their cultural, ideological and political views. They are more secularist and left-wing (Yörük and Yüksel 2014). However, in the case of Turkey, these cleavages to a significant extent overlap with class divisions and poor and non-poor are frequently observed on

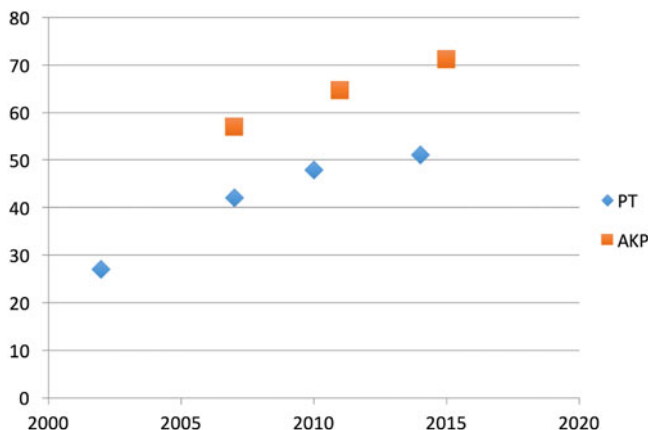


Figure 3. Changes in rate of votes from households with incomes less than two minimum wages in total AKP and PT votes (2002–2015) (Based on authors' own calculations using DataFolha and KONDA reports (KONDA, 2007, 2011, 2015)). (To view this figure in colour please see the online version of this journal.)

opposite sides of these cultural/ideological divides (Çarkoğlu 2007; Somer 2007). Similarly, in Brazil the racial divide between white European descendants, on one side, and non-white indigenous and African-descendants (the latter group corresponding to more than half of the country's population) is also strongly correlated with class divisions; although at the bottom the population is widely mixed in racial terms, the middle and upper classes are strongholds of the white minority. Therefore, we argue that the poor/non-poor divide has become a common denominator of existing socio-political polarizations in Turkey and Brazil, if not necessarily a causal factor of them.

Why Did the AKP and the PT Rely on the Poor? Globalization, Reshaping National Politics and Class Interests

We argue that the popular bases of the governing parties in both countries signal that the break-up of earlier developmental political frameworks has led to a situation in which the governments in question experience a declining capacity to ally with, co-opt, or simply impose their decisions upon the most powerful and globalized economic actors. They, instead, tend to rely more on the poor, mostly through new welfare policies that aim at poverty alleviation. The economies of Brazil and Turkey, and hence their social structures, were built on decades of state-led developmentalist policies, in which industrialization played a key role in establishing and framing class interests in the 'modern sectors'. Under the leadership of empowered public bureaucracies closely connected with key sectors of the economic elites, the state managed to integrate foreign and domestic capital, the middle-classes, public sector employees, and parts of the industrial working class.

The debt crises of the 1980s put an end to the ‘developmentalist cycle’ in most developing countries, including Brazil and Turkey (Taylor 2006). This was followed by IMF stabilization and external liberalization programmes. After the corresponding neoliberal reforms, the economies of Brazil and Turkey relied heavily on FDI, which in turn are tied to a country’s ‘credibility’ in the eyes of foreign investors.⁸ The ‘credibility’ market not only determines the fortunes of companies, but also those of governments in search of credit. Macro-economic stability, a vital source of ‘credibility’ in the eyes of credit-rating agencies, thus became the single most important priority of the Turkish and Brazilian governments, leading both countries to keep interest rates at stunningly high levels.⁹ The governments aimed at inflation control to attract foreign capital, while keeping their currencies chronically overvalued (Pereira 2010). Market opening increased the penetration of imported goods, a trend that was reinforced by chronically overvalued currencies aimed at controlling inflation and attracting FDI (Rodrik 2015). The recipe of combining open capital markets, high interest rates, and an overvalued currency led to recurrent balance of payments deficits, to the expansion of the public debt, and, eventually, to financial collapse (as also happened with Russia and many other countries) in the late 1990s.

Massive displacement of jobs from manufacturing industries to low-skilled short-term jobs in the service sector also resulted in a dislocation of the labour force from the more to the less unionized sectors and curtailed trade-union power. In the mid-1980s, the share of the manufacturing industry in Brazil’s GDP reached almost one third of the total, against 11% in 2014. In Turkey, the overall share of these industries peaked in 1998, reaching 26%, declining to 18% in 2014 (World Bank 2019). In 2000, the average wage in the formal sector in Brazil was at half its value of 1986. Additionally, wage inequality in Brazil between skilled (college degree) and non-skilled workers increased by almost 20% from 1991 to 1999. In Turkey, the share of wage-labour in private manufacturing added value declined from 38% to 15% between 1979 and 1988. Union density declined by 65% (Cam 2002). Employment in the formal sector declined as a share of the total employment, whereas most of the new jobs created were in informal activities, paying consistently less than in formal ones, and carrying no rights and benefits.

During most of their time in power, the PT and the AKP tried to make up for their macro-economic neo-liberal approach by reviving industrial policies, providing subsidized loans for long-term investments, making up for high domestic interest rates,

8. Until the 1990s, Brazil received roughly one to two billion dollars in FDI, yearly. These figures jumped to US\$30 billion in the second half of the 1990s, US\$45 billion in 2008 and more than US\$60 billion annually in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Data extracted from IPEA-Data: www.ipeadata.gov.br/Default.aspx. In Turkey, very small amounts of FDI had historically been received; the boom came in the 2000s, when FDI jumped from less than US\$2 billion in 2003 and 2004 to US\$10 billion in 2005, US\$20 billion in 2006, 2007 and 2008, staying around US\$10 to 15 billion until 2014. For further information, see <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN>.

9. In 2007, before the financial crisis, central banks’ key interest rates were at 15.75% in Turkey and 11.25% in Brazil, compared with 4% in the USA and the eurozone. The huge gaps between domestic and international interest rates are behind the boom in inflows of FDI and ‘hot money’. For a detailed account, see Gaulard (2012).

providing tax breaks for selected sectors, and some level of protectionism in trade. These efforts were, however, not enough to change the trend of deindustrialization, and the attempts to build strategic bridges with the industrial bourgeoisie seem to have failed completely. As argued, the neoliberal framework induces a strong appreciation of national currencies and high interest rates in order to compensate for balancing trade deficits (Pereira 2010). Among the consequences of such policies, Bresser-Pereira highlights, converging with Dani Rodrik, is the weakening of domestic producers' competitiveness in the face of imported goods, hence inducing underinvestment in new industrial capacity, overconsumption, and a decline in domestic savings. In a nutshell, as Rodrik asserts, deep globalization does not leave much room for domestic choices in terms of economic development, and for most developing countries deep globalization implies leaving behind aspirations to build up their so-called national industries (Rodrik 2015). Big capital in both Turkey and Brazil has increasingly sought investments abroad, rendering itself independent from governmental policies and politics. Between 1992 and 2014, FDI net outflows as a percentage of GDP have increased from 0.034 to 1.06 in Brazil and from 0.041 to 0.75 in Turkey, with much of this expansion occurring during the 2000s. By 2012, the ratio of inward to outward FDI for Turkey had decreased to one tenth of its value in 1995, converging to the ratio observed in Brazil (UNCTADstat 2019). The largest corporations in Turkey and Brazil, such as Koç, Sabancı, Ulker, or Petrobras, are leading this trend (World Bank 2017). Deindustrialization in the developing world has made class alliances tying the 'national industrial bourgeoisie' to the 'national interest' a relic of the past.

Hence, the economic boom in Brazil and Turkey over the 2000s deepened the economic changes associated with more globalization and less room for state activism. Investment decisions are now increasingly taken abroad, oftentimes relying on foreign credit markets instead of domestic sources of credit, increasingly freeing themselves from state control, so characteristic of import substitution industrialization (Amsden, 2001). This deindustrialization has led to important changes in class structures and interests. A 'capitalist class' that seeks quick gains instead of long-term strategic developments is increasingly made up of foreigners or nationals working on behalf of foreigners. To those, we must add powerful rentier groups that live on the high interests paid by the state.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the structural core of the working class (the formal proletariat) declined in numbers and/or in political power, with the most dynamic sources of employment being displaced to routine and semi-routine occupations in services and retail trade, both in formal and informal sectors. As a result, governments in these countries lost much of their capacity to build top-down class alliances with big capital, the middle class and the 'formal' working class after national developmentalist frameworks had been dismantled by neoliberal economic reforms. In spite their opposite ideological tendencies, then, both the PT

10. The rentier sector in Brazil owns no less than 6% of the country's GDP and reacts violently to any attempt to change the situation, as happened when president Rousseff began to reduce interest rates, forcing devaluation of the real in the first two years of her first mandate. For a detailed account, see Bresser-Pereira (2016).

and the AKP thus had to mobilize the poor by using various strategies, and most importantly by expanding pro-poor policies.

How did the AKP and the PT Mobilize the Poor: a New Welfare State for the Poor

Given that the AKP and the PT had to rely on the poor for their core electorate, we now move to examine the role played by social and distributive policies in sustaining this, signalling the emergence of a new modality of the welfare state in developing countries. This new welfare state is based on extensive and generous income-based social assistance and poverty alleviation programmes, in contrast with the corporatist fragmented employment-based social policies of the developmentalist period (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Haggard and Kaufman 2008). During the developmentalist era, sometimes through authoritarian and violent means, the states marginalized and kept a tight control over a whole gamut of poor labourers, peasants, artisans, indigenous and national minorities, street merchants, shanty-town dwellers, and domestic workers, usually corresponding to a large or even the major share of the populations of those countries. These were, in short, *the poor*, a mix of the economically, socially, culturally, regionally, ethnically and/or racially marginalized. Those populations had hardly any social and political rights, and little or no access to basic social provisions, such as education and health care. Moreover, among them many were those historically discriminated against on racial, ethnic, religious or other grounds, with Indigenous and African descendants in Brazil and Kurds in Turkey as telling examples of non-citizens of the nation-state in which they were born. In a nutshell, both Turkey and Brazil were economically unequal (to the extreme) and politically (also culturally and regionally) segregated societies.

This picture has changed during the 2000s. Piven and Minnite argue that while advanced capitalist countries have undergone significant welfare retrenchments, many developing countries, including Brazil and Turkey, have expanded their welfare states mostly on the basis of new types of social assistance programmes (Piven and Minnite 2015). For them, these policy innovations/expansions in developing countries have a form and extent much different from social assistance programmes in the West and from previous poor relief arrangements in the developing world. According to the World Bank, the percentage of the population that receives social assistance of any form attained 36% in Turkey in 2013 and 31% in Brazil in 2015 (World Bank ASPIRE 2019). In Brazil, the flagship *Bolsa Família* (BF) programme reached 27% of the population of the country in 2014, covering 76% of those considered eligible in rural areas and 49% in urban areas. Some four million other poor, elderly or disabled people, unable to work and formally with no right to support for not having contributed to the social security, were granted pensions (*Benefício de Prestação Continuada* – BPC) equivalent to one legal minimum wage.

Under Lula, improvements in the labour market played a significant role in improving ordinary people's wellbeing. This included employment growth and

policies to substantially raise the legal minimum wage above inflation, the enforcement of labour laws, and the extension of labour rights to domestic workers. The legal minimum wage (LMW) has also had a huge positive impact on the social protection system. Among the 27 million pensioners supported by the General Pension System (RGPS) in 2013, approximately 17 million (62% of all pensioners) earned the floor value, which is legally equivalent to the LMW. In PPP US dollar terms, the LMW rose from 141 in December 2003, to 301 in December 2014, more than doubling its purchasing power, in real terms (IPEADATA 2019). Overall, the total social public expenditure (social security, education, health and housing) rose from 21% to 27% of GDP (Robles and Mirosevic 2014). The PT also promoted the rapid expansion of higher education by means of granting tuition scholarships and subsidized credit to students of disadvantaged and low-income backgrounds, as well as by doubling slots in the federal system of universities, for which there are no fees. In addition, ambitious affirmative action policies were launched to substantially increase access to higher education for black, mixed and indigenous peoples. The racially motivated affirmative action policies were received with particularly vehement opposition by the middle-classes once they started to be implemented in the public elite schools.

More than ten million formal jobs were created during Lula's two terms alone, mostly jobs in the lower earnings brackets. The result was a 10% decline in the rate of informality in the labour market, which fell from 40% to 30% of the total.¹¹ The unemployment rate, which was at 11.7% in 2004, dropped to 6.7% in 2010, at the end of Lula's second term as president, and further to 4.9% in 2014, when Dilma was re-elected. Finally, the positive impact of both the expansion of social programmes and job creation due to economic growth and public investments in infrastructure (water and electricity, sewerage, telecommunications, trains, ports, highways, etc.) was much stronger in the less developed regions in the north and northeast of the country than in the wealthier and older industrial centres in the southeast and south, decisively contributing to the popularity of the PT in these regions in the actual scenario of social polarization (Barrientos 2013; Robles and Mirosevic 2014).

During the AKP rule, Turkey too has witnessed a boom of social assistance programmes for the poor. Before the 2000s, the Turkish welfare system was based on a fragmented corporatist social provision system, in which employees in the state sector, workers, and the self-employed were members of different institutions with different qualities of service and benefits. The new welfare system of the 2000s has largely done away with this fragmented structure and created a social security and a general health insurance system that covers all citizens so that services for the informal poor now are equal with those of formal sector employees. More importantly, the quality of healthcare has significantly improved, which has often been seen as one of the main pillars of AKP social policies (Yörük 2012). In 2011, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy was established to administer central

11. The informality rate is the ratio between informal, self-employed and non-waged workers to the total occupied population (IPEADATA: www.ipeadata.gov.br/Default.aspx).

government programmes and to introduce new social assistance benefits. The social assistance expenditure, moreover, increased from US\$860 million in 2002 to US\$9.34 billion in 2016 (Ministry of Family, Work and Social Services 2017).

Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of social assistance spending in total government spending increased by 266% (Üçkardeşler 2015). The AKP has drastically expanded means-tested social assistance, in kind or cash transfers, and free health care programmes for the poor, conditional cash transfers, programmes for orphans, food stamps, housing, education and disability aid for the poor, sharply increasing the number of beneficiaries and the share of government budgets allocated (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Elveren 2008; Günel 2008; Yoltar 2009; Yörük 2012). The coverage of the free health care card programme for the poor (Green Card Programme) increased from 4.2 to 12.7% of the population from 2003 to 2009. In 2012, a universal health care system was established, and Green Card holders were included in the new system (Yörük 2012). In addition to these benefits from the central government, the family is still eligible to benefit from many types of in-kind and cash assistance programmes from municipal governments, which have been expanding exponentially during the decade as well. As a result, the regular in-kind and cash benefits from the central government for a poor family add up to US\$260, while the official minimum wage in Turkey is US\$370.

The AKP has also initiated social housing programmes targeting the poor, providing cheap credit to purchase a house, covering over three million families by 2013. The Ministry of Education distributes all school course-book materials free of charge to all students in primary and secondary education, a total of 15 million pupils, and 600,000 students each year are served by free-transportation-to-school programmes and receive a free lunch at school. The party has put into the constitution affirmative action policies for disabled people, which has greatly increased their participation in the labour market. The coverage and generosity of disability benefits has tripled and doubled since 2002. This is also the case for old age pensions for the poor. Most importantly, if a poor family provides nursing to a disabled family member, it receives US\$350, which is almost equal to the minimum wage (Özgür 2014).

These social policies are, at least partly, responsible for declining poverty rates and inequality in Turkey, and particularly so in Brazil. According to World Bank World Development Indicators, between 2003 and 2014 the Gini coefficient declined from 0.58 to 0.51 in Brazil and 0.42 to 0.40 in Turkey. Poverty headcount ratio at US\$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) as a percentage of population declined from 12.3% to 3.66% in Brazil and 3.74% to 0.33% in Turkey. The PT and the AKP have expanded social assistance programmes as the most important platform for securing social inclusion for vast informal and rural sectors never before reached by the welfare policies enjoyed by workers in the formal sector and the middle-classes. This has been done partly by means of reforming the existing welfare system and partly through the creation of new policies purposefully tailored to poor families, informal workers, small farmers, discriminated groups and minorities. The leaderships of the PT in Brazil and the AKP in Turkey both tried to simultaneously engage in globalization and deliver more benefits to the poor, using different strategies and above all embracing very

different ideological positions. By increasing exports (mainly commodities or low-tech industrial products) and by attracting FDI through privatization and the acquisition of domestic firms by foreign investment funds, both governments were able to channel downwards enough of the extra revenues to earn political support among the poorest sectors of the society.

Conclusion

We argue that popular bases of governing parties in Turkey and Brazil have less to do with left- and right-wing ideologies than with structural social changes resulting from the economic transformations those countries have gone through during the last 30 years. These transformations led to the erosion of the state's capacity to regulate the economy and forge alliances with big capital, the middle classes and organized labour. Although the PT was born as a left-wing party, whereas the AKP is religiously conservative, both parties made their way into national politics by approaching and setting up popular sector movements and organizations: workers' trade unions, shantytown dwellers and religious communities. Both parties matured step by step, first conquering some of the most important local governments in the country before achieving power nationally. It was at the head of municipal governments that they started the implementation of pro-poor policies that would later become their national trademark and political hallmark. Before, and after taking power, both were considered outsiders to the traditional political system, which oftentimes meant a threat to the establishment, as they assiduously struggled, though unsuccessfully, to gain the support of the existing economic elites and forge alliances with the majority of the middle classes. Hence, they were forced to largely lean on the shoulders of the 'poor', and they developed extensive pro-poor public policies in the face of increasingly active opposition from the middle-classes and the old-moneyed elites. It should be noted that pro-poor policies are not the only mechanism developed by these governments to stay in power vis-à-vis grand challenges from rival political actors, and the PT and the AKP in this follow quite different strategies. Unlike the PT in Brazil, the AKP government, most critically, resorted to what is frequently designated as 'competitive authoritarianism', which involved repressing opposition groups, protesters and the media (Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Özbudun 2015).¹² In this article, we focus on non-repressive means of sustaining government.

We argue that the process of internationalization and financialization of the national economy has increased the relative political bargaining power of the poor in developing countries, where they make up the majority of governing party supporters. In these countries, we argue, the poor have emerged as the most reliable social base for governing parties to lean on in order to gather the popular support needed to implement economic and political projects. Piven and Cloward once argued that, in the Western world, 'some of the poor are sometimes so isolated from

12. Also see Özbudun (2015) for a detailed account of competitive authoritarianism of the AKP.

significant institutional participation that the only “contribution” they can withhold is that of quiescence in civil life: they can riot’ (Piven and Cloward 1971). In the West ‘the poor were disadvantaged again because their cooperation was less important to major institutions than the cooperation of other groups’ (Piven and Minnite 2015). It is our argument that in many developing countries, contrary to the West, support of the poor is now more indispensable for major institutions than the cooperation of other groups because of the reconfiguration of classes and state power under the neo-liberal internationalization of the economy in the way we described. The poor are able to do politics in these countries not only by protesting, but also by not protesting and supporting the government. The pro-poor policies were a response to the rising political power of the poor, who turned to ‘outsider’ political actors to perform this role. The outsiders ended up with these policies not because they chose to, but because they failed to co-opt or submit to the most powerful sectors of existing economic elites. To our mind, this analysis of electoral polarization and new welfare policies in Brazil and Turkey outlines the conditions for ruling emerging market economies during times of neoliberal economic transformation: relying on the poor for political support, while in return expanding social welfare programmes for them. The limits of such a strategy, however, as we can learn from the two stories presented here, seem quite clear: in both countries, the polarization arising from a decade of power struggles have ended in the collapse of democratic rule and heralded times of instability.

Similar to emerging market countries, the numbers of the poor and the problem of social exclusion have also been growing all around Europe, due to economic crises, immigration and deindustrialization. European welfare states have been struggling to deal with this situation. It is likely that existing poverty and social exclusion in Europe will be radically politicized with the intervention of political actors ranging from radical Islamist to the far right. As a result, the social and political problems most strongly manifesting in emerging market countries may also, in Europe, lead to a permanent political crisis. Following the argument of this article, i.e. that the growing political power of the poor leads to a new welfare regime, it may be expected that similar dynamics will lead to the development of similar welfare policies across Europe as well.

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