

Papeles de Europa

ISSN-e 1989-5917

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/pade.80750> EDICIONES
COMPLUTENSE

Camila Rocha, Esther Solano, Jonas Medeiros, *The Bolsonaro Paradox. The Public Sphere and Right-Wing Counterpublicity in Contemporary Brazil*, Springer, Cham 2021, pp. 154, ISBN 978-3-030-79652-5

Alberto Escribano López¹

Fecha de recepción: 2 de noviembre de 2021/ fecha aceptación: 1 diciembre 2021

The reviewed book is an exciting and in-depth analysis of the New Brazilian Right, precisely the Bolsonaro phenomenon. We are talking about a well-written book that handles an essential dose of information and boldly deepens into a complex and very topical issue.

It is a must-read book if you want to know the emergence and consolidation of the New Brazilian Right, particularly the phenomenon known as Bolsonarism, where the authors reflect their eloquent mastery of this literature. As Marcos Nobre establish in the Foreword, “the book is simply one of the complete successful attempts to explain Bolsonaro and what he represents today in Brazil” (p. xii).

The book’s theme is within the studies on the radical right, political activism and public and counterpublics on the public sphere. Starting from the concept of public sphere conceived by Jürgen Habermas (1989), through a historical analysis of the bourgeois public sphere’s development in key Western European countries, which produced studies on publics and counterpublics, authors will approach the study of the discursive strategy, called right-wing counterpublicity, that Bolsonaro and his supporters employed to explain Bolsonaro’s victory to restore traditional hierarchies, values, and ways of life. From this point of observation, the authors propose a new explanatory frame to explain the rise of the New Brazilian Right, Bolsonaro’s 2018 victory and Bolsonaro’s first administration, that seeks to escape and avoids alternatives of the “populist explanation” in the “crisis of democracy” framework or “reductio ad fascinum” in the “fascist regression” framework.

The book by Rocha, Solano and Madeiros is divided into five chapters, preceded by an introduction. It begins by pointing out that few political analysts took Bolsonaro’s 2018 presidential candidacy seriously since the vast majority of them tried to explain his victory by referring to the unique circumstances surrounding his election.

The thesis defended by the authors establish that those factors contributed to the rise of Bolsonaro to power. Still, it more profoundly requires going back in time, since the election of Bolsonaro was not the fruit of historical accident but rather the unprecedented result of similar political and social processes.

To understand Bolsonaro’s phenomenon, the book makes an exhaustive journey reconstructing the activity of the Brazilian right, active since 1940, until Bolsonaro’s rise to power. In this historical journey, we must highlight the detailed study that authors make, especially in chapters two and three, of the trajectory of the Brazil right-wing, where provide relevant keys to understand its bridges with the new right-wing that would appear years later.

The second chapter, divided into three parts, reconstructs the trajectory of the right that has been active since the 1940s, which its origins dated back to the contact network fostered over time by national and international pro-market think tanks, which were intimately linked to the expansion and the promotion of neoliberalism base on the ideas of the Austrian economist Hayek amid a strong anti-left and communist campaign. The second part shows how the right-wing articulated in the think tanks founded in the 1980s and 1990s expanded through a young militancy that acted on social networks in student movements. Street protest, and how it started to constitute as a new right-wing during Lula’s first administration, which is based on the idea proposed by the philosopher Olavo do Carvalho about the existence of a “left-wing cultural hegemony” this new right-wing adopted a contra hegemonic strategy. And in the third describes how this new right-wing started to spread their ultraliberal writing and ideas through the internet and social media Oktut and how their discourse expanded towards a process of institutionalization of the counterpublics.

The third chapter reconstructs how this new right-wing began to take shape during Lula’s second term (2006-2010) and how he found a fertile ground which to flourish during his successor Dilma Rousseff’s first term (2011-2014) as a result of a series of events that took place during these years. Moreover, it describes how as a result of the institutional advances and demonstration of women and the LGTBT+ community, a reaction

¹ Doctorando en Ciencias Políticas de la Universidad Marie Curie-Sklodowska of Lublin (Poland)
albertoescribanolopez@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5843-8051>

by the conservative parts of the Brazilian society, called “progressive shock”, was triggered, serving as a trampoline for the rise of the new right.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the set of actions orchestrated by the Brazilian right in the massive campaigning in favour of Rousseff’s impeachment and how the new right could channel the energy of the street into institutional politics through Bolsonaro’s figure. The chapter, through a set of interviews and the testimony of Bolsonaro supporters, contributes to explaining how Bolsonaro, through a violent and aggressive discourse, was able to convey confidence to an electorate that saw him as the leader who best offered the response to the problems of Brazilian society and who best represented the values of Brazilians.

In the final chapter, the authors reflect on the characteristics of the Bolsonaro phenomenon, highlighting the effect of Bolsonarist counterpublicity that aims to destroy the 1988’s Democratic Pact and disintegrate Brazil’s post-bourgeois public sphere to restore a new bourgeois autocracy inspired by the military dictatorship.

After this shallow journey, it is convenient to mark several general considerations. Firstly, the book’s title incites us to think that we will find a more extensive analysis of the Bolsonaro Paradox beyond what is established in the book’s conclusions. Secondly, even though the book’s objective is to explain the Bolsonaro phenomenon through the reconstruction of the trajectory of the Brazilian right-wing, a more outstanding analysis of Bolsonarism is missing to know in greater detail its political discourse its political performance. Thirdly, the tremendous empirical knowledge about the phenomenon studied could have allowed it to extract more theoretical conclusions than indicated. For example, academic details are missing on how to place the Bolsonaro phenomenon within the current debate of the far-right and establish some comparisons.

In any case, these considerations do not affect the excellent academic and intellectual work of the book reviewed, which is an outstanding contribution to the study of the new right-wing in Brazil and specifically to the Bolsonaro phenomenon.