

CONJUNCTURES OF DEMOCRACY EROSION: IS BRAZIL A GLOBAL PARADIGM OF RESILIENCE?

CONJUNTURAS DA EROSÃO DEMOCRÁTICA: O BRASIL É UM PARADIGMA GLOBAL DE RESILIÊNCIA?

CHRIS THORNHILL¹

Birmingham Law School/University of Birmingham. Birmingham. United Kingdom

LUCAS DELGADO²

Universidade de Manchester. Manchester. Reino Unido.

Abstract: The paper aims to examine and understand the recent developments in Brazilian democracy in a sociological perspective. It offers an analysis of the conjunctural preconditions for the recent rise of authoritarian populism, presenting ways in which Brazil can be viewed as paradigm of democratic erosion and/or resilience. The article describes the foundational premises that made the development of contemporary democracies possible, and it proceeds from this description to explain how features common to authoritarian populist movements in Brazil and elsewhere are detrimental to these premises. It is argued that democracies are likely to thrive when welfare provisions and access to human rights are open to increasing sectors of the population, generating an inclusionary citizenship effect. The political polarization regarding the Brazilian welfare system and the discourse against international human rights, culminated in the weakening of the Brazilian welfare net and setbacks in the recognition of human rights by courts. These processes preceded, and were aggravated by, the rise of authoritarian populism in Brazil, generating an exclusionary view of citizenship that tended to intensify social conflict, with increasing militarization at both governmental and social levels. Arguably, the absence of warfare or an imminent warfare threat in the most recent democratic transition in Brazil reduced the capacity of welfare and constitutional human rights provisions to limit the influence of the military on democracy. While the efforts to build up the welfare system and protect human rights are still ongoing, the militarization element remains latent, posing a constant threat to democratic consolidation in Brazil.

Keywords: Democracy; Welfare; Human Rights; Militarization; Authoritarian populism; Exclusionary citizenship

Resumo: O artigo tem como objetivo examinar e compreender os desenvolvimentos recentes na democracia brasileira sob uma perspectiva sociológica. Por meio de uma análise das condições conjunturais da recente ascensão do populismo autoritário, são exploradas formas pelas quais o Brasil pode ser visto como um paradigma de erosão e/ou resiliência democrática. São descritas as premissas fundamentais que tornaram possível o desenvolvimento das democracias contemporâneas, tomando esta descrição como ponto de partida para explicar como características comuns aos movimentos populistas autoritários no Brasil e em outros lugares do mundo são prejudiciais a essas premissas. Argumenta-se que as democracias têm mais chances de prosperar quando o estado de bem-estar social e o acesso aos direitos humanos estão abertos a setores crescentes da população, gerando um modelo de cidadania inclusiva. A polarização política em relação ao sistema de bem-estar brasileiro e o discurso contra os direitos humanos internacionais culminaram no enfraquecimento da rede de bem-estar social brasileira e em atrasos no reconhecimento dos direitos humanos pelos tribunais. Esses processos precederam e foram agravados pelo surgimento do populismo autoritário no Brasil, gerando uma visão excludente da cidadania que tendeu a intensificar o conflito social, com crescente militarização em ambos os níveis, governamental e social.

¹ Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2286-5967>

² Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5218-0144>



Discutivelmente, a ausência de estado de guerra ou de uma ameaça iminente de guerra na transição democrática mais recente no Brasil reduziu a capacidade das disposições constitucionais relativas ao bem-estar social e direitos humanos de limitar a influência militar sobre a democracia. Enquanto os esforços para construir o sistema de bem-estar e proteger os direitos humanos ainda estão em andamento, o elemento de militarização permanece latente, representando uma ameaça constante para a consolidação democrática no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Democracia. Bem-Estar Social. Direitos Humanos. Militarização. Populismo Autoritário; Cidadania Excludente.

INTRODUCTION

After decades in which reinforcement of democracy seemed like a worldwide consensus, propelling multinational institutional reform programs, justifying statecraft modelling projects, drawing financial aid to underdeveloped countries willing to comply with democracy-building efforts, and even legitimizing armed interventions (Beetham, 2012), a tidal shift can be diagnosed. For instance, Adam Przeworski (2019, p. 10) claims that modern democracy is afflicted by general crisis, in which “some threat to democracy has already materialized, yet the status quo democratic institutions remain in place”. The work of Ginsburg and Huq (2018) claims that liberal constitutional democracies are in peril and in need of a legal framework that can safeguard them against democracy erosion or collapse. The Democracy Index 2023 report states that “the year was not an auspicious one for democracy”, registering the lowest global average since 2006, when the index was created (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024, p. 3). Similarly, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance – IDEA Global State of Democracy 2023 report qualifies the current situation as “the most worrying political trend in the world today: democratic backsliding” (IDEA, 2023, p. 4). The V-Dem Institute Democracy Report (2024, p. 5) declares that “autocratization continues to be the dominant trend”. In the global political horizon, democracy appears surrounded by a grim scenario.

In the aftermath of the recent general elections with split results – the opposition secured the Presidency, but the incumbent far right-wing party reached the majority of seats in the National Congress –, democracy in Brazil has become a polarizing subject, with different indicators suggesting that the polity is pulling in divergent directions³.

³ The EIU – Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2023 shows a steady decline since 2020, from 6.92 points to 6.68. Although performing marginally better in participation and remaining in the same position in

This gives rise to the question: Is Brazil a case of democratic erosion or a symbol of democratic resilience? This article seeks to shed light on this dilemma from a distinctive perspective. Instead of focusing on the recent historical events, such as the incidents in the *Praça dos Três Poderes*⁴ in Brasília in January 2023, and the implications of these events, it will focus on features of authoritarian populism that form the background for such processes of mass violence. While much of the debate on how to mend Brazilian social fabric is dominated by the need for social media regulation, this article addresses the deep structural conjunctures that can be seen to have affected preconditions for democracy formation and consolidation. That is to say, much recent discussion of democratic crisis focuses on the surface-level institutional features of challenged democracies. However, interpretation of the structural background to the surge of authoritarian populist tendencies provides sociological insights into the embedded premises of democracy, and it may produce evidence to account for (and even to countervail) likely conjunctures of democratic collapse. The article, thus, attempts to diagnose the problems affecting Brazilian democracy at their roots, rather than examining their more visible symptoms. We first resorted to a literature review on historical processes of democratic consolidation to build the analytical framework, the roadmap to which the recent events in Brazilian democracy were compared, and then, we carried out a qualitative analysis of data found in public datasets, case law, draft bills, and legislation to propose if and how Brazil fits into categories of democratic decline. We depart from the consideration that the basic features of the structural background to democratic decline in Brazil need to be placed within a broad comparative inquiry into democratic formation. Reconstructing processes by which constitutional democracies came into being during the twentieth century, the article explores the deep causal relations between democracy formation and the entrenchment of welfare provisions. It explains how the creation of robust integrated democracies relied on the concretion of social, economic and cultural rights, which helped to stabilize government above contingent political disputes. In particular, democracy usually took shape as such rights acted

representation, Brazil fell from a cliff in the dimensions of rights and rule of law of the IDEA Global State of Democracy. Conversely, according to the V-Dem, since 2023, Brazil has become one of the democratizing forces in the globe.

⁴ Three Powers Plaza (authors' version).



to limit and sublimate elements of societal conflict that characterize contexts of warfare and militarization, which also lie at the origin of democratic institution building.

In the following segment, we discuss how Brazil fits into this framework as a paradigm for understanding processes of democratic decline. Our goal is to describe ways by which the rise of authoritarian populism recently witnessed in Brazil hinges on the deconstruction of the socio-structural pillars necessary for democratic consolidation. In other words, the authoritarian populist tide that swept Brazilian politics in the last decade reflects the deep politicization of welfare policies, and it embodies an exclusionary/partisan view of citizenship that denies opposing forces entitlement to human rights, favouring the overall increase in social conflicts and the consequential (re)militarization of government and society. This is expressed in a cycle that might not yet have come to an end, even after the last general elections. We conclude that the preconditions for democracy formation and consolidation involve a paradox. Societies in which the turn to democracy happened in the aftermath of largescale war-induced trauma tend to consolidate stronger and more deeply ingrained protections for welfare provisions and human rights, progressively detaching democracy from the state of warfare that was at its genesis. Conversely, countries in which the transition to democracy occurs in conditions of peaceful transition and negotiation often show only partial and contingent commitment to welfare and human rights, so that the conditions for conflict and militarization may fade but are always lurking, latently, waiting for a propitious conjuncture to arise and put democracy in jeopardy. Brazil exemplifies the latter pattern. Since 2023, the reaction to authoritarian populism that has been articulated by the judiciary may ultimately exacerbate these propensities and reinforce future democratic decline.

1. THE CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC FORMATION: THE ENSHRINING OF WELFARE PROVISIONS AND THE ENTRENCHMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

To explain the rise of democracy and the reasons for its current crisis, a series of historical observations need to be made.

First, constitutional democracy is a very recent form of government. It was only after 1945 that a cluster of polities recognizable as democracies (that is, polities allowing full and equal male and female enfranchisement and permitting long-term competitive rotation of

government) came into being. Before 1945, very few polities met the above definition, and probably only Sweden, Holland, New Zealand and Norway could be classified as consolidated democracies, allowing competitive elections with equal democratic rights for men and women. Ireland and Finland marginally met these criteria. Polities that often project themselves as old democracies – for example, the USA, the UK and France – were not full democracies until the decades after 1945. The UK had plural voting until 1950 (i.e. some people could vote more than others in elections); the USA excluded large sectors of the population from electoral participation on ethnic grounds until 1964-65; the enfranchisement of French women only began in 1945 and it was incomplete for decades thereafter. It was not until after 1945 that democratic government was achieved by more than a handful of polities. Then, democracy was not widely realized as a normative model until the 1960s, and it was not until the 1980s that democracies (often only briefly) became visible in most parts of the globe.

Second, the growth of constitutional-democratic states was not originally distinct from the growth of welfare states. Although the constitutional state and the welfare state are sometimes seen as antinomies, democratic constitutionalism did not broadly predate the rise of welfare states, and, typically, one is causally reliant on the other.⁵ Most states that attempted to create democratic institutions in the period 1918-1939 were brought to crisis over conflicts regarding welfare and by the inter-class fissures that these conflicts displayed and articulated.⁶ The less precarious democracies of the interwar era – for example, Norway and Sweden – occupied a leading position in organizing provisions for social welfare, and democracy was underscored by increasingly generalized welfare policies. Owing to their underlying social homogeneity, such polities managed, to some degree, to reduce the intensity of welfare-related antagonisms. After 1945, a number of polities, mainly initially located in Western Europe, began to consolidate democratic constitutionalism as a broad system of government, such that the decades after 1945 can be seen as a period of wide democratic constitutional transition.⁷

⁵ For background conceptual controversies see Ernst Forsthoff (1968).

⁶ Examples are the UK in 1931, Germany in 1930-1933, Austria in 1933-34, Spain in 1923 and 1936-39.

⁷ Our view here opposes the standard account of the three historical waves of democratic transition that is proposed in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Huntington, 1991). According to our skeletal definition of a democracy as a polity with full male and female enfranchisement and competitive elections, the first large-scale wave of transition can only be seen as taking place after 1945; only a very small number of democracies existed before 1945. We emphasize that we are here still applying only a minimal criterion for measuring democracy. As implied throughout this article, effective democracy has preconditions that extend far beyond full, gender-transcending enfranchisement and competitive elections.

Such transitioning polities included the UK, France, the Western regions of the territories that had, since 1870, formed the German *Reich*, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, much of Scandinavia and later Portugal, Greece and Spain. In each of these transitional settings, the ability of national governments to integrate their populations in democratic procedures was not easily separable from the fact that they also promoted the integration of their populations through welfare state construction. That is, the integration of citizens through the general allocation of political rights was simultaneous with the integration of citizens through the allocation of rights regarding social provisions – including, vitally, education. Few polities experienced processes of democratic constitutionalization on societal premises not defined by the simultaneous distribution of political and socio-economic rights amongst citizens. Even in the USA, where welfare state formation was weaker and shallower than in most of Europe, the expansion of democracy in the mid-1960s was flanked by the dramatic growth of social spending, focused on welfare and education. Outside higher-level economies, some form of welfare state construction usually accompanied early attempts at democratization. For example, limited statutory provisions for welfarism accompanied the creation of the post-colonial democratic state in India. Most early post-colonial polities in Africa saw an expansion of rights in central areas of welfare policy, most especially in the administration of school-level education (Schofer and Meyer, 2005). On balance, although it is formally possible to view the constitutional-democratic state and the welfare state as distinct institutional entities, we can only find a very limited range of examples of states that successfully transitioned to democracy without supporting the political integration of citizens through the material integration of citizens.

What is notable in this regard is that, in most contexts, welfare states were created in social environments very strongly marked by patterns of militarization, and both the formation of welfare states and the linkage between welfare state construction and constitutional democratization were integrally shaped by warfare, or by the threat of warfare. Through the nineteenth century, most European polities established broad electoral franchises (for men), allocating political rights to male citizens, in times in which war or the threat of war shaped interaction between government and citizens. This began around the time of the French Revolution, when the recognition that members of society should be viewed as citizens with constitutionally allotted legal rights and privileges was firmly associated with the notion that

(male) citizens, in acquiring such rights, were required to discharge primary duties to the state – including, above all, military service.⁸ Later, around 1870, the nexus between constitution making, voting and military mobilization was clear for all to see. By this time, virtually all European states acquired constitutions that expanded the scope of political citizenship while they imposed forcible conscription on their citizens. As part of the same process, in the latter third of the nineteenth century, some states began to establish rudimentary systems of welfare provision for their citizens, and, as citizens were politically enfranchised as soldiers, they were also (tentatively) enfranchised as recipients of welfare. In some societies, the process of constitution-making and the process of welfare-state building coincided precisely with increasing inter-state tensions, and increased reliance on citizens as potential soldiers. In such settings, the simultaneous granting of political rights and social rights was clearly designed to increase the willingness of citizens to fight for their states, and the extension of such rights was a vital part in a wider process of national integration. These conjoined dynamics continued after 1918. In most societies directly or indirectly involved in World War I, recognition of military sacrifice induced, at once, a wave of constitutional reform, leading to radical franchise extension and a push (still preliminary) for intensified welfare state formation. At each stage in the rise of modern states, military engagement formed the core impetus for the establishment of central institutions of government – representative parliaments and organizations providing welfare.

These processes approached realization in the years and decades after 1945, and the convergence of constitutional democratization and welfare state formation defined this period. At this time, most democracies acquired a form in which, along with universal voting rights, provision of welfare (including subsidised education) became a common aspect of polity design. Welfare arrangements became implied aspects of a deep constitutional settlement between states and citizens. Importantly, this two-pillared design of modern democracy, linked to guarantees for political and for socio-economic rights, was complexly produced by war, and, after 1945, most democratic states assumed a dialectical relation to warfare. On one hand, both parts of this polity design resulted from deep resonance of war in society, and the democratic-welfare bargain established in most post-1945 democracies clearly took shape because of

⁸ In France mass conscription was introduced in 1793 and made permanent in 1798.

experiences of shared mobilization and shared risk engendered by World War II: the democratic welfare state resulted directly from the structuring of political institutions by intensified military pressures (Dryzek and Goodin, 1986). On the other hand, however, the gradual universalization of political rights and welfare entitlements in the democratic polities created after 1945 meant that, gradually, the material architecture of the state was separated from war and the outcomes of war. After 1945, access to political and material rights was slowly promoted as a general entitlement, open to all members of society, and it was rarely a categorical privilege for persons actually engaged in the provision of military force for the government. Increasingly, further, access to such rights began to characterize most democratic polities, including states whose involvement in World War II had been limited, and even including states that had not existed before 1945. As a result, the deep constitutional architecture of most post-1945 democracies was constructed on dialectical foundations. The architecture of democracy reflected a process in which the deep historical linkage between war and rights of citizenship (political and social) came to full expression, yet in which the immediately formative role of this linkage was suspended. Increasingly, in the decades after 1945, the primary components of the welfare state – provisions for income security, health care, pensions and subsidized education – approached (variably) a level of *full inclusion*, such that personal status, membership or familial attachment lost (formal) importance as a condition of access to such resources. In this process, military membership did not renounce all significance as a condition of inclusion in welfare arrangements, but military performance no longer served as a primary channel for obtaining welfare.

In sum, most democracies established after 1945 were based in a process, on one hand, in which political rights and welfare rights were established together, such that welfare agreements became ingrained in society. Through this process, naturally, welfare remained the defining point of social conflict in most democracies. But the extent to which conflicts pertaining to the distribution of resources through welfare policies could generate polarities that could not be managed within democratic procedures was reduced. In fact, in Europe and beyond, most welfare states were largely built by parties positioned on the political rights. During the great age of welfare state formation from the 1950s to the early 1970s, many European countries, including West Germany, Italy, Austria, post-1958 France, had either no or only very limited experience government by left-of centre parties. In other words, the

propagation of welfare-states depended centrally on the fact that right-leaning parties, which, before 1945, had been sceptical of or openly hostile to welfare investment, changed position, and adopted an attitude of class compromise to secure the future of capitalism. At this time, accordingly, a partial depoliticization of welfare-determined antagonisms appeared as a vital prerequisite of constitutional democracy. On the other hand, this relative depoliticization of welfare was flanked by a relative differentiation between the system of welfare provision and the military order in society, such that the welfare state was decoupled from the organizational apparatus (the army) that had been instrumental in its development.

As above, two very broad statements can be made about the relation between constitutional democracy and human rights law, especially human rights law of international provenance. From the first development of constitutionalism as a means of organizing government, it was often argued that provisions for basic rights sit uneasily alongside the essential functions of constitutional law in guaranteeing the expression of popular sovereignty. Early constitutional practitioners in both France and the USA were equivocating in the construction of catalogues of rights as fundamental parts of constitutional law.⁹ Today, some prominent constitutionalists remain hostile to formal provisions for basic rights, which they view as instruments that dilute popular sovereignty (Tushnet, 1997; Parker, 1993). However, as with welfarism, we have very little objective experience of democracies that do not give elevated and protected status to basic rights. As stated, constitutional democracy only became a materially realized political form in the period after 1945. This realization of democracy coincided both with the rise of the welfare state and the constitutional consolidation of human rights in national systems of public law, which – in turn – was closely linked to the consolidation of human rights law in the interstate domain. Before 1945, constitutional mechanisms for protecting human rights law in national states were very weak, and constitutions that declared guarantees for basic rights usually did so in broadly exhortatory fashion, with the aspiration that such norms would internally shape legislation. However, judicial protection for basic rights in interactions between individual subjects and state agencies only existed in a small number of polities, such as Austria and the USA, and such protection was not robust. In the USA, for

⁹ The US constitution of 1787/89 did not originally have a bill of rights, and the bill of rights introduced in 1791 is not a bill of rights in the modern sense of the word. In France, arguably up to the early 1970s, constitutional rights only had declaratory force and were weakly enforceable.

instance, incorporation of basic rights in federal-state relations was only (partly) cemented after 1945, and this proved vital to the consolidation of American democracy. To this degree, constitutional democracy and human rights law acquired effective structure together, and the number of democracies that pre-existed the growth of human rights law was very small indeed.

Like the growth of the welfare state, the formation of strict constitutional protections for human rights originated in war or the threat of war. This can be seen in a range of different ways, some of which are outlined below.

First, some states began to ascribe strict and enforceable constitutional power to basic rights after 1945 because of experiences of extreme personal vulnerability during World War II. The first countries to implement far-reaching systems of basic rights after 1945 were the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Japan and Italy. Clearly, these polities had been responsible for inflicting extraordinary physical suffering on subjects both outside and within their own societies before 1945. As a result, their constitutions, at least in part externally imposed, were suffused with knowledge of warfare and a memory of military violence. In some respects, they were implemented as *occupation constitutions*: that is, as constitutions whose purpose was to protect individual citizens from violence perpetrated by state officials, even symbolically linking individual citizens immediately to international human rights systems.¹⁰ In broad terms, such constitutions utilized human rights law as a means to signify that they possessed justified authority in a form separated from violence, in which military conflict for power was not constitutive of legitimacy.

Second, in relation to this, some states began to give constitutional protection to basic rights after 1945 because rights formed repositories of legitimacy to which public institutions could refer to construct their authority in a form separate from positional struggles in society. After 1918, many states had created constitutions that gave rise to intense inter-factional conflicts, usually between actors attached to different sides in industrial or socio-economic conflict (i.e. conflicts relating to welfare). In some cases, this led directly to the overthrow of government and the emergence of extreme authoritarianism, ultimately leading to war. After 1945, the enshrining of basic rights as constitutional principles, extracted from an international normative domain, formed a reaction to this experience. This provided a platform in which

¹⁰ See exemplary debates in Pikart and Werner (1993, p. 9-12).

states could signal legitimacy in terms distinct from the management of inner-societal hostilities, and they were less prone to internalize social antagonisms in their own procedures for legitimation. At the same time, the formalization of basic rights as constitutional norms created an individualized grammar of articulation between state agencies and citizens in which societal demands could be processed without large-scale mobilization of group interests. In both respects, constitutional rights created a normative structure in society in which political legitimacy could be produced in relatively pacified and relatively individualized fashion, without triggering collective societal conflicts that had unsettled many polities in the interwar period.

Third, some states began to reinforce protection for individual constitutional rights because of ideological controversies arising from international conflict after 1945. Importantly, the creation of the European human rights system articulated policies specific to the Cold-War context, and its purpose was to signal that Western European polities possessed higher legitimacy than their counterparts in the Soviet sphere of influence. In the USA, the reinforcement of recognition for human rights that culminated in the enfranchisement of minority communities in the mid-1960s was clearly determined by international ideological anxieties. Support amongst American Presidents for human rights was, in key respects, a reaction against anti-American propaganda in the Soviet Union. More directly, it was a reaction to the risk that, owing to ethnic segregation in the USA, America would lose moral (and economic) leadership in Africa in the context of decolonization. The American promotion of human rights in Mississippi and Maryland in the 1960s, therefore, cannot easily be understood without relation to policies in Moscow and Accra (Lauren, 1993; Lockwood, 1984; Dudziak, 1988; Skrentny, 1998; Layton, 2000; Jensen, 2016). In each respect, the *de facto* constitutionalization of human rights in post-1945 democracies was the result of low-intensity warfare in different global regions.

In these respects, as with welfare state formation, the expanding force of human rights as constitutional principles after 1945 was the direct result of war, or at least the threat of war. However, as with welfare state formation, growing constitutional recognition of rights also served, dialectically, to reduce levels of conflict in society and even to establish a partition between the governmental apparatus and military organization. In the first case, the above processes acted to differentiate constitutional government from military agents, and the rights-

based construction of the individual subject drew a thick normative and functional line between public agency and military force. In the second case, the above processes served to mollify conflicts over governmental legitimacy, and to reduce societal propensities for volatile mobilization. In the third case, the above processes led to the implementation of normative regimes that rapidly established general premises for citizenship, and international norms were used to authorize rights that had historically engendered the most obdurate political resistance.

Broadly, the construction of basic rights was enmeshed in a broad trajectory towards the demilitarization of citizenship, and it created within national polities a legal order that softened historically salient points of antagonism. Over time, the demilitarizing impact of human rights law became visible in the fact that constitutions giving salience to human rights became a simply and universally implied aspect of democracy legitimacy production. In most parts of the globe, progressively, it became impossible to argue for a legitimate transition to democracy without high-line constitutional protection of basic rights. In many polities, the functions of basic rights in insulating democratic institutions against intense inter-group hostility and in framing articulations between government agencies and citizens became vital to the success of democratic transitions. This can be seen, for example, in post-1983 Argentina and post-1991 South Africa, in both of which settings human rights formed a pre-agreed premise for democratic transition, recognized by all parties in the transitional process. In many transitions, constitutional protection of basic rights was simply imported from the transnational normative domain. This can be seen in the Eastern European transitions that took place in the 1980s and the 1990s. Frequently, by consequence, the deep genealogical interwovenness between human rights and war was forgotten, and the societal functions of human rights in promoting the individualized softening of social conflict were fulfilled at a submerged, subliminal and almost unreflecting level. Like welfare institutions, human rights law originated in social conjunctures created by war. But human rights law slowly acquired universal effect in the second part of the twentieth century, so that human rights law increasingly stabilized political systems against, and differentiated them from, military organizations and modes of interaction.

Observed together, two conclusions regarding the primary social preconditions of democracy can be drawn from the above analysis. First, we can observe that democracies are structurally rooted in the consolidation of two distinct institutional systems – welfare states and human rights regimes. Sociologically, the impact of both systems is visible in the fact that they

promote democratization by securing conditions for inter-group pacification within national societies. This process is connected to the legal consolidation of individualized patterns of interaction amongst citizens, laterally, and between citizens and state, vertically. Second, we can observe that modern democracy is built on substructures that are dialectically related to war. The preconditions of democracy (welfare and human rights) resulted from warfare, and from the structural influence of war on national societies. Yet, the effect of these preconditions was that they created circumstances in which extreme social conflict became less probable, and they promoted social interaction and even the basic construction of human subjectivities in a form in which social propensities for violence were reduced. In so doing, the preconditions of democracy moved along a fine dialectical between militarization and demilitarization. Through this dialectic, democracy typically resulted from a deep metabolic reaction to war.

2. THE RISE OF AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM IN BRAZIL: ANTI-WELFARISM AND ANTI-INTERNATIONALISM

The government established under Bolsonaro in Brazil belongs to the broad family of populist governments, albeit with strong manifestation of the undemocratic aspects that appear in populist polities. Core features of this regime mirror features of other recent or existing governments that we can reasonably categorize as populist. Moreover, the background to Bolsonaro's emergence was shaped by structural conditions observable in other social settings, in which populist governments have been formed. This article investigates ways in which both the institutional characteristics and the structural precondition of the current political order in Brazil reflect the sources of populism in global society. It explains how, both institutionally and structurally, policies that were implemented before and during the most recent authoritarian populism movement in Brazil undermine the essential preconditions needed to consolidate democracy as they form a nucleus of conditions likely to provoke democratic disintegration.

The 1988 Constitution brought a bold version of the Brazilian social order, dedicating a whole Chapter to social welfare (Chapter II of Title VIII) with provisions regarding the rights to health, a comprehensive social security system of pensions, general social assistance, and the right to education (Arts 205-214). However, such formal guarantees were only partially

substantiated, and often altered by constitutional reforms.¹¹ Limits – whether legal or political – to welfare provision persisted after 1988, and, overall, Brazil transitioned to democracy before, through and after 1988 with a welfare state whose reach was narrow, despite the existence of a strong system of judicial protection for employment rights. Consequently, electoral democracy was put in place without a broad inclusive welfarist component in the democratic order. Although the financial basis and the legal framework for the improvement of the social welfare system was established during the 1990s¹² – under the presidential tenures of the so-called *neoliberals* Franco and Cardoso – the emergence of a greatly reinforced and expanded welfare state became more noticeable in the following decade.¹³ Despite the fact the welfare system still lacked universal reach, a wider welfarist dimension was added to Brazilian democracy decades after its original creation, and the mobilization of social support for welfare became a core platform for the Workers Party. On this basis, the incremental advances in welfare, including educational investment, became symbolically associated with the leading politicians of the period, becoming a focus for parties hostile to the presidency. In sum, the politicization of welfare gave rise to strong propensities for counter-politicization. Such re- or counter-politicization of welfare provision was reflected in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. The attack on the integrity of the Workers Party, propelled by the anti-corruption agenda, served as a veil under which the emergent welfare fabric of Brazilian democracy was partly unstitched. As a result, anti-welfarist policies were sharply enforced after 2015-16. Important in this process was the fact that the intensification of controversy over welfare involved educational provision, which is defined here as a core part of the welfare state, and whose impact on long-term social formation is vital for the perpetuation of welfarism. The retrenchment of welfare investment that occurred prior to Bolsonaro's rise can be easily observed in the reduction of investment in both the education and the health care systems. In

¹¹ There have been at least 14 constitutional amendments (Brazil, 2023) that have addressed rules regarding management, coverage, and financing of the social welfare system consecrated in the Constitution (e.g. Constitutional Amendments n. 14, 17, 20, 26, 31, 47, 51, 53, 59, 63, 64, 67, 95, 103, 108).

¹² The substitution of the INAMPS – a health care system conditioned to contribution with limited coverage – by the SUS – a universal, decentralized, and participative health care system – was put in place by Laws n. 8.080/1990 and 8.689/1993. Constitutional Amendment 31 (2000) instituted the Poverty Eradication and Combat Fund, which was enacted in 2000.

¹³ According to the IPEA's *Gasto Social Federal* report, the public investment in health care, social assistance, social security, education, and access to water/basic sanitation grew from 8.24% to 8,60% of the GDP between 2000 and 2003, and then, rocketed from 9.07% to 11,44% of the GDP from 2004 to 2009 (Pinheiro, 2011).

fact, the commitment to freeze such spending was elevated to the status of a constitutional amendment (Amendment 95, 2016). Since 2016, anti-welfarist policies are reflected in steady decreases in federal investment in health care and education (Senado Federal, Siga Brasil [dataset], v. 8 October 2021).

In sum, years before the rise of a far-right autocratic populist, there occurred an intensified politicization, and polarizing debate about social welfare arrangements, which meant that welfare policies were subject to deep retrenchment even before Bolsonaro appeared as a presidential candidate. The institutional prehistory of the last period of authoritarian populism trend was shaped by a process of democratic formation in which welfare state construction was subject to deep political controversy.

In these respects, the social conjunctures in which authoritarian populism emerged can be compared with social processes in other settings. Retrenchment of welfare is not an absolutely uniform feature of societies that have witnessed populist experiment. For instance, health-care investment was a prominent aspect of President Obama's public policies. Yet, short- or long-term diminution of welfare provision (including education) and the ability of politicians to politicize agreements about welfare form common preconditions for populist government. Crucially and paradoxically, like Bolsonaro, most populist governments have managed to establish electoral support amongst some potential beneficiaries of increases in welfare spending (including education), despite the fact that, once in office, they have typically introduced policies that undermine existing welfare arrangements. This paradox is astutely explored by Jesse Souza. He identifies in the political support offered by the Brazilian urban middle class for anti-welfarist politics reminiscences of loyalties shown by craftsmen and other free workers to rural oligarchs during the colonial period (Souza, 2017).

Alongside this, Brazilian society before the emergence of right-wing authoritarian populism was marked by the strong politicization of human rights, prominently reflected in hostility, amongst some sectors, towards international human rights law, and the Supreme Court. In the years after 1988, the Brazilian polity did not reflect the high intensity constitutionalization of human rights law that was evident in some other polities in South America. The post-1983 transition in Argentina, for example, was partly impelled by international rights organizations, and it was punctuated by moments giving domestic effect to international human rights law. The legitimational basis for the Argentine transition as a whole

was partly defined through the symbolic importance of human rights law.¹⁴ In Colombia, the attempt in 1991 to craft a legal design for a pacified polity was also driven by human rights activists, linked to universities. The new constitutional polity in Colombia was underpinned by the actions of a Constitutional Court, whose members initially took pains to give direct effect to international human rights standards in Colombian society. By contrast, despite the nominal enshrinement of international human rights law in the 1988 Constitution, the public-legal order that took shape in Brazil did not very strongly encourage human rights litigation. Moreover, legislation giving direct domestic effect to international human rights was only introduced, by constitutional amendment, in 2004 (Brazil, 2004), and the purchase of such legislation remained rather weak.¹⁵ In this context, it was not before the middle of the first decade of the century that the reinforcement of human rights law became a characteristic of Brazilian constitutional democracy: the politicization of welfare discussed above coincided, historically, with the political intensification of human rights. The social-rights legislation introduced at that time was connected with a transformation in judicial practices, in which judicial actors showed increased willingness to give effect to human rights provisions and to internalize international human rights norms in domestic law. The emphasis on social rights spread into other areas of legal practice, and alongside increasing levels of litigation related to them, Brazilian society witnessed the reinforcement of environmental rights and rights relating to public administration.

In this regard, the contribution of the Brazilian Supreme Court to promoting recognition of international human rights law is very noteworthy. For almost every fundamental right or guarantee declared in the Constitution, it is possible to find corresponding decisions of the Supreme Court, in which international rules, decisions of international agencies or even other Constitutional Courts from around the world are cited or debated to consolidate constitutional protections for basic rights. The rights to public demonstration and freedom of opinion contained in Articles 19 and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 13 and

¹⁴ In the early part of the Argentine transition, Alfonsín introduced a raft of legislation to establish adequate standards of protection for human rights. He also convoked a constitutional Advisory Committee (*El Consejo para la Consolidación de la Democracia*), which demanded that the constitution should be reformed so that Congress could delegate certain functions to supranational organizations. In 1983, a commission was convened to investigate human rights violations under the dictatorship. This produced the report *Nunca más*, condemning the regime in light of human rights norms, and – implicitly – projecting rights as principles of direction for future political order.

¹⁵ See Emenda constitucional nº 45, de 30 de dezembro de 2004.

15 of the American Convention on Human Rights and Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights have been strongly reaffirmed by the Supreme Court (STF, 2011). In one notable case (STF, 2018a), the Supreme Court confirmed the constitutionality of a presidential decree that used principles regarding self-identification contained in ILO Convention 169 (1989) to insist on the rights of indigenous communities to remain on their land. In a different case, the Brazilian Supreme Court utilized international soft law to uphold and implement a presidential decree that had hardened the rules regarding the removal of vegetation in permanent conservation areas (STF, 2005).

One result of this was that the anti-welfarist turn against the Workers Party in 2015-16 was flanked by a process of mobilization against human rights law, and especially against human rights linked to international instruments or regional systems. In this period, human rights protections were projected as expressions of policies grafted onto the polity in external, artificial terms. As an extension of this process, the Supreme Court – the primary *locus* for the enshrining of international human rights law as norms of supra-legal or even constitutional status –, faced a period of uncertainty. It is possible to observe that the mid- 2010s were characterized by a broad reorientation in judicial decision making, in which pro-international human rights and due process of law guarantees tendencies were (partly) replaced by patterns of judicial activism tending to harsh prosecution and punishment, specially to crimes associated to corruption. Evidence of this reorientation is found in judicial interpretations of the presumption of innocence clause in the 1988 Constitution. Right after 1988, the Supreme Court upheld decisions that did not obstruct incarceration of a convict even if an appeal against imprisonment was under consideration. Subsequently, moving towards the full reception of international human rights provisions, the Court began to favour a more comprehensive version of the presumption of innocence, such that incarceration was not allowed before an unappealable decision had been reached. That understanding endured for around seven years, and it is currently once again in force. Yet, at the height of the Car Wash operation, the Supreme Court came under severe scrutiny by the media, by public opinion and by lower-level judicial authorities and skewed towards a more punitivist trend. During that time, core principles regarding recognition of human rights in criminal prosecution were unsettled.¹⁶

¹⁶ For relevant cases see HC 126.292 (STF, 2016); AP 937 QO (STF, 2018b).

In this respect, the rise of authoritarian populism occurred in a context in which presumptions in favour of human rights law had become controversial, and commitment to the upholding of human rights was susceptible to being discredited on ideological grounds. This paralleled processes in other polities that recently underwent a populist turn, such as India, Hungary, Poland, the UK and the USA, in each of which the rise of populist government reflected a backlash against the constitutional entrenchment of human rights by judicial actors and it was punctuated by polemics against international human rights law.¹⁷ In India, the USA, Poland and Hungary populist governments have tried to select judges because of their willingness to reduce judicial commitments to human rights law established by previous incumbents of senior judicial roles. In Brazil, alongside a similar attempt to pack superior courts with judges more aligned with sectarian nationalism than to international human rights, authoritarian populism involved a strong campaign to delegitimize the Supreme Court. The antagonism between the advocates of the nationalist populist enthusiasts and some Justices of the Brazilian Supreme Court even prompted an investigatory probe (STF, 2019), initiated by the Supreme Court itself, to subject some of the activists to criminal proceedings. After the events of January 2023, leading to the arrest of thousands of the rioters that stormed the *Praça dos Três Poderes* to overturn the last elections results and effect a *coup d'état*, the Superior Electoral Court found former President Bolsonaro guilty of many offenses against the electoral law. The Court decided that when he summoned a formal meeting with representatives of all nations with diplomatic relations with Brazil to cast doubts on the integrity of the upcoming elections, he did not present one piece of credible evidence, using the mandate to gather political support. Similarly, in another decision, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) ruled that former President Bolsonaro abused the political and financial structure of the Presidency to support his campaign during the ceremonies celebrating Brazil's Independence Day. The TSE revoked his electoral rights and banned him from participating in any elections for 8 years in both cases (TSE, 2023; 2024a; 2024b; 2024c). Although these decisions have provoked little debate on formal and legal grounds, members of the populist authoritarian far-right have articulated a

¹⁷ Examples are Trump's hostility towards the International Criminal Court; attempts to limit minority rights in Poland; calls and plans to limit the domestic force of the European Convention on Human Rights through reform of the Human Rights Act in the UK. The full militarization of society in Israel under Netanyahu has been flanked by attacks on the Supreme Court, which, in retrospect, can be seen as the first step in the process of augmented militarization.

discourse arguing that the judiciary is engaged in a campaign of personal persecution against the former President. Others think of it as a backlash to the contempt of Court promoted by the authoritarian populist movement.

3. THE RISE OF AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM IN BRAZIL: EXCLUSIONARY CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIETAL MILITARIZATION

Overall, the conjunctures previously described gave rise to a regime in Brazil that reflects an intensified descriptive embodiment of authoritarian populism. The backgrounds described above were closely linked to other two basic features – exclusionary citizenship and social militarization –. The government projected its legitimacy, first, through direct appeals to the people, not as an aggregate of materially integrated persons, but as an authentic national collective. It also projected its legitimacy, second, in deep hostility to the international architecture of human rights law. In each point, it mirrored and reinforced features found in other polities with a populist hue.

On one hand, Brazilian far-right movement contains elements, familiar to observers of global populist movements, in which politicians promote the radicalization of basic democratic ideals of popular sovereignty in order to establish and sustain legitimacy for government. In particular, the authoritarian populism relies on symbolic attempts to identify certain factions in society as embodying the real will of the people or the real people *tout court*, and to articulate legitimacy around appeals to such groups. By way of example, one study that examines the ways in which the Brazilian new right presents itself on social media has demonstrated how online mobilization is organized around groups with titles such as *Patriotas Brasil*, *Patria Amada Brasil*, *Em Defesa do Brasil*, and *Mobilizacao Patriota*¹⁸. Such organizations promote an adversarial social environment, in which groups identified as the *truthful Brazilians*, the *people*, or the *nation* are encouraged to assert their will over regime opponents (Gallego, 2019). In his inaugural speech as President of the Republic, Bolsonaro specifically referred to the attempt on his life that he suffered during the electoral campaign as a plot by the “enemies of the homeland, enemies of order, and enemies of freedom” (Bolsonaro, 2019, Authors’ version). Such postures are intended to promote the radicalization of factions in society that envision themselves as bearers of the real people’s will.

¹⁸ Brazil Patriots, Beloved Homeland Brazil, In Defence of Brazil, Patriot Mobilization (Authors’ version).

Further, Brazilian authoritarian populism draws capital from an idea of national sovereignty, which is manifest in strategic opposition to international normative constraints imposed on popular agency, and its discourse depends on the separation of the sovereignty of the Brazilian people from the international order. The trend towards isolation vis-à-vis the transnational normative system has become manifest in many different issues. Indicatively, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) expressed deep concerns regarding environmental policies under Bolsonaro, especially the practice of deforestation and the exploitation of indigenous reserves by extractive industries (IACHR, 2021, p. 36-38). The same IACHR report highlights the rising problem of the use of hate speech, threats, persecution and defamation by government officials, which form part of the increasing violation of democratic liberties (IACHR, 2021, p. 176-180). Disregard for international human rights is not the only way in which Bolsonaro's administration expressed contempt for international norms. One of the most emblematic examples of this stance has been evident in attempts to discredit directives of the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic. In an interview in June 2020, President Bolsonaro warned that he was considering withdrawal from the WHO, stating: "We don't need anyone from outside to give opinions on health care here" (Bolsonaro *apud* Vilela, 2020, Authors' version). The strong anti-internationalist emphasis of his regime affected the primary platform of his electoral campaign. Right-wing nationalists were very keen on deepening the anti-corruption agenda, which led to the appointment of the Car Wash operation leading judge as Ministry of Justice with the promise to fully embrace the international anti-corruption package in Brazil. As investigations got close to the former President's family, commitment to anti-corruption policies faded. Importantly, many interventions happened in activities of local officers of the Federal Police, especially in Rio de Janeiro, where the involvement of the former President and members of his family in taking kickbacks, money laundering, and militia financing were under investigation. The decisions prompted unfavourable criticism from Transparency International (2022) and jeopardized the Brazilian bid to become member of the OECD (Adghirni, 2020). Such reactions from the international community were usually ignored by his administration.

In these respects, the authoritarian populist trend in Brazil duplicates, in distinct and partly intensified form, patterns of (self-styled) sovereigntist anti-internationalism that are, or have recently been, at the core of populist government in the UK, India, Poland, Hungary,

Turkey, the USA, Venezuela and other states. In such characteristics, his government reflects a model of regime legitimation, in which classical constitutional images of popular sovereignty norms are mobilized against normative arrangements for checks and balances and legal constraints on executive power.

On the other hand, Bolsonaro's government possessed features, also clearly visible in other populist polities, which mean that his governance system moved towards, and beyond, the edge of democratic politics. Importantly, his government assumed an advanced position in the group of populist polities with regard to the role of the military. Many recent populist governments have been willing to promote a relative militarization of society. In most cases, the success of populist governments in coming to and then holding on to power has hinged on their preparedness to instigate and intensify experiences of polarization between rival social groups. To some degree, the claim to represent the true will of the sovereign people structurally relies on the ability of populists to separate their followers from opponents, and to entrench divisions between their followers and oppositional factions. Some militarization of society, and a consonant militarization of governmental functions in response to societal conflicts, is vital to populist politics. This is seen in the UK, where recent legislation radically increased police powers (UK, 2022). This is seen in the USA (under Trump), in Poland, and – above all – in India. Yet, the factual mobilization of government against regime opponents is probably most strongly articulated in Brazil. Brazilian authoritarian populism specifically embodies the anti-democratic potential in populist politics as it rests on the assumption that opponents possess characteristics that diminish their entitlement to play a role in the political process. Accordingly, they use military rhetoric, potentially backed by real military force, to promote the exclusion of groups hostile to their intents. One very striking example of such militarization is evident in their stance towards the *Movimento Sem Terra*¹⁹, hereafter MST. The MST is a social movement promoting agrarian reform in Brazil, which is a pledge contained in the 1988 Constitution that has not yet been fulfilled. The movement contains more than 350,000 families distributed throughout twenty-four states on Brazilian territory, and it has historically committed itself to identifying, occupying, and establishing settlements in unproductive land. The objective of such settlements is to signal to the State opportunities for appropriation and

¹⁹ Landless Workers Movement (Authors' version).

redployment of land for the development of subsistence agriculture. The movement has some history of engaging in social conflict, especially in confrontations with landowners and the police. Politically, the movement has a clear leftist orientation, and it is a strong source of support for the Workers Party. Since the 2018 general elections, Bolsonaro insisted in the *criminalization* of the MST as a terrorist group (Bolsonaro, 2021), insisting on this classification in many interviews.

In such actions, Brazilian authoritarian populism revokes the essential democratic understanding that groups in opposition possess their own justified and protected place and legitimacy within the political system, and it implies that violent measures to exclude oppositional actors from full political participation may be justifiable. In the above interview, the militarization of governmental policies regarding the MST assumed greater intensity as the former President presented his pro-gun agenda as a palliative solution for landowners who might wish to prevent MST settlements in their regions. During his government, Bolsonaro issued more than thirty measures to make Brazilian gun control legislation more flexible, including fourteen presidential decrees that expanded the general access to guns, increased the right to bear guns, and raised the calibre of weapons accessible to the public. Draft Bill 6.125 (2019) marked an attempt to exempt both members of the military and the police force from any criminal responsibility for deaths or harm occurring during operations conducted for the *guarantee of law and order*, which encompasses actions to repel the *imminent practice of acts of terrorism*.

In matters of this kind, the sovereigntist hostility to human rights was harnessed to an exclusionary pattern of engagement with opposing movements. At the core of this was an implied dual citizenship regime, in which political groups endorsing outlooks close to the Workers Party were accorded reduced status. In these respects, political conditions in Brazil exemplify, at times in accentuated form, the undemocratic aspects of populist government, also evident in other polities. Notably, the incipient promotion of an exclusionary definition of citizenship, in which full access to sovereignty is limited, can be observed in a number of polities – for example, the USA, Poland, and India. In some respects, these dispositions have been reflected in the reaction of courts towards the supporters of the authoritarian populist movement since 2023. Since the failed coup, courts have tended to express commitment to the *defense of democracy* by promoting the criminal prosecution of persons close to the Bolsonaro

regime, a process that may reproduce the exclusionary citizenship cycle, negating access to human rights for supporters of the former government²⁰. In other words, Brazil seems to struggle to articulate the promotion of democracy through a non-criminological vocabulary, which always carries along the threat of the use of state force to silence the divergent voices.

CONCLUSION: BRAZIL IN GLOBAL-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The recent developments in Brazil can be presented as a paradigm of the processes described above, and it illuminates how democracy depends on common patterns of systemic or structural development.

The immediate context in which the rise of authoritarian populism took place was marked by the intensification of controversy over welfare policies and the increased polarization of attitudes towards human rights law. Outlooks regarding these systemic constructions were deliberately transformed into pretexts for ideological ostracization, creating a climate of debate in which persons and groups attached to the Workers Party could be marginalized from positions of influence and even from full rights of citizenship. Such processes impacted measurably on the institutional design of the Brazilian polity. This was seen in welfare cuts and in a general tendency to limit protections for human rights, especially those projected in the international domain. At a deeper structural level, the emergence of Brazilian authoritarianism occurred in a context in which the broader democratic outcomes of welfare systems and human rights protection were weakened. As discussed, in the Bolsonaro administration, the demilitarizing effect of these institutions lost force, and the palliation of social conflict resulting from welfare legislation and human rights was diminished. Both the background to, and the conditions created by, authoritarian populism are immediately linked to a process in which inter-group conflicts were intensified, extreme partisanship came to define political behaviour, and different groups in society were pushed into collective affiliations, often of an exclusionary nature. In these respects, Bolsonaro's government underlines tendencies present, with variations, in all populist governments. Distinctive in the case of

²⁰ In AP 1060 (STF, 2024), the Supreme Court established a leading case, convicting the first of the participants of the anti-democratic acts of January 8th for five different crimes and sentencing him to 17 years of incarceration, which is considered a harsh penalty even for crimes against life in Brazilian criminal law practice.

Brazil, however, was the fact that the weakening of society's insulation against militarization was reflected in the actual presence of military personnel in government and in the actual (although still limited) mobilization of governmental force against targeted social groups. Here, the militarization of society, generally structural to populism, finds its expression (logically enough) in the militarization of the state. This can be directly attributed to the fact that the institutions required by democracy to avert militarization (welfare and human rights) were weakened even before the rise of far-right authoritarian populism.

Brazil's position in the global turn to populism is not universally explanatory, and it throws up several perplexing questions about the broader relation between militarism and democracy. For example, the above analysis gives rise to the following additional questions: Why were the preconditions for the demilitarization of society in Brazil less fully realized than in other settings? Does this have implications for other polities with populist proclivities, such as Poland and Hungary, whose democratic form did not result from war and which are now marked by incipient remilitarization? Are polities not created by war less effective in differentiating their institutions from military organizations than polities arising directly from warfare? None of these questions can be easily answered at present. It appears that, in the case of Brazil, the fact that in the 1980s democracy was created without war meant that social compromises regarding welfare and constitutional designs regarding human rights protection were less securely established than in countries in which democracy was built in the close shadow of war.²¹ It may quite generally be the case that democracies established in after the 1980s have less secure institutional fundamentals because of the absence of war in their development. However, caution is needed in expressing this view, as democracies such as the USA, India and the UK whose origins can surely be traced to warfare have displayed fragility similar to that which characterizes Brazil.

Paradigmatically, nonetheless, the discussion of the case of Brazil allows us squarely to observe the deep substructures of democracy, at a level of high generality. Proceeding from the case of Brazil, we can see that, in virtually all instances, democracy has been held together through a fragile, and highly dialectical wiring, based in welfare and human rights, which extends beyond typical indicators of democratic quality. Whether Brazil constitutes a case of

²¹ See parallel analysis in Thornhill (2022).

democratic resilience or failure will depend on future developments, as the task of building back welfare provisions can be disproportionately more arduous and time-consuming than dismantling them. Similarly, it is far more difficult to expand access to human rights than to deplete the constitutional and international human rights protection system. Meanwhile, the articulation of social militarization and mutual exclusionary trends between opposing segments of society remain present or, at least, latent.

This hard societal wiring created by welfare and broad access to human rights contributes to democracy, primarily, at the behavioural level, by softening lines of inter-group polarization and incorporating individual citizens in national political participation systems while dampening obdurate and volatile group attachments. In most polities, this wiring originally took shape through the organization of national polities around highly conflictual, militarized identities, but, ultimately, it separated national polities from such identities. Where this wiring is destabilized, democracy is sociologically improbable. Whether the unbalancing of this wiring belongs to Brazil's recent past or is waiting in the future is yet to be seen.

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Sobre os(as) autores(as):

Chris Thornhill | *E-mail: c.j.thornhill@bham.ac.uk*

Chris Thornhill é Doutor pela Universidade de Cambridge e lecionou diferentes disciplinas no King's College of London, na Universidade de Glasgow, além de ter sido Professor Visitante na Universidade de Bielefeld, em 2018, e em outras Universidades no Chile e no Brasil. Vencedor do Prêmio Humboldt, concedido pelo Max Planck Institute. Tem diversos livros publicados como *A Sociology of Constitutions* (2011); *A Sociology of Transnational Constitutions* (2016); *The Sociology of Law and the Global Transformation of Democracy* (2018) e *Global Law and Democratic Crisis* (2021). Seu livro *The Sociology of Law and the Global Transformation of Democracy* (2018) foi recentemente eleito, pela Academia Alemã de Sociologia, uma das 15 obras mais importantes da história da Sociologia do Direito. Foi professor titular na Universidade de Manchester, de cuja Faculdade de Direito foi diretor e hoje é professor da Universidade de Birmingham, no Reino Unido.

Lucas Delgado | *E-mail: lucas.delgado@cnj.jus.br*

Lucas Delgado é Mestre em Direito, Estado e Constituição pela Universidade de Brasília - UnB (2017) e Doutor em Direito pela Universidade de Manchester (Reino Unido). Foi professor de Filosofia Política na Escola de Direito do Instituto Brasileiro de Ensino, Desenvolvimento e Pesquisa (IDP) entre 2017 e 2019 e ministrou o curso Constitucionalismo Global e Combate à Corrupção, na pós-graduação *strictu sensu* em Direito do Instituto Brasileiro de Ensino, Desenvolvimento e Pesquisa (IDP) em 2023. É autor de *“Economia Uberizada e Constituição: do Constitucionalismo Societal à Transnacionalização de Problemas Constitucionais”* (2019) em Sociologia Constitucional e Governança Global. Neves, M & Palma, M (eds.) e *“Poder Judiciário e Parcerias Público-Privadas: O Conselho Nacional de Justiça, acesso à Justiça e boa-governança”* (2015) em 10 Anos de Reforma do Poder Judiciário e o Nascimento do Conselho Nacional de Justiça. Revista dos Tribunais. É assessor no Conselho Nacional de Justiça e professor do Instituto Brasileiro de Ensino, Desenvolvimento e Pesquisa (IDP).

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