Debate

The 'Populist' Right Challenge to Neoliberalism: Social Policy between a Rock and a Hard Place

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the rise of right populist politics in both developed and developing countries, and its implications for social policy. The author locates the cause for the right populist surge in the legacies of neoliberalism, paying particular attention to the way neoliberal reforms have affected popular attitudes towards politics. The commodification of politics and social services has stoked mass cynicism towards reigning neoliberal elites, creating receptive audiences for populist slogans to 'drain the swamp' at the heart of governments. More controversially, the author argues that popular resentments toward neoliberal social policies based on the recognition of the rights of women, minorities, migrants and the poor have made communities susceptible to the racist and misogynist messages of the right populists. Through case studies looking at the United States, Brazil and the Philippines the author argues that the biggest impact of right populists on social policies can be found in their discourses and authoritarian practices of social exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

In the 2010s there appeared a palpable shift in politics internationally, at first hard to detect and suddenly omnipresent, at least in the rich and middle-income countries. A new set of right 'populist' actors emerged challenging the status quo, using social media to capture the imaginations and respond to the grievances and alienation of populations in both developing and developed countries. In the Philippines, the United States (US), Italy, Brazil and the United Kingdom (UK), political 'outliers', who often present

themselves as 'outsiders', succeeded in upsetting long-established ways of doing politics, sidestepping or changing conventional political norms and gaining political power. In its divisive discourse and policies towards the poor, minorities and women, the 'new' politics of the right threatens to undermine the already commoditized social policy regimes that have characterized the 'neoliberal era' since the early 1980s.

Can there be any sense in labelling as practitioners of 'right populist politics' political currents as disparate as those led in developing countries by the likes of President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and in developed countries by President Donald Trump in the US and Matteo Salvini in Italy, to name but a few? These are leaders with very distinct programmes, notably on social policy, tailored to appeal to national constituencies and anchored in national political histories. They, and many other similar actors emerging as challengers vying for state power in recent years, operate in both new political movements as well as established political parties, including both parties that have held government power in the past and those that have been operating at the 'fringes' of political systems until relatively recently. By 'fringes' we mean both those on the political extremes and those that have had a very narrow geographical base of support, which in the past appeared to have little prospect of gaining national leadership or state power.

What makes them 'populists'? First, populist leaders appeal directly to their constituents, passing over the heads of traditional instances of political intermediation, including the organizational hierarchies of established political parties and media organizations where programmes and policies have traditionally been scrutinized against independent sources of evidence. Secondly, they classically claim to speak for, and personify the interests of, 'ordinary people' against established elites (even when these leaders often emerge from elites themselves), and they condemn those who disagree as somehow not genuinely 'of the people'. Thirdly, they tell people what they want to hear, often appealing to popular beliefs, prejudices, anxieties and fears, without the need to anchor their programmes or policies in scientific or expert knowledge. Fourthly, these leaders commonly portray themselves as 'outsiders' to established politics (often they have re-invented themselves as outsiders), but more often they are 'outliers' — members of fringe minority factions of established political parties or political organizations that have hitherto operated only on the margins of established political systems.

We eschew the use of 'populism' as it denotes a coherent ideological orientation and a set of shared ideas and beliefs.[1] The term 'populist' refers to a

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1. Historically, there have been distinct political-ideological currents of 'Populism' identified with the political left, for instance in the late 19th century in both Russia (Berlin, 1960: vii–viii) and the United States (Peffer, 1893: 678). In recent years, Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau (2005) has reclaimed 'Populism' as a radical people-centred ideology, inspiring leaders like Pablo Iglesias in Spain (Errejón, 2014; Errejón and Mouffe, 2016).

'way of *doing* politics', which can be, and historically has been, practised on both the left and the right (Conniff, 2012: 5). In recent years, leaders on the political left could also be said to practise populist politics, like former Presidents Evo Morales and Rafael Correa in developing countries and Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn and Pablo Iglesias in developed countries. Here we are concerned with understanding those practising populist politics of the right, who have already achieved state power, and the likely impact they may have on social policy, not least because they have been far more successful in challenging dominant neoliberal political authorities than populists on the left.

The 'right populist' movements of today draw on deeply rooted ideas on the political right about the market and society that pre-date neoliberalism.[2] Those who have attempted to understand the social policy of the new right movements in Europe and North America have failed to discern the differences between them and the reigning neoliberal order.[3] This is not surprising because the right populists and neoliberals share a commitment to market fundamentalism, or economic liberalism. Where right populists have come to power, they have for the most part maintained the 'market friendly' social policies of neoliberalism, but have had their biggest impact on social policy by weakening the rights of minorities and women and sowing division among the poor.

The defining characteristics of 'neoliberalism' remain contested (Chang, 2002; Thorsen, 2010; Venugopal, 2015). However, there is general agreement that a major shift occurred in the dominant economic thinking and policies within the capitalist world with the Reagan–Thatcher revolution of the early 1980s, which can be said to have launched the first phase of neoliberalism that lasted until the early 1990s. Neoliberalism has been defined by a commitment to limit state intervention in and regulation of markets, to create flexible labour markets thus limiting the power of trade unions, to limit state social spending and to promote, where possible, private sector delivery of services (like health, education, water, energy, transportation and, at the extremes, domestic security including policing and prisons). The right populists of today do not diverge significantly from these positions, which after all were born of the philosophies of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, whose laissez-faire economics are the holy grail of

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2. In this contribution to the Debate, the term 'right populist' rather than 'right-wing populism' is purposefully used to emphasize the point that populist politics today is a way of doing politics and not an ideology with right and left wings. These are actors operating in the long tradition of the political right, the lineage of which is traced from its origins in the wake of the French Revolution to the present neoliberal era in the works of Steven Lukes (2003/2008) and Roger Eatwell (1989).
3. Fenger (2018) provides a good summary of this work. In an early article on the topic, Betz (1993: 423) in fact argued that a defining feature of radical right parties was their 'pronounced neo-liberal programme'.

the modern political right. They diverge instead over three further central features of the neoliberal order.

First, where neoliberals have prioritized global markets, the right populists favour domestic markets. Second, the right populists oppose the rights agenda that emerged during what Fine and Saad-Filho (2017) called the 'mature phase' of neoliberalism. A final area of sharp divergence of the new right from reigning neoliberalism involves the authoritarian character of these political movements. While neoliberals skewed laws in favour of capital and the rich against labour and the poor, they were generally in favour of the rule of law. There is a distinct authoritarian trend among the right populists towards a toleration of heavy-handed police and vigilante action against the 'criminal poor'.

The central argument of this contribution to the Debate is that these new rightists are making their biggest impact on social policy in both developed and developing countries through discourses and actions that promote social exclusion. They undermine struggles for more just and universal social policies by dividing society between 'native majorities' and ethnic, religious or migrant minorities. They divide the poor between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' or even the 'criminal', in the worst cases legitimizing vigilante actions of majority communities against minorities. Their legitimation of misogynist and racist discourse threatens to undermine progress made over the past few decades towards recognizing the rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities. On a wider level their tendency to reject scientific evidence, to attack independent media, to question judicial independence and to reject multilateral international rules and organizations, threatens the arenas in which people have fought for and won more progressive social policies in the past.

The first part of the article discusses how reigning neoliberalism has created the conditions for the rise of right populist politics. There is considerable recognition that right populist movements have thrived on popular anger caused by the economic impact of neoliberal globalization. Much less attention has been paid to the political legacies of neoliberalism. These have not only created deep cynicism towards the state and established political parties, but also popular animosity towards the rights won by women and minorities that have partly shaped social policies during the neoliberal era. The second part of the article takes up three case studies chosen because they include both developed and developing countries where right populists have succeeded in gaining power: the Philippines, the United States and Brazil. It examines their often-contradictory moves on social policy since coming to office and how their authoritarian inclinations and their divisive approach to the poor, women and minorities affect actions on social policy. The conclusion sums up the challenges presented by the rise of these new movements, particularly in the domain of social policy.

NEOLIBERAL LEGACY AND THE RISE OF THE POPULISTS: ECONOMY, POLITICS AND SOCIAL POLICY

The economic legacy of neoliberalism has figured prominently in many discussions of the rise of right populist politics, but there has been much less attention accorded to its political legacies and the way 'mature neoliberalism' redefined social policy as delivery of services to 'customers'. The commodification of politics and social services may have been even more potent in rendering populations in most developed countries and middle-income countries in the developing world vulnerable to the messages of right populists than the economic legacy of neoliberalism. In this section we examine the economic, political and social policy legacies of neoliberalism that have created a fertile terrain for right populist politics.

The Return of Extreme Levels of Inequality

The reforms unleashed by the Reagan–Thatcher revolution of the early 1980s undid much of the redistributive fiscal and social policies that had characterized the 'New Deal' and post-World War II era. They led, after nearly four decades, to an enormous increase in inequality in most developed and developing countries. With tax cuts, expanded opportunities for investment in low-wage economies and for speculation in financial markets and almost unlimited opportunities for luxury consumption, the top 1 per cent of income earners in the developed countries captured an ever increasing share of income within their countries (Galbraith, 2002; Milanovic, 2003; Palma, 2009, 2011; Piketty, 2014). Through processes of privatization of state assets, trade liberalization, the radical curtailment of trade union rights, the promotion of flexible labour markets and the deregulation of finance, the reforms were designed to unleash the potential of markets to deliver economic growth. By encouraging finance to move much more freely around the globe, the reforms saw the destruction of many old industrial activities and communities in the developed counties.

This pattern of globalization saw the bifurcation of the developing countries. Those that had states capable of launching export-oriented industrialization (most remarkably so among the 'developmental states' in East Asia) benefited. The majority of developing countries, where moves towards industrialization were arrested or even set in reverse (Arrighi, 2002; Easterly, 2001; Mkandawire, 2005; Palma, 2003: 134–36), suffered.

Trade liberalization, the privatization of state assets and fiscal reforms favouring the owners of wealth allowed elites to maintain their position, or greatly improve it, with opportunities in the globalized economy. Even as growth returned after the millennium, it was founded either in the service sector or primary commodities trade, with limited expansion of manufacturing or agricultural production. The impact of post-1980 neoliberal

reforms benefited the wealthy and the upper-middle classes, whose numbers expanded with growth in the service sector. However, lower-middle classes and workers in the formal sector, especially those whose families once had employment in the public sector or in embryonic manufacturing, as well as poor farmers and farmworkers, enjoyed fewer benefits from neoliberal reforms (Petras, 1999). Already high levels of inequality were either frozen or worsened (World Inequality Lab, 2018). There has been a rapid process of urbanization in many lower- and middle-income countries, but it has been urbanization without industrialization, seeing a vast expansion of informal economic activities as well as increased levels of crime (World Bank, 2017).

The financial crisis of 2007–08 marked a turning point in public awareness, particularly in the rich countries, about the extent of inequality that had evolved in the decades of accelerated globalization. The measures taken to avoid economic meltdown after the financial crisis hardly had an impact on the privileged position of the beneficiaries of globalization. The pattern of unequal distribution of the benefits of globalization, experienced to differing degrees among the developed and developing countries, contributed enormously to the sense of alienation and anger felt by old working class communities, small business owners and much of the middle class in the rich countries, and the lower-middle class and worker and farmer families in middle-income countries of the developing world (Koo, 2016; MGI, 2016).

The sharp rise in inequality and the destruction of old sites of stable industrial employment that had accompanied globalization and the financialization of capitalism, led to widespread popular resentment in both developed countries and middle-income countries in the developing world, and this provided a fertile terrain for the rise of right populist politics.

Vilification of the State and Politics: Social Policy as Service Delivery to Customers

The political legacies of neoliberalism, which involved the commodification of politics and social services, have led to widespread popular cynicism towards established political elites, rendering societies much more susceptible to the demagogic politics of the populist right. During the decades of neoliberal dominance there was the promotion of an entire intellectual architecture that modelled public authority, or the realm of the state, as a site of individual self-seeking behaviour, prone to rent seeking and corruption, as well as 'free riding' and inefficiency. The 'rational choice' theory evolved from neoclassical economics came to occupy a prominent place in the study of states and politics.[4] Criticisms were mounted toward the direct participation

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4. McClean (2017) demonstrates the extent to which James Buchanan and his 'public choice school' were purposefully financed by big business in the United States.

of the state in economic activity; thus prescriptions of privatization of public assets and 'outsourcing' of administrative activities and 'contracting out' of service delivery were widely promoted in both the developed and developing countries. Analytical and prescriptive frameworks of 'New Public Management' were promoted with the objective of increasing efficiency in redirected public agencies (Hood, 1991).

This was not only a change in the way public authority was conceptualized, but actually a profound transformation in how states were organized and in the behaviour of both administrative and political authorities. States became 'service providers' and citizens became 'customers'. The practice of politics also significantly changed as voters too were customers in the 'political marketplace'. Notions of public administration as sites of 'public service' and politics as a 'vocation' were displaced by rational actor models, which increasingly informed organizational design and measurements of success and failure. The same occurred in what was previously known as the 'voluntary sector' re-invented as 'non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) that became increasingly 'professionalized' and organized along the same lines. Whole new 'for profit' businesses developed to carry out what once was considered the provision of public services. While political lobbying activities had long existed, a new sector of political lobbying firms emerged from the 1980s in Washington DC, spreading to political capitals around the world. The wholesale commodification of state and political activities became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Former prime ministers and presidents, senior politicians and administrators came to command hitherto unheard-of salaries after leaving public office or public service, not least on the boards of financial organizations and lobby firms.[5] They joined the ranks of 'globalized elites', symbolized so appositely in the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

In a world of growing economic inequality, where people feel betrayed by established political parties, it is understandable that they have responded enthusiastically to the right populists' calls to 'drain the swamp' of privileged elites at the heart of governments run on neoliberal principles.

Social Policy in the 'Mature' Phase of Neoliberalism: Market-friendly Individual Rights

More controversially, the neoliberals' approach to social policy, based on granting rights to the poor, minorities and women, has created reserves of resentment among middle-class and working people who have experienced

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5. Reports abound in the media of the exorbitant fees for public appearances charged by the likes of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. See, for instance, 'Blair Paid $500,000 for 20-minute Talk', *Financial Times* 8 November 2007.

a decline in their own economic prospects. It is at least partly by stoking this resentment that right populists have built mass followings in recent years. During the second phase of neoliberalism, roughly from the mid-1990s, new attention was devoted to responding to civil society actors, already cowed by neoliberal authorities, who advocated reforms to alleviate the devastating economic and social impact of early neoliberal pro-market reforms (Fine and Saad-Filo, 2017: 695). In the domain of international development, on top of the hard-line prescriptions for structural adjustment and the social protest they generated, moves were made to make pro-market strategies more palatable. This involved the launching of 'Voices of the Poor', the turn to institutions and 'good governance', the endorsement of 'human development', 'poverty reduction strategy papers', 'mainstreaming gender' and eventually the Millennium Development Goals, followed by the Sustainable Development Goals.

It was this evolution during phase two neoliberalism that came to define social policy for the neoliberal era. Targets for poverty reduction, gender equity, access to health and education were to be achieved through aid and domestically funded targeted programmes with such delivery tools as conditional cash transfers (CCTs), none of which contradicted the market-oriented nature of neoliberal strategies. Saad-Filho (2015: 1227) documents the successfulness of the original CCT, the Programa Bolsa Família in Brazil, in providing 'substantial income support to the poorest', but he argues that long-term and widespread progress would have required 'universalization and de-commodification of social provision'.

The changes in the development framework and the evolution of social policy under phase two neoliberalism were designed to cushion, but not undermine, the financialization of capitalism and were functional to the consolidation of the neoliberal order. In fact, these changes could be understood as a great triumph of neoliberalism since phase two, which roughly began in the early 1990s, corresponded to the final surrender of social democracy to the hegemonic neoliberal project. In country after country, social democratic parties and thinkers (Giddens, 1998), accepted the edict of TINA ('there is no alternative') and the logic of neoliberalism. This was when Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and their 'New Labour' party in the UK, Bill Clinton's Democratic Party in the US and Gerhard Schröder's Social Democratic Party in Germany not only surrendered to the reigning ideology by adopting it (with its softer 'third way' face), but actively implemented the agenda of phase two neoliberalism.

This evolution in neoliberal social policy was related at a deeper level to the move among neoliberal-dominated states to recognize a panoply of social and political rights, as long as such a move would further the consolidation of markets. Nancy Fraser (2009) demonstrated the ways in which 'second wave feminism', in its far-reaching critique of the patri-archal character of post-World War II state-managed capitalism, was accommodated and used to extend rights to women that facilitated their

participation in labour markets and patterns of social reproduction consistent with the neoliberal project. Other feminist theorists and social scientists dispute such an interpretation, either by underlining gains of women in the process or insisting on the deleterious impact of neoliberalism on women and the feminist cause (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2018; Wilson, 2015; Yoo, 2011). However, the point is that the decades of neoliberal dominance saw a widespread increase in women's participation in the workplace, the development of microcredit programmes that shifted women's position in the power dynamics of households, programmes for women to access family planning and new legal measures (of course differentially achieved across countries) to formally target sexual harassment, gender discrimination in the workplace and violence against women (World Bank, 2019).

Kymlicka (2013) provides a similar argument about the pattern of recognition of ethnic minority rights and what he ends up calling 'neoliberal multiculturalism'. While during the early days of neoliberalism, there was a widespread rejection of multiculturalism as overly state interventionist, over time there was an increasing enthusiasm among political authorities to endorse multicultural practices. This was in part a response to civil society organizations demanding recognition of ethnic rights and an end to discrimination, but it also became clear that the implementation of multiculturalism advanced the consolidation of markets everywhere. He documents how the World Bank became a strong advocate in the early 1990s on the grounds that ethnicity is a source of social capital, which enables deeper market participation. This was manifested differently in terms of indigenous ethnic groups and immigrants: 'Immigrant transnationalism, then, is an asset in an increasingly global marketplace — it facilitates global trade' (Kymlicka, 2013: 110).

In the developed countries, the widespread practice of recognizing the individual rights of women, ethnic minorities and immigrants, and the associated 'political correctness' adopted by reigning political elites, has likely contributed as much to the rise of right populist politics as the patterns of income inequality unleashed by neoliberalism. Working-class and many middle-class families saw their worlds of work and their communities eviscerated by globalization. On top of this, white working-class men saw their traditional position of authority over women, their 'superiority' over ethnic minorities and the unorganized poor put into question by the recognition of these rights, creating widespread feelings of resentment against liberal elites in power.

In middle-income developing countries, where workers, farmers and lower-middle-class people suffered from neoliberal structural adjustment and financial stabilization programmes, elites had opportunities to maintain or even increase their wealth and status in the globalized economy. By the time that phase two neoliberalism emerged, elites endorsed the 'rights-granting' practices that accompanied new programmes of 'good governance'

and 'institutional reform' financed in large measure by foreign aid. Neoliberal social policy programmes were geared towards the 'poorest of the poor', with much less attention to urban workers, lower-middle-class families in the urban service sector, or rural farmers.

As growth slowly picked up, fast-expanding urbanization without industrialization saw a proliferation of criminal activities in cities in situations where policing budgets were weak, not least because of the low tax efforts and regressive patterns of taxation. Crime was experienced differently by elites and upper-middle-class people in urban gated communities than by those who lived in more open city neighbourhoods. International development agencies and NGOs, backed by national governments, elite philanthropic initiatives and the growing numbers of middle-class professionals with permanent jobs in the NGOs, propagated ideas of gender equality, social inclusion and the due process of law. But in many countries pro-poor programmes and the recognition of social rights rang hollow among the lower-middle class and the working urban and rural poor, particularly as they experienced rising levels of income inequality, crime and daily hardship from the lack of adequate transport and other public services.

Right populist politics in both rich and middle-income countries have mobilized popular support among those angered by what they see as hypocritical liberal elites in government. Many of the hard-won gains made by women, minorities and the poor were achieved in negotiations between civil society organizations and state officials, rather than through widespread social movements, so in many cases there was little sign of a deep social consensus, or social transformation, over the rights won. Neoliberal elites presided over new forms of 'political correctness' when it came to minority and gender rights, but it is questionable how far these changes have been internalized by ordinary people in society.

In sum, the market-oriented policies neoliberals have pursued have led to widespread popular anger over exacerbated economic inequality and the destruction of jobs, communities and social aspirations. The neoliberal reorganization of the state and politics as sites of purely self-interested behaviour and the accompanying commodification of social services have greatly increased the cynicism of populations towards public authority and established political organizations, making them willing audiences for calls to 'drain the swamp'. The social rights and social policy agenda of 'mature' neoliberalism, which recognized the rights of women, minorities and immigrants and targeted social programmes to them, as long as they were consistent with the promotion of markets, has been perceived by many people not only as unfair, but as an assault against traditional norms. By the early 2010s, in the wake of the financial crisis, all this has made the lower and middle classes feel insecure even in their homes and communities, creating widespread receptiveness to the divisive messages of the right populists.

POPULISTS IN POWER: AUTHORITARIAN, MISOGYNIST AND AT WAR WITH THE 'UNDESERVING POOR'

The political outliers (and outsiders) deploying populist politics of the right who have achieved power at the national and sub-national levels in the 2010s have all done so with promises to rid the state of 'liberal', 'globalized' and 'corrupt' elites and to use state power to promote the interests of hard-working deserving native citizens. In what seems almost a masterful 'confidence trick', they have come to power backed by alliances of business interests often promoting greater deregulation of domestic markets than the neoliberals before them. In their campaigns for political power, the right populists did not promise expansive social programmes. Instead, they sought to win support by demonizing the 'undeserving poor', whether they were 'illegal immigrants', 'dangerous Muslims', 'lazy' or 'criminal' poor, portrayed as having received unfair assistance or protection by liberal elites in the past. Once in power the right populist governments discussed here have taken different official stands on specific social policies, ranging from cutting back the social programmes of their predecessors, as in the US, a combination of reluctant maintenance of some neoliberal programmes with deeper cuts in social spending than their predecessors could achieve, as in Brazil, and even the passage of some universalist measures with no clear plan of how to fund them, as in the Philippines.

However, the biggest impact on social policy by the right populists since coming to power has been through the pursuit of agendas of social exclusion directed against the 'undeserving' poor and their attempt to roll back the gains made by women in fighting for their rights during recent decades. Their authoritarian drift, empowering the police, challenging judicial independence and attacking independent media, threatens to silence their political opponents and civil society. Their worst impact on prospects for the pursuit of progressive social policy in the future is the way they have legitimized discourses of hatred towards minorities and women, aided by a rejection of international standards and norms.

While the fundamental reasons for the rapid rise of right populist politics are located in neoliberal legacies, the speed with which they have gained prominence has been greatly facilitated by the technical revolution in information and communications technology and the expansive reach of social media. Although it was probably Barak Obama's earlier campaign for the White House that demonstrated how social media could be harnessed for political purposes by established political parties (Bimber, 2014), the nature of this new media has proven to be particularly suitable to the type of politics pursued by the right populists. Not only has this explosion allowed political actors to transmit their messages directly to people's mobile phones, but it has allowed them to shape the news people hear, read and see and therefore influence public opinion to a greater extent than ever before (ITU, 2018). Unvetted and unregulated, the media has lent itself to the often

demagogic and hateful politics pursued by right populists, allowing them both to leapfrog gatekeepers in established political organizations and in the traditional media, while forcing themselves onto the agenda of mainstream media in the process. From positions of power, social media has proven to be the preferred method of communication for all these politicians.

Politics of Social Exclusion and Implications for Social Policy

In the Philippines, unlike in the US and Brazil, after coming to power President Rodrigo Duterte endorsed at least formal legislation towards 'universal provisions' on free university fees, minimum incomes, social pensions and national health, but the latter two have yet to be provided with meaningful funding. However, Duterte's violent anti-drugs campaign has amounted to a radical form of social exclusion by literally gunning down thousands of poor people.

Duterte won the presidency in 2016, successfully deploying social media as a political outlier with a reputation for having secured 'order' (often by sidestepping law) and development in his many years as mayor of the southern city of Davao. There, he was known for having used armed vigilante groups to stamp out crime by summarily killing criminals, particularly among the urban poor (Breuilm and Rozema, 2009). He promised to sweep away corruption in the central government in Manila, long controlled by *trapos* (a shortened form for 'traditional politicians', which also means 'old dirty rag' in Tagalog). Duterte's populist politics were clearly anchored in the shifting coalitions of non-party politics that have characterized a political system where old (and new) wealthy clans traditionally dominated. Like in the US and Brazil, Duterte's movement divided the poor, in this case, between the hard-working honest poor and the criminal drug users, and appealed to middle-class urban voters preoccupied with rising crime and wholly inadequate public infrastructure. Indeed, it was by transcending voting blocs mainly based on regional lines and winning the urban vote right across the archipelago that Duterte captured the presidency (Putzel, 2016).

True to his word, upon assuming office Duterte unleashed a 'war against drugs' that, according to official sources, by June 2019 had killed between 5,375 and 6,600 drug 'suspects', mostly from among the urban poor (Rappler, 2019). This has involved a succession of operations by the Philippine National Police initially concentrated in urban poor communities in the capital but later moving out to other urban centres, where police have said criminals were gunned down while resisting arrest. But since the start, there have been widespread reports that the numbers killed are much higher and many by armed vigilantes working informally for the police (Amnesty International, 2019; CHRP, 2018; UNODC, 2016). The drug war has been carried out in a macabre fashion disseminating fear throughout poor communities (UNHRC, 2019). Beyond this, while Duterte first assumed office inviting

nominations from the Communist Party of the Philippines to his cabinet and reinstating peace talks with them, soon the peace talks were off and all those from the Left that joined were moved out, with subsequent appointments to cabinet being drawn overwhelmingly from the military.[6] Although he has secured total control over both chambers of the Congress through mid-term elections in 2019, he has still felt compelled to denounce regularly leading members of the opposition and pursue them in the courts.

While Duterte has unleashed a war against the criminal poor, he has maintained the neoliberal social policies of his predecessors, even introducing some universalist programmes. Soon after coming to power, Duterte signed a law guaranteeing universal free access to college and universities.[7] His government has maintained support for the conditional cash transfer programme, known as the '4 Ps' begun by his predecessors (Orbeta and Paqueo, 2016). Legislation has been passed to move toward an expansion of social pensions, but so far implemented only for military veterans. Further legal moves have been made to introduce universal health, but as with pensions it is unclear how these will be funded and the mix of public and private provision. He has gone beyond neoliberal constraints, by signing into law a 'Magna Carta of the Poor' in April 2019,[8] rejected on neoliberal grounds by his predecessor (Aquino, 2013; Chiu, 2013). The law provides, for all those who fall below the national poverty threshold or cannot meet basic needs, support for 'adequate food, decent work, relevant and quality education, housing, and the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health' (GOP, 2019: n.p.). However, the impoverishment of the thousands of households that have seen their major earner killed in Duterte's war against drugs may well undermine any progress made through progressive social policy.

The second big presidential win for populist politics of the right in 2016, and much more consequential internationally, was Donald Trump's usurpation of the Republican Party leadership and his victory in presidential elections.[9] While Trump claimed to defend working and poor people, almost from the start of his presidency he began to roll back state spending on social welfare. Trump was the quintessential 'outsider'; a wealthy real estate magnate and reality television star. He first tapped into a deeply conservative base within the Republican Party. He and his team waged a ruthless campaign against Republican Party contenders, all painted as weak Washington DC 'insiders' and laid out the themes that would propel his campaign in the general election: 'clear out the swamp' of liberal (and criminal) elites

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6. Author's compiled data on the changing cabinet membership.
7. Republic Act 10931, 'Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education'; www.officialgazette. gov.ph/downloads/2017/08aug/20170803-RA-10931-RRD.pdf
8. Republic Act 11291; www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2019/04/12/republic-act-no-11291/
9. This came on the heels of the right populist victory in the UK referendum on withdrawal from the European Union in June 2016.

in Washington; 'make America great again' by stopping and reversing the inward migration of 'criminals' from Mexico and other Latin American countries and 'radical Muslim terrorists'; as well as by reversing the loss of jobs and investment, by taking a hard line on China and other countries who conduct 'unfair trade' and steal American intellectual property, American companies and especially American jobs (Hall, 2018; Trump, 2015). In a careful study using the methods of political anthropology, Matthew Dickinson (2018) convincingly explained how Trump won the election by appealing to people's anger over governing elites who were not ruling on their behalf, storytelling and speaking in a language they could relate to.

When Trump took up office on 20 January 2017, he used the 'bully pulpit' of the presidency (through Twitter) to follow up on all these themes and set out to deliver on his promises.[10] From the White House, Trump continued a discourse aimed at generating support from white working-class and middle-class people, legitimizing white supremacists marching in Charlottesville in August 2017 (*Politico Magazine*, 2018), and eventually implementing his ban in modified form on visas from Islamic hotspots.[11]

The Trump administration's approach to social policy revived far-right discourse about the 'lazy poor'. In April 2018, he signed an executive order instructing all federal agencies to more strictly enforce and, where necessary, increase work requirements for welfare recipients (Trump, 2018), in what Paul Krugman (2018) labelled Trump's 'War on the Poor'. In July, the president's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA, 2018) produced a report advocating that recipients of Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and rental housing assistance programmes should all be required to increase work as a condition for continuing to receive assistance. In July 2019, Trump's Office of Management and Budget signalled a move to redefine poverty (OMB, 2019), while the Department of Agriculture proposed a new rule that according to its own reckoning could remove 3.1 million households from food assistance and render thousands of children ineligible for free school meals (USDA, 2019a, 2019b).

Trump has introduced and amplified over time an authoritarian rhetoric from the White House, which legitimizes the actions of far-right individuals and organizations, virtually inciting violence against minorities. He has doubled down on the 'right to bear arms', opposing abortion, fighting terrorism, controlling immigration and reducing access to social welfare (Lachmann, 2019). His authoritarian tendencies have been in evidence through his incessant tweeting, where he attempts to bully US private companies to invest at home, keep factories open or when he ordered US companies to find 'an

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10. Trump tweet of 20 January 2017.
11. US Executive Order 13769 (Trump, 2017a), modified as US Presidential Proclamation 9645 (Trump, 2017b) in September 2017, and approved by the US Supreme Court on 26 June 2018.

alternative to China'.[12] Trump's discourse and actions within the limits of his executive authority reveal his proclivity towards authoritarian government, as do his statements supportive of rulers like Rodrigo Duterte and Jair Bosonaro in Brazil.

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro won the presidency with an agenda that many saw as combining the more draconian measures favoured by Duterte and Trump. From day one in office he championed an assault on public sector pensions and won Congressional support for a radical reduction in public spending, a reform that had been resisted by previous administrations. However, the agenda of his finance minister for further downsizing of the public sector and regressive tax reform has met growing opposition in society.

Bolsonaro, who assumed the presidency of Brazil on 1 January 2019, like Duterte, did so on the back of promises to jail corrupt politicians and make it easier for the police to shoot down drug dealers. He was a long-time outlier, a former captain in the Brazilian army, who was elected as a Christian Democrat to Congress in 1990, where he served for 27 years campaigning, from the social conservative fringe, against women's rights, abortion, gay rights, drugs liberalization and secularism. He won the presidency under the banner of the far-right and long-time marginal Social Liberal Party. He captured the support of a population disillusioned by a corruption scandal deeply penetrating the political system, high levels of inequality, high rates of urban crime and the impact of an economic recession. The scale of Bolsonaro's victory was striking, roundly defeating the Workers' Party (PT), which once had enjoyed overwhelming support under former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–10). Lula was jailed in 2018 on corruption charges, but released pending appeal in late 2019. The coalition he once commanded disintegrated during the presidency of his successor Dilma Rousseff, who was impeached on corruption grounds in 2016, by a Congress itself beset by corruption investigations. It was a 'perfect storm' that allowed Bolsonaro, who had never held any executive post and was therefore relatively unscathed by corruption, to capture the imagination of a majority of Brazilian voters who had come to believe their state was not working for them.

Jair Bolsonaro, supported by evangelical Christians, used social media to relentlessly berate minorities and call for measures outside the law to battle crime. He had a long history of dividing the poor by targeting ethnic minorities, famously saying in 2017 that *quilombolas* (residents of communities formed by the descendants of escaped black slaves) were 'parasites' and 'not even good enough for procreation' (Hunter and Power, 2019: 76; Leal, 2017). In the election he won among all income groups except the poor and very poor, who stayed loyal to the PT largely due to the legacy

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12. Trump tweet of 23 August 2019; see: https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/116491496 0046133249

of Bolsa Família, the conditional cash transfer programme championed by Lula (Hunter and Power, 2019: 77).

The political crisis that led to Bolsonaro's victory saw a meltdown of the established political parties and dozens of marginal parties sending representatives to Congress. This meant that Bolsonaro, upon assuming office, unlike Duterte, could not count on a legislative majority and attempted to rule by short-term decree (ibid.: 79). The president began an effort to cobble together the kind of majority that Duterte enjoys in his legislature, but initially with far less success. After his first cabinet meeting, Bolsonaro's chief of staff, Onyx Lorenzoni, announced he had already fired 300 'contractors' in his ministry and that other departments would follow suit, to 'clean house' targeting all those deemed sympathetic with the two previous ruling parties referred to as 'socialists and communists'.

Bolsonaro's social policy began to take shape almost immediately. One of his first decrees was to reduce the increase in the minimum wage budgeted by his predecessor. In 2011, Bolsonaro had said 'Bolsa Família is nothing more than taking money from those who produce and handing it to those who are lazy' (Junior, 2018). During his campaign he pledged to maintain the cash transfer programme, but by June 2019 his government began excluding thousands of poor people from joining. The most direct action he took affecting social policy was aimed at minorities. On day two of his presidency Bolsonaro put in place a decree moving jurisdiction over indigenous lands from Funai, the National Indigenous Foundation, to the Department of Agriculture, thus diminishing both indigenous and *quilombolas*' participation in the determination of land rights in favour of agribusinesses (Gonzales and Leme, 2019). Since then, he has campaigned to eliminate the special status of indigenous communities, which would radically cut back their access to education and health care.

Like in the Philippines, Bolsonaro's move towards a more authoritarian government also has implications for social policy, as draconian anti-crime measures target especially poor 'non-whites'. Eight of the 22 cabinet members he appointed were retired generals. The conservative political philosopher Olavo de Carvalho, who purportedly is the president's intellectual guru, was reported as saying that crime would not have increased so rampantly if the former military dictatorship had killed the right 20,000 people (Anderson, 2019). During his campaign, Bolsonaro argued that the only way to fight crime was to pass out guns to the population (Leal, 2017). Two weeks into his presidency, he signed a decree modifying the country's 'disarmament statute' of 2003, lowering the age to purchase firearms from 25 to 21 and relaxing permit restrictions (Gonzales and Leme, 2019). Since Bolsonaro came to office, vigilantes who have long worked closely with the police are more active in the favelas. Newly elected governor of Rio de Janeiro, Wilson Witzel, authorized a 'shoot to kill' policy in confronting armed criminals (Anderson, 2019).

All three countries have experienced an assault on long-established media organizations at the hands of right populists. During the darkest years of neoliberal reforms, the media had been a site in many countries where governments were scrutinized. The modifications of neoliberal social policy and the social rights agenda adopted were in no small part achieved by civil society working through media. The rise of the right populists and their attack on media has reduced the space for public debates over social policy. To gain influence and attain power, all of the right populists have not only used social media to reach their audiences, but in the process openly attacked the established media. They labelled media organizations that were capable of casting a critical eye over their claims and programmes as the harbingers of 'fake news', the hallmark phrase popularized by Donald Trump. Their stance toward the media is one of the clearest indications of their authoritarian character. It not only pre-empts critical scrutiny but has also legitimized violent attacks by their followers against journalists.

Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines has lambasted the press from Malacañang Palace, and his administration has been relentless in trying to shut down the Rappler news service, the most effective news agency monitoring and reporting on his administration.[13] The Philippines has been judged 'the deadliest peacetime country for journalists, with 185 journalists killed since 1986' (IFJ, 2018: 39). While this did not begin with Duterte, he has bestowed legitimacy on these killings illustrated by his remarks shortly before taking office, 'Just because you're a journalist you're not exempted from assassination if you're a son of a bitch' (ibid.: 7). President Bolsonaro was even more extreme reportedly using 'Twitter to criticize the press once every three days on average' (Gonzales and Leme, 2019). He signed a decree, following on his decree to liberalize gun control, specifically authorizing journalists covering crime, among others, to openly carry guns as the way to counter the increasing threats that journalists face — a move condemned by Reporters without Borders (2019: n.p.), who said his 'government has been fuelling a climate of mistrust and confrontation with the media'.

Social Exclusion of Women: Misogyny and the Attack on Women's Rights

One of the most striking commonalities among the right populists, with profound implications for future social policy, is the misogynist discourse employed by all of them that has legitimized increased violence against women and an attack on hard-won women's rights. In the US an 'unholy alliance' emerged between the less-than-pious Donald Trump and evangelical Christians, based on his commitment to appoint 'pro-life' justices to the Supreme Court and the wider judiciary, and to radically cut government

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13. The attack has been directed particularly at internationally recognized Rappler CEO Maria Ressa, who has been seen as a champion of the free press (IFJ, 2018).

spending on family planning and sex education. Since in office, with the assistance of his vice-president, Mike Pence, a hero of evangelical Christians, he has carried out his commitments and populated the Department of Health and Human Services with committed pro-life personnel. While Republicans have long pandered to the agenda of evangelical Christians, the Trump administration has gone further in implementing it than any previous administration. Similarly, in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro had been a long-time spokesperson of Christian evangelicals in Congress, bringing their agenda with him to the presidency committed to rolling back women's rights to control their own bodies and fiercely opposing LGBTQ rights. Duterte is cut from a different cloth, openly expressing his animosity to the powerful Catholic Church. While in the US and Brazil, Christian evangelicals have condemned the secular orientation of the neoliberal state and its stand on women's reproductive rights, in the Philippines, the Catholic Church has been perceived as a pillar of support for the neoliberal state.

What Trump, Bolsonaro and Duterte have in common is their deeply misogynist discourse towards women. It forms a part of their appeal to communities who feel their traditional values and community norms have been undermined by neoliberal elites. The crude speech directed to and about women by all these political leaders seems designed to appeal to communities fed up with the 'political correctness' propagated during the neoliberal era. Their misogynist discourse disseminated from the ruling heights of government has legitimized the worst forms of social exclusion of women where violence against them is tolerated as are traditional sexual power relations in families and communities.

Even 10 years earlier, a US politician who spoke about women in the terms Donald Trump used before and during his electoral campaign would have been dead in the water in any bid for the presidency. During the campaign, the *Washington Post* gained access to and published the transcript of a video recording (later released online) from 2005 capturing Trump explaining to a 'Hollywood Access' host his prowess with women in openly misogynist terms (Victor, 2017). This was just one of the crassest of scores of insulting comments made by Trump against women, a practice that seemed to win him votes during the campaign and not abandoned after he took up office. One journalist collated some 60 such comments along with their sources (Lange, 2018).

President Rodrigo Duterte is by now infamous for his vulgar statements about women that even more explicitly provoke violence against them. During his campaign he gave a speech referring to the kidnapping, rape and killing of an Australian missionary who was part of a group ministering to prisoners in Davao City where he was mayor in 1989. Duterte told the laughing crowd that as he looked at the dead corpse of the woman, he thought he should have been given first go at her, since she was so beautiful (Ranada, 2016). Later during his presidency, when he was sending off soldiers to fight the Islamic armed group that captured and occupied the City of Marawi, he

told them they could rape women, but only three: 'I'll take your place in prison. If you rape 3, I'll take the blame' (Rappler, 2017). On still another occasion, while speaking to troops who were off to fight the New People's Army, he told them not to kill the women combatants, but to shoot them in their genitals 'to make them useless' (Gavilan, 2018: n.p.).

Bolsonaro demonstrated the same vitriol towards women. When he was running for president, he was still facing a court case brought by Congress-woman Maria do Rosario over his remarks in 2014 in the Lower House. She had accused him of having encouraged rape and he replied 'I wouldn't rape you because you don't deserve it', and later claimed that he was not a rapist, but if he were, he would not rape do Rosario because 'she is ugly' and 'not my type' (Forrest, 2018). Bolsonaro's decree loosening gun laws and other measures taken to relax penalties against state security forces using violence to stamp out crime are predicted to aggravate what is already a high rate of female homicide (particularly the killing of black women) in Brazil. Kristina Hinz, who is undertaking research on the impact of the war on drugs in Brazil, cited a study by the Office of the Public Defender in Rio de Janeiro, 'The investigators even found evidence of the use of sexual violence as a measure of retaliation: state agents raped the partners of drug traffickers instead of arresting them' (Hinz, 2019: n.p.). The election to high office of politicians who propagate misogynist views is only likely to legitimize these long-standing patterns of violence against women.

More than any other issue, the potency and danger of right populist politics to social cohesion and the possibilities for progressive social policy lies in their preaching of misogynist discourse. Most worrying is that this appeals to deeply rooted patriarchal ideas still present in most societies.

CONCLUSION

When the neoliberals came to power in the early 1980s, they set out to dismantle the universalist social policies of the preceding New Deal Order (Fraser and Gerstle, 1989) as part of their general efforts to make the world a more friendly place for private capital. The neoliberal era, which has seen the 'commodification of everything', including social services, has created widespread mass cynicism towards political authorities who are seen to preach democracy but who effectively reduce deliberative space, not least over more transformative social policy. In the old industrialized economies of the developed world, many justifiably feel 'left behind', with old skilled jobs and guaranteed pensions a thing of the past. Communities have been fundamentally transformed by the exodus of young people or the inflow of migrants willing to work in low-paying service jobs or high-paying jobs requiring skills that schools in these down trodden communities no longer produce.

In the developing world, it is not surprising that it is in middle-income countries like Brazil and the Philippines that right populists have gained power. These countries are the most integrated in the global economy and most have seen sharp increases in inequality in the neoliberal era. Indian Prime Minister Narenda Modi's BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), which gained power in 2014 and was re-elected with an even bigger majority in 2019, carries all the traits of right populist politics. The disturbing increase in xenophobic attacks on migrant workers in South Africa may be an indication of its vulnerability to the emergence of a similar sort of politics. People are justifiably enraged by elites who profited from the opportunities offered by globalization, but have failed to pursue transformative development in their own countries. In both developed and developing countries, the legacies of neoliberalism have created a fertile terrain for the rise of right populist politics.

The right populist leaders and organizations who have gained power in some of the world's most important countries, and those who are contesting for state power in many others, threaten to undermine the slim gains that were made under phase two neoliberalism through the recasting of social policy in terms of market-accommodating social rights. Where the new governments led by the right populists maintain targeted social policy programmes, they are already being transformed to allow discrimination against, or exclusion of, ethnic, religious, immigrant and migrant minorities. Still worse, the legitimation of vitriolic discourses of ethnic hatred, racism and misogyny from the 'bully pulpits' of the state not only distract people's attention from the economic interests that lie behind these new right populists, but also exacerbates divisions in society that make future mobilization in favour of progressive social policy much more difficult.

The disturbing commonalities between the cases discussed in this article are still only a foretaste of the kind of political movement that some, like the American ideologue of the right Steve Bannon (2014), are actively attempting to build. While Bannon played an instrumental role in getting Trump into the White House (Wolff, 2018), since he left he has been actively networking, particularly in Europe, to consolidate both intellectual networks and organizational ties that could promote a more coherent and dangerous 'authoritarian national radicalism' of the type German sociologist, Wilhem Heitmeyer (2019), has recently discussed. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, the Rassemblement National led by Marine Le Pen in France and Mateo Salvini's Lega in Italy have all gained influence in recent years and may be major contenders for political power in the not-too-distant future.

Right populists have not gone unchallenged by the left as evidenced in the election campaigns in the United States and the United Kingdom. The release of Lula da Silva on appeal may see the galvanization of a fight-back by the left in Brazil. Future political contests are likely to be fought at least in part on the grounds of alternative visions of social policy. At the moment, however, the lines of confrontation in many polities appear to be between

the neoliberal right and the challenge of right populist politics, leaving those who aspire to develop more progressive social policy between a rock and a hard place.

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