

NEOLIBERALIZATION AND THE PRESS: FRAMINGS OF THE COUNTER-REFORMS UNDER THE UMA PONTE PARA O FUTURO REGIME

*Diego FRAGA**

ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the role of the Brazilian press in the neoliberalization process during the hegemony of the “A Bridge to the Future” regime, focusing on the legitimization of the labor (2017) and pension (2019) reforms. It investigates how the country’s main newspapers—Folha de S. Paulo, O Estado de S. Paulo, and O Globo—acted as hegemonic apparatuses in the construction of consensus favorable to the counter-reforms. Through framing analysis and the voices consulted as sources of discursive authority, the study highlights the partiality of key segments of the press in consolidating a neoliberal agenda centered on austerity and the flexibilization of rights. It is argued that the analyzed segments of the press contributed to the naturalization of the reforms and the demobilization of social resistance, playing their part in sustaining the hegemonic neoliberal project in contemporary Brazil.

KEYWORDS: Press. Neoliberalism. Hegemony. Labor Reform. Pension Reform.

1. Introduction

The general objective of this work is to analyze the role of the Brazilian press in the neoliberalization process during the hegemony of the “A Bridge to the Future” regime, with emphasis on the political and social contexts that marked the approval of the labor and pension reforms. It seeks to understand how the media, as opinion shapers and mediators of public discourse, acted in the face of the consolidation of this new regime, especially regarding the construction of consensus around the so-called counter-reforms.

* Doctor of Sociology and Anthropology. Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0237-022X>. diegfraga@gmail.com.

This analysis aims to investigate how the positions of the press, as well as those of voices consulted by it, contributed to the legitimization of legislative changes that addressed the demands of certain classes or class fractions. Understanding the press not as a neutral space for information, but as a field of symbolic and political disputes, whose editorial and discursive practices are permeated by diverse interests and ideological struggle, the research sought to:

- 1) Define the “A Bridge to the Future” regime and the context of the counter-reforms, identifying them as neoliberal inflection points in Brazilian politics, marked by the dismantling of social rights and the consolidation of an economic agenda focused on austerity and the flexibilization of labor and social security guarantees;
- 2) To establish the analytical framework for the study of the press, through content analysis focusing on the framings promoted by the media, especially in the mobilization of different types of voices as sources of discursive authority that confer legitimacy to reforms and reinforce certain interpretations about their necessity and urgency.

Based on Entman (1993), framing is understood as the selection of aspects of reality that are highlighted and emphasized in a communicative text, in order to promote a particular definition of a problem, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation. As Vimieiro and Dantas (2009, p. 4) state, the act of highlighting something refers to “making a part of the information more notable, significant, or memorable for the audience.” In this work, according to Porto (2004), the focus was on interpretative framing, those constructed by various social actors, which offer specific meanings about events and themes, functioning relatively autonomously in relation to the actions of journalists.

- 3) Analyze the framing of the labor and social security counter-reforms (RT 2017 and RP 2019) present in a specific segment of the Brazilian press, more specifically the reference print journalism¹ (Zamin, 2014), represented by three of the country’s main newspapers: Folha de S. Paulo (FSP), O Estado de S. Paulo (OESP) and O Globo (OG).

This study hypothesizes that the segments of the press studied acted as hegemonic apparatuses in favor of the “A Bridge to the Future” regime, decisively contributing to the social acceptance of labor and pension reforms. This action

¹ Zamin (2014) analyzes the concept of “reference journalism,” which can be defined as that which serves as a reference for the opinion-forming elite and for the media—regarding a segment of the public world.

occurred through the predominant adoption of framings favorable to the measures and the recurrent use of experts who reinforced pro-reform arguments, often to the detriment of critical or alternative positions. Thus, the aim is to demonstrate how media discourse played a central role in constructing a symbolic environment conducive to the naturalization of counter-reforms and the demobilization of social resistance.

The article is divided into six sections, including this introduction. The second section analyzes the role of the press as an ideological apparatus, primarily from a Marxist and Gramscian approach. The third section combines the Gramscian approach with a Marxist interpretation of Karl Polanyi's work, discussing the role of neoliberal hegemony and the process of neoliberalization as socially ingrained. Next, the article focuses on the methodological aspects of the research conducted on the highlighted newspapers. The fifth section presents the empirical data, accompanied by reflections on what they represent. The final section analyzes the overall picture presented in the data in light of the theoretical approach employed.

It is important to point out that the data and reflections presented here are excerpts of the results from the research undertaken in the doctoral thesis defended by the author (Fraga, 2025) in the Postgraduate Program in Sociology and Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (PPGSA/UFRJ), funded by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

2. The press as an ideological apparatus

In his reflections, the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (2017) emphasizes the importance of studying the organization of what he called the “ideological structure of a dominant class,” referring to the set of ideas, beliefs, values, and representations that underpin hegemonic thought in society, legitimizing the prevailing social order. As the author points out, this is an analysis of the material structure that acts in the maintenance, defense, and expansion of a hegemonic theoretical or ideological front. For the thinker, the publishing sector constitutes the most significant and dynamic part of this front, encompassing publishers, political newspapers, scientific and literary journals, periodicals, and other publications available at the time. Thus, all these editorial instruments that exert influence—directly or indirectly—on public opinion are part of this ideological structure.

Although Gramsci often uses the concept of the ideological structure of the dominant class as equivalent to the notion of the apparatus of hegemony (Hoeveler, 2019), Buci-Glucksmann (1979) establishes a distinction between the terms. According to this perspective, the hegemonic apparatus confers greater precision to the concept of hegemony, expanding it beyond the cultural sphere and also incor-

porating the political dimension. In this way, the unification of hegemony (cultural and political) occurs within an apparatus linked to the class that is structured through the mediation of various subsystems, such as the educational (schools, universities, etc.), the cultural (museums, libraries, etc.), the informational (press), among others (Buci-Glucksmann, 1979).

Sources (2010, pp. 133–134) defines the apparatuses of hegemony as:

[...] the set of elements that structure civil society, comprising associative instances formally separate from companies and state institutions, but which present themselves in multiple forms of voluntary association. Clubs, parties, newspapers, magazines, churches, and various entities emerge and reconfigure themselves in response to the increasing complexity of capitalist urban life and the challenges arising from it. Although not homogeneous in their composition, these apparatuses often appear distanced from the economic and political organization of social life. Even so, many parties and media outlets – generally aligned with specific class segments – tend to conceal these links, presenting themselves as representatives of “national unity” or as defenders of a supposed informational neutrality. However, all these organisms, ultimately, relate to forms of economic (infrastructure) and political (State) production, even if their actions are predominantly manifested in the cultural field.

In this way, it is possible to understand the media as a whole—and the press, in particular—as instruments of hegemony, with emphasis on their large commercial corporations. Fonseca (2011), when analyzing the newspapers *O Globo*, *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *Jornal do Brasil* in the 1980s, had already reached this conclusion when defining media as

[...] the complex of communication media that involves message and reception, in diverse forms, whose manipulation of symbolic elements is its central characteristic (Eagleton, 1991) – represents a form of power that, in “mass” societies, has extremely significant roles, such as: influencing the formation of public and governmental agendas; mediating social relations between distinct groups (Capelato, 1988); influencing the opinion of countless people on specific topics; participating in political disputes, in a broad sense (defending or vetoing a cause, for example) and a strict sense (supporting governments, parties, or candidates); and acting as “ideological apparatuses” capable of organizing interests. Regarding these, in certain circumstances they act as “political parties” or “collective and organic intellectuals” of specific groups (Coutinho, 1994). These roles are hidden under the motto of the “duty to inform,” which is supposedly “neutral,” “independent,” “non-partisan,” and “non-ideological,” characteristics invariably

claimed by media outlets when portraying their actions in a self-serving manner (FONSECA, 2011, pp. 41-42).

Considering journalism as an intellectual activity (Traquina, 2012), it is possible to affirm that, by informing, interpreting, and attributing meaning to events in different spheres of social life—including those of an economic nature (Guilbert, 2020)—the press plays a central role in the construction and perpetuation of the hegemony of a class or class fraction over subordinate social groups in capitalism. And this also occurs in the current period in which so-called neoliberalism is the hegemonic ideology.

3. Ideology and (dis)uprooting: the hegemony of neoliberalization

According to Gramsci (1999), ideologies represent a common and indispensable element of consciousness and knowledge. Being historically necessary, they “organize” the masses and provide the space in which individuals become aware of their position and wage their struggles. From this perspective, Hall (1986) defines ideology as a set of languages, concepts, categories, and systems of representation used by different social classes and groups to interpret and make sense of how society functions.

Thus, ideologies considered organic are those that seek to spread throughout society, promoting a new national-popular will in favor of a great historical transformation. They act on common sense and seek to systematize the consciousness of the masses. In this context, ideology is directly linked to the way in which certain ideas gain popular support and become a material force (Hall, 1988). The ideological dispute corresponds to the struggle for hegemony, for the pursuit of mass consent. Hegemony is not restricted to the field of ideas, as it depends on the dominance of a social class over economic activity. However, it also cannot be reduced to economics. It is a phenomenon that transcends the immediate economic interests of a class and must incorporate the demands of subordinate groups, becoming a broader social project (Hall, 1988).

3.1. Embedded neoliberalism

Regarding neoliberalism more specifically, Venugopal (2015) states that there are two standard analytical approaches in the literature on the subject. The first conceives of it as a doctrine elaborated by its main thinkers, whose trajectory is traced through the reading and interpretation of canonical texts, paying attention to the origin of the ideas, the context of their emergence, and the biographies of their formulators.

The second approach, in turn, focuses on identifying “actually existing neoliberalism,” seeking to delineate its spheres of operation and explain its concrete dynamics. From this perspective, neoliberalism—understood as an ideological matrix and justification for projects of restructuring the State and society—does not present itself in a “pure” or abstract form, but rather through partial, polycentric, and plural manifestations. As Peck, Brenner, and Theodore (2018) point out, its reproduction is marked by friction, contradictions, polymorphisms, and geographical inequalities, not only due to political resistance, but because volatile hybridity is constitutive of its very existence. Thus, this approach proposes a processual reading of neoliberalization, which recognizes the diversity of forms assumed by neoliberalism and its dynamics of combined, unequal, and mutually conditioning development.

In this sense, neoliberalism as an ideological project would be in constant struggle to maintain its hegemony, even in the face of failures, crises, and resistance. This type of approach understands “neoliberalization” as a process and is not based on conceptions such as that of a regime, for example, which would be determined in time and space.

Neoliberalism defies any explanation in terms of fixed coordinates. On the contrary, it denotes a problematic space, along with a spirit of complementary market regulation. In the most abstract terms, one could say that neoliberalization refers to a contradictory process of market-like dominance, negotiated primarily within the boundaries of the state and occupying the ideological space defined by a (broadly) sympathetic critique of 19th-century laissez-faire and deep antipathies for collectivist, planned, and socialized modes of government, especially those associated with Keynesianism and developmentalism (Peck, 2010, p. 20).

Thus, neoliberalization is configured as a continuous process of institutional transformation, marked both by the destruction and reconstruction of institutional architectures, as well as the superimposition of these onto previously existing structures. Conceiving of neoliberalism as a process, as argued by Cahill (2014), allows us to understand the distance between the implemented neoliberal policies and the utopian discourses of neoliberal theorists, as well as the unequal character of this transformation—an aspect powerfully illustrated by the study of Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002) on the cases of Chile, France, Great Britain, and Mexico.

As Peck (2010) argues, it is understood that the disputes between liberalization and regulation of markets in neoliberalization processes are rooted in class struggle and the ideological disputes that accompany it. In this sense, existing neoliberalism can be interpreted in light of the embedding/disembedding dichotomy, according to the work of Karl Polanyi (2021) and its theoretical developments.

Cahill (2014), drawing on Block's (2021) reading of Polanyi, proposes that the economy is always rooted in society and criticizes the interpretation that associates neoliberalism with a supposed disembedding, since such a reading considers that the retraction of the State in the economy would indicate a structural distancing, and that its return would mark the end of neoliberalism. For Cahill, this view ignores the fact that neoliberalization, as Peck, Brenner, and Theodore (2018) also point out, is a continuous and contradictory process of institutional restructuring, in which neoliberalism does not entirely replace previous formations, but rather overlaps them, reconstructing and adapting existing institutions. This processual perspective also helps to understand the gap between the utopian discourses of neoliberal theorists and the policies actually implemented, as well as the uneven and geographically specific nature of neoliberal advancement, as exemplified by Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002) when analyzing the cases of Chile, France, Great Britain, and Mexico.

In this context, Cahill (2014) argues that neoliberalism is always rooted in three fundamental social structures: class relations, institutions, and ideology. Firstly, it is linked to the defeat of the Western left since the 1970s, in what Streeck (2018) calls the Neoliberal Revolution. Secondly, it reveals itself to be rooted in institutions, especially the State, which, far from withdrawing from the economy, plays a central role in the implementation and maintenance of neoliberal logic, by reformulating its actions based on criteria of market justice, to the detriment of social justice (Streeck, 2018). Finally, neoliberalism finds its basis in ideology, whose massive dissemination, as Dardot and Laval (2016) point out, consolidated a new rationality that imposed itself as common sense among political elites. This ideological hegemony, reinforced by the indoctrination promoted by conventional economic theory (Streeck, 2018), not only shapes the discourses of parties that defend capital, but also of sectors traditionally linked to the defense of workers (Fraser, 2020), profoundly influencing subjectivities and limiting worldviews, in a process that Fisher (2020) calls "capitalist realism".

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3.2. The "A Bridge to the Future" Regime

The document "A Bridge to the Future" (Ulysses Guimarães Foundation, 2015) represented the political program of the sectors that supported the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the governments of Michel Temer and, in part, Jair Bolsonaro. This heterogeneous coalition, described by Pinho (2021) as the "epis-

temic community of fiscal austerity,” includes everything from the large corporate media to businessmen from the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), orthodox economists, right-wing parties, and liberal movements such as the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and Vem Pra Rua. The text starts from the diagnosis of a deep fiscal crisis, which would require a “permanent adjustment,” advocating measures such as the counter-reform of social security, the end of constitutional earmarking of social spending, a fully mandatory budget, flexibilization of labor laws, and a policy of permanent austerity. These proposals clearly express the neoliberal agenda that would gain political strength in the following years.

The publication of “A Bridge to the Future” became a symbol of the ideological shift in the Brazilian state, where the process of neoliberalization decisively supplanted disputes surrounding a developmentalist project. In the context of the institutional crisis caused by the economic slowdown and Operation Lava Jato, there was what Pinto et al. (2019) called a “war of all against all” between factions of the dominant classes. Even so, the document managed to offer a common programmatic basis, providing temporary cohesion to these groups, which organized themselves around an agenda that definitively broke with the principles of de-commodification of the 1988 Constitution. While the Workers’ Party governments coexisted with ambivalences in this respect (Lavinas; Gentil, 2018), these contradictions dissipated with the adoption of policies such as the Spending Cap and the labor and pension counter-reforms, consolidating the neoliberal offensive.

The Michel Temer government (2016–2018) focused on consolidating an agenda of fiscal austerity and counter-reforms, arguing that it would restore market confidence and boost economic growth. A symbolic and institutional milestone of this shift was Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016, known as the “Spending Cap,” which froze public spending for twenty years, imposing severe limitations on the financing of social policies—by 2019, the Unified Health System (SUS) and education had accumulated losses of R\$ 20 billion and R\$ 32.6 billion, respectively (National Health Council, 2020; Pellanda, 2020). In the labor field, the government implemented two significant reforms: the Outsourcing Law (No. 13,429/2017) and the Labor Reform (No. 13,467/2017), which profoundly flexibilized labor relations by allowing, for example, the so-called prevalence of negotiated agreements over legislation and the institutionalization of intermittent work. These measures were supported by arguments stemming from neoclassical economic theory, which sees wages as an adjustment variable to balance supply and demand in the labor market, even in the face of empirical evidence pointing to the persistence of unemployment due to uncertainty and the contraction of investments.

Despite promises of modernization and increased competitiveness, the 2017 Labor Reform deepened labor precariousness and limited the role of the Labor Courts, weakening the legal protection of workers and union activity. The process of

re-commodification of labor was intensified, especially with the creation of extremely flexible contractual forms, such as intermittent work, where there is no guarantee of income or job security (Filgueiras; Bispo; Coutinho, 2018). Furthermore, even with the advancement of these reforms, economic indicators remained stagnant: there was an increase in informality and underutilization of labor, demonstrating that legal changes, in isolation, do not generate dynamism in the labor market (Colombi; Krein, 2022).

Even during the Temer administration, there was an attempt to advance a pension reform through Constitutional Amendment Proposal 287/2016, which included measures such as ending retirement based on years of contribution and increasing the minimum retirement age from 15 to 25 years. However, the “Joesley Day” scandal and the president’s low popularity prevented its approval (Reis, 2020). Even so, this initiative already anticipated the direction that would be consolidated in the Bolsonaro government.

During Jair Bolsonaro’s administration, Constitutional Amendment Proposal 06/2019 was presented, marking one of the most profound structural reforms to Social Security in Brazil. The proposal, drafted under the strong influence of Economy Minister Paulo Guedes and backed by the interests of the financial market (Motta, 2021; Pinto et al., 2019), aimed to replace the pay-as-you-go system with an individual capitalization model. In this system, each worker would contribute to their own account, without guarantees regarding the value of their future retirement pension, depending on the profitability of investment funds (Pacheco Filho; Winckler, 2004).

Although this radical change was rejected by Congress (Dieese, 2019), the essence of the proposal reflected a transition from a defined benefit system, in which the amount to be received is known, to a defined contribution model, in which the benefit amount is uncertain and transferred to the individual’s risk (Lavinas; Cordilha, 2019). Even without capitalization, the approved reform imposed severe changes. The minimum retirement age was set at 65 for men and 62 for women, with a minimum contribution period of 20 years, eliminating retirement based solely on years of contribution. The rules for rural retirement became more stringent, and the calculation of benefits began to consider all contributions made since July 1994, instead of the 80% highest, resulting in reductions in the value of benefits (Brazil, 2024).

For public sector employees, the reform mandated the creation of supplementary pension schemes with defined contributions, consolidating the logic of financializing social security. Even with occasional setbacks, the essence of the counter-reform was maintained: reduction of public spending, decreased social protection, and deepening of inequalities (Fleury, 2019). The narrative used to justify the 2019 pension reform was anchored in arguments typical of neoliberal discourse, such as the supposed social security deficit, often supported by partial data and

biased projections (Drummond, 2019; Fagnani, 2019, 2021). Capitalization, even though not approved, was included in the debate as an “inevitable” alternative, disregarding its failures in other countries and the risks of widening inequalities in Brazil (Lavinas; Cordilha, 2019). The 2019 counter-reform, therefore, was not merely a technical restructuring of the pension system, but the consolidation of a political project to weaken social security, favoring the interests of capital at the expense of solidarity and broad social protection.

If neoliberalization is interpreted as a process, this specific moment in history can be considered as the construction of the hegemony of the regime proposed in “A Bridge to the Future.” In other words, the ongoing neoliberalization process was anchored in the premises of this document, whose proposals were, at least in part, implemented. This agenda found open channels in segments of the Brazilian press for promoting consent and social persuasion. These segments presented themselves, as will be demonstrated later in the cases of the labor and social security counter-reforms, as consistent instruments in the ideological struggle.

4. Methodological aspects

With regard to journalistic genres, the focus was primarily on opinion journalism—which, as outlined by Melo (1994), encompasses editorials, commentaries, articles, reviews, columns, and chronicles—and also on informative content, provided it featured the participation of experts, intellectuals, or representatives of interest groups, such as unions, social movements, and business sectors, and contained opinions on labor issues and/or labor reform, and on social security issues and/or social security reform. An additional criterion adopted was the publication of the material in the print version of the newspapers, since the data collection was carried out from their digital platforms.

The data collection was carried out using the search tools of the websites of the newspapers Folha de S. Paulo (FSP), O Globo (OG) and O Estado de S. Paulo (OESP), using the term “labor reform” with a time frame of 2017, and “pension reform” for the year 2019. In total, 1,280 texts were gathered—including articles, features, and interviews—that met the established criteria, with 362 relating to the 2017 Labor Reform and 918 to the 2019 Pension Reform.

It is relevant to note that the search mechanisms employed by each of the three publications present significant differences in both the quantity and quality of the material retrieved. In this sense, OESP stood out for offering the greatest number of results, which is mainly explained by the fact that its search system does not allow for the distinction between content published in the print edition and that exclusive to the digital medium.

The analysis sought to identify the frameworks that were both favorable and critical of the labor and social security counter-reforms, as well as the issues associated with them. The categorization of the frameworks occurred in two stages: initially, regarding the position on the counter-reforms, being classified as favorable or unfavorable (excluding neutral positions). A single article or piece may contain multiple frameworks—including contradictory ones—especially when it presents different experts or points of view. The smallest unit considered was the sentence, and the largest, the text as a whole, also allowing for the existence of frameworks composed of paragraphs or intermediate sections. The same framework may appear more than once in the same text, and is therefore counted repeatedly. The analysis was conducted using NVivo software (release 1.3).

Among the main voices heard by newspapers, economists, businesspeople, business associations, jurists, lawyers, journalists, trade unionists, social movement activists, and members of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) stand out. Other specialists such as sociologists, anthropologists, statisticians, social workers, etc., had a diminished presence. The identification of these voices was done inductively, based on the analysis of the raw data from the material collected in the newspapers, resulting in 312 in RT 2017 and 503 in RP 2019. In both cases, economists, jurists, lawyers, representatives of the business community and business associations accounted for more than 70% of the voices, indicating the types of voices privileged in these contexts, namely, a certain type of specialist (academic economists and legal professionals) and representatives of capital (businesspeople, business associations, and economists linked to the financial market).

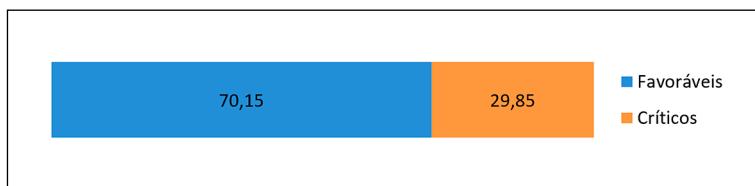
The fact that these voices were given prominence in newspapers meant that certain positions predominated, since voices linked to the business sector defended their own class interests in labor and social security issues, and economists—mostly linked to the financial market or with an orthodox view of the economy—also defended class positions and/or economic views adhering to neoliberalism. A more in-depth analysis of these voices can be found in Author (Year).

5. Labor and social security counter-reforms in the press

Thus, specifically addressing the coverage of the 2017 Counter-Reform, a total of 583 framings were identified, the majority of which were favorable to the 2017 Counter-Reform, accounting for 70.15% of occurrences, while critical framings represented only 29.85%. It is important to highlight, however, that a large part of the criticism is not directly aimed at the Counter-Reform itself, but rather at specific aspects of it or the absence of a broader public debate, as well as the lack of proposed alternatives, which prevents a clear reading of direct opposition. Graph 1

illustrates this predominance of voices favorable or partially favorable to the 2017 Counter-Reform, suggesting, at first glance, a consensus among the experts and other social actors interviewed by the newspapers.

Graph 1: Favorable and critical RT frameworks 2017 (%) (n = 583)



Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the favorable interpretations of RT 2017, one example is the journalist Hélio Gaspari, who in the FSP of July 2, 2017—when then-President Michel Temer indicated that he might agree to maintain the union tax—pointed to the supposed impact of this tax on the organization of workers.

According to the labor reform project, the old union tax, instituted in 1937, will be abolished. This tax was a takeover of one day's salary from formally employed workers, intended to fatten the machine of union monopoly in which a caste of union stooges is embedded. The reform abolished the confiscatory nature of this “contribution.” If a citizen wants to contribute to the union, they will do so of their own free will (Gaspari, 2017).

Another example of a favorable framing of RT 2017 is that produced by Santander's chief economist, Maurício Molan, in the June 20, 2017 edition of the newspaper OG, in which he states that RT:

It has two relevant effects on the labor market. The first is to accelerate the cycle, making the economy resume growth faster, which would have an impact on employment. In addition, it could have a structural effect, resulting solely from the labor reform. When you change the parameters, labor costs fall and generate an increase in the demand for labor (Corrêa, 2017).

Thus, while one voice criticizes the union tax, signaling support for its elimination, another exposes supposed positive effects of the counter-reform on the economy as a whole, suggesting economic growth and job creation.

Among the critical frameworks, it is possible to highlight, for example, the statement by lawyer and professor of Labor Law at PUC-SP, Carla Romar, in an

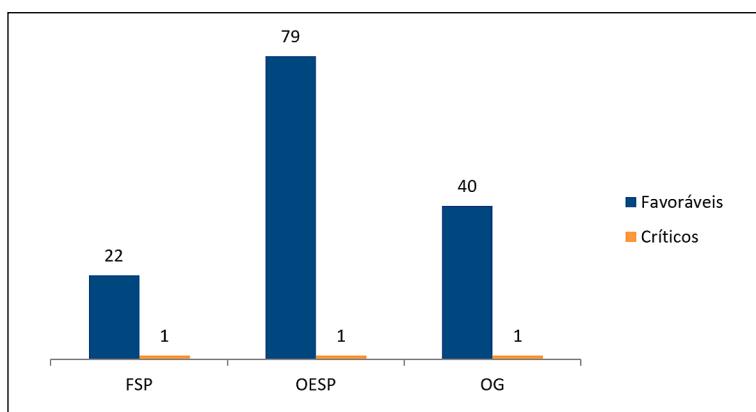
article published in FSP on April 27, 2017 (Perrin, 2017), in which she stated that the counter-reform restricted the role of the Labor Court as a supervisor of negotiations between workers and employers, guiding its actions “by the principle of minimal intervention in the autonomy of collective will.”

In an example of critical framing that cannot necessarily be considered unfavorable, the president of the Commercial Association of Paraná (ACP), Glaucio Geara, in OESP on October 9, 2017, comments that, among the businesspeople he spoke with, there was a concern about the increase in legal uncertainty. And he states:

“Everyone is cautious. I believe that [with the Reform] it will be good for both the employer and the employee, but we need to see how these first months of implementation will go,” he said. “If you consult twenty lawyers today, you will find 20 different positions” (OSAKABE, 2017).

One of the most revealing pieces of data concerns the position taken by the newspapers analyzed in relation to RT 2017, expressed through their editorials—understood, according to Fonseca (2005), as representations of the ideological-editorial line and the official position of these media companies. Fifty-seven editorial framings were identified among the three newspapers, with *O Estado de S. Paulo* (OESP) standing out, followed by *O Globo* (OG) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP). The most significant aspect, however, as shown in Graph 2, is that none of these editorials presented a critical framing of the Labor Reform or any of its aspects, thus evidencing a univocal and favorable alignment on the part of the analyzed press.

Graph 2: Editorials and framing – RT 2017

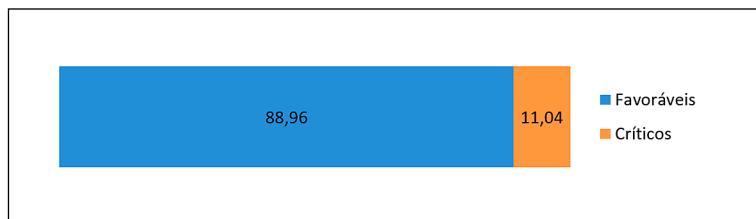


Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the 2019 RP (Reform of Public Policy), 1,132 framings were identified in the three newspapers analyzed, both favorable and critical. Among them, the vast majority—88.96% (1,007)—expressed support for the counter-reform, while only 11.04% (125) presented criticisms. Once again, since not all critical framings indicate direct opposition, the perception of a strong favorable alignment towards the 2019 RP in the pages of FSP, OESP, and OG gains strength.

Compared to the coverage of RT 2017, it is observed that support for the counter-reform agenda intensifies even further in the case of RP 2019. There was a 20 percentage point increase in favorable coverage, accompanied by a proportional reduction among critics, which demonstrates an even more significant backing from the print media for the pension reform proposal compared to the labor reform proposal.

Graph 3: Favorable and critical frameworks RP 2019 (n = 1,132)



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The economist and former Finance Minister Pedro Malan, in an article published in *OG* on June 16, 2019, offers an example of a favorable framing by stating that, among the challenges faced by the country at that time, the most urgent would be the implementation of pension reform, which, although not an end in itself, would be fundamental for the resumption of economic growth:

Of the challenges we face today, the most urgent is pension reform, which must be at least minimally robust now. Just as defeating hyperinflation was not an end in itself, but a condition for achieving other equally or even more important objectives. We are in a crisis that will be with us for a long time. We have grown, on average, 0.6% per year over the last eight years. The rest of the developing world, in those same eight years, grew at least 4.8%, 4.9%. This situation is now the most serious in our recent history (Almeida, et al., 2019).

Businessman Luciano Hang expressed his views in the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper on March 11, 2019, considering the Brazilian social security system prior to the counter-reform as a source of privilege, particularly for politicians and public officials. According to the businessman, the social security system:

It's a ticking time bomb. By 2022, there won't be any more money to pay for it. It's about reducing or ending the privileges of people who work little, earn a lot, and retire early.

The vast majority are the elite of the civil service and politicians. You and I, who are from the private sector, will retire with little. I'm not retired yet. But what about a governor, a congressman? (Cunha, 2019).

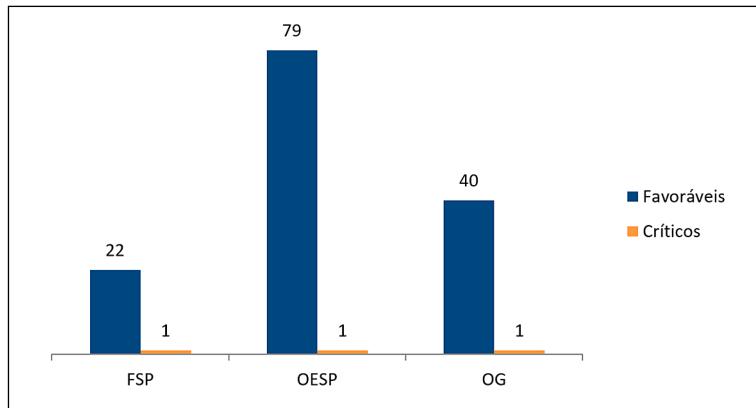
On the other hand, Roberto Dias, a professor of Constitutional Law at FGV-SP, in an article published in FSP on February 28, 2019, stated that he considers the proposed counter-reform a violation of an entrenched clause of the Constitution—provisions that cannot be modified by amendment—highlighting that one of them prohibits changes that imply the suppression of individual rights and guarantees. According to the professor, “the change removes a fundamental right of a worker, which is protection in a relationship where there is a certain vulnerability. Even if he is retired, the right must remain” (Brigatti, 2019).

Among examples of critical framing that is not necessarily unfavorable to the counter-reform, economist Paulo Tafner, in OG on July 14, 2019, revisiting the issue of social security as a privilege, stated that the 2019 Counter-Reform project failed to combat them, criticizing the proposal for its lack of radicalism. Thus, the 2019 Counter-Reform:

It significantly reduces [privileges], but doesn't eliminate them. Full benefits, for example, are a privilege; this doesn't exist in the rest of the world. The same goes for the different treatment of police officers and teachers. The reduction in the minimum retirement age for federal teachers and police officers, as well as maintaining the contribution period for age-based retirement at 15 years (in the original text it would be 20 years), are other points that reduced the fiscal impact of the reform (Tondo; Costa, 2019).

Regarding the opinions expressed by the three newspapers analyzed, the stance taken was almost entirely favorable to the 2019 Pension Reform, with the curious exception of a single critical framing identified in each publication. Thus, of the 201 framings found in the editorials, a markedly favorable defense of the counter-reform is observed, reiterating the trend already seen in the case of the 2017 Labor Reform, in which the editorial alignment was also largely positive in relation to the (counter)reformist agenda.

Graph 4: Editorials and framing – PR 2019



Source: Own elaboration.

It is observed that the vast majority of the framing was favorable to the counter-reforms (graphs 1 and 3), with greater emphasis in the case of RP 2019 compared to RT 2017. When comparing this scenario with the positioning of the editorials of the three newspapers (graphs 2 and 4), an almost coincidence is perceived, indicating that the media outlets prioritized voices aligned with their own opinion. The coincidence is not total because there is some dissent among the voices, while the newspaper editorials demonstrated practically unanimous support for the reforms.

In the case of RT 2017, it is observed that the favorable arguments focused on highlighting the supposed benefits that would result from its approval. The most recurring arguments extolled what they considered the modernization of labor laws, the flexibilization of labor relations, and the consequent dynamism of union negotiations. Promises of economic growth and job creation were also widely disseminated, associated with the idea that the reform would remove legal obstacles that would hinder the dynamism of the market.

These justifications, although stemming from pessimistic diagnoses of the economic situation and the rigidity of current legislation, converge on a central point: the lives of Brazilian workers would improve with the implementation of RT 2017. The constructed narrative was based on the expectation of a virtuous cycle of development, driven by a more “free” and “modern” environment for capital and labor. In short, it was a bet on the efficiency of reforms as a structural solution.

In the case of the 2019 budget reform, the favorable frameworks took on a different nature. The prevailing rhetoric did not promise direct advances or gains, but rather emphasized the need for adjustments to ensure the sustainability of the system. The focus was on the existence of a serious fiscal crisis, and reform was

presented as essential to avoid the collapse of public finances. In this sense, austerity policies, typical of neoliberal thought, were defended as inevitable.

Beyond the fiscal argument, a strongly present line of reasoning was that the pension system, as it was institutionalized before the counter-reform, favored the reproduction of privileges and deepened social inequalities. In this discourse, the counter-reform appeared as an instrument for correcting distortions and promoting a supposed distributive justice. Although some voices mentioned possible positive effects on economic growth, these arguments were less frequent than in the case of the 2017 reform.

Despite the widespread predominance of perspectives favorable to the counter-reforms in the newspapers analyzed, it cannot be said that there was absolute uniformity. Dissenting voices were present, although in a clearly reduced proportion. When dissent existed, it occupied marginal spaces and did not manage to balance the debate.

6. Final considerations

Thus, a significant portion of the Brazilian press acted as a hegemonic apparatus in favor of the “A Bridge to the Future” regime and the labor and social security counter-reforms advocated by its defenders. An analysis of 1,280 texts in the newspapers FSP, OESP, and OG revealed a consistent pattern of editorial alignment among the newspapers with the largest national circulation in Brazil. It was found that the vast majority of voices consulted by the newspapers held positions favorable to the counter-reforms, as did the editorials published.

This convergence reveals the selective process of amplifying voices that corroborate these positions. Such alignment is not accidental: it expresses an editorial choice that privileges certain worldviews over others, thus limiting the diversity of perspectives in public debate. In this sense, considering that the neoliberalization process occurs in an environment of disputes and resistance, the side taken by the newspapers analyzed, as well as the voices consulted by them, becomes clear.

In the specific case of the 2017 reform, a discursive effort was observed aimed at constructing a positive image of the proposal, anchored in the promise of modernization and progress. The framing tended to reinforce an optimistic reading of the reform, with little or no attention to the negative social impacts. This narrative strategy contributed to naturalizing the counter-reformist project, diluting the social conflicts involved and presenting it as an inevitable step towards development.

On the other hand, the 2019 Social Security Reform was largely framed from a diagnosis of fiscal urgency, in which the rhetoric of austerity occupied the center of the debate, eclipsing even alternative proposals for the institutional reconstruction

of social security. By treating the counter-reform as a merely technical and rational remedy for a supposed crisis, the framing not only depoliticized the issue, but also sought to create a consensus around the inevitability of the measures adopted.

The marginal presence of dissenting voices, while registering some discursive diversity, was insufficient to characterize a pluralistic or balanced debate. The concentration of favorable framings, coupled with the near alignment of editorials, signals an asymmetrical coverage and, to some extent, one compromised by a specific project. It is pertinent to question whether newspapers such as FSP, OESP, and OG, which are among those with the greatest national reach, should not adopt editorial criteria that guarantee greater plurality. By prioritizing views aligned with their editorial line, these media outlets limit the space for opposing viewpoints and, consequently, reduce the possibility for the public to have access to more democratic and representative coverage of the diversity of positions that permeate Brazilian society.

The fact is that, in order to create consensus on a process of institutional change that interests the classes or class fractions adhering to neoliberalism, the segment of the press studied here acted in the field of ideology and in reinforcing hegemony, demonstrating the entrenchment of this neoliberalization process in the three fundamental social structures analyzed by Cahill (2014). Given this, it is necessary to discuss the role of the mainstream press in mediating public debate and its responsibility in guaranteeing equitable space for the multiplicity of positions that address issues of profound social impact, such as the counter-reforms analyzed in this study.

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