

The 2013 protests and the emergence of a new right in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the protests that occurred in June 2013 in Brazil and their impact on the country's political landscape. Initially, the protests were contextualized within a backdrop of social inequalities, corruption, and widespread dissatisfaction with the current political system. The Free Fare Movement (MPL) emerged as a symbol of this mobilization, driven by popular outrage and decentralized organization facilitated by social media. The narrative of a new right gained prominence, characterized by a rejection of traditional politics and corruption. The research aimed to review existing literature on these events, investigating triggering factors, conducting an analysis of anti-political discourse, and assessing implications for Brazilian democracy. Through a methodology that included academic sources, scientific articles, and political analyses, the aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the political dynamics that shaped contemporary Brazil, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities for the country's future.

Keywords: 2013 Protests in Brazil, New Right, Anti-political Discourse, 2016 Coup, Bolsonarismo.

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INTRODUCTION

The demonstrations of June 2013 were a phenomenon that erupted in a Brazil immersed in a social and political effervescence. Although the country experienced a period of economic growth driven by the rise of the middle class and the social programs implemented during the Workers' Party (PT) governments, this apparent prosperity was contrasted by deep social inequalities, endemic corruption, and structural flaws in the political system and public services. The readjustment of public transport fares, especially in São Paulo, acted as the trigger that started the demonstrations, which were rooted in a dissatisfaction accumulated over time, fueled by the high cost of living, the precariousness of public services, widespread corruption and the perception of negligence of the rulers in relation to the demands of the population (Schreiber, 2013).

These demonstrations have become a cauldron of indignation and frustration, bringing together a multiplicity of voices and demands. Young people, workers, students, activists and various sectors of Brazilian society united in the streets to demand profound changes in the political system and public policies. The MPL, initially responsible for calling for the protests in São Paulo, quickly became a symbol of this mobilization, inspiring demonstrations across the country. The spontaneous and decentralized nature of these protests was highlighted, highlighting the key role of social media in organizing and mobilizing participants. Digital platforms have enabled the rapid dissemination of information and the efficient coordination of activities across multiple locations. This horizontal and democratic aspect of the demonstrations played a significant role in their scope and impact, challenging established power structures and facilitating the emergence of new modalities of political participation and civic engagement (Mello, 2023).

In the context of these protests, different narratives and discourses emerged that sought to give meaning and direction to the demonstrations. One of these narratives was the emergence of a new right in Brazil, characterized by the repudiation of traditional politics, left-wing parties, and corruption. This phenomenon reflected not only discontent with the PT government, but also a broader rejection of established political institutions and a search for alternatives outside the conventional political spectrum (Scherer-Warren, 2014). It is in this context of political and social effervescence that the relevance of understanding the 2013 demonstrations and their impact on the emergence of a new right in Brazil is inserted.

Given this scenario, some questions arise: what was the real impact of the 2013 demonstrations on the configuration of the Brazilian political scenario, especially with regard to the emergence of a new right in the country? The anti-politics, anti-party, and anti-left discourse that rose to prominence during these events had profound implications for the future of Brazilian democracy, culminating in the consolidation of the coup in 2016. Without the coup, would the pension and labor reforms have been approved?



Understanding these events and their consequences is essential to contextualize the current Brazilian political landscape. The emergence of a new right, the rise of Bolsonaroism, and the collapse of the PSDB in São Paulo are phenomena that have deep roots in the 2013 demonstrations. Understanding the role of these events in transforming the Brazilian political spectrum is crucial to understanding the power dynamics and ideological disputes that have shaped the country in recent decades.

Thus, the objective of this article is to conduct a comprehensive literature review on the 2013 demonstrations and their implications for the Brazilian political scenario. It is intended to investigate the factors that triggered these protests, analyze the anti-political discourse that emerged during these events and understand its repercussions for Brazilian democracy. In addition, it seeks to critically examine the role of the 2016 coup in the consolidation of this new right and its impact on subsequent political and economic reforms. Through this analysis, it is expected to contribute to the understanding of the complex political dynamics that have shaped contemporary Brazil and to reflect on the challenges and possibilities for the country's future.

CONTEXT OF THE 2013 DEMONSTRATIONS

To carry out this literature review, we used academic sources, scientific articles, news reports and political analyses available in academic databases, online libraries and digital platforms. The research was conducted using keywords related to the theme, such as "2013 demonstrations in Brazil", "new right", "anti-political discourse", "2016 coup", "bolsonarism", among others. The selected texts were critically analyzed to identify common trends, patterns, and conclusions in order to build a comprehensive narrative on the topic.

In the early 2000s, Brazil experienced a period of remarkable economic growth, driven by the rise of the middle class and the social policies implemented by the PT. Known as the "golden decade" of the Brazilian economy, this period witnessed significant progress in poverty reduction and consumption expansion. However, behind this scenario of prosperity, deep social inequalities persisted, resulting from decades of exclusion and state negligence (Speranza; Scheer, 2019).

While a portion of the population enjoyed the benefits of economic growth, millions of Brazilians faced precarious conditions, without adequate access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and transportation. The lack of investment in urban infrastructure, coupled with endemic corruption and mismanagement of public resources, contributed to perpetuating these inequalities and fueling growing popular dissatisfaction. The Brazilian political system also faced significant challenges of representativeness and legitimacy. Corruption scandals involving politicians from different parties were recurrent, undermining the population's trust in democratic institutions. The



lack of transparency and accountability generated disbelief and revolt, especially among young people and the most vulnerable sections of society (Moreno, 2013).

In this context, the PT government, despite its efforts to promote social inclusion and economic development, was the target of growing criticism. Sectors of the population questioned the effectiveness of the social policies implemented and denounced cases of corruption involving party members. The perception that popular demands were not being met by the rulers contributed to the accumulation of tensions and dissatisfactions that culminated in the demonstrations of June 2013 (Moreno, 2013).

At the same time, the advancement of digital technologies has provided a propitious scenario for the mobilization and coordination of demonstrations. Online platforms enabled the rapid dissemination of information and interaction between individuals located in different locations in the country. The MPL used them to call and organize protests against the increase in public transport fares in São Paulo. This strategic use of social media was essential to channel and amplify the indignation and discontent already present in Brazilian society, promoting a nationwide mobilization (Serra Junior; Rocha, 2013).

Therefore, the demonstrations of June 2013 did not arise in isolation, but as a result of years of accumulated dissatisfaction and pent-up demands. They represented a break with the political and social status quo, highlighting the contradictions and challenges faced by a democracy under construction. The context of economic growth and profound social transformations created the conditions for the outbreak of these protests, marking a turning point in Brazil's political history (Singer, 2013).

The diversity of voices and demands present in the demonstrations highlight the breadth of the protests and the multiplicity of demands that echoed in the streets. In addition to the specific issue of transport fares, demonstrators raised banners related to political corruption, excessive spending on mega sporting events, the precariousness of public services and police violence, among other issues. This variety of agendas reflected the complexity and depth of social dissatisfactions accumulated over time (Singer, 2013).

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW RIGHT IN BRAZIL

The New Right took advantage of this context of disillusionment and widespread disbelief in the political class, presenting itself as an alternative to the political system dominated by the PT. By vehemently criticizing the PT's corruption, mismanagement, and alleged ideological deviations, the New Right won popular support, especially among the middle class and conservatives in society. The emergence of social media as tools for mobilization and propaganda has played an essential role in spreading the ideas and values of the New Right. Digital influencers, bloggers, youtubers and



conservative politicians found in these platforms a space to disseminate anti-PT, anti-communist and nationalist discourses, garnering followers and sympathizers (Filho *et al.*, 2022).

Another relevant aspect for the emergence of the New Right was the economic crisis and the erosion of left-wing policies implemented by PT governments. The failure to manage the economy, marked by high unemployment, low economic growth and rising inflation, has contributed to undermining the population's confidence in state intervention policies. In addition, the increase in crime and the widespread perception of insecurity strengthened the conservative discourse, which argued in favor of a less interventionist state and more focused on public security and the fight against corruption. This unstable economic and social situation created an environment conducive to the emergence of political leaders and movements that opposed left-wing policies, seeking a new approach to the challenges faced by the country (Telles, 2016).

The political polarization that intensified in the years following the 2013 demonstrations also had a significant impact on strengthening the New Right. The clash between left and right has reached unprecedented levels, fueling a climate of division and confrontation in Brazilian society. This polarized scenario created an environment conducive to the emergence of political leaders and conservative movements that presented themselves as antipodes of what the PT government had been. The ideological clash became even more evident on social media and in the public sphere, where fiery speeches and heated debates drew the dividing lines between the different political camps. Thus, the New Right found fertile ground to expand its influence, capitalizing on the dissatisfaction of part of the population with left-wing policies and consolidating its position as a relevant political force on the national scene (Duarte, 2023).

The emergence of the New Right in Brazil was the result of a combination of factors, including popular dissatisfaction, the spread of ideas through social media, the economic crisis, and political polarization. This new configuration of the Brazilian political scenario brought with it significant changes in the country's dynamics, influencing both elections and public policies and public debate (Duarte, 2023).

IMPACT OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS ON THE BRAZILIAN POLITICAL SCENE

The impact of the 2013 demonstrations on the Brazilian political scene was profound and long-lasting, leaving marks that are still felt today. In the first place, the demonstrations showed a general dissatisfaction of the population with the political class and the established institutions. The clamor for structural changes in the political system and public services reverberated throughout the country, forcing a reassessment of government practices and power dynamics (Ferreira; Tavares Jr., 2016).



The 2013 demonstrations exerted a substantial influence on the electoral performance of traditional political parties in Brazil. The erosion of the PT's image, in particular, was remarkable, given that the party was in power at the time and was the target of intense criticism during the protests. The demonstrations revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with the PT administration, especially in relation to corruption, mismanagement and the lack of an effective response to popular demands. In the midst of this context of disillusionment with the established parties, more conservative and anti-system discourses emerged that conquered space in the political arena. Movements such as the liberal movement and Bolsonarism have emerged as alternatives to the traditional left, capitalizing on popular discontent and presenting themselves as defenders of conservative values, order, and security (Silva, 2021).

These new political leaders and right-wing movements, driven by the wave of dissatisfaction that followed the 2013 demonstrations, managed to attract support from a significant portion of the Brazilian population. His rise has been facilitated by the growing political polarization in the country, which has exacerbated ideological divisions and opened space for more radical and polarizing discourses. Thus, it is undeniable that the 2013 demonstrations left a lasting legacy in the Brazilian political scene, not only by exposing the failures of the PT government, but also by opening space for the emergence and consolidation of new right-wing political forces, which significantly shaped the national political landscape in subsequent years (Silva, 2021).

This growing polarization and distrust in politics convulsed the Brazilian political landscape, culminating in the institutional crisis that led to the impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. The impeachment was the result of a combination of factors, including popular pressure, accusations of fiscal irregularities, and the deterioration of political relations between the government and the National Congress (Cremonese, 2016).

The accusations of fiscal irregularities against the government of Dilma Rousseff refer mainly to the so-called "fiscal pedals". This term refers to accounting maneuvers carried out by the government to disguise the true state of public accounts. Basically, the government postponed the transfer of funds to public banks to fund social programs, simulating a fiscal balance that did not exist in practice. This practice, although not uncommon in public administration, was considered illegal by the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) and served as the basis for the accusations of crime of responsibility against Dilma Rousseff (Cremonese, 2016).

As for the deterioration of political relations between the government and the National Congress, this is largely due to Dilma Rousseff's difficulty in building a solid parliamentary support base. After the 2014 elections, in which Rousseff was re-elected, the political landscape became more fragmented, with the government struggling to gain support for its legislative proposals. This was compounded by the growing unpopularity of Dilma Rousseff, a result of the economic crisis and the



erosion of her image due to accusations of corruption and fiscal pedaling. As a result, the government faced difficulties in approving important measures in the National Congress, which generated an environment of political instability and uncertainty. The lack of dialogue and cooperation between the Executive and Legislative branches has deepened political divisions and weakened the country's governability, creating the conditions for the impeachment process to move forward. These events marked a turbulent period in Brazilian political history and had lasting impacts on the country's democratic institutions (Agência Senado, 2016).

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR BRAZIL

Speculation about whether the pension and labor reforms would have been approved without the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff is a complex issue and subject to different interpretations. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that the political attrition and instability generated by the impeachment process may have influenced the outcome of the votes on these reforms. The controversy surrounding the legitimacy of the government of Michel Temer, who assumed the presidency after the impeachment, may have affected the government's ability to garner support for its legislative proposals. On the other hand, it is important to consider that the social security and labor reforms were already under discussion before the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and were part of a broader economic agenda, defended by political and economic sectors favorable to austerity policies and economic liberalization. Therefore, even without impeachment, it is possible that these reforms would still be proposed and debated in the National Congress (Giovanaz, 2021).

The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff was a political event of great impact, which generated a series of consequences for the Brazilian political scenario. Without impeachment, it is plausible to assume that the political process would have followed a different course. The intensification of political polarization resulting from the impeachment created an environment of division and confrontation in the country, which would certainly have influenced the legislative dynamics around the pension and labor reforms. This exacerbated polarization has led to fierce partisan disputes, making it more difficult to establish political consensus around the reforms proposed by the Temer government. The lack of cohesion between the different political parties and the growing fragmentation of the National Congress have made it difficult to approve unpopular measures, such as economic reforms (Giovanaz, 2021).

In addition, the legitimacy of the Temer government has been questioned by many sectors of society, which may have undermined its ability to lead and negotiate with Congress. The Temer government has faced a number of challenges, including accusations of corruption and low popularity, which have undermined its authority and influence over lawmakers. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that, without the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the political process around



the pension and labor reforms would have been less troubled and more favorable to the approval of the measures proposed by the government. The expansion of political divergences resulting from the impeachment and partisan clashes, added to the contested legitimacy of the Temer government, were elements that probably had an impact on the outcome of the reform votes (Silva, 2019).

Despite the challenges faced by the Temer government, including the challenge to its legitimacy and resistance from some legislators, the reforms gradually advanced in the National Congress. With political negotiations and adjustments to the proposals, the government was able to obtain the necessary support for its approval. Social security and labor reforms were considered essential measures to address fiscal imbalances and modernize labor laws, seeking to stimulate the economy and improve the business environment in the country. Thus, even in the face of the political challenges and controversies that surrounded the Temer government, the reforms were implemented, leaving a significant legacy in Brazil's economic and political landscape (Silva, 2019).

Social security and labor reforms have had significant economic impacts in Brazil. The pension reform, for example, sought to balance public accounts by proposing changes in retirement rules, such as raising the minimum age and contribution time. This was key to curbing the growing pension deficit and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the system. The labor reform promoted changes in labor laws, making some aspects of labor relations more flexible, such as working hours, the bank of hours, and collective bargaining. These changes aimed to stimulate job creation and the competitiveness of companies, creating a more favorable environment for investment and economic growth (Castro; Birth; Santos, 2018).

However, the economic impacts of the reforms have been the subject of heated debate. While some argued that the measures contributed to the resumption of economic growth and the reduction of unemployment, others argued that they made working conditions more precarious and increased social inequality. Overall, the economic impacts of the social security and labor reforms were complex and multifaceted, affecting different sectors of the economy and social groups in different ways (Castro; Birth; Santos, 2018).

The beginning of the strengthening of Bolsonarism and the dismantling of the PSDB in São Paulo were events that took place in an environment of profound political transformations in Brazil. The strengthening of Bolsonarism can be attributed to the emergence of a new right in the country, driven by the social and political dissatisfactions evidenced by the 2013 demonstrations. Jair Bolsonaro, with his populist and conservative discourse, has won support especially among the middle and conservative sectors of society, capitalizing on the discontent with traditional political power, including the PSDB itself (Baldaia; Medeiros de Araújo; Araújo, 2021).

On the other hand, the dismantling of the PSDB in São Paulo, historically considered the party's stronghold, reflected a crisis of identity and leadership. The party has faced a decline in its



representation and influence, the result of a number of factors, including corruption scandals, a lack of leadership renewal, and difficulties in positioning itself in the face of the polarized political landscape. This weakening of the PSDB opened space for the strengthening of new political forces, such as Bolsonarism, which emerged as an alternative to the status quo (Braga; Franzon; Miranda, 2023).

These political transformations took place in the midst of a crisis of democracy in Brazil, marked by growing threats to democratic principles and republican institutions. Political polarization, the spread of anti-democratic discourse, and attacks on press freedom and civil rights were alarming signs of this crisis. However, the 2022 election represented a turning point in this scenario, offering the opportunity to repair the damage done to Brazilian democracy (Braga; Franzon; Miranda, 2023).

Bolsonaro's government, since his inauguration in 2019, has been marked by a right-wing and conservative political agenda, with liberal economic policies, controversial measures in the environmental area, a traditionalist ideological positioning, and an emphatic approach to public security. The construction and rise of a Bolsonarist moral community in the Brazilian political context is highlighted. This moral community is characterized by a belief in binary values that divide the world into good and evil, ethical and corrupt, nationalist and globalist, among others. This simplification of reality into managerial stereotypes is accompanied by an activation of intense collective feelings, such as affection, fear, and hatred, which strengthen the sense of belonging and stigmatize those who are different (Alonso, 2018).

Bolsonaro's election is portrayed as the victory of this moral community over its opponents, in particular the "petralhada", a pejorative term used to refer to PT supporters. Throughout the cycles of recent protests and political polarization, social movements, journalists, social scientists, and politicians have contributed to consolidating this moral community in the public sphere, delegitimizing professional politicians and reinforcing the idea of corruption as the greatest national problem. Bolsonaro, by presenting himself as an ordinary man and a member of this moral community, was able to channel the support of millions of Brazilians who felt represented by his nationalist, moralistic and anti-elitist rhetoric. His communication strategy, fragmentary and virulent, found an echo in the short forms of the internet and led him to electoral success, leading his followers to the Planalto Palace (Alonso, 2018).

Jessé Souza, a Brazilian sociologist, analyzes the 2013 demonstrations and their influence on the emergence of the new right in Brazil. He argues that these protests, initially legitimate, have been co-opted by conservative groups, who have used anti-corruption rhetoric to promote a right-wing political agenda. It highlights how these demonstrations have created an environment conducive to the rise of right-wing leaders, such as Jair Bolsonaro. His analysis offers insights into the social and political origins of the emergence of the new right in the country (Pires, 2018).



Lúcia Scalco, a respected historian, investigates the origins of Brazilian conservatism and how these historical roots influenced the 2013 demonstrations and the subsequent emergence of the new right in the country. Her work highlights the central role of conservatism in the structuring of Brazilian society and the formation of political identities. Scalco argues that Brazilian conservatism is multifaceted, reflecting a combination of cultural, religious, and political traditions that vary over time and space. She underscores how these conservative views have historically been rooted in traditional values such as family, religion, and social order, and how they manifested themselves uniquely during the 2013 demonstrations and the rise of the new right. Her research offers an in-depth understanding of the complexity of Brazilian conservatism and its impact on contemporary politics (Pineiro-Machado; Scalco, 2020).

In the midst of the analysis of the 2013 demonstrations, the work of Pablo Ortellado, a renowned professor and researcher, stands out, whose thorough investigation sheds light on the fundamental role played by the media and political elites. Ortellado examines how media coverage and the strategies of political elites influenced the public perception of the protests and the direction of political debate. Her research reveals how such dynamics have contributed significantly to the strengthening of right-wing positions in Brazil, providing a deeper understanding of the complex forces behind the emergence and consolidation of the new right in the country (Ortellado, 2013; 2017).

The 2022 elections represented a turning point for Brazil, delineating a clear divide between those who supported the continuity of the government's policies and those who sought a change of course. The outcome of the election reflected not only the assessment of Bolsonaro's performance, but also the aspirations and concerns of Brazilians regarding a range of issues, from the economy to the environment and social rights (Rennó, 2022).

In light of the events that have marked Brazilian politics in recent years, it is essential to reflect on the future of the country and the challenges it faces. Firstly, it is necessary to strengthen democratic institutions and restore public confidence in politics. This requires greater transparency, accountability, and civic participation, as well as the strengthening of public power control and oversight mechanisms. It is essential to promote a structural reform agenda that addresses the social, economic, and regional inequalities that still persist in Brazil. This includes measures to improve the quality of education, expand access to health services and infrastructure, and promote policies for social inclusion and sustainable development. In the political field, it is necessary to seek ways to reduce polarization and promote dialogue and consensus among different political forces. This requires greater political maturity and a commitment to the common good, above partisan and personal interests. In addition, it is critical to address emerging challenges such as climate change, the digitalization of the economy, and growing global polarization. This will require innovative public



policies and a collaborative approach between government, the private sector, and civil society (Ferraz, 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

The 2013 demonstrations and subsequent political developments were catalysts for profound changes in Brazil, outlining a new social and political configuration. The emergence of the New Right, the turmoil of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process, and the implementation of economic reforms were just some of the facets of this period of intense transformation. These events exposed not only the political issues at stake but also the deep divisions in Brazilian society, highlighting the persistence of social inequality, political polarization, and economic challenges.

The question of the existence of a "new right" is complex and subject to varied interpretations, depending on the political and social context of each country. In many places, especially after periods of political or economic instability, it is common to see political movements that seek to take advantage of popular discontent to promote right-wing ideals, often presenting themselves as a "new" alternative. These movements may or may not represent a substantial shift in the ideas and policies associated with the traditional right. Sometimes they may include elements of renewal and adaptation to contemporary demands and values, while in other cases they may simply perpetuate already established ideals, taking advantage of circumstances to gain support.

The 2013 protest movement in Brazil, although it was widely diversified in its demands and participation, cannot be categorically defined as exclusively linked to right-wing politics. While there was criticism of the PT government and left-wing policies, the demonstrations also expressed widespread dissatisfaction with issues such as corruption, poor quality of public services, and lack of political representation. In addition, diverse groups and individuals of different political orientations were involved in the protests, suggesting ideological complexity and a lack of clear alignment with a single political position. Although some of the agendas and discourses of the demonstrations could be interpreted as aligned with the right, the diversity of demands and the lack of a unified leadership prevent a simplistic characterization of the movement as exclusively right-wing.

In this regard, as the country moves forward, it is imperative to adopt approaches that promote not only economic growth but also strengthen social cohesion, promote justice, and ensure sustainability. This requires a renewed commitment to democracy, civic participation, and the search for inclusive and equitable solutions to persistent problems. Brazil does not just need superficial changes in the political and economic spheres, but rather a deeper transformation that ensures the well-being of all its citizens and strengthens the foundations of a truly just and resilient society.



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