



Original Research Article

Enacting just food futures through the state: Evidence from BrazilRicardo Barbosa, Jr.^{a*} and Estevan Coca^b^a University of Calgary^b Federal University of Alfnas

Abstract

The state is an important, if sometimes overlooked, terrain of struggle for food activists. To explore the ways and extent to which just food futures can be enacted through the state, we present the experience of Brazil. We argue that activists should seek to advance food policies that have broad social appeal to weather political changes in administrations. Our argument is informed by an extensive review of scholarship on the state, corporate influence, and the possibility of promoting progressive agri-food change through the state, as well as the contradictions of doing so. Drawing on (agrarian) political economy we analyze institutional procurement as exemplifying the state's role not only in “stabilizing” and “growing” the economy but also in enacting “redistribution”. Through our research in Brazil, we compare how the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the National School Meal Program (PNAE) have been impacted by the far-right's rise to power since 2016. When mobilizing the power of institutions to change food systems by leveraging the purchasing power of the state, beyond institutionalization, food policies must be participatory and framed as collective gains for society more broadly, rather than for specific social groups. This would keep such policies from becoming the target of competing administrations, as evidenced by the Brazil case.

Keywords: Brazil; food and agriculture; institutional procurement, (agrarian) political economy; the state

*Corresponding author: ribarbosajr@gmail.com

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Introduction

The ascension of far-right authoritarian populists across the globe (Scoones et al., 2018) has made neoliberal capitalism even more predatory (Sassen, 2010, 2015; Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020). The Green New Deal (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019) and analog proposals have emerged as a response, with the potential to radically change the ways we think about food and agriculture (Selwyn, 2021). These new pacts reassert the state's role in promoting progressive social and environmental change.¹ In this paper, we draw attention to the ways and extent to which just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue) can be enacted through the state. In investigating different perspectives of state-society relations, we highlight how states are built and govern through disputes (Lund, 2016; for more see section 3.1). This conception guides our analysis of institutional procurement by recognizing how “the state” refers to specific political institutions that are relevant to food policy making and implementation in the Brazil context, but also how such spaces are arenas for dispute from which we can mobilize towards just food futures across geographies.

Recent food activism and scholarship in the global North has focussed on the centrality of the state unevenly, at times ignoring experiences in which civil society pursues food system transformation through the state (e.g., Koc et al., 2008). Across North America, hunger rights activists have engaged extensively with the state (Himmelgreen & Romero-Daza, 2010; Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In Canada, for instance, food policy councils are on the rise, demands for the right to food increase, Food Security Canada has become focussed on national Canadian food policy, and the National Farmers Union has long lobbied the state as a key agent of change (National Farmers Union, 2013; Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019). Even Indigenous food sovereignty activists have underlined the important role the state plays in short term solutions (Kepkiewicz & Rotz, 2018). Recent literature has also called for greater engagement with, and more focus on, the state and governance and has critiqued certain elements of food movements for not sufficiently engaging with the state (Desmarais et al., 2017; Andrée et al., 2019). Examples include: Rod MacRae's (2011) work on national food policy, Wayne Roberts' (2014) work on local food policy, Lori Stahlbrand's (2018) work on institutional food procurement, Annette Desmarais and Hannah Wittman's (2014) work on food sovereignty (see also Wittman et al., 2011), among others. Still, some approaches are limited in their ability to meaningfully engage with the state, with others being explicitly state-critical (Rotz, 2017; Roman-Alcalá, 2020). This reflects the diversity of the ways and extent to which food activists and scholars perceive and engage the state.

Several key strands of food activism and scholarship in the global North fail to meaningfully engage with the state as a key platform from which to enact change. These include charitable food initiatives as well as more consumer-based local activist movements. By focussing on private donations, food charity, and even localized—often consumption oriented—

¹ The European Commission's (2019) Farm-to-Fork Strategy seeks to do this through food and agriculture.

grassroots solutions, the actual and potential role of the state may be obscured. While such measures are important and do make a difference, they can only go so far. Those who need food assistance are not always able to benefit from these measures in the ways and to the extent they need (e.g., the Food Bank model; see Suschnigg, 2012), and those who want to make a difference are often unable to enact structural change through consumer-activism (e.g., “buy local”; see Dukeshire et al., 2011). Even well-intentioned local food enthusiasts who “vote with their dollars” reinforce consumers’ position of power over producers without fully sharing the risks or responsibilities associated with farming (Rosol & Barbosa Jr, 2021).

These trends, as exemplified above, are emblematic of how the state’s social services have been transferred to civil society during a period of neoliberalism—including in the food system (Allen & Guthman, 2006). Holt-Giménez (2017, p. 229) signals the “neoliberal shrinking of the state and the erosion of the public sphere” and suggests the food movement can break this political impasse by re-politicizing its organizations through the critical reconstruction of the public sphere. We echo calls for re-politicizing the “public sphere” and argue that we must likewise reclaim the state to shape public policy in order to prioritize collective demands over private interests. Towards this end, we draw on the Brazil case where organized civil society established a close relationship with the state to implement far-reaching, integrated food policies that play a central role in the country’s food system. Having political economy as a theoretical premise that highlights how public policy is not a neutral activity, but rather a site of political and social struggle, we focus on the public procurement of food (de Schutter, 2014) since “procurement and purchasing policies open up economic and social policy space for political actors” (McMurtry, 2014, p. 26) which makes institutional procurement a potential game changer for food systems transformation (Swensson et al., 2021). We ask: What can we learn from the Brazil case regarding how the state can be used to enact just food futures?

The state plays a central role in food systems (McKay et al., 2014; Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017; Desmarais et al., 2017). In the current context of neoliberal globalization, which Philip McMichael (2009) calls the “third” or “corporate” food regime, corporations influence state decisions to leverage favorable conditions. In agreement with much of the existing literature, we insist that if the state is left out of critical scholarship and activism, corporate dominance over state function will remain unchallenged. Scholarship and activism that engages with the state is important because it encourages a structural approach that allows people, and not the market, to regulate food by directing state power towards specific agri-food mechanisms.² This paper argues that when discussing how food activists and scholars work together to make meaningful change across difference (i.e., across scale, geographies, ideas, etc.; Rosol et al., 2022, this issue) we must not overlook the potential role of the state. The state can act as a mediator and sponsor of the relations between society and the market (e.g., regulation, financing, and infrastructure). The premise of our research is that food activists and scholars must leverage the capacity, reach, and power of the state to enact far reaching social change.

² For a similar point based on climate, see Routledge et al. (2018).

This paper's contribution lies in presenting a case study that provides a Canadian audience with insight on how to mobilise through the state to reach transformative agri-food change, which is especially important when Canada is drafting a national food policy (Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019). If popular demands can be strategically positioned within policies and institutions, the state is a useful tool for enacting just food futures (see also Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In engaging with Brazil's right turn, we add nuance to our claim by reasoning that progressive food policies must not only be institutionalized, as the literature has argued for some time (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015; Trauger et al., 2017), but also socially broad enough to not become the targets of competing administrations. We argue that activists should seek to advance food policies that have broad social appeal and are also participatory to weather political changes in administrations.

Research design and methods

We base our argument on analysis of Brazil's two primary public food procurement policies which we have been studying over the last decade: The Food Acquisition Program (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos* [PAA]) and the National School Meal Program (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar* [PNAE]). The current version of these food policies sought to realise the broader goals set forth by the Zero Hunger program: i) increasing the effective demand for food; ii) lowering the price of food; and iii) establishing emergency programs to serve a portion of the population traditionally excluded from the market (Silva et al., 2010). Importantly, our research on these food policies looks different due to the perspectives and context of the research project. It is for this reason that despite having the word "program" in their names we understand PAA and PNAE as food policies, under the umbrella of the Zero hunger program.

Our research builds on institutional procurement policy scholarship (de Schutter, 2014; McMurtry, 2014; Swensson et al., 2021). Namely, scholarship on how these policies originated and functioned during the Worker Party (PT) governments in Brazil (2003–2016), published in Portuguese (Müller et al., 2012; Triches & Grisa, 2015) and in English (Wittman & Blesh, 2017; Pahnke, 2018). We contribute to this literature by focussing on how such policies have been impacted since the right came to power in 2016 when Michel Temer took office (see Niederle et al., 2019, 2022; Sabourin et al., 2020; see also section 4.3). Guided by a political economy approach, our analysis is based on the state—and understanding it as disputed (see section 3.1). Because of this, we focus on budget allocation as an indication of the material implications of such disputes that highlight changing policy priorities across different administrations.

To do this, we have taken the following steps:

First, we carried out a comprehensive documental review of PAA and PNAE using NVivo 11. Sources that include legislation, operational booklets, and reports on these public policies were analyzed in detail. When coding we established the following categories: legislation, budget, civil society participation, and countryside-city relations. With this, we

established an overview of the institutional arrangements that gave rise to PAA and PNAE, as well as their potential for generating structural changes in the countryside (e.g., by providing farmers with reliable income and job security) and in the city (e.g., combating food insecurity and social marginalization) by establishing new food marketing channels.

Second, we identified, cataloged, and read research about these topics and series of events published in Portuguese, English, and Spanish (our shared database is made up of about 240 sources). These sources address topics such as the state, markets, agri-food policies, social movements, and progressive social change. Here we reviewed trends in the academic literature on PAA and PNAE, specifically, and institutional procurement, generally. Which has allowed us to compare data obtained in the previous step and present our findings as informed by the current literature.

Third, we collected and analyzed recent PAA and PNAE data published by government agencies and social movements (e.g., PAA Data, The National Supply Company [CONAB], Food First Information and Action Network [FIAN], and others). After the PT administrations, however, food policy was no longer a priority and, because of this, such data was not as readily available to the public. This challenge led us to request additional contemporary data through Brazil's Freedom of Information Law. In this way, we have been able to update and evaluate our previous interview and fieldwork findings (Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2016a, 2018a; Coca, 2021) through “desk research” updates (Green & Cohen, 2021) that we centre primarily here.

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The state, corporate influence, and the possibility for social change

Defining “the state” as disputed

We recognize the state as the sum result of disputes, confrontations, and agreements between different—and sometimes competing—social groups and interests. The state participates directly in the material and immaterial production of development models (Bates, 2008). As relates to agri-food policies, the state contributes to the production of inequalities (e.g., subsidizing industrial agriculture with disproportionate specialized financing and technical support services) and, at the same time, is influenced by progressive forces that aim to eliminate inequalities (e.g., public procurement policies, agrarian reform, etc.). In this sense, we discuss the state through a political economy perspective (Furtado, 1958; Kautsky 1988; Arrighi, 1994; Sassen, 1996; Wallerstein, 2004; Amin, 2014), which recognizes the state's role in connection with global

markets and through state-society relations, offering further insights into state function within capitalism.

To outline the various ways in which the state has been studied, we draw on Vergara-Camus and Kay (2017) who have identified five approaches to the state that stand out in the agri-food literature: i) the neo-Weberian, which understands the state as endowed with relative autonomy that acts authoritatively and/or in developmentalist terms; ii) the Schumpeterian, which understands the state as determined based on its budget sources, in that rich countries tend to produce rentier states; iii) the Marxist, which sees the state as an instrument for reproducing the interests of hegemonic classes; iv) the Foucauldian, which interprets the state through governmentality (i.e., the establishment of a rationality that reproduces its own interests in individuals and institutions) and; v) the eclectic, which brings together some of the previous propositions and defines the state as an arena for conflict of interest, where diverse actors advance their strategies across different levels and scales. Our analysis into the actual and potential role of the state in agri-food systems can perhaps be understood as more closely aligned with Gramscian Marxism (see also Dale, 2021) which recognizes the co-constitutive relations between the state and civil/political society as struggle and conflict (Fontana, 2002). Conceivably, our perspective also bridges between Gramscian and Foucauldian conceptions to reach the more relational approach we intend (Hansen & Stepputat, 2001), as such derived from political economy but also allowing space for post structuralist preoccupations (see also Barbosa Jr & Roriz, 2021).

In defining state-society relations as struggle and conflict, as we do here, governance becomes a continuous process and not an isolated fact, which allows the state to be understood as both an instrument and result of political strategies. In this sense, governance is not just the unilateral action of governments or institutional arrangements, as it also involves associated networks, practices, rules, and norms that help uphold specific ways of life (McMichael, 2009). As informed by their research into “land grabs,” Woford et al. (2013) draw attention to the ways and extent to which, in a neoliberal globalized world, “complexity” characterizes state formation and activity. The authors argue that governments and governance are shaped by a broad spectrum of activities and possibilities, be they large or small. Such a phenomenon is possible because states are not composed of homogeneous bodies, as we tend to assume colloquially (i.e., of politicians and bureaucrats) but, rather, states are permeable to different groups and social classes with competing interests (Rocha & Barbosa Jr, 2018). In this way the state is “built” through disputes, while it also governs through them (Lund, 2016).

How disputes for the state shape agri-food systems

In the context of neoliberal globalization, corporate interests strongly influence agri-food policies (Clapp, 2012). We believe that agri-food policies provide an especially illustrative example of the ways and extent to which corporations exert influence over the state. Before delving into the

possible changes that can come from mobilizing through the state, we first present the various ways in which corporations influence the state to shape agri-food policies. The state promotes corporate interests through various means that include public financing of large agribusiness producers, the creation of sanitary and health regulations favourable to marketing large scale production, and the construction of infrastructure to transport commodities (Clapp, 2012; Sauer, 2017).

Despite corporate influence over state policy, the state can also be a vehicle for change within agri-food systems, albeit often only partially. Examples include agrarian reform, protecting agricultural land, promoting universal basic income, establishing national food policy, monitoring environmental degradation, as well as regulating markets and labour—e.g., migrant, restaurant, and food delivery workers (Borras Jr., 2008; Levkoe & Sheedy, 2019; Power & McBay, 2022, this issue; Weiler & Grez, 2022, this issue). Structural change can also occur through actions such as orienting institutional markets to address social issues, land de-concentration, and the creation of legal mechanisms to ensure universal access to food (Friedmann, 2007; Claeys, 2012).

Scholars are especially interested in the ways social movements have been able to mobilize the state towards progressive ends, namely in enacting social policies. The Latin American experience (Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017), in particular, has been widely documented and analyzed (e.g., Wittman, 2015). During the “pink tide,” centre-left governments who were elected with a strong popular base allocated public resource towards social policies, in particular food policies that sought to eradicate hunger while also providing small scale family farms with marketing channels (McKay et al., 2014). This was carried out, however, through the intensification of extractivism, leading to the term neoextractivism (Veltmeyer & Petras, 2014), which refers to how progressive social policies and extractivism became inexorably linked in Latin America.

In the literature, these experiences are assessed from different perspectives, ranging from approaches that reinforce their contribution to the production of progressive changes to those that see them as limited and/or contradictory (McKay, 2020). One end of this broad spectrum emphasizes that the involvement of social movements and other civil society actors with governments prioritizes localized food circuits, especially of peasant and Indigenous products (Maluf et al., 2015; Wittman, 2015; Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2016b, 2018b). This is relevant since along with the growth of the food sovereignty movement, several collectives have sought to influence institutions at the sub-national (municipal and state/ provincial), national, regional (e.g., European Union, North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], The Southern Common Market [Mercosur]), and global levels (Trauger et al., 2017). As a result, food sovereignty was formally recognized in the constitution of countries like Ecuador and Bolivia (McKay et al., 2014), and by global institutions such as the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (Brem-Wilson, 2017). At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who defend the idea that structural changes in agri-food systems—as advocated by the food sovereignty movement—cannot occur within the capitalist political-economic framework,

requiring a break from colonial, neoliberal, and neo-development models (Zibechi, 2010; Dardot & Laval, 2013). Bernstein (2014, p. 1054), for example, asserts that the state is the “elephant in the room” in the implementation of food sovereignty, as even popular governments have faced difficulties enacting progressive social policies. Within this broad spectrum there are those who find middle ground, recognizing the importance of the state at least in the short to mid-term, while maintaining that the state itself must be overcome in the long term (Cumbers, 2015; Kepkiewicz & Rotz, 2018).³

The continued importance of mobilising through the state

States can be defined as a set of networks, terrains of contestation, or abstract principles that present themselves with shape, presence, and form (Cooper, 2017). In this way, states produce and reproduce the contradictions of the societies that have built and continue to shape them. As we have reasoned, agri-food policies are formulated by processes that involve conflicts and arrangements between different subjects, social movements, corporations, and institutions. As such, the state’s role in promoting progressive agri-food change must be studied in its full complexity. We must consider how the state performs multiple functions in governance processes (Ehrnström-Fuentes & Kröger, 2018). The state represents simultaneously the manifestation of corporate control over food and the possibility for progressive agri-food change. We echo claims others have made of how the state is needed for far-reaching social change (Akram-Lodhi, 2015; Routledge et al., 2018). Establishing limits to the power of the market is one of the great challenges for the better functioning of agri-food systems, as within capitalism the market fails to recognise food as a public good (see Vivero-Pol, 2017). In this sense, we start from the understanding that the liberal model of *laissez-faire* is fraught with imperfections and that public-power must regulate the market. In relation to agri-food systems, it is the responsibility of the state to create mechanisms that at once guarantee the permanence of family-based farming, actively including them in the market, in addition to facilitating and guaranteeing the access of all consumers to foods of high nutritional value.

To be implemented through the state, progressive agri-food policies need a favourable correlation of forces. This can happen through pressure exerted by social movements—e.g., protests, boycotts, land occupations, and other forms of contestation (Gray, 2018)—or through participation in formal state processes (Abers & Keck 2009), which tends to occur when governments are elected through popular mobilisation. Such actions help to guide the state in service of the people, which includes “holding officials accountable and ensuring that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry” (Holt-Giménez, 2017, p. 229). In this way, the state is simultaneously a target, sponsor, and antagonist of social movements that seek political

³ See Wilson and Levkoe (2022, this issue) for an exploration of the tensions between immediate focus and long-term structural change.

representation (Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995). This institutionalizes collective demands through cosmopolitan, multicultural, and anti-hegemonic conceptions of human rights (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015).

For this reason, we draw on a political economy approach that allows us to consider relations between the state, society, and market (see section 3.1). Drawing on (agrarian) political economy we analyze institutional procurement (de Schutter, 2014). Public food procurement can contribute towards strengthening a proposal for the development of agriculture that favours groups of producers and consumers that are subjected to unfavorable conditions within capitalism, thus, creating new opportunities (Nehring et al., 2017). Adopting public procurement as a strategy to partially remedy the market economy's problems is not new (McMurtry, 2014; Sumner & Stahlbrand, 2018; Poppendieck, 2022, this issue). In the recent past, such actions have been used, for example, to create jobs for immigrants and racial minority groups in the United States and South Africa, to promote gender equality in European countries, and for the empowerment of Canadian Indigenous peoples (de Schutter, 2014). Since then, institutional procurement—a mechanism through which the state intervenes in markets—has been employed as a means of reshaping specific stages of food systems. Such examples are found both in high-income countries of the global North (Allen & Guthman, 2006; Friedmann, 2007) and, also, in low-income countries of the global South (Maluf & Prado, 2015; Coca, 2021).

National food policies and institutional procurement in Brazil

A brief history of food politics and policy

Brazil's Food and Nutrition Security (SAN) is characterized as a social bottom-up response to food insecurity (Maluf, 2006). In the mid-twentieth century, Josué de Castro (1946) identified hunger as a social phenomenon and paved the way for measures that sought to eradicate it. When the brutal military dictatorship ended (1964–1985), and a new Brazilian constitution came into effect in 1988, the Health Reform Movement incorporated SAN into their political agenda. However, it was only in the 1990s, through the actions of the Citizenship Institute, that SAN acquired its own defining characteristics (Maluf & Prado, 2015). As the Citizenship Institute promoted the Parallel Government—a critical action against the Fernando Collor de Mello administration (1990–1992) where organized civil society proposed policy alternatives based on participatory governance of social policies—the creation of a National Council of Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) was planned as a joint entity with participation from civil society and public agencies that would monitor food policies in Brazil. CONSEA's short-lived activities (1993–1994) ended during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term in office (1995–1998) (Leão & Maluf, 2012).

The social construction of SAN in Brazil regained momentum at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the Citizenship Institute formulated the Zero Hunger Project, adopted as one of the main proposals for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's (2003–2010) PT government (Silva et al., 2010). After the reinstatement of CONSEA in 2003, the Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security (LOSAN) was implemented in 2006, establishing the National System of Food and Nutrition Security (SISAN), and declaring the need to introduce CONSEA at the state and municipal levels. LOSAN also recommended the preparation of a National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (PNSAN) and Plan (PLANSAN). In 2007 the Inter-ministerial Chamber of Food and Nutritional Security (CAISAN) was created, which contributed to the institutionalization of SAN as a guiding directive of entities and ministries linked to the Presidency. Maluf et al. (2015) argues that SAN's rich history of struggle—and the resulting democratized governance model for food policies—exemplifies food sovereignty.

The Zero Hunger Program and PT-era food policies

Brazilian public food procurement policies emerged in 2003 as part of the Zero Hunger program adopted by the new PT government. These policies were the result of Lula's campaign promise during the 2002 electoral race and can be understood in part as the result of the coalitions he formed with popular movements, especially rural social movements—the most notable example being the Landless Workers Movement (MST). At that moment, the fight against hunger became a priority for the federal government (Wittman & Blesh, 2017), leading to the creation of the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) and the new version of the National School Meal Program (PNAE). However, it is important to recognize that this process was the result of popular struggle and civil society's capacity to make the most of the available political opportunities, rather than the unilateral action of a progressive government, as is often simplistically claimed.

PAA was established by Law 10,696 on July 2, 2003 and foresees the acquisition of products from family agriculture without competitive bidding. The federal government donates the purchased food to institutions registered in the social welfare network, such as daycares, nursing homes, and hospitals (Müller et al., 2012). PNAE has existed since 1955 and is the oldest food policy in Brazil. The new version of PNAE, updated by Law 11,947 on June 16, 2009, established that at least 30 percent of the products purchased with resources from the National Fund for the Development of Education (*Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação* [FNDE]) should come from family agriculture (Triches & Grisa, 2015). PNAE is also based on a wide-ranging framework of regional and local participatory spaces (e.g., school councils). Through both initiatives, preference is given to producers who organize themselves in cooperatives and associations, especially those with significant participation of women. Organic or agroecological products are purchased at a price 30 percent higher than conventional agriculture, incentivizing sustainable agricultural practices. In these ways, a particular type of farmer and farming is favoured.

Brazil has arguably one of the most robust national-level food policy structures (Wittman & Blesh, 2017; Pahnke, 2018). These public policies are innovative because, unlike other public food procurement processes, they designate family farmers as a priority producer group,⁴ and aid people in conditions of social vulnerability (de Schutter, 2014). These measures address various agri-food issues, such as market conditions for farmers, while simultaneously promoting disenfranchised urban consumers' access to healthy food. Furthermore, these policies incentivize farmers to work collectively, empower women, and promote sustainable agriculture, thus demonstrating that the state can promote progressive change in the agri-food system when directed towards this end. By purchasing directly from family farms, the variety and quantity of healthy foods available in schools improved, with an increase in vegetable consumption and a decrease in food with high sugar content (Soares et al., 2017). PNAE feeds over 40 million students, some of them three meals a day, and provides a secure market for many family farmers (Coca & Barbosa Jr, 2018a). These policies have been extensively evaluated by multilateral institutions, leading to Brazil's removal from the Hunger Map in 2014. Despite criticism from the United States' government in the World Trade Organization that such public policies are indirect forms of subsidy, the model is spreading. In June 2015, the Brazilian federal government established a technical cooperation agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with the objective of showcasing the Brazilian experience in fighting hunger as a reference for other countries in the global South, primarily in Latin America (Coca, 2021) and Africa (Nehring & Hoffmann, 2017).

The far-right rises, food policies decline

The rise of the far-right and rural authoritarian populism is one of the most striking political phenomena of the last decade. The term “authoritarian populism” (see Scoones et al., 2018) characterizes “certain strategic shifts in the political/ideological conjuncture. Essentially, it refers to changes in the ‘balance of forces.’ It refers directly to the modalities of political and ideological relationships between the ruling bloc, the state, and the dominated classes” (Hall, 1985, p. 119). The June 2013 protests in Brazil are often identified as a key moment when generalized discontent led varying groups to take to the streets. While the June protests cannot be simply understood as a “right-wing” protest, it marks a key moment when the far-right was able to organize and gain further mainstream appeal in Brazil. The 2014 elections, where the PT incumbent Dilma Rousseff won by a razor thin margin, exposed just how polarized the country had become. The 2016 *coup d'état* was perhaps the culmination of this process when Rousseff was taken out of office and Michel Temer (2016–2018) took power illegitimately, and was further reinforced by Jair Bolsonaro's (2019–ongoing) electoral success in 2018.

⁴ In Brazil, family farming is defined by Law 11,326/2006. Family farms can be as large as four fiscal modules but must rely predominantly on the family's labour. Fiscal module refers to the minimum average size of rural property according to the municipality in which the property is located. This flexible distinction is important as average rural property size varies greatly across Brazil.

While food policies were already showing signs of decline during Rousseff's second term, the true dismantling process began when the far-right came to power.⁵ Temer dissolved the Agrarian Development Ministry (MDA) with Decree 8,786/2016 and approved Constitutional Amendment 95, which established a spending cap on public investment for twenty years, constitutionalizing fiscal austerity in Brazil. This severely impacted food policies that supported family farming, reducing their margin of participation in the state's budget, and compromising the goals of the 2016–2019 PLANSAN. The neoliberal reforms initiated in 2016 are then executed and reinforced by Bolsonaro's notably authoritarian project (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Soyer & Barbosa Jr, 2020). Bolsonaro extinguished CONSEA through Provisional Measure 870/2019 the day he took office. By closing spaces for dialogue with civil society Bolsonaro left no doubt as to his administration's stance towards SAN. The Bolsonaro administration's position on food was made evident by his controversial declaration that "hunger in Brazil is a lie" (Folha de São Paulo, 2019, unpaginated), despite reports showing that hunger has been increasing since he took office (FIAN Brasil, 2019) and especially during the pandemic (Galindo et al., 2021). But how can we make sense of the far-right's dismantling of food policy in Brazil and how does this point to the challenges of mobilizing through the state?

The rise of the far-right in Brazil has brought about studies that assess the impact of far-right governments on the agri-food world. The literature reveals how the far-right has been successful in exploiting discontent (see Fischer, 2020) to erode the social policies benefitting family farmers (Niederle et al., 2019, 2022).

Results

We identify institutional procurement as exemplifying the state's role not only in stabilizing and growing the economy but also in enacting redistribution. Specifically, we compare how PAA and PNAE have been affected since the far-right came to power in Brazil in 2016. These two policies illustrate the advantages and challenges of mobilizing through the state.

In short, PAA has suffered big budget cuts while PNAE, which is connected with the National Fund for the Development of Education, has maintained its social and economic functions of fighting hunger via school meals and providing local family farmers with a marketing channel for their products. In comparing these two institutional food procurement policies we add nuance and empirical support to claims on the importance of mobilizing through the state to promote just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue).

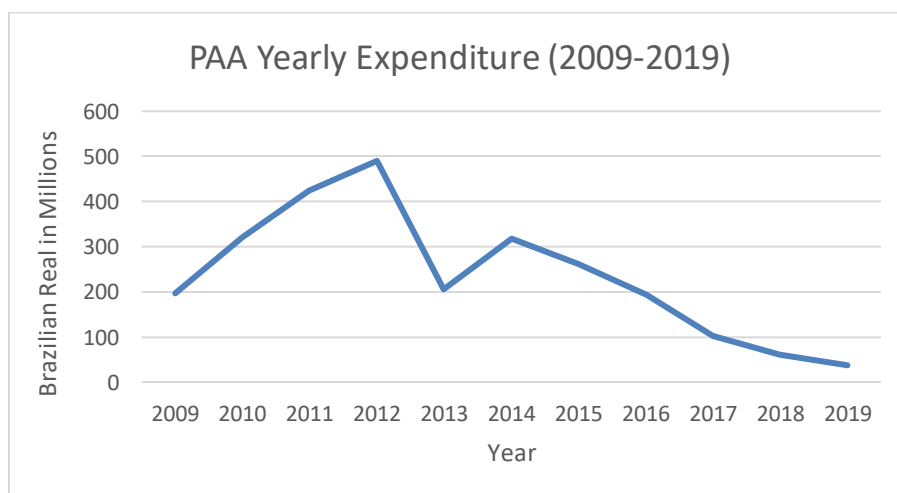
⁵ While here we draw specific attention to the far-right's effect on food policies it is also important to recognize that alongside these processes there was increased deregulation of environmental and land protection (Sparovek et al., 2019; Menezes & Barbosa Jr, 2021) as well as an increase of violence and conflict in the countryside (Barbosa Jr & Roriz, 2021).

Food Acquisition Program (PAA)

PAA is an example of how social movements mobilization for certain public policies are dependent on alignment with the government, be they allies or not. Temer and Bolsonaro—who came to power through the support of agribusiness, in opposition to progressive peasant and family farmer movements (Soyer & Barbosa Jr, 2021; for more see 4.3)—offer strong unilateral support for capitalist agriculture, which has led public food procurement and family farming policies to be neglected and even actively dismantled.

Figure 1 shows that PAA public expenditure increased during the PT administration (2003–2016), with a decrease during Rousseff’s first term (2011–2014). The decrease occurred alongside growing legal interference in politics that took place in Brazil, affecting public policies like PAA. One of the most emblematic examples of this was the Agro-Fantasma operation, which imprisoned thirteen family farmers with accusations of embezzling PAA funds (Triches & Grisa, 2015). All these farmers were acquitted when the charges against them were found to be groundless. However, this was enough to publicly discredit PAA, which led to a decrease in public resources made available for the initiative. It is important to note that the judge who ordered these farmers be arrested was Sérgio Moro, who would later become the face of the Lava Jato operation—which kept Lula from running in the 2018 election—and was then appointed as Bolsonaro’s Justice Minister once he took office. In this way, the first budget cuts PAA suffered were the result of a broader process of judicialization that occurred while PT governments were still in power.

Figure 1: PAA Yearly Expenditure (2009-2019) (author’s compilation, data from CONAB requested through Brazil’s Freedom of Information Law)⁶



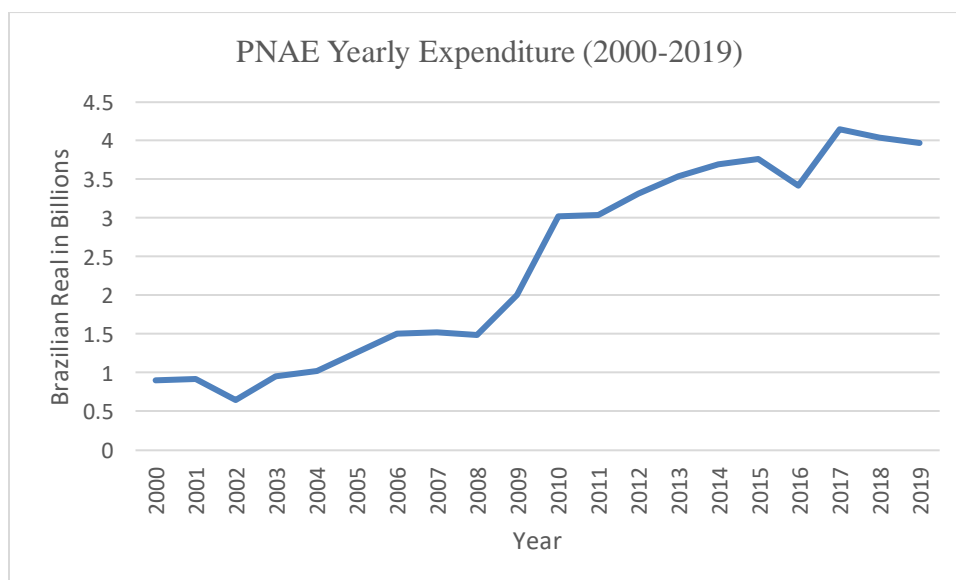
⁶ PAA has six modalities. We select the two modalities with the largest budgets: purchase with simultaneous donation and stock formation.

As Figure 1 shows, the budget cuts made to PAA continued apace after the 2016 *coup*. Temer distanced the federal government from social movements and implemented an austerity agenda in Brazil. PAA was one of the food policies that suffered the greatest impact (see Figure 1). Instead of outright ending PAA, which would most likely lead to widespread public backlash, the Temer administration sought to drastically decrease PAA’s budget until the initiative was unable to operate effectively—a process continued by the Bolsonaro administration.

National School Meal Program (PNAE)

In contrast to PAA, PNAE has remained mostly intact and functional, despite the far-right coming to power. PNAE’s budget increased starting in Lula’s second term (2007–2010), with small fluctuations from 2015 to 2016 and from 2018 to 2019 (see Figure 2). This has only been possible because PNAE has a predetermined budget associated with the national education budget—Article 5 of Law 11,947 published on June 16, 2009.

Figure 2: PNAE Yearly Expenditure (2000-2019) (*Tribunal de Contas da União [TCU], 2020; author’s compilation, data from World Food Programme [WFP] & FNDE, 2019*)



We argue that by identifying the contradictions of mobilizing through the state,⁷ scholars and activists can strive for measures that are better equipped to overcome issues resulting from institutional change and the transition of power, be it democratic or not (as in 2018 and 2016, respectively). The data shows that PNAE's budget has remained relatively stable while other social and food policies, like PAA, have been dismantled. PNAE has managed to remain largely operational because it is linked to the Education Ministry and the national education budget which is generally seen as “untouchable”—since it is defended by various sectors across society. For this very reason, PNAE has been the focus of continued attacks during the Bolsonaro administration. One recent example is the proposed Law 5,695/2019 that among other goals sought to dissociate PNAE funds from FNDE—and, thus, the educational budget—and even remove the stipulation that at least 30 percent of the products should come from local family farmers. These two provisions were targeted precisely because they respectively provide PNAE with its budgetary autonomy, regardless of any current administration, and its redistributive power by guaranteeing a market share for local family farmers which also limits the amount of food procured from conventional corporate suppliers.

Still, beyond this, in 2020, civil society mobilizations successfully redirected PNAE's R\$4 billion budget to “food kits” for low-income families with school-aged children during COVID-19 via Decree 6/2020, which charges municipalities with implementing PNAE-based COVID-19 emergency food response (Barbosa Jr, Coca & Soyer, 2022). Even during a pandemic PNAE has been able to adapt, showing that the policy is well equipped to overcome not only the far-right but also promote public goods through emergency response efforts during the pandemic. In doing so, PNAE remains one of the select national-level policies that has been able to provide pandemic relief during COVID-19. Pandemic relief has been largely mismanaged by the Bolsonaro administration which downplays the virus and the need for an effective pandemic response (see Pfrimer & Barbosa Jr, 2020).

Discussion

Institutional procurement, as exemplified by the Brazil case, shows how food producers and consumers can jointly benefit from a public policy that seeks to promote change across agri-food systems. In such cases, the state directly intervenes in the market by creating specific commercialization channels for family farmers. By questioning how institutions get their food as well as creating awareness of their purchasing size and power, it becomes evident how this portion of the market can be leveraged into food-based change. Through institutional procurement the state can mediate the transfer of food directly from farmers to consumers,

⁷ A key concern is that adapting ideas and agendas to the state structure may divest them of their radical potential. Along these same lines, social movements that align themselves very closely with the state have been accused of being coopted, losing connection to the base, and becoming too caught up the bureaucratisation of the struggle.

especially focussing on those that are simply not able to obtain good food through market-based means. Institutional procurement addresses the problem of farmer's access to market and has the potential to democratize access to good food, realizing just food futures (Rosol et al., 2022, this issue).

Still, proposals for authentic social change require durable policy arrangements that are not subject to the interests of specific administrations. The two policies presented illustrate this by showing how PNAE has remained mostly functional since 2016, while PAA is restricted by the interests and budget allocation of each administration. PAA exemplifies the challenge of mobilizing through the state. It shows how progressive social policies must formally establish a continuing predetermined budget that binds future administrations—that is, not only creating good food policies but institutionalizing them (i.e., formalizing food rights and values as legal measures and mechanisms within state apparatus) as the literature has drawn attention to (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2015; Trauger et al., 2017; Dale, 2021). As opposed to setting the budget on an ongoing basis, which subjects food policies to the preferences of future—possibly competing—administrations.

Our contribution lies in further complicating the challenges of institutionalization, based on an empirical case. Specifically, we draw attention to how food activists and scholars must ensure progressive changes encompasses the breadth of social and political needs or aspirations to not become the targets of competing administrations. Otherwise, progressive food policies are susceptible to being dismantled once an opposition government takes office. The evidence we provide demonstrates how PNAE appeals to broader sectors of society, since it reaches all public-school students in Brazil. Additionally, PNAE exemplifies greater capillarity as civil society is actively engaged through participatory spaces, such as CONSEA and school councils. Continued civil society participation with PNAE strengthens the policy's institutionalization. Which means that PNAE's durability is also related to a policy design that includes broader participation of civil society in its implementation.

Our point is that PNAE (associated with education) is more institutionally durable than PAA (associated with family farmers). Importantly, it is not the policy framing or language that are broad—these seek to address specific issues. Rather, the policy itself is supported by a broad base because it has wide social appeal. Both policies have a clear structure, set of objectives, and so on. Yet, PNAE is able to do this while being framed as “food for students” rather than just a “market for family farmers” as PAA is often reduced to. Despite PAA food donations made to multiple vulnerable groups within cities, few sectors of Brazilian society identify with family farmers, illuminating a policy weakness.⁸ Significantly, when PT was in power, policies for the institutional procurement of food was a demand from social movements made possible through their engagement with the state (Coca, 2021). Since 2016, when the far-right came to power,

⁸ It is worth noting that PNAE, created in 1955, is much older than PAA which may factor into its institutional durability. Yet, it was only in 2009 that PNAE was radically redesigned to stipulate that at least 30 percent of the products procured should come from local family farmers. A timeframe similar to PAA, created in 2003.

these same public policies have become a target precisely because they were linked to social movements like MST.

Conclusion and outlook

In offering evidence of the centrality of the state in promoting just food futures through the Brazil case, we hope to inspire food activism and scholarship that recognizes the role of the state and positions it as an arena of struggle to enact emancipatory and just food futures. Importantly, we are not arguing that all power or “the political will” comes from the state, rather that the state can be strategically used as a platform for far-reaching social change. Along the same lines of Routledge et al. (2018, p. 79) who argued for an “agenda that is enabled through grassroots mobilization in collaboration with state action” for climate, we propose the same for food. Our main point is that progressive demands need to be broadly supported and strategically institutionalized to be participatory if they are to survive the onslaught of neoliberalism and the far-right.

The far-rights’ rise to power across the globe has drawn the attention to the centrality of state control in furthering emancipatory political projects.⁹ Perhaps, as Holt-Giménez (2017, p. 229) suggests, “the time is ripe, as the horror of the Trump administration’s program begins to sink in, to build an alternative vision of the public sphere.” It may be that a shift to the far-right, past the neoliberal parties that have been in power for the past decades, takes us back to the need to dispute the state, since we are all reminded that who controls the state matters.¹⁰ In this way, engaging with the state is also about limiting the harm of the state, especially when it is captured by the far-right, and pushing back against the extension of state power.¹¹ To end, while the Brazil case illustrates how food politics and policies are (or, perhaps can be) about much more than the food itself, it also allows us to reimagine the state (Cooper et al., 2019) and consider how we may enact institutional arrangements differently (Cooper, 2020).

In engaging with the state, we can mobilize the power of institutions to change food systems—e.g., leveraging the purchasing power of the state through institutional procurement (see Kleine & Brightwell, 2015). In doing so, food scholars and activists go beyond private agri-food governance (Kalfagianni, 2015) towards effective public agri-food governance that includes, but is not limited to, the state.

In applying these findings to the Canadian context, we may extend beyond the focus of changing individual consumer behavior to fully embrace Canadian food movement actors desire

⁹ Even the attention of those who are state-critical, see Kepkiewicz and Rotz (2018) and Roman-Alcalá (2020).

¹⁰ We recognize that these points may resonate differently in the global North wherein a change in government may not always imply in a direct change in most people’s lives. In the global South, however, the change in administration may immediately and directly entail significant changes. As a result, the far-right administrations in the global North offer a unique opportunity to showcase the value of and need to “capture the state” instead.

¹¹ We thank Amanda Wilson for making this point to us.

to see greater policy engagement and effective shifts in the food policy landscape (Wilson & Levkoe, 2022, this issue). In dialogue with Poppendieck (2022, this issue), this allows us to consider public policy activism as a form of food activism. Engagement with the state through public policy activism may be a means to address the lack of politicization within Canadian food movements, identified by Wilson and Levkoe (2022, this issue). Public policy food activism allows underlying structural issues to be targeted directly, overcoming Canada’s long history of addressing food security through “charity-based models” and food change through “alternative grassroots community initiatives.” Brazil’s recent experience with participatory food procurement policies could be a reason for hope in this struggle.

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