## Resenha: LAVINAS, L.; COBO, B.; WALTENBERG, F.; VEIGA, A.; MÉNDEZ, Y. S. Percepções sobre desigualdade e pobreza. O que pensam os brasileiros da política social? Rio de Janeiro: Centro Internacional Celso Furtado de Políticas para o Desenvolvimento e Folio Digital Editora, 2014. Coleção Pensamento Crítico, vol. 5. 172p.

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This book is the result of an original and extensive research project investigating perceptions about social inequality among Brazilians, coordinated by Lena Lavinas and carried out with Barbara Cobo, Fabio Waltenberg, AlinneVeiga and Yasmín Salazar Méndez. In times where economists and other social scientists (re)discover their interest in inequality dynamics but do not really know much about how the dynamics that scientists measure are perceived by the populations under investigation, this survey is a highly timely undertaking. It is clear that perceptions of inequality within a society can diverge from measurements (VERME, 2014), and that considering perceived instead of measured levels of inequality makes a significant difference for the evaluation of theoretical approaches to the support for redistributive policies (see for instance ENGELHARDT and WAGNER, 2014). Talking of which: potential readers should take the sub-title of the book more seriously than the title, since the primary focus of the survey is on opinions about redistribution.

Accordingly, the authors start with a review of the very extensive international research literature on 'preferences for redistribution', covering both theoretical and empirical contributions. This overview turns out to be very concise, well-sorted and helpful in such a large and complex research area – it should be made available to a wider academic readership not able to read Portuguese. It is a pity that the authors do not refer back the results of their own survey to this theoretical debate.

They then present descriptive statistics of their own survey, carried out with 2.200 respondents in 2012. The descriptive analysis of the survey as such is very interesting, covering item batteries on opinions and beliefs about inequality and redistribution in general, specific programs existing in Brazil and meritocratic principles as well as experiences and expectations of social mobility of the respondents. The authors present all responses, separating responses from different regions, and offer some first interpretations (some of which are rather tentative). Some findings are in line with the existing literature about Brazil: for example, the majority thinks that the government is responsible of improving the living situation of the poor – supporting a result from Elisa Reis's (2005) elite study. Other findings are rather surprising: two thirds of the

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respondents attribute themselves to the middle-class, but only 4% to the rich and 30% to the poor – this is not totally consistent with their indicated income situation.

In chapter 4, the authors carry out an econometric analysis, seeking to identify characteristics of the respondents associated with higher/lower support for redistribution. They choose 7 variables out of their item battery and construct an additive index as a dependent variable. This choice seems at least questionable: items are chosen not by means of a factor analysis, as the usual procedure would indicate. After a reviewer had recommended improving the procedure, the authors tested a principal component analysis and did not find substantial differences to their index – but why did they not decide to report these results in their book? Now, unfortunately, some open questions remain. With ordinal variables, it would be appropriate not to use standard principle component analysis, but a categorical factor analysis (GIFI, 1990; JOERESKOG and MOUTAKI, 2010; BLASIUS and THIESSEN, 2012) – otherwise, results may be biased. Also the authors do not address the reliability and validity of their index. It might well be that the constructed index is perfectly fine, but one would feel more comfortable asserting this with more information about the process of its construction and more tests.

The authors estimate five different model specifications, using ordinary least squares (OLS). The first model investigates socio-economic explanatory variables like income, labor market status and education. The only significant variables are dummies for higher income levels (incomes higher than R$ 3,000 express less support for redistribution), and the explanatory power seems to be low. Model 2 adds some socio-economic controls. Positive and significant coefficients (indicating higher support) are found for women, respondents from the Northeast, North and Southeast region, and blacks, whereas income loses significance. The third model includes religion, experiences with social mobility and some beliefs about poverty, but takes out all the previous variables. Here, people who believe that poor people might lack opportunities, those who know a beneficiary in person and those who believe in meritocracy tend to report higher support. Model 4 contains all the previous variables and all of the previously significant variables keep their sign and significance, except the income level. Again, the $R^2$ is only about 11% and no further diagnostics are presented. Are the results influenced by specification issues or by the construction of the dependent variable? We can't know.

The authors then decide to add all the other inequality – and poverty – related items that are not part of the dependent variable as explanatory variables. Indeed, they find that some of them are positively related with the dependent variable, and the explained variance increases to 25%. And how could it be surprising that people who believe that *Bolsa Família* is a successful program or that the government rather than NGOs or churches should implement anti-poverty programs are more supportive of redistributive policies? Such positive correlations of course boost the $R^2$, but this does not necessarily

imply that the specification is reliable – all the more since some of the variables perhaps could have been part of the dependent variable.

Chapter 5 elaborates profiles of socio-economic groups that are more likely to support redistribution. This time, the authors use (ordered) logit and probit analyses in order to estimate the response scores to single questions and to identify who is more supportive of a strong role of the state in redistribution and of specific measures. Many results are interesting and informative. For example, the authors find that people who believe that poor people themselves are responsible of their situation are less supportive of government interventions. In contradiction to some strings of the theoretical literature, they also find that people with positive social mobility expectations are more supportive.

To be sure: having read about all these interesting findings, there is no reason to complain. It just seems that the authors might go further in the in-depth analysis of their rich database, exploiting its full potential. Let me give just one example: From the finding just mentioned, they conclude that optimistic people want poor people to benefit from the expected prosperity as well. Yes, this is one potential explanation. Still, it would be interesting to know who these optimistic people are – in terms of income, for example – and if interactions with other characteristics maybe trigger the pro-redistribution tendency of the optimistic Brazilians. Such information would also allow feeding empirical results back into the literature that theorizes effects of mobility expectations.

So, in the end of chapter 5, we learn that Brazilians generally support redistributive policies, that age matters, and that a higher educational level is associated with less support for universal policies. While this is very interesting, one keeps asking oneself why this might be the case and how this fits into the findings from earlier Brazilian studies and into the theoretical literature so well surveyed in the first chapter of this book.

As the reader will have noticed by now, this review has highlighted some methodological issues. Regardless of this discussion, the presentation of the data from the Brazilian case is very informative and interesting, providing detailed insights about how Brazilians think about a crucial topic – and this is very valuable. Hopefully, the results will be able to inform both academic research and public policy.

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