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Policy Dynamics and Government Attention over Welfare Policies: An Analysis of the Brazilian Case[*]

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The recognition of issues as public problems and the ways governments prioritize them constitute focal points in the study of policy change and policy dynamics. In Brazil and other Latin American countries, social welfare systems and related policies have undergone transformations throughout the recent democratic period. This article aims to understand changes in the Brazilian social welfare agenda by means of an analysis of the attention given to social welfare policies at the federal level. The main analytical and methodological contribution of this article is its use of the research strategy developed under the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) to analyze the Brazilian situation. We drew on a set of unpublished datasets on the attention given by governments to social welfare policies from 1988 to 2018 that involves more than one thousand observations across six different datasets. The analyses are made at two different levels: first, we seek to understand macro trends and moments of continuity and inflection in social welfare policy by federal government administration. Second, we analyze the composition of the attention given to social welfare policies, thereby identifying the themes given the highest priority.
Keywords: Policy change; welfare policy; punctuated equilibrium; policy dynamics; policy attention.

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The ways in which social rights are translated into public policies vary historically and institutionally according to economic, cultural and socio-demographic factors as well as political choices. This gives rise to different 'worlds of social protection', according to Gøsta Esping-Andresen(1991). Protection systems that aim to guarantee social welfare also generate stratification in regimes where coverage and generosity vary. In Latin America, the division between insiders and outsiders has been a hallmark of social protection systems since their inception. This cleavage is demarcated by workers' formal positions in the labor market (ARRETCHE, 2018). While the transitions to democracy in Latin America have been important in forming new arrangements for social inclusion and tackling inequalities, the conditions for understanding the newly developed protection arrangements and their limits are not present. The political choices surrounding such policies need to be understood.

The main goal of this paper is to apply an innovative methodology that allows us to understand changes in the attention given by government to welfare policies in Brazil in the period since re-democratization (1988-2018). This new analytical strategy, through the application of an international and comparative project that is recognized worldwide in policy process studies, helps us understand moments of continuity and discontinuity in the agenda of this important policy area. There have been many studies that aimed to understand and explain the origins and patterns of the Brazilian social protection system, including classical historical studies – such as those undertaken by Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1979), José Murilo de Carvalho (2005) and Sônia Draibe (1993) – and those focused on the new social policy patterns that have developed since re-democratization in the mid-1980s (ALMEIDA, 2005; ARRETCHE, 2018, 2012, 2009, 2002). In this paper we do not intend to provide a new causal explanation for the origins and developments of the Brazilian social protection system since the Federal Constitution of 1988; our goal is more modest and complementary: we aim to shed new light on the debate by using an innovative methodological approach that can help in understanding (dis)continuities in the federal agenda.

Our research provides answers such questions as: What level of attention do governments give to welfare policy over time? Are such indicators of attention consistently present across different governments or are there variations

that lead to the inclusion or exclusion of welfare policies from policy priorities? Among the different alternatives available to deal with problems related to such welfare matters as food security, income, poverty, superannuation and disability, is it possible to find changes in government understandings and actions? When we analyze the different indicators of governmental attention in respect of the symbolic and decisional agendas, is it possible to find similarities in the levels of attention given to welfare policies?

This is not the first time that such theoretical and methodological tools have been used to analyze Brazil's agenda-setting and policy-change processes (BRASIL, 2017; BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2019a; BRASIL and JONES, 2020; SUDANO, 2018). It is, however, the first time that a large amount of data has been used for the specific analysis of Brazilian welfare policies over a long time period. When we look at studies carried out by the international community, our research design stands out because the focus here is on multiple datasets that focus on a single policy area (social welfare policies). Traditionally, studies produced by researchers using the same methods and approaches (policy attention indicators over time used to identify priorities and changes in public policies) have favored longitudinal analyses with a single dataset across policy areas that have shown levels of attention given to the various policy areas and then considered the topics that stand out over time (BORGHETTO, CARAMMIA and RUSSO, 2018; BORGHETTO, SANTANA-PEREIRA and FREIRE, 2020; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT, PALAU, and BAUMGARTNER, 2015; GREEN-PEDERSEN and MORTENSEN, 2010; GROSSMAN and SAURUGGER, 2004; JOHN, BERTELLI, JENNINGS and BEVAN, 2013).

Considering the ways in which welfare policies in Brazil have been studied by reviewing the Brazilian literature, our methodology and theoretical approach were innovative. Most of the debate on welfare policies in Brazil – see Arretche, 2018, 2012; Bichir, 2016; Jaccoud et al., 2005; Sátyro and Cunha, 2014; Sposati, 2009 and Yazbek, 2004 – has identified political-institutional dimensions as central to explaining changes in the agenda subsequent to the 1988 Federal Constitution. Work on the role of ideas in welfare policies, such as Sátyro and Cunha (2018) on the trajectory of social welfare after the 1988 Constitution, has tended to emphasize institutional changes and major legal transformations. Sátyro and Cunha (2018) argue that the construction of the social welfare system required more than

the constitutional provisions enacted in 1988. "It required the entire set of subsequent constitutional legislation, a process in which the ruling party played a critical role" (SÁTYRO and CUNHA, 2018). In this sense, the use of detailed indicators of governmental attention, internationally recognized but heretofore not applied to the Brazilian case, can make important contributions to the debate.

As a complement to the work of Marta Arretche (2018), which analyzes access to education, health and social welfare policies since the 1988 Constitution, the contribution of our research design is to produce an analysis based on the literature on agenda-setting, thereby filling a gap in the debate in the Brazilian literature by analyzing the relationship between policy attention and policy change. Our design, methods and theories have allowed us to identify continuities and discontinuities over time. Nonetheless, discussion of the main factors that explain these processes is beyond the scope of this article. In this case study we look at the main trends in social welfare and development policies, including income transfer and food security programs, as well as programs and services aimed at specific social groups, such as children, young adults and the elderly. As our analyses show, the understanding of the importance of social policies has changed as have alternative solutions and the foci of such policies.

Building on the literature on agenda-setting and the role of policy attention in policy dynamics (JONES and BAUMGARTNER , 2012, 1993; BAUMGARTNER, JONES and WILKERSON, 2011; BEVAN and JENNINGS, 2014; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT, PALAU and BAUMGARTNER, 2015; MORTENSEN et al., 2011), the main analytical and methodological contribution of this article is its use of the research strategy developed under the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) for Brazilian policy research (ANDRADE, BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2021; BRASIL, 2017; BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2019a, 2019b; BRASIL, CAPELLA and FAGAN, 2020; CAPELLA, BRASIL and SUDANO, 2015). This contribution accompanies other similar works that have sought to understand agenda-setting and changes in priorities vis-à-vis various policy areas in Brazil. In a specific study on health policies, Brasil and Capella (2019b) revealed the dynamics of governmental attention to health policies and identified the main issues and priority changes between 1986 and 2003. In 2019, in a strategy that looked at a single data set (addresses to National Congress) across policy areas, Brasil and Capella analyzed priorities in presidential attention (BRASIL

and CAPELLA, 2019a). This article results from systematic research that applies this innovative methodology based on content analysis and the categorization of different documents and information to understand the levels of attention given to a particular public policy area – social welfare. Other thematic studies that use different approaches and methods have been made and reported in the Brazilian literature. These, for the most part, range from historical-institutional analyses, such as those by Bichir (2016), Bichir and Gutierres (2019), Gutierres (2015), Jaccoud, Bichir and Mesquita (2017), Margarites (2019), Mendonsa (2012), Mestriner (2008), to case studies of specific programs.

Our interest is not the agendas of specific institutions (ministries or secretariats), the institutionalization of such agendas or the impact of policy changes. Instead, we aim to identify macro trends, moments of continuity and inflections in the social welfare domain through quantitative and qualitative analyses of the level of attention given to relevant policies across time and presidential terms. Using this approach, we were able to look at the levels of attention given to welfare policies over time and to frame, across multiple datasets, how much was said about such policies and what was said about them. This analysis contributes to the existing work on social welfare studies as it presents a series of unpublished and comparable data from different sources and actors. It also contributes by permitting the measurement of inflections in priorities and in the ways in which policies, policy problems and alternative solutions are formulated. Even studies that propose to apply 'process tracing' tools to the analysis of the post-1988 period (SÁTYRO and CUNHA, 2014) do not consider such a large and detailed volume of data. This allows us to specify continuities and discontinuities observed over this long period of time with reference to different data on government attention given to welfare policy. Moments of increased or decreased attention and moments of change can be observed by means of regular and reliable indicators of policy attention over time. This research design does not, however, establish causal relations that explain why changes occur. Other analytical methods and tools would be needed to elucidate such relations.

There is no consensual definition of 'social policy' or 'social protection'. As we have learned since Marshall (1967), notions of social law are historically and socially situated depending on the concept of socially shared citizenship and thus

have different political-social institutional arrangements. According to Kerstenetzky, the welfare state can be defined as "a set of public interventions aimed at promoting welfare and involving (some degree of) income redistribution" (KERSTENETZKY, 2012, p. 447).

For this paper we selected six different datasets to analyze social policy initiatives – such as social welfare, which was established as a policy by the 1988 Constitution, anti-poverty policies (such as cash transfer programs as the 'Bolsa Família' program (PBF) and the 'Benefício de Prestação Continuada' (BPC)) and policies that are aimed at specific groups, such as youth, women, children and the black population (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017). In line with recent studies that have demonstrated the importance of attention at certain political moments and of windows of opportunity at the federal level for the consolidation of social welfare as a public policy, this article analyzes the level of attention given to welfare policies at the federal level by means of an innovative methodological strategy, mapping and analyzing the percentage of government attention given to welfare policies over time through different official documents: investiture speeches, addresses to Congress, provisional presidential decrees, presidential decrees, approved ordinary laws and approved constitutional amendments.

The article is structured in five parts, besides this introduction. The first section presents the theoretical framework of agenda-setting and policy dynamics. The second, methodological section presents the data selected for this study and the tools adopted for the construction of databases on Brazilian government attention. The third section is dedicated to the history of social policy development in Brazil. The fourth section presents an analysis and a discussion. The fifth section summarizes the main findings and indicates possible advances in this research agenda.

Agenda-setting, policy attention and policy dynamics

Over the past thirty years, theoretical and methodological contributions to studies of the agenda-setting process have transformed the literature and the ways in which we understand the process of prioritization and definition as well as the dynamics of public policies. These models (Multiple Stream; Punctuated Equilibrium Theory; Advocacy Coalition Framework) come from the US literature of

the 1980s and 1990s, and constitute 'synthetic models' for the analysis of the public policy process that consider the role of values, beliefs, actors and institutions in government priorities and decision-making processes. From theoretical and methodological innovations, new concepts and research designs have emerged for the analysis of the agenda-setting process. The punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993) explains the coexistence of moments guided by incremental decisions, in which policies go through long periods of stability with small and discreet adjustments but also punctuated by fast and strong moments of change. In 'Agendas and Instability in American Politics' (1993) Baumgartner and Jones showed that it would be possible to analyze attention to small pieces of information over long periods of time as a way to track the dynamics of attention to one or more policy issues. The author of the U.S Policy Agendas Project studied several issues, such as tobacco, nuclear energy and pesticide policies, tracking the attention given to these themes over hundreds of years and explaining changes in public policies through a complex process of interaction between ideas, attention, information and institutions.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) showed that the entry or exit of 'issues' into the agenda is not the result of the influence of institutions only, just as it does not correspond only to changes in the public debate. Instead, it is the product of a complex combination of elements that begins with a change in the attention given to a given theme. In 'The Politics of Attention' (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2005), Jones and Baumgartner investigate US government policies and reveal the direct relationship between increased attention being given to sectoral policies (issues) and consequent changes to public policies. They found that information processing, defined as "collecting, assembling, interpreting, and prioritizing signals from the environment" (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2005, p. 07) is critical to explaining how issues are prioritized. Drawing on studies initially undertaken in the United States, Baumgartner and Jones (2005) describe the level of attention (i.e. increased or decreased attention) that policymakers give to policy by reference to the changes to the agenda. They feel that the information provided to policymakers is uncertain, ambiguous and subject to interpretation. This leads policymakers to select from the range of information available by prioritizing some items and ignoring

others. The levels of attention given to these issues indicate consequent changes in public policies, be they incremental or of substantial impact (punctuations).

Punctuated equilibrium is a theory of policy dynamics that details a set of mechanisms that lead to policy change. Policy change is caused by changes in the preferences of policymakers that do or do not occur in response to different situations affecting political, social and economic systems as well as the attention given to certain matters and the relevant information processes. Unlike institutional-based models that explain policy changes, such as the election-centered model, the agenda-setting perspective recognizes the critical role of information and policy attention in policy processes and policy change. An agenda-setting perspective based on policy attention indicators looks at different issues over a long time frame, observing changes in the patterns of attention given to issues and not just the selection of solutions. Policy dynamics are at the center of this analysis and make clear the necessity of prioritizing issues. The key question is how much policymakers pay attention to issues and how they prioritize them given the flow of information into the system (JONES and BAUMGARTNER, 2012).

In the following excerpt, Baumgartner, Jones and Wilkerson (2011) summarize this innovation and the importance of the findings set out in their General Punctuation Thesis. They point out the relationship between attention, agenda-setting and policy change:

> The typical agenda-setting study from the policy literature suggests a highly dynamic policy-making process where changes can occur more rapidly than a preference-based approach would lead us to expect. Changes in information are central to any explanation. The scarcity of the attention of policymaking institutions is critical. There are many more problems than governments can possibly attend to, and each problem may be extremely complex. These challenges lead to attention scarcity. For example, discussions of poverty may be focused on the severity of the problem or on the efficiency of the solutions but rarely both at once. Both are relevant dimensions, but attention typically is not divided in proportion to any comprehensive assessment of the relative weight of the diverse elements of an issue. (...) The policy agenda-setting perspective also highlights the multidimensional nature of policy process – how attention scarcity can cause policy-making attention to shift from energy to health care to immigration to the economy to war, climate change, or human rights. (BAUMGARTNER, JONES and WILKERSON, 2011, p. 951).

The concept of institutional friction is central to the PET approach and to explain policy incrementalism and change. This concept is present in the literature on organization theory, sociology and behavioral psychology. The concept of friction is related to organizational patterns and culture (symbols and human behaviors) that generate stability and define the forms of operation that tend to preserve the status quo rather than continuously promoting change. In addition to being characterized by organizational and cognitive friction, institutional friction is governed by institutional rules. These are pre-established rules of action that restrict political action or impose mandatory processes to be followed by decision-makers. These rules, such as those set out in a country's constitution or the procedures governing the approval of new legislation, restrict or at least limit major changes so that they cannot occur frequently and easily.

> The stability imposed by the two kinds of friction, cognitive/organizational friction, and institutional friction, does not cause universal gridlock, with a system awaiting elections to point to change. However, it is a retarding force that interferes with the smooth adjustment of a political system to changing information signals from the policymaking environment. Change occurs only when the informational signals from the external world either are extraordinarily strong, on the one hand, or when the signals accumulate over time to overcome the friction. As a consequence, policy-making systems remain stable until the signals from outside exceed a threshold, and then they lurch forward – that is, a policy punctuation occurs; afterward, they resume 'equilibrium' (JONES and BAUMGARTNER, 2012, p. 08).

Institutional friction is variable. Different institutions, actors and venues exhibit different levels of friction. In Brazil, some indicators of governmental attention may be subject to a greater or lesser degree to institutional friction. For instance, the symbolic agenda that involves presidential speeches, such as a president's inauguration speech and annual speeches at the early stages of the policy-making process, are not debated at committee level and do not require that the legislative and the executive branches come to an understanding. The topics addressed in such speeches reflect a broader agenda, characterized by 01. an absence of restrictions regarding content (i.e. any topic can be addressed); 02. an absence of decision costs; and 03. low institutional friction. In general, the symbolic agenda is related to the first steps in the policymaking process, in which institutional costs are lower than in later steps (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2005, p. 175). In contrast to the symbolic agenda, government indicators such as the

'approved ordinary laws', which represent a decisional agenda (the inner circle of the decision-making process), demand a competitive process from proposal to approval (debated in committees, voted on by policymakers, tested constitutionally where called for). Obviously, these indicators are subject to more institutional friction than are symbolic agenda speeches. Throughout our analysis, we will show how the degrees of attention given to social policies can vary according to the different indicators used. The concept of institutional friction will be widely used in the analysis to understand increases and decreases in the levels of attention given to a given policy, as well as the relationship between the types of indicators selected.

Data and methods: the comparative agendas project and the Brazilian case

The U.S. Policy Agendas Project that analyzes the dynamics of public policies in the United States created an international network of scholars who share a large data infrastructure. The Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), collects, organizes and makes freely available millions of bits of information concerning the objects of government attention over long periods of time from more than twenty countries, as well as subnational and supranational entities, such as of the European Union. The main idea of the CAP is to gather information on all government activities for long periods of time, in different contexts and different political systems. To develop this project, researchers sought to identify a set of indicators capable of allowing the observation and comparison of levels of attention over time, across policy issues and in a comparative perspective. Initially, projects looking at the USA considered Congressional hearings, bills and public laws, executive orders, statements from the president, such as State of the Union addresses, the agenda as set by media coverage in widely-circulated newspapers and the agenda as set by public opinion (Most Important Problems). These are used as indicators of government attention from which information about institutions' and actors' priorities is extracted. Datasets are made in order to organize information about how much is said about these issues and what is said about them. One of the great innovations of these projects was the creation of a new field of policy studies with a comparative perspective that considers the dozens of countries that share the methodological framework for the construction and analysis of datasets.

The Brazilian Policy Agendas Project, which joined the CAP group in 2015, aims to test the scope of the original theoretical propositions in other contexts of policy making. As justified by Capella, Brasil and Sudano (2015), the attention indicators selected by the Brazilian Policy Agendas Project are related to those used by other national projects that are part of the Comparative Agendas Project. They are indicators with temporal regularity, which allows analysis over time and which also reflect policymakers' priorities, both in respect of the executive and legislative branch.

The literature developed by the various researchers of the dozens of CAP projects, including Brazilian studies, shows the adequacy of these indicators to measure, monitor and analyze the formation of and changes to the governmental agenda and the resulting possible changes in public policies (BORGHETTO, CARAMMIA and RUSSO, 2018; BORGHETTO, SANTANA-PEREIRA and FREIRE, 2020; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT and PALAU, 2011; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT, PALAU, and BAUMGARTNER, 2015; GREEN-PEDERSEN and MORTENSEN, 2010; GROSSMAN and SAURUGGER, 2004; JOHN, BERTELLI, JENNINGS and BEVAN, 2013). For this analysis, our study considers the following indicators: addresses to Congress and inauguration speeches – both indicators of the symbolic presidential agenda that are widely used to map and investigate the president's priorities (ARNOLD, DOYLE and WIESEHOMEIER, 2017; BREUNIG, GROSSMAN and SCHNATTERER, 2019; CHARAUDEAU, 2006; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT, PALAU and BAUMGARTNER, 2015; CHAQUÉS-BONAFONT; PALAU, and WILKERSON, 2008). Legislative production is also analyzed as an indicator of attention, both in respect of the executive (presidential provisional decrees, executive orders) and the legislative branches (approved ordinary laws and approved constitutional amendments).

The data selected for this research present peculiarities in respect of the legislative process and, therefore, institutional friction, as noted by Baumgartner and Jones (2005, 2002). Documents such as addresses to the National Congress and inauguration speeches are made up of intentions, government projects and proposals. They indicate the president's priorities and are not subject to the institutional constraints and frictions inherent in the selection and approval process. We wish to emphasize that they are nonetheless important. The extensive

literature on the symbolic agenda discusses the uses of official public speeches for policy analysis (CHARQUÉS-BONAFONT, PALAU and BAUMGARTNER, 2015). We use approved laws and constitutional amendments as indicators relevant to the legislative branch. For the purposes of this paper, we do not take into consideration proposed ordinary laws and constitutional amendments.

Although the inclusion of data related to proposed legislation is useful for analysis of the systemic agenda (which includes least-considered issues), several studies on government agenda-setting consider that is also possible to analyze attention by drawing on approved legislation (i.e., approved ordinary laws and constitutional amendments) as an indicator of attention (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993; BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2019b; COLLINS, 2018; DORING, 2001; DOWDING, HINDMOOR and MARTIN, 2016). This choice of indicators results in an analysis of the agenda that is closer to policy change because the indicators reveal the strength of and priority given to the relevant issues as they go through the legislative process. Proposed laws can often reflect individual ideas or attempts to divert attention, and signify highly specific and individual preoccupations that are often untraceable and irrelevant to policy dynamics. By selecting only ideas that attract the attention of the legislature and that have the power and strength to pass to approvals in a competitive process of defining priorities, these data (i.e., approved laws) become an increasingly accurate gauge of policy change.

The variety of indicators selected by this study allowed us to measure and analyze different approaches in respect of social policy dynamics in Brazil. From the symbolic agenda – more fluid and with fewer institutional barriers – to the legislative agenda – a source of indicators of attention that have gone through such processes as that required for laws to be approved – this study presents indicators and results and compares them over time in order to demonstrate the relationships between attention levels vis-à-vis the selected dataset.

This study brings together qualitative and quantitative perspectives involving multiple research tools and methods. We used an information coding system to create a database that synthesizes and organizes information related to the attention given by actors to sectoral policies. Among the main actors involved, the presidency, the legislature and public opinion are considered central to this type of analysis. We used a method established for the first time in the US

Policy Agendas Project (BAUMGARTNER, GREEN-PEDERSEN and JONES, 2006), in which public policy inputs and outputs are ranked using a standardized coding system to produce valid comparisons within nationally-specific and international databases.

To map attention given to sectoral public policies over time, the research design proposed by the US Policy Agendas Project and replicated in this study builds databases on governmental attention using a content analysis approach, with the transformation of raw materials, such as laws, texts and speeches, into major topics and subtopics as a methodological tool. The goal of this process is to comprehensively code large datasets to focus on the attention given to a specific policy issue over time. The coding process follows a common set of rules in order to accurately code the policy focus of each observation. Attention is mapped according to the substantive policy of each item (each ordinary law or each provisional presidential decree) and not according to the target audience or arena where it is defined. This means that the analysis of the selected item is interpretative and seeks to identify in which sector of public policy (only one topic) each observation can be identified according to a list of topics (for the code book see Table 01).

We seek to analyze the macro sector into which the public policy information under examination is inserted, this being selected from a predefined list of sectoral policies called 'major topics'. To ensure comparability between the various cases we consider, these major topics are fixed, i.e., they are not modified according to the specificities of each country's public policies. In other words, it is assumed that national variations can be grouped into these pre-established major topics.

There are some challenges arising from the use of this coding system, especially with information that is sometimes intersectoral and cross-cutting and which is coordinated by different ministries or agencies. It is not possible, according to the coding rules, to classify the same information into two distinct variables (subtopics). This means the classification process is of utmost importance[1].

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[1]All observations are manually coded twice by trained research assistants. Dual coding serves as a reliability and credibility mechanism for coded observations. When coders disagree, a third researcher reads the coders' remarks and resolves the deadlock by means of a final decision.

This standardized coding and database-building process means that raw information such as speeches, official texts and laws can all be uniformly and comparably transformed into major topics and subtopics. When coding selected observations, researchers follow a common set of rules to accurately code the policy focus of each observation. Table 01 shows the list of major topics used by all CAP member projects.

Table 01. Major topic codes and policy issues

Major Topic	Title
1	Domestic Macroeconomic Issues
2	Civil Rights, Minority Issues and Civil Liberties
3	Health
4	Agriculture
5	Labor and Employment
6	Education
7	Environment
8	Energy
9	Immigration and Refugee Issues
10	Transportation
12	Law, Crime and Family Issues
13	Social Welfare
14	Community Development and Housing Issues
15	Banking, Finance and Domestic Commerce
16	Defense
17	Space, Science, Technology and Communications
18	Foreign Trade
19	International Affairs and Foreign Aid
20	Government Operations
21	Public Lands, Water Management and Territorial Issues
23	Cultural Policy Issues

Source: Bevan, 2019.

In addition to the major codes, which set the different sectoral policies, the coding system also classifies observations into more specific subtopics, i.e., 221 subtopics that are hierarchically below and necessarily linked to each major topic. Thus, for each major topic, there is a variety of smaller, more specific subjects inserted within the major policy theme. For example, under the topic of 'energy' subtopics represent different types of energy policies, such as wind, thermoelectric, renewable and oil, among others. Scholars can use these data to perform analyses at higher or lower levels of aggregation.

The definition of our major topic of interest, i.e., 'welfare policies', does not include education, health, employment or income generation policies. According to the definition adopted by the group, welfare policies refer to assistance, social

development, poverty alleviation, food security policies as well as policies aimed at specific population groups, involving interventions aimed at families, children, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Major topics are fixed but individual CAP projects may suggest changing existing subtopics and creating such new subtopics as researchers deem necessary to better portray the realities of each country. The process of creating new subtopics, however, requires researchers to always maintain a reference and similarity list so that, in comparative analyses, specific information can be cataloged and compared with the official master code book framework (BEVAN, 2019). In this study, which follows the structure of the Brazilian code book, no specific subtopic was created, and the study was developed from the existing variables in the master code book.

To avoid confusion, we wish to point out that the method used in this study does not take into account the importance, impact or any evaluative aspect of public policies that appear in the documents we analyzed. Our method highlights the appearance of topics in public policies over time. Thus, a law that creates a national social assistance system and a law that regulates philanthropy, for example, are codified equally according to the number of times that they appear. Therefore, qualitative analyzes, as institutional and historical approaches, supported by the literature on welfare policies, interpret these data and identify special or high-impact policies.

In this paper, we define two distinct levels of social policy attention analysis in Brazil: one that takes into account the attention of the general social policy in comparison to the other sectoral policies proposed in Table 01 and another that disaggregates the general attention given to social policy into smaller and more detailed issues within this sectoral policy, while concentrating the distribution of social policy subtopics, as shown in Table 02.

After the systematization of the data, one of the main challenges faced by studies on agenda setting and policy change is to determine which information, actors and arenas are important when analyzing attention to social policies in Brazil, as discussed in Jaccoud, Bichir and Mesquita (2017). Following the recent literature, especially the work already developed by the CAP groups, this article uses the data produced by the Brazilian project. There are six types of data from two different arenas: the executive branch, which involves speeches made by the president,

addresses to Congress, provisional presidential decrees and presidential decrees; and the legislative branch, with information on approved ordinary laws and constitutional amendments. To ensure comparability with related projects developed internationally, neither ordinances, resolutions, instructions or normative resolutions were considered in the corpus that we analyzed[2].

Table 02. Subtopics related to social Welfare Policies

1300. General	General remarks on social welfare policies involving more than one subtopic, general social welfare policies, the welfare state, social welfare, ministries and budgets such as social development, social welfare policy management systems, 'Cadastro Único', computer systems for the development of social actions and policies, 'Benefício de Prestação Continuada' (BPC) for the elderly and disabled. This subtopic does not classify employment. Policies related to work are not codified as social welfare.
1301 – Food Assistance	Policies in respect of hunger, food education, support for food needs, malnutrition and school meals regardless of where they are prepared, provided or who the competent body is.
1302 - Low-Income, anti-poverty Assistance	Observations on social welfare policies aimed at poverty reduction, income distribution, social assistance, financial assistance, poverty issues and the poverty line. Anti-poverty policies.
1303 - Elderly Assistance	Social policies for elder care. Assistance benefits to the elderly over 65 years old that do not involve retirement. Tariff and payment exemption policies, elderly rights, care centers for the elderly, social assistance policies for the elderly. They are not considered health policies of the elderly, which fall under Major topic 03 (Health).
1304 - Disabled Assistance	Issues related to social and welfare policies for people with physical and intellectual disabilities - not related to retirement. Specific policies on tariffs, pricing and access to specific disability assistance systems. Accessibility, demarcation of spaces for the disabled, priority queues for the disabled, specific transportation. Disability health policies that are in Major topic 03 (Health) are not considered.
1305 – Volunteering and Associations	Volunteering, social services and NGO work with formalized service agreements, church work in promoting social equality and social assistance. For textual documents that contain expressions such as 'assistencialismo' and issues not handled by the State through legislation.
1308 – Family, Youth and Child Care Assistance	Child custody issues in divorce cases, child adoption issues, childcare policies, orphanages, policies to facilitate late adoption, large-scale youth unemployment, education and health policies.
1399 – Others	Observations on social welfare policies that do not fit into any of the above.

Source: Brazilian Policy Agendas Project (2020).

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[2]These institutional documents, which are produced by secretariats and ministries, are sometimes relevant for the institutionalization of social policies in Brazil, such as the case of Unified Health System (ARRETCHE and MARQUES, 2004) and Unified Social Assistance System (BICHIR, 2016).

After the systematization of the data, one of the main challenges faced by studies on agenda setting and policy change is to determine which information, actors and arenas are important when analyzing attention to social policies in Brazil, as discussed in Jaccoud, Bichir and Mesquita (2017). Following the recent literature, especially the work already developed by the CAP groups, this article uses the data produced by the Brazilian project. There are six types of data from two different arenas: the executive branch, which involves speeches made by the president, addresses to Congress, provisional presidential decrees and presidential decrees; and the legislative branch, with information on approved ordinary laws and constitutional amendments. To ensure comparability with related projects developed internationally, neither ordinances, resolutions, instructions or normative resolutions were considered in the corpus that we analyzed[3].

Each dataset was built from original documents extracted from official databases and that were available online. The texts of investiture speeches and addresses to the National Congress were taken from the official website of the Library of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil (http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/). All data relating to legislative activity, both from Executive and Legislative branch, were obtained from the official website LEXML (Legislative and Legal Information Network of the Brazilian Senate: https://www.lexml.gov.br/).

The coding process used in this research that employed in other studies developed by CAP researchers. Because it uses different data sources, with different formats, the process of coding is done in two different ways: all data relating to the executive and legislative branches are coded by unit. That is, each item (law, decrees, etc.) is classified under a single major topic and a single subtopic, according to Tables 01 and 02.

In a different way, texts, such as Addresses to the National Congress and Inauguration Speeches are not classified under a single major topic. Such texts go

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[3]These institutional documents, which are produced by secretariats and ministries, are sometimes relevant for the institutionalization of social policies in Brazil, such as the case of Unified Health System (ARRETCHE and MARQUES, 2004) and Unified Social Assistance System (BICHIR, 2016).

through a fragmentation process, whereby 'sentences' are created according to the appearance of a new policy issue. See an example in the following passage from an Inauguration Speech: "It is absolutely necessary for the country to grow again by generating jobs and distributing income to those in the greatest need". This text is separated into three different 'sentences', since the same sentence refers to three different sectoral policies. The sentences are: 01. "It is absolutely necessary for the country to grow again" which identifies a concern about macroeconomic policy; 02. "generating jobs", which draws attention to employment policies and, finally, 03. "distributing income to those in the greatest need" which reflects a concern about policies to combat social and economic inequalities. As can be seen in the example above, the construction of the sentence reflects the way in which attention is given to different policy areas. After the fragmentation of the text into 'sentences', each 'sentence' is allocated to a major topic and a subtopic. Texts of this type correspond to hundreds of 'sentences'.

To guarantee credibility and methodological confidence, all legislation data and all sentences were classified twice, by two different researchers, according to CAP methodological specifications, and as detailed by the group that produced the codification of all data. It is important to note that the selected data from major topic 13 (welfare policies) used in this research, went through a new check, carried out specifically for the development of this research, where the authors analyzed all the codified data ratifying the codification performed. The results are shown below in Table 03.

Table 03 presents a summary of the database indicating the amount of data analyzed from each sector.

Table 03. Datasets – policy attention in democratic Brazil (1988-2018)

Type of document	Total outputs	Number of outputs on Social Welfare policies	% of Attention given to Social Welfare policies	Branch
Addresses to Congress	5161	390	7.51%	Executive
Inauguration Speeches	1550	134	8.64%	
Provisional Presidential Decrees	7001	106	1.51%	
Presidential Decrees	25527	334	1.3%	
Laws Passed Ordinary	6171	136	2.2%	Legislative
Passed Constitutional Amendments	105	5	4.76%	
Total	45515	1105	2.43%	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the 'Total Outputs' column Table 03 depicts the total data from 1988 to 2018 that was collected and coded, according to each database analyzed (i.e., type of document). Thus, it lists the total number of ordinary laws, constitutional amendments, decrees, provisional presidential decrees and 'sentences' drawn from inauguration speeches and messages to Congress[4]. The second column, 'Number of outputs on social welfare policies', shows the number of observations coded in major topic 13 (welfare policies), according to document type. The third column, '% of attention given to social welfare policies' shows the percentage that welfare policies represent of the total data mapped in column 'Total outputs'. It is important to note that the percentage of attention given to welfare policies presented in the table above shows the average over the 30 years since 1988 in each of our six datasets. The analysis proposed below will aggregate the data by presidential term and show whether the average (considering the entire democratic period) varied over time and presidential term and whether such variations were incremental or acute.

The time frame selected for this analysis runs from 1988 to 2018 and encompasses the Brazilian re-democratization period following the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988. This period saw the consolidation of social assistance as a public policy, as has been discussed by several authors (BICHIR and GUTIERRES, 2019; JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017). According to Jaccoud, Bichir and Mesquita (2017), given the current configuration of social assistance policy, it is possible to identify its contribution to the following three different fields of Brazilian social protection: 01. the provision of services aimed to fight different situations of vulnerability associated with the life cycle, disability and the inclusion of the poor in the labor market; 02. the guarantee of income to the poorest through the BPC and the PBF; and 03. the focus on promoting equity through the prioritization of publics. The process of the historical constitution of these dimensions is discussed in the next section.

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[4]The original data of the thirty years of Brazilian democracy are available for consultation at <www.comparativeagendas.net/brazil>.

The Brazilian social protection system

From 1930 to 1988, a conservative model of social protection based on large state-mediated alliances between capital and labor was the norm in Brazil (DRAIBE, 1993; ESPING-ANDERSEN, 1991). This pattern of social protection was characterized by strong centralization in the federal government, closed decision-making processes, centralized management of large bureaucracies, institutional fragmentation and inequity from the point of view of the distribution of services and benefits (ALMEIDA, 1995).

With re-democratization, a significant process of social policy reform began. The Federal Constitution of 1988 represented a redefinition of Brazil's federal arrangements through a slow and complex process of transferring administrative capacities, functions and resources from the federal government to the states and municipalities, which were recognized as politically autonomous members of a symmetrical and tripartite federalism. However, many of the expectations generated by the Constitution were frustrated and the process of consolidation of reforms was slow, with distinct priorities in respect of each social policy (DRAIBE, 2003).

According to Almeida (1995), the area of social assistance was less changed by this reform cycle than such areas as health, housing and education. Almeida (1995) identified the following three main explanatory factors for the absence of more profound changes to social assistance: 01. the lack of a national reform policy at the federal level; 02. the importance of the federal assistance apparatus as an instrument of patronage and political negotiation between the presidency, its congressional bases and the states; and 03. the political fragility of the reform supporting coalition (ALMEIDA, 1995, p. 95).

The 1988 Constitution's provisions regarding social assistance were approved by president Itamar Franco in 1993 by means of Law Nº 8,742 of 1993, the Organic Social Assistance Law (hereinafter 'LOAS'). As Silva, Yazbek and Di Giovanni (2007) have noted, despite the provisions of the Constitution, the early 1990s, characterized by recession, inflation, and the policy preferences of President Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), were hostile territory for any discussion of income redistribution or poverty alleviation. Many reform proposals were set down in the LOAS, which provided for the construction of a decentralized system, with co-

financing as the central pillar of social assistance and responsibilities being shared between federal levels. The central concern of the LOAS was the overcoming of the patronage model and the introduction of participatory decision-making mechanisms.

Advances in the construction of social assistance as a subject of public policy occurred gradually, especially during the 1995-2002 presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and, with greater vigor, during the 2003-2010 presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Brazil's first cash transfer programs were implemented in the 1990s, initially at the municipal level in various institutional formats that were emulated and disseminated throughout the country (COÊLHO, 2008; FONSECA, 2001; LOBATO, 1998). In 2001, the Cardoso administration launched an education-linked federal income transfer program called 'Bolsa Escola' (BICHIR, 2011). During the Lula administration, 'Bolsa Escola' was expanded to become 'Bolsa Família' (2003). The construction of State social assistance capacity accelerated with the creation of the Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation in 2004 (BICHIR, 2016, 2011; JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017).

The institutional construction process of the Unified Social Assistance System (hereinafter 'SUAS') began in 2005. The SUAS promotes federal coordination, national parameters for subnational policies and strategies for financing services and benefits, including social participation. The institutional construction process was based on various political projects focused on social assistance, with important inflection points in successive governments (BICHIR and GUTIERRES, 2019; JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017).

In spite of the fact that inequality is a well-known characteristic of Brazilian society, social assistance policies have not been always central to the federal agenda. Recent studies, especially Arretche (2018), have shown that policy decisions are central to understanding the process of inclusion of marginalized groups that began with re-democratization. This process has been marked by advances and setbacks in a to and fro between politics and policies that needs to be analyzed in detail, in addition to approaches that are based on historical-institutional arguments. In the next section we contribute to this debate by showing, in a nuanced and empirically-based way, which federal administrations devoted attention to social protection and what the main themes on their agendas were. In the section that follows it, we will

resume the characterization, for use in the analysis of the empirical data, of the main continuities and discontinuities across federal administrations.

Analysis

Two levels of analysis will be described in this section, the major topic level and the subtopic level, as presented earlier. Firstly, we will compare the attention given to welfare policies to that given to the other policy areas that are classified as major topics. Thus, we will consider the percentage of attention given to major topic 13, i.e., welfare policies, relative to the other major topics listed in Table 01. Such an analytical strategy allows us to compare the distribution of governmental attention to policy areas over time.

The following graphs (01 and 02) depict the percentage of attention given by presidents to welfare in speeches and in written documents aggregated by president. The presidents whom we consider are: José Sarney (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), 1985-1990); Fernando Collor (National Reconstruction Party (PRN), 1990-1992); Itamar Franco (PMDB, 1992-1995); Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) Cardoso 1: 1995-1998); Fernando Henrique Cardoso (Cardoso 2: 1999-2002); Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers' Party (PT) Lula 1: 2003-2006); Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula 2: 2007-2010) Dilma Rousseff (PT, Rousseff 1: 2011-2014) Dilma Rousseff (Rousseff 2: 2015-2016); and Michel Temer (PMDB, 2016-2018). Cardoso, Lula and Rousseff were each re-elected for second terms. Collor's sole term and Rousseff's second term were abbreviated by impeachment. Their vice-presidents, Franco and Temer, assumed the presidency for the remaining two years of each term of office.

We start the analysis of the data by presenting an overview of the main topics that appear as priorities in presidential inauguration speeches Although a diffuse sense of 'social debt bailout' was present in the context of re-democratization, as noted by several authors (ALMEIDA, 1995; ARRETCHE, 2018; DRAIBE, 1993), the initial foci were macroeconomic stabilization and inflation control (so-called first-generation reforms) as a precondition for any expansion of social investment, and the reorganization of government, civil rights, liberties, democracy and the public administration (ANDRADE, BRASIL and CAPELLA, 2021).

Table 04 shows the three most important topics in inauguration speeches from 1988 to 2018.

Table 04. Most important topics in presidential inauguration speeches

President	1st	2nd	3rd
Collor	Macroeconomy	International Affairs	Government Operations
Franco	Macroeconomy	Government Operations	Welfare policies
Cardoso 1	Macroeconomy	Civil Rights, Liberties	Welfare policies
Cardoso 2	Macroeconomy	Civil Rights, Liberties	Government Operations
Lula 1	International Affairs	Macroeconomy	Welfare policies
Lula 2	Macroeconomy	Labor and Employment	Welfare policies
Rousseff 1	Macroeconomy	International Affairs	Welfare policies
Rousseff 2	Macroeconomy	Government Operations	International Affairs
Temer	Macroeconomy	Government Operations	International Affairs

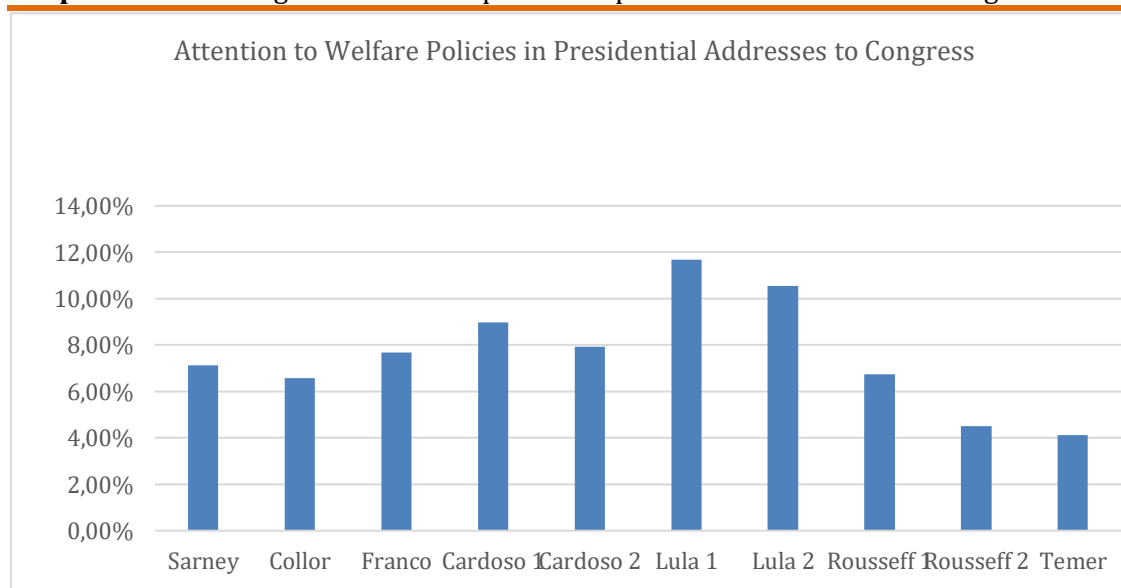Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As we will see in the following tables, welfare policies were given little or no attention in inaugural speeches in the early years of democratization (from 1985 to 1990). Neither were social issues presented as a priority in President Rousseff's second inauguration speech in 2015. The same is true of President Temer's inauguration speech. As revealed by Brasil, Capella and Fagan (2020), macroeconomics (Topic 01), government and public administration (Topic 21) were the priority topics throughout the period we considered. These topics occupied the attention of the presidency and the legislature throughout the lion's share of the post re-democratization period.

The graphs below (Graphs 01 and 02) reflect the percentage of attention given to welfare policies in inauguration speeches and addresses to Congress. The sources of the data are characterized by their discursive form and a low degree of institutional friction. Both are categorized as part of the so-called symbolic agenda (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2005; CHARQUÉS-BONAFONT; PALAU and BAUMGARTNER, 2015). Being more fluid and subject to less institutional friction, the symbolic agenda broadcasts the intentions, ideas and values that decision-makers seek to highlight. These priorities may or may not appear in the decision-making agenda and/or the policy formulation process.

Looking at Graph 01 – Addresses to Congress – emphasis should be given to the scores attributed to the Lula governments. In the first term, between 2003 and 2006, welfare policies accounted for an average of 15% of the total number of documents sent to Congress. Compared to Graph 02 – Inauguration Speeches – in

Lula's first and second terms, welfare policies accounted for 20% of the topics given attention. Incrementalism is clearly apparent at certain moments. The first, between 1990 and 2002, includes Franco's and Cardoso's first and second terms, as well as Rousseff's first term. Incrementalism is inferred when the data do not exhibit large variations or peaks in terms of attention but maintain a stable average across time. Specific moments are treated as snapshots and represent the level of attention being given to a specific issue at that moment. By increasing or reducing the number of such snapshots, peaks may appear or disappear. As Graph 02 shows, the Franco, Cardoso 01 and 02 and Rousseff 1 governments, exhibited an average of 10% of attention being given to welfare policies. This average percentage, with a few variations, can be characterized as incremental attention.

Graph 01. Attention given to welfare policies in presidential addresses to Congress

Attention to Welfare Policies in Presidential Addresses to Congress
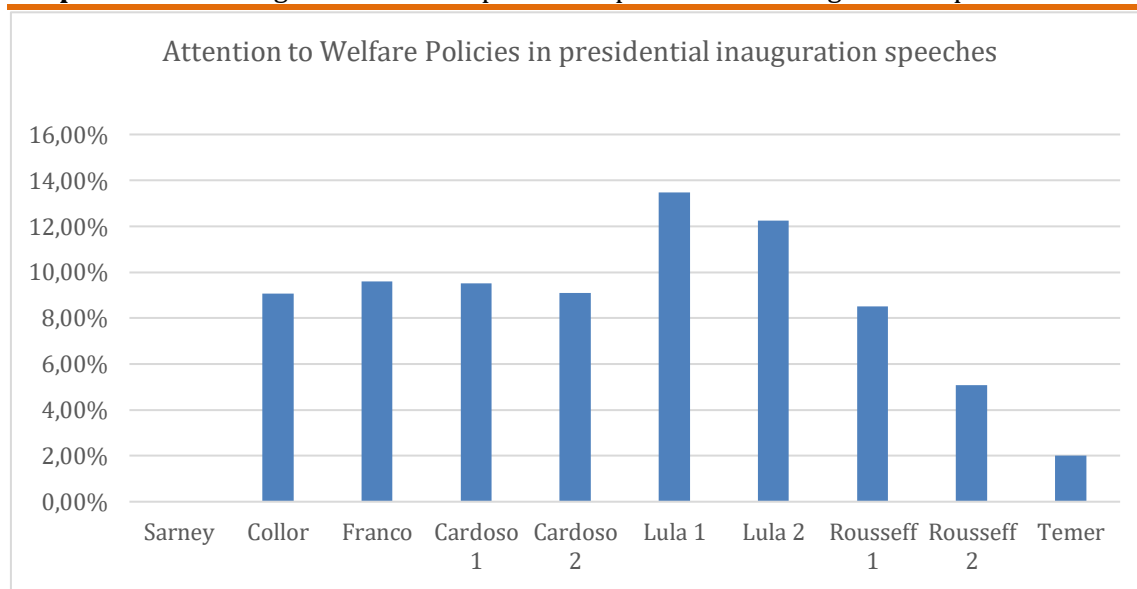
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

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Graph 02. Attention given to welfare policies in presidential inauguration speeches

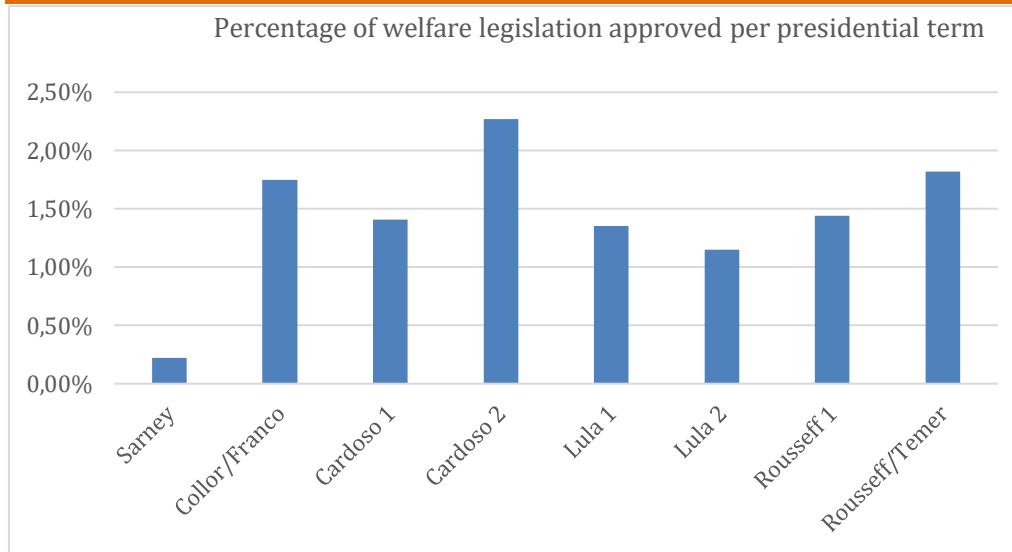
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Another important source of data for analysis is all approved legislation on welfare policies (major topic 13). The following graphs present two complementary analyses. Graph 03 shows the percentage of all legislation, both executive and legislative, on welfare policies. Included in this aggregation are approved ordinary laws, provisional presidential decrees, constitutional amendments and presidential decrees (normative acts within ministries, such as operational rules and ordinances) are excluded. Graph 04 disaggregates the values of legislative outputs by branch of government. Legislative production from the executive branch (presidential decrees and provisional presidential decrees) are separated from

legislative productions from the legislative branch (constitutional amendments and ordinary laws).

These indicators form a dataset that reflects a different type of agenda than the symbolic one. This dataset reflects a more restricted agenda that is subject to greater institutional friction as it has perforce gone through long debate and prioritization processes. Compared to the high levels of attention given to welfare policies in the symbolic agenda, the institutional friction produced by the legislative process potentially reduces the levels of success achieved by and attention given to welfare in approved legislation. The comparison is relevant because it shows that the levels of attention given in speeches cannot always be sustained sufficiently for intentions to be transformed into legislation.

From the Graphs 03 and 04 one can draw two major conclusions based on the agenda-setting and policy change literature. The first major conclusion is directly related to the barriers and limits imposed by environments with high institutional friction such as that suffered by legislation that is necessarily the subject of debate and approval in multiple venues. In the presidential speeches presented in Graphs 01 and 02, the average attention given to welfare policies was approximately 10% to 12%, and it peaked at 14%. This denotes a high priority being given by presidents to social issues in environments with low institutional friction via statements characterized by the expression of promises and intentions. By contrast, the welfare legislation that ended up being approved in the last 30 years, which had to make it through the grueling approval process, accounted for a mere 1.5 % of the total (See Table 03). We can therefore conclude that there is a mismatch between the attention given to welfare in the symbolic agenda and the resulting attention given to welfare in approved legislation.

Our second major conclusion is related to the process of incremental change that is characterized by stability, continuity and small changes in public policy. When analyzing the data from 1988 to 2018, we observed a stable line without large ups or downs. Especially after the 1990s, welfare policies clearly play a discreet role in which they are always present but gain little attention in the form of action being taken by the presidency or the legislature. We can therefore conclude that welfare is ever-present but not a matter of great priority.

Graph 03. Percentage of welfare legislation approved per presidential term

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Graph 04. Percentage of welfare legislation approved per presidential term: comparing outputs from the presidency and the legislature.
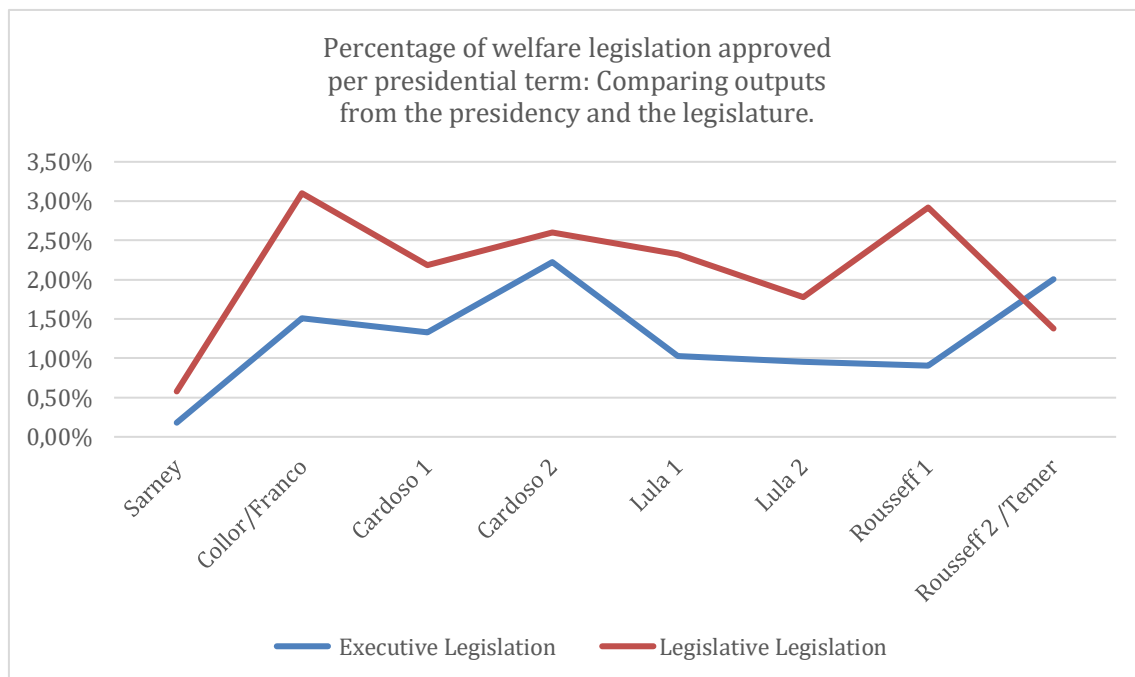
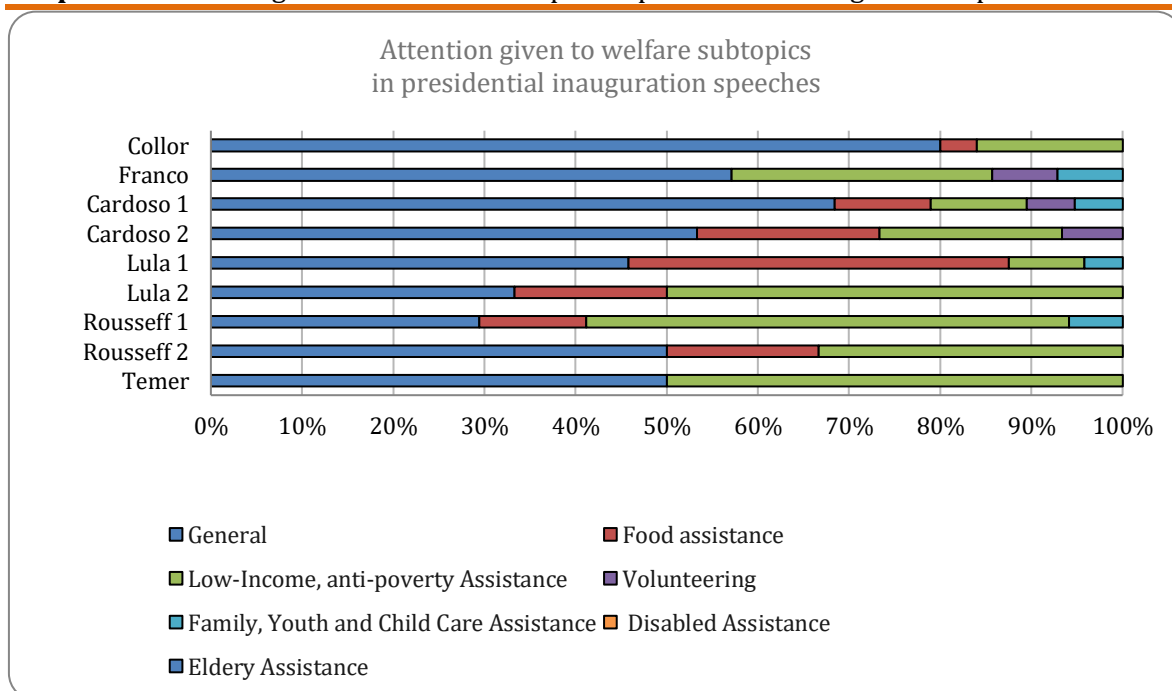Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of the subtopics, it is important to note that the design of this study does not consider the importance, impact or any evaluative aspect of public policies created over time. Especially in this first level of analysis, this research design demonstrates, with

methodological rigor, the level of attention given by selected actors to specific subject matter. Our first analysis found that welfare policies were given less attention during the high-friction legislative process than in low-friction discursive contexts.

Our subsequent analysis considers the subtopics presented in Table 02, and allows us to verify the differences and similarities between governments in terms of the provision of services, themes and target beneficiaries. By analyzing the subtopics, we can see not only how much has been said about a topic, but also what it is being said about and what tools, target beneficiaries and other details are set out in the policy. By specifying what is being talked about, we were able to analyze the differences, similarities, continuities and discontinuities in governmental attention to welfare policies. The percentage of attention can be the same, but the issues discussed, the target groups addressed and the ways the State operates can vary. The following graphs show the distribution of government attention at this second level of analysis.

Graph 05 shows the attention given by each president's inauguration speech, including the speeches made by Franco and Temer.

Graph 05. Attention given to welfare subtopics in presidential inauguration speeches
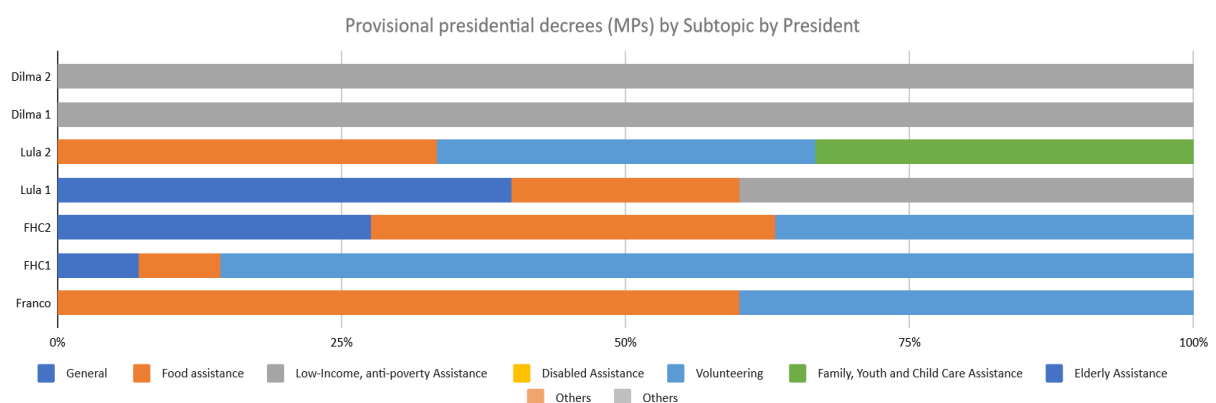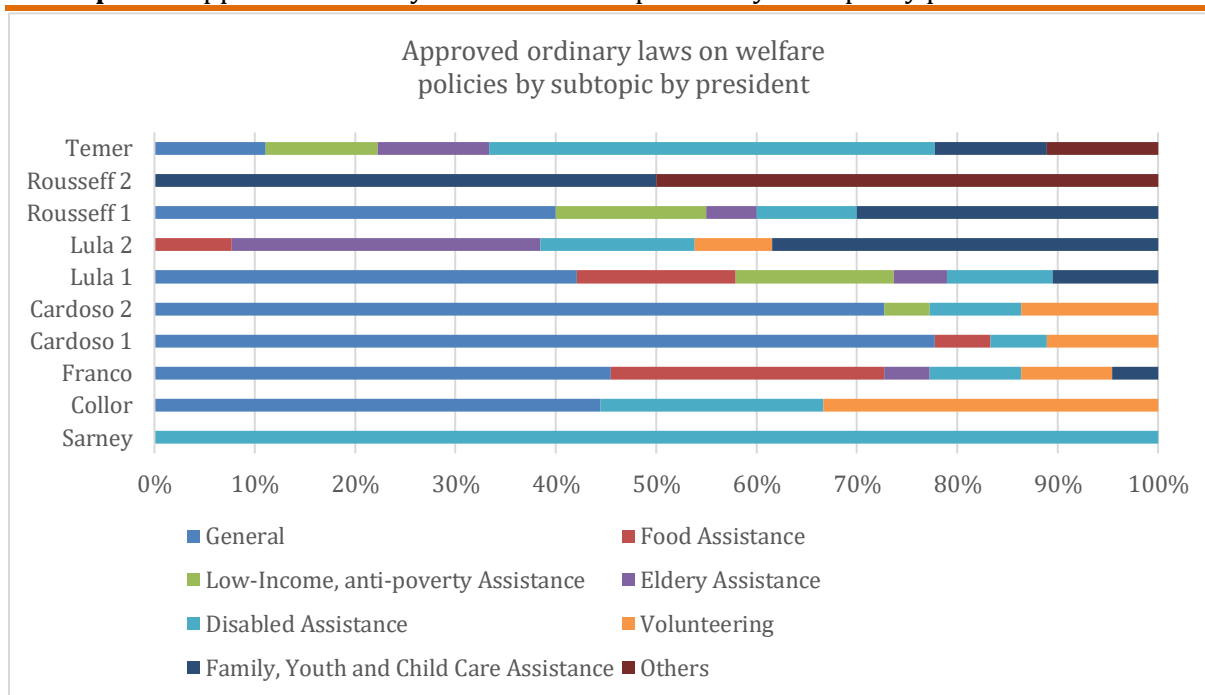

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Over the entire period, most presidential statements about welfare policies were divided between general themes and the fight against poverty, which is hardly surprising. It is interesting to note that some governments presented more thematically diverse messages, in particular the two Cardoso governments and the first Lula government, with important distinctions between them. In Cardoso's two inauguration speeches he discussed, alongside general themes and the fight against poverty, the issue of food security and the themes of volunteering and participation by the 'third sector' in social programs. 'Comunidade Solidária' was his government's flagship welfare policy for fighting poverty. In Lula's two terms, we observe an inversion of Cardoso's priorities. Unlike Cardoso, who prioritized general issues, Lula's first term flagship social policy was the 'Fome Zero' food security program; in his second term, it was the PBF that was aimed at low-income families with children. There is thus an important difference in terms of priorities between Cardoso and Lula.

Graphs 06 and 07 depict provisional presidential decrees and approved welfare policy laws, with bars separated by subtopics that are coded for each approved legislation.

Graph 06. Provisional presidential decrees by subtopic by president

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Graph 07. Approved ordinary laws on welfare policies by subtopic by president

Approved ordinary laws on welfare
policies by subtopic by president

Legend:
- General
- Food Assistance
- Low-Income, anti-poverty Assistance
- Eldery Assistance
- Disabled Assistance
- Volunteering
- Family, Youth and Child Care Assistance
- Others

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Provisional presidential decrees (MPs) were heavily used by the Cardoso government, especially prior to the Constitutional Amendment Nº 32 of 2001, which regulates their use[5]. Cardoso's high rate of MP promulgation did not correspond to a profusion of social assistance policies. Despite high levels of attention being given to food security policies (coded under Nº 1301), Cardoso's 32 MPs related to two programs only, the National School Meals Program and the Emergency Food Distribution Program. The high number of MPs reflected the president's focus on the regulation of these programs. During the Lula government, the PBF was created by means of MP Nº 132 of October 20, 2003.

Our analysis of welfare policy subtopics reveals the diversity of the agenda over time. Our data show that in the first years after re-democratization, which extend from the Collor government to the first Cardoso government, a great deal of welfare policy regulatory legislation was promulgated, especially in respect of budgetary releases for social policies put in place via laws provided for in the 1988 Constitution but which required that further specifications be laid down.

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[5]Constitutional Amendment Nº 32/2011 available at <http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/Emendas/Emc/emc32.htm>.

Another important measure used in the Cardoso government to organize the financing of social assistance and poverty alleviation programs was the creation of the Poverty Alleviation Fund through Constitutional Amendment Nº 31 of December 2000.

From the Lula government onwards, we see a shift of attention from general issues to others, including a variety of social policies, especially food security and anti-poverty policies. This shift applies to both the structure of the social assistance agenda and its coexistence with other policy areas that fall within the purview of the Ministry of Social Development, and the equality promotion agendas (such as those in respect of youth, women and the black population) that fall under the responsibility of other institutions.

In Lula's second term and Rousseff's first term, emphasis was given to youth policies (coded under Nº 1308). As Silva and Silva (2011) noted, since the 2000s, discussion of this theme has intensified at the federal level. In 2003, Congress established a Special Youth Commission tasked with identifying the elements necessary for the construction of the National Youth Plan and the Youth Statute. In 2005, the National Youth Secretariat was created. Another youth policy area, coded under Nº 1305, is volunteering; this theme was present the 1990s, from the Collor to the Cardoso administrations, but practically disappeared under the Lula administrations.

One of the most interesting results of the analysis is presented in the following chart. Two types of indicators were selected from within presidential decrees: anti-poverty policy indicators (subtopic 1302) and policy indicators promoted through volunteering, partnerships and recognition of charities (subtopic 1305).

Graph 08 summarizes two central patterns of dispute in the field of social assistance. The first pattern relates to disputes over how services should be provided, i.e., whether they should be provided directly from the State or indirectly (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017); the second pattern relates to the placement of anti-poverty policies, particularly income transfer programs, in the context of social assistance (BICHIR, 2011).

Graph 08. Comparison of attention given to volunteering vs. poverty alleviation in presidential decrees by president
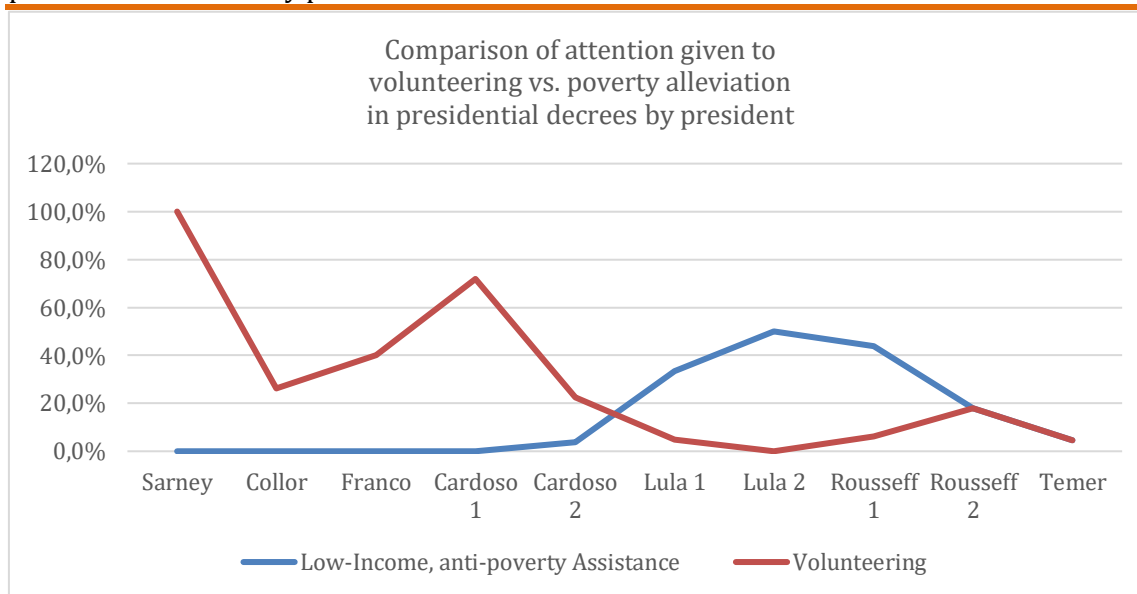
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

From 1988 until the second Cardoso administration, the tradition of indirect service provision through nonprofit entities was maintained. During this period, there were no significant investments in the construction of the State capacity for the direct provision of services. Such direct provision only started during the first Lula government through the expansion of a network of social welfare bodies (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017). It is no wonder then that we see a peak in Graph 9 that relates to the so-called 'Programa Comunidade Solidária', which was central to the agenda of the first Cardoso government and was based on partnerships with CSOs that were under no obligation to present themselves as having any connection with the policy.

In the field of poverty alleviation, we see a variety of initiatives over time, mostly involving conditional cash transfer programs. These started in the 1990s, at the municipal level and were then expanded to the federal level (BICHIR, 2011; OLIVEIRA, 2018). The Cardoso government made progress in the institutionalization of social assistance, in particular through the implementation of LOAS provisions. However, as discussed by Mendosa (2012), social protection was centered on cash transfer programs to families and not on social assistance services, which remained fragmented and outside of the State's purview. The first CCT federal

program, the 'Bolsa Escola' program, was created in 2001, as were other income transfer programs, such as 'Bolsa Alimentação' and 'Auxílio Gás', and were scattered across various ministries. These programs, then, did not fall under a specific social welfare ministry (BICHIR, 2011). 2001 also saw the creation of the 'Cadastro Único' (Single Registry), which was a fundamental step for coordinating such programs as were in existence and would be essential for the expansion of the PBF (BICHIR, 2011; LÍCIO, 2012; PAIVA, FALCÃO and BARTHOLO, 2013).

During the Lula administration, with its focus on combating poverty and inequality, income transfer programs gained scope, articulation and visibility, and the area of social assistance itself was treated as important (BICHIR, 2011). Cash transfer programs were taken to a new level by linking the various existing federal programs into a single umbrella program, the PBF, in 2003. The PBF then overshadowed 'Fome Zero', which had been the showcase program of Lula's first year in office. The process of the institutionalization of social assistance was reinforced through the construction of state capacities (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017). This did not mean, however, that indirect service provision was abandoned. Rather, it meant that a relationship of complementarity between public facilities and civil society organizations was being built up under the aegis of the SUAS (BRETTAS, 2016).

As other recent analyses have found (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017), we observed a downward trend in terms of governmental attention given to policies that fight poverty, especially in the context of the Temer administration.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis at the major topic level indicated that, in general, inauguration speeches and addresses to the National Congress mention themes in the field of social assistance less than other subjects, such as macroeconomics, the organization of government and public administration. Important exceptions are the second Cardoso government and the Lula government, when the fight against poverty and the institutionalization of social assistance policy were given more emphasis. These results are in line with the literature, as the early years of re-democratization were marked by attempts to combat inflation, increase economic stabilization and enhance debt control, as well as the organization of public

administration, these being the so-called first-generation reforms (MELO, 2005). From the 1990s onwards, the so-called second-generation reforms focusing on social policies have become more prominent. Transformations in the field of social assistance occurred late and have really only achieved much impetus since the early 2000s, when the SUAS began to gain institutionality and advance the construction of State capacities in the provision of social assistance services and conditional cash transfer programs, especially the PBF. With the growth of the fiscal deficit from the second Rousseff administration onwards, macroeconomic concerns have returned to the agenda, and the penetration of neoliberal ideas has led to a sharp retrenchment in terms of social assistance and social development issues toward the end of our period.

Our analysis of the legislative production of the executive and legislative branches has indicated two central aspects: 01. approved legislation is more relevant than speeches, in spite of the striking difference in terms of the attention given to social welfare according to the presence of institutional friction; and 02. logical incrementalism remains the name of the game, as it has since Lindblom, i.e., change processes are often incremental and any analysis of long-term government attention reveals more continuity than major transformations, especially when compared to the occasional findings of cyclical analysis. In the specific case of social assistance, this point has been very well made by Margarites (2019), who demonstrates by means of rigorous documentary and content analysis in a study of the 'Assembleia Nacional Constituinte', that the process of institutionalization of social assistance has long-lasting roots.

At the subtopic level, important nuances emerge between governments. While the level of attention given to social assistance and equality promotion is generally low, there are clear differences between governments' substantive welfare policy agendas. Most 1988-2018 governments focused the attention they gave to the area to the relatively more general themes of social assistance and poverty alleviation, but two governments in particular gave attention to differentiated social welfare themes and agendas, with relevant legislative proposals and an influence on the overall trend; these being the Cardoso and Lula governments. Not coincidentally, several social policy analysts in Brazil have focused on the specific contributions of these two governments,

particularly in the field of social assistance (ABRUCIO, 2005; ALMEIDA, 2004; BICHIR, 2016; FRANZESE and ABRUCIO, 2013; LÍCIO, 2012). The different ways that welfare policies are implemented can also be observed at the subtopic level: in the Cardoso government, policies to combat poverty were implemented primarily through civil society organizations rather than government; cash transfer programs were begun and expanded but in a fragmented and diffuse way. Under the Lula administration, the fight against poverty involved increasing the size of and the coordination between income transfer programs (especially with the creation of the PBF), through increased integration between benefits and services (BICHIR, 2016, 2011) and the expansion of a social assistance network with direct State provision at its core. Thus, another maxim of public policy analysis has been reinforced, i.e., politics cannot be ignored in policy analysis, as social policy views, ideas and projects affect the ways institutional policy is made (JACCOUD, BICHIR and MESQUITA, 2017).

Final considerations

The aim of this article was to contribute to the debate on social welfare policies in Brazil and the debate on agenda-setting and change in government performance, based on an innovative analytical-methodological strategy that was developed internationally and applied to the case of Brazil.

The analysis considered the period from the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988 to 2018, a period of seminal importance in the construction of social policies in Brazil. We drew on the literature and made an original analysis of an extensive documentary corpus, which we approached using quantitative content analysis strategies. We demonstrated that the institutional fragility afflicting social welfare in Brazil began to be dealt with after re-democratization. We found that social welfare did not lie at the heart of government concerns and has been dealt with in a variety of ways during our period.

We also sought to underscore the importance of policy analysis in general and changes in the federal government agenda in particular, especially when considering long periods of time, for observing the trends and inflections that can be hidden behind occasionally impressionistic conjunctural analyses. By working with different levels of aggregated information, we were able to look at both the field

of welfare policies in general and the different policy choices within each change of federal government in particular. It is important to understand that different projects and visions for social welfare in Brazil have been underway for the last 30 years. The analytical and methodological strategy that we employed reinforces the importance of considering social protection systems that go beyond dimensions such as social spending, as has been discussed in the specialized literature for some time.

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