



Review Article

The state and public policies to tackle hunger in Brazil O estado e as políticas Públicas de combate à fome no Brasil

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of hunger and its permanent state in Brazil may be considered one of the direst of all social disasters today. That being the case, this article seeks to discuss the role of the Brazilian State in public policymaking, particularly regarding the fight against hunger and, especially, the issue of food security. In order to achieve this objective, the following procedures are applied: a) a survey of the specialized literature to enable the design of a conceptual and exploratory theoretical framework; and b) first- and second-hand document analysis. The procedural and historical linkages of food and nutrition policies and programs as a public and/or political intervention matter are characterized by a fragmented and/or discontinued approach. Equally, they have been aggravated by advances in cycles of neoliberal policies in government agendas in the period 2016–2022, which signal a political-ideological agenda of dismantling public policy.

1. Introduction

In a general analytical view, concerns related to government policies and strategies in different parts of the world to fight hunger in its diverse expressions, though old, have gained new relevance with COVID-19 pandemic impact, in addition to economic, (geo)political and environmental/climate crises. Recent FAO reports (2022; 2023) presented alarming data on the increase in hunger and food insecurity in several regions of the world, particularly in Western Asia, Latin America, The Caribbean, and most African sub-regions. According to the reports, from 702 to 828 million people faced hunger from 2021 to 2023, with predictions indicating that 670 million people will still be in hunger situation in 2030. These numbers highlight the seriousness of the matter, challenging the fundamental principles of the human right to suitable food, as provided in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, besides compromising the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2) Agenda 2030.

Considering the current situation of persistence, increase, and projections on the hunger scenario in global scale, this problem has attracted the attention of several authors and institutions from different fields, particularly in Human Sciences (Grebmer et al., 2023; FAO, FIDA, OMS, PMA, & UNICEF, 2023; Hungria, 2024; Wiemers et al., 2024). These studies raised fundamental questions on the alarming data that indicate the permanence and worsening of hunger and food insecurity in

many regions of the world. Such factors not only indicate a serious civilizational setback, but also show failures in political strategies adopted by governments that face a considerable challenge to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in all of their forms. They also pointed out the seriousness of hunger retroact in some regions of countries whose realities are marked by macroeconomic, political (including environmental ones) tensions and uncertainties, and, chiefly, high levels of inequality in their territories. Such inequalities, many times, have their roots in historical and political processes that shaped their economic and socio-spatial formations.

In Brazil, after a long period of public policies turned to coping with problems related to hunger, poverty, extreme poverty, the country became a world reference (BELIK et al., 2001; Vasconcelos, 2005; Vasconcelos et al., 2019; Brasil, 2010; Hespanhol, 2016; Campelo and Bortoletto, 2022). In recent years, particularly as of 2016 until 2022, there was an advance in neoliberal agendas in government cycles, which marked a political and ideological agenda of dismantling of public social policies (Cruz and Hespanhol, 2023). This process, coupled with sanitary (COVID-19), economic, and political crises (with internal institutional disruptions), brought up the scenario of food insecurity for many Brazilians. In 2022, it was estimated that 33.1 million people did not have anything to eat, a fact that drew international attention (FAO, FIDA, OPS, PMA, & UNICEF, 2023; FAO, FIDA, OMS, PMA, & UNICEF, 2022) and, in national ambit, resulted in the return of Brazil to UN

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Hunger Map (PENSSAN, 2021; 2022, 2023; Hungria, 2024; Sampaio, 2024).

This alarming scenario of hunger and food insecurity aroused the interest of several researchers in retaking investigations and reflections on this phenomenon (Campello et al., 2023). Thus, the attentions were turned not only to the historical roots of hunger, connected to colonialism (Castro, 1957; 1984; Campelo and Bortoletto, 2022; Campello et al., 2023), but also to public policies turned to fighting hunger, food and nutritional security, like State programs and/or political agendas (Lourenço, 2022; Peliano, 2010; Pinheiro, 2008, 2009; Silva, 2014; Vasconcelos, 2005; Vasconcelos et al., 2019). In the ambit of these investigations, little attention was given to the perspective and nature of the State and its public policies, a field of analysis and reflection that we consider of extreme relevance. Moreover, these studies enable a deeper understanding, almost a radiography, of the directive actions of the State and its agents (Crispino, 2016; Marques, 1997, 2013; Moraes, 2005), either while facing the problem through more effective government strategies or in the effects of fragmentation or dismantling of these policies in the face of internal and external conflicts and interests (Boito Júnior, 2018; Cruz and Hespanhol, 2023; Lourenço, 2022; MACEDO et al., 2023; Mascaro, 2013; Sabourin, 2021). Additionally, they allow for an evaluation of how the concepts of hunger and food have been historically constructed and interpreted in the public sphere, as well as how they are used in current policy formulations, taking into account past popular and institutional experiences (LEME, 2021; DE SORDI; LEME, 2024).

In this regard, the present article gains relevance, for bringing up the current status of the policy to combat hunger, particularly the issue of food security in Brazil, which gained new dimensions in recent years, especially from 2016 to 2022. The interesting and new aspect of these processes is that they occurred in a context marked by institutional disruptions inside the State, including several ideological conflicts resulting from the different intentions of government actions. For example, there was a transition from a neo-developmental political-ideological base, which valued the role of the State in the economy, inflation control, affordable credit, and social policies to tackle poverty, hunger, and misery, to a neoliberal or ultraliberal base. This last context, “pandemic bolsionarism” (França, 2020), was characterized by the worsening of the state of public calamity and systematic dismantling of public rights and policies, particularly in the field of food policy.

The present article seeks to discuss the role of the Brazilian State in the creation of public policies that address the issue of hunger and food security. Methodologically, a review of the specialized literature was adopted to build a theoretical-conceptual and exploratory framework, in addition to document analysis, according to Gil (2002) and Marconi and Lakatos (2007).

After this introduction, the following structure was proposed: initially the methodological issue was emphasized by addressing the article draft, data collection and strategy for analysis of the results. Secondly, essential analytical reflections on the State and public policies are presented. Thirdly, the Brazilian State and the hunger and food security issue are analyzed as target of public intervention, with emphasis on the different perceptions and political ideas. Finally, the interesting and new aspect of these processes is assessed, which is the worsening of hunger in Brazil, in a context marked by institutional disruptions inside the State, and different ideological conflicts and advances in neoliberal cycles present in government agendas.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Draft of the article

The article involves exploratory and comparative analyses on the role of the Brazilian State in the preparation of public policies, especially in the field of fight against hunger, with emphasis on the problem of food security.

The hypothesis is that the processual and historical relation of food and nutrition policies and programs, as a matter of public and/or political intervention, is characterized by fragmentation and discontinuation. One interesting and innovative aspect of these processes, particularly from 2016 to 2022, is that they occurred in a context of institutional breakdowns (inside the State) characterized by different ideological conflicts, resulting from the different intentions of the government actions. For example, there was a transition from a neo-developmental political-ideological base, which valued the role of the State in the economy, inflation control, affordable credit, and social policies to tackle poverty, hunger, and misery, to a neoliberal or ultraliberal base. This last context, called “pandemic bolsionarism” (França, 2020), was characterized by the worsening of the state of public calamity and systematic dismantling of public rights and policies, particularly in the field of food policy.

To build the article, a detailed survey of bibliographic and documental sources was made, along with collection of secondary data and organized analysis of the data, in order to explore and compare different policies and perspectives regarding hunger and food (in)security.

2.2. Data collection and strategy for analysis of results

The article followed two main axes, according to Gil (2002), and Marconi e Lakatos (2007): i) bibliographic and documental survey; e ii) survey of secondary data in different sources (Fig. 1).

The first axis, referring to the “first-hand” bibliographic and documental survey (documents that were not previously analyzed, like institutional files) and “second-hand” documents (already analyzed), focuses on the construction of a theoretical-conceptual and exploratory framework. After extensive debate involving national and international renowned authors, analyses of different perspectives on the main problems addressed in the article were chosen, such as: concept of hunger, food security, food insecurity, State, and public policies.

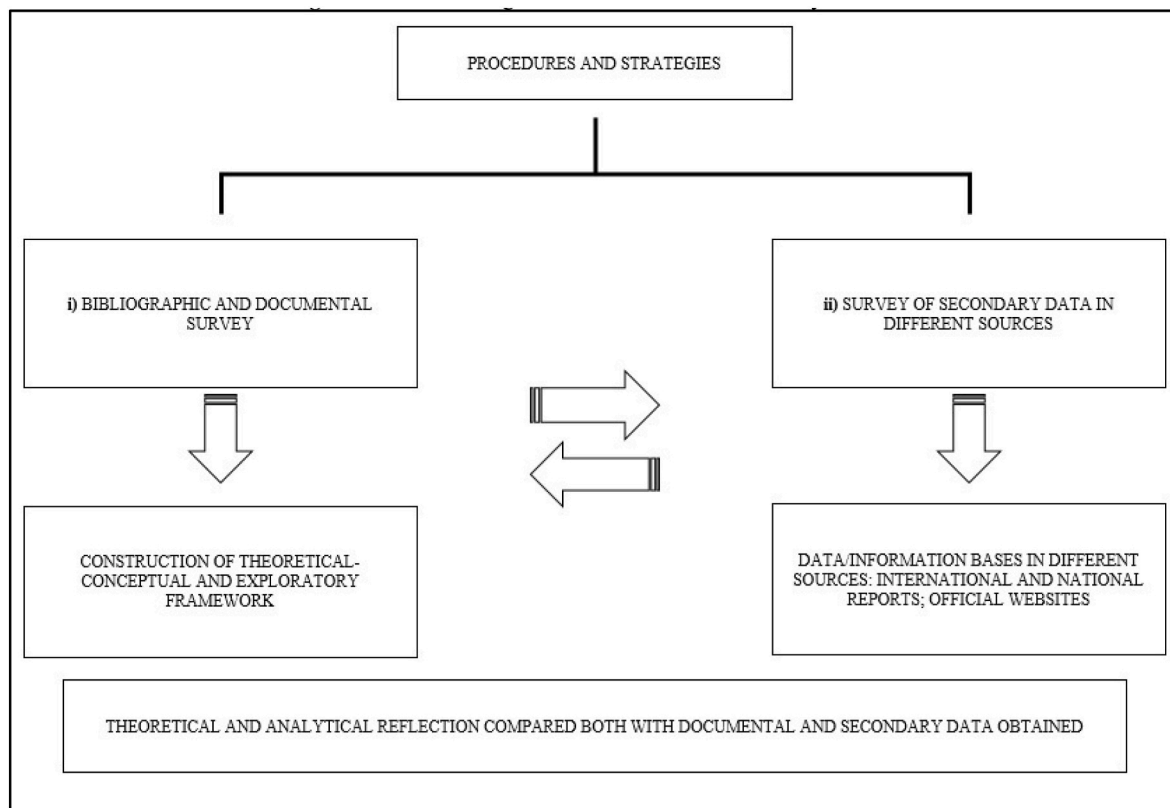
In the second axis, survey of secondary data in different sources, the following data and information bases were used: i) *International and national reports*, like those of FAO, FIDA, OMS, PMA and UNICEF, present in “El estado de la seguridad alimentaria y la nutrición en el mundo” (2022 e 2023) and “Panorama regional de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional - América Latina e o Caribe” (2022), as well as those from Rede PENSSAN, through the I and II National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic in Brazil (2021 and 2022). The Choice of these sources is significant, because they highlight the seriousness of the hunger phenomenon at global level, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Brazil. ii) *Official websites*, like those of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger, and databases from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA). These sources enabled the collection and systematization of data and information on trends of hunger and food insecurity in Brazil, advance of poverty and extreme poverty, and implementation and execution of Food and Nutritional Security Policies by the State.

Regarding the strategy for analysis of results, all data and information obtained from the bibliographic review led to the construction of a theoretical and analytical reflection, compared to documental and secondary data, organized and represented in flowcharts, figures, charts and tables. Moreover, throughout the process of preparation of the article, exploratory and comparative analyses of the different historical and current moments of policies turned to fight hunger, integrated to theoretical-methodological discussions that belong to the theme.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Essential analytical reflections: state and public policies

The alarming COVID-10 pandemic scenario, in addition to economic



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Fig. 1. Methodological structure and axes of analyses.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

and political crises (with internal institutional disruptions), left 116.8 million Brazilians under some level of food insecurity, of which 43.4 million did not have enough food and 33.1 million faced starvation. This critical situation, evidenced from 2016 to 2022, a period marked by important institutional disruptions (parliamentary coup) and changes in political orientation, brought up several questions and analyses by researchers and institutions about serious food insecurity and return of Brazil to UN Hunger Map. The situation of millions of Brazilians who don't have anything to eat was reflected in the practices and ways of institutional actions of the State and in the field of social policies.

The changes in the practices and ways of institutional actions of the State have intensified debates on the government actions and the policies to fight hunger, particularly with regard to food security. This field of analytical reflection is considered extremely important, because it leads to a deeper understanding, almost a radiography, of the directive actions of the State and its agents in the formulation of policies under different government ideologies and approaches (Crispino, 2016; Marques, 1997, 2013; Moraes, 2005). Such analysis comprises both the coping with the problem through more effective government strategies with regard to the effects of fragmentation or dismantling of these policies, considering internal and external conflicts and interests (Boito Júnior, 2018; Lourenço, 2022; MACEDO et al., 2023; Mascaro, 2013; Sabourin, 2021).

According to Moraes (2005), public policies can be broken down in: i) economic policies (exchange, financial, tax); ii) social policies (education, health, social security, food); iii) territorial policies (urbanization, regionalization, transport). As can be observed, it is a field of the so called social policies that concentrates government public actions and strategies turned to food and nutritional policies. However, these policies not always are presented so as to fully reach their objectives.

According to Crispino (2016), all public policies (regardless of the government model) express *intentionality of government action*, and

follow given legal political rules and instruments, but these rules are not always clear or explicit. Many studies on public policies address the State as autonomous subject with own and neutral interests, according to liberal tradition of the State Institutional line. However, this concept is questioned. For example, Mascaro (2013) argues that the modern State expression is capitalist (with separation of economic and political domains), reflects the social relations inside a capitalist society, and is a condensation of specific social interests. Jessop (2006) complements this vision, stating that the State is a social relation where the State power results from a dynamic balance of internal and external political forces, influence by specific institutional structures and procedures. To defend their interests, players adopt strategies (including discursive strategies) that mobilize diverse social forces in different contexts, seeking to change restrictions and opportunities associated to the State structures.

In this regard, the authors see the State as a social relation influenced by political and social forces that act both inside and outside its institutional apparatus. The result of public policies, which constitute a process of production or a 'game', is contingent and depends on the fight and strategies of the different players, as states Marques (1997, 2013).

Based on these arguments, we can infer that the State is an agent that participates in the formulation and implementation of public policies, however subject to conjunctural and structural variables, permeated by social, political and economic interests (internal and external). That explains the fragmentation and discontinuation, as well as the conflicts and dismantling of these policies. In the case of Brazil, target of this analysis, the Brazilian State, in face of these conjunctural and structural variable, has shown fragmentations, discontinuations, conflicts, and dismantling of policies related to hunger and food security.

3.2. Hunger and food security as target of public intervention in Brazil

Studies on directive action of the Brazilian State in the field of social policies, especially in the fight against hunger, have gained strong attention from different authors and institutions in different fields of knowledge (Vasconcelos et al., 2019; CARVALHEIRA; Campello et al., 2023). Such attention is due to the worrying situation of millions of Brazilians who have nothing to eat, according to data from surveys made by Rede PENSSAN (2021; 2022; 2023). The retake of these discussions around this problem has given rise to some questions: what explains these structural and conjunctural factors of hunger and food insecurity in Brazil? How is the Brazilian State participation seen in the field of formulations and implementations of public policies turned to fight hunger?

These questionings are relevant to direct our analysis of the Brazilian State actions in policies turned to fight hunger, particularly with regard to food security, which has faced remarkable challenges in the effective government implementations and strategies to tackle these questions. Such challenges are linked to a processual and historical relation, the roots of hunger as one of leftovers of colonialism: the colonial State favored an exogenous model of economic exploration aligned to the interests of the exporting bourgeoisie, resulting in the concentration of wealth in the hands of large and few owners of land (Castro, 1957; 1984; Campelo and Bortoletto, 2022). Besides, the Brazilian State plays a paradoxical role in the field of public policies; on one hand, it was and is responsible for creating institutional channels to tackle the problem, however, on the other hand, its actions have also contributed to worsen it. This paradox of the Brazilian State, either for its complex nature or the influence of the different forces, political, social and economic alignments and interests, both internal and external to its institutional apparatus, shapes the political arena for the fight against hunger as a process full of fragmentations, discontinuations, conflicts, and dismantling.

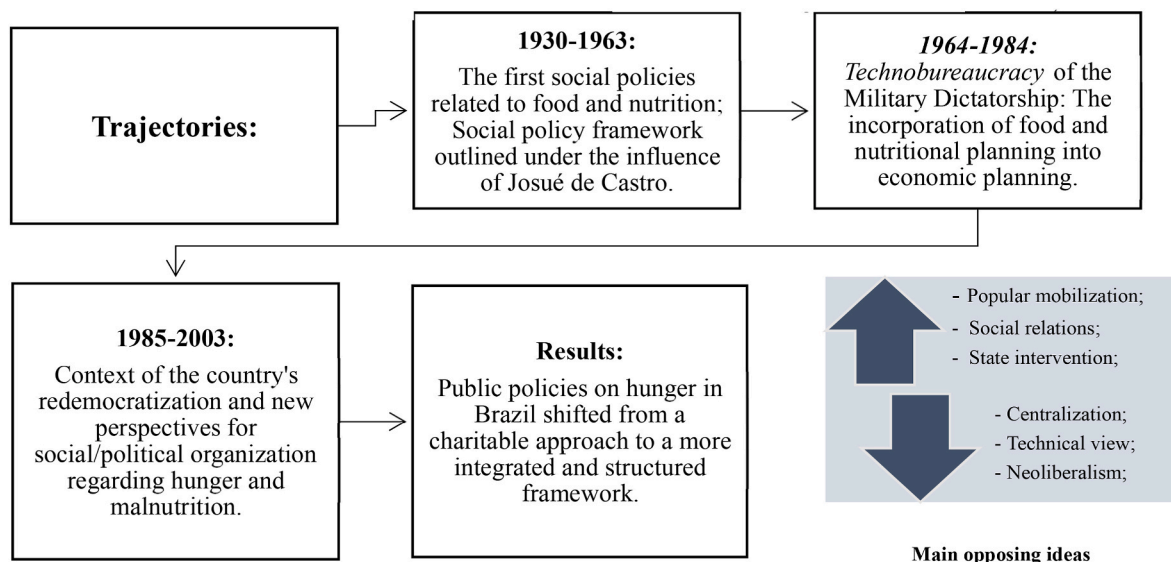
Nevertheless, in Brazil, the issue of hunger and food security while political problem – or, in other words, as target of public interventions – underwent different moments and/or trajectories (Fig. 2).

These different moments and trajectories, considering variables like social interests and political and economic alignments of each time, enable the reflection on a long period of State actions and interventions turned to the preparation of State policies and different government

approaches to fight hunger in the country. To obtain a better analysis this period can be divided in two parts: in the first, the issue of hunger and food security as political problem is constituted within a nationalist developmental ideal (1930–1984), from the so called Vargas era (1930–1945) to the techno-bureaucracy of the military dictatorship (1964–1985). In this period, a change in the accumulation pattern is observed, in a process of urbanization and industrialization. There was a project for modernization of the country, with the State as main inducer and diffuser of innovations in the so called late capitalism, as observe Moraes (2005) and Moreira (2021). The basic instrument for these actions was the planning, through which developmental spatial strategies, explicit and implicit, adopted by different governments: the “March to the West” in Getúlio Vargas government (1930–1945), the “Target Plan” in JK government (1956–1961) and the “National Development Plans” (PND) in the military government (1964–1985). Though these developmental policies have promoted changes in the territory structure by means of a relative industrial ‘decentralization’, ‘modernization of agriculture’ via Green Revolution and interiorization of the population and economy, they also exacerbated regional disparities, and income concentration. Moreover, according to Santos (1987) and Serpa (2011), one can observe the preparation of public policies with strictly economic criteria, in an instrumental and political model, creating a mutilated citizenship, with suppression of political and social rights like the right to housing, food, education, health, work, leisure, and justice.

The socioeconomic framework, with widespread inequality and income concentration promoted by the modernization policies, brought to the ambit of state intervention political actions to fight hunger. Getúlio Vargas government (1937–1945) is considered as the historical moment when the first specific social policy instruments turned to food and nutrition were promoted by the Brazilian State, inaugurating a set of social policies, like the institution of the minimum wage, the creation of the Social Security Food Service (SAPS) and the National Food Commission (CNA). With the dismissal of Vargas in 1945, the SAPS was extinct in 1962, and new actions only gained emphasis in the military dictatorship techno-bureaucracy (1964–1984).

This period represents a second moment of public interventions, where the technical incorporation of food and nutritional planning to the economic planning is observed. Thus, CNA extinction occurred in 1972, and it was replaced by the National Food and Nutrition Institute (INAN), created by Law n° 5.829, within the objectives established by



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Fig. 2. The trajectory of public intervention in the fight against hunger in Brazil (1930–2003).
Source: Prepared by the authors.

the I and II National Development Plans (PND). Considered as one of the impacting projects of the military government, the INAN emphasized the food assistance area and instituted a set of programs turned to populations in social vulnerability situation. It is worth mentioning two other new programs that marked the government action in this period: the National Food and Nutrition Program (PRONAN), created in 1973 by DL n° 72.034, and II PRONAN, launched in 1976 (DL n° 77.116), which attempted to propose an integrated action involving the different State bodies.

The preparation of these policies did not occur in isolation. The context of the First and Second World Wars helped shape certain characteristics of these policies. The issue of hunger gained world relevance, leading to the creation of the Food Security concept, initially linked to national security and the capacity of each country to produce their own food, as pointed out by [Pinheiro \(2008, 2009\)](#). The Second World War intensified the discussion on hunger and poverty, with central countries, led by the USA, using international cooperation to contain social and political instability, according to [Silva \(2014\)](#). After the war, multilateral organizations emerged, like the United Nations for Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 1945), the World Bank (1944) and the Hot Springs Food Security Conference (1943), focused on international commerce, agriculture and humanitarian aid. These organizations, like the World Health Organization (WHO), FAO, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), influenced the responses to food crises, defending production and productivity as solution to hunger, leading to the process of agriculture modernization, particularly in developing countries. Nutritional planning started to be seen as part of the economic planning, widely spread in Brazil by military governments, as argues [Pinheiro \(2008\)](#).

In this scenario, Josué de Castro is outstanding, because, in his work *Geografia da Fome*, (The Geography of Hunger), published in 1946, he brought innovative and important reflections on the social scenario, especially about the hunger phenomenon in the country. [Castro \(1984\)](#) criticized the unequal distribution of resources and the development model, defending that hunger should be addressed through public policies that would ensure not only quantity, but the quality of food as well. The author drew attention to the fact that hunger was not only a result from natural causes, but was a complex social and economic phenomenon associated to unequal distribution of wealth. In his work, he denounced the unequal distribution of food and proposed a division of food areas in Brazil in five large regions, namely: Area of hunger, Amazon, Sugar-growing Northeast and Northeastern Backlands; and Area of Malnutrition — Midwest and Southern End, associating hunger to public health issues. Castro proposed a more thorough analysis of the hunger phenomenon, including the nutritional aspect as indicator of life quality.

The preparation of public policies to tackle hunger undergoes critical moments that involve institutional disruptions (military coup) and changes in political orientation. One can notice that hunger and the concept of food sovereignty become core guidelines in the government agenda, seen from different perceptions and ideas. On one hand, there were state actions turned to seek political food strategies subordinated to the ideological interests of economic growth and the strong influence of international organisms in the preparation of plans and programs, with articulated interests to constitute markets for their industrialized products. On the other hand, a modality of social policy influenced by Josué de Castro started to be build, with the recognition of nutritional diseases, in the Brazilian case, associated to misery, poverty, social exclusion, and economic backwardness. In short, though directed to populations in food insecurity situation and specific groups considered at risk (pregnant women, children and nursing mothers), state interventions in the field of food and nutritional policies have taken marginal and timid turns. As a result, public policies to tackle hunger were characterized by assistencialism, technicism, paternalism and political-electoral clientelism ([Vasconcelos, 2005](#)).

The second part, corresponding to the country redemocratization

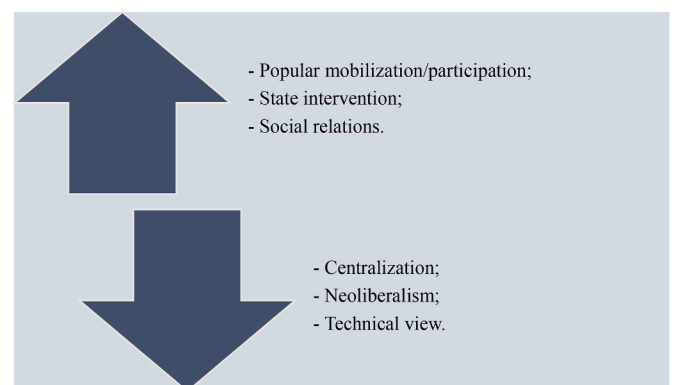
context, from 1985 to 2003, the interaction between government and civil society and political and economic changes were outstanding, because they constituted a new arena for the construction of public policies to fight hunger ([Fig. 3](#)).

With this process, new expectations emerged, expanding spaces for participation and debate, especially due to the rise of popular movements that brought new perspectives to the social organization around the issue of hunger and malnutrition. According to [Andrade and Freitas \(2024\)](#), the fight against hunger did not occur solely and exclusively through the State, in this sense, there were “other poles of resistance” (although records of these mobilizations date back to 1931, with the “March of Hunger”). However, as struggles for the process of redemocratization advanced, discussions about hunger became an important element of social mobilization. Notably, at the end of the 1970s, the Custo de Vida (Cost of Living) Movement and the Marches Against High Prices and the Empty Pot Marches stood out. In 1985, the Popular Supply Program (PAP) was created, which organized the National Debate on Popular Supply, promoting discussions on public policies and covering topics such as economic and wage policies, agrarian and agricultural policies, as well as popular participation in the creation and oversight of these policies.

According to [Arruda and Arruda \(2007, p. 324\)](#), the I National Food and Nutrition Conference consolidated three basic aspects: guarantee food security, articulate the civil society with the government and keep specific roles to each party. This conjuncture offered hope in terms of increasing popular participation and collaboration with the government. However, critics arose with regard to the centralization of policies and lack of integration with other areas, as occurred in José Sarney government (1985–1990), when the National Program of Milk to Needy Children (PNLCC) was criticized for being clientelist.

During Fernando Collor de Mello government (1990–1992), reduction in the State intervention in the social matter was observed, with the strengthening of the neoliberal prescriptions. Agencies and policies turned to health and nutrition underwent restructuring and budget cuts, thus weakening programs like the National School Food Program, the Worker Food Program, and the National Food and Nutrition Institute (INAN), besides the extinction of the PNLCC.

Still, according to [Belik et al. \(2001\)](#) and [Andrade and Freitas \(2024\)](#), there was wide mobilization of the civil society regarding hunger and misery, driven by ethics in politics, which resulted in the National Food Security Policy and the Campaign against Hunger, Misery, and for Life, led by sociologist Hebert de Souza. This movement had significant impact, promoting the approval of the Basic Health Law (Law n° 8.080/90), the creation of councils and commissions like the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA), the expansion of the concept of food security and the creation of the Hunger Map ([Arruda and](#)



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Fig. 3. Main ideas and perceptions regarding policies to combat hunger in the context of redemocratization.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Arruda, 2007).

At the heart of policies to combat hunger, there was redemocratization and preparation of the 1988 Constitution, which mobilized the civil society to develop new ideas and perception for the social organization about hunger and malnutrition. Though bringing social and political advances, the state actions quickly underwent fragmentation. The world crisis, started in 1973, pushed a economic restructuring connected to the rise of neoliberal globalization, which affected the relations between State and market, especially in developing countries.

Moreover, in Brazil, there was rupture with the growth period from 1930 to 1974, marked by national-developmentalism and active role of the State. The answer to the fiscal and financial crisis in the 1980s was permeated by the adoption of neoliberal policies, with budget cuts and weakening of social policies. So, the market became the main guiding factor for national decisions, including the regional dynamics, as observes Amparo (2014). These changes resulted in a competitive integration of regions, promoting a selective expansion and specialization of territories, exacerbating structural problems like regional inequality, income concentration, unemployment, fall in purchasing power, and reduction in the offer of food. As example, according to Cazian (2003), in the early 1990s, 18.6 million people were still considered malnourished in the country. Interestingly, in a context of the international division of labor, the country outstood as one of the main producers and exporters of commodities in the world, the situation continues to this day. However, the approach to hunger started to follow the look of the World Bank, focused on the physical and economic access to food, which reduced the debate on food security to a domestic and individual issue, reinforcing the constant need of political reforms, particularly fiscal austerity. Therefore, hunger and food insecurity were addressed as technical, administrative, political or economic failures as points out Ribeiro Junior (2015).

In Itamar Franco government (1992–1994), hunger and misery became priorities and the I National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA) was instituted, responsible for the preparation of the National Plan to Combat Hunger and Misery. This government strategy proposed a management shared between government and civil society, seeking to guarantee food security. However, the strengthening of the neoliberal agenda returned in Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (1995–2002). The focus on macroeconomic stabilization prevailed over social policies, leading to the emptying of the Citizenship Action and extinction of CONSEA. Thereafter, compensatory policies and partnerships between State, market and third sector became central.

Nevertheless, with the inauguration of president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in January 2003, there was a significant change in the State and Brazilian public policies turned to food security and fight against extreme poverty (Fig. 4). This new political direction in public actions was characterized by the rejection of neoliberal 'canons', and, according to Mota and Moraes (2017) and Boito Júnior (2018), the ideal of

development returned to the agenda of public policies, however with a new version, called 'new developmentalism'. It should be noted, according to the authors, that the neodevelopmentalism is a feasible development strategy conducted by the State within the limits imposed by the neoliberal capitalist model.

This new perspective promoted higher state intervention in the economy and its main objectives good competitiveness indices, inflation control, affordable credit and social policies to face poverty, misery, and hunger, with focus on the creation of structural and comprehensive policies. In this new structural and comprehensive political agenda, it is proposed to place the problems related to hunger at the core of a development policy whose goal was to guarantee quantity, quality and regularity in the access to food to the whole Brazilian population, based on the creation of the Zero Hunger Program (Arruda and Arruda, 2007; Brasil, 2010; Vasconcelos, 2005).

The program actions, in this regard, aimed at eradicating hunger and implementing a National Food and Nutritional Security Policy (SAN), through structural policies, both specific and local. Thus, it comprised three dimensions: i) **theoretical-conceptual**, acknowledging that the formulation of a food security policy will constitute the ideally desirable benchmark for the Program, in order to configure a holistic approach; ii) **political-operative**, embodied in the decision of implementing it and gradually promoting adjustments, and the creation of the Extraordinary Ministry of Food Security and Fight against Hunger; and iii) **consultative**, recreating the National Food Security Council (CONSEA), which later resulted in the approval of LOSAN – Organic Law on Food and Nutrition Security, making of feed a duty of the State (Arruda and Arruda, 2007; Vasconcelos et al., 2019).

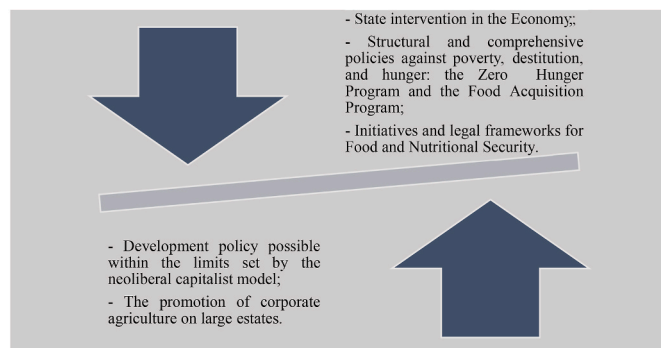
According to Hespanhol (2016), the Zero Hunger Program was considered as the flagship of food security policies in the country, and, from then on, a set of policies was implemented with the Food Acquisition Program (PAA). After the PAA creation, there was an articulation between food and nutrition security policies and policies that promoted family farming, mediating the creation of an institutional market of food, and outlining guidelines and/or mechanisms for direct purchase from family farming. It is also worth considering Bolsa Família Program (Family Allowance Program) that included transfer of monetary resources to families in poverty and extreme poverty situation, whose results implied reduction both in income inequality and poverty indices, thus contributing to minimize poverty and hunger in Brazil, as point out Vasconcelos et al. (2019).

Finally, the centrality of the idea of fight against hunger is outstanding during the whole Lula government (2003–2010), not as assistencialism, or with merely emergency actions. In the words of Frei Beto (2003, p.54), the Zero Hunger program "[...] is a social insertion policy, in which, more important than distributing food is generating income, work, rescue of self-esteem and citizenship". Moreover, as point out Vasconcelos et al. (2019), it is considered that, during Lula government, changes in ideas, values, and interests were identified. Therefore, legal frameworks were created with the implementation and appreciation of food and nutritional security to reduce hunger, despite the contradictions and counterpoints, like the incentive to corporate farming in large properties.

3.3. State and institutional disruptions in hunger worsening

The 2011–2022 period, which covers Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016), Michel Temer (2016–2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2018–2022) governments, is considered critical, because it involves important occurrences, like institutional disruptions and changes in the intentions of government actions, marked by several ideological conflicts. This interaction of divergent forces and changes in political-ideological orientations is significantly reflected in the role of the State and formulations of social policies, particularly those related to hunger and food security, worsened by discontinuations, conflicts, and dismantling of policies (Fig. 5).

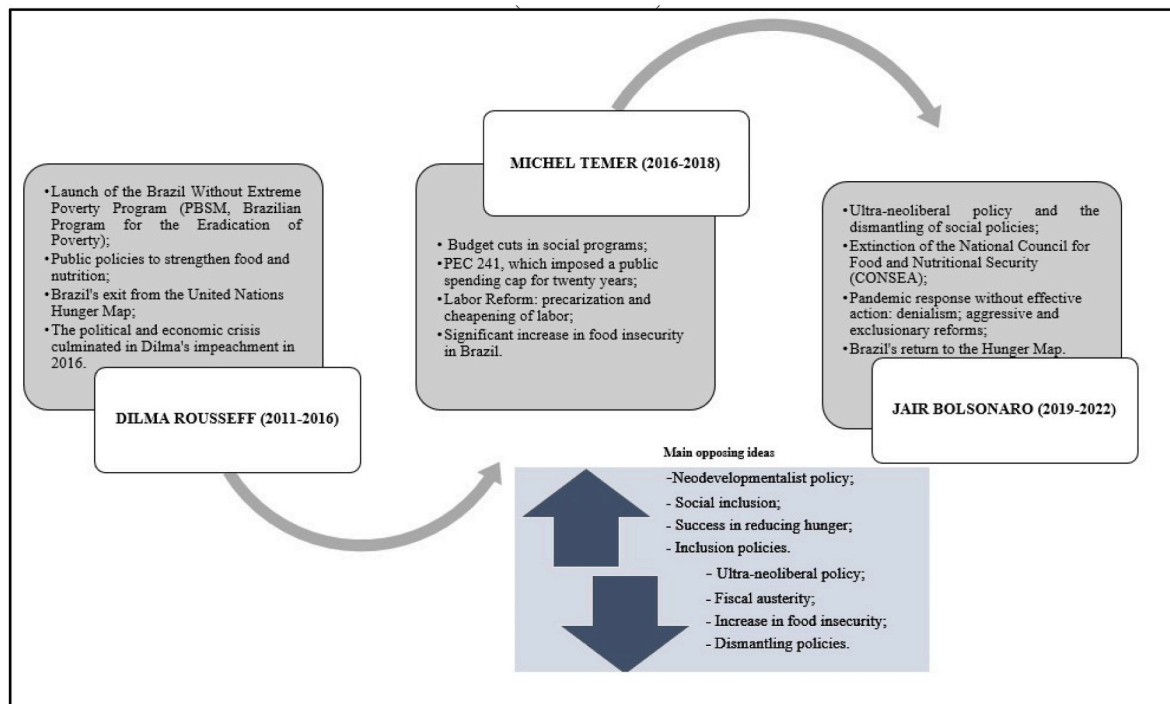
Dilma Rousseff government (2011–2016) was characterized by a



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Fig. 4. Main ideas and counterpoints on the centrality of the State and public policies to fight hunger in Lula government (2003–2010).

Source: Prepared by the authors.



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Fig. 5. Disruptions and changes in political orientations across government in the worsening of hunger in Brazil (2011–2022).

Source: Prepared by the authors.

neodevelopmentalist offensive. The main narrative to face hunger was centered in the fight against poverty and extreme poverty, symbolized by the launch of Brasil Sem Miséria Program (PBSM) (Brazil Without Misery), as pointed out by Vasconcelos et al. (2019). The program was structured in three axes: i) productive urban and rural inclusion; ii) guaranteed income for social protection; and iii) access to public services for social protection and promotion. In the ambit of food and nutrition public policies, the rural productive inclusion axis sought to articulate strategic actions to guarantee access to water for production and consumption, supporting the productive structuring and trading of food (Vasconcelos et al., 2019). Thus, the fight against hunger and misery constituted the basis for social policies, particularly food and nutrition policies, and as consequence Brazil was removed from UN Hunger Map, a condition achieved when less than 5 % of the population was in situation of severe food insecurity situation.

However, in her second term of office (2015–2016), as observes Boito Junior (2018), there was the deepening of the political crisis initiated in 2014, with intense class conflict inside the State, involving disputes for re-distribution of the wealth produced and the social organization of the country. Two factors mark this conflict during Dilma government: first, the big internal Brazilian bourgeoisie, which kept an ambivalent relation of dependence and conflict with the international capital and was the hegemonic bourgeois portion in the block of power during Lula and Dilma governments; second, the orthodox neoliberal political force, which included sectors from the international capital and portions of the national bourgeoisie that aimed to start a new round of neoliberal reforms in Brazil. This scenario marked the crisis in Dilma Rousseff neodevelopmentalist government.

Also, according to Vasconcelos et al. (2019), in the face of recession and rise in unemployment rates, followed by fiscal adjustment actions in several areas of the public administration (with up to R\$70 billion cuts in social programs and policies), the crisis was intensified, resulting in Dilma impeachment in August 2016, considered by many a parliamentary coup. The implications in the field of public policies turned to combat hunger were profound. In 2015, for example, there was 6 %

reduction in the government expenses with the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) against those of 2014, and, in 2016, losses reached more than 20 %. The number of families benefited by Bolsa Família Program also decreased in 2015 and 2016. In the National School Food Program (PNAE), the federal budget for states and municipalities was reduced in 9 %. In short, Dilma government was initially marked by the focus on eradicating misery and poverty, and, in a second moment, the adoption of a policy of austerity, due to the political crisis and recession.

During Michel Temer government (2016–2018), the aggravation of fiscal adjustment measures, with losses in social programs and policies, particularly those turned to tackle hunger, was intensified. A process of institutional and programmatic disruptions, budget cuts, and setbacks in rights acquired was observed, which interrupted the path of reduction of hunger, misery, and poverty, compromising the promotion of food and nutritional security in the country (Vasconcelos et al., 2019; Neves et al., 2019). Among the measures, the approval of PEC 241 (proposed constitutional amendment) imposed public spending ceiling for twenty years. This political agenda, promoted in a orthodox neoliberal perspective that meets the demands of the international capital and part of the national bourgeois, affected especially the poorer population of the country. Data from IBGE Summary of Social Indicators, in 2018, indicated that 13.5 million Brazilians, mainly from most vulnerable groups, lived with per capita monthly income below R\$ 145, or US\$ 1.90 a day, according to World Bank criteria, condition that characterizes extreme poverty.

The destructuring of public policies in the social field contributed to the return of hunger and severe food insecurity, with effects in regional inequalities in the access to food (Table 1).

Data from Family Budget Survey (POF) 2017–2018 showed that 36.7 % of Brazilians were in situation of severe food insecurity, while other 63.3 % experience some level of food insecurity. North (10.2 %), Northeast (7.1 %) and Midwest (4.7 %) regions recorded the highest percentages of households in severe food insecurity, while Southeast (2.9 %) and South (2.2 %) presented indices below 5 %. These results demonstrate the perverse effects of the fiscal adjustment policy, as

Table 1

Michel Temer government: Percentages of households in severe food insecurity per region.

Region	Severe Food Insecurity (%)
North	10.2
Northeast	7.1
Midwest	4.7
Southeast	2.9
South	2.2

Source: POF (2017–2018).

pointed out by Rosário (2020) and Vasconcelos et al. (2019), directly affecting food and nutrition policies. Among the main impacts we have: approval, in 2017, of the Labor Reform, which significantly changed the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), making labor precarious and cheap; extinction of the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA); approval of Bill 6.299/2002, which softens the legislation on pesticides; and Constitutional Amendment n° 95, which freezes govern expenses with health and education for two decades. There was also reduction in resources destined to Bolsa Família Program and Family Health Strategy, without possibility of expansion of the coverage or creation of new actions in the Ministry of Social Development. The budget cut in the Multiannual Plan (PPA) Food and Nutritional Security in 2017 reached 76 %, which contributed to the return of food insecurity in the country.

The return of hunger, and, particularly, food insecurity problems, are worsened by the advances of neoliberal advances present in government agendas since 2016. That reinforces, as emphasizes Sauborin (2021), an agenda to dismantle public policies, particularly those turned to the development of family farming, rural development, and, also, fight against hunger. That becomes clear with the arrival of Jair Messias Bolsonaro in the presidency, from 2019 to 2022.¹ According to Rosário (2020), an ultra-neoliberal political-ideological agenda, based on the structures of colonialism, racism, and cis-hetero patriarchy, oriented public actions, which were submitted to the interests of the financial capital, which imposed aggressive and exclusionary reforms.

During his government, dismantling of previous policies was observed, particularly those associated to PT government, as states Sauborin (2021). That occurred under strong influence of a political and historical conjunction of external (international economic and financial groups) and internal (national economic and financial groups) structural factors, in addition to political projects from sectors connected to agribusiness, forestry companies, logging companies, mining companies, and other political projects (part of the middle class) that supported his candidacy, and, in these projects, formulated attacks to democracy and poor people who had access to some services (higher education, health, transport) and consumption levels (leisure, air tickets, etc.); compensatory social policies to expand civil rights; policies of income transfer and attack to spaces of popular participation in public policies.

Thus, one can observe a government marked by the worsening of the state of public calamity and systematic dismantling of rights and public policies. His government actions promoted administrative changes through Provisional Measure 870, which led to the extinction of the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (CONSEA) and weakening of the coordination of the national Food and Nutritional Security

agenda. So, it contributed to a disorganization at national level of the coordination of policies turned to fight hunger, in a context marked by the advance of poverty and extreme poverty (Chart 1).

This situation was still worsened by the position of Bolsonaro government of not proposing guidelines, according to the Multiannual Plan (2020–2023), to conduct food and nutritional security policies, which affected important projects due to lack of resources, like the Cistern Program and the Program for Food Acquisition (PAA) from Family Farming. Moreover, the context imposed by COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to sanitary, economic, political, environmental and geopolitical (Ukraine's war) crises, brought up, again, the ghost of hunger and food insecurity in the life of many Brazilians. Data presented by Rede PENSSAN (2021; 2022) in its population survey conducted to analyze food insecurity in Brazil in the pandemic context indicated that 116.8 million Brazilians experienced some level of food insecurity, and among them, 43.4 million Brazilian did not have enough food, while 19 million faced hunger. In 2022, 33.1 million people did not have anything to eat. That means that, from one period to the other, 14 million people started to experience hunger every day. From 2021 to 2022, over half of the country population (125.2 million people) lived under some degree of food insecurity.

Therefore, we emphasize that food insecurity, in its most different levels of severity, deepens in a context also marked by the advance of poverty and extreme poverty in Brazil,² within an ultra-neoliberal agenda that has promoted continuation of the dismantling of social protection policies. That reinforces a historical setback, since Brazil was already considered international reference in the fight against hunger.

4. Final analysis

Considering the discussions addressed in this article, some important issues can be considered. First, with regard to the analysis strategy and the approach adopted. That demonstrates how theoretical reflections, cross-checked with data and/or information obtained, can generate valuable insights on the changes in policies turned to fight hunger and food insecurity over time, becoming important contribution in the field of comparative analyses across different government ideologies and intentions in the construction of public policies.

Secondly, such articulations led to a critical and comprehensive

Chart 1

Bolsonaro government: poverty and extreme poverty in hunger worsening

Advance of poverty and extreme poverty (2021)	
Category	Data
Total of people in poverty	62.5 million (29.4% of total population)
Total of people in extreme poverty	17.9 million
Proportion of blacks and browns	37.7% below the poverty line
Proportion of whites	18.6% below the poverty line
People in households headed by women	62% below the poverty line
Regional analysis	
Region with higher proportion of poverty	Northeast: 48.7%
Second largest poverty region	North: 44.9%
Poverty in Southeast and Midwest	20.6%
Lower percentage in South	14.2%

Source: IBGE (2021).

¹ It is worth reminding that Bolsonaro government was marked by the worsening of the public calamity state (CRUZ e Hespanhol, 2023). According to Gondo e Oliveira (2022), the President adopted a conservative and negationist speech with regard to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, he took a position contrary to global leaders that advocated measures of social isolation and lockdown, and opted for promoting self-medication with remedies without scientific proof recognized by WHO, in addition to minimizing the seriousness of the contamination evolution. As a result, over 700 thousand people died as consequence of Covid-19 pandemic, placing Brazil among the five countries with higher number of deaths.

² Public policies of social assistance during Bolsonaro government, mainly in the Covid-19 pandemic context, were controversial. Considering its denial and ultraliberal position, the government initially showed to be contrary to any effective initiative by the Federal Government to assist those poorer and most vulnerable. The emergency AID implanted in his government was a response to political and social pressure at the time, when the opposition in the National Congress suggested and approved an emergency aid of R\$ 600 (and R\$ 1200 for householder mothers) for 65 million people. That was contrary to Bolsonaro and his economic team proposal, which defended only R\$200 as emergency aid.

approach that explores the complexity of policies turned to food security and fight against hunger in a context of social, economic, and institutional crisis. In Brazil, the State, in face of problems related to hunger and food security has always expressed a paradoxical position, thus implying a process of implementation of public policies historically marked by fragmentations and discontinuations, due to their complex nature. The intentions behind the actions of the different governments in the trajectory of public intervention to combat hunger showed a fierce field of struggle, conflicts, and different strategies to enforce their interests, influenced both by external and internal factors.

These different intentions in government actions also demonstrate that they result from historical and political processes of economic and socio-spatial formation of Brazil, thus allowing the construction of diverse narrative of policies to combat hunger. This process started in the social politics modality, under strong influence of Josué de Castro and, later, included the incorporation of food and nutritional planning techniques to the economic planning.

The country redemocratization period brought new spaces for participation and debate, with the strengthening of the popular movement, highlighting new social organization perspectives on the theme of hunger and malnutrition. The neoliberal orientation in coping with the crisis overruled other directions of social policies, bringing significant changes in the practice and in the institutional method of the Brazilian State in the fight against hunger, now under strong influence of World Bank and FAO.

Policies to combat hunger, misery, and poverty returned to the center of the political and ideological agenda of development during Lula (2003–2010) and Dilma (2011–2016) governments. This new political agenda, with neo-developmental base, brought an innovative perspective, and the social issue was addressed by means of a ‘social pact’ that contemplated higher intervention of the State in the economy, with good competitiveness rates, inflation control, affordable credit, and social policies to cope with poverty, misery and hunger. Thus, one can observe a change in ideas, values, and interests, which generated legal frameworks turned to the implementation and appreciation of food and nutritional security in order to reduce hunger in the country.

The breakup with this new perspective occurred in a context characterized by institutional disruptions, and class conflicts within the power block. In this regard, an orthodox neoliberal political and ideological agenda was adopted, turned to meet the demands of the international capital and those of parts of the bourgeois integrated to it. During Michel Temer government (2016–2018), a process of institutional and programmatic disruptions occurred, with budget cuts and setbacks in rights acquired, which, in practice, interrupted the reduction of hunger, misery, poverty and the promotion of food and nutritional security in the country. With the arrival of Jair Messias Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2019, a neoliberal or ultraliberal political-ideological base was consolidated, the ‘pandemic bolsonarism’, marked by the worsening of the state of public calamity and systematic dismantling of rights and public policies, particularly in the fight against hunger.

The history of policies and programs of food and nutrition in Brazil is, therefore, characterized by fragmentation and discontinuation, which makes difficult the effective implementation of these policies. Moreover, this situation was worsened by the expansion of neoliberal politics in the governments from 2016 to 2022, which promoted a political-ideological agenda of dismantling of public policies.

Considering the current scenario, with the return of Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party) government, president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva highlighted, in his inaugural address, that the fight against hunger will be priority in his administration. Among the political actions in the field of food security, the following outstand: recreation of the National Food and Nutritional Security Council (Consea) on February 28, Provisional Measure 1.164, which reformulated Bolsa Família program; readjustment transferred to states and municipalities for acquisition of school meals, with 30 % increase in the values of the National School Food Program (PNAE); and relaunch of the Food Acquisition

Program (PAA) on March 22. These political actions have redesigned a new political-ideological agenda, with highlight to the role of the State in the fight against hunger, enabling the construction of a new arena for debate, with participation of the civil society to develop, more effectively, a food and nutritional policy in the country. Moreover, this new political-ideological agenda has reinforced Brazil protagonism in this matter. During the G20 Summit, held in 2023 in New Delhi, president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced the creation of a task force to establish a Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. This initiative was officially launched in 2024, at the G20 Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, with the presence of Heads of State and delegations from 40 countries, in addition to representatives of international bodies. The Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty already counts on the accession of 82 countries committed to reverse the setback in the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number 1 (poverty eradication) and 2 (zero hunger and sustainable agriculture). In this regard, it seeks to join global forces to promote sustainable production of food, combat inequalities and eradicate world hunger.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jean da Silva Cruz: Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Rosângela Aparecida de Medeiros Hespanhol:** Visualization, Validation, Supervision.

Data availability statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are publicly available and can be accessed through the following link: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15167226>.

Declaration on the use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT/ OpenAI for writing and improving the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Ethics statement

Ethical approval does not apply to this manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

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