

Lula government will have to adjust the focus of social programs

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By targeting the expressive portion of poor voters in the country, the 2022 presidential campaign completely distorted the main objective. of what would be a good social program: focusing on the really poor, with transfers of differentiated values to families, depending on factors such as their vulnerability and number of members and children in each household. Behind votes, both Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT) and Jair Bolsonaro (PL) promised to keep the now Auxílio Brasil (formerly Bolsa Família) at R\$600 — without distinction between beneficiaries. According to FGV Social, Brazil ended 2021 with about 14% of the population in extreme poverty. There are almost 31 million Brazilians (one Venezuela) with a per capita household income of up to R\$281. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Brazil has been doing relatively successful work in the fight against extreme poverty. In 1993, there were 36.6% of Brazilians in extreme poverty. It was from 2003 onwards, during the Lula government, that the rate dropped consistently due to the combination of a well-focused Bolsa Família, with differentiated values and conditionalities (children should attend schools and health centers) and acceleration of economic growth (average of 4% per year). year in the PT's two terms of office). Under Lula, the total number of miserable people fell from 29% of the population (2003) to 14% (2010), reaching 8.6% in 2014, under Dilma Rousseff's government. The fiscal crisis and the brutal recession that followed from there pushed the rate back into the double digits, until we reached 14% of miserable people today. Inequality experts consider the way in which the attack on poverty has been carried out since the contest for the poor in the election began to be completely distorted. "What dominates is the electoral opportunist vision and little focus on overcoming structural poverty. Social assistance policy grows in resources, but loses effectiveness. We are going backwards in relation to what Bolsa Família used to do", says Marcelo Neri, director of the FGV Social. Another reference in the area, economist Ricardo Paes de Barros, defends a kind of revolution in the identification and monitoring of the poorest, using a broad structure that already exists, such as data from the Single Registry and social assistance centers (Cras and Creas) spread across 95% of the country's municipalities — which could do hand-to-hand to identify the most vulnerable families and their needs. For Laura Muller Machado, a professor at Insper and former secretary of Social Development of the São Paulo government, the Brazilian State needs to make a kind of "match" with the poorest to identify and meet their most urgent demands. The main objective, he says, should be to interrupt the current cycle of intergenerational poverty, which leads children of poor parents to become, in the future, parents of poor children. Brazil spends around 25% of GDP (R\$ 2.2 trillion) in the social area, including health, education and social security, among others. While it was in force, Bolsa Família consumed just over 0.5% of GDP (about 43.5 billion at 2021 prices), and was successful because of the targeting. Barros defends, for example, a program that reaches 1% of GDP (almost R\$90 billion), well focused and that takes into account the vulnerabilities of each family, number of children, among other factors. The 2023 Budget proposal for Auxílio Brasil provides R\$105.7 billion to 21.6 million families. In it, the average value of the benefit would be R\$ 405.21. To reach the R\$600 that Lula and Bolsonaro promised, another R\$51.8 billion would be needed, according to calculations by the Independent Fiscal Institution (IFI). In the current format of the program, what happens is just the opposite of targeting. Data from the Ministry of Citizenship published by the newspaper Valor Econômico show that, from November 2021 to September this year, single-person families went from 15.2% of the total beneficiaries to 25.8%. The fact, which is not supported by recent demographic changes, suggests that members of the same family may be registering separately to receive more than one benefit. For economist Naercio Menezes Filho, director of the Brazilian Center for Research Applied to Early Childhood, the fundamental thing in building a social program would be to put a magnifying glass on the needs of families, especially those with very young children. "For families with young children, it's not enough for the parents to have enough to eat, but not enough to buy medicine, clothes, and the children develop in a healthy environment, where the mother has time to talk and interact with the child", says Menezes Filho. The risk of the country wasting resources without focusing on early childhood and education is that, as adults, these same children end up, like their parents, dependent on social programs. To learn more about analysis and proposals on how to improve social programs, see reports from Sheet in the special How to escape poverty. LEAVE A REPLY



