Conservatism and liberalism in the journalistic discourse in contemporary Brazil: case study of VEJA magazine

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the overlapping of conservative and liberal arguments in the production of two VEJA magazine's columnists. The motivation for this search is the daily hardship, at least in Brazilian context, related to distinguishing a conservative political actor from a liberal one, which leads to the hypothesis that in many cases those two might be impersonated by a single person, party or, in the present case, political magazine or group of interest. As Mannheim1 said, conservatism should be historically and socially situated, which means it rises differently depending on the social-historical context. In a neoliberal era, it is not unlikely that conservatism could represent a blend with (neo)liberal values, if this is what it takes to defend the establishment.

Key words:
Conservatism, liberalism, political discourse

Introduction

In the current context of Brazilian politics, it is usually uneasy to distinguish a conservative political actor from a liberal one. This happens because these two currents of thoughts seem to blend in the discourse of such actors, rather than remaining opposed to each other as one would expect. This investigation intend to search for concomitant conservative and liberal arguments in the production of two VEJA magazine’s columnists, namely Cláudio de Moura and Castro and J. R. Guzzo, in the period between 2010 and 2015. The results may reveal some peculiarity of Brazilian political scenario, in contrast to others such as the American one, more clearly divided by these two main currents of thought and action.

Results and Discussion

The present investigation counted on the help of the software for qualitative analysis Atlas/ti², which allows for the linkage among passages on the texts by offering tools for the construction of relational graphic maps (as seen in Image 1). In order to classify the most significant excerpts as either conservative or liberal ones, it was necessary to make a decision regarding on what the definitions of both “conservative” and “liberal” to use. VEJA magazine openly supports neoliberal values, such as individualism, merit-based competition and minimal state. In VEJA: o indispensável partido neoliberal, Carla Luciana da Silva demonstrates VEJA plays a role as an active political actor on promoting and monitoring governmental decisions on the adoption of neoliberal policies and reforms. Excerpts with a neoliberal tone were classified, therefore, as “liberal” ones. Some excerpts related to political centralism, a model defended by conservative Oliveira Viana and brought back by Gildo Marçal Brandão in his analysis on Brazilian political thought, were classified as conservative, as well as other excerpts in defense of authority. It is noticeable how the neoliberal idea of meritocracy leads to a blend into the conservatism, since racism, sexism, and low-income folks disqualifying can all easily be sheltered under an explanation based on lack-of-merit, although they are popularly linked with a conservative attitude. There seem to be a connection between neoliberal socioeconomic model and the self-preservation attitude of wealthy, traditional political actors.

Conclusions

The analysis resulted positive for simultaneous occurrences of both liberal and conservative arguments. In other words, it is possible to say that VEJA magazine, one important political actor in Brazilian contemporary context, at one time plays the role of both promoting neoliberal values and defending structural establishment. This result seems to match with Florestan Fernandes’ analysis of nations at the periphery of capitalism5.

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References


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