

# Smooth transition from “Bolsa Família” to unconditional basic income in Brazil? Anticipation of difficulties based on findings from experiments and questionnaires\*

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Preliminary version. Please do not quote. Comments are welcome.

**Abstract:** *If a consensus were established among Brazilian scholars on the adequacy of implementing an Unconditional Basic Income scheme, could we expect it to be easily endorsed in Brazil? Our working hypotheses were as follows: (a) even under such improbable consensus, the prospects of a smooth transition from the Bolsa Família program to an Unconditional Basic Income would be scanty, due to widespread spontaneous resistance to the latter on moral grounds, (b) to avoid the fulfillment of such pessimistic prediction, the defense of the proposal would need to be carefully framed, and based on a deep scrutiny of Brazilian people’s values, beliefs and behavior. In order to investigate those hypotheses we first systematize the main findings related to ‘social preferences’ coming from experimental economics, as well important results provided by the literature which studies opinions on distributive justice. That is followed by a review of the available evidence regarding Brazilians’ moral values, beliefs and expressed preferences towards redistribution and redistributive policies, which reveal a puzzling picture of Brazilians’ level of solidarity and willingness to redistribute. We end up discussing current prospects of observing a smooth transition from Bolsa Família program to an Unconditional Basic Income program in Brazil.*

**Resumo:** *Caso fosse estabelecido um consenso entre acadêmicos brasileiros acerca da desejabilidade de se implementar um programa de transferência de renda incondicional no país (aqui conhecido como “Renda Básica de Cidadania”), podemos supor que facilmente ganharia respaldo entre brasileiros? Trabalhamos com as seguintes hipóteses: (a) mesmo em se alcançando tal improvável consenso, seriam modestas as perspectivas de uma transição suave de programas de transferência de renda condicionais a programas incondicionais, em razão de resistência a estes últimos baseada em motivações morais espontâneas, (b) para evitar que se verifique tal previsão pessimista, a defesa da proposta deveria ser cuidadosamente expressa, e deveria tomar como pano de fundo uma profunda análise de valores, crenças e comportamentos de brasileiros no que se refere a questões redistributivas. A fim de investigar essas duas hipóteses, primeiro sumariamos os principais resultados relacionados a ‘preferências sociais’ provenientes da economia experimental, bem como aqueles providos pela literatura que estuda opiniões acerca de justiça distributiva. A seguir, resenham-se as evidências disponíveis acerca dos valores morais, crenças e preferências de brasileiros a respeito de redistribuição e políticas redistributivas, as quais revelam um quadro complexo no que tange ao grau de solidariedade e à disposição a redistribuir dos brasileiros. Por fim, discutem-se especificamente as perspectivas de se observar uma transição suave de um programa como o Bolsa Família para um programa como a Renda Básica de Cidadania.*

**JEL classification:** D63 (Equity, justice, and other normative criteria and measurement), C91 (Laboratory, individual behavior), I31 (General welfare)

**Key words:** willingness to redistribute, experimental economics, opinions on distributive justice, "Bolsa Família" program, unconditional basic income

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*The human mind is not a blank slate that is equally disposed to accept whatever moral rules are presented to it as valid, right and just. Rather human beings are predisposed to accept some moral rules, others can be imposed upon them with some difficulty, and still others cannot be imposed in any stable manner at all.*  
(Bowles & Gintis, 1998: 391)

*Mr. Fairmind has strong feelings about the relationship between inequality and efficiency or about the remuneration of effort. It is possible that he is wrong from an ethical perspective. But in that case, economists have to convince him if they want to implement their “correct” conception of justice.*  
(Schokkaert, 1999b: 22)

## **1. Introduction**

The prospects of a transition from Brazil’s “Bolsa Família program” (BFP), which provides means-tested cash transfers, to unconditional individualized cash transfers are unequivocal in the Law 10.835, authored by Senator Eduardo Suplicy, which created the right to an unconditional basic income (UBI) in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> If a consensus were established among Brazilian scholars on the adequacy of a UBI policy, could we expect it to be easily implemented in Brazil? Our initial hypotheses were that: (a) even under such improbable consensus, the prospects of a smooth transition are scanty, due to widespread resistance to UBI on moral grounds, (b) to avoid the fulfillment of such pessimistic prediction, the defense of the proposal should be carefully framed, and based on a deep scrutiny of Brazilian people’s values, beliefs and behavior.

Obstacles of different natures are faced by proponents of egalitarian policies. An important one is related to individuals’ primary propensity to show empathy and solidarity, and to their more or less enthusiastic support for redistributive policies, in general, and for universalistic proposals, in particular. Lavinias (2006) is quite skeptical about the prospects of a progressive implementation of UBI taking BFP as a point of departure in Brazil, among other reasons, due to a “lack of tradition in policies of universal protection” in the country. Kerstenetzky (2009) provides a political economic analysis of the recent evolution of the debate over BFP in Brazil, and raises concerns about the sustainability and the expansion of the program in the long-run, based on the hypothesis that preferences over redistribution are not given, but rather affected by the announced goals and the “pedagogy” of the program – which would not have been wisely set recently – or even its possibly inappropriate name. Previously, various authors had discussed Van Parijs’s (2004) claim that “cultural diversity” might generally be in conflict with “income solidarity”, that is, that redistribution might be bounded by emotional motives, such as identification between net donors and net receivers.

Those studies indicate restrictions on the extent of redistribution stemming from motives such as traditions, perceptions, or emotions. Those restrictions could arguably be usefully generalized and systematized

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<sup>1</sup> While Article 1 states that “a citizen’s basic income is created from 2005 onwards”, Paragraph one’s proviso reads: “the benefit shall be extended to all citizens by stages, upon criteria established by the Executive, and priority shall be given to the poorest segment of the population.” (Translation published in the website of the 13<sup>th</sup> BIEN Congress.)

through resort to recent evidence coming from two interrelated domains. First, evidence from experimental economics that has been soundly challenging long-standing behavioral foundations of conventional economics, by way of *experiments* in which individuals play games such as Prisoner's Dilemma, Ultimatum, Dictator and Public Good Games in the laboratory with actual monetary rewards. A second stream is the literature on individuals' opinions about distributive justice, based on answers to survey *questionnaires*. Both experimental and questionnaire-based studies are quite different from the economic or philosophical literatures which are devoted to devising conceptions of justice through formal models and rational deliberations, since in the former two sets of streams, what plays a central role are commonsense, or uninformed, conceptions of justice.

An important bridge can be built between the lessons taken from studies both on actual behavior in resource-sharing situations and on opinions about justice, and the design of redistributive policies. This relation is outlined in Bowles & Gintis (1998), who highlight “the need to design egalitarian policies that affirm and evoke widely held moral sentiments” and “the difficulty of devising egalitarian principles that violate norms of reciprocity”. Kuhn (2009: 2), in turn, states that “recent theoretical work has pushed forward the idea that the amount of redistribution is essentially linked to individuals' beliefs about distributive justice as well as their perceptions of the determinants of inequality.” The question at stake then is whether Brazilians would be willing to support a transition from BFP to UBI, given their current “widely held moral sentiments”, their beliefs, and their perceptions. Our contribution in this study consists of pulling together a series of apparently disconnected elements in order to look for an answer to that question.

This paper is organized as follows. First, some methodological issues concerning the two streams of literature mentioned above are discussed (section 2). Then we sum up the main findings from experimental economics in their relation with the propensity for individuals to show solidarity and empathy, taking also into account the most important results coming from the literature which studies opinions on distributive justice (section 3). That is followed by review of the available evidence regarding Brazilians' moral values, attitudes, beliefs and preferences towards redistribution and redistributive policies (section 4). We conclude (section 5) discussing the current prospects of observing a smooth transition from BFP to UBI in Brazil.

## **2. Methodological issues**

In this study, findings from two streams of literature are mentioned: evidence from experimental economics and from the literature regarding opinions on distributive justice. In both of them, commonsense, or uninformed, conceptions of justice play a crucial role. In this section, we describe the nature of these two streams of literature, and briefly point out some virtues and limits of each of them.

### **2.1. Experimental economics: the study of actual behavior in the laboratory**

Conventional microeconomic decision theory is based upon a specific, substantive, behavioral theory, which rests upon very strong assumptions on what matters for individuals and on how they take decisions. Choices are based on individual preferences, which are assumed to have a series of features, including being ‘rational’ (complete and transitive), exogenously given, and stable over time. Self-interested individuals are assumed to make choices in order to maximize their utilities subject to constraints. While a full-fledged ‘non-Walrasian’ perspective is still an on-going enterprise (Bowles, 2004), behavioral and experimental economics have contributed by offering evidence challenging a number of critical assumptions employed in mainstream ‘Walrasian’, or ‘neoclassical’, theoretical framework.

Experimental economists have been testing in the laboratory some predictions of economic theory in *ceteris paribus* settings, simulating the effects of institutions on the actual economic behavior of individuals, trying to avoid as much as possible the perturbations found in real-world economic decision-making. Behavioral economists, in turn, have reintroduced psychology into economics, trying to understand for instance when, how and why individuals behave ‘irrationally’, or follow ‘rules of thumb’, or react according to social norms – in sum, why their behavior pattern is not in line with the Walrasian assumptions. The first contributions of both behavioral and experimental economics date back to many decades. Before the 1980s, however, the number of articles published in major, peer-reviewed, journals was still small, having risen steadily in recent years (Levitt & List, 2007). The prestige of both sub-disciplines has culminated when the 2002 “Nobel Prize” in economics was awarded to Vernon Smith and Daniel Kahneman, pioneers in experimental and behavioral economics, respectively.

In the current version of this article, we abstain from analyzing findings coming from behavioral economics, and focus on those offered by experimental economics. Advocates of the latter approach point out as its main advantages the fact that the lab provides controlled variation, the possibility of easily and exogenously changing institutional settings, and the relatively low costs of experiments, given the power they arguably have in testing conventional pieces of theories and predictions (Bowles, 2004; Levitt & List, 2007; Falk & Heckman, 2009).

Many methodological critiques have been addressed to economic experiments, which can be grouped in the following two categories:

1. Lack of realism: the environmental characteristics of a lab are specific and differ from real-world decision-making contexts, due to the following features of lab experiments: (a) stakes are small; (b) subjects are inexperienced; (c) people behave differently when they are aware they are being observed.

2. Lack of representativeness: the subjects of lab experiments are not representative of the population as a whole, due to the following reasons: (a) the number of participants in each study is usually small; (b)

subjects are typically students – most often in economics; (c) individuals with particular characteristics may self-select as volunteers to experiments, biasing the results and eroding their credibility.

Falk & Heckman (2009) enthusiastically defend the usefulness of economic experiments, responding to both sets of critiques in detail. With regards to lack of realism, they argue that the inexperience of subjects can also be tested, as well as the impact of stakes. They argue that the evidence on the effect of stakes is not definitive. They also warn us that an alleged ‘distortion’ caused by being observed is not restricted to choices in the lab: we are frequently observed when taking economic decisions (at home, on the job etc.). The lack of representativeness, they argue, could be easily mitigated by: expanding the number of experiments; applying them to larger pools of subjects; not restricting them to students. They also mention that there are statistical techniques that allow researchers to deal with small sample results. They ponder that self-selection is a problem shared by field data and lab data, and whose impacts can also be tested. They claim that monetary payment ensures that subjects in the lab “take the decisions seriously”, since they are “human beings who perceive their behavior as relevant” and take “decisions with real economic consequences”. (*ibid*)

While showing sympathy towards the experimental approach, Bowles (2004) is prudent when it comes to appraise the legitimacy of the methodology. For example, he admits the possibility that one of the most famous findings of experimental economics itself – framing effects influencing decision-making – might cast doubt on the validity of lab results. “[E]xperimental play is much like any other behavior and the experiment is just another situation” (Bowles, 2004: 119). His conclusion, however, is balanced. He believes the relation between people’s behavior in the ‘real-world’ and in the lab is complex, and recalls that no one claims that a direct correspondence between the two instances is to be expected. In sum, experiments would not reveal “the essence of human nature”; instead, they would simply expose precise domains of falsification of certain theoretical assumptions. For example, they provide evidence of systematic violations of the self-interested individual hypothesis, which are observed in quite diverse experiment settings. If this is true, then “social preferences” would become an important element driving individual behavior.

Levitt & List (2007) evaluate the validity of a particular set of findings from experimental economics, precisely those regarding “social preferences”, just mentioned above, which the authors classify among the most influential in recent years, and which are precisely the most relevant for our purposes. They enumerate a few factors that influence the behavior of individuals in the lab, some of which have already been alluded to above: (a) moral and ethical considerations, (b) the scrutiny of subjects’ action by others, (c) the context of the experiment, (d) self-selection, and (e) the stakes.<sup>2</sup> The presence of scrutiny (actual or “simulated”, e.g., by a pair of eyes shown in a computer screen!) would lead to experimental results overstating the importance of pro-social behavior as compared to what would be prevalent in non-experimental situations.

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<sup>2</sup> They also try to sketch a simple theoretical framework that could explain the results of most experiments in a unified manner. They do so by proposing a utility function that depends on wealth and “morality”, the arguments of which are: (i) the stakes of the game, (ii) the effect of scrutiny, and (iii) social norms.

Another important factor influencing the generosity of individuals consists of what could be called the ‘degree of anonymity’, which is related to the perceived social distance between subjects – for example, if subjects are allowed to talk to each other before a game, overall generosity is increased. Subtle manipulations of the experimental setting can have large effects on the results – for example, merely changing the name of the game have impacts on the level of generosity of the players. Past experiences and social norms – possibly not known and not controlled by the experimenter – may underlie observed behavior: “subjects may not be playing the game that the experimenter intends” (*ibid*: 163). Disregarding the importance of stakes may lead to inaccurate inferences and predictions associated with social preferences. Employing “pseudo-volunteers” (e.g., all the students in a class) might be a way of attenuating potential self-selection biases. Finally, they point out to different dimensions of temporal issues: first, in the lab, the experiment typically consists of a few hours of mostly passive activities, different from what happens in real economic decision-making situations; second, there may be a contrast between short-run (“hot”) decisions, where emotions might take the prominent position, and long-run (“cold”) decisions, where rational deliberation could regain control. Concluding, they postulate that in some non-experimental situations, we should expect less solidarity as compared to what we find in the lab, while the opposite might be true in other situations – as an illustration, generosity towards family members or close friends might be larger than what lab experiments show.

To what extent can we take results of lab experiments (in particular those concerning the so-called “social preferences”) as a point of departure for better understanding or for predicting real-world behavior – in particular the propensity of individuals to support redistributive policies? Providing a definitive answer is not the goal here. Instead, this section is just a brief, but tentatively insightful, inventory of virtues and drawbacks of the experimental approach, serving the purpose of explicitly exposing the methodological controversies involving one of the primary sources of the content of section 3. We believe the experimental findings may be useful, insofar as we keep in mind their limitations and interpret them cautiously.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.2. Questionnaires: opinions about distributive justice**

The other stream of literature on which we base this article concerns opinions about distributive justice. Contrary to the experimental-economic literature, in this case the data are not collected in the context of games with monetary rewards, but rather they come from answers people provide to distributional problem-sets they are given (i.e. a quasi-experimental setting) or from direct questions they are asked. In other words, it is not anymore a matter of testing whether individuals demonstrate they actually behave according to the so-called “social preferences”; it is now a matter of testing normative preferences and beliefs through direct (questions) or indirect (problem-set solving) investigation.

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting methodological appraisal of experimental economics, see Bianchi & Filho (2001).

In two respects, questionnaire studies parallel experimental research. First, while not dealing with the basic behavioral foundations of microeconomics, questionnaire research also serve as a test to conventional economic assumptions, particularly those adopted in standard welfare economics: “(...) economics journals have published the results of questionnaire studies aimed at investigating whether the opinion of economic agents about justice are in line with the assumptions and axioms used in the economic models” (Schokkaert, 1999b: 1). The second resemblance is that again, commonsense, or uninformed, conceptions of justice are expected to govern individuals’ declared opinions and choices.

Since this stream of the literature does not deal with *actual behavior* of people, some of the pros and cons of experimental studies do not apply directly. One possible drawback (at least if we believe in Walrasian behavioral assumptions) is that people might lie or simply act with neglect when filling out questionnaires or solving problem-sets, given that they have no monetary incentive to reveal their true opinions, contrary to what happens in lab experiments. Pretending to be extremely generous or intolerant with regard to income inequality when filling out questionnaires costs nothing to the respondent, casting doubt on the sincerity of the subjects. Another problem might derive from the sensitivity of the results to the precise formulation of some questions. These must be very accurately formulated in order not to give rise to perturbations such as misinterpretations or confusions – a risk which is not totally dissimilar to ‘framing effects’ mentioned in the lab experiment assessment (section 3.1).

As one of the virtues of this line of research, Schokkaert (1999a) draws attention to the fact that it is close to the social choice tradition, since it inquires people about their opinions on justice – which could be associated, for example, with different choices of an inequality aversion parameter in a typical social welfare function. Another unique feature of the research on opinions about justice is that it allows to deepen our understanding of whether a given policy proposal is prone to have social support or not, given that such approval crucially depends on whether different notions of justice are effectively adopted and shared by different social groups.

When it comes to evaluate the extent to which results from questionnaire research can be trusted as guides for illuminating our understanding of individuals’ propensity to support redistributive policies, we believe the same words of warning expressed when we discussed methodological aspects of experimental economics are also worth emphasizing here: results may be useful, as long as we keep in mind the limitations of the approach and we interpret them cautiously.

### **3. Actual behavior in resource-sharing situations and opinions about distributive justice: a summary of the available evidence**

In this section, we summarize some general findings from both lab experiments aimed at observing actual behavior of individuals in resource-sharing situations, and studies revealing individuals’ opinions about

distributive justice. We start by describing two examples of each type of source (subsections 3.1 and 3.2) and then we generalize the evidence which is relevant to our purposes, attempting to unify the results of the two germane streams of literature in a single set of conclusions (subsection 3.3).

### 3.1. Examples of experimental settings and evidence

A first example of a lab experiment is probably the most famous. In the Prisoners' Dilemma, while bilateral cooperation leads to a Pareto-optimal outcome, the dominant strategy for both players is to defect, conducting to a Pareto-inferior outcome. If individuals behaved as assumed by standard economic theory, defection would be the typical choice. However, in one-shot games played in very different environments (i.e. countries, players' profile etc.), the rate of cooperation oscillates between 40 to 60% (Eber, 2007). Even when defection is indeed chosen, such choice needs not be interpreted solely as stemming from pure individual-maximizing behavior, but rather due to a combination of that with fear of being cheated or as a strategy to avoid taking risks, among other explanations. It is possible that a substantial proportion of people does not defect so frequently simply because many people do trust the others – even strangers – at least in a first moment, and as long as other people keep on cooperating in repeated games.

Admittedly, it is not straightforward to relate observed choices in the Prisoners' Dilemma with distributive issues. Another celebrated game is closer to a distributional situation, namely, the Ultimatum Game. A 'proposer' is allocated a fixed amount of money  $m$ , which he has to share in a proportion he defines with a 'responder', who knows the amount  $m$  and responds either by accepting the proposed fraction or by rejecting it. In the latter case both players receive nothing. Both players know  $m$  and are anonymous to each other. The behavior expected from *Homo economicus* as a proposer would be to offer the smallest possible positive amount of money to the responder; if the responder were also a *Homo economicus*, he would accept any positive offer, since any such offer is better than the alternative option of getting zero.<sup>4</sup> The literature indicates that few proposers choose to keep a value close to or equal to  $m$ , and that most offers range from 25 to 50% of  $m$ , with the mean usually oscillating around 40%, and the modal being 50%. Regarding the responder, the evidence is that small offers (20% or less) are usually rejected, and that almost everybody rejects offers of the smallest possible monetary unit (Camerer & Thaler, 1995; Bowles, 2004; Levitt & List, 2007; Eber, 2007).

There is a long-lasting debate on how to interpret the results from Ultimatum Games. The responders' behavior could be compatible with concerns for fairness, or inequality aversion (both of which are related to distributive justice), or simply reveal the importance of reciprocity. The proposer's behavior, in turn, can be seen as a mixture of self-interest (given their anticipation of the responder's reaction) with again concerns for fairness or inequality aversion.

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<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, *Homo economicus* as a responder is indifferent between accepting an offer of zero and rejecting it – both would provide him zero and he does not care about the proposer's fortune. So when faced with an offer of zero monetary units, he could either accept it or reject it.

Many doubts have been raised regarding the findings of the Ultimatum Game: too low stakes, no time for subjects to fully understand the rules of the game and its consequences, subjects not representative of the population. However, results do not change substantially in qualitative terms when the basic structure of the game is maintained, but: with increased stakes; with repeated rounds; or when the pool of players involves non-students. More interestingly is the fact that after altering crucial rules of the game some results do change in an intelligible way, as didactically summarized by Bowles (2004: 114). When the offers are random (to be sure, not determined by the proposer anymore), low offers are rejected less frequently – indicating that intentions matter, not only the payoffs. When instead of being determined randomly, the roles of proposer and responder are defined according to the performance in a quiz (the winner and the loser, respectively), low offers become more frequent and rejections more rare – suggesting that perceived ‘desert’ is valued. When only unequal (intuitively ‘unfair’) offers are possible, the least unequal among the possible offers is not as frequently rejected as it would be in the original version of the game. Other variations include: (a) subtle changes in details, such as the name of game, with consequential changes in the results – indicating that framing effects are powerful, (b) the possibility of punishment by a third party at a cost for this one – in which case the costly punishment option is frequently used, suggesting that fairness concerns, more than pure selfish resentment, would explain behavior; and (c) the so-called Dictator Game, in which the proposer defines the division of  $m$  and the second player (who strictly speaking is not a responder anymore) passively receives his fraction – although the offers are smaller than the typical 40% in the original, they do not fall to zero, oscillating around 20%, what gives more credit to interpretations based on altruism or distributive justice concerns – fairness or inequality aversion (*ibid*; Ebert, 2007).

Whatever the interpretation of the results of Ultimatum Game and its variations, three related findings are worth emphasizing: (a) *Homo economicus* exists, but is a rare species, (b) people care about the fortunes and misfortunes of others, including non-kin (“other-regarding” or “social preferences”), (c) people care about motives, intentions and processes, and not only about outcomes (“process-regarding preferences”).

### **3.2. Examples of the way opinions about distributive justice are collected**

As mentioned in the methodological section above, two strategies have been used to collect opinions about distributive justice. The first consists of directly asking questions on distributive issues. The second consists of confronting respondents, individually or in groups, with problem-sets involving normative issues, asking them, for example, to choose among a set of distributions the one they judge as fair. The latter could be classified as a “quasi-experimental” approach.

As an example of the first strategy, we could mention the questionnaire applied in the World Values Survey,<sup>5</sup> which interrogate people of many countries about a number of subjects including about their perceptions of poverty or inequality. One example is a question which asked respondents place their views in a scale ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 means “Incomes should be made more equal” and 10 is “We need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort”, or another one, employing the same scale, ranging from 1 (“In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life”) to 10 (“Hard work doesn’t generally bring success – it’s more a matter of luck and connections”). Another example is the survey on the perception of the BFP in Brazil, reported by Castro et al. (2009), who have asked Brazilians whether the program “mostly brings good things to the country”, or “mostly brings bad things to the country”, or “does not make a difference to the country”.

With regards to the second, quasi-experimental strategy, a well-known example is provided in the seminal article of Yaari & Bar-Hillel (1984). They had asked students to indicate what they considered to be a fair distribution of a fixed amount of grapefruits and avocados between Jones and Smith, who had different characteristics. A first variant of the problem is framed in terms of different metabolism (i.e. different *needs*) and is presented to one group of students. In a second variant, submitted to another group of students, Jones and Smith differ in terms of how much they relatively enjoy each fruit (i.e. different *tastes*). While the problems are formally equal in mathematical terms, the distribution of responses differ in each case with, for instance, the most popular in the first case being a maximin solution (82%); *versus* an utilitarian solution in the second case (35%). Many other variants are explored, and the main conclusion of the article is that differences in needs, in tastes and in beliefs matter when it comes to choose a normative distribution of resources.

### **3.3. Experimental economics, opinions on distributive justice, and the potential propensity for individuals to support redistributive policies**

Having discussed general examples of both streams of the literature, we now summarize more specific results coming from both kinds of studies, which regard the primary propensity for individuals to show empathy and solidarity, and to their more or less enthusiastic support for redistributive policies, in general, and for universalistic proposals, in particular. The generalizations below have been tied together having as sources, both experimental economics (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1998; Bowles, 2004; Falk & Heckman, 2009) and studies on opinions about justice (e.g., Schokkaert, 1999a; Kuhn, 2009).

1. People exhibit “social preferences”. Individuals are not exclusively self-interested, they show concern for others and they are willing to share even towards non-kin or strangers. Altruism, generosity, solidarity – that is, “other-regarding behavior” is frequently observed in lab experiments.

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<sup>5</sup> Details are available on the World Values Survey website: <<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>>.

2. Individuals' actions are governed by social norms, including distributive justice concerns. These include customs and habits, but more importantly for our purposes, they also comprise concerns for fairness and aversion to inequality. So contrary to conventional economic assumptions, distributive justice considerations are a central elements explaining individuals' behavior.

Experimental evidence indicating that behavior is dictated by social preferences and that actions are governed by social norms is corroborated by what people declare when filling in questionnaires or when selecting fair distributions. "Mr. Fairmind accepts differences resulting from different contributions; but he generally feels that actual income differences are too large. He is much in favor of introducing a minimum floor, below which no one should fall, and he is sensitive to social deprivation." (Schokkaert, 1999b).

Our provisional conclusion based on the two points stated above is that *some demand for redistribution will always be viewed as legitimate and thus feasible*. We cannot say much about the viability of a UBI proposal based on these two findings. It may be that custom and habit do not favor an unconditional provision of cash to individuals, but such attitude will crucially depend upon a larger set of beliefs and perceptions of individuals regarding a series of other dimensions, some of which will be disclosed in what follows.

3. Cooperation is not unconditional, but offered only under appropriate circumstances. Cooperation is provided if others are cooperative too. People are willing to contribute to the provision of public goods – behaving as a free-rider does not seem to be the rule – and to cooperate in setting up collective projects, but are also ready to punish free-riders even at a cost for themselves. People do not like to have the impression that they are being misled or fooled, nor that others are being cheated.

4. People assign importance to processes and not only to outcomes. Contrary to conventional economic assumptions, motives, intentions or reasons leading to an outcome do matter. For instance, people feel it is fair to keep a smaller fraction of a fixed amount when the other person *deserves* to have more; individuals' aversion to what they perceive as *unfair* inequality is more powerful than their aversion to inequality *per se*. Questionnaire evidence reaffirms the relevance of 'need' and 'desert' criteria – that is, factors that condition the way an outcome (i.e., an income distribution) is to be evaluated.

Bowles & Gintis (1998) argue, on the one hand, that the extensive support for Social Security and Medicare in the US is due to the public perception that "the recipients are 'deserving'". But on the other hand, "redistributive policies that reward people independent of whether and how much they contribute to society are considered unfair and are not supported, even if the intended recipients are otherwise worthy of support, and even if the incidence of non-contribution in the target population is rather low." Notice the similarity with Schokkaert's (1999b) claim, according to which questionnaire studies reveal that the typical individual "(...) wants to check whether the needy are really needy and is not eager to guarantee an unconditional grant to those able-bodied persons who simply choose not to work."

Based on in points 3 and 4 *the prospects of a wide support for a UBI seem to be mild*, precisely because of the fear of an average citizen that: (i) able-bodied adults who could otherwise make ends meet only with labor income could choose not to work in the presence of a guaranteed income, (ii) equal amounts would be granted to people with very different living standards, some of which not particularly deprived. For an uninformed observer the institution of UBI could violate intuitive principles of justice such as equality, desert, need, and it could also prove to be too generous towards non-cooperative individuals. Of course alternative policies (e.g. means-tested schemes) present similar drawbacks as well as their own serious disadvantages. But as the quotation in the first page of this paper makes clear, even if the uninformed observer is “wrong from an ethical perspective”, he must be convinced of that.

5. The perceived social distance among participants is a key variable in determining the intensity of other-regarding behavior. When people consider themselves as equal or close enough to identify to others, they tend *ceteris paribus* to be more willing to cooperate and to redistribute. Van Parijs’ (2004) conjecture that “cultural diversity” might generally be in conflict with “income solidarity” seems to be supported by the evidence on both fronts studied here – provided cultural diversity is understood as perceived social distance and income solidarity is synonymous with other-regarding behavior. Demand for redistribution is likely to be bounded or limited by emotional motives, such as identification between donors and receivers.

6. Choices are context-dependent and strongly influenced by the way a problem is framed. Confronted to two formally equal problems, people make quite different choices, depending on the specific characteristics of the problem, such as the already mentioned divergent results in the needs and in the tastes cases from Yaari & Bar-Hillel (1984). Schokkaert (1999b) ponders that “Mr. Fairmind has a context-dependent conception of justice. Depending on the concrete circumstances of the distributional problem, he will emphasize desert, need or simple equality”. Sometimes even “minor manipulations of the social context of interactions may support significant behavioral differences” (Bowles & Gintis, 1998). Merely changing the name of a game – e.g., from one expressing cooperation to another suggesting competition – leads to different choices.

7. Individuals’ preferences are based on (possibly imprecise) beliefs and perceptions, on habit, and are endogenous. In general it is found that: (a) people show *status quo* bias, being averse to changes (especially to losses), (b) expected utility theory’s assumptions are violated in systematic ways (e.g., people overevaluate improbable events and discount the future hyperbolically), (c) people learn with experience and change preferences accordingly.

If people are averse to changes (point 7a above), they should not be expected to be immediately enthusiastic about replacing the current social assistance scheme (including BFP in Brazil) by alternatives (including UBI). As pointed out by Noguera and De Wispelaere (2006:5), “a lack of endorsement for UBI could

equally well be explained by *either* a general reluctance to change currently policy *or* a substantive aversion to UBI itself.” People may have serious deficiencies in calculating probabilities, as indicated in point (7b) above. For example, if a family member or a neighbor becomes unemployed, an individual will tend to overevaluate the country’s unemployment rate as well as his own risk of becoming unemployed. Regarding redistributive policies, this feature might matter, for example, for the way individuals form beliefs about the proportion of poor who are ‘legitimately needy’. One single mass media report presenting, say, a family who whereas not filling the eligibility conditions somehow manages to be granted a benefit will probably have a considerable impact on watchers’ beliefs about the proportion of ‘legitimately needy’ in the population – even if such family is not at all representative of the country’s families – and erode support for the program. Finally, with regards to point (7c), it is possible that peoples’ preferences evolve over time, including those regarding the demand for redistribution – once again in contrast with the standard economic model.

While points 5, 6 and 7 are independent findings with independent implications, they can be connected in the framework of this study’s research object. “Perceived social distance” is clearly not an immutable concept. It depends on a series of objective and subjective factors, and is certainly malleable by spontaneous forces and possibly alterable by effect of policies. The way a social policy is framed – named, implemented, explained, and reformed – might have a considerable impact on its acceptability and legitimacy among different categories of individuals in a country. These results can be interpreted with somewhat more optimism by UBI proponents. Their challenge is difficult, but not impossible: *they have to find strategies for persuading (admittedly convincible) people that: (i) they all belong to a single category of people – say, ‘Brazilian citizens’ as opposed to ‘rich’ versus ‘deserving poor’ versus ‘undeserving poor’, (ii) UBI is a fair and wise policy, and (iii) a departure from status quo is worth it.*

Summing up, the results from experimental economics and from research collecting opinions on distributive justice lead us to conclude that there exists a general, ‘primitive’ (both naturally or socially determined), propensity for individuals to be cooperative and sensitive to the misfortunes of their fellow citizens, and thus to demand redistribution. However, peoples’ intuitive support for redistributive policies strongly depends on how they understand the causes of poverty and inequality, and on whether they consider that beneficiaries are deserving or not, casting doubts on the prospects of an intuitive, spontaneous, endorsement of a UBI proposal. Finally, since people’s preferences are not immutable, since their pro-social behavior depends on the degree of perceived social proximity, which is alterable, and since the context and framing details matter, there is scope for gaining support for specific redistributive and *prima facie* counter-to-common-sense policies such as UBI – the challenge is then to persuade the average person that it is indeed fair and wise.

#### **4. Values and attitudes towards redistribution: the Brazilian evidence**

Based on two lines of empirical research we have sketched in section 3 a very general systematization of the main elements impacting attitudes towards redistribution, supposedly applicable with more or less accuracy

to every group of human beings. But individuals are heterogeneous within countries, such that the rate of support for redistribution is not the same for everyone. And individuals in different nations have different average degrees of demand or support for redistribution, an evidence of which is the presence of so much variation across welfare state regimes around the world. The next step then is to evaluate whether Brazilians' values and attitudes towards redistribution are specific in any respect or just confirm the general pattern exposed in the previous section, and also to determine whether the available evidence allows us to conjecture that Brazilian citizens would be willing to support a transition from BFP to UBI.

Before describing the results it is important to provide a minimal set of basic contextual information. The Gini index of Brazil's income distribution had been oscillating around 0.60 for many decades and only very recently has it stepped down to reach 0.55 in 2007 (Barros et al., 2010). The proportion of poor people in the population has been 1/3 or even more in the 1980s and part of the 1990s, and has been reduced more recently to reach a fraction slightly higher than 1/4 of the population in 2007 (*ibid*). These two interrelated developments are due to a series of factors, including long-term ones such as demographic changes and increase in average years of education, as well as the following ones: (i) a more dynamic labor market reflecting a faster-growing economy, (ii) a generous minimum-wage policy with direct and indirect impacts on available income,<sup>6</sup> and (iii) the expansion of cash transfer programs, BFP in particular.

We have organized the evidence around a few crucial questions and answers, followed by some comments, in an attempt to draw a general picture of the potential demand for redistribution by Brazilians. The results come exclusively from questionnaire research. We are not aware of experimental evidence on social preferences and distributional situations in Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

#### I. Are the high levels of inequality and poverty considered undesirable by Brazilians? The evidence is mixed, but there is a tendency for conformism.

On the one hand, in a survey on Brazilian elites' perceptions Reis (2000) reports that Brazil's "quasi-leadership" in the ranking of income inequality is considered "deplorable" and "shameful" in contrast, for example, with a more lenient attitude expressed by South African elites.<sup>8</sup> Both Scalón (2007) and Rocha &

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<sup>6</sup> Through channels such as: increased wages in the formal sector; larger contributive benefits which take the minimum wage as an index; and increased wages in the informal sector, which mirror to some extent those in the formal sector.

<sup>7</sup> We have recently asked undergraduate students (12 groups of 3 individuals in a Game Theory course in 2009) and graduate students (20 individuals in a Microeconomics course in 2010) at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil, to play a simple version of the Ultimatum Game, in which: (i)  $m$  was equal to R\$1.000,00, and the minimal offer of a positive amount was R\$1,00; (ii) contrary to experiments played in the lab, there was no real monetary award to the subjects; (iii) all individuals (or groups) occupied both the role of proposers and that of a responder to a R\$1,00 offer. The participants had not been previously exposed to a similar game. The setting was thus quasi-experimental and employed pseudo-volunteers. Interestingly, most results are aligned with those from the literature, with graduate students' behavior being slightly more self-interested and severe: the mean offer by the proposers was 32.73% (undergraduate) and 29.78% (graduate); the modal offer was 50.0% (for both groups), and the rate of rejection of the minimal offer of a positive amount by responders was 75.0% (undergraduate) and 50% (graduate).

<sup>8</sup> Reis (2000) reports interviews and surveys conducted in the mid-1990s with high-status individuals belonging to different domains: financial, political, religious, military etc. She defines this group taken together as "the elites".

Urani (2007), based on ISSP-1999 data, coincide in stating that when faced with schematic diagrams representing societies, Brazilians clearly distinguish the actual society they live in from an ideal society, with the latter being less unequal than the former.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, only small proportions of the elite (5.5%) and of non-elite people (3.0%) classify income inequality as one of the main problems of the country, according to Scalon (2007). The author also reports that poverty is considered somewhat more important, a view shared by 7.6% of the elite and 11.0% of non-elite people.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly the richer tend to be slightly more tolerant towards inequality than the less affluent: (normative) income gaps across occupations should be larger according to the former group (people in occupations with the highest status should earn 16 times than people in the lowest status occupations) than to the latter group (the recommended rate is 11 times).<sup>11</sup> Restricting the focus to Brazilian elites, Reis (2000) reports that income distribution was viewed in the mid-1990s as one of the main problems of the countries for 8.3% of the respondents, and poverty for 14.3%. While slightly higher than Scalon’s results, Reis’s results still look modest in the face of the actual situation observed in the country.

**Table 1: Should incomes in your country be made more equal or not? Brazilians’ versus non-Brazilians’ views.**

Waves	Brazilians		Non-Brazilians	
	Average	N. Obs.	Average	N. Obs.
1 (1981-1984)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2 (1989-1993)	5.86	1,730	6.33	20,485
3 (1994-1999)	5.71	1,137	5.80	71,878
4 (1999-2004)	n.a.	n.a.	5.98	57,288
5 (2005-2007)	5.68	1,490	5.92	76,163

*NB: A smaller average is associated with less tolerance to inequality.*

Source: World Values Survey database.

V116: Respondents choose a number ranging from 1 to 10, such that:

1 = “Incomes should be made more equal” and

10 = “We need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort”

Further evidence coming from the World Values Survey allows us to put into perspective Brazil’s results. In one question, interviewees had to express their opinion according to a scale ranging from 1 to 10, in which 1 means “Incomes should be made more equal” and 10 is “We need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort”. The average responses for Brazil and other countries in different waves are shown in Table 1. Brazilians’ average intolerance to inequality does not oscillate much over time, and while it is systematically lower than the international average, the difference is not substantial. Again, given the extremely high income inequality records in Brazil, one would expect a larger departure from the international average.

Among the many possible explanations for the apparent conformism of Brazilians with levels of poverty and inequality, which objectively are high in international standards, we would like to emphasize three. First, as

<sup>9</sup> The ISSP-1999 was undertaken from 1999 to 2001 in different countries. In Brazil, the interviews were made in 2001. Other details about the survey and the datasets can be found on the articles cited in this paragraph.

<sup>10</sup> Scalon (2007) defined the “elite” as those individuals belonging to the set of 10% richest among the respondents.

<sup>11</sup> As a qualification to the apparent neglect for distributional issues, it should be said that, according to Scalon (2007), both elite and non-elite consider that unemployment (14% and 22%), health (20% and 19%) and security (28% and 25%) are important problems, all of which are related to people’s living standard, and indirectly to income.

Amartya Sen has recurrently warned in his critiques to standard welfare economics (e.g., Sen, 1992), people might get used to and even be satisfied with a living condition which is miserable from an objective viewpoint, such as that of a “tamed housewife” or of a slave. The same might happen to individuals in situations of serious material deprivation, or to groups of people whose social achievements are consistently lower than those of other groups. It does not matter how bad their situation is from an objective perspective, these individuals or groups might still feel quite happy or satisfied, for example, because they have always lived in such a context and have become used to it. While “cheap preferences” would explain the conformism of the poor, habit and plain self-interest could be invoked to explain the conformism of the rich. Like the poor, the rich may also be used to the unequal *status quo*; moreover, they might be satisfied with it, and do not perceive current levels of inequality and poverty as much of a problem, except when their own well-being is threatened by, say, insecurity issues – which could give rise to limited, defensive, demand for redistribution.

The second reason explaining the apparent conformism of Brazilians with regard to high levels of poverty and inequality might be related to a hypothesis raised by Bowles and Gintis (1998), according to which concepts like ‘income inequality’ are abstractions, not fully understood by the individuals and not related to their everyday experience. More importantly, such kind of concept does not invoke the ‘primitive’ tendency of individuals to care about the others – that is, the social, or other-regarding, preferences mentioned before. If this is true, while powerful in specific situations and contexts, social preferences would not be moving in a general questioning about abstract notions such as income inequality. Admittedly, that may be less valuable as an explanation for conformism regarding poverty.

The third reason for Brazilians’ conformism might be a misperception of the real parameters of income distribution in the country. Maybe people do not care much about high levels of inequality or poverty, because they are not actually aware of the extent to which the country’s income is unequally distributed or of the magnitude of poverty – after all, they have not experienced another pattern of distribution. This brings us to the next point.

II. Is there a serious misperception of the parameters of income distribution in the country? The answer is unquestionably positive.

Scalon (2007) reports that more than 95% of rich and poor Brazilian interviewees in ISSP-1999 agree that income gaps are huge in the country. Both Scalon (2007) and Rocha & Urani (2007) report that, when confronted with schematic diagrams of societies already mentioned above, most Brazilian respondents correctly classify Brazil as a pyramidal society. However, the familiarity with the characteristics of Brazil’s income distribution does not seem to go much further than such simple and very general recognition of the existence of large gaps in living standards. Rocha & Urani (2007) using both ISSP-1999 data and interviews with economics students from a major university in Rio de Janeiro, have shown that the ignorance of the

parameters of income distribution in the country is pervasive and abysmal. They report an extremely weak relation between the actual and the perceived social position of individuals – valid across income brackets. Many richer Brazilians see themselves as much poorer than they really are – for example in a scale ranging from 1 to 10, many richer Brazilians believe their income position is below 5. If these relatively well-off people are so unaware of their actual position, it is probable that they sub-estimate the extent of inequality and poverty. Interestingly, the poor too fail to indicate their correct relative position: there is a tendency among them to believe they belong to middle income ranges. The authors also show with ISSP-1999 data that, although a perfect knowledge of the parameters of the distribution is not observed in other countries either, the discrepancy between perceived and actual income distributions is maximal in Brazil.<sup>12</sup>

In order to define credible and legitimate principles of justice in the Rawlsian tradition, individuals should be invited to reason, in a thought experiment, under a veil of ignorance. That contrasts with a situation in which individuals would know their actual relative social position, income and status, inappropriately influencing their normative choices. What we observe in Brazil is neither a reasoning conducted under a veil of ignorance ensuring neutrality, nor a reasoning undertaken with an accurate perception of the actual social position. Instead, what we observe is a widespread misperception of the reality. Under these surrealistic circumstances, what are the prospects for Brazilians of favoring income-equalizing or poverty-reducing policies? Admittedly a context of serious misperception of income distribution parameters is not necessarily incompatible with support for redistribution, among other reasons because whereas these are outcomes, individuals do care about processes. But such support will depend upon the *beliefs* about what causes inequality and poverty, and about what policies could effectively mitigate them, as well as upon the *normative principles* that should be used to determine remuneration. Each of those points is taken up in what follows.

III. What do rich and poor Brazilians consider as the causes of inequality and poverty and what policies could address them? As for the causes, the answers point to a vague notion of “ineffectiveness of the State” and only in a limited extent to individuals’ actions, but that view might be changing. The preferred policy options include improving public services, undertaking a land-property reform and improving education.

Richer Brazilians express the view that inequality and poverty are due to a vague notion of the “ineffectiveness of the State” (Reis, 2000). Scalón (2007) corroborates that, by explaining that Brazilian elites view the State (or political representatives), as the main responsible for fighting inequality, and adds that those outside the elites share this view: in both cases, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents agree with such statement. Accordingly, policies aimed at “improving public service” are favored by more than 40% of both elite and non-elite respondents. While land-property reform also scores high among the richer, raising taxes is not a popular option, as we will comment more below. Rather, they set the improvement of education as

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion about the causes and consequences of the misperception of parameters of income distribution in Brazil, see Rocha & Urani (2007).

the main policy – one which would not require direct redistribution of income or wealth as argued by Reis (2000).

It is possible to explore other dimensions of the alleged causes of poverty and inequality, for example, by examining what Brazilians think explains remuneration in the country after all, and how important is effort in leading to rewards. One piece of evidence is reported by Scalon (2007), by means of answers given to a question on whether respondents thought people were indeed rewarded by their efforts in Brazil. Almost 2/3 of elite individuals and more than half of non-elite people disagreed, and only 29% and 41% agreed, respectively. A similar question was whether the respondent thought that people were rewarded by their qualifications and intelligence. An almost equal proportion of elite individuals agrees (40%) and disagrees (42%), while non-elite tend to agree more (56%) than disagree (1/3). Richer Brazilians tend to be more skeptical than the remaining of the population about the prospects of being successful by means of natural talent or personal volition.

Evidence coming from the World Values Survey partly corroborates last paragraph’s result, through a question in which reward to effort appears indirectly. People were asked to answer according to a scale, ranging from 1 (“In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life”) to 10 (“Hard work doesn’t generally bring success – it’s more a matter of luck and connections”). The average responses for Brazil and other countries in different waves are shown in Table 2. Brazilians were substantially more skeptical about the prospects of having success through hard work in the 1990s than in the most recent wave. Having said that, Brazilians’ average still remains higher than non-Brazilians’ average.

**Table 2: Is effort rewarded in the long run in your country?  
Brazilians’ versus non-Brazilians’ views.**

Waves	Brazilians		Non-Brazilians	
	Average	N. Obs.	Average	N. Obs.
1 (1981-1984)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2 (1989-1993)	6.65	1,747	4.09	20,623
3 (1994-1999)	6.82	1,142	4.32	68,300
4 (1999-2004)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
5 (2005-2007)	4.72	1,484	4.27	74,404

*NB: A smaller average is associated with stronger belief that effort is rewarded in the long-run.*

Source: World Values Survey database.

V120: Respondents choose a number ranging from 1 to 10, such that:

1 = “In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life”, and

10 = “Hard work doesn’t generally bring success – it’s more a matter of luck and connections”

If we trust previous sections’ conclusions according to which human beings are not prone to cooperate unconditionally and assign importance to the causes leading to an outcome (e.g., the determinants of a given pattern of inequality or to poverty), an optimistic reading could be made of the evidence that Brazilians do not tend to attribute too much responsibility to those who are in a less favorable condition – it is not their fault, it is States’ fault. After all, people do not believe that effort is effectively rewarded in the country in any case. Such a view could reveal a certain room for empathy by Brazilians towards fellow citizens whose income is low or very low, and as a consequence, open space for social solidarity, in the form of demand for

redistribution. Another dimension of partial optimism can be identified in the sense that if there is a perception that the problem relies on State’s ineffectiveness, there may be room for reforms improving public policies.

However, some qualification is warranted. First, there is a very low level of trust in public institutions in Brazil, such that, while the State is indeed viewed as the major actor in the position of solving important problems (Reis, 2000; Almeida & Young, 2007; Scalon, 2007), it is also seen as “the source of all the evils” (Almeida & Young, 2007: 192). For example, Scalon (2007) identifies a contradiction between the declared undesirability of inequality and poverty expressed by richer Brazilian – almost unanimous in a preliminary direct questioning –, and the reluctance of a large proportion of them for agreeing with a proposed policy of increasing taxes in order to finance redistribution: more than 53% disagree totally or partially, while only around 43% agree totally or partially. (The proportions are inversed among non-elite individuals). Widespread lack of trust in public institutions, together with plain self-interest among richer Brazilians – and maybe obscurity concerning who would pay those taxes after all – might explain the resistance to tax increases, even among non-elite individuals.

Secondly, some changes in Brazilians’ perceptions might be under way, according to both the evidence shown in Table 2 above, and to that reported in Table 3 below. In the latter table, again based on World Values Survey data, we observe the average answers given by the individuals to a question where 1 meant “The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for” and 10 meant “People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves”. From the 1990s to the 2000s, there seems to be a change in Brazilians’ attitudes who now assign more responsibility to individuals – even more than in other countries. It may be the case that a change is under way, such that Brazilians simultaneously begin to believe more firmly that efforts are reward (Table 2) and maybe as a consequence they increase their reliance on individuals’ responsibility (Table 3).

**Table 3: Who should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for in your country: the government or the individuals? Brazilians’ versus non-Brazilians’ views.**

Waves	Brazilians		Non-Brazilians	
	Average	N. Obs.	Average	N. Obs.
1 (1981-1984)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2 (1989-1993)	5.28	1,750	5.35	20,505
3 (1994-1999)	5.45	1,137	6.36	71,555
4 (1999-2004)	n.a.	n.a.	6.39	58,665
5 (2005-2007)	6.69	1,488	6.22	79,048

*NB: A smaller average is associated with an assignment of more responsibility to the government (as opposed to individuals).*

Source: World Values Survey database.

V120: Respondents choose a number ranging from 1 to 10, such that:

1 = “The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for” and

10 = “People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves”.

IV. What normative criteria do Brazilians think *should* be used to determine remuneration? Criteria related to needs are somewhat more popular among Brazilians than those related to talent or effort, but both of these criteria are important. Dissociating remuneration from work is not a consensual idea.

Scalon (2007) reports that the ISSP-1999 survey has asked how important (ranging from “extremely” to “not at all”) should be, for determining individuals’ remunerations, individual features such as: (a) their education and training level, (b) the fact that they exert a supervisory task, (c) the fact they have a family and they need to make ends meet, (d) the presence of children in the household. While the richer tend to assign slightly less weight to education and training as a normative determinant of remuneration than the remaining of the respondents, there are not important discrepancies between elite and non-elite responses, which all converge to high levels of approval of the four factors.<sup>13</sup> The options (c) and (d), which are related to needs, score somewhat higher than the options (a) and (b), which are related to talent or effort.

The limited evidence discussed in the previous paragraph suggests that, given the importance of needs as an intuitive distributive justice criterion, there would be scope for extensive solidarity among Brazilians. However, talent and effort are also extremely relevant as normative criteria, confirming the general traits portrayed in section 3, what might limit Brazilians’ willingness to support generous redistributive policies.

We now turn to World Values Survey data to find some indication of whether Brazilians theoretically would accept dissociating income and work effort, and the judgment they make on people who do not work. That evidence is collected by means of answers given to two somehow direct and ‘tough’ questions, namely: “Is it humiliating to receive money without having to work for it?” (Table 4), and “People who don’t work turn lazy” (Table 5). Such data are available for Brazil only for wave 5, which took place in 2006 in the country.

**Table 4: Acceptance of a dissociation between remuneration and work. Brazilians’ versus non-Brazilians’ views.**

V51: Is it humiliating to receive money without having to work for it?	Brazilians Wave 5 (2006)	Non-Brazilians Wave 5 (2005-2007)	Non-Brazilians Waves 1 to 5
Strongly agree	22.32	26.00	26.94
Agree	34.25	34.12	34.57
Neither agree nor disagree	17.49	17.08	16.25
Disagree	22.52	18.28	17.67
Strongly disagree	3.42	4.52	4.57
<i>Agree + Strongly agree</i>	<i>56.57</i>	<i>60.12</i>	<i>61.51</i>
<i>Disagree + Strongly disagree</i>	<i>25.94</i>	<i>22.8</i>	<i>22.24</i>
Number of Respondents	1,492	64,435	102,261

Source: World Values Survey.

Results show that Brazilians are more acquiescent with dissociating income and work than non-Brazilians, although only by a few percentage points. When we sum the proportions of Brazilians who disagree with, strongly disagree with, or are indifferent to, the question’s statement, we arrive at 43.43%, which is not a negligible figure, and not far from the majority threshold. That might suggest that Brazilians could in principle be relatively more supportive than their international counterparts to cash transfers schemes which

<sup>13</sup> The proportion of elite and non-elite individuals who believe that (a) is important or extremely important is 77.4% and 80.1%, respectively. For the other items the rates are: (b) 74.8% and 74.1%; (c) 85.7% and 85.3%, (d) 82.0% and 84.4%.

do not rely on the workfare rationale. Nonetheless Brazilians are very severe when they judge whether people who do not work “turn lazy” with an agreement rate of  $\frac{3}{4}$ , projecting erosion of support in the long for cash transfer programs, if there is a perception – correct or not – that many beneficiaries do not work.

**Table 5: Judgement of people who do not work. Brazilians’ versus non-Brazilians’ views.**

V52: People who don’t work turn lazy?	Brazilians Wave 5 (2006)	Non-Brazilians Wave 5 (2005-2007)	Non-Brazilians Waves 1 to 5
Strongly agree	27.71	34.11	33.15
Agree	46.39	39.32	39.67
Neither agree nor disagree	2.56	3.00	3.08
Disagree	9.84	12.00	11.85
Strongly disagree	13.49	11.57	12.24
<i>Agree + Strongly agree</i>	<i>74.10</i>	<i>73.82</i>	<i>72.82</i>
<i>Disagree + Strongly disagree</i>	<i>23.33</i>	<i>23.57</i>	<i>24.09</i>
Number of Respondents	1,483	63,330	101,241

Source: World Values Survey.

We now examine Brazilians’ perception of BFP, in order to confront some of the conjectures regarding Brazilians’ attitude towards redistributive policies built up in the previous pages with their views on a concrete redistributive program.

V. What is Brazilians’ perception of the BFP, one the most important redistributive program in the Brazil? They are greatly favorable, but address critiques on moral and incentive grounds.

Castro et al. (2009) have investigated the perception Brazilians have of the BFP in 2008. The authors have asked a great number of questions to a representative sample of the Brazilian population about their opinion on different aspects of the BFP.<sup>14</sup> Although the results vary according to characteristics of the respondents (cf. age, skin color, region of residence and so on), the overall picture is one of *widespread endorsement of the program*: in all the regions, at least 2/3 of the people consider that the program “mostly brings good things to the country”, with an overall average approval rate of 72%. Other questions included whether BFP helps: fighting poverty, keeping children in schools, improving children’s education, fighting child labor, improving children’s and pregnant women’s health. For all of them, the rate of agreement is always above 2/3. Very importantly, people who are acquainted to at least one beneficiary are substantially more enthusiastic about the program than individuals who are not acquainted to any beneficiary – giving credit to the hypothesis that perceived social distance matters.

A qualitative research had also been conducted previously with focal groups, in order to identify the main critiques towards BFP, which were: (a) disapproval of the very principle of transferring money to people who should instead learn how to earn it by themselves, (b) fear of frauds to means-tests and to conditionality-checking, and (c) fear that the program might provide incentives to fertility. All these

<sup>14</sup> Details about the survey design and results can be found in the cited article.

critiques have been confirmed in the interviews. More than 80% of the interviewees believe that the BFP benefit people who are not in need of the transfers; around 2/3 agree that the program makes people lazier, preferring not to supply labor; 56% agree that the program makes people want to have more children; And 45% show concern regarding all the three issues simultaneously.

Summing up this section, we would say that Brazilians are more comfortable with high levels of inequality and poverty than would be expected. The explanations might involve habit, the lack of concrete significance of abstract concepts like income inequality and poverty, or misperceptions of the reality. The latter hypothesis finds strong support in the available evidence. When required to point out the causes of inequality and poverty in the country, Brazilians tend to blame the “ineffectiveness of the State”, and only in a limited sense extent to attribute them to individuals’ choices and actions, what could suggest a predisposition to express solidarity and to favor redistribution. However, such view might be evolving in recent years towards a more individualistic and effort-centered view. In addition, while such predisposition to express solidarity is partly confirmed when we observe Brazilians’ normative determinants of remuneration, in which needs-related criteria are the most salient, effort-related criteria are also widely endorsed. Dissociating remuneration from work is not a consensual idea, but is not strongly rejected. Finally, Brazilians are overwhelmingly favorable to one of the most important redistributive programs in Brazil BFP, but address critiques on moral and incentive grounds.

## **5. Conclusions: what are the prospects of a smooth transition from BFP to UBI in Brazil?**

Based on results from experimental economics and from research collecting opinions on distributive justice we have attempted to understand whether Brazilians would be willing to support a transition from BFP to UBI, given their current “widely held moral sentiments”, their beliefs, and their perceptions.

The reasons for pessimism among UBI advocates encompass Brazilians’ conformism: why would people favor an ambitious redistributive program such as UBI in the first place if they do not even think that inequality and poverty are that much worrying? If such conformism happens mainly because of a misperception of Brazil’s income distribution parameters, an important task for researchers is to play an informative role. Moreover, just like their international counterparts, Brazilians are not willing to redistribute income without certifying *ex ante* that the causes of misfortunes are ‘acceptable’, and checking *ex post* that recipients do not change ‘inappropriately’ their behavior. Those may be sources of strong opposition to a UBI program, especially given the importance of ‘effort’ as a distributive principle among Brazilians. Particularly important for UBI discussions, endorsement of the idea of dissociating remuneration from work is not prevalent among Brazilians. This casts doubts on the possibility of eventually reaching UBI as a series of transformations to BFP: doing so would require climbing steps up to a crucial point which would involve a deep change in the nature of redistribution (from conditional to unconditional), and Brazilians might not be ready to climb that final step, at least in the short-run. Additionally, Brazilians’

values might be evolving in recent years towards a more individualistic and effort-centered view. Finally, in spite of the substantial current support to BFP, the main critiques are rooted on moral and incentive grounds. Altogether, the prospects of an intuitive and spontaneous endorsement of UBI scheme seem to be rather meager.

Having said that, Brazilians think about distributional issues (and possibly behave towards them) in ways which are not dissimilar to what we have found in our reading of the international evidence: they are prone to show some degree of solidarity and to demand redistribution. Possibly attenuated in recent years, but still powerful is a somewhat distinguishing feature of Brazilians: they blame the State for individuals' misfortunes and not the individuals themselves, suggesting a reasonable predisposition to support redistributive policies. In addition to that, such predisposition is partly confirmed by the saliency of needs-related normative criteria regarding the determinants of remuneration. Importantly, with regards to the idea of dissociating remuneration from work, which is so central to the UBI project, while it is not consensual among Brazilians, its rejection rate is not that far from the majority threshold, and the dissociating idea is not as much rejected as in other countries. Moreover it may be the case that people are reluctant with regards to dissociating income and work, not because of an intrinsic and inevitable rejection of that, but rather because of *status quo* bias, given the long-standing prevalence of the rule "income against effort" in our societies, including Brazil.

Paraphrasing Bowles & Gintis' (1998) citation in this paper's first page, some moral rules cannot be imposed upon individuals in any stable manner. Now while preferences are not easily shapeable and certainly do not change abruptly, they do evolve over time. For example, the BFP did not exist 10 years ago and now seems to be supported by a considerable majority of Brazilians, contradicting more pessimistic predictions. Moreover such support is much higher among those who are acquainted to a beneficiary. This is a very important piece of information for UBI proponents: if there were a UBI in Brazil, everybody would not only know many beneficiaries, but also be one of them. Resistance to UBI would probably be reduced after it has been implemented, as it happens with the existing annual unconditional grant in Alaska.

The challenge is then, subject to the behavioral and perceptual constraints brought up here, to find the appropriate instruments and strategies *aimed at persuading the average person* (possibly also the average researcher and the average politician) that UBI is indeed a fair and wise policy. A remarkable challenge.

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