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Editorial. Guest

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EDITORIAL

Social policies in Latin America, far from leveling the inequalities generated by the primary and secondary income distribution, tend to reproduce pre-existing social stratification under different segmented schemes of social protection. The current economic and social crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic made even more evident the weakness of these social protection systems to fulfill their basic functions of prevention, mitigation and overcoming of contingencies that affect income and quality of life.

Once again, it is the citizens most unprotected against social risks who bear the greatest costs of crises. This means that a large number of Latin American states have been unable to adequately collectivize this type of risk. The markets of the region, on the other hand, fail to insure those who really need it. Consequently, the burden of providing welfare falls disproportionately on families. The impacts of all this on extreme poverty, poverty, and inequality have been severe, and the region has lost many of the gains made in the first decade of the 21st century.

At a time when the distance between social rights and people's material reality is particularly extreme, some questions arise: How can we understand what is happening? What can we learn from studies of government and social policies? Will this crisis open new windows of political opportunity to achieve substantive changes in different subsystems of public policies? What direction could these changes take? In Latin America, are the burdens and benefits being rebalanced between States, markets, communities and families to create new welfare regimes?

With the aim of analyzing issues like these related to social policies and the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, *Gobernar: The Journal of Latin American Public Policy and Governance* presents this Issue. Its main objective is to focus on:

- Welfare regimes, their typologies, continuities, changes or particularities.
- Social policy as a whole or one of its main subsystems: employment, health, education, housing, protection, insurance and social assistance.
- Social policy, universalization, targeting and target populations: childhood, youth, adulthood, aging, gender equity, sexual diversity, and disability, among others.
- The role that the State, markets, communities or families have played in facing the social and economic crisis generated by the COVID- 19 pandemic.

This emphasis on Latin America is decisive because mainstream literature on welfare regimes and comparative social policy has privileged the study of developed countries, generally focused on Western Europe. As a result, many of emerging welfare regimes around the world remain under-studied and much is unknown about the institutional arrangements, policy instruments or long-term social policy outcomes that exist in these countries. There are significant exceptions that, however, do not compare with the amount and scope of knowledge produced about Western Europe. Besides that, much of the research that dares to look beyond Western welfare regimes has focused on comparisons between developed countries and specific East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore. These same studies pay very little attention to the experiences of countries such as the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam or even China.

For many decades, the academic debates in Latin America were marked by the literature on social security, and references to the state or to welfare regimes in the strict sense were rare. Moreover, the vast majority of researchers on comparative social policy have overlooked the marked similarities between some Asian countries and Latin America. For example, a past of authoritarian governments with a recent process of democratization, highly dualistic labor markets, fragmented social security systems, the role played by multi-general extended families in welfare provision –through Confucian inheritance in the case of Asia or Catholic inheritance in the case of Latin America– or a clear division of productive and reproductive work between men and women. In any case, all these relationships remain practically unknown to date.

In Latin America, social policy research is often concentrated in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay or Costa Rica, countries that were pioneers in the implementation of social security schemes in the region and which have better data on social indicators. In the other countries, where there is no established academic tradition on the study of welfare regimes, it is quite common for social policy to be confused with some form of charity on the part of the state. This is due to a historical past in which charity and philanthropy prevailed to meet the basic needs of the poorest, based on Catholic mercy, and the current residualist and familiaristic nature of social policy. In the specific case of Colombia, the literature on violence and armed conflict monopolized a good part of academic agenda in the social sciences for decades. But after the peace process reached between the Colombian state and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in 2016, it is very likely that new lines of research will be opened on the challenges to welfare provision across national territory.

This issue aims to contribute to the gaps in knowledge highlighted above, by providing comparative analyses and case studies that include understudied countries and communities globally and in Latin America.

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