

Articles

# Populism and Bureaucratic Frictions: Lessons From Bolsonarism

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How do populist governments approach public bureaucracies? Here we reflect on the rise of Bolsonarism as a form of populism in the Brazilian context and on its relationship with public bureaucracies. Bolsonaro’s “strategy of governing” builds on an unstable coalition that combines neoconservatism, market-oriented economic approach and military nationalism and corporativism. We analyze how the antagonism at the center of this coalition shapes bureaucratic strategic positions and defend an understanding of Bolsonarism as an ideology of contentious governing that nurtures divisive bureaucracies.

## 1. Introduction

Populism frames politics as an existential conflict between different social groups: insiders or “true people” on one hand and “corrupt elites” on the other (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2014). Populist politics differ on the criteria of classification of “true people” versus “elites”, but they share contentious policymaking as a dominant form of politics. While research advances on the role of populism on democratic backsliding, studies about the relation of populism with public bureaucracies are still scarce.

Contentious populist politics clash, however, with the ideal view of bureaucracy as a neutral administrative system rooted on rational-legal authority, leading to inevitable friction. The vision of a neutral and value-free bureaucrat is a myth that doesn’t correspond to a more realistic view of bureaucracies as political institutions on their own, with distinctive values, discretion and power distribution (Meier et al., 2019). But how do populist governments approach public bureaucracies?

We answer these questions by reflecting on the rise of Bolsonarism as a specific form of populist government in the Brazilian context. We define Bolsonarism as an “anti-system”, “anti-PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores – Workers’ Party) & anti-left” and “neoconservative” populism (Solano, 2020). Bolsonaro’s “strategy of governing” (Roberts, 2020) builds on a broader coalition that combines neoconservatism in the social sphere with a market-oriented economic approach and a high presence of the military, well known for their political conservatism, corporativist and nationalistic approach to economy (Garcia, 2019).

Policy antagonism is at the center of Bolsonarism with obvious implications for a strong Weberian-based bureaucracy in place. Different from other Latin American countries, Brazil, particularly at the federal level, is marked by a strong, merit-based and competitively recruited public bureaucracy that co-exists with segments influenced by political patronage (Praça et al., 2021). Yet Brazilian bureau-

cracies are also shaped by internal inequality and heterogeneity, with some segments (e.g. military) in clear consonance with parts of the Bolsonaro’s agenda. Within this context, how Bolsonarism does approach different segments of Brazilian bureaucracy?

Exploring documental and bibliographical resources, we observe, aligned with previous studies on the relation of bureaucracy with populism, that hiring loyalists at the expense of expertise (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021; Müller, 2017; Peters & Pierre, 2019), followed by an attempt to discretionarily reassign institutional priorities and public resources (Bauer et al., 2021; Bauer & Becker, 2020; Dussauge-Laguna, 2021b; Dussauge-Laguna & Aguilar, 2021) are the preferential strategy of Bolsonarism in government. In addition, we identify three strategies of bureaucratic positioning and response to Bolsonarism’ divisive politics: structural coalition, conjunctural coalition and resistance. Finally, we defend an understanding of Bolsonarism as an ideology of divisive governing that, empowered by the prerogatives of a strong presidentialism, nurtures divisive bureaucracies.

## 2. Populism and Bolsonarism

The growth of populist political leaderships has been a growing trend worldwide (Bauer & Becker, 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Understanding populism as a thin-centered ideology, that considers society to be ultimately separated in two homogeneous but antagonistic camps, populist leaders frame politics as an existential conflict between “true or pure people” on one hand and the “corrupt elites” on the other, –and based on such division defend that the policy should be an expression of the “general will of the people” (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2014). Commonly shaped by anti-elitist, anti-pluralist, and moralistic elements, populist political discourses may differ on the criteria of classification of “true people” versus “others” but share contentious policymaking as a dominant form of politics.

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According to Mudde & Kaltwasser (2014), the Latin American region offers probably the richest tradition of populist leaders, movements and parties, varying from classic populism of the 1930s and 1960s (e.g. Argentinian Peronism), neo-liberal populism of the 1990s (e.g. Fujimori in Peru), to radical leftism populism of the 2000s (e.g. Chávez in Venezuela). Despite different policy proposals, or leftist and rightist political orientations, all experiences share strong and powerful political leaders, speaking “in the name of the people.”

Brazilian Bolsonarism rises within such a broader context. After 21 years of military dictatorship that ended in 1985, Brazil experienced a relatively stable period of democratic governments. A leftist party, PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores – Workers’ Party), governed for over a decade. Major corruption scandals (widely known as Lava-Jato) and massive social protests (June, 2013) resulted in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, escalating the degree of political polarization – a broader trend observed since re-democratization, with more than half of Brazilian voters expressing either a strong affinity for or antipathy against PT (Araújo & Prior, 2021; Samuels & Zucco, 2018).

The 2018 elections resulted in the victory of Jair Bolsonaro, with more than 57 million votes, representing 55% of the total valid votes. Using mainly anti-elitist, moralist and anti-corruption discourse, Bolsonaro promised to fight “gender ideology”, NGOs, social movements, and to banish “reds” (aka supporters of the Worker’ Party) from “our homeland” (Araújo & Prior, 2021).

The transition from Lulism (2002-2016) to Bolsonarism (2018-) has been subject of many explanations. Several scandals caused by the Lava-Jato investigation and other corruption cases in the PT government played an important role in his election. Indeed, research on the 2018 presidential elections based on data collected by the Brazilian Electoral Study, indicates that along with voters’ retrospective evaluation of government, flourishing ‘antipetismo’ (i.e. anti-Workers’ Party sentiment), growing numbers of voters self-identifying as right wing, and religion (being a Pentecostal Christian) were key in Bolsonaro’s election (Amaral, 2020). Additional ethnographic works attribute this major shift to people’s individual self and political subjectivity. According to Pinheiro-Machado and Scalzo (2020), the inclusion of the poor into the market economy in the PT era was followed by a sense of self-worth that was threatened by economic recession. This change unleashed an existential crisis, especially among men, who saw in Bolsonaro (as a male figure) and his campaign a new order to a changing world - resulting in massive numbers of votes.

But what is Bolsonarism? What type of populist rhetoric does Bolsonarism rely on? Here we rely on Solano’s (2020) categories of bolsonarist rhetoric.

## Anti-system

Bolsonarism and his supporters reject the “old” party-based politics, accusing them of being corrupt. Such rhetoric includes not only political representation, but also state bureaucracy. The rhetoric was fueled by the “Lava-Jato” operation, led by judge Sergio Moro, who uncovered a huge corruption scheme. Solano (2020, p. 213) describes that words such as “hope” or “change” were associated to the figure of Bolsonaro in all her field interviews: “*Bolsonaro is seen as honest and authentic, an anti-mainstream figure, capable of capturing the protest vote, channeling the frustration and anger against the political system...The old, traditional politics are rejected and the political novelty appears as a value in itself*”. Meanwhile “Sergio Moro appears characterized in the interviews as a hero, a savior, someone who “has a task,” “is an envoy,” and even more, “will clean Brazil” of corrupt politicians who, in a moralist and dualistic point of view, represent evil, the enemy to be exterminated, “a cancer.” The rejection of the political system as a whole led to the election of an outsider like Bolsonaro and resonates with valid criticisms and significant evidence of serious corruption among political elites in the country (Daly, 2019).

Within such a broader context, Bolsonaro alliance with Paulo Guedes, a Chicago-trained economist, enabled another important coalition partner for his election: important financial and productive sectors (e.g. agriculture, agrobusiness, commercial) in search of market-driven reforms, less environmental and labor markets protections. Part of such coalition was also a network composed of liberal professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers who were directly affected by high taxes, costs of labor and social security’s rights.<sup>1</sup> Initially hesitant, the support of the financial sector and large corporation came at the end of his campaign, where Guedes added to Bolsonaro’s agenda explicit support for privatization, public expenditure cutting and shrinking state bureaucracy (Garcia, 2019).

## Anti-petism and Anti-Leftism

Bolsonaro skillfully integrated anti-petism (anti-Worker’s Party) and anti-leftism in an anti-communist rhetoric. The anti-petism is an old sentiment, particularly in rise since the pro-impeachment demonstrations of 2015 and 2016 (Samuels & Zucco, 2018; Telles, 2016), expressed in rejection of PT government, of Lula as a political leader and of PT government social inclusion policies as Bolsa Família (a conditional cash transfer program) or affirmative actions. However, 2018 elections indicated that anti-petism is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with a growing conservative wing supporting Bolsonaro’s rise (Borges et al., 2020).

Bolsonaro propaganda articulated anti-petism, anti-leftism and anti-communism in the first TV electoral program, where he explicitly focused on PT’s relationship with

<sup>1</sup> See Casarões & Magalhães (2020) about their role in building an altscience network supporting Bolsonaro discourse during Covid-19 pandemic.

Venezuela and Bolivia to alert about the danger of “Venezuelanism” if PT won the elections. Bolsonaro claimed he was the only candidate who could save Brazil of this imminent communist danger.

The return of the military to the forefront of Brazilian politics fueled such events. After Dilma’s impeachment, during Michel Temer’s government, amid speculation of a military *coup*, the commander of the army relied on Twitter to reassure the public: “our democracy is not in danger.” The same general, Eduardo Villas Boas, warned that the military “repudiates impunity and respects the Constitution, social peace and democracy” in what was widely interpreted as a threat to potentially intervene if the Supreme Court declined to jail former president Lula (Daly, 2019, p. 11).

These events position the military as an important early ally of Bolsonaro, a former army captain himself who left due to insubordination. In addition, Bolsonaro’s early career in the military, from his union-like activity to his imprisonment and to evidences of a terrorist plot became important parts of his performative populism (Silva, 2020).

### Neoconservatism

Bolsonarism also articulates a solution to a “moral” crisis that Brazil faces: a return to the values of the “traditional family”, based on Christian values and appealing to evangelical Christian support. According to Solano (2020), identity movements became the main target of attack of Bolsonarism, accused of being the cause of the moral chaos of society. For his voters, Bolsonaro is not misogynistic, racist, or homophobic; rather, he speaks shamelessly about what he thinks, reacting against the dictatorship of political correctness.

The coalition with Pentecostal Christians was key for Bolsonaro’s rise. Such coalition was translated in a larger share of votes among evangelical Christians than his PT opponent (21.7% versus 9.7%). Born Catholic, he was converted by a Pentecostal, Pastor Everaldo. “God” was and still is one of the words most repeated since his campaign and inaugural speech, on January 1, 2019. Powerful evangelical leaders openly manifested their support during the election campaign. Being a Pentecostal Christian rather than Catholic increased the odds of voting for Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 elections (Amaral, 2020).

Bolsonaro explored electorally the Pentecostal Christian neoconservatism by accusing PT and the left of being against religious values that are necessary to guide public and private life and responsible for the chaos and disorder that took over social life. “*This strategy of moralization and Christianization of politics matches very well with the Car Wash idea of a corrupted and “dirty” State*” (Solano, 2020, p. 219). In addition, exploring Bolsonaro’s military background suited such moral strategy, since it evokes discipline, authority, respect and hierarchy. It is worth noting that, the Armed Forces are consistently evaluated as the most reliable institution in Brazil in sharp contrast with declining trust in government or political parties. 58% of the population declared to trust the armed forces while only 7% declare to trust in the government (Latinobarometro, 2018).

### 3. Bolsonarism in government

While a vast literature explores the causes of populism, and its association with democratic backsliding (Bauer et al., 2021; Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), research on the consequences of having populists in office for the functioning of the public administration and bureaucracies is still relatively scarce (but see Bauer & Becker, 2020; Bellodi et al., 2021; Peters & Pierre, 2019; Rockman, 2019; Dussauge-Laguna, 2021b). Yet for many populists, bureaucracy often becomes a symbol of corrupted elites (Rockman, 2019), as illustrated by Trumpism and its opposition to the US administrative state (Moynihan & Roberts, 2021).

Populism often includes criticism of bureaucracy and is likely to translate into lower expertise and higher bureaucratic politicization (Peters & Pierre, 2019; Rockman, 2019), reflecting populists’ preference for simplistic policies (Bellodi et al., 2021; Morelli et al., 2020) and the urge to centralize decisions about institutional priorities and public resources (Bauer et al., 2021; Bauer & Becker, 2020; Dussauge-Laguna, 2021b). The attempt to politicize the administration exists everywhere (Rockman, 1988), but purges of human resources and top bureaucrats and hiring of their own loyalist agents shape specifically many populist governments (Müller, 2017). This is important, because we already know that “agency politicization is detrimental to what laws and the public mandate agencies to do in a democratic society” (Lim, 2019, p. 2).

However, populist’s relation with bureaucracy is highly complex, because bureaucracy is necessary for policy making. Different from other Latin American countries, Bolsonaro found a strong and massive “Weberian” bureaucratic sector in place. Politically appointed positions are also very abundant in the federal level, accounting for more than 22000 positions (PEP, 2021), but most of the positions need to be filled with tenured public servants. Within this context, how did Bolsonarism approached federal bureaucracies?

Contrarily to populists as Trump, who was slow to nominate officials to key positions (Lewis & Richardson, 2021), Bolsonaro quickly filled the highest politically appointed positions in the federal government. As anticipated by the literature, hiring loyalists (Müller, 2017; Peters & Pierre, 2019) was the first move of Bolsonarism. Politically appointed positions were chosen on political and ideological grounds, and evidence is emerging on how social media accounts of current public servants in political positions were screened to check for political and ideological affinity. Expertise was jeopardized as most of the positions were filled based on political and ideological coalitions, at the expense of professionalization.

Two main groups became central for indicating politically appointed positions (Garcia, 2019). The military representatives were allocated in different ministries, occupying one-third of high-ranking positions. The other group represents the ultra-conservative ideology linked to Olavo de Carvalho, a self-entitled philosopher who resides in the U.S. and to Bolsonaro’s son, Eduardo, who articulates for the group. Both, Eduardo and Carvalho are associated with Steve Bannon. Eduardo was designated by Bannon as the principal leader of ‘The Movement’ of the far-right in Latin

America. In the initial composition of Bolsonaro government, the group appointed two key ministries: Education and Foreign Affairs. Both Ministers articulate the moral-conservative agenda: combating ‘gender ideology’ and ‘Marxist indoctrination’ in schools and universities; denying the military dictatorship period; positioning against multilateral negotiations (as in the case of climate change or migration), maintaining a direct alignment with Trump and Israel, against what they call ‘cultural Marxism’ and ‘globalism’. The new Ministry of Woman, Family and Human Rights, headed by an evangelical Christian, is also part of the neoconservative agenda.

In addition, Paulo Guedes became the most powerful minister of the new government. The new Ministry of Economy merged previous ministries of Finance, Planning, Industry and Trade, and Labor. The appointed secretaries of “De-bureaucratization”, “De-nationalization and De-investment” signaled the new market-oriented priorities and have launched important reforms (administrative reforms, pension reforms, labor reforms) aligned with the neoliberal agenda (Garcia, 2019). According to the Panel of Personnel (PEP, 2021), the “super” Ministry also allocated the highest number of the politically appointed positions (1623 out of more than 22 thousand). It is worth mentioning that most of these positions are filled with tenured public servants.

As Bauer et al. (2021) highlight, Bolsonaro’s populist governing strategies also are shaped by the discretionary reassignment of institutional priorities and public resources. Such strategy become particularly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic when Bolsonaro consistently opposed stringent sanitary responses to tackle the pandemic, overcoming expertise-based decisions, underutilizing public health resources, firing a popular Health Minister and replacing experts of the Brazilian public health system (SUS) with military personal (Peci, 2020). Meanwhile, the government implemented an emergency aid to low-income families, taking advantage on the existent bureaucratic capacities and expertise that enabled its implementation (Rosario et al., 2021).

#### 4. Contentious policy making and bureaucratic frictions

[Figure 1](#) associates rhetoric dimensions of Bolsonarism (antisystem, anti-PT, anti-left and neoconservatism) with major governing coalitions in Bolsonaro’s administration. Bolsonarism as a governing strategy (Roberts, 2020) combined neoconservatism in the social sphere with a market-oriented approach to economy and a high presence of the military, well known for their political conservatism, corporatist and nationalistic approach to economy – fueling tensions at the center of the federal government.

Antagonism is at the center of such unusual combination of forces. For example, the military, one of the building blocks of Bolsonarism in government, favors state interventionism, in sharp contrast with the market-orientation of the Chicago-trained Minister of Economy. The first years of Bolsonaro government were shaped by intra-governmental conflicts, with clear shifts in power distributions (e.g. the ultra-conservative coalition lost the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

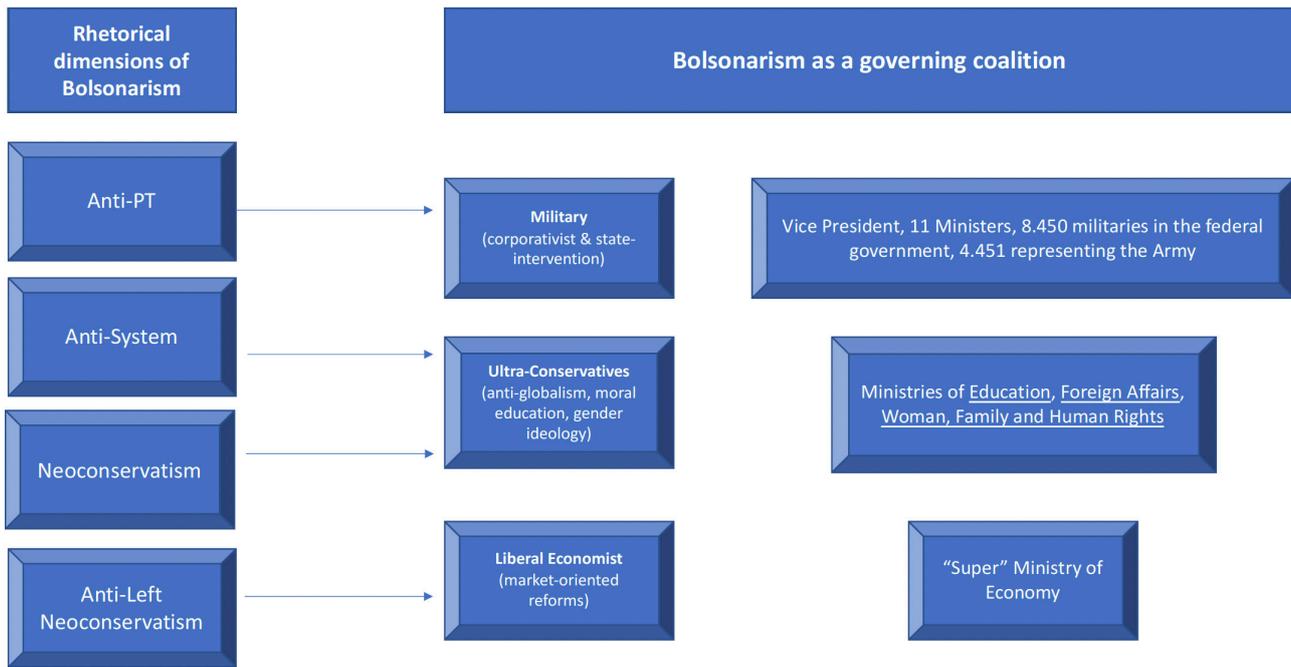
Such antagonism has several implications for the Brazilian bureaucracy. Bolsonarism deteriorates the already challenging conditions of governing within Brazilian multiparty presidentialism (F. Lopez et al., 2015; Praça et al., 2012). The most common failure in providing clear policy goals is exacerbated due to the presence of contentious policy goals disputed at the center of government. If the political function means resolving conflicts, taking the cacophony of interests and voices, and generating policy (Meier et al., 2019), Bolsonarism is fueled by such cacophony, undermining bureaucratic effectiveness.

On the other hand, despite being structured as a Weberian, value-free institution, Brazilian bureaucracies are important political institutions shaped by internal heterogeneity and inequality. In May, 2021, more than 1 million (1243287) tenured, merit-based recruited bureaucrats were distributed across approximately 300 careers and 2200 job position in the federal level alone –with numbers multiplied in state and municipal levels of government. The inequality among bureaucratic positions is illustrated by differences among the lowest and the higher salaries (30 times higher) and among the different careers (PEP, 2021; Profili, 2021). Corporatist pressures also shape public sector dynamics, as illustrated by high civil service positions distributed in legal or audit careers that concentrate the higher remunerations (Cavalcante & Carvalho, 2017; Profili, 2021; Ventura & Cavalieri, 2021). The inequality within the public sector becomes more visible when one considers the compensation differences with the Judiciary (F. G. Lopez & Guedes, 2020). Government bureaucrats hold a wide range of values (Clinton & Lewis, 2008) and power positions that might influence the form they respond to Bolsonarism.

As diverse and heterogeneous political actors on their own, Brazilian bureaucracies may distinctively position themselves to Bolsonarism, resisting, neglecting, or cooperating with his administration. Research about bureaucratic responses in illiberal democracies has relied on the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty framework to explore bureaucratic dynamics (see Guedes-Neto & Peter, forthcoming).

However, loyalty seems to historically be the response of Brazilian bureaucracies. History indicates that segments of bureaucracy were co-opted by the former military regime, thus ending up implementing undemocratic policies (Schmitter, 1971). Nevertheless, decades of democratic governments changed the composition and the dynamics of the federal bureaucracy, strengthening tenured the civil service workforce and bureaucratic capacities in areas such as social policies (Paiva et al., 2020; Sátyro et al., 2016). Research demonstrates that federal bureaucracies responded to the new policy orientations of democratically elected governments (Fernandes & Palotti, 2019; Souza, 2017).

Bolsonarism challenges bureaucratic actors in unique ways, by disrupting bureaucratic capacities and key institutions in different policy areas and relying on loyalists to advance policy agenda. However, Bolsonarism, as any form of populism, also demands bureaucracy to implement policies. Expanding on [Fig.1](#), follows an analysis of bureaucratic positioning in Bolsonaro administration.



**Figure 1. Bolsonarism as a populist rhetoric and a governing coalition**

Source: Elaborated by the author

### Bureaucracies as part of the structural coalitions of Bolsonarism

Rooted on Bolsonaro's corporatist trajectory and fueled by their value congruence, the coalition with the military and police forces is one of the building blocks of Bolsonarism. Starting from the Vice President, General Hamilton Mourão, the presence of the military shaped the government, with military personnel taking over nine Ministries in the initial composition of the government (later expanding their presence in 11 ministries). Despite the high turnover, there are currently 8,450 military officers in the federal government, 4,451 representing the Army, according to a National Audit Office report (PODER360, 2020).

Key policy areas, historically anchored in professional bureaucracies, are gradually being replaced with military personnel. Bolsonarism took advantage of the high prestige of armed forces among the Brazilian population and attempted to replace sectorial-based expertise, with military one. The substitution of two Ministers of Health by the Army General, Eduardo Pazuello, in the midst of the pandemic, exemplifies this substantial change. The General was appointed due to his experience in "logistics." Numerous examples of militarization of bureaucracies abound, illustrating an important maneuver of Bolsonarism in assaulting historically established professional bureaucracies. The replacement of professional with military expertise is reflected in a shift from the Weberian civil service ethos to obedience, respect and authority to the President and Commander-in-Chief.

Bolsonaro also counts on the relevant support of the police forces, despite being less represented in the federal government. A recent survey organized by Atlas/Revista Época, in 04.04.2021, elucidates police support (military, civil and

federal police) during the election (67% of the three police forces voted for Bolsonaro). However, the data also indicate certain decline, especially among the civil and federal (investigation) police forces, with higher bureaucratic status than the military operational police force who strongly support Bolsonaro and his policies. The report brings worrisome data in indicating that 27% of the military police supports a military dictatorship in Brazil, while the other forces position themselves strongly against such scenario (more than 94%) – indicating the divisiveness of Bolsonarism as a governing strategy. These data, associated with sporadic events of violent military police action, such as an illegal strike in Ceará, where a senator was hit by two shots, spread the fear of police support in an eventual military coup promoted by Bolsonaro (Brasil de Fato, 2020).

Despite resistance, Bolsonaro has been able to enact important policy decisions to sustain this bureaucratic coalition: making it easier to carry weapons; reducing the age of criminal majority from 18 to 16 years; and changing the rules of engagement to be more tolerant of the use of lethal force by police (Solano, 2020). Last, but not least, the military is systematically left outside of any reform proposal (e.g. pension and administrative reform) and police forces directly benefit from subsidies (e.g. housing programs) in the current administration.

### Bureaucracies as part of temporary coalitions of Bolsonarism

As indicated, the rise of Bolsonarism also reflects a convenient yet less stable alliance with financial markets and some economic segments, enhancing, at least temporarily, coalitions with other branches of bureaucracies (e.g. Ministry of Economy, Treasury, Central Bank). The super-Min-

istry of Economy has been responsible for implementing a market-oriented agenda, through important, yet frustrated, legislative proposals.

In September 2020, the federal government submitted a Constitutional Amendment Proposal (PEC32/2020), containing the administrative reform project, to the National Congress. The administrative reform emulates Trump's Schedule F (Moynihan, 2021), changing the dynamic of the Brazilian civil service workforce, specifically by eliminating tenure protection for important segments of bureaucracy (Peci et al., 2021). However, the proposal is facing difficulties to be approved by the Congress. In addition, the Secretary of "De-nationalization and De-investment" has not been able to advance with the privatization of important state-owned companies, leading to the resignation of the Secretary. When Bolsonaro and his closed political aides overruled economic advice and disrespected the maximum amount of the new emergency aid to replace Bolsa Familia program, four high-level secretaries responsible for Treasury and Budget of the Super-Ministry of the Economy also resigned on Oct, 21, 2021 (JOTA, 2021).

Exit – through resignments – has been the preferred response of politically appointees in the Ministry of Economy, in face of Bolsonaro's discretionary centralization of institutional priorities and budget, undermining basic administrative principles and evidence (Bauer et al., 2021; Dussauge-Laguna, 2021b; Peters & Pierre, 2019, 2020). However, the "exit" strategy reflects the fragile coalition with economic segments. Most of the senior executives' vacancies are being fulfilled by career bureaucrats, indicating a role for "stayers" in Hirschman's (1970) perspective. This corroborates the findings of Guedes-Neto (2022) about Brazilian tenured and appointed public servants being less prone to intend to quit, possibly reflecting the high status enjoyed by these bureaucrats in government, meaning more power and a higher salary.

The "ultra-conservative" group is also facing several obstructions. The group already lost two "radical" ministers, Education and Foreign Affairs (as indicated in Fig 1). Faced with the new reality of the pandemic, the group is gradually toning down the "anti-globalist" rhetoric, while strengthening the moral neoconservative discourse. The ultra-conservative agenda on gender, feminism or LGBTQ rights is led by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights and it is still important within the Ministry of Education.

The unequal distribution of bureaucratic capacities and budget is key to understanding the implementation of the neoconservative agenda. In areas shaped by strong bureaucracies (e.g. education) the unconservative agenda aims to destabilize and deconstruct key institutional capacities (e.g. advocating homeschooling, undermining public funding or weakening regulatory roles and institutions). On the other hand, scarce or inexistent bureaucratic capacities and limited budgetary resources are an obstacle to effectively implement conservative policies led by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights.

## Bureaucracies as resistance to Bolsonarism

Bolsonarism elected traditional politics and, particularly, *antipetismo* (opposition to PT - Workers' Party, whose coalition governed for more than 10 years) as the "outsiders" of its divisive politics but neglected the role of professional bureaucracies that were nurtured and strengthened within PT governments. PT coalition governments changed quantitatively and qualitatively the composition of the federal workforce. Along PT governments, professional bureaucracies sustain key social policy areas and have gradually developed capacities to address poverty and inequality (D'Araujo & Petek, 2018). These bureaucracies resisted attempts to reduce the role of social programs like Bolsa Familia, a successful anti-poverty conditioned-cash program - in the Bolsonaro administration. Bolsa Familia sustains an important social protection network that exists in Brazil since early 2000s and is responsible for significant decline in poverty, increases in nutrition, decline in infant mortality, and improvement in schooling and entrepreneurship. As noted, the same segments of bureaucracy that sustain this important social protection network, were key to understanding the Brazilian government's quick response to the pandemic through a massive emergency cash program.

However, the attractiveness of cash programs for electoral benefits,<sup>2</sup> the drive to centralize policymaking in Bolsonaro persona, and the rebranding of the program lead to replacement of Bolsa Familia with a temporary program that is due to end after elections in 2022 (Provisory Legal Act 1.061/2021, creates the Program "Auxílio Brasil" replacing "Bolsa Família"). It is worth noticing that the new program builds on Bolsa Familia, redesigning some aspects and unifying alternative aid programs, ignoring some evidence for improvement (Bartholo et al., 2021), but indicating that it was built on existent bureaucratic capacities in social policy area.

Another important illustration of bureaucratic resistance arose from diplomatic careers. The former minister of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araujo, with his fierce "anti-globalist" discourse was forced to resign. The growing resistance within the diplomatic careers and their alignment with the agrobusiness sector and contributed to his resignation.

Last, but not least, solid institutions (e.g. expertise, independent agency design or transparent procedures) shielded some segments of bureaucracy from Bolsonarism. The case of the Brazilian health surveillance and pharmaceutical agency (Anvisa), designed as an independent regulator, illustrates such resistance. Bolsonaro was able to change the composition of Anvisa's board (indicating a military President) and openly pressured the agency to disapprove "Chinese" vaccines, without apparent success. Anvisa approved a different set of vaccines, including the "Chinese" opposed by the President, relying on a technical and transparent process, broadcasted in national TV. The institutionalization of democratic procedures (transparency) and the autonomy of the institutions shielded the agency from politi-

<sup>2</sup> Mexican President López-Obrador also terminated conditional-cash programs, as Prospera, substituting the program with unconditional cash transfers to families detected in a newly designed poverty census that was implemented by "loyalists" (Dussauge-Laguna, 2021a).

cal capture.

Research about the role of “voice” or dissent behavior as a bureaucratic strategy, particularly in face of illiberal governments is still scarce and nonconclusive. While bureaucratic discretion may allow sabotage (O’Leary, 2019), shirking is not common behavior among bureaucrats (Pierre & Peters, 2017). Guedes-Neto (2022) finds that when Brazilian bureaucrats are exposed to the possibility of an undemocratic policy, they become more engaged in shirking and sabotaging it than their US and UK peers. The author attributes these findings to tenure protection and legal mechanisms available in the Brazilian administrative tradition. More research about bureaucratic resistance to Bolsonarism is necessary to understand the role of individual bureaucrats and institutions, particularly considering that one of the tenets of Bolsonarism is to delegitimize tenure protection for civil servants and deinstitutionalize agency design or transparent procedures that shield bureaucracy.

### Conclusions

This paper reflects on the rise of Bolsonarism as a form of populist politics, focusing on its relationship with Brazilian public bureaucracies. Bolsonarism as a “strategy of governing” (Roberts, 2020) builds on an unstable coalition that combines social neoconservatism and market-oriented economic approach with corporatist and nationalist military positions. The antagonism at the center of this governing coalition has several implications for the public bureaucracies.

To begin with, Bolsonarism promotes contentious policy goals (e.g. corporatism versus market-oriented economic reforms) that undercut the conditions of bureaucratic policy making and bureaucratic performance. Divisive politics accentuates the defiant conditions of governing already existent within the Brazilian multiparty presidentialism.

Corroborating previous studies, we also observe that hiring loyalists at the expense of expertise (Bauer et al., 2021; Müller, 2017; Peters & Pierre, 2019) was the preferential strategy of Bolsonarism once in government. However, the antagonism at the center of the governing coalition has contributed to several shifts in its building blocks— with the military strengthening its position at the expense of the ultra-ideological block. Bolsonarism took advantage of the relative prestige of the armed forces within the Brazilian population, and gradually replaced professional bureaucracy with military expertise in several policy areas – the growing military role in the Ministry of Health being the most paradigmatic illustration.

While the military is the building block of Bolsonaro’s coalition, other temporary coalitions, exposed with the presidential drive to centralize policymaking and public resources at the expense of policy evidence are “exiting.” It is interesting to observe how senior executives’ vacancies are being fulfilled by tenured bureaucrats, indicating an important role for “stayers” in Hirschman’s (1970) terminology or “opportunists” (Aberbach & Rockman, 1995) - or simply reflecting the high status enjoyed by these bureaucrats in government, meaning more power and a higher salary (Guedes-Neto, 2022).

In addition, while administrative tradition may allow Brazilian bureaucrats to adopt shirking or sabotage to resist illiberal policies, Bolsonarism is attacking tenure protection for civil servants and deconstructing solid institutions (e.g. agency design, transparent procedures) that ultimately shield bureaucracy.

Last, but not least the relationship of Brazilian bureaucracy with Bolsonarism goes beyond resistance. History had shown that segments of Brazilian bureaucracy can be coopted by an illiberal and authoritarian government. Brazilian public bureaucracies are relevant political actors, with nonconvergent interests and sharp inequalities that sometimes, may echo Bolsonarism in its ultra-conservative or corporatist building blocks. Power and higher salaries in senior executive positions may influence opportunistic behavior and undermine bureaucratic resistance. Bolsonarism grows out of such divisions. Ultimately, Bolsonarism is an ideology of contentious governing that nurtures divisive bureaucracies.

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