

How do bureaucracies respond to authoritarian populism? Lessons from Bolsonarism¹

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Abstract

How do bureaucracies respond to authoritarian populism? Here we reflect on how Brazilian bureaucracies respond to Bolsonarism: a form of authoritarian populism. Conceptually, we depart from Bauer & Becker (2020)'s populist view of the state, and highlight that Bolsonarism builds on an unstable coalition that combines positive and negative views of the state - bonding neoconservatism, market-oriented economic approach, agrobusiness interests, military nationalism and corporativism. The resulting antagonism at the center of Bolsonarism is manifested in contentious forms of governing, but also faces a plural administrative order shaped by both, robust and fragile bureaucracies, that may shirk, work or sabotage parts of this antagonistic agenda. Based on a plural understanding of the administrative order, we identify that Bolsonarism is reflected in a) frictions within public organizations, fundamentally shaping their *modus operandi*. B) divisive bureaucracies that ultimately respond through a *continuum* of behaviors that vary from *ad hoc*/strategic resistance to *ad-hoc*/strategic collaboration. We focus on collaborative behaviors and build three categories of collaboration: strategic collaboration, ideological alignment, and pragmatic alignment. We illustrate the strategic collaboration through the militarization of bureaucracy and discuss how such collaboration blurs political and professional expertise. We discuss *ad hoc* ideological alignment with the case of the police force and pragmatic alignment, with the link between digital populism and bureaucratic involvement in digital transformation agenda. Our pluralist perspective identifies bureaucracies as active players that may echo Bolsonarism due to ideological affinity, pragmatic convenience or may leverage its agenda due to a stronger alignment with their own vision of the state.

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1. Introduction

Faced by mounting indicators of democratic backsliding and growing populism worldwide, research tends to see public administration and bureaucracy as the guardians of the liberal democracy. Research has already gathered evidence about bureaucratic evidence to democratic backsliding and populism (see Guedes & Peters 2022; Lotta et al. forthcoming). Yet Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" is a constant reminder that anyone, including bureaucrats, may become part of a massive moral failure... If the Brazilian elections were today, Bolsonaro would lose in most of the Brazilian states, but 7- among them the Federal District, epicenter of the federal bureaucracy. So how do exactly bureaucracies respond to authoritarian populism?

Here we reflect on Bolsonarism as a form of authoritarian populism in the Brazilian context. Conceptually, we depart from Bauer & Becker (2020)'s populist view of the state, and highlight that Bolsonarism builds on an unstable coalition that combines both, positive and negative views of the state, without a clear demarcation. Neoconservatism, market-oriented economic approach, agrobusiness interests, military nationalism and corporativism are part of the Bolsonaro governing coalition and do not share a coherent vision about the state. On the contrary, antagonism is at the center of Bolsonarism and is manifested in contentious forms of governing.

In addition, Bolsonarism in the office also faces a plural administrative order shaped by both, robust and fragile bureaucracies, that may shirk, work or sabotage parts of this antagonistic agenda. Based on such plural understanding of the administrative order, we identify that Bolsonarism is reflected in: a) frictions within public organizations, fundamentally shaping their *modus operandi*. B) divisive bureaucracies that ultimately respond through a *continuum* of behaviors that vary from *ad hoc*/strategic resistance to *ad-hoc*/strategic collaboration. Recognizing the burgeoning research that is already analyzing bureaucratic resistance to Bolsonarism, in this paper we focus on collaborative behaviors of bureaucracy – part of the continuum of potential behaviors bureaucrats may display toward Bolsonarism.

We illustrate bureaucratic frictions based on the Funai case (Brazilian Foundation for Indigenous Affairs), indicating that the friction mainly results from the presidential use of patronage to accommodate the antagonist coalition in place. In addition, we build three categories of bureaucratic collaboration: strategic collaboration, ideological alignment, and pragmatic alignment. We illustrate the strategic collaboration through the

militarization of bureaucracy and discuss how such collaboration blurs political and professional expertise. We discuss *ad hoc* ideological alignment with the case of the police force and pragmatic alignment, with the collaboration around the digital transformation agenda, that connects bureaucrats with the digital populism of the Bolsonaro administration.

Finally, we defend an understanding of Bolsonarism as an ideology of contentious governing that, empowered by the prerogatives of a strong presidentialism, nurtures divisive bureaucracies. Last, but not least, our pluralist perspective identifies bureaucracy as an active player that may echo Bolsonarism due to ideological or pragmatic affinity or may leverage its agenda due to a stronger alignment with their own vision of the state.

2. Bolsonarism as anti-pluralist populism & contentious form of governing

The growth of populism has been a growing trend worldwide (Bauer and Becker, 2020; Norris 2019) and probably one of the main drivers of democratic backsliding (Bauer et al. 2021; Peters and Pierre 2019). Commonly understood as a thin-centered ideology, populism 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). 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 the venality of business or political leaders (including bureaucracy) and press for greater power for “the people” (Peters and Pierre 2019).

The Latin American region offers probably the richest tradition of populist leaders, movements or 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.” (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2014).

Brazilian Bolsonarism rises within such a broader context, after a relatively stable period of democratic governments, succeeding a 21 year-long military dictatorship that ended in 1985. 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” (Araujo and Prior 2020).

2.1 The anti-pluralist and moralistic dimensions of Bolsonarism

It is the anti-pluralist and moralistic rhetoric which substantively defines Bolsonarism as a populist ideology (Bauer & Becker 2020). Differently from other right-wing populists, which build, for example, on nationalism or anti-immigration rhetoric, Bolsonarism bundles many rhetorical dimensions in an unstable “agenda”, without a clear positive or negative view of the state. The components of this populist rhetoric are briefly described below.

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. For Solano (2020:213): *“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 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 Gueddes, a Chicago-trained economist, enabled another important coalition partner for his election: important financial and productive sectors (particularly agriculture and agrobusiness) in search of market-driven reforms, with 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. 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 and 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 Familia (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, Casalecchi and Rennó 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 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 2019:11).

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

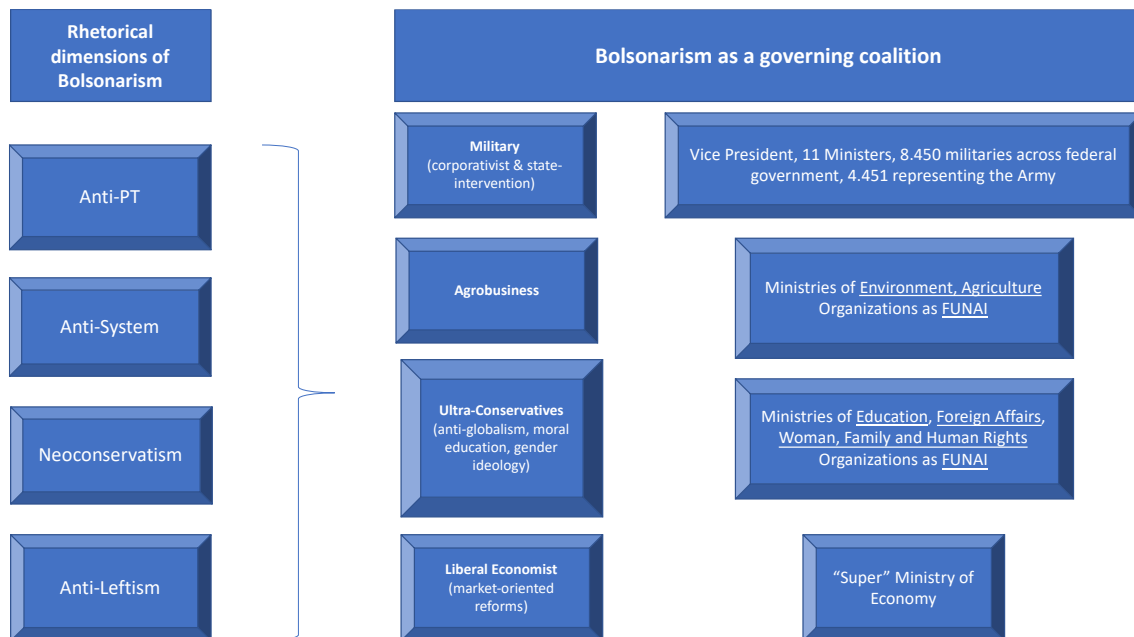
Bolsonarism also articulates a solution to a “moral” crisis that Brazil faces: a return to the values of the “traditional family”, based on Christian values and appealing to evangelical Christian support. According to Solano (2021), identity movements became the main target of attack of Bolsonaroism, 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 2021: 2019). In addition, exploring Bolsonaro’s military background suited such moral strategy, since it evokes discipline, authority, respect and hierarchy.

Figure 1 represents major governing coalitions in Bolsonaro’s administration. In office, Bolsonaro administration built an unstable coalition that attempted to accommodate the anti-pluralist and moralist rhetoric dimensions (antisystem, anti-PT, anti-left and neoconservatism) with the military corporativism and nationalistic view of the state. Bolsonaroism as a governing strategy (Roberts 2019) combines neoconservatism in the social sphere with a market-oriented approach to economy and a high vertical and horizontal presence of the military in the administration (Schmidt 2022). The military reactivate authoritarian geopolitical conceptions of the state, oriented by the “national security” assumptions (Barreto Filho 2020), political conservatism, corporatist and nationalistic approach to economy and society and are not easily integrated with other dimensions of Bolsonaroism, fueling tensions at the center of the federal government.

Figure 1: Bolsonaro as a populist rhetoric and as a governing coalition



Antagonism is at the center of this unusual combination of forces and is translated in contentious forms of governing and approaching bureaucracies.

3. Bolsonaro administration`s approach to bureaucracy

Populism has an ambiguous relationship with bureaucracy and public administration. Rhetorically, bureaucracy is typically one of the objects of populist criticism of “elites” (Rockman 2019), but, once in office, populists need bureaucracy to implement their agenda (Peters & Pierre 2019). Populism is likely to translate into lower expertise and higher bureaucratic politicization (Peters and Pierre 2019; Rockman 2019), reflecting populists` preference for simplistic policies (Belotti, Morelli and Vanonni 2021; Morelli, Nicolò and Roberto 2020) and the urge to centralize decisions about institutional priorities and public resources (Bauer and Becker 2020; Bauer et al. 2021; Dussauge-Laguna 2021). 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 2019:2).

Literature also indicates that once in office, populists' approach to bureaucracy will reflect their positive or negative views of the state, but also will have to face an administrative order that might be more fragile or robust (Table 1), yielding to sidelining, ignoring, or using the bureaucracy (Baur et al. 2021). Case studies indicate that populist governments produce significant disruption in established political practices and governance processes, criticizing the "deep state" (Moynihan 2022; Moynihan and Roberts 2021), dismantling bureaucratic institutions (Hajnal & Boda 2021), sidelining administrative expertise (Dussauge-Laguna 2021) among other approaches (Bauer et al. 2021).

Table 1. Populist Public Administration Goals

Administrative Order			
Populist view of the state		<i>Fragile</i>	<i>Robust</i>
	<i>Positive</i>	Capture	Reform
	<i>Negative</i>	Dismantle	Sabotage

Source: Bauer & Becker 2020

We built on Bauer and Becker (2020)' Populist Public Administration Goals (Table 1), to highlight how the antagonism at the center of Bolsonarism shapes its approach to bureaucracy. To begin with, both positive and negative views of the state populate Bolsonarism. As mentioned, 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. Agrobusiness interests to commercialize with China conflict with the anti-globalist views of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs. If the political function means resolving conflicts by taking the cacophony of interests and voices, and generating policy (Meier et al. 2019), Bolsonarism is fueled by such cacophony.

In addition, the administrative order at the federal government is not easily accommodated in the *fragile* versus *robust* dichotomy. According to QoG Institute, Brazil has the most professional bureaucracy in the Latin American region (see Gomide, Silva & Machado 2021). Nevertheless, despite being structured as a Weberian, value-free institution, Brazilian bureaucracies are also 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 and Cavaliere 2021). The inequality within the public sector becomes more visible when one considers the compensation differences with the Judiciary (Guedes and Lopez 2019).

Bolsonaro administration faced this heterogeneous administrative order once in office. Contrarily to populists as Trump, who was slow to nominate officials to key positions (Lewis & Richardson 2021), Bolsonaro quickly filled the available politically appointed positions in the federal government. Politically appointed positions are 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.

As anticipated by the literature, hiring loyalists (Müller 2017; Peters & Pierre 2020) 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 Gueddes 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 personnel (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 governing and bureaucratic frictions: the Funai case

The contentious governing of Bolsonarism is transformed in bureaucratic frictions: public organizations losing track of their central mission and invaded by contentious policy goals reflecting the unstable power coalition that combines social neoconservatism and market-oriented economic approach with corporatist and nationalist military positions. The antagonism at the center of Bolsonarism deteriorates the already challenging conditions for governing within Brazilian multiparty presidentialism (Lopez, Bugarin, & Bugarin, 2015; Praça, Freitas, & Hoepers, 2012). 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).

The most common failure of multiparty presidentialism in providing clear policy goals is exacerbated due to the presence of contentious policy goals disputed at the center of government and consequently, permeating public organizations, mainly using politically appointed positions. Political appointees connect public organizations with the political coalitions and constitute one of the most important ways that cooperation between legislative and executive is forged. Research demonstrates that this patronage coalition has a significant effect on legislative support and have been a critical tool for presidents (Bersch, Lopez & Taylor 2022).

As mentioned, Bolsonaro also relied on the patronage “toolbox” to accommodate its governing coalition, clashing with the mission of several public organizations of the post-democratic era. Organizations as FUNAI (National Foundation of Indigenous Affairs) responsible for the promotion and protection of the indigenous people rights in the national territory, received PA indicated by the agrobusiness (with clear interests in the land demarcation), as well as by the Pentecostal neoconservatism – two allies not operating in “harmony”.

When Bruno Pereira (former head of Isolated and Recent Contact Indians Division at FUNAI, recently killed in the region with the brutish journalist Tom Phillips), was dismissed in 2019 from Funai, he was replaced by Pastor Ricardo Lopes Dias, a missionary who did not understand the “zero-contact” policy, but also “did not deliver the products” that the president of the Foundation, Marcelo Xavier, linked to the ruralists, wanted on indigenous lands.

““At Funai, he [Ricardo Lopes Dias] is a laughing stock. Whoever holds him is the evangelical bench, along with Damares, right? And it was already building, the guy letting go, a hell of a bombing on the question of isolated Indians. [He] doesn't even know how to handle it. And I think, here behind the scenes too, that he doesn't deliver what the president [Marcelo Xavier] wants, the products that he wants, the products that the president wants. The president is linked to the ruralists, right? And that's where the ventures come in, like that, right? So the guy [Ricardo Lopes Dias] is 'overwhelmed'” (Leitao, 2022).

The case of the FUNAI illustrates the frictions experienced by a public organization relying on patronage positions that are not ideologically or economically aligned. The result, for the Amazonia region, is the absence of any policy: the “laissez-faire”: liberation from any legal demarcation and requirements. Think of the flexibilization for guns

commercialization and ownership by residents of rural areas and violent cities...When you brake these limits you potentially silence – with physical or symbolic violence - the opposition and eliminate the rules of environmental protection...(Barretto 2020).

5. Collaborative bureaucratic responses to Bolsonarism

While populist leaders rely on a strategy to approach the bureaucracy, the civil service also have some power in responding to populist approaches, albeit exercised more subtly (Peters & Pierre 2019). Research about bureaucratic responses in illiberal democracies has relied on the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty framework to explore bureaucratic responses to populism (see Guedes-Neto & Peters forthcoming) or the trichotomy of “working, shirking or sabotage” (Brehm & Gates 1999).. Most of the emerging research in Brazil is focusing on bureaucratic resistance (see Lotta forthcoming, Peci 2021). 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.

The contentious form of governing of Bolsonaro administration demand choices from public servants, in tenured or politically appointed positions. The first years of the contentious governing of Bolsonaro administration have been reflected in the “exit” in politically appointed positions. However, most of the senior executives’ vacancies are being fulfilled by career bureaucrats, indicating a role for “stayers” in Hirschman`s (1970) perspective. Brazilian tenured and appointed public servants are less prone to intend to quit, possibly reflecting the high status enjoyed by these bureaucrats in government, meaning more power and a higher salary (Guedes-Neto 2022).

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. If we shift from the assumption of a robust administrative order and focus on the Brazilian bureaucracy as diverse and heterogeneous political actors on their own, we may observe a variety of bureaucratic responses to Bolsonarism in office. Its contentious forms of governing faces a plural administrative order shaped by both, robust and fragile bureaucracies, that may shirk, sabotage, bur also work to implement its agenda. Based on this plural understanding of the administrative

order, we identify that Bolsonarism is reflected in a *continuum* of bureaucratic behaviors that vary from *ad hoc*/strategic resistance to *ad-hoc*/strategic collaboration.

Here we focus on bureaucratic loyalty or other forms of bureaucratic collaboration with Bolsonarism and differentiate strategic versus *ad hoc* collaboration, as forms of working with the new administration.

5.1 Strategic collaboration: The militarization of the bureaucracy

January 6, 2021` riot shaped the violent culmination of President Trump and his Republican allies' war on the legitimacy of American elections. While the effects of the insurgence continue to shape American politics, the failure of the insurgence might be attributed to the lack of support of US military. Intense officer socialization and elite education to protect the constitution played an important role in preventing US military support (Moynihan 2022), but is this the pattern of bureaucratic response we can anticipate in the Brazilian context?

Literature about authoritarian with a populist inclination has identified their reliance on the “uniformed bureaucracy in the form of the military” (Pierre and Peters 2019). The military always played a more ambitious and ambiguous role in Brazilian politics and administration. Historically, during the military dictatorship, the military institution which assumes the power to restructure society and the state shaped the bureaucratic-authoritarianism that emerged as an alternative to caudillismo of the old Latin American militarism (Collier and Cardoso 1979). As observed by O'Donnell, the army, as guarantor of the authoritarian order, prefers a “technical”, supportive relationship between the state and social groups, rather than a relationship based on alliances with broad social groups. The civilian technocrats made an alliance with the interventionist, technocratic elements of the Latin-American militaries. History indicates that segments of bureaucracy were co-opted by the former military regime, thus ending up implementing undemocratic policies (Schmitter 1971).

The militarization of the bureaucracy shaped the post-democratic era in Brazil. Military presence increased in all the bureaucratic and politically appointed positions, as well as in the civil occupations of the federal bureaucracy, tripling in the period 2013-2021. However, since Bolsonaro took office, the military presence in the highest decision-making positions of the federal bureaucracy increased by 500% (DAS 5) and 375% (DAS 6). Military presence increased in policy areas as Health, Mines & Energy, Justice,

Citizenship, Economy among others. Among the military forces, the Army had the highest increase in bureaucratic occupations (IPEA 2022).

According to a National Audit Office report (TCU 2021), the participation of the military in the Brazilian bureaucracy doubled in the Bolsonaro administration. 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 (TCU 2021). In addition, it is worth mentioning that the military is systematically left outside of any reform proposal (e.g. pension and administrative reform).

Rooted on Bolsonaro's corporatist trajectory, fueled by their ideological congruence and materialized in patronage appointments in the federal bureaucracy, the coalition with the military is one of the building blocks of Bolsonarism, resulting in a win-win scenario.

The militarization of the bureaucracy distorts the demarcation of expertise or political competence. 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. 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. 57% of the population declared to trust the armed forces while more than 91% declare none or low levels of trust in the government (Latinobarometro 2018). 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 (see Peci, Gonzales & Doussage-Laguna, 2021).

The militarization of the bureaucracy became the preferential strategy to sideline the bureaucracy, building loyalty to political leaders and gaining capacity for governing,

particularly in programmatic areas of interest to populist leadership (Peters and Pierre 2019). The military loyalist/technocrat is used to sideline existing bureaucratic capacities, with clear benefits for both parts, constituting a strategic response to Bolsonarism.

5.2 Ad-hoc collaboration: ideological alignment & pragmatic alignment

Ideological alignment

An example of ad-hoc example of collaboration emerging from ideological affinity comes from the police forces. Bolsonaro counts on the relevant support of the police forces, despite being less represented in the federal government. A recent survey organized by Atlas/Revista Epoca, 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 2021). Last, but not least, police forces directly or indirectly benefit from legislative proposals of the current administration in mor subtle forms: subsidies (e.g. housing programs) or changes in the administrative reform bill.

Pragmatic alignment

The digital transformation agenda meets digital populism

When the notion of impartiality is deeply ingrained in the public service workforce, or parts of it, the bureaucrats will tend to carry one the political agenda, even if denigrated by populist leaders (Peters & Pierre 2019). Research observes that bureaucracy always tends to respond to ideological orientation in government (Schuster XXXX). Embracing

their “own” agenda or finding programmatic areas which align with the current administration is a very common strategy of “working” - without ideologically aligning - with a populist administration.

Bolsonarism is one of the best representations of digital populism (Demuru 2020), a form of contemporary populism that joined technology. According to Kenis et al. (2022), digital populism is political behavior facilitated by the Internet which provides both a form of political participation and an instrument of mobilization (Kim, 2008). Without the “gate-keeping” function of newspapers, radio or TV channels, populist leaders communicate with their followers on Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook or Telegram, an interactive form of media that help users cultivate a sense of community and belonging” (Appleby, 2022, May 23). Bolsonaro`s election is partly attributed to the skillful use of digital populism, but how does the digital populist agenda translate in the office?

The digital transformation of the federal government has become one of the few undisputable agenda of Bolsonaro government. Since 2004, the federal government has been issued several regulations supporting the digital transformation (Thorstensen e Zuchieri 2020). According to field interviews, one of the first moves of the Bolsonaro administration was toward the use of social media by public organizations – not a successful one. However, the Bolsonaro Government issued the Plan for the Digital Transformation of the Federal Government (2020-2022), following OECD (2021) guidelines, a part of the National Policy for State Modernization (Decree n.º 10.609/2021). Most importantly, the Secretary for Digital Government, headed by tenured bureaucrats, is considered as an “island” of bureaucratic excellence and leader of the digital transformation strategy. Field interviews with public servants who participating in coding training programs also highlight that the digital transformation agenda got political momentum in the current administration.

OECD agenda

The “OECD agenda” is another example of pragmatic collaboration around programmatic areas. A number of senior civil servants institutionalized a network of elite organizations of the civil service (e.g. National Audit Office) pressing for the agenda of OECD ascension in the current government. Mostly allocated within the Ministry of Economy through political appointments, this network of senior civil servants relies on OECD`s peer reviews and other instruments to push their own agenda in the federal government, without ideologically aligning with the populist administration.

Conclusions

This paper reflects on the rise of Bolsonarism as a form of authoritarian populism, focusing on its relationship with Brazilian public bureaucracies. Bolsonarism as a “strategy of governing” (Roberts 2019) builds on an unstable coalition that combines social neoconservatism, agrobusiness interests, 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 are reflected in bureaucratic frictions that undercut the conditions of bureaucratic policy making and bureaucratic performance.

Corroborating previous studies, we also observe that hiring loyalists at the expense of expertise (Müller 2017; Peters and Pierre 2019; Bauer et al. 2021) 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.

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 eventually 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, where strategic and ad-hoc collaborations might emerge as bureaucratic responses, despite the anti-pluralist perspective of the current government.

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