

Claremont McKenna College

In Memory of the Colonel:

Democratic Decline and Authoritarianism in Brazil

Ari Moore

1 January 2021

Edward Haley Fellowship in International Studies

Faculty Advisor: Professor Bou Nassif, Hicham

Introduction

Mid-January 1970, Dilma Rousseff was arrested at a bar in São Paulo for being a leftist threat to the government, and subjected to extensive torture by the Brazilian military dictatorship.¹ At the end of October 2010, she was elected as Brazil's 36th president, the first woman ever elected to that position in the country. At the end of August 2016, she was impeached and removed from office. During the congressional vote on her impeachment, many congresspeople used the affair as an opportunity to publicly signal their disgust at the corruption that had been brought to light by the infamous anti-corruption "Lava Jato (Car Wash)" investigation. These were the circumstances that Jair Bolsonaro, a congressman representing Rio de Janeiro and a former military officer, was operating within when he announced that his affirmative impeachment vote was "in memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra." Ustra is best known in Brazil for "overseeing the torture of political dissidents" between 1970 and 1974,² including that of the exiting president, Dilma Rousseff. Some people booed Bolsonaro when he invoked Ustra's name, but his speech ultimately ended with raucous applause. And at the beginning of January 2019, almost 50 years after Rousseff was arrested and tortured, Jair Bolsonaro, the man that publicly honored her torturer, was sworn in as the 38th president of Brazil.

How can a country go from electing a former leftist guerrilla to electing a man with ties to the very movement that the guerrilla was fighting against? Why would a country exit from a brutal military dictatorship, only to later elect a leader that vocally supports both that dictatorship

¹ Maciel, Mariana Lemos and Camila. "Dilma Rousseff: "Torture Is about Pain and Death. They Want You to Lose Your Dignity"." Brasil De Fato. January 16, 2020. <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/01/16/dilma-rousseff-torture-is-about-pain-and-death-they-want-you-to-lose-your-dignity/>.

² Paiva, Marcelo. "What the Brazilian Dictatorship Did to My Family." The New York Times. October 29, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/29/opinion/what-the-brazilian-dictatorship-did-to-my-family.html>.

and its usage of state sponsored, systematic torture? How does Brazil fit into the global trend of backsliding democracies and worldwide, increasing authoritarianism? This paper will seek to answer all of these questions using both a historical as well as present-political analysis of Brazil and its engagement with democracy, the military, and human rights. In engaging with these questions and themes, this paper will make educated predictions about where Brazil politically goes from here, and how it changes with trends observed in the rest of the world.

Rising Authoritarianism in the World

Understanding the recent trends in Brazilian politics requires a broader analysis on the nature of democracy, authoritarianism, and global democratic decay. While Brazil's history includes specific events that have led to its current political state, recent Brazilian history parallels many other countries that have ended up with similar authoritarian leaning leaders despite a democratic style of government. This analysis will be largely based on the work of political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, both known for their expertise in comparative politics, authoritarianism, and democracy. Analysis will also be based on Madeleine Albright's book *Fascism: A Warning*.

The dramatic global rise in democracies towards the end of the 20th century signaled a new period in human governance. The world had come a long way from the short lived Athenian semi-democracy³ thousands of years ago, and that progress inspired hope that with democracy would come widespread and long-lasting adoption of Liberal values such as personal rights and freedoms. These dreams were proven short-sighted as countries including Venezuela, Georgia, Hungary, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Ukraine have all seen authoritarian sentiments rise in governments elected via democratic processes.⁴ Overall,

³ Revolutionarily democratic at the time but far from today's democratic standards

⁴ Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Penguin Books, 2019. Page 16.

in 2017, The Economist's Democracy Index found that democratic health is declining in 70 countries.⁵ These countries demonstrate that constitutions, robust middle classes, high levels of education, and diversified private sectors are not the strong safeguards against authoritarianism that they have long been thought to be.⁶

From a larger, system-wide perspective, the process of democratic decay is lethally slow moving.⁷ With no clear crossed line that overtly signals an abandonment of democratic ideals, the alarm bells of society go unring as those in power seeking to erode democratic institutions benefit from a long period of plausible deniability.⁸ Another system-wide contributor of democratic decay is extreme polarization.⁹ Partisanship let loose decreases a country's mutual toleration and institutional forbearance. When parties stop seeing each other as groups with the same goal, they also stop accepting electoral losses for fear of an existential threat being realized. Political opponents go from "wrong and misguided" to "traitors and manchurian candidates," excusing a total lack of institutional forbearance, all of which makes proper governing more difficult. As the government's gears grind to a halt, populist politicians with little regard for democratic ideals are given the opportunity to exploit the situation and promise radical, systemic change. They are able to point to a country's democratic system as the culprit for its failures. And, if the circumstances are dire enough, voters make a radical choice. These system-wide circumstances, especially increased polarization,¹⁰ have become true in Brazil.

⁵ Albright, Madeleine Korb, and William Woodward. *Fascism: A Warning*. William Collins, 2019. Page 152.

⁶ Levitsky and Ziblatt. Page 10.

⁷ Abramovay, Pedro. "A Correia De Transmissão Do Autoritarismo No Brasil De Bolsonaro." *EL PAÍS*. January 26, 2020.

<https://brasil.elpais.com/opiniao/2020-01-26/a-correia-de-transmissao-do-autoritarismo-no-brasil-de-bolsonaro.html>.

⁸ Levitsky and Ziblatt. Page 17.

⁹ *Ibid.* Page 23.

¹⁰ Pablo Ortellado Professor of Public Policy, and Márcio Moretto Ribeiro Professor of Information Systems. "Mapping Brazil's Political Polarization Online." *The Conversation*. October 25, 2020.

<https://theconversation.com/mapping-brazils-political-polarization-online-96434>.

At the individual level, there are several indicators that act as red flags for a politician's likelihood of veering into authoritarian leadership. These include 1) rejecting the democratic rules of the game, 2) denying the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerating or encouraging violence, and 4) indicating a willingness or desire to "curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media."¹¹ The identification of these indicators sheds light on why stopping democratic decay early is difficult. Even something that seems as straightforward as encouraging violence can be done in a way that allows for plenty of plausible deniability.¹² Other actions taken by individuals once in power that have a direct decaying effect on democracy include handicapping the judicial system,¹³ criminalizing opposition party leadership,¹⁴ decapitating independent media, and silencing prominent cultural figures. Jair Bolsonaro checks off more than one of these boxes, as will be expanded upon later in this paper.

Another individual factor that can lead to authoritarianism is "political-outsidership," defined here as having little to no experience or existing relationships with a country's political system. While being a political outsider does not make someone inherently likely to be a dictator, the way that the system responds to political outsiders can push them towards authoritarian decisions. When an outsider wins, especially on "drain the swamp" rhetoric, the political establishment feels threatened and acts extra-obstructionist to fight back against what they see as a threat to democracy. The outsider sees these actions as a serious threat to power, and therefore takes more hostile actions in a tit-for-tat that ends with a disturbing hole which democracy once occupied in a sort of accidental slip into authoritarianism. This was the case

¹¹ Levitsky and Ziblatt. Page 34.

¹² Smith, David. "Donald Trump Hints at Assassination of Hillary Clinton by Gun Rights Supporters." The Guardian. August 10, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/09/trump-gun-owners-clinton-judges-second-amendment>

¹³ As has been done in Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Hungary, Poland, Malaysia, and many others, Levitsky points out.

¹⁴ As was recently seen in Belarus

with Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori. As the establishment continued to antagonize him, the checks and balances began to “feel like a straightjacket,”¹⁵ and he began removing those checks and balances in the name of getting legislation passed.

On the other side of the breakdown of law is the abuse of it. One must note how the law can be weaponized by malicious actors against democratic institutions, “incrementally hollowing out democratic rule.”¹⁶ The term “Populist Constitutionalism” has been used to describe the process of populists carrying out constitutional changes that 1) deconstruct old institutional order, 2) develop a project rooted in critique of that order, and 3) consolidate power into the hands of populists.¹⁷ Not only can laws be weaponized against democratic institutions, but the rhetoric of “rule of law” can turn into a reality of “rule by law,” feigning commitment to democratic institutions while simultaneously undermining various aspects of them. When the Brazilian military dictatorship began enacting legislative acts that turned the state into a less constitutionally liberal one, it demonstrated the perniciousness of this abusive constitutionalism.

18

History of Authoritarianism in Brazil

Only recently in its history has Brazil become a comprehensive, relatively stable democracy. For its first hundred years, old undemocratic governments gave way to new undemocratic governments via revolutions and coups. The First Republic from 1889-1930 was oligarchic, with a revolution ushering in the Second Republic from 1930-1937. This was followed by a coup d’etat which resulted in the semi-fascist New State led by Getulio Vargas

¹⁵ Levitsky and Ziblatt. Page 133.

¹⁶ Daly, Tom. "Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay in Brazil: Understanding the Rise of Jair Bolsonaro." SSRN Electronic Journal, 2019. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3350098. Page 1.

¹⁷ Ibid. Page 4.

¹⁸ Ibid. Page 11.

until 1945.¹⁹ A fragile democratic period with free and fair elections deciding the president was established in the 50s, then broken not too long after.

The 24th president of Brazil, a leftist named João Goulart, served from 1961 until a military coup ousted him in 1964. Organized by the military's generals, troops marched to Rio de Janeiro, forcing him to flee to Brasilia, and later to Uruguay and Argentina. The political right had begun seeing itself as a permanent minority due to leftists staying in power for 30 years. When a conservative president was elected at the beginning of the 1960s only to die a few months into his term and be replaced by Goulart,²⁰ conservative parties abandoned mutual toleration. Riding a Red Scare that had infected Latin America around this time, the military accused Goulart of being a secret Communist (of which there was no evidence for), and the coup d'état was realized.

The military dictatorship in Brazil was similar to the other military dictatorships in Latin America at the time. Generals promised that the return to civilian rule would be swift, but as was the case in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, civilian rule would not be reinstated for over a decade, in Brazil's case almost two.²¹ The Cold War and Cuba's turn toward communism heightened anti-communist fears in the region, giving the dictatorships at the time similar *raison d'être*.²²

Where the Brazilian military dictatorship differed was its approach to opposition powers. Rather than silence the political opposition with threat of arrest or execution, the military dictatorship maintained the facades of a democracy. It maintained elections (though neither free

¹⁹ Daly. Page 8.

²⁰ The president and vice president do not share a ticket in Brazil

²¹ Chirio, Maud. *Politics in Uniform: Military Officers and Dictatorship in Brazil, 1960-1980*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018. Page 5.

²² *Ibid.* Page 6.

nor fair), a judiciary, and passionate opposition parties given opportunities to voice their positions. It also executed far fewer people than the surrounding military dictatorships. To be clear, the body count of a regime does not spell out its level of repressiveness, and there is widespread documentation of state sanctioned torture, propaganda, censorship, political detentions, and other hallmarks of a regime decidedly undemocratic.²³ Nonetheless, where the victims of Pinochet are estimated to be in the tens of thousands,²⁴ the Brazilian military dictatorship was responsible for around 434 deaths and disappearances.²⁵ These comparatively lower numbers and the attempts at the dictatorship to maintain the illusion of constitutional liberalism (for at least some time) has given many Brazilians today a warped understanding of just how abusive and inhumane the military dictatorship really was, leaving them vulnerable to rhetoric by Bolsonaro about restoring the “law and order” of the dictatorship.

The facade of liberalism was not to last. The administration of Marshal Arthur da Costa e Silva in 1967 was supposed to begin the process of restoring representation and democratic rule.²⁶ Then, after protesting in front of a restaurant with a group of fellow students in 1968, Edson Luis was murdered by a policeman.²⁷ This inspired protests across the country, amplified by people at Luis’ memorial mass being beaten by cavalry armed with swords and teargas. Rio de Janeiro congressman Márcio Moreira Alves brought this rebuke of the dictatorship into the halls of congress, encouraging the boycott of military independence day and calling out the usage of

²³ Ibid. Page 7.

²⁴ "Chile Dictatorship Victim Toll Bumped to 40,018 | CBC News." CBCnews. August 19, 2011. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/chile-dictatorship-victim-toll-bumped-to-40-018-1.998542>.

²⁵ Chirio. Page 7.

²⁶ Alves, Maria Helena Moreira. State and Opposition in Military Brazil. University of Texas Press, 1990. Page 80.

²⁷ Ibid. Page 85.

torture by the dictatorship.²⁸ The Executive tried to sue Alves for his speech, but Congress denied it permission. The walls began closing in, and in response, Costa e Silva enacted institutional act 5, an act which increased the repressiveness of the state exponentially. The president could suspend habeas corpus for anyone and impeach any legislator at any time. The Ministry of Justice was given surveillance powers, the president could close any legislature in the country defaulting to Executive rule, and police could (and did) arrest anyone and hold them for up to 60 days with 10 days of solitary confinement.²⁹ The repressiveness of the act encouraged leftists such as Dilma Rousseff to take up arms on a wide scale. It would remain in place for over 10 years.³⁰

The Military and Government Today

Despite the fight by leftist guerillas against military dictatorship, democracy was not restored with the violent struggle they were known for carrying out. During the mid-1980s, the Diretas Ja! (Rights Already/Now!) movement led to one of the largest peaceful protests in the country's history,³¹ calling for the restoration of civilian rule. The first democratic election with civilian participation since the 1960s was held in 1989. However, to interpret this as a resounding defeat for the military would not be quite accurate. The military had begun the slow process of transitioning back to civilian rule in the 1970s. While it is undeniable that the Diretas Ja! movement sped up the process, the military was able to more or less depart on its own terms. This is best exemplified in the Amnesty Law of 1979 that effectively protected dictatorship era

²⁸ The Brazilian Report. "AI-5: 50 Years Ago, Brazil Institutionalized Torture and Repression." The Brazilian Report. December 13, 2018.

<https://brazilian.report/power/2018/12/13/ai-5-brazil-torture-repression/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Deutsche Welle. "Brazil Remembers Its Struggle for Democracy: DW: 10.04.2014." DW.COM. <https://www.dw.com/en/brazil-remembers-its-struggle-for-democracy/a-17554707>.

military officers from prosecution for their crimes.³² The National Truth Commission of 2014 came to the conclusion that “torture, summary executions, and forced disappearances had constituted official State policy under the military government of 1964-85,” and identified the names of 377 people that should be prosecuted.³³ The Inter-American Court on Human Rights twice recommended that the Amnesty law be amended, but the officers responsible for the decades of torture and terror are still being shielded by that Amnesty Law to this day.³⁴

Though the military will not face the legal scrutiny that it should for those decades of dictatorship, it has since adopted a policy of non-interference with politics. One of the problems with the military’s structure in the early 20th century was its over-professionalization. In pursuit of a strong, efficient, and independent military such as the US’s, the Brazilian military became further and further removed from civil society, strengthening its sense of “superiority and contempt for democratic resolution of political and social conflicts.”³⁵ Learning from that mistake, the military is now structurally distant from politics with strong civilian oversight. This has not fully reinstated trust of the military in society or *completely* removed it from politics, though. When Michel Temer, the interim president after Rousseff and before Bolsonaro, signed an executive order that would have given the military the power of arrest, rumors of a military coup immediately spread,³⁶ reminding older Brazilians of a time they wished to leave in the past. Temer rescinded the order a day later, but that did not stop General Eduardo Villas Boas from implicitly threatening military intervention if the Supreme Court failed to jail Lula, Rousseff’s predecessor, for corruption.³⁷ Concerningly, the military has started to embed itself into Brazil’s

³² Daly.

³³ Ibid. Page 20.

³⁴ "No Justice for Horrors of Brazil's Military Dictatorship 50 Years On." Human Rights Watch. October 28, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/13/no-justice-horrors-brazils-military-dictatorship-50-years#>.

³⁵ Chirio. Page 47.

³⁶ Daly. Page 10.

³⁷ Ibid. Page 11.

democratic institutions once again. Bolsonaro himself is a former officer, his vice president was a General, the Minister of Education worked in military academies, and 70 military candidates were elected to congress.³⁸ The military background of these elected officials may not warrant special concern in a vacuum, but the context of Brazil's historical military dictatorship coupled with the military's "long tradition as a tutelary power since 1891"³⁹ suggests that their lack of interest in protecting democratic principles could push acceptance of authoritarianism.

Politics in Brazil

Three of the most important factors at play that have shaped the status quo are Lava Jato, Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, and the changing demographics of Brazil and its political parties. Lava jato has fueled anti-establishment sentiments in Brazil and used "rule by law" style abuses to undermine democratic institutions. Dilma Rousseff's impeachment was the result of a recession, increasing violence, and the culmination of bubbling "antipetismo" (being anti-Workers' Party), which directly resulted in the election of Bolsonaro. The changing demographics of Brazil has changed which political parties hold influence, and suggests which issues will become more contentious in the future.

Lava Jato is the name of a corruption investigation that revealed widespread corruption at an unexpected scale. Politicians from every party were investigated and indicted, leading to half the congress failing to secure reelection.⁴⁰ The indictments went all the way to the top, with former president Lula da Silva arrested and charged with accepting a bribe from a construction company in the form of a free apartment. Lula as well as the Workers' Party as a whole vehemently denies the veracity of the charges, nonetheless, his brief imprisonment kept him

³⁸ Ibid. Page 20.

³⁹ Chirio. Page 20.

⁴⁰ Daly.

from running against Bolsonaro (a race he was expected to win). It was also discovered that the corruption investigation itself was compromised, as leaked audio and messages revealed that the judge and lead prosecutor had been collaborating on the investigation, outside their scope to legally communicate with each other about it.⁴¹ Though this did not end the investigation, it threw the charges against Lula into question, serving as a clear example of a legal process being abused to undermine the principles of the larger democratic process.

The impeachment of Dilma was significant because it existed at the intersection of a failing economy, an uptick in violence, growing antipetismo, and of course revelations about political corruption. Beginning at the start of the 21st century, Brazil's economy experienced continual growth due to an international commodities boom, increased minimum wages, and a newly successful Conditional Cash Transfer program called Bolsa Familia.⁴² Then, in 2013, the economy went into freefall, and eight percent of Brazil's GDP vanished into thin air.⁴³ It was the worst recession in Brazil's history and sparked outrage at Rousseff. Upticks in violent crime were also frustrating people, as Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates of any country in the world.⁴⁴ Brazil's federalist system means that the president has little to do with street violence, but Bolsonaro still successfully weaponized a "law and order" message. As Madeleine Albright states, fascism feeds on fear. The growing antipetismo also had a hand in pushing Rousseff out. Rather than support for one specific party or another, Brazil has started being more clearly

⁴¹ Fishman, Andrew, Rafael Moro Martins, Leandro Demori, Alexandre De Santi, and Glenn Greenwald. "Exclusive: Leaked Chats Between Brazilian Judge and Prosecutor Who Imprisoned Lula Reveal Prohibited Collaboration and Doubts Over Evidence." *The Intercept*. June 09, 2019. <https://theintercept.com/2019/06/09/brazil-lula-operation-car-wash-sergio-moro/>.

⁴² Hunter, Wendy, and Timothy J. Power. "Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash." *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 68-82. doi:10.1353/jod.2019.0005.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Page 70.

divided amongst who is pro-Workers' Party, and who is against it.⁴⁵ Since civilian rule was established, there has been a functional political duopoly between the left of center PT and the more centrist/right PMDB.⁴⁶ PT governed between three and a half terms, from 2003-2016. As its leadership stretched into the future, the question of *which* alternative was preferred dissolved into *if* an alternative was preferred at all. Those who wanted something new identified with antipetismo. When Rousseff was impeached, antipetismo won out. The issues arose when, instead of filling the power vacuum, PMDB also crumbled because of the still failing economy and the corruption investigation which had implicated its high level members as well. When it fell, so did a few other large right-of-center parties, and the gatekeepers were gone. This made Bolsonaro's ascension to the presidential palace relatively smooth. PT tried running a candidate, but Lula had been deemed ineligible with such little time left before the election that the new candidate did not stand a chance.

Changing demographics in the country have played a crucial role in shaping the current political landscape. In 1980, only 6.6 percent of Brazilians identified as evangelical. In the last 40 years, that percentage has quadrupled to around 24 percent of the population.⁴⁷ With evangelicals as Bolsonaro's most fervently supportive base, that growth trend is good for his political prospects. Evangelicals are also in his cabinet, with Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo often talking about climate change as a "Marxist conspiracy" and warning people about how red meat and heterosexuality are "being criminalized." These demographic changes have not only elevated Bolsonaro's political profile, but they have also shaken up the Brazilian party system.

⁴⁵ "Petismo, Antipetismo E O Centrão." Revista Piauí.

<https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/petismo-antipetismo-e-o-centrao/>.

⁴⁶ Hunter and Power. Page 69.

⁴⁷ "Democracy and Authoritarianism in Brazil." Council on Foreign Relations. January 23, 2019.

<https://www.cfr.org/conference-calls/democracy-and-authoritarianism-brazil>.

Aside from what Lava Jato and antipetismo have done to the larger political parties, the surge of support for Bolsonaro also helped the previously nondescript Social Liberal Party (PSL) which he joined to qualify for the presidential race. In 2014, it had one seat in congress. In 2018, it won 52 seats,⁴⁸ and Bolsonaro's success shaped its new ultra-conservative messaging. Because the other conservative parties had been weakened by scandals, PSL successfully launched a hostile takeover of the mainstream conservative base. The impact of this has been even greater polarization with now widely-platformed ultra-conservative beliefs shifting the Overton window, compounded by the polarization caused by Lula's controversial imprisonment.

Jair Messias Bolsonaro

Before his presidency, Bolsonaro was a congressman and retired army captain. After three decades as an essentially unknown congressman in Brasilia, he did not have a party or solid campaign funding. He instead relied on spurts of attention from his bombastic rhetoric to quickly raise funds.⁴⁹ His support was strongest with evangelicals and youth. The evangelical support mirrored his own religious affiliation, the youth support was likely because his campaign was 1) social media savvy and 2) youth had grown up with PT in power for the last 14 years, making antipetismo the anti-establishment stance. Although plenty of morally and politically abhorrent quotes are attributed to him, his base suggests taking him seriously, but not literally.

His messaging has always been clear. He focuses on law and order, and campaigns on nostalgia for the military dictatorship.⁵⁰ His original platform was limited to military issues such as improving salaries and advocating for veterans.⁵¹ As he was continuously re-elected to congress, his platform broadened to a more general far-right one, and he is now well known for

⁴⁸ Hunter and Power. Page 68.

⁴⁹ Council on Foreign Relations.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hunter and Power. Page 74.

his extreme socially conservative policy positions. Similar to rhetoric used by the US GOP, he makes sure to talk about how he is fighting communism, despite PT not being communist. Another policy issue that he is invested in is the relaxation of gun laws in the country. He has been successful thus far in effectively reinstating the public's ability to purchase firearms, a position which flies in the face of evidence which demonstrates that more guns in Brazil cause higher rates of homicide.⁵²

Authoritarianism and Brazil Today

Since taking office, Bolsonaro has launched both rhetorical and legislative attacks against democratic institutions, journalists, the film industry, minorities, civil society, leading members of the opposition party, and science. Those close to him have called for the reinstatement of institutional act 5. By Levitsky, Ziblatt, and Albright's metrics, Bolsonaro is unequivocally pushing the country closer to authoritarianism.

His second day in office, Bolsonaro passed a law tightening the controls of the government over and subsequently cutting the funding of civil society organizations.⁵³ His term has seen an increase in violence directed at LGBTQ+ people, women, indigenous people, and journalists.⁵⁴ Jean Wyllys, one of the only openly LGBTQ+ lawmakers in the country, gave up his seat and fled the country in response to an avalanche of threats he was allegedly receiving after Bolsonaro won.⁵⁵ In April of 2019, he signed a decree eliminating over 55 policy councils, a democratic institution established by PT that brought civilians and civil society organizations

⁵² Muggah, Robert. "Opinion: Brazil's High Murder Rate Could Get Even Worse If Gun Laws Are Relaxed." NPR. January 11, 2019.
<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/10/684079625/opinion-relaxing-brazils-gun-laws-could-make-a-murderous-country-even-deadlier>.

⁵³ Council on Foreign Relations.

⁵⁴ Waldron, Travis. "Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro Is The Far-Right Authoritarian He Promised He'd Be." HuffPost. January 01, 2020.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bolsonaro-brazil-authoritarian-far-right_n_5e0a3afdc5b6b5a713b24bce

⁵⁵ Ibid.

together to craft policy proposals and monitor their implementation by the government.⁵⁶ His administration claims it was to cut costs and government spending wastes, but his critics have accused the move of being an attempt to stymie transparency and tear down any and all progress made by PT. He has repeatedly downplayed the gravity of COVID, and has refused to provide additional help to indigenous people in the Amazon that lack healthcare infrastructure.⁵⁷ Coincidentally, indigenous people are also those most fiercely standing in the way of his agri-business allies. In a victory speech he delivered over Facebook, he made sure to threaten members of PT with imprisonment or exile.⁵⁸ His son and supporters meanwhile have both openly advocated for the reinstatement of institutional act 5,⁵⁹ the one which pushed the military dictatorship into extreme despotism. He attended one of the rallies calling for the reinstatement of act 5, and did not speak against the wish, though it is exceedingly unlikely that anything like act 5 could be passed in the modern Brazilian political system. His Vice President, the former military general, has openly called for a replacement of the 1988 democratic constitution in favor of a new text,⁶⁰ one that would likely provide more opportunities for executive power consolidation (as was the case with Hungary's 2011 Basic Law and Venezuela's 1999 Socialist Constitution). If any of these abusive constitutionalist changes were to happen, the lives, rights, freedoms, and futures of many Brazilians would be thrown into even further disarray than they are being thrown into now.

⁵⁶ Lima, Valesca. "Analysis | Brazil's New Leaders Are Challenging the Tradition of Participatory Democracy. Here's Why." The Washington Post. June 07, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/07/brazils-new-leaders-are-challenging-tradition-participatory-democracy-heres-why/>.

⁵⁷ Zimmermann, Flavia Bellieni, Professor Amy Verdun, and Maryam Jami. "COVID-19 in Brazil: Bolsonaro's Far-Right Authoritarianism in a Pandemic." Australian Institute of International Affairs. April 16, 2020. <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/20579/>.

⁵⁸ Daly. Page 21.

⁵⁹ Waldron.

⁶⁰ Daly. Page 21.

Conclusion and Predictions

It is unlikely that Bolsonaro will win a second term. Firstly, his handling of COVID has been arguably the worst in the entire world. He was able to slightly rehabilitate his image by providing checks to everyone in the country, but the vaccine rollout at this point appears to be as haphazard as one would expect from an administration which has rarely demonstrated the ability to govern effectively.⁶¹ Additionally, Brazil's center-right wing has not embraced Bolsonaro the same way the GOP lined up behind Donald Trump (who also lost). This disunity means that, next election, he is likely to split the right wing vote more than he did last time, as the parties will be four years removed from the scandals that were rocking them at the time. This does not mean that his ideas will disappear. Evangelicals are still rising in proportion to the population, and with that increasing demographic will come stronger support for socially conservative issues such as limiting women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ rights. Additionally, in 2017, 43 percent of Brazilians said they support a temporary return to military rule.⁶² Brazil has long been the Latin American country most skeptical of democracy, and Bolsonaro's departure will not change that.

The rise of Bolsonaro was not necessarily predictable, but there are clear paths showing how he ended up winning power. It was made possible by "a combination of fundamental background conditions (economic recession, corruption, and crime), political contingencies (most notably, the weakness of rival candidates), and a shakeup in campaign dynamics..."⁶³ It does *not* appear that he found power as a result of other authoritarian leaning strongmen rising

⁶¹ "'We're Being Left Behind': Anger and Confusion in Brazil as Vaccine Program Lags." The Guardian. December 31, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/31/brazil-coronavirus-vaccine-jair-bolsonaro>.

⁶² Daly.

⁶³ Hunter and Power. Page 71.

around the world. Though it is tempting to draw lines between continents and call it a day, Brazil's individual historically created conditions were what ultimately resulted in the 2018 electoral results. The transition of power went from a former guerilla to a military officer because the negative quality of life outweighed the electorate's understanding of the problems posed by Bolsonaro's ties and feelings towards the military. Additionally, because the military dictatorship kept its charade of democracy running and its body count low enough, there is not the same inherent disgust as in other countries with people that give it praise. Instead of providing an easy explanation to a complex situation, an understanding of authoritarianism's rise around the world allows us to better identify why Bolsonaro's political strategies work, and what it may take to negate their harmful societal impacts.

Works Cited

- “We're Being Left behind': Anger and Confusion in Brazil as Vaccine Program Lags.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 31 Dec. 2020,
www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/31/brazil-coronavirus-vaccine-jair-bolsonaro.
- Abramovay, Pedro. “A Correia De Transmissão Do Autoritarismo No Brasil De Bolsonaro.” *EL PAÍS*, 26 Jan. 2020,
brasil.elpais.com/opinion/2020-01-26/a-correia-de-transmissao-do-autoritarismo-no-brasil-de-bolsonaro.html.
- Albright, Madeleine Korbelt, and William Woodward. *Fascism: a Warning*. William Collins, 2019.
- Alves, Maria Helena Moreira. *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*. University of Texas Press, 1990.
- “Chile Dictatorship Victim Toll Bumped to 40,018 | CBC News.” *CBCnews*, CBC/Radio Canada, 19 Aug. 2011,
www.cbc.ca/news/world/chile-dictatorship-victim-toll-bumped-to-40-018-1.998542.
- Chirio, Maud. *Politics in Uniform: Military Officers and Dictatorship in Brazil, 1960-1980*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018.
- “Com Ou Sem Golpe, Bolsonaro Marcha Rumo Ao Autoritarismo, Dizem Singer e Safatle.” *Rede Brasil Atual*, 5 May 2020,
www.redebrasilatual.com.br/politica/2020/05/com-ou-sem-golpe-bolsonaro-marcha-rumo-ao-autoritarismo-dizem-singer-e-safatle/.
- Daly, Tom. “Populism, Public Law, and Democratic Decay in Brazil: Understanding the Rise of Jair Bolsonaro.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2019, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3350098.

- “Democracy and Authoritarianism in Brazil.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, www.cfr.org/conference-calls/democracy-and-authoritarianism-brazil.
- Deutsche Welle. “Brazil Remembers Its Struggle for Democracy: DW: 10.04.2014.” *DW.COM*, www.dw.com/en/brazil-remembers-its-struggle-for-democracy/a-17554707.
- Fishman, Andrew, et al. “Exclusive: Leaked Chats Between Brazilian Judge and Prosecutor Who Imprisoned Lula Reveal Prohibited Collaboration and Doubts Over Evidence.” *The Intercept*, 9 June 2019, theintercept.com/2019/06/09/brazil-lula-operation-car-wash-sergio-moro/.
- Hunter, Wendy, and Timothy J. Power. “Bolsonaro and Brazil's Illiberal Backlash.” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2019, pp. 68–82., doi:10.1353/jod.2019.0005.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. *How Democracies Die*. Penguin Books, 2019.
- Lima, Valesca. “Analysis | Brazil's New Leaders Are Challenging the Tradition of Participatory Democracy. Here's Why.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 7 June 2019, www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/07/brazils-new-leaders-are-challenging-tradition-participatory-democracy-heres-why/.
- Maciel, Mariana Lemos and Camila. “Dilma Rousseff: ‘Torture Is about Pain and Death. They Want You to Lose Your Dignity.’” *Brasil De Fato*, 16 Jan. 2020, www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/01/16/dilma-rousseff-torture-is-about-pain-and-death-they-want-you-to-lose-your-dignity/.
- Muggah, Robert. “Opinion: Brazil's High Murder Rate Could Get Even Worse If Gun Laws Are Relaxed.” *NPR*, NPR, 11 Jan. 2019,

www.npr.org/2019/01/10/684079625/opinion-relaxing-brazils-gun-laws-could-make-a-murderous-country-even-deadlier.

“No Justice for Horrors of Brazil's Military Dictatorship 50 Years On.” *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2020,

www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/13/no-justice-horrors-brazils-military-dictatorship-50-years#.

Pablo Ortellado Professor of Public Policy, and Márcio Moretto Ribeiro Professor of Information Systems. “Mapping Brazil's Political Polarization Online.” *The Conversation*, 25 Oct. 2020, theconversation.com/mapping-brazils-political-polarization-online-96434.

Paiva, Marcelo. “What the Brazilian Dictatorship Did to My Family.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 Oct. 2018,

www.nytimes.com/2018/10/29/opinion/what-the-brazilian-dictatorship-did-to-my-family.html.

“Petismo, Antipetismo e o Centrão.” *Revista Piauí*,

piaui.folha.uol.com.br/petismo-antipetismo-e-o-centrao/.

Smith, David. “Donald Trump Hints at Assassination of Hillary Clinton by Gun Rights Supporters.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 10 Aug. 2016,

www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/09/trump-gun-owners-clinton-judges-second-amendment.

The Brazilian Report. “AI-5: 50 Years Ago, Brazil Institutionalized Torture and Repression.”

The Brazilian Report, 13 Dec. 2018,

brazilian.report/power/2018/12/13/ai-5-brazil-torture-repression/.

Waldron, Travis. “Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro Is The Far-Right Authoritarian He Promised He'd Be.”

HuffPost, HuffPost, 1 Jan. 2020,

www.huffpost.com/entry/bolsonaro-brazil-authoritarian-far-right_n_5e0a3afdc5b6b5a713

b24bce.

Zimmermann, Flavia Bellieni, et al. "COVID-19 in Brazil: Bolsonaro's Far-Right

Authoritarianism in a Pandemic." *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 16 Apr.

2020, www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/20579/.