

Justice and Democracy in Brazil

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

From 1964 to 1985 we had a dictatorship in Brazil. On April 1, 1964 Brazil suffered a *coup d'état*, when military governments not elected by the population took office. Brazil was governed by the military between April 1, 1964 and 1985. Between 1985 and 1990 there was a transition government, that of José Sarney, who was indirectly elected by the National Congress. In 1990, Fernando Collor took office; he was the first president directly elected by the population. He resigned on December 29, 1992, to avoid impeachment proceedings.

For 13 years, from 2003 to 2016, we enjoyed a very popular and democratic government under President Lula, followed by that of President Dilma. These governments have created many social programs to eradicate hunger, raised 32 million people out of extreme poverty and have promoted the inclusion of low-income people and Afro-descendants in universities.

However, since 2013 we have noticed the rise of a very conservative movement in Brazil, which led to the impeachment of President Dilma in 2016 and to the imprisonment of President Lula in 2018. All of these conservative movements led to the election of a right-wing president in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, that represents a decline in the many fields of public life, concerning democracy and rights.

The book is an attempt to understand Brazilian politics, especially from the second Dilma Rousseff government (January 2015 to August 31, 2016) until the end of 2022. After her impeachment, her vice president, Michel Temer, took office. On January 1, 2019, President Jair Messias Bolsonaro took office.

In this period, there are at least two impactful facts: the impeachment of President Dilma and the coronavirus pandemic. Her impeachment has become an important fact due to disputes over its legitimacy. Even though it followed a legally established procedure, many argue that politically it was a *coup d'état*, albeit of a peculiar nature. The COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, led to the death of almost 700,000 people. Many argue that the Bolsonaro government was negligent or careless in dealing with the problem, and was responsible for these deaths. There was even, in the year

2021, a *Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry* by the National Congress to investigate the government's actions in confronting the pandemic.¹

Brazil has an electoral system that leads to polarization. It is a majoritarian and direct electoral system, in two rounds. The second round occurs when one of the candidates does not get 50% of the valid votes, which is very difficult to achieve in direct elections with several candidates. By itself, this system leads to two rather polarized positions. However, the 2018 election registered a deepening of this polarization, showing a very divided society. At least three aspects were impactful in this process. The first aspect involved the social programs of the previous governments, which distributed basic income to the poorest, the *Bolsa Família*.² The second was the so-called customs agenda, used by the right-wing candidate Bolsonaro, which strongly highlighted the prejudices of society, including a connection with some religions. The third was the use of fake news in social networks and the mass media against the PT (Workers' Party) candidate.

In the moment that we write this book, we are facing the results of the new presidential elections: the victory of Lula, who took office for the third time on January 1, 2023. The challenges of governing the country will be enormous. In a consistent movement of rapprochements, articulations and negotiations between the various social forces of the center and the left of the political spectrum, a broad and heterodox coalition (between the PT and allies, former allies and opponents' parties) was formed in the democratic field around Lula's candidacy to confront Bolsonaro right-wing ideology, to contain the authoritarian populist logic of dismantling institutions, that has prevailed since the deposition of President Dilma, and to guide the reconstruction of the basic structure of a deeply polarized and radicalized society. The task of the new government not only involves rebuilding the main institutions and once again taking the country off the hunger map by increasing employment and income, but also improving access to health, basic sanitation, education and the cultural system in a scenario of economic crisis, growing socioeconomic inequalities, segregation and social marginalization, and precarious labor relations. Undoubtedly, these are fundamental and indispensable social justice policies to create a new cycle of inclusion of people in the ideal of democratic citizenship. But conditions

¹ <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2021-10-21/os-principais-culpados-pelas-mais-de-600000-mortes-da-covid-19-no-brasil-segundo-a-cpi-da-pandemia.html>.

² Pinzani, Alessandro and Rego, Walkiria Leão. *Money, Autonomy and Citizenship: The Experience of the Brazilian Bolsa Família*. Cham/São Paulo: Springer, Editora da UNESP, 2019.

of achievement are much more challenging now, in the first cycle of Lulismo, than 20 years ago. Now, it is not just a question of accommodating conflicting and contradictory social and economic tendencies in the arrangement of a democracy that can be understood as a legal political regime resulting from the democratic rule of law aimed at ensuring social justice and well-being; it is rather, about deepening our understanding of democracy as a cultural way of life and as a social cooperation system between a plurality of citizens as free and equal moral persons. To overcome the social, political and cultural fractures and divisions caused by the Bolsonarist ideology in recent years, we have to understand that the extreme right wing not only consolidated itself as a politically active force, accompanied by a brutal commodification of the political system in a traditional physiologism that became radicalized on the right, but has also consolidated itself as a normalized social force in a world view and a set of values (the religious values of the traditional family, exaltation of work ethics, entrepreneurship and unbridled economic freedom, aporophobia, intolerance, xenophobia, etc.) of a considerable part of the economic elite and a population that manifests a growing disbelief in the ideals of social justice and the egalitarian liberal conception of democratic citizenship, its institutions and its public political culture.

The texts included in this book show the dimensions of the roots and persistence of the extreme right wing in Brazilian society and also show important directions to overcome it.

We hope there will be a new period in Brazilian politics, with full democracy, and respect for the rule of law and social justice.

Maria Borges
Delamar Dutra
Denilson Werle

Florianópolis, November 2022

CHAPTER 1

THE BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT AS AN AUTHORITARIAN PROJECT

ALESSANDRO PINZANI

In recent years, democratic elections in many countries have led to the creation of governments that are considered to be authoritarian by columnists, pundits, scholars, and the general public: Orbán in Hungary, Modi in India, Erdoğan in Turkey, Putin in Russia, the Law and Order (PiS) Party in Poland, Maduro in Venezuela, and of course, Bolsonaro in Brazil. It is also necessary to include those politicians who have tried, or are still trying, to implement forms of government that are more or less authoritarian, but have failed for the time being, like Salvini in Italy (who might have further chances in future elections), or those who have encountered unsurmountable problems in the very institutions they have tried to subvert, such as Trump in the USA and Johnson in the UK (I am thinking here of Johnson's unlawful prorogation of parliament).

There have been many attempts at explaining this phenomenon.¹ However, almost all of them look for a single, or at least a general, explanation that can be applied to all of these cases. They frequently recur to “populism,” but I would rather avoid this term as it is ambiguous and seldom used in a neutral manner; that is, it mostly implies either a positive or a negative connotation (rarely a positive one, if we are honest). I have still not found a definition that I find convincing, and even the most useful analyses (e.g., Manow, 2018) end up admitting that (1) there is not a single form of populism, and (2), in the end, explanations focused on local circumstances are more useful than general explanations based on a single definition of the phenomenon.

¹ Just to mention a few: Müller, 2016, Jörke and Selk, 2017, Manow, 2018 and Urbinati, 2019.

In this chapter, then, I aim to clarify how best to categorize the abovementioned governments, especially that of Bolsonaro, thereby defining (even if in a sketchy way) authoritarianism. This attempt will be systematic and didactic, maybe at the price of being trivial sometimes, but systematicity and triviality frequently go together. The chapter is in three parts. In the first, I will try to define authoritarianism in general. In the second, I will try to establish what kinds of policies can be considered authoritarian. In the third, I will discuss the topic of the authoritarian personality. In all these sections, I will use examples from Brazil under Bolsonaro, although I will sometimes refer to examples from other countries.

1. On Authoritarianism

In this section, I aim to define authoritarianism. This is to provide an answer to the question of whether, and up to what point, we can designate Bolsonaro's government as authoritarian. As we will see, it is important to distinguish authoritarianism from both totalitarianism and despotism. This should help to avoid problematic comparisons between the Bolsonaro government and totalitarian regimes such as Nazism, even though some of the present Brazilian government's policies or some of its members' declarations might bear an eerie similarity to some from that regime. But these coincidences should be treated with prudence to prevent any form of easy labelling that ends up obscuring the peculiarities of the Bolsonaro government and/or relativizing Nazi crimes. We will, however, see how the authoritarian but non-despotic character of the Bolsonaro government does have parallels with the Italian fascist regime.

1.1 Authoritarianism and Authority

When it comes to defining the concept, the word "authoritarianism" points to the central role of the notion of authority. But which authority is meant here? It is not the authority of constitutions, political institutions, or legal norms; rather, it is the authority attributed to those who govern the country: a political party; a single person; a leader; a *führer*; a *duce*; a *caudillo*; or, more modestly, a former army captain like Bolsonaro. The central idea underpinning authoritarianism is that the government (understood first and foremost in the technical sense as the political summit of the executive power, i.e., as the chief of the executive and its members) has an indisputable, unquestionable, and irreprehensible authority that elevates it over all other powers and even the law itself, if that law hinders its actions.

For this reason, the term authoritarianism is traditionally used to qualify regimes that aim to subvert democratic institutions and to diminish the role and strength of the legislative and judicial powers to transfer decision-making to an executive power. In this regime, that executive is then free to act unchecked by any constitutional constraints and, therefore, by judicial review. The case of the PiS government in Poland is paradigmatic. Here, the executive submits the judiciary to its control and claims far-reaching competencies. It does so with the complicity of the legislative, which is dominated by PiS, and it enjoys a majority large enough to enable amendments to the constitution. Hungary's case differs from the Polish one only by the presence of a strong leader, Viktor Orbán, who ends up personalizing the concentration of competencies in the hands of the executive.

Indeed, that kind of personalistic authoritarianism is more common: as also shown by Trump in the US or Modi in India. But authoritarianism need not have a personalistic character. Neither the Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki nor the PiS Leader Kaczyński has Orbán's charisma; nor do they play such a central role in the PiS government's authoritarian project. On the contrary, they could easily be substituted by other leaders. What counts here, then, is a government that is understood as an instance of decision-making (governmental authoritarianism). In the Brazilian military dictatorship that began in 1964, no one played the role of the strong leader, not even its most ferocious and ruthless military president, General Médici. Bolsonaro tries to pose as a strong leader à la Orbán, but his attempts at governing by presidential decree, without Congress, have been quite unsuccessful. And since he does not have enough congressional votes to modify the constitution (in contrast to both Orbán and the PiS government), he has not yet been able to formally modify the democratic institutions. In this sense, Bolsonaro is a "wannabe" authoritarian leader who is still looking for a way to impose his project on Brazil. His assiduous (and economically costly) courting of the army—and, above all, the powerful and omnipresent Military Police—could be seen as a sign that he despairs of attaining his goals congressionally and might try to follow the ultimate authoritarian path of a state coup. Only time will tell.

To sum up, the authority referred to within the word "authoritarianism" is the authority of the executive—understood as a decision-taking instance (governmental authoritarianism) or as its leader (personalistic authoritarianism).

1.2 Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism

Authoritarianism is not a synonym for totalitarianism. The latter term applies to a specific kind of regime, namely, to a regime in which the state (generally controlled by a single party) aims to fully shape and control citizens' lives, imposing ethical values and social practices that make people mere cogs in the state machine. This is also the definition of the "Total State" under the entry of "Fascism" in the 1932 *Enciclopedia Italiana*, which was taken up by Benito Mussolini among others (Mussolini et al., 1932). Totalitarianism represents a qualitative transformation of authoritarianism since the government succeeds in radically changing state institutions and eliminating (often physically) any form of opposition. Principally, however, totalitarianism modifies the personality of its citizens and forms a docile, easily manipulated mass, as many scholars have observed (e.g., Arendt, 1951). This might be the secret dream of every authoritarian government, but its realization presupposes resources and energies that at present most governments lack, except perhaps for North Korea. (It is debatable, however, whether Pyongyang's regime is effectively controlling its citizens or simply keeping them captive, having transformed the whole country into a huge prison.)

This was clearly the strategy followed by the Nazi regime. And it is probably not by chance that Bolsonaro's former Secretary for Culture quoted at length a speech by Goebbels when he presented the guidelines of *bolsonarista* cultural politics. He was fired after the turmoil provoked by his words (more accurately, by his parroting of Goebbels),² but this does not mean that the government was distancing itself from the Nazi ideal. On the contrary, this episode showed its relative lack of strength in the face of Congress and even of public opinion (see above 1.1). The Bolsonaro government's massive employment of the neoliberal grammar of self-responsibility and mistrust of the state suggests that it is trying to create a new economic and social subject (namely, the *emprendor de si*, the self-entrepreneur) who is primed to enthusiastically accept the radical reforms of Brazil's already slim welfare state that the Economy Minister Paulo Guedes (a former *Chicago Boy*) has proposed. The adoption of this neoliberal grammar and the attempt to shape a new kind of citizen are not characteristic of authoritarianism. Indeed, such phenomena have characterized almost all Western democracies in the last forty years (Pinzani, 2016). Furthermore, Brazilian neo-Pentecostal Churches that preach the so-called

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51149224>.

theology of prosperity also widely employ this grammar. It is not by chance, then, that almost all leaders of these Churches have backed Bolsonaro.

1.3 Authoritarianism and Despotism

Authoritarianism differs from despotism (at least partially) due to the presence of democratic institutions that are subversively targeted by the government. Despotism, in contrast, as defined since Montesquieu (1989), is characterized by the very absence of such institutions and by the absolute arbitrariness of the despotic ruler(s). From this point of view, it is not a proper government but a borderline ideal type that has never been fully realized in its pure form—at least, not in the context of the most important states in Western and Eastern modernity. As Montesquieu himself highlighted, not even the Ottoman Empire was a despotic regime, even though many modern European political writers considered it an archetypical one. In modernity, no government can be fully arbitrary without facing serious legitimacy problems and equally serious internal struggles. It can only prevent these by using violence and creating a repressive apparatus that exhausts all the energies of the state—like in North Korea. Italian fascism respected the rule of law, although it had to redefine the content of said law to make it compatible with its totalitarian spirit. The case of Nazism is different because of the *Führersprinzip* (which gave Hitler the power to autocratically decide on any issue) and the tendency of judges to oppose formal, positive law and to prefer the moral principles they thought were held by the “healthy” spirit of the people (Pauer-Studer, 2020). In both cases, however, the expectation was that decisions would be taken based on some general principle and not out of a whimsical, arbitrary choice.

This means that an authoritarian government does not act arbitrarily; rather, it obeys—at least formally and externally—the institutional rules and procedures in force at the time. It appears to acknowledge their validity but is willing to change them or even to remove them if they become obstacles to its goals. A good example of this is Bolsonaro’s repeated nominations of federal university rectors who were not selected by the academic community.³ Bolsonaro did not violate any law. However, he emptied the

³ In Brazilian federal universities, the choice of rector is generally preceded by a consultation with the academic community (students and staff), which goes improperly under the name of an election; the three most voted candidates are then indicated to the president, who is responsible for the nomination. All presidents before Bolsonaro nominated the person who received the most votes in the consultation.

law of its content by using it as an excuse for a monocratic decision (not for an arbitrary decision, since the names of the people he nominated were generally included on the lists he received from universities).

When rules or procedures hinder an authoritarian government's plans, it will try to bypass them, for instance by legislating by decree or by employing similar tools such as the Brazilian *medidas provisórias* (provisory decrees). As an alternative, it will try to modify the rules according to its goals, try to abolish them, or simply ignore them if they leave room for ambiguity and uncertainty concerning their real content or the correct procedure to be followed. These were the strategies adopted by, among others, Bolsonaro, Orbán, Modi, and PiS—as well as Salvini, Trump, and Johnson, albeit unsuccessfully in the latter cases. Their chances of success depend on many factors. One is the nature of the institutions that may hinder the government's action, as for example, in the controversy over the 2019 prorogation of the UK Parliament. Johnson acted formally in accordance with the law, but his decision to prorogue Parliament was deemed unlawful because it was of an unjustified length—and thus tantamount to an unjustified suspension of Parliament. Another relevant factor here is whether the executive controls the legislative power; that is, whether the government has a strong enough majority to force institutional and constitutional reforms. The absence of such a majority has represented a major obstacle for Bolsonaro (and for Trump, among others), while thanks to their ample parliamentary majorities, Orbán and PiS have been able to make significant changes to the constitutions of their countries. This shows, once again, that authoritarianism is a project for transforming existing institutions with the goal of removing their democratic character. It remains to be seen what “democratic” means in this context.

1.4 Authoritarianism and Democracy

Authoritarian leaders tend to perceive and/or to present themselves as representatives of the united will of the people. They claim to be acting in the name of the people and for the good of the country. Consequently, their political opponents are deemed enemies of the people or traitors. They sometimes claim to be the only real democratic leaders, in contrast to politicians in liberal democracies, who they allege merely represent particularistic interests (e.g., class interests). In this case, advocates of authoritarianism present it as a regime that, while radically opposed to liberal democracy, in fact represents the only true form of democracy. Carl Schmitt's view of the Nazi regime is a significant example of this, but Mussolini also claimed to give voice to the real will of the Italian people

and to be its true representative. When a British tabloid published front-page photos of the judges who had decided that the Brexit agreement should be submitted to the approval of parliament under the headline “Enemies of the People,” it was adopting this authoritarian idea. That is, the leader of the government should be free to take decisions without the obnoxious control exerted by the legislative or by the judiciary.

The rhetoric of the Bolsonaro government abounds in examples of this vision. In the most visible terms, the Bolsonaro campaign’s adoption of the colours of the national flag and the football jersey of the national team indicates full identification of the leader with the people and the nation. This leaves no space for opponents, who are thus considered to be foreign bodies within the country (enemies of the people). Authoritarian leaders think that by winning an election they have been invested with the absolute power to govern in the name of the people and that any attempt to hinder their action is an act of hostility against the country itself. Nationalist rhetoric and symbolism are therefore essential to authoritarianism. Authoritarian leaders may be utterly convinced that they are democratic leaders. However, while theirs is a government of the people and for the people, it is certainly not by the people—at least not directly: the people have entrusted the executive with limitless power to govern in their name, so from that moment on, the populace must enthusiastically follow its national leader.

This appeal to popular investiture has led many scholars to conflate authoritarianism and populism. But this is a questionable conclusion. Populist leaders may also claim to be acting in the name of the people, but they do not necessarily claim to have received unrestricted power to govern. According to some definitions of populism (a concept I find problematic, as I have said), both Lula in Brazil and Mujica in Uruguay would be populist leaders, but they neither described their opponents as enemies of the people or the country nor abused national symbols for party politics.

In addition, authoritarian leaders tend to acknowledge the results of elections only when they win. In this case, they see the result as an authorization to brazenly govern even outside the rules. If, however, the election favours their opponents, they cry fraud and refuse to acknowledge the result. One example here, of course, is Trump. As for Bolsonaro, he publicly declared before the 2018 election that the only result he would accept was his victory in the first round. After the leftist candidate Haddad took the elections to the second round, Bolsonaro claimed it was rigged. However, once he was elected president, he stopped pushing this accusation. The Federal Electoral Tribunal has since unsuccessfully demanded that he

provide evidence for his claims. In failing to do so, he may himself be liable to accusations of interfering with the electoral process.

1.5 Authoritarianism and State

The relationship between authoritarian leaders and movements and the state is ambiguous. Even right-wing authoritarians, who tend to idolize the state, may be very hostile to existing state institutions if they represent a hindrance to their plans. They see in the state the material expression of the strength of the nation and the people, but they are not at all interested in the democratic character of its institutions. This ambivalent attitude is paradigmatically clear in the way Mussolini managed to seize power in Italy: at the same time as violently attacking the liberal state and its (weakly) democratic institutions, he also participated in elections in a bid to gain power. When these attempts failed (the Fascist Party never secured a majority before the March on Rome), he staged a coup—which was ultimately successful thanks to the King’s complicity in inviting him to lead the new government. Once he was in charge, he managed to get state institutions to submit to his decisions and those of the party elite. The state became a mere instrument through which the Fascist Party was able to carry out its “revolution”, imposing its values and worldview as the only ones accepted and acceptable, and eliminating (physically) any alternative or critical voice. In Nazi Germany, this identification of state and party went even further.

Bolsonaro has attempted a similar operation. He has frequently and explicitly affirmed his intention to fill the relevant offices with people who share his views, thus removing civil servants not willing to passively obey his orders. This process of substituting experienced professionals with inexperienced supporters has led to paralysis in many institutions. Despite their alleged veneration of the state, authoritarian leaders like Bolsonaro perceive state institutions as mere instruments to force their ideals on the populace and they are more than willing to forgo their functioning or even dismantle them if they obstruct their plans.

1.6 Authoritarianism and the Right-Left Cleavage

The organisation of an authoritarian regime is based on values it considers to be immutably true and natural; for example, in the case of the innumerable instances of reactionary or right-wing authoritarianism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It can also stem from an attempt

to establish a new kind of government, that is also based on “true” values, but has never been implemented before. This is the case of revolutionary or left-wing authoritarianism, which has been and can still be observed in Venezuela, China and the Soviet Union. (One should not forget, however, that the Soviet and Chinese regimes evolved to display openly totalitarian traits in certain periods of their history—under Stalin and during the Cultural Revolution, respectively.)

This shows how the logic of authoritarianism is not exclusive to right-wing movements; it can be used (and actually has been used) by political projects that consider themselves to be leftist and aim to implement a new society with no place for traditional unjust structures. China, for example, rightly boasts of raising more than half a billion people out of poverty and substantially improving material conditions for its citizens. In the eyes of the Chinese government, these economic successes justify its systematic violations of political and civil rights as well as its strict control of its citizens’ economic activities. (The alleged liberalization of production and the internal market should not deceive us into thinking that the government does not strictly monitor these two spheres.)

Bolsonaro has presented himself from the very beginning as a defender of traditional Christian values: faith in God, love of country, and defence of the monogamous heterosexual family (the fact that he has divorced twice appears to be irrelevant for his followers). His campaign motto was “Brazil above all, God above everyone.” He has repeatedly made misogynistic and homophobic declarations⁴ that mirror the dominant patriarchal and homophobic views in Brazilian society, especially those held by his neo-Pentecostal fundamentalist voters. He has repeatedly defended the military dictatorship of 1964-85 and praised individual torturers who were active during that regime. Further, he has claimed that the military regime did not complete its job and it will be necessary to kill at least 30,000 communists and leftists to liberate Brazil from Marxism and corruption.⁵

⁴ When talking of his children he said: “I had five children. The first four were boys. Then I had a moment of weakness and I got a girl.” He also declared that he would rather his son died than him be homosexual.

⁵ Bolsonaro's victory was largely due to the unpopularity of the Workers’ Party, which in the last decade has been involved in many corruption scandals. Bolsonaro promised to end corruption and enlisted in his government Sérgio Moro, the judge who sent former president Lula to prison (a judgment later declared void by the Brazilian Supreme Court because of Moro’s lack of impartiality). Notwithstanding this attempt to surf popular indignation against corruption, Bolsonaro has not

2. Authoritarian Policies

In the first section, I presented authoritarianism from a purely institutional point of view: a way of governing and exerting executive power. I argued that its main characteristic is to try to attain its goal even when it is contrary to institutional rules and norms and against the will of the other powers. But can one speak of goals that are typical of authoritarian governments? Are there such things as *authoritarian policies*?

2.1 State Policies and Governmental Policies

Authoritarian governments do not generally distinguish between state and government policies. For this reason, they are willing to destroy the institutions that democratic governments consider relevant for the state, notwithstanding their political views; for instance, public broadcasting companies and universities, state institutes for economic and environmental research, health care systems, and so on. Generally, the aim of democratic governments is rather to influence such institutions and use them for their governmental policies. But in their subversive elan, authoritarian governments are willing to dismantle public institutions that have been built over decades by successive governments, if these institutions are perceived to represent an obstacle to the government's goals or to provide shelter for its enemies.

As we have seen, the Bolsonaro government has violently attacked public universities by nominating *bolsonaristas* as rectors, although they were not selected by their academic communities. Principally, however, his attacks have taken the form of cutting universities' funding and dismantling the federal funding agencies Capes and CNPq. Even during the pandemic, when the relevance of scientific research became obvious to anyone who was not blinded by partisan anti-intellectualism, the government cut funding for research institutes involved in studying the virus. Similar treatment has been doled out to other federal institutions, such as the Secretariat for Culture and Arts (briefly headed by the man who parroted Goebbels, as mentioned); the agencies that should care for environmental preservation or monitor the situation of the *Indios*; the Public Economic Research Institute IPREA; and the *Palmares* Foundation, which has the aim of fostering Afro-Brazilian

managed to free himself from the suspicion of protecting corrupt politicians, including three of his sons, who are themselves active in politics. When Moro left the government, accusing the president of interfering with Federal Police investigations of his sons, the anti-corruption rhetoric of Bolsonaro suffered a major blow.

culture and a new director who denies the existence of racism in Brazil. Even if Bolsonaro loses the 2022 elections, it will take many years to return these institutions to their previous levels of efficiency and excellence.

2.2 Reactionary Policies

As we have seen, authoritarianism is traditionally connected to a reactionary or ultraconservative ideological background. This stems from the fact that historically it has mostly been thinkers and politicians from this background who have respectively theorized and practised it. Thinkers such as De Maistre, Donoso Cortéz, and Carl Schmitt defended the necessity of an authoritarian government to oppose the revolutionary, liberal, and democratic ideals prevailing within their societies, which they believed were destructive for their countries or Western civilization as a whole. Nowadays, authoritarian governments and their theorists identify different kinds of enemies, and these are often imaginary. The identification and denunciation of these enemies are nevertheless an essential element of authoritarianism. The gamut is wide, running from so-called Gender Ideology to Cultural Marxism, from Multiculturalism to Wokeism, from International Communism to the Imperial EU Project, and from the Islamization of Europe to the Great Replacement. (For some reason, authoritarians seem to consider it important to capitalize all these impressive names.) All these phenomena demand extraordinary actions from the authoritarian government because they represent such a serious threat to the people, the country, civilization, and so on. Quite often this rhetoric corresponds with a religious discourse: the threat is directed against Christianity (Bolsonaro, Trump, Putin, Salvini), Islam (Erdoğan), or the Hindu character of India (Modi).

Sometimes the alleged threat is directed against the institutions and the democratic order which, in the twisted logic of authoritarianism, then need to be subverted to be maintained. (Most state coups try to justify themselves as an attempt to maintain the existing order and rule of law—by suspending the latter.) In all these cases, it is necessary to build some original national identity that has to be protected against attacks from external or internal forces (Islamic terrorists, migrants, foreigners, LGBT+ people, etc.), which operate more or less overtly (conspiracy theories abound among authoritarian leaders and voters) and can be more or less clearly identified with certain social groups. During the Cold War, for example, the Red Scare was widely used to justify state coups all over the world (often backed by the US government). Revealingly, the Soviet Union adopted the same strategy to justify the repression of popular protests and even the invasion of allied countries, such as in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968).

In these cases, the regime denounced conspiracies concocted by foreign nations and their local accomplices, that is, by external and internal enemies cooperating to subvert the legitimate popular government.

Generally speaking, however, authoritarian governments try to implement policies that aim to modify a status quo that they deem unacceptable because it allegedly violates the traditional values that they consider supreme and eternal, for example, the triads of “God, Fatherland, and Family” and “God, Family, and Property.” Bolsonaro’s campaign motto “Brazil above everything, God above everyone” is a good example of this attitude, notwithstanding the absence of “family” (which, however, Bolsonaro has vowed to protect against so-called Gender Ideology).⁶

2.3 Authoritarian moralism

From this point of view, authoritarian governments are moralistic governments that justify their political actions by referring to (allegedly) higher moral values. Some of this attitude can even “spill over” and affect other powers, especially the judiciary, which then starts taking decisions and applying sentences not only based on positive law (of codes, of constitutional articles, or even of explicit constitutional principles) but also or mostly based on moral principles that are not present in the codes or that even go against the letter of the law and legally established procedures. When the Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Barroso defined judges as the “moral vanguard” of the country, he was assuming an authoritarian posture, putting the presumed moral authority of judges above the written constitution, other constitutionally established powers, and the processes of democratic decision-making.⁷ Of course, the decision about what counts as a supreme moral value is up to the judges or the political leaders and their supporters.

As with every moralism, authoritarianism is intolerant and firmly opposes every form of moral pluralism. This can at least partially explain the internal tensions of the Bolsonaro government in which different axiological postures are represented: traditionalism, anti-leftist reaction, fascism, neoliberalism, libertarianism, Christian fundamentalism, and so on.

⁶ Bolsonaro was also very eager to help his own family, particularly his sons, who are all politicians against whom many inquiries for different forms of corruption have been opened.

⁷ This is true even if Barroso explicitly positioned himself against Bolsonaro and his actions. On the causes of Barroso’s attitude, see Pinzani, 2020.

Generally, though, authoritarian governments are characterized by a certain internal cohesion around values whose basis may (or may not) be religion (PiS, Erdoğan, and Modi), nationalism (Orbán, Salvini, and Trump), nostalgia for a glorious past (Johnson), or a combination of these options (Bolsonaro ticks all three). For example, the very name of PiS, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or Law and Justice, highlights the intention of defending law and order from a concept of justice inspired by a fundamentalist Catholic ideology. Paradoxically, the PiS government repeatedly violates state law, or the constitution, or modifies it so much that its original intentions are turned upside down. The name “Law and Justice” indicates, therefore, that what its members consider to be the real concept of justice ought to orient the law, even if this requires rewriting the existing laws. Authoritarianism is thus the political face of moralism. But there are two provisos here.

First, authoritarian politicians do not always seem to firmly believe in the values they profess to defend. Or at least, they do so selectively. Consider, for example, those politicians who define themselves as Catholic and then have a sex or family life that is incompatible with Catholic doctrine, or those who consider themselves to be patriotic and then sell the natural resources of their country to foreign companies or even to foreign governments. This is not tantamount to claiming that such politicians are mere opportunists whose only interest is power (although this might often be the case). Indeed, a selective perception of the causes and values to defend is common among people in general, not only authoritarian politicians, although in the particular case of the latter it appears to be in strident contrast with the proclaimed goals.

Second, in traditional authoritarianism, there is always an attempt to save face: the government or its members try to pass themselves off as democrats and to convince their citizens and international public opinion that they want to respect democratic institutions, when in reality they are undermining them. The only exceptions until now have been the military juntas installed after coups, for example, in Brazil (1964) or Chile (1973). But even on these occasions, the military tried to justify their actions by claiming that they were protecting democracy against the threat of a communist regime that the democratically elected presidents (respectively Goulart and Allende) allegedly wanted to establish. In other words, they defended a “temporary” suspension of democracy for democracy’s sake, although they never clarified what they meant by “temporary.” In both cases, the “suspension” lasted twenty years. Some contemporary authoritarian governments or leaders take a similar attitude, swearing on the democratic character of their

anti-democratic policies. In recent times, however, a new kind of authoritarian politician has emerged; one who openly glorifies anti-democratic ideas and values; openly defends racist, classist, misogynist, homophobic, and xenophobic positions; and welcomes the use of state violence against certain social groups (migrants, criminals, antiracist or anti-fascist demonstrators, etc.). These authoritarian politicians do not even pretend to be democratic or hide their position behind traditional, dog-whistle-filled conservative rhetoric; rather, they assume a violent, aggressive posture and are not afraid to openly proclaim their intentions of radically subverting democratic institutions and values, starting with human rights. This kind of discourse is only possible in the context of growing polarization and extremization within the public sphere.

3. On the authoritarian personality

This leads us to the last aspect of authoritarianism that I would like to briefly discuss in this chapter. Authoritarian regimes, when they result from democratic elections and not from coups, can establish and maintain themselves only if a sufficiently large part of the electorate demonstrates what has been called the “authoritarian personality” (Adorno et al., 1950). The empirical research that Adorno and his colleagues conducted in the 1940s on this phenomenon has been heavily criticized for its methodology and typology. Similarly, there has been strong resistance to the idea that individuals can have a personality that facilitates their adhesion to authoritarian political projects. Therefore, instead of a psychoanalytical explanation or one broadly based on individual psychology, an increasing number of authors prefer to adopt the perspective of social psychology. Going against the idea of authoritarian features within the individual personality, they highlight the relevance of specific emotions in politics, in general, and in contributing to the success of authoritarianism, in particular. The emotion most often mentioned in this context is resentment (Engels, 2015, Cohen, 2019 and, more specifically on Brazil, Kehl, 2020).

Referring to this emotion or affection (authors do not agree on the right term) is quite problematic, particularly when it comes to identifying its alleged causes. Who precisely is the resentful person who backs an authoritarian government and its subversive policies? Authors offer a wide spectrum of candidates: for example, men who feel threatened by “emancipated” women, heterosexual men who think homosexuals threaten their masculinity, unemployed people who blame migrants for allegedly taking their jobs, or members of the white lower-middle class who feel their

privileges have been eroded by the socioeconomic ascension of the black lower classes (a phenomenon that is often mentioned in analyses of contemporary Brazil, e.g., in Singer, 2018). Resentment leads people to not only openly express their hatred and to discriminate against people they deem different, but sometimes to have recourse to violence and even to homicide. They also tend to vote for politicians who share their prejudices. However, there are other possible causes of resentment that do not produce this. The different forms of chauvinism, homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and classism aimed at women, LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities, and poor people should provoke resentment in their victims too and move them to react on their part with hate, prejudice, and violence. But this does not happen. The concept of resentment, therefore, seems to be insufficient explanation and might even offer a justification or rationalization for the attitudes of those who are “resentful.” Furthermore, the kind of resentment described, for example, by Arlie Hochschild in her study of Trump voters (Hochschild, 2016), seems to obey a logic contrary to that sketched by Nietzsche in his path-breaking theorization of resentment (Nietzsche, 2013). The resentful persons, in this case, are not “slaves” who hate their “masters;” on the contrary, even though they live in a condition of disadvantage and precariousness, they occupy a higher position within their society than the object of their hate. They do not resent those who are above them (as in the case of Nietzsche’s slaves), but rather those who are below them. Resentment of so-called liberal elites is just a consequence of the fact that these elites defend those who are allegedly the cause and the object of resentment: namely, women, members of ethnic minorities, poor people, and so on. While, for example, the Koch brothers and Rupert Murdoch also belong to the elite, there is no resentment against them—although they belong to a purely economic and political elite and seem to share with the resentful ones their hatred for certain groups. This theory of resentment cannot, however, explain why a billionaire should feel resentment towards those who need social benefits to survive or those who are victims of violence for the mere reason of being who they are (women, LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities, etc.). The theory describes resentment but does not clearly explain how it is born and what causes it.

For this reason, it is useful to return to Adorno’s concept of the authoritarian personality, but to free it from an orthodox psychoanalytical perspective and look for a version that is more sensitive to the different national and social contexts in which such a personality develops. This is not the place to elaborate on this theory, of course. However, I would like to advance a hypothesis. Even if we admit, following Adorno and his colleagues, that the percentage of individuals who have an authoritarian personality within a

specific society remains more or less constant in time, we can claim that these individuals demonstrate their authoritarian traits in a more or less explicit and aggressive way depending on external social circumstances. It is improbable, for instance, that there were no racist people in Italy in the 1970s; however, racism has only become a widespread phenomenon in Italian society in recent years for specific reasons (e.g., because Italy ceased to be a country from which people emigrate and started attracting immigrants). It is the task of the social scientist to identify these circumstances, which may be local or global. For this reason, attempts at finding a single explanation for the rise of authoritarian governments in different countries run the risk of not explaining anything at all: they neglect local peculiarities or are too generic and use vague categories like “globalization losers,” “left behind,” or “resentful.” Although such categories correctly point to one aspect of the phenomenon, they do not help to identify its causes. A theory of authoritarian personality, as general as it may be, must always go with social analyses that are unavoidably parochial and local.

Hopefully, I have offered some elements here that might aid a better understanding of authoritarianism in general and, in particular, the kind of authoritarianism that has found its expression in Bolsonaro, his government, and his voters. Whether this is just a temporary phenomenon or whether Brazilian society and many other societies are drifting towards authoritarian regimes for good or for a long time, however, remains to be seen.

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CHAPTER 2

THE RISKS OF NEO-PENTECOSTALISM TO BRAZILIAN DEMOCRACY

AYLTON DURÃO

§1. Pentecostalism

Due to enormous population growth over the past decades, Brazil¹ has become, in absolute terms, the country with the largest Catholic population in the world, far surpassing countries of southern Western Europe and Mexico; however, paradoxically, at the time when it quantitatively reached its highest all-time peak, the percentage of Catholics decreased significantly, due to three concise factors²: (1) the self-affirmation of the identity of adherents of spiritism and religions of African origin, previously oppressed by religious prejudice; (2) recognition of the condition of atheism, agnosticism or being “without religion”; but mainly (3) basically Pentecostalism¹ or Neo-Pentecostalism², owing to Protestantism’s vertiginous growth³.

Pentecostalism began in 1906 with the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles promoted by Pastor William Seymour (Stemback 2012). It quickly spread

¹ The Brazilian population went from 51.9 million inhabitants in 1950 to 190.7 million in 2010 (IBGE, 2011) and is estimated to be 214 million in 2022 (IBGE, 2022).

² According to IBGE (2012), the percentage of Catholics: 99,7% (1872); 91,8% (1970); 89,9% (1980); 83% (1991); 76,3% (2000); 64,6% (2010); and the percentage of Protestants: 5,2% (1970); 6,6% (1980); 9% (1991); 15,4% (2000); 22,2% (2010). According to DATAFOLHA (2016, 11), Catholics, 50% and Protestants, 29%; (UOL, 2020) Catholics, 50% and Protestants, 31%. According to PoderData (2022): Catholics 42%; evangelicals 29%, without religion 15%, spiritists/kardecists 6%, umbanda or candomblé 3%.

³ The division in Protestantism in relation to the Brazilian population, in 2010: mission, 4.1%; 10.4% (IBGE, 2012). In 2016: non-Pentecostal, 7%; 22% (DATAFOLHA, 2016, 11).

around the world, becoming the dominant version in Protestantism. It is based on events that occurred during the Jewish ceremony of Pentecost, at which Christians, baptized by the Holy Spirit shortly after the Assumption of Jesus, were genuinely able to perform miracles similar to those of Jesus himself, speaking in and interpreting unknown tongues, making prophecies, having visions, performing healings, and casting out demons as well as raising the dead (Stemback, 2012).

The gifts of the Holy Spirit were needed in the early days of Christianity to assist conversion, especially of the Gentiles, but their powers gradually dissipated as they moved away from the coming of Jesus and, with the consolidation of the Christian Churches, the Bible became the major form of manifestation of God's will (Grudem, 1996, 343).

Consequently, the belief in cessationism became hegemonic and accordingly, the Pentecostal gifts of baptism by the Holy Spirit ceased over time, although they never completely disappeared. Nevertheless, they came to manifest themselves in some special people, such as those who were blessed and the saints (Grudem, 1996, 31). In opposition, continuationism considers that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have never ceased. This has been strengthened lately, due to the emergence of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century (Ruthven, 2008, 2).

In general, Pentecostalism considers that, notwithstanding, the intensity of the presence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has varied; it was greater soon after the First Coming of Jesus, and then faintly diminished. Once again, it has increased due to the approach of the Second Coming of Jesus (Grudem, 1996, 345).

Whether it is cessationism or continuationism that is accepted, Pentecostalism considers that there is a revival of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of the Second Coming of Jesus.

Therefore, the first fundamental characteristic of Pentecostalism is the belief that "Jesus is coming back." Naturally, this is also a belief common to all Christians, but for Pentecostals, it is not only a promise of an occurrence in an indefinite future, but also a promise that the Lord Jesus will return "still in our days" (Phillips, 2021, 2).

All things considered, as a consequence of the immediate return of Jesus, the second fundamental difference arises between classical Christian doctrines and Pentecostalism. While the former considers that the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifest themselves in an extraordinary way in some chosen

people, at least in the historical moment that humanity exists, the latter understands that all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit, and spiritual gifts are therefore shared universally and generally among Church members (Phillips, 2021, 6).

In this sense, Pentecostalism is characterized by the conception that baptism in the Holy Spirit allows any Christian to have some of the gifts attributed to Jesus, thus extolling the reality of speaking in tongues, prophesying, having visions, healing the sick (including their wickedness), casting out demons and even raising the dead (Phillips, 2021, 6).

Singularly, these gifts manifest themselves differently among devotees, for believers might have distinct gifts. Moreover, there is possibly a hierarchy among Church members, since the most relevant gifts such as healing, the expulsion of demons and the resuscitation of the dead, are reserved exclusively for Church leaders. In any case, all of the faithful may participate in these gifts, not always individually, but instead collectively, gathered as a Church.

Christianity considers that the Second Coming of Jesus will be preceded by Revelation. In this sense, although Pentecostals vehemently insist on biblical passages where no one knows the exact moment of Jesus' return, meaning that it could happen at any moment, the third fundamental characteristic of Pentecostalism is the pressing search for synchronized signs demonstrating that Revelation has already begun. Therefore, it is necessary for the Church to be prepared (Phillips, 2021, 4).

Evidently, the threat of the end times also serves as either an argument to preserve the faithfulness of Church members to the doctrine and customs that are preached, or an incentive for the conversion of new members. Due to their belief in the approach of Jesus' return and the consequent salvation of true believers, Pentecostals, far from fearing the harrowing biblical description of the Great Tribulation, are longing for the immediate beginning of Revelation.

In fact, Pentecostalism considers that these three phenomena feed backwards in a circular way, because the Second Coming of Jesus refers to the signs and wonders arising from the revival of spiritual gifts from the baptism by the Holy Spirit and the signs of Revelation, as well as the increase and generalization of cases of spiritual gifts, associated with the "unequivocal" signs of Revelation that prove the immediate Second Coming of Jesus.