



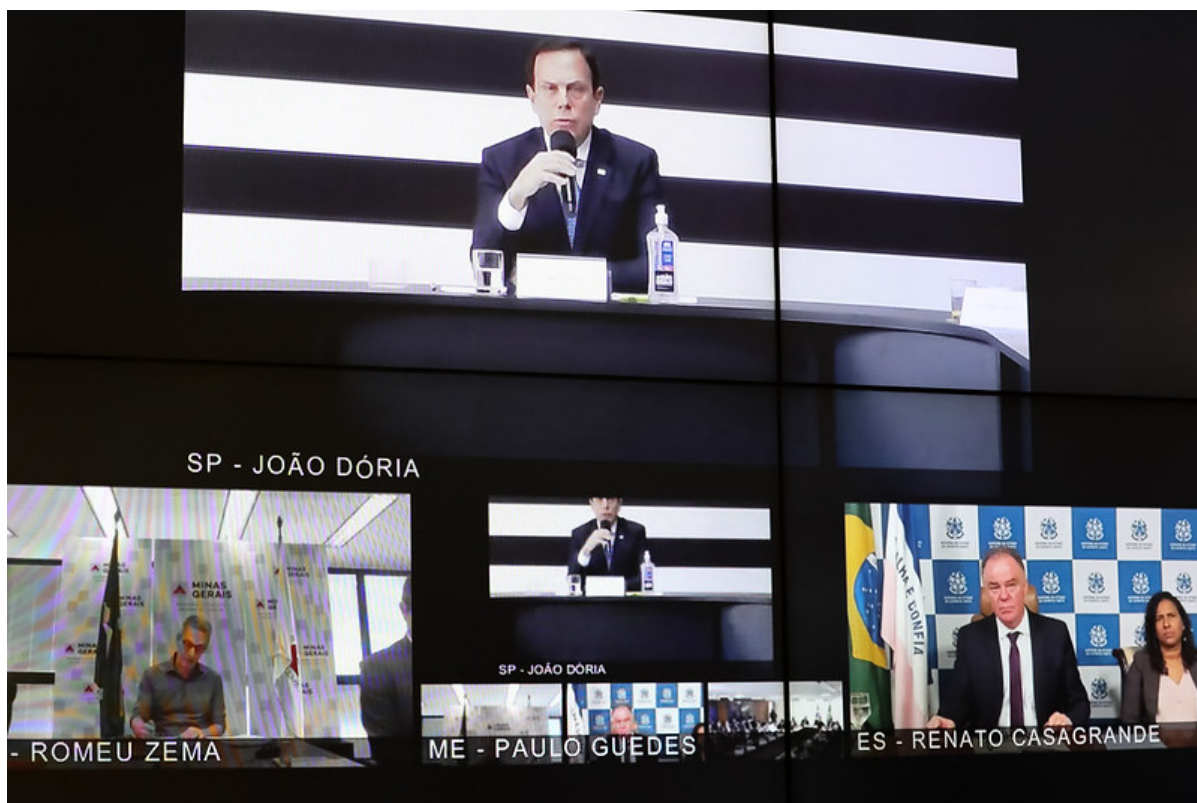
## Daily Brief on Brazilian Politics

March 25, 2020

### **Bolsonaro's controversial speech**

Last night, President Jair Bolsonaro made a nationally televised speech where he went on the offense against the media, called measures taken by local governments "hysteria," and told Brazil's population to continue to live their lives as normal. The speech was widely criticized by both media and politicians. In the streets of many cities, the *panelaço* (the banging of pots and pans) could be heard loudly. Bolsonaro has clearly chosen to continue on his divisive path, instead of calling for unity. This is a story in progress.

- In a nationally televised speech, Bolsonaro accused the media of spreading fear and urged people to continue their normal lives.
- São Paulo has entered quarantine with commercial establishments no longer being allowed to receive customers. Rio de Janeiro has closed down most commercial establishments.
- During the speech last night and in a video conference with governors this morning, Bolsonaro criticized governors for taking restrictive measures to counter the spread of the virus.



João Doria (above), governor of São Paulo, and other governors of southeastern states, in a meeting with President Bolsonaro this morning. *Photo: Marcos Corrêa/PR (CC BY 2.0).*

**In a nationally televised speech, Bolsonaro accused the media of spreading fear and urged people to continue their normal lives.**

Speaking last night to the Brazilian population, President Bolsonaro lauded the work of his government so far, especially his health minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta, and added that with the arrival of the virus in Brazil, it had been necessary “to contain ... the panic, the hysteria,” while at the same time formulate a strategy to “save lives and avoid mass unemployment.”

Then he claimed that the majority of the media had done the exact opposite, spreading “the sensation of fear” through using Italy as the foremost example of the virus’s impact. Bolsonaro argued that the comparison is false because Italy has a large number of older people and “a climate totally different from ours.” In this way, according to the President, the media had used a worst-case scenario to trigger an “absolute hysteria throughout our country.” He emphasized that “balance and truth” is important.

“The virus arrived,” he continued his speech, “it is being tackled by us, and will soon pass.” He emphasized that life must continue and jobs must be kept, adding that “we must, indeed, return to normality.”

Bolsonaro criticized “some few state and municipal authorities,” without specifying which ones, urging them to “abandon the ‘scorched earth’ concept – the prohibition of transports, the closing down of commerce, and mass confinement.”

The President pointed out that the people at risk are those over 60 years old and asked: “So then, why close the schools?”

Bolsonaro said that people should follow the guidelines given by the Ministry of Health. The president then added that “in his particular case,” he would not need to worry about a potential infection due to his “athletic past.” The virus would at most give him “a little flu,” he claimed. Bolsonaro has in the past called the virus “a little flu” (“*gripezinha*”).

The President said that research in Brazil and the US of chloroquine had been showing positive results. Donald Trump has also spoken positively about the medication. Another medication that both presidents has talked positively about as a potential antidote for the coronavirus is hydroxychloroquine. It was quickly sold out in Brazilian pharmacies after rumors of its effectiveness against the virus, becoming unavailable for people that needed it for other diseases. A few days ago, both became classified as “controlled products” to ensure their accessibility for those in real need of them.

“Without panic or hysteria, as I have been saying from the beginning, we are going to defeat the virus and be proud to be living in this new Brazil that has everything, yes, to be a great nation,” Bolsonaro said at the end of his speech.

### **Reactions in Congress to the speech**

Reactions to the President’s speech were swift. The President of the Senate, Davi Alcolumbre, tweeted that in “this grave moment, the country needs a serious and responsible leadership.”

“We [referring to the senate vice-president, Antonio Anastasia] consider as grave the position expressed by the President of the Republic today, on national television, attacking containment measures against COVID-19,” he continued, adding that “now is not the time to attack the press or other public administrators.”

The president of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber of the Brazilian congress), Rodrigo Maia, retweeted Senator Alcolombre's message while adding his own: "The President's pronouncement was wrong in attacking the press, governors, and public health specialists."

Simone Tebet, president of the Senate Constitutional and Judiciary Committee, also released a message, saying that the error was in "the timing, form and content." Adding that, in the meanwhile, "we are voting on projects that frees up extra money to healthcare and subsidies to companies, in order to protect the most vulnerable and guarantee employment."

### **Bolsonaro in video conference with governors this morning**

This morning, the President had a meeting with governors from Brazil's southeastern region, which include São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

The common opinion expressed by most governors after the heated meeting was a lack of coordination on the part of the federal government. They viewed Bolsonaro's actions as an attempt to make politics and not taking the situation seriously. The measures taken by state and local governments have in general been more severe than those proposed by Bolsonaro, such as restricting public transport and closing non-essential commercial establishments. Bolsonaro has told governors not to take restrictive measures that could harm the economy.

Yesterday, São Paulo governor João Doria announced that that the state would enter a quarantine lasting until April 7. Business are no longer allowed to receive customers, but can continue with administrative work in locals closed to the public. Exceptions were given to sectors considered essential – such as grocery stores, food delivery and pharmacies, as well as cleaning and transport services – will remain open.

During the meeting, Governor Doria urged "serenity, calm and balance." If the federal government tried to confiscate ventilators, he said, the state would take the case to court. The federal government, through its health ministry, tried to confiscate ventilators from the city of Recife, state capital of Pernambuco. The action was temporarily blocked by the regional court, whereafter the City of Recife and the federal government agreed to let the ventilators stay put.

Bolsonaro said that Doria had no right to criticize, because he was elected with

the President's support. Elections for governor and president occur simultaneously in Brazil, and Doria made an appeal to Bolsonaro's supporters by promoting a more aggressive public security policy that included giving more leniency to lethal action in police operations. Once elected, Doria tried to distance himself from Bolsonaro – many believe in order run for the presidency in 2022.

“If you don't stand in the way, Brazil will take off and exit the crisis,” Bolsonaro told the São Paulo governor, adding: “Get off the stage!”

### **In other news... still related to the coronavirus**

The death toll from the virus has increased to 48 deaths – an increase of 12 deaths since yesterday and the fastest so far. In yesterday's brief we reported 34 deaths caused by the virus. There are now 2,292 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country, but most likely the real number is higher.

The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Rodrigo Maia, has supported the proposal to reduce public servants' salaries by 20% to help combat the coronavirus. In his view, such a measure should exclude employees with lower income and those that are immediately involved in the fight against COVID-19. He expressed his support in an interview with *Rádio Bandeirantes*.

### **THE CONGRESSIONAL AGENDA**

**19:00 (GMT -3):** An “extraordinary deliberative session” has been called for deputies (lower chamber of Congress) to discuss a bill facilitating the implementation of digital tools into the Brazilian bureaucracy. Such implementation has become ever more urgent with the coronavirus situation growing more serious each day.

*More news from Brazil tomorrow!*



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