



Daily Brief on Brazilian Politics

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Allies worry about Bolsonaro's polarizing statements

Bolsonaro's health minister has said that he will criticize the president when he deviates from technical recommendations. Earlier in the week, the minister seemed to want to avoid confrontation by asserting that many states' isolation measures went too far too early. Bolsonaro, in turn, said he would fire the minister if he criticized him. The next day, Bolsonaro was out greeting people on the street. Most of his allies that do not directly criticize him say he should opt for dialogue. But the president remains intent on continuing his increasingly lonely battle.

- Brazil had 136 deaths caused by the coronavirus as of Sunday, 17:00 Brasília time (GMT -3). 98 of the deaths occurred in São Paulo. The number of confirmed infections stands at 4,256.
- The government's "Brazil cannot stop" campaign, that promoted limited isolation and a return to normalcy, has been stopped by a federal court. The government's press office denies the campaign ever existed.
- Congressional allies of the president and government officials, including the health minister and the vice-president, think Bolsonaro's aggressive campaign against the directives of his own health ministry is the wrong approach. They appeal for dialogue with state and municipal authorities.



President Bolsonaro in a press conference on Friday. Photo: [Marcos Corrêa/PR \(CC BY 2.0\)](#).

Rio judge prohibits Bolsonaro administration's anti-isolation campaign and the government denies its existence

Last Friday, a video promoting a return to normalcy, produced at the request of the Bolsonaro government, circulated the web. The hashtag #OBrasilNãoPodeParar (“Brazil cannot stop”) was distributed through government communication channels. It followed various statements by President Bolsonaro criticizing isolation measures for society as a whole, beyond just risk categories, like the ones many Brazilian states have taken.

On Saturday, a judge at Rio de Janeiro’s Federal Court prohibited the government from publishing and spreading the video. In the judge’s opinion, the government cannot spread information that goes against scientifically based directives, such as the Ministry of Health’s own recommendations. The decision came after a request by the Public Prosecutor’s Office.

The government’s press office released a message claiming that there was no publicity campaign called “Brazil cannot stop.” The press office on Friday still had the slogan on their official Twitter and Instagram profiles, but they were later taken down.

On Wednesday, one day after President Bolsonaro made his speech urging a return to normalcy, the press office published messages supporting isolation restricted to risk categories only. The messages said that victims of the

coronavirus are rare and ended with the hashtag #OBrazilNãoPodeParar (“Brazil cannot stop”).

The message released by the press office on Saturday claimed that it was a lie that the campaign “Brazil cannot stop” had ever existed, saying it was “fake news” made up by “certain communication vehicles.” Earlier in the day, before the judge’s decision, the press office had acknowledged the existence of the campaign video but said it had been “experimental.”

Bolsonaro’s health official speaks out and allies of Bolsonaro support dialogue about how to confront COVID-19

Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta appealed on Saturday for a “favorable environment” in regard to discussions about the coronavirus, to be able to form a pact between the federal government and regional authorities. He refuted President Bolsonaro’s statement that the coronavirus is just a “small flu” and asked that the president refrains from diminishing the gravity of the situation in his public statements.

The minister said that if the death toll reached a thousand people, it would equal four Boeing aircrafts. “Are we ready for the worst scenario,” he asked, “with military trucks transporting bodies through the streets?”

Mandetta said that if the president continued to treat the crisis lightly, he would be forced to criticize him. Bolsonaro replied that, if that were the case, he would fire the minister. On Sunday the president visited various places around Brasília, the federal capital, moving among crowds while greeting and hugging people. At one time, Bolsonaro told the people surrounding him that he felt like decreeing tomorrow that all commercial activities should go back to normal. The visits were not on the official agenda.

Bolsonaro published messages on Twitter from his tour in areas around Brasília, but Twitter later removed them for violating the rules in vigor during the coronavirus pandemic. By greeting people on the street and promoting a return to normalcy, Bolsonaro was effectively breaking the guidelines of his own health ministry, which triggered Twitter’s removal.

The health minister’s comments come after press statements earlier in the week where he tried to minimize potential friction with the president. At the time, he said that isolation measures imposed by various state governments, such as limiting commerce and prohibiting crowds, were “precipitated.” He also expressed worry about the economy, a nod to President Bolsonaro.

Congressional caucuses supporting the president expressed concern with Bolsonaro’s approach. Important allies, such as gun supporters, evangelicals,

farmers, and truck drivers, saw the president's statements as a communication failure, wishing for a less conflictual attitude. They did not think it appropriate to call COVID-19 a "small flu" and thought it unnecessary to "add fuel to the fire" in this manner, according to the newspaper *O Globo*.

In an interview with *Folha de S.Paulo* on Saturday, Vice-President Hamilton Mourão said that there is a "lack of coordination" in the response to the coronavirus and that a middle-ground is needed in the discussions.

Governors and mayors react

The governor of São Paulo, a state in quarantine until at least April 7, questioned Bolsonaro's strategy.

"More than 50 countries are in quarantine. It is the worst health crisis in the world. Almost half the planet's population is at home. The whole world is wrong? And Bolsonaro is right?" the governor, João Doria, asked rhetorically.

Rio de Janeiro's governor, Wilson Witzel, will renew his decree that closed non-essential commercial activity and prohibited larger gatherings of people, as well as recommending that people stay home.

The National Front of Mayors, an organization that represents mayors in Brazilian cities with a population over 80,000, said it found the government's position on how to deal with the virus dubious and asked for clarification. If the government did not clarify, the only alternative would be to take the case to court and demand that civil and criminal responsibilities for local health measures, and their consequences, be transferred to the presidency.

More viral news

Bolsonaro's government will appeal against a decision by a federal judge that removed religious gatherings from the list of essential services. Last Thursday, the president edited the decree prescribing essential services, adding religious activities to the list. The judge's opinion said that "the access to religious temples and lotteries stimulates agglomeration and circulation of people."

On Friday, the government restricted accesses for all countries to Brazil for a one-month period. Previously, European citizens, as well as citizens from some countries in Asia and South American countries bordering Brazil, had been prohibited from entering the country.

We will be back tomorrow with more news from Brazil!

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