



100 DAYS JAIR BOLSONARO

Has the new administration lived up to expectations?

THE
BRAZILIAN REPORT 

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ABOUT THE BRAZILIAN REPORT

The Brazilian Report is an independent English-language media outlet uniquely positioned to offer an insider's view on current affairs in Brazil. We put the news in perspective in order to understand the issues and allow you to forecast trends.

As a team of award-winning, independent Brazilian journalists, we at The Brazilian Report are uniquely positioned to give you an insider's view into the complexities and nuances underpinning our country's political, economic, and social situations.

The Brazilian Report gives you the critical tools needed to stay informed, letting you come to your own conclusions.

TBR Daily Briefing, a daily newsletter every weekday morning which covers Brazil's political and economic affairs;

TBR Weekly, a weekly report, summing up what happened during the week and a special topic selected by the redaction;

Brazil On The Record, a weekly report, compiling and explaining the most important laws and decrees published on the Brazil's Federal Register (Diário oficial da União);

TBR Website, new, in-depth articles on aspects of Brazil every day from our award-winning journalists and industry experts;

Explaining Brazil, a weekly podcast.

INTRO

The 100-mark bears enormous symbolism in politics. While there's nothing particularly special about it—after all, a presidential term is 1,461 days long—the milestone is often used to assess how an administration is doing, and to observe if any real changes have been put into action from the previous administration.

It is also believed to be the best window for a new administration to pass unpopular legislation or reforms. After all, the new leader traditionally enjoys popular support from a recent election win, and there has rarely been enough time for grudges with Congress to develop. Furthermore, the next election is far away, meaning there is time to recover from any political hit unpopular measures may cause.

Jair Bolsonaro set a high bar for himself. He promised to end corruption and horse trading, recover the sluggish economy, and put an end to political correctness. So far, however, the government has little to show for.

The patchwork of different—and often conflicting—political forces has proven to be ineffective. With different wings bickering with each other, the administration has made a habit out of starting unnecessary fires.

As political scientist Maurício Santoro told *The Brazilian Report*, if the first 100 days are a honeymoon period, “for Mr. Bolsonaro, this honeymoon started with an incident of domestic violence, and someone trashing the hotel suite.”

In all areas, the government's performance seems to have been affected by officials' lack of experience (in some areas, of competence, too). Even the economic team—one the most prepared ever assembled—has wasted time. Instead of tweaking the pension reform bill presented by former President Michel Temer, the sitting administration decided to present a new bill from scratch—pushing the process back to square one. This has proven to be a mistake, given the government's inability to negotiate with Congress.

If markets began 2019 euphoric about Mr. Bolsonaro, they now seem to look at the president with less kind eyes: a survey by investment bank XP shows that support for the government among market operators has quickly eroded.

The Brazilian Report has spoken to a dozen experts from various fields about Jair Bolsonaro's first steps as president.

We hope you will enjoy this report,

Gustavo Ribeiro

Editor in chief



Jair Bolsonaro was elected Brazil's 38th president and given a huge responsibility: to make the country grow again and avoid the state going bankrupt. This significant task has been delegated to his Minister of the Economy, Paulo Guedes, who has been regarded by investors as the administration's most precious asset thanks to his ultra-libertarian philosophy.

In less than two months, Mr. Guedes and his team presented their proposal for a grand overhaul of the Brazilian pension system—a reform on which the country's economy depends.

Paulo Guedes had the option to tweak the reform bill Michel Temer submitted while still in office. Instead, he chose to draft his own bill from scratch, pushing the legislative process back to square one. The minister may have underestimated the government's inability to negotiate with Congress—but now he realizes how politics can get in the way.

But Mr. Guedes' agenda is not limited to the pension reform. Privatizations, reducing the size of the state, fighting fraud in the social security system, and opening up Brazil's economy to world trade were high on the list of priorities. Where does the administration stand on its first economic promises?

An economy in agony

Brazil grew only 1.1 percent in 2018 and the first numbers of 2019 are not much better. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) reported that Brazil's industry grew by only 0.7 percent between January and February, below the already low expectations of 1 percent. Unemployment remains rampant, while consumer and business confidence is falling.

“The first days of the Jair Bolsonaro administration were worse than we thought. We expected an adaptation phase, but what we see is a president who is very distant from economic issues. He is not committed to the reform, as his past suggested, and he is delaying the process. The market has finally understood that it will take time to approve it and expectations are starting to decrease. To have economic prosperity, you need political stability. We see this year as a transition period for the economy; 2020 may have a better performance if the reform is approved, but we have doubts due to [Mr. Bolsonaro's] instability.”

Sergio Vale, chief-economist at MB Associados

More Brazil, Less Brasília

Mr. Bolsonaro did fulfill his promise to reduce the number of cabinet ministries, creating “super-ministries” in order to save money and produce a more streamline structure. Infrastructure auctions inherited from the previous administration were successfully accomplished and there are more to come. Inside the government, coordination remains a challenge and, in Congress, the pension reform is overshadowing all other proposals.

“It is not easy to restructure a cabinet. The government is feeling the political cost of it now and there is also an administrative cost. The ministries are still being organized. It will take time to be successful.”

[...]

“The Ministry of Infrastructure corresponds to the positive move to regroup things. The minister also announced the merging of regulatory agencies which were created incorrectly and should never have been separated. The government is working on it, but the legislative proposal is waiting for a better moment. Waiting for the pension reform bill is a problem in terms of organizing the government.”

Carlos Ari Sundfeld, Ph.D. in Law from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, and founding professor of the Fundação Getulio Vargas Law School

“Concessions and privatizations are the positive sides of the government, the auctions were a hit. I think we are going to move forward on infrastructure, there are auctions planned for railways and roads. One of the most interesting things to follow is Eletrobras. There are a lot of uncertainties around it, but I see a chance that it will be privatized in 2020. And the same for Correios over the next four years.”

[...]

“The government wishes to move forward with the sanitation decree and telecommunications law, which have both stalled in Congress for so long. It is not likely they will move forward in the first half of the year, because of the pension reform, but they are likely to go through in the second half. They could be analyzed alongside the tax reform.”

Sergio Vale, chief-economist at MB Associados

Markets on a rollercoaster

The mood of investors appears pegged to news from the pension reform process in such a manner that Ibovespa, Brazil's benchmark stock index, reached its all-time high of 100,000 points and fell 7,000 points in the same week. Although optimism still lingers, market movers are becoming more cautious—and government support has rapidly waned.

“The approval or rejection of the pension bill will affect the price of every Brazilian asset. The foreign exchange rate touched BRL 4 against the USD, which is high, because of this tension. If the reform is not approved, the USD will be negotiated around BRL 4 to BRL 4.10, a ceiling observed by Brazil's Central Bank. But the Real will appreciate if the bill is approved.”

Sergio Vale, chief-economist at MB Associados

“After the first clash between the president sons' and the House Speaker, there has been an important change. The president's meeting with political leaders was well received, but I think the market will remain cautious in order to avoid surprises. Companies will soon report first quarter results and we'll see how things progress in light of a better political mood, but I think Ibovespa will go back to 100,000 points. On the other hand, the foreign exchange rate has changed and I think the market won't disarm its protections until clearer advances are seen, and a better environment for emerging markets abroad.”

Daniel Alberini, manager at CTM Investimentos

With or without Paulo Guedes?

Questioned by lawmakers if he would stay in the government if the pension reform does not go through, Mr. Guedes said he is not “attached to the job, but will not be so irresponsible as to quit at the first sign of defeat”. His comments have sparked controversy and fear about economic projects if the administration’s main strategist leaves. For the time being, Mr. Guedes remains active in advocating for the reform and even went beyond his technical role, visiting Congress and campaigning for the reform alongside business leaders.

“My feeling is that Congress will approve a deeply watered-down proposal and he won’t stay in the job by the end of the year. Without a relevant privatization agenda, without relevant tax reform, Paulo Guedes will have no reason to stay, because he is an authentic reformist in a government whose reformist principles are based on a headstrong right that accepted anything.”

Marcio Holland, Ph.D. in Economics, professor at Fundação Getulio Vargas

“I don’t see him leaving today. I think it is a bit early to think about that and things change a lot in politics. His visit to the House of Representatives’ Constitution and Justice Committee was excellent. The only problem is that he was left alone to defend himself against the opposition. But this is an issue of political organization, not of Paulo Guedes.”

Daniel Alberini, manager at CTM Investimentos



Since the elections, it was clear that President Jair Bolsonaro’s first year in office would be defined by the challenge to balance the public accounts through an overhaul of the social security system. This complex matter is by far the most important item on the government’s agenda—and what may decide the fate of the administration come 2022—but didn’t receive much of the president’s attention so far.

Although the bill reached Congress swiftly, the real battle has not started yet. Analysts and politicians have criticized the government’s negotiation skills and the self-inflicted crises that have overshadowed its priorities. As a result of delays and a sense of inactivity, economic expectations are deteriorating and people are starting to question whether the government will be strong enough to approve not only the pension reform, but further overhauls.

To answer these and other questions, The Brazilian Report reached out to some of the most respected Brazilian experts in politics, economy, and society. Through diverse opinions, we try to understand the present and warn about trends that may define the future of the Jair Bolsonaro administration.

The mother of all reforms?

On February 20, Mr. Bolsonaro delivered the pension reform bill himself in Congress. What started with signs of commitment ended up exposing the government's fragility in terms of dialogue and priorities. While the fight rages on, the president has sent his economic team to the battlefield and diverts attention on Twitter. His apparent lack of commitment generated a growing wave of dissatisfaction among lawmakers, which resulted in clashes with House Speaker Rodrigo Maia, and a consequent slowdown of the bill's process.

"[Jair Bolsonaro] does not have a majority, he does not do political negotiations, he is not convinced about [the pension reform], and neither does his own base. It's a surreal situation and my guess is Congress may take the lead, considering how important the pension reform is to the country".

Marcio Holland, Ph.D. in Economics, professor at Fundação Getulio Vargas

"Initially there's a lack of know-how to deal with Congress, which is totally normal for a first term. We forgot about it as it has been a long time since we've had someone in office who wasn't a major decision-maker before. But it has to be fixed soon and meeting with party leaders is a sign of progress towards negotiation. The point is that the government's will to approve the reform has to be bigger than the opposition's desire to destroy it. Congressmen have to see the spark in the president's eyes. He may not be expressing that the bill is his first, second and third priority as his allies wish he would."

Thiago de Aragão, political analyst and partner at Arko Advice, a consultancy firm

“The chance of not approving the bill is remote because Congress is seen by society as the main group responsible for its approval—even in light of the government’s actions. They will be blamed if the country goes into chaos. So they will approve a reform, but Congress’ reform. And it will be much lighter and less effective than that of Mr. Guedes’.”

Leandro Gabiati, political scientist and director at Dominion consultancy

Other reforms

The economic team has been floating plans to make Brazil a pro-business country, including proposals such as a tax reform. The idea is to open the country commercially while easing bureaucracy, simplifying and lowering taxes to make local companies more competitive. However, given the terrible fiscal scenario, it is unlikely the government will give up on revenue without slashing spending—most of all, if it is not strong enough to do it.

“If they are able to approve the pension reform easily, which I do not see happening, they will be able to present and pass other [reforms]. The pension reform is the thermometer of the government’s strength.”

Jorge Boucinhas, a Postdoc researcher in Law at Université de Nantes, Professor at Fundação Getúlio Vargas Law School

“This government shoots itself in the foot all the time. If they are able to pass a diluted version of pension reform, they won’t be able to do tax reform next year, due to the municipal elections. This government signals that will deliver few reforms.”

Marcio Holland, Ph.D. in Economics, professor at Fundação Getulio Vargas

A tweak from the barracks

Pressured by Congress, the government presented a reform of military pensions. However, as the Armed Forces is one of the president's support bases, he softened the blow by submitting a new career plan alongside the reform, including a number of perks for the military. The result? A mere BRL 10 billion in savings over ten years.

“The pension reform game is harmed by the unambitious project regarding the military. It gives a powerful point for civil servants to find ways to minimize the content of the initial project. The narrative that says that the pension reform is fighting privileges and not only a fiscal issue is weakened by the military bill.”

Rafael Cortez, partner and political scientist at Tendências consultancy

Economy on life support

With GDP growth projections for 2019 being slashed progressively, there's more pressure on the government to approve the pension reform bill—seen as the only solution to balance public accounts, allowing investments and reaffirming the trust of financial actors. However, the longer it takes to pass the bill in Congress, the more doomed the year looks.

“Approving pension reform is not enough for the short term, because Brazil's fiscal issue is way more serious. The effects on economic growth will show up gradually. But our aging process is so fast that we'll need another reform in a matter of 5 to 8 years. It is not a matter of approving the bill and then living in a world of growth, prosperity and balanced public accounts. The reform won't create this situation for Brazil over the coming years, but it will make things better, mostly for state administrations.”

Marcio Holland, Ph.D. in Economics, professor at Fundação Getúlio Vargas



Back in October, the 58 million votes that propelled Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency had a clear wish, over several different platforms: his supporters demanded a rupture with the way politics has been done in the past. Taking on this idea of disruption, Mr. Bolsonaro has reorganized his cabinet, clashed with Brazilian realpolitik, and redefined the way the president uses social media—for better or for worse.

During his first 100 days in power, Mr. Bolsonaro had to deal with some unprecedented circumstances, such as a third surgery to recover from his stabbing in September 2018, and the most deadly environmental disaster in the country's history. The unusual situation was coupled with an extended period of inertia in Congress, due to the Carnival holidays coming later this year, in March. This kept analysts and the population in “wait and see” mode over the government's first months.

However, by now, the government's frailties have been more than exposed. So far, two cabinet ministers have been fired amid government crises, Mr. Bolsonaro party has changed its leadership in the House, and the president has seen unprecedented low popular support for a new head of state in his first three months. But, after all, is this the price to pay for disruption? How long is it going to take for the government to put itself together? Is chaos the new politics?

To answer these and other questions, The Brazilian Report reached out to some of the most respected Brazilian experts in politics, economy, and society.

Through diverse opinions, we can try to understand the present and warn about trends that may trace the future of the Jair Bolsonaro administration.

The Bolsonaro way of doing politics

The involvement of Mr. Bolsonaro's sons in government affairs has only increased since the elections, something is unprecedented in Brazil since its return to democracy. Flávio Bolsonaro, the president's eldest son, dragged the government's image through the dirt during its first days in office, due to the suspicions of illicit enrichment against his advisor Fabrício Queiroz, and links to urban militias in Rio de Janeiro.

Eduardo Bolsonaro is taking on a more prominent role in foreign affairs and Carlos Bolsonaro's social media activity has led to the dismissal of a cabinet minister and a clash with the Congress. Their behavior is drawing criticism from both allies and the opposition, but so far it does not seem that the president is willing to get in their way.

"There have been ups and downs. The family relationship does not seem totally under control and I don't think it will be. Depending on the political timing, his sons attack and retreat, but they tend to respect their father's thoughts. They are very aligned as a political clan."

Leandro Gabiati, political scientist and director at Dominion consultancy

"The family involvement is relevant as long as it is to support their father in what he wants for the country. If it is used to approve the reform, it could be great."

Thiago de Aragão, political analyst and partner at Arko Advice, a consultancy firm

The first defeat

In a demonstration of strength amid the crisis with the government, House representatives decided that the administration must honor investments proposed by lawmakers, which can currently be deferred to future budgets. In the Senate, the government managed to make the measure more gradual, but it doesn't mean the problem is solved. Without space to manage the budget, the government may either disobey the federal spending cap, or there will be a government shutdown.

“This measure just adds pressure to approve the pension bill, otherwise the accounts do not add up. If you total all the social security spending, it's a huge part of the budget, and then you are forced to fulfill investments, it is obvious that it will substantially reduce any margins left to develop public policies. Approving the pension reform becomes way more urgent, relevant and much tougher.”

Marcio Holland, Ph.D. in Economics, professor at Fundação Getulio Vargas

“The family involvement is relevant as long as it is to support their father in what he wants for the country. If it is used to approve the reform, it could be great.”

Thiago de Aragão, political analyst and partner at Arko Advice, a consultancy firm

Musical chairs

Gustavo Bebbiano, one of the president's most loyal party members and a cabinet minister lost his job after an electoral scandal in Jair Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party (PSL). The trigger, however, was pulled by Carlos Bolsonaro, who called the minister a liar on Twitter, only to see Mr. Bebbiano retorting with several leaked audios which proved he did in fact tell the truth. The Ministry of Education has become a source of trouble after a series of controversies and Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez was dismissed on Monday, becoming the second cabinet minister to fall in such a short space of time.

Meanwhile, Chief of Staff Onyx Lorenzoni appears ineffective when it comes to political negotiations and PSL's leadership in Congress is not making much progress to form a cohesive front. The party launched an alternative, making newly-elected member of Congress Joice Hasselmann the new PSL leader in the legislature.

“Mr. Lorenzoni has important political experience, but many lawmakers who knew him previously thought he would not have the status to be a negotiator. Ms. Hasselmann is more inclined to conflict than negotiation, I'm not sure if that was a good idea. But the whole point is that the negotiator's power to make promises comes from the president. So far, the government did not give signs that it is willing to talk. It does not want to do politics. Unfortunately, signals from conversations in Brasilia suggest there are no expectations that it will change.”

Leandro Gabiati

A general under the captain's command

While Mr. Bolsonaro has constantly involved himself in controversy, his vice president, four-star Army general Hamilton Mourão, has positioned himself as a more moderate and pragmatic figure. However, the stark contrast was enough to create rumors of insubordination inside the palace walls.

“Mr. Mourão is a protagonist due to his personal qualities, such as his analytical mind. His role is essential in turbulent times when people can see there's someone more moderate. If well used, this may be a strength for the government.”

Thiago de Aragão

“There is an open war between the president and his vice. It keeps raging on and there is no easy solution for it. I believe this conflict is and will continue to be one of the largest dramas during Bolsonaro's administration.”

Matias Spektor, author and vice-dean of Fundação Getulio Vargas' International Affairs School



No Brazilian leader spent more time abroad during his first 100 days in office than Jair Bolsonaro—and that’s no coincidence. On visits to Switzerland, Chile, the U.S., and Israel, he tried to shape the image of Brazil’s new diplomatic era, “without ideological bias,” drawing both support and criticism. His actions, however, have shown that ideological bias has never been so present in Brazilian diplomacy.

Mr. Bolsonaro’s goal was to promote a 180-degree turn from previous administrations. He decided to remove the Mercosur symbol from the cover of Brazilian passports, join Prosur, a new regional bloc tilted to the right, waive visa requirements to certain developed countries without asking for anything in return, and forge stronger ties with the U.S. by any means necessary.

The true impacts of his actions will be felt with time, but there is no doubt he has already established a clear action plan. After the first shock, he now will have to address matters such as the Venezuela crisis and international trade in an increasingly protectionist world. All of this while balancing the interests of own support base, often contradictory among itself.

Cozying up to Donald Trump

In his first bilateral meeting, Mr. Bolsonaro visited Washington to meet his counterpart and biggest inspiration, President Donald Trump. There, he signed a deal to buy more wheat from Americans, allowed the U.S. to use the Alcântara Launch Center, and waived visa requirements for American tourists visiting Brazil.

In return, Mr. Trump granted his support for Brazil to join the OECD (providing Brazil gives up some perks in the World Trade Organization), as well as gaining priority ally status in NATO, and a pledge to send an inspection team to evaluate Brazilian beef. At the time, analysts considered the meeting was much more about bringing the leaders closer, than their countries.

“He promised to join the U.S. in an attempt to diminish Chinese influence over Latin American economies. In exchange, he would ask for concessions, and that’s what he did in Washington. He brought concrete concessions for the military. He’s got two long-term sources of income for the Army (the Alcântara base and the extra NATO priority ally status) in a time when the state has fiscal issues.”

Matias Spektor, author and vice-dean of Fundação Getulio Vargas’ International Affairs School

“There was no huge gain for Brazil, just promises. The U.S. won an extremely important ally in South America, while Mr. Bolsonaro got to take a photo with Mr. Trump and showed there is a new policy in Brazil.”

Leandro Gabiati, political scientist and director at Dominion consultancy

A “balanced” diplomacy

One of the most radical changes in Brazilian diplomacy is its new position towards the Middle East. During a trip to Israel, Mr. Bolsonaro adopted a totally new approach and even broke some protocols, such as visiting the Wailing Wall accompanied by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

His promise to switch Brazil’s Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem echoed a similar pledge made by Donald Trump, but he has yet to follow through on it. The government considers that it is balancing a policy that was previously tilted due to ideological bias. Potential benefits of technological and business cooperation with Israel were also advertised, but economic sectors—such as meat suppliers—are deeply concerned about an economic backlash from Muslim-majority countries in the region.

“Of course [Muslim-majority] countries object to Brazil getting closer to Israel. So far, they are only calling attention, I do not see any retaliation yet. However, changing the embassy is crossing a line. As long as he does not do that, they will continue buying from Brazil.”

Leandro Gabiati

Pleasing both sides

In spite of the rapprochement with the U.S. and some attacks during the electoral campaign, the new administration expressed its desire to foster trading relations with China. The move is closely watched over by the agribusiness sector, one of Mr. Bolsonaro’s main support bases.

“He has scheduled a trip to China and this time he won’t, by any means, alienate the other piece of his base, agribusiness, and public listed companies.”

Matias Spektor

“During the campaign, he was very critical about putting Chinese capital in Brazil, but it seems he was convinced that it is important to have a bond with them. His visit to China will be all about the economy, not diplomacy.”

Leandro Gabiati

A divided South America

South America is in a delicate situation, largely due to the Venezuelan crisis. Since the electoral campaign, Mr. Bolsonaro has positioned himself against the Nicolás Maduro regime and gathered a lot of international attention in the conflict, as one of the first leaders to recognize Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s rightful president.

Meanwhile, he managed to get closer to leaders aligned to his ideological view, creating a new regional bloc in the area: Prosur. But analysts worry about the lack of unity in the continent and how it may pose difficulties toward integration in trade and political decisions.

“The American government’s idea is to keep high diplomatic pressure on Venezuela, and there is a consensus around that in the Brazilian government. I would not rule out the chance of Brazil changing its laws to impose sanctions on individuals and companies in Venezuela. But military intervention is not considered, because it is not even considered by the U.S. (...)

Brazil’s bilateral relationships with Paraguay and Bolivia will go through their most important moment in 30 years during Mr. Bolsonaro’s administration. Next year, we will negotiate gas tariffs with Bolivia, and that’s why president Evo Morales came to Mr. Bolsonaro’s inauguration ceremony, despite his hostility toward him. And in 2023, we will have a new chapter in the energy tariffs at Itaipu hydroelectric power plant with Paraguay. The negotiations will be tough, but Brazil has an advantage.”

Matias Spektor



President Jair Bolsonaro is the least popular first-term head of state in the first three months of government. His approval rating is comparable to presidents in their second terms—after years taking political hits. This poses a stark contrast to his growing popularity on social media. Despite preaching union in his inauguration speech, the president has sowed division within Brazilian society. Mimicking Donald Trump, Mr. Bolsonaro engaged his loyal social media base through controversial issues, attacking Carnival celebrations, the press, and even his allies.

In his first three months, Mr. Bolsonaro was true to the conservative agenda he has always supported, in fighting what he calls “gender ideology” (a dog-whistle term for homophobia) and adopting a hard-line approach against crime. Meanwhile, the opposition seems to take every piece of bait, fueling the “Us v. Them” narrative.

The tweeting president

The president continues to increase his presence on Twitter, sharing both his political views and official announcements in social media even before official press releases. This new style is a first in Brazilian politics and it is starting to cause trouble. During the peak of the crisis with Congress, House Speaker Rodrigo Maia said the president “should spend more time taking care of the pension reform than (taking care of) his Twitter.”

According to research by Congresso em Foco, 75.4 percent of party leaders in Congress think the administration is poorly managing the pension reform negotiations. One of the most common criticisms of the president’s style is that, by spending time and energy on issues such as claiming Nazism is a left-wing idea, and retweeting videos of golden showers, he diverts attention from what really matters.

“Involving himself in controversy is part of a certain game, but it is irrelevant for the decisions the country has to make. There are at least two sides of the matter; those who dislike the government emphasize these issues. The government does not bother about it, Jair Bolsonaro grows in a polarized environment.”

Fernando Schuler, political scientist and professor at Insper

“Adopting a controversial profile that goes in an opposite direction (than traditional political parties) meets the strategy of mobilizing voters, but does not offer a perspective about what the government will do to get out of the crisis. There is criticism of old politics, but no indication of what is the new one”.

José Alvaro Moisés, Political Science professor at University of São Paulo

Girls wear pink, boys wear blue

Among the controversial cabinet, the Minister of Women, Family and Human Rights, Damares Alves, is by far one of the most vocal members of the administration regarding the government's conservative agenda. From the beginning of her term she has drawn attention for her political stances towards issues such as gender, stirring turbulence on social media.

However, she is also following the goals established for the area, fostering campaigns to prevent suicide and self-harm. Recently, Ms. Alves said the government is working on a provisional measure to regulate homeschooling in Brazil—another of the department's goals.

“The president was elected expressing a conservative agenda that was approved by the majority of Brazilians. It is absolutely natural for Ms. Alves to express conservative ideas, that's part of democracy.”

Fernando Schuler, political scientist and professor at Insper

Security measures stuck in Congress

Addressing one of his main campaign promises, Mr. Bolsonaro eased requirements for owning weapons and quickly submitted the so-called anti-crime package proposed by Minister Sergio Moro to Congress, fulfilling the goals it set for the first administration. So far, the bill is being overshadowed by the pension reform in Congress and Mr. Moro's retreat about illegal campaign financing wasn't well received.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Security is preparing a program to fight violent crimes, but it won't take effect until the second half of the year. Meanwhile, cases of violence have not let up on the news, making people wonder about the effectiveness of the government in one of its major causes.

“There is a backlog of bills in Congress, including proposals to fight crime and corruption. I believe this will make the process slower in parliament and the pension bill is a priority. Violence is a structural problem and solutions are normally for the medium and long term. However, the government still owes a faster and more effective answer to society when it comes to the short term. This could be one of the factors that led to his popularity drop.”

Fernando Schuler, political scientist and professor at Insper

“The government has presented the anti-crime bill, but it is not clear how it will proceed in Congress, as the pension reform is the priority. Minister Sergio Moro himself has expressed concerns about it. So far we have only seen this bill, I do not see any other action that signals how the administration intends to act about public security.”

José Alvaro Moisés, Political Science professor at University of São Paulo

Blaming the thermometer for the fever

Mr. Bolsonaro has repeatedly attacked pollsters and statistics institutes, as well as questioning their methods, after unfavorable results. The measure has been questioned by economists and the media, who claim the government is actually putting its head in the sand to avoid facing Brazil's real economic and political issues.

“It is natural that the government will lose a bit of its popularity, because the country is experiencing a crisis, with high unemployment and little growth. [Mr. Bolsonaro’s Social Liberal Party] has little experience and some negotiation mistakes have occurred. So, it is natural to have some popularity losses, but it is not expressive. I don’t think that his criticism of pollsters is a big deal. It is part of democracy to express criticism and be criticized.”

Fernando Schuler, political scientist and professor at Insper

“The president’s posture towards agencies and results offered by institutes presents a government that does not deal well with criticism and adds to the feeling of a government that rarely explores rationality. At worst, it affects the president and the administration’s credibility.”

Rafael Cortez, partner and political scientist at Tendências consultancy

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