

Dealing with the Pandemic: the Brazilian Case. What Are the Lessons for Ukraine from This?

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This research aims to give an overview of what is happening inside Brazil when it comes to the public policies regarding the pandemic. The country's situation is far from ideal, so the second goal is to analyze how Brazil reached such a complicated situation of having around 1500 (this number is higher every day) deaths per day by COVID-19. The case of Brazil is one of the most radical today. Therefore, from the Ukrainian state's perspective, it is justified to thoroughly analyze Brazil's situation in the fight against SARS-CoV-2 to avoid making significant mistakes in the future.

Keywords: Brazil, global pandemic, public policy, SARS-CoV-2 virus, fatal disease, counteracting COVID-19

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Brazil is among the top among countries like the United States and India in the death toll. The government has confirmed over 260.000 deaths by COVID, and it is the epicenter of the disease in Latin America, the second in the global ranking (Andreoni, 2021a). At the start of 2020, with many cases confirmed worldwide, Brazil seemed not to be worried about a pandemic. As usual, the country promoted its most lucrative event of the year, the well-known Carnival of Rio de Janeiro, when the country welcomed many tourists. Moreover, that is when the situation got serious when COVID cases spread fast all over the country.

In March 2020, Brazil declared the country had a serious public health situation. However, it was expected that the government would deal well with the situation. After all, the country has a record of facing health care problems. Even with all the information about the spread of

the virus in the country, little was made to contain COVID. The population was still traveling, doing everything as usual. The Federal government did nothing until it was too late.

Brazil certainly faces its biggest crisis in the health system, not only in public but also in the private sector. We can see this clearly when on March 17, 2021, we had a record of more than 3 thousand deaths in a very day while nothing is being done for the pandemic to be controlled in the country. We were in second place in the world ranking countries with record deaths or COVID-19. We are already in first place for the first time. We are in first place in something even after such a tragic month, not just one month, but a tragic year with so many losses. Still, the Federal government has no effective plan for the pandemic's contingency spreading across the Latin American continent through the subcontinent of South America. We have become a global threat.

Despite having created a national vaccination plan, this plan came late and disorganized since the country had a lack of vaccines. We got to the point of keeping enough syringes for vaccination of the Brazilian population, not even needles for vaccination. The capacity to produce our own vaccine at Instituto Butantan and the Oswaldo Cruz Institute, also known as Fio Cruz, in several moments, stated that the production capacity of up to one million vaccines per day in Brazil. And why are these vaccines not being produced within the country? Our country, our government, in particular, is still in denial about our actual situation about what we see every day in the news within the country and in international media that we are on the verge of collapse.

In fact, we were not on the verge of a collapse, but we are already one step ahead of the collapse. It has already happened. We are witnessing the collapse of public and private hospitals daily people who are going to die waiting for a place in a hospital need to be admitted to an intensive care unit, but we have no vacancies in hospitals. We see literally people suffocating because of the lack of medical staff, medicaments, oxygen, among so many other necessary equipment.

The President of the Republic Jair Bolsonaro continues in denial, continues insisting on a preventive treatment that has been proven ineffective for the case of COVID-19, which is chloroquine, himself having been a victim of COVID-19 (Editorial, 2020). He continues to argue that we do not need a national lockdown. That we do not need social isolation that we do not need to close our trade that we do not have to worry about we do not even have oxygen. Some doctors are going through situations where they need to sedate patients who are on the verge of death suffocating because they do not have oxygen. When we have the crisis in Manaus in the state of Amazonas north of Brazil, we saw the variant called p1 stem cells across the country, but we have no oxygen and no more sedatives. Our neighbor Venezuela started a help program to send us oxygen, and yet the president of this country was insulted by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

Due to our politicians' very example, especially for the Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, many Brazilians also deny the pandemic. It is easy to see if in the streets agglomerations people who refuse to wear masks still as with the world telling us that we need to have more aggressive attitudes towards the pandemic. We perpetuate this pandemic. We are waiting for our variants to spread to the rest of the subcontinent and to the world.

In a country like Brazil, with a Public Health system with its problems having to deal with health crises today, we are not prepared for anything. Brazilian government continues to deny its adequate population treatments. The Brazilian people do not have enough vaccine, lack medicines; hospitals do not have enough oxygen. We do not have enough hospital

beds to meet the demand. Even the Brazilian funeral system is collapsing. We have reached complete chaos.

Amid a pandemic of global proportions, Brazil, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is more concerned with defending his sons (also politicians) from accusations of corruption and arming the population, saying that we need to raise our economy more. The population is getting more and more impoverished every day. We have the lowest gross domestic product in 24 years. We are going through hyperinflation once again, the population is unemployed, and the president wants to make it easier for this miserable population and hungry tool to have more chances to acquire armaments. In what world is he living? He lives in his bubble of populism amid such unemployment within Brazil. He created a program called emergency aid once again; populism gaining a chance within Brazil amid an emergency aid tragedy is not the worst-case scenario. Of course, many unemployed people are still unprotected by adequate social policies. Still, we need to help these people by giving money, and the program was created by the previous government of the workers' party the Bolsa Família. In fact, many people in the country lack government assistance in the form of direct financial aid. However, the government is using the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic to promote itself: "If Brazil does not take it seriously, it will affect its neighbors and beyond, so it is not just about Brazil, I think it concerns the whole of Latin America" (Piccinini, 2021). Brazil's example in the fight against COVID-19 points to specific mistakes made by governments. Ukraine should learn a lesson from these experiences in order not to make mistakes in the future. Therefore, the rest of the article presents specific situations related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, which are intended to indicate the narrative's direction in the fight against the global pandemic, and where the mistakes were made.

How did Brazil get to This point?

This question is perhaps the most important to be asked at this critical moment that the country is going through. However, the question "how did Brazil get to this point?" is also one of the most challenging questions to be answered. The central question guides this brief attempt to analyze how Brazil became an outcast, the new epicenter of the global pandemic. There are too many variables that can start the hypothesis of how a country that has research institutions and a health system that has previously dealt with other situations related to public health problems came to this dramatic situation. Despite several issues that can be analyzed, one of the most latent and complicated, but that has to be debated, is Brazil's presidency.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, as previously stated, the Brazilian government took too long to take any action to prevent itself. So, it got to the point that we had no action plan when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country. From the beginning, Brazilian President Jair Messias Bolsonaro dismissed the pandemic as something emblematic and even dangerous; it often came out to the public through social media to say that COVID-19 was "just a flu, just a cough" (Andreoni, 2021b). While many states were preparing to deal with the pandemic, in Brazil, the president himself did nothing but tell his followers on social networks, and in interviews, it was no big deal. Even after Jair Bolsonaro was affected by the virus, he continued to follow the line of stating that COVID-19 was nothing so serious. The list of absurdities that the President of Brazil continued to pass on to the public and did not stop there.

Probably one of the most regrettable actions by the government was to encourage the use of chloroquine as an early treatment for COVID-19 (Sharma, 2020: 154-156). Many doctors

claim that this measurement has no properties to deal with this virus without any scientific basis, but still, since 2020, the government insists that the population even use chloroquine as a treatment (Costa and Saxena, 2021). One more question arises from this incensed propaganda: why does the government remain in this place as a propagandist for a drug that does not help patients who are victims of the COVID? What seems to be just one more of Bolsonaro's anti-cite lines is something obscured (Reuters, 2020).

This is an inhumane strategy of a government that supports necropolitics. There are some facts:

- a) chloroquine, in addition to not helping to treat the infected, is a medication that can cause several hazardous adverse reactions;
- b) it is a cheap medication and easily accessible even by the low-income population;
- c) the chloroquine patent expired many years ago;
- d) in Brazil, the main producer of chloroquine is the army's laboratory (supported and supporter of the current president);
- e) the laboratories that can carry out the distribution of this medicine are supporters of the government and are making huge profits.

Given this revelation of why Bolsonaro has been insisting so much on the use in chloroquine, there is no doubt that Brazil's president cares about not the population but personal gains. In this sense, many resources that should be destined to hospitals, the purchase of input for the manufacture of vaccines, or the purchase of vaccines will be gained by the armed forces, the president, and the business people who support him.

Idiocracy: Whom to Blame?

That is another pertinent question. Whose is the fault for the Brazilian situation in light of this pandemic? Brazil is facing the worst phase of the pandemic so far. Many individuals can be blamed for such a situation, including civil society itself. However, President Jair Bolsonaro seems to be the most public and base face of a situation that we have, basically, a negligent genocide (Bastos, 2020). From 2020 to the present moment, the country has already registered around 300,000 deaths, and the country's leader continues to fail to take really effective measures. Jair Messias Bolsonaro is the poster boy for COVID-19, rejecting social distance, declining the use of masks, increasing the cost of testing for COVID 19, and being against a national lockdown, he is a negationist (Andreoni & Londoño, 2020).

In a country marked by poverty, inequality, and lack of education, the civilian population follows its leader blindly (Marson & Ortega, 2020). This way, it is not difficult to find countless individuals across the country who also then are against the vaccine, refusing to be vaccinated. These individuals do not take the necessary precautions to slow down the spread of the virus. On April 6, 2021, Brazil had the deadliest day of the pandemic, reaching more than 4,000 deaths in a single day. Still, nothing is being done. Amid the country's destruction, the president is concerned with the "economy," so we have not established a national lockdown. What economy are we talking about? There is no economy, our GDP is in vertigo, and the unemployment rate continues to rise as the hyperinflation.

One more factor that leads people to crash on the streets instead of trying to stay at home: in the year 2020, the so-called "emergency aid" was introduced in the country. This is a financial aid given by the government, with an emphasis on the unemployed population. In 2021, this

aid should be extended to the population registered in 2020 by applying for it. However, in 2021 “emergency aid” is not being paid, leading the people to take to the streets searching for informal ways to earn money to support themselves and their respective families. However, there is one more problem. Last year, the population that lost their jobs had increased. In the year 2021, there was no possibility that these people in critical financial situations could make their registration to receive “emergency aid.”

As a result of the country’s economic issues due to the lack of payment of emergency aid to the neediest population, one more question arises. The pandemic is affecting more severely certain social and ethnic groups; after all, it is the poorest population that needs to go to the streets to try to find ways of livelihood. In addition to economic issues that affect a certain portion of the population, the poorer population also suffers from disinformation. Since the beginning of the pandemic in Brazil, the poorest population, who are often slum dwellers, not only did not have access to the correct information on how to prevent the transmission of the virus, as well as having no means of acquiring, for example, masks or even alcohol for cleaning. This same population in several locations also lacks basic sanitation (Alves et al., 2021). The government also did nothing about this issue, so private institutions, companies, NGOs, among others, were taking basic inputs to these needy populations. The target of COVID-19 is increasingly poor individuals, as well as the black population. For a while, many citizens work from home offices. The poorest population does not have this option. They are on the road daily on the way to their jobs, mostly informal and crowded public transportation. In yet another aspect of the extreme right, Bolsonaroist policy is working.

Final Remarks: More to Blame on Him?

There is always more to blame on him. In March 2020, a research was released asserting that 44,000 deaths by COVID-19 were expected in Brazil. Only in April 2021, it is expected that the death tolls surpasses 95,000. The global pandemic ended up aggravating Brazil’s domestic problems. Besides, Jair Bolsonaro also managed to turn the country into a worldwide threat and still create external relationships with other states.

In terms of domestic issues since the beginning of his term as president of the republic, the government already has the fourth minister of health. This fact suggests that not only is the current Brazilian president unable to deal with the government as a whole, but it is also a threat to public health and the Brazilian population. The first two ministers of health were dismissed, as they were following the WHO’s suggestions, the third, General Eduardo Pazuello, who knew nothing about health, yet the reason for his departure is not known.

Cardiologist Ludhmila Hajjar who is not a politician, was quoted to replace Eduardo Pazuello. However, the doctor said she was against “early treatment” with chloroquine. Soon the doctor was discarded. Here are some of the criticisms made by the cardiologist: “We were never supposed to be on the increase in the number of dead patients, and the world is showing a drop,” said the cardiologist. “Brazil is doing everything wrong and is paying the price for it... Brazil should already have five or six vaccines available today... There are councils that defend. There are pieces of advice that do not deny... It is a conjunction of factors. The lack of knowledge and the non-adoption of practices based on scientific evidence only puts people’s lives at risk” (Lima & Hajjar, 2021).

Recently, Jair Bolsonaro found another doctor, also a cardiologist, to assume the post of Minister of Health, Marcelo Queiroga. This is from the Bolsonaro team. It is clear that the

current Brazilian president does not want to be surrounded by the ministers who disagree with him. Queiroga never criticized Bolsonaro and defends the use of chloroquine. Bolsonaro is also a threat to Brazilian democracy. The country is also worried about a coup (Rodrigues, 2021).

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