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ARTICLE

Intelligence and Security Services in Brazil Reappraising Institutional Flaws and Political Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

The intelligence and security sector in Brazil has experienced institutional tensions between legitimacy and effectiveness throughout its history. The combination of unequal socioeconomic structures, an authoritarian political culture, and uncooperative political dynamics explain such imbalances. During the Military Dictatorship (1964–1985), the National Information Service (SNI) was effective against those opposing the regime. The New Republic (1985–2014) tried to overcome its legacy. In 1990, the SNI was closed down. In the first decade after the Cold War, security reforms lingered. The National Congress established the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN) in 1999. Over two decades, the Brazilian Intelligence System (SISBIN) expanded to 42 leading agencies. Legislative oversight developed slowly and narrowly focused on ABIN. Although prone to various crises, Brazil was able to keep the trilemma democracy, security, and development in precarious equilibrium. Tight reelection for Dilma Rousseff (PT) in 2014 marked a new prolonged economic crisis and bitterly polarized politics in Brazil. Under Bolsonaro, there is concern about the military tutelage, undue politicization of law enforcement and security, and insufficient legislative oversight. Legitimacy in the security realm depends on analytical integrity, robust accountability, and clear operational rules and limits. Will that be possible in an era of global erosion of equality and democracy?

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Recent events in Brazil have raised concerns about the security sector's role (*i.e.*, intelligence, law enforcement, and armed forces) to sustain or erode democracy (Harris & Schipani, 2020). For instance, Brazil's Supreme Federal Court (STF) ruled that the government must suspend the production of reports on political opponents acting within the law (Brasil, 2020, August 20). The debate about the compatibility between intelligence and democracy is not new (Mattei & Bruneau, 2011). Global democratic setbacks in recent years have renewed the need to explain past events and novel challenges (Economist, 2020).

Remembering Huntington (1968), institutionalization is the process through which organizations and rules acquire value (legitimacy) and stability (effectiveness). Normatively, the policy goal is to increase legitimacy and effectiveness as much as possible in a balanced way (Goodin, 1998). In the case of Brazil, this has been hard to attain. There is consensus in the literature

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regarding institutional flaws in the country's intelligence (Bruneau, 2015; Cepik & Bruneau, 2008; Gonçalves, 2017). Therefore, the research question guiding our effort is stated as follows. Why are there institutional imbalances between legitimacy and effectiveness in the evolution of the Brazilian intelligence system? The working hypothesis states that Brazilian authoritarian political culture, combined with highly unequal socioeconomic structures and uncooperative political dynamics among political actors (groups and individuals), ultimately cause such imbalances. In other words, to explain intelligence and security policies, one needs to combine power-based, cultural, and institutional approaches (Cepik, 2003; Swenson & Lemozy, 2009). Existing literature covers specific periods, sectors, or crises (*e.g.*, Cepik & Antunes, 2003a; Stepan, 1988). What is missing is an integrated reinterpretation connecting broader political features and specific institutional results. This article offers a single case internal comparison between three Brazilian history periods (1964–1985, 1986–2014, 2015–2020). Previous periods shall be considered as contextual background.

The semiofficial historiography sought to trace the origins of a continuous and non-problematic institutional development back to Portugal's Brazilian independence in 1822 (Oliveira, 1999). This sort of anachronistic bias can be found in general accounts of intelligence and security (Keegan, 2003; Warner, 2014). In the Global South, most countries developed stable and professional intelligence services only after World War II (Herman, 1996).

In Brazil, military intelligence slowly evolved since the Navy defined missions for the 2nd Section of its General Staff in 1907. Organized political policing started in the 1920s, with the Fourth Precinct. It expanded during Getúlio Vargas' authoritarian regime (1930–1945), under Filinto S. Müller, his long-serving Chief of Police (Roth, 2009). The first civilian intelligence agency was established in 1946. It was called the SFICI (Federal Information and Counter-Information Service). Eventually, it became effective under the National Security Council's direction during the Juscelino Kubitschek government (1956–1961). His presidency promoted economic growth, institutional innovation, and national optimism. Nevertheless, reactionary forces repeatedly turned against the developmentalist coalition in power (Ioris, 2014). Following years of growing political instability and subsequent faulty economic growth, a military *coup d 'état* in 1964 ended the so-called populist democratic regime established in 1945, just nineteen years old by then (Fausto & Fausto, 2014).

If the past of the Brazilian intelligence and security sector was more turbulent than the scarce historiography has been able to acknowledge, its current trajectory (flawed, but not erratic) points to a bleak future. This article will assess the available evidence to explain the observed institutional failures and check if the previous sentence's pessimistic assertion is justified. Besides extensive literature review and primary sources consulted, assessing facts and

underlying conditions is based upon more than 25 years of academic research on related subject matters and direct engagement with public debates in Brazil and other countries. Direct communication via e-mail and interviews with long-serving intelligence officers and managers helped confirm specific facts and test the trends' interpretations. Interviewees' identities were not disclosed following their request. Only three such interviews are referred throughout the article to avoid overreliance on anonymous sources.

Military dictatorship (1964-1984)

In April 1964, with the support of wealthy business people, right-wing politicians, the media, the US government, as well as broad sectors of the middle class, the Catholic Church, and the judiciary, the armed forces spearheaded the overthrown of a democratic regime (Pereira, 2016; Schwarcz & Starling, 2017). In the name of combating communism and corruption, a civil-military dictatorship emerged. Between 1964 and 1985, five Army generals occupied the Republic's Presidency (Skidmore, 1988). Such was the fundamental power dynamics explaining institutional intelligence developments over that period.

The SFICI's role in the 1964 coup is controversial (Carvalho, 2019; Oliveira N, 2013). In any case, the emerging regime preferred to create a new agency, the National Information Service (SNI). The National Congress, disfigured by repressive actions, sworn in General Castelo Branco as President in April and approved Law 4,341 in June, creating the SNI. By December 1964, Decree 54,303 changed the National Security Council (CSN), and Decree 55,194 specified the structure and missions of the new agency (Fico, 2001 p. 81–89; Stepan, 1988, p. 16–20). SNI's Central Agency was organized into three sections (Strategic Information, Homeland Security, and Special Operations). The SNI chief had the status of Minister of State and authority to request information from federal, state, and municipal (local) state bodies, private companies, and citizens. In each Brazilian state, there was also a regional SNI agency. In 1967, Decree 60,940 expanded security and information divisions and advisory services (DS Is and ASIs) to operate in ministries, government agencies, public companies, and universities (Roth, 2009, p. 67–70).

The SNI eventually became one of the most powerful agencies within the authoritarian regime. Two of the SNI heads later became presidents, Army generals Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–1974) and João Figueiredo (1979–-1985). According to former chiefs' interviews, the SNI directly employed more than 2,500 personnel at its central agency and state branches in its first years. Neither DSI/ASIs staff in other ministries nor informers (paid and otherwise) were included in that total (Fico, 2001). In 1970, Decree 66,732 instituted the first National Information Plan (PNI), with requirements aligned with the National Security Doctrine (DSN). The National Information System (SISNI)

was also made official, under the umbrella of the SNI. In 1971, a National School of Information (ESNI) was created to provide services for the entire system (Andrade, 2014).

It is important to note a contradiction. On the one hand, the "information community" claimed the doctrinal influence of the United States of America (exemplified by recurrent references to Sherman Kent and Washington Platt). On the other hand, the organization structure was closer to the Soviet model. The SNI was a heavily militarized agency, with ministerial status and many ramifications. It was in charge of internal security, external espionage, counterintelligence, covert operations, and the development of technical means (Gonçalves, 2014). A lingering authoritarian political culture explains this inconsistency. In Brazil, the threat perception and the ruling classes' reaction through the state apparatus since colonial times feared the "subversive internal enemy" more than the external economic or military threats (Schwarcz, 2019). Such kind of political culture is also relevant to explain specific institutional features of the intelligence sector.

Besides, alignment with US security priorities during the Cold War and cooperation with other dictatorships on the continent to repress opponents (armed or not) prevented any sort of real progressive liberal influence. As epitomized by Operation Condor, the US government provided material and organizational support for dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru to conduct kidnappings, torture, assassinations, and "disappearances" of thousands of opponents labeled as terrorists (McSherry, 2002; Rabe, 2016). The regional profile of the information services was then inseparable from harsh political power disputes. In the Brazilian armed forces, the two missions (information collection and political repression) were carried out by specific units under a single chain of command (Antunes, 2002).

In 1968, the Fifth Institutional Act (AI-5) turned the political regime even more authoritarian. With the triggering of low-intensity armed resistance by some left-wing opposition groups, an Internal Security System (SISSEGINT) took shape. In 1969, Operation Bandeirantes (OBAN) was launched in São Paulo. An officer from the 2nd section of the II Army commanded military and police personnel. The São Paulo state government and national and foreign private companies were the primary financial source (Schwarcz & Starling, 2017).

In September 1970, General Médici issued secret security guidelines creating regionally-based Internal Defense Zones (ZDI) under Army commanders' authority. Each ZDI had an Internal Defense Operations Center (CODI) and, subordinate to it, Information Operations Detachments (DOI). There were elements from the armed forces, the SNI, the federal police, and the state police at each DOI. The government also issued counterinsurgency directions for the Navy Information Center (CENIMAR, 1957), the Army Information

Center (CIE, 1967), and the Aeronautics Information Center (CISA, 1968). Another critical component of the system was the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) subordinated to each state's governors, plus the Federal Police Department (Antunes, 2002; Stepan, 1988). The repressive upsurge reached tens of thousands through censorship, harassment, forfeiture of rights, clandestine infiltrations, illegal surveillance, arrests, kidnappings, torture, banishment, and murder. In 2014, the National Truth Commission (CNV) officially recognized 434 political deaths and disappearances between 1946 and 1985, most of them during the dictatorship (CNV, 2014). According to unverified data from SISSEGINT itself, between 1964 and 1973, around 105 security operatives died in clashes with the armed opposition (Fico, 2001).

Following the classification advanced by Peter Gill (2016), both systems (SISNI for information and SISSEGINT for repression) converged to form an independent security state, characterized by a high capacity to penetrate society and no external accountability.

In 1974, the last attempt of armed resistance was defeated in the northern Araguaia River region. The government employed more than five thousand soldiers against eighty guerrilla cadres mobilized by the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), most of them tortured and murdered after surrendering. Albeit "effective" in crushing the armed resistance against the regime, the information and security systems lacked legitimacy and had become a focus of right-wing extremism. Under the presidency of General Ernesto Geisel (1974–1978) and the leadership of General Golbery do Couto e Silva (ex-SNI chief), the dictatorial regime implemented a controlled political transition project that would last ten years until 1985. To succeed, it had to neutralize the so-called hard-liners' violent internal opposition (Arturi & Rodriguez, 2019).

In 1979, General João Batista Figueiredo was selected as President due to its support to the transition project as head of the SNI under Geisel. During his government, the economic situation deteriorated with the external debt crisis in Latin America. Citizens' mobilization had also grown, demanding the end of the dictatorship. The adoption of a broad Amnesty Law (1979) and a new National Security Law (1983) signed the beginning of a period when the SISNI became less powerful as a political police, still incompatible with democracy (Gill, 2016).

According to the testimonies of generals who commanded the SNI, in the first half of the 1980s, there were technically qualified civilian and military personnel, abundant budget, and credibility with government officials (Antunes, 2002). The eventual effectiveness in carrying out surveillance missions against students and union members did not guarantee legitimacy. On the contrary, in society's eyes and the new political actors who promoted a massive campaign in 1984 for popular voting in the next presidential election, the authoritarian rubble that was to be removed included the SNI and its practices (Schwarcz & Starling, 2017).

New republic (1985-2014)

In 1985, a civilian opposition president was elected by the National Congress. Tancredo Neves died before his inauguration, and the consequent rise of Vice President José Sarney (a former supporter of the dictatorship) inaugurated a new phase in the long transition toward another democratic regime. The new regime had the challenge of creating and consolidate new institutions without being impaired by the twin legacies of an authoritarian political culture and vast inequalities (Anderson, 2019).

During the Sarney government (1985–1989), the SNI continued to operate under an army general (Stepan, 1988). In the new context, the SNI tried to build links with the National Congress to improve its legitimacy (Emilio, 1992). The Federal Constitution promulgated in 1988 established the general political framework for this new period of Brazilian history, enshrining democratic civil, political, and social rights. In 1989, a civilian president was elected by popular vote in the turbulent context of the end of the Cold War.

In April 1990, president Fernando Collor signed Law 8.028, reorganizing the Presidency of the Republic. Following a pledge made during his campaign, Collor disbanded the SNI (Cepik & Antunes, 2003a). Two years later, Collor was impeached on charges of corruption. Fernando Henrique Cardoso (PSDB) was elected in 1994 after a successful stabilization plan to curb high inflation and a declining GDP. After the National Congress controversially passed a law allowing him to run, Cardoso was reelected by a landslide to a new term in 1998. However, following the Mexican, East Asian, Russian, and Argentinian financial crises, the high social costs of the PSDB-led coalition government's economic policies triggered a confidence crisis. During Cardoso's eight years as President, the annual average GDP growth was 2.3% (Anderson, 2019).

This period's power dynamics were driven by two political forces and its respective allies, the governing Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and the opposing Workers Party (PT). Although disagreeing about policies and priorities, both forces pursued their modernizing goals under the common framework of the 1988 Federal Constitution. In that context, intelligence and security mattered only as part of an unresolved broader civil-military issue (Bruneau & Matei, 2013). Slowly transitioning from "military tutelage" to "conditional subordination" of the armed forces, the period corresponds to a combination of low legitimacy and low effectiveness of intelligence (Cepik, 2007; Fitch, 1998). In 1995, Cardoso enacted a Provisional Measure reorganizing the Presidency's Office. An Intelligence Subsecretariat was authorized despite the stigma surrounding such activities. In the armed forces, the word "information" was replaced by "intelligence" in military agencies' official name, with no immediate change in operational capabilities or priorities. Cepik &

Antunes described SNI's end as "Brazil's intelligence structures being emptied but not changed" (2003a, p. 359).

It was during his second term (1999–2002) that Cardoso introduced significant institutional changes. In December 1999, the National Congress finally passed law 9,883, creating the current Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN). The first article of the same law established a new Brazilian Intelligence System (SISBIN) under the agency's general coordination (Antunes, 2002). In the same year, two new cabinet positions were installed, the civilian-led Ministry of Defense (MD) and the military-led Institutional Security Office (GSI) of the Presidency of the Republic.

ABIN's first institutional crisis occurred shortly after. In November 2000, Cardoso dismissed the first Director-General (DG) after complaints of illegal wiretapping and surveillance by politicians and social movements. The director had also appointed a former SNI official accused of torturing political prisoners during the dictatorship to head one of the agency's divisions (Cepik & Ambros, 2014). According to Cepik (2007), five additional developments in the final years of Cardoso's government.

First, ABIN ceased to be directly linked to the President of the Republic and became subordinate to the GSI in 2000. ABIN's director needs to have her name approved by the Senate. In contrast, the cabinet-level position of chief of the GSI, although freely appointed by the President of the Republic, has been held since 1999 by an Army general. Therefore, tensions have recurred in the past decades (Gonçalves, 2014). Second, the Executive Decree 3,695 established a Public Security Intelligence Subsystem (SISP) in 2000. The Ministry of Justice coordinates the federal, state, and local law enforcement components of the subsystem (Brandão, 2013).

The third development also happened in 2000, when the National Congress formally instituted the Joint Commission for the Control of Intelligence Activities (CCAI). Endowed with legal powers to oversee the activities conducted by the federal government's various agencies, the CCAI has limited effectiveness due to its lack of technical staff and predominantly deferential and unattentively participation of its rotating members (Gonçalves, 2010).

The fourth change transpired in 2002 when Executive Decree 4,376 fixed the criteria for participation in SISBIN, forming its Consulting Council.

The fifth development also came in 2002, when policy directives (Normative Ordinances 295 and 227) of the Ministry of Defense instituted a Defense Intelligence System (SINDE). The objective was to integrate the Army Intelligence Center (CIE), the Navy Intelligence Center (CIM) and the Aeronautics Intelligence Center (CIAER) with the intelligence components of the Ministry of Defense, mainly in the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces (EMCFA) and the Amazon Protection System Management and Operational Center (CENSIPAM). Area command structures and large units, such as Army divisions and

battalions, also deploy intelligence sections. In each force, intelligence is also organized as a "system," as exemplified by the Aeronautical Intelligence System (SINTAER).

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT) was sworn in as President in January 2003. Lula's broad coalition government's political priorities were to resume economic growth and reduce poverty and some of Brazil's enormous inequalities. The international economic environment was favorable in terms of capital supply and valued commodities demand, allowing fiscal space for the PT-led government to advance pro-poor policies. Between 2003 and 2010, household consumption in Brazil grew 48%, investments grew 74.3%, extreme poverty was reduced from 15.2% to 5.3%, the Gini index was reduced from 0.58 to 0.53, and the country's GDP raised to seventh-largest in the world. Lula was national and internationally recognized for his transformative leadership (Arretche, 2019). On January 01, 2011, he left office with a popular approval rate of 83%, being succeeded by his former minister Dilma Rousseff (PT).

During Lula's two presidential terms (2003–2010) and Rousseff's first term (2011–2014), intelligence and security activities strikingly expanded. Both presidents did not consider this issue a priority, only acting in the aftermath of an eventual institutional crisis (Cepik & Ambros, 2014). However, two other power dynamics explain such expansion.

The first was related to foreign and defense policy. With Lula, initiatives in Latin America, especially the Brazilian military command of the UN Peace Operation in Haiti and the construction of the Union of South American Nations – UNASUR, as well as various global initiatives, within the scope of the G20 and BRICS for example, demanded new military and external intelligence capabilities (Riggirozzi & Tussie, 2012). In 2008, Decree 6,703 approved a National Defense Strategy (EDN) from which military intelligence requirements and capabilities would be defined (Cepik & Bertol, 2016). Perceived international threats have also become more critical for ABIN. In the journal published by the agency, there is a concentration of articles in the area of counterterrorism (ABIN, n.d). During Dilma Rousseff's government (2011–-2016), Brazil hosted significant international events. To provide security for events such as the United Nations Conference of Sustainable Development (2012), the Catholic World Youth Day (2013), the FIFA World Cup (2014), or the Rio Summer Olympics (2016), better interagency coordination and a sense of priority toward effectiveness were required and partially implemented (Ceravolo, 2019).

The second underlying dynamics was the worsening of a public security crisis. In 2011, there were 47,215 intentional violent deaths, a number that rose to 63,880 in 2017. Less than 10% of the murders are ever solved in Brazil. Nevertheless, the number of incarcerated people increased from 232,755 in 2000 to 755,274 in 2019 (30.4% of which were pre-trial detainees). The total number of sworn police officers employed by federal, state, and municipal

governments exceeded 500,000 in 2014. However, the armed forces were used 141 times between 1992 and 2020 in internal law and order operations (GLO), which was supposed to be a subsidiary mission according to the Constitution (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública [FBSP], n.d.).

Intelligence was presented by the bureaucracies and was perceived by the public and the elected officials as an effective (and less violent) way of tackling the new security and defense demands (Interviewee 2, 2020). Consequently, intelligence budgets and personnel increased. For instance, the expenses authorized in the states' security budget and the federal government for security intelligence operations went from 448 million Reais in 2011 to 1.3 billion in 2016. (FBSP, 2018). Foreign and domestic companies have also amplified the supply of equipment and services, from radars for border surveillance to cybercrime analysis software (Zaparolli, 2019). New intelligence bodies were established in various sectors and levels of government (federal, state, and municipal). For example, in the criminal justice system, intelligence offices were either established or empowered in the various police, prison, public prosecutor, and financial departments, both at the federal and state level (Pacheco, 2013; Brandão, 2013. The Council for Financial Activities Control (COAF), created in 1998, expanded its functions following the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units' prescriptions and the Palermo Convention's provisions (Oliveira, 2013b).

In sum, the Brazilian intelligence system expansion during the New Republic (1985–2014) took place predominantly in the armed forces and the criminal justice system. Between 2002 and 2020, formal membership of SISBIN increased from 22 to 42 agencies (ABIN, 2019a December 04). ABIN is the central agency established by the 1999 law, but it has limited clout over other participating agencies.

Several problems arise from this process. First, neither international events nor the public security crisis suffices to alter the Brazilian security sector's prevalent political culture. The explanation for this is twofold. On the one hand, threat perceptions expressed in public statements and documents tended to treat terrorism, organized crime, interpersonal violence, and social protest as a continuum list (Interviewee 3, 2020). On the other hand, the practical demands that such a threat perception engenders are much more tactically and operationally oriented than strategically or politically reflexive.

A second related problem was institutional. SISBIN expansion was not accompanied by a similar strengthening of control (direction) and oversight (scrutiny) mechanisms (Gill, 2020). As Gonçalves (2014, 2017) demonstrates, the Brazilian National Congress established the CCAI in 2000, but it was only in 2013 that Resolution 02 established its rules of procedure and expanded the number of members from six to twelve (six senators and six deputies). Despite attempts from different chairpersons, CCAI lacked staff and technical means to conduct daily investigations or regular inspections. To make things worse,

neither CCAI nor any other federal or subnational legislative bodies could oversee police or military intelligence activities (Interviewee 1, 2020). Only after a crisis or scandal erupted, *ex-post* Congressional oversight and mitigating Presidential action were implemented (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984).

The system may have become more effective, but bureaucracies increasingly defined their missions without external democratic control and oversight. There were some attempts to provide a more strategic orientation for such growth. For instance, a Public Security Intelligence Doctrine was formally adopted in 2009. Likewise, declassified manuals for the Defense Intelligence Doctrine (2005) and Joint Military Operations (2006) were published. Timid transparency openings notwithstanding, intelligence governance and operational rules were not sufficiently regulated by existing mechanisms. As a result, legitimacy deficits caused all national security-related crises in contemporary Brazil (Cepik & Ambros, 2014).

In ABIN's case, institutionalization was less opaque. According to Law 9,883, the civilian agency does not have police powers or legal authorization to intercept communications. As the central organ of SISBIN, the agency gradually found a more strategic focus. For example, training officers for the entire system, especially in doctrine and analytic tradecraft. In 2008, Law 11,776 defined the careers of officers and technical intelligence agents at ABIN. In 2012, Ordinance 463 introduced a new Professional Code of Ethics for its employees, a requirement for the professionalization of intelligence in Brazil (Cepik & Antunes, 2003b).

To be sure, ABIN also went through crises and was criticized for its performance. In 2008, for example, the ABIN's director was fired for irregularly collaborating with the Federal Police (Operation Satyagraha) in a criminal investigation (Cepik & Ambros, 2014). After Edward Snowden's revelations about the United States' espionage against Petrobras and the Republic's Presidency in 2013, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) in the National Congress pointed to counterintelligence failures and budgetary distortions. For instance, most of ABIN's budget goes to salaries and pensions. In 2013, out of a total budget of USD 257 million, ABIN spent only 29.5 million on running costs and investments (enado Federal 2020).

Over the years, ABIN developed internal controls (ombudsperson, inspector general, internal affairs, acquisitions integrity practices) because it was submitted to external oversight by the President's Control Secretariat (CISET), the Federal Audit Court (TCU), the Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF), and the CCAI in the National Congress. In 2014, the agency could claim to be more stable and valued (institutionalized) by the Brazilian society than other, less visible components of the SISBIN. In any case, because effectiveness and legitimacy developed in such an unbalanced way, observers grew pessimistic about the intelligence and security reform (Bruneau, 2015).

In recent years, the deterioration of Brazil's political and economic situation has provided plenty of additional concerns. Annual economic growth in Brazil fell from 7.5 in 2010 to 3% in 2013. Following mass protests and renewed hostility from the media and the middle classes, President Dilma Rousseff's approval rates started to drop from a record high of 79%. In 2014, international commodity prices plummeted. After a bitterly polarized campaign, Rousseff won again with a 51.64% majority in the runoff. The defeated opponent, Aécio Neves (PSDB), did not accept the results. From that point onwards, Brazil's *descent into the Maelström* would accelerate.

Playing heart of darkness (2015-2020)

Repeated political and macroeconomic policy mistakes coupled with broadening animosity against PT haunted Rousseff's second term. The unfolding *Car Wash* operation against corruption at Petrobras, growing fragmentation in a demoralized National Congress, and worsening economic conditions further drained her ability to govern.

In August 2016, with the support of wealthy businesspeople, media corporations, the US Department of Justice, as well as broad sectors of the middle class, the Pentecostal churches, the judiciary, the police, and the armed forces, right-wing politicians (including former allies) deposed Dilma Rousseff. Though considered legally valid by the Supreme Federal Court (STF), her impeachment on the controversial grounds that she had failed to obtain Congressional approval before signing four routine supplemental budget decrees in 2014–2015 amounted to a political coup (Anderson, 2019, pp. 54–69; Brinks, Levitsky, & Murillo, 2020, pp. 98–117).

The interpretation of what has happened in Brazil in recent years will be disputed for decades. As President, Bolsonaro disputes 1964's military coup meaning (Londoño, Darlington, & Casado, 2019). In any case, focusing solely on formal institutions is insufficient (Ames, 2019). Ideas and power need to be factored in. Rhetoric about combating communism ('Bolivarianism') and corruption, for instance, mobilized by political forces since 2014 as a justification for socially excluding and authoritarian policies, reverberates a persistent *topos* of the Brazilian political culture (Avritzer, 2019; Cardoso, 2020).

Vice President Michel Temer (PMDB) took office as an unpopular president and remained so (2016–2018), with approval rates that decreased to a mere 3%. With the support of the PSDB and the 'market,' he promoted a neoliberal economic program with harsh social implications. Contractions of national output in 2015 (−3.5%) and 2016 (−3.3) reduced per capita income, partially eliminating the gains under the PT-led administrations (Costa & Silva, 2020). Economic stagnation kept the open unemployment rate above 12% since 2017. The fiscal deficit and the domestic public debt soared, and

large firms in the oil, shipbuilding, construction, and other critical value chains and sectors were severely damaged (Saad-Filho & Morais, 2018). Facing growing opposition, Temer resorted to the armed forces to survive (Campos, 2018).

The transitional government reinforced the security and intelligence sector. After restoring the GSI that Rousseff had attempted to extinguish in 2015, Temer appointed General Sergio Etchegoyen to be the Minister of Institutional Security. Influential in the Army and a strong critic of the National Truth Commission (CNV) created by Rousseff to clarify human rights violations of the military regime, soon, Etchegoyen became the strongman of an increasingly weak government. Under his leadership, in 2016, the National Intelligence Policy (PNI) was enacted by Decree 8,793. It came to light almost 17 years after the SISBIN law mandated it (Brasil. 2016a, June 29). Another unnumbered Decree issued on December 15, 2017, defined a National Intelligence Strategy (ENINT). Both documents were positive when they committed intelligence to the Constitution and signaled priorities and challenges, such as cyber capabilities. However, they are also very generic and not entirely consistent, as the PNI continues to list terrorism as a primary threat (Brasil, 2017).

Plans of the Intelligence Section (SC2) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (EMCFA) and those of the military Intelligence Centers in the Navy, Army, and Air Force, are supposed to adjust to PNI and ESINT. The Air Force, for example, updated its Intelligence Plan (PIAER) in December 2019. If the PNI stipulates, for example, that drug trafficking is a national threat, the EMCFA plan must prioritize intelligence for integrated border security, and the Air Force Command (COMAER) should prioritize information on incoming routes for unknown air traffic (Interviewee 2, 2020). No formal documents were made public by the armed forces or law enforcement agencies (Interviewee 1, 2020).

Once more, ABIN's response was less opaque. Through Ordinance 244/2016, the agency made public a formal doctrine after 17 years. Grouped into four thematic blocks (characterization and evolution; organization and practice; theoretical foundations; performance and control), the 12 chapters of the document produced by the School of Intelligence (ESINT) advanced in the specification of practices, concepts, and commitments (Agência Brasileira de Inteligência. ABIN, 2019a).

In 2018, ABIN opened a public contest for 300 vacancies, including 220 new intelligence officers. The number of ABIN employees is classified, but it is estimated to be less than four thousand, of which 1,500 would be intelligence officers (Aofi, 2016). According to its official governance report, in 2018, the agency had three departments responsible for intelligence operations, strategic analysis, counterintelligence, and a specific department for counterterrorism and transnational crimes. Also worth mentioning are the Intelligence School (ESINT) and the Center for Research and Development of Secure Communications

(CEPESC), both under the Secretariat for Planning and Management (Brasil, 2016b, November 17). Headquartered in Brasilia, ABIN has superintendencies in all Brazilian states. In addition to maintaining intelligence attachés for liaison in 20 countries on five continents, the agency is part of the Ibero-American Intelligence Services Forum (FOSII) and the Information and Intelligence Services Forum of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries. In 2018, the Brazilian agency reported having exchanged information with 106 intelligence services from 85 countries (Brasil, 2018b).

Strengthening SISBIN's institutional capacity is a positive development. Again, the problem is the imbalance between effectiveness and legitimacy caused by the gap between formal institutions and the underlying power dynamics that give concrete meaning to their functioning.

In April 2018, judge Sergio Moro issued the arrest warrant of former President Lula to begin serving a 12-year sentence. Grounded on the disputed fact domain theory and testimonies obtained under plea bargains, Lula was convicted for his alleged intention of receiving an apartment from a construction company that he never used or owned (Proner et al., 2018). The Army's chief commander felt compelled to threaten the STF against granting *habeas corpus* to the former President (Anderson, 2019). Lula continued to lead the polls as the most likely victor in the oncoming presidential election from behind bars. His candidacy was finally rejected by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), despite national and international appeals (Brooks, 2018). His substitute, Fernando Haddad (PT), was defeated 44.87 against 55,13% of the valid votes by Jair Bolsonaro in the runoffs (Moura & Corbellini, 2019). In the process, the armed forces and the majority of the police forces threw themselves into the political arena, renouncing institutional neutrality in favor of Bolsonaro (Amorim Neto & Acácio, 2020).

Inaugurated in January 2019, Bolsonaro's government has been characterized predominantly by its far-right ideological stance, automatic alignment with the Trump administration in the United States, and an economic agenda promoting the privatization of strategic state assets, as well as deregulation of the environment, labor contracts and social security (Winter, 2020). Bolsonaro's way of governing, without a formal coalition of political parties and social forces, has been prone to political infighting. Just to mention one example, former *Car Wash* judge Sergio Moro was announced as his Minister of Justice right after the election, and by April 2020, he was out of the government (Oyama, 2020).

Economic results in 2019 were bleak, with GDP growing by 1.1% and informality among workers rising to 41%, plus 12.5 million unemployed (International Monetary Fund [FMI], 2020, May 25). All that before the Covid-19. With a death toll of more than 165,000 citizens in November and GDP contraction estimated for 2020, Brazil under Bolsonaro became hostile toward multilateral cooperation and a regional sanitary threat due to its

handling of the pandemic (IHME, 2020, May 25; Lopes, 2020). Regardless, public opinion remained polarized in the country. While 45% of the respondents in a national survey supported Bolsonaro's government in August 2020, another 45% of the respondents disapproved of it (Freire, 2020, August, p. 05).

Two issues will be at the center-stage of future developments related to intelligence and security institutionalization. The first is the growing militarization of the Bolsonaro government. According to a survey conducted by the Federal Audit Court (TCU), in July 2020, there were at least 6,157 active duty and retired armed forces personnel holding relevant civilian jobs in the federal government (Cavalcanti & Victor, 2020, July, p. 17). Ten out of twenty-two cabinet members were military officers, including Army generals in charge of the Defense, Government Affairs, Civil Affairs (*sic*), and Health portfolios. In contrast, during Lula's presidency, only one minister (GSI) was military (Amorim Neto & Accorsi, 2020). Besides the President (a former captain) and the Vice-President (another Army general), dozens of police and armed forces have been elected to the National Congress and the State Legislative houses (UOL, 2018, October 08). Explaining and evaluating this direct participation of armed forces and police top brass in the current Brazilian government is a vivid challenge for both experts and citizens (Amorim Neto & Acacio, 2020). The public opinion is split between 37% that think this is a positive development and another 37% that says it is negative (Rodrigues, 2020, June, p. 10). Considering how the armed forces maintained their generous benefits after the Pension Reform and are now demanding that the defense budget rises to 2% of GDP, one hypothesis is that they condition their support to Bolsonaro to the fulfillment of corporate interests (Harris & Schipani, 2020, August, p. 11). Another possible line of explanation would explore ideological alignments and professionalization failures (Penido & Mathias, 2019). In any case, this raises concerns about the potential misuse of intelligence components obliged by hierarchy and loyalty in the law enforcement and the armed forces.

The second issue, also related, became more evident after Bolsonaro's fall out with Moro over law enforcement agencies' control (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública. FBSP, n.d.). In April 2020, Bolsonaro stated at a ministerial cabinet meeting that he trusted his "informal intelligence services" more than the SISBIN agencies that were supposedly failing to inform him (DW News, 2020). Given the Prosecutor's Office and the Federal Police's investigations on the Bolsonaro family's connections with militias in Rio de Janeiro, the potential implications are dreadful (Andreoni, Casado, & Semple, 2020, May, p. 29).

In 2018b, Law 13,675 established general guidelines for a new National Public Security and Social Defense Policy (PNSPDS). The Unified Public Security System (SUSP) was defined as a federative arrangement supported by the Public Security Intelligence Subsystem (Brasil, 2018a, June 11). Created in 2019 by Decree 9,662, the Integrated Operations Secretariat

(SEOPI) of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJSP) would have as its central mission to promote integrated actions with the Federation Units (Brasil, 2019, January 01). SEOPI's Directorate of Intelligence (DINT) was designated as the coordinator of the SISP, and the new body was incorporated into the SISBIN. In July 2020, the press reported a dossier produced in secret by the Directorate of Intelligence (Valente, 2020, July, p. 24). The report would contain the names of 579 law enforcement civil servants (federal and state levels), allegedly linked to the "Anti-fascist Police Movement," as well as four professors, listed as "opinion influencers." Internationally respected intellectuals, whose names would appear on the list, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Secretary of Human Rights in the Cardoso government) and Luiz Eduardo Soares (National Secretary of Public Security in the Lula government) expressed concerns about the fate of Brazil's democracy (Cepik, Rodriguez, & Arturi, 2020, August, p. 04).

While Moro claimed that the dossier's responsibility rested exclusively with Bolsonaro and his new Minister of Justice, André Mendonça, the trouble runs deeper as shown by the legal abuses plaguing the *Car Wash* operation (Almeida, 2019). It seems that contemporary Brazil provides an example of what Peter Gill (2016, 2020) has designated as securitism: unchecked and secret connections between state agencies, foreign governments, security companies, and para-state entities in the Digital Era.

Such networks can emerge in a more or less regulated way. For example, Decree 47,797 that created the Public Security Intelligence System of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais in 2019 provides for the possibility of technical cooperation with intelligence agencies in the private sector (ALMG, 2020, May, p. 30). However, due to the concerns arising from the twin issues of militarization and law enforcement abuses by either governments or bureaucracies, one is compelled to be pessimistic at this point. In 2015, bill 3,578 was introduced in the National Congress to regulate and control security intelligence operations targeting citizens and lawful residents. However, the law was never voted on and was shelved in 2019 (ABIN, n.d.).

Even if securitism prove to be a lesser threat to democracy, analytical integrity under the current situation is another source of concern. In May 2020, ABIN's secret reports about the seriousness of Covid-19 in the country were made known by the press. The document distanced the agency from the President's denialist discourse about the pandemic (Agência Estado, 2020, June, p. 10). Such tensions repeat a pattern observed in the United States (Gentry, 2020). In Brazil, the idleness of the CCAI further complicates the impasses. Between 2018 and the current crisis, the committee met only once. Its vice-president was Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of the President. He also chaired the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Commission (CREDN) of the Chamber of Deputies (Senado Federal, n.d).

Although the Brazilian Supreme Court ruled in favor of suspending the Ministry of Justice's dossier on opposition groups in August 2020, none of the underlying causes have been addressed. A possible "contagion effect" may hamper any initiatives in the realm of national security. For example, an Executive Decree reorganizing ABIN and creating a National Intelligence Center (CIN) to improve the coordination of SISBIN was received with distrust (Brasil, 2020a, 2020b,).

Conclusion

The 42 agencies comprising SISBIN now have a National Intelligence Policy and a National Intelligence Strategy to guide them. Nonetheless, Brazil's national security sector badly needs to foster public trust in their decisions and actions. To achieve such an elusive goal, three measurable and necessary conditions must be attained. First, the National Congress needs to enact legislation to regulate collection and counterintelligence operations in the country. Second, the three branches of government need to strengthen external control of all national security agencies. Last, intelligence agencies need to assure the public about their ability to provide high-quality analytical products.

Without these legitimacy challenges being adequately addressed, the Brazilian security services' effectiveness will remain limited and potentially misused. According to Goldman and Rascoff (2016), the purpose of the first generation of oversight institutions in the United States and Europe was to detect and prevent official misconduct. In the Digital Era, besides legal conformity, a robust oversight ecosystem should perform new roles. It must be proficient and proactive in helping to reconcile competing interests in complex national security systems. Furthermore, it needs to obtain the citizens' respect and consent from all social strata by asking difficult questions to power. Such tasks are increasingly arduous, even in older and wealthier democracies (Gill, 2020).

On paper, Brazil's national security oversight is among the most developed in Latin America (Swenson & Hirane, 2017). Between the end of the Military Dictatorship and 2014, Brazil experienced its most durable democratic regime. Since 2015, instead of moving toward more equality and deeper democratization, the lessons were unlearned, and the deeds were undone. Our research's main theoretical contribution is to demonstrate how an institutionalist perspective needs to be combined with cultural and power-based variables to interpret the national security sector institutionalization challenges. Brazil provided a critical testbed for developing this approach.

In this country, efforts to build democratic institutions must overcome vast social inequalities and an ingrained authoritarian political culture. Historically,

when elected governing coalitions advance public policies to redistribute wealth and status in favor of more impoverished workers, the dominant social groups and the repressive state apparatus tend to abandon liberal-democratic attitudes. Echoing Joseph Conrad's description in the *Heart of Darkness* (1996), Brazilian elites resort to rather brutal behavior to suppress interests and opinions contrary to their appetites (Gorender, 2000). The combination of rigidly unequal socio-economic structures and consequent low levels of trust between millions of groups and individuals continuously interacting explain the seemingly abrupt political regime changes in Brazil (Reis, 2020). The breach between formal security institutions and the underlying, uncooperative power dynamics was significant also under the last two democratic regimes (Cepik & Antunes, 2003a). Therefore, this article also corrects inconsistencies in the Brazilian case's interpretation arising from a strict focus on national security's institutional design.

In the final passage of *The Secret Agent* (1908), Conrad's incorruptible anarchist Professor poses a threat as he caresses images of ruin and destruction, passing like a pest in the streets full of people. In today's Brazil, the President of the Republic resembles Conrad's character more than any anarchist or the virus itself. A crucial enigma intelligence and security must solve to balance effectiveness and legitimacy in the contemporary world.

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