

How do authoritarian populists affect the functioning of federalism? An analysis of the Brazilian case under the Bolsonaro government

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the Bolsonaro government (2019–2022) and how it simultaneously confronted the federal design and democracy, which were reestablished and reinforced after ending the military regime in 1985. Bolsonaro sought to attack three pivotal pillars of cooperative federalism, which were built throughout the Brazilian redemocratization, and continue to be pillars of Brazilian democracy. First, the autonomy and federal safeguards of states and municipalities. This division of powers is part of the Brazilian democratic model and is guaranteed by laws and institutions. Second, the federative cooperation, which favors the quality and democratization of public policy decisions. Third, federalism is one of the checks and balances of Brazilian democracy, along with congressional and judicial control over government officials. Throughout the redemocratization process, this model of federative checks and balances worked in a balanced way, containing actions that concentrated power and leading to dialogue to improve national policies. The Bolsonaro government attacked these three pillars of federalism, which had an impact on the Brazilian democracy and cooperative federalism.