

Partisans and bureaucrats: A Bolsa Familia Case study

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On 12th March 2016, President Dilma Rousseff, from the Workers' Party (PT), stepped down from office after a contentious impeachment process and is replaced by her vice-president, Michel Temer, from the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB). Shifting alliances to the center-right parties, Michel Temer's new administration promoted an agenda of budgetary cuts and reduction in social welfare policies left by the PT administration such as the **Bolsa Familia Program (PBF)**. (Holland 2019; Ferreira Silva 2019). This research conducted semi-structured interviews with middle and high-ranking bureaucrats in the **National Secretariat for Citizenship Income (Senarc)** within the Ministry of Social Development (MDS) to explore to what extent a change in **partisan politics affected the federal management of the Bolsa Familia Program**.

Study in the field of public administration:
clash of interests between

bureaucracy and **politicians**

Increasingly **bureaucratized** and bureaucrats becoming more **politicized**, creating **hybrid actors** that exceed their prescribed roles (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981)

Bolsa Familia Program

- Conditional cash transfer program targeting populations in and below the official poverty line
- Objective: **immediate poverty relief**
- **Conditionalities** in health and education for families to obtain benefit
- Average of **R\$180 a month** (Paiva, Falcão, and Bartholo 2013)
- Managed by the Senarc within the Ministry of Social Development (MDS)
- Highly associated to **Workers' Party (PT)** administration for its creation when PT held office

Literature review

Bolsa Familia

- Andrade and Lima-Silva studied the changes in high-level federal bureaucracy during the first years of PBF (Andrade and Lima-Silva 2016)
- Oliveira and Lotta focus on the historical path of Bolsa Familia and its construction by middle level bureaucrats to claim that the program has created an island of bureaucratic efficiency that was shielded from political decisions throughout its creation (V. Oliveira and Lotta 2015)
- Literature on the program has shown that it has successfully reached low-income Brazilians along the social assistance dimensions of health, education, and income (A. Carvalho, Almeida, and Jaime 2014; C. Carvalho and Marques 2014)

- Weber saw an ideal bureaucracy that is the rationalizing activity of the state (Weber 2019)
- On the other hand, Wilson saw politics and administration as inherently complementary when a functional division exists between them (Wilson 1955)
- **Hybrid bureaucrats** (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981)

Brazilian bureaucracy

- Brazilian bureaucracy as operating in 'bureaucratic rings' of influence where privileged groups could insert themselves within the state in order to serve them (Cardoso 1974)
- **Islands of rationality** or "pockets of efficiency" in Brazilian bureaucracy created to insulate administration from clientelism (Evans 1993, N/A)

Hypothesis

PBF is understood as an island of rationality within Brazilian federal bureaucracy. Therefore, it presents a strong path dependency that provides it with a solid structure during periods of political change

Research design

Interview with **10 high and middle-level bureaucrats** from the Senarc that managed the program during and after the shift from Dilma Rousseff to the Michel Temer administration

Interviewees were asked about:

- Their evaluation of the program during Dilma
- Their expectation with regards to Temer
- Their evaluation of the program during Temer

Analysis

Lula (2003-2011)

- PBF as key priority
- Organization of bureaucracy

Dilma (2011-2016)

- Expansion of program's directives
- Political insulation
- Autonomy of administration
- Budgetary pressures

Temer (2016-2019)

- Bureaucrats' expectation for significant changes in the program
- Focus on discourse of exclusion of beneficiaries rather than inclusion
- New readjustment of the benefit
- 'Fine Comb Operation' to find faults in the program
- Senarc secretary remained – continuity in bureaucracy

Conclusion

Unlike expected by bureaucrats, the Temer administration did not make substantial alterations in the program. That is given to Bolsa Familia's:

- **Capillarity**
- **Technically competent staff**
- **Bureaucratic spirit de corps**
- **Social recognition**
- **Policy effectiveness**

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