

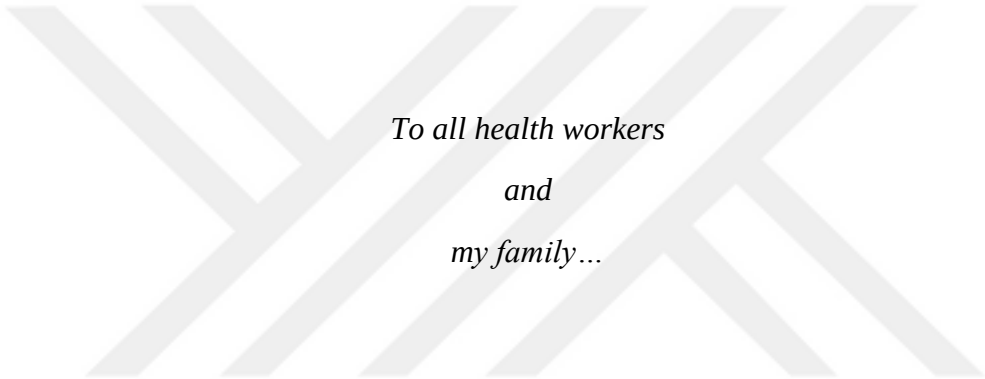
HOW TO WEATHER THE STORM: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON POPULIST TRAJECTORIES TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Master's Thesis

by

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July 2021



*To all health workers
and
my family...*

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TRAJECTORIES TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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The Department of International Relations
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July 2021

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ABSTRACT

HOW TO WEATHER THE STORM: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON POPULIST TRAJECTORIES TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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July, 2021

Why populist leaders have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic differently? This thesis addresses this question through a paired comparison of Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey. These three countries, despite being similar, have employed unique responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cases are explained based on two sets of indicators. First, the national indicators address the overall conduct within the case where vaccination efforts, closures, quarantines, local and national policies are assessed. The second set of indicators address the leaders' attitude, their recognition of the seriousness of the pandemic, and assess their populist tendencies during the crisis. Crisis management, populism, and recently emerging COVID-19 politics literature have been used alongside articles in media to trace the change in the policies and leaders' evolving discourses. These changes are explained through three factors: the left-right continuum, social aid capabilities, and opposition strength.

After the analyses, the thesis suggests new terms for unique trajectories. Adversarial denialism for Brazil indicates an environment where during the downplaying of the pandemic, efforts of other parties are demonized. Defective inclusionism for Mexico denotes a setting where the leader gradually defects his denialistic positions after popular pressure while failing to provide inclusionist policies. Partisan affirmation for Turkey signifies a monopolization of the conduct where efforts of others are systemically prevented.

Keywords: populism, crisis management, COVID-19

ÖZET

FIRTINAYI NASIL ATLATMALI: COVID-19 PANDEMİSİ'NDE POPÜLİST YÖNTEMLERE İLİŞKİN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI VAKA ANALİZLERİ

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Popülist liderler COVID-19 Pandemisi karşısında neden farklı cevaplar verdi? Tez, bu soruya Brezilya, Meksika ve Türkiye vakalarının karşılaştırmalı vaka analizi üzerinden cevap vermeyi hedeflemiştir. Büyük ölçüde benzerlik göstermelerine karşın, her üç ülkede de COVID-19 pandemisine verilen cevaplar farklılık göstermektedir. Vakalar, ulusal ve bireysel olmak üzere ikiye ayrılmış kriterler üzerinden incelenmiştir. Ulusal kriterler ülkelerin aşılama faaliyetleri, karantina ve kapanma faaliyetleri, ulusal ve yerel politikaların uyumu gibi kriterleri içermektedir. Öte yandan bireysel kriterler, bu ülkelerin popülist liderlerinin pandemi sürecindeki tavırlarını ve genel anlamıyla pandeminin gerektirdiği uygulamalara ilişkin tutumlarını ele alır. Tez, bu kriterlerin anlatımının yanı sıra, liderlerin süreç boyunca siyasi tutumlarının değişimini, kriz yönetimi, popülizm ve yeni şekillenmekte olan COVID-19 literatürleri ile, uluslararası medyada işlenmiş haberler üzerinden anlatır. Bu bağlamda, kuramsal kısımda açıklandığı üzere, pandemi boyunca ülkelerdeki değişim, siyasi spektrum üzerindeki konum, sosyal yardım kapasiteleri ve muhalefet etkinliği olmak üzere üç açıklayıcı unsur üzerinden temellendirip yeni terim önermeleri yapar.

Bu bağlamda, Brezilya için önerilen karşıt inkarcılık, pandeminin varlığına ilişkin liderin açık inkarı esnasında pandemiye ciddiye alan tarafların şeytanlaştırılmasını içerir. Meksika için önerilen vazgeçici içermecilik, liderin pandemiye ilişkin tutumunun popüler baskılar sonucu değiştiği bir ortamda liderin ideolojik tutumuna sadık kalamadığı durumlardır. Son olarak, Türkiye için önerilen partizan olumlama terimi ise liderin pandeminin etkilerini önemseydiği, fakat pandemi bağlamındaki çabaları monopolize etmek üzerinden diğer tarafların baskılandığı bir tutumu işaret eder.

Anahtar kelimeler: popülizm, kriz yönetimi, COVID-19

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I would also like to express my sympathies for all the doctors, nurses, and volunteers around the globe who supported their communities and stood strong during the pandemic. And, on this occasion, would like to express my condolences who lost their lives, including Dr. Li Wenliang and his surviving family.

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INTRODUCTION

“It has been an entire year, is it brother?” sighed my 7-year-old sister, while putting her medical mask on to take a walk in the neighborhood with our mother during the time allowed for her age group to go out, amidst a rather strictly enforced curfew. After their walk, our mother rushed to wash her hands and disinfected the chocolate bar my sister was grasping firmly between her palms. This anecdote would have been completely irrelevant a year ago. Yet, since late 2019, the way that ordinary citizens traverse through their daily life has changed drastically as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the succeeding months, going out, seeing a concert, celebrating Valentine’s Day, and many other social activities gradually became distant memories as the COVID-19 virus rapidly escalated into a global crisis. The pandemic resulted in a substantial decrease in national economies in 2020, which has only started to recover in mid-2021 in developed nations and continues to be a struggle in developing and under-developed markets. (Congressional Research Service, 2021) The pandemic has also resulted in a significant fallout for enterprises and workers. “Nearly half of the world’s 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods (WHO, 2020).” The pandemic has also brought in light, the questions about the cooperation between national states in the face of a global pandemic. The development of vaccines –and prior to it- other medical equipments has added a new dimension to our existing understanding of international trades and specifically, to the ‘global public goods’ which are non-rival and non-excludable (Brown & Susskind, 2020). In partial relation to this, a new phenomena called the vaccine diplomacy has appeared as a way to influence international relations and trade as

well as bilateral relations. All these aspects have had different conducts and results in different nations.

Indeed, as there are differences between countries in their approach to the global effects of the pandemic, the governments have also employed differing strategies within. More than a year into the pandemic, some sufficient time has now elapsed for scholars to categorize the policy responses of governments. New Zealand for instance, has been widely praised by the international community for its effective response to the pandemic, where scientific advices are heeded with caution and precision. This led to a normalization period only within three months. In the USA on the other hand, former president Donald Trump was often criticized for his ineffective response and negligence, where the USA still struggle with high numbers of death per million today. When compared, these two countries have the equipment and the resources for an effective response, yet they diverged in how the pandemic is handled. Mudde (2016) acknowledges a populist surge where the number of populist politicians and leaders has increased substantially in the last years. During the pandemic, most of these populist leaders were in power and they had different approaches to handle the crisis. While the general sentiment is towards thinking ineffective governance exercised by the populists, they also have variances among themselves. In this sense, this thesis aims to systemically categorize the different trajectories under typologies using three independent variables. In accordance, the left-right continuum, social aid capabilities, and opposition strength are argued to be central in causing divergences across the populist cases.

Populism –argued to be an elusive concept– has attracted significant scholarly attention, which paved the way for multiple different approaches in the definition. A prominent name in the field, Laclau defines populism as a political

practice that requires “the dichotomization of the social space through the creation of an internal frontier and the construction of an equivalential chain between unfulfilled demands (Aretxaga & University of Nevada Reno. Center for Basque Studies., 2005)”. In a similar vein, populism has four core components where an antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite operates under the idea of popular sovereignty through the valorization of the people and denigration of the elite (Stanley, 2008). “[Populism] is distinct from classical ideologies such as fascism and liberalism, because it has a limited programmatic scope (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018)”. Mudde (2021) defines populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite.”

The emergence of the COVID-19 came as a sudden exogenous shock to governments. The pandemic constitutes a major public health crisis that researchers can use to assess how populist leaders deal with it. The COVID-19 pandemic falls under the category of a natural crisis, and therefore, is a good opportunity to observe how actors deal with such exogenous shocks. The thesis aims to contribute to three different pieces of literature, crisis management literature, populism literature, and the COVID-19 literature and, show how a public health crisis contributed towards the perpetuation of populist agendas across cases. For doing so, the thesis provides in-depth paired comparisons of Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey. Moffitt (2015) argues that “populist actors actively participate in the ‘spectacularization of failure’ that underlies crisis, allowing them to pit ‘the people’ against a dangerous other”. The literature, therefore, connects crises and populism, and the pandemic appears to be a good opportunity to assess the relationship between exogenous shocks and their use at the

hands of populists. While populists strive to manipulate and control crises, the pandemic proved otherwise.

Whether be it a perpetuation of an existing crisis, or the artificial creation of a new one, the notion of crisis is linked to populism in the literature. Kenneth Roberts (1995) argues that “[populism] surges most strongly in contexts of crisis or profound social transformation”. In a similar line, Laclau (2005; 2007) argues populism cannot emerge without a crisis and advocates a strong correlation between crises and populism. In this direction, crises are useful for politicians since they provide a specific “‘window of opportunity for the emergence of new political actors which capitalise on citizens’ discontent (Caiani & Graziano, 2019)”. Hence “open[ing] up political opportunities (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014)”. However, the literature often is concerned with financial or political crises where humans have the agency in the making and the perpetuation of the event. Being a disease, the emergence and the perpetuation of the pandemic has a lesser degree of human agency involved while organizational capacities become more important. These two aspects, in turn, render crises as events where it becomes hard to blame someone, if not impossible.

Therefore the difference in the human agency inevitably leads to the question ‘what makes a disaster natural?’. In a broad sense, natural crises can be defined as “natural events that are uncommon enough to be considered outside the range of normal human experience, and therefore present extreme challenges when they eventually do occur (Alagona, 2006)”. As these events are rare and beyond the human agency, “natural hazards have the special quality of emphasizing man’s relative helplessness (Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997)”. Yet, natural disasters and crises do not occur in a vacuum and they are not “immune from politics [as] incentives faced by human actors can affect the prevention, mitigation, and damage of natural disasters (Cohen

& Werker, 2008).” The COVID-19 pandemic on the other hand, seems to be an in-between case where the natural occurrence is later manipulated by the populist leaders in accordance with their political agenda. While the occurrence of the virus had no human involvement –biologically speaking- its perpetuation on the hands of human agents have been the defining factor that altered the outcome. This adds up the complexity of the situation at hand, while rendering more importance to understanding the underlying mechanisms beneath it, especially to that of populist leaders.

Being an ongoing process, both the scholarly work and the data is somewhat limited for the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it should be noted that available data is also somewhat contested as the WHO argues some countries failed to provide transparent numbers. Therefore, in an environment of data uncertainty, qualitative studies with a smaller number of cases are easier to conduct and are more reliable. This is evident by the steady growth in the number of similar COVID-19 studies that recently started to penetrate populism literature. Following a similar logic –all the while suffering the same limitations– this thesis will employ a paired comparison of Brazil, Mexico and Turkey.

Accordingly, Turkey, Brazil and, Mexico appear to be similar settings where all three cases are considered to be governed under populist leaders. To display the differences in these populist countries, three aspects will be taken into account which I contend are the best variables in explaining the deviations across cases. First is the prior state strength. In cases where the state’s capacity of social aid distribution was high, states appear more able and willing to acknowledge the need for taking the virus seriously. Likewise, countries with crippled or weak social aid distributing schemes are more likely to experience difficulties in shielding their citizens from the

negative effects of the pandemic. Second is the strength of opposition. In cases where the opposition is relatively strong, they can pressure the leader and their government to take more definitive steps and aid citizens or take their own measures despite lacking government support. Third, is the ideological differences, or the left-right continuum. It should be noted, however, what the thesis aims to uncover is not to tell whether the right or the left is successful during the pandemic as it would require an overhaul of the research question, the data, and would also require a different perspective. Instead, what the thesis strives to uncover is the effect of the ideology in the creation of different trajectories. A left-populist would have a different discourse in comparison with a right-wing populist. The former would tell the story of poor masses while the latter would defend not being a nanny state. Either way, the left, and right continuum appears to be a defining factor in how the responses are tailored which shall be elaborated in the theory section. Moreover, as populist regimes are dependent on a common enemy of the people, the subject matter for blame-shifting differs accordingly which alters the outcome.

The thesis expands upon the individual cases and assigns individual chapters while doing so. In accordance, the perpetuation of the crisis is told with reference to populism and crisis management literatures, and bridges them to the COVID-19. The next chapter establishes the theoretical bases upon which the deviances in cases are caused. The upcoming chapter also provides the reader with the literatures pertaining to populism and crisis management. After that, it explains the dependent variables and systemically divides them into two categories, national and individual, in an effort to assess their deviances upon the cases.

CHAPTER 1

1.1. Literature Review

A recently emerging literature, the COVID-19 politics literature has now produced some scholarly work that addresses the connection between the pandemic and populism. A group in the literature argues that closing of the international borders, surveillance over citizens combined with the questioning of the legitimacy of international organizations has given way to the rise of a new ‘pandemic populism’ (Vieten, 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Woods et al., 2020; Su & Shen, 2020). In a similar direction, another group focus on how the pandemic changes the political field where anti-establishment parties ease their rhetoric while authoritarian leaders use the fear of unpredictability and subvert democratic institutions through emergency laws (Belin & De Maio, 2020; Degerman et al., 2020; Bayerlein & Gyöngyösi, 2020; Kavaklı, 2020b). Another related group approach the pandemic from a state-capacity perspective where they argue states having no prior experience of similar crises were indicative of a state’s preparedness to the pandemic while government effectiveness is significantly associated with decreased casualties (Capano, 2020; Serikbayeva et al., 2021). A more focused group explores the different mechanisms and responses given both by the governments and their citizens. Manson (2020) for instance, argues both ends of the political spectrum in liberal countries abide by the government practices which, under normal circumstances, were to be opposed. Kavaklı (2020) on the other hand, argues that populists were slower to respond at the beginning of the pandemic due to their mistrust towards experts. Some scholarly efforts for the categorization of the

mechanisms and responses are also present. McKee et al. (2020) identified four different mechanisms where they conclude populism and the pandemic created a self-feeding cycle. In the literature, I have encountered only one such work that created a typology of responses which is quite inspiring. Meyer (2020) compared 17 different cases in a two-part framework. “The first decision that a leader makes is whether to downplay the virus or to take it seriously (Meyer, 2020)”. Their policy decisions are then classified as ‘liberal’ or ‘illiberal’. Even though Meyer offers some explanation as to how their classifications are made, he fails to provide an in-depth explanation why that particular answer is given by these countries. The reader is not informed about why, for instance, Bolsonaro chose to downplay the pandemic and fired his health minister while Giuseppe Conte of Italy or Boyko Borisov of Bulgaria employed a serious response despite being categorized as populists. In this direction, the thesis aims to provide the readers with the specifics of Turkey, Brazil and Mexico and will classify their policy decisions based on theoretical grounds. This effort will hopefully bolster our understanding about different motivations and different approaches within populists themselves.

Some significant efforts are also visible in individual cases of specific countries. Such studies are valuable for providing a better understanding of how scholars chose to approach the pandemic. First, this literature offers a broad understanding of how different regimes and democracy levels tend to respond to the crisis. For instance, as mentioned, some studies in the literature show a lack of swiftness on the part of authoritarian leaders, which is puzzling since the centralization of power would bring about a faster decision-making process. Second, the existence of such studies allows researchers to see similarities between similar countries. By all means and purposes,

the similarity criteria for this thesis begins with whether these countries are under a populist rule or not. In this direction, Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico are often hailed in the literature as populist countries.

A significant group in the literature define Turkey as a competitive authoritarian (Levitsky & Way, 2002) regime where the political ground is tilted towards the incumbent Justice and Development Party (*AKP*) through the justification of new reversals in democratic practices based on popular support mustered (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016; Somer, 2016; Yılmaz & Turner, 2019). Similarly in Brazil, authoritarianism is socially rooted following years of military rule where the ruling elite gradually forged an ‘authoritarian neoliberal alliance’ with the middle class. (Pinheiro, 2002; Domínguez, 2002; Saad-Filho & Boffo, 2020). According to the data of Freedom House, despite being classified as a free democracy with competitive elections, the upper echelons of the Brazilian administration are plagued with corruption and minority groups are economically excluded (Freedom House, 2020). These problems combined seemingly provided a strong basis for a populist turn under Bolsonaro. As for Mexico, long years of Partido Revolucionario Institucional (*PRI*) rule where the presidents could name their successors, appoint party members to civil service, rendered the party an umbrella of elites and bastion of their coalition over decades (Booth & Seligson, 1984; Zinser, 1987; Bailey & Gomez, 1990; Lawson, 2000). Even though the PRI rule came to an end, and Obrador was recently elected through the promises of eradicating the corruption and empowering the poor, critiques have increasingly associated him with demagoguery to embody himself as the voice of the popular will. The literature thus, suggests that these three cases share the same trait of authoritarianism at some point in their

history which provided the basis for their recent populist turn. In this direction, a solid opportunity emerges for researchers to compare and contrast how similar populist countries with similar backgrounds have responded to a public health crisis to demarcate a line between different motivations and mechanisms of their responses

A group of scholars who study Turkey acknowledge that the pandemic amplified the financial problems that Turkey has been experiencing before the outbreak which can result in Turkey seeking the help of international organizations such as the IMF (Buğra et al, 2020; Taskinsoy, 2020; Açıkgöz & Günay, 2020).

Another group, on the other hand, focus on the polarizing effects where they argue Turkey employs a nationalistic response in which the pandemic is repeatedly framed as a war of independence, opposition members are accused of treason for their criticism directed towards the handling of the crisis and even so far, the campaigns of the opposition party are denied existence (Gülseven, 2020; Bekdil, 2020; Stavrakakis et al., 2020; Keyman & Aydın-Düzgit, 2020). “The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ introduces a discourse of solidarity and otherness in a context where the elite holds power—even that of life and death—over the people and fiercely resists any perceived threat to this monopoly (Stanley, 2008)”. In this direction, the literature suggests that the pandemic helped the AKP to deepen the pre-existing socio-political cleavages. In a very similar line, it is also argued that the pandemic created the means for furthering the ‘presidentialization’ of Turkish politics while at the same time limiting the responses that the municipalities and officials can employ (Bakir, 2020; Keyman & O’Donohue, 2020; Cagaptay & Yuksel, 2020). The literature for Turkey, therefore, revolves around three gravity centers; the presidential system, the AKP’s political discourse, and the economy. Having struggled for almost a decade

with growing public discontent, a worsening economy, and adaptation problems after transitioning to a presidential system, these three aspects are not mutually exclusive. These three aspects combined, the pandemic hastened the advance of authoritarianism as it allegedly allowed Erdoğan to use the crisis as a pretext to further erode checks and balances which has already been weakened systematically in the last decade.

As for Mexico, there is a significant lack of individual case studies and scholarly work and due to a lack of language skills, I am unable to review the material written in Spanish. Yet, existing sources and news articles helped greatly for the creation of a projection. In the international media, Mexico was told to be one of the epicenters in the Latin American region as of June 2020 where the importance of the virus has been underestimated (Marques V. et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2020). According to Worldometers data, the total number of cases stands around 2,2 Million while the death toll slightly surpassed 200.000 as of March 2021 (Worldometer, 2021). In such a setting, the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is more visible in the Mexican case where president Obrador “criticized medical doctors and accused many of them of wanting to earn more money from practicing medicine rather than to help people (Ibarra-Nava et al., 2020)”. This appears as a text-book practice in populism where the society is progressively divided into two distinct camps. In Turkey, on the other hand, an opposite attitude is visible where the doctors and nurses are praised for their hard work and dubbed as the “soldiers of the public health army”. This contrasts with the case of Mexico and demonstrates the difference in attitudes which the thesis claims to exist. President Obrador encouraged Mexicans to take care of their parents should they contract the disease, stating it is the Mexican

tradition to look after the elders (Flannery, 2020). Some articles are highlighting the issue of poverty where poverty has fueled the spread of the virus as it diminishes access to quality healthcare services (Millán-Guerrero et al., 2020; Gutierrez & Bertozzi, 2020). The federal government has also been slow to respond to the pandemic where measures were not compulsory amidst a binary ‘it is either health or the economy’ rhetoric (Renteria & Arellano-Gault, 2020; Vázquez, 2020). In light of the few English sources reviewed here, the problems of the Mexican response revolve around deliberate neglect of the virus by the Obrador administration and the ongoing issue of economic poverty.

The largest economy in the Latin American region, Brazil is often told to be a worst-case scenario. A significant amount of scholarly work has been produced which emphasizes the attitude of president Jair Bolsonaro that contributed to the escalation of the pandemic. It is observed by a group of scholars that the Brazilian response is characterized by an attitude of anti-scientism where Bolsonaro has repeatedly denied scientific facts while employing aggressive rhetoric against scientists and senior officials who advocate compliance with the measures that can aptly be named as medical populism (Duarte, 2020; Ortega & Orsini, 2020; Conde, 2020; Lasco, 2020). Some studies also inspect the federal states of Brazil. Scholars observed that federalism in Brazil has had negative effects yet individual states are forced into a leading role where they decided to follow measures despite the unwillingness of the federal government (Greer et al., 2020; Abrucio et al., 2020; VanDusky-Allen et al., 2020). In this sense, the literature for Brazil primarily revolves around the discrepancy between responses given by individual federative

states and the federal state governed by Bolsonaro where sub-national governments are primarily responsible for measures in their local surroundings.

As aforementioned, scholarly work on the implications of COVID-19 politics is somewhat scarce which poses an important limitation that the thesis can capitalize on. Therefore, the thesis will make intensive use of international media to complement the scarcity of scholarly work. Yet, the studies published so far are sufficient to direct researchers in a certain direction and possibly can highlight some important patterns. In light of the work reviewed, the responses given by the three cases here are primarily analyzed through their government and the leaders in particular. The motivation behind placing a special emphasis on these two entities complies with the authoritarianism literature. Svoblik (2009) argues that a power-sharing mechanism exists between the leader and the ruling elite. By logic, this necessitates either a joint effort in the decision-making process or convincing of the elites by the leader. In all cases, the leader seemingly built their rhetoric upon pre-existing cleavages in the society to amplify their popularity in a crisis time while cases like Brazil have deviations between the leader and the ruling elite. In Turkey, the rhetoric is built upon ideologies where the opposition is prevented from helping the people with mostly compliant ruling elites. In Mexico and Brazil, a degree of anti-elitism and anti-scientism is visible where the latter has to protest ruling elites. In this sense, the literature points to a possible relation between the reversal of democratic practices in the context of the pandemic. The economy also appears to be a crucial point as some sources observe. At the same time, all cases had to consider a possible trade-off between full-closure or strict measures versus letting the business

as usual which not only have possibly slowed down the responses but also contributed to nationalistic rhetoric.

1.2. The Theory

The thesis constructs its backbone upon three crucial factors that are argued to provide the best explanation for different trajectories. The left-right continuum, the social aid strength, and the opposition strength.

It has been argued that “populism appeared mostly in a neoliberal guise in the 1990s (e.g., Alberto Fujimori in Peru), yet in a mainly radical left variant in the 2000s (e.g., Hugo Chávez in Venezuela) (Mudde, 2017).” Therefore, until recently, it was the left that was primarily associated with the concept of populism. However, in recent years, populism is often used for both ends of the continuum. The latter half of the 2010s was an important period where most scholarly attention was drawn towards a rising right-wing populism in Europe with Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in The Netherlands, Viktor Orban in Hungary. Although some critics argue the left-right paradigm has collapsed because subjective variables such as anti-system opinion and low-interpersonal trust, gained more importance (Algan, et al., 2018) more and more classifications are visible in populism studies at both ends of the spectrum. Thus, the rise of populism at both ends necessitates a discussion about populist governments’ position on the political spectrum. The position of the government is valuable primarily for two aspects. First, left and right-wing governments have different political agendas and different use of political language. This not only affects the construal of the political universe but also significantly alters the policy decisions imposed upon the people. Second, as populists rely on a sharp distinction between the elite and the true people, the extent of what constitutes

and qualifies the members of both sides differs dramatically. The right populists, for instance, often construct their sentiments on the concept of nation where the members of the elite are argued to undermine its unity. As an extension most policy choices are done under the pretext of being national or serving the nation while efforts of others are demonized for not being or serving the true interests of the nation. Yet, being a thin-centered concept, what constitutes or serves the nation is highly salient. Similarly, left-wing populists also demarcate a line between the true people and the elite, but it is often done through more class based sentiments. Left-wing populists often promise empowering the poor masses, or the true people, and save them from the lavish elite who only perpetuate a state of exploitation. Different from their right-wing counterpart, the true people is not constituted through a sense of kinship or nativity but through class based distinctions. This is also the reason behind why some critics argue left-wing populism has components of the socialist way of thinking, promising a fairer resource distribution to the true owners of the state, not the elite.

As Moffitt (2015) aptly put, crises and populism are linked where the former is mediated and performed. The crises therefore cannot be thought of as separate entities from those who govern them. The pandemic, therefore, is intertwined with how the incumbents perform it. As the left-right distinction is important in the construction of policies as well as the discourse to convince the people to comply with such policies, left-right distinction matters in the appearance of different trajectories. In accordance, the cases of this thesis have both ends of the populists. Mexico under AMLO is a left-wing populist country where the president promised to empower the poor masses. Brazil, and Turkey, are right-wing populists. Both leaders

have promoted a strongman image with a pinch of macho and religious sentiments. This, in turn, affected which segments of the society, or the true people, were more privileged in receiving the governments' help, or be excluded from the negative impacts of the pandemic. In Turkey, for instance, supporters of the government were unlawfully allowed to disobey regulations to participate in government-favored events. In March 2021, Taksim Mosque in Istanbul was opened to service with masses attending the ceremony. While it is actively discouraged by the police to be in public in-crowd, attending such events yielded no consequences. Similarly, Turkey imposed a ban on alcohol sales during the national lockdown and other days of curfew in the ensuing weeks with no legal basis. This not only sparked discontent among most citizens but also showed that the definition of true people largely relied upon perceptions on lifestyle choices. This shows the left-right difference has been effective on policy decisions which also strengthened the polarization and possibly served the agenda of the incumbent. Therefore, it is one of the reasons for having different responses to the pandemic.

The existence of opposition is a valuable commodity for populist rules. Often, populist regimes derive legitimacy from regularly held elections, albeit the playing ground is significantly skewed towards the incumbent. This reduces the chances for opposition to topple the populist incumbent and break the cycle. The existence of the opposition also provides somewhat sustainable means. Constant polarization is possible as, through the grace of the true people, incumbents allegedly prevent the elites from infecting or exploiting the system. But aside from providing a crucial component of such regimes, opposition strength during crisis times may fulfill two important objectives. First, the opposition can push the incumbent parties to pursue

less populist agendas and realistically handle the situation. This would happen through a systemic denunciation of the government's inability to provide assistance to its citizens. The opposing politicians and parties may also fill the gap through the initiation of competing campaigns and measures, thus forcing the incumbent populists towards acknowledgment. In such cases, opposition supporters would have access to more resources that are otherwise sparsely allocated to them. Second, should the crisis be underplayed or neglected, they would take their own measures or mobilize their bases to shield them from the crisis as best as they can. This is quite relevant for the pandemic as a handful of the debates revolve around governments' ability to properly address the severity of the pandemic and take necessary steps. In Brazil, governors of Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro opted to push their own quarantine and measures when Bolsonaro refused to initiate one. This partially helped locals of these states to remain the same while weakened Bolsonaro. In Turkey, mayors of Ankara and Istanbul were quick to take action and launch a solidarity campaign for donations. These efforts were immediately halted by the ministry of the interior. Yet, the same model was adopted by the government while being embroidered with a nationalistic tone. This also helped partially extend the capabilities of opposition cities but also weakened the speculations about the opposition's perceived inability to govern. Therefore, the opposition strength appears as another factor that explains the deviation in the responses.

1.3. Indicators for the Responses

Following the brief exploration of the cases, several indicators can be used to measure the government responses to the covid-19 pandemic. Following the brief exploration of the

cases, several indicators can be used to measure the government responses to the covid-19 pandemic. These indicators are subjected to systemic analysis to assess the unique trajectories the cases have employed during the pandemic. Indicators are used to create a typology on different perpetuations for the pandemic at the hands of populists. In accordance, the thesis measures the responses through different indicators on two units of analysis, the government, and the leader. For the government, the thesis will explore social aids, economic stimulus packages, closures and quarantines, seriousness, compliance with WHO suggestions, tandem in local and national policies, creation of a specialized response body and vaccination efforts. The indicators for leaders on the other hand, are separated from the rest, as populist movements largely center around a charismatic leader. The leaders' attitudes towards the crises, often affect the conduct dramatically which the COVID-19 pandemic has not been an exemption. For the leader, seriousness, tandem with ministers, and personal compliance with measures are also thought to have an effect upon the conduct besides more important government indicators. Indicators for the government are important to show whether the country was able to employ an institutionalized effective response. Indicators for the leaders, on the other hand, are important to show whether such institutionalized responses are hampered or twisted to empower the leader. The thesis argues that populist governments have varying responses partly because of disharmonious conduct between the government and the leader. At the end of each individual chapter, the thesis provides the reader with a table, displaying the evaluation of case's strength. The coloration in the tables are assigned with respect to three tiers; weak, moderate and strong. These are determined in accordance with other nations' conduct during the pandemic. In accordance, populist leaders made use of the crisis to further their agenda and empower their rhetoric during a crisis. Something they would normally hard to achieve during normal times.

1.4. The Government

Social aids have been a central item throughout the pandemic where the central governments partially shielded their citizens from the negative impacts of the pandemic. Social assistance included unemployment payments, rent aids, medical aids, and financial support for low-income workers. Germany for instance compensated affected workers up to 77% using an existing scheme designed for unforeseeable events (Deutsche Welle, 2020). While populist countries claim to have similar schemes and funds, oftentimes such social aid is problematic to deploy and distribute. Primarily because populist countries are subjected to partisan resource distribution where only a select group of elites and citizens receive such benefits. This renders social aids an important aspect to consider in the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis argues that social aid distribution, however weak or strong they are, is often misconducted and selectively done. Any differentiation in the cases is valuable to show how and why populist countries chose to distribute these aids (or not) the way they do in times of crisis.

In a similar vein, economic stimulus packages are intended to shield enterprises and employers from the negative financial effects of the pandemic. Because most countries and individuals have opted to refrain from socializing, such enterprises suffered catastrophic financial losses and in turn, required support from the government. These supports and stimulus packages included loan guarantees, loan service deferrals, a ban on lay-offs, and tax deferrals. While not being as local as social aids, economic stimulus packages also require strong operational capacity and regulations aside from the economic means to create them. As argued in the populism literature, populist economies are often retarded since the system operates on a partisan –and often neo-patrimonial- basis with unprecedented inefficiency. The

stimulus packages in this sense are an important step to differentiate trajectories that populist countries follow. The thesis argues that all three cases, despite announcing similar packages, had different conduct based which shall be elaborated in the relevant sections.

Another indicator is the closure of non-essential businesses and quarantines. Such measures almost always result in citizens refraining from social life and remain indoors. In other words, the closure of non-essential businesses is a result of deciding upon a quarantine. In the very first days of the pandemic, the international media often showed footages from Wuhan where citizens are forcibly made to remain indoors with their doors barred shut by the officials. Although not as radical as China, most nations have gone through similar phases where either a total or partial lockdown has been initiated. And just there are differences in the conduct of liberal democracies, populist countries have also followed different trajectories except for one common point. The majority of the populist cases have resisted a total lockdown. Brubaker (2020) acknowledges populists' resistance to lockdowns while arguing it to paradoxically creating a wave of popular anger. The lockdowns have not been uniform conduct throughout the pandemic where the duration or the enforcement methods have differed. The motivation behind such avoidance is valuable for understanding populist countries in times of crisis and identifying different trajectories. Previously, Turkey enforced 'a partial lockdown' where closures and curfews were imposed upon only select age groups and sectors. A nationwide lockdown occurred only after 1,5 years into the pandemic which lasted only for mere 17 days. At least 10 million citizens were excluded from the curfew as they were in essential sectors like logistics, defence, public service etc. Brazil, on the other hand, resisted calls for a nationwide lockdown primarily because of an unwilling

Bolsonaro. Despite extremely high levels of casualties, Brazil opted to trade-off business as usual for a lockdown and closures. Bolsonaro himself was often seen meeting with shop owners. In a similar vein, Mexico refrained from going under a full lockdown. Moreover, minor measures such as masks and social distancing were not ‘enforced’ but ‘encouraged’ (Sheridan, 2021). In other words, the central government never made it mandatory to comply with measures as it would arguably lead to discontent in society. Moreover, AMLO himself compared lockdowns and their enforcements as a dictatorial practice, “A lot of them are letting their authoritarian instincts show,” he said, adding “the fundamental thing is to guarantee liberty. (The Guardian, 2020)” Therefore, associating lockdowns with a fundamental discourse of the leftist tradition, liberty. In such differing responses, the decision to go under a lockdown and closure of businesses had fundamental effects on how the trajectories differed.

Taking the covid crisis seriously appears to be an important aspect at both levels, the government and the leader. Normally there would have been no need to separate the leader from the government as in theory, the state apparatus would work independently from the individuals. An analysis of Germany or the United Kingdom would have yielded lesser results from such an analysis as personalistic ties are less important. Yet, in populist countries, the checks and balances system is subjected to extreme erosion, and the state is often governed through personalistic ties. In other words, the acknowledgment by the government does not necessarily translate into serious actions because the leader may not have the same sentiments. In Turkey, both the government and the leader were in unison. Both in conduct and discourse, ministers, officials, experts, and Erdoğan specifically emphasized how it went

unchecked, the virus may devastate the country. In Brazil, on the other hand, the leader and the government had serious disagreements. Even though governors of the bigger cities like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro pushed for quarantine, Bolsonaro refused. Moreover, through disagreements on medications and measures, Bolsonaro repeatedly changed health ministers. This, in turn, resulted in both poor conduct and sidelining of some politicians within the system. In Mexico, AMLO recognized the seriousness of the situation after constant pressure from not only the experts but also from the government officials. The seriousness at both units of analysis is crucially important since it directly affects successful conduct and political unison. All cases this thesis deal with has had different approaches, which appears as a solid indicator for identifying different trajectories and classifications.

Compliance with the WHO recommendations, on the other hand, includes encouragement of following social distancing, mask use, maintenance of essential health services, and rapid implementation of measures. Although closely associated with closures, this indicator encapsulates both larger and smaller actions by the government. Ideally, the responses of nations should be in tandem with WHO regulations at the appropriate scale to manage the social, public, and financial impacts and reduce transmission (WHO, 2021)” The WHO compliance can be hampered in primarily two ways. First is the inability to comply with the measures due to the state lacking the necessary means. Most African nations, even if they have the political will to follow the recommendations, are severely lacking the state capacity to conduct even the most basic measures.

The grave situation is further amplified as most African nations have fragile healthcare systems. Therefore, the first way is not a deliberate action. The second is a

conscious choice. In our cases, the states not only have the capacity for compliance with the general directives and measures, but it is an active effort on the part of populists not to mobilize the means for it. It does not stem from lacking the means, but a plethora of misconduct and negligence of the ruling elites. In Brazil, for instance, the “Administration’s internal disputes have delayed implementation of coherent federal regulatory measures in the health system and increased the ongoing political instability (Urban & Saad-Diniz, 2020).” Even though Brazil is the largest economy in Latin America, the political strife and political ambitions prevented an effective response. Bolsonaro’s repetitive belittling of the pandemic and the macho approach to the measures have escalated the situation. Turkey on the other hand, financially speaking, is a close resemblance with Brazil. Yet, Turkey seems to comply with most of the recommendations while maintaining the healthcare system efficiently. The recommendations are often enforced through police where non-compliance results in a 3150 lira fine. Moreover, this perceived success has been a central item in the AKP’s discourse where Erdoğan found a use for mega hospitals in larger cities constructed years before the pandemic, which were criticized by the opposition as unnecessary. The amelioration of the healthcare system has been the gemstone of the AKP discourse where they argue previously the system was crumbling. This shows compliance with the WHO regulations are valuable for explaining different trajectories where both compliance and non-compliance have populist undertones.

While compliance is an important factor, compliance and implementation should be harmonious. By logic, the same regulations should be the same at the entirety of the country, regardless of mayors, urbanization, and political parties. Local and national policies should in

theory be in tandem with the central government. This would allow more equity in accessing resources and result in healthier conduct. Yet, it has often been the case in populist regimes local policies and national policies differed. This can happen primarily through two factors. First, the government would be incapable and/or unwilling to implement policies uniformly. In such cases, local rulers are tempted to implement their measures. A prime example of such is Brazil, where federal governors followed different policies despite their disapproval from the leader and the central government. Second, as populist regimes tend to favor certain districts and sideline others, other localities are somewhat left to fend off for themselves. This again would deviate from the national policies. Again the Favelas, or the slum neighborhoods, of Brazil often improvised their own methods for protection. In this sense, the discrepancies between local and national policies would be an important indicator for different trajectories.

The creation of an official meritocratic body that can respond to public health crises at the initial phase is also valuable to explore. Such bodies are expected to actively participate in the decision-making mechanisms while overseeing the implementation of the measures. Even though countries like the US and Brazil have Centers for Disease Control (*CDCs*), by definition these bodies are not specialized for the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, an analysis of pre-existing health policies or preventive bodies will yield little to no result as the magnitude of COVID-19 is unlike what the world has experienced in the last century. In Turkey, the creation of CSAB is prior to the first case. In Brazil and Mexico, the operational capacities were previously regulated by law, yet their response lacked effectivity, primarily due to the negligence of the leader and their disharmonious conduct with their government. The creation of such bodies is important for two factors. First, such bodies –in theory- are composed of technocrats and experts where decisions can be taken with precision. Where politicians fall short, experts can identify and execute decisions with precision.

Second, in countries with lesser similar experiences, it may help bolster operational capacities and know-how for possible future incidents. In the context of populist countries, however, such bodies can be used to divert discontent and avoid blame. In 2020, Turkish minister of health, Fahrettin Koca appeared as a trusted figure, ranking 4th out of 15 (Sputnik News, 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, the Turkish society received bad news almost exclusively from Koca who also lead CSAB. Inversely, most of the announcements about new batches of vaccines, decrease in the cases and normalization announcements were made by Erdoğan. It appears CSAB was a useful tool for Erdoğan to shift the blame and redirect discontent away from himself should it occur. Aside from being a serious commitment for efforts against the pandemic, such bodies are also joker cards in populist regimes for their aforementioned use. In this sense, the thesis argues creation of a response body in populist regimes can devolve into being a double-edged sword and a useful scapegoat.

And finally, vaccination efforts appear as an important indicator. It should be noted, however, vaccination indicator here is not based on sheer numbers. All three cases have only recently increased their vaccination ratios which loomed around 10% to 15% percent before July, with Turkey significantly hastening the mass vaccination efforts as a result of securing large batches of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. This is somewhat low compared to the developed world where the UK has 42.8%, the US has %43 percent. Instead, the thesis is concerned with vaccination skepticism and the ability to deliver vaccinations. It has been repeatedly debated in both the international media and some scholarly works that vaccination has ties with populism. (Kennedy, 2019) claims that anecdotal evidence shows parent's reluctance to vaccinate their children has ties with rising populism. This is particularly interesting to observe as distrust for expertise and elites is an intrinsic component of populism. In other words, it would not be surprising to observe lower rates of vaccination in populist countries

as people would not trust doctors and their vaccines. In Mexico, AMLO initially claimed that the pandemic was a lucrative opportunity for doctors to fill their pockets and exploit the poor masses. Even though he has later apologized, the sentiment of mistrust towards doctors made things harder for Mexico. As of June 2021, Mexico stands around 11% at vaccination. In Brazil, which also has around an 11% vaccination rate, Bolsonaro has repeatedly rejected scientific expertise and joked about the vaccine turning people into alligators. Brazil's ability to secure vaccines was also impaired over tensions with China. Bolsonaro, whose government often had strained relations with China, also refused to purchase CoronaVac, calling it the vaccine from "that other country" (France 24, 2019). Turkey on the other hand never made any negative comments at any level. From the first day onwards, both Erdoğan and government officials have made positive statements about vaccinations and urged citizens to get their shots whenever it is available. Yet, the government had problems in securing a constant supply of vaccines. Initially, Sinovac was used and officials claimed additional shipments will be made. Turkey's political will to actively pursue Sinovac despite conflicting results with the Brazilian trials could stem from the purchasing methods as the purchasing agreements made with China required the presence of intermediary actors, which could be subjected to corruption. A smaller batch of Pfizer-BioNTech was also imported and for a short period, citizens are allowed to choose either vaccine. It was later announced that Sinovac company had failed to deliver shipments and instead, Pfizer-BioNTech vaccinations are to be used. Although vaccination efforts took up the pace as of June, and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination has become the dominantly used one, the vaccines were previously rationed and only select age groups could have their shots. Despite such confusing developments, the AKP repeatedly claimed

that their government is among a select group of nations that vaccinated their citizens, all thanks to the reforms the AKP made in their 19-year governance. Thus, the ability to vaccinate and encourage citizens to have their shots, appear as a good indicator for different populist trajectories. The details about the vaccination and its implication will be further told in relevant chapters.

1.5. Personal Indicators

Although not as intensive as the indicators above, leader's attitudes towards the pandemic played an important role in the creation of different trajectories. International media have often covered other interesting stories. Lukashenko of Belarus, Donald Trump, and Bolsonaro are often criticized for belittling the pandemic and not taking decisive steps crafted towards expertise. The abundance of such news articles has made it valuable for this thesis to delve into the leaders' attitudes to assess their role in the creation of different trajectories. The thesis identified four main indicators that can complement the institutional indicators. Seriousness, compliance with measures, comments about medication methods appear as important factors to regard.

The first is taking the measures seriously. Aside from the more institutional seriousness, this particular indicator for the leaders seeks to analyze leaders' personal opinions about the pandemic. Leaders' approach towards the pandemic and their construal of the situation helps us understand how and why the efforts are tarnished as the leaders possibly manipulated and undermined them. Not exclusive to the populist countries, leaders' approach to the pandemic defined how effective the

responses were in terms of returning to normal life and shielding the citizens from negative effects. Countries like New Zealand, Australia, and Taiwan are often exemplified in their responses. Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, for instance, appeared as a role model during the pandemic as her government was extremely swift and decisive in taking action and returning to normal life only months after the pandemic has begun. Their success is also supported by numbers where all three countries have less than 3 new cases per day as of April 2021 (End Coronavirus, 2021). In the case of New Zealand for instance, Jacinda Ardern administration was willing “to be led by expertise, its efforts to mobilise the population, and to enable coping, all of which serve to build the trust in leadership needed for transformative, collective action such as the pandemic demands (Wilson, 2020).” Ardern’s serious attitude towards the outbreak is also evident in her parliament speeches where she urged closure and compliance with the measures (McGuire et al., 2020). Donald Trump on the other hand, besides having the necessary means, significantly slowed down the efforts and somehow augmented the severity of the situation. Amongst the debates for income inequality and a weak healthcare system, Donald Trump was often criticized for his belittling of the pandemic. Similarly, Brazil and Mexico suffered severe casualties as their governance depended on personalistic ties. Populist leaders are often charismatic leaders who can influence the construal of reality on the part of their voters. Supporters of such leaders are often manipulated to think their supported party and the leader knows the best, and they have the solution. An apparent method employed during the crisis, such misconceptions often shield people from cognitive dissonance and effectively render them vulnerable to reality.

In this sense, leaders' attitude appears as an important personal indicator that has greater implications for the execution of actions.

Second is the leaders' compliance with the measures. In some populist countries including Turkey, quarantines and closures are not encouraged but are enforced. Normally the logical outcome in proper democracies is to observe compliance of the leader in unison with the regulations prepared for the pandemic. However, it is often observed in populist countries that leaders often make themselves and their popular base an exemption from the rules. This is an extension of a polarized society which populism strives upon. Through events and rallies organized by the incumbent party, supporters and break the regulations without any legal consequences. A solid example of such is the Turkish case where it is often voiced by the opposition that compliance with the measures has been unequal. The AKP congresses in May and April 2021 defied regulations of social distancing. Party members from all provinces gathered in first the Black Sea region cities and ultimately the capital, effectively accelerating the spread. That was evident through the numbers where Turkey has reached a record 60.000 daily cases after the congress, according to the official numbers. Similarly, AKP supporters are welcomed to partake in mosque openings and funeral services. Although Erdoğan's personal compliance with the measures appear different from his Latin American counterparts, such events are often led by Erdoğan himself which is an interesting observation to make. In Brazil and Mexico, leaders were often seen socializing with their grassroots while Bolsonaro held massive rallies. While the latter measures are not enforced, leaders often made things worse by encouraging citizens to socialize

despite its dangers. Therefore, leaders' compliance is an effective indicator affecting the conduct and severity of the situation.

Another important factor is the leader's willingness to work with disapproving ministers. The disapproval mentioned here is by no means translate into an effort for undermining the government policies or agenda. Instead, disapproval expresses the different mindsets in handling and conduct between the minister and the leader. Often, such cases result in the leader replacing the minister with a more compatible person. As such, this often shows the assertive sentiment of the leader and potentially silences internal criticisms. Brazil had four different health ministers serving the nation as Bolsonaro had severe disagreements over lockdowns, seriousness and, medications. At the opposite end, ministers would be completely silent or obedient to their leaders for pragmatic purposes. The Turkish health minister has never been at odds with Erdoğan despite increasing public discontent over the conduct. Once a trusted political figure, his popularity now dwindles as a result of increased discontent. Still, Erdoğan kept his health minister in office. This of course has some different implications for a populist leader which will be elaborated in the respective section. The tandem with ministers, therefore, is a useful factor to analyze different political goals and methods that populist leaders possess.

After having explained the indicators for the government and leader, the cases are assessed in their situation on their strength in each one. Accordingly, the indicators are grouped and assigned to each country, ranking from weak to strong. The table below visualizes the performance of countries for given indicators.

	Indicators	Brazil	Mexico	Turkey
Government	Vaccination	Weak (15,9%)	Weak (16,8%)	Moderate (24,6%)
	Social Aids	Moderate	Weak	Weak
	Closures and Quarantines	Weak	Weak	Moderate
	Creation of an effective specialized response body	Weak	Weak	Moderate
	Local and National Policies are in tandem	Weak	Moderate	Moderate
	Economic stimulus packages	Weak	Weak	Weak
	Opposition is strong	Weak	Weak	Moderate
Leader	Took the virus seriously	Weak	Moderate	Strong
	Opposition efforts are undermined	Strong	Weak	Strong
	Leader often changes relevant ministers	Strong	Weak	Weak
	The Ruling Elite encourages and complies WHO guidelines and recommendations	Weak	Moderate	Moderate

Table 1: Grouped Indicators for each cases.

From here onwards, the thesis will progress in a way that each case is given its own chapter. Individual chapters for each case also complements the nature of this study since it is argued that there are three different trajectories. This also allows seeing an in-depth analysis of cases where the readers are not confused because of seeing subtle differences in the same chapters. As such, upcoming chapters will follow an alphabetical order of the cases. After the analyses of Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey, the thesis will discuss the similarities and differences of the cases and suggest three distinct terms for different trajectories.



CHAPTER 2 - BRAZIL

BRAZIL AND ADVERSARIAL DENIALISM

In the previous chapters, the thesis established the background for the readers. In accordance, the theoretical bases, the literature, the indicators, and the chapter breakdown were provided. It has been told that through three aspects and indicators for both the leader and the government, it would be possible to find a unique trajectory for each case. In this particular empirical chapter, the thesis will explore the Brazilian case beginning with their first interaction with the virus and its escalation into a full-blown medical crisis. Thus, in the following pages, the reader will be informed about the Brazilian response based on the indicators and the explanatory aspects, while also seeing a continuous narrative. Accordingly, this section argues Brazil's unique trajectory can be named Adversarial Denialism which is characterized by a strong rejection of the severity of the pandemic, while those who acknowledge it are demonized and undermined.

Just a simple Google search with the keywords 'Brazil' and 'Covid' immediately brings up news articles about why the death rates have been high. The question about the Brazilian response is by no means whether has it been a successful one, but rather is a question about how bad and dramatic it is. Brazil has been one of the epicenters in the Latin Americas. In the first weeks of April 2021, the country has accounted for a quarter of global COVID-19 related deaths (Horton, 2021). Where in the same time, most nations have accelerated their vaccination policies and normalization efforts, Brazil reached a record of over 4000 deaths in a single day (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2021). Despite a year into the crisis, the death

rates alone show that Brazil is not only a worst-case scenario but also severely lacks a centralized and serious response. The gravity point about Brazil's retarded response is the lack of political will. In accordance, Bolsonaro has been extremely reluctant, and as a result, extremely ineffective at providing necessary assistance as well as necessary regulations. There are even reports where it is told "patients being tied up in order to be intubated, for want of anaesthetics. Hundreds have died on trolleys, hospital floors or at home (Moreira, 2021)" pointing to a dramatic collapse in the healthcare system across the nation. While the health system was overwhelmed, Bolsonaro repeatedly belittled the pandemic, which according to him, did not necessitate any closures or quarantines.

Brazil appears to be an extremely interesting puzzle where despite being a vibrant economy and the most populous country in the region, has one of the worst global conduct during the pandemic. Bolsonaro often played the economy card, where he argued kneeling down to the 'little flu' would result in a catastrophe for the national economy. Moreover, he bragged about being a strong male, referencing his past as a military officer and as an athlete, arguing that the virus would have a hard time infecting strong individuals (BBC, 2020). As an extension, his mindset required a business as usual approach instead of lockdowns and he pushed for the recent policies of negligence. However, despite being a popular subject in the international media, Bolsonaro does not solely explain the Brazilian catastrophe. Moreover, explaining the Brazilian response only through Bolsonaro would be an extreme oversimplification while belittling the Brazilian democracy, economy, and institutions. According to the data of Freedom House, Brazil appears to be a vibrant democracy. The data shows that as of 2020, Brazil scores 31/40 for political rights

and 44/60 for civil liberties, thus classified as a free country (Freedom House, 2020). The personalistic rule does not explain the Brazilian response as the international media argues. Populists conduct within the politics is often beyond the potential of institutions. In this sense, this chapter introduces other aspects that contributed to the down-spiraling crisis management. Accordingly, quarantine, aids, vaccination efforts, and finally, the opposition will be explored. The chapter concludes with the new term suggested for the Brazilian trajectory, which is adversarial denialism.

2.1. How Did It Begin?

Brazil's first interaction with the virus was back in late January 2020, "scientists at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation [...] say molecular tests suggest one patient who died in Rio de Janeiro between 19 and 25 January had Covid-19 (BBC, 2020)." The exact date for the appearance of the first case has often been told in numerous sources to be a different date. Earlier views suggested that Brazil's first COVID-19 related death was during late February (Rodriguez A. , 2020). This means, there are conflicting views about the first official case. This potentially has two important implications. First, the gap between dates points to important negligence in the identification and prevention of the first cases. The experts would have simply missed infected individuals and let them away without proper procedures. Second, and related, the one-month gap potentially provided an unchecked ground for the virus where the public was not informed about the potential dangers. Primarily because experts were unaware of the existence of the virus, hence, necessary precautions were not taken. Considering that the virus is quite contagious, this set Brazil to a worse start.

The government initially made efforts to repatriate citizens in China. According to a Reuters article, a six-minute video was recorded by Brazilians, pleading the Brazilian government to launch a campaign. Luiz Mandetta, the minister of health promised to send a plane, while Bolsonaro stated “repatriating Brazilians from Wuhan would not be ‘opportune’ as it could put the population back home at risk (Reuters, 2020).” Only after a second video from the Brazilians, directly talking to Bolsonaro but not the health minister, Bolsonaro changed his position. Yet, some critics claim repatriation efforts were not entirely altruistic or sympathetic. Pfrimer and Barbosa (2020), after analyzing Bolsonaro’s speech, point that the administration framed repatriation through nationalism, putting the armed forces before health authorities while the message focused on ‘rescuing’ Brazilians from enemy territory. The rhetoric of the enemy is a central aspect in a thin-centered populist discourse where the leader dichotomously separates the real people from the rest. As in the case of repatriation efforts, China has been placed against the true people which Bolsonaro can rescue fellow citizens, thus, significantly simplifying the occurrence of the crisis and proposing a solution for it. Also, the change of attitude in the repatriation efforts appears to be pointing towards two important observations. First, Bolsonaro’s reluctance could only be broken after he was personally addressed. Therefore in the very first days, it hinted towards a personalistic response where decisions have to be approved by Bolsonaro. Second, it shows a fractured response where there were different opinions within the government and the response was not in unison. Moreover, this shows how a populist leader can make use of a situation. This seems, like a very singular and small example. However, as the upcoming

sections will display, the Brazilian response is dramatically affected by the leader's persona.

Shortly after the repatriation efforts, the first case in Brazil was confirmed officially on the 26th of February 2020, when a 61-year-old man returned from his trip to Italy (Rodriguez A. , 2020). In the ensuing days, confirmed cases rose steadily. One of the first statements made by Bolsonaro on the 15th of March 2020, was to compare the national economy and the lockdowns. "When you ban football and other things, you fall into hysteria. Banning this and that isn't going to contain the spread, [...] We should take steps, the virus could turn into a fairly serious issue. But the economy has to function because we can't have a wave of unemployment (Charner et al., 2020)." Following his remarks about keeping the economy running, Bolsonaro made a public appearance in a bakery and released a video on social media. "In the video published on Twitter and YouTube, Jair Bolsonaro is seen hugging supporters and posing for pictures inside the bakery and out on the street (Newshub, 2020)" all with a complete disregard for social distancing and without wearing a mask despite the recommendations of experts. The emphasis on the economy continued in the ensuing days. In a televised broadcast, Bolsonaro commented; "Our life has to go on. Jobs should be maintained" which he combined with a flurry of accusations against the media as they allegedly instilled 'a sense of dread' and 'real hysteria in the country' (Arias & Darlington, 2020)."

Bolsonaro's statements and frequent visits, however, were not entirely on par with his cabinet, and most notably, the health minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta.

Around the time Bolsonaro engaged with his supporters, Mandetta was proactively

arguing that “the national scenario has changed (Charner et al., 2020)” and was in favor of following social distancing measures and closure of businesses. This deviated from what Bolsonaro envisioned for the pandemic who aimed and promised a swift return to normal life and business as usual. The difference in the attitudes of Mandetta and Bolsonaro created duality and tension within the government as Mandetta became the voice of the opposition while assumed a leadership position to oversee quarantine efforts. It was widely known that Bolsonaro and Mandetta were at odds with how to handle the pandemic (Phillips, Bolsonaro fires popular health minister after dispute over coronavirus response, 2020). Primarily over the use of malaria drugs as medication and quarantine measures. The discrepancy between the two names has resulted in the ousting of Mandetta. “Mandetta was one of Brazil's biggest proponents of social distancing, supporting governors' decisions to shut down schools and businesses (Darlington & Kottasová, 2020).”

Mandetta was fired in April 2020. “Speaking shortly after Mandetta’s exit was announced, Bolsonaro claimed the separation had been “a consensual divorce” – but signaled dissatisfaction with his former minister’s position on the economic impact of coronavirus (Phillips, Bolsonaro fires popular health minister after dispute over coronavirus response, 2020).” Shortly after, Nelson Teich was appointed as the new minister of health who initially seemed more on par with Bolsonaro, promising to take social and economic indicators into account, referring to the possible implications of the pandemic on the Brazilian Economy as Bolsonaro argues (The Brazilian Report, 2020). He disagreed with the president's desire to widely use chloroquine as a treatment [and] over plans to open up the economy, saying [...] he has not been consulted ahead of an order that paved the way for gyms, beauty salons,

and hairdressers to reopen (BBC, 2020). This brings us to the first aspect that was crucial to the disastrous conduct of the pandemic in Brazil, the quarantine measures.

2.2. Closures and Quarantines in Brazil

Quarantines and closures had been an ardent topic in Brazil. Bolsonaro was often criticized for paying little attention to the pandemic, belittling it as little flu, and refraining from quarantines and closures. Bolsonaro's position surely contributed to the catastrophe in Brazil, but not everybody was willing to comply with Bolsonaro's decisions. It is widely known that in a federative Brazil, governors of federal districts were opposed to Bolsonaro's views. Instead, many governors rejected the political will of the leader, going into closures, and started taking their own measures. That of course, was an alternative possibility due to having a federal system, and also is a significant sign for showing the disharmony between Bolsonaro and governors. In this direction, this section aims to explore the policy differences between the center and the federal governors and tell how governors of federal states have followed a different path despite Bolsonaro.

From the beginning, Bolsonaro was opposed to a nationwide lockdown, arguing that such measures would not only cripple the economy but also the virus itself does not necessitate a total surrender of the nation. Instead of a nationwide lockdown, Bolsonaro devised a plan called a 'vertical isolation'. This particular approach suggested putting in quarantine only people above 60 years old and other individuals who are highly vulnerable to Covid-19, such as those who have diabetes or high blood pressure (Duarte, 2020)." The vertical quarantine, therefore, would

spare the working population of a quarantine, shielding the fellow Brazilians from surrendering, and possible unemployment. Bolsonaro's approach was met with a fierce backlash. "State governors responsible for more than 200 million of the country's 210 million people refusing to follow his commands over the pandemic (Phillips, 2020)."

Different opinions on how to deal with the crisis have contributed to the creation of discourse for blameshifting on Bolsonaro's part. "Politicians' inability to control *what* the public debates leads them to try to manage *who* they hold accountable. This entails a strategy of blameshifting. According to this strategy, leaders acknowledge the gravity of the crisis but absolve themselves from responsibility by shifting it elsewhere (Murdie, 2020)." Even though Bolsonaro seems to be failing from acknowledging the seriousness of the virus, the blame-shifting strategy still exists. He "claims that coronavirus is an invention of the world's media and that media hysteria exaggerates the scale of the disaster. He blames the consequences of the pandemic on governors, mayors, members of the government, and media disloyal to him (Sushentsov, 2020)." The blame-shifting serves primarily two purposes on Bolsonaro's part. First, since the crisis is not properly handled, Bolsonaro strives to escape from the responsibilities and consequences of the Brazilian response. The absence of a unified response is largely Bolsonaro's fault, but blameshifting portrays not him as the reason, but the others. Accordingly, even though he wanted to make things better for everyone very sincerely, the governors would not comply. This helps him to demonize the other side and partially shields him from the negative perceptions. Second, it helps him sideline deviances from his point of view within the system. In late May 2020, an AP

News article covered the extent of blaming; “Some states went too far in their restrictive measures, and the consequences are knocking on our door,” he said, adding that tens of millions of Brazilians have lost their income. He has repeatedly singled out some local leaders by name (Biller, 2020).” The name-calling in this sense would divert the attention away from Bolsonaro’s persona and to other names pronounced. “The politics of blame have flourished during the pandemic. Politicians know that when bad things happen (from high unemployment to a natural disaster), avoiding blame for poor management is more important than receiving credit for good policy (Murdie, 2020).”

Despite the constant barrage from Bolsonaro, the governors have resisted the calls for laying down the measures. In the first months of the pandemic, “Brazil’s leader has himself been isolated by an unprecedented alliance of key ministers in his federal government, congressional leaders, and 24 of the country’s 27 governors, who have substantial power [...] (Sandy & Milhorange, 2020)”

Many news articles covered statements by governors from both the left and the right on how they would defy the will of the central government and comply with WHO recommendations. Some of these names were known as close allies of Bolsonaro “Gov. Ronaldo Caiado of Goiás state, a physician who had been a close Bolsonaro ally, participated in a meeting [where] nearly all Brazilian governors to coordinate their efforts. The federal government wasn’t invited (PBS, 2020).”

Gov. João Doria has even claimed governors are fighting a ‘Bolsonaro-virus,’ besides the pandemic (Savarese & Biller, 2020).

Amidst an apparent lack of coordination, “On April 8, the Supreme Court ruled that state governments could implement measures to respond to the epidemic within their jurisdictions and municipal governments could complement decisions taken at federal and state levels (Fonseca et al., 2021).” This paved the way for individual states to deviate from the center and act in unison. Moreover, the court decision resonated sharply in circles close to the president. “Bolsonaro responded with several presidential decrees listing essential activities that should continue and businesses that should remain open, including religious services, gyms, construction sites, and industrial activities, among others (Fonseca et al., 2021).” Moreover, the politicization of the quarantine and increased tension resulting from Bolsonaro’s conflicting conduct against the ministry of health resulted in ousting of his second minister, Nelson Teich. Teich promised to take social and economic indicators into account, referring to the possible implications of the pandemic on the Brazilian Economy as Bolsonaro argued (The Brazilian Report, 2020). However, less than a month he resigned and was replaced with General Pazuello who had no prior health experience.

Despite being a central subject for growing internal opposition against the president, Brazil has dramatically failed to implement a centralized and nationwide lockdown. It has been often brought to the attention that effective handling of the pandemic necessitates an aggressive policy of isolation and quarantine. Yet, in Brazil, the quarantine and closure efforts have largely remained local and often unenforced as it was not supported through a political will. Even in such instances where individual states have decided upon closure or quarantine, a considerable fraction of the population did not benefit from such decisions. Though governors

made efforts to curb the spread, the lack of centralization in the response has pushed many Brazilians to tackle their own measures. In Brazilian slums, the favelas, the negative effects of decentralized response have been amplified. Most favela residents experience trouble in finding clean water and accessing the electricity grid, which over time, has pushed residents to communities to provide for each other. According to the reports of Instituto Pólis, a Brazilian NGO, some favelas fared better than cities in terms of mortality rate. In Paraisópolis, for instance, residents have hired two ambulances and converted public buildings into isolation centers where the infected can be kept away from the rest of the populace (Ortega & Orsini, 2020). This points to an inverted response in Brazil on closures and quarantines where the efforts become more intense as one goes down in the hierarchy.

More than a year into the pandemic, Bolsonaro has remained adamant on his initial stance about quarantines and lockdowns. Thus, not much has changed on the part of quarantines in Brazil. As recently as May 2021, “Bolsonaro has described as ‘tyrants’ state governors and mayors who have imposed lockdowns to contain the coronavirus outbreak (BBC, 2021).” Thus empirical observations on the closures and quarantines in Brazil bring forth two important findings. First, the quarantines and closures are highly politicized in the country. Where experts and senior members advocate their existence, Bolsonaro makes use of such measures to strengthen his emphasis on its possible implications on the national economy. In accordance, those who favor such measures are constantly demonized and are often sidelined from the system. Second, as the supreme court ruling that grants authorization for governors to initiate, monitor, and lift off such measures, Bolsonaro uses this to shift the blame and divert the attention from himself. Governors with such authority are a perfect fit

for a polarizing discourse where they allegedly not only trample the national will but are also unable to deal with the virus despite having the means. “When populist leaders cannot gratify, they distract to divert attention (Tucker, 2021).” Therefore, the issue of quarantines and closures in Brazil appears to be a textbook example of in populist regimes under crises, certain policy decisions and their meanings can be skewed by the leaders to favor their own political agenda. This retards the response employed while resulting in decentralization.

2.3. Social and Financial Aids

Another central item during the pandemic appears to be social and economic aids that the citizens receive for lessening the negative impact of the pandemic. After having explained the implications of quarantines and closures in Brazil, this section aims to explain the aids with respect to their extent and effectiveness. Accordingly, the section will begin with Brazil’s former capabilities in distributing social and economic aids. Then, their possible effect upon the aids given during the pandemic will be assessed.

Brazil’s first proper experiments upon social aids began in 1995 and later evolved into Bolsa Familia (Family Allowance). “From 1995, with initial experiences at the sub-national level, to its actual implementation in 2003, it took a long time and lots of pressure for the federal government to first decide to adopt the programme and then to implement it on a large scale (Soares, 2011).” Being one of the largest programme in the Latin America, Bolsa Familia “provides a conditional monthly transfer to poor households those that earn less than R\$120 (US\$68) per capita monthly with children up to seventeen years of age and/or a pregnant woman

with up to a maximum of three children (Soares, et al., 2010).” The programme primarily aimed to fight hunger and promote poor families’ access to public services, education, and health services in particular. “[T]he strict conditions for government assistance legitimized Bolsa Família with Brazilian voters and generated widespread support on both ends of the political spectrum (Liddicoet, 2016).” The popular programme also covered a huge portion of Brazilian society. According to the World Bank, Brazil’s pre-pandemic social programmes reached 76% of the population. However, the majority of the beneficiaries were “the elderly and households with formal labor market attachment (Morgandi, 2020).” This appears as one of the most criticized aspects of the Bolsa Familia. Since only a select segment of the society is chosen as beneficiaries, the programme is told to deepen the income inequality. “As a result, only 3.8 percent of the population above 65 years old is in poverty, compared to 35 percent of children under 15 years old (Morgandi, 2020).” Despite the success that the programme has garnered, its extent was gradually weakened after Bolsonaro came into power despite initial promises to keep them intact and expanding. Initially, “alongside Economy Minister Paulo Guedes [...], Bolsonaro announced a new welfare transfer program for the poor called ‘Renda Cidadã’, an extension and expansion of the current ‘Bolsa Família’ cash transfer program (Paraguassu & McGeever, 2020).” In an interview, an expert talks about the extent of Bolsa Familia during the pandemic. The interview reveals that the Bolsonaro administration gradually reduced the numbers. “Bolsonaro government had been reducing the number of beneficiaries, with the biggest cuts in the Northeast region, measures without any consistent explanation. Several other families met the eligibility conditions, but did not receive transfers from the program (UFRGS).”

Bolsonaro government also made efforts to target informal workers through a new programme called Auxílio Financeiro Emergencial (Emergency Financial Assistance). AFP was initially expected to reach 6 million informal workers who do not receive funds from Bolsa Família or other programmes (Gazeta da Povo, 2020). The distribution of AFP had a slightly positive effect on Bolsonaro's popularity as well. Bolsonaro's overall rejection rate has dropped from 50 to 45 percent, indicating a positive trend for the president as half of emergency salary beneficiaries support him (Castro, 2020; Berti, Half of emergency salary beneficiaries support Bolsonaro, 2020). Despite the programme's relative popularity, it gradually decreased. Numbers point to a sharp decline in the number of families receiving the benefits. "The number of families admitted to Bolsa Família has dropped from 275,000 a month to fewer than 2,500. The number receiving benefits has fallen by 1 [million] (Belagua, 2020). The World Bank also estimates: "Brazil's economy is projected to expand by 4.5 percent in 2021. Private consumption will be boosted by a fresh round of emergency payments to households, although social transfers will be substantially smaller than in 2020 (The World Bank, 2021)." During times of crisis, governments are expected to increase their spendings as crises typically result in a decrease in real wages and higher unemployment. The assets of poorer segments are exposed, while economic activities slow down (The World Bank, 2001).

Moreover, Brazil has already had financial problems prior to the pandemic. The national economy had consecutive years of recession which resulted in more unemployment and raised the demand for aids. "COVID-19 hit as Brazil was still recovering from its 2014-16 recession. Economic recovery remained weak and fiscal policy space limited since the peak of the recession in 2015-2016, with GDP growth

below 2 percent in the following years (The World Bank, 2021).” Even though there were “significant achievements to put the country on a path of rebuilding fiscal buffers, such as the 2016 spending cap rule (teto dos gastos) or the 2019 pension reform, did not have sufficient time to bear fruit before COVID-19 engulfed the world and Brazil (The World Bank, 2020).” The severity of the recession is deepened during the pandemic. “The domestic demand and supply are affected by consumers’ decision to avoid physical interactions, and by the restrictions on economic activity imposed to prevent contagion (The World Bank, 2020).” This has led to one of the sudden shocks in Brazil, effectively resulting in a sharp recession.

Under such conditions, the “social protection measures were at the center of the fiscal response package to COVID-19 in Brazil; the first response measures relied on the existing social protection programs (Morgandi, 2020).” Under a weakened economy, Brazil has implemented several trade-related measures. The measures included a reduction of salaries, suspension of contracts for 60 days, deferral of payments for companies, and new credit lines for small-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of which, affected employees became eligible for governmental assistance (Praz, 2020). The financial stimulus policies were quite formidable in size, as one source notes, they amount to 8% of GDP (Greenwood, 2021). Yet, despite having sufficient means to cushion citizens from a financial catastrophe, Brazil’s main problem lays under its disorganized and decentralized response. ““Brazil’s problem is not that they didn’t have sufficient fiscal response, it’s the fact that it wasn’t combined with efforts to actually get on top of the virus,’ (Rosati & Beck, 2021).” Indeed, the Brazilian response to the pandemic suffered in all aspects

through the lack of political will to properly impose measures which social and financial aids are not an exemption.

Thus, even though the government wanted to provide its citizens with social aids, existing schemes and previous economic indicators have led to conduct below the potential. Initial promises to expand the scope of the Bolsa Familia and additional programmes targeting the informal workforce have remained limited. Existing Bolsa Familia allowances were discriminatory in the sense that they covered a certain age group with formal ties. This meant the majority of the working population had felt the negative financial impacts of the pandemic more visibly than elders. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Bolsonaro government initially pumped the system with resources through the use of existing Bolsa Familia and the newly initiated AFP. Yet, this seems to be a strategy to gain more popularity. “The economic impact of the aid was matched by its political punch, reversing Bolsonaro’s dwindling popularity as the first wave of COVID-19 hit and winning him record approval among the country’s poorer classes and regions, which has since retreated (Aljazeera, 2021).” In this context, the Brazilian case in financial and social aids primarily leads to two preliminary conclusions. First, social and financial packages during the pandemic must be supported through a centralized response, which if not, leads to inefficiencies. Second, during times of crisis, populist leaders may use resources as a means to garner support. In the case of Brazil, despite having a wider income inequality and second global highest death rates, Bolsonaro was able to carve out some support through resource distribution. In populist regimes, some segments of the society, and especially the incumbent’s popular base are selectively targeted by the state apparatus to receive benefits. In the Brazilian case, the supporters of

Bolsonaro might have received additional resources through expanded schemes which would compel them to support Bolsonaro's decisions to preserve their newly found income. This is apparent through pro-Bolsonaro and anti-vaccination demonstrations observed when opposing citizens protested Bolsonaro's policies. However, it can be said that even though Brazil made serious efforts for aids, it largely remained ineffective.

2.4. Vaccination Efforts

A single sentence summary for the Brazilian vaccination campaign would be the following: "the demand for vaccines is greater than their availability (Boschiero et al, 2021)." "We are being left behind," wrote Brasilia's leading newspaper *Correio Braziliense* on its front page on the last days of December 2020, referring to the non-existence of COVID-19 vaccinations in the entirety of Brazil (Philips, 'We're being left behind': anger and confusion in Brazil as vaccine program lags, 2020). That was not surprising for the Brazilians as it is known the far-right leader has been against the vaccinations from day one. "If you become superhuman, if a woman starts to grow a beard or if a man starts to speak with an effeminate voice, they will not have anything to do with it," he said, referring to the drug manufacturers (France 24, 2020)." Amidst an unwilling president and supreme court decision requiring all Brazilians to get vaccinated (Preissler Iglesias, 2020), the vaccination campaign became a central item in Brazil. "[T]he federal government, under public pressure, started to plan a vaccination program. But it focused on a single manufacturer, AstraZeneca, whose vaccine trials ended up taking longer than others [...] After the approval of the vaccine in January, there was a shipment delay." As early as

February –almost a month into the vaccination campaign- “Five Brazilian state capitals announced [...] that they have run out of coronavirus vaccines from various manufacturers (Toueg, 2021).“ The stall of second doses was postponed among the high-risk group after doses ran out (Majeed, 2021). “Seven of Brazil's 26 state capitals have stopped administering the booster shot of Chinese-developed CoronaVac because of a lack of supply [...] (MedicalXpress, 2021).”

Rio de Janeiro for instance, announced on the 15th of February, that the campaign has been suspended in the city of 6.7 million until more doses arrived (France 24, 2021). The failure to procure shots is not attributed to the system. On the contrary, Brazil conducted extremely effective vaccination campaigns in the past. In 1973, The National Immunization Program eradicated polio and rubella and in 1980, 17.5 million children were vaccinated in a single day (Barbara, 2021). Brazil is also known for its universal healthcare system which provides free shots to all citizens in most states. In this sense, Brazil is considered among the best in the region for vaccinations. So why did Brazil fail to procure them during the pandemic?

An active user of social media platforms, Bolsonaro’s unwillingness to procure vaccinations became evident in late October 2020. Initially, Brazil focused on two different vaccines, CoronaVac and AstraZeneca. “Sinovac had started its phase III trials on CoronaVac, its COVID-19 vaccine, on July 21, 2020. Trials were conducted in Brazil, Turkey, Indonesia, and Chile (Business Wire, 2021).” However, the clinical trial results for these four countries have been different where the Brazilian trials have proved the vaccine to be 50.4% percent effective as opposed to 91.25% in the Turkish trials (BBC, 2021; Gümrükçü & Küçükgöçmen, 2021). The

lower effectivity percentages in the Brazilian trials did not go unnoticed by the president. Bolsonaro openly expressed his discontent about the trials and with CoronaVac in particular. On his social media accounts, he said: "The Brazilian people will not be anyone's guinea pig, My decision is to not purchase such a vaccine (The Associated Press, 2020)." His statements sparked some protests in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro where the demonstrators chanted against Joao Doria and in support of Bolsonaro's anti-vaccination stance (Sciaudone, 2020). Doria was at the center of these small protests primarily for two reasons. First, the CoronaVac trials were conducted in Sao Paulo where Doria is currently the governor. Doria has appeared in the international media multiple times, criticizing the conduct of Bolsonaro and accused him of making things worse. In an environment of populist polarization, Doria seems to be a proper focus for antagonization. Second, Doria was a name considered for the presidency before the 2018 general elections (Ellyatt & Tso, 2018). Amidst the devastation created by the pandemic, Doria appears to be a strong political advocate for the next general elections. In this sense, focusing on Doria would be a strategy for blameshifting and diverting attention away. This also simultaneously meant that Bolsonaro rejected a large batch of vaccines, effectively denying citizens 46 million doses of vaccines (Savarese, 2020). Around the same time, Turkey has ordered 50 million doses to kickstart their own vaccination campaign (Reuters, 2020). "'We could be vaccinating 2 million people a day,' says Carla Domingues, who ran Brazil's national immunization program for most of the past decade. 'If Brazil had signed agreements last year, we could have been in a privileged position, just like the U.S. or the U.K.' (Leite et al., 2021)" Nonetheless, around mid-January, Brazilian regulatory agency Anvisa approved both the

Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine and the Coronavac vaccine (Pedroso & Caitlin, 2021).”

In the next weeks, Brazil also approved the use of Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson’s vaccines (MedicalXpress, 2021). The country also started developing homegrown vaccines in Sao Paulo’s Butantan Institute which, according to a piece of video news by Deutsche Welle, will also prove useful for Doria’s popularity as he supported the homegrown efforts. In the same video, Doria also hinted at candidacy in the next elections while arguing Brazil fights with a Bolsonaro virus along with the COVID-19 (Deutsche Welle, 2021). The same institute is also the producer of CoronaVac in Brazil and conducted experiments in Serrana, in the south-eastern São Paulo state, [...] between February and April where they concluded a sharp %95 decrease in death as the result of CoronaVac vaccination (Moutinho, 2021).” In early March “the government announced it intended to purchase 100 million doses of Pfizer’s vaccine, 38 million of Johnson & Johnson and 13 million of Moderna’s (Nugent, 2021).”

After that point, Brazil started to gradually acquire larger batches of vaccines and gained a slight momentum in vaccination efforts. “At the end of March, as deaths soared, only 7 percent of Brazilians had been at least partly vaccinated. The campaign has accelerated since then — around 30 percent of the population has had at least one dose — but it still has far to go (Londoño & Milhorange, Brazil Passes 500,000 Covid Deaths, a Tragedy With No Sign of Letup, 2021).” The central problem for the vaccination efforts in Brazil has not entirely been the lack of political will, but the government has also failed to secure larger batches to launch a mass immunization effort. Although Brazil has participated in the phase III trials of CoronaVac, the government made a strategic mistake by refusing to sign a purchasing agreement. This has resulted in severe setbacks in the national

vaccination campaign. As recently as July, Brazil still experiences problems pertaining to the administration of the second CoronaVac doses (Ionova, 2021).

Therefore, even though the vaccination campaign has gained momentum for some months, the pandemic continues to ravage the country. The analysis of the Brazilian vaccination campaign not only paints a worrisome picture but also leads to two important findings for populism studies and the Brazilian trajectory. Even though officials of the Brazilian government and governors of individual states pushed for vaccination purchases, this process has been severely interrupted by Bolsonaro's unwillingness to make the purchases despite possessing necessary economic means. This makes sense as Bolsonaro often mocked scientific expertise and refused to get vaccinated despite Brazil being an exemplary case of mass vaccination in the past decades. Distrust against the scientists and belittling the pandemic appeared as a means to consolidate his popular base while social aids boosted his popularity, albeit, temporarily. Moreover, Bolsonaro wanted to pursue his own methods throughout the pandemic. In a recent congress hearing, members have questioned Bolsonaro about the mass distribution of malaria drugs despite warnings. "The hearings have also aired suspicions that Mr. Bolsonaro actually wanted to let the virus spread freely, to reach "herd immunity," no matter the cost — though experts question whether that goal is even attainable (Londoño & Milhorange, Brazil Passes 500,000 Covid Deaths, a Tragedy With No Sign of Letup, 2021)." Second, the vaccination efforts are politicized as Joao Doria, governor of Sao Paulo and Bolsonaro's highly possible adversary on the next elections. Bolsonaro's anti-vaccination stance was supported by some of his followers but not based on a rejection of the shots themselves, but on the basis of opposing Joao Doria. The

efforts on Bolsonaro's part might have actively sought to undermine Joao Doria and possibly eroding his public image. Thus, an adversarial stance characterized the campaign where governors and officials had to carve the campaign out of unprecedented denialism. In this sense, the retardation in the campaign cannot be attributed to the Brazilian system or the lack of resources but the political strife that Bolsonaro created.

2.5. Opposition During the Pandemic

In the previous section, the thesis drew attention to the political strife between Joao Doria and president Bolsonaro. Yet, describing the opposition efforts only through two names would oversimplify the role of opposition in the Brazilian case. Thus, this section aims to shed more light on the collective efforts of Brazil. In his election campaign, Bolsonaro often made populist references to his predecessors. In this sense, this section will highlight, very briefly, the last 10 years of Brazil's opposition.

Brazil entered the 2010s by electing its first woman president, Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party. Being the second president of the same party after Luiz Inacio da Silva, Rousseff's political career, along with public trust towards her party, was quickly decimated only 5 years into her presidency. Her name, and so the party's, was mixed within allegations of corruption schemes that triggered an impeachment process. "The technical grounds for her impeachment were that she had manipulated the federal budget to conceal the scale of the country's mounting deficits (Winter, 2017)." Yet, "Operation Car Wash as the investigation has come to be known, found

that private companies had been sending politicians cash through intermediaries at Petrobras in exchange for juicy contracts with the oil giant, the board of which Rousseff had led before becoming president (Mello & Spektor, 2016).” The investigation was concluded with Rousseff’s impeachment and saw her replacement with vice president Michael Temer as the acting president. The unveiling of the corruption has been the final blow for the Worker’s Party as Brazil was already suffering from a contracting economy, growing unemployment, and income inequality. These aspects were promised to be eliminated by the Worker’s Party which through four successful elections, proved otherwise. Far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro was quick to make use of the scandalous revelations, quickly capitalizing on a discourse on dishonest and exploitative left-wing. “Part of the reason for Mr. Bolsonaro’s victory was the collapse of the left. Many cried foul after former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the longtime front-runner in the race, was ruled ineligible to run after he was imprisoned in April to start serving a 12-year sentence for corruption and money laundering (Londoño & Darlington, 2018).” While campaigning, “Bolsonaro openly acknowledges the opposition (the left and PT) as being his enemies, addressing the PT government as corrupt, inefficient, and responsible for executing a plan to spread its ideology while in power (Tamaki & Fuks, 2020).” Therefore, Brazilian society was effectively divided into two camps, exploitative and corrupt leftists, and rightful representative of the true people, Jair Bolsonaro. This division provided the pretext within which the pandemic was governed.

The pandemic has made this political turmoil visible while strengthened the polarization between Bolsonaro, cabinet, and governors. Primarily over the crisis

management during the pandemic (Zilla, 2020). Bolsonaro's open denial of the pandemic and his clashes between members of the cabinets and governors, not only made clear national directives non-existent but also polarized the Brazilian society further as individual states decided to follow their own de-centralized directives. "Most states, including the most populous and harder-hit states—São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro—implemented social isolation measures, canceled school, and called on a number of businesses to shut down. In addition, Rio de Janeiro gangs enforced mandatory lockdowns in favelas (Summers, 2020)." Also, "Some state leaders were scouring international markets for basic protective gear, only to be denounced by the president for paying inflated prices to secure masks, gloves and saline solution (Muggah & Lago, 2020)." Constant denunciation and inability to curb the virus made Bolsonaro more and more unpopular and as a result, more agitated. As explained in the previous section, the governance of the crisis became extremely politicized where the governor of Sao Paulo, Joao Doria chose to rename the malfunctioning response as 'Bolsonaro virus'. As the death toll mounted, demonstrations for and against the pandemic measures appeared in the larger cities. According to Deutsche Welle, unions, student associations and leftist political parties mobilized their bases in at least 16 cities, demanding the impeachment of Bolsonaro (Deutsche Welle, 2021). Popular protests are important as according to The Brazilian Report, there are over 120 separate impeachment files by Bolsonaro's opponents, and some are former allies of the President (Berti, 2021). Popular protests may accelerate the process and ironically could result in the same outcome Bolsonaro campaigned against back in 2018. In this sense, the opposition is slowly gaining the upper hand through a live demonstration of Bolsonaro's incompetence in governing crises.

Thus, the opposition who were left to fend for themselves seemingly tries to turn the table around and use Bolsonaro's ignorance to weaken him politically. Former president Lula da Silva of Worker's Party, for instance, has criticized Bolsonaro for his conduct during the pandemic. Da Silva emphasized the inefficiencies in the national response and told he will be seeking advice from right-wing politicians and businessmen (Savarese, 2021). Thus, bringing Worker's Party and its ideological opposites to the same table, which are natural popular bases of Bolsonaro. "Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's disapproval rating passed 50 percent for the first time, [...] marking a new low in the far-right leader's declining popularity (France 24, 2021)." The ever-lessening popularity of Bolsonaro contributed to a further demonization of the opposition members, who in turn capitalized on higher death tolls and incompetencies in vaccination campaigns, missed deals in purchasing vaccines, and Bolsonaro's insistence of using malaria drugs despite lacking scientific support. This manifests itself as 57% support for Bolsonaro's impeachment (Philips, 2021) and would prove to be Bolsonaro's undoing eventually.

2.6. Lessons From the Brazilian Case

Going back to the indicators in the first chapter, this session assesses the Brazilian trajectory and suggests the term that suits the most for the response Bolsonaro's government has employed. Beginning with quarantines and closures, Brazil has had the worst-case scenario. Even though officials within the government and state governors openly advocated implementation and compliance, they met with fierce resistance from the president. Where Bolsonaro argued such measures would result in further hardships financially and they really should stop whining about the

virus, lack of a centralized response had the death toll mount to extremes. As a result, all besides Bolsonaro had to fend off themselves where the efforts become more desperate in the poorer segments of the society, indicating an inverted response. Moreover, the issue is politicized to such an extent that compliance with the measures became synonymous with recognizing the incompetence of Bolsonaro. As a result, quarantines have contributed to existing polarization and resulted in a loss of Bolsonaro's popularity. For the social and financial aids, Bolsonaro initially relied upon the existing Bolsa Familia scheme and later introduced Auxilio Financeiro Emergencial. Yet, even though these programs had, in theory, covered larger segments of the population, its discriminatory nature rendered it weaker in effect for the working population. Moreover, the claims about the aid not fairly being distributed where in some parts of the country some citizens did not receive it at all further crippled already vulnerable citizens. Financial aids on the other hand largely protected the employers, but not workers. Though being in tandem with Bolsonaro's right-wing liberal stance, the pandemic did not discriminate ideologies. Also, these efforts did not have targeted effects as Brazil was introduced to the pandemic without having fully recovered from the previous economic recession, so they remained limited.

Vaccination efforts have also been weak, where Bolsonaro refused to make people 'guinea pigs' referring to the phase III trials of CoronaVac. As a result, much-needed batches were quite late to be distributed where in some states campaigns came to a halt because they lacked the means. Moreover, Bolsonaro having underplayed the pandemic said on many occasions that he was against being vaccinated and has deliberately undermined the efforts. An open hostility was

visible, especially against Joao Doria which polarized the society and politicized the campaign. Using the repetitive pattern of failure, the opposition was able to use Bolsonaro's weapon against him and framed his incompetence as 'Bolsonaro Virus' potentially strengthening their hands in the upcoming elections while widening their political space.

In this sense, the Brazilian response is best described through two keywords. Adversarialism, since even minor decisions like wearing a mask, were met with resistance by Bolsonaro. That being said, Bolsonaro was openly hostile to different opinions to a point that the pandemic saw three different health ministers. Denialism is the second word as Bolsonaro, in almost every aspect had a cynical attitude and disregarded scientific advice as well as the reality itself. Therefore, the term the thesis suggests for unique Brazilian trajectory is "Adversarial Denialism". The table below shows the assessment of indicators for adversarial denialism.

	Indicators	Brazil
Government	Vaccination	Weak (15,9%)
	Social Aids	Moderate
	Closures and Quarantines	Weak
	Creation of an effective specialized response body	Weak
	Local and National Policies are in tandem	Weak
	Economic stimulus packages	Weak
	Opposition is strong	Weak
Leader	Took the virus seriously	Weak
	Opposition efforts are undermined	Strong
	Leader often changes relevant ministers	Strong
	The Ruling Elite encourages and complies WHO guidelines and recommendations	Weak

Table 2: Indicators for Adversarial Denialism

The next chapter will explore the Mexican case using the same indicators to see how AMLO fared in the pandemic. The Mexican case is important as it is the only left-populist case among three cases, that can be used to highlight the difference between the left-right continuum as the thesis argues it is a central point in explaining different trajectories.

CHAPTER 3 – MEXICO

MEXICO AND DEFECTIVE INCLUSIONISM

This chapter aims to present the Mexican response with respect to explanatory factors and the indicators provided in the first chapter. The chapter follows the same format as the Brazilian case and is divided into four sections: quarantines and closures, social and financial aids, vaccination effort, and finally the opposition. Sections related to the indicators are important to portray an overall picture of the Mexican trajectory with respect to populism and crisis management literature. The Mexican trajectory is important to display how the pandemic resonated in a left-wing populist setting. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion of Mexico's left-wing populism and its possible effects on the creation of a unique trajectory while suggesting yet another term, defective inclusionism. In accordance, defective inclusionism is characterized by the leader's constant defection of his point of view regarding the pandemic, while arguing to favour the poor first, which was also defected through failure to expand direct social assistance.

3.1. How Did It Begin?

Mexico's introduction to the virus has been around the same time as other Latin American nations yet its preparations predate the first case. On January 30, 2020, the government schemed a response plan for rehabilitation, alerting, and regulation purposes as well as implementing the first mathematical models in the region (Secretaría de Salud, 2020). "The first COVID-19 cases were confirmed by the government on February 28 (Ibarra-Nava et al., 2020)." A later version of the

health ministry data included a positive case a month before the first official case. This indicates possible misconduct on the part of health workers, potentially giving a month of uncontrolled spread. Yet, Mexico was relatively quick to introduce preventive measures. On March 30, “the Mexican General Health Council declared a national state of sanitary emergency, caused by *force majeure* [...] [that] would last until April 30 (Walsh, et al., 2020).” The circulation of citizens was also limited by the government except for essential sectors. “From March 24, 2020, to April 19, 2020, all activities that require the agglomeration, transit, or displacement of people are temporarily suspended. The Resolution allows implementing an operations continuity plan for essential activities (Martinez, 2020).” On the 14th of May, the ministry of health announced a new plan for phased reponing which consisted of three phases, to have the country largely opened as of June (Baker McKenzie, 2020). Around the time that the plan has been devised, WHO declared Mexico as the new epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic (Boadle, 2020), in May 2020.

The Mexican government was relatively swift and organized in comparison with Brazil. Where Brazil lacked a centralized response, the plans devised by the Mexican government tended to be relatively more centralized and organized. However, this proved not effective and Mexico saw an exponential rise in the number of deaths, becoming the second-worst country after Brazil. While this cannot be attributed to the state or governors which were quick to introduce measures, the problem was mainly caused by AMLO’s initial reluctance to implement measures. According to the figures on the WHO website, both the number of cases and deaths have peaked in mid-July with a second and sharper peak in January 2021 (WHO). This indicates a malfunctioning response despite the existence of measures in

Mexico. Even though the country opted to go under closures, they have been lifted earlier before the results can be visible, largely due to AMLO's eagerness to reopen the economy. In Mexico, informal workers generate almost a quarter of the economic output (McDonald, 2020). Being a left-wing populist, AMLO said: "he was waiting to impose stricter public health measures in order not to disrupt the economy prematurely. His greatest concern, he said, has been the country's poor (Semple & Kitroeff, 2020)." Because AMLO noticed closures would have the biggest negative effect on the poor which constitutes the backbone of his popular base.

As a part of his left-populist discourse, AMLO has chosen to downplay the virus initially. This, however, has contradicted the general policies of the government and appears as AMLO's personal attitude. He continued to hold massive gatherings across Mexico as part of a presidential tour (Ibarra-Nava et al., 2020) and defied the guidelines regarding social distancing as he hugged supporters, and kissed their children (Reuters, 2020). At a press conference on March 18, he pulled out his wallet to show off the religious images, four-leaf clover, and \$2 bill he carries for good luck. !—and as protection, he claimed, from COVID-19 (Zissis, 2020). By that time, the state and local governments had begun implementing measures closing public gathering spaces and urging residents to remain at home when possible (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Only in the course of April did [AMLO] heed the advice of Mexican health and scientific organizations, gradually backing off his denialist positions and endorsing social distancing measures (Weiffen, 2020). The same resistance was present for getting vaccinated. After having contracted the virus in January 2021, AMLO has claimed that his body has produced enough antibodies,

and later abandoned this attitude to set an example for elder citizens (Berti, Mexican president refuses coronavirus vaccine: "I have antibodies", 2021; Woodhouse, 2021).

The Mexican case displays the role of the left-right continuum as the pandemic has often been framed within the boundaries of a left-wing discourse employed by AMLO. In accordance, AMLO has often associated the possible outcomes of the intended measures with the well-being of his popular base, the poor people. He initially resisted the calls for widespread lockdowns measures from the middle class and aimed to appeal to informal workers (Bruera Gomez, 2020). He argued that he waited not to close down the economy prematurely as it would affect his greatest concern, the country's poor (Semple & Kitroeff, 2020). AMLO also framed the pandemic as an opportunity for doctors to exploit the people and enrich themselves in 'neoliberal' Mexico (Mexico News Daily, 2020). The extension of AMLO's leftist discourse was also visible in his attitude towards the use of face masks. He told reporters that "You know when I'm going to put on a mask? When there is no corruption. Then I'll put on a mask and I'll stop talking (Agren, Mexican president Amlo says he will wear mask 'when there is no corruption', 2020)." Thus, AMLO's discourse differs from that of Bolsonaro's where a specific segment of the society is framed as the elite, and the poor people are embedded within the discourse as the victim. Thus, "capitalizing on a general loss of faith and disaffection with [...] the elite (Moffitt, 2015)" as the literature suggests.

3.2. Closures and Quarantines in Mexico

Mexico was relatively quick to devise a plan to limit the mobility of the citizens. "The Mexican strategy is grounded on assumptions about the capacity of the

State, [...] drawing from the accumulated experiences of the H1N1 epidemic of 2009, as well as the outbreaks of Zika and Dengue from past years (Diaz-Cayeros, 2020).” The initial plan of the government consisted of a color system that indicated when the normalization period will occur in the selected area based on the number of local cases (Velasco Álvarez, 2020). Some districts were opened earlier than intended. “‘Municipalities of Hope’ (Municipios de la Esperanza), namely those without confirmed Covid-19 cases and not located next to a municipality with confirmed contagions, will resume starting on May 18, 2020 school activities, mobilization in closed or open public spaces and activities regardless they are considered essential or non-essential (Basham, 2020).” The total number of these municipalities was close to 300, but many of them were located in remote parts of Mexico and primarily in the southern state of Oaxaca (Rodriguez & Verza, 2020). Despite the natural isolation, these municipalities had the number started to dwindle within weeks. “One town – Ometepe, Guerrero, lasted less than 14 days on the list (Wattenbarger, 2020).” In April 2020, AMLO has declared the disease under control and urged efforts for reopening. The political will for the quick reopening had economic factors as the motivation. The number of informal workers in Mexico is chronically large. According to OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, 60% of all workers are affected by informal labor, rendering them unable to receive social security and pension (OECD, 2019). In other words, the majority of the Mexican workforce relies on daily continual of their businesses and are extremely fragile against the measures. It is also estimated that more than 90% of those who lost their jobs were informally employed citizens (Woodhouse, Mexican informal workers, hit hard by the pandemic, press for more government support, 2020). As AMLO

promised to empower the poor and protect their interests against the elite, his efforts to reopen the economy complies with his political discourse.

On the 1st of July, the federal rule for social distancing ended where, “every state, except the state of Zacatecas, is considered “red” or having a high number of cases (Juarez, 2020).” Under normal circumstances, the color code dictated a maximum level of risk where only the essential skills would resume activity while all education and public gatherings are suspended and high-risk individuals would remain in place (Straulino-Rodriguez & Villalpando Badillo, 2020). This appears as a clear indication of a fast and risky opening where despite having a high-risk situation, the political will has pushed for an early opening, thereby eroding the possible positive effects of the quarantine. Some governors, similar to the Brazilian case, have resisted the calls for reopening and have decided to extend the closure of schools while in Mexico city 1000 schools have resumed education (Mexico News Daily, 2020). In this direction, the efforts to reopen the economy have only been partially followed by some governors. In Cancun, for example, despite the end of federal rule, social distancing measures have remained intact (Verza & Roja, 2020). This points out a fractured response in the Mexican case and possibly division of the national efforts along partisan faultlines. A case study on Mexico points out the following:

“Disagreements between federal and several state governments, typically those controlled by opposition parties, remained throughout the pandemic and exacerbated as conditions worsened. Given that states and the federal government have shared jurisdictional

responsibility for health policy during crises, the lack of effective coordination mechanisms hampered the response (Sánchez-Talanquer et al., 2021). ”

In the following months, the fracture between the federal government and governors became more apparent. However, the motivation behind their deviance did not stem from the ineffective response from the government but rather is caused by the unwillingness to implement further measures. Hugo Lopez-Gatell, the deputy health minister proposed to change the color code and stated that non-compliance with the code may result in legal action. This largely broke the consensus on the effectiveness of the code, hampering the effectiveness of the quarantines. “The governors of several states have indicated that they won’t impose stricter coronavirus restrictions this week despite being allocated a ‘red light’ (Mexico News Daily, 2020).” The ‘Federalist Alliance’ of these governors later demanded the resignation of Lopez-Gatell and ultimately stated that AMLO is a threat to the Mexican democracy (Mexico News Daily, 2020).

Therefore, the closures and quarantines in the Mexican case are characterized through two aspects. First, despite the existence of measures, they had a short lifespan as the majority of the Mexican economy relied upon informal workers. AMLO was initially skeptical about the pandemic but later changed his position to support social distancing and careful reopening of the economy. The duration of the closures was also short where 300 municipalities were allowed to continue operations based on the color system. Second, the policies for decisions are centralized through the color code which was met with backlash in a federative Mexico. Governors refusing to comply with the federal government deviated from

the system and formed a new opposition block called the Federal Alliance. Thus, politicizing the quarantines and closures similar to the case of Brazil. The main difference, however, where the governors of Brazil coordinated response despite Bolsonaro's reluctance, Mexican counterparts argued the color code of the central government is a scheme for exerting greater federal influence upon the states. Following the end of the federal rule in June, the Mexican response became voluntary to comply, within the pretext of recommendations from health officials. As a result, "the federal government's hands-free approach to infection control *de facto* transferred the bulk of responsibility over public health measures to the states [...] [which] lacked the guidance, coherence, and coordination that national health institutions are meant to provide (Sánchez-Talanque et al., 2021)." The lack of coordination, thus, resulted in a greater loss for the Mexican case.

3.3. Social and Financial Aids

Social welfare in Mexico has been a catalyst since the 1980s, which contributed to the political opening in the country, the end of single-party (PRI) rule, and subsequently the transformation into a multi-party system (Ward, 1993). In other words, social welfare programs were important aspects of political competition. Thus, reflecting upon the previous capabilities has also political implications for today's capability and the creation of the Mexican trajectory during the pandemic.

The social welfare programs in Mexico had largely been temporal and sought to appeal to the popular bases. Bordi (2002) remarks that:

"Most of these programs are transitory; they either disappear once their political mission is achieved or are replaced by similar ones but

under a different bureaucratic structure. Consequently, workers, peasants, indigenous people, and women become the focus of emergency social assistance policies, as they are simultaneously the [...] base that keeps the party in power .”

An important one, “The Progresa/Oportunidades program began just after a major macroeconomic crisis in Mexico in 1995 in which real GDP fell by 6 percent, contributing to a context where government officials began to seek greater efficiency in antipoverty spending (Parker & Todd, 2017).” The program, similar to the Bolsa Familia in Brazil, was a conditional cash transfer program, meaning the families had to commit to the education of their children as well as ensuring preventive healthcare. In the successive years, “[t]he programme was subsequently renamed to *Oportunidades* which benefited an additional 750,000 families by 2001 (UNDP, 2011)” and later was renamed Prospera.

While the programs were quite effective in disseminating similar practices internationally and lifting people out of poverty, they were regarded as an extension of politics. In the case of AMLO, the Prospera program was politicized and used as an extension of the political discourse and as a strategy to appeal to bases. “Shortly before taking office, Mexican President Andres Manuel López Obrador decided to create an army of volunteers [...] The team dubbed the “servants of the nation” set out door-to-door to canvass people who receive government benefits, collecting their personal information (Cabrera, 2020).” Despite prior promises to expand the social welfare programs by AMLO before the pandemic, there has been no extension (Lustig et al., 2020). As a result, Mexico remained limited in shielding citizens from

the negative impacts while deepening the existing inequalities. “Inequality is projected to rise from a pre-pandemic Gini coefficient of 0.46 up to 0.48, and around 9 million individuals are likely to fall below the poverty line (Blofield et al., 2021).” Moreover, the World Bank reports indicate that “only 37 percent of adults has a[n] bank account and just 32 percent has made or received digital payments (The World Bank, 2020)”, indicating a lower level of financial inclusion, potentially limiting the distribution of existing social aids.

On the part of financial aids, the Mexican approach deviates from the rest of the region. Where other major economies of the region opted to provide tax incentives and increased spending, “most of AMLO’s proposals amount to credit extensions, the expansion of existing jobs programs in sectors such as agriculture, and early disbursements for social subsidies that were already in place before the crisis (Russel, 2020). These measures appear to be in tandem with the left-populist discourse and that of AMLO’s, promising to provide people with more jobs. As a result, the response of the government has been largely about the loaning capabilities of the banks through an increase in liquidity. “The initial economic response of the authorities is geared to enable liquidity in the financial system, protect poorer households, and (an initial) support to SMEs and the informal sector (The World Bank, 2020).” It has been suggested through different examples that liquidity is positively correlated with the loaning capabilities of banks (Alper & Hulagu, 2012). “AMLO has opted for a minimalist approach to fiscal stimulus. The government announced a package to face the pandemic equivalent to 3% of GDP (Berber, 2020).” Other measures included “frontloading two bimesters payments of the old-age and disability pensions; accelerating procurement processes and VAT refunds;

lending to firms and workers in both formal and informal sectors (Hannan, et al., 2020).”

Another interesting aspect during the pandemic has been the surge of remittances that Mexicans receive from abroad, primarily from the United States. The stimulus packages initiated in the United States also saw some Mexican expats receiving their stimulus checks, allowing them to send a portion of this money in the form of a remittance. “ [...]U.S. stimulus added about 3.5 percentage points to Mexico’s gross domestic product in 2020 -- seven times as much as the fiscal measures taken by the country’s own government [...] (De Haldevang, 2021).”

Therefore, the social and financial aids in the Mexican case is an important variable in the determination of the Mexican trajectory. AMLO administration has deviated from the common practices in the region and opted to provide loans instead of increasing government spending. This orthodox method is then framed by AMLO in part with his ideological alliances. As a result, the aids in the Mexican case saw little to no growth in the entirety of the pandemic where most citizens relied on other forms of acquisition including remittances. In this sense, the government provided some incentives, but these incentives were not in the form of expanding existing social schemes.

This has resulted in worse conduct in comparison with the Brazilian aids where “Brazil will regain its pre-pandemic GDP level by 2023, according to IMF forecasts, but Mexico could take until 2026 (Webber, Populist Amlo’s tight grip on Mexico finances holds back Covid stimulus, 2021).” While AMLO has opted for these measures, his main motivation behind these policy decisions were only partly

in compliance with his leftist discourse. AMLO “criticized forms of economic stimulus such as credit or tax breaks for companies to avoid laying off workers, which he sees as helping the wealthy at the expense of the poor (Pérez, 2020).” He justifies his “stance as a mixture of principle and necessity [and] believes that his government should avoid increasing public debt which, he fears, future generations would have to finance (Webber, Populist Amlo’s tight grip on Mexico finances holds back Covid stimulus, 2021).” Yet, he opted to provide loans instead of expanding the social aids, thus contradicting the discourse of poor first at the cost of avoiding public spending.

3.4. Vaccination Efforts

Mexico’s national vaccination program started in late December and became the first program in the Latin American region. The efforts for vaccination are not supervised by the government. Instead, Mexico's military is in charge of running the vaccination program (Weiss, 2020).” In the following days, Mexico received its first batch of 3000 doses from Belgium with 50.000 additional doses set to arrive next week (Lopez, 2020). The initial rounds of vaccines were distributed to health workers. Besides the health workers, the volunteer group, servants of the nations, were also made eligible to receive shots earlier than designated (Agren, 2021). The vaccination priority for the volunteers is important to observe clientelism in vaccination, as told in the previous section, these individuals are an extension of AMLO’s political campaigns and are associated with Morena. Roniger, et al., (2004) defines clientelism as an “asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationship between individuals or groups of unequal standing. It implies mediated and selective access to

resources and markets which others are normally excluded.” Thus, in the case of vaccinations, the servants of the nation had become unusually privileged compared to the rest of the society in an environment where only select groups are chosen to have access to a particular resource, the vaccines. Vaccination of the volunteers, caused “suspicious vaccinations would be used as a prop in campaigns for June’s midterm elections (Agren, 2021).”

Although the number of doses available rose steadily in Mexico the efforts have been slow in conduct and uneven in access. It is reported that wealthier neighborhoods have had easier access to well-tested vaccines while poorer areas have waited in long queues to receive less-tested vaccines (AP News, 2021). The conduct in the vaccine campaign, therefore, contradicts AMLO’s ‘poor first’ sentiment. The government also had problems related to the prioritization of vaccines. The national vaccination efforts that began in December has first prioritized health workers and later covered elders and teachers, yet they also proved unequal in access. The WHO prioritization roadmap states that during times of severe vaccine constraints, the prioritization efforts should be directed towards the maintenance of essential services and reciprocity towards front-line health workers (WHO, 2020). Despite the roadmap, health workers in the private sector had been denied access to their vaccines which sparked protests across the nation. In late April, “hundreds of private practice physicians crowded near the entrance of the naval academy in Mexico City, demanding to get a dose of the vaccines stored inside. Most were turned away, because the country’s vaccine schedule prioritized health care workers in the public sector (Valencia, 2021).” The protests continued in small clusters in May, some doctors filed and won a court case which was met with

criticism from Lopez-Gatell. (Agren, 2021). AMLO has shunned the protests and demonstrations, claiming the protests are a manifestation of a “very perverse” campaign of private media outlets (AP News, 2021). “Anti-neoliberalism has revitalized a leftist core of critical ideas about the press and media that have permeated government personnel and coalitions (Kitzberger, 2012).” The president’s attitude towards the media had been uneasy since elected, often criticizing journalists for being “‘conservative,’ ‘neo-liberal,’ and ‘fifi’ –meaning elitist or out-of-touch (Hootsen, 2019).” In this sense, the denunciation of protests, and the active neglect of private-sector doctors, serve AMLO’s populists discourse as both professions are framed under the exploitative elite.

Therefore, the vaccination campaign in Mexico has been characterized by partisan distribution, blameshifting and unequal access among citizens. AMLO has opted to deny access to private-sector health workers which, alongside private media, is framed as the elite. Initially adamant about not getting vaccinated, AMLO changed his attitude and received his vaccination publicly.

In comparison with his Brazilian counterpart, AMLO has failed to garner popular support for his vaccination stance and prioritization which pushed him to update his stance as the events unfolded. This can be partly related to social and financial aids the Mexican government opted to provide. Bolsonaro government was able to provide citizens with additional income while Mexico opted to remain at pre-pandemic levels which is indicative of a resource distribution-related reaction on the part of citizens. A lesser level of support from the government led to a lesser degree of popular support which in turn pushed AMLO to constantly change his standing.

While initially opposed to the measures for the pandemic as well as his personal decision to not get vaccinated, AMLO gradually defected these points and complied with the general practices. While he was opposed to getting vaccinated, he later received his vaccination in a televised event.

3.5. Opposition During The Pandemic

The alliance against AMLO announced its creation with the motto: “Va por Mexico” or “Go for Mexico” in late December. The members of the alliance are ideologically distinct and had fierce competition in the past. “The National Action Party is conservative, the old ruling Institutional Revolution Party is centrist. They [are] joined by the left-of-center Democratic Revolution Party, to which López Obrador once belonged (AP News, 2020).” The alliance has “criticized his administration’s management of the economy and the coronavirus pandemic, its relationship with companies, and pledged to promote renewable power sources, which have been sidelined by López Obrador’s oil nationalism (Reuters, 2020).” The unification of parties occurred in a fateful time, as in late December, the campaign season for Mexico’s midterm elections began. Shortly after the formation of Va Por Mexico, “MORENA launched an ad that was censured by the National Electoral Institute for supposedly violating campaign rules, causing it to go viral on social media (Hackbarth, 2021).”

The campaign period was violent where political assassinations and kidnappings occurred. “At least 34 candidates have been murdered since campaigning began [...]” In the midterm elections, AMLO and Morena lost their supermajority. For instance, “[Mexico City] has been the preserve of the left since

the late 1990s but looked set to be split almost equally between Morena and opposition parties (Webber, 2021).” Even though AMLO lost some votes, he largely retained approval around 60%. This is interesting to observe while many populists suffer from substantial popularity losses, AMLO managed to retain higher rates of approval around 60% and the alliance of the opposition was met with little enthusiasm (Agren, 2021). Still, the loss of popularity even in small margins is potentially bad for AMLO and his party. “In the current congress, Morena has a simple majority, holding 253 seats [which] deprive the president of a qualified majority of two-thirds required to approve constitutional reforms (NPR, 2021).”

The attitude of the opposition during crises is important to observe. A recent study found that opposition parties are more likely to reverse their positive sentiments as the leader moves further into the pandemic and takes up a negative attitude (Louwerse, et al., 2021). Similarly, AMLO has often dismissed the criticisms of the opposition blocs and chose to situate them among the elite which caused the problems before he took the office. The newly created opposition bloc consisted of parties that governed the country in the past. PRI governed Mexico between 1929 and 2000, acting on the basis of a revolutionary family concept in which the presidents nominated their successors, thus the members of the party are somewhat assured of upwards mobility if they remain within the party. PAN was the party that ended 71 years of PRI rule when Vincente Fox assumed office in the historic 2000 general election. PRD on the other hand was created from a faction within the PRI after the 1988 elections (Norden, 1998). AMLO himself was a member of PRI until late 1980s (Reuters, 2020).

This provided the grounds for AMLO to denounce the newly formed bloc, as these parties are subjected to party dilution as a result of their own incompetence in ruling the country. In the aforementioned video of Morena, the opposition bloc is accused of damaging Mexico. The narrative in the video mentions the rise of value-added tax percentage in 1995, the alleged electoral fraud in 2006, and new gasoline taxes in 2017 and primarily opposing the fourth transformation that AMLO advocates (Hackbarth, 2021). The fourth transformation refers to the political and social reforms which aim to undo the corruption that retarded the Mexican nation in the past. This rhetoric also underlines the existing inequalities among citizens where the wealthy live extravagantly at the expense of exploiting the poor.

In this sense, the opposition during the pandemic in Mexico has seen a revival of old parties under a common goal and bloc. They were not only successful in carving out a space for politics despite the party dilution but also has managed to steal some votes from the incumbent, potentially blocking them to pass necessary laws from the parliament since their supermajority is now lost. The main point for the opposition to criticize AMLO has been over the centralization of the national response and spending of resources for construction projects instead of economic alleviation of the affected (Cervantes, 2020). Similar to the Brazilian case, the opposition managed to come together during a crisis and managed to project a unified voice which stands out as an important similarity between cases. The pandemic saw the unified voice of governors and previously brand diluted PRI, PAN, and PRD which is argued by AMLO to oppose the fourth transformation.

3.6. Lessons From the Mexican Case

Mexico has been the second hardest-hit country in the region after Brazil. Thus, the analysis on Mexico is valuable to reflect not only the different responses in the region but also to uncover the motivation behind the differences. The Mexican case is similar to the Brazilian case in the sense that, both countries experienced significant setbacks due to the political reluctance to implement necessary policies. The quarantines also appear as crucial misconduct in the Mexican case. Although the government was quick to implement closures and quarantines, they had a short lifespan which potentially hampered its effects in the upcoming periods. The quick reopening occurred due to the economic and financial concerns as the Mexican labor market largely operates informally which renders workers not only vulnerable to sudden shocks but also requires them to actively continue working for sustenance. The color-code system that the states used for the indication of the density of the infected individuals and the normalization period were met with backlash by the governors. The central claim was that AMLO has been using the color-code for centralizing the response and effectively hampering the jurisdiction of the governors. Lopez-Gatell's indication of legal action should the color-code be defied, added to the concerns of centralization on the part of governors. A quick decrease in the number of Municipalities of Hope furthered the skepticism about the effectiveness of the color code system and made it vulnerable to criticism. The governors, initially willing to follow stricter measures, opposed imposing further measures after the federal rule has ended.

The social aids have been puzzling and interesting to observe in the Mexican case considering that AMLO is a left-wing populist. Left-wing populism mostly relies upon a discourse about the clash between elites and common people, albeit with more emphasis on social justice and income inequality. Although ill-defined, these conceptualizations help populist leaders articulate a thin-centered discourse that can be tweaked by the current realities. Although AMLO situated doctors, the private media, and previous governments of an elite, his policies did not fulfill his discourse on the poor. The social and financial aids in Mexico had no expansion and instead relied upon previous schemes and loans. The response primarily aimed to increase liquidity and keep the economy running. Financial aids corresponded a very small proportion of the Mexican economy and primarily catered towards the SMEs. Although the expansion of social welfare policies was important in AMLO's presidential campaign, primarily the Prospera, Mexico remained limited in curbing the negative financial effects of the pandemic. Although the government provided important incentives to provide loans and credits, the social aids have not been in the form of direct cash transfers to the poor and instead opted to preserve SMEs through cheaper credits. This is still compliant with the principles of populism but contradicts with the discourse of AMLO.

The vaccination efforts have been slow and unequal while also being politicized. The initial batch of vaccines was reserved for the doctors and the elderly, yet private sector doctors were left as an exemption. Populism often strives upon dichotomous definitions where the society is deliberately divided into two camps. In this sense, the private sector doctors were placed at the camp where the true people do not belong. This is also complacent with the fourth transformation rhetoric. This

sparked small clusters of protests and AMLO claimed the protests were a scheme orchestrated by the private media. Servants of the Nation, a volunteer group with close ties to Morena were prioritized in the vaccination and thus, secured a limited resource through closer ties to the government. This constitutes a classic populist practice of clientelism.

The opposition saw a unification in the right-wing as a result of government practices in the pandemic. The combination of the aforementioned policies has provided the opposition with an opportunity to unify against AMLO and Morena. The Federalist Alliance consisted of previously governing parties PAN, PRI and PRD, managed to deny AMLO a super-majority required for his fourth transformation while carving out some political space despite a heavy party dilution.

The primary characteristic of the Mexican response has been AMLO's constant update on his policy stance and the lack of social aids. Moreover, AMLO even though kept his majority in the midterm elections, failed to manifest his popularity physically. There has not been any popular demonstration to support AMLO's conduct during the pandemic like in Brazil. I hypothesize that this was primarily affected by the resource distribution the state had allocated from the beginning. Despite problems, Bolsonaro managed to expand upon new programs and actively supported citizens with additional revenue and financial measures. That in turn has bolstered a degree of support which is evident by anti-vaccination and pro-Bolsonaro protests on the streets. Bolsonaro supporters were able to initiate and participate in counter-protests which strengthened Bolsonaro's stance upon his current opinions. In Mexico on the other hand, as social and financial aids remained at pre-pandemic levels, additional income is not allocated to citizens and AMLO's

popular base. This created a cognitive dissonance as while AMLO constantly claimed to be on the side of the poor citizens, he was weak at delivering support. As a result, AMLO failed to create a popular consensus and its physical manifestation on a variety of issues including the vaccination campaign, thus, had to comply with the general practices.

In this sense, the Mexican response has been somewhat ineffective and unsure. The personal preferences of the president, despite him voicing them, failed to occur in the practice. Thus, rendering the national efforts contradictory and fragmented. AMLO also has contradicted his promises and ideological stance. Most deaths in Mexico City, for instance, are concentrated in “working-class neighborhoods such as Iztapalapa, Gustavo A. Madero, and Alvaro Obregon (Flannery, 2020).” As a leftist leader, AMLO failed to shield his popular base from the pandemic both financially and physically and defected from his promises. In this sense, the Mexican trajectory can be named as a “defective inclusionism.” Although AMLO promised the inclusion of the poorer masses, he later defected his ideological stance. The table below visualizes the indicators for Mexico’s defective inclusionism.

	Indicators	Mexico
Government	Vaccination	Weak (16,8%)
	Social Aids	Weak
	Closures and Quarantines	Weak
	Creation of an effective specialized response body	Weak
	Local and National Policies are in tandem	Moderate
	Economic stimulus packages	Weak
	Opposition is strong	Weak
Leader	Took the virus seriously	Moderate
	Opposition efforts are undermined	Weak
	Leader often changes relevant ministers	Weak
	The Ruling Elite encourages and complies WHO guidelines and recommendations	Moderate

Table 3: Indicators for Defective Inclusionism

The next chapter explores the Turkish case which is important as it shows an important deviation among populist regimes. While many populist leaders opted to belittle the pandemic, Turkey employed serious rhetoric from the first days of the pandemic. The Turkish case also contrasts with the Brazilian case and displays the variance within the right-wing populism.

CHAPTER 4 - TURKEY

TURKEY AND PARTISAN AFFIRMATION

This chapter explores the Turkish response to the pandemic using the same format as previous chapters. In accordance, quarantines and closures, social and financial aids, vaccination efforts, and opposition efforts will be explored with respect to pandemic and Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The chapter concludes with the definition of a unique Turkish trajectory and its comparison with other cases.

The Turkish case appears to be a true deviation from its populist Latin American counterparts. Where Mexico and Brazil, presidents are currently serving their first terms in office, Erdoğan governs since 2002. Since his accession into power, Turkish politics rapidly de-escalated from being a multi-party democracy to being an illiberal democracy. As Esen and Gümüşçü (2016) note: "Since [...] 2002 Turkey has undergone double regime transitions. First, tutelary democracy ended; second, a competitive authoritarian regime has risen in its stead." According to Freedom House, Turkey scored 32 out of 100 overall where both political rights and civil liberties stand at 16 points (Freedom House, 2021). As a result, Turkey is classified as not free where Latin American counterparts appear as functioning democracies.

"The aftermath of the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 and the 2017 constitutional referendum structured a new path of political regime transformation in the country, creating a clear drift toward full authoritarianism (Yılmaz & Turner, 2019)." After the ratification of the presidential system, Erdoğan is claimed to have

systemically eroded remaining checks & balances, wielding even superior power over the judiciary, legislation, and media. This resulted in the centralization of institutions, meaning the policy decisions cannot be taken or implemented without permission from Erdoğan. In this context, The Turkish response to the pandemic cannot be thought of separately from this new presidential system. The Turkish case, therefore, is important as it highlights the differences within the right-wing populists as the Brazilian case yielded different conduct and results despite belonging to the same category within the left-right continuum. Thus, the puzzling Turkish case enables seeing the response employed by an increasingly authoritarian right-wing populist which contrasts with a milder form of right-wing populism seen in Brazil.

The deviation of the Turkish case is apparent at the leader level. In Latin American cases, both Bolsonaro and AMLO had downplayed the virus and its possible effects upon their societies through rhetoric constructed upon economic concerns. Despite having different motivations, the possible trade-off between compliance with the cases and economic retardation was at the center of their policy agenda. The Turkish case, on the other hand, differed from its Latin American counterparts where there has been virtually no debate about if and how the pandemic is serious or not. From the very beginning, members of both the ruling elite, the president, party officials as well as members of the opposition simply did not quarrel about the severity of the virus. The pandemic in Turkey has always been a case that politicians, experts, and society, in general, approached with caution. This places Turkey as the best-ranking case for seriousness indicators at all levels. The problems in the conduct on the pandemic, therefore, stemmed not because of a lack of political will, but because of other aspects which shall be further explained in the upcoming

sections. Accordingly, the Turkish case has employed a partisan affirmative response which is defined by a serious acknowledgment of the virus while opposition efforts are suppressed. This is correlated with the increased polarization of Turkish society and worsening economic conditions.

4.1. How Did It Begin?

The Turkish case combines the trait of possessing a populist government while giving unusual importance to the pandemic at the same time. The measures that the Turkish government took against the pandemic, pre-dates the existence of its first imported case. The first step that Turkey took, was the establishment of the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board (CSAB). The board consisted of 26 members, including 21 university professors and 4 medical experts specialized in Pulmonology, Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, and a legal advisor, including the minister of health. The number of board members increased later to 31 with the joining of expert academics in virology, internal medicine, intensive care medicine (ILKHA, 2020). Later, the number has been increased to a total of 38 members. Until the confirmation of the first case, the CSAB kept a relatively low profile, only giving recommendations about preemptive measures like flight suspension, travel restrictions, and border closures while installing sanitization stations to public transportation stops and distributing informing leaflets to raise awareness. Other preventive measures included the suspension of flights to China, Italy, Iran, and Iraq, the closing of the Iranian border, and the repatriation of Turkish citizens abroad

(Daily Sabah, 2020). The experts and the opposition members claimed that the government was late in implementing measures, waiting until the last minute to announce and enforce them.

On March 10th, the minister of health Dr. Fahrettin Koca announced Turkey's first COVID-19 case. . Yet, the announcement of the first official case was only a day before WHO declared a global pandemic. This raised skepticism on the government's possible intention to hide the importation to prevent panic. The patient who returned from Europe and his relatives are put under quarantine (McKernan, 2020). In the same televised speech, Dr. Koca predicted that at its current stage, the infection is ought to be limited while emphasizing a national effort to follow the guidelines his ministry has been informing the citizens for weeks. In the ensuing days, the number of cases rose quickly where around the 18th of March, a week after the first case, the total number of cases was 191 (Hürriyet, 2020). On the same day, President Erdoğan himself urged the public to comply with the measures, saying;

"I appeal to our nation not to leave their homes as much as possible until the threat is over. The more we increase social distancing, the more we decrease movement, the lower the threat will be. It is time to minimize our contact with the outer world, it is time to stay home as much as possible. (Daily Sabah, 2020)"

In the next few days, Turkey gradually shut off its non-essential businesses where museums, barbers, places of worship, restaurants have gradually closed, signaling the beginning of a nationwide quarantine for most citizens.

Turkey appears to have handled things differently than Brazil and Mexico of which the

leaders initially failed to recognize the possible severity of the virus and allowed to spread. Instead, both the leader and the ruling elite spearheaded the implementation of the measures while opting to rapidly detach non-essential aspects from daily life, effectively reducing the number of vectors that can carry the contagion. Its fast response has placed Turkey in a select number of countries, or as Dr. Jeremy Rossman of Kent University puts it in a BBC article: “[among the] small club of countries that have been quite effective in reducing the viral spread (Guerin, 2020)” Yet, despite the existence of a political will, Turkey’s conduct has not been entirely successful. The COVID-19 pandemic has further polarized the politics while hastened the declining support for the AKP. Moreover, the pandemic has been politicized both in conduct and discourse. There have been strong opinions regarding the conduct of the government where the opposition claimed Erdoğan has used measures to ban activities and sectors that do not comply with their Islamist world view under the presidential system. This hastened already existing populist practices and made the crackdown upon the opposition more visible.

4.2. Closures and Quarantines

According to the WHO report, Turkey’s current notification system dates back to 2004 and the creation of the Early Warning and Response System in 2007. The report also acknowledges the past experiences in swine flu (H1N1), avian flu (H5N1), and SARS outbreaks (WHO, 2020). At the end of March 2020, Turkey restricted domestic travel in 81 cities, and travel permissions were introduced, requiring citizens to obtain a permit from district governorates. Entrance to 31 cities was banned altogether (Göncüoğlu et al., 2020). A nationwide lockdown, however, appeared to be a subject that the government has strongly resisted. Despite the

opposition's calls to go under a total lockdown, the government initiated a partial lockdown where curfews are initiated only during weekends. The first weekend curfew on the 11th of April was announced only two hours before it went into effect (Eski, 2020). The unplanned announcement of the curfew caused panic among citizens who rushed out to restock for the weekend, defying the recommendations about social distancing. On social media, footage displaying the panic-buying citizens went viral. The minister of the interior, Süleyman Soylu was widely criticized for his sudden decision and the panic it created. Shortly after, Soylu announced his resignation on his Twitter account, claiming full responsibility while the president refused his resignation. Weekend curfews continued until the summer while certain age groups are restricted to leave their homes. Vulnerable groups such as citizens over 65 and youngsters under 18 were only allowed to go out in designated hours. Compliance with the curfews, different from the Latin American cases, has not been voluntary but instead was enforced. Checkpoints were created by the police which had the authority to fine citizens should they fail to provide the necessary documentation. Workers and managers in essential sectors were excluded from the curfews with necessary documentation obtainable from the government's digital portals. Yet, also from personal experiences, the police checkpoints seldom functioned properly where officers would simply choose not to investigate vehicles or ask for paper. Across many cities, including the capital, it was possible to travel from one end of the city to the other without ever encountering any investigation in checkpoints.

In the summer of 2020, Erdoğan announced that Turkey has now entered into a period of normalization and that restrictions would be eased. Turkey restarted

international flights on June 11 for the first time after an almost three-month ban imposed to stem the coronavirus pandemic (Hürriyet Daily News, 2020).” The 14-day quarantine period for expats and tourists was also lifted, allowing travelers from abroad to traverse within the borders with lesser restrictions (YTB, 2020). The tourism sector in Turkey has been a sizeable portion of the national GDP with 12% (Gökay, 2020). Under heavy economic pressure in financial terms, the government’s normalization plan for the summer was geared towards active discrimination for the tourism sector. To assure tourists that touristic enterprises comply with general pandemic practices, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism initiated safe tourism certificates. “The certificate validates the execution of high levels of health and hygiene requirements at airline companies, airports (and other transport stations) and accommodation outlets, as well as food and beverage facilities (Paul, 2020).” During summer, the number of deaths and new cases rose steadily. Large gatherings were present. “Despite all expert warnings, the Turkish government organiz[ed] large public gatherings, such as an ostentatious inaugural Friday prayer in Hagia Sophia [...], on July 24 (Özel & Balta, 2020).” In September, Fahrettin Koca announced that the nation is going through the second peak of the first wave as the society failed to observe social distancing and proper compliance with the measures (Pavlovska, 2020). An anonymous senior official who spoke to Reuters claimed that the figures that the government provided at that time, was incorrect where the actual numbers are five times more than that of official ones. The official also told that though the government is considering to re-impose measures, they also consider its potential economic effects at the same time (Coşkun & Devranoğlu, 2020). Despite increasing numbers after summer, the government resisted the calls

for tightening the measures. Instead, Koca encouraged citizens not to leave their city and voluntarily remain at home (McKernan, 2020). In the following days, Erdoğan announced new measures which included a nationwide weekend curfew from 8 p.m. to 10 a.m. and revisions in the rules for select age groups while re-closing the school opened a few weeks earlier (Daily Sabah, 2020). On New Year's Eve, the government initiated a 4-day curfew to prevent mobility and new year celebrations. These measures are argued to be based on the party's political and cultural concerns rather than the necessities of the pandemic.

In the first months of 2021, while most of the restrictions remained intact, the government planned to relax the measures with the beginning of the national vaccination campaign. Similar to the Mexican color code, the Turkish government initiated a risk map. All provinces were "classified as 'very high,' 'high,' 'medium' and 'low' for every province (Daily Sabah, 2021)." In accordance, the president stated that schools in low-risk provinces would re-open while wedding ceremonies are allowed in low and medium-risk provinces with a limited number of guests. Between February and March, the AKP held a series of regional congresses in first, few cities in the Black Sea Region, and another grand congress in the capital, with participants from all provinces. Despite warnings from experts and the opposition, the congresses became a source of contention for Erdoğan. He told: "We are holding a congress in the period of the pandemic and the hall is jam-packed (Bianet, 2021)." The case numbers rose steadily in these cities which the AKP officials denied having any correlation. The congresses were met with criticism by the opposition. İYİ Party member Lütfü Türkkan, for instance, told: "You cannot go to a concert, theatre play or cinema," [...] "The only social activity that you can go to is the corona congresses of the [AK Party] (Wilks, 2021)." The same was also applicable to religious services and mosques where the government has mostly refrained from

prolonging the bans for mass prayings. For most of the pandemic, mosques were allowed to remain open and accepted congregations for religious practices. Following the rise of figures in the following weeks, the government started entertaining the possibility of going under a lockdown. In April, Turkey went into a full lockdown between 29 April and 17 May. Erdoğan told that it was imperative to reduce the daily number of new cases below the 5.000 line, both to alleviate the case numbers which loomed around 50.000 after the congresses, but also to prepare for the summer season.

“At a time when Europe is entering a phase of reopening, we need to rapidly cut our case numbers to below 5,000 not to be left behind. Otherwise, we will inevitably face heavy costs in every area, from tourism to trade and education (Al Jazeera, 2021).”

Erdoğan's emphasis on the necessity to shield the tourism sector was reflected in the measures. Except for a few countries, the government have revoked the requirement for a PCR test, while at the same time 14-day mandatory quarantine was removed if the travelers show no symptoms. The measures pertaining to the mobility of tourists within the borders have gradually been lifted where they became exempt from most of the measures. While Turkish residents are required to obtain a HES code, tourists are not. This is a recent occurrence with the approach of tourism season. While most of the measures remained intact until summer, Turkey began to lift them starting from June 1st. First, countries in which Turkey attracts the most number of tourists were excluded from the testing and quarantine requirements under the pretext of gradual normalization. On the 12th of June, the measures have been lifted for all countries (Travelling Lifestyle, 2021). Tourists were excluded from the

lockdown alongside the workers in essential sectors. The government's decision to exclude tourists caused a backlash in Turkish society. In a viral video on social media, some citizens in Datça who swam in the sea were fined by the police officers while tourists were doing the same thing next to them (Sputnik News, 2021). A few days later, "a video promoting tourism in Turkey amid the pandemic has caused an uproar on social media for showing tourism employees wearing masks that read 'Enjoy, I'm vaccinated.' (Bilginsoy, Turkish tourism video sparks outcry, unequal treatment claim, 2021)" Alcoholic beverages were served in tourist enterprises while shops are banned from selling them to the public. This sparked a sentiment of being a second-class citizen as tourists were mostly treated unequally than locals. As the summer season approached, Turkey further relaxed the measures, and on the 1st of June, most measures were lifted including the partial curfews.

Although Turkey's response in terms of quarantines and closures, initially garnered a degree of support and optimism, the government's and Erdoğan's resistance to a total lockdown rapidly eroded the consensus on Turkey's success in the implementation of measures. Similar to his Latin American counterparts, Erdoğan's primary motivation to resist a nationwide lockdown was the necessity to keep the economy running. Before the pandemic, Turkey already had financial problems. Since 2018, Turkey has kept suffering from a currency and debt crisis where the Turkish Lira constantly depreciates against the USD and EUR, increasing the costs of production and employment. AKP's inability to restore the national economy and curb ever-rising living costs had been a widely criticized aspect which not only resulted in a gradual loss of popularity but also penetrated the aura of invincibility that the party has heavily invested over the years. Under such

circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic “has exacerbated already high unemployment and inflation [...] [and] raised fresh concerns about Mr. Erdogan’s heavy investment in giant infrastructure projects (Gall, 2020).” Erdogan also made intensive use of the mega-hospitals constructed in major cities, arguing that hospitals, combined with other precautions, have caused the national system not to fail or overload. Different from Latin American cases, closures and quarantines did not cause friction within the government officials. However, this is not caused by the effectiveness of the measures themselves but simply stems from Turkey being a unitary state as opposed to its federal Latin American counterparts.

Although municipalities and governors were largely compliant with the measures, the conduct has not been far from politicization. The closures of bars, night clubs, as well as the ban of alcohol sales on weekends, have been argued to be the methods that AKP used for imposing the conservative lifestyle their grassroots subscribe to. In the latest measures, despite the ending of closures and sit-in customer bans, restaurants and clubs are banned from playing music after midnight. The leaders of the opposition parties, Meral Akşener and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu often criticized the government and Erdogan in particular upon lifestyle issues, which possibly acted as one of the venues for uniting the opposition. Other criticisms are directed towards the government as the implementation of the measures has been unequal among the citizens. As seen in the example of Hagia Sophia, regional congresses, and other occasions, AKP supporters are often excluded from the enforcement of the measures provided that the occasion is either organized by the government or was organized for supporting the government. In a very recent and anecdotal occurrence, supporters of Süleyman Soylu were allowed to break the

curfew and were allowed to demonstrate in front of a TV channel to support him. Therefore, the implementation of the measures was politicized, and unequal. The government was able to tweak, neglect, and penetrate the rules it created for its events while others are strictly denied. This not only created resentment in the society as the treatment was unequal and selective but also eroded the support to the party to a certain degree.

4.3. Social and Financial Aids

The social and financial aids in Turkey have been problematic primarily due to Turkey's worsening economic conditions. In the context of the pandemic, there have an increased feeling of being left alone where Turkish citizens did not feel adequately shielded from the financial fallout. As a result, the aids during the pandemic did little to alleviate the needs of citizens amidst an economic crisis.

Turkey's policies for social welfare have shifted dramatically with the transformation of politics in the early 2000s. In the 1990s, successive governments "hesitated to implement policies targeting the rights of formal sector workers because they needed the political support of wide sectors of the population (Yörük, 2020)." In the ensuing years, the AKP has dramatically transformed the social assistance schemes, partly within the pretext of fulfillment for the EU accession processes. (Grütjen, 2017). Turkey's social assistance programs and almost all social aids are governed centrally with marginal support from NGOs and municipalities. Turkey's three social welfare programs Emekli Sandığı, Bağ-Kur, and SSK, were grouped under Social Security Institution in 2006 (Grütjen, 2008). The creation of the Ministry of Family and Social policies in 2011, has been the realization of long calls

for the unification of other institutions which previously governed such programs separately (Öktem, 2019). “Social assistance in Turkey is managed at the national level by the Social Assistance Directorate General (SADG) under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MoFSP) and is implemented by 1,000 locally based Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASFs) (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Family and Social Policies, 2017).”

Social assistance has been an important promise of the AKP which as a result was substantially increased over the years. The spending has been increased “from US\$860 million in 2002 to US\$9.34 billion in 2016 (Yörük, 2020).” During the pandemic, However, despite the increases in social spending over the years, the Turkish response in social and financial aids is retarded by the economic crisis Turkey is going through since 2018. “Turkey’s mix of low-skilled labor in which a third of workers informally earn cash daily, a private sector dominated by small businesses and public finances already strained from a 2018-2019 recession leaves the country uniquely vulnerable (Spicer & Küçükgöçmen, 2020).” Moreover, the Turkish welfare system, as it is centralized, can hardly be separated into two components. Both social and financial aids are distributed from the center, differently from their Latin American counterparts. Some of the social allocations still bore the necessity of inclusion in the SGK system, therefore, individuals lacking formal ties were mostly left out. Such allocations included a bonus of ₺1000 to 5.5 million families, short-time work allowances, raising of minimum pension to ₺1.500. Yet, considering the ever-increasing life costs in Turkey, such minimal allowances were far from sufficient to make a significant difference. A substantial amount of support was also mustered through donation campaigns from both the government and the

opposition which shall be elaborated in the upcoming sections. Most of the individual benefits offered by the government are largely included in financial stimulus packages. In this sense, the remainder of this section will analyze financial aids.

Turkey was very quick to announce a new stimulus package. Only after a week from the official confirmation of the first case, Erdoğan announced a new stimulus package called the Economic Stability Shield which deployed 100 billion Turkish Liras (Daily Sabah, 2020). The package included postponed taxes, reductions in VAT, postponed interest payments to public banks, increased limits to the Credit Guarantee Fund and, loan packages for social purposes (EY, 2020). However, the package was meager in the sense that, the total amount announced only corresponded to 1,5% of the GDP (Erdemir, 2020). Following the announcement of the stimulus package, the board of TÜSİAD sent the president a letter, urging him to do more which shows “growing discomfort among the country’s most influential businesses as they seek support to offset the weakening demand at home and in export markets led by Europe (Karakaya & Ersoy, 2020).” Similar to the case of Mexico, the Turkish response aimed to increase liquidity through loans and credits to shield SMEs from the negative effects of the pandemic.

“On March 22nd, all financial enforcement and bankruptcy proceedings were halted until April 30th. On March 23rd, all payments to the Small and Medium Industry Development Organization (KOSGEB) [...] were postponed until 2021, and employers’ inability to pay rent [...] March 1st and June 30th was

disqualified as a valid reason to cancel residency contracts (Tanca et al., 2020)”

Turkish economy currently “has 3.2 million active SMEs, representing 99.8% of all registered entities in the country. The SMEs constitute 64.5% of the total turnover of the enterprises, 56.3% of the country’s exports, and 73.8% of its workforce (TOBB, 2020).” In terms of sheer numbers, the initial shielding package was somewhat effective in alleviating the blow but not sufficient. As the financial stimulus package did not meet the expectations, the opposition, Yavaş, and İmamoğlu in particular capitulated on the discontent and launched a donation campaign. The donation campaigns were met with a severe backlash from the president where the efforts are compared to being a state within the state (Cumhuriyet, 2020). The bank accounts for the opposition campaign were blocked through the circulation of the ministry of the interior. “The efforts of the Ankara and Istanbul mayors to raise donations from the public were declared illegal, a declaration that violated the law governing the powers of municipalities in Turkey (Kirişçi, 2020).” On the 30th of March, Erdoğan announced yet another national campaign that functioned the same as the opposition campaigns and announced he would be donating seven months’ worth of his salary while encouraging others to do the same (Daily Sabah, 2020).

In this sense, the Turkish response in terms of social and financial aids has been affected by the central tendencies of the social welfare system. In an increasingly central Turkey, social aids are distributed from the center. This prevented the creation of additional programs and schemes in comparison with their Latin American counterparts. Although the social welfare system used to be

fragmented in the past, their unification in the early 2010s, led to a centralized system. Much like other cases, Turkey's informal workers were excluded from the system, albeit more severely than Latin American counterparts as an inclusion in the SGK system was necessary. Where the central response remained short in reaching informal workers, the opposition was quick to respond in the form of donations. However, the opposition campaigns have been systemically prevented through the ministry of interior. Still, a significant portion of the social aids that people are distributed from the municipalities. However, these donation campaigns were outlawed by the government which instead initiated its own donation campaign thus monopolizing the donation efforts. This potentially has two implications. First, the AKP is known to entertain a discourse about the opposition's inability to govern. In a very recent speech, Erdoğan told that they cannot hand over the nation to them, hinting at their perceived inability to govern. In a similar line, monopolization of the social aids during the pandemic was an extension of the monopolization of the resources which are distributed in a partisan way. Should the CHP mayors be allowed to fill the shortcomings of the social aids, this would hamper the AKP as a political brand, which sustained its popularity through social aids. Second, the opposition has been enjoying a slowly rising popularity amidst the economic crisis. Allowing the donation campaign to penetrate AKP's popular bases in two major cities, would strengthen the arguments about the benefits of the local governance, which the AKP has eroded over the years. In this sense, the social aids in Turkey, which are weakened due to economic problems before the pandemic, were politicized as their insufficiency appeared as a gravity center for the opposition to focus upon.

4.4. Vaccination Efforts

Turkey's national vaccination campaign began towards the end of December with the arrival of vaccination shipments from China, two weeks later than stated in the purchasing agreement. Yet the national efforts for a locally developed vaccine dates back to the summer of 2020. The development of a Turkish vaccine has been a topic that was widely covered in the national media. In August, "Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday that Turkey has become the third country to develop vaccines locally against COVID-19 after the United States and China according to the World Health Organization (Global Times, 2020)." Even though pro-government media has covered many stories about a locally developed vaccine and its trials, these stories, in truth, only remained as a part of nationalistic and populist discourse. Even though some universities in the country are actively working on vaccinations, their development has been slow. Thus, Turkey was not able to employ or mass produce these vaccinations as the president claimed to be the 3rd vaccination for the virus ever. Moreover, the announcement of the local vaccination efforts by the president, but not the ministry of health or the experts on the projects are typical observations in a populist regime. By announcing the vaccination campaign himself, thus delivering good news to the public, Erdoğan aimed to retain his political image while pointing to light at the end of the tunnel. As Moffitt (2015) points out, populist leaders often "radically simplify the terms and terrain of political debate and advocate strong leadership and quick political action." In the case of a locally developed vaccine, its development offered a quick, radical and simple solution, this was made use of in the context of a sudden crisis.

As the development of a local vaccine was slow, Turkey had to resort to currently developed vaccinations. In September, Turkey started participating in Phase III trials of Coronavac where recruits volunteered (Clinical Trials Arena, 2020). This appears to be a characteristic in typical developing nation reflex in which Brazil and Turkey opted to pursue Chinese-made vaccines. This is primarily caused by developing nations' fragility during the pandemic. Developing countries had to pursue vaccination efforts more rapidly since the time period without mass inoculation would result in bigger cracks in the national economy. Following the trials, Turkey made agreements to purchase 50 million doses of Sinovac, where officials expected to receive 20 million doses in December (Bilginsoy, 2020; TRT Haber, 2020). However, the initial batch consisted of 10 million doses which arrived in two separate shipments (TRT Haber, 2021). After local tests are conducted, Fahrettin Koca received the first shot on a televised occasion. "Today is the first day of a new period where we will put an end to the devastating effects of a global pandemic [...] I would like to ask you to support the vaccination program bearing in mind the importance of this day (Ministry of Health, 2021)." Although Sinovac was a hopeful development for Turkey, its widespread use raised suspicions since Brazilian trials proved CoronaVac to be only %50,4 effective% (Sevinçlidir, 2021). Turkish officials, on the other hand, claimed Sinovac to be 91,25% effective (Euronews, 2020). After administering Sinovac for several weeks, Turkey managed to supplement existing stocks with additional batches of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Pro-government media previously announced that Turkey would receive up to "4.5 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Pfizer by late March, with the number potentially reaching 30 million by 2021"

(Daily Sabah, 2020).” In March, Turkey received the first batch of Pfizer-BioNTech which consisted of 5,800 doses for test purposes, with additional 1,4 million doses shortly after (BBC, 2021). Before larger batches of Pfizer-BioNTech arrived, there were rumors about smaller batches being reserved for the AKP elites. Aytun Çıray of the İYİ Party, for instance, asked if these smaller batches are administered to AKP supporters so that regional congresses could be held. On a side note, I remember hearing ordinary citizens speaking about the possibility of never receiving Pfizer-BioNTech as it was reserved for the wealthy supporters of the AKP. Although it proved only to be a rumor and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccinations were made available in large amounts to the public, the existence of rumors points to a fundamental mistrust of the government’s conduct. In May and June, Turkey substantially managed to secure more doses of Both Sinovac and Pfizer-BioNTech and hastened the national vaccination campaign. The age groups were divided into five-year intervals where citizens gradually became eligible for the vaccine. Only in the course of June, after procuring enough batches, the government lifted the age criteria and expanded the eligibility substantially to all citizens. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Health, Turkey administered approximately 59.4 million doses of vaccination of which 18 million citizens received their second doses as of July 13th. This roughly corresponds to 21% of all population.

Thus, the national vaccination efforts of Turkey have not been without populist implications. The government voiced an indigenous vaccination as early as August 2020 and claimed that Turkey has been the 3rd country to develop a vaccine. However, indigenous vaccines have only recently reached Phase III in late June. According to pro-government media: “If its approval is fast-tracked, it will be fully

available for the Turkish public by the start of next year (Daily Sabah, 2021).” By announcing an indigenous vaccine too early, Erdoğan may have aimed at two things. First, promises of an indigenous vaccine may have aimed to weather the storm by reducing people’s disenfranchisement during the rising numbers, and possibly bolster hope among the popular base. The rhetoric about being the third country would place Turkey besides the U.S. and China, possibly contributing to the discourse about how Turkey became a country that Western nations always envy under Erdoğan and the AKP. Second, it may have bought the time necessary for the government to procure developed vaccines without suffering too much politically. Before vaccinations have been secured, the government constantly updated their predictions on the procurement of Sinovac, which resulted in a prolonged period without vaccination. The government’s inability to provide definitive dates for the vaccination program, resulted in a loss of trust in the government, and progressively, Erdoğan. This appeared as a new venue for the opposition to capitulate upon.

4.5. Opposition Efforts

Turkey’s political sphere has long been divided into two distinct camps, yet the attributes of these camps varied overtime under a thin-centered ideology of conservative democracy. The AKP claimed that most of the problems in the 1990s stemmed from Kemalism, and its elites, which over the years, AKP increasingly portrayed as the corrupt elite. “The premiership of Erdoğan has concentrated on the delivery of a ‘services’-oriented government [which] continually seeks to deliver tangible benefits to citizen body (Ciddi, 2014).” Since 2002, the political sphere of Turkey gradually has transformed into a dominant-party system where practices are, as Pempel (1990) argued, enacted and implemented policies that consolidate the power base through a continuous game of politics. Under such a system,

the maneuverability of the opposition parties is incrementally limited through clientelism and patronage, as well as strong control over the media and systematic erosion of checks and balances.

The fractured opposition of Turkey has first gained a majority in the June 2015 general elections where the AKP lost the majority for the first time. After few rounds of failed attempts to form a coalition, the elections are renewed in November where the AKP regained its majority. Mounting economic problems, increasingly narrowed political freedoms and the failed coup attempt of 2016, signaled an erosion in the AKP's popularity. In a very narrow margin, the 2018 referendum on the presidential system granted Erdoğan immense political power, yet, it also severed the feedback loops that the government had maintained with the general public. Erdoğan became increasingly unaware of the problems within the society, as most state institutions became responsible to Erdoğan himself, but not to the parliament. This was tried to be remedied with a nationalistic discourse along with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). In this context, the sudden occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, while deepening the economic problems, increasingly provided the grounds for the opposition to capitulate upon the severed feedback loops. The central discourse of the opposition has been constructed upon Erdoğan's perceived negligence of Turkey's day-to-day problems and the inefficiencies of the presidential system which manifested itself in the form of unemployment, lack of meritocracy, and increasing living costs. In accordance, the opposition claims that Turkish society suffers under what is called 'palace politics' which refers to the presidential palace or '*külliyeye*' in Ankara. As an extension of the government's shortcomings, the opposition has tried to fill in the aspects which the government failed to provide. As aforementioned in the social aids chapter, the first major move of the opposition was to launch donation campaigns

which were halted through legal channels. Although the donation campaign was halted and replaced by a national one, it backfired and boosted the popularity of opposition leaders (Bayhan, 2020). Korkmaz argues that: “Their efforts on the local level are challenging the core message of the ruling party — that the CHP cannot govern (Pitel & Güler, 2020).” The crackdown on the opposition is recognized by the Human Rights Watch which reports that “Selectively using Covid-19 as a pretext, provincial governors banned peaceful protests of women’s rights activists, healthcare workers, lawyers, and political opposition parties (Human Rights Watch, 2021).” The pandemic also provided the AKP with a fertile ground to pick fights with opposition mayors, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş in particular who advocated to fill the gaps that the government’s social aids have failed to fill. While the notion of quarreling with the opposition has been present in all cases, the primary aspect of the Turkish case has been upon economic faultlines alongside closures and quarantines. The opposition has repeatedly claimed that government fails to help its citizens as a result of a retarded economy during the AKP rule. More directly, oppositions claim have led to the unraveling of other inefficiencies and partisan favoring of the AKP where an important topic appeared to be lavishly living partisan state bureaucrats who receive multiple salaries from different positions while some citizens were left to fend for themselves.

The government has also failed to provide solid answers to the allegations of corruption and extravagance. The economic fallout the pandemic has brought, helped the opposition to strengthen their discourse on the inefficiencies of the government which sparked debates around the foreign currency reserves of the Turkish Central Bank, amounting to \$128 billion. “According to a recent Metropoll, 58 percent of

voters expect the situation in Turkey to worsen. The economy and unemployment are Turkey's biggest challenges, according to 65.9 percent of respondents (Korkmaz, 2021).” In this sense, these allegations, combined with the local efforts to aid citizens have helped the opposition to unite and challenge the traditional methods of the AKP. Recent polls indicate that opposition has 52,2% support as opposed to the government's 47,8%. Therefore, the pandemic has hastened the dissolution of the AKP support as the government failed to meet the current demands for government support, financially and morally. As the economic indicators went negative, the opposition was able to capitulate upon the inefficiencies of the presidential system.

4.6. Lessons from the Turkish Case

The Turkish response to the pandemic has been important to show yet another unique trajectory for the populist responses deployed to the pandemic. The Turkish case has differed from the Latin American cases, primarily in two aspects. First, Bolsonaro and AMLO currently serve their first term while Erdoğan has been a central figure in Turkish politics for almost two decades. This permits him to establish practices and discourses affecting the general conduct during the pandemic. The Turkish case also displays the possible variance within the right-populism as Turkey and Brazil had different motivations and trajectories.

In terms of closures and quarantines, Turkey stands out as the only case where the leader did not initially neglect the virus and the country was able to quickly take measures, albeit partially. Despite repeated calls from both the experts and the opposition, Turkey went to a lockdown only after one year from the first case, which lasted less than a month. The closures in Turkey seem to be motivated by two

factors. First, similar to other cases, economic factors mattered where the fragile informal workers relied on day-to-day work which largely constitutes the electoral base of the AKP. While some sectors afforded to switch into remote working options, the workers did not make use of this option. In an increasingly expensive Turkey, lack of shielding has resulted in more resentment. Second, the closures and lockdowns display a pattern of relaxation and contraction in tandem with the tourism sector. The tourism sector constitutes a large portion of the GDP while allegedly is a lucrative business within the wealthy elites. As mentioned in the previous sections, Turkey opted to relax the measures only to reintroduce them after the season. The pattern can repeat should the delta variant be the dominant species. Another aspect of the closures includes political debates centered around lifestyle intervention. It has been argued by the opposition that closures target certain sectors and activities which does not comply with the Islamic values of the AKP and its popular bases. Closures of nightclubs, bars, alcohol bans, and recently introduced midnight music bans are strongly criticized by the opposition.

In terms of social and financial aids, Turkey used previously existing institutions and schemes which are, by definition, centralized in the 2000s. Although the government provided tax exemptions, VAT reductions, and bonuses to citizens, these measures have been far from shielding the citizens. The government's stimulus packages were short-lived and limited, which, considering the economic problems, failed to provide sustenance for those who need. In an environment of ever-increasing living costs, a single payment of 1000-1500 liras did not make any difference. In another dimension, the government tried to monopolize the aids by

declaring opposition efforts unlawful and initiating its own campaign, mostly to preserve ‘the opposition cannot govern’ discourse.

Vaccination efforts have been politicized by the opposition as the government failed to provide clear roadmaps and deadlines, mostly through the delays that occurred in Sinovac shipments. The government and the media had to constantly update their previous statements which led to disbelief and mistrust. Some conflicting information was present on the effectiveness of the vaccine which conflicted with the information from the Brazilian trials of Coronavac which furthered the dissent. After the arrival of Pfizer-BioNTech doses, rumors about the vaccine being exclusive to the AKP elites spread, and some opposition figures argued members of the AKP are vaccinated before their designated time so that the regional congresses could be held. Although the vaccine was made public as more batches are secured, the existence of the rumors points out a general mistrust towards the government.

The opposition, on the other hand, has been able to project a unified voice capitulating on all the aspects mentioned here. The lack of feedback loops caused by the transition to the presidential system, made Erdoğan disconnected from the public which provided new venues for the opposition to highlight, and with the pandemic, fill in. The problems pertaining to the economy, justice, freedom of speech, and lifestyle were some aspects that the opposition successfully capitulated on amidst a failing economy and declining political spheres. Pandemic not only became an opportunity for the opposition to solidify under the ‘Millet’ alliance but also showed the local governance capabilities while making them objectively visible to non-

supporters. The increase in visibility is evident through increasing vote shares in the opinion polls.

Therefore, the Turkish trajectory is characterized by the serious, yet insufficient response of the government which solidified the opposition. In this sense, the unique Turkish trajectory can be named as “partisan affirmation” Erdoğan has been unusually serious about the pandemic where the state officials have actively encouraged compliance with social distancing, vaccination, and closures, albeit under pressure from the problems in the national economy. The pandemic also provided the ground for further suppression of the opposition party, which in turn capitulated on problems in the conduct. The table below visualizes the criteria for the Turkish trajectory.

	Indicators	Turkey
Government	Vaccination	Moderate (24,6%)
	Social Aids	Weak
	Closures and Quarantines	Moderate
	Creation of an effective specialized response body	Moderate
	Local and National Policies are in tandem	Moderate
	Economic stimulus packages	Weak
	Opposition is strong	Moderate
Leader	Took the virus seriously	Strong
	Opposition efforts are undermined	Strong
	Leader often changes relevant ministers	Weak
	The Ruling Elite encourages and complies WHO guidelines and recommendations	Moderate

Table 4: Indicators for Partisan Affirmation

CONCLUSION

The question of why populists responded differently to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a puzzling one. Despite being subjected to the same crisis, populist leaders have employed different strategies to weather the storm which this thesis argues to be unique trajectories shaped primarily through three factors. The thesis contributes primarily to the COVID-19 pandemic literature while connecting it with populism and crisis management literature.

The literature on the relationship between populism and crisis has been analyzed. A dominant vein within the literature acknowledges a relationship between the perpetuation of the crises and the populist discourse. Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1997) point out that crisis management centers around the desirability of effective, immediate, and tough measures to terminate the crisis. More crucially, Moffitt (2015) argues that the crises can be performed to pit ‘the people’ against ‘a dangerous other’, thus simplifying the crisis while advocating a strong leadership. The desire to have immediate action is parallel with the strong leadership advocacy, often resulting in populist implications. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a globally disrupting event that is often told to be a once-in-a-century occurrence. In this sense, the sudden occurrence of the pandemic has provided to pretext within which, populist leaders have expanded upon their populist agendas, albeit differently.

The thesis explains the existence of different trajectories through three aspects. First is the left-right continuum where the conduct and the discourse employed by the leader, as well as their target population, is affected by the ideological constraints.

Second, is the prior social welfare capabilities, that is, the ability of the state to

redistribute resources in times of need, as well as, its existing CCTs and schemes.

Finally, the opposition strength which would force the leader to change or update the policy decisions through the popular pressure that the opposition can employ.

To highlight the different trajectories, the distinct cases of Brazil, Mexico and Turkey have been examined in a paired comparison. These countries are currently governed by leaders who are widely accepted to be populist while also possessing similarities in their economies, informal sectors, and populations. The individual analyses of these cases have been divided into four sections within their respective chapters and are constructed through 10 different indicators: closures and quarantines, social and financial aids, vaccination efforts, and opposition efforts. As such, these sections constitute an in-depth analysis of certain indicators which have helped to identify the characteristics of unique trajectories. To show the variance, these 10 indicators have been classified as national indicators, which show the national efforts, and individual indicators which display the attitude of the leader. The indicators for the leader have been complementary to the national indicators as in populist regimes, leaders play a greater role in politics. As a follow-up, the thesis suggests three distinct terms to signify the deviations in the responses: Adversarial denialism for Brazil, defective inclusionism for Mexico, and partisan affirmation for Turkey.

Brazil's adversarial denialism appears to be the worst response among the cases. Adversarial denialism is characterized by a strong notion of total denial of the existence of the crisis while those who argue otherwise are constantly undermined and demonized through populist discourses. This is accompanied by a strong sense of

mistrust against scientific experts. Despite the lack of clinical evidence, Bolsonaro advocated the use of hydroxychloroquine which resulted in the ousting of Mandetta and Teich. Brazil's methods have been widely covered in the international media to be an extremely ineffective one where the discussion is centered around Bolsonaro's constant belittling of the crisis. The Brazilian president has claimed to be naturally strong against the virus, referencing his past as an athlete and former military officer. This macho-like discourse is compliant with the regional political culture and has not been without homophobic and denouncing manners. Bolsonaro constantly compared the measures with his manhood, associating, for instance, the use of masks with a homophobic slur, denouncing it to be something 'for fairies'. What little pandemic measure conducted by the federal government, has been significantly hampered as Bolsonaro often refused to impose further measures to keep the economy afloat. President's denialism was met with severe criticism and largely unified the federal governors, who by law, have the authority to impose their measures within their area of jurisdiction. As a result, the pandemic saw a unification of governors, including close allies of Bolsonaro, who resisted the federal decisions to not go under a lockdown. This helped certain figures to attract popular support and attention such as Joao Doria of Sao Paulo who is increasingly voiced to be a candidate in the next elections.

A similar occurrence is present in Mexico's defective inclusionism, albeit more unstable. While the resistance for a lockdown has also been visible for AMLO, his initial attitude of downplaying has slowly faded. Similar to Bolsonaro, AMLO has claimed to be resistant to the virus, but based on four-leaf clovers, luck charms, and religious icons. AMLO's resistance is also characterized by a significant

undertone of poor first rhetoric. Accordingly, the president justified his stance against the closures based on protecting poor masses, who largely rely on day-to-day informal works. As such, defective inclusionism results in leaders defecting their standpoints while having the motivation to protect, or include, the poor. Under such conditions, AMLO's decisions about closures and quarantines have aimed to consider and preserve his popular base at the cost of defying general directives and practices during the pandemic. What significantly deviates the Mexican case from the Brazilian one has been the state's ability to expand existing social and financial aids. Despite being a sizeable economy in the region, Mexico simply did not provide any additional resources to its citizens which is contradictory to observe under inclusionism. Brazil, on the other hand, was able to provide additional sustenance to its citizens, which potentially provided some popular support for Bolsonaro's policies.

Turkey, although exceptionally serious about the necessity of initiating lockdowns and closures, has failed to impose a national lockdown due to impending economic and financial constraints. What deviates the Turkish case from Latin American cases, has been the existence of a political will. Turkish politics have traditionally been leader-centric where right-wing governments almost always existed under popular and charismatic leaders. This leads to a strong political image where the leader is often portrayed as a brother or a father figure. As such the popular expectation for the Turkish case was the decisive and protective actions taken by Erdoğan who time and, claimed to be the man of the people, albeit more patriarchal. Turkey's seriousness, therefore, is necessitated by the political culture of the country. Yet, the expectations were largely unmet due to financial constraints and

polarization. Should there have been a strong state capacity to financially shield citizens from the economic fallout of the pandemic, Turkey would have gone under a full lockdown much earlier and for prolonged periods. Instead, Turkey opted to go under a full lockdown only for three weeks, after holding regional congresses which welcomed citizens from all 81 provinces of the nation. The closures and lockdowns have been partisan and selective where pro-government events are allowed despite measures being intact. Mosque openings, regional congresses are held while the circulation from the ministry of interior banned such events. Tourists, a source for foreign currency revenues, were gradually excluded from the measures in a short time, which saw citizens under lockdown to attract more tourists under the pretext of safe tourism, leading to widespread dissent. The relaxation of measures fits into a pattern where measures are relaxed as the tourism season approaches and tightens after it. These aspects have provided fertile ground for the opposition to capitulate upon. Accordingly, there have been increasing allegations for Erdoğan's manipulation of the crisis to repress the opposition, selectively impose measures to weaken some sectors which the AKP deems unfit for their conservative democratic values.

National vaccination programs have been problematic in all cases which is evident through the death numbers and daily cases. Although vaccination campaigns did not begin until mass production, the debates about vaccination were present. All cases have had problems in securing shipments of vaccination which led to different responses. In Brazil, Bolsonaro denounced the CoronaVac, based on the results from phase III trials. This presented itself in the form of a missed purchasing opportunity, where the national vaccination campaign has been disrupted across states. In Turkey,

Sinovac has been argued to have over 91% effective which contradicted the Brazilian trials. Brazil and Mexico, the leaders have initially refused to get vaccinated, claiming that vaccines do not provide adequate protection. In all cases, vaccination efforts have been politicized where in Mexico private sector doctors are left out, while partisan volunteers were rapidly vaccinated. In Turkey, the president, although not against vaccination, has employed a nationalistic discourse about the development of an indigenous vaccine, almost a year before its actual development under the name Turcovac. The AKP government also made arguments about mega construction projects, which included the construction of mega hospitals. While the construction of these hospitals contributed to the health infrastructure massively, other projects have been criticized by the opposition which was portrayed as the extravagance of the government. As such, they argued the social aids remained weak because of the inefficiencies in the Turkish economy. The inefficiencies in the economy also made local governance more important where

In all cases, two patterns can be observed without exemption. First, the pandemic has helped the opposition to unite and capitulate upon the dissent of the public. In Brazil, 24 of 27 state governors have unified their efforts to implement measures while denouncing the methods of the federal government. In Mexico, the pandemic saw the backlash of previously brand-diluted parties, PAN, PRD, and PRI. As a result of AMLO's governance during the pandemic, these right-wing parties have unified under the federalist alliance against the president. Yet, the most interesting, and arguably effective, case is observed in Turkey. Over two decades of AKP governance and the centrality of Erdoğan in national politics have been tarnished mostly due to the opposition's ability to highlight the lack of social aids

and the refusal of repetitive calls to go under a full lockdown. As a result, the polls now indicate that the opposition has the upper hand in terms of psychological advantage. In all cases, pandemic seems to be unifying the opposition.

Second, all populist leaders have refrained from excessive measures, the kind that was seen in Spain, Italy, or China. Populist regimes are economically inefficient, as institutions are often subjected to partisanship where the bureaucrats are often recruited based on loyalty rather than merit. As a direct result, the national economies tend to operate inefficiently. In this context, the populist regimes had problems in allocating resources or provide informal workers with social protection. Thus, all cases had to consider a trade-off between closures and business as usual. Accordingly, the worst answer has been given under adversarial denialism which not only demonized the advocates of closures but also denied the necessity of closures, based on arguments to keeping businesses open and workers intact. Defective inclusionism appears to be the second-worst case as it initially denied the necessity of closures but later acknowledged it as a result of pressures from the opposition. Similarly, the inclusionist part, although existent on the level of discourse, was not implemented. Instead, Mexico opted to increase the liquidity through loans and credits which contributed little to workers in informal sectors. Turkey on the other hand, despite having shown seriousness, has refrained from a national lockdown for a year, instead employed a ‘new normal’ where only partial efforts have been made while government-related events are unofficially left as an exclusion which potentially hampered previous efforts.

To conclude, populist cases have responded differently to the pandemic. Populist cases have similar aspects yet they have deviated in most of them, which can fall under a general typology. In accordance, the left-right continuum, social aids, and opposition efforts have significantly altered the conduct of governments, leading to similar results through different means. I personally think that COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to hasten the process of weakening populist leaders primarily through two aspects. First is the visibility of the ineffectiveness of such governances. Because populist governments tend to operate inefficiently, they have become more likely to underperform which resonated sharply in the pretext of the pandemic. Second, the man of the people or the strongman image that populists tend to invest, has been tarnished by their inability to have an organized and proper response. This is indicated by the varying degrees of popularity losses all around the globe, including these three cases. How the pandemic and populists unfold, therefore, needs greater observation and detailed analyses.

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