

Articles

Building Resilience, Agility, and Trust: The Neo-Weberian State as a Referential Model for Brazilian Public Administration

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The paper explores the challenges and potential solutions for enhancing Brazilian public administration through the lens of the Neo-Weberian State (NWS) model. It discusses the historical context of Brazil's public administration, highlighting the coexistence of different administrative mechanisms and the need for a stable, resilient, and agile bureaucracy to address contemporary societal challenges effectively. The article advocates for a paradigmatic shift toward a more coordinated, inclusive, and socially driven public sector, emphasizing the importance of hierarchical mechanisms and public service ethos in safeguarding democracy. By analyzing the trajectory of public administration reforms in Brazil and comparing them to global challenges, the essay underscores the NWS's potential to bring legitimacy and effectiveness to state actions, ultimately aiming to restore trust in public administration and strengthen democratic governance in Brazil.

Introduction

Brazil's public administration (PA) is characterized by its complex combination of features from developed and developing countries. As one of the most socially unequal countries in the world and with the democratic instability it has experienced over the last century, Brazil presents a unique landscape as an upper-middle-income country. While certain aspects of its public bureaucracy and services can be compared to those found in consolidated democracies and welfare states, another facet exhibits characteristics of patronage, clientelism, and lack of transparency, as in other countries in Latin America (Ramos & Milanesi, 2020).

Brazil has undergone various reforms during its democratization process since the mid-1980s to professionalize its PA. This process renders Brazil a case of potential institutional hybridity, where different models of PA coexist, creating multiple constraints for the government to improve democracy, enhance service delivery, and effectively address complex societal challenges.

These distinctive features position Brazil as an interesting case study to understand the Neo-Weberian State's (NWS) potential for a country facing historical and systemic issues. Implementing a more robust PA capable of legitimately navigating current and future societal problems is crucial. This paper discusses these issues, arguing for a stable, resilient, and agile bureaucracy to effectively address Brazil's contemporary developmental challenges. Therefore, it analyses the NWS as a set of principles that can guide the most effective PA changes. It discusses its potential superiority over alternative paradigms to restore trust in PA while strengthening democracy and the rule of law in Brazil. However, in the context of evolving governance

paradigms, it is essential to ground support of the NWS through empirical analysis, ensuring that the arguments presented are based on evidence rather than a pure normative perspective. Therefore, the article also calls for comprehensive empirical studies to validate the effectiveness and resilience of the NWS in various administrative contexts.

Based on a review of existing studies on Neo-Weberianism and the Brazilian PA, this paper analyzes the trajectory of PA reforms in Brazil since the advent of the 1988 Democratic Constitution to discuss the main challenges and the principles that can facilitate improvement. The article underscores the vital role of the bureaucracy and public service ethos in both making policy and resisting policy dismantling by discussing the impacts of various eras, including the recent illiberal period during Bolsonaro's rule. Recognizing the limitations of current models, such as the New Public Management (NPM) or New Public Governance (NPG), the paper advocates for a paradigmatic shift in PA, emphasizing the need for a stable, resilient, and agile bureaucracy to address Brazil's societal challenges. The paper outlines conditions supporting the NWS as a promising referential model, as it envisions a 'whole of government' perspective within a 'whole of society' context, incorporating regulated markets and social networks for inclusive service delivery and effective governance.

The article is organized as follows: The next section presents the main principles related to the NWS, discussing how they can potentially help Brazil's PA face the new challenges experienced by states worldwide. In the second section, we comprehensively examine the historical development and reforms implemented in the Brazilian PA, emphasizing the complexities, challenges, and the coexistence

of different mechanisms within the administrative structure. The third section analyzes and draws lessons from the challenges faced by the Brazilian PA in recent years, emphasizing the need for a robust, coherent, and hierarchical PA to safeguard democracy and resist illiberal political agendas. The analyses incorporate evidence from recent administrative reforms and their outcomes to substantiate these lessons. This empirical approach ensures that recommendations for adopting the NWS are based on observed data and practical results rather than normative assumptions. The fourth section discusses the societal challenges currently facing Brazil. It proposes a reform agenda for the PA, emphasizing the importance of a well-functioning, adaptable, and social-democratic-driven public bureaucracy. The last section advocates for the NWS as a promising paradigm for PA transformation in the country, given the model's potential to bring resilience, effectiveness, and legitimacy to state actions that could effectively address Brazil's complex societal challenges. This section also acknowledges the country's lack of necessary political conditions, emphasizing the need for continuous empirical evaluation to effectively adapt the NWS framework to Brazil's dynamic political landscape.

1. Emergence and Principles of the Neo Weberian State (NWS) in Public Administration

During the last decades, many countries worldwide have faced new crises, a lack of legitimacy and trust, and an inability to deliver public services. A new model has since emerged, claiming a more resilient and robust PA capable of facing existing challenges and preparing society for new crises (Ansell et al., 2023; Cha & Im, 2024). However, to firmly establish the NWS's claims, it is crucial to ground these assertions in empirical research. Comparative analyses and case studies should demonstrate how the NWS framework can effectively address complex administrative and societal issues across different contexts. These new paradigms recognize that the nature of current problems and crises is wicked, meaning they are complex, systemic, and have multiple causes (Peters, 2017). Addressing them would require the development of a portfolio of actions across different sectors and a set of technological, social, organizational, and political initiatives to deliver transformative outcomes for the economy, society, and environment (Mazzucato, 2021).

By definition, the state is a collective actor capable of initiating necessary actions and organizing public and private investments that catalyze transformations in multiple domains and tackle wicked problems and crises. Given that PA models and instruments are not neutral (Lascoumes & Les Gales, 2007), new reforms should address current challenges and be related to developmental strategies and societal goals. They should also efficiently promote states and bureaucracies turning them into stable and agile. According

to Kattel et al. (2022), a stable, resilient, and agile bureaucracy maintains consistency and continuity in its core tasks and functions while adapting and responding effectively to environmental changes. Stability implies providing consistent and reliable services or performing essential functions over time. Resilience is the capacity to withstand and recover from disruptions or challenges, maintaining functionality over time and during crises.¹ Conversely, agility is the ability to quickly and effectively adapt to new challenges and demands. Therefore, states should implement new PA paradigms that combine these features to face current and future challenges.

The NWS materialized as a promising PA paradigm because of the challenges mentioned above (Bouckaert, 2023). In the present article, we adopt the definition of NWS proposed by Bouckaert (2023) as an analytical model. This model aims to promote the state's resilience, effectiveness, and legitimacy by strengthening and directing state capacities toward societal challenges and integrating different governance mechanisms that bring together stability, long-term planning, professionalization, and dynamic abilities into a cohesive framework. The NWS model embraces a whole-of-government approach and a whole-of-society perspective. The whole-of-government approach emphasizes collaboration and coordination between all government agencies and departments to address societal issues and achieve common goals. At the same time, the whole-of-society perspective advocates for inclusivity by involving the government and private for-profit organizations, civil society organizations, and other societal actors (Bouckaert, 2023). Therefore, according to Bouckaert, the NWS model has many advantages over previous paradigms, such as NPM and NPG (2023).

First, the NWS is an innovative framework emphasizing a functional hierarchy that creates and guides partnerships with markets and networks while prioritizing service delivery and policy outcomes. In contrast to market-driven and network-driven systems, which typically focus on efficiency and voluntary collaboration, the NWS firmly stresses the rule of law, inclusivity, and equity. By maintaining a distinctive role as a state actor and utilizing hierarchy mechanisms as the driving force without disregarding market and network mechanisms, a PA under the NWS model operates within a structured framework. It relies on laws, norms, and standards to guide, control, and steer state action, emphasizing the rule of law to legitimize democratic authority and power.

Second, the NWS places the defense of liberal democracy at the forefront of PA paradigms, which are under threat in many parts of the world. Recognizing the rule of law in legitimizing democratic authority, the model ensures that public bureaucracy operates within set legal boundaries, respecting citizens' rights and freedoms. In a democratic system, the hierarchy-driven bureaucracy is open, participatory, transparent, sound, and trustworthy for all citi-

¹ See also Stauffer, Sager & Künzler (2023).

zens. The NWS model calls for a responsible, accountable, and robust hierarchy that proactively directs market and network mechanisms while considering the logic of consequences and appropriateness. The NWS focuses on outcomes and emphasizes the roles of norms and the social context in shaping decisions. This reinforces the participatory nature of governance, aligning with representative and direct democratic principles.

Third, the NWS supports innovation in the public sector through the state. The model fosters innovation in the public service sector by advocating for professional, performance-oriented management and engaging citizens and service users in participatory processes. It promotes a culture of quality and service by recognizing the initiative of public servants and the potential for improvement when unimpeded by heavy bureaucratic control. By incentivizing partnerships between various sectors, the NWS model taps into the innovative potential of both government agencies and private enterprises. High-risk, high-return research activities are essential for pushing the boundaries of innovation, and the state can pursue transformative economic and societal changes by investing in experimental projects. While inherent risks exist, the potential rewards, such as new healthcare technologies and breakthrough solutions to societal challenges, justify this innovative and forward-thinking approach (Mazzucato, 2018).

Fourth, the NWS model focuses on legitimizing the image of the state and the bureaucracy by preserving public service ethics. Following Weberian principles, the model recognizes the public bureaucracy as a distinctive ethos, status, and culture. At the same time, given the centrality of democratic values, it promotes an open, accessible, participatory, affordable, transparent, and trustworthy bureaucracy (Du Gay & Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2023). Moreover, by acknowledging the complexities of dealing with powerful interest groups in policy processes, the model emphasizes the importance of public service ethos and recognizes its uniqueness in serving public interests. Therefore, the NWS advocates for the importance of the state in constructing consensus and promoting participation within society. The NWS also endorses changes in the role of public organizations. Unlike the NPM, which supports the decrease of inefficiency as a primary goal, the NWS model proposes that public organizations should focus on creating value for society. This movement involves instilling a sense of purpose and mission, motivating public employees to work for the public interest, and providing them with the capacities and resources for innovation and problem-solving (Bouckaert, 2023).

2. Evolution and Challenges of Public Administration in Brazil

2.1. Brazil's Complex Public Administration Landscape

Brazil was a Portuguese colony until 1822 and became a formal republic in 1889. However, during the 20th century, the country faced different periods of authoritarianism and dictatorships, leading to the new Democratic Constitution

of 1988. In addition to transforming the country into a liberal democracy with a presidential and multiparty regime, the new Constitution also proposed a welfare state and a federative system. According to the Constitution, the state is responsible for guaranteeing multiple universal rights, meaning it must provide various public services to all citizens, including universal healthcare and education. Regarding the federative system, the Brazilian federation is organized into three levels of government: federal, state (27 states), and municipal (5,570 municipalities). Each level has its organizational structure and duties to perform specific functions and services. Brazil has more than 11 million civil servants working in the three branches of government, with around 1.1 million individuals working at the federal level.

The creation of the welfare state increased the population's well-being, reducing poverty and improving economic and social conditions (Arretche, 2018). However, Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries in the world (according to data from the *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, the Gini coefficient was 0.544 in 2021). This inequality also exists within the country's PA. The federal government has organizations and bureaucracies comparable to most developed nations; however, its states and municipalities face many challenges and require more capacity. Moreover, Brazilian public institutions suffer from a lack of trust from citizens. For example, in a survey conducted in 2022 by the OECD (2023), only 19% of respondents believed that their public service requests would be treated fairly. Only 30% were satisfied with the educational system, and 32% were confident in their country's administrative services. These percentages are below what is found in OCDE countries. Considering the same indicators, the average satisfaction was 58% and 63%, respectively, for the 22 countries studied in the survey. Brazilian citizens are also critical of the civil service; 62% of the survey respondents believed public servants would not treat all citizens equally. As the survey suggests, this distrust is related to the public sector in general, meaning that Brazilians do not believe the state fully considers or works toward fulfilling their needs. In 2022, only 23% of the population expected the state to be prepared for a new pandemic, and only 40% believed that the Brazilian state would comply with international climate change goals. These data show how Brazilian society mistrusts public institutions and the bureaucracy. In the next section, we provide a comprehensive overview of the historical trajectory of the PA and various reforms implemented in Brazil.

2.2. Reforms, Hybridism, and Incomplete Trajectories

The history of PA in Brazil has undergone many changes over the last century. As previously mentioned, the country formally became a republic in 1889 after abolishing slavery a year earlier in 1888. However, initial attempts to construct a Weberian state with a merit-based bureaucracy occurred in 1937, when President Getúlio Vargas proposed a PA change based on the Civil Service Reform implemented in the late 19th century in the United States. Vargas introduced merit and competence principles in selecting and

promoting civil servants, which defined careers and training systems; he also promoted administrative rationalization under central government centralization and control through this reform in parts of the state. The reform was refined in the following decades, especially under the dictatorship in the late 1960s, when the military government implemented an administrative reform with new measures, such as administrative decentralization (giving greater autonomy to government agencies and public companies), planning and coordination instruments to achieve national development goals, reinforcement of the importance of merit in the selection and promotion of public servants, and the establishment of control and audit mechanisms.

However, as some scholars have pointed out, while these changes brought some formal characteristics of a Weberian model to the Brazilian PA, they were introduced in only a few specific areas of the federal government (Nunes, 1997). At the same time, other public sectors kept their more backward practices, such as patronage and clientelism, or less accountable ones, like insulated technocracy (Nunes, 1997). Besides path dependence, the explanation for the coexistence of these different patterns and the existence of the old order with the new ones (i.e., patronage with merit-based recruitment) have been central to guaranteeing political governability, as various presidents have used different strategies and instruments to deal with political forces and remain in power. This reality means that, for most of the 20th century, the Brazilian PA was characterized by institutional hybridism, given the incomplete implementation of Weberian reforms and the late capitalist modernization process (Gomide, 2022).

In 1988, after 20 years of dictatorship, the country approved the new Constitution to restore democracy and the rule of law while establishing and protecting individual and social rights. As mentioned, the new Constitution proposed a welfare state—for the first time in Brazil's history—and strengthened the federative system. The new system is based on the idea that the federal government, states, and municipalities have political, administrative, and financial autonomy. Brazilian federalism mixes characteristics of the competitive and cooperative models with various instruments and incentives that generate cooperation or competition. In this sense, all federal entities are responsible for the welfare state, meaning they must coordinate to provide public services. Concurrently, given the significant inequalities among municipalities, the Constitution (and later regulations) created mechanisms for intergovernmental relations inspired by network mechanisms.

The Constitution also improved and established many measures to enforce a rational-legal state, characterizing what Lapuente and Dahlstron (2021) called a “closed bureaucracy,” i.e., a formalized meritocratic recruitment system with public exams (*concurso público*), lifelong careers (tenure), and a special employment law (and a retirement/pension system) for civil servants (*Regime Jurídico Único*). The 1988 Constitution also established rational-legal principles for the Brazilian PA, such as legality, impersonality, ethics, and transparency. These principles were enforced by creating a system of control and accountability (e.g.,

Tribunal de Contas and Ministério Público). The Brazilian Constitution also created mechanisms for the direct participation of society in policy decision-making through popular councils, conferences, and public hearings, which are entities for deliberation and consultation with the population. Moreover, these mechanisms became mandatory for many policies (for example, municipalities only receive public funding for health policies if they have an active health council with social participation).

Although the changes to the Brazilian PA proposed by the Constitution are closer to a model combining hierarchy and network governance mechanisms, the reform needed to be completed. First, these measures were not fully implemented in the Brazilian PA, especially considering municipalities, as there were insufficient resources, political will, or conditions to implement them. Furthermore, despite the requirement for an impersonal public examination to work in the civil service, many discretionary appointment positions created space for patronage and clientelism practices (especially at the municipality and state levels, which still do not have capable bureaucracies).

The 1990s were characterized by the arrival of neoliberalism in Latin America via the Washington Consensus recommendations. It was no different in Brazil, especially under Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration (1995–2002). In 1995, state reforms through privatization and deregulation began to be implemented. For the PA, the adoption of the NPM model was substantiated by the 1995 Master Plan for Reform the State Apparatus (*Plano Diretor da Reforma do Aparelho do Estado*) and the creation of the Ministry of Administration and State Reform. However, Brazil's 1995 PA reform principles followed the political and economic ideology of the Third-Way style more than the Public Choice version implemented in New Zealand and Australia, which meant that the administrative reform focused on increasing the efficiency of the PA through market mechanisms, such as contractualization, agencification, and privatization. The employment law for civil servants (*Regime Jurídico Único*), the recruitment system via public exams, the tenure structure, and the standardization of procedural rules for all Brazilian PA organizations established by the 1998 Constitution were considered setbacks by NPM reformists but were not changed by the reform.

Overall, the 1995 reforms resulted in changes in the structure of the PA through the creation of autonomous agencies, especially for the regulation of recently privatized services, the transference of the parts of service provision from the state to civil society organizations, privatization of many state-owned enterprises, and changes in legislation to create more flexible labor relations in the public sector. Nevertheless, it was only in the sphere of ideas and political discourse that the NPM reform succeeded: the concept of Weberian bureaucracy and the meaning of hierarchical mechanisms were distorted by the reformists and seen as the root of the the PA's dysfunctions, with ‘efficiency’ becoming the holy grail of all state action. Nevertheless, this reform was, again, incomplete. First, it prevailed more in the ideal sphere than the practical one (for example, although the reform criticized tenure and public

exams, the government did not change these but created the possibility of third-party contracts to provide services). Second, because it was associated with political ideas from the center-right and right-wing parties, the center-left and left-wing parties did not want to fully implement it, meaning some of the reform's measures were noticeable in specific areas, municipalities, and states. Still, we cannot observe its complete proposed changes in the Brazilian PA.

New attempts to improve the PA were conducted incrementally during center-left Workers' Party's administrations (Presidents Lula and Dilma) between 2003 and 2015 (Abramovay & Lotta, 2022). Due to the party's anti-neoliberalism political ideas, the administration invested less in the market and more in network mechanisms via social participation instrument enhancement. During this time, the government also hired more civil servants through public exams, created more jobs, and enhanced mechanisms and instruments of control and accountability. These measures were crucial for professionalizing the federal PA and improving public services, and, in this way, they are more aligned with several NWS strategies. Due to the implementation of large investment programs in the industrial, social, and infrastructural sectors during this period, the central government's role was strengthened. However, advances at the federal level are only infrequently extended to the subnational level, maintaining the widespread inequalities in the federation.

In 2016, the course of Brazilian political history underwent a radical shift. In that year, Temer assumed the presidency after a controversial impeachment, and in 2019, Bolsonaro, a typical illiberal populist politician, took office. Both administrations were aligned with economic neoliberal principles, aiming to reduce the welfare state and enhance the market's role in the economy. Believing that the country's PA was costly and overly extensive, these two leaders pursued different measures to drastically reduce the roles of the civil service and state in many sectors.

During Bolsonaro's term, the administration terminated over 600 network instruments related to social participation. As the Brazilian legal system allows what is called "infralegal measures" (as decrees and other decisions do not require approval by parliament; see, for example, Morais de Sá e Silva, 2022 and Galego, 2023, p. 15), Bolsonaro had the terminated the existence of all instruments of participation solely regulated by this kind of measure. Therefore, in one decree, he abolished hundreds of councils and other instruments (Koupak et al., 2021). He also proposed a PA reform by constitutional amendment (PEC 32, 2020). The Bolsonaro administration's PA reform proposal, undoubtedly inspired by the Public Choice approach of the state and bureaucracy, intended to end civil servants' tenure, remove the special employment law for civil servants (*regime jurídico único*), make forms of recruitment and the hiring of civil servants more flexible, and strengthen market mechanisms for public services provision. Fortunately, Bolsonaro possessed no political conditions that enabled him to approve his reform in Congress despite the support of the business sector and mainstream press. However, his mandate resulted in many policies being dismantled and bu-

reaucratic capacities weakening—even with the relative success of implementing digital government instruments (Gomide et al., 2023; Lotta et al., 2023; Story et al., 2023; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2023).

In 2023, after a fierce election and frustrated coup attempts to prevent the new administration from taking office, Lula assumed the presidency for the third time. Until mid 2024, his administration has focused on promoting transformations in Brazilian PA to strengthen state policy capacity, rescue public service ethos, and promote gender and racial diversity in the civil service sector without abandoning market mechanisms. New public competitions were announced for the recruitment of future public servants. In addition, participatory institutions abandoned by the Bolsonaro administration were reactivated. However, the new administration could not remove PEC 32/2021 from the Congress's agenda, as the party coalition that supports the government is very fragile. It is still too early to define the transformation of the country's PA during this period, yet it can be said that the NWS model guides—even if not formally—the agenda for the transformation of the PA.

[Table 1](#) summarizes the nature of Brazilian PA reforms and the prevailing mechanisms discussed in this section.

[Table 1](#) and the Brazilian PA's historical trajectory analysis highlight two main conclusions. The first is that the trajectory is characterized by incomplete reforms that generate hybridism and dysfunctionalities over time, and, in this sense, only some characteristics of the NWS can be identified. This means that various types of mechanisms coexist in different parts of the PA, but this is not a logical or harmonious coexistence. It resembles a patchwork PA where citizens can only sometimes benefit from participatory, rational-legal, and market-oriented mechanisms.

The second conclusion concerns the support of the rational-legal state and liberal democracy. According to Beetham (1996), the rejection of Weberian bureaucracy is one of the rare unanimities in all political-ideological currents: the right demonizes bureaucracy in the name of the free market, and the left intends to replace it with popular participation and diversity. This insight can be corroborated by examining PA reform initiatives in Brazil since democratization. Right-wing and/or neoliberal administrations favor market mechanisms for greater efficiency; center-left administrations invest in network mechanisms and representative bureaucracy policies to achieve greater equality and service inclusion. However, both fail to understand the role of hierarchy and ideal-typical Weberian bureaucracy in coping with more significant turbulences, such as managing pandemics, ensuring inclusive service delivery, protecting the democratic rule of law, and addressing ambitious societal goals or challenges to drive innovation, economic growth, and societal progress. These challenges and concerns will be discussed in the following sections, but they are departing points for understanding how the NWS model exists in the Brazilian PA.

Table 1. Brazilian public administration reforms and prevailing mechanisms.

| Period | PA Reform | Prevailing mechanism |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-1988 From a patrimonial to a rational-legal state | Beginning of the Weberian State | Hierarchy (coexisting with patronage, clientelism, and corporatism practices) |
| 1988 Redemocratization | New Federal Constitution (liberal democracy with welfare state) | Hierarchy ("closed Weberianism") with networks (via social participatory instruments and mechanisms for federal coordination) |
| 1995 Neoliberal reforms | NPM (Third-Way style) | Market (contractualization and privatization) and networks (publicization and third-sector partnerships), preserving some existing hierarchy |
| 2003–2015 Workers' Party (center-left) administrations | Incrementalism (no announced reform) | Network (enhancement of participatory instruments) and hierarchy (via Center of Government strengthening and Weberian characteristics) |
| 2018–2022 Illiberal populism | Constitutional Amendment Proposal (Public Choice-inspired reform) | Market (via privatization and flexible forms of recruitment and hiring civil servants) and attempts to reduce hierarchy and network through dismantling |
| 2023–2024 Neo-Weberian PA? | Strengthen bureaucratic capacity, rescue public service ethos, and promote gender and racial diversity in the civil service | Hierarchy (Center of Government strengthening), networks (reactivation of participatory institutions), and market |

3. Impact of Incomplete Reforms on the Brazilian Public Administration: COVID-19 Pandemic and Illiberal Populism

As mentioned earlier, the history of the Brazilian PA is marked by incomplete reforms and a persistent hybridism that has weakened bureaucratic capacities and the democratic state over time. Since the Constitution of 1988, these characteristics seemed like a problem that could be dealt with and solved incrementally. However, events in recent years have underscored the consequences of the Brazilian PA's lack of coherence, strength, and ethos.

Between 2019 and 2023, the country experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and an illiberal government under Bolsonaro. These two elements tested democratic institutions and state capacities.

Similar to other countries, the pandemic highlighted the importance of the state and the PA in addressing this type of global crisis. Studies have shown that states with more capabilities and societal trust were more effective in managing the pandemic (Dolan, 2022).

One of the most crucial components proposed by the 1988 Constitution for the welfare state was the creation of the Universal Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS), the world's most extensive public health system, which provides free services to all citizens. The SUS combined hierarchy mechanisms (such as federal regulation and coordination) with network mechanisms (e.g., increased social participation and collaboration between the different federal levels) and market mechanisms (e.g., contracting NGOs based on performance management). In past decades, the SUS was implemented nationwide, with various federal actors working together to provide all citizens with universal and comprehensive access to healthcare. The outcomes of this program have been remarkable, including a significant reduction in infant mortality rates, improved

life expectancy, universal access to vaccines, and eradicated diseases. Therefore, the SUS represents a hierarchical coordinated model that effectively combines governance mechanisms aligned with the NWS model.

However, due to its complexity, the SUS requires strong coordination from the federal government to direct resources and effort to states and municipalities. Despite the strong capabilities developed over time, these must be activated, managed, and coordinated to tackle wicked problems. During the pandemic, Brazil was led by Bolsonaro's government, which, on the one hand, opposed welfare state mechanisms and sought to dismantle the SUS, transferring health provision to the market and, on the other hand, denied the severity of the pandemic from the beginning and made no efforts to address it. Consequently, he attempted to dismantle public health services, publicly attacked health workers, reduced health resources, did not adopt preventive measures (such as masks), instigated conflicts with municipalities, and refused to purchase vaccines while publicly criticizing their effectiveness.

The consequences are widely known: Brazil had one of the worst COVID-related experiences in the world in terms of pandemic-related casualties (Lowy Institute, 2021), with more than 700,000 deaths (in a total population of 214 million inhabitants). However, the remnants of a system constructed over the last decades were still visible: states and municipalities that chose to confront the pandemic succeeded due to their expertise and capabilities (Abrucio et al., 2021). Some states independently procured and administered vaccines, pressuring Bolsonaro to follow suit. The pandemic-related case underscores the importance of a robust and capable state with different and combined mechanisms, as proposed by the NWS model. At the same time, it highlights how politicians can either destroy or fail to activate PA capabilities when they require consolidation, as in Brazil's case. This shows how even more balanced models,

such as the NWS, can be directly affected by political decisions.

The second case revolves around Bolsonaro's government itself. Bolsonaro exemplifies an illiberal populist who aims to alter democratic institutions and dismantle policies once in power (Peci, 2021; Peters & Pierre, 2022; Gomide et al., 2022). As previously mentioned, his agenda combined neoliberal economics, cultural conservatism, and authoritarian political principles. Therefore, one of his initial decisions was to eliminate many network mechanisms related to social participation, which he quickly achieved. In addition, he attacked sectors of the public bureaucracy using formal and informal measures (Lotta et al., 2023), which included strongly criticizing, persecuting, harassing, dismissing, and suing them. Again, in 2020, he even sent a constitutional amendment proposal to eradicate the existing tenure held by civil servants (the law was not approved).

However, even with these attempts to weaken the public bureaucracy, once in power, Bolsonaro encountered numerous barriers and resistance to his projects, not only from parts of the judiciary, civil society, and the media but also from sectors in the public administration itself (Bersch & Lotta, 2023). Several tenured civil servants committed to the rule of law created barriers and employed various strategies, such as publicly voicing their concerns, sabotage, and shirking, to thwart Bolsonaro's attempt to dismantle policies. Research examining federal areas during this period indicates that the strength of the PA and institutional power played a central role in explaining how civil servants were able to resist Bolsonaro and act and react to protect the rule of law (Bersch & Lotta, 2023; Lotta et al., 2023; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2023; Milhorange, 2022). Most importantly, scholars have demonstrated that the fortification of the bureaucracy in this process was directly linked to the existence of Weberian and hierarchical mechanisms. For instance, robust regulations and procedural rules were a primary safeguard for civil servants during their resistance (Lotta et al., 2023; Morais de Sá e Silva, 2023).

Conversely, research also reveals that PA sectors lacking capabilities and Weberian features (e.g., places where non-tenured workers were employed) were not able to provide a platform for resistance (Koga et al., 2023). Therefore, a crucial lesson from this period is that to confront illiberal politicians, the PA must be vigorous and rely on hierarchical mechanisms and a civil service committed to the rule of law and democratic values. Ultimately, market and network mechanisms proved incapable of safeguarding administrative institutions and democracy, with only bureaucracy, hierarchical mechanisms, and public service ethos proving effective for resilience (Im, 2017). Regarding the NWS, considering that Brazil has cases of incomplete reforms, the examples show how the lack of coordination and coherence may even affect areas more inspired by the NWS model, as the entire PA is still exposed to political decisions to (de)activate the coordination system.

4. What is missing? Toward the NWS Principles for a Public Administration Transformation Agenda in Brazil

Brazilian public organizations must develop long-term capacities and dynamic capabilities to formulate and execute large and ambitious policies. This development involves having a clear vision and strategy for long-term goals. Bureaucratic organizations should be able to learn from their experiences and adjust their strategy accordingly. They must also be agile in responding to shifting circumstances while maintaining a stable foundation to ensure predictability and consistent performance. We propose some measures inspired by the NWS to help guide this process.

A PA reform agenda should improve the governance capacity of the state. The Brazilian PA fails to integrate different political actors and stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, in important policy realms to foster coordination among these diverse actors around common goals. This lack of capacity compromises the state's ability to deal with wicked problems. One example is the difficulty of developing agreements and actions regarding climate change goals or protecting the Amazon rainforest. Any reform should propose new mechanisms and instruments to improve the state's capacity to face these societal challenges. With its broad and diverse ecosystems, Brazil faces unique challenges but can use numerous opportunities to address climate change. The interplay between economic growth and environmental sustainability is crucial for the country, where policies must balance economic development and preservation of the Amazon and other critical biomes.

Wicked problems require a collaborative effort by different policy sectors. However, the Brazilian PA suffers from extraordinary fragmentation and agencification reinforced by its organizational structure, fragmented civil servants' careers, and ineffective sectorial planning and budget allocation. This extensive fragmentation in many areas hinders the PA's capability to use coordination mechanisms and instruments when facing challenges. Moreover, given the Brazilian political system, governability also requires a multiparty coalition maintained through the division of ministries and appointment positions inside ministries. Therefore, the Center of Government's capacity to coordinate priority policies should be improved by creating and enhancing hierarchical instruments to ensure that ministries, state-owned enterprises, and public agencies work together toward shared goals. Finally, Brazil should revise current structural elements that limit coordination by integrating the careers of civil servants, budget allocation, and organizational structures (Ramos & Milanese, 2018). Overall, mission-oriented policies could improve the governance capacity of the state (Kattel & Mazzucato, 2018). Inspired by the NWS principle, the coordination of cross-cutting project portfolios using state authority that initiates critical policy monitoring and evaluation techniques and criteria is also possible. Even if specific goals are not

achieved, a policy's success can be measured by its positive side effects on the economy, society, or the environment.

All reforms should be guided by social inclusion principles, reducing inequalities and improving access to and the quality of public services. Digitalization could be a significant measure in this respect. Although digital governance capabilities in Brazil have improved recently (e.g., the 'gov.br' platform, which contributed to digitalizing 90% of federal public services), interministerial data sharing and interoperability are still lacking (Mazzucato, 2023). This is particularly important in the context of the country's institutional arrangements for information technology to enable the government to streamline processes, improve service delivery, and enhance citizen engagement.

The Brazilian PA must embrace policy instrument changes to better balance hierarchy, network, and market mechanisms. The primary focus should be on aligning these instruments with ambitious policy objectives. Specifically, reforms are needed in public procurement to ensure that purchases contribute effectively to policy delivery. Additionally, the government should develop new financial tools to support transformative investments. There is also a need to update mechanisms for social participation, incorporating innovative digital platforms to enhance engagement. Furthermore, the PA should adopt modern methods and techniques for forecasting and anticipating future scenarios. Lastly, regulatory frameworks governing the relationship between the public and private sectors must be bolstered to prioritize public interests and transparency in contract agreements.

Another NWS principle that can guide Brazilian PA transformation is related to the values of the public sector. The PA does not yet have a solid culture of combining the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, which focuses on results, equity, and democratic values in service delivery. The PA also lacks a culture of innovation—i.e., an openness to adopt new approaches and practices for adaptability, experimentalism, and taking risks to meet society's evolving needs. This requires changing the current administrative culture and legal framework to guarantee autonomy for public managers to innovate and experiment based on new accountability mechanisms that ensure legal security. Therefore, those responsible for or working in the Brazilian PA should look for and anticipate these cultural changes to improve the values of innovation and experimentalism.

Finally, as mentioned before, public bureaucracy was an essential element of resistance in dismantling some policies during the Bolsonaro government. However, parts of the bureaucracy adhered to his government's illiberal agenda. Therefore, another element for future reform should be improving the democratic values of the rule of law and constructing a public service ethos within the bureaucracy, which will strengthen its professional autonomy.

The principles based on the NWS model should guide an agenda of Brazilian PA transformation toward improving state action and legitimacy. However, the agenda has to consider that the Brazilian PA is characterized by considerable heterogeneity and inequalities. Some sectors with

professionalized and effective bureaucracies capable of implementing innovative and effective policies exist. Some notable examples are the healthcare system and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Company (*Embrapa*), which is vital in boosting agricultural productivity. However, other policy sectors still need to expand their capacities by adding more personnel, becoming more professionalized, and gaining more expertise. For example, nearly 100% of school-aged children are enrolled in schools (83% of them in public institutions). Yet, Brazil remains one of the worst countries in terms of the PISA ranking, which measures students' mathematics and language proficiency. Therefore, any reform must recognize these inequalities and deficiencies and strive to improve them as a core principle of overall PA development.

Despite defending an agenda of changes inspired by the NWS, we realize that practical and effective implementation of the NWS paradigm in Brazil is a significant challenge, primarily due to existing political obstacles that make providing a clear reform agenda and obtaining societal support difficult. Achieving consensus and presenting a well-defined reform agenda within a coalitional government is challenging, as internal and ideological differences between political parties and a lack of political will and leadership can hinder reform efforts. Moreover, any new agenda could lead to different perceptions and degrees of societal support. For the private sector, for example, cutting expenditures and improving efficiency are primary goals. For those involved in social movements, the priority is to improve social participation and access to services. Academics defend a reform based on improving social rights, transparency, effectiveness, and inclusion. Philanthropic organizations defend one based on NPM, NPG, and representative bureaucracy. Society is stuck in the middle of this narrative battle. A "reform without losers" (Panizza, 2004) would not solve any problems (Ramos & Milanese, 2018). Moreover, given the path dependence and hybrid legacy, it is difficult to implement any extensive reform that can change all existing features.

Therefore, several conditions must be considered to address these challenges and ensure successful NWS reform in the country. Political leaders must prioritize reform, support initiatives, and ensure effective implementation. A clear and cohesive strategy must be designed with the agreement of different actors and widely communicated and publicized. Given the short-term outcomes, this strategy has to combine essential changes with incremental ones to guarantee future support. Political actors must also develop a supportive legal and regulatory framework that aligns with reform principles. They must also provide adequate resources—funding, technology, and infrastructure—to ensure the implementation of these changes. Lastly, the government has to promote inclusive public debate around the agenda and build coalitions to overcome resistance and excessive vetoing. Therefore, addressing these challenges is necessary to successfully implement the NWS in Brazil and ensure a *sine qua non* condition for the country to become an economically developed, socially just, and environmentally sustainable nation.

Final Remarks

Like many nations, Brazil is grappling with many challenges, ranging from economic and political instability to environmental and social crises, which collectively jeopardize the foundations of liberal democracy and the credibility of its PA. In response to these pressing issues, there is a growing recognition of innovative governance paradigms that can balance stability and adaptability, fostering collaboration among the various stakeholders to pursue the public good. Despite attempts at reform over the past century, Brazil has struggled to enact lasting change, including adopting NWS principles.

While the NWS offers a compelling framework for transforming Brazil's PA, it is not a panacea. Its strengths are noteworthy, but caution is warranted to avoid the shortcomings experienced with previous models like New Public Management. An approach that is both critical and nuanced is necessary to effectively adapt NWS principles to Brazil's unique context.

The history of Brazil's PA is characterized by a lack of resilience in the face of crises and societal challenges. Reforms have been partial and incomplete, and the professionalization of the public bureaucracy still needs to be

finalized—events that have led to a fragmented system ill-equipped to tackle the country's complex issues. Persistent problems such as inequality, violence, stagnant economic growth, and environmental degradation continue to plague Brazil, highlighting an urgent need for a more capable and responsive state.

A reformed Brazilian PA must be stable, resilient, and flexible enough to implement bold policies and restore public trust in institutions. The NWS model offers a comprehensive approach to reform, emphasizing resilience, effectiveness, and legitimacy, principles that align well with Brazil's multifaceted challenges. By integrating elements of hierarchy, market mechanisms, and networks while simultaneously upholding democratic governance and the rule of law, the NWS model aims to address societal issues and provide inclusive services.

However, it is essential to maintain a critical perspective and differentiate the NWS from other governance models. While the NWS provides valuable insights, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Its principles must be carefully adapted to Brazil's administrative and cultural context to address its specific challenges efficiently.

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