

Bolsonaro Will Politicize His “Alleged” Coronavirus Infection to Regain Lost Popularity

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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It is only natural for many people to think Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro testing positive for COVID-19 is a karma for his insistence on minimizing the risks of the disease and a near non-existent management of the pandemic that has led to the death of more than 67,000 Brazilians. But from the perspective of political manoeuvring in Brazil, by receiving a positive test result could also work in Bolsonaro's favor as his popularity plunges because of his handling of the pandemic.

The pro-American leader could use the contagion to his advantage, and if all goes well, he will become the embodiment of the argument he has been defending since the beginning of the pandemic – the virus is nothing more than a “minor flu” that passes in a few days and should not be exaggerated. It can even help him demonstrate that hydroxychloroquine is an effective treatment method, a claim that still divides scientists. The first thing he did after confirming that he was infected was to say that he had already taken the first tablet of the inexpensive anti-malarial tablet that can also supposedly treat coronavirus. Bolsonaro's infection has not at all changed his policies or thoughts towards coronavirus and hydroxychloroquine. He remains the biggest supporter of using the drug and continues to downplay the severity of the disease despite tens of thousands of Brazilians dying.

“Everyone knew that [the virus] would affect a considerable part of the population sooner or later. For example, if I hadn't had the test, I wouldn't know the result, right? And it just turned positive. It tested positive,” he said.

After urging people to continue life as normal by not social distancing as he endlessly takes selfies with his supporters and only using a mask when absolutely necessary, Bolsonaro has not reflected on his policies once testing positive. During Bolsonaro's announcement that he was infected, he took the opportunity to continue his recurring criticism against authorities for not having calibrated the economic impact that social isolation measures would have.

“Life continues. Brazil has to produce. You have to start the economy. Some criticized me in the past, saying that the economy recovers, life does not. Look, that is an absolute truth. I know that nobody recovers their life, but if the economy does not work it leads to other causes of death, suicide in Brazil. That was completely forgotten,” he said.

Bolsonaro will spend the next few days in his official residence, the Alvorada Palace, being treated by doctors, a luxury that many Brazilians do not have access to. Bolsonaro will recover like the vast majority of coronavirus sufferers and will likely continue to denounce rival mayors and governors who have been determined to “destroy the economy” with their

“exaggerated” restrictions.

At the beginning of the pandemic Bolsonaro was already in the spotlight due to allegedly being infected with coronavirus. He had just returned from an official trip to Miami and more than 20 members of his party had been infected, including some very close ministers. Bolsonaro said that tests had been done and that they were negative. Doubts increased as the government did everything possible to not show the official results. Bolsonaro appealed in all legal instances until the Supreme Court forced him to show the results. In the end, after all the drama and speculation, his test results were shown to be negative.

It is curious that with a negative result Bolsonaro fought fiercely to defend his privacy. Now, with a positive result and when his popularity is drastically falling, he had no problem calling a press conference and calmly answered all questions from reporters. It is not accidental, and he will utilize this to push his agenda to return Brazil to normalcy at a time when tens of thousands of Brazilians are being infected every day.

When the pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization on March 11, Bolsonaro followed the footsteps of US President Donald Trump who brushed off the severity of the virus and insisted that the US would be back to full normalcy by Easter – which as we know did not occur. Bolsonaro has always defended the US and advocates for the maintenance of a Washington-led unipolar order. This policy has seen Brazil sever relations with Venezuela, make attempts to relocate the Brazilian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and not take the coronavirus seriously. It is therefore unsurprising that Brazil today is one of the worst countries in the world in handling the coronavirus with the second most total cases and deaths, behind only the US in both metrics.

By Bolsonaro openly declaring he is infected with coronavirus before speculation and rumors can take hold like what happened months earlier, he is attempting to control the narrative since he will most likely recover from coronavirus in the shortest period of time and will then emphasize that it truly is a “minor flu,” thus justifying the reopening of the economy. Bolsonaro promised economic growth and political stability when he was elected – he failed in both promises long before coronavirus even started, and both problems have only exacerbated because of the pandemic. He can now blame coronavirus for his failings, and use his own recovery as an example of why Brazil must be returned to full normalcy. This is all in the attempt to recover his declining popularity.

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Paul Antonopoulos is an independent geopolitical analyst.

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