

# FIGHTING COVID-19 IN SALVADOR: cooperation and conflict in intergovernmental relationship

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to analyze the intergovernmental relationship between the Government of the State of Bahia and the Municipality of Salvador, and the measures put in place by these entities to fight COVID-19. This paper also reflects on the Federal Government's relationship with the federative units during the fight against the pandemic. It analyzes the extent to which intergovernmental relations are based on verticalization, cooperation or conflict. The paper concludes that, despite being led by politicians from groups and parties that are historically antagonistic, the governments of the State of Bahia and the city of Salvador have been adjusting actions and cooperating among themselves to implement policies to face the health crisis. Going in a completely different direction, the Federal Government of Brazil is building relationships with federal state governors characterized by verticalization attempts and conflicts.

**Keywords:** Federative Pact; Intergovernmental relationship; COVID-19

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## 1. Federative Pact and intergovernmental relations in Brazil

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the intergovernmental relationship between the Government of the State of Bahia and the Municipal Government of the City of Salvador, and the measures put in place by them to fight COVID-19. It also discusses the characteristics of the Federative Pact and the relationship between Federal Government and other entities involved in the fight against the pandemic.

According to Anastasia (2015, p. 143), Brazil is a bicameral, proportionally represented, multi-party Federative Republic with a Presidential system. The Brazilian Federative Pact is formed by the Federal Government, the Federal States, the Federal District, and the Municipal Governments. These are autonomous entities. They can adopt their own political agenda, and each of them has independent legislative, administrative and taxation competence. However, even with a separate taxation system, the federal government concentrates much of the tax collection. To reduce these inequalities, according to Brazil's Constitution, the Federal Government must transfer part of its tax revenue to states and municipalities. After the Constitution of 1988, these transfers decentralized the implementation of several public policies. Nevertheless, Arretche (2004) observes that the existing relationship between Brazil's federal entities is still quite vertical and the ability to coordinate sector-specific policies depends to a large extent on the institutional arrangements of each public policy, but their implementation and impacts also depend on the profile of the predominant political coalition in each context, as Anastasia highlights (2015).

The coordination of policies can, in part, be analyzed through the logic of collective action, as discussed in Olson's (1999) classic paper. Olson analyzes the factors that make individuals and organizations cooperate, taking into consideration the size of the groups and the engendered incentives. For him, the public good would not be achieved unless negative selective incentives (coercion) were applied to members who did not cooperate, or positive selective incentives (such as material or symbolic individual retributions) to members who contributed to the "common good".

Collective action also depends on the interests and strategies of the political elites, which encompasses people, parties and groups who are in charge or who have the power to influence decision-making entities. The elites interfere with the public agenda (KAPLAN; LASSWELL, 1984) and create their own political institutions, which, in part, are the result of their own actions (MARENCO, 2008).

Taking these elements into consideration, it is possible to discuss the articulation of federative entities by analyzing the extent to which intergovernmental relationships and the political elites' strategies are based on actions of cooperation (entities' autonomy maintenance), verticalization/hierarchization actions (an entity that concentrates resources intervenes on the sphere of action of other entities) (SOUZA, 2008), or actions of competition and conflict (entities assume different positions or dispute the actions during the formulation of a given policy). These articulations are of fundamental importance to understand the measures that have been put in place in the fight against COVID-19 in Salvador and in Brazil.

## 2. Government measures against COVID-19: interfederative relations

In recent years, the Government of the State of Bahia and the Municipal Government of the City of Salvador (MGCS) have demonstrated great inability to produce cooperative governance. There are many reasons for this: the historical vulnerability of the local political power in Bahia compared to the state executive power – which is a sphere that concentrates resources and technical capacity – on several occasions has subjugated the autonomy of municipal federative entity due to political-electoral disputes (DANTAS NETO, 2000). The state government has always exercised vertical and centralized power over municipalities, as in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador (MRS); where the government prevented the creation of a more horizontal metropolitan governance pattern based on the entities' autonomy (SOUZA, 2008).

Although the predominant tendency is the centralization of actions on state's governments, sometimes the municipalities, especially the city of Salvador, manage to dispute their autonomy. This is a true intergovernmental competition that has been happening in the city since after the 2012 election, when a mayor from the opposing political spectrum in relation to the state government<sup>1</sup> was elected. This competition between federative entities and political elites has materialized in different ways: in the symbolic dispute of who does more for the city of Salvador, who has presented the best management model, and who intervenes the most in the city space. A competition that has resulted, on one side, in the overlapping of actions, and, on the other side, in a lack of complementarity. The dispute has also given cause to self-referencing on the many plans that were created, such as Salvador's PDDU (Salvador Direction Plan of Urban Development), and the boycott of metropolitan institutions. The consequence is the inability to cooperate, which is a fundamental governance strategy in an extremely complex metropolis (ARANTES; PEREIRA, 2019).

The fight against the pandemic, however, seems to have put this historical competition on hold, at least momentarily. The first COVID-19 case in the state of Bahia was confirmed on March 6, nine days after the first confirmed case in Brazil. It was a woman from Feira de Santana, the second largest city in the state. She got infected during a trip to Italy. Ten days later, on March 16, when there were 10 confirmed cases, the State Government adopted the first temporary measures against the new coronavirus, and, on March 18, it declared State of Emergency in the entire territory of Bahia. Since then, the State Government has issued more than twenty decrees and sanctioned three laws on the subject, and it has been progressively expanding the actions.

In general, the measures taken deal with the following dimensions:

- a) Social distancing (suspension of all non-essential activities including academic activities, intermunicipal and interstate transport, among others);
- b) Reorganization of public services (remote work for public servants, suspension

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1 - Mayor ACM Neto, of the Partido Democratas (Democrats' Party), is part of a political group that is historically antagonistic to that of the current state governor, Rui Costa, of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party).

of vacations and paid leaves to essential workers, bidding exemption for health products purchase, among others);

c) Health surveillance actions (cleaning and disinfecting transport services; screening and testing procedures at the Salvador airport for passengers coming from locations that present community transmission of the virus<sup>2</sup>; mandatory use of protective masks in workplaces, and employers must provide masks to employees<sup>3</sup>; installation of disinfection tunnels in hospitals for health professionals, which is an innovative piece of equipment; among others);

d) Health care actions (creation of new hospital beds, including beds created by official request from private hospitals; allocation of health units to treat exclusively COVID-19 patients; purchase of ventilators, among others);

e) Socioeconomic measures (water and energy bill 90-day exemption for low-income people, and distribution of meal vouchers worth R\$ 55 to the state public schools' students).

The Municipal Government of the City of Salvador also adopted very strict and early measures to fight the new coronavirus. It edited at least 20 decrees and passed a new law by mid-April. The city had its first confirmed case on March 13, and it was also a person who got infected during an international trip. On the following day, before the State Government, the MGCS published its first decrees enforcing measures, although mild, to prevent and control the virus. Two days later, when the city had four confirmed cases, and the coronavirus was not the State's main focus, the MGCS expanded social distancing measures. On March 18 Salvador declared State of Emergency.

The MGCS progressively implemented other actions, which were very in line with the measures adopted by the State Government:

a) Social Distancing (the suspension of non-essential activities, including schools, under the penalty of revoking their licenses; closure of tourist attractions; interdiction of the city's most popular beaches and the prohibition of commerce on the others; reduction of bus circulation; limitation of the number of people inside supermarkets; among others);

b) Reorganization of the public service (remote work; suspension of vacations and paid leaves to essential workers; bidding exemption to buy material and health products; among others);

c) Health surveillance (cleaning intensification at stations and on the buses of the

2 - Having started in March, it was soon banned by the Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (National Health Surveillance Agency). The Federal Justice even authorized the inspection, at the request of the state government, but later Brazil's Supreme Court prohibited.

3 - In this regard, Bahia's government was a pioneer, because since the beginning of April, even before the WHO recommendation, the state's science committee was already recommending the general use of fabric masks.

municipal transport system; mandatory use of masks; roadblock on streets to inspect the use of masks; mandatory distribution of mask from employer to employees; fabric masks distribution to informal workers; performance of rapid diagnostic tests in roadblocks – a measure idealized and first tried in Brazil –; and others);

d) Health assistance (reorganization of the Municipal Assistance Network, preparing the Municipal Hospital to receive patients; administrative requisition of a private hospital and an agreement signed with other hospitals to increase bed offer; convocation of new health care professionals; and public call to buy masks, rapid diagnostic tests and lung ventilators; et cetera);

e) Socioeconomic measures (distribution of basic food products to the city's public school students; donation of meals and basic food products to people in socially vulnerable situation; the creation of the "Salvador for All", a program that will give R\$ 270.00 for three months to informal workers registered in the City Hall and also to taxi and app drivers over 60 years old; among other).

Due to the exceptional moment caused by the pandemic, right after the Declaration of Health Emergency, the state's governor and the city's mayor, leaving aside the recent history of inter-governmental competition, got together, along with their health secretaries, to define joint actions and to adjust interfederative actions, even if the decrees and measures taken present a few differences in date and breadth. In April, a new meeting took place with both, governor and mayor, highlighting the "joint effort" "above any party differences" as something fundamental to "preserve lives". Of course, they strategically took advantage of the moment to demonstrate political leadership aiming at strengthening their political group for the next elections. A recent research by the DataPoder Institute revealed that the governor's measures to fight the pandemic have 61% of approval in Bahia and 71% in Salvador, with a rejection of 7% and 5% respectively. The mayor has 73% of approval and only 3% of rejection in Salvador.

As seen, both the governor and the mayor have emphasized the need for cooperation between federal entities<sup>4</sup>. According to the newsletter from Rede CoVida – Science, Information and Solidarity, produced by Cidacs/Fiocruz and UFBA, published on April 13, even with the increase on the number of cases, Bahia, until that moment, had reduced the transmission rate of the coronavirus by 27%. According to researchers, the data analysis strongly suggests that social distancing measures and also the reduction of intercity transport flow have been flattening the epidemic curve (REDE COVIDA, 2020, p. 7).

The governor and the mayor have not only been producing a cooperative governance but they also have taken a very critical stand against the Federal Government, especially against the President due to his inability to produce a political-federative agreement to fight the current health emergency.

Still in March, the state disclosed the State Contingency Plan to Combat the New

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4 - This has not been occurring in other contexts, such as in Natal's Metropolitan Region, where there have been conflicts between the state government and municipalities (SILVEIRA et al., 2020).

Coronavirus – SARS CoV 2 which, among its main points, highlighted the importance of “interfederative cooperation”, especially towards the municipalities. In view of this, especially considering the poorest municipalities with reduced technical and bureaucratic capacity, the state’s government has been organizing integrated strategies of surveillance and health care. In addition, the governor idealized the Scientific Committee of the Northeast Consortium Against the Coronavirus focusing on assisting the region’s managers to make decisions and to act against the pandemic. This Consortium is formed by the nine states of Brazil’s Northeast region, currently chaired by Bahia’s governor.

In this regard, the governor has also taken a stand against the Federal Government. On the same day that President Jair Bolsonaro (elected by the Social Liberal Party and currently without a party), in a national TV broadcast, minimized the risks of COVID-19, calling it “a little flu”, accusing the media of spreading a sense of panic and criticizing the governor’s measures of social distancing, Governor of Bahia, Rui Costa took a hard line, stating that the country is at a “war” and that it was not the time for an “empty speech and delusions” (G1 BAHIA, 2020). Three days later, the Northeast Consortium disclosed a letter to the president entitled In Favor of Life in which the governors expressed indignation at the Federal Government’s stance of ignoring WHO recommendations. The governors stated that they would continue to be guided by science in order to elaborate health policies. They also demanded for respect from the Presidency of the Republic and wished the Federal Government to cease the aggressions against the governors. They also expressed their desire for an institutional positioning to promote of national norms in favor of public health instead of favoring conflicts that prevent unity. Northeastern governors stated that in the absence of an effective national coordination – federal government together with other federal entities – the Northeast Consortium would continue to advance in regional integration, alongside other regions of the country.

The mayor of Salvador, Antonio Carlos Magalhães Neto, better known as ACM Neto, also took a stand against the President of the Republic’s pronouncement, considering his statements “irresponsible”, especially in the face of a problem that means the “sacrifice and lives of thousands of Brazilians”, and right in a moment when “what we need is the union of all” (G1 BAHIA, 2020). ACM Neto is the president of the Democrats Party, which had, at the time, three ministers on Bolsonaro’s government. His stance, however, was very similar to Luiz Henrique Mandetta’s - Health Minister at the time - also a member of the Democrats Party. And while Health Minister, he worked in partnership with states and municipalities, but was constantly unauthorized by the President and ended up being fired in mid-April. His successor, Nelson Teich, remained in charge of the ministry for less than a month. He resigned due to pressure from the President to release the use of hydroxychloroquine for the treatment of Covid-19, even without scientific proof of the effectiveness of this drug. Currently, the Ministry of Health is temporarily led by an army general with no medical experience. The exchange of ministers in the midst of fighting the pandemic has been causing uncertainties regarding the management of the current health crisis.

In terms of cooperation, Bahia has been opposed at federal level by the President himself. Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, continues to criticize and boycott social distancing measures, downplaying the virus' risks and emphasizing only its negative economic impacts, aside from constantly criticizing the governors' measures. The actions of the head of the national Executive Power demonstrate an attempt of verticalization towards the federated entities, carrying out an authoritarian and personalist policy. As an example, the President even threatened to suspend the isolation measures by decree, but on April 15, Brazil's Supreme Court determined that the Federal Government cannot unilaterally dismiss the decisions of state governments to restrict services and people circulation. It is important to note that this decision takes into account the Brazilian Federative Pact in which states and municipalities are autonomous federative entities and, therefore, cannot be submitted to an isolated decision by the President of the Republic.

Interfederative conflicts have also been expressed in other dimensions. Governors have asked the Federal Government for fiscal and financial relief measures such as the 12 months suspension of debt payments; the possibility of paying the total debt only at the end of the contract; the opening of credit lines; among others. On this issue, the House of Representatives, the lower house of Brazilian parliament, recently approved a financial federal aid to the states, the Federal District and municipalities to compensate for the drop in tax revenues. This aid was considered a "bomb" (undesired and unexpected government spending) by the federal government.

Therefore, cooperation between the federal entities depends on a series of issues that permeate institutional arrangements, material and symbolic incentives, and even the strategies of political elites. In fighting COVID-19, the government of the state of Bahia and the municipality of Salvador, led by politicians from historically antagonistic groups and parties, seem to have understood the exceptional character of the moment, adjusting actions and cooperating in the implementation of health, social distancing and socio-economic policies.

The cooperation between municipalities and states with the Federal Government, however, suffers daily from verticalization and also from the not so republican actions of the President himself. This is a reality that may increase the severity of the consequences of this pandemic to the country's public health. Consequences that can only be better evaluated at the end of this entire process, which, in Brazil, seem to be even more unpredictable than in other countries because of the political current crisis, among other factors.

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# O enfrentamento à Covid-19 em Salvador: cooperação e conflito nas relações intergovernamentais

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São Paulo. Vol. 23, 2020  
*Ideias em debate*

A época CO-  
VID-19: Pesquisa  
interdisciplinar e  
uma nova ética sus-  
tentável e justa

**Resumo:** O presente trabalho tem como objetivo analisar a relação intergovernamental do Governo do Estado da Bahia e da Prefeitura Municipal de Salvador e as medidas colocadas em prática por eles no enfrentamento à Covid-19. Reflete também sobre a relação do Governo Federal com os entes federados no combate à pandemia, analisando em que medida as relações intergovernamentais se fundamentam em ações de verticalização, cooperação ou conflito. O trabalho conclui que, mesmo liderados por políticos de grupos e partidos historicamente antagônicos, os governos do estado da Bahia e do município de Salvador vêm ajustando ações e cooperando na implementação das políticas de enfrentamento à crise sanitária, diferentemente do que vem ocorrendo na relação do governo federal, especialmente da presidência, com os governos estaduais, que se caracteriza por tentativas de verticalização e conflitos.

**Palavras-chave:** Pacto Federativo; Relações intergovernamentais; Covid-19

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# La lucha contra la COVID-19 en Salvador: cooperación y conflicto en la relación intergubernamental

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São Paulo. Vol. 23, 2020  
*Ideas en debate*

La época CO-  
VID-19: investiga-  
ción interdiscipli-  
naria y una nueva  
ética sostenible y  
justa

**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la relación intergubernamental entre el Gobierno del Estado de Bahía y la Municipalidad de Salvador y las medidas implementadas por ellos en la lucha contra Covid-19. También reflexiona sobre la relación del Gobierno Federal con las entidades federadas en la lucha contra la pandemia, analizando hasta que punto las relaciones intergubernamentales se basan en la verticalización, cooperación o conflicto. El trabajo concluye que, aunque liderados por políticos de grupos y partidos históricamente antagónicos, los gobiernos del estado de Bahía y del municipio de Salvador han ajustado acciones y cooperando en la implementación de políticas para enfrentar la crisis de salud. Ello es diferente a lo que viene sucediendo en la relación entre gobierno federal, especialmente la presidencia, y gobiernos estatales, que se caracteriza por intentos de verticalización y conflictos

**Palabras clave:** Pacto Federativo; Relaciones intergubernamentales; COVID-19

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