

Publication status: This preprint has not been published elsewhere.

# 'A Resonant Crisis: Hartmut Rosa's Theories and Brazil's Democratic Decline (2013-2023)'

Helder Ferreira do Vale

<https://doi.org/10.1590/SciELOPreprints.15215>

Submitted on: 2026-02-26

Posted on: 2026-03-04 (version 1)

(YYYY-MM-DD)

## **‘A Resonant Crisis: Hartmut Rosa’s Theories and Brazil’s Democratic Decline (2013-2023)’**

Helder Ferreira do Vale

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4993-7932>

Visiting Professor, Graduate Program of International Relations,  
Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Rua Barão de Jeremoabo, s/n, PAF-V. Ondina, 40170-115,  
Salvador, BA, Brazil. [helderdovale@gmail.com](mailto:helderdovale@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This article applies the sociological theories of Hartmut Rosa, namely, his social acceleration and resonance theories, to Brazil’s democratic decline from 2013 to 2023. It argues that the relentless pace of modern life, as described by Rosa’s theory of acceleration, created public discontent with the slow and procedural nature of democratic institutions. The article argues that this discontent with democracy fostered a profound sense of dissonance between citizens and Brazil’s political system. This dissonance, exacerbated by political and economic crises, created a fertile ground for an anti-systemic movement that culminated in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 and in the process of democratic decline thereafter. By applying Rosa’s theoretical framework to Brazil’s democratic decline, the article proposes a fine-grained analysis for comprehending the socio-temporal elements that have undermined Brazilian democracy. This article enhances Rosa’s theoretical and conceptual framework to elucidate how anti-democratic forces exploit dissonance and create ‘pseudo-resonance,’ which represents a false sense of connection based on shared antagonism against democratic institutions.

**Keywords:** acceleration, Brazil, democratic decline, dissonance, populism, resonance

**Data Availability/Accessibility:** This study does not rely on original datasets. All empirical information used in the article is derived from publicly available sources and is fully referenced within the text.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Disclaimer/AI Transparency Statement:** The author acknowledges the use of QuillBot for limited language polishing. All theoretical arguments, case interpretations, and analytical contributions remain the sole responsibility of the author.

### **About the Author**

Helder Ferreira do Vale is a political scientist specializing in international relations, global governance, and comparative institutional change, with expertise in democratic transitions, policy processes, and development in the Global South. He holds a PhD from the European University Institute and has held academic appointments across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, including as Associate Professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (South Korea) and Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University (China). He is currently Professor in the Graduate Program in International Relations at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), Brazil. His work has appeared in journals such as *Research in Globalization*, *Insight Turkey*, *Brazilian Political Science Review*, *Dados*, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, *Regional & Federal Studies*, *World Affairs*, among others. He has professional experience with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Spanish government on governance and decentralization initiatives.

## 1. Introduction: Hartmut Rosa's Theoretical Framework

The inability of some institutions to resist democratic decline has come under scrutiny since 2006. In 2017 alone, 71 countries experienced democratic decline, the highest number recorded by Freedom House (Abramowitz 2018). This decline has weakened democracy's global appeal. However, while institutions falter, democratic values seem to endure. Welzel (2021) emphasizes that democracy depends on human agency, which is rooted in cultural norms and values. Data from the World Values Survey (1995-2014), for example, shows sustained support for emancipative values, namely, autonomy, equality, and voice, alongside a decline in traditional-conforming values such as obedience and religious authority (Welzel 2021).

In the Brazilian case, the World Value Survey shows that confidence in civil liberties remain high in Brazil, whereas confidence in democratic institutions has decreased. Between 2010 and 2022 (Survey Wave 7 and 8) the belief of Brazilian respondents that “civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression” remained unchanged at approximately 46% of the respondents, almost doubling the support of the 2005-2009 (Survey Wave 6) survey, which displayed only a 28% support. Contrary to the growing confidence in democratic values, confidence in the elections, political parties, and justice system systematically decreased from 2005 to 2023. Considering this scenario, the following question becomes pertinent: why does the support for democratic principles in Brazil increase amidst waning support for democratic institutions?

This article argues that this apparent paradox can be clarified by examining the quality of the relationship between citizens and the state, an issue that is central to the sociological framework of Hartmut Rosa.<sup>1</sup> To understand the Brazilian case, it is essential to first comprehend Rosa's core concepts: social acceleration and resonance.<sup>2</sup> Social acceleration emerges from Rosa's observation that modernity is characterized by a

---

<sup>1</sup> In the article we refer to Hartmut Rosa's theoretical and conceptual framework simply as “Rosa's framework”, which refers mainly to two of his quintessential works, namely, “Social Acceleration” (2013) and “Resonance” (2019). The theoretical dimension of his work includes what we refer to as Social Acceleration Theory and Resonance Theory. The conceptual framework not only includes his conceptualization of acceleration and resonance but other terms that are integral to his theories: dynamic stabilization, frenetic standstill, *weltbeziehung*, *unverfügbarkeit*, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Before further elaborating on these two concepts in his career, Rosa already proposed that speed undermine democracy, suggesting that the very idea and nature of “institution” is incompatible with accelerations (2009: 102).

constant pressure to accelerate life leading to three categories of pace: technical acceleration (e.g., communication, transport), acceleration of social change (e.g., cultural norms, family structures), and acceleration of the pace of life (e.g., multitasking, feeling a scarcity of time). These accelerations, in turn, create a demand for ever-faster results and growth. The outcome are situations of “frenetic standstill” (Rosa 2013a), a characteristic of late modernity that leads to a false sense of progress. In his later works, Rosa further elaborates this concept and reconceptualizes it in terms of “dynamic stabilization” (*dynamische Stabilisierung*) (Rosa 2017, 2018).

The article purports, as an extension from Rosa, that this false sense of progress has been enlarged by the Western-centric pattern of internationalization of liberal democracy (Sanín-Restrepo 2016). The post-Cold War tandem of liberal democracy and capitalism fostered an assumption of unstoppable democratization (Mearsheimer 2019), while simultaneously contributing to the very citizen discontent that now threatens democratic life.<sup>3</sup> A consequence of the liberal democracy-capitalism tandem is that governing institutions contribute to the alienation of citizens. From the perspective of alienated citizens living in an accelerated world perspective, democratic procedures and dynamics are perceived as slow and inefficient, failing to keep pace with societal expectations. This is the core argument behind Rosa’s acceleration theory in the context of our analysis of democracy crisis.

Rosa’s resonance (*Resonanz*) describes a vibrant, responsive, and meaningful relationship between an individual and the world.<sup>4</sup> It is a two-way connection in which one feels heard and, in turn, can be affected by people, nature, and institutions. The opposite of resonant relationships is alienation (*Entfremdung*), which states that the world feels cold, mute, and unresponsive. In a political context, dissonance manifests as a disconnect between citizens and their governing institutions, leading to feelings of powerlessness, distrust, and cynicism. Rosa envisions the possibility in which a greater connection and responsiveness between the individual and the world is created, leading to resonance. These dynamics are the core of Rosa’s resonance theory.

---

<sup>3</sup> Democracy in this article reflects Robert Dahl’s (1971: 4) two dimensions of polyarchic, namely, contestation and inclusion. We consider that these two dimensions of democracy are subject to the democratic decline.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that in Rosa, resonance is not synonymous of perfect harmony, but it is a state that is unfit for hatred and repulsion of others (Rosa 2019: 184-190).

This article employs Rosa's acceleration (*Beschleunigung*) and resonance theories to understand Brazil's democratic crisis. This crisis emerged in 2013 with large street protests across Brazil, leading to an unprecedented polarization between citizens and politicians across the ideological spectrum. After years of deepening political polarization, Jair Bolsonaro, an ultra-right president (2019-2022), was elected in 2018 establishing a Manichean and antidemocratic style of governance. He has been convicted by Brazil's Supreme Court for leading a failed *coup d'état* in the January 8, 2023, which has been the first direct assault aimed at discontinuing Brazil's democratic regime since the country transitioned to democracy in 1985.

Our analysis is motivated by the attempt to illuminate this relatively recent phenomenon of democratic decline in Brazil and across the world, which existing social science theories struggle to fully explain. While important conceptual frameworks on democratic decline have provided valuable insights into democratic decline (e.g., Bermeo 2016, Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Lindberg 2023, Stepan and Kaufman 2021), they offer incomplete interpretations of how rapid social acceleration, individual alienation, and the weakening of fluid democratic relationships contribute to such decline. As democratic decline represents a multifaceted phenomenon, it is perhaps unsurprising that traditional approaches, whether focused on institutional design, elite competition, or structural factors, provide only partial explanations.

This article contends that Rosa's framework, with its integration of temporal modes, relational dynamics, and attention to the subjective individual, offers essential tools to analyze the Brazilian case. With the application of Rosa to Brazil's crisis of democracy, we also hope to expand his framework showing that it can be used as a powerful analytical tool to understand democratic declines beyond Brazil. While Rosa's work addresses politics (Rosa 2009), systematic application of his framework to democratic decline remains underdeveloped. This article addresses this gap by demonstrating how acceleration and resonance theories illuminate the socio-temporal dynamics underlying Brazil's crisis in ways that institutional or structural approaches cannot.

We argue that a critical dynamic in Brazil's democratic decline is the transformation of dissonance into a pseudo-resonance, which is a state of public dissatisfaction that resonates with a leadership that has a capacity for resonance of citizens' anxieties and frustrations. This "responsivity," instead of aiding citizens to encounter resonance, keeps individuals in dissonance, although affected citizens falsely

believe they are experiencing resonance. In other words, pseudo-resonance occurs because people feel affected by their leadership yet, political dynamics are transformed by aggressively attacking the institutions and antagonizing opposition and minorities.

Central to this *pseudo-resonance* outcome is the temporal mismatch between democratic time, and social acceleration (Rosa 2009), which creates friction in democratic regimes. Citizens accustomed to digital technology's (e.g., social platforms) instant gratification and consumer markets' immediate responsiveness increasingly interpret democracy's own pace not as an insurance for fairness and legitimacy, but as a result of dysfunction, and often used as evidence of inefficiency, corruption, among others. This perception directly fuels the political dissonance that alienates citizens from democratic governance, therefore, creating vulnerabilities that anti-democratic forces can exploit through pseudo-resonance.

Rosa's framework offers five distinct advantages: (1) integration of material, existential, and social dimensions (*Weltbeziehung*), (2) bridging of micro-macro dynamics, (3) normative assessment beyond preference satisfaction, (4) recognition of relational subjectivity and moments of uncontrollability (*Unverfügbarkeit*), and (5) individual-centered transformation within enabling contexts. These advantages position Rosa as a sophisticated alternative to both rational choice and structuralist approaches. These five traits of Rosa's framework emphasize individual agency as being subjective yet influential in interacting with contextual conditions. Rosa, indeed, offers a dynamic and relational understanding of social life that combines a critical and philosophical approach that is socially grounded.

This article unfolds in five subsequent sections. Section 2 first elaborates on Rosa's core concepts, focusing on the temporal and relational dynamics relevant to Brazil's democratic crisis. Then, Section 3 applies this framework to the sequence of events in Brazil from 2013 to 2023, analyzing the country's democratic decline. Building on this case study, Section 4 reflects on theoretical extensions to Rosa's framework, particularly the concept of pseudo-resonance. Section 5 situates this contribution by considering alternative theories, arguing that such theories provide an incomplete account of Brazil's experience. Finally, the conclusion recapitulates how a resonant framework enhances our understanding of contemporary political crises.

## **2. A Resonant Framework for Democratic Crisis**

To recapitulate, Brazil's crisis of democracy can be analyzed not just as a crisis of institutions or values, but as a crisis of temporal expectations and relationship that can be assessed through Rosa's framework. Through this framework, it is possible to observe how existing democratic institutions create dissonance in the citizenry.

### *2.1 The Temporal Disconnect: Social Acceleration vs. Democratic Time*

A central pillar of Rosa's framework, and for this article, is the temporality mismatch between social acceleration and democracy's inherently deliberative and decelerated rhythms. This mismatch is a primary source of the political dissonance that creates fertile ground for anti-democratic movement. Opportunistic movements (e.g., populism), as we argue, exploit this dissonance by promising immediate solutions and a direct and unmediated connection that bypasses democracy's "slow" institutions. Indeed, this is the main source of this article's concept of pseudo-resonance.

That said, we consider populism as having anti-democratic features (Riedel 2017) rooted in the problems of democracy (e.g., corruption, limited deliberation), that have been consciously pursued in the 20th-century onwards.<sup>5</sup> One of the basic assumptions behind this article's interpretation of contemporary democracy is that its inclusive rhetoric has become less resonant among citizens.<sup>6</sup>

This temporal mismatch represents a critical source of the political dissonance, as previously described. The temporal dimension of contemporary democratic crisis becomes particularly evident when considering the appealing political agenda of populists that, despite their promises, are largely unfulfilled and are damaging to democracy (Dussauge-Laguna 2022). This intermediation under populist ideologies combined with social acceleration generates the temporal tensions that characterize democratic dissonance.

---

<sup>5</sup> We adopt a minimal definition of populism as this is a multifaceted sociopolitical phenomenon whose conceptualizations largely vary in terms of time, context and leader. That said, our definition considers it as having a leadership style that relies on an anti-democratic rhetoric and widespread social dissatisfaction with democratic institutions (Moffitt 2016). This definition acknowledges that despite populist's use of communication and sentiment, they have a lasting effect on policy, politics and institutions (Caiani and Graziano 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Historically, earlier democratic systems provided more direct channels for citizen participation and elite accountability, whereas contemporary representative democracy creates institutional distance between citizens and governing processes (McCormick 2001).

Rosa's concept of "dynamic stabilization" illuminates how late modern societies require constant growth, innovation, and acceleration to maintain social stability. In turn, this creates a daily life characterized by a pervasive sense of "shrinking of the present," according to which the present becomes a frantic interval to be optimized for future advancement (Rosa 2013b). This results in moments being less meaningful for individuals.

This understanding of time essentially redefines societal conceptions of the "good life," shifting focus from resonant experiences toward material progress and consumption. Within contemporary ethical pluralism, Rosa (2018) identifies the emergence of what he calls the "Triple A," which entails making the world more available, accessible, and attainable. This set generates cycles of consumption and growth that fuel further acceleration, ultimately producing alienation, which reflects relationships with the world based on control and appropriation rather than on mutual responsiveness. Consequently, a "good life" grounded in resonance, based on which individuals can meaningfully affect and be affected by their environment, becomes increasingly marginalized and associated with dissonance.

While acceleration serves as the primary mechanism of social change, it creates temporal incongruity with democratic political life (Dewey 2009). Although technology can accelerate certain governmental functions, as democracy's core processes remain reliant on building long-term legitimacy democracy's temporalities clash with the accelerations of late modernity.

It is possible to identify situations of "democratic time" that produce tensions. In effect, legislative and executive exercise of power has been increasingly based on states of emergency and exception (Schmitt 2009, Virilio 2009). Examples of democratic time include fixed political mandates, legal assurances (e.g., right of appeal) granted by lengthy judicial proceedings, accountability of public procurement for policy implementations, and deliberations in legislative processes. In consolidated democracies, electoral cycles operate on fixed terms, requiring long-term planning and accountability structures. This tempo contrasts with the short mandates of private sector executives, the precarious nature of employment in the digital sector. Regarding judicial processes, which are based on the rule of law, they are meant to guarantee fairness over efficiency. In the context of democratic policymaking, public procurement, which is fundamental for abiding to principles of transparency for awarding public contracts, often incorporate multiple accountability measures to prevent corruption. In the parliamentary arena,

lawmaking involves debate, negotiation, and compromise among diverse stakeholders. These democratic processes are critical to preserve legitimacy and policy quality, but might be misinterpreted under social acceleration. Table 1 summarizes these processes highlighting the main mismatches between “democratic time” and “social acceleration”.

**Table 1:** Examples of Democratic Time and Mismatches with Social Acceleration

<b>Democratic Processes/Instruments</b>	<b>Democratic Time</b>	<b>Mismatch with Social Acceleration</b>
<b>Electoral Cycles</b>	Fixed terms, long-term planning, delayed accountability.	Contrasts with decision-making dynamics of the corporate and digital worlds.
<b>Judicial Processes</b>	Methodical, focused on due process and fairness over speed.	Perceived as frustratingly slow versus the expectation of instant gratification.
<b>Public Procurement</b>	Requires slow, transparent procedures to prevent corruption.	Seen as inefficient bureaucracy versus the pace of private sector deal-making.
<b>Legislative Processes</b>	Relies on deliberation, debate, and compromise.	Viewed as political paralysis versus the demand for immediate solutions.

*Source: Own elaboration*

## 2.2 Democratic Resonance, Alienation and “Good Life”

Before applying these concepts to the Brazilian case, it is essential to elaborate how Rosa’s theories directly intersect with democratic functioning and ideals. Within this theoretical framework, democracy transcends mere procedural mechanisms. Instead, it constitutes a relational sphere in which citizen-state interactions can be characterized as either “resonant” or “dissonant.”<sup>7</sup> This distinction helps to reframe democratic analysis from institutional design questions toward the quality of relationships that democratic systems may enable or even obstruct.

Rosa identifies dissonance, associated with alienation, as modernity’s pathology. Applied to political contexts, alienation describes conditions in which citizens experience democratic institutions as unresponsive, opaque, and disconnected from their concerns

<sup>7</sup> In this regard, for Rosa dissonance is not the opposite of resonance. Instead, it is possible to say that in Rosa’s conception, resonance is a final stage of a dynamic process in which dissonance succeeds alienation, and it is a necessary step for resonance.

and agency. This democratic dissonance produces several negative effects that undermine democracy's legitimacy including loss of political efficacy, institutional delegitimization, and radicalization.

One of the most serious consequences of democratic alienation is citizens' perception that their participation through voting, protesting, or civic engagement is meaningless because political systems fail to "listen" and/or "respond." In turn, this generates powerlessness because democratic channels appear structurally incapable of translating citizen input into meaningful outcomes.

Under the context of democratic alienation, core democratic institutions including parliaments, judiciaries, and political parties are perceived not as mechanisms for collective will-formation but as self-serving entities operating according to logic entirely alien to citizen experience. This perception may develop contempt toward the entire political establishment. This perception might be coherent with reality. For this reason, several institutions seem to be losing "virtue" in liberal democracies (Scheuerman 2009).

Division and polarization can be considered another consequence of alienation. Confronted with apathy, citizens find themselves attracted to radical alternatives promising to weaken or eliminate unresponsive establishments. Populist leaders exploit these conditions by offering pseudo-resonance, which essentially are direct and emotional connections that bypass unresponsive democratic channels while deepening systemic dysfunction.

If alienation represents the pathological condition (Rosa 2019: 476), what are the characteristics that define a "resonant democracy"? Resonant democracy does not require constant consensus but instead dynamic and responsive relationships between states and citizens. Such relationships exhibit some essential features. One of these features include functional resonance channels, in which there are effective mechanisms through which citizens' voices can be articulated, heard, and meaningfully addressed through trusted media systems, accessible political representation, independent judicial systems, and vibrant civil society organizations that facilitate genuine dialogue between political leaders and citizens.

Another feature of a resonant democracy is the meaningfulness of democratic procedures, namely, elections, public hearings, consultations, which are experienced not as ritualistic performances but as authentic deliberative processes capable of shaping political outcomes. Citizens should perceive these mechanisms as genuinely consequential rather than instruments of performance. To be consequential, resonant

democratic institutions should be effective in responding to citizens. State institutions demonstrate capacity to be “affected” and transformed by public engagement. Citizens experience themselves not as extensions of governmental power but as co-creators of shared political worlds, possessing genuine agency within collective decision-making processes.

Rosa’s framework connects democratic quality to fundamental questions of human development. Democracy could potentially contribute to Rosa’s “good life” by enabling citizen experiences of political self-efficacy. Efficacy entails that citizens would consider as a sense of meaningful participation in collective projects with genuine capacity to influence their direction. As such, democratic “good life” arises when individuals experience belonging and recognition within political communities by believing that their voices matter in deliberative arenas.

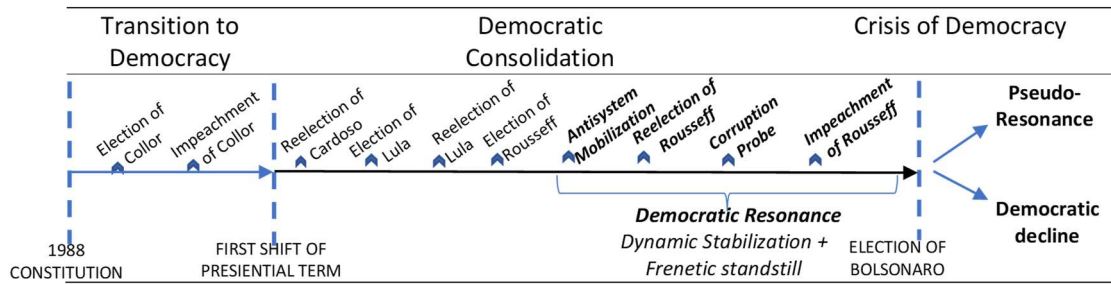
Resonant democracy has resemblances with deliberative and participatory democracies. This is so because deliberation allows the opportunity of a small group of citizens to engage in decision-making by hearing divergent perspectives, while participatory democracy emphasizes the mobilization of citizens behind a collective goal. Despite the complex relationship between deliberation and participation, opposition manifested through deliberation might encourage participation (Jang 2009).

In this regard it is worth mentioning that Brazil in the 1990s built participatory institutions, yet this potentially resonant democratic engagement has not been enough to prevent dissonant and alienating political relationships, which lies at the heart of Brazil’s crisis from 2013 to 2023. Understanding this transformation through Rosa’s lens reveals how institutional failures created conditions based on which pseudo-resonant authoritarian alternatives could appear attractive to citizens experiencing democratic abandonment.

### **3. Case Study: Brazil as a Dissonant Republic (2013-2022)**

Bolsonaro’s emergence and political strategy can be understood through what we call “pseudo-resonance” that is deemed as a responsive connection without its genuine substance.

**Figure 1:** Timeline of almost four decades of Brazil’s democracy



Source: Own elaboration

Our analysis suggests that public dissatisfaction stemmed not simply from poor economic performance or corruption *per se*, but from a replacement of a temporal logic of “dynamic stabilization” by a “frenetic standstill” that created an opportunity for Jair Bolsonaro to exploit this context via “pseudo-resonance”. His appeal transcended detailed policy proposals, positioning himself as an anti-systemic force capable of transforming what he and his supporters deemed as the “old” dissonant politics. Figure 1 provides an overview of the events that lead to “pseudo-resonance” and democratic decline. Note that the democratic crisis starts before the election of Bolsonaro, and before his elections.

### 3.1 Acceleration Theory in Brazil (2013-2018)

Rosa’s concept of “dynamic stabilization” offers a compelling lens for understanding Brazilian public frustration during 2013-2018. Rosa defines “dynamic stabilization” as a condition in which events and actions take place in an accelerated pace, yet this rapid tempo must be sustained to maintain social stability. Modern societies, he argues, maintain equilibrium not through static balance but through constant growth, innovation, and acceleration. As societies depend on continuous forward momentum, when this movement stalls, they become vulnerable to crisis.

This rationale illuminates Brazil’s experience during the commodity boom and Lula years in the presidency (2003-2010), when significant economic growth created societal expectations of continued acceleration. In this period, economic growth trickled down to the poor, lifting millions out of poverty, also leading to the enlargement of the Brazilian middle-class (Kerstenetzky et al. 2015). When GDP growth decreased dramatically from 7.5% in 2010, dropping to an average of 1.7% in the period 2011-2014, it was followed by a period of recession (Ferrari Haines et al. 2020). This macroeconomic instability represented a failure of the dynamic stabilization that previously had legitimized the political system. Citizens had internalized expectations of upward

mobility and expanding opportunities, making stagnation feel more like systemic failure rather than cyclical adjustment.

This phase of economic stagnation leading to an individual and collective sense of failure exemplifies Rosa's concept of "frenetic standstill," which refers to intense political actions including scandals, investigations, protests, and an impeachment process that generated a pervasive sense of national paralysis. Indeed, by 2013 Brazilians, approximately 55%, started to experience dissatisfaction with Brazil's direction and economic condition (Horowitz 2013).<sup>8</sup> Rosa's theory explains why these problems triggered such intense social mobilization: in dynamic stabilization regimes, any pause or reversal feels existentially threatening because systemic legitimacy depends entirely on forward movement. The 2013 protests were the largest street manifestations the recent democratic history of Brazil, and interestingly it took place when the country was governed by a left-wing party that adopted robust social assistance programs (Saad-Filho 2013). Initially sparked by transportation fare increases, the protests escalated precisely because they symbolized broader anxieties about Brazil's stalled modernization trajectory (Vicino and Fahlberg 2017).<sup>9</sup>

Operation Car Wash (*Lava Jato*) further intensified this sense of "frenetic standstill" by exposing systemic contradictions in Brazil's development project.<sup>10</sup> Citizens expected their democracy (Moisés 2010) to be improving and becoming more transparent, efficient, and responsive over time. The revelation of extensive corruption networks involving major political parties suggested the opposite: that apparent "progress" had been masking institutional stagnation and decay. An opinion poll by

---

<sup>8</sup> An opinion poll of the Pew Research Center shows a large gap between public priorities, and the perception of how the country is fairing. For example, for 88% of the respondents "law and order" are considered very important, but only 14% believe that Brazil is doing very well in this priority (Horowitz 2013).

<sup>9</sup>These protests started as non-partisan, however, they slowly transformed themselves into anti-left and anti-democratic protests from which it is possible to trace the emergence of the new right in Brazil (Mendonça et al. 2019, Telles 2025).

<sup>10</sup> In 2014, Operation Car Wash uncovered a vast corruption scheme involving Petrobras, where politicians, including members of the Workers' Party, colluded with construction firms for bribes. The investigation uncovered around \$2 billion in embezzled funds, leading to dozens of convictions and over 60 politicians under scrutiny (Do Vale 2022). The Operation gained important popular support: almost five years after the corruption investigation started 81% of Brazilians believed it should continue to investigate corruption schemes (Folha de São Paulo 2019).

Datafolha indicated that “pride of being Brazilian” dropped from 89% of the respondents in 2010, to 50% in 2017 (Poder 360 2017). Political corruption enabled citizens to connect economic failures with democratic breakdown, creating a comprehensive crisis of legitimacy.

The fiercely contested 2014 presidential elections reflected and deepened societal divisions (Do Vale 2015), while Operation Car Wash implicated top politicians and business leaders, primarily from the ruling Workers’s Party (PT).<sup>11</sup> For many Brazilians, these revelations confirmed their growing belief that the political system represented a self-serving scheme completely disconnected from citizens’ reality. The trust required for resonant relationships between citizens and the state diminished (Santos et al. 2020). President Dilma Rousseff’s 2016 impeachment was consummated despite her not being directly implicated in Car Wash corruption. While following constitutional procedures, the controversial process was widely perceived by supporters as a parliamentary coup (Ansell 2018), shattering democratic faith for significant portions of the population, and there was a sense that the political crisis would severely affect, negatively, personal lives (Lima and França 2021). The then Vice President Michel Temer succeeded Rousseff and governed until 2018, implementing austerity measures and budget cuts (Holland, 2019).

### *3.2 Resonance Theory in Brazil (2018-2023)*

Rosa’s resonance theory provides crucial insights into how Brazil’s crisis of “dynamic stabilization” evolved into what can be described as a breakdown in the responsive relationship between citizens and democratic institutions. Whereas resonance describes moments of genuine connection characterized by mutual responsiveness, affectability, and self-efficacy, “democratic dissonance” represents the opposite: a state where citizens experience political institutions as unresponsive. The traditional channels of democratic engagement such as elections, parties, and representative institutions, ceased to function as sources of meaningful connection between citizen concerns and

---

<sup>11</sup> The highest politician investigated in this corruption probe was then former president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, who was arrested in April 2018. Him and his supporters claimed his rights were violated and that he was targeted by a political campaign against the Left. The trial was highly controversial due to its speed and media leaks, despite available appeals. His conviction—later annulled in 2021 by the Supreme Court due to procedural irregularities, not innocence—became a focal point of national polarization.

political outcomes. Instead, these institutions appeared as distant entities operating under a logic disconnected from ordinary experience.

Bolsonaro successfully channeled public rage against the political establishment by presenting himself not as a traditional politician but as an unmediated voice for citizen anxieties and frustrations. His supporters experienced his aggressive rhetoric as finally having someone who “spoke their language” and directly confronted the institutions from which they felt alienated (Sahd 2024). This created among his followers a sense of political efficacy and responsiveness that had been absent from their previous democratic experience (Tamaki and Venturelli 2023). However, this represented what Rosa would identify as instrumentalized or commodified resonance—connection based on shared antagonism instead of genuine dialogue with democratic otherness.

As president, Bolsonaro’s administration deepened democratic decline by systematically attacking democratic institutions (Hunter and Power 2022), spreading disinformation (Cavalcanti et al. 2019), and developing rhetoric and policies targeting minorities (Bernardino-Costa 2023). These actions can be understood as attempts to institutionalize the conflict born from democratic dissonance, replacing deliberative democracy with permanent campaign-style antagonism against perceived enemies. Far from restoring genuine resonance between citizens and institutions, which entails among other things openness to the world (Rosa 2020: 52), Bolsonaro framed democratic institutions not as potential partners in dialogue but as an impediment to governance requiring constant combat.

In the realm of environmental sustainability, Bolsonaro systematically weakened two essential institutions for environmental preservation: the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) and the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA). As part of his strategy to antagonize environmental advocates, he defunded and maintained these institutions understaffed (Santos et al. 2021). Moreover, he promoted legislation that relaxed environmental protection to the benefit of agribusiness interests. As part of Bolsonaro’s marginalization strategy of minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, he limited government efforts to supply indigenous populations of adequate access to health and other services (Silva et al. 2021) resulting in a legal case, accusing Bolsonaro of genocide, filed by an indigenous association, the APIB, before the International Criminal Court.

Bolsonaro’s constant unfounded claims of electoral fraud, despite Brazil’s secure electronic voting system, represented a fundamental assault on the possibility of

democratic resonance itself. By undermining trust in elections, he attacked the basic mechanism through which citizens could experience political efficacy and institutional responsiveness. This systematic attack on democratic legitimacy through culminated in the January 8, 2023 insurrection in Brasília, after Bolsonaro lost the 2022 presidential election for Lula da Silva (Hunter 2023). This insurrection followed a playbook in which a political elite aligned with Bolsonaro disseminated statements through social media about electoral fraud and military intervention (Bastos and Recuero 2023). This violent rejection of electoral outcomes represents the complete breakdown of democratic resonance consummated by an authoritarian imposition.

#### **4. Theoretical Insights**

Rosa's multiple dimensions of human experience work as a compass to situate Brazilian contemporary politics. In effect, his framework allowed us to understand how Brazil's crisis operated simultaneously across material, spiritual, and ideational registers. The crisis of democracy was about economic stagnation (material), a loss of faith and meaning of socio-political relations (existential), and a battle over democracy's very identity (social). As previously stated, Rosa's framework transcends the typical fragmentation found in contemporary social theory. Unlike theories that privilege one dimension over others, whether materialist approaches that emphasize economic structures, culturalist theories that focus on meaning-making, or phenomenological frameworks that prioritize transcendent experiences, Rosa's acceleration and resonance concepts operate across all three registers. This multidimensional coherence allows for analytical elaboration on complex phenomena that resist reductive explanations, offering an encompassing sociological perspective.

The normative-critical dimension distinguishes Rosa's work from the value-neutral positivist traditions that have dominated social science methodology. Rather than describing social phenomena or accepting existing preference structures as given, Rosa's framework provides tools for critically evaluating the quality of social life itself. We were able to identify how individuals' feelings of alienation in Brazil aggregated into the macro-political phenomenon of Bolsonaro's rise, demonstrating how personal moments of dissonance constitute broader social change. Furthermore, Rosa's concept of "the good life" emerges not from abstract philosophical deduction but from empirical analysis of how human beings manifest in their relationships with the world. In effect, this parameter allowed us to identify Bolsonaro's appeal as a deceptive promise of a "good life." As

genuine resonance involves mutual transformation and recognition, it was possible to recognize a parallel transformation in Bolsonaro's Brazil that provoked further social division leading to what we call pseudo-resonance. In the Brazilian context, Bolsonaro's pseudo-resonance offered only the hollow satisfaction of destruction and the affirmation of one's grievances through the negation of others.

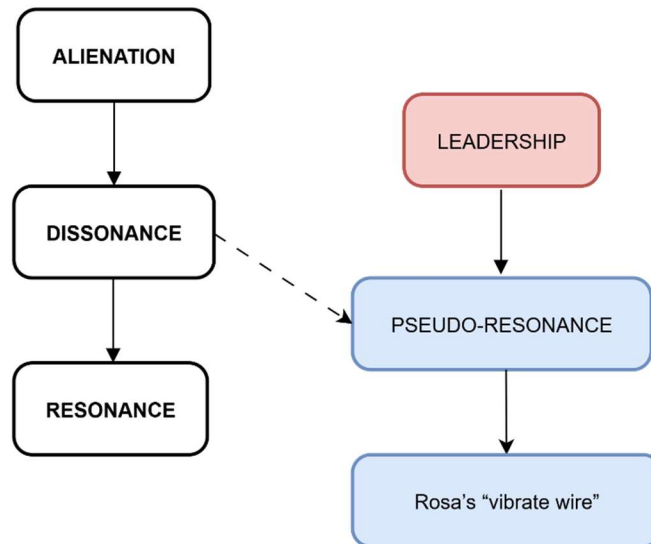
The observation of relational subjectivity allowed us to understand how in a moment of dissonance, many Brazilians were in search of meaningful identity, which was built negotiating with alterity leading to social polarization. This understanding of subjectivity in times of crisis helps us to situate a radicalized ideological orientation of Bolsonaro's followers, which are far removed from a recognition of subjectivity in others and in themselves. Based on the Brazilian case, we have a better idea on how the moment of dissonance can serve as a moment of political instrumentalization of Rosa's (2019: 36) "vibrate wire" (*vibrierenden Draht*) that connects individuals with the world. It is important to note that the capture of this "wire" is a central action/attitude of the rationale provided that in pseudo-resonance state it is possible to find some element of Rosa's resonance, namely, contradictory, touching, affirmative, and self-effective. This leads us to further inquire about the sustainability "pseudo-resonance," which seems to be self-defeating as the momentum of Bolsonaro's "movement" apparently receded.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 2 describes this article's adaptation of Rosa's framework based on Brazil's democratic decline. This figure represents a process where societal alienation creates dissonance, which, in an enabling context, can be resolved through authentic resonance. However, the Brazilian case presents a subtype of dissonance: alienation still produces dissonance, but instead of genuine transformation, it leads to pseudo-resonance, which in essence is a manufactured interplay controlled by leadership. This leadership captures Rosa's concept of the "vibrating wire" of social synergy, not to create authentic connection, but to manipulate it for their own purposes.

**Figure 2:** Adaptation of Rosa's resonance process

---

<sup>12</sup> Bolsonaro after the 2023 coup attempt, although indicted for sedition and having his political rights legally suspended, remains a popular politician. An opinion poll indicates that if he would be eligible to run for the 2026 presidential election as Lula's contender, he would obtain 26% of the votes and Lula 32% (Globo-G1 2025).



Source: Own elaboration

Four questions emerge in this expanded interpretation of Rosa’s framework. The first question concerns the duration of this pseudo-resonance: is it a permanent state and, if not, how does it lead to resonance? This is a critical question because it helps us to understand the extent of the individual and socio-political transformations, if any, in the state of “pseudo-resonance”. This leads to a second question, which refers to the type of transformation that the world experiences under “pseudo-resonance”: is it an adaptive transformation (*Weltanverwandlung*) or substantial escalation of knowledge (*Weltaneignung*)? The third question addresses the pathways (equifinality) to achieving resonance after a period of its pseudo-form. It seems, based on the Brazilian case, that resonance is still achievable.<sup>13</sup> If this assumption is true, what are the pathways a society that already experienced pseudo-resonance can consciously move towards authentic resonance? The fourth question refers to the real ability to reach in politics a state of resonance in which the ideal of “controllability” is relaxed, provided that Rosa considers that control is a requirement for institutions to exist (Rosa 2020: 86-101), and yet resonance contains the attribute of “uncontrollability.” The application of this extended framework in other cases of democratic decline might be instrumental to provide answers to the above questions. These are issues that a future research agenda cannot overlook.

## 5. Integrating Existing Approaches: Why Rosa’s Framework Provides Synthesis

<sup>13</sup> There are indications that political conflict and polarization is in a state of constant web and flow, indicating that it is contingent upon the positioning of the media and political events (Santos Junio 2023).

Brazil's democratic decline has generated substantial scholarly attention from multiple theoretical perspectives. While these approaches illuminate important dimensions of the crisis—institutional failures, elite strategies, class dynamics, and citizenship deficits—they remain analytically fragmented, each capturing partial aspects without explaining the underlying socio-temporal logic binding them together. This section demonstrates how Rosa's framework provides the integrative mechanism that explains why and when these various factors coalesce into democratic decline, without necessarily competing with these theories. In doing so, we show that Rosa's acceleration and resonance concepts offer a meta-theoretical lens that synthesizes institutional, structural, and experiential dimensions into a coherent explanation.

### *5.1 Rosa's Framework as Integrative Mechanism*

Scholars have identified multiple drivers of Brazil's crisis: executive aggrandizement (Bermeo 2016), party system volatility (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), corruption and state capture (Operation Car Wash), historical patterns of “regulated citizenship” (Dos Santos 1979), and the “perverse confluence” between democratization and neoliberalism (Dagnino 2004). Each provides genuine insights.

Rosa's acceleration theory explains the critical element missing from institutional accounts: why the 2010s? Brazil had experienced before corruption scandals (e.g., Collor, *mensalão*), economic downturns before (1980s, late 1990s), and populist leaders (e.g., Vargas, Collor). What made 2013-2023 different was the temporal context. Social acceleration had reached a point where democratic institutions' deliberative pace—once accepted as legitimate—became interpreted as dysfunction. This temporal mismatch transformed manageable problems (e.g., corruption, recession) into existential crises because they violated the “dynamic stabilization” logic that had sustained post-1985 democratic legitimacy.

Similarly, Rosa's resonance theory explains what institutional theories cannot: why voters embraced institutional destruction. Executive aggrandizement theories describe how Bolsonaro attacked institutions but not why citizens supported this. Populism studies describe his rhetoric but not its deeper experiential appeal. Rosa's dissonance concept reveals that Brazilians were not merely dissatisfied with policy outcomes—they experienced fundamental alienation from democratic processes themselves. Bolsonaro's pseudo-resonance exploited this by offering the feeling of

connection through shared destruction, something rational choice or institutional theories cannot capture.

### *5.2 Democratic Decline in the 20th-Century: Structure and Agency*

Democratic crises in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Latin America, particularly in Brazil, generated influential approaches to political change. Much scholarship focused on structural transformations linked to industrialization and shifting class relations, which were seen as conducive to new leadership styles, especially populism. Alongside populism studies, the “democratic breakdown” literature and the “bureaucratic-authoritarian” approach became central to explaining authoritarian trajectories beginning in the 1960s, emphasizing structural tensions, elite coalitions, and institutional fragilities.

Populism gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century as a framework for interpreting large-scale social mobilization behind charismatic leaders and state-led political agendas associated with the cooptation of organized labor (Weyland 2001). In Argentina, Juan Perón mobilized workers through expanded labor rights and the creation of a minimal welfare system. In Brazil, by contrast, Getúlio Vargas relied on corporatist mechanisms to incorporate and demobilize labor, generating prolonged political instability (Fonseca and Heines 2012). Beyond political economy, populism scholarship also addressed social development. In Brazil, Dos Santos (1979) argued that citizenship evolved largely as a state concession, reinforcing top-down control over social transformation.

With democratization during the “Third Wave,” populism reemerged in new forms. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Argentina and Brazil experienced neoliberal populism under Carlos Menem (1989–1998) and Fernando Collor (1990–1992), combining charismatic leadership with sweeping market liberalization. Edwards (2019) characterizes these reformist governments as a “new populism.” In the 2000s, the “Pink Tide” brought leftist administrations often labeled populist (Grigera 2017). Initially sustained by economic growth, these governments lost support as growth slowed and policy autonomy narrowed within liberalized economies (Weyland et al. 2013). More recently, Brazil under Bolsonaro and Argentina under Milei have experienced ultra-right populism marked by anti-system, Manichean rhetoric, intense polarization, and institutional erosion (Borges and Zanotti 2024). Existing theories struggle to fully capture this contemporary variant.

The democratic breakdown framework developed by Linz and Stepan (1978) profoundly shaped interpretations of regime collapse in the 1960s and 1970s. Building on modernization theory (Lipset 1959; Moore 1966), they argued that industrialization alone does not secure democracy; rather, regime outcomes depend on class coalitions. In Latin America, middle classes often aligned with military and economic elites, fearing redistributive policies from elected leftist governments in weak welfare states. These strategic calculations fostered authoritarian alliances designed to preserve existing privilege structures.

Complementing this perspective, O'Donnell (1973) analyzed authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay as “bureaucratic-authoritarian” systems forged through alliances between military institutions and technocratic elites seeking controlled modernization. In Brazil, scholars emphasized the military’s self-conception as a professional “moderating power” (Stepan 1971) and its systematic strategies of cooptation and repression (Schmitter 1973), highlighting how institutional legacies and elite strategies shaped the country’s authoritarian trajectory.

Earlier frameworks explained democratic collapse through elite coordination against democracy. Brazil’s 21st-century crisis emerged differently—through popular electoral support for an anti-democratic leader rather than military coup. This shift requires frameworks attuned to citizen experience in accelerated late modernity.

### *5.3 Democratic Decline in the 21st-Century: Multiplicity of factors*

Since the mid-2000s, democratic decline has become a global phenomenon (Abramowitz 2018), marked by institutional weakening, power concentration, and declining capacity to manage political conflict (Laebens and Lührmann 2021). Democratic backsliding typically involves restrictions on civil liberties, press freedom, political opposition, and electoral integrity. Institutionally, scholars highlight key drivers such as executive aggrandizement, party system transformations, and coalition-building aimed at state capture.

Executive aggrandizement has featured prominently in contemporary democracies, as elected leaders expand their authority by undermining checks and balances, particularly targeting courts and legislatures (Bermeo 2016). This process has coincided with the radicalization of once-centrist parties, eroding the ideological moderation that stabilizes democratic competition (Gidron and Ziblatt 2019). Democratic systems may also enable their own erosion when they fail to constrain extremist actors

operating within formal rules (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Autocrats exploit such vulnerabilities through strategies including court-packing (Garcia Holgado and Sánchez Urribarri 2023) and politicized corruption (Stephenson 2015). Polarization and misinformation further undermine institutional trust, legitimizing authoritarian practices (Lindberg 2023; Stepan and Kaufman 2021), particularly in contexts marked by deep ethnic, racial, or ideological divisions (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) and perceived economic stagnation or blocked mobility (Stoesz 2022).

Brazil's recent democratic decline reflects these institutional dynamics. Executive aggrandizement was evident during Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, characterized by repeated attacks on the judiciary and legislature, hostility toward the press, and nostalgic references to military rule. His government also weakened transparency mechanisms by altering legislation on access to information and digital governance (e.g., Law 12.527/2011; Law 12.965/2014), expanding executive secrecy. These tensions culminated in his indictment in November 2024 for allegedly attempting to prevent the inauguration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Maia 2023).

Party system transformation constituted another enabling condition. Brazil's fragmented and volatile party landscape created space for Bolsonaro's 2018 rise as an anti-establishment outsider under the small Social Liberal Party (PSL), marking a sharp rightward shift. Central to governance dynamics was the "Centrão," a bloc of ideologically fluid, patronage-oriented parties that exchanged legislative support for access to state resources, weakening programmatic politics and reinforcing transactional coalition-building.<sup>14</sup>

State capture dynamics were exposed by Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato), launched in 2014, which uncovered systemic corruption involving Petrobrás executives, major construction firms, and politicians across parties. The scandal eroded trust in public institutions and contributed to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 and the imprisonment of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2018, excluding him from that year's presidential race. The cumulative effect of political crises between 2013 and 2018 created

---

<sup>14</sup> The terminology "*Centrão*" has been increasingly used in the Brazilian mainstream media to refer to a center-right group of small political parties that have been essential to support legislative proposals of Brazilian presidents in a multiparty system that makes difficult for any party to hold a majority of seats in either of the houses in the national congress. However, these parties have become politically more relevant with the emergence of the "new right" in Brazilian politics (Bezerra and Vieira 2022).

conditions conducive to Bolsonaro's electoral success. Yet no single institutional theory fully explains Brazil's democratic erosion.

Sociological perspectives complement institutional accounts by emphasizing limitations in citizenship and participation. Brazil continues to exhibit what Dos Santos (1979) termed "regulated citizenship," whereby rights are mediated and constrained by state authority. Dagnino (2004) argues that since the 1980s Brazil has experienced a "perverse confluence" between democratization and neoliberal reform. While democratization sought to expand "nova cidadania," neoliberal restructuring shifted state responsibilities to the third sector and diluted the substantive meaning of participation and civil society.<sup>15</sup> As a result, civic mobilization often failed to transform state institutions, reinforcing elite dominance. Similarly, De Carvalho (2002) identifies an "inverted trajectory" of citizenship in Brazil, where rights were granted by the state rather than conquered through societal struggle.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the European sequence—civil, then political, then social rights—Brazil's path moved from limited social rights to political and finally civil rights, producing a weaker foundation for participatory citizenship.

These institutional and sociological accounts identify crucial mechanisms but leave unexplained the specific timing, popular support for destruction, and experiential dimensions of Brazil's crisis. Rosa's framework provides this missing dimension.

#### *5.4 Synthesis: Rosa as Meta-Theory*

Table 2 shows how existing theories of democratic decline can be complemented by Rosa's framework, which supplies the socio-temporal logic explaining when and why institutional and sociological factors become politically consequential. Executive aggrandizement succeeds when citizens experience dissonance; corruption scandals become regime-threatening when they violate expectations of dynamic stabilization; populist appeals resonate when they offer forms of pseudo-resonance. Rosa's concepts thus operate as meta-theoretical mechanisms that integrate otherwise fragmented explanations into a coherent account.

---

<sup>15</sup> This interpretation connects with Rosa's dissonance, provided that Dagnino's account serves to understand the socio-political outcome of the process of emptying institutions of their meaningful and resonant potential.

<sup>16</sup> This "inverted trajectory" can be seen as a condition of Brazil's political culture that creates a non-resonant relationship between citizen and state, in which the state is a distant benefactor, not a partner of civil society. This could explain the pseudo-resonance developed by Bolsonaro.

Operation Car Wash illustrates this integrative move. Institutional theories explain the corruption networks and judicial processes involved, while sociological theories clarify how historically weak citizenship structures enabled elite capture. Yet neither explains why this scandal became regime-threatening when earlier episodes (e.g., mensalão, Collor) did not produce comparable systemic destabilization. Rosa's acceleration thesis offers an answer: by 2014, social acceleration had intensified expectations of dynamic stabilization. Corruption became intolerable not necessarily because it was objectively worse, but because it violated temporal expectations of continuous improvement and institutional responsiveness in ways previous scandals had not.

Similarly, institutional accounts accurately describe Bolsonaro's attacks on democratic institutions, but they cannot fully explain why millions of citizens supported them. Rosa's concept of dissonance helps clarify this paradox: significant segments of society experienced democratic institutions not as channels of representation, but as sources of alienation. Attacks on these institutions were, therefore, interpreted not as democratic decline, but as attempts to restore responsiveness. In this sense, Rosa does not replace institutional or sociological theories; he explains the experiential and temporal conditions under which their mechanisms gain traction.

**Table 2:** Integrating Theoretical Approaches Through Rosa's Framework

	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Core Explanation for Democratic Decline</b>	<b>Key Insights for Brazil under Democratic Decline</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Rosa's Integration</b>
<b>20st-Century Theories</b>	<i>Populism Studies</i>	Leadership style co-opting or mobilizing masses.	Context for Bolsonaro's anti-establishment rhetoric.	It does not fully explain the specific timing or the experiential appeal in an accelerated pace of late modernity.	Acceleration explains the timing; pseudo-resonance explains appeal beyond rhetoric by offering emotional reattachment in conditions of alienation.
	<i>Breakdown Theory</i>	Class alliances and elite pacts against democracy.	Historical context of elite-led authoritarianism.	It is less effective in elucidating deterioration caused by the popular election of an anti-establishment leader, who enjoys ample popular support.	Under acceleration, class identities fragment and new resonance/dissonance dynamics reshape political alignments beyond traditional class coalitions.

	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Core Explanation for Democratic Decline</b>	<b>Key Insights for Brazil under Democratic Decline</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Rosa's Integration</b>
<b>21st-Century Theories</b>	<i>Political Science Theories</i>	Executive aggrandizement, party system collapse, state capture.	They elucidate some factors contributing to democratic decline under Bolsonaro (e.g., assault on institutions).	These theories fail to offer a cohesive explanation for why voters are sympathetic to democratic institutional destruction.	Dissonance explains why alienated citizens interpret institutional attacks as corrective rather than destructive.
	<i>Sociological Theories</i>	"Perverse confluence" of liberalism and democratization, "Inverted trajectory" of citizen's rights	Civil society in Brazil has historically been constrained by elites through mechanisms designed to limit the power and liberation of citizens.	They assist in explaining the discontent with democratic institutions and the emergence of the "new right" in Brazil. They fail to adequately address the ideological extremisms of elected politicians.	Acceleration intensifies alienation, generating demand for new state-society linkages that populist actors exploit through pseudo-resonance.

*Source: Own elaboration*

Having demonstrated how Rosa's framework synthesizes fragmented theoretical insights into a comprehensive explanation of Brazil's democratic decline, we now consider the broader implications for understanding and addressing democratic crises in late modernity.

## **6. Conclusion**

Brazil's democratic decline from 2013 to 2022 has not been comprehensively interpreted considering temporal and relational parameters. As this article has shown, Hartmut Rosa's theoretical and conceptual framework allow us to identify deeper socio-temporal dynamics that fundamentally shaped this crisis in Brazil.

To recapitulate our application of Rosa's framework, the pressures of social acceleration generated public expectations for responsive governance in Brazil. However, the country's existing democratic institutions proved structurally incapable of meeting citizens' expectations in the 2010s, which in turn created widespread citizen frustration with the pace and quality of democratic responsiveness. This frustration evolved into profound democratic dissonance, which can be framed as a systemic breakdown in the resonant relationships between citizens and governing institutions, that were particularly exacerbated by corruption scandals, economic stagnation, and political instability. Such context produced alienation, in Rosa's terminology, rendering the electorate vulnerable

to a Manichean leadership style and strategy which promised to establish meaningful political connection through the demise of democratic institutions, generally perceived by the public as largely unresponsive. Therefore, Brazil's democratic crisis, instead of being only a result of contextual policy or institutional failure, it was a crisis of resonance: a dissonance with origins in the quality of citizen-state relationships.

Expanding on Rosa's theoretical framework, we identified the possibility of a "pseudo-resonance," which created an illusion of resonance. Through the Brazilian democratic decline, it is possible to observe that Bolsonaro's appeal was not on policy-oriented but the performance of responsiveness. In effect, he did not "fix" as promised the existing institutions. Differently, he channeled citizens' rage at such institutions, making his supporters to feel heard. The temporal mismatch between an accelerated society and slower democratic pace, often deemed ineffective for not contributing to the "dynamic stabilization," has been a critical trigger of dissonance in Brazil in the face of the economic slowdown and corruption probe between 2013 and 2018.

This analysis contributes to democratic theory by demonstrating how Rosa's concepts of acceleration and alienation in late modernity fundamentally alter the functioning of established institutions such as democracy within contemporary contexts. The framework reveals that democratic systems themselves, not only capitalist economic structures, can generate the very alienation and disconnection they purport to remedy. When democratic institutions fail to provide resonant channels for citizen engagement, they become sources of alienation rather than solutions to it. This dynamic manifested clearly in Brazil's macro-level democratic crisis, in which mismatches between citizen expectations and democratic responsiveness created conditions favoring authoritarian alternatives.

Beyond enhancing our analytical understanding of democratic decline, Rosa's framework helps us to think about ideas concerning democratic renewal. The resonance theory suggests that effective democratic reforms must prioritize the quality of citizen-state relationships. This might include institutional innovations designed to bring governing processes closer to citizen experience and create more responsive channels for political engagement, such as the democratic reforms proposed by McCormick (2001) that emphasize direct participation and elite accountability. Rosa's framework challenges democratic theorists and practitioners to reimagine how representative democratic systems can foster genuine resonance between citizens and their collective governance, contributing as such to political arrangements that enhance democratic life.

This analysis suggests a broader research program examining how late modern temporalities interact with democratic institutions globally. Future work might investigate whether pseudo-resonance manifests differently across regime types, how it relates to media environments, and what conditions enable transitions from pseudo-resonance back toward authentic democratic resonance.

## References

- Abramowitz, Michael J. 2018. Democracy in Crisis. Freedom House.  
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/democracy-crisis>
- Ansell, Aaron. 2018. Impeaching Dilma Rousseff: The Double Life of Corruption Allegations on Brazil's Political Right. *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 59(4): 312–31. doi:10.1080/14735784.2018.1499432.
- Bastos, Marco and Recuero, Raquel. 2023. The Insurrectionist Playbook: Jair Bolsonaro and the National Congress of Brazil. *Social Media + Society*, 9(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231211881>
- Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. On democratic backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>
- Bernardino-Costa, Joaze. 2023. Opening Pandora's Box: The Extreme Right and the Resurgence of Racism in Brazil. *Latin American Perspectives*, 50(1): 98-114.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X221147596>
- Bezerra, Gabriella Maria Lima and Vieira, Márcia Paula Chaves. 2022. Interpretações e poderes em disputa: o ressurgimento do Centrão na política brasileira. *Caderno Eletrônico de Ciências Sociais*, 10: 36-59.  
<https://doi.org/10.47456/cadecs.v10i1.39670>
- Borges, André and Zanotti, Lisa. 2024. Authoritarian, But Not Nativist: Classifying Far-Right Parties in Latin America. *Political Studies*, 0(0).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217241301317>
- Caiani, Manuela, and Graziano, Paolo. 2022. The Three Faces of Populism in Power: Polity, Policies and Politics. *Government and Opposition*, 57(4): 569–588.  
doi:10.1017/gov.2022.4
- Cavalcanti, Davi Barboza, Zuccolotto, Vinicius Rodrigues. Bringel, Elder Paes Barreto, Costa, Fábio Regueira Jardelino da, and Oliveira, Tassiana Moura de. 2019.

- Digital activism and indignation Nets in Brazil: The pressure groups. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 11(1): 109-130. DOI: 10.1177/1866802X19840455
- Dagnino, Evelina. 2004. Construção democrática, neoliberalismo e participação: os dilemas da confluência perversa. *Política & Sociedade*, 1(5): 139-164.
- Dahl, Robert. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Folha de São Paulo. 2019. Para 81% Lava-Jato ainda não cumpriu seu objetivo e deve continuar. *Folha de São Paulo*, Dezembro 13, 2019. Available at <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/12/para-81-lava-jato-ainda-nao-cumpriu-seu-objetivo-e-deve-continuar-diz-datafolha.shtml>
- De Carvalho, José Murilo. 2002. *Cidadania no Brasil: O Longo Caminho*. Civilização Brasileira.
- Dewey, John. 2009. The mania for motion and speed. In: Rosa, Hartmut and Scheuerman, William E. (eds.), *High Speed Society; Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. Pennsylvania University Press (pp. 61-63).
- Do Santos, Wanderley Guilherme. 1979. *Cidadania e Justiça: A Política Social na Ordem Brasileira*. Campus.
- Do Vale, Helder Ferreira. 2015. Territorial polarization in Brazil's 2014 presidential elections. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 25(3): 297-311.
- Do Vale, Helder Ferreira. 2022. Brazil's Digital Politics and the Crisis of Democracy (2013–2018). In H. F. Do Vale (Ed.), *Democracy: Crises and changes across the globe (pp. 1–26)*. IntechOpen.
- Dussauge-Laguna, Mauricio I. 2022. The promises and perils of populism for democratic policymaking: the case of Mexico. *Policy Sciences*, 55: 777–803. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-022-09469-z>
- Edwards, Sebastian. 2019. "On Latin American Populism, and Its Echoes around the World." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33(4): 76–99.
- Ferrari Haines, André Ernesto, Ferrari-Filho, Fernando, and Neyra, Hernan. 2020. The consequences of the international financial crisis and the great recession in Argentina and Brazil. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, 40(1): 68-85. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-31572020-3048>
- Fonseca, Pedro Cezar Dutra, and Haines, Andrés Ferrari. 2012. Developmentalism and economic policy: a comparison between Vargas and Perón. *Economia e Sociedade*, 21: 1043-1074. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-06182012000400013>

- Globo. 2025. Os recados da pesquisa Quaest de julho para Lula e para a oposição. <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2025/07/18/os-recados-da-pesquisa-quaest-de-julho-para-lula-e-para-a-oposicao.ghtml>
- Gidron, Noam and Ziblatt, Daniel. 2019. Center-right political parties in advanced democracies. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1): 17–35.
- Grigera, Juan. 2017. Populism in Latin America: Old and New Populisms in Argentina and Brazil.” *International Political Science Review*, 38(4): 441–55. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26940303>
- Garcia Holgado, Benjamin, and Sánchez Urribarri, Raúl. 2023. Court-packing and democratic decay: A necessary relationship? *Global Constitutionalism*, 12(2): 350-377.
- Holland, Márcio. 2019. Fiscal crisis in Brazil: causes and remedy: Crise fiscal no Brasil: causas e remédio. *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, 39(154): 88-107.
- Horowitz, Juliana Menasce. 2013. Dissatisfaction in Brazil, Despite Positive Views of the Economy. Pew Research Center. Available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2013/06/21/dissatisfaction-in-brazil-despite-positive-views-of-the-economy/>
- Hunter, Wendy. 2023. The road to January 8: Bolsonaro’s authoritarian project and the assault on Brazilian democracy. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 55(3): 419–447.
- Hunter, Wendy, and Power, Timothy J. 2022. Bolsonaro and the destruction of democratic norms in Brazil. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3): 26-40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2022.0031>
- Jang, Seung-Jin. 2009. Are Diverse Political Networks Always Bad for Participatory Democracy? Indifference, Alienation, and Political Disagreements. *American Politics Research*, 37(5): 879-898. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X09332790>
- Junior Santos, Marcelo Alves. 2023. As Flutuações de Longo Prazo da Polarização no Brasil: Análise do Compartilhamento de Informações Políticas Entre 2011 e 2019. *DADOS*, 66 (2): e20200076. <https://doi.org/10.1590/dados.2023.66.2.287>
- Kerstenetzky, Celia Lessa, Uchôa, Christiane, and Silva, Nelson do Valle. 2015. The Elusive New Middle Class in Brazil. *Brazilian Political Science Review*, 9(3): 21-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1981-38212015000300018>

- Laebens, Melis G., and Lührmann, Anna. 2021. What halts democratic erosion? The changing role of accountability. *Democratization*, 28 (5), 908-928. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2021.1897109
- Levitsky, Steven, and Ziblatt, Daniel. 2018. *How democracies die*. Crown.
- Lima, Marcus Eugênio Oliveira, and Dalila Xavier de França. 2021. Crisis, anomie and trust in institutions in Brazil. *Revista Psicologia Política*, 21(52): 630-645.
- Lindberg, Staffan I. 2023. The state of democracy: Global challenges and challengers. *International Studies Review*, 25(2), viad019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viad019>
- Linz, Juan José, and Stepan, Alfred. 1978. *The breakdown of democratic regimes: Latin America*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1): 69–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1951731>.
- Maia, Tatyana de Amaral. 2023. Negacionismo histórico e emergência da extrema direita A crise do regime moderno de historicidade no Brasil (2019-2022). *Varia Historia*, 39(81): e23312. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104-87752023000300012>
- Mearsheimer, John J. 2019. Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order. *International Security*, 43(4): 7–50. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00342](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342)
- Mendonça, Ricardo Fabrino, Selen A. Ercan, Umut Ozguc, Stephanie Lorraine Gomes Reis, and Paula Guimarães Simões. 2019. Protests as “Events”: The Symbolic Struggles in 2013 Demonstrations in Turkey and Brazil. *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, 27(69): 1-27. doi: 10.1590/1678987319276901
- McCormick, John P. 2001. Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism. *The American Political Science Review*, 95(2): 297–313. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3118122>.
- Moffitt, Benjamin. 2016. Understanding Contemporary Populism: Populism as a Political Style. In *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*, 1st ed., 28–50. Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvqsd8.6>.
- Moisés, José. 2010. Os significados da democracia segundo os brasileiros. *Opinião Pública*, 16: 269 – 309. Doi:10.1590/S0104-62762010000200001
- Moore, Barrington Jr. 1966. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Beacon Press.

- O'Donnell, Guillermo. 1973. *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism*. Berkeley, California University Press.
- Poder 360. 2017. Vergonha de ser brasileiro é recorde e alcança 34% da população. Poder 360, May 2, 2017. Available at <https://www.poder360.com.br/brasil/datafolha-vergonha-de-ser-brasileiro-e-recorde-e-alcanca-34-da-populacao/>
- Riedel, Rafal. 2017. Populism and Its Democratic, Non-Democratic, and Anti-Democratic Potential. *Polish Sociological Review*, 199: 287-298.
- Saad-Filho, A. 2013. Mass Protests under 'Left Neoliberalism': Brazil, June-July 2013. *Critical Sociology*, 39(5), 657-669. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205133501906>
- Sahd, Fábio Bacila. 2024. É a retorica bolsonarista fascista?: reflexões necessárias. *Revista Angelus Novus*, 20: 1-24. Doi: 0.11606/issn.2179-5487.vi20p198186
- Sanín-Restrepo, Ricardo. 2016. *Decolonizing Democracy: Power in a Solid State*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Santos, Anderlany Aragão, Menezes, Marcela., Leite, Acácio Zuriga, and Sauer, Sérgio. 2021. Ameaças, fragilização e desmonte de políticas e instituições indigenistas, quilombolas e ambientais no Brasil. *Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, 29(3), 669–698.
- Santos, Everton Rodrigo; Hoffmann, Fábio; and Duarter, Scarleth. 2020. A (Des)Confiança dos Brasileiros na Democracia. *Revista Opinião Jurídica*, 18(27): 170-191. <https://doi.org/10.12662/2447-6641oj.v18i27.p170-191.2020>
- Scheuerman, William E. 2009. Citizenship and Speed. In: Rosa, Hartmut and Scheuerman, William E. (eds.), *High Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. Pennsylvania University Press (pp. 287-307).
- Schmitt, Carl. 2009. The Motorized Legislator. In: Rosa, Hartmut and Scheuerman, William E. (eds.), *High Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. Pennsylvania University Press (pp. 65-73).
- Schmitter, Philippe C. 1973. Introduction. In Schmitter, P. (Ed.), *Military Rule in Latin America*. Sage Publications (p. vii-xiii).
- Silva, Luciana Leite da, Patrícia Emanuelle Nascimento, Ordália Cristina Gonçalves Araújo, and Tamiris Maia Gonçalves Pereira. 2021. The Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil in Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 6. doi:10.3389/fsoc.2021.611336
- Stepan, Alfred. 1971. *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

- Stepan, Alfred, and Kaufman, Robert. 2021. The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 32(4): 27–41.
- Stephenson, Matthew. 2015. Corruption and democratic institutions: A review and synthesis. In S. Rose-Ackerman and P. Lagunes (Eds.), *Greed, corruption, and the modern state* (pp. 92–133). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781784714703.00010>
- Stoesz, David. 2022. *Meritocracy, populism, and the future of democracy*. Routledge.
- Tamaki, E.R., and Venturelli, G. 2023. International Constellations of the Populist Radical-Right: An Analysis of Jair Bolsonaro’s International Speeches (2019–2020). In: Lacatus, C., Meibauer, G., Löffmann, G. (eds) *Political Communication and Performative Leadership*. The Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41640-8\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-41640-8_14)
- Telles, Helcimara. 2025. Protests and Emergence of New Brazilian Right-Wing: Perception of Democracy, Ideologies and Anti-PT. In: Telles, H., Silva, J. (eds) *Public Opinion and Turmoil in Latin American Democracies*. Latin American Societies. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83105-8\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83105-8_5)
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2009. *Social acceleration: Ethical and political consequences of a desynchronized high-speed society*. In: Rosa, Hartmut and Scheuerman, William E. (eds.), *High Speed Society; Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. University Park: Pennsylvania University Press (pp. 77-111).
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2013a. "Conclusion: Frenetic Standstill? The End of History". *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, pp. 299-322. <https://doi.org/10.7312/rosa14834-017>
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2013b. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2017. Dynamic Stabilization, the Triple A. Approach to the Good Life, and the Resonance Conception. *Questions de communication*, 31: 437-456. <https://doi.org/10.4000/questionsdecommunication.11228>
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2018. Available, accessible, attainable: The mindset of growth and the resonance conception of the good life. In *The Good Life Beyond Growth*, Hartmut Rosa and Christoph Henning (eds.). New York: Routledge.
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2019. *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Polity Press. (Epub version)

- Rosa, Hartmut. 2020. *The Uncontrollability of the World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rosa, Hartmut. 2023. Property as a World Relation (Weltverhältnis): Reflections on the Structural Change of Possessive “Weltbeziehung.” In Hollstein, Bettina, Rosa, Hartmut and Rüpke, Jörg (eds.), “*Weltbeziehung*”: *The Study of our Relationship to the World*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus.
- Vicino, Thomas J., and Fahlberg, Anjuli. 2017. The politics of contested urban space: The 2013 protest movement in Brazil. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 39(7), 1001–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2017.1323545>
- Virilio, Paul. 2009. The State of Emergency. In: Rosa, Hartmut and Scheuerman, William E. (eds.), *High Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power and Modernity*. University Park: Pennsylvania University Press (pp. 201-213).
- Welzel, Christian. 2021. Democratic Horizons: What Value Change Reveals about the Future of Democracy. *Democratization*, 28: 992-1016.
- Weyland, Kurt. 2001. Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics*, 34(1): 1–22.
- Weyland, Kurt, de la Torre, Carlos, and Kornblith, Miriam. 2013. Latin America’s Authoritarian Drift. *Journal of Democracy*, 24(3): 18-32.
- World Value Survey. 2025. Brazil: World Value Survey Data (online data analysis). Available at <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>

This preprint was submitted under the following conditions:

- The authors declare that the necessary Terms of Free and Informed Consent of participants or patients in the research were obtained and are described in the manuscript, when applicable.
- The authors declare that the preparation of the manuscript followed the ethical norms of scientific communication.
- The authors declare that they are aware that they are solely responsible for the content of the preprint and that the deposit in SciELO Preprints does not mean any commitment on the part of SciELO, except its preservation and dissemination.
- The authors declare that the data, applications, and other content underlying the manuscript are referenced.
- The deposited manuscript is in PDF format.
- The authors declare that the research that originated the manuscript followed good ethical practices and that the necessary approvals from research ethics committees, when applicable, are described in the manuscript.
- The authors declare that once a manuscript is posted on the SciELO Preprints server, it can only be taken down on request to the SciELO Preprints server Editorial Secretariat, who will post a retraction notice in its place.
- The authors agree that the approved manuscript will be made available under a [Creative Commons CC-BY](#) license.
- The submitting author declares that the contributions of all authors and conflict of interest statement are included explicitly and in specific sections of the manuscript.
- The authors declare that the manuscript was not deposited and/or previously made available on another preprint server or published by a journal.
- If the manuscript is being reviewed or being prepared for publishing but not yet published by a journal, the authors declare that they have received authorization from the journal to make this deposit.
- The submitting author declares that all authors of the manuscript agree with the submission to SciELO Preprints.