



The Challenges of Accountability in Democracy: A Comparative Study of Donald Trump's 2021 Impeachment and Jair Bolsonaro's 2023 Electoral Trial

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Abstract

Following Donald Trump's defeat in the U.S. 2020 presidential election, his supporters stormed the Capitol under the false belief of electoral fraud, leading to his second impeachment. Similarly, Jair Bolsonaro spread unsubstantiated claims about Brazil's electoral system during the 2022 presidential election, and after his loss, his supporters attacked the Three Powers Plaza, resulting in the former president's electoral trial. However, while Trump was acquitted and later reelected, Bolsonaro was declared ineligible to hold office until 2030. This study explores the reasons behind these divergent outcomes, challenging the assumption that stronger democracies ensure more effective accountability. Using process tracing, we analyze the accountability mechanisms in the U.S. and Brazil through three key explanatory variables: (1) the normative framework governing oversight institutions, (2) the electoral system within which these institutions operate, and (3) prevailing national conceptions of democracy. By systematically comparing these cases, we aim to provide insights into how institutional design and democratic perceptions shape accountability in different political contexts, and ultimately impact how accountable an incumbent truly is.

Keywords: accountability, democracy, electoral system, institutional oversight, process tracing.