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Beyond Jair Bolsonaro: The Making of Brazil's Environmental Crisis

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Beyond Jair Bolsonaro:
The Making of Brazil's Environmental Crisis

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies of Bard College

by
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Introduction

Over a year ago, the international community watched in horror as the Amazon, one of most valued ecosystems in the world, went up in flames in Brazil. About 3,800 square miles have been engulfed in fire resulting in mass amounts of indigenous resettlement causing a catastrophic shift in political strategies in order to accommodate for all the endangered ecosystems and species. Not only has this negatively affected surrounding communities and ecosystems, but also the atmosphere. The added carbon dioxide traps heat, altering the atmospheric circulation and causing the pollution levels to increase throughout the nation. For Brazil this means that resources, both financially and personal, will have to be allocated in the endangered areas. This scorching of the Amazon is a vivid testament of how far Brazil has fallen from the expectations raised by 1992's Rio's Earth Conference. That epic international event put Brazil on the map as a leader in the nascent global movement to protect the environment, and raised expectations the world over of how Brazil could show the world, but especially developing nations, how to sensibly balance development and environmental protection. So how to explain this fall from grace for Brazil—How did the country go from an international environmental darling to an international environmental pariah?

If there is a received conventional wisdom about the dismal state of affairs about the environment in Brazil, that wisdom would point to the rising influence of the Right in Brazil—especially the advent of the right-wing populist administration of Jair Bolsonaro.¹ This is especially prominent in the appointment of Ricardo Salles, the Minister of Environment and Tereza Cristina, Minister of Agriculture, both of which are known for their conservative

¹ “Brazil Farm Lobby Wins as Bolsonaro Grabs Control over Indigenous Lands | Reuters.” Accessed October 20, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-politics-agriculture/brazil-farm-lobby-wins-as-bolsonaro-grabs-control-over-indigenous-lands-idUSKCN1OW0OS>.

expansion policies of the agricultural sector. Under the first 11 months in office over 290 new pesticides were approved for use, causing detrimental health effects to only communities in the surrounding areas, but also prove to be toxic to the soil in turn contaminating food. In this paper, I argue that the “Bolsonaro factor” is just one of several factors in having created the current environmental crisis in Brazil. And, in fact, it may not be the most important since before his arrival in office conditions for the environment in Brazil were already very dire. In this paper, I pay special attention to three factors that preceded the Bolsonaro era: (1) shifting priorities for the international community after the Rio Conference, (2) the internal structural weaknesses of the Brazilian environmental movement, (3) the privileging of economic development over environmental protection under the years of PT rule (2003-2017).

The study is organized as follows. Part one provides a broad overview of the current environmental crisis in Brazil since the rise of the environmental movement in 1992. Part two explains the shifting of priorities from the international environmental community and how that put a cloud of judgement and obstacles for the environmental movement domestically, how the environmental social movement failed short of providing concrete action for environmental policy to flourish, and the prioritization of economic growth over environmental concerns, especially between 2003-2017, under the administrations of Lula DaSilva and Dilma Rouseff. Part three focuses on the Bolsonaro years and its attack on the environment. These differing explanations all play into one another, some often dictating the success of another. In sum, in the following pages I will detangle the notions that have led up to the idea that Bolsonaro is the one for blame for the current attack on the environment in Brazil. To be put bluntly, Bolsonaro’s assault on the environment was made possible by the factors that came before him. It will be

clear that a multiplicity of factors predated the actions done by Bolsonaro and have, arguably, ensured his success in carrying out unsustainable environmental policy.

PART I: An Overview of the Environmental Crisis

In the years since the Rio 1992 environmental conference, Brazil has faced a multitude of environmental tragedies. From fires to oil spills, the circumstances in Brazil are far from ideal. Over one million hectares of the Amazon has been burned and scorched, an ever-expanding cattle ranch operation has taken root in the Cerrado of Brazil, and with thousands of people dying from the Corona Virus Brazil has been a breath away from drowning in its own fumes. Over a year ago the international community watched through tearful eyes as one of the most valued ecosystems went up in flames in Brazil. This scorching flame proved to be a harsh metaphor for what was yet to come within Brazilian government and society through the presidency of Jair Bolosonaro. From decrease in international support and monetary contributions to the increase in climate science deniers running governmental committees, Bolsonaro has drastically changed the environmental circumstances in the nation. There is not a deeper contrast from the government we see today to the one in which fostered environmental progress in the wake of a new democratized nation. While the world watched the Amazon go up in flames the international community gasped in disbelief that such a catastrophic event could take place in what is one of the most highly contested lands. Incidences such as dams collapsing, like the one in Minas Gerais in November of 2015, have become a prominent obstacle for civilians. Not only do these tragedies end up killing people in the event itself, but also in the aftermath that ensues. The dam collapsing in Minas Gerais left entire communities homeless, with polluted water, and unfertile soil. The surrounding communities will have to live with these

consequences in the decades to come. In February of 2018 an overflow by a dam in Para caused water contamination to thousands of people in the region of Barcarena, again demonstrating the deteriorating nature of Brazilian ecosystems and environment. Under the presidency of Bolsonaro two major environmental crises hit the nation, the Amazonian forest fire and the oil spill from August to November in the Northeastern coast. These rather harsh catastrophes have put the pressure on response groups to rapidly and correctly address these disasters.

Since 1992 Rio Conference Brazil has been trying to implement sustainable initiatives. For example, it is easy to see that Brazil has the potential to become a keynote advocate internationally and domestically for sustainable economic development and is possible to demonstrate a model for environmentally sustainable progress. One can see this in how Brazil had taken renewable energy in stride. Throughout the year of 2018 about 65% of the electric supply within the state came from large scale hydropower projects and 15% came from wind, solar, and biomass.² This type of mass scale mobilization drastically altered the infrastructure within the nation and showed the international community that Brazil had the ability to concretely change their society. While there have been clear signs of environmental neglect in Brazil it is clear that there are some definitive outcomes from the environmental push since the Rio 92 conference. While the Amazon is suffering from drastic environmental damage and is yet to be fully restored and protected, there have been several positive outcomes. It is because of its importance that the Amazon has drawn international attention, leading to international pressure on Brazil to meet environmental demands. Now, there is increasing efforts to restore deforested parts of the Amazon and more resources allocated to the protection from poachers and loggers. Since the Rio 92 some outputs have been sustained and loosely implemented throughout

² “Brazilian Energy under Bolsonaro’s Government: Brazil above All?,” Energy Transition, November 9, 2018, <https://energytransition.org/2018/11/brazilian-energy/>.

Brazilian society. From the conference the Declaration on Forests and the Convention on Biological Diversity were created.

These institutions created standards for countries to follow in order for change to happen domestically. While it is arguable as to whether or not these intuitions carried out anything tangible on a domestic level, they nonetheless brought the conversation front and center. For our context of current developments in the environmental crisis, this means that international organizations have an easier way to engage with governmental organizations easier in order to target key conservation areas. From these initial steps to enact change within the Amazon it is amazing to see the efforts taken domestically and internationally to address issues of species restoration, indigenous land conservation, and combating mining and agricultural expansion. The technological resources allocated to monitoring forest health and biodiversity is another demonstrating factor that the current crisis is trying to put its best foot forward. Overall it was through the Rio conference that initial steps were taken to enact binding change and further led to the conflict between developed and developing countries. It was clear from the initial meetings that many of the countries present had deep roots into ongoing environmental issues. The conference itself demonstrated one of the most promising engagements of cooperation between nation-states. Through the sheer magnitude and logistical coordination alone to make the conference happen showed great promise. However, after all the smoke and dust settled the collaboration between NGOs, private corporations, governmental organizations, and economic players dwindled down. Because of the vague language used and the lack of communication the resolute ideas fell through, leaving the majority of the population in disarray. While outcomes of the conference did not foster true domestic change, one factor becomes abundantly clear: coordination between countries is possible. While the conference did not aid in concrete ways, it

was not because of the conference itself, the ambiguous wording and lack of binding agreements. Since the Rio 92 conference there have been some positive impacts on the environment crisis, but it often seems like the negatives overshadow the positive outputs.

Even with these small successes the digression of sustainable development continues under economic demands. From environmental disasters such as increased deforestation for cattle ranches, increase in use of pesticide and herbicides, and water and air pollution many Indigenous communities have been forced to relocate. Along with the effects caused by pesticide and herbicide runoff in the water stream, mining has destroyed and relocated indigenous reserves like the Raposa Serra do Sol. The more politically unjust actions have steadily increased since the Rio 92' conference. Not only has forest been a major point of impact, but also the tropical savanna in Brazil; the Cerrado. Recent developments have turned this savannah into an agricultural powerhouse and like all agricultural demands this came at the price of deforestation, land grabbing, and loss of traditional flora and fauna. Around 44% of the Cerrado's native vegetation is destroyed.³ With the transformation of this land Brazil celebrated higher yields in soya and beef, and is further expanding its agricultural opportunities within this newly discovered ecosystem. This has led to an increase in support for agricultural expansion in regions with rich biodiversity. It is due to the soya and beef production that deforestation and water contamination has plagued surrounding communities. The large amount of soya produced is mainly processed into feed for the beef industry. This cyclical process depicts the dire environmental situation that Brazil finds itself in and shows little promise for systems that break the norm of unsustainable agriculture. The dire outcome to a lot of these issues results in

³ Dom Phillips, "The Cerrado: How Brazil's Vital 'Water Tank' Went from Forest to Soy Fields," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020, sec. Environment, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/25/the-cerrado-how-brazils-vital-water-tank-went-from-forest-to-soy-fields>.

communal poisoning of water sources and drastic health defects from pesticide runoff. It is through society that one can see who is the most affected by the detrimental effects of the environment and the lack of concrete action occurring in Brazil.

Going further, some of the major outputs of the Rio Conference have all fallen out of view. For example, the convention on biodiversity has become obscure in all accounts except for hard core environmentalists. In an editor's note Clemençon delves into the topic of how the actions from the Rio Conference in 92 have transpired into Brazilian society. From funding to collective action, Clemençon speaks about how these dilemmas have hindered progress within the nation. "Furthermore, funding for nature conservation through the Global Environment Facility has been very modest. Recent studies point to significant declines in populations of many species, particularly of mammals, birds, and amphibians."⁴ Despite the growing need for more attentive action done by the state, these issues of funding persist as an ever-occurring problem. With the focus on economic expansion, trade domination, and international legitimacy Brazil has continuously fallen short to addressing these issues. Prioritizing equitable economic development and progress should be the main focus of all economic longevity. It is clear that Brazil, along with many other nations, will only start to address this issue once it becomes mainstream enough to affect market trends. The caveat however is that these trends only start once private companies, corporations, and consumers begin to collectively make a shift towards those elements of preservation. This sort of change only occurs on the ground and through the resolution in millions of individuals to enact change. Clemençon said it best when in his conclusion stated: "Ultimately, sustainable development is about action on the ground, and it

⁴ Cléménçon, Raymond. "On the Back Burner Again: Environment and Development Politics Since the 1992 Rio Conference." *The Journal of Environment & Development* 13, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1070496504263156>.

must build on efforts by millions of individuals who try to live more environmentally sustainable lives and by innovative private sector firms. But voluntary action alone is not enough.

Governments must set legislative and regulatory frameworks to correct market failures and encourage more sustainable practices.”⁵ It is painfully obvious that these are still hurdles that we face politically and institutionally in not just Brazil, but in countries across the globe. Now, almost 30 years later from this iconic collaboration and organization between states, private sectors, and NGO’s it is clear that environmental prioritization is still on the back burner.

PART II: ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS BEFORE BOLSONARO

The Role of the International Community

The international community has continuously played a critical role in how environmentalism has developed in Brazil. It has proven to be an important factor in domestic progress of environmental initiatives. While the Brazilian environment has drawn attention from international actors, there have been many distracting elements that have also taken up the international stage. From environmental progress to globalized power, Brazil drastically changed its priorities after the Rio 92’ Conference. The international community played a big role in leading up to the Rio 92’ conference and had gained momentum in the battle for environmentalism in the 1972 Stockholm conference. This conference is a pivotal event in shaping both the rising democratic government and a new wave of environmental prioritization. Following the 1972 Stockholm global enthusiasm around environmental movements exponentially increased allowing for a surge of support in the 92 conference. President Jose Sarney, who took office from 1985-1990, initiated the rally around environmentalism through his

⁵ Ibid, 117.

bid in hosting the environmental conference. His hope was to demonstrate to the international community and domestic social movements that he was spearheading support for environmental movements. When President Fernando Collor de Mello took office in 1990-1992 and he strongly paved the way for environmental initiatives. Pushing and pursuing stronger advocacy routes in the name of progressive environmental legislation. It was through Collor's extensive travels before he took office that he saw the issue of environmental degradation as crucial to advancing global support in Brazil. With new international cooperation and pressure the conference proved to provide a space where social movements and NGOs could collaborate in ways that had not previously been available. However, the events leading up to the conference civil society continued to be overlooked and undermined in a lot of negotiations. Career diplomats soon took lead in deciding how to advocate and carry out environmental resolutions, further deepening the level of corruption amongst powerful politicians.

One key example of this is demonstrated when Jose Lutzenberger of AGAPAN became a key figure in the development of Brazilian environmental policy, who suggested to the international community to not give money to Brazil because of corrupt practices in the internal system. Soon, Lutzenberger was removed from his position, ensuring the domination of career politicians. With Collor de Mello elected into office in 1990, the continued trend of corruption surged through the Mello administration. Although Collor de Mello was a democratically elected president, it did not deter him from corrupt action.

Like several presidents that would follow Collor de Mello, he created a high profile centered around just policies, all the while behind the scenes making no true change. For example, creating photo opportunities at the illegal airstrip in Yanomami territory that was being closed under his administration. However, later finding out that the airstrip was soon rebuilt in

secret. The misleading public view was continuously exploited without any consequence from other political officials. Media soon became a prominent figure in picking apart the insincere facade that Collor de Mello portrayed to the public. It is important to note that during this period the emergence of the World Wide Web was becoming consumer friendly and increasingly accessible. This would alter how the international community would view Collor de Mello and reveal the underlying themes of corruption. The events in the Rio conference itself are pretty straight forward. Rio pulled the attention of international actors at a scale that had not been present since. While Brazil underwent several degrees of domestic turmoil the global response to the conference was insurmountable. After all the international committees and states arrived the negotiations began. From the conference there were many progressive outputs that emerged from international collaboration. Some of those outputs included: “The Rio Declaration-a short statement of principles revolving around sustainability; Agenda 21-an enormous action plan of forty chapters comprising recommendations to governments; A Declaration on Forests which had been intended as a hard law convention but could not be agreed upon; A Convention on Biological Diversity; A Framework Convention on Climate Change; and an agreement within the context of Agenda 21 to establish a Sustainable Development Commission to monitor the progress in implementing the Rio Declaration.”⁶ These concrete acts would later prove to be hard to implement in the domestic context.

It soon became clear throughout the negotiations that hard and soft power were at stake when drafting a lot of the solutions. States would often gravitate towards softer forms of power that would not bind them to any true obligations, in the end being able to maintain sovereignty. Sovereignty and state interest dictated the talks within nations despite the strong sentiment of

⁶ Kathryn Hochstetler and Margaret E. Keck, *Greening Brazil: Environmental Activism in State and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 115.

cooperation between nations. It is through these rather personal lines that a lot of the international community cooperated with one another. These ties and relationships made it possible for the bonding of non-governmental actors to participate as well. The effect that NGOs had on the composition in the Brazilian environmental movement is a big signifying factor as to how critical the issue used to be. Huge NGOs like Greenpeace and WWF established permanent offices in Brazil to show just how important it was to preserve this nation-state. The international community turned towards Brazil as a country that is in desperate need of resources. This sentiment rose from NGOs like Greenpeace drawing international attention as to what was happening within the environmental sector. Hochstetler and Keck wrote about the effect of Greenpeace in Brazil “The organization had its own media, specialists, fundraisers, experts in substantive areas, volunteer coordinators, and the like. Emboldened by its rapid access, Greenpeace adopted modern business management techniques at both national and international offices.”⁷ The relationships formed from NGOs and governmental operations resulted in a complex dichotomy between these two actors. Through these more ambiguous modes of operation the prioritization from the international community began to shift. As Brazil portrayed itself as a corrupt state the increase of more global economic prosperity overshadowed the environmental aid. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Hochstetler talk about the overall decrease in international attention: “Nonetheless, despite a number of important successes, and a gradual but steady growth in diffuse environmental consciousness and practices (environmental education in schools, recycling in urban areas, concern with water and air quality), environmental activism of the kind that mobilized people through the 1980s and early 1990s did not appear to be growing.”⁸ The more that Brazil presented itself as a divided front the less bargaining power they

⁷ Ibid, 135.

⁸ Ibid, 129.

were able to ensue on the internal level. This became evident after the Copenhagen conference in 2009. The failure in the Copenhagen Summit reduced the political priority, both domestically and internationally, in Brazil. It is clear that this resulted in sharp changes of perception of the validity and legitimacy in Brazil.

Overall, after the 92' Rio Conference Brazil took a turn towards expanding its global economic impact through the avenues of increasing agriculture, energy, and its ethanol industry. For the international environmental community this showed little promise for environmental progress in the nation. With the deck stacked against the environmental actors, they soon began to retreat. Support financially and backing in larger negotiation settings dwindled as Brazil began chopping down the rainforest, tearing into indigenous lands, and incentivizing unclean energy methods. The growing tension between these sectors placed greater pressure on the non-existent international force that should have been present throughout the time of economic incentivization. Drawing farther and farther away from the environmental movement Brazil began its push towards economic expansion, a theme clearly present under the Lula Da Silva administration between 2003-2017.

The Weakness of the Environmental Movement

The environmental social movement in Brazil has been highly regarded as a groundbreaking initiative within the environmental sphere. However, it is first important to analyze what constitutes as a social movement and in what structures did the movements take place? How did they develop? What sort of approach do you take in order to get one's message across? More specifically to environmental movements, environmental mobilization has taken an interesting analytical dimension in the view of Brazilian politics. Some scholars such as Mario

Diani define a social movement as, “informal organizations that, to be alive, depend on activists sharing experiences as well as on mobilizing resources and strategies.”⁹ This holds true for the environmental movement taking place in Brazil shortly after the dictatorship fell in the 1980s. Diani further explains the nature of social movements by stating: “Social movements are defined as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities.”¹⁰ After the fall of the dictatorship Brazil entered a phase of mass civil mobilization not only in the topic of the environment, but also in justice, human rights, and equal representation. Using the tools of Political process or the collective identity have been methods used to purposefully get across one’s ideas to mobilize mass amounts of people. Some scholars have pointed out that in order for a social movement to be alive, it must take on concrete features of mobilization. This is demonstrated in the forms of political or the collective identity process. Without tangible ways to measure the impact of each movement the social movements fall short to becoming an unstructured ideal. Some scholars further argue that these movements further need material products to show that they are achieving what they have set out to achieve. This in turn highly emphasizes the job of the activist in a lot of these complex structures. Without activist enabling and facilitating mobilized change social movements again fail. Activists create political opportunity, choose the protest forms used, and perhaps unknowingly shape identities to further add to the collective.

Between the periods of 1970 to present day, Brazil underwent a unique change both political and economically. This resulted in a unique process which the environmental movement

⁹ Angela Alonso, Valeriano Costa, and Débora Maciel, “The Formation of the Brazilian Environmental Movement,” in IDS Working Paper 259, n.d., 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

had to navigate. With industrialization and globalization taking its first steps into Brazilian society the movements had to accommodate new features by the minute. Features such as international intervention, an emerging middle class, and the multitude of different movements demanding the same, if not more, change. Using the reason for social movements to help understand the nature in which Brazilian society sought to implement change is one of the more mainstream understandings to the environmental dilemma at the time. First looking at the avenue of political opportunity. Political opportunity structures come in the form of new coalitions, new opportunities for activist groups to mobilize, and the ability to make new reformations and claims to how society should be. An important feature that caused increased mobilization was the opening of the governmental process to civil society. This came after years of suppression from an authoritarian regime. The political elite soon found themselves at a crossroads between incorporating these new political structures or fighting a strong opposition. Now the forced political elite had to reduce repression of mobilizing political movements in order to peacefully transition to a new democratic state. Cooperation between these two structures was shown in how the new constitution legally acknowledged the need for new political parties and the facilitation to create these new forms of representation. After these new political opportunities arise the increase in protest and public dissent for the past behavior of a repressive regime comes into light. Expressing demands in a public arena shows another aspect of mobilization in how society has organized to demonstrate discontent. Political opportunity is just one lens to view how the environmental movement took root in Brazil. This element of social movement takes on a nationalistic level of activism and is seen as one of the bigger and broader aspects of social movements.

This correlates with the political opportunity present within the years of 2003-2017, when the PT party had a strong foothold within governmental structures and influence. Analyzing how these elements will take smaller concrete forms in society, specifically in the micro context of social interaction. Political opportunity and micro cultural exchanges are two forms of mobilization that spread throughout Brazil in the decades following the fall of the dictatorship. It is hard to say which one was the dominant feature as the mobilized communities took to implementing change, however it is clear that these small micro exchanges are just as important as those on the national level. The micro-cultural exchanges come in the form of education reformation, new professional institutions, cultural exchange, and friendship and neighborhood networks. How these interactions impact daily life affects the habits of individuals in their own homes and communities. For the environmental movement in Brazil this is one of the harder obstacles to tackle. Ensuring that people are personally invested in the change that is happening in different cities proves to be perhaps the most influential part of a movement. This shows utility and an importance for optimization within the mobilization within a social movement. This form of activism not only caters to the overall goal, but also strengthens and sustains ties between community members. Loyalties, cultural identification, membership to a society, and personal interaction are fostered in this mode of activism. In Brazil this looked like a multitude of groups tackling different issues in regards to the environment. Preserving the Amazon, combating air pollution, ocean preservation, and waste management were few of the many cultural identifications created by the incorporation of the environment into society. These factors of distinctions varied from boundaries and interest of each sector in Brazilian life. Nonetheless the environmental issue in Brazil brought the isolated members of communities into a collective, giving them a sense of belonging and meaning.

One of the ways in which collectivism and in turn mobilization occurs is through frames within societal situations. By first pointing out an issue in their specific situation, assigning blame to an authority, and then taking on the responsibility to fix such grievance in their own community. Specific frames affect specific communities heightening the formation of activist groups. Frames are structured around shared experiences, grievances, and demographic commonalities, and these are key features that unites people into a collective identity. Frames are also used as the foundation for larger modes of social movement such as political opportunity. This is seen in how these groups shape the Brazilian environmental movement and how dominant frames such as preservation of the Amazon have risen to become one of the main issues tackled in Brazil. Of course, The new constitution legally acknowledged the need for new political parties and the facilitation to create these new forms of representation. After these new political opportunities arise the increase in protest and public dissent for the past behavior of a repressive regime comes into light.

Each issue competes to take center stage with the promise of increased funding, public attention, international aid, and legislative prioritization. Legitimizing their own frame of network by transforming Brazilian reality into an environmental problem indicated that their own grievances are reassured by community members. This brings into light another important part of social movements, the institutionalization of each issue raised. Creating an institution that tackles this specific social issue legitimizes the importance of fixing said issue. This legitimization helps enhance political opportunities within the group. Institutionalizing a frame of contingency comes in the form of long-term action. This means creating trusts, associations, parties, campaigns, protests, and coalitions.

It is extremely interesting to know how the mode of activism has changed tremendously since 1992 and the years before the Rio conference. Alonso and Favareto say it best in their article “From one Summit to Another.” “The new style of activism to present environmental claims relies much more on declarations by movement leaders to the media and on symbolic direct action activities that only require a few motivated individuals (such as the campaigns for which Greenpeace has become famous) than on massive popular demonstrations, with the volume, the diversity, and the strength they reached in 1992.”¹¹ The way in which social movements are now carried out do not require the force, scale, and numbers that it once demanded. Now, a few individuals can radically change attention on an issue through the use of social media. Arguably reaching out to more international players than the larger protest in the 1990’s. However, this form of social activism does not require the diversity and collaboration between civil society in order to get attention. This in turn loses an essential part of protest and demands for justice, the unity that comes with organizing mass protests. While progress and adaptability are great in light of new emerging technologies and trends, this crucial aspect seems to have been left behind. Further, with the environmental movement gaining more traction in governmental legitimacy the crux of issues is now solved at the round table instead of on the streets. Now it is negotiations and formal lobbying that enact change. In some senses the Brazilian environmental movements have had to dress up in a fancy suit and meet the politicians in their own playing field. Just like how activism has changed, so had the mode achieving change. The environmental movement is becoming more individualized in turn leaving behind other social forces. Having to make a shift to accommodate other political factors such as

¹¹Angela Alonso and Arilson Favareto, “From One Summit to Another: The Changing Landscape of Brazilian Environmental Movement,” *The Journal of Environment & Development* 21, no. 1 (2012): 30.

economics and international corporation, the environmental movement has left behind social environmental interests.

While looking at individual motivations for social movements the cohesion between two ideals proves to be one of the most powerful forms of action. When two groups work together to address mass public dissent how does that affect the individual identity created in its original formation? It is easy to conclude that identities would become convoluted and diluted, however this is a common misconception. In order to act together Brazil had to start solving issues collectively. The Rio 92 environmental conference demonstrates such mentality as it unified a nation into acting on greater issues that may not be present in everyone's life. However, one element must be present for this form of transcendence to happen, that being the political opportunity given to these activist groups. Without the government extending an olive branch and creating a space for progress the activist groups fail to reach the top level of collectivism. This is why the Constitutional Assembly in 1988 proved to be a crucial stepping stone in the mobilization of activism in Brazil. The Constitutional Assembly in 1988 drafted a constitution that facilitated public participation in governmental legislation.¹² This forced smaller and local environmental movements to form partnerships in order to gain enough support and resources to be taken seriously on a national level. There are several notable environmental groups that demanded center stage nationally in Brazil. Those being: FBCN (Brazilian Foundation for the Conservation of Nature), Agapan (the Southern Association for the Protection of the Natural Environment), Mape (The Art and Ecological Thinking Movement), APPN (The São Paulo Association for Natural Protection), Oikos-Friends of the Earth, PV (Green Party), Funatura (For Nature Association), SOS Mata Atlantica, Greenpeace-Brazil, WWF-Brazil and ISA (Socio-

¹² See bibliography for more information on Constitutional Assembly in 1988.

Environmental Institute).¹³ These groups optimized their ability to create local frames, form coalitions while still preserving individual identity, legitimize their movement through institutions and properly take advantage of the political opportunities at the time. Broadly speaking the delicate connection between frames, strategies, and political opportunities showcases how the mobilization of movements is a hard feat to accomplish and relies heavily on cooperation between a multitude of individuals and collectives.

So then why did it fail and was unable to prevent the environmental crisis? With all the odds stacked in its favor the social movement failed to grab hold of political opportunities within the institution of the government in order to make lasting, concrete change. While there were a multitude of different factors that surmounted to its ultimate demise, such as the environmental movement running out of steam, lack of organization, and corruption, the straw that broke the camel's back was the inadequacy of the leaders to establish themselves in government. Being able to have the same negotiating power as big coalitions like the Ruralists, or the BBB caucus, would have set them on a standard of achieving great environmental progress. One of the root causes as to why they were unable to tap into this sector of change, through the governmental avenues, was because of the lack of resources available. Further, the vastness of this movement proved to be an organizational disaster, in the end failing to comprehensively agree on a central issue to combat. In the end the Brazilian environmental social movement tripped at the finish line, failing to exploit political opportunities and engage with political leaders who would have enacted concrete environmental change.

To conclude the importance of the social movements within Brazil varied drastically, highlighting the fragility that civil society faces in environmental justice. What was the

¹³ Angela Alonso, Valeriano Costa, and Débora Maciel, "The Formation of the Brazilian Environmental Movement," in *IDS Working Paper 259*, n.d., 7.

underlying cause for the failures in the different forms of social movements within Brazil? The failure was a result of the internal structure of each movement. Without the cohesion on the part of civilian organizations and therefore the ability for mass political influence, the structures that kept the movement alive in the beginning crumbled. From the start the environmental movement gained a large amount of support, however as time progressed the ability for these movements to unite under a given cause began to collapse. There soon became an issue with the individual vs. collective representation and how some people saw their voices as being silenced by those whose cause had larger numbers. In turn coming to the conclusion that the success of the social movement was the cause of its demise.

The Environmental Legacy of the Lula-Rousseff Administrations (2003-2017)

In its inception in 1979 the PT emerged as an organized force behind São Paulo Metal Workers' union. Even in its younger years the PT was a result of a deepening social contradiction in classes as a result of dependent capitalism in Brazil. Because of its loud and boisterous call for liberalization and just treatment the PT played a vital role in the break of the military rule. In 2002 Lula Da Silva took office as the Workers Party (PT) leading candidate. The government under Lula soon brought the democratization of politics and society. This meant the integration of new players in the political arena. New coalitions, social movements, and unions all formed the PT liberal mentality. Social movements from a diverse set of backgrounds began to flourish as the political arena opened. Some of those include the labor, the Afro-Brazilian, LGBT rights, women's, indigenous, and most notably the environmental movement that rose throughout the nation. However, as the Lula administration progressed the liberalized policies soon worked in contrast to the original intent of democratization. In their book *A Concise History*

of *Brazil*, Boris and Sergio Fausto address how these conflicting views caused a divide from past progressive ideology. “The party had discarded its advocacy of a ‘worker’s government,’ its rejection of alliances with non-leftwing parties, and, in practice, the utopia of a socialist society. It had become a pragmatic reformist party, bettering more on the power of the ballot box than on the mobilization of the masses.”¹⁴ This in large also affected how the public viewed the issue of environmentalism. When the Lula came into power the hope was that sustainability and the environment would now take a more central role in politics. However, while the government could preserve its outward appearance of liberalized values, beneath the surface it perpetuated the past values of economic growth. The contrast was further highlighted in the division of social class, “Additionally, it had consolidated the image of a party associated with the interest of wage earners and the poor, in spite of the fact that its main factions and leader either came from or were in the process of ascending to the middle class.”¹⁵ These misconceptions on what was actually happening behind closed doors made the Lula administration appear to hold the values of environmentalism and to some extent they did.

In the earlier years of the PT rule both the Lula and Rousseff administrations took sides with politicians advocating for economic growth. Specifically, in the fields of business expansion and agribusiness. While these earlier alliances would set the tone for the future of environmental progress that we now see, there were still some productive actions taken in order to preserve environmentalism. The cooperation between Rousseff and IBAMA (the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) showed great promise in the prioritization of environmental issues. The hope that Brazil had taken a turn in their environmental policy was

¹⁴ Boris Fausto and Arthur Brakel, *A Concise History of Brazil*, Second edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 375.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

highly acknowledged when Lula took office. While running for presidency he strongly advocated for sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and decrease in pollution. His appointment of Marina Silva depicted these values. As Minister of the Environment Marina Silva represented a liberalized notion of careful and tactful economic progress. She valued a slower process of checks and balances that would calculate environmental risk when expanding agribusiness, favored a more in-depth process of licensing to build infrastructure, and heavily advocated for Amazon preservation. It was only after Lula took office that the values of the PT became centralized around economic growth. Soon, Marina Silva would resign, agribusiness would expand, and international markets dictated environmental demands, overall leading to the decline in environmentalism.

Within the context of the Lula Da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff's (2011-2017) administration there was a large shift towards using Brazil's natural resources in order to advance economic expansion. It was during the years of 2003-2017 that the industries of agriculture, energy, and forestry became highly exploited. During his time in office Lula also elected to have Jose Alencar as his second in command. As the vice president Jose Alencar was a great ally and bridge between the PT and the business community. After having created an empire in wealth Jose became one of Lula's biggest supporters, and through his connections in the business sector became a great addition to the administration. Jose Alencar very tactfully eased the fears among the business sector and ensured that Lula would not radicalize Brazil. It is now clear that the self-made millionaire that came from a very poor background helped boost Lula's popularity and helped calm fears amongst the business community. This strategic move once again exemplifies an instance where Lula chose the road towards economic expansion. It is also quite clear during this time that the government stood in contrast with its internal members.

Marina Silva became the Minister of the Environment under Lula and was at a constant battle with coalitions and ministers who pushed for progress in the agricultural sector. These ministers advocating for grandeur economic expansion saw the environmental precautions set in place by Marina Silva to be excessive and while Marina tried to fight for more progressive environmental techniques Lula favored the accelerated growth model. It was under the Lula administration that approval to clearing land for livestock, bringing more land under cultivation, major investments in the energy sector were allocated. Marina quickly came under fire from much of the PT party in Brazil. Often facing backlash because of how long IBAMA took to approve licenses for transportation and energy projects. IBAMA, working under Marian's ministry, faced criticism on how it regulated agricultural practices. This means limiting the number of pesticides used and implementing strict laws regulating how agriculture is carried out. From all the backlash that she got at Minister of the Environment, Marina resigned in 2008. She was replaced by Carlos Minc, again appointed by Lula, who was considered to be more pragmatic. While the struggle between coalitions, ministers, and politicians decreased, they did not go away altogether. One of the bigger dividing issues was over the forestry code. The environmentalist and the representatives in agribusiness shared conflicting ideas on what and how this code should be prioritized. Due to the overall prioritization of economic development, imposed by Lula, the agribusiness sector held the majority and rallied a bigger support base. In the end resulting in larger changes feared towards economic development.

In the first years of Lula da Silva's presidency he appointed Marina Silva to head the Ministry of Environment, showing a hopeful step in the right direction towards progressive environmental movement. Marina had grown up a rubber tapper in the state of Acre and had

worked closely with environmental leaders.¹⁶ She had astounding credentials to become the PT's first Minister of Environment. The appointment of Marina by Lula helped propel the bureaucracy of environmental legislation, regulation, and licensing. This created avenues for public servants to easily access the Brazilian environmental sector. Overall this helped draw attention towards sustainable solutions and initiatives. While the appointment of Marina was a great step for the environmental movement in the PT party, the tension from economic demands and environmental ones was explicitly evident. Many in the PT coalition wanted to expand infrastructural projects, facilitate the increase of agribusiness, and push towards decreasing environmental regulation. In the essay "Tracking Presidents and Policies," Kathryn Hochstetler outlines the difficulties that Marina faced in regards to differing political demands which eventually led to her resignation over this conflicting dilemma. "Silva eventually resigned over these tensions in 2008, at the beginning of Lula's second term, taking some of her new environmentalist hires with her."¹⁷ This new change in the PT party led to the appointment of Carlos Minc, who served as Minister of the Environment under the platform of a more urban environmental activist. His priority turned toward activist orientation and wrote on how to form an environmental social movement. Both of these players eventually would fall under political and societal pressure to progress economic pursuits over environmental ones. Falling under the pressure of the Agrarian, Energy, and Transportation ministries Minc often had to set aside his environmental agenda to accommodate for infrastructural reformation. Fixing issues such as roads and energy access pushed the environmental prioritization out the window. These appointments under the PT party depicts the difficulty that is present in winning the battle

¹⁶ "Marina Silva," Goldman Environmental Foundation, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/marina-silva/>.

¹⁷ Kathryn Hochstetler, "Tracking Presidents and Policies: Environmental Politics from Lula to Dilma," *Policy Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 4, 2017): 262–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2017.1290229>.

between economy and environment. With the environment often coming up short. These robust trends continued throughout the years between 2003-2017, where the environmental sector tried to build stride towards progress, but was constantly deterred by economic prioritization.

Not only was there a huge increase in trying to dismantle environmental progress domestically, but also the intervention from international business that demanded resources from Brazil skyrocketed. State-owned companies began to partner with larger national corporations that would in turn cater to a global market. These advances in industry put Brazil on the map as spearheading aggressive industry expansion. This is shown in the creation of PAC, The Growth Acceleration Program. Dilma Rousseff and Marina Silva both joined forces in order to run the PAC and worked on partnering with domestic actors in order to enact change through the PAC. “From their standpoint, IBAMA (the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) and the public prosecution service, which had become intensely involved in the environmental question since the 1998 constitution, created barriers to the countries development under the pretext of protecting diffuse collective rights.”¹⁸ In 2007 Lula administered this piece of legislation in order to drive investments towards economic growth. For Lula this was one drop in the pool of growth. The economic policy in Lula’s first term had benefited the growth of the domestic economy as well as the expansion into the international one. Due to Brazil entering a more competitive global market the attention paid to internal companies and sectors diminished. This caused a reliance from Brazil onto these international companies in order to elevate its economy. These trends also correlated with the impact that foreign policy played in the structure of the Lula administration. Foreign policy was seen to be a defending factor under Lula. Lula worked hard to enhance Brazil's image internationally,

¹⁸ Boris Fausto and Arthur Brakel, *A Concise History of Brazil*, Second edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 397.

especially in the perspective of global markets. In addition, Lula found himself in an interesting position of power when it came to the international community in his second term in office. With the emergence of new political and economic powers in the international sphere, Lula was able to interject Brazil into more global markets and systems. This was particularly evident when it came to trade and the terms that were shaped by the southern nation-states. Brazil soon was able to set itself apart from the United States in particular and the dominating northern nation-states. This meant that the coalitions formed between the southern states proved valuable when it came to bargaining and redistributive power it held in more formal settings such as the UN and the IMF. Celso Amorim, Brazil's external relations minister, appointed by Lula, drove the country in rather unrealistic fashion. Celso Amorim was criticized for over exaggerating the capacity in which Brazil could effectively participate in the global arena. Also, about how much the country would be able to do domestically to meet global market demands.

Starting in 2003 the PT (Workers Party) took hold of Brazilian politics and since its inception it has been plagued by the denunciation of numerous allegations of corruption. Boris and Sergio Fausto speak to this point, "During its long years in opposition, the PT had wielded the banner of "ethics in politics," constantly denouncing alleged or proven acts of corruption. Even those who did not identify with the party were convinced that its conduct would be morally differentiated. This conviction was to be roundly disabused."¹⁹ That is the type of government that Lula Da Silva took office in. The biggest one being the 'mensalao.' The Lula administration had been using private and public funding to bribe members of the government to ensure the approval of certain projects. Specifically, this looked like, buying votes in congress and stealing money from public infrastructure projects budgets to pass legislation catered to the Brazilian

¹⁹ Boris Fausto and Arthur Brakel, *A Concise History of Brazil*, Second edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 390.

elite. These scandals set the tone for how legislation and the government would interact with the middle class and in turn prioritize its funding towards domestic infrastructure. Sergio and Boris address how the elite became one of the government's primary concerns in fixing these scandals. "In fact, the president did suffer a significant decrease in popularity during the course of 2005. However, this did not extend beyond higher income and better educated social segments and proved to be transitory. At the beginning of the 2006 electoral race, the president had recovered his lost popularity and was outright favorite for re-election, in spite of a new scandal of a different nature that had led to the fall of his minister of finance."²⁰ This shows just how the system within the Brazilian government relies heavily on a few elites, while eliminating a true majority sentiment.

These scandals were soon overshadowed by programs such as Family Allowance, which gave income and credit to poorer sections of society. This soon put Lula in good terms with the lower classes in Brazil and the scandals were soon forgotten. Interestingly enough these scandals had an array of different outcomes of Lula himself. Sergio and Boris state that, "This situation merely underscored what had already become evident: Lula had risen above and become greater than the PT. The party, however, continued to be the most popular among the electorate."²¹ Lula transcending the PT's image and becoming a fighting figure on his own enabled an uncanny amount of public support that would soon be put towards economic expansion.

Under the Lula administration there was a more visible and tangible battle between the sectors of environmentalism and economy. The willingness to sit down and troubleshoot ideas on how to develop in an environmentally friendly manner was demonstrated through the collaboration between coalitions and agendas under the Environmental licensing and the

²⁰ Ibid, 391.

²¹ Ibid, 392.

environmental impact assessment (EIA). The EIA was meant to prevent infrastructural development from environmental harm. Economic projects had to be run through this committee in order for it to be carried out and were often deterred due to the environmental damage it would create. Lula and the PT party worked to collaborate between the different ministries in order to find sustainable solutions. The process for carrying out a project has three levels of approval, planning, construction and operation. Kathryn Hochstetler highlights some of the negative impacts this has taken on Brazilian society in her essay “Tracking Presidents and Policies.” “For example, the World Bank has calculated that payments for the socio environmental impacts of hydropower projects in Brazil now average 12% of total project costs.”²² These processes are one of the biggest contingency’s points under the current administration.

One of the clearest examples lies in the increased push for obtaining a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. These southern bonded relationships soon resulted in separate trade agreements. In turn, this meant that once again Brazil shifted its focus to a more economically driven development model. In this light it was clear to see that Brazil was mainly focused on gaining international power through the process of globalization and trade. This contradicted the earlier sentiment of establishing a progress environmental foothold on the international community in order to push influence and power within those mediums. It was through institutions such as Mercosur that these southern nations were able to bind together in order to incentivize growth and economic development in each region. Mercosur served as a way to connect markets between Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil, in turn facilitating a monopoly of business by these countries within the region. In some cases, these leadership roles put these countries in rather fickle situations. For example, when Bolivia nationalized their oil

²² Kathryn Hochstetler, “Tracking Presidents and Policies: Environmental Politics from Lula to Dilma,” *Policy Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 4, 2017): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2017.1290229>,16.

and gas sector, a sector in which housed many international companies and businesses, Brazil's reaction underwhelmed the public. The more tepid approach that Brazil took instead was to demonstrate that Brazil understood the developmental plans of its poorer neighbors, as well as to show the international community that it was not an audacious or arrogant leader.

Following the reign of Lula Da Silva, Dilma Rousseff took office. As the first female president in Brazil she faced particularly difficult trials, in addition she inherited an extremely broken government from the Lula administration. In regards to the environment Dilma Rousseff favored a neo developmentalist model. Her environmental policy dug deeper than conservation and touched on inequality that benefited the rising middle class whose consumer habits relied on unsustainable modes of production and human treatment. This was the face that the Rousseff administration put forth to the public as she took office. It is no shock however that the Dilma administration followed in the footsteps of the government before her. Her message of digging deeper and combating the root cause of environmentalism was soon overshadowed by the appointment of Katia Abreu, the leader of the Ruralist caucus in congress as minister of agriculture.²³ It was through the work of Katia that the neo developmentalist model further grew roots in community expansion. This expansion again augmented the unsustainable mode of consumption, elevating the middle class and deepening the divide between the poor and the rich. From once advocating to fix the fundamental cause of environmental degradation to experiencing one of the worst cases of violence towards environmental activists, Dilma followed in Lula's footsteps. Making promises they couldn't keep. Her policies towards environmentalism depict how she was a clear apprentice to Lula, not steering far from his own policies.

²³ "Brazil's 'chainsaw Queen' Appointed New Agriculture Minister," the Guardian, December 24, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/24/brazil-agriculture-katia-abreu-climate-change>.

From these events we can now see how the status of the Brazilian environmental system has been slowly deteriorating even before Bolsonaro took office. What people are calling a ‘radical’ mentality of environmental destruction embodying the Bolsonaro administration has been a result of the prioritization of previous governments. Since the takeover by the PT in 2003 the economy has been front and center as issues that need solving and have set the stage for more conservative politicians to take these systems and run with them. While the Lula administration and the PT were supposed to represent the more leftist point of view, behind the scenes they discouraged environmental progress, favored development over sustainability, and overlooked societal demands for progressive environmental legislation. This has disproved the common thread of thought around the Bolsonaro administration. Following this common thread of thought neglects to take into account the history of how Bolsonaro came to power. These institutions that defined his ability to manipulate society in a particular way facilitated the narrative in which we see today in regards to the environment.

PART III: BOLSONARO’S ATTACK ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Bolsonaro came to power in January of 2019 and has remained steadily controversial. The first several months of his presidency was peppered with endless twitter wars, racist and homophobic comments, international dramas, and corruption scandals. These attitudes have remained throughout the administration and have been especially detrimental in the current coronavirus pandemic. In his initial months Bolsonaro’s approval ratings were some of the worst in history. Jeffery Webber writes about his terrible approval rating in his article *A Great Little Man: The Shadow of Jair Bolsonaro*.

According to a poll from April 7, 2019, conducted by the polling firm Datafolha, Bolsonaro registered the worst approval ratings after three months in office of any elected

president in a first term since democracy was restored in 1985. 30% of Brazilians considered his government to be bad or terrible, 32% optimal or good, and 33% average. By contrast, for the equivalent period in office during their first terms, the disapproval ratings for former presidents Fernando Collor, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff were 19, 16, 19, and 7, respectively. All the same, Collor was eventually impeached, Lula imprisoned, and Dilma thrown out of office by an institutional coup d'état.²⁴

These numbers depict a very real reality of how the administration has addressed the issues arising in social society. Bolsonaro has continued to prioritize a business model in his approach to fixing domestic institutional issues. This is evident in his alliance with the 'bull, bullet, and bible' (BBB) coalition he clings heavily onto. Representing expansion of religious conservatism, agribusiness, and overall economic expansion the BBB has dictated the outcome of legislation within the Brazilian government. "Collectively, the "BBB caucus" accounts for some 60 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Its members benefit from the chamber's operating rules that require that consideration of any bill have the approval all the major voting blocs. This gives evangelicals de facto veto power, which they have used to block a ban on anti-gay discrimination."²⁵ His early support before he won the election also points to evidence of what type of president he would be. With the backing from finance and industrial capital, Bolsonaro could easily persuade the elite demographic to support his ideals. In addition, his neoclassical approach to economic structures also depicted the mode in which Bolsonaro would enact change. Throughout his campaign he had backing from presidents representing strong conservative ideals. The most notable being Donald Trump. Bolsonaro's adoption of a neoliberal style of

²⁴ Jeffery R. Webber, "A Great Little Man: The Shadow of Jair Bolsonaro," *Historical Materialism* 28, no. 1 (March 13, 2020): 3–49, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569206X-12342801>.

²⁵ "Amid Crisis in Brazil, the Evangelical Bloc Emerges as a Political Power | The Nation." Accessed May 2, 2021. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/amid-crisis-in-brazil-the-evangelical-bloc-emerges-as-a-political-power/>.

economics played in favor of wall street elites looking to gain capital through international export.

In these circumstances it comes to no surprise that the environmental policy under Bolsonaro has been given no resources for improvement or development. These trends of working towards more economic prosperity have greatly affected huge ecosystems such as the amazon. The Amazon, representing one of the biggest cornerstones of environmentalism in a global context has been destroyed more under Bolsonaro administrations than in any previous government. Bolsonaro has cleared areas greater than the size of London and continues to put pressure on the legislative body to loosen restrictions on allocating permits in order to clear more for agriculture. This mentality has stemmed from his pro-business ideals and the need to cater to Brazilian elite. The amazon, one of the biggest melting pots of environmental issues, has drawn attention from hundreds of international actors in trying to stop the deforestation process. Within the issue of deforestation arises the humanitarian problem of indigenous land and livelihood. Currently the United States and Brazil are entering negotiations in order to decrease deforestation by 20-30% at the end of 2021. A Reuters article touches on these new developments:

Environment Minister Ricardo Salles, who is leading the Brazilian negotiators, has publicly asked for \$1 billion in foreign aid in advance, that potentially could come from the United States with other partners. One of the sources confirmed that request has been made in the talks. Salles told Brazilian newspaper O Estado de S.Paulo this month that upon receiving that money, Brazil could lower deforestation by 30%-40% in a span of 12 months. Without money up front, he said Brazil would not be able to set a hard target.²⁶

Due to the all-time highs of deforestation in Brazil under the Bolsonaro administration the United States, and the international community, have created a significant incentive for

²⁶ “Brazil Demand for U.S. to Pay Upfront Stalls Deal to Save Amazon Forest,” Reuters, April 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/brazil-demand-us-pay-upfront-stalls-deal-save-amazon-forest-2021-04-15/>.

Bolsonaro to take the level of deforestation seriously. However, the disputes and negotiations between both parties are slow to progress and continue to follow the trend of unprofessional behavior. This circumstance between the United States officials and Brazilian ministers depicts the ideal that Bolsonaro has taken in regards to the environment thus far. Looking for more economic expansion, not taking the issue of deforestation seriously, and further augmenting unjust humanitarian issues.

Bolsonaro's, not just lack of environmental prioritization, but targeted disapproval of it has led the international community to pay close attention to what Brazil will and will not do in these coming years. Bolsonaro has already refused to host several international environmental conferences, showing the uninterest in sustainable participation on a global scale. From the international perspective Bolsonaro's actions are less than ideal, resulting in a shifting of priorities from an international standpoint. This means that resources and money have decreased when it comes to international aid. One of the key reasons the international community has begun to leave Brazil in the dust is because of the rise of coalitions like BBB, which stands for Bullets, Bible and Beef. The BBB is an extremely influential entity of the Brazil democratic process and often dictates crucial legislation. This means that conservative ideals are often pushed through parliament due to the mass amounts of money and resources that coalitions like BBB have. "Together with the law-and-order lobby and the agrarian oligarchs, the evangelical comprise the formidable-and deeply conservative- "bullet, beef, and bible" caucus."²⁷ For the BBB, Bolsonaro is an exemplary leader. Due to the backing from the BBB Bolsonaro has been

²⁷ "Amid Crisis in Brazil, the Evangelical Bloc Emerges as a Political Power | The Nation." Accessed May 2, 2021. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/amid-crisis-in-brazil-the-evangelical-bloc-emerges-as-a-political-power/>.

able to advance his agenda in terms of agricultural prioritization and further avoid legal loopholes that would prevent him from clearing the Amazon for crop production.

Another bloc which is extremely influential in Brazilian conservative politics is the “Ruralist” coalition. The members of this coalition are directly linked to the cattle industry and agriculture specifically soy production. The Ruralist party has been heavily associated with wealthy landowners and the elite class in Brazil. Because of their right-wing policies many in the nation are worried that violence will ensue in the Amazon due to the policies set to deforest more of its biodiversity. Not only the fear of violence ensuing between indigenous populations and the government, but also the fear on behalf of environmental defenders. Brazil has been known to be one of the most violent places for people in the sector of conservation and it is slowly becoming a norm that a lot of people are often killed for defending land rights. This is another factor that has contributed to the decrease in international attention. Bolsonaro is running on the power of fear from his people and this cannot be more apparent than in the environmental sector.

As the international community continues to peer down on the Bolsonaro administration the rigidity of its allowance towards the nation slowly dwindles. Coalitions such as the BBB and the Ruralist play an important role in the discontent from the international community. Under the Bolsonaro administration these strong actors have increased deforestation in the Amazon, further jeopardizing the global effect on the environment. In addition, since the election of Jair Bolsonaro Brazil has found itself in a position of digression from years of environmental policy and progress. The withdrawal from the Paris Climate agreement is a clear representation of that digression. “Not surprisingly, Brazil’s retreat from international liberalism is already afoot. Foreign Affairs Minister Ernesto Araújo, a climate change skeptic (he has referred to climate change as a Marxist plot), has announced that Brazil will pull out of the Paris climate change

agreement, something inconceivable only a few months ago.”²⁸ The decision to pull out from the Paris climate change agreement depicts his overall withdraw from international liberalism. Because of his decision to roll back on several legislative decisions regarding agriculture, deforestation, and chemicals use, Jair Bolsonaro now faces doubt and distrust from the international community on how capable the country is at representing sustainable development. This is demonstrated in the simplest of forms, from not hosting the 25th United Nations Conference of the Parties to earning support from the agricultural coalition, the Ruralist, during his campaign, Bolsonaro continues to raise suspicion from international actors. It is clear to see that Brazil’s environmental momentum has come to a crashing stop since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Having this attack on the environment from the Bolsonaro administration has drastically affected international support for sustainable development in the nation. These issues have continued to play a dominant role in international leadership on Brazil’s end.

The willingness to sit down and troubleshoot ideas on how to develop in an environmentally friendly manner was demonstrated through the collaboration between coalitions and agendas under the Environmental licensing and the environmental impact assessment (EIA). The EIA was meant to prevent infrastructural development from environmental harm. Economic projects had to be run through this committee in order for it to be carried out and were often deterred due to the environmental damage it would create. Lula and the PT party worked to collaborate between the different ministries in order to find sustainable solutions. The process for carrying out a project has three levels of approval, planning, construction and operation. Kathryn Hochstetler highlights some of the negative impacts this has taken on Brazilian society in her

²⁸ Encarnación, Omar G. “Brazil’s Love Affair With Diplomacy Is Dead.” *Foreign Policy* (blog). Accessed May 2, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/08/brazils-love-affair-with-diplomacy-is-dead/>.

essay “Tracking Presidents and Policies.” “For example, the World Bank has calculated that payments for the socio environmental impacts of hydropower projects in Brazil now average 12% of total project costs.”²⁹

These processes are one of the biggest contingencies’ points under the current administration. Jair Bolsonaro has continuously verbalized his discontent with this system of checks and balances. So much so that under the first 11 months in office over 290 new pesticides were approved for use, causing detrimental health effects to only communities in the surrounding areas, but also prove to be toxic to the soil in turn contaminating food. In the midst of catastrophes such as dams collapsing and oil spills happening throughout the nation, Bolsonaro is still pushing for the loosening of the legal approving process that prevents deforestation, mining, and dam installations. It is the strong conservative coalitions that are dictating the fate of communities throughout the country and inhibiting the increase in environmental degradation. Further, the disempowerment of the environmental regulatory agencies has become a regular trend within the Bolsonaro administration. This has led to a crisis within the scientific community, where it is now more important than ever for scientists to collaborate with civil society in order to share accurate information. For any country scientific literacy is hard to share with large demographics and populations. Scientists are now having to step into the role as mediators amongst different stakeholders and policy analysts in order to correctly relay information. From an infrastructural to an ideological level Brazil’s environment is degrading and the current state of affairs is finding itself more adrift after decades of environmental progress and prioritization. Environmental tragedies are trickled through Brazilian history and society, often going unnoticed by the public. These circumstances are fundamental examples of

²⁹ Hochstetler, “Tracking Presidents and Policies,” 16.

how the environmental movement has gone adrift because of the frequency in which it happens within the nation.

Conclusion:

The 2020 fires in the Amazon proved to be a direct metaphor for how Bolsonaro would govern and lead Brazil. Just like the roaring flames engulfing the centuries old trees, Bolsonaro also reigned hellfire down onto his citizens. From the lackluster care for the environment to his inhumane treatment of his citizens since the coronavirus pandemic, Bolosonaro continues to scorch the terrain. However, just like the Amazon, the fires merely reflect the product of political conditions and factors that came in the decades before his rise to power. The hot embers that were set aflame by politicians such as Lula Da Silva and Dilma Rousseff laid the foundation for the flames to engulf Brazil. From prioritizing economic growth to appointing conservative politicians Lula and Dilma are just two of the hundreds who contributed to the arson of Brazil's destruction. To be put plainly, Bolsonaro's ability to cause as much destruction, as he currently does, could not be achieved without a perfect path of crumbs leading him to power. From Lula's most progressive Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva, resigning because the administration failed to deliver on its sustainability promises, to Dilma Rousseff appointment of Katia Abreu, a conservative politician as the minister of agriculture depicts how the path was being paved for Bolsonaro. The common wisdom that Bolsonaro is to blame for the drastic environmental degradation is clearly disproved when closely investigating how Bolsonaro got to his current place. This tension between what is commonly assumed and the more comprehensive explanation is the reason as to why I embarked on disproving those misconceptions.

In order to create a comprehensive understanding of how the environment in Brazil has become degraded through the decades a clear overview of the history of environmental politics in Brazil was included. The overview provides a good background into how these different factors (international community intervention, social movements, and politics) came into conversation with one another throughout the text. Following the overview, a comprehensive analysis of the different factors was presented. First, starting with the role that the international community played in the development of environmental policy in Brazil. The international community contributed enormously to how the public and policy developed within these structures. It was through the international community that external support either increased or faltered as different political and social priorities took shape in the nation. A big indication in the decrease of support from NGOs and international sustainable organizations was caused by the new found prioritization for economic development. This soon discouraged these international actors from setting up a base or helping the Brazilian environmental movement.

Second, tying in the role that the social movements had in the makeup of the environmental crisis. The social movements gave rise to the lasting dispute we still see now between Brazilian elite and the majority of civilian society. It was through the medium of social movements that communities were able to protest the environmental injustices happening in their own backyards. From this emerging mode of civil unrest arose a new way for public society to be represented. This was soon followed by the incorporation of more community-based organizations and NGOs being represented in government. It is now evident that these organizations had to fight hard to gain their voice in politics within Brazilian society. While these organizations have a seat at the table they still continue to struggle with the political elite and have to constantly fight harder and longer for environmental justice. The social movements

that arose far before the Bolsonaro administration paved the way for productive conversations and representation, however fell short of incorporating lasting change in the structure of governmental makeup.

Lastly the impact of politics proves to be one of the most confusing yet instrumental parts of the structure that builds the current state of affairs in Brazil. Specifically, the politics under the Lula da Silva administration and Dilma Rousseff. While these two figures outwardly represented a more liberalized approach to politics and economics, their internal structures did not back up the surface claims being made to the majority of people. Behind closed doors the notions and policies that we now see we're continuing to be perpetuated. Those ideals being a big prioritization of economic wealth and agricultural expansion. This in turn resulted in little effort for allocating resources for civil society, fixing the environment, and combating domestic corruption. In this text I have presented my explanations as to why we see the dire situation in Brazil unfolding the way it has been these last several decades. Through analyzing the involvement of the international community, the environmental social movement, and lastly the political priorities under Lula Da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, I make the claim that the conventional wisdom that blames Bolsonaro for the current environmental state is a mere product of these past issues.

Having now analyzed more in depth how these policies are just now translating into society through the Bolsonaro administration depicts the issue with a wider lens. These issues are directly related to how the current administration has decided to tackle environmental policy and the ideals surrounding economic expansion. Since the Bolsonaro administration has taken office several catastrophic events have taken place in which Bolsonaro has failed to adequately address. In turn, this had led Brazil facing one of the most inhumane treatment of its citizens. First, the

Amazon fires that plagued the region in 2019-2020. The ecosystem of hundreds of species was destroyed and the relocation of hundreds of indigenous communities put Brazil on the international radar. Bolsonaro, doing little to restore the Amazon, has further pushed for more clearing of this habitat in order to make space for agriculture. While these inhumane actions have sparked the attention of the international community, nothing has shocked the global community more than the Coronavirus pandemic.

At the beginning of 2020 the coronavirus spread throughout the globe affecting some countries in harsher ways than others. One of the countries that has been the most affected is Brazil. Bolsonaro has refused to enact any lockdown procedure, allocate more resources towards vaccine distribution, and continues to dismiss the rising concern of the different variants of the virus originating in Brazil. The enforcement of standard procedures to help reduce the spread, such as wearing masks and abiding by social distancing rules, has been dismissed. Bolsonaro is often seen holding large gatherings in which he is often not wearing a mask. With the Brazilian healthcare system near its impending collapse the government has failed in providing affordable masks and gear to prevent the spread. An article published by nature reviews, written by Daniela Ponce states:

Brazil's health system is now on the brink of collapse; >1,500,000 cases of COVID-19 and >60,000 deaths have been reported, but these numbers are undoubtedly underestimates. Brazil has a population of 200 million and has run only ~14,000 tests for every 1,000,000 people. Hospitals in São Paulo, Manaus, Belém, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro have denounced a lack of essential supplies and an increase in prices. The cost of a box of masks rose from R\$4.50 in January to R\$140 by March; the federal government did not prevent this huge increase and seemingly did not negotiate with industry to meet the increased demand.³⁰

³⁰ Daniela Ponce, "The Impact of Coronavirus in Brazil: Politics and the Pandemic," *Nature Reviews Nephrology* 16, no. 9 (September 2020): 483, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41581-020-0327-0>.

These domestic turmoil's have placed a larger emphasis on the international community to help address this rising humanitarian crisis. In an article published by Reuters this need for help is well depicted, "Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga said Brazil was in talks with Spain and other countries to secure the emergency drugs. Hospitals, he added, were also struggling to get enough oxygen."³¹ Brazil is now facing a new set of international cooperation, having to negotiate for health care support in the midst of a global pandemic. In addition, the international community faces a hardship in helping Brazil due to the values held by the current administration. It is apparent that Brazil's healthcare system is going to fall short of providing citizens with adequate healthcare. It is only through the help of an international support system that Brazil will be able to start fighting the Coronavirus.

In addition to a crumbling health care system the economic downpour of resources has heavily affected Brazilian markets. Brazil has faced a devastating loss in capita since the initial hit of the coronavirus in 2020. A Reuter article states: "GDP per capita fell 4.8%, IBGE said, the steepest fall since at least 2000."³² This fall in the economy has been felt most by the poorest demographic in Brazil and further has pushed more middle-class citizens towards poorer statuses. With little emphasis on social spending, even amidst this catastrophe, Bolsonaro still is pushing for increase in resources in sectors such as agribusiness, trade, and energy. By providing little relief domestically Bolsonaro has left the work to be done by local and international NGOs and advocacy groups. Relying on the international economic wealth and failing to stimulate the internal economy will in turn put Brazil in a fragile position that becomes reliant on international trade. While the health care system falls so does the economy and its ability to push lower

³¹ Reuters Staff, "Brazil's Hospitals Running out of Sedatives as COVID-19 Rages," *Reuters*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-idUSKBN2C22B0>.

³² Jamie McGeever, "Brazil GDP Drops 4.1% in 2020, COVID-19 Surge Erodes Rebound," *Reuters*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-economy-gdp-idUSKBN2AV1FZ>.

income households out of poverty. These trends show how the correlation between how the past prioritization of economic expansion and increase in international trade has left the internal revenue in the dust. Without the domestic economy stimulating its social societies the issues surrounding not only the environment, but also the coronavirus pandemic will only worsen.

These faltering economic structures in Brazil have also given rise to political tension amongst government officials, coalitions, and party leaders. This is recently evident when the Brazilian health minister resigns due to the controversial way in which the administration is facing the pandemic. Nelson Teich, the second health minister under the Bolsonaro administration, resigned after Bolsonaro demanded for the approval of hydroxychloroquine to treat coronavirus patients.³³ This is after the concern of its effect on patients' hearts and its effectiveness as a malaria treatment. These types of tensions amongst differing party members and their correlating beliefs have predated the Bolsonaro administration for decades. These sorts of resignations have dated back to the Lula administration, when the minister of the environment, Marina Silva, resigned due to unprogressive environmental legislation. From this perspective the rotating door of politicians entering and leaving politics in Brazil is nothing new under the Bolsonaro administration. Even under Lula, what the majority of people would consider a more liberal government, these issues and disputes still occurred. In addition, controversial statements by Bolsonaro have bolstered international and domestic worry in how he will address the rising issue of deaths within the nation. Bolsonaro is quoted saying: "I was elected to make decisions. And the decision about chloroquine goes through me,"³⁴ Bolsonaro told business leaders in a

³³ Daniela Ponce, "The Impact of Coronavirus in Brazil: Politics and the Pandemic," *Nature Reviews Nephrology* 16, no. 9 (September 2020): 483–483, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41581-020-0327-0>.

³⁴ Lisandra Paraguassu Boadle Anthony, "Brazil Loses New Health Minister as Bolsonaro Grabs Reins in Coronavirus Crisis," *Reuters*, May 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-idUSKBN22R2FM>.

video conference. From discouraging vaccines to not allocating resources to hospitals, Bolsonaro has become a staple of instability in the eyes of the international community.

Looking beyond the current crisis unfolding in Brazil's economic and health sector, the political scene has also indirectly addressed a lot of rising changes within the governmental structure. Since the Supreme court in Brazil has annulled all allegations against former leftist president Lula Da Silva, there has been a large debate on his return to government. After serving time in jail for money laundering and corruption Lula wants to make a strong return to the political scene. With Lula Da Silva now in the scene analyzing how these different issues will unfold in the coming years is up in the air. However, from this text we can draw some small conclusions as to what the rest of Brazil has in store for their future. First, the issue of environmentalism will still be centered around the preservation of the Amazon, paying little attention to the demands from civil society. This will in turn create an upsurge in social movements. From welfare to sewage and pollution these issues will be brought forward in Brazil's agenda. A caveat lies however as to the timeline in which all this will take place. First, the need to address the issue of the uncontrolled pandemic in Brazil will have to be a priority amongst politicians. Second, fixing the healthcare system and the economy will essentially dictate how well the demands from the social movements will be met. The ability to allocate resources to smaller levels of society will aid in the success of the mending of socio economics. Lastly, the obstacle of corrupt politicians will have to be addressed in order for the poorer communities to receive the proper help needed. Overcoming the hurdle of money laundering will enable an easier transition of resources from top to bottom. This obstacle has been present throughout the different administrations and continues to affect the livelihood of the majority of the population living under the poverty line.

Brazil continues to struggle to find its footing in both the domestic and international sectors. So, what awaits Brazil in its future? How will the comeback from a crippling pandemic, that has caused the vast degradation of economy, health care, and human rights, recover? Can one look to the past to answer the impending questions Brazil will have to face in the future? In addition to the crumbling infrastructure and government, there seems to be a rising elite in favor of more conservative policies. With the rise of Bolsonaro, and now the emergence of Lula, how will these structures change within Brazilian society and politics? These questions call for a reorganization in how one perceives the current status in Brazil. This text is an attempt to destabilize common norms that explain the current circumstances that Brazil faces. Taking this into consideration analyzing new dilemmas through this same lens of questioning will put into broader context how and why Brazil is in its current status.

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