

2023 POLICY PAPER

DECEMBER, 2023

Presented By

WASHINGTON BRAZIL OFFICE



Published by Washington Brazil Office, December 2023

www.braziloffice.org

The Washington Brazil Office (WBO) is an independent institution that specializes in thinking about Brazil and supporting actions that strengthen the role of civil society and institutions dedicated to the promotion and defense of democracy, human rights, freedoms, and sustainable socioeconomic and environmental development of the country.

Our objective is to produce knowledge and support the international work of all sectors that need support, action, bilateral exchanges, knowledge production, and the construction of cooperative relations between Brazil and the United States and/or with international organizations and bodies headquartered in the United States.

The WBO maintains a close and collaborative partnership with Brazilian civil society, fostering engagement and cooperation across various sectors. A testament to this robust network is the affiliation of 54 organizations representing diverse areas within Brazil that are closely associated with the WBO. This broad spectrum of affiliations underscores the WBO's commitment to inclusivity and comprehensive engagement, creating a platform for cooperation that spans across a multitude of sectors and interests within the Brazilian landscape.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy paper stands as a testament to the collaborative efforts of a dedicated team whose commitment and expertise have significantly enriched its content. The Washington Brazil Office research fellows played an instrumental role in the development of this document, actively contributing their insights, research prowess, and dedication to the meticulous writing process.

Special gratitude is extended to the following academics whom the WBO is honored to have as research fellows: André Pagliarini, Fábio de Sá e Silva, Tracy Devine Guzmán, Silvio Eduardo Alvarez Candido, Vânia Penha-Lopes, Andrew Janusz, Rosana Heringer, Rubia Valente, Cecília Macdowell Santos, Fernanda Martinelli, Rafael Ioris, and Jana Silverman. Your collective expertise and dedication have been indispensable in shaping the comprehensive analysis presented in this policy paper. We also express gratitude for the contributions made by Victor de Wolf of ABGLT and Giuliano Galli of the Institute Vladimir Herzog.

This policy paper is a collective achievement, made possible by the passion, expertise, and collaborative spirit of each individual mentioned. We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone involved for their exceptional contributions, without which this endeavor would not have been possible.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Policy Paper

This policy paper is crafted with the primary aim of providing a thorough and insightful analysis of the critical challenges Brazil faces in diverse domains. Emphasizing key pillars, such as democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, racial equality, gender, sexual diversity, and socio-economic development, the paper seeks to contribute a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in Brazil's current landscape.

At its core, this document strives to serve as a comprehensive guide for policymakers, academics, and advocates, offering a structured exploration of the multifaceted issues shaping Brazil's trajectory. By analyzing each thematic area, the policy paper endeavors to illuminate the intricate interconnections between democracy, environmental sustainability, social equality, and economic development.

The paper's purpose, however, extends beyond mere analysis; it aspires to be a catalyst for positive change. By distilling challenges and opportunities within each domain, the document sets forth a series of targeted policy recommendations. These recommendations are tailored to foster positive transformation, addressing the root causes of issues and envisioning a more equitable and sustainable future for Brazil.

As Brazil stands at a critical juncture, grappling with pressing issues that resonate globally, this policy paper endeavors to be a valuable resource. Its purpose is not only to inform but to inspire action, providing a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders to navigate the complex landscape of challenges and opportunities and collectively contribute to the advancement of a more inclusive, just, and sustainable Brazil.

1.2 Executive Summary

This policy paper provides a comprehensive analysis of critical issues facing Brazil across various domains, emphasizing democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, racial equality, gender, sexual diversity, and socio-economic development. The document is structured to offer insights into challenges and opportunities in these areas, presenting policy recommendations for fostering positive change.

- **Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression**

This section delves into the status of democracy in Brazil, analyzing the human rights situation and highlighting challenges to freedom of expression. Recommendations are presented to strengthen democratic institutions and uphold human rights principles in the country.

- **Amazon, Environment and Climate Change**

Focusing on the environment, this chapter emphasizes the importance of the Amazon Rainforest, addresses environmental challenges, and outlines the impact of deforestation. It explores potential strategies to ensure sustainable environmental practices and mitigate climate change effects.

- **Racial Equality and Overcoming Racism**

Examining Brazil's historical context of racism, this chapter evaluates the current state of racial equality, proposes solutions to address structural racism and discrimination, and outlines policy recommendations to promote racial equality in the nation.

- **Gender and Sexual Diversity**

This section addresses LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment in Brazil. It provides an overview of the challenges faced by these communities and suggests strategies for advancing gender and sexual diversity rights.

- **Socio-economic development, SDGs and 2030 Agenda**

Focusing on Brazil's socio-economic landscape, this chapter assesses progress and challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and outlines policy approaches for sustainable development in alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

CHAPTER 2: DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

2.1 Overview of Democracy in Brazil

As the second-largest democracy in the Western Hemisphere and the fourth-largest in the world, Brazil is a vast, complex country marked by inequality and a history of authoritarianism that continues to influence its politics. It is also a nation with dedicated social movements; diverse political parties; and sophisticated thinkers, entrepreneurs, activists, and political leaders. Between 1964 and 1985, Brazil was under a right-wing military dictatorship that brutally suppressed dissent. In 2018, the country elected a president who openly praised the military rule experience. However, the dysfunctions and instabilities of Brazilian democracy began earlier: in 2014, the defeated presidential candidate Aécio Neves questioned the fairness of the elections; in 2016, then-president Dilma Rousseff faced an impeachment process widely considered a parliamentary coup; and in 2018, candidate Lula da Silva was removed from the electoral race due to corruption charges later deemed tainted by the bias and abuses of Judge Sérgio Moro, who, after the 2018 elections, was appointed Minister of Justice and Public Security in the Bolsonaro government.

The Bolsonaro government was marked by constant attacks on democratic institutions, perpetrated by government members, including the president himself, and their allies in an extreme-right ecosystem anchored in sectors of the business community, commercial media, and social media influencers. These attacks intensified during the electoral process and persisted after the official results were announced. Numerous groups, attributing Lula da Silva's victory to fraud—a theory Bolsonaro helped propagate—camped in front of military barracks for over 60 days, demanding military intervention in politics to annul the elections, arrest judges, and install Bolsonaro for a second term. A week after Lula's inauguration, these supporters staged an insurrection in the capital city, breaking into and vandalizing several government buildings.

The apparent resilience of Brazilian institutions to the January 8, 2023 attacks hides the dysfunction resulting from the last decade of Brazilian political history. During this period, the Brazilian Congress became more conservative and transactional, exercising greater control over the budget and the public policy agenda; the military returned to politics, occupying thousands of civilian positions in the federal executive; the Attorney General's Office was instrumentalized to ensure Bolsonaro's impunity; and the judiciary, especially the Supreme Federal Court (STF) and the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), became the main vectors of accountability and control for

abuses committed by the former president. This, in turn, exposed these courts to extremist attacks, while generating criticisms against judges, especially Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, for alleged abuses. The current Lula government has the challenge of attempting to stabilize this political-institutional framework, restoring the legitimacy of the presidency, and holding public and private actors accountable for violating democratic norms and respecting due process.

The attack on Brazil's democratic institutions underscored the country's profound polarization, one that President Joe Biden recognized on the occasion of Lula's visit to the White House in February: "Both our nations' strong democracies have been tested of late—very much tested—and our institutions have been put in jeopardy. But, both in the United States and Brazil, democracy prevailed." He concluded that "our mutual agendas, they sound very similar."¹ In the eyes of many Brazilians, this is a half-truth. While it is indeed necessary to acknowledge the important role of the United States in signaling to the elites and the armed forces in Brazil that it would not support a new democratic rupture,² there are resentments regarding the apparent role played by the U.S. government in the Lava Jato (Car Wash) operation, which led to Lula's imprisonment.³ Although these tensions between the two countries are challenges to overcome in a government led by Lula himself, collaboration for the strengthening of democracy remains a mutual interest for Brazil and the United States. Both countries are facing attacks on democracy from political forces with similar profiles and methods. In this context, issues, such as combating extremism and disinformation and regulating digital platforms, could bring Lula and Biden closer, with positive repercussions for democracy in the hemisphere.

This is also true about other issues—most notably, fighting climate change and preserving democracy—but not all. Indeed, insisting on a commonality of interests overlooks a great deal and ultimately undermines opportunities for deeper collaboration. Brazil has its own needs, desires, and interests, some of which are not in line with what Washington wants for the region and the world order more generally. The United States should accept and respect that.

¹ Biden, Joe. "Remarks by President Biden and President Lula da Silva of Brazil Before Bilateral Meeting." February 10, 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/02/10/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-lula-da-silva-of-brazil-before-bilateral-meeting/>.

² Congresso em Foco. "Ação Dos Eua Impediu Golpe No Brasil, Diz Ex-Chanceler Mexicano." Congresso Em Foco, 20 Aug. 2023, congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/area/pais/acao-dos-eua-impediu-golpe-no-brasil-diz-ex-chanceler-mexicano/.

³ Andrew Fishman, N. V. (2023, July 25). "The secret history of U.S. involvement in Brazil's operation car wash." The Intercept. <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/12/united-states-justice-department-brazil-car-wash-lava-jato-international-treaty/>; Estrada, G., & Bourcier, N. (2022, March 11). "lava jato," the Brazilian trap. Le Monde.fr. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/archives/article/2022/03/11/lava-jato-the-brazilian-trap_5978421_113.html

In the past, U.S. administrations have frustrated Brazilian hopes for greater influence in South America and beyond, a dynamic that has engendered lingering mistrust. Many Brazilian policymakers see China and Russia as being at least as reliable as the United States, a sobering prospect for U.S. officials concerned about China's growing clout in the Americas and Russia's war on Ukraine. Under Lula, Brazil has maintained a policy of steadfast nonalignment, seeking to maximize trade opportunities with the United States as well as its rivals. Openly acknowledging differences rather than condescendingly papering them over is an important step the United States must take to regain Brazil's trust. The ultimate aim of a productive U.S.-Brazil relationship should be to lay the groundwork for a greater Brazilian role in global governance. Doing so would demonstrate to Brazilians that the United States recognizes their importance as democratic partners capable of addressing thorny transnational issues in ways Washington sometimes cannot.

2.2 Human Rights Situation

The defeat of Jair Bolsonaro in the 2022 elections brings significant opportunities for the projection of human rights, but the country is far from eliminating Brazil's historical challenges in this regard, exacerbated by the rise and legacy of the former president. During his inauguration, the new president Lula da Silva ascended the ramp of the presidential palace accompanied by a Black boy, a waste picker, an elderly Indigenous person, a metalworker, a teacher, a woman, and a young person with a disability—thus demonstrating the importance of a government focused on all segments of the population.⁴ Shortly after taking office, Lula acted swiftly to rebuild the country's institutional capacity in crucial areas for human rights policy, reactivating participatory institutions that had been abolished or weakened during the Bolsonaro administration (especially councils) and recreating agencies with ministerial status to address racial and gender equality issues. Lula also, for the first time in the country's history, established a ministry entirely dedicated to the rights of Indigenous peoples, appointing an Indigenous woman, Sonia Guajajara.⁵

Almost a year after Lula's inauguration, it can be said that there has been relative success in reconstructing several policies relevant to human rights that were undermined during the

⁴ Patriolino, Luana. "Veja Quem São Os Representantes Do Povo Brasileiro Que Subiram a Rampa Com Lula." *Política*, www.correiobraziliense.com.br/politica/2023/01/5063027-veja-quem-sao-os-representantes-do-povo-brasileiro-que-subiram-a-rampa-com-lula.html. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁵ "Nova Estrutura de Ministérios Começa a Valer Nesta Terça." *Ministério Da Gestão e Da Inovação Em Serviços Públicos*, 23 Jan. 2023, www.gov.br/gestao/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/janeiro/nova-estrutura-de-ministerios-comeca-a-valer-nesta-terca.

Bolsonaro government. Noteworthy are the policies aimed at promoting racial equality, with congress approving the extension of the law guaranteeing quotas for Black and Indigenous people in public universities and extending these quotas to postgraduate courses.⁶ There is also significant movement to address more contemporary challenges, such as combating political extremism⁷ and violence in schools,⁸ which are the focus of working groups in the Ministries of Human Rights and Education.

Despite these advances, the political conditions for the human rights agenda remain extremely unfavorable. While it is true that Bolsonaro lost the election (which, it is important to remember, happened by a narrow margin), candidates identified with his positions were massively elected to the Chamber of Deputies (Brazil's lower house), the Senate, and state governments. These political actors remain committed to the same cultural war that informed the Bolsonaro government's actions and targets the human rights of vulnerable populations. For example, on October 10, 2023, a committee of the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill prohibiting same-sex marriage.⁹ If passed in a plenary session, this bill would inevitably be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which, in the joint judgment of ADPF 132 and ADI 4277, ruled that same-sex and heterosexual couples must have the same rights and state protection. However, symbolically, these legislative initiatives demonstrate the strength of sectors whose worldview and political project are structured in a way that is incompatible with human rights, rejecting the fundamental premise that all people should be treated with equal respect and consideration.

Equally challenging will be dealing with positions held by people resistant to human rights and entrenched in sectors of the state itself, especially among police organizations and the armed forces—a problem that dates back to the country's redemocratization and the choice, since then, not to confront the military and not to reform the public security agencies inherited from the civil-military dictatorship (1964–1985). The new Lula government deserves credit for halting institutional transformation processes that were reconfiguring federal police forces—especially the federal highway police—and turning them into true forces of political repression and attacks on

⁶ Nova Lei de Cotas Segue Para Sanção — Ministério Da Educação, www.gov.br/mec/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/outubro/nova-lei-de-cotas-segue-para-sancao.

⁷ “MDHC Entrega Relatório Com Propostas Para Enfrentar o Discurso de Ódio e o Extremismo No Brasil.” *Ministério Dos Direitos Humanos e Da Cidadania*, www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/julho/mdhc-entrega-relatorio-com-propostas-para-enfrentar-o-discurso-de-odio-e-o-extremismo-no-brasil. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁸ “GTI de Combate à Violência NAS Escolas Apresenta Relatório.” *Ministério Da Educação*, www.gov.br/mec/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/outubro/gti-de-combate-a-violencia-nas-escolas-apresenta-relatorio.

⁹ “Comissão Aprova Projeto Que Proíbe O Casamento Entre Pessoas Do Mesmo Sexo - Notícias.” *Portal Da Câmara Dos Deputados*, www.camara.leg.br/noticias/1006272-comissao-aprova-projeto-que-proibe-o-casamento-entre-pessoas-do-mesmo-sexo/.

democracy.¹⁰ Nevertheless, police violence in the states continued to make headlines in 2023, with notable massacres in São Paulo¹¹ and Bahia.¹² These events, which preferentially victimize young Black in the outskirts residents of urban areas, were publicly justified by authorities from opposing political forces, including those within the federal government, using the same law and order rhetoric ("crime is not fought with roses").¹³ Thus, they reveal a capitulation of the country to authoritarian solutions in public security matters.

Similarly, despite the work of reconstructing the relevant institutional capacity for human rights policies highlighted above, an important and symbolic gap related to the Special Commission of Dead and Disappeared Political Activists persists. This commission, created during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (1994–2002) to recognize victims of the civil-military dictatorship, locate their bodies, and compensate their families, was deactivated at the end of the Bolsonaro government. Its recreation by the Lula government, however, continues to be postponed, despite pressure from families and civil society. According to press reports, the delay stems from an attempt to avoid conflicts with the military.¹⁴

In summary, the human rights situation in present-day Brazil reflects a delicate balance that will likely characterize the entire current government cycle, namely between the election of a president linked to the democratic forces and, therefore, committed to human rights agendas combined with the attempt to rebuild institutional capacity that allows the government to recognize and address the demands of diverse population segments, on one hand, and an adverse political context that, whether liked or not, seems to be here to stay and is linked to forms of authoritarianism historically entrenched in the state.

¹⁰ Pinotti, Fernanda. "Pf Indica Que Silvinei Vasques Teria Determinado 'Policiamento Direcionado' Da Prf Em 2o Turno Das Eleições." *CNN Brasil*, www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/pf-indica-que-silvinei-vasques-teria-determinado-policiamento-direcionado-da-prf-em-2o-turno-das-eleicoes/.

¹¹ Folha. "Operação Na Baixada Santista Tem Indícios de Chacina, Dizem Especialistas." *Folha de S.Paulo*, 2 Aug. 2023, www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2023/08/operacao-na-baixada-santista-tem-indicios-de-chacina-dizem-especialistas.shtml.

¹² "Chacina Com Nove Mortes Na Bahia FOI Motivada Por Ciúmes, Diz Polícia." *G1*, 29 Aug. 2023, g1.globo.com/ba/bahia/noticia/2023/08/29/coletiva-policia-civil-chacina-bahia.ghtml.

¹³ Jussara Soares, Basília Rodrigues. "Não Se Enfrenta Crime Organizado Com Rosas, Diz Número 2 Do Ministério Da Justiça à CNN." *CNN Brasil*, www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/nao-se-enfrenta-crime-organizado-com-rosas-diz-numero-2-do-ministerio-da-justica/.

¹⁴ MARIANNA HOLANDA - RENATO MACHADO - Folhapress. "Governo Lula Ignora Promessa e Mant." *Estado de Minas*, 24 Sept. 2023, www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2023/09/24/interna_politica,1566338/governo-lula-ignora-promessa-e-mantem-extinta-comissao-de-mortos-e-desapare.shtml.

2.3 Challenges to Freedom of Expression

In a still polarized, extremely unequal society that is heavily influenced by the media, journalism and communication play an absolutely fundamental role: to inform and circulate relevant information to all segments of the population, considering the different perspectives and ways of life that make up the world. It is a condition of democracy that citizens have access to independent information and contribute to the free circulation of such information, enabling people to genuinely participate in political life and gain an enlightened understanding of public interest issues. A government committed to guaranteeing and strengthening the democratic regime, therefore, must act to ensure that these principles are duly upheld, in accordance with what is established by the Constitution and other national and international documents governing the democratic state based on the rule of law.

In Brazil, however, recent years were characterized, among other things, by systematic threats and violations of the rights to freedom of expression and the press. Moreover, there was an attempt to co-opt these basic principles of democratic life. This placed the topic, in general, at the center of public debate, making the need for action by the new government even more urgent and assertive. In this sense, the legacy left by the previous administration is staggering as the number of threats and attacks on journalists and communicators skyrocketed, with the former president himself becoming one of the main agents of these violations. Misinformation not only took advantage of the negligence of digital platforms but also became a communication tool for the group that led the country over the past years. During this period the Bolsonaro government dismantled Brazilian state protection programs and undermined their structures.

The challenges for the new government, which were already considerably complex, became even greater after the regrettable coup-like acts committed in the Three Powers Square in Brasília on January 8th. Bolsonaro supporters invaded public buildings, stole or damaged works of art, and broke windows. Destruction was widespread. Amid this terrorist act, rioters cowardly attacked journalists and communicators in the exercise of their profession. These attacks ranged from verbal assaults to physical violence, torture, destruction of equipment, and thefts.

There, on the first day of the second week of an inaugurated administration, the actions of the new government began to take shape. Before that, a transition office set up working groups that, for several weeks, delved into various public issues, including those directly and indirectly related to guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression. But it was in the wake of the reaction

to the serious acts committed on January 8th that the new government began to act concretely in defense of constitutional principles.

At the beginning of its term in office the new administration created the Digital Policies Secretariat of the Social Communication Secretariat (Secom) of the Presidency of the Republic of Brazil. The administration appointed civil society experts in various areas to the body, with a focus on one of the greatest challenges not only for the new government but for contemporary Brazil and the world, namely, combating misinformation. Despite the notorious seriousness of the misinformation problem and its impact on democracy and social justice, discussions of solutions were underdeveloped in Brazil, Latin America, and elsewhere. Despite the large number of highly qualified civil society entities with experience in discussing internet policies, there was a deficit in state participation and effective proposals to address this problem.

Establishing a secretariat tasked with formulating and orchestrating the execution of these suggestions, the new government has taken a notably commendable stride in tackling the issue. While these endeavors naturally require fine-tuning, it is imperative to foster greater cohesion with various sectors of the Brazilian government and the State. This involves the challenging task of raising awareness within Congress about the pressing necessity for approving laws and implementing tangible measures that advance progress in this area.

In this regard, it is worth emphasizing the urgent need to move forward with the approval of Bill (PL) 2630/20, which establishes rules related to the transparency of social networks and private messaging services, especially regarding the responsibility of providers in combating misinformation and increasing transparency on the internet, establishing transparency regarding sponsored content, and promoting government action. A problem as complex as misinformation requires, necessarily, assertive state participation. Even if not perfect, PL 2630/20 creates fundamental conditions for an improvement in the ecosystem where information, including journalistic content, is produced and shared.

In the first half of January 2023, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, through the National Secretariat of Justice, announced the creation of the National Observatory of Violence against Journalists and Communicators, which has since been tasked with monitoring, receiving cases, and promoting multidisciplinary actions to contain the concerning scenario of violence against the press across the country. The establishment of such an entity has been a longstanding request from unions and civil society organizations engaged in this sphere. Hence, the adoption of a measure that unequivocally yields political and material advantages for the protection of

freedom of expression in Brazil is praiseworthy. Refinements are undoubtedly required, but the inherent vision of the Observatory, which foresees an expansive arena for political engagement by citizens and entities already committed to this cause, enhances the initiative's positive assessment. It underscores the importance of the state progressively acting as a facilitator for the knowledge and initiatives generated by civil society and universities across the nation.

It is undeniable that the achievement of a public policy that ensures the performance of individuals and groups dedicated to enabling the free circulation of information, promoting democratic construction in the strengthening, defense, or repair of rights is undoubtedly a significant advancement, resulting from efforts and investments between civil society and the State. It was for this reason that the Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists (PPDDH) was created in 2017, based on the National Policy for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (PNPDDH), nine years earlier. However, this initiative has not yet been taken seriously by the Brazilian State—and this diagnosis includes the previous government and the first year of the current government. The operation model of the PPDDH is still extremely bureaucratic, resulting in a lethargy that is absolutely incompatible with the need for the provision of protection measures. Moreover, there are no unified national protocols for risk analysis and the definition of measures to be adopted. Finally, the PPDDH is not very transparent, not well-known, and does not promote initiatives to increase its visibility. Approaching its first year under the administration of the new government, there was an expectation that the PPDDH, being a crucial State public policy, would undergo—or at least initiate—restructuring. It is important to reiterate that the legacy of the previous administration was one of devastation. However, what has been observed is a certain inertia, resulting in the program still not being shaped as a feasible alternative for journalists and communicators encountering threats and violations related to their journalistic work by the end of this inaugural year.

Nevertheless, it can be asserted that, on the whole, the new government has made strides in championing freedom of expression. This extends beyond the notable decrease in the frequency of egregious assaults on journalists, communicators, and media establishments by state representatives, which were almost a daily occurrence. The progress is chiefly attributable to the evident acknowledgment, reflected in the agenda of the new administration, of the crucial role that freedom of expression plays in the effective functioning of a democratic system. The challenge now is to reconcile this understanding with the absolutely urgent need to adopt concrete measures that effectively guarantee the preservation and expansion of this right for all Brazilian citizens. Without the free flow of information and opinions, the democratic regime does not function.

2.4 Recommendations for Strengthening Democracy and Human Rights

In terms of democracy and human rights, Brazil and the United States face similar challenges. As discussed, in both countries, there have been movements to undermine the results of the electoral process, and in both, significant human rights milestones—racial and gender equality and equality between same-sex and heterosexual couples, to name a few examples—have been questioned. Therefore, there is a unique opportunity for collaboration between the governments of the two countries on issues ranging from combating political extremism to regulating digital platforms, from combating discrimination against LGBTQIA+ populations to addressing police brutality against Afro-descendants.

In dealing with Brazil, the U.S. government would do well to recognize that the leaders of Latin America's largest nation chafe at the sense that they are held to a different set of rules on the world stage than the one Americans set for themselves. Much of the criticism of Lula's independent foreign policy in the press and by some public officials would seem to suggest that there is no legitimate critique of U.S. hegemony. From the Brazilian perspective, there is precious little accountability for U.S. foreign policy catastrophes even as Brazil risks diplomatic backlash for refusing to contribute weapons to a war in which it is not directly implicated. The paradox is clear: Lula's thoughts on any foreign policy matter are heavily scrutinized to gauge Brazil's democratic commitments and determine whether it can or should be allowed to have a bigger say in global affairs while U.S. hegemony is taken as a given despite the mottled history of the twentieth century. This double standard contributes to the trust deficit between the hemispheric giants and feeds a sense that more voices need to be heard in the construction of a new framework of international governance. This, so far, is the project of Lula's third term when it comes to foreign policy.

For the Brazilian president, the project of South American integration is a matter of geopolitical strategy and ideological affinity. Above all, however, Lula is committed to multipolarity because he believes it serves the interests of Brazil and other countries that see few avenues for ascension under the current arrangement. His administration aims not to undermine the so-called liberal international order but to expand its democratic appeal. Against the common refrain that a dilution of U.S. power in international affairs would lead to worse human rights outcomes around the world, Lula argues that greater influence for a broader array of nations would actually strengthen democratic commitments around the world.

The Lula administration does not see eye-to-eye with Washington when it comes to the situation in Venezuela under Nicolás Maduro.¹⁵ Indeed, Lula has been compared unfavorably to President Gabriel Boric of Chile, a younger progressive leader who has taken a much harsher line against Maduro. Here too it is important for policymakers in Washington to understand Lula's reasoning. Lula's long-held objective is to position Brazil—and himself—as a go-between for sticky diplomatic problems. Maduro is currently as isolated as he is going to get on the world stage. What would Lula accomplish by joining the overwhelming chorus of condemnation against him? What end goal would that advance? It is unclear such an approach would do anything to alter the current stalemate. Instead, Lula insists on warm relations in the hope that Brazil can preserve credibility all around and eventually help broker an agreement. Whether this approach will yield tangible results or not remains to be seen, but it is a clear, concrete strategy. Recognizing the strategic thinking of Brazil's foreign policy moves is the bare minimum required in establishing a more trusting relationship between Washington and Brasília.

Engaging in dialogue and diplomacy can help to improve human rights conditions by building trust and understanding between the United States and Brazil, and by creating a more conducive environment for cooperation on human rights. This can be done by holding regular meetings between officials from both countries, and by participating in international forums on human rights. Doing so would enable U.S. officials to better understand Brazilian foreign policy thinking and vice versa. Washington could also signal its commitment to a deep, productive relationship with Brazil by recognizing the broad range of human rights challenges confronting Latin America's largest nation. This includes stronger commitments to protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples; fighting torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; increasing enforcement against human trafficking; and protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people. Unlike the Bolsonaro administration, the Lula government is committed to addressing each of these issues. The United States can and should do more to demonstrate that it is an active partner.

Aside from a robust trade relationship, which is mutually beneficial and largely uncontroversial, there are a number of things small and large that the United States can do to signal that it sees Brazil as a valuable partner and to show that it can itself be a productive, trustworthy ally. Brazil is a massive country with a youthful population, bountiful resources, and technical proficiency in several key areas. Since the return of democracy in the late 1980s following two decades of military rule, successive administrations, particularly in the last twenty years, have

¹⁵ “Lula cosies up to Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela’s autocrat.” *The Economist*. June 1, 2023. <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/06/01/lula-cosies-up-to-nicolas-maduro-venezuelas-autocrat>.

passed social-democratic policies that have earned international acclaim. The United States has often acknowledged this even as, historically, it has undermined Brazil's ability to govern itself. The United States could do more to formally recognize Brazil's democratic policy achievements, like lifting millions out of poverty and fighting hunger. Explicitly holding the South American giant up as a model in specific areas is a small, inexpensive, but potentially powerful gesture the U.S. could make to create warmer relations with Brazil.

Working proactively to make Brazil a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the OECD, declassifying records related to the 1964 military dictatorship, boosting funding for environmental preservation and collaborative research initiatives, deepening intelligence sharing, and recognizing the country's accomplishments and contributions are but a few of the things Washington could do to address the trust deficit that has built up over years with Latin America's largest nation. If Washington takes a number of relatively small but symbolically heavy steps, it can demonstrate to leaders in Brasília that it is serious about involving new voices in the construction of global governance. Such measures will soften the difficult bilateral conversations that are unavoidable between such large, dynamic, and ambitious democracies. Recognizing that building trust takes time, leaders in Washington should take deliberate steps to show that it is a valuable and viable partner.

CHAPTER 3: AMAZON, ENVIRONMENT, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

3.1 Importance of the Amazon Rainforest

On August 7-9, 2023, high-level representatives from eight Latin American nations convened alongside world leaders from Africa, South Asia, and Europe in the port city of Belém do Pará, Brazil to discuss the fate of the international Amazon, approximately 60 percent of which rests inside Brazilian borders. Joining summit organizer, President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, and leaders from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam, and Venezuela, were delegates from French Guiana, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, and Norway—long and by far, the world’s largest donor to Brazil’s international Amazon Fund.¹⁶ While gathering members of the forty-five year old Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) for its first meeting in fourteen years was a significant achievement for Lula and his administration, which boasted a 42.5 percent reduction in deforestation rates after its first seven months in office,¹⁷ the session failed to meet key objectives, including, most notably, a common timeline to cease deforestation by 2030, and an agreement to end the environmentally destructive exploration for fossil fuels.¹⁸

The “Belém Declaration” resulting from the summit documented general consensus around 113 broad and interrelated issues, including safeguarding human rights; providing a permanent mechanism for including Indigenous perspectives in Amazonian oversight and governance; heightening visibility, protection, and participation for women and girls in sustainable development initiatives; and augmenting cooperation for international surveillance and policing to curtail illicit resource extraction and trafficking. But with no clear promise on protecting the remaining rainforest, no consensus to establish barriers to the region’s economic dependence on oil, and no plan for reforestation, participating countries and their international allies will continue to be hamstrung in their efforts to ensure that Amazonian degradation will not reach the “tipping point” of 25 percent, when massive portions of rainforest will convert irreversibly to tropical

¹⁶ The Amazon Fund was established in 2008 during Lula’s first administration, which oversaw a 70% reduction in deforestation over eight years. Managed by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) with national and international support, the fund was suspended under the Bolsonaro regime and reinstated in 2022. See: <https://www.amazonfund.gov.br/en/home/>.

¹⁷ Ministério do Meio Ambiente e Mudança de Clima, “Desmatamento na Amazônia cai 42.5% nos primeiros sete meses.” <https://www.gov.br/mma/pt-br/desmatamento-na-amazonia-cai-42-5-nos-sete-primeiros-meses-de-2023>. 3 August 2023.

¹⁸ For the full text, see: “Get to Know the Belém Declaration,” *Global Forest News*. <https://globalforestcoalition.org/get-to-know-the-belem-declaration/>. 11 August 2023.

savannah, with a resulting biodiversity loss that climate scientists have been foreseeing for decades.¹⁹

Disregarding the dire nature of such widely accepted scientific prognostications and their ethical mandate for consensus around shared aims beyond the comparatively short-sighted parameters of national interest, summit participants reiterated enforcing state sovereignty among their very first objectives, thus making it possible for each country to sidestep critical restrictions on its own conduct in the Amazon for the sake of economic growth and development.²⁰ For example, while asserting that the world's most developed countries (and historically, its biggest polluters) would need to contribute much more substantially to Amazonian protection initiatives,²¹ President Lula reasserted Brazil's aim to further oil exploration in the already fragile region; Bolivian President, Luis Arce, flouted deforestation targets because of his country's burgeoning dependency on land-dependent and environmentally costly agribusiness in beef, soy, and palm oil; and the Venezuelan regime resisted the goal of reduced deforestation because of the predatory mining trade that has spread across its Amazonian regions since the collapse of the country's oil industry and its ensuing economic crisis.²² In each case, the ultimate impact of such initiatives will be further environmental devastation in the form of forest loss, decreased rainwater recovery, moisture loss, carbon loss, biodiversity loss, and increased temperatures, regionally and worldwide.

That local circumstances across the Amazon have global consequences ranging from sea-level rise to a surging population of climate refugees is, in 2023, familiar news. And yet, these destructive human and environmental costs have proven insufficient to mitigate the political and economic imperatives of dominant sovereignty for Amazonian countries, including Brazil, that struggle to balance the shorter-term wellbeing of marginalized sectors of their population with longer-term goals of ecological protection. These increasingly discernable and quantifiable environmental lessons have likewise failed to guide the Amazonian policies of wealthier and more

¹⁹ Thomas Lovejoy and Carlos Nobre, *Amazon Tipping Point* Vol. 5, Issue 15, 20 December 2019. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.aba2949>

²⁰ "Get to Know the Belém Declaration," *Global Forest News*. <https://globalforestcoalition.org/get-to-know-the-belem-declaration/>. 11 August 2023.

²¹ Ministério das Relações Exteriores, "United for Our Forests: Joint Communiqué of Developing Forest Countries in Belém." 9 August 2023. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/united-for-our-forests-joint-communicue-of-developing-forest-countries-in-belem>

²² See: "Soy, Beef, and Gold Gangsters: Why Bolivia and Venezuela Won't Protect the Amazon." *Climate Home News*, 24 August 2023. <https://climatechangenews.com/2023/08/24/bolivia-venezuela-deforestation-soy-beef-illegal-gold-mining/> and "Predatory Mining in Venezuela," *World Rainforest Bulletin* 254, 9 March 2021. <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/predatory-mining-in-venezuela-the-orinoco-mining-arc-enclave-economies-and-the-national-mining-plan>

industrialized countries, like the United States, who have a huge stake in the game but few cards to play. Paradoxically, their situation in some ways mirrors that of Brazil's Indigenous peoples, who have everything to lose but hold minute demographic power to impact the national situation, despite the well-documented finding that they are the most environmentally responsible stewards of Amazonian lands.²³ Crucially, President Lula's current administration has empowered Brazil's Indigenous movement by creating the new Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, led by environmental and human rights activist Sonia Guajajara and by appointing attorney, environmental activist, and former Congresswoman Joenia Wapichana as the country's first Indigenous leader of FUNAI—meaningfully renamed in 2023 as the “National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples” rather than the longstanding and paternalist, “National Indian Foundation.”

The confluence of these new appointments and recognitions is vital and timely given that more than 95 percent of Brazil's protected Indigenous territories are in the Amazon, comprising more than 25 percent of the region and nearly 14 percent of national territory.²⁴ But unless Brazil and its Amazonian counterparts can balance their desire for economic expansion with the interrelated goals of environmental wellbeing and social justice, such arrangements, like the August 2023 Amazonian Summit and Belém Declaration, will do little to move beyond the realm of symbolism.

More than loud and newsworthy international gatherings and unenforceable conventions penned on what Yanomami activist Davi Kopenawa skeptically denominated “paper skins,”²⁵ meaningful Amazonian protection requires sustained cooperation and the quiet prioritization of new strategies for regenerative and cyclical farming; the development of sustainable crops; increased fuel efficiency and renewable energy; augmented regulation and taxation of damaging industries and practices; enforceable constraints on the overexploitation of valuable resources; and perhaps most crucially, reforestation. Countries like the United States have a key role to play not only by investing in such initiatives through existing mechanisms like Brazil's Amazon fund, but by checking and rectifying the environmentally costly consequences of their imports, beginning with the multi-billion dollar soy and beef industries.²⁶

²³ Kathryn Baragwanath and Ella Bayi, “Collective Property Rights Reduce Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon,” *PNAS*. 11 August 2020. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1917874117>

²⁴ Ana Carolina Crisostomo et. al., *Indigenous Lands in the Brazilian Amazon: Carbon Stocks and Barriers to Deforestation*. Brasília: Amazon Environmental Research Institute, 2015.

²⁵ Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*. Translated by Nicholas Elliot and Alison Dundee. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

²⁶ USDA, “Monthly U.S. beef import volumes from Brazil surge to record high in early 2022.” 8 April 2022. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=103669>

3.2 Environmental Challenges and Deforestation

The first year of Lula da Silva's third term was marked by an enormous and significant challenge: restoring the Brazilian state's capacity to control deforestation in the Amazon Rainforest. Unlike what readers from nations with relatively legitimate and autonomous state structures might imagine, the bureaucratic mechanisms to control deforestation in this vast and somewhat isolated region of Brazil were far from well-established. Deforesting the Amazon is illegal, and Brazil has in fact enacted stringent laws limiting deforestation in the region for over fifty years. However, as is frequently observed in the country, these laws have not been consistently enforced.

Since the 1980s, this situation has slowly started to change. With the rise of environmentalism and facing international pressure, the country has gradually and cumulatively established the capacities to implement its forest laws and control deforestation. A decisive step in this direction was the creation in 2003, during Lula's first term and under the leadership of Marina Silva, of the first comprehensive and structured public policy to control deforestation, the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAm). The implementation of this plan was decisive for an 81.95 percent reduction in deforestation seen between 2004 and 2014 (INPE, 2023).

However, the effective implementation of the plan conflicted with other developments and gradually generated political reactions. Opposition to it began to strengthen at the end of Lula's second term (2007-2010) and was initially led by two major and strengthened political groups – agribusiness and infrastructure lobbies. As a result, in Dilma Rousseff's first term (2011-14), the National Forest Law was modified, relaxing the restrictions on legal deforestation, and the construction of major dams and roads in the Amazon moved forward. Accompanying the overall political context of the country, this retreat reached its peak during Bolsonaro's government (2019-2022). In this period, the opposition to deforestation control had three important specificities. First, oppositionists from within the Ministry of the Environment attacked constituted state capacities. Second, the government endeavored to legitimize and enhance the standing of marginalized sectors within the informal and illicit economy of deforestation in the region. This included small-scale and illegal logging as well as gold mining, which were depicted as though they were being oppressed by the state. Finally, in the Bolsonaro government, the military regained strength in defining and implementing policies for the region, sidelining environmentalists. As a result of this dismantling, between 2014 and 2020, deforestation grew by 116.5 percent (INPE, 2023).

The restoration of deforestation control was a key issue in Lula's 2022 campaign, enabling a welcome reconciliation with Marina Silva, who left the Workers' Party in 2009 due to environmental setbacks. As a result, on the first day of Lula's third term, the government issued a decree resuming PPCDAm and indicating its expansion to other biomes. In April, the newly devised plan, developed in collaboration with thirteen ministries, underwent public consultation. Subsequently, in June, the plan was officially launched, with the objective of achieving zero deforestation by 2030. From a technical standpoint, the plan is sturdy, reviving and refining strategies that have proven effective in previous efforts. Its main challenge is to improve initiatives to promote land tenure in private areas and enable sustainable activities, going beyond the implementation of protected areas and the monitoring and enforcement of law, which were key to its previous success.

Despite encountering technical obstacles, the primary impediment to the success of the new phase of the plan is political. Modern states and governments are not homogenous entities; rather, they are somewhat contradictory institutions shaped and governed by diverse individuals. A significant political hurdle that the plan will confront is its relationship with the Congress, currently characterized by a conservative stance and clear control by "Centrão" (Big Center) parties, with substantial influence from agribusiness that is more organized than ever. The significance of this relationship became evident in the inaugural year of Lula's mandate, leading to significant setbacks for the environmental agenda, such as the transfer of the management of the Environmental Rural Registry (CAR) from the Environment Ministry and the assignment of responsibility for establishing Indigenous lands from the recently created Ministry of Indigenous Peoples.

Furthermore, Lula's third term in office involves a broad coalition, symbolized by the alliance with his former adversary Geraldo Alckmin and the current vice president. The perceived threats to democracy posed by Bolsonaro drove the formation of this coalition. Its expansive nature fosters potential conflicts among its components and tends to weaken less influential government entities, such as the Environmental Ministry. The power dynamics are not yet fully discernible, and it remains premature to determine which other segments of the government may work against efforts to control deforestation. Despite the publicized amicable relations between Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply Minister Carlos Fávaro and Environment and Climate Change Minister Marina Silva, there is a perpetual concern about the organized and influential agribusiness group acting as a potential adversary. Although there is apparent concern for sustainability in the launch of the government's infrastructure program, the Novo PAC, persistent tensions related to the environmental licensing of projects pose a significant risk of conflict. Lastly, while there are

no indications that the government intends to resume dam construction in the Amazon region, public disagreements with the Ministry of Mines and Energy have arisen, particularly concerning the prospects of oil exploration at the mouth of the Amazon River.

Certainly, none of these conflicts are inherently insurmountable. Successfully navigating them will require a resolute approach to politics with a capital "P". Certain opportunities may work in favor of this undertaking, with a significant one being the alignment of environmental concerns with the strategies outlined by one of the most influential ministries in any government—the Finance Ministry. Fernando Haddad appears dedicated to formulating an ecological transition plan that facilitates the country's reindustrialization, garnering support from environmentalists. Additionally, progress in international negotiations on Climate Change, as demonstrated by the establishment of the Paris Agreement, is poised to benefit the challenging efforts of Marina Silva.

CHAPTER 4: RACIAL EQUALITY AND OVERCOMING RACISM

4.1 Historical Context of Racism in Brazil

As in every country with a history of slavery, race is central to the Brazilian national identity, shaping it from its earliest days. Brazil, home to the world's longest and most widespread slavery system, grapples with racism even many years after the official abolition in 1888. Initially a Portuguese colony from the fifteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, one group of conspirators sought independence through an all-White movement in 1789 from the province of Minas Gerais. Inspired by the American Revolution, this movement planned to preserve slavery. Nearly ten years later, another attempt at independence occurred in the province of Bahia, known as the Tailors' Revolt, an interracial movement advocating abolition. Participants in the earlier movement, such as Tiradentes, are revered to this day; Tiradentes was hanged, and his death became a national holiday when Brazil became a republic. Conversely, the later movement is hardly mentioned, and only its Black leaders were hanged.

To a global audience, Brazil often appears as a nation that champions racial equality, particularly when juxtaposed with the United States. Unlike the United States, Brazil has undergone seven constitutional revisions, not all of which included laws addressing race relations. In the early twentieth century, during a period when the United States maintained a stringent system of racial discrimination, the absence of legal segregation in Brazil prompted U.S. newspapers targeting Black communities to promote "wonderful opportunities offered in Brazil for thrifty people of all races" and highlight how Brazil "offers first-hand knowledge of the solving of the race question." This served as evidence that Brazil had, at least in part, convinced the world of its purported racial harmony.

However, following the declaration of the republic in 1889, a year after abolition, a coordinated initiative by the elites brought millions of European, Middle Eastern, and Japanese immigrants to Brazil. The aim was to dilute the population's African "blood" and counter the eugenic claim that Brazil would face challenges as a nation due to its "racial inferiority." Simultaneously, the elites recognized that even the so-called White Brazilian population was predominantly of mixed race, preventing the country from being perceived as predominantly White in the eyes of the world.

In the early twentieth century, Brazil developed the ideology of "racial democracy," claiming that its three main races – Whites, Blacks, and Indigenous – lived in harmony. This ideology was promoted so well that, in the 1950s, the United Nations sponsored social scientific research there with the goal of replicating that harmony worldwide. However, the research revealed what Brazilians, especially non-White individuals, had known all along: the farther away from Blackness one is, the higher one is in the racial hierarchy. Social interactions in Brazil unfold within an authoritarian framework grounded in a racial and economic hierarchy marked by color gradation and fluidity, with society valuing miscegenation more as it brings individuals closer to Whiteness. While Brazil has never developed a legal system of racial segregation like that of the United States, it has relied on discriminatory practices to keep darker-skinned individuals away from privileged places. As such, to this day, Brazilian Whites earn more, are more educated, have better access to healthcare, and are much less likely to be murdered by the police.

The roots of this discrepancy date back to the post-abolition period, when no provisions were made to integrate former enslaved persons into a market economy. First, exclusion from receiving free land to work in agriculture, and later exclusion from or discrimination in obtaining good-paying factory jobs in the nascent Brazilian industrialization, not to mention high illiteracy rates, offered few opportunities for upward mobility. This reality has been exposed by social activists since the late nineteenth century, including the efforts of the Black Front in the 1930s, the Experimental Black Theater in the 1950s, and the Unified Black Movement since the 1970s. Only in the 1980s, however, did the federal government recognize that racial democracy is a myth and began to implement policies to combat racial inequality. After the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, which had censored any allegation of racism as subversive, the new Constitution of 1988 redefined racial discrimination as a crime and promoted the preservation of ethnic diversity in Brazil. In the early 2000s, universities established quotas for Afro-descendants and those who had graduated from public schools. Shrouded in controversy, the quotas became federal law in 2012. In general, though Brazilians today are much more likely to recognize the existence of prejudice and discrimination; most are also quick to deny that they or anybody they know is racist.

4.2 Current State of Racial Equality

Racial inequality is pervasive and deeply entrenched in Brazil. On virtually every indicator of objective well-being, African descendants lag Whites. That has not changed much in recent years. Statistics reveal that Afro-Brazilians have less education than Whites and are more likely

to be unemployed. Moreover, those with jobs are paid less than Whites and are more likely to live in extreme poverty.

Education is among the many areas in which racial inequality is undeniable. In 2022, Afro-Brazilians reported on average having 9.4 years of education and Whites reported having 10.9 years. This 1.5-year difference is similar to what the IBGE found in 2019. That year, the difference in years of schooling was 1.6 years. This modest decline, however, may be short lived. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the children who were out of school were Afro-Brazilians. Moreover, those that remained enrolled were not always able to participate in activities at home because they did not have access to the internet. As a result, racial disparities in education may be greater than official numbers suggest. Just as importantly, studies show that many of those students who left did not return. According to one Datafolha poll, 10.8 percent of high school students and 4.6 percent of elementary school students reportedly dropped out.²⁷ Among both groups, Afro-Brazilians are overrepresented.²⁸

Racial disparities in educational attainment show up in other ways as well. In 2022, 7.4 percent of Afro-Brazilians over the age of 15 reported they were illiterate as opposed to just 3.4 percent of Whites.²⁹ While the gap has shrunk since 2019, when 8.2 percent of Afro-Brazilians and 3.3 percent of Whites over the age of 15 reported they were illiterate, the fact that the rate of illiteracy among Afro-Brazilians is more than double that of Whites is cause for concern. One reason to be optimistic, however, is that access to public universities, where student populations have historically been primarily White, are more diverse than ever. Brazil's racial quota system, which was introduced in 2012, is the main reason for that. A recently reformulated quota policy that was approved by congress and sanctioned by President Lula promises to expand even further the access of Black students to universities.

Enhancing educational opportunities is pivotal for addressing racial disparities in employment and income. Unemployment poses a significant challenge in Brazil, affecting

²⁷ "Cerca de 4 Milhões Abandonaram Estudos Na Pandemia, Diz Pesquisa." *Notícias de Hoje Do Brasil e Do Mundo*, Folha de S.Paulo, 22 Jan. 2021, www1.folha.uol.com.br/amp/educacao/2021/01/cerca-de-4-milhoes-abandonaram-estudos-na-pandemia-diz-pesquisa.shtml?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=comptw&__twitter_impression=true&s=09.

²⁸ "Abandono Escolar e a Pandemia No Brasil: Efeitos NAS Desigualdades Escolares." FCC, 22 Nov. 2021, www.fcc.org.br/fcc/educacao-pesquisa/abandono-escolar-e-a-pandemia-no-brasil-efeitos-nas-desigualdades-escolares/.

²⁹ *Tabela 7125: Taxa de Analfabetismo Das Pessoas de 15 Anos Ou Mais de Idade, Por Cor Ou Raça e Grupo de Idade*, sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/7125#resultado.

individuals across all racial groups, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the unemployment rate has declined since then and Brazil's economy appears to once again be growing, not all groups are benefitting from it. According to data from IBGE, the unemployment rate in 2022 was approximately four percent higher for Afro-Brazilians than Whites.³⁰ Expanding access to education may also lead to changes in where Afro-Brazilians work. Of the 39.1 million individuals that work without a formal contract, around 24 million are Afro-Brazilian. Those workers have less job security and limited benefits, as well as lower wages. In 2022, the median income of Brown and Black Brazilians was just over R\$2,000 (US\$400) a month. For Whites, however, it was R\$3,400 (US\$680).³¹ Income data reveals that Afro-Brazilians receive lower pay, resulting in a higher prevalence of poverty compared to Whites. However, overarching statistics offer limited insights into the underlying reasons. It might be assumed that Afro-Brazilians earn less due to lower educational attainment, but this assumption doesn't hold true. Across every level of education, Afro-Brazilians consistently earn less than their White counterparts.³²

However, race isn't solely linked to socioeconomic factors; in Brazil, it significantly influences matters of life and death. In 2022, law enforcement agencies in Brazil were responsible for the deaths of 6,430 individuals, with a disproportionate number of those killed being Black people from marginalized neighborhoods. Hence, across various dimensions, there is ample room for improvement in Brazil.

A contributing factor to the significant racial disparities in Brazil is the stance of the Brazilian state. During President Jair Bolsonaro's tenure, the government not only failed to promote racial equality but also reversed protections for Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous peoples. Budget cuts to agencies meant to assist marginalized communities, along with the appointment of politicians opposing their missions, undermined the support structures. Bolsonaro's actions against racial equality initiatives were consistent with his earlier declarations, where he openly stated that "the minorities must bow to the majority" during his presidential campaign.³³

³⁰agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/media/com_mediaibge/arquivos/db973ee2b450d2303b0d3e622c67645b.pdf . pg 24

³¹ <https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/tabela/7441#resultado>

³² "Maioria Entre Trabalhadores, Pretos e Pardos São Menos de 30% Dos Chefes." Valor Econômico, valor.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2022/11/14/maioria-entre-trabalhadores-pretos-e-pardos-sao-menos-de-30-dos-chefes.ghtml.

³³ Calgaro, Bruna Borges e Fernanda. "A Única Coisa Boa Do Maranhão É o Presídio de Pedrinhas, Diz Bolsonaro." Notícias, 11 Feb. 2014, noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2014/02/11/minha-proposta-e-defender-direitos-da-maioria-e-nao-da-minoria-diz-bolsonaro.htm?cmpid=copiaecola.+WorldCat.

The 2022 presidential elections in Brazil marked a crucial clash between two visions for the country. Under Bolsonaro's leadership, an ostensibly "color-blind" administration would overlook racial disparities and the role played by the Brazilian state in their creation and perpetuation. In contrast, Lula's election brought back a leader who acknowledges the disparate opportunities provided to members of different racial groups in Brazil and strongly advocates for racial policies, such as affirmative action. Lula's election sparked optimism that the Brazilian government would no longer deny the existence of racism and would once again actively work towards racial equality. On his inauguration day, he was surrounded by a diverse group of individuals, including a Black child and a Black woman, symbolizing inclusivity. However, the importance of this symbolism must be reinforced by concrete actions.

4.3 Addressing Structural Racism and Discrimination

Structural racism is a type of discrimination that permeates all systems, laws, written regulations, policies, and attitudes, resulting in widespread unfair treatment, barriers, and exclusion of historically oppressed people of color. Racism is embedded in the very fabric of Brazilian society. It is so deeply rooted that most people have normalized its existence. Contemporary examples of structural racism in Brazil include residential segregation, barriers to higher education, home ownership, accumulation of wealth, environmental injustice, physical violence, killings, biased policing, disproportionately harsh criminal sentencing of Black men, and voter suppression policies, among many other practices.

An important step to dismantle structural racism is to first acknowledge its existence. President Lula has been vocal about racial discrimination and continues to publicly acknowledge and denounce the dangerous existence of racism in Brazil. This is in stark contrast to his predecessor, Bolsonaro, who, as mentioned, publicly denied racism and rolled back years of human rights policies, promoting discrimination and attacks against marginalized communities in Brazil.

President Lula has appointed a record number of ministers from marginalized groups to work towards the creation of systems, laws, and policies to tackle discrimination. Crucially, the creation of the new ministry of Indigenous People led by Sonia Guajajara, an Indigenous woman, and the new ministry of Racial Equality led by Anielle Franco, a Black woman, were the first steps taken in this new administration to address structural racism and discrimination in Brazil. In her inaugural speech, Minister Anielle Franco highlighted that the new ministry for Racial Equality was “a step forward towards fighting institutionalized racism in Brazil and that it would bring the

topic of racism to public and institutional debate in a way that had not yet been experienced in Brazilian politics.”

During the ceremony, Lula sanctioned a new law on racial crime that equates the crime of racial insult, or verbal abuse, to that of racism---a crime without bail and statute of limitation, punished with two to five years in prison. This is an effective and direct way to combat racism in Brazil. The sanction of this law showcases how the current Brazilian government considers racism a heinous crime that should not afford its perpetrators the benefits of bail or sentence reduction. Enacting more criminal law to curtail racism is important, particularly in a country where structural racism is blatantly manifested as physical abuse and violence against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

It is important to underscore that it was during Lula’s first term as president that Brazil implemented Law 10.639. This legislation made teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African history and culture mandatory in primary and secondary schools across the country. The law was an important achievement of the Black movement and a response to the demands for recognition and appreciation of Black history and culture in Brazil. Lula also created the Special Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPPIR), which was responsible for coordinating policies to promote racial equality and implementing affirmative actions in several areas, such as education, health, work, and culture.

In a ceremony at the Palácio do Planalto on March 21, 2023 to celebrate 20 years since Law 10.639 was signed, Lula recognized these past achievements and signed a series of new decrees to expand racial rights in Brazil. This included among many things, affirmative action policy allocating 30 percent of federal commission positions to Black and Indigenous people and giving the official title of land ownership to Quilombola communities of former enslaved peoples. During the event, Lula added that combating racism is not just a task of the Ministry of Racial Equality, but of the entire cabinet, government, and Brazilian society. “This is a government open to dialogue with civil society, the Black movement, and the human rights movement. Rebuilding this country and creating increasingly inclusive public policies is an obligatory and collective task,” he said.

President Lula’s words and actions indicate that he understands that Brazil needs to establish an anti-racist government to overcome structural racism and discrimination. The government must continue to actively seek to combat discrimination and enact policies that will lead to a more equal and just society.

4.4 Policy Proposals for Promoting Racial Equality

The year 2023 began in Brazil with positive expectations regarding the proposition of policies promoting racial equality. After four years of obscurantism and even denial of this agenda by the previous federal government, President Lula's mandate starts with the recreation of a ministry focused on the theme, the Ministry of Racial Equality, in addition to the creation of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and the appointment of an anti-racist jurist to the Ministry of Human Rights.

Within the Ministry of Racial Equality, more directly associated with this agenda, the reconstruction of the racial equality promotion system gained strength through partnerships with other government agencies and the expansion of affirmative action policies in both education and the labor market. The decree signed in March 2023, establishing goals for the occupation of positions in the federal public administration by Black professionals, is a significant milestone in these policies. Similarly, the Ministry of Racial Equality has played an important role in advocating for the approval of the new quota law in the National Congress. In its first year of government, the Ministry of Racial Equality has also worked to resume and expand actions in other vital areas, such as policies for Quilombola communities and the promotion of health for the Black population.

In 2023, Brazil grappled with a multitude of pressing and substantial agendas, rendering it difficult to establish a clear hierarchy of importance among the areas that demand attention. While the briefly mentioned aspects are gaining increased focus, the agenda for political proposals aimed at promoting racial equality encompasses a noteworthy array of issues that still await more direct attention.

The public security policy has a significant component of institutional racism that daily victimizes dozens of Black men, especially young people, in major Brazilian urban centers (and is increasingly not confined merely to major urban areas). Responses to the dramatic situation of public security in the country vary between authoritarian and repressive actions by right-wing governments and poorly planned and insufficient measures by progressive governments. Although constitutionally, public security management is the responsibility of the states, the federal government, through the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Human Rights, has the duty and responsibility for coordination and support to state actions, including financing, independent investigations, border protection, among other measures. The federal government can and should act to reorganize security actions in the direction of reducing lethal force, executions, and the

macabre repetition of the racial profiling of victims in these armed conflicts. This is an agenda that urgently needs to be developed and implemented.

It is crucial to implement measures to counteract racism and religious intolerance, spanning from legal measures to cultural and educational initiatives. The secular nature of the state still needs to be defended and affirmed.

This agenda is ambitious, and numerous challenges lie ahead. Advocating for the defense of the rule of law and individual and collective rights is a complex undertaking in a country marked by intolerance, discrimination, and historical inequalities often endorsed by significant sectors of society. The commendable initiatives currently underway by the federal government should be acknowledged, and it is crucial to closely monitor the public debate and diverse perspectives from various stakeholders regarding the implementation of effective racial equality policies in the country.

CHAPTER 5: GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

5.1 LGBTQ+ Rights and Challenges

The election of the new government in Brazil has reignited hope within the LGBTQIA+ community to see their rights acknowledged and the return of public policies for inclusion, citizenship, and combating violence.

The establishment of the National Secretariat for LGBTQIA+ Rights within the Ministry of Human Rights marked an initial stride toward this goal. Over the first year of the administration, some discernible government actions have been implemented, though they still require time to manifest tangible effects for the population. These include the reestablishment of the National Council for LGBTQIA+ Rights, an instrument designed to encourage a dialogue between the government and civil society; the development of the Employment, Education, and Income Program in partnership with the International Labor Organization; the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Memory and Truth program as a form of reparation for those affected by the Brazilian military dictatorship; the establishment of the National Intermanagement Commission, aiming to organize public policy actions nationwide, especially with guidelines to address violence; the change in the Brazilian Official Document (Identity Card), eliminating the "gender" field and ending the distinction between "name" and "social name," ensuring the inclusion of transvestites and transgender individuals; and the convening of the First National LGBTQIA+ Culture Conference in December 2023, formulating specific guidelines for the National Culture Plan.

Internationally, the Brazilian government has also significantly changed its positions, resuming a path traced in past decades. Upon taking office, the federal government reviewed the previous administration's misguided decisions regarding the review process of Brazil's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), especially those that had excluded the country's commitments to LGBTQIA+ rights themes. On June 28, Brazil joined the alliance defending the LGBTQIA+ community at the UN Human Rights Council, aligning with 34 other countries. President Lula's statement at the recent UN General Assembly, stating that "we will be rigorous in defending LGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities' rights," stands out. Never before has a Brazilian president positively mentioned and openly defended the LGBTQIA+ community in the United Nations General Assembly.

In the legislative arena, an enduring struggle persists with conservatives attempting to revoke established rights, including same-sex unions (sanctioned by the Brazilian Supreme Court in 2011). Despite being unconstitutional, bills moving in this direction have made progress in Congress. Notably, the year 2022 witnessed the election of the first two Brazilian transgender federal congressional representatives, Erika Hilton (São Paulo) and Duda Salabert (Minas Gerais), both of whom ranked among the top 25 congresspeople. In the Senate, Fabiano Contarato (Espírito Santos), an openly gay senator, has been prominent and was honored as the country's best senator in 2023. It is essential to highlight that these politicians face constant threats to their lives, necessitating 24-hour security in order for them to carry out their duties.

The judiciary is where the most significant victories have been achieved in recent times. In 2023, the judgment that equated LGBTIphobia with racial slander, proposed by ABGLT (Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Intersex), stands out. From this year onwards, offenses directed at LGBTQIA+ individuals may receive harsher penalties, a change aimed at combating violence against the community and ensuring that crimes do not go unpunished. In contrast, the case addressing the use of bathrooms according to the gender identity of transgender people has been suspended since 2015, and it is unknown when it will be taken up by the courts.

While hope has been reignited in the LGBTQIA+ community, there remain substantial challenges to surmount. Numerous accomplishments from the early administrations of President Lula (2003-2011), which were eroded, particularly after 2013, have yet to be reinstated. In the realm of education, vital for constructing a society devoid of violence, there has been minimal tangible progress. Essential initiatives such as a human rights education program, formative discussions for Brazilian educators, and the policy of textbooks free from racist, sexist, and LGBTQIA+phobic content have not been revived, with no indications of the government doing so. Additionally, in the arena of justice and public safety, tangible advancements are lacking. In 2023, Brazil exceeded the previous year's number of murders of transvestites and transgender individuals, maintaining the lamentable distinction of being the country with the highest rate of violence against this population globally.

Brazil has resumed the path of respect and dialogue, requiring swift actions to avoid further delay in ensuring full dignity for all. This commitment is essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable society that upholds the rights and well-being of every individual.

5.2 Gender Equality and Violence

In the initial decade of the twenty-first century, Lula da Silva's government spearheaded significant institutional changes to protect women's and human rights.³⁴ Lula established three bodies dedicated to women's rights, racial equality, and human rights, respectively: the Secretariat of Policies for Women (Secretaria Especial de Políticas para Mulheres, hereafter SPM); the Secretariat for Racial Equality (SEPPIR); and the Secretariat on Human Rights (SDH).

The SPM represented an enhancement compared to the national secretariat on women's rights during the previous administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002). The SPM initiated unprecedented national plans and programs to combat violence against women. The government introduced a new hotline service to raise awareness of this issue: Call 180 (Ligue 180, Central de Atendimento à Mulher). In 2006, Law no. 11,340/2006, known as the Maria da Penha Law, was enacted to address “domestic and family violence against women.” This legislation defined domestic violence as gender-based violence and framed it as a violation of human rights. The law marked a historic victory for the feminist and women's movements in Brazil, resulting from feminist legal mobilization in collaboration with the SPM.

During the drafting of this groundbreaking legislation, the first of its kind in Brazil, the SPM organized a series of public meetings and consulted with various sectors of the women's movements. In 2007, the SPM launched the National Pact to Confront Violence Against Women (Pacto Nacional pelo Enfrentamento à Violência Contra a Mulher). The national policies on women's rights led to an expansion of services combating violence against women throughout the country.

Despite the progressive institutional and legal changes, the landscape of domestic violence against women in Brazil underwent no fundamental transformation. The judiciary did not fully implement the Maria da Penha Law. As the issue became politicized and gained increased visibility, feminist and women's movements persisted in exerting pressure on the judiciary and other branches of state power at both federal and local levels to combat and eliminate violence against women. During Dilma Rousseff's administration, similar policies to those of the preceding

³⁴ This sections draws on the article by Cecília MacDowell Santos and Luanna Tomaz de Souza, “Del avance a la reacción conservadora: la política nacional sobre derechos de las mujeres y su impacto en la movilización legal a nivel local bajo los gobiernos de Lula/Dilma y Bolsonaro,” forthcoming in *Revista Estudios* at the University of Cordoba, Argentina.

Lula government were maintained. However, the economic crisis in 2013 impacted and diminished the funding for national plans and programs aimed at combating violence against women.

Through feminist mobilization, Congress established the Parliamentary Commission to Investigate the Situation of Violence against Women (CPMI – A violência contra a mulher no Brasil) in 2011. The CPMI's final report, published in 2013, recommended, among other measures, the creation of a new law addressing femicide.³⁵ The “Femicide Law,” officially known as Law n. 13,104/2015, was enacted in 2015. It increased the prison sentence for homicides committed against women because of their gender. Unlike the Maria da Penha Law, this legislation did not use the term “gender” but rather “feminine sex.” Additionally, the Femicide Law was not formulated in consultation with feminist and women's movements.

The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, Brazil's first woman president, triggered a backlash against human rights, particularly women's rights. The impeachment itself had a gender dimension as Rousseff, a divorced woman and former political prisoner who had suffered torture during the military dictatorship, supported women's rights and appointed several women to lead ministries under her administration. Those in Congress who voted for her impeachment cited family and religious values in their remarks, with Jair Bolsonaro even paying tribute to the military officer who had tortured Rousseff.

Michel Temer's government (August 2016-2018) subsequently dismantled and downgraded the former Secretariat of Policies for Women, the Secretariat for Racial Equality, and the Secretariat on Human Rights. Although Rousseff had merged these three secretariats in 2015, the new entity still held ministerial status and promoted progressive policies on women's rights, racial equality, and LGBTQI+ rights.

After Temer's time in office, Bolsonaro's administration was marked by an anti-gender and family-centered discourse, promoting the nuclear, cisheteoresexist, middle-class family as the norm. Unlike previous administrations, Bolsonaro's government had an antagonistic relationship with feminist activists and established the Ministry of Woman, Family and Human Rights, advocating a conservative agenda centered on traditional family values. The so-called “gender

³⁵ For more details on this report, see <https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/item/id/496481>

ideology” was under attack, and Minister Damares Alves declared a shift to a new era where “boys wear blue, and girls wear pink.”³⁶

Under Bolsonaro, existing programs and public policies for women's rights were dismantled, with budget cuts affecting essential services to combat violence against women, including the Call 180 hotline.³⁷ The Federal Budget Tribunal (Tribunal de Contas da União – TCU, 2020) investigated gender equality-related public policies and identified an 80 percent budget reduction from 2015 to 2020. In 2021, the Call 100 hotline for reporting human rights abuses underwent changes, with the new Manual of the Taxonomy of Human Rights, created by the Ministry on Woman, Family and Human Rights, redefining human rights violations and erasing terms like sexism, lesbophobia, transphobia, racism, and gender identity diversity. The manual even redefined ‘gender ideology’ as a human rights violation.³⁸

The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the lack of national policies to address the issue effectively, exacerbated violence against women in Brazil. In 2021, over 820,000 women reported being victims of violence, marking a 203 percent increase compared to the previous year (ISD, 2022).³⁹ The 2021 Atlas da Violência by IPEA (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada) revealed a reduction of 18.4 percent in the rate of female homicides between 2009 and 2019. However, the killing of women increased in 14 of the 27 states, with race playing a significant role: “In 2019, 66 percent of women killed in Brazil were Black. In relative terms, while the homicide rate for non-Black women was 2.5, the rate for Black women was 4.1” (IPEA, 2021: 38). Violence against LGBTQI+ people also surged despite the criminalization of transphobia and homophobia, as determined by the 2019 Supreme Court's decision. Despite this legal change, Brazil continued to be ranked as the country with the highest number of assassinations of trans people globally.

³⁶ *O Globo* (2019). “Em vídeo, Damares diz que 'nova era' começou: 'meninos vestem azul e meninas vestem rosa'.” Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/01/03/em-video-damares-alves-diz-que-nova-era-comecou-no-brasil-meninos-vestem-azul-e-meninas-vestem-rosa.ghtml>.

³⁷ *Poder 360*. “Recursos para combate à violência contra a mulher caem 79% desde 2014.” Available at: <https://www.poder360.com.br/governo/recursos-para-combate-a-violencia-contra-a-mulher-caem-79-desde-201/>

³⁸ *O Globo*. “Disque 100: manual criado por ministério de Damares prevê denúncias 'por ideologia de gênero'.” Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/direitos-humanos/disque-100-manual-criado-por-ministerio-de-damares-preve-denuncias-por-ideologia-de-genero-25305729>.

³⁹ ISD – Instituto Santos Dumont (2022). *Painel de Dados da Ouvidoria Nacional de Direitos Humanos*. Available at: <http://www.institutosantosdumont.org.br/2022/03/09/violacoes-de-direitos-das-mulheres-crescem-205-no-rio-grande-do-norte/>

The new Lula administration has established four ministries dedicated to addressing the rights of women, racial equality, indigenous rights, and human rights, respectively. The Ministry of Women, led by feminist activist Cida Gonçalves, has been actively promoting campaigns to combat violence against women and misogyny. "We need to listen to and ensure the continuous participation of social movements in the government," declared the minister at the Mercosul meeting held on December 7, 2023.⁴⁰ Anielle Franco, sister of Marielle Franco, Rio de Janeiro's councilwoman who was assassinated in March 2018, heads the Ministry of Racial Equality. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples is led by Indigenous leader Sonia Guajajara. Silvio Almeida, a Black law professor oversees the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. These ministries are actively engaged in campaigns to combat racism and promote the rights of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous peoples.

It is crucial to note that the judiciary and parliamentary structures in Brazil lean towards conservatism. The far-right's influence is growing in Congress, where Bolsonaro's political party, the Liberal Party (PL), and its elected allies attained majority control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the 2022 elections. The Lula administration faces significant political and economic constraints, posing a challenging reality in its aspirations to bring about fundamental transformations in the political system and Brazilian society.

⁴⁰ For more details, see <https://www.gov.br/mulheres/pt-br/central-de-conteudos/noticias/2023/dezembro/201cprecisamos-ouvir-e-ter-a-participacao-dos-movimentos-permanentemente-no-governo201d-diz-ministra-cida-goncalves-no-mercosul-social>

CHAPTER 6: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) AND 2030 AGENDA

6.1 Brazil's Socio-economic Landscape

Employment Indicators and Labor Rights under the new Lula Administration

Workers were one segment of the Brazilian population that was particularly hard-hit by the economic liberalization and austerity measures implemented by the previous Temer and Bolsonaro administrations. The 2016 Constitutional amendment which put limits on social spending gutted financing for education, sanitation, and healthcare, directly impacting the quality of life of working people who rely on public subsidies for most if not all of these services. The 2017 Labor Law Reform reduced access to the labor justice system for workers, expanded outsourcing, limited collective bargaining, and drastically reduced the financial and institutional capacity of unions to defend worker rights. On top of these policy setbacks, Brazilian workers also had to contend with dramatic increases in inflation eating into their household budgets, with the Brazilian real losing 31 percent of its purchasing power from March 2017 to March 2022,⁴¹ and growing labor informality and precarity, with a record number of more than 39 million workers (39.7 percent of the economically active population) employed informally without access to basic labor rights or social security as of August 2022.⁴² Likewise, close to 35 million Brazilian minimum-wage workers were denied cost of living increases by the two previous administrations in every year except for 2019,⁴³ negatively impacting their domestic consumption, leading to an increase in economic inequality and food insecurity.

In the face of this bleak panorama, the Lula administration has promised measures to promote “union reconstruction” that will benefit the Brazilian working class, by undoing some of the most anti-worker policies implemented by Temer and Bolsonaro. One of the first measures his new government undertook was to mandate a real increase in the minimum wage. This policy was then codified and expanded vis-a-vis a law passed in August 2023 that guarantees annual cost of living increases in the federal minimum wage for years to come and reduces income tax levels for

⁴¹ See: <https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2022/05/04/em-5-anos-real-perdeu-quase-30percent-de-seu-poder-de-compra.ghtml>

⁴² See: <https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/estadao-conteudo/2022/09/30/brasil-tem-recorde-de-39307-milhoes-de-informais-no-trimestre-ate-agosto.htm>

⁴³ See: <https://www.dieese.org.br/boletimdeconjuntura/2023/boletimconjuntura37.html>

low-wage workers.⁴⁴ Likewise, the Lula government has committed to reducing gender inequalities by passing a law to promote equal wages for equal work in July,⁴⁵ as well as constructing a National Care Work policy, envisaged to reduce, recognize and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work that disproportionately falls on Brazilian women and girls.

Regrettably, the Lula administration has encountered significant challenges in making progress on various other labor-related policy fronts, in addition to those previously mentioned. The Labor Ministry convened a tripartite commission in April to review some of the most anti-union measures that were included in the 2017 Labor Law Reform and to discuss the expansion of collective bargaining rights. However, this group has not yet been able to construct a consensus position on issues regarding union representativeness, union financing, and the legal hierarchy of negotiated versus legislated labor norms, despite the fact that the Labor Ministry had encumbered it to produce a policy proposal by November 20, 2023.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the Labor Ministry brought together a multipartite commission in June 2023 to formulate new normative guidelines for app-based gig work, which is currently exempt from many of the protections enshrined in Brazilian labor law. However, the different actors participating in the commission have not been able to reconcile their divergent visions regarding hourly pay, social security contributions, occupational health and safety standards, and whether or not gig workers should be considered direct employees of the companies that operate the digital platforms that offer ride-share and delivery services.⁴⁷ On top of difficulties stemming from these social dialogue processes themselves, any pro-worker policy proposal generated by these commissions is likely to face varying degrees of opposition by the right and center-right political blocks that hold a majority in the Brazilian Congress. Once again, the Lula administration will need to conduct an intricate political negotiation that can reconcile fragmented interests and navigate complex institutions to be able to promote and protect the labor rights of Brazil's long-suffering working class.

⁴⁴ See: <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/noticias/2023/08/presidente-sanciona-politica-de-valorizacao-do-salario-minimo-e-nova-faixa-do-ir>

⁴⁵ See: <https://g1.globo.com/trabalho-e-carreira/noticia/2023/07/04/entenda-o-que-muda-com-a-nova-lei-da-igualdade-salarial-entre-mulheres-e-homens.ghtml>

⁴⁶ See: <https://www.gov.br/trabalho-e-emprego/pt-br/noticias-e-conteudo/2023/outubro/gt-discute-mudancas-no-sistema-sindical-e-valorizacao-da-negociacao-coletiva>

⁴⁷ See: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2023/09/24/governo-busca-contornar-impasses-entre-trabalhadores-e-empresas-na-regulacao-de-trabalho-por-aplicativo-veja-o-que-pode-mudar.ghtml>

Reviving Healthcare: Challenges and Priorities in Lula's New Administration

Public healthcare, one of the most affected areas during the Bolsonaro government, poses a major challenge for this third term of the Lula government. The life expectancy of Brazilians increased in 2022, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) released on November 29, 2023, rising to 75.5 years on a national average, after two years of decline attributed to deaths caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸

The Bolsonaro administration significantly contributed to the severity of the pandemic's impacts. From minimizing the risks of COVID-19 by comparing it to a “minor flu” to supporting unverified treatments and ignoring the recommendations of the scientific community and the World Health Organization, Bolsonaro's resistance to pandemic-related social distancing measures and refusal of Pfizer's offer of 70 million vaccine doses in 2021 were pivotal aspects of this situation. Additionally, Bolsonaro's distorted promotion of vaccine negationism played a role in the decrease of vaccination coverage in Brazil, increasing the threat of the resurgence of diseases such as poliomyelitis.⁴⁹ To reverse this alarming scenario, in February 2023, the Lula government launched the National Vaccination Movement, aimed at restoring the Brazilian population's trust in vaccines and the country's vaccination culture.⁵⁰

The Bolsonaro government also created and aggravated crucial logistical challenges encountered by the current administration. The data blackout promoted in the previous Administration involved segmented data, particularly regarding the number of vaccinated Brazilians, as well as critical details concerning medication and vaccine stockpiles, including expiration dates. These vital pieces of information either disappeared or were not logged into the system. Reports from the Federal Budget Tribunal (TCU), shared with the transitioning government team, highlighted this blackout as one of the primary hurdles faced at the outset of the Lula government. Its unprecedented impact reverberated significantly within the Unified Health System (SUS).

At the intersection of health and social policies, an important initiative by Lula was the revival of the Bolsa Família program,⁵¹ that had been dismantled by Bolsonaro. This meant the interruption of the Unique Social Assistance Service (SUAS), responsible for supporting the

⁴⁸ See <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/38455-em-2022-expectativa-de-vida-era-de-75-5-anos>

⁴⁹ See <https://jornal.usp.br/radio-usp/poliomielite-tem-risco-muito-alto-de-retornar-ao-brasil-segundo-a-opas/>

⁵⁰ See <https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/campanhas-da-saude/2023/multivacinacao>

⁵¹ See <https://www.gov.br/mds/pt-br/acoes-e-programas/bolsa-familia>

poorest families through the Unified Registry and the Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS). By reinstating the Bolsa Família, enrolled parents receive guidance not only to keep their children in school but also to ensure they get vaccinated and maintain a regular routine of medical visits. Lula also reinstated other important programs that had been terminated by Bolsonaro, such as the Farmácia Popular,⁵² Brasil Sorridente,⁵³ and Mais Médicos⁵⁴ –the latter responsible for reducing infant mortality by 20 percent.

During the 17th National Health Conference in July 2023, President Lula emphasized that no other country worldwide, with over 100 million inhabitants, possesses a public healthcare system matching the quality of Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS). Confronting issues of inequality, combating infant mortality, addressing food insecurity, eradicating diseases, and enhancing life expectancy in a nation where around 70 percent of the population, approximately 150 million people, solely depend on SUS requires substantial investments and a comprehensive reassessment of public policies. Prioritizing healthcare as a fundamental pillar of social development is imperative in meeting this challenge.

Rebuilding Education: Lula's Mandate Amidst Post-Bolsonaro Challenges

The Bolsonaro government adopted an anti-science stance, deliberately reducing resources allocated to education and dismantling several essential programs and actions implemented by the Ministry of Education. Bolsonaro failed to achieve the several goals established by the National Education Plan (PNE, Law No. 13,005/2014),⁵⁵ approved in 2014 and considered a landmark law for civil society and social movements in the field of education. The PNE underscores the importance of educational planning, guiding investments, management, and promoting social participation. Additionally, the absence of adjustments in school meal programs worsened the already rising school dropout rates, attributed in part to the impact of the pandemic.

Throughout 2022, Bolsonaro reinforced his stance on reducing budgets for public universities, escalating a crisis that persisted during his tenure.⁵⁶ Alongside severe financial slashes, Bolsonaro directly targeted the independence of Federal Universities and Institutes of

⁵²See <https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/composicao/sectics/daf/farmacia-popular>

⁵³ See <https://www.gov.br/saude/pt-br/composicao/saps/brasil-sorridente>

⁵⁴ See <http://maismedicos.gov.br/>

⁵⁵ See <https://pne.mec.gov.br/18-planos-subnacionais-de-educacao/543-plano-nacional-de-educacao-lei-n-13-005-2014>

⁵⁶<https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2022/12/01/governo-federal-volta-a-retirar-verba-de-universidades-e-institutos-no-mesmo-dia-em-que-tinha-recuado-de-bloqueio.ghtml>

Education, naming chancellors without consensus from the academic community. His administration's consistent delays in awarding scholarships impacted marginalized youth groups, including those from low-income, Black, Indigenous, Quilombola, and other communities. Moreover, his persistent opposition to affirmative action policies and repeated threats to academic liberty and scientific advancement further exacerbated the situation. A study by the Center for Analysis of Freedom and Authoritarianism (LAUT) revealed alarming statistics: 35.5 percent of professors admitted constraining their research, while 42.5 percent censored content due to fears of reprisal. At the same time, 58.4 percent reported witnessing interferences in the academic endeavors of their colleagues and students.⁵⁷

The Lula administration confronts numerous challenges in the realm of education, encompassing the need to strike a balance and prioritize both basic education and the enhancement of higher education. A shared call from student and professor unions, along with local representative education councils and boards, is the restoration of bodies of social participation in shaping policies for both basic and higher education. Additionally, there is a collective demand for the recognition and appreciation of all education professionals.

An impactful measure resulting from the increased education budget was the inception of the Full-Time School program, known as Escola em Tempo Integral.⁵⁸ The initiative aims to generate one million openings in basic education, offering a curriculum spanning at least seven hours per day, split into two shifts. Furthermore, Lula introduced a national media education strategy, emphasizing the cultivation of critical media literacy skills, countering misinformation, and advocating for democratic principles.⁵⁹

The discontinuation of the National Program for Civic-Military Schools, a key educational initiative under the Bolsonaro government since 2019, represents a notable change.⁶⁰ Owing to persistent reports of rights violations and violence, oversight of these schools will shift from the Armed Forces to the Ministry of Education. They will be reintegrated into the standard educational framework.⁶¹

⁵⁷ http://portal.sbpcnet.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/liberdade-academica_pdf.pdf

⁵⁸ See <https://www.gov.br/mec/pt-br/escola-em-tempo-integral>

⁵⁹ See <https://www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/10/estrategia-brasileira-de-educacao-midiatica-apresenta-as-politicas-publicas-voltadas-para-a-populacao>

⁶⁰ See http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2023/decreto/D11611.htm

⁶¹ See <https://educacaointegral.org.br/reportagens/desmilitarizacao-da-educacao-200-entidades-pedem-revogacao-de-decreto-ao-mec/>

In the domain of higher education, there is a need for a plan that standardizes study and admission conditions across all higher education institutions in the country. Restarting the expansion plan for higher education, which involves constructing new federal universities and institutes, represents a strategic initiative to improve access to quality higher education. Simultaneously, strengthening and expanding the implementation of affirmative action programs is vital for fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

6.2 Progress and Challenges in Achieving SDGs

In 2023, Brazil resumed its historical course as a nation increasingly valuing democracy and multilateralism under the leadership of a president with significant global influence. However, despite President Lula's efforts to rebuild Brazil's image as an essential environmental player in negotiations and plans to address the global warming crisis, as a defender of democratic values and issues related to economic and social inclusion, and as an emerging economy with significant diplomatic weight among countries in the Global South, it is certain that Brazil has much to resolve domestically to fulfill the promise of ascension on the international stage.

A crucial component of the forthcoming efforts to reconcile addressing the vast socioeconomic needs confronted by a significant portion of the Brazilian population with an ambitious global agenda is the prioritization of the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations in 2015. These goals are envisioned to guide the actions of all countries until 2030 and will need to assume a central role in Lula's government in the upcoming years.⁶²

Interestingly, in a recent public statement about the direction he intends to take the G-20, the group of the world's major economies that Brazil will lead starting in December, Lula stated that he will act guided by the central goal of promoting the fight against inequalities. In the same vein, Brazil will adopt the agenda of environmental protection, technology transfer, inclusive growth, access to health and education, as well as dignified work and income, as the cornerstones of its management in the group.⁶³

Beyond the defense of democratic values and institutionalism, other actions on the domestic front can already be felt. And, although there is a dramatic disparity between living

⁶² "The 17 Goals | Sustainable Development." United Nations, sdgs.un.org/goals.

⁶³ Mundi, Opera. "Lula Vai à Índia Para Assumir Presidência Do G20." Opera Mundi, 4 Sept. 2023, operamundi.uol.com.br/politica-e-economia/82619/lula-vai-a-india-para-assumir-presidencia-do-g20.

conditions within and between the country's cities, since last year, largely thanks to the efforts of multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations, Brazil has become the first G-20 country in the process of implementing the Sustainable Development agenda in all its municipalities.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the picture that emerges from this monitoring is not comforting. Seventy-one percent of cities have a low sustainability development index, and in most municipalities, the index has regressed or remained stagnant over the last seven years.⁶⁵ Much of the problem results from Brazil's historical and defining wound: its extremely high and persistent level of inequality. And what the mapping also indicates is that promoting Sustainable Development Goals will have to include targeted actions for urban, rural and forest contexts nationwide.

In the urban setting, access to public sanitation – key to reducing the structural exclusion of large populations and mitigating the environmental impact of large urban conglomerates in the country – still requires specific measures,⁶⁶ but at least there are now specific public policies to try to improve the current situation.⁶⁷ Similarly, the fight against hunger, a policy central and representative of President Lula's first term but tragically abandoned in recent years,⁶⁸ is once again assuming its due centrality.⁶⁹

In the non-urban context, actions to reduce deforestation take center stage. But although much needs to be done to reduce the damage of recent years,⁷⁰ the positive impact of the new

⁶⁴ Secretariat, SDSN. "Brazil Is the First G20 Country to Track the Sustainable Development of All Its Cities." *Sustainable Development Solutions Network*, 23 Sept. 2022, www.unsdsn.org/brazil-is-the-first-g20-country-to-track-the-sustainable-development-of-all-its-cities#:~:text=The%20index%20is%20a%20tool,city%20on%20over%20100%20indicators.

⁶⁵ Madeiro, Carlos. "Carlos Madeiro: 71% Das Cidades Do País Têm Baixo Desenvolvimento Sustentável, Diz Pesquisa." *UOL*, 6 Aug. 2023, noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/carlos-madeiro/2023/08/06/saude-educacao-fome-71-das-cidades-no-pais-tem-baixo-desenvolvimento.htm. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁶⁶ Content, Desenvolvido por Rock and BRK. "Saneamento básico no Brasil: veja os principais números!" *Saneamento em Pauta*, 27 May 2020, <https://blog.brkambiental.com.br/saneamento-basico-no-brasil/>.

⁶⁷ "Saneamento Para Todos." *Acesso à Página Principal Do Site CAIXA.*, www.caixa.gov.br/poder-publico/infraestrutura-saneamento-mobilidade/meio-ambiente-saneamento/saneamento-para-todos/Paginas/default.aspx.

⁶⁸ "Infomaterias." *Senado Federal*, www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/infomaterias.

⁶⁹ "Governo Federal Lança Plano Para Tirar o Brasil Do Mapa Da Fome Novamente." *Ministério Do Desenvolvimento e Assistência Social, Família e Combate à Fome*, www.gov.br/mds/pt-br/noticias-e-conteudos/desenvolvimento-social/noticias-desenvolvimento-social/governo-federal-lanca-plano-para-tirar-o-brasil-do-mapa-da-fome-novamente.

⁷⁰ "Desmatamento Na Amazônia Tem Queda Histórica de 66% Em Julho." *Serviços e Informações Do Brasil*, www.gov.br/pt-br/noticias/meio-ambiente-e-clima/2023/08/desmatamento-na-amazonia-tem-queda-historica-de-66-em-julho. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Brazilian government's administration can already be clearly felt.⁷¹ In the same vein, the protection of Indigenous reserves, always threatened by agribusiness interests,⁷² seems to finally be gaining relevance for Lula.⁷³ Similarly, it is vital that Brazil's energy matrix, already significantly sustainable, manages to expand even further, thereby reducing the environmental impact of the country's production chains.⁷⁴ Finally, Lula should try to promote economic activities with lower energy impact, such as those that do not depend so much on trade with countries on the other side of the world.⁷⁵

We thus have a promising outlook for the current administration of the Brazilian government regarding the possibility of achieving, at least in part, the Sustainable Development Goals in the coming years. The task will certainly be arduous, especially given the destruction of recent years. It would be important, therefore, for such policies to take priority not only during a specific administration but also to become state policies and priorities embraced by society at large.

6.3 Policy Approaches for Sustainable Development

The pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Brazil, as articulated by President Lula at the 78th United Nations General Assembly, emphasizes the urgent need to reduce inequalities and implement the Agenda 2030. However, recent developments reveal a challenging path ahead, despite the positive signals already conveyed by actions from the current government.

In the days leading up to and following President Lula's address at the United Nations, significant developments unfolded in Brazil's journey towards Sustainable Development Goals. Four days before his UN speech, on September 15th, Lula signed a decree to establish the National

⁷¹“Desmatamento Na Amazônia Tem Queda Histórica de 66% Em Julho.” *Serviços e Informações Do Brasil*, www.gov.br/pt-br/noticias/meio-ambiente-e-clima/2023/08/desmatamento-na-amazonia-tem-queda-historica-de-66-em-julho. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023..

⁷² Neiva, Lucas. “Ruralistas Aceleraram Marco Temporal Na Câmara Para Evitar O STF.” *Congresso Em Foco*, 25 May 2023, congressoemfoco.uol.com.br/area/congresso-nacional/ruralistas-aceleraram-marco-temporal-na-camara-para-evitar-o-stf/.

⁷³ “Lula Afirma Que Governo Vai Demarcar Novas Terras Indígenas Nesta Terça-Feira.” *Exame*, 5 Sept. 2023, exame.com/brasil/lula-afirma-que-governo-vai-demarcar-novas-terras-indigenas/.

⁷⁴ CEBRI Revista. “Uma Agenda Estratégica e de Futuro Para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável Do Brasil.” *CEBRI Revista*, cebri.org/revista/br/artigo/60/uma-agenda-estrategica-e-de-futuro-para-o-desenvolvimento-sustentavel-do-brasil.

⁷⁵ Ricardo Abramovay, et al. “Superar a Monotonia Agroalimentar.” Ricardo Abramovay, ricardoabramovay.com/2023/09/superar-a-monotonia-agroalimentar/. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Commission for the SDGs.⁷⁶ This body is charged with crafting and overseeing strategies, actions, and policies to effectively implement and achieve the SDGs.

However, a stark contrast to this initiative was highlighted six days after Lula's UN speech, with the release of the Luz Report⁷⁷ on September 25th. This comprehensive analysis, conducted by 82 experts from 41 organizations, revealed a worrying trend: Brazil has regressed in 102 of the 168 development targets set by the United Nations since the inception of the 17 SDGs in 2015. This represents a regression rate of 60.7 percent, signaling a major setback in the country's pursuit of sustainable development. The report further detailed that only three targets showed satisfactory progress, while a majority faced regression, stagnation, or imminent threats.

This revelation is particularly concerning given Brazil's commitment to the Agenda 2030, established at the United Nations Summit for Sustainable Development in 2015. This global agenda, endorsed by 193 countries including Brazil, set forth 17 objectives and 169 targets to address critical issues, such as hunger, poverty, environmental sustainability, and social inequality.

During president Lula's third term he will face the challenge of realigning Brazil with these goals. Central to this effort is addressing environmental preservation and climate change, especially in critical biomes like the Amazon and Cerrado (savanna). This involves not just combating deforestation but also protecting the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous, Quilombola, and other local communities.

Additionally, tackling poverty and hunger remains a high priority, requiring comprehensive socio-economic strategies to elevate marginalized communities. Education and media literacy are key in empowering citizens to participate actively in sustainable development initiatives. Lula's task is to harmonize these challenges, ensuring progress that is inclusive and environmentally sustainable, while also fostering socio-economic development.

The setbacks faced in these areas are partly attributed to the previous administration under President Bolsonaro. His government's environmental omissions, mishandling of the pandemic, and policies that exacerbated violence, hunger, unemployment, and societal disengagement have significantly hindered Brazil's progress towards the SDGs. Therefore, Lula's current mandate

⁷⁶ "Presidente Lula Institui Comissão Nacional Para Os Objetivos Do Desenvolvimento Sustentável." *Secretaria-Geral*, www.gov.br/secretariageral/pt-br/noticias/2023/setembro/presidente-lula-institui-comissao-nacional-para-os-objetivos-do-desenvolvimento-sustentavel.

⁷⁷ https://brasilnaagenda2030.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/rl_2023_webcompleto-v9.pdf

involves not only advancing new initiatives but also rectifying past deficiencies to steer Brazil back on the path of sustainable development.

In light of President Lula's initiatives and Brazil's challenges in meeting Sustainable Development Goals, two critical issues have come to the forefront: Brazil's re-entry into the map of hunger under President Bolsonaro's tenure and the complex relationship between agribusiness and hunger. Additionally, the anticipation of a tax reform and the upcoming 30th UN Conference on Climate Change (COP 30) in Belém are also pivotal in shaping Brazil's path forward.

Under President Bolsonaro's administration, Brazil witnessed a distressing regression in its fight against hunger. By 2022, nearly 66 million people, accounting for 30.7 percent of the population,⁷⁸ were living in moderate or severe food insecurity, a situation reminiscent of the early 1990s. This alarming increase in hunger highlights the urgent need for effective policies and interventions to reverse this trend. A key element in this discussion is the productive relations in the agricultural sector, as the relationship between agribusiness and hunger in Brazil presents a paradox. While Brazilian agribusiness claims to feed a billion people globally, the reality within Brazil is starkly different. In 2022, millions faced hunger, despite the country's large-scale production of grains and meats. This situation arises from several factors:⁷⁹

- a. Encroachment on Family Agriculture: Agribusiness competes for land traditionally used by family farmers, essential for producing staple foods.
- b. Rural Exodus: The loss of rural jobs, particularly in family farming, has been exacerbated by the shift towards large-scale, mechanized agribusiness.
- c. Financial Resource Allocation: Agribusiness enjoys privileged access to public financing, often at the expense of smaller, family-run farms.
- d. Export-Driven Market: The focus on exports has led to price hikes in domestic markets, making basic foodstuffs like rice and meat more expensive for Brazilians.
- e. Dollar Linkage and Inflation: Global market dynamics influence domestic prices, often leading to instability and higher costs for essential grains like corn.

There is a growing expectation that the tax reform will be passed this year. The Ministry of Finance's analysis suggests a base rate of 25.45 percent to 27 percent for the Value Added Tax

⁷⁸ https://brasilnaagenda2030.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/rI_2023_webcompleto-v9.pdf

⁷⁹ Redação. "Tudo o Que Sabemos Sobre as Relações Entre Agronegócio e Fome." *O Joio e O Trigo*, 21 Sept. 2022, ojoioetrigo.com.br/2022/09/tudo-o-que-sabemos-sobre-as-relacoes-entre-agronegocio-e-fome/.

(IVA),⁸⁰ aiming to maintain the current tax burden. The reform is currently awaiting debate in the House, after being approved in the Senate. This reform is crucial for addressing fiscal challenges and ensuring a more equitable tax system, as well as underpinning the Brazilian state capacity to face key challenges posed by the socio-environmental demands of the sustainable development agenda.

A symbolic component of this multifaceted agenda is represented by the confirmation of Belém, Pará, as host of the COP-30 climate conference in November 2025, mentioned previously. This decision follows President Lula's proposal made at COP-27 in Egypt. Hosting COP-30 in the Amazon region underscores Brazil's commitment to addressing climate change and showcases the country's unique environmental challenges and opportunities.

These developments paint a complex picture of Brazil's current social, economic, and environmental landscape. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that balances the needs of the economy, environment, and society, particularly in the face of the country's recent struggles with hunger and the impacts of large-scale agribusiness. The anticipated tax reform and the hosting of COP-30 in Belém are steps towards this balance, offering potential pathways for sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

⁸⁰ Noberto, Cristiane. "Análise Da Fazenda Sobre a Reforma Tributária Aponta Alíquota Entre 25,45% e 27%." *CNN Brasil*, www.cnnbrasil.com.br/economia/analise-da-fazenda-sobre-a-reforma-tributaria-aponta-aliquota-entre-2545-e-27/. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In the tapestry of Brazil's complex challenges and opportunities, this policy paper has woven together a comprehensive analysis across vital domains, amplifying the significance of democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, racial equality, gender, sexual diversity, and socio-economic development.

The tumultuous political history of Brazil, marked by authoritarianism, a complex democracy, and recent attacks on its institutions, underscores the nation's intricate challenges. From military rule to the recent Bolsonaro government's assaults on democratic pillars, Brazil has faced profound polarization and institutional dysfunction. Despite the resilience displayed during the January 8, 2023 attacks, underlying issues persist, including a conservative and transactional Congress, military involvement in government operations, and judicial complexities. The Lula government seeks to stabilize this framework, emphasizing accountability and due process. President Biden's recognition of Brazil's democratic responses to authoritarianism highlights the importance of collaboration in facing shared challenges, particularly in combating extremism and disinformation. However, acknowledging differences and respecting Brazil's independent aspirations are crucial for a more fruitful U.S.-Brazil relationship. Striving for greater collaboration, especially in areas like climate change, while acknowledging Brazil's unique interests, is vital for fostering a productive partnership and enhancing Brazil's role in global governance.

The challenges and complexities surrounding the fate of the Amazon Rainforest demand urgent and concerted global action. The Belém Summit, while marking a significant gathering of nations and yielding the Belém Declaration, fell short of crucial objectives to halt deforestation by 2030 and curtail environmentally destructive practices. The political and economic imperatives of individual sovereignty have impeded a unified approach, allowing participating countries to prioritize short-term economic growth over long-term ecological wellbeing. The resilience of Brazil's institutions to the challenges of environmental protection relies on sustained cooperation, regenerative farming, sustainable crops, renewable energy, and enforceable constraints on damaging industries. The new phase of the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation faces not only technical obstacles but formidable political challenges. Balancing environmental goals with the influence of agribusiness and infrastructure lobbies, navigating conflicts within the government coalition, and addressing potential adversarial stances are critical. However, with resolute political commitment, aligned environmental concerns with influential ministries, and international support, there is hope for steering Brazil toward a more sustainable

and ecologically responsible path. The urgency lies in recognizing the global consequences of Amazonian degradation and fostering meaningful cooperation for the preservation of this vital ecosystem.

Brazil stands at a critical juncture, navigating the complexities of achieving Sustainable Development Goals amidst a backdrop of significant challenges and promising initiatives. President Lula's commitment to promoting the fight against inequalities and prioritizing environmental protection, technology transfer, inclusive growth, access to health and education, and dignified work is a positive signal. The establishment of the National Commission for the SDGs demonstrates a formalized effort to craft strategies for effective implementation. However, the Luz Report's revelation of regression in 60.7 percent of development targets underscores the formidable task ahead. Brazil's commitment to the Agenda 2030, set forth at the United Nations Summit for Sustainable Development, necessitates urgent action on environmental preservation, climate change, poverty alleviation, and social inequality. The re-entry into hunger maps during the previous administration and the intricate relationship between agribusiness and hunger pose significant challenges that demand comprehensive policy interventions. The anticipated tax reform and the upcoming COP-30 conference in Belém offer opportunities to address fiscal challenges and showcase Brazil's commitment to climate change. Achieving SDGs in the coming years requires sustained political will, inclusive policies, and societal engagement to transform these initiatives into lasting state priorities embraced by the entire nation. The path to sustainable development demands a delicate balance between economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social equity, echoing President Lula's vision for a more just and sustainable Brazil.

This culmination of insights and recommendations is not merely a static document but a dynamic call to action. It beckons policymakers, academics, and advocates to collectively engage with the identified challenges and seize the opportunities for positive transformation. By heeding the policy recommendations within these domains, Brazil has the potential to sculpt a future characterized by democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, racial equality, gender equity, and socio-economic prosperity. This paper serves as both a reflection and a catalyst, inviting a collaborative journey toward a more equitable and sustainable Brazil.

