

Brazil's Rise and Decline in Global Governance: Glory and Pain in the Tropics

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Since the beginning of this century, Brazil has risen to a power of global relevance. Within one decade, the democratic country from the tropics turned into a global leader in several sectors of global governance, contributing with a distinctively social agenda of innovative and democratic ideas to tackling a series of global (development) challenges, reshaping international agendas, strengthening democratic norms, human rights and transnational cooperation processes. On many occasions, the country's ideas have been regarded as role-models in the solution of some of the major challenges confronting the global governance system and humankind in the 21st century, among them the fight against poverty and hunger, health epidemics and the regulation of the Internet. With its activities the country has turned into a serious advocate for more justice and democracy in the global governance system and has inspired hope that developing democracies from the global south can play a significant role in strengthening the values of multilateralism, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and human rights (Fraundorfer 2015; 2017a and b).

For instance, Brazil established itself as a powerful actor in strengthening the human right to access to medicines, actively defending and promoting the reduction of prices of life-saving medicines for HIV/AIDS and other neglected diseases in the developing world, thereby confronting and successfully challenging hegemonic actors such as the US, the EU and the influential pharmaceutical industry (Fraundorfer 2015). The country's democratic and inclusive HIV/AIDS programme, developed in the 1980s and 1990s, inspired the global approach to HIV/AIDS embraced by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (UNAIDS) and other international organisations, states and social movements. In the fight against hunger and poverty, Brazil turned from a country notorious for its embarrassingly high poverty rates into a country leading the fight against this scourge. Brazil's rate of undernourished people "fell from 10.7 percent of the population in 2000–02 to less than 5 percent in 2004–06" (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2014: 23). In this context, "[o]verall poverty fell from 24.3 percent to 8.4 percent of the population between 2001 and 2012, while extreme poverty dropped from 14.0 percent to 3.5 percent" (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2014: 23). The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) attributed this historic success to Brazil's innovative Zero Hunger programme, established by the

Brazilian government in 2003 (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2014: 23–26). The UN's Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) is a direct consequence of these experiences.

As a consequence of these success stories, Brazil has played a vital role in the creation of some of the most democratic and innovative global governance mechanisms in place today, such as the Committee on World Food Security or the international drug-purchase facility UNITAID (Fraundorfer 2017a). Brazilian foreign policy actors have also contributed to the establishment of a set of rights-based international norms in global Internet governance in order to strengthen the attempts of state and non-state actors to establish a more democratic, rights-based and regulated Internet (Fraundorfer 2017a and b). In all these instances, Brazilian foreign policy actors have collaborated with transnational civil society actors and other progressive states from the developed and the developing world, challenging powerful industry conglomerations from the global north, positioning Brazil as a legitimate advocate of the world's poor, marginalised and neglected communities as well as promoting more democratic and inclusive alternatives to the dominant neoliberal approaches to a wide set of challenges in the global system. Brazil's new visibility on the global stage was also reflected by the promotion of several Brazilians into key roles in a series of international organisations and other mechanisms of global governance; among them José Graziano da Silva, since 2012 the director-general of the FAO; Roberto Azevêdo, since 2013 the director-general of the WTO; and Celso Amorim, since 2016 the chair of the executive board of UNITAID.

Brazil's extraordinary rise to a serious and, in many ways, inspiring actor in global governance was favoured by several internal and external factors. Internally, the two most important factors were 1) the stabilisation of Brazil's economic system in the years under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and his centre-right coalition as well as 2) the promotion of an agenda emphasising social, inclusive and democratic policy programmes under Cardoso's successor Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), the president of the Workers' Party (PT) who was born into extreme poverty in the poor North-East Region of Brazil, worked his way up the social ladder as an inspiring union leader and became the first president of Brazil without a university degree. Externally, Brazil's strong economic growth during the Lula years was favoured by the international commodities boom, particularly driven by China's ferocious hunger for agricultural products, and the transformation of Brazil into the world's agricultural powerhouse as the leading exporter of a series of agricultural products, including beef, soy beans, coffee, oranges, sugarcane, poultry and corn (Andrade 2016; Hopewell 2016).

In 2010, Lula da Silva stepped down as the most popular president in Brazilian history with popularity rates reaching an incredible 90 percent (Phillips 2010). This wave of popularity helped Lula da Silva's hand-picked successor Dilma Rousseff to win the presidential elections effortlessly and become Brazil's first female president. And for a moment everything seemed possible! Dilma Rousseff was on her way towards eliminating extreme poverty in Brazil and further consolidating Brazilian democracy with the social policies inherited by Lula da Silva. Brazil continued making international headlines as the sleeping giant that had finally awoken, taking its natural place as a power with global reach. But then, things started to fall apart in the country.

The end of the commodities boom in 2008/09 exposed the economy's structural weaknesses, revealing that Brazil's economic growth cycle was largely due to the high prices of agricultural commodities and not a reformed and competitive economy (Andrade 2016; Lyons and Kiernan 2015). Except for its powerful agricultural sector and some industrial islands of excellence (particularly the aerospace conglomerate Embraer, the state majority-owned oil company Petrobras, the public agricultural research corporation Embrapa and the public health institute Oswaldo Cruz Foundation - Fiocruz), Brazil's industry largely continues to be uncompetitive with the rest of the world, bogged down by its overburdening bureaucracy, high interest rates, low productivity, inefficiency and relative closedness to international trade (Andrade 2016; Fraundorfer 2015).

The worsening international situation for Brazil's economy was further complicated by Lula da Silva's successor, Dilma Rousseff, who turned out to be a weak and uninspiring president, particularly in the fields of economic and foreign policy. While Lula da Silva had prioritised foreign policy in his two terms, building together with his Foreign Minister Celso Amorim a Brazilian dream team in international politics, Rousseff was largely disinterested in foreign policy. Not only did Rousseff lack any particular interest in foreign policy, but she also underestimated the changing economic situation. While Lula da Silva in his first term continued the pragmatic and neo-liberal economic policy of his predecessor Cardoso, in his second term, his economic policy acquired a more ideological touch, called Neo-Developmentalism (strong role of the state to control the currency, protect national industries and support the distribution of income), which was continued and further reinforced by Dilma Rousseff. While the inclusion of neo-developmental elements in the government's economic policy rendered positive results in Lula da Silva's second term, Brazil's economic performance worsened rapidly in the Dilma years. Rousseff's government had to face declining commodity prices and could no longer rely on the gains from the commodities boom. Rousseff's unwillingness and incapacity to adapt her economic policy to the changing economic situation, reinforced by other factors such as the political fragmentation of the governing coalition and Rousseff's weak leadership skills, ultimately caused one of the most disastrous economic recessions in Brazil's entire history (Amorim Neto 2016; Morais and Saad-Filho 2012; Roberts et al. 2018).

Although the embattled Rousseff narrowly won re-election in 2014, the worsening economic crisis and her lacking leadership skills led to dwindling popularity rates and diminishing political support in the Senate and the House of Representatives. In 2016, Rousseff's term in office was cut short by a successful impeachment process. While the justifications for the impeachment process stood on shaky ground (an alleged crime of responsibility for the issuing of spending budget decrees without congressional support), the impeachment process would probably never have been successful if Rousseff had not lost the political support of her coalition partners and the public support in the Brazilian society (Fraundorfer 2016; Watts and Bowater 2016). After all, the credibility of the overwhelming majority of politicians in both chambers had been tainted by a series of widely ramified corruption scandals. But it was the strong winds of the economic recession that sealed Rousseff's destiny and swept her away, paving the way for Rousseff's vice-president and the leader of the PT's major coalition partner PMDB (Brazilian Party for Democratic Movement), Michel Temer, to inherit Rousseff's place.

With Brazil's economy in free fall, several corruption scandals came back to the fore to haunt the legacy of the Workers' Party. Among these corruption scandals figures the so-called "Car Wash" (Lava Jato) corruption scandal that involves leading politicians of all the big parties in Brazil, some of the most influential Brazilian construction firms and the country's most revered company, the majority state-owned oil company Petrobras, in systemic corruption and money-laundering schemes worth billions of Brazilian *reais* (Watts 2017). The "Car Wash" corruption scandal is so gigantic that it is considered one of the biggest corruption scandals worldwide uncovered with ramifications in several other Latin American countries and offshore accounts in Switzerland. Over one hundred high-profile representatives from Brazil's political and economic elite are already behind bars and an overwhelming majority of politicians in the Senate, the House of Representatives and the current government, including President Temer, are being investigated for corruption and money laundering by the Federal Police. Lula da Silva, the personification of Brazil's glorious years in global politics, the living legend of the Brazilian Left and the celebrated figure among a considerable proportion of Brazil's society, became the first ex-president in Brazilian history to serve a prison sentence because of corruption and money-laundering (Oliveira et al. 2018). Due to this and other developments, the "Car Wash" corruption scandal has thrown the entire democratic system in Brazil into its most serious political and constitutional crisis for decades. The heads of political and economic elites in other Latin American countries are also rolling. For example, the last two presidents of Peru, Ollanta Humala (2011–2016) and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016–2018) were also implicated in these money-laundering schemes. As a consequence, Kuczynski had to resign from office in March 2018 (BBC 2017; Collyns 2018).

It became clear very soon that Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 ended an era in Brazilian domestic and foreign politics. The Workers' Party with its social agenda dominated Brazilian politics for 14 years. Brazil's emerging role in global governance is closely related to the Workers' Party in power with its distinctive focus on a social agenda. The Workers' Party under Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff achieved to shape domestic politics in Brazil and international politics in global governance. The Workers' Party showed what was possible to accomplish for a developing democracy from the global south in global governance today. Under the current President Michel Temer, very different winds started to blow. It was the return of what Brazilians call "velha política", the return to power of white, old men, with mindsets stuck in the past, desperately clinging to their privileges, protecting Brazil's self-interested political elites and hostile to any meaningful democratic and social reform that could benefit society as a whole. In short, it was the return of that political class and mindset that had been responsible for Brazil's backwardness and irrelevance in international politics for the last few centuries.

It is ironic that the Workers' Party, through its long years in power, has become part of this self-interested and privilege-seeking class. Lula da Silva, for example, is no longer the inspiring outsider, the brave union leader taking on the political, economic and social establishment in Brazil. Lula da Silva, a highly polarising figure today, has become as corrupt as other leading Brazilian politicians. The Workers' Party today is as morally bankrupt as almost all other big parties in Brazil; adrift and entirely out of touch with Brazil's reality. While the Workers' Party was responsible for an extraordinary decade in Brazilian domestic and foreign politics, the party also wasted a historically unique opportunity to break Brazil's patriarchal power structures and prepare the country for the challenges of the 21st century. In the end, the Workers' Party only

scratched the surface, shying away from any transformative reforms of the political system and surfing complacently on the big wave of the commodities boom. The big wave is gone, and the winds have changed.

And the agendas of ultra-conservative movements and politicians are gaining strength not least because of the unelected President Michel Temer who has proved to be even weaker than Dilma Rousseff. Since he lacks any real legitimacy, his popularity ratings do not even reach 5 percent (making him the least popular president in Brazil's history) (Phillips 2017). And lacking strong leadership skills, he has become a pawn of political factions with agendas that represent everything that is archaic and backward in Brazil (that is, Christian fundamentalists with ultra-conservative beliefs; representatives of the cattle industry who belong to the major culprits for the destruction of Brazil's biomes; big landowners who disrespect the land rights of indigenous people; and patriarchal power structures sustained by family dynasties). These agendas embrace a social and political conservatism hostile towards human rights, minority rights and environmental protection. At least, the Temer government can be credited for having regained control over the economy, largely thanks to the agricultural sector. The economy as a whole, however, remains structurally weak and uncompetitive.

Brazil's spectacular rise in global governance was based on social policies that emphasised democratic decision-making structures, the importance of marginalised people and communities as well as the collaboration of state institutions with civil society movements and organisations. These social policies have successfully consolidated Brazil's democracy and have pointed to more democratic and inclusive solutions to some of the major social development challenges confronting humankind at the outset of the 21st century. With Dilma Rousseff's disinterest in foreign policy and the total collapse of effective foreign-policy making under Michel Temer, Brazil has virtually disappeared from the global stage. If the future government is going to turn its back on those policies and mindsets that helped establish Brazil's reputation as a serious power in global governance, the country risks becoming irrelevant once again. Of course, what is going to come, is hard to predict. But the notoriously sunny skies over Brazil have darkened. It seems that Brazil has come to a crossroads. Either the country continues its path of modernisation, innovation and democracy accompanied by an innovative foreign policy, which has resulted in Brazil's inspiring role in the global arena. Or the country takes a different path, traveling backwards in time and becoming once again irrelevant in global politics. A lot will depend on the outcome of the upcoming presidential elections in October this year.

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