


Letter

Renewed environmental
governance scenarios in
the Brazilian Amazon

Carlos A. Peres ^{1,2,*}
Camila Duarte Ritter,² and
João Campos-Silva^{2,3}

Philip Fearnside [1] is cautious about environmental outcomes in the Brazilian Amazon under a renewed federal administration – led once again by Luiz Inácio (Lula) da Silva – after Bolsonaro's defeat. We agree that there is no room for complacency, and there are many challenges ahead [2]. Our view, however, reconciles both optimistic and pessimistic views for the Brazilian Amazon in a deeply divided country.

We note that Bolsonaro honored all of his many antienvironmental pledges, and this would only have become worse during a second term. These include rollbacks in environmental protection, severely defunding environmental agencies, overlooking illegal logging and mining, downgrading and downsizing protected areas, and pandering to land-grabbers, all of which are reflected in Amazonia's deforestation and wildfires records during his 2019–2022 (mis)administration. If anything, decades of haphazard commercial exploitation have shown that debilitated environmental protection secures neither sustainable economic growth nor the persistence of natural ecosystems. We therefore breathe a sigh of relief at Lula's third term in office, compared with a would-be Bolsonaro second term, while nevertheless mindful of tricky minefields ahead in all areas of the executive, legislative, and judiciary governments. This has been re-emphasized by Lula's populist declarations during his campaign and the early days of the current administration, which may carry severe

environmental implications and call for vigilance. Here we largely reaffirm Fearnside's comments, but also extol the positive developments in the new administration.

**Reversing antienvironmental
policies**

Several measures have already shown that Lula is a breath of hope compared to his predecessor. A comprehensive package repelling previous antienvironmental legislation has already been enacted, including revoking decrees that resulted in bare-bones funding for environmental agencies, annulments of environmental penalties, and legalisation of 'artisanal' mining. In addition, Lula and his cabinet have restructured and reinvigorated the National Council for the Environment (CONAMA) [3]. Lula resumed the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAm), a program hitherto showing the 'best' results in suppressing Amazonian deforestation [4]. A renovated PPCDAm has been restructured around four action points: sustainable productive activities, environmental monitoring and control, land and territorial planning, and regulatory, economic, and tax instruments deployed to reduce deforestation [5]. Combined with newly enhanced satellite forest-monitoring systems, effective enforcement on the ground, and empowerment of research institutes dismantled by Bolsonaro, deforestation is expected to decelerate, as observed by the 61% decline in the deforestation rate compared to the same period in 2022.

Many other actions have been deployed. We highlight the creation of an Indigenous Peoples Ministry led by a native Amazonian for the first time in Brazilian history; the undoing of antienvironmental legislation that hinders the application of minimum environmental licensing standards; initiatives by frontline task forces and an embargo on illegally deforested landholdings, illegal logging, and charcoal operations across

Brazilian Amazonia; and a newly established National Secretariat for Regional and Territorial Development Policies [6] in charge of both land use policies for both public lands and land title deeds.

Challenging obstacles

The new Lula administration will, however, confront intractable challenges. For example, we foresee clashes within the federal government in relation to oil and gas exploration in sensitive areas. The predominantly right-wing National Congress is expected to oppose most, if not all, environmental legislation. For instance, the likely nomination of former Bolsonaro minister of environment (Ricardo Salles) for the environmental commission of the Congress preempts how the federal legislative will oppose the implementation of the environmental agenda. Many Amazonian local governments are also pro-Bolsonaro (e.g., Mato Grosso, Rondônia, and Roraima), hindering policy implementation in those states. Beyond Congress hostility, agribusiness pressure, and budget difficulties, previous Lula declarations suggest that we need to be alert with new government directives. The sheer pressure on Amazonian forest ecosystems by millions of rural entrepreneurs, which was encouraged during the Bolsonaro years, can be gauged by the rapid acceleration in deforestation rates after his defeat in the elections (<https://infoamazonia.org/2023/01/27/acceleracao-do-desmatamento-nos-ultimos-meses-de-2022-traz-desafios-para-politica-ambiental-de-lula/?s=09>).

To sum up, nation-state elections can have a huge impact on tropical deforestation, not just in Brazil but worldwide [7]. Amazonian environmental degradation has been extensive, thanks to preordained geopolitical strategies during the military dictatorship of the late 1960s, followed by the migration of scores of Brazilian farmers and land speculators. Environmental management and protection of

the world's largest tropical forest region under the jurisdiction of a single country would be extremely difficult under any circumstances. However, overthrowing the Bolsonaro administration represents a fresh start which has sent warnings to rogue violators who had grown accustomed to pervasive lawlessness. This positive psychological impact cannot be underestimated, as even a reinforced army of frontline law-enforcement agents cannot cope with millions of private actors battling for rapid prosperity at the expense of natural ecosystems.

Finally, we believe that conservation optimism is critical to reshaping our future, from the current doom-and-gloom climate to a positive conservation and development agenda. In this context, we believe that Lula and his team echo the myriad voices of scientists, environmental and

indigenous leaders, and others who had been silenced. These players again have the opportunity to participate in the political agenda, contributing to the creation of a new model for the Amazon, reconciling conservation imperatives with legitimate social aspirations.

¹School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

²Instituto Juruá, Manaus, Brazil

³Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia (INPA), Manaus, Amazonas, Brazil

*Correspondence:

C.Peres@uea.ac.uk (C.A. Peres).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2023.02.009>

© 2023 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

References

1. Fearnside, P.M. (2023) The outlook for Brazil's new presidential administration. *Trends Ecol. Evol.* Published online February 2, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2023.01.002>
2. Peres, C.A. *et al.* (2023) Environmental policy at a critical junction in the Amazon. *Trends Ecol. Evol.* 38, 113–116

3. Order of the President of the Republic of Brazil of 2nd January 2023. www.in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/despacho-do-presidente-da-republica-455355621a1 (in Diário Oficial da União)
4. Capobianco, J.P.R. (2021) *Amazônia, uma década de esperança: Como o Brasil controlou o desmatamento entre 2004 e 2014 e está pondo tudo a perder, Estação Liberdade, Brazil, São Paulo*
5. Da Silva, L.I.L. and Costa, F.D.D.C.E. (2023) Regularization of the use and transport of fire weapons in Brazil. Decreto N° 11.366, of 1st January 2023. <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/2023/decreto-11366-1-janeiro-2023-793600-publicacaooriginal-166716-pe.html>, Accessed date: 27 February 2023
6. Secretaria Nacional de Políticas de Desenvolvimento Regional e Territorial – Ministério da Integração e do Desenvolvimento Regional (2023) *Formular e Implementar a Política Nacional de Ordenamento do Território, MIDR, Brazil*. www.gov.br/mdr/pt-br/composicao/secretarias-nacionais/desenvolvimento-regional-e-territorial
7. Morpurgo, J. *et al.* (2023) The role of elections as drivers of tropical deforestation. *Biol. Conserv.* Published online February 6, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2022.109832>

