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SPECIAL ISSUE - 'THE POLITICS AND POLICIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN BRAZIL'

The Politics and Policies of Climate Change in Brazil: mapping out the field

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Introduction

Increasing global warming, health pandemics, accelerated losses of biodiversity, growing deforestation rates, frequent and non-anticipated climate events such as off-the-scale floods, longer droughts, storms, typhons and cyclones in Brazil and world-wide are also political agendas. They have produced intense public debates about the responsibility of states and corporations, the connections between the climate emergency and development models, including the role of the fossil economy, agribusiness and mining in obstructing sustainable transition policies. The climate emergency has also steered governments and international agencies to work on recovery programs (also known as Green New Deals) and just energy transition frameworks. Civil society organizations (CSO), North and South of the international system, have started promoting transnational actions on ecological and social transition scenarios, projects to overcome the fossil combustion energy model, new consumption patterns and lifestyles, relationships of solidarity between human and non-human forms of life, among many other subjects. Ultraconservative think tanks have also disseminated messages against what they have framed as the 'climate hoax' and promoted linkages between authoritarian leaders and anti-science networks. The politics of climate change, nationally and transnationally, involve a myriad of actors, vested interests, and world visions that meddle in the making of public policies, from the local to the international levels.

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The confluence between what some researchers have called the multiple crises of the Anthropocene (COCHET, 2018; CRUTZEN and STOERMER, 2000; MERCHANT, 2020; SWILLING, 2013), on the one hand; and geopolitical disputes between the USA and China, systemic financial crises, and hegemonic transition in the global order, on the other hand. So, has produced something new in the realm of political science and international relations (BURKE et al., 2016; CHANDLER et al., 2018; GIDDENS, 2011; KEOHANE, 2015; OSTROM, 2014). This confluence leads us to reimagine the role of States in public policies, the design of institutions for sustainable development, and the definition of responsibilities in sharing the climate burden both nationally and internationally. It has also implied renegotiating and redefining general principles, rules, and procedures in multilateral organizations. Very importantly, it has allowed for a critical debate on capitalism and the role of the fossil economy in producing the current state of affairs, and the need to phase out oil, gas and coal from the energy matrix and development models world-wide (MOORE, 2014; NEWELL and PATERSON, 2010; WRIGHT and NYBERG, 2015).

As a result, because they relate to socio-economic development as well as energy and food security, climate issues have altered power relations and become a political problem in the field of political science and international relations. Since the 1980s, climate debates have problematized and contributed to redefine the boundaries between national and international politics, hierarchies between economic and environmental priorities, and connections between human and natural dimensions, thus intervening in the definition of modes of regulation and conflict resolution nationally and globally. Therefore, climate change has also led to debates on the role of the State, international organizations, economic operators, corporations, and CSOs. Climate change has become a fundamental issue in the contemporary world, in all dimensions of social life, from local to global, affecting the way knowledge is produced and taught in various disciplines, including political science and international relations. This article introduces the Special Issue on 'The Politics and Policies of Climate Change in Brazil', addressing the subject from the perspective of political science, political sociology and international relations.

What are the responses given to the causes and effects of climate change in Brazil's public policies and international negotiations? What are the relationships between science and policymaking, and between development models and capitalism in such debates? What are the interfaces between climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and development models? These are some of the main questions that the authors of this Special Issue have attempted to discuss and analyse. As part of a cooperation programme between the Brazilian Political Science Review and the ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, this Special Issue contributes to the body of work on the diagnostics of the national debate on climate change (FLEURY et al., 2019; MORAES et al., 2020; SALMI and FLEURY, 2022), focusing on the following dimensions: 01. 'Government, climate change policies in Brazil and international negotiations': the prominence of the federal government and the role of subnational entities, Congress, political parties, and the Judiciary; different interests and visions of development within State, market and civil society, the role of science and diplomacy in policymaking; 02. 'Political economy and the national-international nexus': the reorganisation of the economy and the role of the agribusiness and the mining sector, the relationship between oil and renewables in Brazil. The next two sections explore these dimensions in a more detailed fashion.

Public policies and International negotiations: the role of Social Science knowledge and expertise

Often, debates on the climate emergency, such as those held during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of Parties (COPs), start from the premise that we must reinvent ourselves as a society and civilization, that we will have to rethink economic and political models that allow the overcoming of these crises immediately, in the short term, but also in the medium term, so that our viability as a human species in the future is ensured. To this end, since the first COP held in Berlin in 1995, UN COPs and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have dealt with the promotion of alliances with the private sector. The IPCC recognizes the importance of involving private companies in the work of governments and the United Nations, of building sustainable and equitable societies together, and of mobilizing comparative advantages in the pursuit of a world free from want,

poverty, and fear. However, private partners can obtain privileged access to IPCC research and the contents of its reports. What is the role of the private sector in political decision-making and funding research on the global climate? What are the dangers for future development and climate change when companies (oil, for example) are indirectly involved in public decision-making and the financing of research considered relevant to these policies?

Societal minimum denominators about the climate-development nexus are important. Thus, on the one hand, scientists gathered within the framework of the IPCC have reached a broad consensus around the high probability of anthropogenic contributions to the phenomenon of climate change. IPCC scientists were able to build bridges with the political world within multilateral negotiations, as demonstrated by De Pryck (2023). However, on the other hand, almost simultaneously, there emerged a set of dynamics of political obstruction to recognizing the climate emergency as a problem, which required collective action from local to global. This obstructionist position can take different forms: denial, delay, dissemination of false news, manipulation of doubt, religious obscurantism and policies of delegitimization of scientific methods, among others (EDWARDS et al., 2023).

From a conceptual point of view and in order to understand the sources of the IPCC's authority, it is important to clarify that denial and skepticism are not synonymous. Skepticism is a healthy philosophical posture practiced in the scientific world, but also by individuals who cultivate doubt in the face of the many uncertainties that surround us. By trying to explain climate change not through superstition and religious dogma, true skepticism is part of the creative process of science. Skepticism pushes scientists and defenders of reason to search for evidence, since the scientific method seeks neither certainty nor truth. The 2007 IPCC report, for example, indicated that there was a 90% chance that climate change was anthropogenic. Of course, there are some obscure dimensions about the causes and trajectory of climate change in geological times, but there are many others that are clear-cut, which result from a broad scientific consensus. Denial is distinguished from skepticism in that it refuses to believe something despite the accumulation of evidence of its existence. Skepticism is good for science and society, it is creative, whereas denial silences or seeks to silence.

This distinction is important to help us think about the future of the IPCC model in the international circulation of expertise (MILANI, 2022). International expertise, particularly within the UN, circulates globally, regionally and nationally, producing not only authoritative collective thinking, but also a sense of political legitimacy, unity and solidarity linked to global interdependence and 'public bads'that demand global solutions, as in the case of the climate emergency. This kind of expertise may generate global advocacy around evidence-based policy options and a common lexicon for multilateral negotiations (MILANI and BENOIT, 2023). In this Special Issue, Lucas Feitosa and Rafael Mesquita make a valuable contribution to understand how issues of energy justice are discussed within multilateral forums, particularly within the UN General Assembly.

However, social science knowledge and expertise matter not only in terms of multilateral negotiations. As Mendes and Viola show in their article in this Special Issue, climate governance in Brazil is necessarily connected to the interests of three sectors: deforestation and land use change, agriculture, and energy, which, combined, represent around 90 percent of the country's emissions. While some of these sectors may associate themselves with denial networks, including those within the Bolsonaro administration, the authors show how corporate and industrial interests still suffer from serious climate coordination gaps. Knowledge produced by social sciences, particularly political science and international relations, is particularly relevant in debates around climate change responsibility, both in terms of causes and burden share, climate justice, but also in crafting adaptation policies at the national and local levels.

In addition, Guilherme Stein and Alfredo Gugliano recall in this Special Issue how relevant it is to understand the connections between political and institutional factors, civil society participation, and the promotion of pro-climate policies. Based on the case of the Bolsonaro administration, their analysis illustrates how dismantling councils, forums and participatory legislation can negatively affect environmental and climate governance.

Markets and business interests

It is increasingly accepted among policy-makers and scientists as well as civil society and business actors (even if not by all) that historical processes of

capital accumulation, industrialization, economic growth and changing land use have contributed to environmental degradation, climate change and ecological harm. The academic literature extensively discusses how global environmental and climate change are linked to national and international systems of production, distribution and consumption, i.e. the full spectrum of market activities. Markets and economic activities create both direct impacts on the environment (e.g. deforestation, air and marine pollution, top soil erosion, biodiversity reduction) and indirect impacts via creating harmful by products of these activities (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions, toxic waste, emergent diseases). As the harmful consequences of climate change and environmental degradation from economic activities become more widespread, the risk calculus of market actors raises demands for political action and policy decisions to combat them, including mitigation, adaptation and compensation measures as well as efforts to reduce uncertainty and inequalities.

The link between globalization and environmental problems was noted already before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992 (HURRELL and KINGSBURY, 1992), but it is this landmark conference that pushed international organizations as well as national and local authorities to make greater commitments to strive for sustainable development. In Rio, states signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which would eventually lead to the holding of COPs and the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015) at these meetings.

Given Brazil's important place in climate change debates (not least because of the centrality of the Amazon in them), unsurprisingly, Brazil's decisions, status and role in environmental and climate change governance received considerable attention in the political science and international relations literature. For decades already, scholars have discussed how CSOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental activists around the world became more concerned and vocal about preserving the environment and combating climate change; moreover, scientific knowledge expanded to provide evidence to support action. The politics and international relations literature took longer to focus its attentions on how firms, entrepreneurs and business associations began engaging with the sustainable development agenda. This was especially so in the case of Brazil, where it is only in the twenty-first century that scholarly research agendas became increasingly

interested in the link between Brazil's booming resource-based commodity exports and degradation of the environment. The debates and policy priorities around export-oriented growth strategies and sustainable development agendas saw a parallel shift of academic interest towards studying the implications of these choices for markets and business interests in Brazil.

Brazilian firms (both local and foreign owned) and business associations are well aware of the debates around climate change and the sustainable development discourse. Company and association websites typically address these issues with reference to the policy and academic literature related to Agenda 2030, sustainable corporations and entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and environmental, social and governance (ESG). However, the scientific and environmental activist communities and even financial regulators often accuse business of insincere commitments and greenwashing (TEMPLE-WEST, 2023). Evidence of business commitment is mixed. For example, only 23 Brazil-based business organizations are listed as participants in the United Nations Global Compact initiative, which involves firms committing to 'meet fundamental responsibilities in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption wherever they operate' (UN Global Compact 2024). More encouragingly, local business networks have been developed, such as the Brazilian Business Council for Sustainable Development (CEBDS), which includes important voices in the business community demanding more sustainable approaches to managing the economy (production, distribution and consumption) and representing Brazil in international forums (CEBDS, 2024). Moreover, there are signs of growing recognition among market actors of the harms of illegal markets and economic activities damaging the environment (e.g. illegal deforestation, poaching and mining) as well as the benefits from opportunities for lucrative trade and investment in value-added activities related to forestry and other sustainable uses of natural resources.

However, until recently, political economy approaches to examining the situation were less prominent, especially when researching and analysing the Brazilian case. When applying political economy approaches to the issue, there emerges a distinction between more techno-centric and more eco-centric approaches. Technocentric approaches focus on policymaking and resource

management activities that occur within a market context and argue that climate and environmental change occurs due to market failures, externalities and imperfect pricing of climate/environmental values and efforts. These approaches support developing market-based solutions (policy incentives, regulations, command and control measures) to shape growth and profit calculations. Typically, researchers evaluate mechanisms to minimize the political costs of enacting market-based solutions to mitigate climate change. The literature discusses how tax-based measures (e.g. carbon taxes) are much less popular than measures to protect vulnerable households (e.g. social safety nets) or introduce regulatory standards (e.g emission limits) or environmental credits (e.g. emissions trading) that encourage and reward 'good' behavior (FURCERI, GANSLMEIER, and OSTRY, 2023). The eco-centric political economy approach is ecologically focused and more overtly challenges conventional economic goals and development models, and even the capitalist system itself - it identifies the latter with exploitative economic values and practices that inhibit sustainable development.

Most of the articles in this Special Issue, if and when they address political economy aspects, do not challenge the capitalist system itself. Authors note how 'the environmental debate is intrinsically linked to the economy' (Luciana Veiga et.al), but also note how power, politics and vested interests shape the debate. Techno-centric perspectives are evident in Veiga et. al. on how media plays a key role in agenda setting and framing of environmental issues, and Mendes and Viola discuss 'scattered engagement among most economic stakeholders' but especially the positions of agriculture and energy sector business interest groups on climate policy. Queiroz Stein and colleagues examine the role of participatory institutions and impacts of climate denialism on the economy under President Jair Bolsonaro.

However, some of the articles in the Special Issue allude to more eco-centric values and agendas. For example, Salmi's examination of the literature on climate ethics from a sociological perspective, with specific reference to the PlanB Index and Katiani Zape applies gender perspectives to evaluating Brazilian state laws on climate change and the issue of climate justice. Her article shows how environmental issues are closely linked to the exercise of power, where vulnerable groups (women, indigenous people, the poor) are marginalized from decision-making due to 'deeply

rooted political, historical and cultural factors' and excluded from fair access to the labour market and income.

Concluding remarks

Thanks to the initiative of the BPSR and its partnership with ICLEI, this Special Issue on 'The Politics and Policies of Climate Change in Brazil' has brought forward a series of papers that aim to steer and broaden the debate on the climate emergency within political science and international relations. They have covered relevant research agendas, but there is no doubt that many others are still open for national and international collaboration. For instance, anyone looking for information about the tiny territory of Tuvalu in the main search engines will find a website that has, in English, the following title: 'Tuvalu: the world's first digital nation'. This is a page that explains the country's proposal to become the first 'digital nation', challenging what is understood today as a nation. Tuvalu announced the plan to become a 'digital nation' at the end of 2022. Simon Kofe, the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Communications, explained the proposal in a speech at UNFCCC COP27 in Egypt*. What are the implications of a state extinction and its digitalisation for international relations?

Another example of research agenda in political economy deals with the role of rating agencies in promoting pro-climate policies. For example, Moody's signal in the case of the Yasuni park in Ecuador expresses the power of rating agencies in discussions about debt management and sustainability. After all, there are many countries that have not yet entered the discussion about carbon markets precisely out of caution regarding the repercussions on debt and its negotiation. If rating agencies do not place the climate emergency at high risk and do not consider it in their assessments, this could derail many of the efforts in several developing and emerging countries.

Finally, in Brazil, there is also a new (or revived) research agenda developing around the politics of climate change that is informed by the development policy dilemmas facing President Lula in his third term. Scholars of international relations also might fruitfully engage with the literature on environmental leaders and

*Link to article: <https://www.nexojornal.com.br/expresso/2023/12/21/o-que-e-uma-nacao-digital-e-como-tuvalu-pretende-virar-uma>.

pioneers (LIEFFERINK and WURZEL, 2016) to understand whether the government's external and domestic environment and climate policy ambitions are high enough to categorize Brazil as a leader in this policy area. Undoubtedly, Lula's government will have to make difficult choices to balance its environmental and climate change commitments with pressures to take advantage of Brazil's significant fossil fuel reserves and its booming agribusiness commodity exports to grow the economy. Given the Special Issue call predated the Lula government, the articles do not deal with this dilemma directly, but they excellently set the scene for the many political, economic and societal considerations that must be taken into account when making climate policy in Brazil.

The Special Issue aimed to present a range of academic research on the politics and policies of climate change in Brazil and to stimulate further research and engagement from scholars on this subject. We believe we have achieved the first, and time will tell if we also achieve the second aim.

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