

Brazil: The New Government's First Year, Review and Outlook



Foreign Affairs





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CONTEXT

In President Lula da Silva's third term, one of the main objectives was to expand Brazil's international influence and revitalize the international agenda. The first year of the new government was characterized by an active foreign policy led by President Lula.

Brazil's return to the global stage focused on promoting environmental issues, emphasizing climate change and the importance of the Global South. The country also sought to play a central role in the debate on multilateralism and multipolarity, and adopted a neutral position in the dispute between the US and China.

Lula undertook 15 international trips and visited 24 countries in 2023, spending about 60 days outside Brazil. While some saw this extensive agenda as an important step for the projection and reconstruction of the country's image, critics and opponents labeled the President as absent.

G20

In November 2023, Brazil assumed the rotating presidency of the G20, representing approximately 85% of the global GDP. In his inaugural speech, Lula emphasized three fundamental pillars for the country's term: addressing climate change, combating hunger and inequality, and promoting a new global governance. This marks the first time Brazil has taken on this role within the organization.

Mercosur

Brazil held the temporary presidency of Mercosur through the end of 2023 and expectations were high for Lula's leadership and a potential trade agreement between the bloc and the European Union. Negotiations did not progress as expected, however, and lost momentum by the end of Brazil's term.

In May 2023, Lula gathered almost all South American presidents in Brasília for a regional summit, a rare occurrence since 2002. The event reflects Lula's influence on the continent but also highlighted a sensitive topic in Brazilian foreign policy: the stance on the situation in Venezuela. The heads of state of Uruguay and Chile, Lacalle Pou and Gabriel Boric, openly criticized Lula's position, characterized by his support for the political situation in the country.

United Nations General Assembly

Lula's speech during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September marked his return to the UN, twenty years after his debut in 2003, in a significantly different global and national context. Under the motto "Brazil is back," the President was applauded several times during his speech, demonstrating his desire to oppose the former president Bolsonaro's recent statements made between 2019 and 2022.

The occasion also marked the launch of the global initiative program for dignity in work by Joe Biden and Lula, becoming one of the most anticipated events on the Brazilian President's agenda in New York. Brazil and the US are expected to collaborate with union partners from both countries, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO). Presidents Biden and Lula announced the global initiative for dignity at work, highlighting the vital role of unions and emphasizing the protection of the rights of informal workers, especially those working in digital platforms, along with the need for more robust taxes on the wealthiest.

What to expect for 2024? >>>

The expectation is that the domestic agenda will gain greater prominence in 2024, as already hinted by the government itself, especially considering it is an election year and the need for organizing the parliamentary base. In this sense, the presidential agenda is expected to prioritize domestic travel, creating an itinerary for the launch and inauguration of PAC projects in all states. Additionally, the government should leverage the presidency of the G20 to increase Brazil's influence in international negotiations.

G20

On November 18 and 19, 2024, Brazil will lead the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the pinnacle of its term at the helm of the group. Prior to this meeting, the presidency seeks to define tangible goals to reduce food insecurity, launch the Global Mobilization against Climate Change, and drive reforms in global governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations Security Council, aiming to expand space and access to resources for developing countries.

Food security

The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty is the strategy of the Brazilian mandate to address some of these issues. The initiative is part of a G20 task force that seeks to mobilize financial resources and promote policies and programs to combat hunger and poverty at the national and global levels and will be launched in November at the Summit of Heads of State and Government in Rio de Janeiro. The alliance aims to foster collaboration among governments, international organizations, and multilateral funds, with the intention of leveraging experiences and resources available in the implementation of public policies and programs aimed at reducing food insecurity and global poverty.

The Brazilian initiative used as a reference is the "Plano Brasil Sem Fome" (Brazil Without Hunger Plan), led by the Ministry of Social Development and Assistance, Family, and Fight against Hunger (MDS). Following a similar logic, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) approved a food security plan in January that sets the goal of eradicating hunger by 2030.

Mercosur

Paraguayan President Santiago Peña currently holds Mercosur's presidency, and has already indicated that he will not prioritize the agreement with the European Union. Despite no longer presiding over the bloc, Lula is expected to maintain a relevant position and continue influencing the agreements and future of Mercosur. In early January, Lula had a conversation with the Prime Minister of Japan, Fumio Kishida, regarding the possibility of a trade agreement between Japan and Mercosur.

United Nations General Assembly

Brazil's participation in this event highlights the priorities the government intends to emphasize during its term, particularly focusing on the G20 presidency in 2024 and the preparations for COP30, set to take place in Belém, Brazil in 2025. The initiative for workplace dignity aims to collaborate with Brazil, the USA, and the International Labour Organization, aiming to involve other nations in this endeavor.



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