

On the Way to COP30: Participation, deliberation and climate justice

Camino a la COP30: participación, deliberación y justicia climática

A caminho da COP30: participação, deliberação e justiça climática

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ABSTRACT:

This article analyzes the claims and mobilization strategies of social movements and organized civil society in relation to COP30. The aim is to examine participation processes in the context of three contemporary and interrelated crises: (i) the climate crisis, (ii) the democratic crisis, and (iii) the crisis of multilateralism. It seeks to understand how the convergence of these three crises constrains the development of actions in defense of socio-environmental rights, while at the same time fostering significant resistance on the part of social movements. The article also explores the challenges and limitations involved in organizing and mobilizing this resistance in the context of the Lula 3 government, which is likewise affected by these crises.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo analiza las reivindicaciones y las estrategias de movilización de los movimientos sociales y de la sociedad civil organizada en relación con la COP30. El objetivo es examinar los procesos de participación en el contexto de tres crisis contemporáneas e interrelacionadas: (i) la crisis climática, (ii) la crisis democrática y (iii) la crisis del multilateralismo. Se busca comprender cómo la confluencia de estas tres crisis compromete el desarrollo de acciones en defensa de los derechos socioambientales, al mismo tiempo que fomenta una resistencia significativa por parte de los movimientos sociales. El texto también explora los desafíos y las limitaciones para la organización y movilización de esta resistencia en el contexto del gobierno Lula 3, igualmente afectado por estas crisis.

RESUMO:

Este artigo analisa as reivindicações e as estratégias de mobilização dos movimentos sociais e da sociedade civil organizada em relação à COP30. O objetivo é examinar os processos de participação no contexto de três crises contemporâneas e inter-relacionadas: (i) a crise climática, (ii) a crise democrática e (iii) a crise do multilateralismo. Procura-se compreender como a confluência dessas três crises compromete o desenvolvimento de ações em defesa dos direitos socioambientais, ao mesmo tempo em que fomenta uma resistência significativa por parte dos movimentos sociais. O texto também explora os desafios e limitações para a organização e mobilização dessa resistência no contexto do governo Lula 3, igualmente afetado por essas crises.

1. Introduction

This article analyses the participatory political processes of social movements and organised civil society in relation to COP30, which took place within the framework of the UNFCCC in Belém do Pará, Brazil, in November 2025. The subject will be investigated in the context of three complex and interrelated contemporary crises: (i) the climate crisis and its global agenda (or lack thereof); (ii) the crisis of democracies, given their weakening and the rise of authoritarianism; and (iii) the crisis of multilateralism, which is disrupting the post-war institutional architecture. It is against this backdrop of multiple crises that Brazil hosted COP30, the first Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC to be held in an Amazonian city. Socio-environmental movements tried to organise themselves at the intersection of these three crises to seek political protagonism at COP30 and respond to the crises by articulating rights, justice, and climate issues. In this endeavour, gender issues and the call for climate justice have come to the fore, as women's leadership in social struggles has gained prominence, particularly among indigenous women and traditional communities. This paper focuses on the role of civil society and social movements in the preparatory conferences organised by the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment. It discusses the extent to which gender issues, and more broadly, intersectionality, are present in climate claims made by social organisations. Conversely, it explores how such claims are adopted by governmental policies and converted into proposals to be presented at COP30.

The first crisis is the deepening climate crisis itself. Despite thirty-three years of UNFCCC negotiations and key agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015), 2024 was deemed the hottest year in the last 100,000 years. This information was released by the European Union's Copernicus Service on 9 December 2024. According to the institute, the average daily temperature in 2024 was 15.12°C, compared to 14.73°C in 2023, which is 1.5°C higher than pre-industrial levels and has reached the ceiling set by the Paris Agreement for 2030 six years early. These unprecedented temperatures, coupled with the intensification of extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and wildfires worldwide, prompted UN Secretary-General António Guterres to declare in his New Year message that we are experiencing a real-time climate collapse from which we must urgently recover.

The second crisis is the decline and weakening of democracies, particularly in countries that are considered to be guardians of the regime, such as the United States and various European countries. While the world was seeking an ambitious agreement through the Paris Agreement in 2015, Donald Trump was elected to his first term in the White House. He denied the climate crisis, dismissed science and the importance of multilateralism, and withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement. During his second term in 2025, these actions were reinforced with greater persecution of science and universities, and the dismantling of the state. While the aim between 1990 and 2015 was to strengthen democracies through practices such as participation and deliberation to increase legitimacy, the rise of far-right movements around the world, particularly in countries with a long democratic tradition, highlights the urgent need to defend democratic principles.

The advance of autocratisation processes in the country that founded the post-war multilateral order, and international cooperation has led to a third crisis, characterised by the erosion of multilateralism and the resurgence of a realism that disregards laws and institutions. The foreign policy of various countries, including Brazil, is now navigating uncharted territory based on new, more tense, complex, and challenging rules of diplomatic engagement. Following redemocratisation and the 1988 Constitution, Brazilian foreign policy focused on renewing the country's credentials by directing its actions towards a commitment to human rights and the

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environment (Milani & Pinheiro, 2017). This commitment resonated with the geopolitical changes of the time, which were marked by the end of the Cold War and the advance of multilateralism. These changes offered new opportunities for Brazil's engagement with the rest of the world.

In 1992, the Rio 92 conference saw Brazil establish itself as a key player in socio-environmental and climate issues, as it was the birthplace of the three major environmental conventions currently in force (Climate, Biodiversity, and Desertification). Three decades later, as it hosts COP30 in Belém do Pará, the question arises as to the extent to which the country continues to occupy this position. In 1992, renewing democratic and socio-environmental credentials before the world relied on a vibrant civil society, highly mobilised and organised by the recent democratic transition following twenty years of military dictatorship. The film *Ainda estou aqui*, directed by Walter Salles and winner of the 2025 Oscar for Best Foreign Film, clearly demonstrates the dark years of oppression and authoritarianism that marked Brazil from 1964 to 1985. It was during this period that strong resistance was built, which was decisive for the formation of a highly participatory Constituent Assembly in 1987/88. This assembly guaranteed semi-direct democracy and human rights, as well as indigenous rights. This context of high social commitment to democracy was reflected at Rio+20 and in the development of environmental foreign policy, with significant engagement from the socio-environmental movement in the COPs. During the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula and Dilma, social movements and civil society organisations participated in Brazilian delegations, lending greater legitimacy to national environmental foreign policy.

Like other democracies around the world, Brazil was not immune to the rise of authoritarianism from 2015 onwards, with right-wing and far-right governments in power between 2016 and 2023. During Jair Bolsonaro's government (2019–2022), a former military officer who was elected by reactionary sectors nostalgic for oppression and a 'strong' government, social, environmental, indigenous and gender rights were dismantled, and several public policies were discontinued (see Machado, Vitale & Rached, 2023). Following the near-coup d'état in 2023, Lula's return to power saw him prioritise the restoration of democracy, as well as the rights and policies abandoned for the most vulnerable, such as indigenous peoples and women. This also signalled Brazil's return to multilateralism and climate negotiations, with the country offering to host COP30 in November.

However, structural tensions, contradictions, and challenges posed by the new global scenario undermine these intentions. Conversely, the organisation and mobilisation of resistance by socio-environmental movements may indicate some possible paths forward. This article's central focus is analysing the potential and limits of this resistance, and how its discourse and practice gain meaning. Climate emergency and gender issues are two priorities in Lula's third term discourse. So too is the need to enhance democracy to resist the return of a far-right government that denies both agendas. This paper considers the possibilities and limitations of the participatory and deliberative movement leading up to COP30. How has this process brought climate justice to the centre of the agenda? Which movements and organisations have gained more prominence? How do economic, institutional, and political tensions undermine democratic legitimacy?

The paper is developed at theoretical and empirical levels. From a normative perspective, it discusses how democracy is being weakened by the rise of concepts such as neoliberalism and neofascism. It also explores how classic 20th-century concepts such as the public sphere, participation, and deliberation survive in a completely new digital communication framework that structures contemporary societies. On the empirical level, it describes the scope for active participation and grassroots movements within state-mediated forums, conferences, and arenas. This empirical analysis is based on a qualitative approach incorporating observation, interviews, and document analysis.

This article takes an interdisciplinary approach to analysing processes of political participation, drawing on literature from political science, international relations, socio-environmental studies, and law to understand the problem. Section 1 examines the global democratic crisis, Section 2 examines the tensions in the environmental and climate policies of the Lula administration, and Section 3 examines the participatory processes related to COP30. The final remarks suggest possible responses from civil society and social movements to contemporary crises.

2. Democracy in crisis: neo-liberalism, neo-fascism and the denial of the climate crisis

When the Second World War ended, humanity decided to give peace a chance. The establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 and the United Nations in 1945 marked the beginning of the era of multilateralism, whose promises of diplomacy, dialogue, and law resonated with people who were hopeful for the future. After two global wars, the economic collapse of 1929, Nazi extermination programmes, and the destruction of Europe, hope was the answer, and international cooperation the means to achieve it. Liberalism, democracy, and human rights were once again the keywords for a possible peaceful global order.

The marriage between liberalism and democracy seemed unbreakable. Since the beginning of modernity, economic and political liberalism have maintained a symbiotic and functional relationship. While the market ensured economic growth and tax revenue for the state, the state, in turn, provided the conditions for the market to function, particularly in terms of legal structures, civil and political rights, and the monopoly on force. A certain 'public' emerged between these levels, and through social and political pressure, progress was slowly made towards greater pluralism and more rights (social, racial, gender, and environmental).

No one denies that democracy has its problems. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the USSR, it was widely accepted that capitalism had triumphed and that democracy, as its political counterpart, should become the norm worldwide. Several studies analysed the transitions to democracy in Eastern Europe and Latin America (e.g. Przeworski, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996). The former left socialist regimes, while the latter freed themselves from military dictatorships aligned with the US liberal democratic structure. Most studies acknowledged the challenges faced by emerging democracies, particularly in Latin America, due to social and economic inequalities or the absence of a democratic culture within societies. Nevertheless, they emphasised the importance of deepening democracy through participatory and grassroots movements, strengthening civil society, and empowering citizens. At the same time, studies on public management and public policy emphasised the importance of state reform through co-management, accountability, and transparency. The idea of greater legitimacy and effectiveness in public-private relations was widely accepted in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The economic crisis of 2008 exacerbated dissatisfaction with democracy and enabled far-right movements to gain strength and rise to power. The effects of this crisis had been intensifying since the beginning of neoliberalism in the 1980s, when the doctrine of neoliberalism pushed for the dismantling of the welfare state and financial deregulation. This resulted in greater income concentration and social exclusion. The collapse of the US real estate bubble caused widespread public discontent and led to questions about the system, paving the way for the rise of the populist and demagogic leader Donald Trump, who was elected in 2016. In 2015, neoliberal capitalism embraced extremist politics, breaking with the symbiosis of economic and political liberalism. Economic liberalism, in its libertarian aspect, began to view political liberalism and its pluralism not as allies but as obstacles, leading to processes of autocratisation. Neoliberalism ended up joining forces with neofascism (Brown, 2003, 2019).

At the same time, this disruptive process is characterised by a second crisis relating to communication structures. The profound technological revolution in communication, brought about by smartphones and widespread internet access, as well as new forms of socialisation through social networks, has radically transformed the formation of subjectivities, resulting in a significant political impact. Previously, subjectivities were constructed through a complex flow of communication conveyed by the media (newspapers, magazines, radio and television), which was always mediated by editors or opinion makers. Now, subjectivities are formed without any mediation. While the media was oligopolised and largely allied with capital, there was a commitment to verifying information and factchecking on the part of professional media outlets. The sensationalist tabloid press was a minority and was known for the poor quality of its information. However, nothing compares to an individual publishing news that goes viral, not because of the quality of the information, but because it 'shocked' people and generated engagement. This could be because of the value of the person who published it, as measured by the number of their followers. This represents a radical

change in the way communication works. Current technology means that each individual can instantly become both the author and recipient of a message, with no time for criticism, contradiction, consideration or reflection (Habermas, 2023). Consequently, the public sphere has imploded and the very idea of the public and the common has changed. During the modern era, there was an open space between the private sphere and the state. The scale of this change is so profound that some authors argue that we are experiencing a civilisational shift (TV Brasil, 2024).

The crisis of democracy and the subsequent rise of autocracies, alongside the crisis of communication and the potential for civilisational change, make tackling the climate crisis an even greater challenge. Given the high cost of transitioning to a low-carbon economy, political actors focused on short-term goals (such as maintaining power) find it difficult to promote robust actions capable of generating effective long-term results, such as those required by climate policy. Consistent with their project of disassociating themselves from any validation criteria that limits their actions, including fake or invalid elections, far-right leaders simply deny or ignore the problem and do not address the challenge of reconciling short-term and long-term logic. Centre or centre-left leaders who still value science recognise the problem, but their solutions seem ambiguous, hesitant, and often paradoxical.

The rise of right-wing populist parties, leaders and governments in various regions poses a threat to the climate agenda due to their strong hostility towards, and even denial of, the problem. Lockwood (2018) examines structural and ideological explanations for this phenomenon. Structural approaches link the rise of populism to structural changes in post-industrial societies. According to these approaches, climate hostility would be associated with the political and economic marginalisation of certain groups. These interest-based explanations cover the behaviour of 'left behind' actors, i.e. groups that have suffered the economic effects of globalisation, as well as certain elites and workers involved in sectors such as mining and carbon-driven heavy industry. The research shows correlations between hostility and sociodemographic characteristics that fit the 'left behind' group, but variations exist. In Germany, for example, climate change deniers have incomes and levels of education that are comparable to those of climate activists. Lockwood examines the available evidence and concludes that there are limits to the degree of correlation between support for right-wing populism and the 'left behind' group. This suggests that explanations based purely on interests would not be sufficient. He argues that an ideology-based approach would be more convincing.

Climate policy is a perfect target for populists. As Lockwood explains, climate policy is not only technical and complex, but also marked by "high levels of uncertainty, long time horizons, impacts across multiple sectors, problems of international collective action, and diffuse benefits" (2018, p. 13). The opacity of causal relationships and international influence also contributes to climate change being subject to conspiracy theories with nationalist tendencies. As anti-elitism and anti-cosmopolitanism are common traits of populism, climate change is vulnerable to populist hostility towards science, technology, and cosmopolitanism due to its very nature. Environmentalists and climate change scholars could be perceived as a minority elite group that does not meet the demands of the people regarding job losses and economic stagnation. Therefore, it is important to explore the ideological characteristics of populist leaders, their supporters, and their parties to understand hostility and resistance to climate policy.

Democracies, on the other hand, are facing difficulties because short-term electoral cycles, among other reasons, prevent the creation of long-term climate policies. Success or failure in electoral competition is usually dictated by a politician's ability to solve immediate problems, which is the opposite of what is required to address climate change. David Runciman, who studies the history of democracy, sums up the problem: "Democracies prioritize immediate experiences over future ones, simplicity over complexity, instinct over science" (Runciman, 2013, p. 314). Additionally, democracies struggle to address the significant economic power that exacerbates the climate crisis, thrives in the short term, and resists change.

The 2008 crisis, the advance of neoliberalism, and the new transformation of the public sphere into semi-public or semi-private spheres (Habermas, 2023) have paved the way for the rise of the far right in places with a strong democratic tradition, such as the United States and Europe, leading these actors to question

the liberal-democratic order they founded in the postwar period. This process of autocratic legalisation results in the erosion of the liberal principles that underpinned historical democracies, where human rights, respect for minorities, and pluralism were fundamental cornerstones (Scheppelle, 2018). Now freed from these constraints, democracies are adopting nationalist, anti-globalist, anti-climate, anti-indigenous and anti-gender discourses (Machado, Vitale & Rached, 2023).

The current democratic crisis is putting pressure on how conflicts are resolved, favouring neither cooperation nor multilateralism, and highlighting the injustices of the climate crisis, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups, including women, children, indigenous peoples, traditional communities and black communities. Although a small group of countries and a few actors are responsible for most emissions, the effects are most keenly felt by the majority of the planet's population when the intersection of class, gender and race is considered.

3. Lula's environmental policies and tensions

The environment, particularly the protection of the Amazon, is at the heart of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's current foreign policy agenda. The appointment of Marina Silva, a key figure in reducing deforestation rates in the Amazon during previous Workers' Party (PT) administrations, to the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, was a clear indication that environmental and climate policies would be a priority for his government. Furthermore, the establishment of a Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, led by Sonia Guajajara — a prominent indigenous leader — reinforced Lula's dedication to environmental and gender equality.

Following Lula's election in 2022, the executive branch has taken a notably more positive stance on environmental protection and indigenous rights than under Jair Bolsonaro (Rached *et al.*, 2022; Machado, Vitale & Rached 2023). In 2024, the total area deforested in the Amazon dropped by 30.6% (G1, 2024). Brazil also presented a more ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) at COP29. However, two issues need to be resolved before Brazil can play a leading role in the global environmental arena. Currently, Brazil's position is ambiguous and hesitant due to the associated transaction costs of a low-carbon economy and the discrepancy between long-term policies and short-term electoral logic.

The first source of tension is economic. Despite their rhetoric, the Lula administration continues to maintain an economic development model based on the exploitation of natural resources. Right-wing and left-wing Brazilian governments alike have committed themselves to the agribusiness sector and the extractive industry. During the administrations of Lula da Silva (terms 1 and 2) and Dilma (terms 1 and 2), highly controversial megaprojects such as the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant, the transposition of the São Francisco River, the IRSA (Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America) and the PAC (Growth Acceleration Programme) gained momentum by disregarding environmental principles such as the precautionary and prevention principles. Despite their inherent environmental risks, these projects were all justified as being necessary for the country's strategic development¹.

In 2023, Brazil's contradictions came to a head when IBAMA, the country's environmental agency, was criticised by senior government figures after rejecting Petrobras's request to explore for oil in an ecologically sensitive area near the mouth of the Amazon River. IBAMA cited technical reasons for the rejection, but the project was eventually approved. In a statement to *The Guardian* in 2024, Petrobras defended its oil exploration plans as a means of achieving sustainable development and an energy transition. This exemplifies the deadlock that many economies find themselves in. Given the current situation, it is highly contradictory for Brazil to claim to be a global climate leader while simultaneously defending and exploring for oil at the mouth of the Amazon River.

The second source of tension is political and institutional. Here, the main culprit is the National Congress, which is dominated by reactionary forces. Since the 1990s and the global adoption of neoliberalism, the Brazilian economy has become increasingly dependent on agribusiness. This has led to a significant increase

in GDP but has also made the country more reliant on the primary sector. The economic and cultural power of agribusiness are closely linked to pro-gun arguments, which are reflected in Congress. The number of representatives in the BBB (*Boi, Bala, and Bíblia*) caucus has increased, while the Workers' Party has been subjected to mounting popular pressure.

The recent approval by the Senate of Bill 2.159/2021, known as the "Devastation Bill", which changes the rules for environmental licensing in Brazil, by 54 votes to 13, marks a major setback for environmental protection. Announced as a way to "simplify" and "reduce bureaucracy," Bill 2,159/2021 is far from these goals. It is not about simplifying environmental licensing but about emptying it. It is not about reducing bureaucracy, but about eliminating the oversight, monitoring, and accountability apparatus necessary for any solid environmental licensing process. This is the same Congress that approved the unconstitutional Temporal Framework Law, which restricts the demarcation of indigenous lands to the physical presence of indigenous communities in the territories at the time of the promulgation of the Brazilian Federal Constitution. Congress's anti-environmental stance demonstrates the disconnect between political representation and the views of the people they represent on socio-environmental issues.

Brazilians are concerned about the environment and the consequences of the climate crisis², but this concern has not translated into political discourse or has simply been overshadowed by more immediate economic concerns. A clear example of this disconnect is the re-election last October of the mayor of Porto Alegre, a city that was flooded last April. Although there was an opposition candidate who was not a climate denier and was concerned about the climate, the fact that she belonged to the Workers' Party hindered her chances, as "polarization" is still present. In fact, there has been no polarization since Lula moved to the centre, although the history of the Workers' Party brings back memories of the left.

This disconnect between citizens and their representatives is known as a 'crisis of representation'. If left unchecked, this crisis threatens our democracy and creates a fertile ground for the emergence of figures such as Bolsonaro, thereby creating a vicious cycle between democratic processes and those leading to autocracy. Conversely, the resumption of the National Conferences and the Secretariat for Social Participation, which are linked to the Presidency of the Republic, have sought to encourage greater political participation in civil society. In the case of environmental issues, for example, the 5th National Conference on the Environment, held in Brasília in May 2025, demonstrated the strong commitment of organised civil society across the country to the most pressing socio-environmental issues, such as climate justice, mitigation and adaptation, and financing.

The economic and political-institutional contradictions of the Lula administration, which hindered the implementation of an ambitious environmental agenda, are illustrated by the attacks on Minister Marina Silva in the Senate Infrastructure Committee on 27 May 2025. Three senators took turns to criticise the minister, in what was perceived as a blend of ideological, misogynistic and self-serving motives (Watts, 2025). 'Respect me, Minister. Know your place', shouted the committee chairman.

Despite the Lula administration's rhetoric, environmental protection is viewed as an obstacle to economic development, much like the Minister was portrayed in the Senate. As in the Lula 1 and 2 and Dilma administrations, developmentalism and the dominance of agribusiness, mining and oil are evident in the Lula 3 administration. Despite the government's attempts to accommodate different perspectives, and the Ministry of the Environment's efforts to engage in dialogue with various government agencies and other branches of government to ensure sustainability and adherence to the principles of the Paris Agreement, the executive leadership is reluctant to challenge these economic forces which ultimately dominate the national agenda. An example of this occurred at the beginning of the administration, when the Chief of Staff's Office shelved the Climate Authority proposal. The presence of Marina Silva and other socio-environmental leaders, such as Sônia Guajajara, is more symbolic than representative of structural change.

The foreign policy of the Lula 3 administration reflects the balance of power within the government. It is no coincidence that Lula assigned the presidency of COP30 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thereby removing the Ministry of the Environment from this role. While it is common practice in Brazilian foreign policy to entrust

important international events to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this is a clear exception in the history of the COPs. Since COP 1, which was chaired by Angela Merkel when she was Germany's environment minister in 1994, the host country's Ministry of the Environment has been responsible for chairing the Conference of the Parties. With the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the helm of COP, internal tensions and differences can be more easily accommodated, at least on the diplomatic level.

4. Mobilization and resistance of civil society as a path

Shortly after winning the disputed elections, Lula offered to host the first climate COP in an Amazonian city at COP27 in Egypt. Even before taking office, this gesture signalled his government's commitment to the climate agenda, the protection of the Amazon, multilateralism, and socio-environmental rights. On 1 January 2023, Lula ascended the ramp of the Planalto Palace to begin his third term in office, accompanied by members of the Brazilian people, including representatives of marginalised groups such as Black people, children, women, Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. This was a clear indication that his government would be of the people and for the people, rekindling the hopes generated during his previous terms in office and in the Workers' Party manifesto. Environmental and climate issues, social justice, and popular participation thus formed the pillars of his government.

In the composition of the government, this expectation was fulfilled with the appointment of three women known as great leaders in the socio-environmental area: Marina Silva to the Ministry of the Environment, for a new term (Marina had been minister of the MMA for six years in Lula's first governments, leaving in 2008 after losing the internal battle within the government over tensions with the developmentalist vision); Sonia Guajajara, an indigenous leader, to the newly created Ministry of Indigenous Peoples; and Joenia Wapichana, another leader of the indigenous movement, to the presidency of Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (Funai, Brazil). In the National Congress, largely made up of representatives of agribusiness and the BBB (bullet, Bible, beef) caucus, the election of the first indigenous federal deputy, Célia Xakriabá, shed light on the relevance of indigenous women's political leadership, as well as the serious lack of representation in the Brazilian Parliament.

In recent decades, indigenous women have become a significant force for resistance and political mobilisation among socio-environmental advocacy groups in the country. The aforementioned appointments have solidified the ongoing struggle for the implementation of rights, resulting in the "village-ization of politics". From the early 2000s to the present day, indigenous women in Brazil have developed a strong organisational and mobilising capacity, drawing inspiration from movements in other Latin American countries such as Guatemala, Ecuador and Bolivia, while forging their own path. In Brazil, the establishment of local associations and networks that are connected to a national movement and the transnational experience of COPs and the international indigenous movement — which has gained institutional strength at the UN — has been important in this process. The strengthening of the indigenous movement, particularly among women, is characterised by the formation of two simultaneous fabrics: one global and one national. These fabrics emerged in parallel to fill the gaps in human rights institutions established since the post-war period, such as certain UN bodies and the Inter-American Human Rights System (Machado, Vitale, and Rached, 2023; Vitale and Nagamine, 2022; Vitale, 2021). Since 1992, the spaces opened up by national diplomacy have also been occupied, with representatives of indigenous peoples and associations actively participating in Brazilian delegations while maintaining a critical stance and challenging the State's actions and omissions in guaranteeing their constitutional rights. The indigenous movement's rise is a prime example of how democracy, participation and multilateralism have worked together to strengthen the agenda for human and socio-environmental rights.

Since 2018, with the rise of the far right to power and its agenda of dismantling and undermining environmental, indigenous, and gender issues, the role of indigenous women in resistance has gained even more prominence. This strengthening of resistance was clear in the demonstrations of Indigenous April 2019, which brought together more than 500,000 women at the Terra Livre Camp in Brasília, and in the First Indigenous Women's March in Brasília in August of the same year. With the theme "Territory: our land, our spirit", more than 2,000

indigenous women from 113 different peoples participated, calling on the government to stop dismantling gender and indigenous rights agendas. This first edition of the March was followed by two others, in 2021 and 2023, all with a central focus on the demarcation and respect for indigenous territories and the defence of women's rights. In the Third March, in 2023, the transnational nature of the struggle became evident, with the participation of delegations of women from indigenous peoples from 18 countries, including Malaysia, the United States, Peru, Kenya, New Zealand, Russia, Indonesia, and Finland.

The Lula 3 government has reopened institutional channels for social participation, maintaining the vitality of the indigenous women's movement. At the Belém Summit in August 2023, the Presidency Secretariat held dialogues with civil society over the weekend before the Summit. However, many of the guidelines and deliberations were not included in the final text. Other initiatives have been proposed, including Lula's suggestion to establish an Amazon Parliament to legitimise public policies for the region and his recommendation to reinforce the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO) due to its democratic principles (Vitale & Rached 2023).

In May 2025, the 5th National Environment Conference, titled 'Climate Emergency: The Challenge of Ecological Transformation', took place in Brasília. The conference was organised into fifty working groups, each focusing on one of the following five themes: mitigation, adaptation and disaster preparedness, climate justice, ecological transformation, and governance and environmental education. Climate justice, a central issue in the struggle of socio-environmental movements, particularly for indigenous women, has become a key topic in public discussions, alongside well-established themes such as mitigation, adaptation and governance. Given the inequalities of gender, race, income, housing and age that are already present in today's societies, it is fundamental to consider that everyone is and will be affected by climate change in different ways when establishing priorities and directing public policies. Including climate justice at the heart of the debate is important because it links the climate emergency to human rights from a just perspective, considering existing inequalities.

The 5th National Environment Conference was a key moment in the lead-up to COP30, providing an opportunity for participation, deliberation and prioritisation of socio-environmental policies. After 11 years, it marked the resumption of participatory governance, seeking to strengthen Brazil's leading role in the global climate agenda. With over 3,000 participants from all Brazilian states and sectors, including the public and private sectors, social movements, and the third sector, the conference was the culmination of a participatory process involving 282 open forums and over 900 municipal, inter-municipal, and open conferences, mobilising 2,570 municipalities. Notably, women made up 56 per cent of participants, black people 64 per cent, and people with disabilities 7 per cent, demonstrating an effort towards diversity and inclusion. The delegates selected 100 proposals to address the climate emergency, forming the basis for updating the National Climate Change Policy and developing the new Climate Plan. The government has launched a platform to guarantee popular participation in preparing the Climate Plan.

The protagonism and mobilisation of indigenous women have been present in various institutional spaces. In the design of COP30, four leadership circles were created as a way of increasing the COP30 Presidency's capacity to mobilise and articulate to materialise the results. Sonia Guajajara chaired the 'Peoples' Circle', which seeks to amplify indigenous, traditional and Afro-descendant voices, promoting the recognition of their knowledge and practices in the global climate discourse. Also, at the Bonn Pre-COP in June 2025, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon Basin demanded, through a formal document, direct participation in climate governance and financing, signalling the need for this moment to be a watershed in indigenous protagonism.

This dimension of citizenship and participatory-deliberative politics should inform and guide public policies and foreign policy itself, as provided for in the Brazilian Constitution. The democratic deficit, characterised by limited citizen participation in political and institutional life beyond voting, exacerbates existing tensions and increases the political cost of contradictory and ambiguous socio-environmental foreign policies. According to official discourse, there is an ongoing debate about improving democracy and participation, and some initiatives have been implemented to enable more participatory spaces.

In fact, these actions align with the Workers Party's "old" history and its strong commitment to participatory democracy during its first local-level governments in the 1990s. The Workers Party's experience of Participatory Budgeting in more than a hundred Brazilian cities, the best-known case study of which is Porto Alegre, elevated it to a leading position in democratic innovation by maintaining legitimacy and accountability. Political science and sociology literature from the 1990s and early 2000s, before the first Lula government, paid enormous attention to participatory practices such as Participatory Budgeting, Management Councils on Social Policies and 'Ouvidorias'. Although the Brazilian Constitution mentions mean of participatory democracy within the legislative power, such as plebiscites, referendums and popular law initiatives, it was at the executive level that participatory mechanisms advanced, enhancing democracy in public policies. Brazil was known as a 'participatory laboratory', and these new practices were exported to many cities abroad.

Many of the studies associated these new practices with the theoretical framework of Habermasian public sphere, discussing to what extent the participatory experiences enhanced the public sphere and the political processes, improving democracy through a strong deliberative process. In a complex and post-socialist context, the strengthening of a procedural democracy conceived in a linguistic paradigm was, for Habermas, the exit of a neoliberal and anti-welfare new order. During Lula's first term this live participatory culture was somehow maintained as he launched several thematic national conferences, replicating at the national level the UN model of the 1990s. However, the internal disputes and conflicts concerning deeper developmental models led to a political crisis, which can be illustrated with the depart of Marina Silva from the government. After 2008 and, especially during Dilma's Presidency and, of course, Temer and Bolsonaro – this participatory spirit was definitely abandoned.

The decline in public participation beyond formal voting was accompanied by the decline of the traditional public sphere, where traditional media outlets consisting of newspapers, television news and magazines began to share attention with the explosion of social media, often circulating fake news. This new phenomenon led to a structural change in the public sphere, which became composed of a mixture of semi-private or semi-public spheres, customized according to the interests, tastes, ideologies and expectations of each specific public (Habermas, 2023). New media, controlled by algorithms and three or four large companies, paint a much more difficult scenario for strengthening democracy, as people live in parallel realities. There is no longer a common life based on shared facts, a common basis from which we could interpret, analyse, change our opinions by listening to our fellow humans and make decisions rationally, keeping in mind the best argument. In a world where everyone is both editor and spectator, the space for criticism and reflection has almost disappeared.

It is possible that the sense of emergency regarding climate change will reconnect us with common ground, reviving the participatory spirit. This is essential for expanding and achieving social participation. However, the procedures and level of implementation must be efficient to ensure that decisions are legitimate and encourage the government to act in the interests of democracy and citizenship. After all, it is the people themselves who will feel the impacts of the climate emergency.

5. Final remarks

This article discusses the current prospects for civil society to resist and mobilise in response to the climate decisions made at COP30, in light of the democratic crisis, the increase in autocratic processes, and the decline of post-war multilateralism. It seeks to understand how the confluence of three simultaneous crises – climate, democracy and diplomacy – has compromised the development of actions in defence of socio-environmental rights, while also fostering considerable resistance from social movements. It also explores the challenges and limitations of organising and mobilising this resistance, considering the tensions and ambiguities of the Lula 3 government, which was similarly affected by these crises.

Brazil demonstrates how the climate and environmental protection agendas are caught in the crossfire of the vicious cycle between democratic setbacks and processes of autocratisation. If, on the one hand, it's

true that a huge reaction is expected after Trump's new election, on the other hand, it's urgent to look for gaps in politics, strengthening popular and social movements to resist and sow the seeds for a better time. The Brazilian Ministry of the Environment's Participatory Climate Plan, the resumption of environmental conferences and the strengthening of the role of indigenous and traditional peoples at COP30 are efforts in this direction. Although breaking this cycle is proving to be one of the most intriguing enigmas of our time, it is undeniable that the change in our current situation lies in the capacity for organisation, mobilisation and resistance of the social groups most affected by the climate emergency.

While it is true that the magnitude of the crises, exacerbated by a government's indecision on the climate agenda, can be overwhelming for social movements, particularly the most vulnerable, history also shows that there are always opportunities for positive change. However, history also teaches us that there are always a few cracks through which light can shine, and that strength can emerge from very difficult situations. In the run-up to COP30, socio-environmental movements, especially indigenous women, are firmly pursuing their mission in village politics. Like great warriors and guardians, they are striving to save the forests and the planet.

NOTES

¹ In fact, economic tension is widespread throughout Latin America. Eduardo Gudynas coined the term neo-extractivism to explain how progressive governments in Latin America have championed the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but, somewhat contradictorily, have intensified the economic development model based on the exploitation and export of natural resources (Gudynas, 2012, Gudynas, 2009)

² See the report *Mudanças Climáticas segundo a percepção dos cidadãos brasileiros*. Available at < https://itsrio.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Percep%C3%A7%C3%A3o-sobre-queimadas_Report_ENGLISH.pdf >

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