

Bolsonaro in 2019: A Year of False Hope and Failures for Brazil

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Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, accompanied by First Lady Michelle Bolsonaro, made a Christmas address to their country on Tuesday night. The address was just as comical as Bolsonaro's year of failures, with the most interesting part being the president claiming that the year ended "without any denunciation of corruption." No corruption scandals?

Perhaps he forgot that the Minas Gerais Electoral Public Prosecution Service prosecuted [Tourism Minister Marcelo Álvaro Antônio and ten others](#) on charges of setting up fake congressional candidates in Minas Gerais with the aim of collecting more public campaign funding. Even after the minister was indicted by the Federal Police and denounced, [the government decided to keep him in](#) government.

But more shockingly, as explained [by David Miranda](#), all three of Bolsonaro's politically active sons, along with his wife, have been implicated in corruption scandals. The most serious of these investigations is how senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the eldest son of Jair, spearheaded a corruption racket during his 15 years as a Rio congressman, while maintaining links with "The Untouchables," a notorious death squad [called](#) Rio's "most lethal and secretive phalanx of hired guns." The Bolsonaro family has [well-documented social ties](#) to members of Rio's mafia, yet the Brazilian president has the audacity to claim during Tuesday's address, next to his wife donning a Jesus t-shirt, that the year ended without any corruption scandals that consistently plagues Brazil?

Even away from the blatant lie of finishing the year without a corruption scandal, surrounded by expectations, Economic Minister Paulo Guedes failed to deliver the great economic promises for Brazil that were expected in 2019. Bolsonaro's electoral victory in October 2018, defeating Fernando Haddad of the Worker's Party in the presidential runoff, made the Brazilian financial market very comfortable. The reason for this excitement? Paulo Guedes, a neoliberal [Chicago Boy](#), would lead the economy.

Brazil was projected for a 2.5% growth rate at the beginning of the year but ended with 1%. Investors postponed their investments because of the political fragility and confusion that the Bolsonaro government itself created, for example, his inconsistent [China policy](#). As a part of Guedes neoliberal agenda, he began to be more politically active in Brasília – attempting to ensure Bolsonaro's confused and faltering rhetoric would not disrupt his plans of downsizing the Brazilian state's role in the economy to the benefit of the mega-rich and the detriment of the poor. Guedes' Security Reform had a vision of reducing debt by reducing pensions, including against the most vulnerable and poor in Brazil.

Willing to appease the Christian Zionist Evangelical support, accounting for at least a third of the population, Bolsonaro even before taking office promised that, like U.S. President Donald

Trump had, he would transfer the Brazilian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This again affected investments in Brazil as Bolsonaro was trying to prioritize his theological worldview rather than the recovery of his economically ruined country that has an unemployment rate of 11.6%, and many of the employed in informal or part-time work, and a poverty rate of about a quarter of the population. The Arab League and Iran did not shy away from confronting Bolsonaro's attempt to move the embassy in Israel, breaking a promise to the Evangelicals as he was forced to back down, and instead decided to only open a trade office in Jerusalem.

This threat by the Arab League and risking relations with China, Brazil's largest trading partner, has forced Bolsonaro to be less theologically motivated and more pragmatic in recent months. This will likely carry on into 2020 as Trump shot down a U.S. backing for the South American country to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) back in October. This came despite Bolsonaro enthusiastically embracing the moniker of "Tropical Trump" and consistently saying one of the biggest achievements of his government was securing Washington's support for Brazil to join the OECD.

In a further headache for the Brazilian president, the U.S. dollar strengthened over the first year of the Bolsonaro administration, to the extent that Guedes declared that Brazilians should get used to the high value of the U.S. currency. The political insecurity generated by Bolsonaro, coupled with the difficulties of implementing proposals from the Ministry of Economy, as a series of high-impact privatizations did not bring about the expected investments. Foreign investments into Brazilian infrastructure would relieve pressure on the Brazilian Real, but the dollar has skyrocketed now because of this investment frustration. There was an expectation that foreign investors would bring dollars into Brazil, pushing the dollar market lower, which has not happened.

And as a final blow from Trump to Bolsonaro, let's forget the announcement that tariffs will not be [placed by the U.S. against Brazil](#).

So, in a year that was full of promise, Bolsonaro's first year of administration has been an abject failure - full of corruption and controversies, economic stagnation, failure to keep the Evangelicals happy with an embassy move to Jerusalem, and hostile actions by Trump despite Bolsonaro's enthusiasm for the U.S. president. Perhaps slowly in 2020 he will remember his country's membership in BRICS.

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