

Bolsonaro's Popularity Continues to Plummet as Venezuela Becomes Hot Topic Again

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Earlier this month, the National Committee for Refugees of Brazil (Conare) extended until December 31, 2022 the simplified process for analyzing applications from Venezuelan asylum seekers. According to Correio Braziliense, Conare recognized the “serious and widespread violation of human rights” in Venezuela, and therefore decided to extend the deadline.

“The decision reinforces the position of the Brazilian government in the humanitarian acceptance of our neighbors in the face of the serious crisis that has been taking place in Venezuela in recent years,” said the minister of Justice and Public Security, Anderson Torres.

More than 50,000 Venezuelans were recognized as refugees in June, according to data from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Since Venezuela is plunged into an economic, political and health crisis of almost catastrophic proportions, this was an important decision made by Brazil. According to an August 5 UN report, there are 5.6 million Venezuelans who have migrated or sought refuge in other countries. Brazil is behind Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador in receiving Venezuelan migrants despite their own significant economic, political and health crisis, raising questions on why the country is taking on such a huge burden.

Since the accession of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2019, Brazil has lost its status as a leading South American country as it pursues the interests of Washington without question or thought on whether it is in the interests of the continent. In fact, Brazil's lack of leadership, despite being South America's largest country in terms of size, economy and population, is seen with Mexico, a non-South American country (although it is Latin American), take a lead in trying to negotiate between the Nicolás Maduro government and the Venezuelan opposition.

Bolsonaro uses an anti-communist and anti-socialist narrative to galvanize his supporter base. It was partly because of this platform that he found success in the 2018 election-cycle, something he is hoping to repeat next year when the re-election campaign begins.

Therefore, the subject of socialist Venezuela will undoubtedly be a part of Bolsonaro's re-election campaign, just as it was in 2018 for him. However, Bolsonaro was also galvanized by riding the wave of Donald Trump's election success in 2016, often employing the same rhetoric and ideas as his former American counterpart.

What Bolsonaro does not acknowledge though is that the world is different to what it was even just a few years earlier. Bolsonaro's approval rating continues to reach new lows. His disapproval rating in July passed 50 percent for the first time, [according to a poll](#) published by the Datafolha Institute, marking a new low in the leader's declining popularity. His approval rating also stayed at its lowest mark of 24 percent, which was set in May.

Even if Bolsonaro's anti-leftist narrative will involve Venezuela in the re-election campaign, he will not be alone as some political forces more aligned with liberals and so-called progressives will also speak out against the so-called "Maduro dictatorship."

Former leftist Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took a stand on the issue, saying that U.S. policy towards Venezuela is imperialist. Lula is expected to run in the next election and will represent a bloc that aims to limit and contain U.S. influence in the region whilst also promoting Pan-(Latin) Americanism. Lula's outlook regarding Venezuela is more realistic as Maduro has already successfully defended himself against several coup attempts, and has the support of the Armed Forces, state bureaucracy, and the majority of the people. Even the U.S.-led sanctions applied against Venezuela are no longer effective in pushing the government towards collapse.

Sanctions are only effective in keeping many Venezuelans stuck in poverty, something that had been reducing since the accession of Bolivarian ideology to state power in 1999. Venezuela's vast natural resources can allow the country to redevelop, especially since China, Russia and others countries like Iran and Turkey have significant economic interests in the South American country.

If Maduro has not fallen after years of endless U.S.-orchestrated assassination and coup attempts, it is unlikely he will ever fall through external pressure. Despite this reality, coupled with Trump's failure to be re-elected, Bolsonaro is still likely to wager on the Venezuela issue to boost his collapsing popularity. The return of Lula and the survival of Maduro puts Bolsonaro in a precarious position, especially since Joe Biden has expressed no interest in Brazil because of the Bolsonaro governments hostility towards the now president during last year's U.S. election campaign. The Bolsonaro administration are among the biggest fanatics of Trump.

Part of this fanaticism for Trump led to Brazil breaking with Latin American consensus and ruining their relations with Venezuela. As part of the U.S.-led pressure campaign against the Venezuelan president, Brazil became a key player. However, instead of removing Maduro from power, Bolsonaro only helped instigate a migration crisis, forcing him to simplify the process for analyzing applications from Venezuelan asylum seekers, at a time when Brazil itself is struggling to deal with a collapsing economy and a pandemic.

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