

Brazil: Bolsonaro plans threaten Amazon, say experts

2 hours ago



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Image caption

The Amazon rainforest loses vast areas to deforestation every year

Brazil's far-right President-elect Jair Bolsonaro will merge the ministries of agriculture and the environment, an aide says, in a move which critics say could endanger the Amazon rainforest.

Mr Bolsonaro's future chief of staff, Onyx Lorenzoni, announced the new "super ministry" as details of the new administration began to emerge.

The controversial new Brazilian leader is supported by the agribusiness lobby.

A former environment minister tweeted that the move was "tragic".

"This disastrous decision will bring serious damage to Brazil and will pass on to consumers abroad the idea that all Brazilian agribusiness survives thanks to the destruction of forests," Marina Silva said.

Can Bolsonaro ride the 'Bullsonaro wave'?

Jair Bolsonaro: The Trump of the Tropics?

Earlier, Vice President-elect Hamilton Mourao dismissed environmentalists' concerns about development in the Amazon, saying the government would act responsibly by managing the spread of agriculture in the region.

Why is the Amazon important?

The Amazon region holds the largest tropical rainforest in the world and is home to plant and animal species that are still being discovered by scientists.

Is the Amazon facing new dangers?

Most of its millions of square kilometres are inside Brazil, where under laws dating back to 1965, landowners must keep a percentage of their terrain forested.

That percentage ranges from 20% in some parts of the country to 80% in the Amazon.



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Image caption

Thousands of Jair Bolsonaro's opponents took to the streets of Sao Paulo on Tuesday

But a debate has raged in Brazil over the often conflicting needs of environmental protection and economic development.

Earlier this year **the supreme court upheld major changes to laws** which environmentalists say will make illegal deforestation acceptable.

What are Mr Bolsonaro's views on the environment?

Mr Bolsonaro, 63, has previously suggested that Brazil could pull out of the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change. He says its requirements compromise Brazil's sovereignty over the Amazon region.



Media caption

Far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro has won Brazil's presidential election. But who is he?

In the run-up to the election he had suggested merging the agriculture and environment ministries, saying, "Let's be clear: the future ministry will come from the productive sector. We won't have any more fights over this."

Warned by activists that such a move would undermine the environment ministry's controls on the commercial sector, he struck a more conciliatory tone saying he was "open to negotiation on that issue".

What else has been decided?

Following behind-closed-door talks on Tuesday, Mr Bolsonaro's top economic adviser Paulo Guedes confirmed that an economic super-ministry would be formed combining finance, planning, industry and trade.

It will be headed by Mr Guedes.



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Image caption

Senior aide Onyx Lorenzoni (C) and economist Paulo Guedes (L) held talks with Mr Bolsonaro in Rio de Janeiro. Mr Lorenzoni also announced that Mr Bolsonaro's first foreign visits would be to Chile, Israel and the US. He described them as countries that "share our worldview."

Mr Bolsonaro swept to victory in Sunday's election, easily beating his left-wing rival Fernando Haddad.

The former paratrooper is a deeply polarising figure who has in the past defended the actions of the country's former military regime and said he is "in favour of dictatorship".

His populist approach has led to some media dubbing him "Trump of the Tropics".



Bolsonaro backers wage war on the rainforest

Polls show Jair Bolsonaro has 78% support in the heavily deforested Amazon state of Rondônia on Brazil's western border.

Photograph: Environmental Images/Universal Images Group/REX/Shutterstock

Most in Brazil's heavily-deforested western border support Jair Bolsonaro and his promises of progress instead of protection

by **Dom Phillips** in Porto Velho

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The growl of a chainsaw and the howl of a straining tractor engine were enough to draw the environment officials up a rutted track into the forest.

In the clearing at the end of the road, three young loggers silenced their machines and proffered their documents. They were paid in cash, they said – nearly four times the Brazilian minimum monthly salary of £200 (\$258) – to ship out up to two truckloads a day of huge hardwood logs.

And like most people in the heavily-deforested Amazon state of Rondônia on Brazil's western border, they are sure who they will vote for in Sunday's presidential run-off vote.

“It has to be Bolsonaro. He supports us,” said Edivaldo da Silva, 22.

Polls show that **Jair Bolsonaro**, the far-right former army captain **has 78% support** in Rondônia, leaving his leftist rival Fernando Haddad in the dust.

In the Amazon, Bolsonaro has promised progress instead of protection.

And his radical proposals – to **neuter** federal environment agencies, give the green light to destructive **hydro-electric** dams, freeze the demarcation of new **indigenous** reserves and open up existing ones to **mining**– chime with voters here, including those breaking environmental laws.

Loggers, illegal gold miners and squatters on a protected reserve all told the Guardian they are voting for Bolsonaro because they believe he will

make their lives easier.

Environmentalists argue Bolsonaro's plans will prove disastrous for the Amazon and 33 non-government **groups** have warned his proposals represent "concrete and irreversible risks" to Brazil's forests, biodiversity and even the reputations of its agribusiness producers.

Bolsonaro's allies rubbish such concerns. His planned chief of staff and his party's candidate for governor of Rondônia criticised foreign "interference" in the Amazon and told the Guardian they harboured doubts over global warming science.

Such views are common in a state where where smallholders say they are unjustly penalised for breaking environmental rules and argue that responsibility for climate change should be shared globally.



Lucemar Kouchut drives a shipment of logs. Photograph: Dom Phillips

The three loggers showed the environment officials documents which they said showed their work was licenced under a plan permitting "sustainable" tree-cutting.

But the officials later concluded the papers referred to another patch of land 400 metres away – not this area next to a protected forest and an indigenous reserve.

This was a common ploy, said Sebastiana Almeida, a forest engineer in Rondônia's environmental development agency. "With that document in their hands, they steal wood from inside the protected area or indigenous reserve," she said.

People in Rondônia – 43% of whose **territory** has been deforested – largely agree on two things: that they will vote for Bolsonaro, and that the state is getting hotter and drier.

Government data backs that up. Average annual temperatures in the northern part of Rondônia **averaged** between 26C-28C (79F-82F) in 2017, two degrees higher than five years previously. Annual rainfall has also fallen across the state.

"The weather is all confused," said Wagner Matos, 37, an Uber driver in its capital Porto Velho, who blamed deforestation.

But congressman Onyx Lorenzoni, Bolsonaro's probable chief of staff, disputes that global warming is a problem.

"There are things that are solid and there are things that are ideological," he told the Guardian, before criticising Greenpeace for meddling in the Brazilian environment. "Brazilians will be in charge in the Amazon, my brother, not the Europeans."

Brazilians will be in charge in the Amazon, my brother, not the Europeans
Onyx Lorenzoni

Other Bolsonaro allies have called for more industry in the Amazon. Colonel João Chrisóstomo, a retired army engineer elected as one of the state's federal deputies on 7 October for Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party (PSL) said the military should asphalt its dirt roads. "The environment can't hold up development," he said.

Better roads would please Rondônia residents like Sheila Barros, 44, who lives with her fisherman husband Adegilton Lopes, 44, and their two children inside the protected Lago do Cuniã reserve.

"There is no highway, no way to get our produce out," she said. The reserve is just 70km (43 miles) from Porto Velho, but reaching it involves driving hours on dirt roads, two boat trips and a hair-raising motorbike ride down a narrow forest trail.



“Where else is there this much greenery?” says fisherman Mabel Lopes, a resident of the protected Lago do Cuniã reserve.
Photograph: Dom Phillips

But Amazon history has shown that paving roads bring development and destruction to forest reserves like Lago do Cuniã, run by the government’s Chico Mendes Institute (ICMBio), which only allows small scale fishing and sustainable farming for 400 residents living beside a majestically beautiful lagoon home to alligators and flocks of birds.

Fisherman Mabel Lopes, 65, said that until the reserve was created in 1999, the lagoon was overfished by outsiders. Nowadays, he said, there is plenty of fish. Nodding at the lush forest, he asked: “Where else is there this much greenery?”

Bolsonaro has previously promised to withdraw Brazil from the **Paris climate deal**, although on Thursday he said he changed his mind on pulling out of the deal.

But he has pledged to put an end to “environmental activism” by ICMBio, and the environment agency Ibama, and may fold the environment ministry into the agriculture ministry – whose chief will be chosen by the agribusiness lobby.

He has also promised help for artisanal miners known as **garimpeiros**, some of whom work illegally, dredging mud from Amazon rivers in search of gold – and in the process dumping tons of mercury and

poisoning fish stocks.

Our planet can't take many more populists like Brazil's Bolsonaro
Jonathan Watts

On a recent afternoon, several wooden *garimpeiro* barges were moored on the River Madeira near the Lago do Cuniã. Two men manning the chugging pumps onboard one of the vessels admitted they were working illegally, and feared raids from Ibama – then said Bolsonaro's promise to bring them “dignity and security” had won their votes.

“He promised he would legalise it, for us to work,” said Aroldo da Silva, 53, the barge's owner, as a rainstorm whipped up the river. “He promised changes in the law.”\

Marcos Rocha, a retired police colonel from Bolsonaro's PSL party who is leading polling for Sunday's runoff vote for governor of Rondônia, also believes *garimpeiros* should be legalised because people needed to work.

Arold



o da Silva's garimpeiro barge. Photograph: Dom Phillips

“The garimpeiros and the loggers were the people who started our state, but today they are marginalised. There are many people in poverty,” he said in an interview. “We want to generate riches and income for our country.”

The Amazon needed “more industry”, he said, before suggesting the planet’s alarming temperature **rises** could be cyclical and naturally occurring.

Rondônia’s state’s current governor Daniel Pereira and its state legislature are locked in judicial **deadlock** over 11 new forest reserves created by his predecessor and then overturned by state deputies. Rocha sided with lawmakers and said people squatting on protected reserves should be allowed to stay.

Some of those squatters live on Jaci Paraná, a state-government run reserve around 100km (62 miles) from Porto Velho which only permits sustainable, small-scale agriculture by members of a cooperative. Cattle

are prohibited, but the reserve has been widely deforested by ranchers.

Last week, a group of state environment officials toured the reserve with an armed police escort. They stopped by a wooden farmhouse surrounded by grazing cattle, where Jessica da Silva, 23, was sitting with her two young children while her husband, Alex dos Santos, tended the herd.



A Rondônia state environmental protection officer Nei Peres looks over a deforested section of land in Jaci Paraná reserve.
Photograph: Dom Phillips

Da Silva said she was not planning to vote because she is registered in another town but that her husband would vote for Bolsonaro.

Further down the dirt road, they passed a motorbike whose pillion rider was carrying a chainsaw in his lap. Officers waved the bike over and approached, but before they had got far with their questions, the passenger made a dash for the undergrowth. One of the officers fired a shot and the man was brought back in handcuffs – but he was later released.

Nobody pays much attention to environmental laws here.

Ednesio Diogo, 51, and Jonas Dantas, 22, were cooking lunch beside the frame of a wooden house they were building when the officials arrived.

Diogo said the house was for his son, Wallan, 21, who had been given the land where he planned to raise cattle, plant coffee and build a fish nursery.

When environmental protection officer Nei Peres told the men, that they were there illegally and would have to leave, Diogo just nodded. Both men said they'd be voting for Bolsonaro.

On Saturday, Ibama vehicles were set on fire in Buritis, a day after **ICM Bio** agents on an anti-deforestation mission were left stranded when locals torched a bridge in Pará, another Amazon state.

Brazil's new war on its forests and those who defend them has already begun.

8 October 2018

Front-runner in Brazil's election wants to pull out of climate treaty

Jair Bolsonaro looks set to win Brazil's presidential election

Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

By **Michael Le Page**

It's not a move in the right direction. Just as a [major climate report](#) has highlighted how we are not doing nearly enough to meet the target of the Paris climate agreement, the first round of Brazil's presidential election has been won by a far-right candidate who wants to withdraw from the deal.

Jair Bolsonaro will face a left-wing Workers' Party candidate in the second round on 28 October after he failed to get the 50 per cent of votes needed ...