

## Five challenges for contemporary Brazil Jacques Marcovitch (\*)

Democratic renewal, food security, reindustrialization, digital transition, sustainability in the Amazon biome are critical challenges faced by Brazilian society

1. **Democratic renewal** – Terrorist hordes invaded the heart of Brazilian government – the Palace of the Federal Government, the Federal Supreme Court, Congress, and the Senate. Federal Police was mobilized with extreme speed to respond to the most violent attack on democratic institutions. The executive and other republican powers, with the support of civil society, retook control of the country. The government is undertaking the demilitarisation of leadership roles in public life.

De-toxifying Brazilian public discourse by focusing on combating disinformation on social media, holding the leaders and financiers of disinformation and anti-democratic campaigns to account, as well as identifying and dealing with these elements in public office will be the short-term challenge for Brazilian society.

In the medium term, a renewed focus on civic education and critical thinking at all levels will be required to ensure that society can begin to heal. Party governance also needs to undergo dramatic reform, with greater campaign funding transparency. Better control over congressional discretionary budget spending is also needed, to ensure that it aligns properly with national priorities, rather than pork barrel policies to local constituencies.

2. **SOCIAL** – Recovery of the national network of healthcare assistance (SUS), coordinated and financed by the federal government and executed by state and municipal authorities all over the country. The system was degraded during recent governments, and the country was among the worst worldwide for age adjusted COVID mortality (146<sup>th</sup>). The challenge now is to eliminate waiting lists, return the system to regular functioning and focus on public health, outreach, and preventive medicine.

Also in the social sphere, a solution that guarantees food security for around 33 million unemployed people, many in a state of extreme poverty must be found. Despite its status as an agricultural superpower, the country ranks 91<sup>st</sup> on the Global Food Security Index. The main challenge here is to restructure and reform the registration system for the *Bolsa Familia* and re-establish its conditions: regular school attendance and vaccination status.

3. **ECONOMIC** – Brazil's productive sector currently needs a reindustrialisation policy. This need is brought about by the bankruptcy of many factories, and low productivity of those who survived the financial crisis. The National Confederation of Industry (CNI) sent a paper to the new minister for

development, industry and business aligning priorities, all of them well-recognised by the sector. In his acceptance speech Geraldo Alckmin, vice president and Minister of Industry underlined “a contemporary industrial policy must consider digitalisation and sustainability.”

Agribusiness, on the other hand, has derived large profits from the devaluation of the Real in commodity exports in overvalued dollars. Global instability and rapidly rising food prices caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have driven the rising prices of agricultural exports. This year, the agricultural sector will make up 8% of GDP, redeeming itself from the 2% shrinkage it suffered in 2022. It will be the only sector to grow, and the national GDP is expected to remain stagnant.

4. **Environmental** – 10,267km<sup>2</sup> was the area of Amazonia that was deforested in 2022. The reconstruction of environmental policies in the Amazon has already begun with the revocation of hundreds of decrees and directives from the previous administration that stoked a 53% increase in deforestation of the biome. The challenge to be faced by the current government, which has already re-established the Amazon Fund, and is revoking toxic legislation, is to balance the fundamental need to preserve the standing forest while providing economic opportunities and a better quality of life to its inhabitants and ensuring food security for the whole population.

Without a set of effective policies to protect the Amazon biome, beyond a catastrophic loss of the world’s greatest source of biodiversity, Brazil has no hope of meeting its nationally declared contributions in the Paris Accords. It requires a conjunction of federal and state governments acting in symphony with civil society, the productive sector and international allies cooperating on governance and monitoring, financing and knowledge and expertise.

5. **Technological** – Brazil is currently 18<sup>th</sup> in the international ranking that measures twenty countries’ respective scores in practices that prevent cyber-attacks. It is, therefore, an indispensable element of any new industrialisation policy for the Brazilian economy. While the country ranks well for e-participation in government (18<sup>th</sup> worldwide), online service index (19<sup>th</sup>), it lags seriously in internet access (63<sup>rd</sup>) and network readiness (48<sup>th</sup>).

This shows that expanding internet infrastructure to ensure universal access will bring large benefits to the country, and that all citizens can effectively participate in civic life. Complimentarily, if agriculture sector is to continue growing sustainably with digital capabilities without entailing increased deforestation and emissions, it is imperative that agriculture is modernised by transferring the world leading agricultural technology and knowledge produced in Brazilian universities and research institutes that ensure that production is intensified, not extended.

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