

Brazil: from a global example of food security to back on the Hunger Map

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Leaving the [Hunger Map](#) was a historical milestone in Brazilian politics, one that is currently under threat due to [major cutbacks](#) on social-economic policies in past years. The political instability, along with an economic crisis that the country faces has built the path to where it is now: with [10,3 mi](#) people in food insecurity. This reveals a great contradiction, as Brazil allocates a large part of its food production for export, being the [third-largest food producer](#) in the world.

In 2014, Brazil was commended internationally, for its great efforts in combating hunger and poverty. For the first time, the country was not featured on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's (UN/FAO) Hunger Map, reducing food insecurity [by 84% in 24 years](#). These promising numbers were a result of several food security policies, which improved food access, provided income generation, and supported food production by small farmers.

Lula's pink tide government



Former President Lula in 2003, in the speech in which he launched Fome Zero. Photo: Ricardo Stuckert /

Given the context of redemocratisation and decentralised social policies ([Angell 1998](#)), Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT (Workers' Party) chose the

politics around poverty and hunger as the central narrative of his candidature. When elected, he transformed the fight against hunger into a state obligation. The first and most famous policy was the *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger), which was composed of cash grants, nutritional policies, and development projects that mobilised governmental and nongovernmental actors. The *Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional – Consea* (National Council of Nutritional and Food Security) was created and became the main institution to monitor the food security policies. Still in 2003, *Fome Zero* was reformed to be a simpler model of negative income tax as direct transfers and was now named *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance).



Recipient family of the Family Allowance. Photo: Ubirajara Machado/MDS

To receive the allowance, they considered indicators such as children's school attendance and prenatal care for pregnant women, which resulted in a great reduction of misery and hunger, removing Brazil from the Hunger Map in 2014. This inclusive policy coverage, together with enforced political rights, helps build a country with more equal opportunities ([Justino et al., 2003](#)).

Dilma's era: from steady growth to a political-economic crisis

Dilma's second term (2015-2016) was marked by a strong recession that further led to her [impeachment](#) in 2016. As an attempt to dribble the crisis, the government cut [70 bi reais](#), around 21,6 bi dollars at the time. Then Acting President, Michel Temer introduced [a cap](#) on public spending, which is now frozen until 2036 and is only adjusted by inflation. He [cut](#) the Family

Allowance to more than 352.000 families, extinguished the *Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário* (Ministry of Agrarian Development), and cut 4,35 bi reais of resources for food security programmes. The impact of such radical cuts affected those who greatly depended on government assistance, resulting in 10,3 mi people struggling with hunger in 2017-2018.



Michel Temer on the left and Dilma Rousseff on the right. Photo: Pedro Ladeira/FolhaPress

"Saying that people starve in Brazil is a big lie": Bolsonaro's denial reflects his policies

By picking up where Temer left off, now President Jair Bolsonaro seems oblivious to any sense of emergency regardless of a FAO's Report indicating that hunger increased [43.7%](#) in the past 5 years. One of his first measures was to abolish the [Consea](#) and close [27](#) of the 92 storage units of the *Conab* (National Food Supply Company). Many privatisations took place because of the neoliberal agenda of Paulo Guedes, one of the "Chicago Boys" and Minister of Economy. Privatisation, deregulation, and open foreign trade are at the core of the New Right of Bolsonaro's government ([Cowan, 2018](#)). For instance, by prioritising agribusiness, rice is more present in the [list of exporters](#) than in local production, leading to increased food prices. In such a way, the government sets up long-term consequences, moving Brazil closer and closer to the Hunger Map.



President Jair Bolsonaro meeting with journalists at the Planalto Palace. Photo: Marcos Corrêa/PR

A new player in the fight against hunger: increasing food insecurity during the pandemic

It is estimated that [more people](#) will go into extreme poverty due to the pandemic, so Brazil may be returning to the Hunger Map. The dismantling of the Consea and budget cuts expose the state's failure to reduce inequalities, tackle food and nutritional insecurity in Brazil, and make the already food-deprived people more vulnerable to hunger.



5.4 mi people in Brazil can go into extreme poverty due to the pandemic. Photo: Ricardo Funari/Getty Images

What does the future hold for Brazil?

This year's local elections in Brazil will be crucial to determine consecutive policies and the political arrangement of the National Congress, as new alliances can be formed that may pressure the government to enforce new measures.

To overcome the challenges of the pandemic and increasing hunger, great strategies and political will are required. Budget readjustment is crucial during the pandemic and the long-term, through allocating resources to the poorest people. By neglecting the alarming numbers of hunger and poverty, the country goes from a global example of food security to back on the Hunger Map in only 6 years. This gives the world an example of how unprecedented achievements can easily be taken down, so that society always stay vigilant on those we put in power. Hopes are that the 2020 local elections shed a light on the path the country wishes to follow.