

How Brazil's far-right government is adding forces to the global anti-gender crusade

Beatriz Judice Magalhães
PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil

Isadora Cardoso
MA Globalisation and Development Studies
currently working with
GenderCCWomen for Climate Justice, Germany

After being a congressman for almost three decades, mainly known for his pro-military dictatorship, racist, sexist and homophobic declarations, Jair Bolsonaro is now Brazil's current chief of state, leading a far-right government targeting public universities, non-governmental organisations and sexual education in schools as enemies. The reflections of such directions on foreign policy were quickly noticeable. The Foreign Affairs Ministry, led by Ernesto Araújo, whose discourses deny climate change and oppose “globalism”, has been dramatically altering Brazil's positions in international fora. Since the new government began in January 2019, the country's positions on human rights, gender and sexuality have taken an opposite direction from the ones built along the last twenty years of sound, progressive Brazilian diplomacy.

As Sonia Corrêa explains in an online video on anti-gender politics around the world, there has been an increasing global *anti-gender crusade* since the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, when the term gender appeared for the first time on a United Nations document. Since then, mainly

conservative male political and church leaders have led the crusade across the Global South and North at various levels, from international to domestic and institutional politics. In Brazil, this crusade struck hard when Bolsonaro and Araújo seized power.

In June 2019, journalist Patrícia Campos Mello reported that Brazilian diplomats were supporting a definition of gender, based on a binary, biological definition. Journalist Jamil Chade reported that the country's representatives also acted against a resolution proposing that governments counter barriers created by religious groups which negatively affect women, as such a move could mean restrictions on religious freedom. In September 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs classified documents regarding the country's positions on gender as confidential until 2024.

Bolsonaro tweeted that the country would present its priorities for a re-election candidacy to the UN Human Rights Council, among which are the "strengthening of family structures and the exclusion of gender references". In the candidacy document, the government did not mention LGBTQI rights, contradicting its past twenty years of leadership in bringing the issue to the forefront. Not surprisingly, this position turn has been attracting conservative governments to align with Brazil, such as Saudi Arabia, Russia and Pakistan. In October 2019, Brazil finally secured its seat at the Human Rights Council, which will boost the anti-gender crusade in the country and abroad.

The consequences of such a turn are more than disorienting Brazil's long-standing diplomatic articulations based on multilateralism, human rights and gender equality principles. It means Brazil is joining forces to the anti-gender crusade, which affects from educational national plans to international negotiations, and legitimise discriminatory discourses and practices within the country. It is part of our duties as activists and researchers to keep denouncing, tracking and pressuring against such backlashes.