

Charting The Rise Of Anti-French Sentiment Across Northern Africa



Vijay Prashad - Photo:
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In November 2021, a French military convoy was making its way to Mali while passing through Burkina Faso and Niger. It did not get very far. It was [stopped](#) in Téra, Niger, and before that at several points in Burkina Faso (in Bobo-Dioulasso and Kaya as well as in Ouagadougou, the country's capital). Two civilians were killed as a result of clashes between the French convoy and protestors who [were](#) "angry at the failure of French forces to reign in terrorism in the region." When the convoy crossed into Mali, it was [attacked](#) near the city of Gao.

Colonel Pascal Ianni, French Chief of Defense Staff spokesperson, [told](#) Julien Fanciulli of France 24 that there was a lot of "false information circulating" about the French convoy. Blame for the attacks was placed on "terrorists," namely Islamic groups that continue to hold large parts of Mali and Burkina Faso. These groups have been emboldened and hardened by the 2011 war on Libya, prosecuted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and egged on by France. What Colonel Ianni would not admit is that the protests that followed the convoy revealed the depth of anti-French sentiment across North Africa and the Sahel region.

Coups d'états in the region have been taking place for more than two years—from the [coup](#) in Mali in August 2020 to the [coup](#) in Burkina Faso in September 2022. The coups in the region, including the [coup](#) in Guinea in September 2021 as well and the two other coups in Mali (August 2020 and [May 2021](#)), and another coup in Burkina Faso ([January 2022](#)), were driven in large part due to the anti-French sentiment in the Sahel. In May 2022, the military leaders in Mali [ejected](#) the French military bases set up in 2014, while France's political project—G5 Sahel—[flounders](#) in this atmosphere of animosity. Protests against the French in [Morocco](#) and [Algeria](#) have only added weight to the anti-French sentiment spreading across the African continent, with French President Emmanuel Macron

[showered](#) with insults as he tried to walk the streets of Oran in Algeria in August 2022.

Animosities

“The situation in the former French colonies (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, and Mali) is different from the situation in northern Africa,” Abdallah El Harif of the Workers’ Democratic Way Party of Morocco told me. “The bad relations between the regime in Morocco and France is due to the fact that the Moroccan regime has developed important economic, political, and security relations with the regimes of West Africa at the expense of the French,” he said. About the former French colonies along the Sahel in particular, El Harif said that “many popular insurrections” had taken place against the continued French colonial presence in these countries. With Morocco distancing itself from France, Paris is angered by its growing ties with the United States, while in the Sahel region people want to eject France from their lives.

Morocco’s monarchy has [reacted](#) quietly to the coups in the Sahel, not willing to associate itself with the kind of anti-French sentiment in the region. Such an association would call attention to Morocco’s close relationship with the United States. This U.S.-Morocco relationship has provided the monarchy with [dividends](#): military equipment from the United States and permission for Morocco to continue with its occupation of Western Sahara, including the mining of the region’s precious phosphates (in exchange for Morocco opening ties with Israel). Each year, since 2004, Morocco has [hosted](#) a U.S. military exercise, the African Lion. In June 2022, 10 African countries [participated](#) in the African Lion 2022, with [observers](#) from Israel (for the first time) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Morocco, El Harif told me, “has enormously developed its military relations with the United States.” France has been sidelined by these maneuvers, which has [annoyed](#) Paris. As he left behind the jeering crowds in Oran, Algeria, President Macron [said](#) that he would visit Morocco in late October.

In the Sahel region, unlike in Morocco, there is a growing popular sentiment against the French colonial interference (called [Françafrique](#)). Chad’s former President Idriss Déby Itno, who died in 2021, [told](#) Jeune Afrique in 2019 that “*Françafrique* is over. Sovereignty is indisputable, we must stop sticking this label of French backyard to our countries.” “The French control the currency of these states,” El Harif told me. “They have many military bases [in the Sahel region], and their corporations plunder the natural resources of these countries, while

pretending to combat terrorism.” When political challenges arise, the French have colluded in assassinating leaders who challenge their authority (such as Burkina Faso’s [Thomas Sankara](#) in 1987) or have had them arrested and jailed (such as Côte d’Ivoire’s [Laurent Gbagbo](#) in 2011).

Why Is Françafrique Over?

In a recent [interview](#) with Atalayar, France’s former ambassador to Mali Nicolas Normand blamed the rising anti-French sentiment on “the repeated anti-French accusations of Mali’s prime minister and the virulent media campaign carried out by Russia on social media, accusing France of looting Mali and actually supporting the jihadists by pretending to fight them, with fake videos.” Indeed, Mali’s prime minister [before](#) August 22, 2022, Choguel Maïga, made strong statements against French military intervention in his country. In February 2022, Maïga [told](#) France 24 that the French government “have tried to divide his country by fueling autonomy claims in the north.” Malian singer Salif Keïta posted a [video](#) in which he said, “Aren’t you aware that France is financing our enemies against our children?” accusing France of collaborating with the jihadis.

Meanwhile, about the accusation that the Russian Wagner Group was operating in Mali, Maïga responded in his interview with France 24 and [said](#) that “The word Wagner. It’s the French who say that. We don’t know any Wagner.” However, Mali, he said in February, is working “with Russia cooperators.” Following an [investigation](#) by Facebook in 2020, it removed several social media accounts that were traced back to France and Russia and [were](#) “going head to head in the Central African Republic.”

In an important [article](#) in Le Monde in December 2021, senior researcher at Leiden University’s African Studies Center Rahmane Idrissa pointed out three reasons for the rise in anti-French sentiment in the Sahel. First, France, he said, “is paying the bill in the Sahel for half a century of military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa,” including France’s protection of regimes “generally odious to the population.” Second, the failure of the war against the jihadists has disillusioned the public regarding the utility of the French project. Third, and this is key, Idrissa [argued](#) that the inability of the military rulers in the region “to mobilize the population against an enemy (jihadist),” against whom they have no real strategy, has led to this anger being turned toward the French. The departure of the French, welcome as it is, “will certainly not resolve the jihadist crisis,” Idrissa [noted](#). The people will feel “sovereign,” he wrote, “even if part of the territory

remains in the hands of terrorist gangs.”

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Chomsky: 20 Years After Iraq War Vote, US Continues To Flout International Law



Noam Chomsky

This week marks the 20th anniversary of the U.S. congressional vote to authorize the deadly war on Iraq, which according to some estimates, killed between [800,000 and 1.3 million](#) people. In the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, Noam Chomsky shares his thoughts on the causes and ramifications of this appalling crime against humanity.

Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the department of linguistics and philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most-cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs. His latest books are *The Secrets of Words* (with Andrea Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C.J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, 20 years ago, the U.S. Congress authorized the invasion of Iraq despite massive opposition to such an undertaking. Several leading Democratic senators ended up supporting the war authorization, including Joe Biden. For both historical and future purposes, what were the causes and ramifications of the Iraq war?

Noam Chomsky: There are many kinds of support, ranging from outright to tacit. The latter includes those who regard it as a mistake but no more than that — a “strategic blunder,” as in Obama’s retrospective judgment. There were Nazi generals who opposed Hitler’s major decisions as strategic blunders. We don’t regard them as opponents of Nazi aggression. The same with regard to Russian generals who opposed the invasion of Afghanistan as a mistake, as many did.

If we can ever rise to the level of applying to ourselves the standards we rightly apply to others, then we will recognize that there has been little principled opposition to the Iraq War in high places, including the government and the political class. Much as in the case of the Vietnam War and other major crimes.

There was, of course, strong popular opposition. Characteristic was my own experience at MIT. Students demanded that we suspend classes so that they could participate in the huge public protests *before* the war was officially launched — something new in the history of imperialism — later meeting in a downtown church to discuss the impending crime and what it portended.

Much the same was true worldwide, so much so that Donald Rumsfeld came out with his famous distinction between Old and New Europe. Old Europe are the

traditional democracies, old-fashioned fuddy-duddies who we Americans can disregard because they are mired in boring concepts like international law, sovereign rights, and other outdated nonsense.

New Europe in contrast are the good guys: a few former Russian satellites who toe Washington's line, and one western democracy, Spain, where Prime Minister Aznar went along with Washington, disregarding close to 100 percent of public opinion. He was rewarded by being invited to join Bush and Blair as they announced the invasion.

The distinction reflects our traditional deep concern for democracy.

It will be interesting to see if Bush and Blair are interviewed on this auspicious occasion. Bush was interviewed on the 20th anniversary of his invasion of Afghanistan, another act of criminal aggression that was overwhelmingly opposed by international opinion contrary to many claims, matters we have discussed before. He was interviewed by the *Washington Post* — in the Style section, where he was portrayed as a lovable goofy grandpa playing with his grandchildren and showing off his portraits of famous people he had met.

There was an official reason for the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq, the “single question,” as it was called from on high: Will Iraq terminate its nuclear weapons programs?

International inspectors had questioned whether there were such programs and asked for more time to investigate, but were dismissed. The U.S. and its U.K. lackey were aiming for blood. A few months later the “single question” was answered, the wrong way. We may recall the amusing skit that Bush performed, looking under the table, “No not there,” maybe in the closet, etc. All to hilarious laughter, though not in the streets of Baghdad.

The wrong answer required a change of course. It was suddenly discovered that the reason for the invasion was not the “single question,” but rather our fervent wish to bring the blessings of democracy to Iraq. One leading Middle East scholar broke ranks and described what took place, Augustus Richard Norton, who wrote that “As fantasies about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were unmasked, the Bush administration increasingly stressed the democratic transformation of Iraq, and scholars jumped on the democratization bandwagon.” As did the loyal media and commentariat, as usual.

They did have some support in Iraq. A Gallup poll found that some Iraqis also leaped on the bandwagon: One percent felt that the goal of the invasion was to bring democracy to Iraq, 5 percent thought the goal was “to assist the Iraqi people.” Most of the rest assumed that the goal was to take control of Iraq’s resources and to reorganize the Middle East in U.S. and Israeli interests — the “conspiracy theory” derided by rational Westerners, who understand that Washington and London would have been just as dedicated to the “liberation of Iraq” if its resources happened to be lettuce and pickles and the center of fossil fuel production was in the South Pacific.

By November 2007, when the U.S. sought a Status of Forces Agreement, the Bush administration came clean and stated the obvious: It demanded privileged access for Western energy companies to Iraqi fossil fuel resources and the right to establish U.S. military bases in Iraq. The demands were endorsed by Bush in a “signing statement” the following January. The Iraqi parliament refused.

The ramifications of the invasion were multiple. Iraq has been devastated. What had been in many ways the most advanced country in the Arab world is a miserable wreck. The invasion incited ethnic (Shia-Sunni) conflict that had not existed before, now tearing not only the country but the whole region apart. ISIS emerged from the wreckage, almost taking over the country when the army trained and armed by the U.S. fled at the sight of jihadis in pickup trucks waving rifles. They were stopped just short of Baghdad by Iranian-backed militias. And on, and on.

But none of this is a problem for the lovable goofy grandpa or the educated classes in the U.S. who now admire him as a serious statesman, called upon to orate about world affairs.

The reaction is much like that of Zbigniew Brzezinski, when [asked about his boast to have drawn the Russians into Afghanistan](#) and his support for the U.S. effort to prolong the war and to block UN efforts to negotiate Russian withdrawal. It was a wonderful success, Brzezinski explained to the naïve questioners. It achieved the goal of severely harming the U.S.S.R. he (dubiously) claimed, while conceding that it left a few “agitated Muslims,” not to speak of a million cadavers and a ruined country.

Or like Jimmy Carter, who [assured us](#) that we owe “no debt” to the Vietnamese

because “the destruction was mutual.”

It is all too easy to continue. From a position of supreme power, with a loyal intellectual community, little is beyond reach.

The 2003 Iraq invasion was as criminal an act as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. But the reaction on the part of the Western community was very different than it has been in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. No sanctions were imposed against the U.S., no freezing of the assets of U.S. oligarchs, no demands that the U.S. be suspended from the UN Security Council. Your comments on this matter?

Comment is hardly needed. The worst crime since World War II was the long U.S. war against Indochina. No censure of the U.S. could be contemplated. It was well understood at the UN that if the horrendous crimes were so much as discussed, the U.S. would simply dismantle the offending institution. The West righteously condemns Putin’s annexations and calls for punishment of this reincarnation of Hitler, but scarcely dares to utter a chirp of protest when the U.S. authorizes Israel’s illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights and Greater Jerusalem, and Morocco’s illegal annexation of Western Sahara. The list is long. The reasons are clear.

When the operative rules of world order are violated, reaction is swift. A clear illustration was when the World Court condemned the Holy State [the U.S.] for international terrorism (in legalese, “unlawful use of force”) in 1986, ordered it to terminate the crimes and pay substantial reparations to the [victim](#) (Nicaragua). Washington reacted by escalating the crimes. The press dismissed the judgment as worthless because the court is a “hostile forum” (according to the *New York Times*), as proven by its judgment against the U.S. The whole matter has been effectively wiped out of history, including the fact that the U.S. is now the only state to have rejected a World Court decision — of course with total impunity.

It’s an old story that “Laws are spider webs through which the big flies pass and the little ones get caught.” The maxim holds with particular force in the international domain, where the Godfather rules supreme.

By now the contempt for international law — except as a weapon against enemies — is barely concealed. It is reframed as the demand for a “rules-based international order” (where the Godfather sets the rules) to supersede the [archaic](#)

[UN-based international order](#), which bars U.S. foreign policy.

What would have happened if Congress had refused to go along with the Bush administration's plan to invade Iraq?

One Republican voted against the war resolution (Chafee). Democrats were split (29-21). If Congress had refused to go along, the Bush administration would have had to find other means to achieve the goals that Cheney-Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz and other hawks had laid out fairly clearly.

Many such means are available: sabotage, subversion, provoking (or manufacturing) some incident that could be used as a pretext for "retaliation." Or simply extending the brutal sanctions regime that was devastating the population. We may recall that both of the distinguished international diplomats who administered Clinton's program (via the UN) resigned in protest, condemning it as "genocidal." The second, Hans von Sponeck, wrote an extremely illuminating book spelling out the impact in detail, *A Different Kind of War*. There was no need for an official ban of what is arguably the most important book on the build-up to the criminal invasion, and on the U.S. sanctions weapon generally. Silent conformity sufficed. That might have crushed the population sufficiently as to call for "humanitarian intervention."

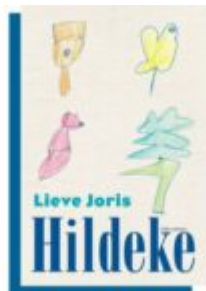
It is well to remember that there are no limits to cynicism if conformity and obedience prevail.

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books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

De liefst van heeldeweert



Hildeke stond in de kast met reisverhalen in de boekwinkel waar ik het nieuwe boek van Lieve Joris kocht. Ernaast stond nog een exemplaar van *Terug naar Neerpelt*.

Na al die landen, steden en dorpen die ze in haar schrijversbestaan heeft bezocht en

beschreven, is Lieve Joris thuisgekomen. En thuis lagen een paar verhalen die verteld moesten worden.

Terug naar Neerpelt is het verhaal van de grote broer die alles kon en durfde. Maar ook de broer die door zijn verslaving het gezin Joris meesleepte in een draaikolk van emoties.

Vier jaar later gaan we weer naar Neerpelt. Om naar het verhaal van Hildeke te luisteren. Hildeke, het zusje met Downsyndroom. Hildeke die door het leven scharrelt; dan blij, dan bang, dan stilletjes.

‘Tegen Fonny wapenen we ons; Hildeke zullen we van jongs af aan beschermen’, schrijft Lieve Joris.

Het eerste deel van *Hildeke* is een ontroerende beschrijving van de laatste levensfase van vader Joris. De man die zich niet kon wapenen tegen Fonny. Waardoor de andere kinderen zich door hem wat in de steek gelaten voelden.

Als vader een reproductie van *De val van Icarus* ziet in de gang van het verzorgingshuis, vraagt Lieve Joris zich af of hij dit verhaal uit de Griekse

mythologie misschien op Fonny betreft. Waarmee in één beeld verteld wordt hoe de kinderen keken naar het gevangen zijn van hun vader.

In het tweede deel zien we Hildeke.

‘Lachen en huilen liggen bij Hildeke dicht bij elkaar; daartussen bevindt zich een raadselachtig landschap dat wij herhaaldelijk proberen te ontsluiten.’

In dit deel krijgt de lezer ook een mooi portret van al die kinderen Joris. Een kluwen van karakters. Waarbij ieder op eigen wijze voor Hildeke zorgdraagt.

Die kluwen wordt prachtig beschreven als de familie naar Estland gaat:

‘De Jorissen in een chique omgeving, dat leidt onveranderlijk tot typische taferelen: ze zijn geïntimideerd en palmen het terrein tegelijkertijd volledig in. Rennen, lachen en roepen in de gangen, bonken op deuren, elkaars kamers verkennen tot aan de zeepjes in de badkamer en de chocolaatjes op de hoofdkussens toe.’

De stilte treedt in als Hildeke weerloos in het ziekenhuis ligt.

‘Het liefste wat we ooit kregen gaat ons verlaten’, schrijft een zus.

De liefst van heeldeweert is niet meer.

Wat blijft is dit boek.

Daar zit je dan. Een uur voor je uit te staren. Met die hele familie in je hart.

Brazil's Runoff Election Will Have Enormous Effects On The Global Climate Crisis



Noam Chomsky

Brazil is now headed toward a rocky presidential runoff vote on October 30, after its October 2 election produced no clear winner between far right populist president Jair Bolsonaro — an outspoken admirer of the brutal military dictatorship that came to power in 1964 by deposing a democratically elected president and lasted until 1985 — and Bolsonaro's leftist challenger, Lula.

This is a tightly contested election, but polls are giving Lula a clear edge as he has received the endorsement of both the third and fourth finishers. Meanwhile Bolsonaro has indicated on numerous occasions in the past that he will not accept the election result if he loses.

The election will determine the future of Latin America's powerhouse — a country with the [12th largest economy in the world](#) that is rich in a variety of natural resources and home to the world's biggest rainforest, the Amazon. Brazil is also a country of extreme inequality, awash in corruption and violence.

What is at stake in the runoff election, both for Brazil and the world at large, is brilliantly elucidated by Noam Chomsky in the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows. Chomsky is presently in Brazil and has been following very closely both the election campaigns as well as overall developments in the country.

Chomsky is internationally recognized as one of the greatest public intellectuals alive, the founder of modern linguistics and one of the most cited scholars in the history of the world. He is institute professor and professor of linguistics emeritus at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics at the University of Arizona. He has published more than 150 books in linguistics, politics and current affair, history and political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and global affairs.

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the eyes of the world were focused on Brazil's presidential election a couple of weeks ago, which pitted incumbent Jair

Bolsonaro, a divisive far right populist, against former leftist president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had served years in prison on charges of money laundering and corruption in a controversial trial. Neither candidate managed to win more than 50 percent of the vote, so there is going to be a runoff election at the end of the month. Why does Brazil's election matter so much to the world?

Noam Chomsky: A century ago, Brazil was declared to be “the Colossus of the South,” set to lead the hemisphere along with “the Colossus of the North.” Since then, the northern Colossus has replaced Britain as the virtual ruler of the world, extending its power far beyond the dreams of what is now Washington’s junior partner. The southern Colossus has stumbled. It is important to understand how.

In the 1950s, decolonization was beginning, and the former colonial societies were not only seeking independence but also advances toward social justice and peaceful settlement of international disputes. The non-aligned movement was formed. Other initiatives were beginning. All of this was anathema to the U.S. and its imperial predecessors.

Brazil was part of the global effort under Kubitschek and in the early ‘60s, Quadros and Goulart. The Kennedy administration was deeply concerned with these global developments, particularly in the traditional U.S. preserve in Latin America.

In 1962, in a decision of historical importance, JFK shifted the role of the Latin American military from “hemispheric defense” to “internal security,” meaning war against the population. The effects were graphically described by Kennedy-Johnson Director of Counterinsurgency Charles Maechling: The decision led to a shift from toleration “of the rapacity and cruelty of the Latin American military” to “direct complicity” in their crimes, to U.S. support for “the methods of Heinrich Himmler’s extermination squads.”

A primary concern was Brazil, Latin America’s powerhouse. The JFK administration helped prepare the ground for a 1964 military coup that overthrew the flourishing Brazilian democracy shortly after Kennedy’s assassination.

The destruction of democracy was welcomed by Kennedy-Johnson Ambassador to Brazil Lincoln Gordon as a “democratic rebellion,” “a great victory for the free world” that should “create a greatly improved climate for private investments.” This democratic rebellion was “the single most decisive victory of freedom in the

mid-twentieth century,” Gordon continued, “one of the major turning points in world history” in this period.

Gordon was right. The vicious military junta in Brazil was the first of the neo-Nazi terror-and-torture National Security States that then spread over Latin America, a plague that reached Central America under Reagan’s murderous regime.

By the 1980s, the plague was declining in South America, less under U.S. control. In Argentina and Uruguay, truth commissions exposed the horrors of the military regimes. Not in Brazil. The democratization process largely evaded the topic, apart from a Church-based inquiry. The result is that many younger Brazilians are unaware of the terrible crimes, or not concerned. That enables a great admirer of the military regime like Bolsonaro to condemn the Brazilian generals for their “weakness”: They did not murder 30,000 people as their associates in Argentina did.

Plumbing the depths of depravity — a considerable achievement for this Trump admirer — when voting for the fraudulent impeachment of [Workers’ Party] Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to her torturer, the chief torturer of the junta.

All of this passes with little comment, something else we are more than familiar with in the U.S.

The crushing of Brazilian democracy was one stage of a much broader process that is one of the most important and least discussed features of modern history: beating back the efforts of the former colonies to find a place in the global system. That idea was utterly intolerable to the U.S., which led the western campaign to cut off this departure from good order, also virtually wiping it out of history.

Brazil resumed the process in the new century. It became one of the most respected and influential world powers during Lula’s term in office (2003-2010), a “golden decade” in Brazil’s history in the eyes of the World Bank. Together with his Minister of Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim, Lula also led efforts to gain a voice for the Global South more generally. These positive developments went into reverse during the [erratic and authoritarian Bolsonaro years](#).

The potential remains. The country has abundant resources that the world

desperately needs. It is culturally and technologically advanced in many areas. It suffers under the Latin American curse of an ultra-privileged elite that has little commitment to the welfare of the country, a major reason for the sharp divergence in development between resource-rich Latin America and resource-poor East Asia in the past years, as economic historians have discussed.

Cooperating under leadership based on progressive popular movements, the two Colossi could be leading the world toward a brighter future. In a Trump-Bolsonaro alliance, they would be dragging the world to an abyss.

The most compelling immediate concern is the fate of the Amazon forests, mostly in Brazil. It has long been understood that if current trends persist, this core component of the “lungs of the earth” will turn to savannah, unable to produce enough moisture to sustain itself. A major carbon sink that has been protecting all of us will turn to a carbon producer, impelling us toward catastrophe.

As in many other cases, the time scale of this tragedy has been severely underestimated. Brazilian researchers have shown that it has already begun to happen in some regions, which are reaching irreversible tipping points. The threat to survival has been sharply accelerated by Bolsonaro’s support for illegal logging, mining, agribusiness expansion, and destruction of native reserves and the many tribes that inhabit them. Formally, they are protected under laws that are being cast aside in the interests of short-term profit and power.

Though not of course confined to Brazil, the crime against humanity is particularly grave there because of the scale. And it is particularly critical right now because the fate of the Amazon, and all that it entails, will be decided on October 30, the runoff for the elections. A Bolsonaro victory would likely doom the Amazon. A Lula victory might be able to save it, averting a disaster for Brazil and a catastrophe for life on earth.

The good news is that in the first round Lula came close to victory, much as polling had predicted. Collaboration with a center-left party rather close to Lula’s Workers’ Party would have led to victory. This and broader coalitions are now forming and might lead to victory on October 30.

The bad news is dual. Bolsonaro’s vote was far beyond what polling predicted, and his candidates swept other offices: governors and parliament particularly, meaning that Lula’s hands will be tied even if elected. The far right surge even

included such monstrous figures as Ricardo Salles, the point man for Bolsonaro's campaign to enrich the criminals who were destroying the Amazon under his watch.

A week later, an election will take place in the northern Colossus with similar stakes but of even greater import given power relations. The denialist party is poised to add Congress to its conquests. The most reactionary Supreme Court in memory is already firmly in its hands and is likely to grease the way to the campaign to turn the country into an Orbán-style "illiberal democracy" where a minority party of the far right will be able to maintain power and drive the country to an extremist Christian nationalism. None of this is at all concealed.

That grotesque outcome will, in fact, not matter much as environmental destruction goes out of control under the hands of those dedicated to enhancing corporate profits whatever the human consequences.

In answer to the question, there is a fateful week ahead.

Opinion surveys had shown Lula leading Bolsonaro by more than 10 percentage points, but the race turned out to be much tighter than anticipated and, in fact, Bolsonaro swept the state and senate races. What happened?

We have to withhold judgment until the facts are in. One possibility is that what happened is similar to what has been studied in depth in the U.S.

In both counties, the huge evangelical vote is by now fairly solidly in the hands of the far right and its propaganda messages about the fires of hell if the accomplice of the devil triumphs. In the U.S., that traces back to the GOP campaigns of the '70s to shift to "culture wars" to gain political power.

Trump voters regard pollsters as part of the hated elite that is supposedly leading the "Great Replacement" and grooming children for sexual perversion (not an exaggeration of current right-wing discourse) and therefore do not respond to them accurately if at all. That is very likely a factor in Brazil as well. There may well be studies of the matter, but I don't know of them.

Another factor is suggested by the fact that many of the right-wingers elected seem to be little known, meaning that voters may have not even been aware of their programs — a fact familiar in the U.S. as well, as extensively documented.

Pre-election, Bolsonaro was lavishly distributing state funds to potential voters, using a mysterious “secret budget” of public funds, possibly supplemented by private funds from wealthy supporters in Brazil and the U.S. What was the impact? We can surmise, but do not know.

What we do know is that the stakes are very high.

The election campaign was marked by a series of violent incidents between supporters of Bolsonaro and Lula, and it's highly unlikely that the climate will be different now that the two candidates are heading to second round. What's the main cause of the extreme polarization that characterizes contemporary Brazilian society?

I should defer here to people who know far more about Brazil than I do.

Some aspects of the polarization are not obscure. One was already mentioned. The polarization goes far back. Inequality is deeply rooted. A very rich mostly white minority lives in luxury not far from miserable slums, where people lack access even to food and water. Furthermore, the rich have little commitment to the society. They evade taxes, export their capital, import luxury goods and have second homes in Paris — a pattern increasingly familiar in the U.S. after 40 years of the brutal class war misleadingly framed in terms of market worship.

On the surface, Brazil gives the impression of a well-functioning multiracial society, far more so than the U.S. That's on the surface. Behind the veil, the white rulers are deeply racist and have harsh class prejudice. One reason for their contempt for Lula, scarcely concealed, is that he is a mere industrial worker lacking formal education. Not the “right kind of person” to be in the presidential palace. Even a white face doesn't protect him from the contempt, in his case class-based, and deepened by his initiatives at social inclusion of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous communities as well as social welfare for the undeserving poor. Again, the resonances in the U.S. are too obvious to discuss.

The polarization may be taking sharper forms today, as is happening in much of the world, but it is drawing from social pathology that runs deep.

Bolsonaro has long raised doubts about Brazil's electoral process. Is it likely that he might refuse to go if he loses the runoff vote at the end of the month, especially with his party having the most seats in both chambers of the congress?

How far will Brazil's military back him?

We can speculate idly or devote our efforts to restricting the possibilities. Brazil is not the U.S., but the questions are not unfamiliar there. Both countries are awash in guns, a recent phenomenon in Brazil as Bolsonaro has opened to arsenals, overwhelmingly to his supporters. There are heavily armed militias that control areas that are barely accessible to the police. Civilian control of the military, and the major police forces, is less firmly institutionalized than in the U.S. – where questions also arise.

In the U.S., large parts of Republican voters have called for violence if it is necessary to “save the country” from the devils intent on destroying the white race, Christianity, the family.... There are similar elements in Brazil. Both countries are plagued by demagogues with the talent to tap the ugliest currents that rot the society from below. They are visible, prominent, influential, close to power.

If power is allowed to fall into their hands, we will be facing the nightmare of a Western Hemisphere in the hands of the two Colossi bent on driving to world to destruction.

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primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Zorg

Het is stil in het koffiehuis.

‘Kreeg gisteren bijna ruzie met mijn dochter’, zegt oom Henk.

‘Wat nu?’, vraagt Andries.

‘Ze vindt dat ik niet goed voor mezelf zorg. Ze wil dat ik een paar keer per week bij haar kom eten.’

Het lijkt ons een fideel aanbod.

‘Dat denk je’, zegt Henk, ‘voor je het weet bemoeit ze zich overal mee.’

Hij zucht.

“En je zult zien wie dan de hond uit gaat laten.”

Brazil's Lula Remerges — In A Very Different Political World



*Sonali Kolhatkar - Photo:
sonalicolhatkar.com*

Brazil's first round of elections, held on October 2, yielded a major victory for the man who held the presidency from 2003 to 2010, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Winning [48 percent of the vote](#) in a multicandidate race, Lula now heads to a runoff against incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro, who won 43 percent. It's the first chapter of a dramatic comeback for a leader who was once hailed as the epitome of Latin America's resurgent left, who was then [imprisoned](#) on corruption charges by a politicized judiciary, eventually was [released](#), and has now emerged onto the political scene in a very different nation than the one he once led.

A founding member of Brazil's Workers' Party (PT), Lula ran for president several times before [winning in 2002](#). A year later I recall sitting in a huge stadium in Porto Alegre for the second annual World Social Forum (WSF), getting ready alongside tens of thousands of people to hear the new president speak. The WSF was an organized response to the [World Economic Forum](#) held in Davos, Switzerland, where world leaders annually hobnob with corporate executives to explore capitalist solutions to the problems created by capitalism.

In 2003, the crowds that had gathered in a Porto Alegre stadium to explore alternatives to capitalism greeted Lula with coordinated roars of "olè olè olè Lula!" It seemed at that moment that everything could change for the better, and that, in the words of Indian writer [Arundhati Roy](#), who also addressed the WSF, "another world is not only possible, she is on her way." Indeed, Lula's rewriting of Brazil's economic priorities emphasizing benefits for low-income communities was a welcome change in a world seduced by neoliberalism. He went on to win reelection in 2006.

In subsequent years, Lula moved closer toward the political center. Maria Luisa Mendonça, director of Brazil's Network for Social Justice and Human Rights, says, "I don't think Lula is this radical left-wing person" today. In an [interview](#) she explains, "many social movements had criticisms of the Workers' Party before because they thought [the party] could move to make structural changes in Brazil." Still, she maintains that Lula's changes to Brazil were profound. "The amount of investment that the Workers' Party did, in education for example, [was] unprecedented." She asserts that "they really made concrete improvements in the lives of people."

Fast-forward to 2018 and [Bolsonaro swept into power](#), glorifying the ugliest aspects of bigoted conservatism and making them central to his rule, and decimating Lula's legacy of economic investments in the poor. Business executives in the U.S. [celebrated his win](#), excited at the prospect of a deregulated economy in which they could invest, and from which they could extract wealth.

Today Latin America's largest democracy has been shattered by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Bolsonaro's fascist and conspiracy-fueled leadership [elevated snake oil cures](#) above commonsense scientific mitigation. The Amazon rainforest has suffered the ravages of [unfettered deforestation](#), and its Indigenous inhabitants have been [exploited](#) beyond measure.

Bizarrely, some corporate media pundits in the United States place equal blame on Bolsonaro and Lula for Brazil's worrisome status quo. Arick Wierson writes on [NBCNews.com](#), "these pressing problems are the result of the policies and actions of Brazilian leadership over the past two decades—inextricably linked to both the Lula and Bolsonaro administrations."

The Economist advises Lula to "[move to the center](#)" in order to win the election, implying that his social and economic agenda is too leftist. A PT spokesperson told the [Financial Times](#) that if Lula wins a third term in the October 30 runoff election, he plans to focus on the "popular economy," meaning that "the Brazilian state will have to fulfill a strong agenda in inducing economic development," which would be achieved with "jobs, social programs, and the presence of the state."

It speaks to the severe conservative skewing of the world political spectrum that a leader like Lula is still considered left of center. [According](#) to Mendonça, "I don't

think that investing in education and health care, in job creation, is a radical idea.” She views Lula as “a moderate politician,” and says that now, “after a very disastrous administration of Bolsonaro, Lula again is the most popular politician in the country.”

Most Brazilians appear to have tired of Bolsonarismo. A [Reuters poll](#) found that Lula now enjoys 51 percent support to Bolsonaro’s 43 percent ahead of the October 30 runoff race. But, just as the 2016 U.S. presidential race yielded a win for Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton, the candidate who had been widely expected to win, there is no guarantee that Lula will prevail.

And Bolsonaro, who has been dubbed the “[Tropical Trump](#),” has worryingly taken a page out of the disgraced American leader’s 2020 election playbook in claiming ahead of the first round of elections that Lula loyalists plan to [steal the election](#). “Bolsonaro has been threatening not to accept the result of the election,” [says](#) Mendonça. “His discourse is very similar to Trump’s discourse.”

Just as Trump—in spite of damning and overwhelming evidence of his unfitness for office—remains [disconcertingly popular](#) among a significant minority of Americans, Bolsonaro enjoys a stubborn level of allegiance within Brazil. He has reshaped the political landscape so deeply that the lines between reality and propaganda remain blurred.

“We had years and years of attacks against the Workers’ Party,” [says](#) Mendonça. She asks us to “imagine if all mainstream media [in Brazil] were like Fox News.” Additionally, Bolsonaro has built what she calls “a huge infrastructure to spread fake news on social media.” And, like Trump, Bolsonaro enjoys support from evangelical churches.

“The challenge is how you resist that type of message,” worries Mendonça. She dismisses claims that Brazil is politically polarized as too simplistic, saying that it “doesn’t really explain that there was this orchestrated effort to attack democracy in Brazil.” Putting Brazil into an international context, she sees Bolsonaro as “part of this global far-right movement that uses those types of mechanisms to manipulate public opinion and to discredit democracy.”

The nation and the world that a resurgent Lula faces are ones that require far more sophisticated opposition and organized resistance than when he last held office more than a decade ago.

Ultimately, the challenges facing Lula, the PT, and Brazilians in general are the same ones that we all face: how do we prioritize people's needs over corporate greed, and how do we elevate the rights of human beings, of women, people of color, Indigenous communities, LGBTQ individuals, and the earth's environment, in the face of a rising fascism that deploys organized disinformation so effectively?

This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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