

Death and Fire: The Amazon and Brazil's status under the far right

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Abstract

The assassination of British journalist Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira, the Brazilian expert on Indigenous peoples, symbolized a shift in the nature of Brazil's international image. During the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), the Amazon rainforest came to play an increasingly important role in shaping Brazil's international standing in the eyes of the foreign media. This article analyzes international media coverage of Brazil between May and July 2022, the period in which Phillips and Pereira were murdered. It assesses news related to the country published by seven newspapers from different countries and reveals how the murders increased the number of times Brazil was mentioned, while the tone of coverage became more negative. Based on our findings, we argue that the progressive destruction of the Amazon has become a concrete liability to Brazil's international status.

Introduction

In June 2022, British journalist Dom Phillips and Brazilian indigenist Bruno Pereira were murdered during a trip through the Vale do Javari, the second-largest indigenous area in Brazil, west of the State of Amazonas. They disappeared during a trip down the Itaguaí River, while Phillips was carrying out research for a book about the rainforest and conducting interviews with the indigenous people of the region with the aid of Pereira. Their disappearance prompted immediate reactions from activists and journalists around the world. Their bodies were found two weeks later, and three men were arrested and confessed to their murders. According to prosecutors, the two were killed because Pereira asked Phillips to photograph the suspects when they passed by in a boat in an area that is a hotspot for illegal fishing and poaching. Although this may seem frivolous as a motivation, they were silenced because of their attempts to shine light on the situation of the Amazon, the destruction of the forest, and the criminality corruption of the region (Staff, 2022). Their assassination led to a global awareness campaign led by Phillips' widow, Alessandra Sampaio, The Guardian newspaper and NGOs such as Survival International to urge Brazil's authorities to act to protect the Amazon Forest, its people, and the activists and journalists involved in its protection (Phillips, 2023; Watson, 2022). The tragic deaths happened in a troubled context of increased destruction of the forest during Jair Bolsonaro's far-right presidency. Along with growing deforestation, the killing of a foreign journalist put the increasingly hostile environment of the world's largest

rainforest under the spotlight. International media coverage at the time not only increased Brazil's visibility in the short-term, but also projected an increasingly negative image of the country (Buarque and Mariutti, 2022a). Even weeks after their bodies were found and the suspects of the murders were arrested, the Amazon continued to overshadow foreign perceptions of Brazil and its reputation (Bimbati, 2022; Bonaldo, 2022; "'Capítulo escuro na história sangrenta da Amazônia,'" 2022; Phillips, 2022a; Wright, 2022).

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the scholarship surrounding the role of the Amazon in shaping Brazil's international status. It focuses on the government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) as an important milestone in the longer history of the Amazon's role in Brazil's reputation, during which time the former president's treatment of the Amazon increasingly came to shape international media coverage of the country. It assesses the tone of news related to Brazil, particularly the Amazon, to understand to what degree this period of increased visibility may have affected Brazil's international status, standing and how the country is perceived globally.

The research draws from a theoretical framework based on the concept of status in international relations and applies mixed methods to examine the relationship between the country's environmental politics and its international prestige. It analyzes international media coverage between May and July 2022, the period before and after the assassinations of Phillips and Pereira. The systematically collected data is taken

from the Índice de Interesse Internacional/iii-Brasil (International Interest Index), which also provides a weekly assessment of the ways Brazil is portrayed in foreign media, developed by Daniel Buarque and Fabiana Gondim Mariutti, and regularly published in Portuguese (Buarque and Mariutti, 2022b).

We argue that, since 2018, with the election of Bolsonaro, the increased destruction of the environment transformed the Amazon into a major focal point, increasing its influence over Brazil's international image and status. In this context, the two infamous deaths of June 2022 can be considered a reference point for the broader shifts in perceptions of the country, through which the state of environmental politics became a hindrance to Brazil's pursuit of international prestige.

The paper is divided into five sections. It begins by presenting a theoretical framework based on the concept of status in international relations. A second section details the article's methodological approach and research design regarding the analysis of foreign press coverage. A third section provides an overview of environmental politics under Bolsonaro, focusing on domestic policy and international agreements and diplomacy, as well as the international reactions these engendered. In this section, we analyze our findings to assess the impact of the growing destruction of the Amazon on the nation's international prestige. Finally, a concluding section looks ahead to the post-Bolsonaro period, suggesting potential avenues for future research on this topic.

Image and status

In order to analyze the importance of Brazil's environmental policy for its level of global prestige, this article draws on the theoretical framework based on the concept of status in international relations (IR), an approach largely overlooked until recent decades. Within IR scholarship, status is the language states traditionally use to discuss positions of power. The language of status influences almost every aspect of state-to-state exchanges: it defines and articulates notions of superiority and subordination in a stratified global society, it creates competition between states striving for prestige, and it can ultimately generate tensions, conflicts and even wars (Clunan, 2014; Lake, 2014; Larson and Shevchenko, 2019, 2014; Lebow, 2010; MacDonald and Parent, 2021; Paul et al., 2014; Stuenkel and Taylor, 2015).

Status is traditionally studied in disciplines such as sociology and economics, and is often defined as an actor's rank or position in a group's hierarchy (De Botton, 2008; Gilady, 2017; Goffman, 1951; Neumann, 2014; Veblen, 2007; Weber, 1946; Weber and Tribe, 2019). IR scholars have long recognized that prestige and status play a role in IR beyond the traditional focus on hierarchies of power and wealth. Scholars traditionally associated with realism, such as Morgenthau and Waltz, mention that prestige and status were important as a way of differentiating states according to their level of power, especially the role and importance of great powers (Markey, 1999; Morgenthau, 1997; Volgy et al., 2011; Waltz, 1979). Status is also present in the perspective of the English School, and in constructivist theories, which defend the idea

that there are variations in the way states deal with each other, with institutions, and how they are classified (Bull, 2002; Volgy et al., 2014, 2011; Wendt, 2003, 1992).

It was only in the 21st century that status gained the attention of IR scholars, an area in which the concept is constituted around the idea that the world order is stratified and that there are social hierarchies at the global level. This new approach has been fundamental to pointing out the limitations of traditional theories, which fail to acknowledge or account for recognition and prestige in their assessment of the propensity to engage in international war and peace. While international politics is often assumed to operate under conditions of anarchy and equality, without a centralized governmental structure responsible for world order and global governance, this does not explain the variation in power dynamics and level of influence of different states in international political conditions (Larson and Shevchenko, 2019; Lebow, 2010; Markey, 1999; Paul et al., 2014; Renshon, 2017).

With this recent approach to IR, status has been defined as the recognition of a state's rank relative to other states, and consists of collective beliefs about its position and affiliation within international stratification (Clunan, 2014; Esteves et al., 2020; Larson and Shevchenko, 2019; MacDonald and Parent, 2021; Paul et al., 2014; Wohlforth, 2014). The concept reinforces the importance of understanding what "others" think about a given state, as classification depends on the recognition of the level of prestige allocated to a state by the other members of the global society (Carvalho, 2020; Casarões, 2020). Status, therefore, is a recognized position in a social

hierarchy, implying relations of domination and deference. It is socially constructed and only achieves meaning through intersubjective beliefs and social processes. It is a concept that depends on collective beliefs about the classification of a given state in a variety of attributes such as wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demography, socio-political organization and diplomatic influence, among others (Paul et al., 2014; Wohlforth, 2014; Wohlforth et al., 2018). The environmental issue, in particular, has become a key issue in international policy issues in recent decades, and has also been consolidated as an important determinant of the status of a state (Esteves et al., 2020; Vale and Marques, 2022).

This dependence on collective beliefs makes the concept highly subjective; it is tied to the concept of a nation's 'images' as it is not a simple reflection of the material attributes of a state, but rather depends on external perceptions about it, referring to beliefs about the relative classification of a given state (Paul et al., 2014). In order to understand a country's international status, it is essential to consider the images that inform external perceptions. For the case study of this article, Brazil, the question of status has implications for "emerging markets" more broadly. This makes it particularly important to understand the status attributed to Brazil by states with a higher level of prestige, whose relative authority shapes the recognition (or not) of emerging countries attempting to achieve status as a peer among the great international powers.

In this study, the main construct of international status theoretically relies on attributes such as a country's prestige, image, and reputation. Although there are many similarities between these three attributes, existing literature has highlighted particular conceptual and practical points of connection and alignment. Prestige is seen as being closer to status, but without its connotation of rank; reputation, on the other hand, is built on a country's actions and image over time and refers to all of the ways the country is thought about by foreign audiences. The concept of status builds on these concepts and refers to the position of a state within a stratified global society. It can help comprehend what motivates countries in their international attitudes, as not all of a state's actions can be justified by traditional IR approaches such as the pursuit of power (realism) and wealth (liberalism); and many countries attempt to improve their reputation and develop a better international image as they focus on climbing the rank in a hierarchy of status of different states (Anholt, 2016; Boulding, 1959, 1956; Herrmann, 2013; Jervis, 1970; MacDonald and Parent, 2021; Neumann, 2014).

Status goes beyond the idea of prestige or pride and becomes more of a supporting structure for the reputation of a country. Furthermore, status can be understood as the conveyor of valued attributes (such as the Amazon in Brazil) that are distinct to a given socially constructed group and can contribute to either a favourable or an unfavourable reputation. Literature indicates that a nation's reputation influences its value, while its image builds the foundation for reputation

(Mariutti and Giraldi, 2020). A country's reputation is denser, stronger, and more serious than a country's image, and is harder to change (Mariutti and Giraldi, 2020; Mariutti and Tench, 2016). Furthermore, in IR studies, Jervis (2017, 1970) has debated the logic of image-making through mass media; as nations perceive one another, "to manipulate the other side's perceptions sometimes for deception but not always; the image you are trying to get the other side to believe can be the correct image" (Wheeler, 2014, p.484).

Analyzing these intersubjective external perceptions about a state has proved challenging. Several studies have attempted to do so by using surveys, which end up being more relevant for studies of images, marketing and nation branding than status per se; or by assessing the number of embassies and diplomats exchanged between states, which is also problematic since it does not consider the intersubjectivity that is a fundamental part of status, as well as other methods (Anholt, 2007; Buarque, 2015; Carvalho, 2020; Duque, 2018; Røren and Beaumont, 2019). In this study, we systematically assess the way Brazil is portrayed in foreign media as a proxy for understanding intersubjective perceptions about the country between other states. This approach reveals a lot about the ways the country is perceived by other nations, which is fundamental for understanding its status, as the media can be seen not only as platform to show the image of a state, but also a reflection of the ways the elites think about the role of the country in the world (Anholt, 2009; Buarque, 2015; Jiménez-Martínez, 2020; Mesquita and de Almeida, 2016).

Research design

This paper systematically analyzes the importance of the Amazon for Brazil's status by looking at how the country and its environmental politics have been portrayed by international media. It focuses specifically on the period before and after the deaths of the British journalist and the Brazilian activist in June 2022 to ask: What was the volume (in terms of number of articles published) and the tone (positive, negative or neutral) of the international media coverage of the murders of Phillips and Pereira? Moreover, how might they affect the Amazon's role in influencing the country's status?

Foreign journalistic press highlights Brazil's external image. It communicates what is happening in the country to the rest of the world and plays a strong role in shaping the perception that foreigners have of the country, while also reflecting an interpretation of the nation and Brazilian identity itself. Like any other type of media, such as films, TV series, video games, social networks and so on, media are the basis for people all over the world to form their impressions of the geographic space, state and human community that is Brazil. Apart from travelling to the country, meeting expats representing it abroad, consuming products exported from it, the foreign media are largely responsible for shaping the perception that foreigners have of the country. The international media coverage of what is happening in Brazil at a given moment helps to reveal - at least in part - what the rest of the world thinks about the country (Anholt, 2009; Araújo, 2011; Badet, 2016; Buarque, 2015, 2022a; Jiménez-

Martínez, 2020; Julian and Lopes, 2016; Mariutti and Giraldo, 2020; Mariutti et al., 2021).

When presenting and communicating facts and news about Brazil from an external point of view, foreign journalists need to pay much greater attention than Brazilian reporters to contexts and explanations. There is a constant attempt by these foreign correspondents to summarize and explain what is happening and why it is important, since their readers in other countries may not be familiar with the Brazilian reality they are describing. The need to simplify complex and nuanced situations in a way that the global public can follow and understand can, however, lead to a reliance on and overuse of stereotypes and clichés, rather than serving the intended purpose of informing the public. A survey of news about Brazil during the 2014 World Cup, for example, revealed that 80% of the times the country was mentioned across five of the main foreign newspapers included stereotypes about the country, such as permanent social and political unrest, its passion for football, the high levels of corruption and Carnival. Considering that international media is an important source of information for foreigners, and that it forms the basis of the intersubjective perceptions that shape Brazil's international image and status, the prevalence of stereotypes is problematic (Badet, 2016; Brasil, 2012; Buarque, 2015; Paganotti, 2007).

To analyze the way Brazil is portrayed in international media, this article draws from the authors' ongoing project of data collection through iii-Brasil (International Interest Index). This is a database of systematically collected and analyzed news

articles developed by the Brazilian journal “Interesse Nacional”, a scientifically based quantitative and qualitative analysis of the country's reputation in the world and its image abroad. Since April 2022, iii-Brasil collects and analyzes the level of international visibility and the tone of the coverage used by seven newspapers from different countries: “The Guardian” (United Kingdom), “The New York Times” (United States), “El País” (Spain), “Le Monde” (France), “Clarín” (Argentina), “Público” (Portugal) and “China Daily” (China). These publications were selected because they are some of the most prominent in their countries and represent different regions of the world, but also because they are fundamental for Brazil's foreign relations. The identification of the material for analysis is based on the search for the term “Brazil”, in different languages, both in the title and in the headline of the page, as a searched word for the research corpus.

After collecting news mentioning Brazil, each article was analyzed to determine the level of international visibility Brazil had in the period as well as the tone used to address the country. The definition of qualitative categorization begins to measure the respective classifications as a quantitative approach, determining whether each of the news articles can be classified as negative, neutral, or positive for the country's image. Since articles communicate an underlying tone with varying terminology (such as image type), they are classified as “positive”, if they have the potential to improve Brazil's image; “negative”, if they have the potential to worsen how the country is perceived from abroad; and “neutral”, if the approach does not appear to be able to

change what one thinks about Brazil. This classification is done by two separate researchers and follows the classification used in established scholarship (Mariutti et al., 2021). Following this initial step, the study uses qualitative content analysis to explore, classify and interpret news content data from the articles analyzed, developing reports about Brazil's international image.

The index was created to assess the different portrayals of Brazil in different parts of the world in order to follow the evolution of its image and how news can influence its reputation. It is a data-driven tool based on some of the most relevant newspapers, which allows a better understanding of the country's position in the world (Buarque and Mariutti, 2022b). Data collected from documents such as media articles can be considered a relevant source of information; as they originate in a certain historical, economic, and social context, they portray and provide data about that same context. To this end, the procedures for collecting secondary data take place digitally and following an already-established methodology (Mariutti et al., 2021). The data collected by the index offers a broad look into how the country is described abroad, but the analysis is limited in scope, since it includes the news published by seven newspapers representing seven different countries, which is a small sample of thousands of different media outlets and hundreds of countries. The data should be read as a representation of the whole, but keeping in mind there could be different perspectives from other publications and countries that likewise regularly broadcast news about Brazil around the globe. The quantitative analysis is also confined to the

tone used in the articles about the country, and it does not go any further in terms of frames used or subjects approached, which could provide a more in-depth understanding about the country's reputation.

For the study presented in this paper, the data from iiii-Brasil was filtered to isolate a period of ten weeks between the first week of May and the second week of July 2022. The periods were assessed separately. We specifically selected and addressed news relating to the Amazon and discussed their significance in the whole of the data corpus. The selection of this period was motivated by the attempt to explore the evolution of the coverage in the period before and after the killings of Phillips and Pereira. It includes the analysis of one month before their assassination, the two weeks (from the 5th to the 22nd of June) of coverage of their disappearance and finding their bodies, and one month after their deaths. This way, the paper proposes assessing how the murders may have affected how the international media referred to Brazil, and what kind of effects this could have on Brazil's status.

Previous scientific studies applying the news coverage technique have showed the prominence of environmental issues in relation to Brazil, for instance, a four-year study carried out between 2013 and 2016 signposted the geocultural and sustainability dimensions of the country's image signposted as the second most published news (Mariutti et al., 2021). Furthermore, the environment is considered one of the most significant components of a given nation's brand, along with technology and education (Anholt, 2016). Concerns regarding the governance of environmental policy

and the prioritisation of investment opportunities is seen as a key issue for Brazil, as are citizens' needs and the strategic implications of natural and food resources (Mariutti and Tench, 2016). Furthermore, Brazil can enhance its reputation abroad by constantly monitoring its dichotomous and multidimensional reputation, which regularly shifts between positive and negative.

The next section will provide historical context about the changes in Brazilian politics and environmental policies under the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, drawing from secondary data about the increase in the destruction of the Amazon Forest and how it was perceived from abroad, which can serve as evidence of how it affected Brazil's image and status. A subsequent section will present and discuss foreign press coverage of the assassination of Phillips and Pereira and analyze its possible impacts for Brazil's status.

Burning the Amazon and the country's image

Historically, Brazilian foreign policy has aimed to achieve higher prestige. It is well documented that Brazil has long adopted a proactive stance to these ends, shaping its global politics and diplomatic endeavours to join the ranks of other major players in global politics (Esteves et al., 2020). Different studies have argued that the search for status can help explain Brazil's interest in becoming a permanent member of the UNSC, which is largely defined by the desire for prestige (Andrade, 2012; Coelho, 2015; Vargas, 2008), its increased presence in Africa in the 2000s (Stolte, 2015),

the country's humanitarian actions in the world, its participation in Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) (Carvalho et al., 2020, 2015; Kenkel, 2010), and its hosting of the World Cup and the Olympics in 2014 and 2016 respectively (Bender and Saraiva, 2012; Buarque, 2015; Castro, 2013; Mariutti and Giraldo, 2020; Rhamey and Early, 2013; Schallhorn, 2020). Brazil has engaged in what is called conspicuous consumption as part of its ambition to achieve higher status, buying aircraft carriers of little or no strategic value (Gilady, 2017). Even within the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Group of Twenty Leaders' Summit (G20), it is possible to see the country focusing on status based aspects (Doctor, 2015).

From 2019 to 2022, however, during the four years that Jair Bolsonaro acted as president of Brazil, significant changes to the country's domestic and international politics also impacted to the country's level of prestige in the world. Bolsonaro's 'new foreign policy' upended decades of tradition and eroded many of the initiatives that had once gained the favour and legitimacy of more powerful nations. Policies that once constructed and expanded Brazil's international prestige, and projected a positive image of the country, including the efforts of Bolsonaro's predecessors to protect the Amazon, were being undone (Buarque, 2022b, 2023a). Despite the fact that much of the international criticism of Bolsonaro focused on authoritarianism, the defence of democracy, human rights and respect for minorities, we argue that it was the global concern with environmental issues and the Amazon that dominated the image of Bolsonaro's administration from an external perspective (Buarque, 2022a).

While in power, Bolsonaro emulated the contemporary nationalist rhetoric prominent in Donald Trump's presidency in the United States, allowing the domestic agenda to dictate foreign policy decisions. Bolsonaro broke with Brazil's existing foreign policy trends by seeking out new partnerships and taking a distinct stance on international issues, particularly in relation to environmental politics and the fight against global warming. His actions led to a wave of international criticism. French President Emmanuel Macron suggested giving the Amazon international status and, later, Germany and Norway withdrew environmental funds based on Brasília's laissez faire response to mass wildfires. Bolsonaro reacted by emphasizing Brazilian sovereignty, accused Europeans of colonial thinking, and argued that the region was not a sanctuary but rather a natural resource that could and should be utilized to benefit the country economically. His administration declared Brazil a victim of globalist "climatism", while insisting that climate change was a "Marxist conspiracy" (Shively and Negreiros Mariano, 2022).

Brazilian diplomacy has historically engaged the environmental agenda as a soft-power tool, a situation that changed drastically under Bolsonaro. Imitating other far-right populists and their anti-environmental rhetoric, Bolsonaro attempted to use the topic to inflame his domestic supporters against international players. Since Bolsonaro came to power, the government has worked to allow more exploration of the Amazon – as the president himself told former US Vice President Al Gore, during a meeting made public by a video (Mendonça, 2020). Ricardo Salles, Minister of the

Environment from early 2019 to June 2021, who was supposed to lead environmental protection, defended “passing the herd” of deregulation, having, in fact, carried out this project himself. Under his terms as Minister of the Environment until 2021, 57 legislative acts were passed to weaken environmental legislation, 49% of which took place during the 7-months period of the Covid-19 pandemic alone. Environmental fines were reduced by around 70% , and protected areas were weakened through the exoneration of staff during the pandemic (Vale et al., 2021). Thus, the country that was once considered a leader in global environmental policy lost its prominence. During the UN climate conference in Glasgow, in 2021, for example, Bolsonaro’s absence led to an even bigger loss in credibility for the country in the area (Andreoni, 2021). This strategy weakened Brazil's international influence and led to an increase in deforestation rates as well as attacks on traditional communities. Even though changes in the international context led to a softening of Bolsonaro's international environmental and climate discourse, especially after Trump's electoral defeat in the United States, there were no substantial internal policy changes. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's strategy did not bring about significant results in terms of support or international relevance (Toni and Feitosa Chaves, 2022).

As soon as Bolsonaro was elected, in 2018, foreign media already put a lot of emphasis on measures of his administration that could affect the world's climate, in what has come to be called the threat of an environmental catastrophe (Gatinois, 2018). Bolsonaro’s first week in the Presidency was marked by an increase in discussions

abroad about the risks of Brazil's new government to the Amazon and to indigenous populations living in the country's forests. The international media denounced the fact that an hour after taking office, Brazil's new president launched an attack on environmental and Amazonian protections with a measure transferring their regulation – as well as the responsibility to create new indigenous reserves - to the Ministry of Agriculture. Foreign press coverage highlighted the increase in deforestation and blamed the Bolsonaro government for reducing forest protections. According to the main analyses published abroad, Bolsonaro emptied agencies that worked with the protection of forests and at the same time encouraged the economic exploitation of forest areas. This combination led to an increase in fires, which were then seen as out of control and as contributing to a global crisis (Casado and Londoño, 2019; Georgiou, 2019; Phillips, 2019).

By July 2019, the international debate about the destruction of the Amazon had grown significantly in the foreign media, setting the image of Brazil and the president on fire along with the rainforest. For most in the rest of the world, Bolsonaro was directly responsible (Beauchamp, 2019; Dickson, 2019; Scudderi, 2019).

The negative reputation associated with Brazil's management of the forest reached such heights that it generated a rare – and dangerous – debate about the country's sovereignty over the Amazon region. 'Who owns the Amazon?' asked the "The New York Times" amid growing global commotion over forest fires (Jurecic, 2019). Until then, this type of question would not have made any sense and would not

even appear seriously in the international press or in academic and diplomatic circles. Until then, any discussion of the internationalization of the Amazon was easily and correctly interpreted as conspiracy theory, paranoia, and fantasy (Buarque, 2010). However, with the increase in forest fires, more and more discussions touched on this subject, which until then had been practically unheard of. Brazil's sovereignty and possession of the territory of the Amazon suddenly became more open to discussion than the international order usually accepts. Onlookers argued that it was necessary to rethink ownership of the Amazon, going as far as to suggest that it would not be strange if other countries invaded Brazil to protect the Amazon, since destroying the environment was as dangerous as having weapons of mass destruction. Two US senators went as far as advocating that the US Congress take action to combat the destruction of the Amazon rainforest (Foer, 2019; Neves et al., 2019; Schatz and Murphy, 2019; Walt, 2019).

During the COP-25 Climate Summit in December 2019, Brazil assumed a negative role. While many expected the country to take leadership in action against global warming, it acted as an obstruction, abandoning the strong symbolic capital that had been accumulated by the country since the 1990s (Amaral, 2019; Bauchmüller and Gurk, 2019; Peker, 2019). Until 2018, Brazil was seen as one of the most important countries in the world in the fight against global warming, but with Bolsonaro, the government decided to abandon this potential leadership and assume a negative role,

blocking negotiations, attacking the so-called “globalism” and mocking the failure of the conference.

External responses to the transformation of Brazil into a problem for the environment did not take long. Even before being elected president of the United States, Democrat Joe Biden declared, in a debate with Donald Trump, that if he won the elections the Brazilian government would need to control and prevent the destruction of the forest, under penalty of international sanctions (“Brazil’s Bolsonaro slams Biden for ‘coward threats’ over Amazon,” 2020). In an equally harsh tone, Europe's leaders spent months rejecting the approval of the European Union-Mercosur agreement, claiming that Brazil did not seem committed to environmental protection. Governments and companies discussed boycotting Brazilian products associated with forest destruction (Grieger, 2020).

Bolsonaro's government, meanwhile, took a denialist stance. The president lied during his speech at the opening of the UN Annual Conference in 2020, denied the seriousness of the fires in the Amazon and distributed accusations to NGOs and indigenous populations, in addition to evading responsibility for the rupture of the role that the country had in world environmental politics. In official discourse, Brazil protected its nature, and those who criticized it had external interests (Araújo, 2021).

Criticized in the rest of the world, Bolsonaro's environmental stance has always been supported by the “beef lobby” (better known as the *ruralistas*), with the objective of granting Brazil's influential farmers increased autonomy in utilizing the country's

abundant land and water resources, thereby boosting food production. This lobby expressed dissatisfaction with the environmental regulations that have limited their operations. While the larger farmers, especially in the prominent soya sector, have shown growing environmental awareness and understanding of the importance of sustainable practices to maintain their market position, there are still numerous smaller operators on the outskirts of the Amazon who seek the freedom to clear or burn rainforest whenever they require land (Fellet, 2021; Lapper, 2021).

This section has drawn from official documents, political discourses and anecdotal evidence to show how much Bolsonaro changed Brazil's foreign policy traditions in many areas (Buarque, 2022b), including the environment, which provoked significant international criticism due to the increased destruction of the Amazon (Casarões and Fledes, 2019; Georgiou, 2019). The following section provides a systematic analysis of the foreign press during one of the most dramatic developments in the Amazon region during Bolsonaro's four-year term as president. It assesses the international media coverage in the period before and after the assassination of journalist Dom Phillips and indigenist Bruno Pereira, and discusses how this event may have affected Brazil's status.

Fire and blood – Negative images of the Brazilian Amazon

Since the election of Bolsonaro, the increase in fires, deforestation, and the deregulation of the destruction of the forest already began to transform how the

Amazon influences the international perceptions about Brazil. This section analyzes the data collected from international newspapers to understand how significant this spotlight was during this particular period, as well as what tone used to describe Brazil. This analysis will be used order to advance our hypothesis about how the tone of international news journalism can affect the Amazon's role the country's status. The assassinations of Phillips and Pereira thus serve as a symbol of the transformation of the role of the rainforest for the international status of Brazil. This particular event was selected because it was evident that the killing of a foreign journalist had increased the international spotlights into what was happening in the Amazon, fomenting the publication of diverse articles about the government's environmental policies. Within the international media coverage of their deaths, we identify patterns within foreign perceptions about the Amazon and the country as a whole.

The entire first year of data collected by iii-Brasil, from the 1st of April 2022 to the 30th of March 2023, found a total of 3,574 articles about Brazil published by the seven newspapers, a weekly average of 70 references to the country. Brazil's visibility fluctuated significantly throughout the year, but one of the main highlights of the entire year was in June, the month in which the assassination of Pereira and Phillips took place. Although the general quantitative data of the index does not include an assessment of the main topics addressed by the foreign press in the period, a qualitative observation based on weekly published reports makes it clear that the dominant theme of foreign media coverage in relation to Brazil was the environment,

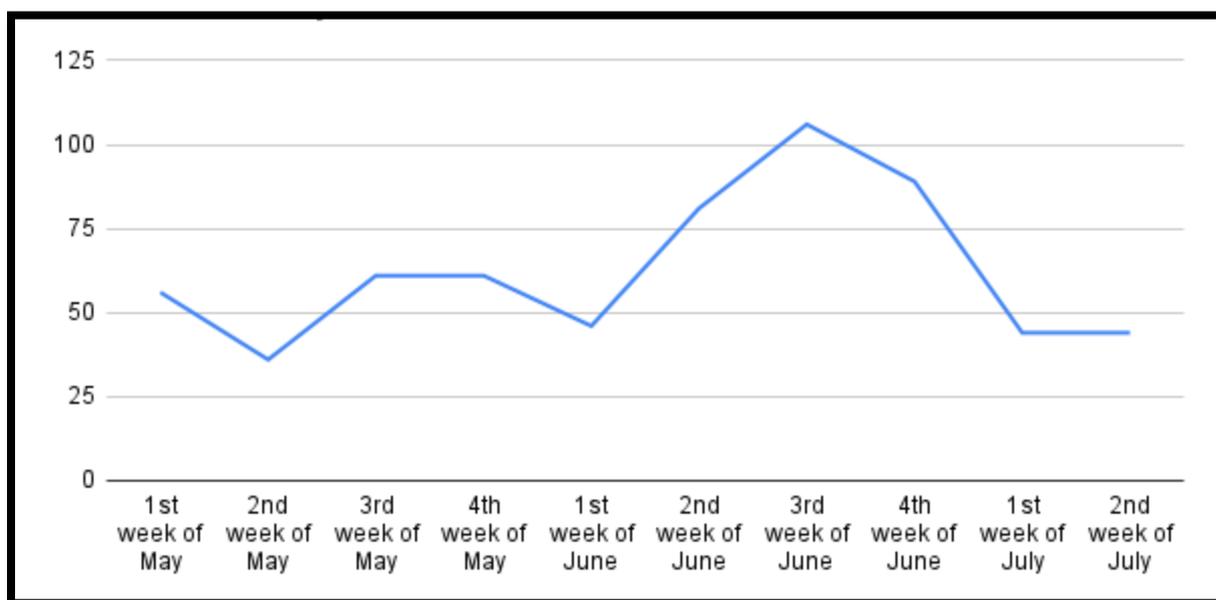
the Amazon, and their associated political and social issues. The relative visibility of the case of Pereira and Phillips is evidence of this shift, as their story gave rise to wider coverage of the situation of the forest Brazilian, as well as the violence and the lack of action by the government associated with it (Buarque, 2023b).

The systematic analysis of the ten weeks of data presented in this study allows us to perceive three separate moments of Brazil's international visibility. The first took place in the month of May, prior to the disappearance of Pereira and Phillips; the second one considers the two weeks during which a search was carried out to find their whereabouts; and the third reflects articles about Brazil after the news broke of their assassination. The data analysis (graphs 1 and 2) shows a clear increase in the number of times Brazil was mentioned in news published by international newspapers during this period.

During the four weeks of May analyzed, a total of 214 news articles were collected. This represents an average of 53.5 news items per week – much less than the weekly average of 70 articles over the entire year. This level of visibility surged in June, when the number of references to Brazil increased by 50.4 to 322, an average of 80.5 per week. In the first two weeks of July, this average decreased again and returned to a low tier of 44 per week.

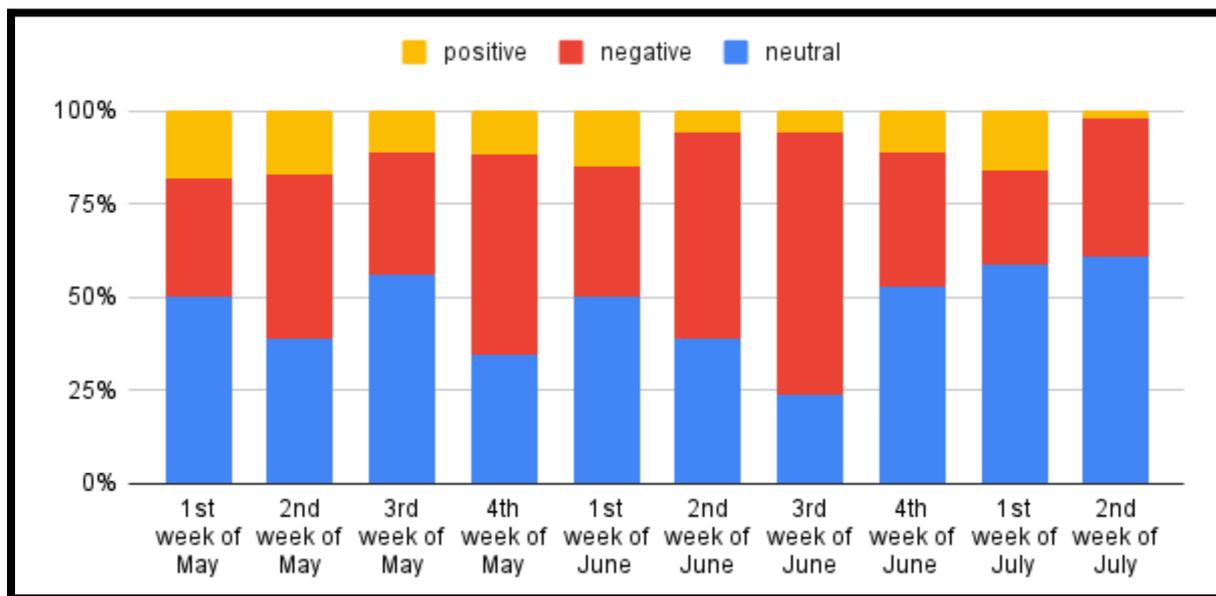
The peak of Brazil's visibility took place in the three weeks between the 6th and the 26th June (see Graph. 1), corresponding to the first report of Phillips and Pereira's disappearance and the week after their bodies were found. During this period, 276

articles mentioned Brazil, an average of 92 per week, 31% above the yearly average. In the third week of June alone, a total of 106 articles were published about Brazil, of which 66 were about the disappearance and death of Phillips and Pereira, whose bodies were found that week.



Graph 1. Evolution of Brazil's visibility in the international media, own data.

Our analysis of the data also revealed an oscillation in the nature of reportings and therefore the image projected about Brazil. Coverage of the murders produced an increasingly negative image of the country; however, this was followed by a general increase in "neutral" news. In the aggregate of the entire first year of iii-Brasil, most news pieces about Brazil – 50% - can be categorized as "neutral". However, we also found more than twice as many "negative" news pieces (34%), than "positive" ones (16%) (Buarque, 2023b).



Graph 2. Tone of the articles mentioning Brazil, own data.

We took four weeks of May, prior to the assassination, as a control to compare with the period following their disappearance. During this period, 45% of news pieces can be considered “neutral”, 41% “negative”, and 14% “positive”. By contrast, the first three weeks of June, the most intense period of international media coverage, showed that these numbers had shifted to 38% “neutral”, 53% “negative”, and just 9% positive. In the third week of June, when their bodies were found, the percentage of “negative” news pieces had risen to 70%, while that of “positive” news had reduced to only 6%.

In July, the tone reverted to mostly “neutral” news (60%), with 31% falling in the “negative” category and just 9% “positive”. Our systematic analysis also allowed

us to establish that the main source of negative international media came from news coverage relating to the Amazon. One month after the murders, the Amazon appeared consolidated as one of the main negative associations with Brazil and, consequently, of the image Brazil projected within the international press.

The immediate impact of the coverage of the disappearance and death of Pereira and Phillips raised the country's visibility abroad and negatively impacted external perceptions. At the same time, international media began to report other damaging news. Besides stories of brutal violence, media outlets discussed deforestation, forest destruction and related criminal activity, disrespect for human rights and environmental devastation, all of which continued to gain prominence and project an unfavourable impression of the country. It reinforced the extent of global concerns for the largest forest on the planet as well as its journalistic relevance.

Even though just a month after the deaths the volume of negative news reportings had fallen well below that of the period of their disappearance and was lower than that of "neutral" news, it was clear that the Amazon had considerable influence and the ability to significantly worsen the image of Brazil. Almost a third of all articles collected by iii-Brasil between July 4th and 10th dealt with the Amazon in a negative tone, while a quarter of the articles collected and analyzed that week still addressed the deaths of Phillips and Pereira. The British newspaper "The Guardian", for which the Phillips wrote frequently, published an article accusing the Bolsonaro administration of encouraging violence in the region (Phillips, 2022b). But other

themes were also very prominent. The Argentinian newspaper “Clarín” and the Portuguese “Público”, for example, dealt with the increase in forest clearing. The Spanish “El País”, on the other hand, published an warning from Brazilian scientist Carlos Nobre stating that the Amazon was showing symptoms of death, as well as a report claiming that the possibility of a change of government was increasing the depredation of the Amazonian region (Gortázar, 2022).

It is noticeable that the Amazon was the topic that had the most visibility in foreign press coverage of Brazil and that it was treated with a mostly negative tone. This comparative analysis is important because the forest region is undoubtedly one of the strongest icons of the international perception of Brazil. Nature, as a dimension associated with the Amazon, is a socio-environmental cliché in Brazil, just as football and carnival are seen as cultural clichés. Historically, these are characteristically positive “clichés” in the face of national visibility abroad.

As much as there is a global concern for the protection of the forest and criticism of the country’s protection policy is common (especially since Bolsonaro came to power), the Amazon has always been seen as an advantageous asset, perceptually, for the Brazilian “brand”. The notoriety of this compendium of negative news is not just the result of a drastic shift in the country’s perceived prestige, but it also clearly shows that this shift from a favourable association with nature to an unfavourable reputation stems directly from the lack of protection and care for the forest itself and its territory

— again they signify the real implications of environmental destruction, criminality, and disrespect for human rights.

Understanding how Brazil is portrayed in the international press is essential to understanding the place that other nations see the country occupying in global relations. It also helps us to think about better strategy design when it comes to Brazil's international insertion.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the scholarship about Brazil's international status and the importance of the Amazon to the country's prestige. By developing a systematic assessment of the way Brazil was projected by international media over a period of several weeks, we showed how Phillips and Pereira's disappearances and the discovery of their bodies brought Brazil under the spotlight. We showed how this news simultaneously increased the visibility of the country while also negatively influencing the way in which Brazil was described and portrayed. Further, our analysis showed that even after the tragic deaths in the Amazon, the visibility of damage to the Amazon and the environment remained high.

Considering that international status is highly dependent on intersubjective perceptions from other states, these findings are relevant to point out how foreign perceptions may have been affected by negative news related to Brazil, as well as how those perceptions might affect the country's image and international standing. As this

paper has tried to show, foreign media is one of the most important means through which the global population has access to information about Brazil, so it is fundamental to shaping the intersubjective perceptions of others. As the analysis presented here showed, the period studied was marked by the projection of more negative information about Brazil.

The article also offers an important contribution to the study of the impacts of Bolsonaro's administration on Brazilian politics and to Brazil's global prestige. It discussed how the far-right president broke away from the traditional use of reputation and image to project the country as a leader in environmental politics, and the reaction this solicited from the rest of the world. This is particularly important as a new administration intends to return to the previous approach of using the fight against global warming as a means to make Brazil a global protagonist (Buarque, 2022c; Della Coletta and Chaib, 2022).

As Bolsonaro's administration ended after he lost the 2022 election to former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, much of the global attention directed at Brazil focused on the hopes that the new government would change the course of the country's environmental politics. Even before his inauguration, Lula was invited to COP27, in Egypt, where international leaders met to discuss the fight against global warming. Based on the success of his previous terms in power, there was an expectation that Lula would try to bring Brazil back to a leadership role it once had in the area. International media reacted positively to the change in administration,

mostly focusing precisely on how important it would be for the world to have the country doing its part (Baragwanath, 2022; Buarque and Mariutti, 2022a; Spring et al., 2022).

The evidence here has shown the extent of the damage done after four years of Bolsonaro's management of environmental protections, as well as how this has affected the international status of the country. As this paper has shown, the increasing destruction of the rainforest, lack of regulation, failure to enforce policies to protect the environment, and the government's denialism of climate change has led Brazil away from the leadership role it once aspired to. This reinforces the idea that protecting the rainforest can be a means to improve Brazil's international image and to (re)gain global status.

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