



'Climate pedaling': On the eve of the climate conference, Brazil maintains CO2 accounting maneuver

October 3, 2021 by [Abhishek Pratap](#)

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SAO PAULO – In a month, the Brazilian delegation arrives at COP-26, the climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, under domestic and external pressure not to retreat from assumed commitments. At the center of the controversies in which the country has placed itself is the attempt to apply an accounting maneuver that would allow it to relax its goal of cutting carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions.

Dubbed the "climate pedaling" by environmentalists, the strategy consists of maintaining the promised cut percentage, but changing the basis for calculating the promise. The country is expected to cut 43% of annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, based on what the country emitted in 2005. As Brazil has retroactively revised its emissions figures, however, it argues that this allows it to increase the promise made in the country. under the Paris Agreement.

'Irrational proposals': Europe plans to isolate Brazil at UN Climate Summit to prevent Bolsonaro government from blocking deal

This maneuver was already embedded in the proposal that the government made last year for its NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution), the document that countries need to produce with their promises for the climate convention. The impact of the maneuver, however, started to be denounced mainly after April of this year, when scientist Raoni Rajão, from UFMG, published a study showing the size of the increase in resulting emissions.

In 2005, according to the calculations of the Second National Inventory of Greenhouse Gas Emissions, the country produced about 2.1 billion tons of CO₂ per year. This volume, however, was revised to 2.8 billion. The government argues that, keeping its percentage promise, this leaves room for 400 million tons more of greenhouse gases per year to be emitted in 2030.



In practice, this calculation creates a gap for Brazil to continue with the annual deforestation rate at the level of 10 thousand km², considered worrying. The government, however, says its new NDC is more ambitious as the 2030 goal has evolved from "nomination" to "commitment" status.

reverse gear

GLOBO spoke with three climate policy analysts who follow the backstage of the COP-26 negotiations, and all see Brazilian diplomats in an uncomfortable position now to make some progress at the conference.

— With this NDC, the country is violating the Paris Agreement, according to which it can only submit commitments that are more ambitious than the previous ones, not less. The idea is to prevent governments from going backwards," explains Stela Herschmann, a climate policy specialist at the Climate Observatory, a collective that brings together the largest environmental NGOs in the country. — Brazil arrives at COP-26 as the country that retreated the most in its NDC. Mexico did a similar thing, but the revision of the numbers did not impact as much – she says.

Article: At the UN, Bolsonaro sells green image but has no credentials or ambition

The Brazilian government, in theory, still has a few days to change its mind, as the UN Climate Convention extended the deadline for countries to submit new NDCs. The organization postponed editing its report on global commitments because it realized that there had been little progress before COP-26.

The 2015 Paris Agreement provides that CO₂ emission cuts will prevent the planet from warming more than 2.0°C by the end of the century, compared to pre-Industrial Revolution levels. The combined global emission cuts, however, put the planet towards 2.7°C.

The countries that are not doing their homework well, therefore, were all sought out this year by the United Kingdom, host of COP-26, which is trying to stimulate progress in the commitments. Brazil's diplomats, as expected, are in this group. Itamaraty has not yet commented on the matter.

— They are being pressured from all sides: by governments, civil society and everything else. Brazil made a calculation with a wrong base – says Rachel Biderman, spokesperson and co-facilitator of the Coalition Brazil Climate, Forests and Agriculture. The organization, which is trying to articulate a consensus between agribusiness and civil society to advance environmental policies, does not see a chance for the Brazilian government to leverage itself in the negotiations in Glasgow.



The pain of hunger: a man selects tallow and meat bones discarded by a market in a truck in Rio de Janeiro. Unemployment and rampant inflation increased the number of people at risk of food security in Brazil Photo: Domingos Peixoto / Agência O Globo



Resident casts net to fish in his partially submerged village in Lopburi province in central Thailand after tropical storm Dianmu Photo: LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHA / AFP



People rush through the Pakistan border gate from the Afghan border at Spin Boldak. Thousands of Afghans try to escape poverty and migrate to their country's southern border, but attempts to cross are thwarted by the Taliban Photo: BULENT KILIC / AFP



Haitian immigrants cross the jungle of Darien Gap, near Acandi, department of Choco, Colombia, on their way to Panama, in an attempt to reach the United States. Photo: RAUL ARBOLEDA / AFP



Pilgrims line up to enter the Grand Mosque of Touba during the Grand Magal of Mourides, the largest annual Muslim pilgrimage in Senegal. Photo: CARMEN ABD ALI / AFP



English actor Daniel Craig arrives for the world premiere of James Bond 007 film "No time to die" at the Royal Albert Hall, London Photo: TOLGA AKMEN / AFP



Protesters throw bottles of red paint at police during a protest in Bangkok against Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha over government policies against Covid-19 Photo: JACK TAYLOR / AFP



People protest against the use of bitcoins, other economic measures and against a decree that dismissed judges from their functions, in front of the Congress building in San Salvador Photo: MARVIN RECINOS / AFP



Red-billed Pelican on the shore of an artificial lake in Colombo Photo: ISHARA S. KODIKARA / AFP



Taliban fighters ride pedal boats on Lake Qargha outside Kabul Photo: WAKIL KOHSAR / AFP



Lava produced by the Cumbre Vieja volcano reaches the Atlantic Ocean at Los Girres beach, in Tazacorte, in the Canary Islands of La Palma, Spain Photo: SUNSETS SWEDEN / AFP

The Brazilian government has the ambition to negotiate rules that favor it in financial compensation mechanisms to combat deforestation, but without showing commitment, it is difficult to gain ground.

— The world is not a “buyer” of Brazil. It is clear that there has been an increase in emissions from deforestation, that there is less monitoring and that there is an urgent need to expand environmental control measures along the agricultural frontier in the Amazon, and in the Cerrado, says Biderman.

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For Caroline Rocha, manager of the climate program at the Brazilian section of the WRI (World Resources Institute), the pressure for progress is not just on Brazil, and the country should not be privileged in the negotiations.

— The expectation of the United Kingdom, as host of the COP, is that they pressure the member countries to increase their ambitions, and the new NDC in Brazil is one of those that fall short of expectations — he says. — But it is important to understand that, as the NDC is “nationally determined”, there is no mechanism to impose goals from the top down,” explains Rocha.

In other words: without the government’s political will, no proposal moves forward.

Removal on account

In addition to recalculating its target, an expedient that hinders Brazil's argument is its practice of discounting large volumes of "removal" of CO2, considering that its indigenous lands and conservation units are part of the effort to cut emissions. This practice of reporting "net" emissions lower than their "gross" emissions (see box on the left) masks the fact that these protected areas are being questioned in bills and many of them are already suffering degradation.

"This makes the country vulnerable in the climate negotiations," says Biderman. "We should be investing a lot more in things like firefighting control and building firebreaks (firestop areas), but we're seeing the opposite.

The increase in forest fires since 2019 also puts Brazil in a difficult situation, because fires are not counted beyond "clear cut" deforestation, underestimating national emissions.

Miriam Piglet: The UN climate warning was the most serious ever and Brazil will be seriously hit

A hope of advancing Brazil's promise emerged from President Bolsonaro's speech at the UN General Assembly last month, in which he voiced the promise of zeroing deforestation by 2030.

"But it's not written in our NDC, so it's not an official commitment," says Herschmann.

— If the president has already said this in a speech, why not make this update now? he asks.

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