

Brazil: a catalyst of plurilateralism

Brazil has demonstrated its ability to mobilize states and non-state actors around specific issues and solutions, engaging partners in the global south and north, the west and the east. Canada could learn from this.



Brazil President Luiz Lula da Silva at an event in Fortaleza, Brazil, on March 12, 2025. In the space of 13 months, led by efforts from Lula, Brazil has catalyzed coalitions of the willing on hunger, artificial intelligence, forests, and more, Edward Jackson writes. *Photograph courtesy of Ricardo Stuckert/Wikimedia Commons*

[**Opinion**](#) | BY [EDWARD JACKSON](#) | January 2, 2026

Brazil is redefining internationalism. Canada should pay attention.

“The twilight of multilateralism will be followed by the rise of plurilateralism,” Mark Carney wrote recently in [The Economist](#). “States that embrace variable geometry, weaving new networks and constructing pragmatic alliances, will be best placed to thrive in this new age.”

In the space of 13 months, led by its president Luiz Lula da Silva, Brazil has catalyzed coalitions of the willing on hunger, artificial intelligence, forests, and more.

In November 2024, Brazil hosted the annual G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro, where it launched the [Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty](#) with support from 16 countries and the European Union along with a similar number of development agencies, which was later [endorsed](#) by G20 members at the 2025 meeting in South Africa. On climate, the

president, who is commonly known as Lula, [exhorted](#) member states to accelerate their emission reductions and to double down on the energy transition to clean power.

In July 2025, Lula presided over the BRICS Summit, also held in Rio de Janeiro, which focused on global governance reform and global south co-operation. Among other outputs, BRICS leaders issued a statement on artificial intelligence, [which sought](#) “to foster responsible development, deployment, and use of AI technologies for sustainable development” while respecting the sovereignty of states and the UN Charter, and called for “robust tools to identify and mitigate errors and negative algorithmic biases.”

With the admission of Indonesia, the BRICS group now comprises 11 full members which account for [40 per cent of the world economy](#). The bloc intends to grow its affiliated, [infrastructure-financing New Development Bank](#), headed by Brazil’s former president Dilma Rousseff.

In November 2025, Brazil hosted the 30th UN Conference of the Parties (COP 30) on climate change in the Amazon city of Belém. Lula launched the [Tropical Forests Forever Facility](#), a fund that will pay 70 heavily forested countries to preserve their forest carbon sinks and punish those that cut or burn their trees. With US\$6.7-billion in [initial pledges](#) (including \$3-billion from Norway, \$1-billion each from Brazil, Indonesia and Germany, and \$500-million from France), the facility aims to raise a total of \$25-billion to start operations.

However, facing resistance from Russia, the Gulf states and other oil producers, COP 30 could not include in its final statement a global commitment to phase out the use of fossil fuels, despite the [support of 80 countries](#). In response, Colombia and the Netherlands will co-host the [First International Conference on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels](#) in 2026. For its part, Brazil will lead a voluntary process to develop a binding agreement on deforestation for presentation at COP 31 in Turkey.

While it derives nearly half its [primary energy from renewables](#)—hydro, biofuels (in the form of sugar cane), wind and solar—Brazil is a bona fide petro state, ranking [seventh](#) among the world’s top oil-producing countries behind Canada’s fourth-place status.

At the same time, like Canada, Brazil has a strong environmental movement as well as a legal obligation to respect the interests and cultures of diverse Indigenous communities. Lula’s announcement in Belém of new plans to [drill for oil](#) in the Amazon drew loud protests, underscoring his government’s own policy contradictions.

And like Canada, Brazil’s trade and diplomatic relations with the U.S. administration are convoluted and volatile. On the one hand, Brazil has asserted its sovereignty by holding Jair Bolsonaro, Lula’s conservative predecessor and a Trump ally, in police custody following his conviction for plotting a coup.

While the U.S. administration may try to influence the 2026 presidential elections, current [polls](#) project Lula, who will campaign for another term (and was jailed himself in 2018 on [corruption charges](#)), prevailing over various right-wing candidates, including Bolsonaro if he were permitted to run.

On the other hand, American policymakers seem to appreciate the fact that Brazil produces and markets its oil independently rather than through OPEC, the Gulf-controlled Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. Perhaps more pressing, however, are the intense interests of the American defence and technology industries in stabilizing their supply chains by tapping into Brazil's rich store of [critical minerals](#), notably niobium, nickel, lithium and [rare earths](#), plus its unexploited [copper](#) reserves. A new bilateral agreement with tariff exemptions could help achieve this objective.

Meanwhile, Brazil continues to build new plurilateral alliances, rewriting the diplomatic playbook. The underlying values of these coalitions—social and gender equity, environmental sustainability, and space and voice for civil society—are endorsed by many Canadians. So is Brazil's respect for multilateral institutions, which are always invited to contribute to these initiatives, even as they help reshape the international order.

In this era of variable geometry, Brazil has demonstrated its ability to mobilize states and non-state actors around specific issues and solutions, engaging partners in the global south and north, the west and the east. Moving with agility and purpose across platforms, Brazil has designed and nurtured support for these coalitions, launched and fundraised for them, and then reinforced them as the initiatives shift to action.

Brazilian educator [Paulo Freire](#) published a book entitled *We Make the Road by Walking*. By bringing plurilateralism to life in real time—by doing it—Brazil is redefining how the world works.

Apprends de ça, Canada.

Edward Jackson is chair of the Group of 78, senior research fellow at Carleton University, honorary associate of the Institute of Development Studies, and president of E.T. Jackson and Associates.