

04 feb 21 - Following the thread of the socio-environmental destruction in Brazil

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We are back! What a harsh start into the new year, huh? 2021 begun with the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic aggravated by the federal government's continued sanitary terrorism. Brazil has over 210,000 covid-19 deaths and faces huge delays on its national vaccination plan. Not to mention the growing economic crisis with rising levels of unemployment and poverty across the country. While the chaos of the pandemic and the economy dominates media headlines and trending topics on social media, draining our attention and sense of urgency, socioenvironmental destruction rages on. The crisis threatening the main Brazilian biomes continues to be fuelled by land grabbing, out of control deforestation and record fires in the Amazon, Cerrado and Pantanal, as well as violence towards indigenous, *quilombolas* [Afro-brazilian traditional communities] and rural communities. In such a nightmare context, to connect the dots between political landscape, structural issues, and the contemporary multi-crisis seems to be the real challenge of those searching democratic solutions for Brazil. This has been precisely the motor behind the work of the [Smoke Signal](#) team: to help society follow the thread of socio-environmental destruction carried on by Bolsonaro's administration. For example, if you were to do a quick search on deforestation and fires records, for instance, it would reveal a 81% increase on the annual Amazon deforestation rate in 2019. The data, when compared to 2016-2018, already indicated 2020 as a potential hell in terms of human induced forest fires. This happens because in the cycle of forest destruction, the more deforestation accumulates, the more fires you register in the following year. Indeed, according to the National Institute on Space Research (Inpe), in 2020, 222,788 fires hotspots were registered with satellite monitoring, a 12% increase in comparison to 2019 and the highest number in over a decade. Reading the news in chronological order helps to explain how the criminalisation of activists and NGOs, the budget cuts and the weakening of enforcement agencies such as Ibama and Funai resulted in the lowest amount of environmental fines applied in the past few years. The interface between the pandemic and traditional communities is also highlighted in the timeline, thanks to the federal government's disregard with basic health access and the denial of the right to the land, making indigenous and *quilombolas* communities more vulnerable to the coronavirus; such groups have a higher average of covid-19 cases than the national indicators. Even with the sustained presence of the military at deforestation frontiers, the social outrage, denunciations to the press, the UN and commercial threats made by foreign buyers of Brazilian agribusiness, the expectation is that the socio-environmental crisis will get even worse during 2021. Contrary to what the political opposition in Brasilia, the nation's capital, seems to understand, Bolsonaro's government knows that the environmental agenda is decisive in the power struggles with and within the National Congress. The Ruralist Caucus gathers 280 members of Parliament and together with the mining lobby, has the power to tip the balance of forces with regards to voting economic reforms, electing the command of the legislative House and Senate and eventually, impeachment processes against the president. If at the national level it seems hard to hold back the dismantling of the environmental governance promoted by Bolsonaro, internationally, the Biden/Harris new administration in the US promises to join the European Union to increase diplomatic and economic pressure over Brazil due to forest fires and the climate emergency. This process, however, is slow, and its impacts will not be felt immediately over here. With the aim to bear witness and document this historic moment, we will continue monitoring the socio-environmental crisis and publishing curated, evidence based content, as well as civil society responses. Resist. PS: Follow us also on [Twitter](#).