



Risking development by prioritizing the possession of firearms in Brazil: development is not achieved by arming the population!

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ABSTRACT

The information in this article problematizes and broadens the debate on the importance of science to the development of Brazil, which is currently in crisis due to cuts in research investments in the country, making it impossible for scientists to continue carrying out ground-breaking research. We argue that this is due to two main factors: the approval of the Constitutional Amendment Project no. 55/2016, popularly known as the “death PEC,” which freezes public investments for twenty years and heightens the precariousness of education, health, science, security, and other sectors key to the country’s development along with the lack of interest in investing in national science by President Jair Bolsonaro who, among other things, prioritizes the possession of firearms as well as relaxation in the control of pesticides, which can further increase deforestation and deteriorate Brazil’s environment. The development of a nation is dependent on many factors such as investment in health, education, public safety as well as science, technology, and innovation. Although Brazil is a country with enormous potential for economic development and international research, these areas have been neglected by the current government. This article analyzes the possession of firearms in Brazil as a means of inhibiting the country’s development. It concludes that investing in the above-mentioned areas can reduce violence and poverty among other problems that are present in countries where governments invest little in such crucial sectors.

Keywords: Development; Firearms; Social Sciences; Brazil; Violence; Public Safety.

INTRODUCTION

In our opinion, the victory of the extreme right-wing politician Jair Bolsonaro is likely to further reduce investments in several strategic sectors in Brazil as they are not a priority for his government (Editorial, 2018). In addition, President Bolsonaro approved Decree no. 9685 in January 2019, enabling Brazilians to own firearms, so that they may have the right to “defend themselves” against any threat. This demonstrates that instead of investing in Science, Technology and Innovation (C,T&I) along with education, public safety, and other segments that are important for national development and increasing Brazilians’ quality of life, the President is concerned about making the possession of firearms more flexible in a country with a worrying history of violence aided by firearms—they account for approximately 70% of violent deaths in Brazil (IPEA, 2018).

However, this is not the first time that “Tropical Trump,” as he is popularly called, has startled many segments in the society—the president was one of the Brazilian politicians who voted in favor of the Constitutional Amendment Project – PEC no. 55/2016, known in the country as

“death PEC,” which paralyzes public investments in several sectors for 20 years (Brazil, 2016), including C,T&I, health, public safety, and education. When this PEC was approved by Brazil’s politicians, their justification for it was “reducing” expenses that could allow the country’s economic growth. In fact, this reduction only favors the politicians. In this sense, we argue that this Project (PEC) as well as the flexibility of possession of firearms, defended by the Bolsonaro Government, end up regressing the development of the country and several of its sectors.

THREATS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRAZIL

Bolsonaro is a threat to Brazil’s development not only because of his extremely conservative style but also because he defends controversial ideas, such as being in favor of the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985, that the solution to end the violence in the country is arming the population, being in favor of making half of the penal code a heinous crime, and defending the death penalty and summary execution in the national prisons. Bolsonaro also does not support indigenous causes and those of minorities, such as the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community or women, and is reportedly homophobic and misogynist. This goes against NGOs that “preach” human and environmental rights. In particular, with respect to environmental issues, in addition to the scrapping of the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA) and the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), this lack of support from the Federal Government is a significant threat to nature, especially to the world’s largest rainforest, the Amazon, which has been plagued with deforestation and declining biodiversity over the years. Many Brazilian scientists estimate that almost 7,000 square kilometers of the Amazon were deforested by 2017 (Tollefson, 2018), and this may worsen under the Bolsonaro government. In addition, such deforestation will further reduce the protected environmental and indigenous areas (Tollefson, 2018). Moreover, the approval of PEC no. 55/2016 puts the country in a situation of economic and social vulnerability, regressing its development (Brazil, 2016).

In addition to that, Bolsonaro’s pro-firearm defense is extremely worrying, given that in Brazil, the data on violence—mostly homicides—is alarming and could increase with the approval for firearm possession in society. In 2016, more than 62,000 homicides were recorded in the country, and more than 500,000 Brazilians have lost their lives in the last 10 years (IPEA, 2018). To establish the seriousness of this problem, the death rate is 30.3 per 100,000 inhabitants; 30 times that of Europe (IPEA, 2018). Other statistics are even scarier; between 1980 and 2016, around 910,000 people were killed by firearms in Brazil, and in 2003, firearms accounted for 71.1% deaths in the country; homicide rates in other countries with a serious history of violence like El Salvador and Honduras were 76.9% and 83.4% respectively, far higher than the European average of 19.3% (IPEA, 2018). Also, in the last ten years, the age group of 15 to 19 years among men has seen the highest homicide rate in Brazil due to firearms—56.5%. The victimization rate of the black population has increased by 23.1%, while that of the non-black population has seen a 6.8% decrease (IPEA, 2018). This indicates that 71.5% of the homicides by firearms in Brazil kill black and/or brown people (IPEA, 2018).

Brazil is a country with enormous potential for national and international research and has been developing high-quality science in many areas. Yet, the Bolsonaro government will not prioritize C,T&I; this is a cause for concern since these are strategic areas vital to further the development of a nation, and lack of investments herein and/or dilutions in such sectors could affect Brazil for years. In 2018, the two most important research and graduate development agencies in the country, namely Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), published open letters to the community and Michel Temer, the president at the time, expressing concern over the financial cuts in their budgets for the year 2019. This decrease will

greatly affect scientific research in the country in all areas of knowledge including the primordial ones such as biotechnology, which deals directly with the manufacture of medicines and vaccines essential for public health. There is a greater risk of the continuity of these researches getting significantly affected if such reduction in the federal budget for science occurs under Bolsonaro's government as well. Research grants in Brazil have great relevance and are fundamental for the development of C,T&I, since the knowledge production in Brazil is based mostly on the work of researchers who get scholarships for their fields of study. Decrease in the C,T&I budget may affect this availability of scholarships for researchers and postgraduate programs in the country.

Furthermore, female scientists may lose important positions in the management of the country's C,T&I—for instance in public university rectors—keeping in mind Bolsonaro's misogynistic views and statements. The fact that only 30% of these organs are occupied by women (Benício, 2019) worsens the scenario. However, the creation of the Prize for Women in Science by the Institute of Pure and Applied Mathematics (IMPA, 2019)—which awards research scholarships to promising Brazilian scientists in different knowledge areas—is a relevant way of valuing women's work for the country's C,T&I development; it also helps recognize gender equality (IMPA, 2019) within Brazilian scientific spaces, which are thoroughly devalued under the current government.

CONCLUSION

From this summary of the conservative and polemical vision of President Jair Bolsonaro, we can foresee the immeasurable regression in the development of the country. The federal government needs to recognize that the flexibility afforded to the arms industry will not bring great benefits to Brazilian society. Along with the fact that firearm homicide numbers in Brazil are alarming, it should be noted that our country was recently caught in a troublesome situation when two adolescents entered a public school in São Paulo with firearms and killed ten people—students and staff (Fantástico, 2019). Such tragic situations only reinforce the point that arming the population is not the solution. Also, with Decree no. 9685 of January 2019 (Brazil, 2019), the Disarmament Statute that has contributed to stop the arms race in the country now loses strength and relevance (Brazil, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that we are not affirming that possession of firearms is the main reason behind increasing violence in the country; there are other contributing factors, such as social and economic inequality, the precariousness of the public safety system, the presence of numerous illicit markets that sell firearms, and criminal factions that devastate the country (IPEA, 2018).

However, it is essential to propose strategies that have a responsible control over firearms in Brazil, failing which, homicide rates in the country—especially under the current government that supports the possession of weapons—will increase significantly. That is why, we believe it does not make sense to arm the population for their defense and that there are other factors more relevant to the country's development, which deserve increased investments and attention from the government—C,T&I, health, public safety, and education are fundamental pillars for economic and social growth of any nation, besides reducing violence, poverty, and other problems that may plague countries where governments do not invest in the primary areas.

List of abbreviations

Institute for Applied Economic Research - IPEA
Constitutional Amendment Project - PEC

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Not applicable

Consent for publication

We declare that the present work is unpublished, original, and not submitted for publication to another international journal. It does not present any conflicts of interest, complies with all the ethical procedures of scientific research, and has our authorization for publication in *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal (ASSRJ)*.

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