

Bolsonaro rejects 'Captain Chainsaw' label as data shows deforestation 'exploded'

Data says 2,254 sq km cleared in July as president says Macron and Merkel 'haven't realized Brazil's under new management'

Tom Phillips *Latin America correspondent*

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An aerial view of deforestation in the western Amazon region of Brazil. Photograph: Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon “exploded” in July it has emerged as **Jair Bolsonaro** scoffed at his portrayal as Brazil’s “Captain Chainsaw” and mocked Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel for challenging him over the devastation.

Speaking in São Paulo on Tuesday, Brazil’s president attacked the leaders of France and Germany – who have both voiced concern about **the surge in destruction since Bolsonaro took office** in January.

“They still haven’t realized Brazil’s under new management,” **Bolsonaro declared** to cheers of approval from his audience. “Now we’ve got a blooming president.”

The far-right populist repeated claims that his administration – which critics accuse of helping unleash a new wave of environmental destruction – was **the victim of a mendacious international smear campaign** based on “imprecise” satellite data showing a jump in deforestation.

Bolsonaro ridiculed what he called his depiction as “*Capitão Motoserra*” (“Captain Chainsaw”).

But as he spoke, official data laid bare the scale of the environmental crisis currently unfolding in the world’s biggest rainforest, of which about 60% is in **Brazil**.

According to **a report in the Estado de São Paulo newspaper**, Amazon destruction “exploded” in July with an estimated 2,254 sq km (870 sq miles) of forest cleared, according to preliminary data gathered by Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research, the government agency that monitors deforestation.

That is an area about half the size of Philadelphia and reportedly represents a 278% rise on the 596.6 sq km destroyed in July last year.

Rômulo Batista, an Greenpeace campaigner based in the Amazon city of Manaus, said the numbers – while preliminary – were troubling and showed a clear trend of rising deforestation under Bolsonaro. What was not yet clear was if the devastation was “going up, going up a lot, or skyrocketing”.

Batista blamed Bolsonaro’s “anti-environmental” discourse and policies – such as slashing the budget of Brazil’s environmental agency, Ibama – for the surge.

“It’s almost as if a licence to deforest illegally and with impunity has been given, now that you have the [environmental] inspection and control teams being attacked by no less than the president of the republic and the environment minister,” Batista added. “This is a very worrying moment.”

The spike in destruction under Bolsonaro – who was elected with the support of powerful mining and agricultural sectors – has come as a shock to environmentalists, but not a surprise.

During a visit to the Amazon last year Bolsonaro told the Guardian that as president he would target “cowardly” environmental NGOs who were “sticking their noses” into Brazil’s domestic affairs.

“This tomfoolery stops right here!” Bolsonaro proclaimed, praising Donald Trump’s approval of the Dakota Access and Keystone XL oil pipelines.

Bolsonaro returned to that theme on Tuesday during a gathering of car dealers in Brazil’s economic capital, São Paulo, complaining that “60% of our territory is rendered unusable by indigenous reserves and other environmental questions”.

“You can’t imagine how much I enjoyed talking to Macron and Angela Merkel [about these issues during the recent G20 in Japan],” Bolsonaro added to guffaws from the crowd. “What a pleasure!”

In June Merkel described the environmental situation in Bolsonaro’s Brazil as “dramatic”.

In recent weeks the globally respected National Institute for Space Research has found itself at the eye of a **political storm** as a result of the inconvenient truths revealed by its data.

Earlier this month, with alarm growing about the consequences of the intensifying assault on the Amazon, its director, Ricardo Galvão, was **sacked** after contesting **Bolsonaro’s “pusillanimous” claims** he was peddling lies about the state of the Amazon.

Galvão’s successor, the air force colonel Darcton Policarpo Damião, looks set to follow a more Bolsonarian line. In an interview this week Damião said he was not convinced global heating was a manmade phenomenon and called such matters “**not my cup of tea**”.

Pope Francis – who is preparing to host a special synod on the Amazon in October – has also incurred Bolsonaro’s wrath on the environment.

In June the Argentinian leader of the Catholic church **questioned** “the blind and destructive mentality” of those seeking to profit from the world’s biggest rainforest. “What is happening in Amazonia will have repercussions at a global level,” he warned.

Asked about those comments, Bolsonaro offered a characteristically unvarnished response, suggesting they reflected an international conspiracy to commandeer the Amazon.

“Brazil is the virgin that every foreign pervert wants to get their hands on,” **Bolsonaro said**.

Bolsonaro has blessed 'brutal' assault on rainforest, sacked scientist warns

In interview with the Guardian, Ricardo Galvão says if the far-right leader doesn't change tack the Amazon will be ruined

Tom Phillips *Latin America correspondent*

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View of an illegal felling area in the Amazon forest. Ricardo Galvão says 'enormous' damage had already been done since Jair Bolsonaro took power in January. Photograph: Raphael Alves/AFP/Getty Images

Illegal loggers are ramping up a “brutal, fast” assault on the Brazilian Amazon with the blessing of the far-right president **Jair Bolsonaro**, the sacked head of the government agency tasked with monitoring deforestation has warned.

Speaking to the Guardian five days after **his dismissal**, Ricardo Galvão said he was “praying to the heavens” the far-right leader would change tack before the Amazon – and Brazil’s international reputation as an environmental leader

– were ruined.

“What is happening is that this government has sent a clear message that there will not be any more punishment [for environmental crimes] like before ... This government is sending a very clear message that the control of deforestation will not be like it was in the past And when the loggers hear this message that they will no longer be supervised as they were in the past, they penetrate [the rainforest],” Galvão said, claiming “enormous” damage had already been done since Bolsonaro took power in January.



Amazon deforestation: Bolsonaro government accused of seeking to sow doubt over data

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“It is a question of brutal, fast economic exploitation.”

Galvão, an internationally respected scientist, was director of Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (Inpe) until last week when a public clash with Bolsonaro cost him his

job.

Days earlier, during a meeting with foreign journalists, Bolsonaro had **publicly questioned Inpe's data suggesting an alarming spike in Amazon destruction** and accused Galvão of peddling “lies”.

That attack led the MIT-trained physicist to hit back at his “pusillanimous” president.

“I felt great indignation and great sadness,” the 71-year-old scientist recalled of what he called Bolsonaro’s “infantile” attack on Inpe and its staff.

In an interview with the Guardian, Galvão accused Bolsonaro and two cabinet members – the environment minister, Ricardo Salles, and the institutional security chief, General Augusto Heleno – of waging a months-long battle to undermine his agency, which uses satellite and radar technology to observe and help prevent deforestation.

Galvão claimed the campaign was designed to discredit Inpe’s findings and thus clear the way for greater exploitation of the Amazon.

“There is no doubt about it. They have much closer relations with the loggers [than previous governments] ... The president has said explicitly that he wants to make deals with American companies **to exploit minerals in indigenous reserves,**” Galvão said.

“It is a negative plan with the intention of reducing control over the Amazon ... because they believe that by exploiting the Amazon they will achieve much faster economic development of the region ... This is completely mistaken,” the scientist added.

Already, in the first seven months of his four-year term,

Bolsonaro had helped cause “an enormous increase” in deforestation by signalling leniency towards those wrecking the rainforest, Galvão claimed.

Environmentalists and scientists from around the world have condemned Galvão’s sacking which some suspect is designed to cover up inconvenient truths about the obliteration of vast tracts of jungle under Bolsonaro.

Nasa scientist Douglas Morton, who has collaborated with Inpe for nearly two decades, said its highly-trained scientists deserved to be “lauded” for their “pioneering, rigorous and robust” research which had brought great benefits to **Brazil** and its environment. He called Bolsonaro’s move “concerning”.

Romulo Batista, a Greenpeace campaigner in Brazil, said Galvão’s dismissal reflected Bolsonaro’s hostility to science and the environment. “This is not a government that is based on facts ... this is a government whose *modus operandi* is the lie,” Batista said.

But Batista said Bolsonaro would fail to suppress the truth about the accelerating assault on the Amazon.

“If he thinks that by sacking an internationally renowned scientist ... and bringing in someone who is going to hide or distort or introduce data that is not true he will manage to convey the false impression that Amazon deforestation is under control, he is very mistaken. There are numerous other [monitoring] systems that will show the truth.”

After nearly five decades serving his country, Galvão said he felt sadness at the circumstances surrounding his sacking and the plight of Brazil’s environment. “The country is seeing a political scenario that is going to cause great damage in the future.”

Galvão echoed fears over research suggesting deforestation was pushing the world's biggest rainforest towards a **catastrophic tipping point** from which it would not recover. "This is a very great danger – not to mention that the Amazon is essential to control the rain cycles across South America."

Galvão also accused Bolsonaro of dismantling Brazil's hard-earned reputation as an environmental leader – a reputation his agency helped cement by producing deforestation alerts that helped authorities slash Amazon destruction between 2004 and 2012.

"Brazil was seen in a very positive light as a world leader on environmental preservation. This is being rapidly destroyed by the Bolsonaro government," he said.

Galvão said he hoped the international community would now support "those Brazilians who are struggling against this state of affairs, and force the government to understand that increasing deforestation in the Amazon will only cause harm to Brazil – and to the government itself".

"I hope, and I pray to the heavens, that the president changes his stance and returns to the correct policy Brazil adopted in the past," he added.

That seems unlikely. This week, as new Inpe data emerged suggesting an "explosion" of Amazon deforestation in July, **Bolsonaro scoffed at his portrayal as Brazil's "Captain Chainsaw"** and mocked Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel for challenging him on the environment.

To hoots of approval from his audience, **Bolsonaro declared**: "They still haven't realized Brazil's under new management."

Jair Bolsonaro: 'Poop every other day' to protect the environment

8 hours ago



Mr Bolsonaro says eating less will also help the planet

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has suggested people should "poop every other day" as a way to save the planet.

His comment came in answer to a journalist who asked him how to combine agricultural development and protecting the environment.

Mr Bolsonaro recently came under fire after official data showed an increase in deforestation in the Amazon.

He then sacked the head of the agency that reported the increase, accusing it of lying about the problem's scale.

Mr Bolsonaro's comment came after the journalist quoted reports saying deforestation and agriculture were responsible for a quarter of the planet's greenhouse effect.

"It's enough to eat a little less. You talk about environmental pollution. It's enough to poop every other day. That will be better for the whole world," he said.

Scientists say the Amazon has suffered losses at an accelerated rate since Mr Bolsonaro took office in January, with policies that favour development over conservation.

Brazil's space agency data showed an 88% increase in deforestation in June compared with the same month a year ago.

As the largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming.

Official figures suggest that the biggest reason for felling trees there is to create new pastures for cattle. Over the past decade, previous governments managed to reduce deforestation by means of concerted action by federal agencies and a system of fines. But Mr Bolsonaro and his ministers have criticised the penalties and overseen a dramatic fall in confiscations of timber and convictions for environmental crimes.

Amazon deforestation: Bolsonaro government accused of seeking to sow doubt over data

Ministers look at setting up alternative monitoring scheme as existing system shows alarming rise in clearance rates

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Amid an international outcry over Amazon deforestation, the Brazilian government has met to review the data collection system. Photograph: Felipe Werneck/AP

The Amazon forest is being burned and chopped down at the most alarming rate in recent memory, but the Brazilian government of **Jair Bolsonaro** is focused on reinterpreting the data rather than dealing with the culprits, monitoring groups have said.

At a clearance rate equivalent to a Manhattan island every day, deforestation in July was almost twice as fast as the worst month ever recorded by the current satellite monitoring system, which is managed by the government's National

Institute for Space Research.

Over the single month, the **latest data shows** destruction of more than 1,800 square kilometres, which is pushing the world's biggest rainforest **towards an irreversible tipping point** and eroding a globally essential sink for carbon dioxide.

After an international outcry, the Brazilian government – which is closely aligned with the loggers, miners and farmers responsible for most of the forest loss – held a special meeting on Wednesday of ministers and senior officials from the environment ministry, the science and technology ministry, and agencies responsible for satellites and forest protection.

The primary topic, according to several sources, was a review of the data collection system, which has **come under attack from Bolsonaro** and other ministers who have been embarrassed by the evidence from their own government that Brazil is moving in the opposite direction from the deforestation control commitments it made as a signatory to the Paris climate treaty.

The far-right government is investigating the possibility of an alternative monitoring scheme, but scientists defended the credibility of the existing system, which is recognised overseas as one of the best in the world. But the battle over the numbers looks set to continue.

After the meeting, the environment minister, Ricardo Salles, admitted deforestation was rising, but he continued to criticise what he called “the lack of precision in the data” and the “wrong” interpretations of the journalists who reported on it. He said the government wanted to make greater use of private satellite data and strengthen the team of analysts working on it.

This has prompted concerns in the science community and among climate activists that ministers may be preparing to twist or devalue the numbers to hide the true scale of deforestation.

The Climate Observatory NGO said the government had failed to explain why deforestation has hit the worst monthly level since the Deter satellite system was established in 2004 and also failed to discredit the numbers.

“What is even worse is that [Ricardo Salles] has reaffirmed the intention to use public money to contract yet another system of remote sensing, when what is missing in Amazonia at this time is supervision and investment in sustainable

activities,” the climate group said in a statement. “Bolsonaro blamed the thermometer for the fever. Now the minister blames the thermometer reading. The disease, however, remains untreated.”

Carlos Souza, of the independent monitoring group **Imazon**, said foreign satellites would still be able to track what was happening in the Amazon, but he was worried the introduction of yet another new system would confuse the data and make it hard to compare with the past and track historical trends.

“I’m very concerned,” he said. “In the past it was very useful to respond to the trends and to show the world **Brazil** is keeping on track of deforestation. If you get rid of historical trend, you lose that reference and stop putting on pressure.”

Bolsonaro backers wage war on the rainforest

Polls show Jair Bolsonaro has 78% support in the heavily deforested Amazon state of Rondônia on Brazil's western border. Photograph: Environmental Images/Universal Images Group/REX/Shutterstock

Most in Brazil’s heavily-deforested western border support Jair Bolsonaro and his promises of progress instead of protection

by **Dom Phillips** in Porto Velho

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The growl of a chainsaw and the howl of a straining tractor engine were enough to draw the environment officials up a rutted track into the forest.

In the clearing at the end of the road, three young loggers silenced their machines and proffered their documents. They were paid in cash, they said – nearly four times the Brazilian minimum monthly salary of £200 (\$258) – to ship out up to two truckloads a day of huge hardwood logs.

And like most people in the heavily-deforested Amazon state of Rondônia on Brazil's western border, they are sure who they will vote for in Sunday's presidential run-off vote.

"It has to be Bolsonaro. He supports us," said Edivaldo da Silva, 22.



Polls show that **Jair Bolsonaro**, the far-right former army captain **has 78% support** in Rondônia, leaving his leftist rival Fernando Haddad in the dust.

In the Amazon, Bolsonaro has promised progress instead of protection.

And his radical proposals – to **neuter** federal environment agencies, give the green light to destructive **hydro-electric** dams, freeze the demarcation of new **indigenous** reserves and open up existing ones to **mining**– chime with voters here, including those breaking environmental laws.

Loggers, illegal gold miners and squatters on a protected reserve all told the Guardian they are voting for Bolsonaro because they believe he will make their lives easier.

Environmentalists argue Bolsonaro’s plans will prove disastrous for the Amazon and 33 non-government **groups** have warned his proposals represent “concrete and irreversible risks” to Brazil’s forests, biodiversity and even the reputations of its agribusiness producers.

Bolsonaro’s allies rubbish such concerns. His planned chief of staff and his party’s candidate for governor of Rondônia criticised foreign “interference” in the Amazon and told the Guardian they harboured doubts over global warming science.

Such views are common in a state where where smallholders say they are unjustly penalised for breaking environmental rules and argue that responsibility for climate change should be shared globally.



Lucemar Kouchut drives a shipment of logs. Photograph: Dom Phillips

The three loggers showed the environment officials documents which they said showed their work was licenced under a plan permitting “sustainable” tree-cutting.

But the officials later concluded the papers referred to another patch of land 400 metres away – not this area next to a protected forest and an indigenous reserve.

This was a common ploy, said Sebastiana Almeida, a forest engineer in Rondônia’s environmental development agency. “With that document in their hands, they steal wood from inside the protected area or indigenous reserve,” she said.

People in Rondônia – 43% of whose **territory** has been deforested – largely agree on two things: that they will vote for Bolsonaro, and that the state is getting hotter and drier.

Government data backs that up. Average annual temperatures in the northern part of Rondônia **averaged** between 26C-28C (79F-82F) in 2017, two degrees higher than five years previously. Annual rainfall has also fallen across the state.

“The weather is all confused,” said Wagner Matos, 37, an Uber driver in its capital Porto Velho, who blamed deforestation.

But congressman Onyx Lorenzoni, Bolsonaro’s probable chief of staff, disputes

that global warming is a problem.

“There are things that are solid and there are things that are ideological,” he told the Guardian, before criticising Greenpeace for meddling in the Brazilian environment. “Brazilians will be in charge in the Amazon, my brother, not the Europeans.”

Brazilians will be in charge in the Amazon, my brother, not the Europeans
Onyx Lorenzoni

Other Bolsonaro allies have called for more industry in the Amazon. Colonel João Chrisóstomo, a retired army engineer elected as one of the state’s federal deputies on 7 October for Bolsonaro’s Social Liberal Party (PSL) said the military should asphalt its dirt roads. “The environment can’t hold up development,” he said.

Better roads would please Rondônia residents like Sheila Barros, 44, who lives with her fisherman husband Adegilton Lopes, 44, and their two children inside the protected Lago do Cuniã reserve.

“There is no highway, no way to get our produce out,” she said. The reserve is just 70km (43 miles) from Porto Velho, but reaching it involves driving hours on dirt roads, two boat trips and a hair-raising motorbike ride down a narrow forest trail.



“Where else is there this much greenery?” says fisherman Mabel Lopes, a resident of the protected Lago do Cuniã reserve. Photograph: Dom Phillips

But Amazon history has shown that paving roads bring development and destruction to forest reserves like Lago do Cuniã, run by the government’s Chico Mendes Institute (ICMbio), which only allows small scale fishing and sustainable farming for 400 residents living beside a majestically beautiful lagoon home to alligators and flocks of birds.

Fisherman Mabel Lopes, 65, said that until the reserve was created in 1999, the lagoon was overfished by outsiders. Nowadays, he said, there is plenty of fish. Nodding at the lush forest, he asked: “Where else is there this much greenery?”

Bolsonaro has previously promised to withdraw Brazil from the **Paris climate deal**, although on Thursday he said he changed his mind on pulling out of the deal.

But he has pledged to put an end to “environmental activism” by ICMbio, and the environment agency Ibama, and may fold the environment ministry into the agriculture ministry – whose chief will be chosen by the agribusiness lobby.

He has also promised help for artisanal miners known as *garimpeiros*, some of whom work illegally, dredging mud from Amazon rivers in search of gold – and in the process dumping tons of mercury and poisoning fish stocks.

On a recent afternoon, several wooden *garimpeiro* barges were moored on the River Madeira near the Lago do Cuniã. Two men manning the chugging pumps onboard one of the vessels admitted they were working illegally, and feared raids from Ibama – then said Bolsonaro’s promise to bring them “dignity and security” had won their votes.

“He promised he would legalise it, for us to work,” said Aroldo da Silva, 53, the barge’s owner, as a rainstorm whipped up the river. “He promised changes in the law.”

Marcos Rocha, a retired police colonel from Bolsonaro’s PSL party who is leading polling for Sunday’s runoff vote for governor of Rondônia, also believes *garimpeiros* should be legalised because people needed to work.



Aroldo da Silva's garimpeiro barge. Photograph: Dom Phillips

“The garimpeiros and the loggers were the people who started our state, but today they are marginalised. There are many people in poverty,” he said in an interview. “We want to generate riches and income for our country.”

The Amazon needed “more industry”, he said, before suggesting the planet’s alarming temperature **rises** could be cyclical and naturally occurring.

Rondônia’s state’s current governor Daniel Pereira and its state legislature are locked in judicial **deadlock** over 11 new forest reserves created by his predecessor and then overturned by state deputies. Rocha sided with lawmakers and said people squatting on protected reserves should be allowed to stay.

Some of those squatters live on Jaci Paraná, a state-government run reserve around 100km (62 miles) from Porto Velho which only permits sustainable, small-scale agriculture by members of a cooperative. Cattle are prohibited, but the reserve has been widely deforested by ranchers.

Last week, a group of state environment officials toured the reserve with an armed police escort. They stopped by a wooden farmhouse surrounded by grazing cattle, where Jessica da Silva, 23, was sitting with her two young children while her husband, Alex dos Santos, tended the herd.



A Rondônia state environmental protection officer Nei Peres looks over a deforested section of land in Jaci Paraná reserve. Photograph: Dom Phillips

Da Silva said she was not planning to vote because she is registered in another town but that her husband would vote for Bolsonaro.

Further down the dirt road, they passed a motorbike whose pillion rider was carrying a chainsaw in his lap. Officers waved the bike over and approached, but before they had got far with their questions, the passenger made a dash for the undergrowth. One of the officers fired a shot and the man was brought back in handcuffs – but he was later released.

Nobody pays much attention to environmental laws here.

Ednesio Diogo, 51, and Jonas Dantas, 22, were cooking lunch beside the frame of a wooden house they were building when the officials arrived.

Diogo said the house was for his son, Wallan, 21, who had been given the land where he planned to raise cattle, plant coffee and build a fish nursery.

When environmental protection officer Nei Peres told the men, that they were there illegally and would have to leave, Diogo just nodded. Both men said they'd be voting for Bolsonaro.

On Saturday, Ibama vehicles were set on fire in Buritis, a day after **ICMBio** agents on an anti-deforestation mission were left stranded when locals torched a bridge in Pará, another Amazon state.

Brazil's new war on its forests and those who defend them has already begun.