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**(Un)Sustainable Development? Examining Growth Model Selection in Workers' Party and Bolsonaro Presidencies**

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## **University of Notre Dame Library Research Award**

Annemarie Foy, Thanh Nguyen, Abigail English, and Adriana Pérez

Our generation has grown up in a uniquely difficult position within the global environmental discourse. We are a generation of activists and protestors, terrified by climate change and furious about the lack of substantial action, yet unable to do much due to our youth and (relative) inexperience. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that each of us gravitated towards a political science seminar course entitled “Politics of Climate Change” taught by Professor Jazmin Sierra. We entered the class eager to learn more about the political processes and systems that can both create and mitigate the growing threat of environmental degradation. In particular, we were all motivated by the desire to figure out how we, as students, can contribute positively to the global discourse on climate change.

As part of our course, we were tasked with writing a research paper to examine an aspect of the politics of climate change that we had not discussed in class. Each of us came with an interest in the role of developing countries in both causing and mitigating climate change. Thus, we decided to research the reasons for which a developing nation would choose to implement a resource-intensive growth model, which is an economic model based on the extraction of natural resources with little to no regard for the environmental impacts, versus a sustainable development model, which is one that seeks to meet “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987) and emphasizes the interconnectedness of economic growth and environmental concerns. We studied the effects of various factors, including government ideology, indigenous activism,

globalization pressures, and economic profile, through a case study of Brazil from 2003 to the present. In order to complete this daunting task, and to eventually produce our final 35-page paper, we relied heavily upon the resources available through the Hesburgh Library.

Our first course of action was to review the existing literature related to this subject. In doing so, we found ourselves deeply grateful for the extensive catalog of materials that we could access through the Hesburgh Library. We used the Political Science Database, JStor, AccessUN, the Global Economic Monitor, the Oxford Research Encyclopedia, and ProQuest. Each of these were extremely valuable in bringing us to dozens of academic articles that we collected in order to better understand our topic. We read the abstract of each, and then could decide whether the full article would be useful. While we did not contact the Political Science Librarian, Mark Robinson, in direct connection with this research paper, he had previously met with members of our group and had taught them how to navigate each of these databases. Without him, we would not have known how to enter a very precise search and filter results, which would have made our research process much slower. In addition, we checked out several physical books from the library catalog, which we discovered using OneSearch. These books were longer than the academic articles and could therefore be more thorough and longitudinal, providing greater context and continuity to our work.

Our literature review revealed four primary factors that previous researchers believed impacted a government's choice of growth model: government ideology, indigenous activism, globalization pressures, and economic profile. We measured the impact of each of these factors on the "outcome," or the degree to which the Brazilian government prioritized and implemented

sustainability initiatives. For government ideology, we primarily relied on qualitative data about voter demographics, professionalization, and extractivism that we derived from academic sources about Brazil's political economy, which in turn we found through the Hesburgh Library's online databases and print collection, as previously discussed. For indigenous activism, we likewise derived qualitative data from library-provided databases to determine the presence of indigenous representation in government and the presence of policies involving indigenous actors and/or ideas. To measure globalization pressures, we collected data on foreign direct investments (FDI) in Brazil, and to measure economic profile, we tracked the rate of change in national GDP. The data for both was available to us through the World Bank e-Library, which we accessed through the Hesburgh Library.

Furthermore, aside from the academic sources, we read news articles to understand issues from the Brazilian popular perspective and to gather statements from political leaders. These news sources were available to us in databases and through direct online access to newspapers as provided by the library. News sources were particularly valuable for us in order to obtain direct quotes from government leaders, which we then used as a qualitative measure of sustainability to complement our quantitative data.

In addition, in order to work together most efficiently and effectively throughout the project, we relied upon the study and collaboration spaces that are physically available at the Hesburgh Library. We were able to reserve quiet library rooms with a table and chairs so that we could face each other and discuss more organically than in the seminar-style setup in our classroom. The whiteboards in these rooms were also very helpful in outlining the intricacies of our argument,

particularly to visualize the comparison between the impacts of each potential explanation on the choice of growth model.

At the conclusion of our research process, we decided from the evidence that government ideology is the ultimate driver of the choice of growth model, primarily through the mechanism of bureaucratic appointments. Ideologically liberal heads of state tend to choose a sustainable development model over a resource-intensive growth model because they appoint environmental activists to official bureaucratic positions, in comparison with their counterparts on the right of the political spectrum. This clearly has important implications in the fight to slow climate change, so future research should focus on how to best advance the professionalization of activism in developing countries. For the sake of our environment and future generations, we hope that such research can count on the same level of support and resources that were available to us at the Hesburgh Library!