

AGDA Reflection

COP30 in Brazil: Between Speeches, Real Action and a New Configuration in Global Geopolitics

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As the world gathers in the Amazon to debate the climate future, old promises intersect with new urgencies. With ongoing geopolitical and technological megatrends, critical minerals are emerging as key players in an energy transition that is still poorly understood and deeply unequal.

In November 2025, Belém do Pará will host the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) under the watchful eyes of the world. It will be a symbolic moment: more than three decades after the historic 1992 Earth Summit (ECO-92) in Rio de Janeiro – which launched the multilateral climate governance process – Brazil once again hosts a crucial summit amid geopolitical disruption and global transition. But in the face of an increasingly complex scenario, the key question remains: will we repeat the same speeches, or are we finally approaching real, concrete action?

Since the first COP in 1995, science has made remarkable progress. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nation's scientific arm, leaves no doubt about the catastrophic impacts of global warming, which are already a reality across the globe. However, the political response remains marked by idealism, vague promises and slow-moving mechanisms – almost always falling short of the climate emergency.

The current COP decision-making model is based on consensus among nearly 200 countries. It is a noble ideal, but ineffective in practice. The competitive nature of nations, diverging interests and economic lobbying pressures make climate governance a slow and often frustrating process.

It is time to rethink this model. More agile approaches – based on regional agreements, bilateral pacts or economic

blocks could move faster on specific solutions. Remaining stuck in a structure that requires unanimity to move forward keeps the world in limbo during a time of crisis.

The 'Just Transition' Needs Substance – and Action

'Just transition' has become one of the most used terms in reports, speeches, and commitments. But what does it really mean in practice? Who is part of this transition? Who is being left behind?

In most cases, rhetoric does not translate into inclusive public policies – whether national or cross-border. Instead, millions of people – especially in developing countries – remain marginalized from the benefits of the new green economy. Climate justice must move beyond rhetoric into budgets, legislation and infrastructure.

Energy: Dogmas or Strategic Realism?

The energy agenda is another area where rhetoric often outpaces reality. The global push to eliminate fossil fuels has generated a worldwide movement – but not always a rational one. Many countries are being pushed toward unrealistic targets without consideration of their socioeconomic realities, technical capacity or energy security. It is already clear that many of the promises made in recent years are unattainable.

Even in an optimistic scenario, at the current pace, renewable energy is expected to account for only 30% of the global energy matrix by 2050. Some wealthy nations may achieve carbon neutrality, but many others – especially in the Global South – will continue to rely on coal, oil and gas. A true transition requires time, investment and, above all, intelligent strategic planning. There is no room for ideology. Here, a combination of NBS (Nature-Based Solutions) and SBS (Science-Based Solutions) is expected and may bring new opportunities to this transition.

Regenerative Agriculture: From Collapse to Soil Recovery

In the field of food production, we are also at a historical crossroads. The 20th-century Green Revolution, driven by mechanization and heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, helped avoid global famine – but at a tremendous environmental cost. Today, about 35% of the world's farmland already shows signs of severe degradation.

Fortunately, a new approach is gaining traction: regenerative agriculture. Based on recent advances in soil biology, this practice aims to restore agricultural ecosystems through techniques like no-till farming, crop rotation, crop-livestock-forest integration, and replacing chemical inputs with biological ones. It is a smart response to decades of soil exhaustion, capable of combining productivity with sustainability.

Likewise, in processing, transportation, manufacturing, and consumption, wasting nearly one-third of everything we produce is no longer acceptable. That says a lot about our current society. So, we must look not just at agriculture, but at the entire food system.

This paradigm shift can – and must – be at the heart of COP30 discussions. Feeding the world sustainably will be one of the greatest battles of the 21st century.

Artificial Intelligence and the Silent Revolution

At the same time, digital transformation is imposing a new reality. Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing entire sectors: from climate analysis to natural resource management, from pharmaceuticals to medicine, from mining to steel production. It enables real-time deforestation monitoring, advanced climate simulations, production modelling, and optimization of water and energy use.

But AI also raises new ethical and power-related questions. Who controls the algorithms? Who has access to the data? The digital revolution can either expand climate justice or deepen inequalities – it depends on how (and by whom) it is directed.

We must also remember that the massive data centers already in operation – or under construction in several countries will soon represent a significant share of global energy and water consumption, so there is a point of precaution in this regard.

The Rise of Critical Minerals: The New Geopolitical Battlefield

In this context, a new key player is emerging on the global board: critical minerals. Elements such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earths, and graphite are essential for manufacturing batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, and other core components of the energy transition and digital revolution. Without these minerals, there are no electric cars, smart grids, or quantum computers.

The problem? These resources are extremely unevenly distributed. Countries like China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chile, Australia, and Brazil hold the largest reserves and/or refining capacities. This creates new strategic dependencies and intensifies geopolitical disputes.

Brazil, in particular, holds a privileged position. It has significant reserves of lithium, niobium, copper, and graphite. However, it still lacks a strong industrial

policy to transform this mineral wealth into added value, technology and economic sovereignty. Instead of just exporting raw materials, the country could, and should, invest in complete production chains, creating skilled jobs and strengthening its energy and technological autonomy.

It is crucial that the discussion on critical minerals be at the centre of COP30. Talking about energy transition without discussing the secure and sustainable supply of these resources is ignoring the material engine of change. More than that: it is failing to see that the next global conflict may not be over oil, but over lithium and rare earths.

Youth as a Global Force and the ‘Silent Power’

Meanwhile, there is a silent reconfiguration of global power underway. The West is aging. The East is young, dynamic and increasingly influential. By 2030, 70% of the world’s youth will live in the Global South – and they will make up about 60% of the new global middle class, holding the power of consumption and, consequently, driving new trends that may not necessarily align with those of the West.

Alongside this, countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore among others are quietly accumulating power: large financial reserves, strategic investments in science, technology and innovation, and stakes in key companies and sectors of the global transition. It is a new form of influence – less noisy, but deeply effective.

Brazil at the Centre: Opportunity or Risk?

In this scenario, COP30 represents more than a conference for Brazil. It is a showcase to demonstrate its leadership capabilities. The country has unique conditions: a clean energy matrix, abundant biodiversity, critical mineral reserves, huge food production, scientific capacity, and diplomatic influence.

But it also carries contradictions: ongoing deforestation, social inequality and a history of political volatility that compromises the continuity of major projects. The world will be watching – and the symbolic and political weight of COP30 will be proportional to the courage with which Brazil leads the process.

COP30 has the potential to mark a historic turning point. But that will only happen if the leaders gathered in Belém have the courage to see – and address – the major transformations underway: youth as a driving force, critical minerals as the foundation of the new economy, AI as a disruptive agent, and the need for climate governance that is pragmatic and far less ideological.

The world can no longer wait for perfect consensus. It is time for imperfect – but possible – decisions. The difference between a memorable COP and an irrelevant one lies in recognizing that the era of empty diplomacy is over.

Now is the time to act.