

BLACK ACTIVISM CONTINUOUSLY REINVENTED: ACTIONS ADOPTED BY THE BLACK COALITION FOR RIGHTS IN BRAZIL SINCE 2019

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Anti-racist struggles in contemporary Brazil hinged around policy processes, which the black movement had the opportunity to influence, given its access to the state through institutional means. Currently, state–society relations in racial/ethnic matters are obstructed by the rise of political leaders who have unprecedented disdain for the demands of the black movement. In this context, what has happened to the movement? Based on qualitative research on the repertoire of collective action adopted by the Black Coalition for Rights (BCR), we argue that it developed several initiatives to defend existing rights and raise public support to black causes, acting on both institutional and extra-institutional fronts, in Brazil and abroad. In other words, and as it had done before in Brazilian history, the movement proved the ability to continuously reinvent itself.

The BCR is a network that brings together 199 organizations of the Brazilian black movement (Coalizão, 2022). Created in 2019, it aims to represent social demands and defend rights through action directed at the three branches of the Brazilian government. The BCR has a diverse composition and agenda, which includes initiatives to monitor the enforcement of laws and policies that represent historical victories for the black movement such as: the Racial Equality Statute^[1]; the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education^[2]; the Resolution 01/2004 of the National Council of Education and the National Curricular Guidelines for the Teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian History and Culture and for Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations^[3]; the constitutional protections to quilombola communities^[4]; as well as the preservation of affirmative action policies in higher education^[5].

However, the political context from 2019 on inevitably shaped the actions of the BCR. Since the campaign trail in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro outlined a government program that seeks to suppress rights previously achieved by oppressed groups in Brazilian society. In addition, the Coronavirus pandemic deepened inequalities and worsened the health conditions of the black and indigenous peoples, who are most vulnerable and unprotected in the face of public calamity.

These past years have also been marked by several iconic cases of black bodies elimination, which demanded urgent action by the Coalition. Examples include the exposure of the rural black community of Ilha da Maré, in Salvador, to chemical contamination by international factories in the region^[6]; the killing of 14-year-old black boy João Pedro while playing with friends at his uncle's house, in Complexo do Salgueiro, state of Rio de Janeiro, during a police operation^[7]; and the beating to death of João Alberto

Freitas, a black man, by the security guards of supermarket Carrefour in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul^[8].

The death of black men, women and children in police operations led the BCR to file complaints with international human rights courts. The BCR has also used advocacy campaigns in social networks to raise awareness about issues such as religious intolerance, deficits in the political representation of the black population, and the omission of the Brazilian State regarding the situation of black populations in the face of the health crisis caused by the pandemic.

Based on the analysis of the Coalition's Twitter account, Table 1 summarizes its actions since the beginning of the Bolsonaro government in January 2019.

Actions	Examples
Participation in international meetings	Participated in the 2020 California Brazilianists Conference at the University of San Diego in California Represented by Historian Wania Sant'anna, spoke at the Midterm Review Debate of the International Decade for People of African Descent, 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Advocacy campaigns	#MinhaFéÉAntirracista (My faith is anti-racist) #PorumFundebantiracista/ #aprovemaemenda34 (For an Anti-Racist Education Fund) #TorturaNãoSeVêPelaTV (Torture is not seen on TV) #Tireoracismodecampo (Take racism out of the soccer field) Belonging to an African Religion doesn't make you anti-racist. Voting for black movement candidates does (https://votosantirracistas2020.com.br) Livestream: "Lawsuit filed with the Supreme Court for the life and health of Quilombolas in Brazil" #Covid_19 in quilombola territories and the absence of mitigation actions on the effects of the coronavirus on the quilombola population in Brazil. #ADPFQuilombolanoSTF PANE (Anti-racist platform on the elections) #AprovaTSE #CoalizãoNegraPelolmpeachment (Black Coalition for the Impeachment [of Jair Bolsonaro]) #AlvosdoGenocidio (Genocide targets) #CANDELÁRIANUNCAMAI (Candelaria massacre never again) #JustiçaPorJoãoPedro (Justice for Joao Pedro) #ParemDeNosMatar (Stop killing us) #Falsaabolição/#FaremosPalmaresdeNovo (False abolition; We will build Palmares again)



Public petitions	Organized petition asking a boycott to Carrefour Organized petition to the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) demanding a campaign to encourage votes on black candidates. Organized petition demanding that racial quotas in job search processes by the city of São Paulo were maintained
Public statements	Issued statement against the attempt, by Federal Public Defender Jovino Bento Junior, to prohibit and penalize affirmative actions in favor of blacks by private companies
Open letters	Issued "Program Letter to the Brazilian people" Issued "Human rights for blacks" Issued "As long as there is racism, there won't be a real democracy"
Legislative proposals	Lobbied for the approval, by Congress, of PL5231/2020, which prohibits discriminatory behavior of any nature, both by public agents and private security professionals
Legislative advocacy	Lobbied for the approval, by Congress, of the "Interamerican Convention against racism, racial discrimination and other forms of intolerance".
Formal complaints against public agents	Took legal action against the president of the Palmares Foundation Petitioned with the Organization of American States against the Sao Paulo police and Governor Joao Doria
Impeachment requests	Submitted the 56th impeachment request against President Jair Bolsonaro.
Court-centered activities	Filed lawsuit against the decision of former Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, to suspend quota policies in education. The lawsuit was granted preliminary injunction; existing quota policies were maintained
Activities before International Courts	Reported police abuses in Brazil at the 175th Session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Spoke about structural racism in Brazil at the IACHR Hearing on Racism and Police Violence in America. Denounced the genocide of black populations in the Americas at the IACHR (with human rights organizations in Latin America and North America). Filed complaints about Environmental Racism and Racial Discrimination in the case Ilha de Maré at the 45th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

Source: Elaborated based on the Twitter page of @coalizãonegra

The BCR's lobby for the approval, by Congress, of the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance was successful; the Convention was promulgated by the Senate in February 2021 and later ratified by the Executive. Actions to increase representation of black people in politics led to the creation of the initiative Quilombo in Parliament, encouraging black candidates for the legislative elections in Brazil. In the 2022 elections 120 candidacies have been registered for the state legislatures and the national one.

By the end of 2021, the actions of Coalition had high engagement in social networks, news about its complaints and demands were disseminated in traditional and alternative media. It also increased its representation in the national territory through state and local committees. Having representative organizations in the states and municipalities in most Brazilian regions allowed for the expansion of a national campaign to raise funds for emergency actions to confront hunger, poverty, and violence in the pandemic^[9], in which the Coalition is one of the leading entities.

Besides rights advocacy at national and international level, the Black Coalition for Rights has engaged in strategic litigation at the Federal Supreme Court (STF). The National Coordination for the Articulation of Rural Black Quilombola Communities (Conaq) filed and won the lawsuit 742/2020 at the Federal Supreme Court (STF).

This lawsuit denounced the omission of the Brazilian government in implementing measures to protect quilombola during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In sum, the election of Jair Bolsonaro and the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant challenges to the black movement in Brazil, foreclosing opportunities for the continued participation of black organizations in the policy process. By adopting a new repertoire in response to these circumstances, the BCR showed resilience and the capacity to continuously reinvent itself, laying out a new direction for black activism in the country, with actions that cut across the institutional/non-institutional and the domestic/international domains.

Notes

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[1] The Statute of Racial Equality was established by Federal Law 12,288/2010 from July 20th, 2010. It defines the fundamental rights of the black population and the mandates the implementation of a National System for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SINAPIR) to promote public policies and affirmative actions aimed at reducing racial inequalities in Brazil.

[2] The Law of Directives and Bases of Education defines and regulates the organization of Brazilian education based on the principles present in the Federal Constitution.

[3] Resolution CNE/CP No. 01 of 2004 establishes the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education on Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture.

[4] Quilombos were communities formed by runaway slaves; quilombolas descent from those slaves and inhabit the territories where they settled. The Brazilian 1988 Constitution granted quilombola communities land rights and the right to maintain their own culture (articles 215 and 216).

[5] Federal 12,711 reserved 50% of spots in public higher education institutions for students from public schools, with a sub-quota for indigenous people and self-declared black people in the same proportion as the demographic in the institution's state. In 2022, the law is set to be rediscussed by the National Congress. The 2012 legislation may be maintained, changed or even terminated.

[6] <https://globalvoices.org/2021/08/31/quilombola-communities-lament-environmental-damage-of-industry-around-aratu-port-in-brazils-bahia-state/>

[7] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/03/brazil-black-lives-police-teenager>

[8] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/black-man-beating-death-protests-brazil-carrefour-supermarket-security-guards-1.5810679>

[9] <https://www.temgentecomfome.com.br/>

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